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10 OF THE BEST GALLERIES IN MUMBAI

By Nayantara Kilachand

Nayantara Kilachand takes us on a tour of Mumbai's best galleries, showcasing everything from contemporary Indian art to dust sculptors



Sweet Unease by Ranbir Kaleka at Volte, one of the most influential contemporary art galleries in Mumbai

Volte

One of the newest spaces on the block, Volte is on a short strip of road that houses three other galleries, and has quickly become one of the best galleries in the city, having formed a small but influential roster of artists both obscure and celebrated. Owner Tushar Jiwarajka's eclectic taste – he has spotlighted little-known Tibetan artists and hosted seminal video works by the eminent Ranbir Kaleka – has all but cemented Volte's reputation as a power player on the local art scene.

Chemould Prescott Road Gallery

One of the oldest and most prestigious galleries in Mumbai, Chemould was a hothouse for a group of modernist artists who later come to be known as the Progressives (its most famous exponent, MF Husain, passed away in London last year). Today, relocated to a vast loft-like space, it alternates between showing contemporary bigwigs (Shilpa Gupta, Atul Dodiya, Nalini Malani) and emerging

artists (Dhruvi Acharya, Shezad Dawood) and remains an inspiration to the art world's new generation of stars.

Tasveer

Even though the city lost its sole photography-focused gallery (Matthieu Foss) earlier this year, shutterbugs need not despair. Tasveer, a national photography collective, which has been bringing in international names like Norman Parkinson and Martine Franck and spotlighting the country's emerging and established talent (from the godfather of Indian photojournalism Raghu Rai to Vogue fashion photog Prabuddha Dasgupta) since 2006, hosts its show in Mumbai at the Institute of Contemporary Indian Art in Kala Ghoda. Though the exhibitions barely last for 10 days and tend to favour black-and-white photography, they occasionally throw open access to historic archives from the maharajahs to Magnum.

Project 88

This cavernous space was once a warren of office cubicles that housed employees of an elevator company. Luckily, the six-year-old gallery, owned by Sree Goswami, is now a minimalist space with exposed beams and iron pillars and bears little evidence of its industrial past. In addition to the coterie of big names – such as Vogue India fashion photographer Bharat Sikka, auction house favourite Bharti Kher and graphic novelist Sarnath Banerjee – Goswami also takes a chance on the offbeat and experimental, like the intellectual Raqs Media Collective and, more recently, the dense video works of Turner Prize nominees The Otolith Group.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya

The CSMVS, formerly the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, was built at the behest of the people of Bombay in 1914 (though it opened to the public in 1922) and sits in domed splendour in South Mumbai. In the past few years, thanks to donations and government grants, it has spluttered into life. Drop in to the Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation wing, which houses the philanthropist's marvellous contemporary Indian art collection (ask to browse through the archives); for something that reaches farther back in time, the newly refurbished miniature wing offers an exquisite glimpse of courtly Mughal life.

Gallery Maskara

In a neighbourhood of matchbox-sized spaces, this former grain storage facility is enviously roomy. The ceiling alone soars to about 50ft, allowing for giant installations, like the mammoth floating dolls of Canadian sculptor Max Streicher, which debuted the week of the gallery's opening in 2008. Owner Abhay Maskara,

who spent four years working in Seattle, is committed to opening up India's cloistered art scene by bringing in artists from around the world (such as Brazilian graffiti artist Nina Pandolfo and Belgian dust sculptor Peter Buggenhout) and taking a gamble on non-traditional media and controversial subject matter – such as T Venkanna's sexually explicit oils, which have been snapped up by Saatchi Gallery brokers

Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum

This impeccably restored Palladian edifice is worth a peek just for its pastel and gold stucco and stencil work, conjuring up images of decadent colonial living (it was previously called the Victoria & Albert Museum). Though its permanent collection is not much to cluck about (most of its artefacts and dioramas chart the city's history), it has reached out to the contemporary art world, putting on avant garde exhibitions by celebrated artists such as Sudarshan Shetty and Sheba Chhachhi and hosting performance-driven work by the likes of Nikhil Chopra.

Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke

One of the very few Mumbai galleries to bring in noteworthy international names (such as Kiki Smith and Wolfgang Laib), Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, run by mother-and-daughter team Usha Mirchandani and Ranjana Steinruecke, also rotates local talent on its small but expertly curated list – including the likes of Tejal Shah and Mansi Bhatt. If the 2,000 sq ft airy space reminds you of a Manhattan gallery, don't be surprised – Steinruecke's path to Mumbai has taken her through New York and Berlin.

Chatterjee & Lal

Though compact, this one-room gallery in Colaba, founded by husband-and-wife team Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal, has already managed to push the boundaries of contemporary art: it was among the first to host performance artist Nikhil Chopra, who spent three continuous days and nights in a room above the gallery, as well as staging retrospectives of Amrita Sher-Gil, and the hugely talented but little-known photographer Nasreen Mohamedi. Focusing on young, emerging artists working mainly in India, the duo have unearthed a consistent pool of talent, from Minam Apang's vibrant ink-based works to Aditya Pande's zany computer-generated scribbles.

Amrita Jhaveri Projects

This private, largely-by-appointment space on the seafront is run by one of the most influential art consultants in India. Jhaveri (working with her sister Priya) uses the white cube gallery to showcase emerging talent from the South Asian diaspora and

elsewhere – among them Simryn Gill, Gyan Panchal and Rana Begum. As the go-to authority on most matters concerning India's art scene, it's little surprise that the duo was instrumental in helping bring the Mumbai-born, UK-based Anish Kapoor to India for his homecoming retrospective in 2011.

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