

Priya Jhaveri Talks How Shifting From Walkeshwar To Colaba Matters

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As Jhaveri Contemporary moves to Colaba, co-founder Priya Jhaveri talks of how location matters in the larger conversation



One of the foremost names in bringing cutting edge contemporary art to the city has moved. From its eight-year-old address in Walkeshwar, Jhaveri Contemporary is poised to present its new home in the 130-year-old Devidas Mansion, Colaba. The shift from the quiet of Malabar Hill to the jostle of Colaba's promenade is an important moment in the gallery's evolution. It has now approached closer to other establishments in the business, with the hope of offering more to collectors and the art community in Mumbai.

Passing through the arcade shops selling attars and Kashmiri shawls, the stairs lead up to the third floor of Devidas Mansion to inconspicuous doorway. Once you step in, the vastness of the gallery presents itself, with 13-foot high ceilings. Through its windows and balconies, you can see the gallery's impressive neighbours - the Taj Mahal Palace and the Gateway of India. "We had been looking for a space for about three to four years - not actively but regularly - but were never convinced. Then, last October, we stumbled upon this place. It was serendipity," says Priya Jhaveri, 41, one of the two sisters, who founded the gallery.



Colaba's Devidas Mansion, where gallery Jhaveri Contemporary has relocated to (above). PICS/randhir Singh. Pics

Courtesy/Jhaveri Contemporary

The young gallery

Priya describes Jhaveri Contemporary as a young gallery. She also calls it an "accidental" gallery. In 2008, while the economy had dipped, she and her older sister, Amrita, a leading art consultant based out of London, thought of bringing artists they had regarded and watched internationally to India. Amrita's converted apartment in Walkeshwar became a project space, and they first presented artist Simryn Gill.

The project space evolved into Jhaveri Contemporary, in 2010, and has since presented artists with important connections to South Asia, including Rana Begum, Manisha Parekh, Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi, Prem Sahib and Mrinalini Mukherjee. In 2011, Jhaveri Contemporary produced Anish Kapoor's first-ever public exhibition in India. This year, it won the New York Frieze Stand Prize for its presentation of Mohan Samant, a member of the Progressive Artists' Group, but rarely seen by mainstream audiences. In Frieze's statement, the jury commended "the spirit of risk taken by the gallery".



Looking outward

Devidas Mansion's original details have been retained - the slightly undulated floor, the rafters overhead and the aged walls. "We had to strike a balance between having too much character and having no soul. I hope we have got it right," Priya smiles. Interestingly, the Jhaveri sisters haven't chosen to work with an architect for the project. They made "a million small decisions", aided by the expert eye of exhibition designer, artist and Priya's partner, Mark Prime.

"The building has great bones and faces the sea - there is the idea of looking outward. In a way, metaphorically, we have found a space that represents what we do, for I think our programme is quite outward-looking," says Priya. It's a thought that forms the basis of the gallery's inaugural show at this new venue, opening on September 1. The group show will evoke this location, at the intersection of land and sea, the feeling of transitoriness and rootedness, the sense of both looking outward, while looking inward.

Jhaveri Contemporary has always been known for its sophisticated and critically acclaimed exhibitions, but its Walkeshwar outpost had, at times, proven to be a detour for art enthusiasts in Mumbai, who aim to squeeze in as much as possible during their free hours. That Jhaveri Contemporary is now in the vicinity of other leading galleries in Colaba means more access during significant art events, such as Art Night Thursdays and the Mumbai Gallery Weekend. It's a chapter in the gallery's life that the community will embrace wholeheartedly. "We hope to bring the best of Jhaveri Contemporary to our new space, and are excited to share it with visitors, colleagues and friends."

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