



Jhaveri Contemporary Opens In Colaba



Expect to be surprised!

11.09.2018

When sisters Amrita and Priya Jhaveri started Jhaveri Contemporary (JC) in 2010, its stark white interiors piqued the interest of the art set: unassuming from the outside, tucked into a section of the first floor of a small building on Walkeshwar; its location was on the other end from the hectic frenzy associated with the Colaba contemporary art scene.

What appeared at first glance as a white cube, revealed itself slowly as dynamic, its walls moving unexpectedly from quick turns to a restful nest. Its particular oeuvre of presentations were seen as unconventional, at a time when conceptual works were considered fashionable in the country's urban artistic ecology, their overt politics considered necessary to be noticed by critics and collectors alike.

Amrita and Priya had around the same time, helped bring an ambitious exhibition of Anish Kapoor's to Bombay, as part of a two-city India retrospective of the artist with Indian origins. JC's mandate was quieter in comparison, even while it reflected a similar trajectory - of practitioners with a connection to the subcontinent, their work premising materiality. Far from spectacle, such work was developed through carefully cultivated hand skills in making, and was diverse in its representation of media, whether paper-based sculptures, drawings using vegetable dyes or photographic collages. It was impressive while being restrained, with an affective quality which spoke beyond words. It earned JC within a short span, die hard fans, including self-admittedly this author.

Just over a week back, JC opened its new space in Bombay, in Colaba, behind the iconic Taj Mahal Hotel and with a direct view of the Gateway of India. In close proximity of these two iconic symbols of Modern India, its opening exhibition titled *What's Essential* explores the many meanings and implications of its new location in a cosmopolitan neighbourhood with a rich history, thinking about its own journey in the last eight years - the image on the invitation is of an included work by Sri Lankan artist Vasanth Yogananthan, made in collaboration with Jaykumar Shankar. What appears as a photograph, is in fact intricately hand-painted, showing two men standing at

the threshold of land and sea.

Most other works allude towards traditional handmade techniques of art making in a contemporary idiom: a tapestry by Monika Correa, a large portrait by Ali Kazim in miniature style, a screen print on a vintage textile by Shehzad Dawood...they fit well within the gallery's own design with exposed beams, walls left bare in parts and a patina-red floor, appearing almost hand-baked with hairline cracks. The gallery comes alive as a hand-painted abstract canvas itself.

It would be a mistake, however, to focus only on such aesthetic aspects of JC's curatorial programming. Its resilient politics has been seen at the vanguard of some of the most pathbreaking projects in South Asian contemporary art in recent years, bringing attention to incredible makers unacknowledged sufficiently in their time. A few years back, JC took the lead in showing works by Mrinalini Mukherjee, who had for decades been dismissed by her male contemporaries as a craft-maker, denied the status of a contemporary artist in her own right. An exhibition in Delhi and Bombay showing her latest body of work, in bronzes, was followed by a major retrospective of the artist at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi. In June 2019, her work is being shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

There are estates of late artists that JC has also helped revive. The Pakistani Anwar Jalal Shemza, the Indian Mohan Samant and the Sri Lankan Lionel Wendt come to my mind. At this time of transition, it is heartening to think of some from its past: an early solo in 2011 by artist Rana Begum of Bangladeshi origin - the first in India - and who has gone on to become one of the most significant British contemporary artists today; France-based Gyan Panchal's sublime contemplation of stone in 2012; *Considering Collage* in 2013, which looked at the medium of paper collages across several generations of Indian artists; *Approaching Abstraction* in 2015, which explored ideas of abstraction through the lens of women artists.

In 2016, they made us stop with two special projects which broke away from their usual format of presentations, usually against a minimalist backdrop, offering artists a blank canvas to express from. Ashim Ahuliwalia's revisiting of Akbar Padamsee's 1969 film *Events in a Cloud Chamber* tried to recreate the artist's flat where the equipment for the film was set up. While Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi's fun installation brought alive their preoccupation with popular culture using neon light sculptures, transforming the space into a dark suburban street ally from anywhere in the world!

In the months to come, JC has a line up of solo shows of some of the artists they work with, leading upto a booth in London's Frieze Art Fair in October, where they are showing a young artist's work for the first time.

Expect to be surprised!

Getting there: Jhaveri Contemporary is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 11 am to 7 pm; Whats Essential is on view till 29 September. J3rd Floor, Devidas Mansion, B K Boman Behram Marg, Apollo Bandar, Colaba, call +91 22 22021051.

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