

# Art Radar

*Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond*

## **“What’s essential”: inaugurating Jhaveri Contemporary’s new space in Mumbai – in conversation**

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7 Votes

**After eight successful years, Jhaveri Contemporary moves into the city’s illustrious art district in the sylvan surroundings of Colaba.**

*Art Radar* also talks to Jhaveri Contemporary Founders Amrita and Priya Jhaveri.



“What’s essential”, 1 – 29 September 2018, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai. Photo: Randhir Singh. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

## A new beginning in historic surroundings

**Jhaveri Contemporary** was founded in 2010 by sisters Amrita and Priya Jhaveri and during the course of the last eight years, it has focused its efforts on showcasing work of artists across generations and nationalities who have celebrated South Asian connections and traditions in their practice. On 1 September 2018, the gallery opened its inaugural group exhibition **“What’s essential”** at its new location in Colaba, Mumbai’s historic art district, and home to some of the city’s most prestigious galleries and museums. Since opening in 2010, Jhaveri Contemporary has provided an important platform to showcase the work of artists such as **Simryn Gill**, **Rana Begum**, **Raghubir Singh** and **Anish Kapoor** amongst others. A significant achievement in those early years was holding the **first-ever public exhibition** of Mumbai-born, UK-based Kapoor’s work in India, which was a landmark event in the country’s contemporary art world.



Simryn Gill, 'Channel', 2014, Ilfochrome print, 31.6 x 32 cm. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

The gallery’s new space, situated on the third floor of a 19th century heritage building with 4-metre-high ceilings, comprises of two exhibition spaces and has a design aesthetic that breaks from the conventions of the white cube, harmoniously balancing a contemporary feel with original features such as raw concrete walls and exposed beams. The venue has large windows, with frames made from reclaimed Burma teak, and two external balconies that offer abundant natural light and spectacular views of the Gateway of India, one of the city’s most important landmarks,

and the Arabian Sea. Speaking on the occasion of the move, Amrita and Priya Jhaveri said:

*We cannot wait to share the new space with the city we love and would like to thank all the Jhaveri Contemporary artists, our colleagues, collaborators and collectors for their support over the past eight years. We hope the new gallery will inspire artists and curators to present exciting exhibitions that engage and enlighten by turn.*



“What’s essential”, 1 – 29 September 2018, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai. Photo: Randhir



Singh. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

### Exploring the past and investigating the present

It is only fitting that the gallery’s first exhibition at the new site is entitled “What’s essential” and explores its journey thus far while investigating the identity and significance of the location itself. In this group exhibition of a long list of eminent Indian and international artists, the works celebrate the new space and its surroundings using colour, texture, tones, themes and motifs.

The inspiration of being relocated to Colaba, a suburb of South Mumbai that has a seaside promenade, are evident in the choice of artworks – from Raghubir Singh’s *The Taj Mahal Hotel* (early 1990s) and *Victoria Terminus, insect screen vendor* (1991) to **Nalini Malani**’s digital animation *Now I See it Now I Don’t* (2018), in which you see the historic Gateway of India before it disappears into the tides and the waves.

The vastness of the sea and its paraphernalia are starkly depicted in Simryn Gill’s series of prints entitled *Channel* (2014), while its shoreline and the people and architecture that inhabit it is the subject of Lionel Wendt’s series of black and white photographs including the haunting *Swaying Palm Trees* (1936-39).



Lionel Wendt, 'Men Walking Along the Seashore', 1930s, gelatin silver print, 19.5 x 28.9 cm.

Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

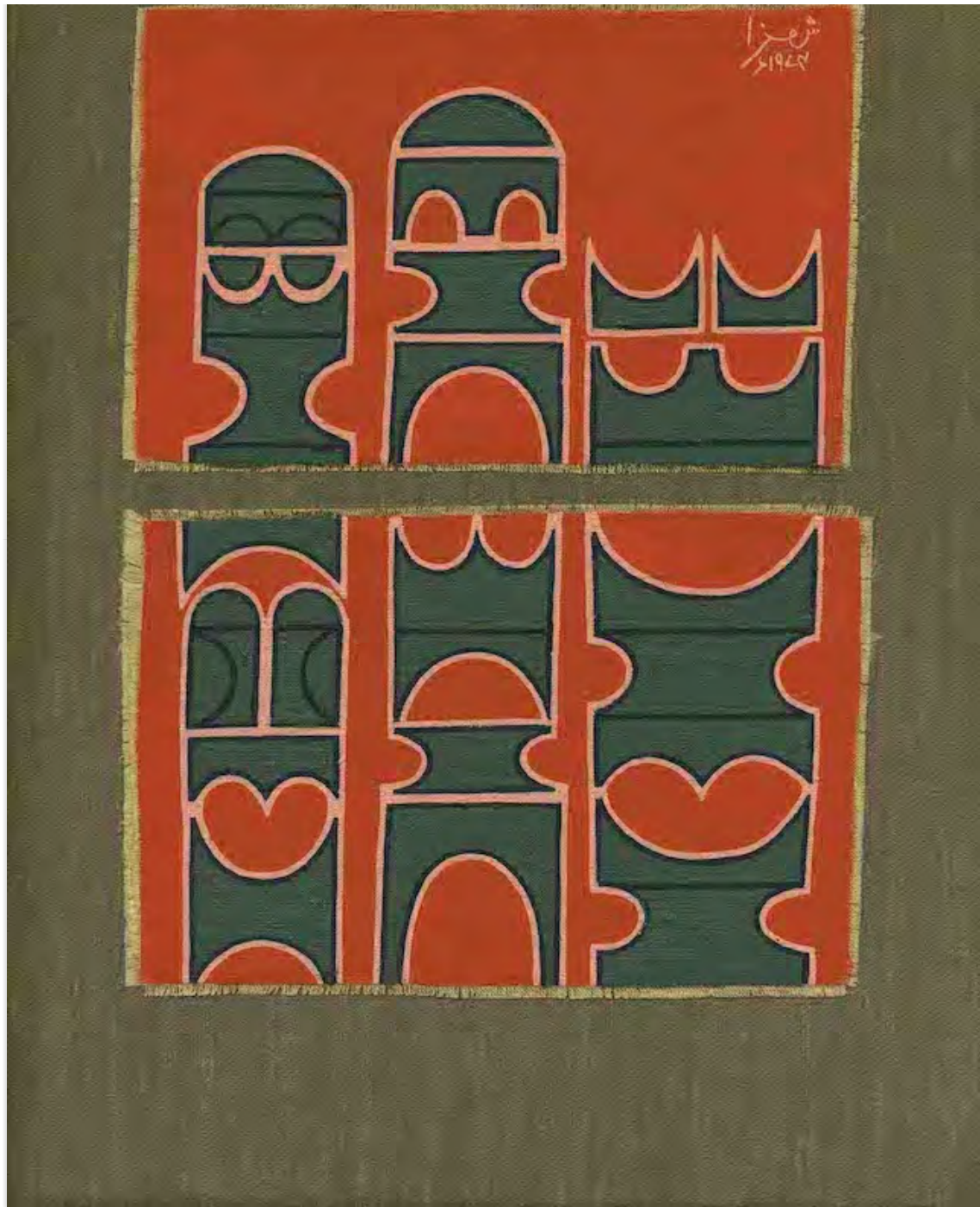


Vasanth Yoganathan, 'An Ocean of Uncertainty', 2013, black and white C-print hand-painted by Jaykumar Shankar, 42 x 34 cm. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

There are varied depictions of the seaside from direct visual references in **Vasanth Yoganathan's** hand-painted photographs to more symbolic references such as the myriad hues of the coast in Rana Begum's tonal studies on paper. The urban detritus familiar in coastal metropolises like Mumbai is the subject of **Gyan Panchal's** bamboo installation *bndus* (2018) and **Prem Sahib's** green neon light *squiggle 24-7* (2016).

**Mrinalini Mukherjee's** bronzes, which are strategically placed across the floor space of the gallery, take the theme further, speaking with the raw concrete of the walls and the warmth of the earthy tones of the Burma teak doors and windows – transforming the metal into something more organic, like driftwood emerging from the heart of the sea.





Anwar Jalal Shemza, 'Red on Orange', 1974, oil on canvas, silk on hardboard, 40.3 x 30.2 cm.

Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

Whether it is the sense of form and permanence projected by **Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi**'s ceramic sculptures *Neolith* (2018) or the fragility and delicacy of **Anwar Jalal Shemza**'s rendering of inks on Japanese paper *City Gate* (1978), the exhibition showcases varied interpretations of the city, its location and its past through the eyes of different artists.

This enables the spectator to look at the urban environment in a unique manner, bringing to mind a line from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux." (What's essential is invisible to the eye.)



*Art Radar* also spoke with the gallery’s founders Amrita and Priya Jhaveri about their journey and their plans for the new space.



“What’s essential”, 1 – 29 September 2018, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai. Photo: Randhir Singh. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

**After eight years since its conception, Jhaveri Contemporary moves from its first location in Mumbai. What would you consider to be your most memorable success in a period that has seen significant developments in the contemporary art space in India?**

Our most memorable success was the **Mrinalini Mukherjee’s exhibition**. To persuade an artist of her stature to show with a young gallery and her ready acceptance was a great vote of confidence. Also working with her and **Peter Nagy** on her retrospective at NGMA, New Delhi was a challenge that we rose to and of which we are immensely proud.





Mrinalini Mukherjee, 'Bronze Emergence I', 2008, 170.2 x 59 x 49 cm. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

**Along the same lines, your gallery’s growth has been contemporaneous to that of path-breaking initiatives such as the India Art Fair and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Did these or others provide impetus to your own trajectory?**

Large scale public events like Kochi or **India Art Fair** have highlighted the primary market. Our participation in the fair has been sporadic, yet these events create excitement and drive traffic to the gallery. They bring patron groups to India to visit galleries and studios and we have certainly benefited from that.



Yamini Nayar, 'What's Essential', 2006, C-print, 50.8 x 61. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

**Your mission has been to showcase work that celebrates South Asian connections and traditions of artists across generations and nationalities. This is crucial as the region strives for greater inclusivity in the art world. What are the challenges that you have faced to give South Asian art and artists an equal international platform?**

The biggest challenge is knowledge and awareness of the art from the region. India is itself a large and fragmented country in terms of the art world so to get an in-depth understanding, one has to spend time and be willing to travel to centres of production and teaching. The second challenge is resources and awareness among patrons in India about how the international art world operates. To insert ourselves into it we need to support museum exhibitions, residencies and ensure our artists are represented in these forums.



“What’s essential”, 1 – 29 September 2018, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai. Photo: Randhir Singh. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

**As you move into Mumbai’s historic art district, which is dotted with other eminent galleries, many of whom have been there for decades, how does Jhaveri Contemporary plan to distinguish itself?**

I think we are quite distinct already in our choice of artists and presentations. The gallery is also substantially different in that we have raw concrete walls interspersed with white walls. We have also retained many of the traditional fixtures. We admire our colleagues and are delighted to be in the same neighbourhood as them. It does feel very grown up!



“What’s essential”, 1 – 29 September 2018, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai. Photo: Randhir Singh. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

**While the design of your earlier space was along conventional white cube lines, the design aesthetic at your new location draws on its past as a 19th century heritage building. Do share with us your architectural vision for the space and how it will tie in with your future curatorial plans.**

We didn’t have an architectural “vision” for this space. I think I would say the architectural intervention was much greater in the old space. Here in the new space we have tried to work with the structure of the building and revive the space rather than re-invent it. We have left a lot of the old features – the large windows, the old brass fittings, the floor and the walls, some of which are left as we found them.





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**Your inaugural show “What’s essential” showcases the works of over twenty different artists, each with their own unique artistic language and medium. How did you integrate their work into your curatorial vision, which was to celebrate the gallery’s relocation?**

Integrating diverse works is straightforward if one can find connections between them. There are several interconnecting threads running through the show – the ocean, arrivals, the horizon line, the flora and fauna of Colaba. The idea was to look at our own history of exhibitions, to consider our new location and to point to our future interests.



Lubna Chowdhary, 'Letting Loose', 2018, ceramics, 50 x 130 cm. Image courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

**The artists participating in “What’s Essential” make up an interesting and impressive list and seem to have a special significance for Jhaveri Contemporary. How were they chosen and were any of the works bespoke pieces that the artists created specifically for the occasion?**

Yes, we have new works created by Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi and **Lubna Chowdhary** but more often than not we showed recent or pre-existing work that spoke to the ideas generated by our new location. Some of the artists in the show are no longer alive so making new work does not apply.



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**What should *Art Radar* readers look forward to from Jhaveri Contemporary in the coming months?**

Coming up are a series of solo exhibitions by **Mohan Samant** and Simryn Gill.

**Amita Kini-Singh**

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***“What’s Essential” is on view from 1 to 29 September 2018 at Jhaveri Contemporary, 3rd Floor, Devdas Mansion, 4 Mereweather Road, Colaba, Mumbai 400001.***

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