



Artist: Bikash Bhattacharjee, showing at DAG

PEOPLE & CULTURE

## How to enjoy Art Mumbai: tips from artists

Grab a map, wear comfy shoes and take the kids along...

BY ELA DAS  
13 November 2024

"It's not all about high-brow art. Everyone from a student at JJ School of Art to museum curators and the most seasoned collector will get access to art they can identify with," says Minal Vazirani, co-founder of ART MUMBAI, which is back with its second edition.

"We'd been talking about an art fair in Mumbai for many, many years because the city makes up for 65% of the country's art market. In fact, the first modern art galleries in India opened in Bombay. Over time, we noticed very little programming taking place here, compared to other cities, and thought an art fair would make art so much more accessible and inclusive for Mumbaiers and their visitors," says Vazirani.

This year's fair covers double the space they took up at 150-year-old Mahalaxmi Racecourse last year, with 74 galleries participating from India and overseas, and a 200-seat auditorium being built for the performing arts. Vazirani says that the overall personality is very casual

and lively, meant to make art approachable. "Grab a map for the sculpture walk that's spread out throughout the fair to take in a range of artworks outside the conventional white walls of a gallery space," she says. The highlight this year is at the main entrance—an immersive artwork titled *Vichitra*, which unfolds like an interactive game. "But I don't want to give away the element of surprise! Walk in and take a look!"

### How to navigate an art fair: tips from the artists

"Art fairs can be overwhelming for everyone, even the most seasoned collectors and experienced artists," says artist Sameer Kulavoor, sharing how he first makes a quick round across an art fair to take it all in. "I make a mental note of things that interest me or I'm instinctively drawn to... especially if someone's used a material in an innovative way. It's also interesting to see how gallerists place their artworks, especially when they juxtapose modern masters with contemporary artists."

Kulavoor points out how it's impossible to read all the curatorial notes and texts at each **exhibit** "because there's so much research that's gone into it over a period of time, it's hard to understand it in one shot. Don't feel small if you're suddenly a bit lost. **Take breaks** to grab a bite—or three—in between." You'll usually find him checking out the bookstores at any fair for a breather, picking up material to read after being inspired.

As an art fair insider who's participated in several over the past few years, he adds, "**Come in as early as possible**. Chances are you'll catch the behind-the-scenes frenzy or a more human side to the fair. There's always the last-minute rehang for a wrongly placed artwork or exhausted teams rushing for a cuppa just before the **show**. You may end up eavesdropping on some juicy gossip!"

#### **Art fairs can be a place for the whole family**

Because her mum Meera Devidayal was also an artist, graphic designer and visual artist Rachana Devidayal recalls visiting **art fairs** "probably from the time I started to walk. There's an element of luxe grandeur in each one, but the art can consume you... almost leading to visual fatigue at times," she warns. "Go in with an open mind, and **dip into the fair's social media or programming before visiting** to make a rough list of what you want to see or do. It'll save you the energy of wandering around aimlessly, because just like you can't see an entire **city** in one visit, you won't be able to take in the whole fair in a day."

She recalls still feeling daunted at times when visiting fairs after all these years, "especially witnessing the volumes of art being sold and the monetary transactions for it. But it's more of a narrative you tend to create in your head. **I cover little pockets at a time** and sometimes **strike up a conversation** with someone next to me who's looking at the same **artwork** for perspective. And gallerists are usually stuck at their stalls all day—they're always happy to chat with new faces that come by."

Devidayal also finds **art fairs** the perfect place for a **family outing**, especially for kids—whether they're toddlers or teenagers. "If you have a little one who has just discovered an art medium, point out works which have been created with in. Or research what's currently trending or part of your child's school curriculum—you'll find something here you can explore and learn together."

#### **How galleries think**

"I look at art fairs as a place to discover more about **galleries** and the way they think about the art they put up," shares artist and visual autoethnographer of the Koli tribe, Parag Tandel. "Very often, a gallery holds a group show at a fair, and I find it interesting to see how they put different works together, especially the placement. As an artist, you often see the dialogue they want to create between the art, or even the works they think are more important than another," he chuckles.

Tandel points out that a fair is a place where one can discover the best works of any **artist** because "it's very rare a **gallery** will experiment much here. You'll mostly see a distilled curation of hero art." He encourages **going up to the artists** to learn more about their work or creative process since, often, there's a slew of research that goes into a piece—all of which might not translate onto paper. "But don't touch the artworks! And **wear comfy shoes**...you'll be walking around for hours."

#### **ART MUMBAI at a glance**

- Once you buy a ticket, book a guided **walk** with Art & Wonderment for a **tour** of the fair with a group of people. Chances are, you'll get to meet like-minded folk, taking in and discussing the art more informally along the way
- A slew of stage performances, most notably by junk percussion band Dharavi Rocks on Sunday, 17 November
- The Speaker **Series** which will cover thought-provoking topics ranging from understanding collecting patterns of the past and how they are evolving today, to exploring the different urgencies that shaped the Indian modern art movement, or the impact of AI advancements on art. The most anticipated is Karan Johar's, who will be in conversation with the ladies from *Fabulous Lives vs Bollywood Wives*
- A centenary tribute to Indian masters FN Souza and VS Gaitonde, featuring a collection of Souza's gouaches from his 1965 collaboration with miniaturist Mohan Sharma; alongside Gaitonde's early compositions and post-1984 drawings—created after an accident limited his ability to paint large canvases

*ART MUMBAI 2024 takes place at Mahalaxmi Racecourse, Mumbai, from 14 November to 17 November from 11am to 7pm. Tickets available on [Insider.in](#) starting Rs699*