

# Portrait of a young studio

Space 118 provides artists with the most precious thing in Mumbai — a space to paint and sculpt

**RAMYA SARMA**

**T**ucked deep in the bylanes of Mazgaon is a serene space belonging to a family with business interests in warehousing. Drive through the urban village that is Tarwadi and turn into enormous aluminium gates nestled between slum dwellings and you suddenly arrive in an oasis that could be anywhere except the metropolitan mess that is mid-central Mumbai.

And it is indeed an oasis for those who desperately seek space to create art. Artistic inspiration needs a nurturing home, a shelter from where to flower, and that is what entrepreneur Saloni Doshi has made a reality with Space 118, started in 2009.

Giving up a corporate job to start this space was a big step, but Doshi says that she has always been “passionate about art”. Her choices were either to start a gallery, which she did not want to do, or to paint, which she does not have the talent for, she laughs. On her travels, she discovered that residencies provided a much-needed haven for artists who did not have their own space to work within. She saw these facilities elsewhere in India — in Delhi, in Chennai, in Bangalore, but “Where do people work in Mumbai? The studio system does not really exist here. Someone had to start it — so I did!”

A number of young and potentially outstanding artists have worked here, including Aashna Jhaveri, Armando Miguelez, Juan Requena, Mufaddal Husein, Nyela Saeed, Rupa Chordia, Sharath Kumar, Sharmistha Ray, Jenny Bhatt and Shrutti Garg.

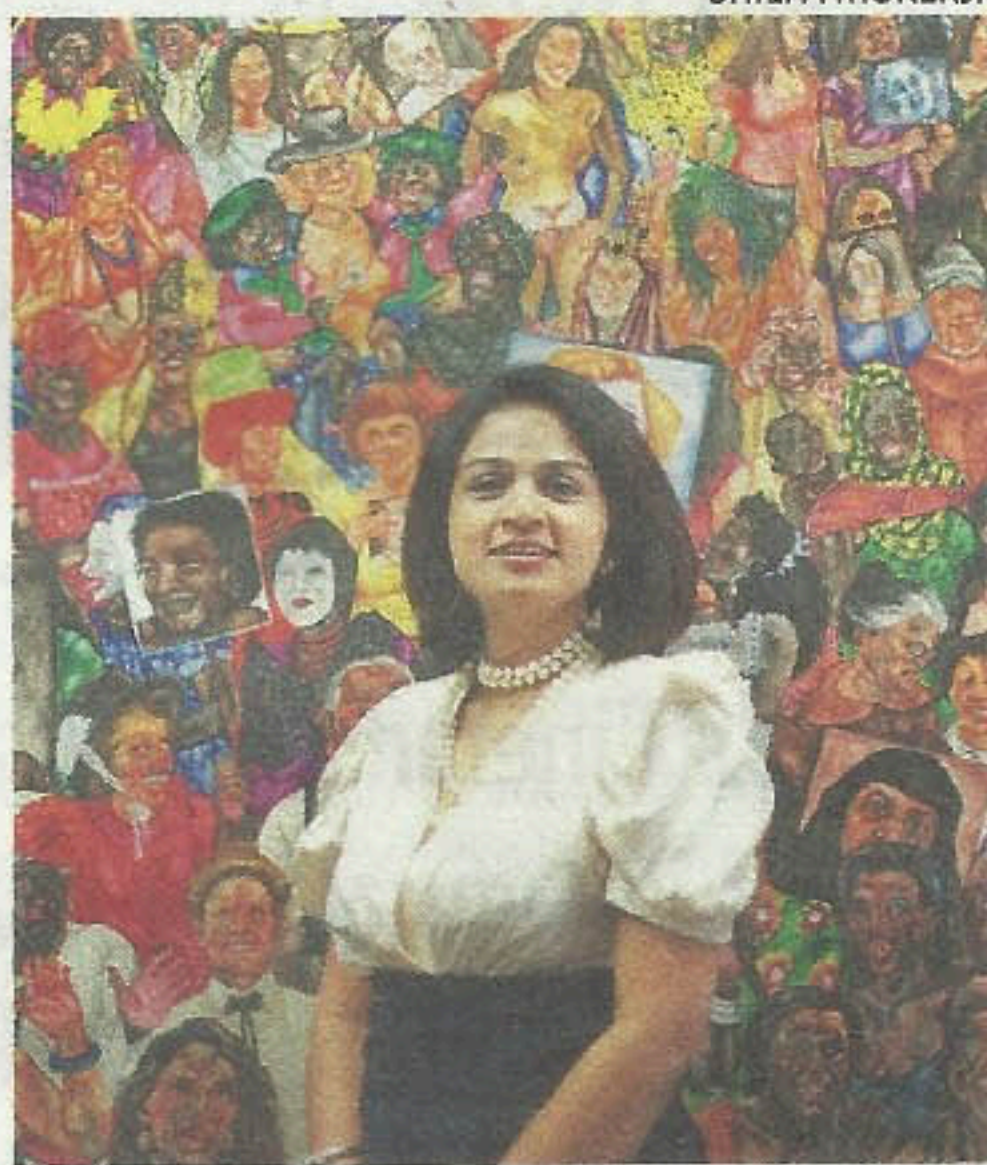
“I come from a family of entrepreneurs,” Doshi explains. “My parents were extremely supportive, especially since I said I was doing this, with no business plan in hand. It was something new, somewhere between business and philanthropy, and my family trusted me totally.” For almost two years, “artists came, worked for from two to six months. Now I give them space for one to four months. Each person has to apply and give no one else work in the time that they are at Space 118. I decide who comes. People who come here are serious artists who need space — which I give them, in the context of work done. And they need to

know what they are doing.”

In exchange, Doshi gets one work from each client. And the response has been very positive indeed. “Artists have loved it, some didn’t want to leave!” she says. “Or when they were going, they said they wanted to come back.” The studio is run on a barter system, space is not rented out, she clarifies.

The studio-residency works by word of mouth. And the studio holds Open Days, where the art produced is displayed and perhaps finds a market. There is, of course, as would be expected, some criticism as well. An artist who prefers to remain unnamed said, “Some artists

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**COLOUR FEST: Saloni Doshi offers space to artists on a barter basis**

before me were pressurised to give large works in exchange for the studio. Dates when the studio is available could suddenly change after all the arrangements had been made and early departures are not taken well. Dates are sorted out immediately, but this kind of thing leaves a bad taste in the mouth.”

Others like Jenny Bhatt are all praise for the time they spent there. “Space 118, like most studios and residencies in the world, gives artists a quiet place to be able to focus on their work,” says Bhatt. “It is always enriching to interact and exchange views with other artists. This space is young and some systems are in the process of being streamlined, but that is just a matter of time. On the whole, it has been a good experience.”

And for Doshi, there is another kind of satisfaction that comes from home. Her parents are now “happy, surprised!” ■