

Art patron Saloni Doshi opens up her collection of photographs to the public

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The second edition focuses on landscape and abstract photography from Saloni Doshi's collection. (Saloni Doshi)

Mumbai-based art patron Saloni Doshi has been collecting artworks since the age of 23. Two decades into her collecting journey, she felt a deep desire to make her art more accessible to the public. The 44-year-old patron took a step in this direction last year when she showcased works of contemporary photography from her archive in the exhibition, *The Right To Look Part I*. Following its success, the exhibition's second edition opened to the public in Mumbai earlier this month.

While the first edition focused on figurative and performance photography, the second edition, curated by Amit Kumar Jain, is all about landscape and abstract photography from Doshi's collection. "Photography is a unique medium, which beautifully captures moments that pass us by. I started my collection with photographs, buying them extensively very early on," says Doshi.

As a first-generation art collector, Doshi's initial hurdle was making her family understand why she chose it as a calling. For her, it started as a passion, but it didn't take long for it to become a vocation. "I was in my early 20s, and at that time it was not a profession that people had heard of. So, it was a difficult beginning," she adds.

In 2009, Doshi converted a part of her warehouse space in South Mumbai to launch Space118 studio. She had a simple reason—to provide the one thing that artists often don't have access to in urban areas, which is space. Over the years, the space has hosted 450 artists as part of residency programmes for budding artists.

The Right To Look Part II, Space 118's first exhibition this year, dwells deeper into the world of photography. The showcased works are rooted in historical traditions and contemporary practices, enabling people to reflect on spatial relations. The photos capture places of comfort, those of disarray—a moment of disquiet where the natural world collides with sprawling concrete urban jungles, the exhibition brochure explains. It also makes people ask poignant questions, such as what happens to the places we leave behind.

The exhibition is divided into five rooms, wherein the photos are bound together by a theme. In the first studio, *The Promised Land*, people will get to see works such as Raghu Rai's *Self Portrait, Mumbai* (2019) and *Madhya Pradesh* (1982), Sohrab Hura's *River* (2005) and Ketaki Sheth's *Man Under Flyover* (2015), among others. The theme refers to the land that people inherit from their forefathers; land that waits for us, always and forever, says Doshi. "It's interesting to see how Amit has made sense of works that I have bought over 15 years and presented them under a theme," she adds.

The passage of time is explored through clocks and places in studio two, *A Crack In The Surface*. For instance, there is Raqs Media Collective's *Sleep Clock* (2018), a print with humour about the passing of time and its effect on various psychological states of being, and Priyank Gothwal's *Public Clocks* series, which documents actual clocks of Mumbai. Raghu Rai's 1973 work, *Jantar Mantar, Delhi*, shows how the place was before, urging one to reflect on how times have changed.

One of the interesting works in studio three, *Stuck In A Moment*, is from Pakistani photographer Bani Abidi's *The VIP's Waiting Room* (2009) series, wherein photos examine the interiors of buildings. Doshi explains that there is a lack of doors and no clear entry or exit point in photos, which leaves people in a dilemma as they wonder for how long they have to wait.

The exhibition raises an important question about 'what happens when nature no longer nurtures us' through the works displayed in studio four, *The Wasteland*. Doshi says the works are an artistic enquiry into where people have taken the planet. "For instance, Arun Kumar

HG's *Landscape* (2011), shows cities that have grown out, trees that have grown beyond space, and bridges that have taken over spaces. Our cities have become a wasteland and we have to question the exploitation that's happening in the environment," she explains.

Other works such as Puja Vaish's *From Memories of Under Construction* (2012) and Gigi Scaria's *In Conversation* (2010) push people to reflect on the receding natural landscape that's being overtaken by a consumeristic culture.

Talking about the theme for the last studio, *A Light Through The Cracks*, Doshi says the purpose was to leave people hopeful and reassured. It includes Surekha's *The Whispering Silence Photo-Action* (2010) where people can see a lush tree braving its odds against in an unsporting environment and Neha Choksi's *Lone Orange* (2008), where a single orange atop a barren tree shows resilience.

One of the main aims of this exhibition is to expose people to contemporary works, Doshi says. "It's also about educating people about all kinds of photography, introducing them to the medium and seeing what kind of photography connects with people," she adds. A book, based on the collection, will also be published.

The Right To Look – II is open to the public from January 11 to March 16 and is on view at Space118, Mumbai from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., including Sundays.
