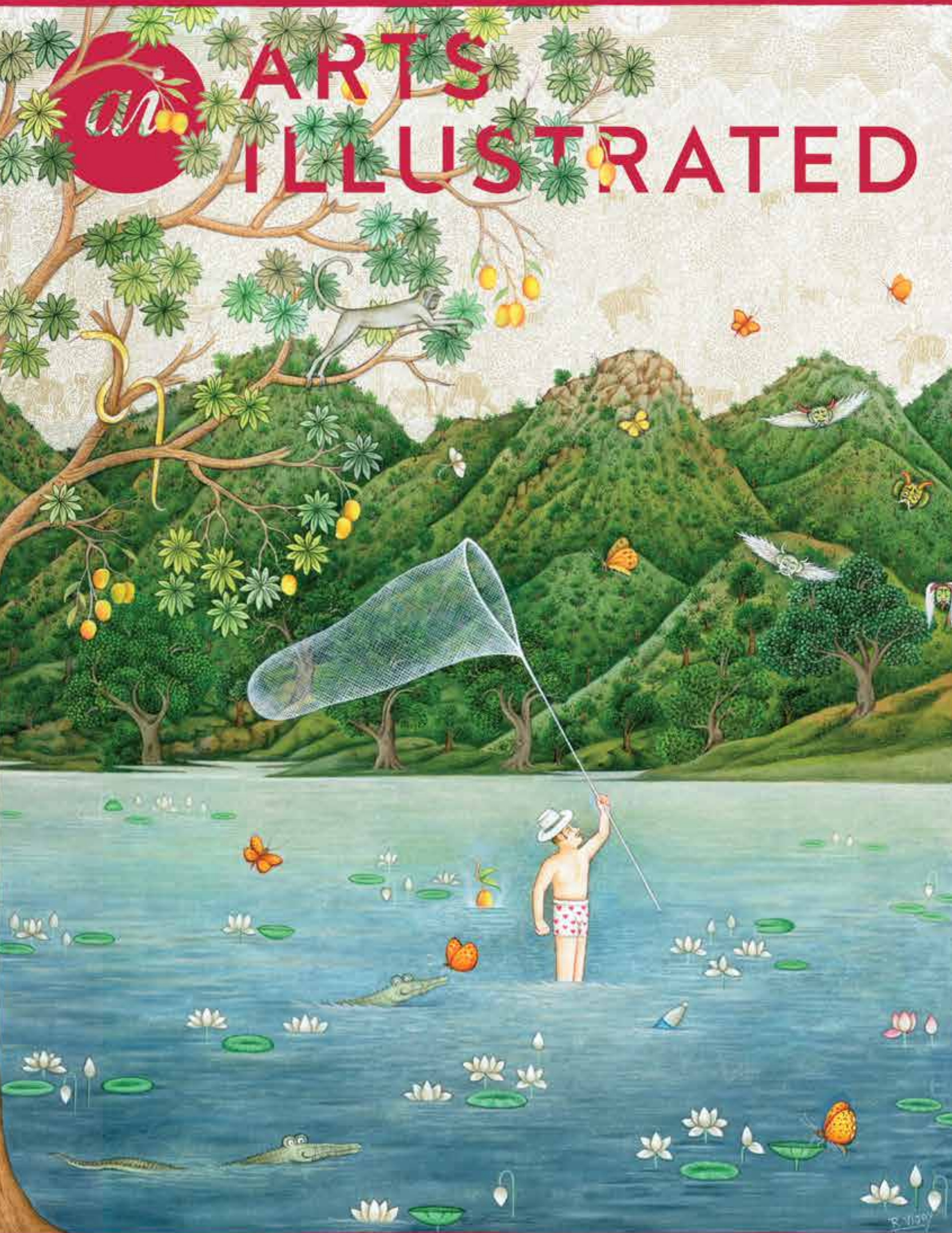


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Publisher's note

The realms of imagination that surround us give us unexpected glimpses of otherworldliness, often sandwiched between the moments of ordinariness. This world is delicious because it allows you free interpretation; but it is also tricky because, once discovered, it follows you around like a shadow.

This issue of Arts Illustrated, we take on the big, squishy, shape-shifting word – Fantasy. We look at artists who have this capacity to not only clearly see and feel the pulsating throb of reality around them but also have the ability to look deeper, look beyond, to see and feel the steady thrum of magic. Not the magic of fairytales, but that of thought, dialogue and expression wrapped in a cloak of flamboyance.

Vincent Adaikalraj



Editor's note

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, an American fantasy sitcom called *Out of this World* would become my first conscious brush with fantasy. I remember watching sporadic episodes as a child, utterly fascinated with the half-human-half-alien protagonist, Evie (later, *WALL.E*'s 'Ee-vah' would bring back strong memories), who could freeze time on earth. *Small Wonder*'s 'Vicky' suddenly paled in comparison. Magic was accessible and did not have to be a robot (even if only half human), and that became such an indelible part of an internal reality that I couldn't un-magic it away. Something in the fabric of the world changed; a broken needle that had to be cast away but could be replaced with a shinier, more malleable version. If we chose to. Much later, I would discover the *Lord of the Rings* – and then, of course, there would be no looking back.

This act of choice is what sets the world of fantasy apart. It isn't forcing you to believe or even benignly accept. It simply exists by virtue of its ability to remain, to float, like a lost petal content to settle anywhere. And, for me, that sense of magic which defines this space isn't so much about spells and wizards, but about the relatability of it all, filled with the hope that we invest in an eyelash carrying a wish.

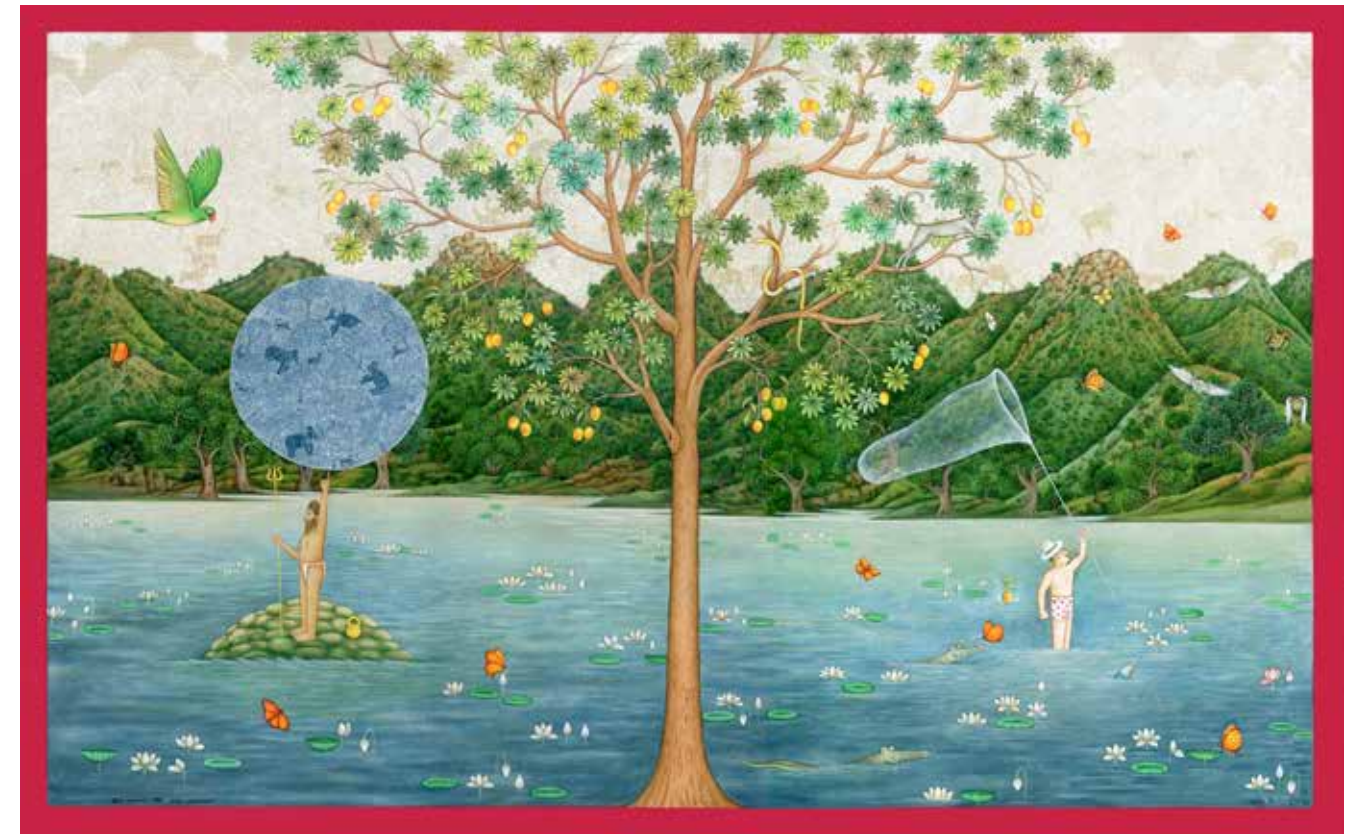
We found that all our stories this issue were conscious acts of choice by the artist(e)s to enter realms of the absurd, the theatrical, the glamorous, the glitzy, the ordinary, and the narrative patterns we are constantly seeing and unseeing. Sometimes the results are surprising, almost giddily so, and sometimes introspective, like a neglected switch that is suddenly found and switched on. It is also about beauty, this issue, of a kind that leaves you breathless while holding your hand.

Would I still be just as mesmerised by Evie and her time-freezing superpower, and ignore the messy politics of gender and identity that it had, that I can now see? Maybe not. But does that take the idea of the fantastic away? Also, maybe not, because, there is always Tolkien. And then, this issue.



Praveena Shivram
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Cover Artist



A Day of Possibilities, Gouache on wasli, 2018

Sometimes our work is dismissed as simply 'whimsical', but a closer look with a bit of thought always reveals a deeper meaning. In the work titled *A Day of Possibilities* that we made for the cover of this issue of *Arts Illustrated*, our oft-seen 'Everyman' (wearing a white fedora) 'fishes' for butterflies, knee-deep in a lake. He is oblivious to the practical need to catch fish, his mind probably filled with the desire for knowledge and specimens for evidence. Is he hoping for the fragility of a precious butterfly? Or does he seek the horned demons with white wings? A falling mango has nearly missed him, a viper is in the tree, and two crocodiles are dangerously near. It is a day of possibilities, and yet our protagonist is fixed upon only one of them. It is as if a self-imposed tunnel vision has left him almost sightless, to his own immediate dangers and a plethora of opportunities.

And, yet, there is peace in this image, too. Perhaps our fedora-man knows fully well what he is doing. As we ourselves are merely spectators, viewing this scene with our own perceptions. The lush mountains recede into a puzzled sky, a jungle-sky that hints at myths and archetypes and consciousness that extends beyond our own time, place and understanding. The *sadhu*, who is in a way a mirror to the protagonist, seems to have it all figured out. He balances the universe on his fingertip. But we are left really not knowing the reality. Has the *sadhu* truly found enlightenment, or does he only imagine it so? After all, the ball he holds can only be a partial universe. Meanwhile, our protagonist perseveres: be his way of knowing foolhardy, or patiently wise.



Waswo X. Waswo

Cover Artwork by Waswo X. Waswo with R. Vijay
Cover and sub-covers curated by Rahul Kumar



Collective Commons

The Antiquity of Time

In a 70-year-old bungalow in central Delhi, there is antiquity that is 900 years old. Stone statues from the Chola period and porcelain vases from China sit comfortably with contemporary art. The architecture of the house is left untouched and is home to Tarana Sawhney, a patron of the Foundation of Indian Contemporary Art (FICA), member of the TATE International Committee, and recently appointed Chair of the Task Force for Art and Culture formed by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). We spoke to her about her love for the arts at her home, where she lives with her husband, Tarun, and their two children, Noor and Yash.

RAHUL KUMAR

Photographs by Shantanu Prakash



Mine is an old family of Peshawar with a strong sense of Peshawari culture.

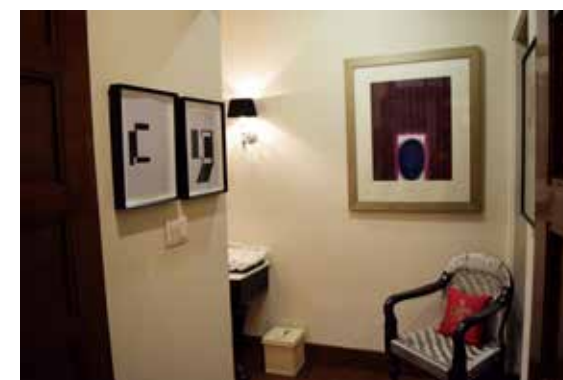
I spent a considerable amount of time with my grandmother when I was young. As a result, my childhood was spent with deep flavours of the local culture in every sense. From food, dialect and even approach to life, it had an immense influence on my persona. The family moved to India after the Partition, and our ancestral home in Pakistan is now converted into a museum. So, history and heritage were always important to me.



I also had a strong bond with my grandfather, who was an incredible human being.

He had his business based out of the then Connaught Place. From when I was about nine years old, we had a day out after school every week. We would go to museums and art galleries, which at that time were all concentrated in central Delhi. We were regulars at the National Museum, National Gallery of Modern Art, Shri Ram Centre, and the Lalit Kala Akademi. At the age of 14, I saw the incredible *Padshabnama* exhibit (pictorial account of the Mughal Empire). Looking at original miniature paintings through a magnifying glass had a resounding impact on me. The arts, in general, were a big part of my growing up. Legends like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan were visitors at home, and I learnt Hindustani classical music...I guess the love for music led to my very name, which refers to a composition style by poet-saint Amir Khusro.

Art was not a big part of my life in my teenage years.



I studied law, and as a young adult, there were other interests. I met my husband when I was studying at LSR and he was at Cambridge. When we got married and moved to Philadelphia as students at the University of Pennsylvania, we went to the Barnes Foundation. This was the trigger for me to explore and enjoy modern art. The museum boasts the largest and most versatile collection of Henri Matisse and Paul Cezanne. When I look back, I feel that was 'contemporary' for me since I was used to seeing Monet and other classical forms prior to that. Trained in

law, reading all the wall text came naturally to me and stories of Rothko and his peer group intrigued me as much as they fuelled my curiosity.

Back in India, I began collecting big names.

I worked with Arun Jaitley as a corporate lawyer before taking a sabbatical when I had my daughter. My husband and I had similar tastes in art. Having been exposed to modern art in the West, it was the natural choice for art at home. We bought art without much study or thought. Collecting masters was like owning a big brand. Indian

modernists like Husain and Raza needed no introduction. Soon, collecting art became my core interest and collecting wine became his.

I owe it to my mentors who taught me to view art.

As is the case with anything, you have to immerse yourself into the study of the subject to evolve. Amit Judge took me to Baroda for a show by Anju Dodiya. It was a defining show in more ways than one. The experience of the exhibit itself was unique and immersive. The other enthusiast, curator and gallerist who coached me was Peter Nagy. My endless



interactions with him led me to appreciate contemporary and conceptual art. I started reading and actively visiting galleries.

Art-as-a fundraising initiative became the foundation stone for an NGO I co-formed for underprivileged children. In 2006, a group of friends formed Khushi to provide education and healthcare for children from marginalised

backgrounds. To raise the corpus money, we began art auctions under the title 'India on Canvas' where artworks made collaboratively by an artist along with a celebrity were auctioned. Art remained the major funding mechanism till 2012 for this NGO and it ended up adopting 97 villages in this time.

The downturn of 2008 and art for the sake of return-on-

investment disillusioned me. The commercial nature that contemporary art was taking disenchanted me. Commerce per se is important and not a bad thing, but when it hinders creativity, the art that emerges is not inspiring. I was a buyer at a time when contemporary art was expensive, and, as for all other collectors from that time, the prices haven't recovered. While there are no regrets, I got bored of art. Over

the years I read a lot on heritage and that logically led to my interest in antiquities. Stone and metal sculptures from the 12th century became a fascinating discovery.

It has been an organic evolution for me.

My taste as an art collector evolved considerably over time. I now collect works that have a symbolic reference and relate to my own life. For instance, works of Zarina Hashmi speak of my own life, of borders and homes, of belonging and migration. My collection of photographs by Gauri Gill, Dayanita Singh and others has deep-rooted meanings. My positions with various art organisations made me realise the depth of our soft-power through the arts and the gravity of support needed for it rise to its potential. I felt I had the responsibility to become a patron. My house today is open to internationally visiting collectors and I feel humbled when I try, in a small way, to fill the gap that our public institutions are unable to.

Antiquities next to contemporary art do not seem disjointed to us.

A few years ago, I had acquired a large *pichhwai* painting. Since the purchase happened by looking at images, I never saw the actual work. When I opened it several months later to check on its well-being, I was in awe of the detailing. Of course, it was also too beautiful to be in storage. The work was so huge that I had to remodel our drawing room to accommodate it. There is immense respect for history, and therefore I continue to

acquire antiquities in parallel. Anita Dube saw an immediate correlation of her installation with this antique *pichhwai* painting. I see a seamless connection between history and contemporary through my collection.

Collecting a few artists vertically became important for me.

I learnt this from a great collector in the West. It was important to become part of the story of the artist, and the only way to do that was to acquire works over a continued period of the artist's practice. Other than Zarina Hashmi who I have collected over the years, I have a good representation of Rana Begum. My other favourites remain Atul Dodiya and Jitish Kallat, with whom I share a special friendship.

It would be so hard to pick one work that I love the most.

Of the antiquities that we own, it will have to be the 900-year-old 'Hoysala statue' from South India – I will never find a piece like that again. And from my art collection, at the moment, I feel it will be *The Last Supper* by Annie Leibovitz.





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