

CULTURE

After nine years, Tarq is moving to a newer, warmer space in Mumbai's Fort

The gallery known to spotlight new artists moved to a bigger space while retaining the warmth of its inaugural space.

By Aatish Nath

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Tarq's new home, opening out on AK Nayak Marg is almost twice as big as its Dhanraj Mahal space. The gallery, known for showcasing the work of younger artists, has grown in reputation since opening nine years ago, and "needed to move to a bigger space", explains Hena Kapadia, its founder and director. With the opening of artist and illustrator Sameer Kulavoor's Edifice Complex, its new location at KK Chambers, designed by [architect](#) Goto Katsushi is now open to the public.

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Katsushi is the founder of Square Works, a Mumbai-based architecture and design firm. He also happens to be married to Vishwa Shroff, an artist represented by the gallery. He lives between Tokyo and Mumbai and has imbued the space with a minimal materialism that is stark yet warm – bringing in colours and details that are familiar to those that have visited its previous space. Using a material palette that encompasses brass, wood, concrete, corten steel and milled steel, the design is detail-oriented, down to the window locks and door handles. The new location, which had been unused for years before Kapadia chanced on it, needed a lot of work, given the accumulation of dust and general neglect.

The interiors were a collaboration, as Kapadia explains, “We basically started from scratch.” Together with Katsushi, she was able to “mould it the way I wanted it and the way that was beautiful but also very utilitarian. So that we can use the space for everything we want to use it for.” From a design point of view, that meant that the poured concrete flooring is interrupted by wooden planks, because as Kapadia notes, “I wanted to retain the warmth that we had in the Dhanraj Mahal space,” even as she moved to a space that is, “Industrial and bigger and cavernous.” Practically, it meant that Katsushi was given a list of rooms that Kapadia wanted, along with the requirement that each room would fulfil.



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So, while visitors walk into a large gallery, there's also an eight-desk admin office, pantry, conference room, art storage, library and director's seating area. The conference-cum-art viewing room is given its own distinct look – with black tile flooring and a corten steel tile wall—separating it from the rest of the gallery. A black mild steel staircase is hidden near the workspace and has been custom-made for the space. Visitors can see the library, which used to be in Kapadia's office at Dhanraj Mahal. While it's not a lending library, Kapadia explains, "it is a reference resource and in case someone does want to use it, they can reach out."

The gallery itself is more of a white cube than previously, with high ceilings, unobtrusive details and a whole lot of custom, space-specific design. Given that Kulavoor's practice has always looked at the built environment and spaces in the city, the show is the perfect foil to the space, as the pieces run from large wall-dominating canvases to smaller, individually-framed studies that are playfully displayed in the new gallery. Because Kulavoor's work draws from urban ubiquity, it speaks to the new, carefully designed space with its arches and intersections, delicate shading of shadows and reverse painting, of acrylic and oil marker on glass sheets.



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Speaking about the gallery, Kapadia says with a laugh, “My carpentry budget was one-third of my total renovation budget.” For his part, the [Japanese](#) architect says, “All the details are custom made for this project, so they are site-specific. It could be adapted to other projects in the future, but these are conceived to achieve simplicity in the gallery and avoid bringing a manufactured materiality.” The double height space features lighting design by Tripti Sahni of Studio Trace, though it does get natural light through the archways that punctuate one wall.

Katsushi has devised an ingenious closing mechanism for the wooden shutters for the arches, which hinge from the mid-

point of the curve and shut outward. A custom brass lock, attached to the wall on either side, seals the shutter in place. Similarly, bathroom doors feature custom-made handles that double as locks, and the original metal columns that punctuate the entire space feature wooden inserts that add warmth to the gallery. Taken as a whole, the space feels open to possibilities. Certain touches, like the use of pastel tiles in the bathroom bring a sense of the old space's [Art Deco](#) roots. This desire to retain a sense of continuity is also what led to the corten Steel tiles that can be found on a single wall in the conference room. Thinking about its purpose Katsushi explains, "I thought of bringing crimson red, Tarq's brand colour, into a windowless conference room without using artificially created wall paint. We had thought of glazed tiles with crimson red and corten steel. We chose corten steel, as it coexists with the original steel structure and gives boldness with its materiality and texture, as compared to the sheen of glazed tile."



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He also speaks about designing for a heritage building saying, "another [design](#) effort in response to the heritage structure was to keep steel beams visible, instead of putting them behind false ceilings. These structural beams are independent of the gallery space. For my practice, it is imperative to keep these elements that are independent of each other to express the coexistence of different times and systems."

Given that Kapadia says, "I wanted a more challenging space to challenge my [artists](#) and their practice," it's easy to see how the gallery could lend itself to more—from site-specific works to group shows where a clear dialogue can be established in the large space.

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