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"TARQ IS AN OPEN-HOUSE INVITATION TO ANYONE INTERESTED IN ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND QUESTIONS." – HENA KAPADIA

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Text and Photography by Asad Sheikh.

The founder of the almost decade-old contemporary art gallery in Mumbai tells us what colours her artistic vision and how the new space has been designed to grow their gallery programme



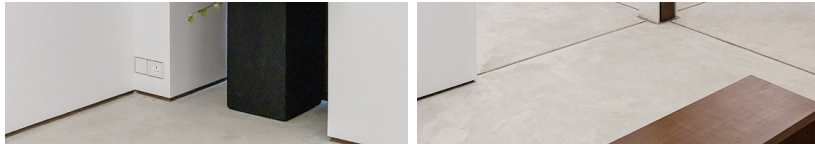
Tarq's new location is characterised by an extreme verticality of space.

Ever since Tarq's inception in 2014, the gallery has been at the forefront of the contemporary art scene in Mumbai. It has represented a gamut of young, upcoming artists who have gone on to make their mark both nationally and globally.

Now, nearly a decade later, the gallery's founder Hena Kapadia decided to shift its location from its first home at Dhanraj Mahal, an art-deco building in Mumbai's art district. Tarq can now be found on the ground floor of KK (Navsari) Chambers, a 100-year-old building in one of the bylanes near the iconic Flora Fountain. Kapadia collaborated with Mumbai-based Japanese architect Katsushi Goto on the new space's architectural details. In its new avatar, its design aims to strategically maximise a sense of verticality.

In [an earlier interview](#) with *Verve* when the gallery was founded, Kapadia had emphasised, "The essence of Tarq is that it is open to vibrant conversation." She hopes to carry the dialogue ahead in the new premises that is, for starters, distinctly larger than its previous one. As one walks into the gallery through its tall door, one is immediately conscious of how high the ceiling is. The gallery boasts a large open area flanked with teakwood pillars that further add to the verticality of the space. The entrance and the windows — with dark brown panels and brass hardware that stretches from the floor to the ceiling — are easily its most eye-catching aspects. Cleverly placed steel frames enhance the interiors of the gallery.





Floral arrangements by Nazneen Jehangir adorn the space during the gallery's opening weekend. Tarq also has lighting designed by Tripti Sahni.

When I visit Tarq, massive green floral arrangements by Nazneen Jehangir of Libellule, adorn the window alcoves. I am informed that these would be on display for the gallery's opening weekend — later the huge windows swivel open to let in light and enable passersby to get a peek of the exhibits, inviting them to walk in. Long floating strips of light, designed by Tripti Sahni, dance around the pillars and the perimeter of the gallery — and the windows that are lined up on one wall promise to let in natural light. Teakwood lines form the grouting on the peach-grey tile work. As one walks further into the gallery, having explored the space with the pillars, one is led into a smaller area also dotted with artworks. The library — with its detachable teak wood railing — which highlights Kapadia's personal collection, is visible from the lower level.

The gallery's inaugural exhibition is quite aptly a solo show (*Edifice Complex*, on show till 10th June, 2023), by Sameer Kulavoor, an artist whose creatives express his unique observations of spaces, structures and geographies.

In a walkthrough at the gallery, a day before its official opening, *Verve* speaks to Kapadia about her vision, her motivation for the shift, and her future plans.

Excerpts from the conversation...

Why did you feel the need to move from your original prestigious location?

Very frankly, we outgrew Dhanraj Mahal at some point. We had reached a stage where we needed additional space for storage. So, for example, if we needed to hire someone, we didn't have the physical bandwidth to do that. Realising the crunch, I started looking around for viable options. And when I

found this place it had actually been *khali* (empty) for about 20 years. It was just an abandoned place because there had been some issue with the landlord. That was resolved and we were able to rent it. It took us about eight months to get it ready. We've retained some elements like the pillars, which are the original ones.



The office at the rear can be accessed through a narrow corridor.

What have you brought across from your old space at Dhanraj Mahal?

Of some of the things we wanted to use architecturally in our new premises, one was the teakwood assets. We have also reused most of our old furniture. I would also like to think that the warmth of the people that worked there will continue here. Now, the library is visible to everyone, which is nice and different from earlier, where it was inside my office. But access to the library is still restricted.

Who did you work with to create the new interiors?

We work with an artist called Vishwa Shroff. Her partner Katsushi Goto is an architect and he's the one who has actually helped us design and put everything together — the pillars, the windows, the flooring, all the detailing.

I've been working with Vishwa since 2014 and I've known Goto since 2015 so we've developed a great personal and professional rapport. He's paid incredible attention to detail, especially in terms of functionality and other things which mean a lot to us. In fact, Goto is moving his architectural practice to the fourth floor (of the same building) and I found out about this vacant space through him.



Teakwood furniture from its original location at Dhanraj Mahal finds a place in the new gallery.

And the contractors who worked on the Dhanraj Mahal gallery worked on this one too. I firmly believe that Tarq is built on its relationships, so I wanted that to carry on.

What was your brief to Goto?

I wanted to maximise the natural light that the gallery has. Apart from that I allowed him to do whatever he wanted to do, as long as we retained the warmth of our old space. The design also had to be practical for us. But it was his vision entirely; I think my inputs were more functional.

There are a few specific things that Goto did for us, but they are storage-related. For example, most of our storage is upstairs so he made the library railing removable for easy access. So, what needs to be stored can thus be easily transported straight up from the gallery space and we do not need to lug it up via a smaller staircase.



The library features a detachable railing for functionality.

Speaking about design, there is a funny story behind the sound of the doorbell. Its chirping bird sound belies its appearance. I asked the electrician to change its sound, but I was told, 'Madam, this is the sound given for this design'. And I decided to retain it because Goto liked it.

What do you love most about your KK Chambers space?

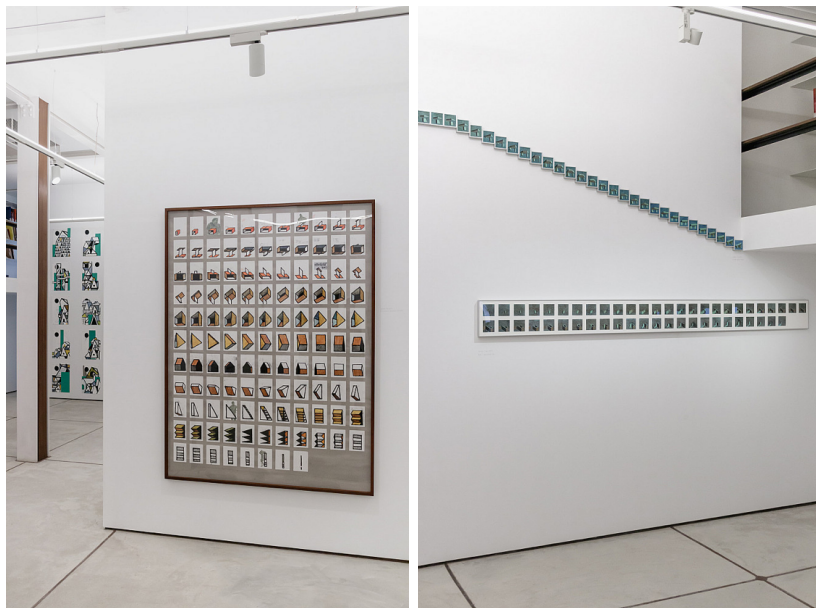
Creating it has been a labour of love and though we had our

challenging moments, the space in its final form carries the imprint of a process rooted in collaboration and care. I really value the natural light and verticality — both these qualities are going to push us to explore interesting curations. I'm anticipating some very long installation days to bring some mad and wonderful exhibitions to life!

What makes it reflect the essence of Tarq?

I think we have managed to retain the warmth and authenticity that is at the heart of Tarq's spirit. And the space has been designed to allow us to grow our gallery programme that is quite simple — an open-house invitation to anyone interested in artistic practices and questions. Everyone is welcome to the table.

At Dhanraj Mahal due to the gallery's structure, you were unable to display many three-dimensional pieces, apart from say works by artists like Rah Naqvi. Given that the new Tarq is larger and airier, do you have any plans to shift to presenting artists who work in more diverse mediums of art?



We have worked with a couple of sculptors like Parag Tandel or with painter and ceramic artist Savia Mahajan in the past, but we haven't done a show with either of them for a long time. Both have solos lined up this year. I think it is exciting that it's a different set up here, so everyone's going to be a little challenged in their practices.

Apart from exhibitions, are events also on the agenda?

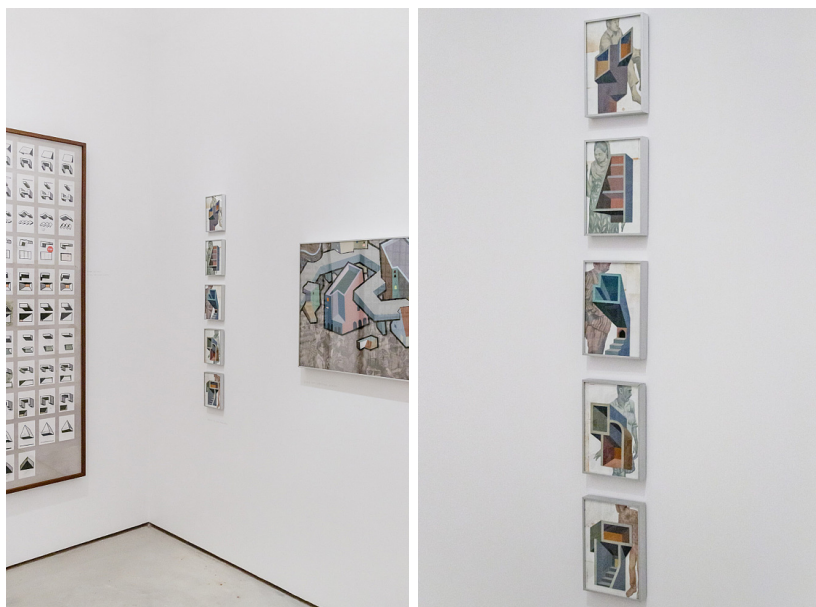
Events are something that we have always done; they're in the gallery's DNA. But post the pandemic we have been getting mixed responses to these. Although online ones are slowly becoming a thing of the past, I feel that in the case of in-person events, it's a very specific type — perhaps of the more interactive kind — that would pull in a crowd.

Where do you think the art gallery scene in the city is headed?

I feel like it's growing. When we started in 2014, it was so different — to get people to come to the gallery was like pulling out their teeth! But now people are up in arms asking 'Where are you moving?', 'Why are you moving?'. It feels so amazing to see them so invested in the gallery. It's wonderful.

And to those who ask why we moved, I say, moving was essential. There are a lot of utilities and operational things that our visitors won't see but the obvious change for them would be its larger expanse, including its main facade.

Take for example Sameer's show. In Dhanraj Mahal, our walls would not have been able to accommodate more than two of these big works. Showing four of them simultaneously would have been impossible there, but here it's been done.



The inaugural exhibition was a solo show, *Edifice Complex*, by Sameer Kulhavyoor

Complex, by Sameer Kulavoor

Was it a strategic decision to have Kulavoor do the inaugural show here, given that his work is rooted in the idea of building spaces?

Yes definitely! But, Sameer was ready with his show Edifice Complex much before the gallery was. I requested him to wait — to be the opening show — and thankfully he said yes. And it works right? It's very space centric!

Tags: Contemporary Art, Contemporary Space, Design, Featured, Flora Fountain, Galleries, Hena Kapadia, Katsushi Goto, Tarq