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Attend A Mumbai Exhibition Celebrating The City's Maritime Legacy And The Koli Community



Parag Tandel, is showcasing a series of fantastical sculptures that archives the cultural legacy of the Koli people, who created a thriving relationship between themselves and the vibrant coastal ecosystems of Mumbai. [TARQ Mumbai](#)



Vaaswat Sarkar

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Amidst the rampant din of construction in a fast-paced world of globalization, it's quite hard to imagine that there was once a time when the city of Mumbai was an idyllic archipelago of seven islands. Among several indigenous tribes that inhabited these islands, were the Kolis, a fishing community, that primarily inhabited the islands of Worli and Mazagaon, as well as parts of the other islands in the archipelago. These islands provided them with access to the sea and its resources, allowing them to thrive as skilled fishermen and traders. They played a crucial role in supplying fish to the local population and contributing to Mumbai's maritime economy. As Mumbai grew and underwent urban development, the Kolis' way of life and occupation evolved, but their



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Now, in an ongoing exhibition titled *Archipelagic Archivist*, Mumbai-based artist and a member of the Koli community, Parag Tandel, is showcasing a series of fantastical sculptures that archives the cultural legacy of the Koli people, who created a thriving relationship between themselves and the vibrant coastal ecosystems of [Mumbai](#). Titled *Into the Bones*, this work was made in collaboration with metalwork artists in Mr. Bhupen Jaidev Baghel's studio.



Parag Tandel with Bhupen Jaidev Baghel 'Into the Bones' artwork - 20198 , 2019 Brass, river clay, farm clay, termite hill clay, and rice husk 9.3 x 3.5 x 4 inches TARQ Mumbai

This sculptural installation is a comparative research of local material culture of the landlocked habitats and ocean peripheral habitats. The Into The Bones series is part of a long-term research on how my indigenous fisherfolk perspective discerns local art materials on the Indian subcontinent. The technique utilized to formulate is a world-famous Dokhra technique from the Bastar district in Chhattisgarh. This is the very ancient Indian indigenous technology to cast metal objects (basic jewelry), production was done at the Dhokra Art Center, Kondagaon.

Parag Tandel



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Parag Tandel | TARQ Mumbai



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word. Tandel's artistic pursuit manifests as a direct riposte to this historiographical subjugation. The exhibition has unveiled a constellation of sculptural creations that incorporates the culinary rituals, maritime vocations, and spiritual tenets intrinsic to the Kolis' existence. In a deliberate renunciation of imperial methodologies typified by cartography and ledgers, the artist embarks on a reverberating journey into the domain of affect, birthing an idiosyncratic archival medium that harmonizes with the [ancestral](#) ethos.

This method of archiving that Parag has developed can be seen within the context of what Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant has called archipelagic thinking — one that balances acts of belonging with ways of being in relation to the world, that is 'rooted and open, in harmony and in errantry. Presenting a solo show after seven years, one sees a profound leap in Parag's practice, especially within his immersion into material culture that simultaneously channels his Koli ancestry while being in dialogue with the rapidly changing state of the city, and the global climate crisis at large.

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Shaunak Mahubani, the curator of the exhibition | TARQ Mumbai

Embarking on a historical sojourn spanning from the Portuguese incursion to the contemporary coastal thoroughfares, Tandel resurrects a trove of interlinked chronicles. The sculptures made from the venerable Jambul tree encapsulate the ramifications of 17th-century edicts that proscribed time-honored Jambul wine craft. Commensurate with these sculptures, the limited edition compendium titled *Ek Bagal Mein Chand Hoga Ek Bagal Mein Rotiyan* introduces [gastronomical](#) paradigms from Koli kitchens, an epicurean heritage presently imperiled by urban encroachment and marine pollution's bane.



Install view, Archipelagic Archivist, 2023 TARQ Mumbai

Yet, Tandel's ambition is not circumscribed by retrospective musing; it germinates in the fertility of prospective vistas. *Into The Bones* stands as a transcendent collaboration with metallurgists from the Bastar province, an alchemical melding of indigenous craftsmanship from disparate landscapes, yielding an **ensemble** of a dozen intricate mixed-media sculptures. A clarion call to nascent generations is embedded within the gamut of the exhibition's zenith, characterized by an assemblage of fervent thread sculptures. These ethereal creations, emblematic of Koli spirituality, interlace fervor with the undulating energy of the oceanic realm and its myriad inhabitants. Dubbed 'भराली', these talismans unfurl spells for a harmonious interplay between coastal species.



Install view, Archipelagic Archivist, 2023 TARQ Mumbai



Install view, Archipelagic Archivist, 2023 TARQ Mumbai

With a poetic cadence akin to tidal undulations, Parag Tandel guides the beholder across the maritime avenues of erstwhile Bombay's archipelago. An epic narrated in tides of mirth, sorrow, and unyielding optimism surges forth, as Tandel meticulously resurrects the submerged echoes of antiquity. Through the interplay of [artistic](#)



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Archipelagic Archivist

Opening preview: August 10, 2023 from 6 pm to 9 pm

On view till: September 30, 2023

Venue: TARQ, Fort

Time: Tuesday - Saturday 11 am to 6:30 pm

Follow Parag Tandel [here](#).

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