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Home > Mumbai Guide News > Things To Do News > Article > This art exhibition in South Mumbai tells impactful stories of 26 young Indians

This art exhibition in South Mumbai tells impactful stories of 26 young Indians

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 Nandini Varma | theguide@mid-day.com

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An exhibition in a SoBo gallery, documented between two general elections, takes us through the stories of 26 young Indians, and encourages us to listen deeply

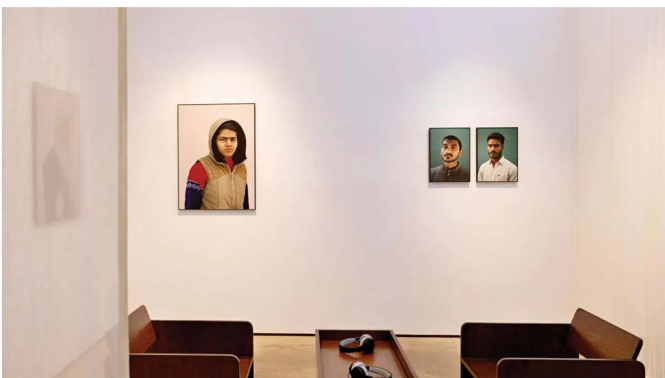


The photographs are presented without titles to maintain the anonymity of the individuals

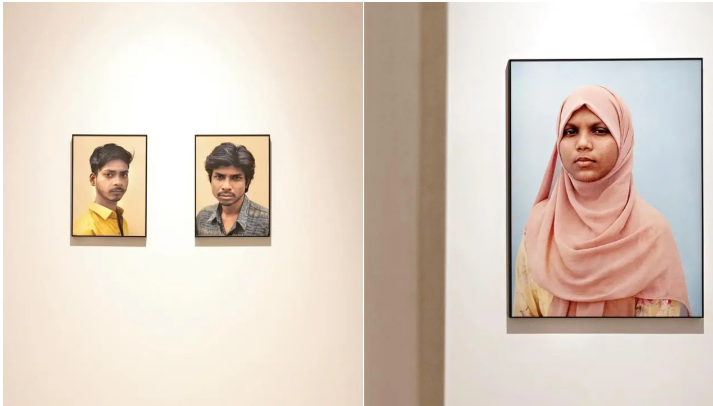
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The fierce yet tender gaze of people aged 18 to 25 years is the first thing you sense when you enter the warmly lit gallery. Twenty-six portraits of a generation are housed here. As we walk further in, we're alerted about their complex familial and social histories as well as their aspirations through their soundbites. We guess that each voice we hear is from a different background, carrying their own stories of struggle and freedom, big dreams and biting actualities, but each seems to be asking the viewer a singular question: Will you listen?



TARQ is hosting 2024: Notes from a Generation, an exhibition curated by Skye Arundhati Thomas. When the photographer Prarthna Singh and writer Snigdha Poonam got together in 2019 for the project, they wanted to explore stories of a generation forced to choose sides and cast votes "before they [could] form their ideas of nationalism", as Poonam writes in the introductory note. When we catch Singh at the gallery, she adds, "I don't think we listen without judgment anymore," and that's the fear that the generation documented carries with them.



Opening up about her work and vision, Singh tells us that much of what she does is "about making human connections; the image is often the built residue of my interactions. I want my practice to continually move beyond the act of image-making." This is why the two did not want to treat the images and the stories as anecdotal. "They serve as urgent records of the current moment in India's political and contemporary history," she says. This is the period between two general elections, as the nation is pushed into massive social and political turmoil. At the same time, this period has witnessed moments of historic resilience. Many have taken to the streets; others have negotiated spaces of dissent at home.



Snigdha Poonam and Prarthna Singh

Poonam shares how the conversations with those documented began with their fight for the freedom to be "who they wanted to be, love who they wanted to love, study further, live on their own, etc." It is this "truth-telling" against untruths that the exhibition is built on.



The photographs on display. Pics Courtesy/Prarthna Singh; TARQ

The background of the visual and aural elements is telling, too. It catches the essence of the nation. The images portray the prominent colours representative of the cities in Singh's palette — the pink of her hometown Jaipur, the blue of Mumbai, the sepia-like cream of the DDA flats in Delhi, and the green of Poonam's hometown Ranchi. The audio captures the sound of the streets.



Skye Thomas. Pic Courtesy/Emma Riviera

One can plug into the stories, present in fragments, inside a tent created in the gallery, a big part of the exhibition. It's a simulation of the original setting within which Poonam had had conversations. Singh reveals, "We wanted to create a safe space for the sitters, where they could feel at ease and speak freely" about their lives. This safety is, therefore, maintained when their stories reach us, too. Strangers sit in the gallery in front of each other connected by stories running parallelly on each of their headphones. Singh and Poonam have done the work, and in this quiet moment; all they are asking is the singular question: will you listen?

Till 11 May; 11 am onwards

At TARQ, KK (Navsari) Chambers, 39, AK Nayak Marg, Azad Maidan, Fort.

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