



Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation

CULTURE

9 new art shows in India we're excited about this May

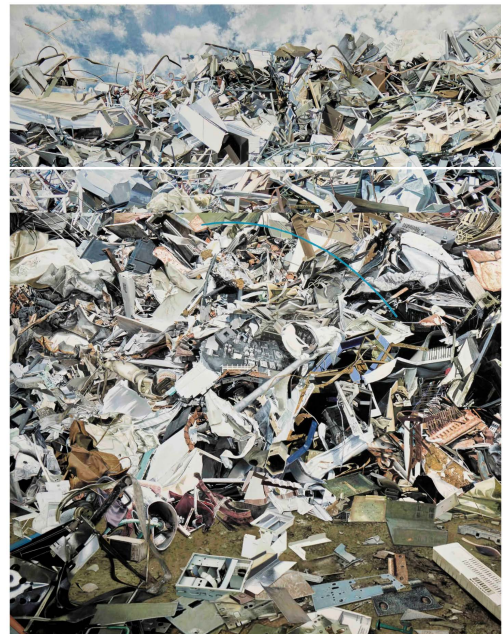
From a Raja Ravi Varma exhibition that explores how print culture shaped India to canvases by a self-taught painter who earned the title of 'Karnataka's Van Gogh'

By Huzan Tata

6 May 2026

It would've been great to be in balmy Italy instead of unbearably hot India, but an extension of the new art shows in India—via Venice Biennale—could just send a light breeze our way. Starting from 9th May, this year's biennale includes *Nalini Malani – Of Woman Born*, a major, site-specific commission presented by the KNMA, as well as *From India, to Venice*, a satellite exhibition focused on the glorious art form of Pichwai by Pooja Singhal, founder of the art atelier Pichvai Tradition & Beyond. Closer to home, Bikaner House is hosting *Dakshin | Dilli – A Sacred Dialogue* till the end of the month, an exhibition that features works from North and South India, presented by RGAL | Raseel Gujral Art Legacy. Here's our selection of other shows you definitely must catch this month:

Waste Archives as Landscape by Navjot Altaf at JNAF, Mumbai



Waste Archives as Landscape by Navjot Altaf (2024-25). Courtesy the artist & Valle Gallery.

It takes a true artist to find something striking to look at even in a landfill or piles of waste material. Navjot Altaf, who has been working between Chhatisgarh and Mumbai for several years, focuses the lens of her latest exhibition on waste and refuse, and human relationships with the environment. Juxtaposing images of vibrant flowers against stark landfills, Altaf aims to showcase how waste matter is a growing archive of human memory, and how culture and ecology are closely intertwined. The exhibition includes site-specific installations, photographs and more works across a range of media.

On view at JNAF, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Kala Ghoda, Mumbai until 10th June 2026

Nothing Twice and Chance Remains of Another Time at Emami Art, Kolkata



The Space Between I (Series The Space Between) by Moumita Basak

For most creative minds, there's no better muse or inspiration than one's own lived experience. Illustrating this idea, two exhibitions in Kolkata present distinct perspectives that engage with memory, personal encounters and life in the contemporary world. While *Nothing Twice* brings together works by nine young women artists who draw from Polish Nobel laureate Wislawa Szymborska's reflections on life's fleeting nature, *Chance Remains of Another Time* is a solo show by self-taught Bengali artist Suman Dey. In his latest body of polypptych works, Dey showcases the complexities of urban life as well as its shifting nature.

On view at Emami Art, 777, opp. Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, Adarsha Nagar, Kolkata until 9th May 2026

Open Fences at Gallery XXL, New Delhi



A Room That Breathed in Stitches by Sabiha Dohadwala

A fence is a barrier, a sign to not cross through where it is or a means of separation. What happens when we open up these dividing lines? When we allow thresholds to be crossed and fences to be opened? This group exhibition, featuring works by six diverse artistic minds—Bikash Chandra Senapati, Kapil Jangid, Sabiha Dohadwala, Sowat, Suruchi Choksi and Tomislav Topić—aims to let viewers explore these 'open fences' to find a sense of togetherness. From handwoven jacquard and yarn works and woodcuts to acrylic and ink drawings as well as fibreglass installations, the artworks in this show explore memory, place, language and body, finding possibilities of connection both with one another as well as with the viewers themselves.

On view at Gallery XXL, A-277, Defence Colony, New Delhi until 16th May 2026

***and the trees sing resistance songs* by Rah Naqviat Tarq, Mumbai**



Khwabgan

Material to mould and create art can be found anywhere, sometimes even in your own mother's garden. Amsterdam-based Indian artist Rah Naqvi, who spent a lot of last year collecting soil from their parental home at every visit, traced it into what they refer to as "histories of dirt". Featuring works spanning painting, installation, textile and film, Naqvi's latest solo show uses soil as both 'a boundary and a threshold' between what's above and below the ground, to create poignant and evocatively-rich artworks. "I am tracing lines between blood and soil—land that bears witness, trees that sing resistance songs," explains the artist about the body of works in this engaging exhibition.

On view at Tarq, Ground Floor, KK (Navsari) Chambers, Fort, Mumbai until 23rd May 2026

***Varna Mythri* at Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad**



King Edward VII Statue, Cubbon Park, Bangalore. By Rumale Chennabasaviah (1976).

He was a freedom fighter, a nation builder, a politician, an editor, a spiritual seeker and a cultural and social activist. And because this was not enough, he became a self-taught painter at the age of 52. Rumale Chennabasaviah, whose intricate canvases earned him the title of 'Karnataka's Van Gogh', created almost 600 paintings through his lifetime. This retrospective, which commemorates Salar Jung Museum's 75th year, also celebrates the great artist by featuring 80 major works as well as archival photographs, personal memorabilia, sketches and audio-visual material that delves into his long and illustrious life. Translating to 'harmony of colours', *Varna Mythri* gives us a glimpse of Chennabasaviah both as an artist and a man of integrity in everything he did and every brushstroke he made.

On view at Salar Jung Museum, Darulhijra, Hyderabad until 25th May 2026

***The Future of Nostalgia* by Murari Jha at Nature Morte, New Delhi**



Can the events of the future be 'remembered'? In his second solo show at the gallery, Bihar artist Murari Jha delves into this question, playing with material, memory, the idea of 'nostalgia' and what it truly means. Using mediums like stone, bronze, wood, brass, synthetic putty and aluminium, Jha's creations are reminiscent of animals, tools, architectural details, insects, toys, and vegetables, brought together in a sort of animated tableau. The sculptures will make you stop, stare and ponder the meaning of memory and the world around us as a whole.

On view at Nature Morte, Dhan Mill, D-Block, Dr Ambedkar Colony, Chhatrapur, New Delhi until 17th May 2026

In the Telling at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai

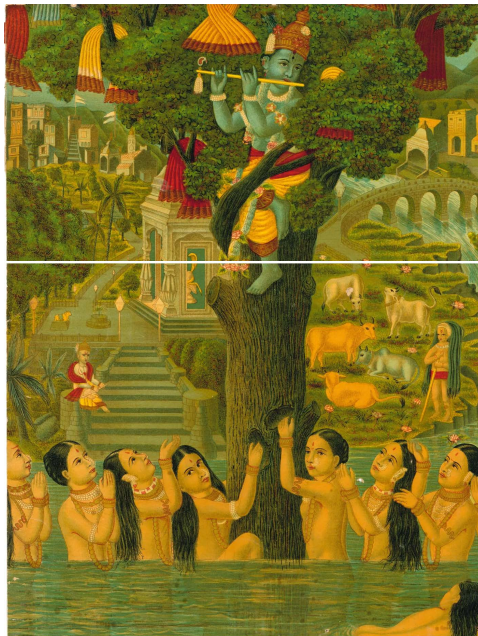


Scenes from the Quit India Movement. Photo courtesy: The Citizens' Archive of India. Bindu Shankar's collection

History is less about leaders and nations, and more about the ordinary, everyday people living through bygone eras and the changing world as they know it. The Citizens' Archive of India, a digital archive that records the oral histories and material memory of regular people who have lived through India's evolution from pre-Independence to the modern day, presents an exhibition to showcase the process of an oral history interview and how everyday lives can contribute to the shaping of a nation. Including photographs, recorded voices and personal narratives, the show brings Indian history alive for viewers through everyday faces. The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of talks, performances and guided experiences to further delve into the intricacies of oral history, including a talk by author and oral historian Aanchal Malhotra on everyday objects being carriers of history, and a heritage walk through Mumbai's Catholic neighbourhoods with journalist and oral historian Jane Borges.

On view at Chemould Prescott Road, Queens Mansion, Fort, Mumbai from 14th to 17th May 2026

What India Learned to See: From Battala to the Ravi Varma Press and Beyond at Gallery G, Bengaluru



Being part of a country as large as India, the north is vastly different from the south in its culture, as is the east from the west. But it was the advent of printmaking that bridged this divide, helping with the dissemination of widely available print images. Exploring this phenomenon by taking viewers into the world of the Ravi Varma Press, *What India Learned to See* brings together a rare corpus of oleographs, lithographs and printed ephemera spanning the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. With a focus on the visual language of Indian mythology—standardising iconographies of deities such as Lakshmi, Saraswati, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama and Krishna that were translated from oil paintings into printed images—the exhibition shows us how a shared visual vocabulary can be built even in a land as vast as ours. “The artist is gone, the original press is no longer active and yet the imagery continues to live, shaping how generations have learned to see, to recognise divinity and to engage with visual culture. That, to us, is where their true value lies—cultural, educational and deeply embedded in the public imagination,” says Geeranjali Maini, Managing Trustee and CEO of the Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation, which is the presenter of this intriguing show.

On view at Gallery G, 38 Maini Sadan, Lavelle Road, Ashok Nagar, Bengaluru until 31st May 2026

***The Architecture of the Void: Lines on a Postcolonial Skeleton* at Gallery Dotwalk, New Delhi**



Badri Narayan Circa 1960

This new gallery's second exhibition turns its lens on the world of artworks on paper, and how these creations shaped much of what we know today of Indian modernism. Featuring creations by Bhupen Khakhar, F. N. Souza, G. R. Santosh, Jogen Chowdhury, Meera Mukherji, Ram Kumar and Somnath Hore, among other illustrious names, *The Architecture of the Void* uses drawings, watercolours and prints on paper to explore Indian ideas of history and identity, how they changed with the advent of our country's independence and how they continue to resonate with viewers of today.

On view at Gallery Dotwalk, D-34, First Floor, Defence Colony, New Delhi until 30th May 2026