

How Four Indian Galleries Are Reshaping India's Place at Art Basel



Art Basel 2026 saw four Indian galleries take centre stage at one of the world's most influential art fairs, highlighting India's growing cultural and market influence in contemporary art through artists such as Gulammohammed Sheikh and Rithika Merchant



Sonali Mukherjee

21 July 2026 11:07 PM

For a few days every year, the Swiss city becomes the vibrant heart of the global art market, where careers are launched, collections are built, and cultural conversations take shape. Collectors move briskly between booths with catalogues tucked under their arms, curators linger before a painting for an extra minute, and conversations in half a dozen languages spill into the aisles. Here, reputations are built, markets are shaped, and the next chapter of contemporary art quietly unfolds.

It was against this backdrop that Art Basel 2026 unfolded in June, with four Indian galleries, Vadehra Art Gallery, TARQ, Chemould Prescott Road and Experimenter, earning a coveted place at one of the world's most influential art fairs. Their participation was more than a milestone for the galleries themselves; it was a reflection of India's growing prominence in a global art ecosystem that is increasingly turning its attention towards the country.

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Founded in 1970, Art Basel has long been regarded as the gold standard of international art fairs. What began in Switzerland has since expanded to Miami Beach, Hong Kong, Paris and more recently, Qatar, bringing together leading galleries, artists, collectors, museum directors and cultural institutions under one roof. Admission into the fair is highly competitive, with galleries undergoing a rigorous selection process that evaluates their programming, curatorial vision and contribution to contemporary art. Being selected for Art Basel is not merely about exhibiting work but also about receiving recognition from one of the art world's most influential platforms.

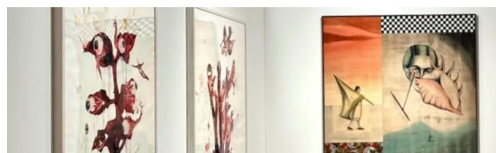


Basel Meets Contemporary India

This year, India's presence was spread across multiple sectors of the fair, demonstrating the breadth of its artistic landscape. Delhi-based Vadehra Art Gallery presented 'Of Cities and Tongas', a solo showcase of works by Gulammohammed Sheikh in the Feature sector. Widely regarded as one of India's most significant modern artists, Sheikh's oeuvre traverses mythology, memory and history, offering layered narratives that continue to resonate across generations.



Mumbai's TARQ made its Art Basel debut in the Statements sector with 'As The Universe, So The Soul', a presentation by contemporary artist Rithika Merchant. Known for her intricate compositions and speculative storytelling, Merchant's works explored themes of ecology, interconnectedness, and imagined futures. The presentation was particularly significant, not only because it marked TARQ's first appearance at the fair, but because it highlighted the growing international appetite for younger Indian artists whose practices transcend geographical boundaries.





Chemould Prescott Road and Kolkata-based Experimenter, meanwhile, returned to the fair with presentations that reflected their longstanding commitment to pushing artistic discourse. Together, the four galleries offered a portrait of contemporary India that was nuanced and expansive, spanning generations, mediums, and perspectives.



The Global Indian Canvas

Their collective presence comes at a time when India’s art market is undergoing a remarkable transformation. According to Art Basel’s own assessment of India’s art ecosystem, the country has emerged as one of the fastest-growing art markets globally, driven by an expanding base of collectors, increased institutional support, and growing international visibility.

The shift is already evident in auction houses around the world. Works by Indian masters and contemporary artists have repeatedly achieved record-breaking sales, while international museums and biennales have increasingly incorporated Indian voices into their programming. Simultaneously, a younger generation of collectors is entering the market, viewing art not only as a cultural asset but also as an expression of identity and patronage.

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For decades, Indian art occupied a peripheral space in global conversations, celebrated in specialist circles but rarely commanding centre stage. That narrative is changing. The significance of Art Basel 2026 lies not merely in the fact that four Indian galleries were selected, but in what their presence represents: a cultural ecosystem that has come into its own.

At Basel, amid the movement of collectors and the quiet scrutiny of curators, India was not participating as an emerging market seeking validation. It arrived as a confident voice, contributing to the conversations that will define the future of contemporary art.

Published At: 21 July 2026 11:07 PM

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