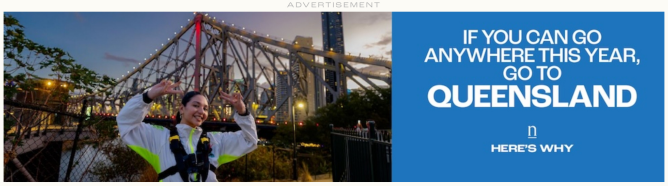
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The new rules of collecting: Art Mumbai 2026 edition

Do you need to own 80 artworks or more to be a collector? The Moderns or contemporary artists? Art as appreciating asset or art for art's sake? As the annual art fair returns for its fourth edition, young collectors give us the low-down on how they're buying art now

BY SHIKHA SETHI



Artwork by Gunjeet Singh

The fair before the fair

A few days before Art Mumbai 2026 opens, Chennai-based collector and art patron Jaiveer Johal reckons he has seen 80 per cent of the fair already. "I think fairs become redundant if you're going to send me all the catalogues in advance. What's the point of taking a flight and checking into a hotel if I've seen everything beforehand?" Just as quickly, he laughs and admits that while many galleries have sent him PDFs, in some cases he's asked for them himself because he "doesn't want to be left out of the loop".

Atyaan Jungalwala, founder of Chemould CoLab, confirms the practice of sharing sales PDFs about a week to 10 days before the fair, usually on WhatsApp, with people "who've bought from us before". (Galleries like Mumbai-based Subcontinent and Delhi-based Ojas Art, among others, offer you the option to request a catalogue ahead of the fair if you're on their mailing list.)

When I open CoLab's catalogue and the corresponding ArtLogic page, I see that almost 20 per cent of the works are already reserved. Jungalwala says, "People will buy a work outright if an artist has been on their radar and they have a relationship with the gallery. In some cases, they reserve the work till they see it in person."

Johal estimates that some of the fair's most valuable works may already be spoken for by the time it opens to the public. He's already committed to an Ai Weiwei work from Nature Morte, a portrait by photographer Sunil Gupta from Vadehra Art Gallery, and works by Sheetal Gattani and Aditi Singh from Chemould. He's also

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reserved a few more works by the Moderns. "They're more expensive, so it's important to see them once before buying," he says.

At the fair, Johal's first port of call are the galleries holding works for him, followed by those whose programmes he has traditionally supported. He also likes to wander and see what catches his eye. "The good thing about a fair is that there's a wider gamut to choose from. If a gallery is like a specialised store, a fair is like a department store. You visit galleries you don't know and get a sense of their programme. That learning is important."



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Artwork by Gunjeet Singh

Ahmedabad-based collector Aneri D Patel, founder of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Ahmedabad, and recently appointed to Tate Modern's South Asian Acquisitions Committee, has a particular focus on south Asian art. The 30-something started her collecting journey at India Art Fair almost seven years ago, and she is deliberate about resisting the pressure to buy immediately. At Art Mumbai 2026, she has committed to just one work: a painting by Joya Mukerjee Logue. She is also keen to explore photography, a medium she believes is becoming increasingly prominent in global art-world conversations.

While her collection is centred on south Asian art, it also includes international artists, among them an oil painting by Emily Krauss and a sculpture by Korean-born ceramicist Jane Yang-D'Haene. She is looking forward to exploring international galleries such as Rajiv Menon Contemporary, and seeing works by Maya Seas in particular. "I visit galleries when I'm travelling abroad," she says, "but it's easier to buy from international galleries when they're showing in India. You see the work in your context." Beyond the fair, Patel will visit recently opened exhibitions around Mumbai and parallel events, including the artist-led Quiet Art Movement pop-up in Bandra.

What makes a collector?

The question of what actually constitutes a collector comes up repeatedly in my conversations. Is it the number of works one owns, the amount one spends, or the intention behind the purchase? Interior stylist and consultant Samir Wadekar is blunt. Not every art buyer is a collector. "Many people buy to decorate homes but then stop. One swallow does not make a summer," he says. "For someone to be an art collector, they need to have 80 or more works on average. Or they should have more works in storage than they have on display." By that definition, a young collector might seem like an oxymoron. But Wadekar softens the argument: "A collector is also someone who collects with intention, who buys thoughtfully, consistently, and over a period of time."

How much should you expect to spend?

That question of access and intention is reflected in the galleries' offerings, too. Chemould CoLab, while counting seasoned collectors among its clientele, is deliberately presenting works across mediums, from ceramics and soft sculpture to textiles, at price points aimed at first-time buyers and younger collectors.

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Jungalwala says younger buyers often connect with artists of their generation because they relate to the work. Artists such as Umesh S and Ahalya Rajendran, alongside Gurjeet Singh, are among the gallery's popular names, with smaller works on paper starting at ₹35,000.

Mumbai-based Art & Charlie continues to present fresh voices at a range of price points. Its presentation this year includes Cape Town-based Sujay Sanan, Sri Lanka-based Fathima Rukshana, and Sunil Awachar, a self-taught artist who has contributed to several publications associated with the Dalit Panther movement and will be exhibiting his work publicly for the first time.

For Anubhav Nath of Delhi-based Ojas Art, the sweet spot for younger collectors is "up to ₹2 lakh", with the gallery offering a robust selection of works in this range. Its booth brings together indigenous works by Jodhaiya Bai Baiga and Pisava Ram Mandavi, alongside miniatures and contemporary art inspired by indigenous practices. It will also present a limited-edition serigraph by G Ravinder Reddy, best known for his large sculptural heads.



Aneri D Patel, founder of the Museum of Contemporary Art, is eyeing a painting by Joya Mukerjee Logue at Art Mumbai this year



'Facemask' (2025) by Hemali Vadalia

At Delhi-based Blueprint 12, run by gallerists Mandiraa Lamba and Riddhi Bhalla, conversations around works range from ₹75,000 to approximately ₹10 lakh. The gallerists have noticed growing interest in "research-led and multidisciplinary work, and in material: textiles, works on paper, sculpture, text. People are more open to emerging and mid-career artists, and to artists from across the region". The gallery has already placed several works ahead of the opening, with Youdhisthir Maharjan and Kaimurai attracting particular attention.

There is also interest in artists whose work has yet to receive the recognition it deserves. Mumbai-based Subcontinent, run by Dhwani Gudka and Keshav Mahendru, focuses on historically significant Indian artists whose market value has yet to catch up with their importance. Keshav Mahendru, the gallery's co-founder, points to KG Subramanyan and his protégés Haku Shah and Jyoti Bhatt as good examples. "Younger collectors are interested in artists of their own generation," he says, "but they keep an equally close eye on undervalued historical material." Mahendru is particularly gratified to see that artists like Jangarh Singh Shyam, "who were long filed under 'folk' or 'regional' are increasingly being seen simply as great Indian artists".

The gallery will also present works by Hemali Vadalia, who's been "a breakout success" for the gallery, and by Anjana Mehra, whose exhibition *Strangers in a Strange Land: Drawings by Anjana Mehra and VR Patel* at Subcontinent earlier this year elicited collector and institutional interest.

Collecting as an instinctual practise

For collectors under 35, like Aditi Toshniwal, a molecular biologist by training who now works in the wellness space, buying art is as much about personal expression as it is about acquiring an object. "Everything is so homogenised these days. Homes have the same aesthetic, people holiday in the same spots, everyone wears

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the same brands. With art, the possibility of personal self-expression still exists."

Her husband Udit, co-founder of menswear brand The Pant Project, shares this view. "With an earlier generation, there was a bit more of a herd-collecting mentality, with several people owning fragments of a 'headline artist'." Today, he feels, collectors are more confident about following their own instincts.



Sujay Sanan's 'Mundane and the Mystic' (2026)



Jyoti Bhatt's 'PHOENIX' (2026)

He began collecting almost a decade ago, with an interest in textile-based works partly informed by his family's background in textile exports. His collection includes works by Lavanya Mani, Haku Shah, and Vinita Mungi. The couple were travelling to London when I spoke to them, and while they will miss this year's edition of Art Mumbai, they've identified a few works they're interested in, including pieces by Al-Qawi Nanavati and Vishwa Shroff (both Tarq).

Consider both the global and the local perspective

Udit also sees a growing awareness among younger buyers, who see art as a "liquid and appreciating asset". As Indian artists gain traction internationally, their profiles are increasingly reflected in the prices their work commands.

Rithika Merchant, for instance, collaborated with the Chanakya School of Craft on 'The Flowers We Grew', an installation presented at the Musée Rodin in Paris as part of Dior's 2025 haute couture show, and had a solo presentation with Tarq at Art Basel earlier this year. Tarini Sethi, who made her Mumbai debut with a solo exhibition at Chemould CoLab in 2023, was the only Indian artist at Frieze Sculpture this year, where she presented her four-panel stainless-steel sculpture 'The Sun Bathes Its Friends and Neighbours'.

Art & Charlie is presenting two artists who have attracted attention internationally: Deepak Dhiman, whom Johal describes as a "talent to watch", and Sukanya Ayde. "From Delhi to Amsterdam, Vienna to Paris, Dhiman has elicited much interest. His work on the facade of the Asia Now venue, Monnaie de Paris, as part of the billboard, is a proud moment for us," says the gallery's director Ayesha Parikh. Delhi-born Ayde's collaborations with luxury houses have included window displays for Cartier in Dubai, Delhi, and Mumbai, and festive windows for Hermès at Mumbai's Jio World Plaza last year.

For Mumbai-based psychotherapist and mental health counsellor Malika Noor Mehta, however, the appeal of a work has little to do with its investment potential. She spent years on Tarq's waitlist for a work by Rithika Merchant before bringing one home from Art Mumbai last year. The return, for her, is the pleasure of living with the work itself. "Rithika's is perhaps the most expensive piece I own and one that I intend to keep forever."

Mehta studied photography and grew up around art. Her mother is art historian and curator Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, honorary director of the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, and her childhood home included works by artists such as Nalini Malani and Reena Kallat.

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“A lot of my approach to collecting comes from observing my mother. When mama started collecting, she would ask herself: ‘Who do I want to support? What narratives do I want my home to hold?’ So much of her collecting focused on contemporary women artists, particularly those who might not have had the same opportunities or platforms to have their voices heard [as their male counterparts].”

That emphasis on supporting artists continues in Mehta’s own collection. Some of her most recent purchases came through Immerse, a residency and fellowship for emerging Indian artists and curators at Somaiya Vidyavihar University. The 2026 programme culminated in an exhibition from April 1 to May 3. “I bought works by Madhav Vyas, Sudip Jana, and the photographer Aakash Gulzar, whose black-and-white photographs of Srinagar really struck a chord with me.”

Mehta has taken Thursday, November 12, off to visit the fair, when many collectors and art-world insiders are expected to attend. She’s particularly looking forward to seeing works she’s earmarked at Muziris Contemporary—paintings by Santhi EN, whose compositions evoke the rhythms of village life in Kerala, and Smitha GS, whose vibrant, verdant forests have caught her eye. At Tarq, she’s keen to see work by Al-Qawi Nanavati and Natasha Preenja aka Princess Pea.

Beyond the usual categories

Entrepreneur, art patron and Immerse co-founder Siddharth Somaiya, 36, admits he hasn’t had much time to keep up with what’s happening at Art Mumbai this year. He is, however, looking forward to a panel he’ll be moderating at the fair, titled ‘Living Legacies’.

Somaiya’s own collecting practice is medium-agnostic and focuses largely on emerging artists, including Jayeta Chatterjee, Sahil Kumar, and Satyanarayana Gavara. “I acquire works to support an artist, rather than to build a collection. I ask myself: Is this work opening up a conversation about something that’s important to the artist or to the country? The two things I look for are depth and the ability to execute.”

Thirty-three-year-old Mumbai-based artist Viraj Mithani offers an example of a collector whose choices don’t fit neatly into conventional categories. His collection includes works by Siji Krishnan, Gurjeet Singh, and Roshan Chhabria, among others. In the week before Art Mumbai, he acquired a photo collage by British surrealist Stella Snead, who spent time in Bombay between 1960 and 1971 and had a darkroom in Juhu.

Mithani first encountered Snead’s work at a talk hosted by The Richard Saltoun Gallery at Soho House. The gallery, which represents her estate, is making its Art Mumbai debut this year. He was drawn to the breadth of Snead’s practice, spanning painting, photography, photo collage, writing, and documenting her travels. The work also resonated with him on a personal level: it brought to mind his grandfather’s photographs of Juhu beach from the same period. “My grandfather was a photographer and artist, with a practice operating completely outside the art world.”

Gallerist Joe Cyril of Muziris Contemporary suggests the market is seeing a healthy churn, with traditional categories being upended. “We’re seeing established younger collectors looking at serious works, while traditional collectors, partly in response to soaring prices for the Moderns, are turning to contemporary art. Our recent show of original street artworks by Guesswho, for instance, attracted interest from these collectors.

“Before Covid, younger collectors were often associated with younger galleries and emerging artists, while mid-career and senior collectors gravitated towards mid-career artists and Modern art. That divide is dissolving. The new influx of collectors is age-agnostic in what they choose to look at.”

Johal echoes the sentiment. “I went down a very traditional path: collecting Moderns and then getting into contemporary art. The younger lot are heading straight in. They’re buying solid works that are not easy to sell, including installation works. I’m very impressed with these 28- to 35-year-olds who’ve just entered the market. They’re putting their money where their mouth is. I think they should be mentoring me.”

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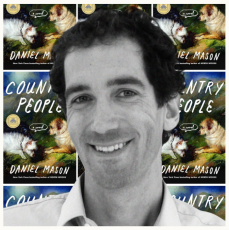
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