ART & CULTURE

Beyond the Fair: Women Take Centre Stage in Mumbai's Galleries this Art Season

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Every year around this time, Mumbai fills with artists, gallerists, collectors and art lovers, and the conversation turns to **Art Mumbai**: which booths to visit, which artists to watch, and which works might find a buyer. But beyond the fair's aisles, another itinerary unfolds across the city's galleries.

On our most recent Art Night walk, the spotlight on many of India's prolific women artists stayed with me. Across five exhibitions, their work explored conversations about material, memory and ecological crises. Most importantly, they prompted reflection on the spaces we call home.

Listening to what is lost

At Chemould Prescott Road, Reena Saini Kallat's *Spectral Frequencies (2025-2026)* left a deep impression on me. Built on the idea of ecological absence and changing landscapes, her works give physical form to sounds no longer heard in the wild.

A solitary bird song fills the gallery, turning the experience of looking into a conscious act of listening. It is the final recorded mating call of a Kaua'i 'Ō'ō, believed to have been the last of its species appealing to a mate that never answered.



Reena Saini Kallat's *Spectral Frequencies*. Image 1: Free Press Journal

At TARQ, Garima Gupta's *Homesick (2026)* approached ecological change through close observation. Her research into medicinal plants and their habitats informs her practice, rendering specimens that might otherwise escape our notice using dry pastel and collage.

There is something moving about that shift in scale. A fragile plant is impossible to overlook; an extinct bird song is a metaphor for our fractured relationship with nature. Their works ask us to urgently consider the emotional loss of ecological crises. They draw emphasis to the act of remembrance: through artistic efforts to hold on to something whose place in the world is becoming less certain.



Courtesy of Garima Gupta and TARQ 2025

Material and memory

Emily Pugh's exhibition at Galerie Isa offered a different encounter. Working with a wide range of mediums, she draws attention to the possibilities of the material itself. The layered glass, gilded relief drawings and *Shiramine* paper dipped in indigo and burnt with incense were easy to fall in love with.





Emilie Pugh, burnt Shiramine paper gilded in 22K gold leaf. Courtesy of Gallery Isa.

At Nature Morte, the experience began with the climb. Three flights of stairs give way to an enlarged and warped photograph of Ayesha Singh's former home, drawing us into a space that is at once personal, disorienting and unfamiliar.

In *Collapse of a Geometry,* impressions of a demolished home, alongside her reflections on the women in her life rendered in sculptural forms, made this an intimate encounter with the fragility of memory. I found myself reflecting on the experiences that shaped the work: what a home holds, and what remains after its gone.



Ayesha Singh, Collapse of a Geometry 2026. Courtesy of the artist.

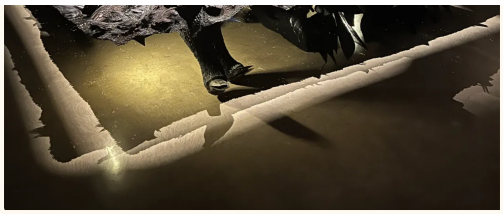
A reason to return

Our final stop was at Experimenter, Colaba, bringing the sculptural works of Ayesha Sultana and Sakshi Gupta in conversation with each other. Titled *Layl*, which translates to *the darkest hour of the night*, the show invites us to look for life within stillness.

Ayesha Sultana draws inspiration from the environment around her and turns it into abstract forms, with a geometric precision that makes graphite on paper look strikingly metallic. Sakshi Gupta's sculptures made me linger. Developed over three years using industrial metal scrap, her Mughal carpet becomes a world teeming with life, its flora and fauna rising into three dimensions, full of chaos and movement.

It was the right place to end the night, and an exhibition I will definitely return to.





Sakshi Gupta, *A storm, a song, 2026.*

That, perhaps, is the invitation I would extend to you this month: explore the city beyond Art Mumbai. Walk into a gallery, and stay with works that peak you curiosity. I'll be making another round soon, and I'd love for you to join me.

With perspective,
Prarthna Lalbhai

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It's so lovely to see the representation of women artists, and their voices being platformed. I look forward to visiting these galleries soon!

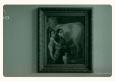
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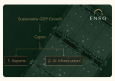
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End of the Run, or Start of a New Cycle

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