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JULY 14, 2017

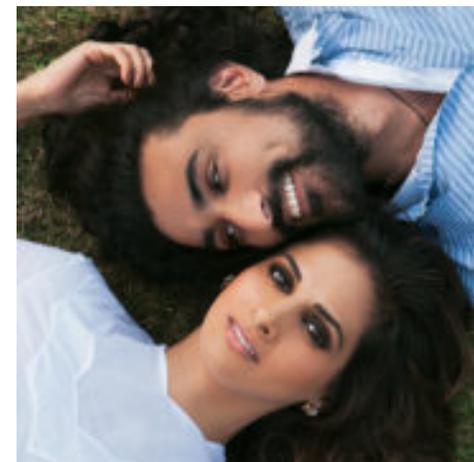
CURATOR SHANAY JHAVERI ON HIS LEAP FROM MUMBAI TO THE MET IN NEW YORK

Text by Huzan Tata. Photographs by Shubham Lodha

With a career spanning continents, he is something of a wunderkind, known for his unconventional shows



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VERVE EXCLUSIVE:
NAINA BACHCHAN



At the opening of Gednev In India at the Jehancir Nicholson Art

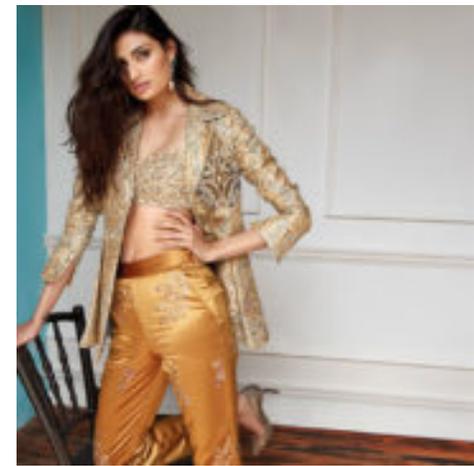
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KAPOOR'S FAIRY-
TALE LOVE STORY



STATE OF THE
UNION: DO
PRESENT-DAY
WEDDINGS HAVE
TO BE
UNCONVENTIONAL
TO BE COOL?

Foundation (JNAF) in Mumbai a few months ago, his was the most animated face in the room; one could gauge his undeniable passion as he introduced the show of photographs he had co-curated. Shanay Jhaveri — always immaculately coiffed and exuding a style distinctly his own — radiates a contagious zeal every time you meet him.

While work frequently brings him back to his hometown, Mumbai, the 32-year-old curator and art historian's current home is New York City, where he holds the position of Assistant Curator of South Asian Art at the renowned Metropolitan Museum of Art — a role that one might add, was created specifically for him in 2015. Known for its historically significant collection, the museum hopes to engage modern audiences through more contemporary works beyond the Western world, and this is where Jhaveri comes in, accepting his new responsibilities with much enthusiasm. "Being the first curator of South Asian modern and contemporary art at the Met was daunting, but what it offered me was the possibility to engage in a more embodied manner with some of the discursive concerns I had been formulating in my practice as an independent writer and art historian. The question I had to ask myself is 'how do you begin to introduce modern and contemporary art from South Asia into the already fairly well-established chronology of the museum in which it has been a persistent blind spot?'" he says. Although the Met has over eight departments that cater to art from the region, most are antiquities



ATHIYA SHETTY ON
THE IMPORTANCE
OF LIVING ONE'S
DREAMS AND JUST
BEING HERSELF



VERVE EXCLUSIVE:

dating back several centuries. "My primary responsibilities are to actively build the museums holdings of South Asian modern and contemporary art, and to contribute to its on-going exhibition programme at both the Met Breuer and the Met at Fifth Avenue. These activities have to be done with an ear to what is first and foremost happening in the region, but also keeping in mind the museums own historic collections and wider exhibition programme."

Jhaveri is no stranger to the world he so effortlessly inhabits, hailing from a family well-engaged with the arts. His parents are noted collectors, and aunts Priya and Amrita run the Mumbai-based gallery Jhaveri Contemporary. So, though he shuttles across New York and London for work, spending time at home in Mumbai also keeps him connected to the happenings in the country. "What's wonderful is that we're all involved in different aspects of the art ecosystem, so that varied perspectives can be shared. We don't always have the same opinion but it's wonderful to have people within one's own family who can engage with what one does. It is extremely exciting and energising, and a great rapport to have," says the Brown University graduate. And does his home in the States reflect his love for art as well? "I live very modestly in New York, but the things on my wall right now are a print by an artist friend, Lucy Raven, and a Museum of Chance book object by Dayanita Singh, which I got in a barter. I also have a little antique object, a living frame from the 19th century and a textile work by Monika Correa. It's an eclectic group of things." He

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adds, "There is of course a long list of works I desire to have, but as a curator, I'm quite preoccupied by making sure these make it to the museum rather than having them for myself!"

In a 2015 interview with Verve, he had said, "In the programmes I put together, I always try to formulate relationships between works that would never appear alongside one another, developing a constellation which asks questions instead of offering definitive statements."

Companionable Silences, held at the Palais de Tokyo in 2013 showcased non-Western women artists who had lived and worked in Paris around the mid 20th century, with Amrita Sher-Gil's Self-Portrait as Tahitian serving as a central piece. "The show was a significant moment in my practice. It really allowed me to bring together great works and think about the non-West and a relation between various kinds of artistic practitioners who were working in different countries at the same time," explains Jhaveri.





With a PhD in curatorial and critical studies from the Royal College of Art, London — where he focused on the evolving concept of South Asian male identity through works by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakhar and Raghubir Singh — Jhaveri has always been fascinated by the preliminary work in the run-up to any show. Curious to know what he personally looks for when working on his exhibitions, we ask him what drives him as a curator. “It’s very much about doing the historical and academic research before putting a show or film programme together. All the work that I’ve done has contributed to a growing understanding of how to engage with film and art objects.” Whether it is his books, *Outsider Films on India: 1950-1990* and *Western Artists*

and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design, or his exhibitions which include In Dialogue: Amrita Sher-Gil and Lionel Wendt at Jhaveri Contemporary, and an untitled one on photographs by Raghubir Singh and William Gedney at Berlin's Esther Schipper gallery, Jhaveri enjoys any project that allows him to push the envelope. "One of the big research questions that's occupied my practice till now is how to appreciate and understand cross-cultural moments of exchange or encounter. My first two books were about Western artists coming to India and being inspired by or engaging with the country. That also led to the Palais de Tokyo show. There is an encounter with the non-familiar that I have consistently been exploring. I'm always interested in cosmopolitanism, travel, and movement of the transnational."

And his interest in travel isn't limited to the arena of his work. One who's seen quite a bit of the globe, Jhaveri would love to explore Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa if given the chance, with Eritrea being high on his bucket list, on account of its modernist architecture. When asked for a cultural itinerary in his two home countries, his list is all ready. "I would suggest a balance of the historical with the modern. That would include Hampi or Khajuraho, and the temples of Odisha. In terms of museums, I think the Calico Museum of Textiles in Ahmedabad is truly incredible. For those interested in modern architecture I would suggest they visit Chandigarh, and also see the Golconde dorm in Sri Aurobindo Ashram built by George Nakashima in Puducherry."

And now, living in one of the great epicentres of the world gives him much to rave about. "What's remarkable about NYC is the diversity of institutions and how each one of them has a different and circumscribed approach of its own. What the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art), Whitney Museum of American Art or Guggenheim are doing is quite distinct from the Met. Each of these allow audiences a huge spectrum of creations to reflect on." Apart from travel, it's the passions for experimental cinema, contemporary dance, literature and fashion that keep him constantly in touch with the cultural beat around the world.

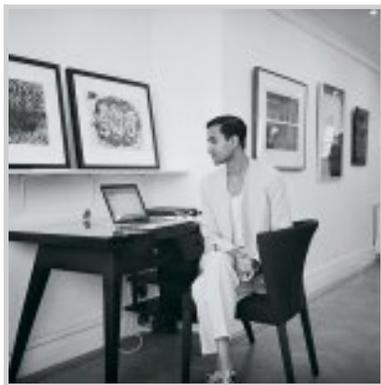
Busy working on two projects for the Met that open next year, the first an installation of a contemporary artist's work at the Fifth Avenue location and the second a solo show of an Indian woman artist at the Met Breuer (details for both being under wraps for now), Jhaveri is currently gearing up for Everything We Do Is Music, an exhibition of artworks influenced by Indian classical music that opens in a few months at the Drawing Room in London.

One hopes that his dream for the future of museums is one that is fulfilled in the coming years: "Shifts in museum culture are contingent on many factors but I still do believe that they must offer the opportunity for a personal and contemplative engagement with a work of art that can stimulate and provoke thoughts and actions."

Tags: Everything We Do Is Music, Featured, In Dialogue: Amrita Sher-Gil, Lionel Wendt, Outsider Films on India: 1950-1990, People, Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design

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