

## Culture

# Saloni Doshi: “In India, most collectors are gay men”

Collector Saloni Doshi is part of the international group visiting arteba.

Of Indian origin, he shares what collecting is like in the country with the most "super-rich" people on the planet.

The young patron tells how she set up the Space118 Foundation, her artist residency platform.



Saloni Doshi, collector and patron from Mumbai, India



**MATILDE  
SÁNCHEZ**





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She comes from Mumbai, which she still calls by its colonial name—“Bombay has all the tradition a new name lacks”—and presents herself with a conclusive definition: “I’ve been collecting art since I was 22, and I’m 45 now. It’s been **a long, exciting, and lonely journey** . And I say this last because I’m first-generation in almost every way among my family. **The first woman in the family to study abroad** (London School of Economics), the first to achieve financial independence and live on her own, the first collector. I come from a wealthy family, but like most in my country, they believed in investing in property and jewelry, but not in art.”

Saloni Doshi collects folk, tribal, and contemporary art from India and Southeast Asia. She has **a foundation in her**

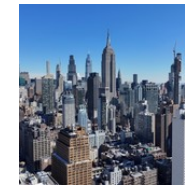
**name, Space118, which offers residencies and fellowships to** artists across the country. She also serves on the Middle East Acquisitions Committee at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, among other institutions, and is a columnist for the centennial daily *The Times of India*. In the last three years, she has begun sharing her collection of over 1,000 pieces.

“It just so happened that before going to study Communications in England, I worked for a few years at an auction house in Bombay, researching works of art and their provenance. And I fell in love with collecting. I realized that I had also been a collector as a child—of stamps and coins—although without giving it that name. But the gene was already there. I started collecting with my salary. Then I trained my eye by going to every fair and Biennial you could think of,” she recounts on the first day of her visit to the country. Saloni is restless and incredibly engaging, mastering all the labels and how to circumvent them. In fact, she's preparing to **tire out artists' studios and**

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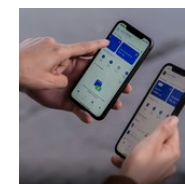
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LUCIA SALINAS



- It's true, the number of Indian millionaires has grown exorbitantly. We see it every day in the boom in the construction of mansions and large properties, both in the cities and in the suburbs. However, **the majority of the wealthy buy art to decorate their new homes; we're talking millions of square meters of walls...** If in my youth you saw five of these buyers, today you find 500 interested in art for decoration. For them, there are now around 30 galleries in Bombay. But collectors, beyond wanting to beautify the walls, if there were 20 before, now there are at most 35. That number hasn't grown exponentially. **It's a peculiarity of South Asia that there are no single women collectors.** Those who collect are wives of millionaires spending their husbands' or companies' fortunes. In India, in my age group, the vast majority of collectors are **gay men.** Anyway, what we see happening—this is a key factor—is that, unlike in the early 2000s, we all now want to stay and live in India. Before, we dreamed of going to live in Great Britain or the United States. Now, we're much more proud of India and want to do things there.

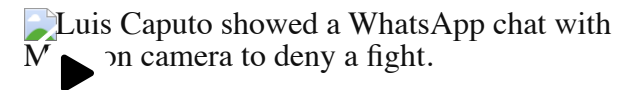
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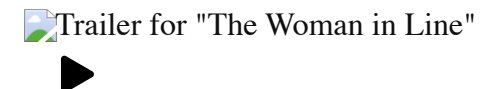
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The incidents at Karina Milei's event in Corrientes, from another angle

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Despite the opulence of the country's "super-rich," Doshi sees limited collecting, which prioritizes decorating the walls of new mansions.

**- What community are you referring to? The Persian Gulf countries almost run on immigrant labor from India.**

-I'm referring to those with money and highly trained people. Art arrives once all needs are met, of course; they're luxury items. We need to see the number of these people who collect art grow, regardless of how well-stocked the walls are.

**-How did you go from collector to patron?**

The Foundation started because I used to visit artists and their work in the city of Baroda, home to the important Faculty of Fine Arts, where there are large studios with residents. But there was nothing like that in Bombay. I acquired an old family property, renovated it, and turned it into Space118. I created a platform to provide residencies for artists from all over the country, facilitating experiences that go beyond technical school. My role is to contribute to the understanding of art within the country, both for young artists and collectors.

**- There are very few patrons like yours left in Argentina.**

An artist once told me that during her residency, she dreamed about what she would later do in her own home. I understood early on the techniques and the dreaminess with which art is made. You don't become a patron just because you have money and allocate it to these incentives, but when you are very close to the artists, making a



commitment. Perhaps not having children made these people become friends and family. I am a patron because I understand their needs. I give talks among artists about how to understand and make the most of the art ecosystem. Without art, there is no history. Without history, there is no architecture, city, or nation. It is the cradle of civilization.

**-Indian artists have experienced a decisive internationalization in recent years. They are recognized by major Western institutions.**

Let's name Shilpa Gupta, Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher, Titish Kallat; they've done exceptionally well abroad. Bharti Kher just opened a retrospective at the Queen's Museum in Copenhagen. All of them have had major shows in the West. Of course, there are many more. The mid-career artists are also doing very well, and the modern masters have grown. We have ten auction houses in India, most of them in Bombay.

**You've been very close to the art scene in London, Paris, Berlin, and now New York. For centuries, art had its exclusive center of gravity in Western art centers. However, the Global South, a concept originating in India, has summoned a tremendous amount of energy. What's your position on this?**

I don't limit myself to the South-South connection. What happens is also quite traditional: **you're not recognized in India unless you're validated in the West!** Why do I know the work of the Argentine Adrián Villar Rojas? Because I saw him on the terraces of the Met in New York and the Cartier Foundation in Paris. I wouldn't have a way of knowing an Argentine artist if he weren't globalized. For Indian artists, it's crucial to know where art is going in the West. There, you meet collectors and institutions from other countries, and that also helps you understand their art. You can't appreciate a given art without knowing about the politics and religion of that country. Every country has its history and a foundation. We have an enormous variety of social classes; there aren't just three. The new social

strata in Bombay are much more complex. It's true that you have to break away from those national categories by remaining very "grounded," because otherwise, no one will respect you as a patron. Many of the artists, when I bought them, no one knew them, and today they have a name. I've never bought works from established artists. **I don't like to act like a person who hands out money, like a "rich heiress."** I'm something else. I bring that knowledge back to Bombay and pass it on. I often play that role; I give them ideas and show them our possible paths. And I'm committed to each artist; they all have my cell phone. I encourage them, I open their eyes to what's happening in the world. I've touched so many lives so far; I feel blessed.

**—Why do you call your city Bombay? It was called that, a phonetic transcription from Portuguese and English, from the 17th century until 1995.**

-Well, my friends and I used Mumbai for a while, when the new name caught on. But I never made it my own. Bombay

is an emotion; Mumbai is more political. After a few years, we all went back to calling the city what we always had.

### About the signature



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