

How the Piramal group is creating a culture of art



(from above) The Piramal Museum of Art; 'La Terre' by S.H Raza on display; and Ashvin Rajagopalan, director, Piramal Art Foundation, says the group wants to change mindsets.

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What is the first image that comes to mind when you think of an office space? A row of cubicles with people hunched over keyboards? You certainly wouldn't think of a well-lit gallery filled with renowned works of art.

That, however, is exactly what the Piramal group has created. In November 2015, it opened an art museum on the ground floor of its corporate office in Lower Parel, Mumbai, that organizes exhibitions of works by celebrated artists. Every employee has to cross this space to enter the office, so they can interact with the artworks. This free-access museum is open to the public too.

"The Piramal family's art collection of the last decade has modern and contemporary Indian art. But not many people are privy to such pieces. The Piramal Museum of Art was set up to build a culture of art that is accessible to everyone, especially in cities with space constraints," says Ashvin Rajagopalan, director, Piramal Art Foundation.

Gaurav Sawhney, president, sales and marketing, India, Piramal Realty, believes that the definition of the workplace itself is changing. Companies are now focusing on harnessing the power of "community", with offices becoming spaces where people can work and grow together. They are also investing in nurturing employees holistically—from sprucing up the workplace with art that inspires, to introducing programmes that contribute to well-being.

"At Piramal Realty, art is integral to our business—with some of the most awe-inspiring works on display across our projects, sales centres and show flats. Not only do we get to see masterpieces by some of the most renowned names on the Indian art circuit, but we are constantly educated on,



and interact with, art through workshops, exhibitions and events. These initiatives have enabled me to develop a genuine appreciation for the arts, and that parlays into a better cultural experience for our customers," says Sawhney.

The Piramal family's collection includes some of the best-known names in Indian art—from S.H. Raza (whose collection it recently showcased at the Mumbai corporate office in an exhibition titled *S.H. Raza: Traversing Terrains, A 50 Year Retrospective*) to M.F. Husain. News of these exhibitions is circulated through office mailers.

The foundation also conducts art appreciation workshops for employees. These are usually themed on the artist whose works will be displayed in a forthcoming exhibition.

Kashif Shaikh, chief manager, design and production, Piramal group, says: "For me, I think it works to help me relax

and de-stress. And I have seen colleagues who had no previous interest in art, talking about it now—so it does open up the initial conversation in their minds too."

Two years ago, Rajagopalan realized the general public did not seem to be

aware of the museum. "People thought it was only for Piramal employees. But we wanted art to be enjoyed by everyone—irrespective of their company, their age. So we collaborated with a few other companies who have their offices in the same corporate park and asked them to submit their own artworks," adds Rajagopalan.

Employees from the corporate park sent in their drawings, poetry and sculptures. The museum security guard created a series of portraits of museum visitors. This helped Shaikh, for instance, get back to painting after over a decade. "I finally went out and bought some colours and canvas," he says.

This is not all. As Rajagopalan puts it: "Going to a museum is something that the average Mumbaikar has done twice during school. School kids have to be there because it is part of their curriculum. To change this mindset, we have created a network of art teachers and they are the ones driving selected, but focused, students to us now."

The foundation has opened similar spaces in four Piramal Realty properties in Byculla, Mulund, Kurla and Thane. Every show has attracted larger numbers, including families of employees. "That to us is the push we need to keep working for," says Rajagopalan.

Art at work is a series which looks at how offices are looking to inspire and boost creativity in their staff through art.

Life

ART AT WORK



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