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A hero's journey

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Taking Pichwai Global: Pooja Singhal is on a mission to revive a sacred art

WRITTEN BY: BINDU GOPAL RAO



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(June 30, 2025) Pichwai, the intricate art form that illustrates tales of Shrinathji, has long remained tucked away in temples and private collections. But now, it's finding new life on the global stage—thanks to Pooja Singhal, philanthropist and founder of Pichvai: Tradition & Beyond, whose unending passion for the preservation and innovation of the form has allowed it to evolve and stay relevant for contemporary audiences. Through her work, Pichvai has begun to resonate with art lovers across the world, from Delhi to Singapore. A US-returned MBA, Singhal chose not to follow a conventional corporate path. Instead, she turned her focus inward—towards India's rich craft heritage. She launched RUH, a handloom brand that deepened her engagement with traditional textiles and became the starting point of her journey into art revival.

Introducing Pichwai: A Childhood Immersed in Sacred Art

Childhood memories are always not just cherished but also ones that leave a deep impression on oneself. It was no different for Pooja Singhal, who grew up in Udaipur, surrounded by rich artistic traditions, thanks largely to her mother, an avid collector who often welcomed Pichwai painters into their home.



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Taking Global: A Landmark London Showcase

She is now all set for her new show 'Feast, Melody and Adornment' at London's Mall Gallerie from July 2 to 5, 2025, which marks a significant milestone in her journey with Pichwai art. "It's the first time we are presenting the tradition to a global audience on this scale, showcasing 350+ works, and the location, right in the heart of London's art district, allows us to engage a completely new audience. The show is a curated celebration of the artform's visual richness and ritual roots, reinterpreted for a contemporary global context. The works we are showing span the original sacred works as well as contemporary reinterpretations, including our Greyscale series and architectural interventions inspired by the jharokhas of Nathdwara. It's deeply gratifying to see this once temple-bound tradition find resonance in an international art capital. My hope is that this exhibition not only sparks appreciation for Pichwai's craftsmanship but also opens conversations about how traditional art forms can evolve and remain meaningful across cultures and geographies," she says.

From Preservation to Empowerment: A Revivalist's Vision

As a revivalist, her focus has always been twofold: to preserve the integrity of the Pichwai tradition and to ensure its relevance in today's world. "When I began, many of the techniques were being lost, and artists that were originally based in Chitrakaron Ki Galli, the 'Lane of Painters' in Nathdwara, were drifting away due to lack of recognition and livelihood. By introducing an atelier model at Pichvai Tradition & Beyond, we moved away from the insular guru-shishya tradition to a more collaborative and sustainable system where younger artists train under experienced masters," she explains.

The impact, she says, has been deeply encouraging. "This not only revived long-forgotten skills but also gave artists pride, purpose, and a sense of community. Many who had left the field have returned, and today, they see their work showcased at major institutions, both in India and internationally. It's incredibly rewarding to see their confidence grow when they realise that they are not merely preserving the past but actively shaping the future of an art form with global resonance," she adds.

Between Legacy and Innovation: Navigating a Fragile Ecosystem

One of her biggest challenges has been the delicate ecosystem of traditional art that she operates within. “The art form I work with has existed for over 400 years, passed down through generations and historically patronised and traded in a particular way. Introducing this into the contemporary gallery model, applying principles from the world of contemporary art to a form that has its own legacy, has required both careful disruption and deep reimagination. Managing the sensitivities of artists, traders, and even those who run art fairs has been no small feat. While there are shared elements between traditional and contemporary art practices, they function quite differently, and helping stakeholders understand and embrace that distinction is an ongoing journey,” she says.



Art with Purpose: A Passion Turned into Legacy

While art is what inspires and motivates her, she says that she has been fortunate to turn a personal passion into her profession. “I find real joy in working every day in a space I care so deeply about. Beyond that, the social impact of what I do is immensely fulfilling. When I began, the artist community had dwindled from around 4,000 to 5,000 people to barely 2,000; it was fading fast. To now see it running, thriving, and regaining its strength is a powerful motivator. I am also deeply moved by seeing Indian traditional art and heritage cross borders, being appreciated by the younger generation here, and finding new audiences abroad. It is a reminder that these forms still speak to people across cultures and time,” she says.



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For Pooja Singhal, the journey with Pichwai has never been just about art — it's about identity, legacy, and creating space for tradition in a rapidly changing world. By reimagining an age-old form with respect and vision, she has not only revived a fading practice but also empowered a community of artists to dream bigger. As *Feast, Melody and Adornment* opens in London, it marks a new chapter—where a once temple-bound tradition finds its place on the global stage, resonating with audiences far beyond its origins.