

REVIVAL PITCH

Pooja Singhal has updated the pichwai tradition into a thriving art form by rehabilitating artists and creating a new community of patrons, finds **Shahnaz Siganporia**

Photographed by ADIL HASAN



The new patrons of pichwai (from left) Karishma Mangla Bhat, Radhika Chopra, Aparajita Jain, Pooja Singhal, Rashmi Vashtola and Tanya Goel

Nude sketches by FN Souza and a series of Zarina Hashmi's minimal geometric works hang almost expectantly along the walls of Pooja Singhal's clean-lined, stone-walled apartment. But just when you expect another great Modernist, a cluster of miniature pichwais breaks the flow. And yet they seem to fit in seamlessly—the traditional artform, through its miniaturised treatment and red-metal frames, is neatly transformed in this contemporary apartment.

Collector, curator and aesthete Singhal's Delhi home tells her story as India's foremost pichwai revivalist.

Singhal has gathered some of Delhi's finest art collectors and patrons for a salon-style lunch. "To make pichwais flourish again, we need an entire support system, and this bunch of women have my back. They are experts in their fields with invaluable insights—Tanya (Goel) made me realise the sophistication of colour theory in pichwais, while Radhika's (Chopra) keen eye has led to some incredible commissions." Between the carefully curated display of her recently commissioned pichwai paintings and the chhapani bhog-themed feast, it becomes clear she is not just a

A cluster of miniature pichwai paintings take centre stage in Singhal's home



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With the Indian artwork market having risen to 21.6 per cent last year, this is the ideal time to invest in the country's artists. That said, it needn't be extravagant. Kolkata-based gallerist and art collector Rakhi Sarkar is bringing the country's largest affordable art fair, CIMA Art Mela, to Delhi this month for the second time. The founder of CIMA Art Gallery, Sarkar has curated works of over 85 artists including

masters like Jogen Chowdhury, Parash Mehta, and Manu Parekh. This show will feature traditional art, watercolours, graphics, and digital prints within the price range of ₹5,000 and ₹75,000.

Art revivalist Pooja Singhal will also be showcasing contemporary *pichwai* paintings, derived from the 400-year-old Rajasthani art form that portrays the life of Lord Krishna, in *Pichwai Tradition & Beyond*. Singhal has treated classic paintings to new stylistic interventions—the motif of the cow has been placed on chevron backdrops, and some paintings even resemble black and white photography. A special section has been curated for young investors on a budget.

CIMA Art Mela will be held from April 12 to 16 at the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi; Pichwai Tradition & Beyond will be on display from April 27 to May 5 at Bikaner House, New Delhi



(Top) Krishna's Cow at *Pichwai Tradition & Beyond*.
(Below) An untitled painting by Parash Mehta at CIMA Art Mela.