



HERITAGE ON A CANVAS

ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR OVER 400 YEARS, THE INTRICATE TEMPLE ART FORM OF PICHVAI IS PRICELESS TO ART CONNOISSEURS. ART CURATOR POOJA SINGHAL SHARES WITH HELLO! HOW THIS SLICE OF INDIAN HERITAGE FITS INTO MODERN INTERIORS



Shrinathji, 32 x 76 in

It's an ancient Indian art form that originated in the small town of Nathdwara, in Rajasthan. Pichvai or Pichwai painting is a 400-year-old temple art form, which narrates some glorious chapters from Lord Krishna's life. Although it is steeped in religious contexts, the intricate creations are a rare delight to art connoisseurs.

The unique but lesser-known miniature art tradition dates back to a specific medieval Vaishnavite religious cult of the 16th century, although known references to the paintings itself go back to 1739 AD. In Sanskrit, the term "pich" means "back" and "vai" stands for "hanging" – simply translated, these paintings were used to adorn the wall behind the idol of Lord Shrinathji – the blue skinned, childhood aura or manifestation of Lord Krishna.

Pichvais were developed as part of a larger ensemble of the

Vallabhacharya sect's elaborate temple rituals. The paintings showcase the coming together of the aesthetic practices with the spiritual, through temple decoration, idol ornamentation and grand festivities. Apparently, around five artists were allowed the holy *darshan* of Lord Krishna or Shrinathji at the time of his *darshan* or daily ritual – and only for a few minutes! But, every *darshan* happened to be an elaborate ritual, during which his *sevak* helped change his articles of clothing. Pichvais capture these stunning rituals, with a focus on the intricate attires donned by Lord Shrinathji – rich in colours, with pure gold embellishments.

The multiple compositions and meticulous detailing in these paintings demonstrate the proficiency of our ancestors in upholding our legacy and heritage. Before long, the art form became a canvas for not only the rituals happening

Lotus Jaal, 14 x 12 in





Shrinathji with Pando, 114 x 84 cm

inside the temple, but also outside it. The art form started celebrating the life and times of Lord Krishna.

Initially, Pichvais were designed with exquisite floral and geometrical patterns, near the centre of the piece, to provide as the perfect backdrop for the idol. But, over the last century, Pichvais have gained prominence as a standalone work of art that can be used to accentuate the décor of an entire living space – these are, now, much sought-after by art collectors around the globe.

With photography acquiring momentum in the late 20th century, a noted rise in portraiture was observed. Soon after, an elaborate yet rigid iconography developed, depicting a wide range of themes, especially episodes from the ancient text of *Bhagavata Purana* and scenes from Lord Krishna's childhood.

Pichvai is no different from any other art form that one can invest in. Despite its many

compositions, the techniques of this art form have an aesthetic balance of their own.

Originally, a traditional Pichvai painting required weeks of work as they were created in large formats – ranging from six to eight feet in height. As a result, these artworks were mostly used as anchor pieces on huge walls. At the Pichvai Tradition and Beyond atelier, we have deconstructed those bigger artworks into smaller, more versatile formats to suit compact apartments with limited wall spaces, niches and corners, thereby making this traditional art form more relevant for a modern abode. Consequently, in contemporary homes, metallic or coloured frames are used to add a modern touch to these paintings. The art of Pichvai also serves as a relevant investment opportunity for the younger generation.

Traditional art is all about the Indian heritage – incorporated in homes, they become a part of a family's heirlooms. 



Annakut Laaf, 32 x 24 in



Krishna as Govinda, 10 x 8 in