

## The Jaya He Art Museum in Mumbai is an artistic marvel

Mallika Iyer | **Updated:** Thursday, August 22, 2019, 03:19 PM IST



**RECENT STORIES**

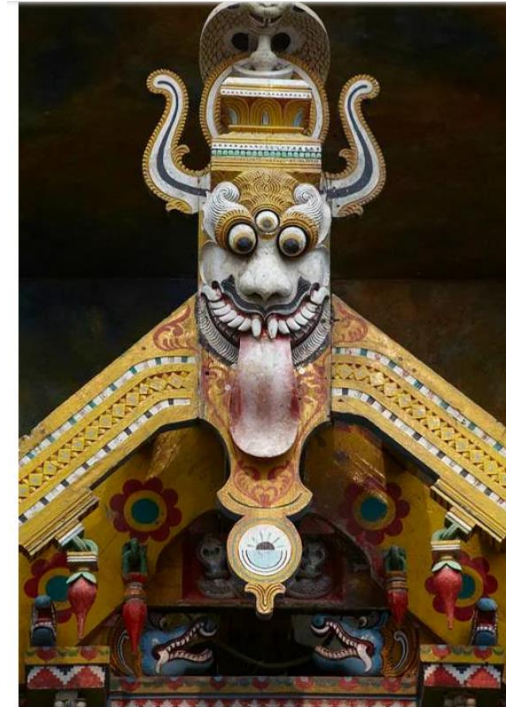


The installation Moving Constant is a contemporary take on Tanjore style painting; also the most engaging selfie/photography point |

**Almost 100 artists and 1000 crafts-persons including architects, designers, engineers, technicians and workers took more than six years to create what is now known as the wonder of Terminal 2 of Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport. The Jaya He Art Museum is one of the world's largest public art programmes with more than 5000 exhibits, creating a magical blend of the ancient with the modern. Mallika Iyer takes a stroll**

*"No lights in the terminal during the day!"* explains Ravindra Nevrekar, pointing towards the high ceilings of T2 of the Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (CSIA). For the first time, one notices the absence of electric lights in the bright building. It is skylight pouring through the ceiling that illuminates the terminal until sundown. Marvelling at the thoughtfulness of the design, one realizes that this, is just one of the many instances of the careful planning and aesthetic appeal of the T2, leading to CSIA winning the prestigious ASQ Award for being the World's No. 1 Airport!

When GVK bagged the contract for constructing the Mumbai Airport, MD Sanjay Reddy, realized it was the opportunity of a lifetime to give wings to his vision of showcasing Indian art in a public space so ordinary Indians could engage with their rich heritage. How that dream manifested into reality makes for quite a story! Blending ancient cultural artefacts effortlessly into a modern space like an Airport was not going to be an easy task and Rajeev Sethi, well-known curator and scenographer, was roped in for the landmark project. The brief was clear. The target audience was not foreign travellers but Indians. It is with this in mind that Sethi, along with his team of 11, travelled across India, collecting pots and paintings, wheels and windows, textiles and totem poles. Scouring curio shops and travelling through remote villages, the team returned at the end of one year – with over 7000 artefacts!



## Logistical Challenges

Having overcome challenges of identifying, acquiring and transporting the artefacts, the next and most herculean of hurdles was going to be in displaying them in an airport. *“Naturally, the installations could not disturb the flow of passengers and staff. The airport is used by over 1,20,000 passengers daily! And yet the exhibits would need to be exhibited in a manner such that they could be seen and appreciated by people,”* explains Ashwini Verma, who manages events and leads tours at the Museum. Keeping both ends in mind, it was decided to display the exhibits on the walls. A win-win for functionality and aesthetics. The exhibits could be viewed from all sections – Arrivals, Domestic and International and at the same time, not disturb passenger flow.

But this was easier said than done. The designers had to develop a 40-foot high wall over a stretch of 3.2 kms. that could serve as a canvas for the display. The Jaya He Museum is situated in the heart of the Central Processor Building on the walls on the east and west sides of the Terminal. A part of the museum is also located at the Arrivals Corridor and the Baggage Area. Moreover, the load-bearing capacity of the walls had to be carefully designed as some of the exhibits to be displayed weighed several tonnes.



---

Mounting these huge artefacts on the walls was no easy task. A team of engineers and designers was called in to deploy and integrate high levels of technology to ensure that the structure could withstand the weight of installations. Moreover, the pieces had to be aesthetically mounted, concealing the screws and fasteners. The mock-up site installation was done over and over again. The artefacts comprised items of wood, clay, mud, glass, steel, stone and more. Some of them several centuries old, requiring conservation, treatment and utmost care. The end result of all that planning and care is plainly visible for all to see and the feat does not escape the discerning eye. *“As an architect, what caught my eye were the actual fixing details of the particularly heavy pieces that were attached to the wall – a different but equally fascinating type of artistry,”* notes Amrita Ravimohan, architect, blogger & museum-lover, upon a visit to the Museum.

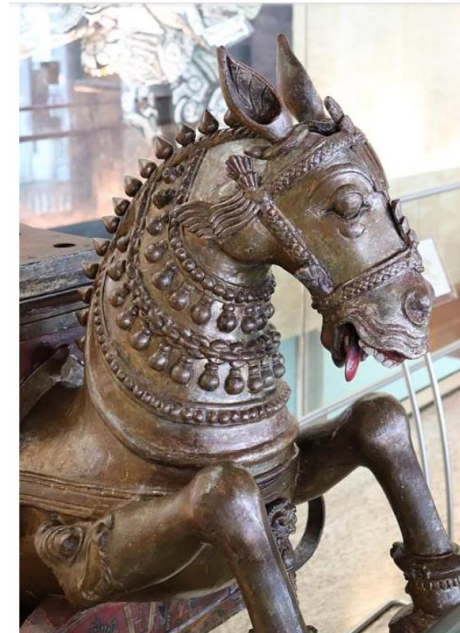
For 6 years, over 1000 craftsmen were engaged in creating, conserving, fitting and installing the artefacts. A large team of conservators, architects, designers and engineers worked alongside. All in all, a team of over 1500 people worked tirelessly in putting the museum together. The result was the largest public art program of this scale anywhere in the world. No other airport in the world has a museum comprising such a vast collection.

### **New Artworks**

Apart from displaying ancient artefacts from across India, budding young artists were commissioned to create art works for Jaya He. The artists whose works are on display were relatively unknown names, pulled out of their comfort zones by Reddy, who threw them the challenge to reach for greater heights. 100 artists, (97 of them Indian), created a dazzling array of art works – ranging from photography to sculpture, using a variety of materials from bottlecaps to cow-dung – leaving the viewer wowed and intrigued.

Craftsmen from villages for whom the craft was a means of livelihood were brought in to create art works. Some stories about the artists are as interesting as the art works. A group of craftswomen from Rajasthan were not comfortable working in the presence of male workers present at the construction site. Hence these women would come in early in the morning and finish their work before the other workmen got there! Another rural artist was so moved when she saw articles made of cow-dung being given pride of place in what she had imagined to be an exclusive fancy airport, that she broke into tears. A set of rural artists who had never seen a plane were given a free hand to make what they imagined to be a plane and the result was an array of imaginative works ranging from planes fashioned like birds and swans to the mythological Garuda and Pushpaka-Vimana.

Curating and placing all these interesting art-works amidst passengers as they go about their travel in one of India's busiest airports was an equally daunting prospect. *"What excites me the most is the complexity of the program which the airport is – within which is the Jaya He Museum. It brings a touch of 'softness'; a 'pause' and a 'moment of reflection' to all who pass by as they transit from one destination to another,"* points out Tejal Mor, who heads initiatives at the Museum. And true enough, the exhibits across three components are enough to make the visitor stop and stare.



---

## **India through Six Stories**

The art works, comprising paintings, sculptures, textiles and more are displayed in three principal zones

- Thresholds of India (in Domestic and International Departures)
- Layered Narratives (in Arrivals corridor)
- Baggage Acclaimed (in Baggage Claim Area)

Of these, it is the Thresholds of India that is the most extensive of collections – ranging across six thematic exhibitions. Each of the themes has a unique story to tell.

### **Thresholds of India**

The Threshold, like the Airport, is the point of Transition. A place for welcomes and goodbyes, greeting and waiting, rangolis and toranas. Where the door leads inward and windows open out. The threshold is a place of change and this resonates in the art and crafts of India. This section, comprising six themes, explores this magical zone of transformation.

- **India Greets**

Artefacts that mark India's warm culture of welcome from traditional doorways and facades along with threshold figures like Dwarpalakas and Yalis. Some of the oldest artefacts of the museum – stone sculptures from Maharashtra dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE – can also be found in this section.

---

- **Silent Sentinels**

Talismans and totem poles amidst a fantastic mural by Moreshwar Patil comprising a 127 ft backdrop acrylic-on-canvas painting of Naga textiles, is a unique mix of research and art where traditional carpet designs have been deconstructed and recomposed to create a stunning textile-like effect.

- **India Seamless**

With wood-work and paper-maché from Kashmir, terracotta and miniature paintings from Rajasthan, gopurams and Tanjore Paintings from Tamil Nadu, roof shingles and mural paintings from Kerala and much more -this section offers a glimpse of art from different states.

- **India Moves**

Celebrating mobility the Indian way, one finds here boat-heads and snake-boats, carts and chariots, vahanas and pushpak-vimanas, howdas and palanquins along with a range of other art works.

- **India Global**

Amidst other art works here, one notices Recycled Mumbai, a map of the city created by Akshay Rajpurkar, made entirely out of discarded waste materials like buttons, bottle-caps and motherboard. Miniature artist Charmi Shah's work Resonances of a City, make a bold statement demonstrating the price of modernity by showing the dust and the rubble buried under a destroyed city.

- **India Elemental**

Air, Fire, Earth, Space and Water – the *panchamahabhutas* – are depicted in this section. Keyur Patel's artwork of glass cubes textured to resemble melting ice encasing brass lamps is a unique portrayal of the element of Fire. Also found here is what must account for the most popular exhibit of the museum, particularly amongst children – the artwork symbolizing the element of Water. A visitor can run their hands across streams of water to create musical notes of the jal-tarang much like playing a xylophone.

**Layered Narratives**

This exhibition in the Arrivals area comprises a series of artworks that flank the walkways leading towards the baggage claim area meant to serve as an introduction to the city of Mumbai.

**Baggage Acclaimed**

India's rich diversity in textiles and costumes is on display here along with containers like hand-crafted trunks and more.

**Oiling the Wheels**





---

Apart from serving as a window of Indian art to the world, the museum has also given unknown artists a great platform to showcase their creations. And of-course all this cannot be kept running without funds. Amidst enjoying the rapture and beauty of Art, one cannot forget that Art requires patrons. The recommendations of the Central Ministry of Works and Housing in 1972 which state that 2% of building costs be allocated towards the incorporation of art works used in the built domain and the willingness of MIAL to subscribe to these recommendations, were the foundation of the Jaya He dream.

Maintenance is another challenge for a museum that houses thousands of artefacts on high walls in the midst of a bustling airport. Some of the artefacts belong to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Some have lights. Some contain several components. They require constant cleaning and maintenance. Passenger flow cannot be obstructed by the maintenance staff. Hence most of the maintenance is done during non-peak hours. A team of 32 persons specially trained to care for the installations, look after the artefacts with great care. Says Ajay Rathod who manages maintenance *"It is a very challenging job, to adapt to all the constraints and conditions of a fully functional terminal and keep these artefacts shining. But it is a dream to be so close to India's arts – all under one roof and be the care-taker. I feel like I am contributing to the country when I do this."* When asked how they maintain the artefacts, true to the surroundings, Rathod responds with an artistic-touch, *"Just like water takes the shape of its vessel, my team adapts to the situation!"*

Through the Museum Shop and other initiatives, the Jaya He team tries to get more and more people to make that first brush with the wonderful world of Indian Art. The Jaya He Safari is a recently launched program for passengers to avail of a specially curated tour of the museum. They also run events during festivals and special days. *"Passengers can book a tour with us and we would be happy to take them around,"* smiles Verma, taking great pride in describing the exhibits in vivid detail to visitors.

*"The Jaya He museum visit was really an immersive experience, not only because of the sheer range of art & artefacts on display but also because of the thought behind it – making an India-centric exhibit that would appeal to locals & foreigners alike,"* notes Ravimohan, after attending a tour led by Verma.



## Aesthetic Rapture

The Design brief was to create a terminal that was not just another glass and steel building but a reflection of Indian warmth and hospitality. The result, apparent for all to see, is a pioneering blend of tradition and modernity. *"The initial vision laid down by Mr. Reddy was that if a passenger missed his/her flight he/she should not regret it! We saw this coming true when a passenger going from Nepal to Australia missed his flight but thoroughly enjoyed his time at Jaya He!"* notes Mor.

From private collections to road-side stalls, from the palatial to the humble. From Kashmir to Kerala and Rajasthan to Nagaland. From the real to the symbolic, from the sacred to the profane. Wood and stone craft to mural and textile painting. Stone-inlay to marble- carving, quilt making to pilgrimage map-making. The Jaya He Art Museum is a celebration of Indian Art in every form. Through this unique vista where Past, Present and Future come together to create one of the largest public art platforms allowing Indians to take pride in a space that is modern and yet celebrates its rich ancient legacy, Mumbai can stake claim to what no other airport in the world can boast of. So, the next time you are flying out of T2 in Mumbai – let the airport be more than a transition. Allow it to become the first step of your destination!

*(To receive our E-paper on whatsapp daily, please [click here](#). To receive it on Telegram, please [click here](#). We permit sharing of the paper's PDF on WhatsApp and other social media platforms.)*