



## ***Archivist Chronicles***

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In this edition of Archivist Chronicles, we feature an exclusive interview with **Vineet Kajrolkar, Manager of Exhibitions at the Museum of Art and Photography (MAP)** in Bangalore. Vineet shares his journey from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Mumbai to MAP, discussing the unique challenges and opportunities he has encountered. He provides insights into managing exhibitions and public engagement, balancing digital accessibility with digitised materials, and ensuring long-term artifact preservation. Vineet also highlights strategies to make MAP's exhibitions inclusive and educational for diverse audiences.

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**Based on your previous work experience at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Mumbai and your current role at the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) in Bangalore, what are the unique challenges and opportunities you have encountered in the archives and museum sector? Specifically, how have these experiences shaped your approach to managing exhibitions and public engagement at MAP?**

Working with archives at the CSMVS happened by chance and ended up being a steep learning curve. Rewind a little, my work in museums started because of my interest in preserving India's rich history and cultural heritage and making it accessible to people. My background in Mass Media made me think about disseminating information and ways to use it to increase interest amidst people for museums. This became my impetus to work in museums.

My initial roles at the CSMVS with the Education & Outreach and Exhibitions departments helped me realise the ways I could work towards my larger goals. When I started working in the Archives, it was a whole new world for me. It was a window into the institution's 100 years of history, with mountains of information at my disposal. I had to simply adapt and integrate my previous learnings from Education and Exhibitions into the new role.

At MAP when I joined as an Archivist, my role was different. Compared to CSMVS, which is a legacy institution, MAP was still being built (physically and institutionally), and it was on us to build the Archive. For this, we had to identify milestones in the institution's making and get access to copies of documents related to them. In comparison to CSMVS's vastly physical archive, MAP's was more digital.

In both the institutions, the biggest challenge was to decide on what documents to safeguard and preserve for the archives. More so at the CSMVS with documents coming from its foundation years, from various directors, curators, and departments. Another challenge was to decide on

what to make publicly accessible and what to restrict access to. At MAP, since a lot of our collection comes from private donors, it came with a large archive of correspondence of the artists with these donors. Since most of the donors and artists are alive, deciding the ethics of making these documents accessible to the public was difficult. But at the same time, it gives an insight into the research of this core collection.

Histories of these institutions shaped the way their archives functioned, and these varied experiences shaped the way I look at exhibitions. Working in the archives was extremely object-centric, keeping the collection at the core of everything. Whereas, exhibitions are more public-centric, they are curated, designed, and programmed keeping in mind the audience. So taking from there, my approach for exhibitions at MAP is always to find the right balance of both these aspects. When I work on a design for an exhibition, I look into how the artworks will make the most impact on the viewers, while giving them a peek into their story. Ultimately, kindling curiosity to learn more and generate larger public interest in preserving these works.

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**With the increasing shift towards digital records, how do you balance the need for digital accessibility with the challenges of managing digitised materials, while overseeing exhibitions at MAP?**

MAP, in its nascent years, has done an incredible job at digitising a large part of its collection, and making a part of it accessible to anyone who wishes to explore. This mammoth task is skilfully handled by the Collections and Technology teams. With almost 12,000 records on our website, for me it's almost like entering a stationery store where I want everything, but don't know where to start unless I enter with a defined goal.

Digital records give you information, but do not give you the sensorial experience, or the thrill of being in close proximity to the artwork. As an Exhibition Manager, along with the Curatorial team, I get the opportunity to design this physical experience. Everyone experiences art in unique ways – some like to explore through our digital database by themselves, while some like to see artworks with contextual information, but may not be able to visit the physical museum. For them, we have digital

exhibitions and programmes. Most people like to be around artworks, feel their presence, and understand their materiality. For these audiences, we have physical exhibitions. Sometimes space and artwork conditions limit what we can show. Here, we rely upon our digital records to incorporate them into the physical space using technology to give the viewer a peek into the larger collection.

At the end of the day everything we do is to make these works more accessible to our viewers through different modes.

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**How does the conservation lab at MAP collaborate with the archive to ensure the long-term preservation of artefacts, and how does this collaboration influence the final exhibition of the collections, given MAP's focus on both conservation and archival practices?**

Preservation of artefacts is a collaborative and tedious process. It is the most important aspect of collection management, but is always unnoticed.

Preventive conservation forms the core of the museum's collection care routine and is thoroughly monitored by the Collections and Conservation departments. Our galleries and storages are climate controlled, and the materials used for the storage and display of works are pre-approved by Conservation to ensure they are safe for the artworks. During display for exhibitions, all selected works go through a thorough condition assessment. Only works that are found to be fit for display are included in the shows. If they are not found fit for display, we find alternate ways to include them or find replacements, such as digital displays. If there are minor issues with the works, they go through conservation to be stabilised before the show. Display and storage is planned keeping in mind the conservation needs and structural integrity of the works.

As collection care is an ongoing process, it does not stop with the opening of the show, the Conservation, Collection and Exhibition departments do regular checks of all works on display, and storages to check for any early signs of deterioration. For long term exhibitions, we keep rotating works every few months to make sure that the works do not get overexposed to light and the elements. In cases where replacements are not available in the collection, a tough decision to use reproductions is taken.

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**In what ways do the gallery and exhibition spaces at MAP facilitate public engagement and accessibility of archival materials, and how do you ensure that these exhibits are inclusive and educational for a diverse audience?**

Displays and curation at the museum aid the viewer to think deeper and beyond the physical exhibition. Even though the museum's collection is very different from the traditional archive collections, the concept of dissemination of information stays the same. We do incorporate parts of our archival materials in exhibitions wherever possible. Like in the exhibitions on Jyoti Bhatt and T.S. Satyan, we included their writings, notebooks and contact sheets to give the viewer a deeper understanding into the artist's practice. Whereas in the postcards exhibition, due to spatial limitations which guided the number of works on display, it was a curatorial and design decision to explore the messages rather than displaying more works, which could have been overwhelming for certain visitors. This exploration was done through 60 reproductions that people could hold and read, creating a sensorial experience of reading the real cards instead of looking at them in a case from a distance.

To make our exhibitions inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences, we have tactile works as responses for some works for audiences that prefer a hand-on experience, and bilingual texts that cater to local visitors. We do use technology to our advantage at MAP. Every artwork on display has a corresponding reference number that you can search on the Bloomberg Connects app. The app, which acts as a digital museum guide, holds information for our varied audience needs with artwork details, ISL videos and audio descriptions. The app is screen reader friendly and audio clips to help visitors with visual disabilities, the permanent exhibition has Indian Sign Language (ISL) videos that explain the works to deaf audiences. All videos incorporated in our exhibition spaces either have subtitles or ISL interpretation.

MAP also recognises the limitations of space for displaying all our artworks, and that not everyone can visit the museum to see all the exhibitions we have on display. To counteract this, we have the Sasken multimedia gallery that uses 23 screens that can display digital exhibitions — creating your own custom museum experience. This gallery also becomes an archive for our physical exhibitions once they go off display. Apart from this, the 5 large screens on the ground floor give visitors access to all our digitised collections, where they can simply browse through works, make a selection of works they like, and get all the information for these sent to their email IDs.

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## Concluding Note:

As the interview concludes, Vineet Kajrolkar's journey from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) to the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) clearly demonstrates his significant contributions to the preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage. His innovative approach, blending traditional archiving with digital tools, has enhanced public engagement and inclusivity at MAP. The collaboration between the conservation lab and archive at MAP underscores the importance of preventive conservation and regular monitoring. Through his dedication and strategies, Vineet ensures that exhibitions at MAP inspire curiosity and appreciation, making art and cultural heritage vibrant and accessible for future generations.

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