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Mumbai: Museums go digital, aim for more inclusive future

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Written by **Benita Fernando** | Mumbai | May 18, 2020 5:53:18 am



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Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Byculla.

The buzzwords for this year's International Museum Day, which falls annually on May 18, are diversity and inclusion, a fitting theme as more museums explore digital engagement for a global audience during the [coronavirus pandemic](#). In Mumbai, where [Covid-19](#) cases are surging, museums are working on strategies for post-lockdown, in anticipation of the "new normal".

"We cannot expect to host a large number of visitors together in one spot for public tours, lectures or workshops till a vaccine has been produced and is available to all," said Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, the managing trustee and honorary director of Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Byculla. She foresees a shift in the way we consume art, with restrictions on the movement of objects and people, as airfares and travel will remain prohibitive. "Tactile experiences may no longer remain tactile."

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, director general of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Fort, said that initiatives in their European and American counterparts show that the museums will have a major role to play in the months to come, while other modes of entertainment, such as theatres and concert halls, have to stay closed. "There are ways to bring visitors round the buildings by using a time-ticket system in place. A great deal of information [on museum collections] is



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Museums and cultural institutions across the globe are hosting webinars, online panel discussions and social media events to mark International Museum Day this year. In India, a number of museums, including CSMVS, will be a part of ‘Ghar Se Museum’, a series of free and paid digital events planned by Art X Company, an interdisciplinary arts organisation. The Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum also hosted its first-ever live webinar, with artists and curators, including Nikhil Chopra, Shuddhabrata Sengupta and Gayatri Sinha, on the future of art exhibitions in public spaces.

Museum staff, too, has had to quickly adapt, irrespective of their roles, for the “virtual museum”, right from running prolific social media accounts to choosing artefacts that spike the curiosity of a viewer. Mehta said, “The museum sector in India needs to change quickly, otherwise the public will forget they exist.”

However, when museum activities are primarily online, as they are now, there is a new set of issues to contend with, especially when it comes to inclusivity. Ashvin



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inclusivity of museum programming. He said, “When we talk about inclusivity, we also mean the visually challenged, who **Sign in** tactile experience for art, and providing access to people who are not on the internet. The digital world is not as inclusive as a physical museum.”

The lockdown has meant a loss of revenue for museums, especially since it has happened during summer, when footfalls are at their highest. Mukherjee said many countries have already started giving emergency grants to museums and archaeological societies for maintenance of collections and research, and that the Indian government can play “a positive role as a saviour of this sector”. On the other hand, private museums, which are dependent on corporate funding and philanthropy, may need to brace themselves in the event of a major economic downturn.



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