

# Power of three

By Reema Gehi,

ePaper, Mumbai Mirror, Sun, Aug 10, 2014, Page 10:

<http://www.mumbaimirror.com/others/sunday-read/Power-of-three/articleshow/39998823.cms>



*Passionate collector Jehangir Nicholson (right) found perfect partners in astute businessman Kali Pundole (left) and dreamer gallerist Kekoo Gandhi*

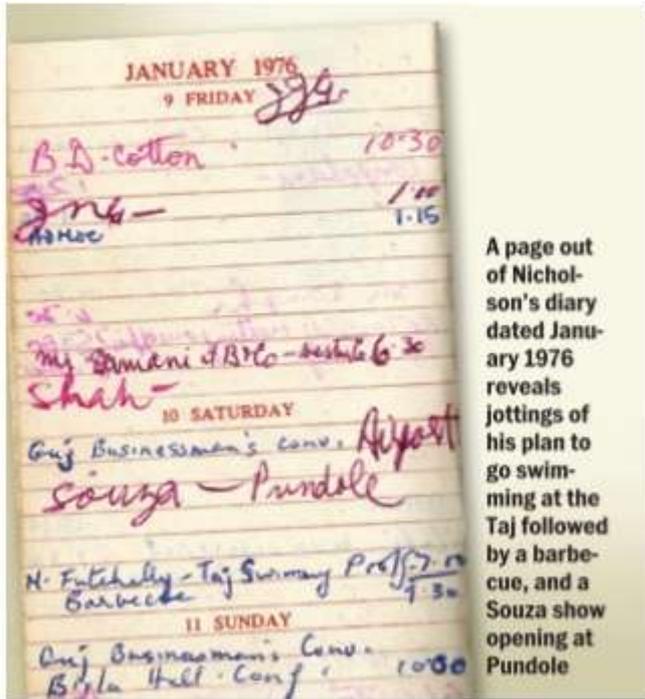
*An upcoming exhibition thrives on nostalgia, exploring the relationship between two gallerists and a collector who shaped the destiny of modern Indian greats.*

It's the triumvirate -- Parsi-only, as their community loves to say -- that could very well be held responsible for shaping the future of modern Indian art. Jehangir Nicholson was a premier collector of his time, and they - Kekoo Gandhi of Gallery Chemould, the dreamer; and Kali Pundole of Pundole, the astute businessman - Mumbai's pioneering gallerists. Together, they shaped the futures of master artists, including, MF Husain, SH Raza, VS Gaitonde, Ram Kumar and Akbar Padamsee.

Opening next month at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangharalaya's Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, is an exhibition that explores their relationship marked by friendship, competition and respect. Conceived by Kali's son - gallerist and auctioneer Dadiba Pundole - Kali, Kekoo and Jehangir seeks to present an association of trust and friendship that often existed between collectors and gallerists and the great art collections that grew as a consequence, whether intended or unintended, says the gallery's curator, Kamini Sawhney.



The focus is on Jehangir's interest in art spanning the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the establishment of Mumbai's most prominent galleries, Gallery Chemould and Pundole Art Gallery. "Frequent visits here and long discussions that followed helped Mr Nicholson build the foundation of one of the best private collections of modern Indian art in the country," says Sawhney. "It was at their galleries, we learn, that Nicholson met Husain, Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta and Laxman Shreshtha, who became close friends."



But, Nicholson's introduction to art was coincidental. It was a Tuesday afternoon in 1968. The Taj was hosting a Rotary Club session. Nicholson, a member, wandered into the art gallery situated on the ground floor of the hotel and, on an impulse, bought a landscape painting by Sharad Waykool for Rs 500. "This purchase kicked off a journey that continued till he died in 2001," says Dadiba.

This was five years after Kekoo and Kali opened their respective galleries, in 1963. Nicholson's presence, no doubt, contributed to their survival, "since both had clients they could probably count on their fingertips," he adds.

Kekoo was a fellow Rotarian, while Kali's father, Naoroji sold and serviced watches for Nicholson. "A true collector," in Dadiba's words, "Nicholson not only consistently bought art, he also kept in touch with the art world".

In a conversation with Dadiba, that will appear in the yet-to-be printed catalogue for the show, Kekoo's gallerist daughter Shireen Gandhi, recalls seeing 'Jhangoo' (that's what friends fondly called Nicholson) at her home because he was a family friend. Kali, on the other hand, shared a professional relationship with Nicholson. But to a young Dadiba, the man was curiously interesting.

"My early impression of him was of a frail, short man who always wore white, had unusually large ears and a ready smile. He drank plain club soda - no whiskey, no rum - at openings, and did not smoke, quite unlike the others I saw at my father's gallery. His passion and seriousness did amuse me early on and he came with his own quirks," Dadiba recalls.



Nicholson, it's famously known, would request for a painting he was keen on to be rotated 180 degrees so that he could view it upside down. Dadiba knows it's incredulous, but tells you anyway with a laugh that he once saw Nicholson lying flat on the gallery floor, in immaculate whites, viewing a work. "He was also particular about his signature initials. Dad said he'd send bills back if they didn't carry 'JKSN'," he says. "At other times, he'd fold a brochure into a roll viewing the painting as if he was looking into a telescope. "I'd often ask dad why he did that, but he never gave a satisfactory answer."



Even if he wasn't on a 'shopping spree', Nicholson would drop in at galleries to meet artists like Bhupen Khakhar (left), represented by Gallery Chemould, and Ram Kumar (centre), who was associated with Pundole

While Dadiba often suggested to Nicholson that he build on his collection of Souza, Padamsee and Gaitonde (he owned nine of his paintings), the collector was keen to own a representative work of a bouquet of artists.

What might have started as an interest piqued by the two gallerists, reckons Dadiba, gradually turned into an obsession to build a museum-level collection that was housed at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in the 1990s, and eventually moved to CSMVS.

Courtesy : Tehemton B Adenwalla