

VERNISSAGE / DESIGN GALLERY, MUMBAI

# Rediscovering Heritage



*Text*

Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar

*Images*

Courtesy of æquō

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India's first collectable design gallery, æquō, was founded with the aim to connect global designers with local craftspeople so as to preserve and further the country's craft culture. Creative director Florence Louisy designed æquō's debut collection, RAW, each piece crafted by a skilled local artisan

A chance encounter in Paris in 2019 led Tarini Jindal Handa, the third-generation scion of Indian conglomerate jsw Group, to meet French designer Florence Louisy — and the rest is history. 'I was raised in a tradition of arts patronage and had connected with many craftspeople. Elevating Indian craft has always been a cause dear to me,' she says. Her conviction resonated with Louisy and the two decided to explore a working partnership. In early 2022, Handa founded India's first collectable design gallery, æquō, as a space to encourage dialogue between makers, designers and materials via bespoke furniture and interior objects. 'The aim of æquō is to connect global minds with Indian craft in order to create a new conversation around the country's heritage,' she says.

Situated in Mumbai's historic Colaba district, the gallery is characterised by clean lines and pristine white spaces. For the interior design, Handa enlisted French architect Ivan Oddos — an emerging talent noted for his minimalist design ethos — to transform one floor of a heritage building into a collaborative gallery with two workshops and a showroom. True to his signature style, Oddos took a restrained approach to preserve the building's character. The picture windows and original columns were restored, while locally sourced materials such as Kota stone, marble, red terracotta and teak were introduced to complement the original architecture. The gallery is as rooted in function as it is in form, so a series of Parisian-style interior glass doors allow for the space to be divided into smaller rooms as needed.

The muted interior is a fitting backdrop to the objects on display: sculptural bronze pieces made in Mumbai, brass and silver-plated tables from Jaipur, curved oak furniture from Mysore and hand-sculpted marble lights from Makrana, to name a few. Each object is prized for its provenance, designed by Louisy and made at the hands of skilled Indian artisans as part of æquō's debut collection, RAW. 'The collection explores the raw beauty of metal, clay, stone and wood. Each contemporary object is dedicated to one material,' explains the designer, adding that the approach was inspired by the mono-material culture of India's artisanal clusters.

Future collections will be driven by other eminent designers. 'Of course, designers will be asked to design for the craft, not the other way around,' says Louisy, who has now taken on a curatorial role. She and Handa are presently working with five international designers, each working with a unique craft or material. Some of the artisans with whom the pair collaborates belong to rural communities, while others are from workshops in larger cities. 'The challenge so far has been introducing new designs to craftspeople who are used to traditional typologies,' Handa says. 'Our goal is to create a cultural fusion where designers and makers feed off each other's work and inspire a story behind each object.'





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 Each object in Louisy's RAW collection is dedicated to a single material to reflect India's artisanal mono-material culture, such as the hand-sculpted marble Bow light (top left); the Camur chair crafted from local teak and jute fibre (top right); the Tight console, made by nailing oak strips to wooden blocks (bottom left); and the Ilia armchair in cotton (bottom right)

This page, top left  
 The Dyad series of tables is inspired by the everyday brass- and silver-plated objects seen all over India

This page, top right  
 The Tavit armchair is crafted from hand-moulded cast bronze or aluminium

This page, bottom right  
 Inspired by the woven structure of a basket, the stainless steel Traverse chair pays homage to the objects crafted in Mumbai's metal workshops

