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BUSTING MYTHS

Art galleries in Capital come of age

NOT JUST SHOW New addresses offer art lovers more than just exhibitions

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NEW DELHI: Altmaram Mansion on Kasturba Gandhi Marg in central Delhi is one of the latest art hotspots in the city.

It is attracting a mixed crowd of men, women and college students all of whom have one thing in common — art.

But what's different about this art gallery that overlooks Connaught Place is that it offers much more than just exhibits.

It has a café, a resource center with hundreds of books, catalogues, and CDs on art and an art store that sells products designed by the country's best-known designers.

Welcome to Religare Arts-I.

a first-of-its kind art hub in the country.

"There are art galleries like Triveni Kala Sangam and Lalit Kala Akademi, but the environment there is stuffy. I often come to Arts-I to hang out with like-minded people," said Manish Sharma, 28. "It's the ambience of the place that attracts me."

The unique integrated art platform started in October last year has become a favourite haunt of art lovers in the Capital.

"Ours is 360 degree art platform provides a complete art experience to the visitor," said Mukesh Panika, director, Arts-I.

Its art store offers a variety of art works like handmade stainless steel products by



■ **Mukesh Panika, the director of Religare Arts-I. The art gallery has a cafe, an art store and a resource centre with books and CDs.**

Francis Joseph, beautiful blue pottery by Madan Lal and office stationery by Mukul Goyal.

Arts-I also organises activities and events.

In July last, it organised a day-residency with 25 young artists with the theme — Connaught Place, The Why Not Place — that captured the ups and downs of the iconic marketplace.

It also hosted the media preview of director Ram Gopal Verma's Rann.

A READING ROOM

Vadhra Bookstore is another favourite art lover's hangout in city.

Opened in August last year, the store is a two-roomed enclosure with a shop in the front and

a reading room at the back.

The reading room has about 1,300 books on art, CDs and DVDs of art films, a large plasma TV, a laptop computer, and a coffee machine — all for free.

The place is pretty popular with researchers and students. "There is no place in the city where you can access latest books and films on art free of cost," said Mohit Gupta, an art student. "I drop in here at least once a week with friends."

Owner Parul Vadhra said the purpose was to make art



books reachable to all.

"We wanted to create a space where art lovers who can't afford to buy costly books could read them in a nice ambience free of cost," she said.

The bookshop has a central display table crammed with all kinds of art memorabilia — coasters, gift bags, diaries, etc.

"The idea is to introduce art in people's everyday life," said Vadhra. "Our bookstore is selling things acquired from museums abroad."

The bookstore also organises film screenings, book launches and discussions on art.

CYMK, a bookstore at Meher Chand Market, is another popular haunt. It boasts of about 4000 titles on art and design, holds exhibitions and has a terrace where people can read and relax.

The USP of the stores is the fact that it sells signed copies of contemporary artists like

■ **Parul Vadhra, the owner of Vadhra bookstore, says the purpose of the store is to give art lovers access to costly books that they can't buy.**

Damien Hirst which costs cost as much as Rs 32,000.

"What makes our art bookstore different is our collection; we have art and design books that have never been available in India before," said Kapil Kapoor, director of Roll Books that started the bookstore.

PICTURE PERFECT

Photoink is a 3,500 square ft. gallery at Faiz Road in Jhandewalan that is exclusively devoted to photography.

The gallery has a bookshop — Steidel — selling books on photography and has a library. "Our visitors are curators, photographers and students," said Devika Dault-Singh, director of photography.



■ **Photoink, a gallery devoted to photography on Faiz Road, also has a library and bookstore.** VIRENDRA SINGH SOGAIN / HT PHOTOS

We are trying to challenge set norms about art galleries by turning our gallery into a happening social space.
 MUKESH PANIKA
 director, Arts-I