

INDIA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER NUPUR TRON AND HER NEW MUSEUM AT MAISON FRISON



MAISON FRISON ART NOUVEAU BY VICTOR HORTA

Editor Erica Bureau is excited to share a Q&A with our exceptional India Advisory Board Member, Nupur Tron. She has embarked on a one-of-a-kind project – to make her new Victor Horta-designed home, located in Brussels, Belgium, into a museum, now known as Maison Frison Victor Horta. GPP had a chance to visit with Nupur at this historical gem in November, and she noted, “I asked Nupur how she found such a beautiful house? Her answer: “The house found me!””

EB: Tell us about your vision for this museum and what we can find on exhibition at the moment?

NT: The idea is to create a cultural bridge and dialogue between East and West through art, craft, and *savoir faire*, creating a rich exchange between the two continents just as it was during the glorious period of the silk route and the *Belle Époque*! I love the concept of the ‘exchange of art’ and artisans from around the world being influenced by each other’s traditions and heritage.

The current exhibition at Maison Frison is titled ‘Maharanis: Women of Royal India.’ Although Indian royalty have in the past formed the subject of several exhibitions and publications, the emphasis of these exhibitions has always been centered on the figure of the male ruler, or the Maharaja. It’s about time to focus on the Maharanis and other royal women of erstwhile Princely India!

Maharanis: Royal Women of India includes images from the archives of the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP); esteemed royal collections from across the subcontinent; and other institutional and private collections both in India and abroad such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and National Portrait Gallery in London, and the Amar Mahal Museum & Library in Jammu.

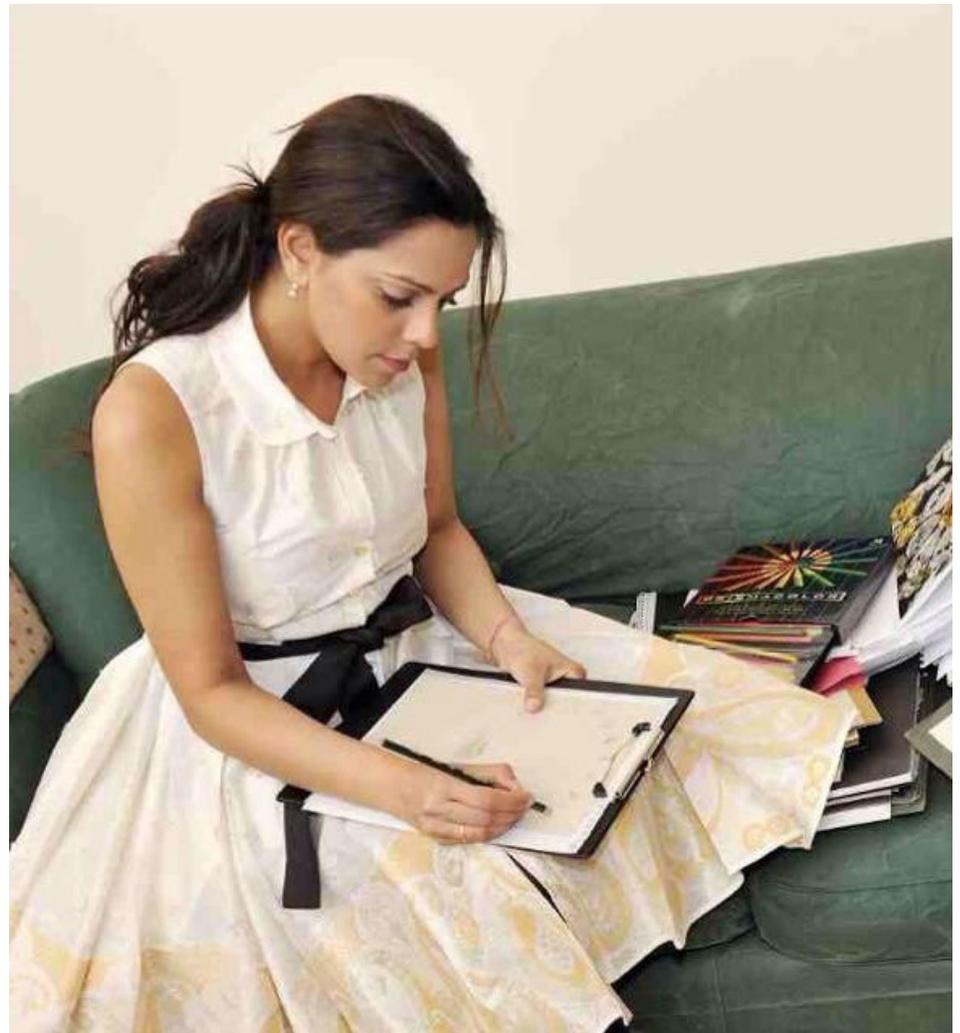
EB: What an impressive collection to bring in to one space! Can you tell us more about the royal portraiture?

NT: Royal portraiture in the context of India has had a long tradition, with miniature artists capturing the splendor and spectacle of court life in earlier centuries. With the advent of photography in the 19th century however, painted portraits were steadily supplanted by the photograph with its claims of truthful accuracy. Early photographic portraits often showed rulers in complete regalia, sometimes accompanied by their children, wives or attendants, but as technology and social mores changed with time, the palace (including the Zenana Mahal) began to open up and experiment with various modes, poses, and forms of photography.

Due to several factors, including the practice of *purdah* (seclusion) prevalent at the time, fewer images of royal women are found, relative to the male members of Indian royalty. The photographs in this exhibition function as documented history, pointing us towards the ways in which these women circumvented and reinvented the traditional, or embraced and reinvented the modern. The images allow us to map the transforming modalities and conditions of the princely class, and its complex relationship with colonialism and the British Empire. With these ‘windows in to a different era’ we can extrapolate from their clues, larger contexts and conditions, leading us to revisit our comfortable constructions of the past, gender roles and Indian royalty.

EB: Tell us a bit more about your art nouveau home/museum and the restoration to bring the project to where it is today.

NT: This is a classified building so everything had to be done in honor and regulation with the historical significance of it, as a monument! I was aided by experts of The Royal Commission for Monuments and Sites, and the work included redoing the marble stairways, uncovering intricate murals, and rebuilding the façade. There is always something exciting going on here, and more treasures to uncover. I welcome anyone visiting in Brussels to get in touch, and help me to share in preserving this amazing history, while also bringing in other artistic elements to enhance the conversation in the years to come.



NUPUR TRON, INDIA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER AND OWNER OF MAISON FRISON, VICTOR HORTA