

**INDIA'S GALLERIST**

Kekoo Gandhi photographed in front of Kekee Manzil, an image used in the film; and Behroze Gandhi

FILM

Freeze Frame

A NEW DOCUMENTARY TELLS THE STORY OF GALLERIST **KEKOO GANDHY** WHO FIRST PUT INDIAN ART ON THE MAP

In the early 1940s, when Kekoo Gandhi got into the framing business, he had no dearth of customers. Everyone with pictures of gods and goddesses in their home wanted a handsome frame for the deities. But more than his frames, Gandhi was interested in what lay inside some of them—art. And so, in 1963, he opened Gallery Chemould, one of the first exhibition spaces exclusively dedicated to Indian modern art. With help from his wife Khorshed, Gandhi promoted dozens of struggling artists—M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza, Tyeb Mehta, S.H. Raza and Bhanu Prasad Khakhar. It was Gallery Chemould, for instance, that gave the relatively untested Mehta his first solo show in 1964. Shrewd art dealers know how to blend commerce with aesthetic and aspiration, but in matters of art, Gandhi was driven solely by “love and passion”, notes artist Anish Kapoor in *Kekee Manzil: The House of Art*, a documentary that paints the portrait of a man instrumental in putting Indian modern art on the map.

Produced by his London-based daughter, Behroze Gandhi, and directed by Dilesh Korya, *Kekee Manzil* is named after Gandhi’s

sea-facing family home in Bandra. Mixing archival footage with interviews of the Gandhi family and global celebrities like Kapoor and Salman Rushdie (who created a Gandhi-like character in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*), *Kekee Manzil* shows its subject as a man of vision, but also of ideals. “I call him a historical accident,” says Behroze. “A rarity, he was part of independent India’s history, its secular vision that is today being challenged.”

Husain’s support to Indira Gandhi during the Emergency cost him Gandhi’s friendship. But the friends patched up in 1991. When the artist was forced into exile, the Gandhys were the first to defend him. Her father’s relationship with Husain forms the heart of *Kekee Manzil*, which Behroze started shooting in 2002. For a limited period, Chemould has made the film available to interested online audiences. “My father was one of the last repositories of Indian art history who was just at the right place at the right time,” she says, hoping her 90-minute film might “travel outside the art circle”. ■

—Shaikh Ayaz

The documentary *Kekee Manzil* shows its subject, Kekoo Gandhi as a man of vision, but also of ideals

To watch *Kekee Manzil*, email communication@gallerychemould.com for a weblink

