H ead to the Museum to check out its latest exhibition — Voicing a Presence: Women Artists in the Jehangir Nicholson Collection. It features paintings by women artists from art patron Jehangir Nicholson’s portfolio (the gallery is named after him). Nicholson bought his first painting in 1968 after his wife Dina died, and from that first painting, the collection grew to include 800 works by 250 artists. While women artists had to fight for state and private patronage during those times, Nicholson collected artworks by close to 60 women artists and thus showed his support for them.

The film spearheaded the Right to Water campaign to add a 31st article to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, establishing access to clean water as a fundamental human right. Director Irena Salina shares her thoughts in an email interview, before the screening of her film by the Asia Society.

Excerpts from the interview:

What were the startling facts that you came across while working on the film?

In South Africa, we had to follow women up a mountain for more than an hour, so that they could get to a little hole where there was just enough water for them to fill a bucket. That was my experience on the first day of filming, and one of my most striking memories of the film. Another image that remains with me is the story of a small township on the outskirts of Johannesburg that had no water. In a neighbouring building, however, water was being wasted from an overflowing pipe. The community managed to install a pipe to collect the water with which they were able to nurture a vegetable garden to feed the small community. I was witness to the wastage of water, as well as how that wastage (when properly channelled) changed the lives of people. One of the local women told me, “You see, for us small things makes a big difference”. That night in my hotel room, while taking a shower, I thought of that community and realised the value of water.

The film has received rave reviews and awards. What do you believe is the film’s greatest achievement? The biggest gift this film has given us is not in the awards, but showing us how a small film can create room for discussion, inspire projects and make people take initiative. Screenings have helped raise money for wells and other smaller water projects. Recently, we received a mail from Hawaii, where kids made a project to build a system to harvest rain at their school after watching the film. They are now using the rainwater from that system for a small garden planted by them.

What do we, as Indians, need to know about the water crisis? What should the common man do?

Wake up your mother is drowning! And your uncle has run away with all your savings! I’m only joking, of course, but there needs to be an awakening. The last time I was in Mumbai I saw so many luxurious high-rises, and I thought to myself: Does the architect consult with experts to include water harvesting within the building? Water is so crucial that it is important to be informed about what is going on, what laws or new policies are being passed, and the ways in which one can raise awareness about the cleaning of rivers and the conservation of water. There are so many people in India who are dedicating themselves to the cause that even if others don’t have the time to get directly involved, they can at least support an organisation that does.

ON Today, 6:30 pm (registrations 6 pm onwards)
AT US Consulate General, C-49, G-Block, Bandra-Kurla Complex. RSVP: asiasociety@asiasociety.org.in

Director Irena Salina will be available for a discussion via video conference post the screening.