

# Mumbai's CST comes alive with public art

The newest public art initiative in Mumbai returns to the iconic site



A still from 'You Are forever'.

Since 2010, a Mumbai-based initiative ArtOxygen (ArtO2), has been working on making the city a site for art. In the seventh iteration of a public arts festival called '[en]counters' that they curate, they revisit the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (once called Victoria Terminus or VT), a nodal station of Mumbai, and the Central Railways—and a Unesco World Heritage Site.

This time around, the festival aims to look at migration and a city that is in constant flux. Titled 'Bori Bunder @ Platform 8', the nearly-two month-long festival began on 8 October and will culminate next month. Eleven artists have been invited to create works that are site-specific and create a dialogue with residents, in this case, commuters and travellers walking through CST station each day. Five artists, including Hong Kong-based Peggy Chan, Wong Chun Hoi and Chu Yiu Wai, put up their installations over the 8-9 October weekend. On 22-23 October, three other artists, including artist and filmmaker Owais Husain, Italian video artist Emilio Leofreddi and painter Pradeep Mishra, will put up theirs.

It can be argued that public art has a multi-purpose role—not only is it meant to disrupt our conceptions of what constitutes art (a legacy of contemporary artists like Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, for instance), it must also engage its viewer to think about location, their own as well as the art work's, within a larger site that is the city. In such a framework, the space of exhibition is of equal significance—a railway station such as the CST attracts lakhs of commuters daily and would therefore be quite the site for the sort of public engagement that the organizers seek.

Husain's installation comprises two stacks of metal trunks arranged in an L-shape, on to which a video has been projected. Titled *You Are Forever*, the installation recalls the idea of homeland and displacement, even as the projection seems to present a dreamscape.

The city is in flux, but so are its people—and, as this festival shows, so are these works of art. Chan's piece, *Happy Birthday* was a sound piece that carried the birthday greeting sung by Indian immigrants in Hong Kong. Mishra's *Incubating Love* is an installation of roses wrapped in jute parcels. This will be placed on a goods trolley and wheeled across the station.

ArtO2 has, over the past six years, curated a number of events that have used the city's public spaces for installations and artistic collaborations, such as the stretch of land that connects the Haji Ali Dargah to the city, the history-laden Crawford Market, and Bandra Bandstand; involved a multitude of activists, art historians and foundations, including Simpreet Singh, Studio X, Dr Bhau Daji Lad City Museum's Tasneem Mehta, the Mohile Parekh Centre among others; and included a number of artists from India and around the world, including Reena Saini Kallat, Prajakta Potnis, Tushar Joag and the late Hema Upadhyay.

In this iteration, the installations, including those that will be shown at the station over the coming weeks, will also be exhibited at the JJ School of Art till 30 November. The weekend of 3 December will see the exhibition of Andrea Caretto and Rafaella Spagna's installation, *Mumbai Matter Experience* in which the artists will map the social, economic and physical properties of objects collected from a mining site, a riverbed, and a railway station among other places.

For a city that is starved of public art installations, and especially those that disrupt conventional assumptions, this intervention is a welcome change.