



Photo: Jagadesh NV

Streets ahead

Public art is about making a splash and taking art to the masses, says **Aarti Dua**

He was showing as part of an ongoing public arts festival called [en]counters 2016 — Bori Bunder@Platform 8 organised by ArtOxygen (ArtO2). Alongside it were other crowd-pulling works like Pradeep Mishra's *Incubating Love* and Emilio Leofreddi's *Flying Carpet*.

"There are a lot more public art initiatives today," says Leandre D'Souza, co-founder, ArtO2, who launched [en]counters in 2009.

Cut to Hyderabad, where the St+art India Foundation turned the Necklace Road precinct into an art gallery with St+art Hyderabad, the city's first street art festival earlier this month. It followed the month-long St+art Bangalore festival in October. Nine Indian and international street artists like Daku from Delhi and Daan Botlek from the Netherlands painted large-scale murals at various sites like the low-income Makhta neighbourhood in Hyderabad.

Says designer Hanif Kureshi, who co-founded St+art India in 2014 to promote street art in India: "Our aim is to take art to the masses and make it popular."

India isn't known for a strong public art culture unlike the West with its large commissioned public art displays like Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* in Chicago. True, there have been some for-

ays like Sudarshan Shetty's *Flying Bus* in Mumbai, or Subodh Gupta's *Banyan Tree* in Delhi and gigantic *Cactus* in Patna, or even the *Jaya He Museum* in Mumbai's Terminal 2 airport.

Artists like Navjot and Tushar Joag have also long engaged in public art. And contemporary art organisations like Khoj have been taking art out of the gallery for years. Still, there's little public awareness.

But now, a host of younger arts organisations are eager to expand the reach and scope of public art. They're taking all kinds of art — from street art with its accent on beautification and urban regeneration to curated contemporary art — into the public arena.

So, earlier this year, Surbhi Modi's Floodlight Foundation held Publica, its second public arts festival. Modi got nine artists like Gigi Scaria, Anant Mishra and Spanish artist Lucas Munoz to create works in places like Nehru Park and Saket Citywalk in Delhi.

Photo: Jagan Negi



Surbhi Modi is promoting public art through her Publica festival, which showed works like Lucas Munoz's *Delhi Lungs* this year

"When I was in London, I saw so many avenues to see art unlike in India, where it's the preserve of a few people. I felt we needed to bring about a change here," says Modi, who launched Floodlight in 2011. "Publica got a huge response. What's lacking in India is government support, not interest from people," she adds.

Indeed, St+art India's WIP show at the Internal Container Depot in Delhi drew a massive 30,000 people earlier

this year. St+art got 25 Indian and international artists to paint 100 shipping containers, transforming the depot into a "fully painted" environment.

"I don't think even the NGMA gets that many people. We wanted to do something larger than life and let people get the feel of an art exhibition," says Kureshi.

Simultaneously, as part of the St+art Delhi festival, it transformed a government residential area, Lodhi Colony, into "the first public art district in India"

St+art India Foundation's co-founders (L to R) Hanif Kureshi, Giulia Ambrogio and Akshat Nauriyal have just taken street art to cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad

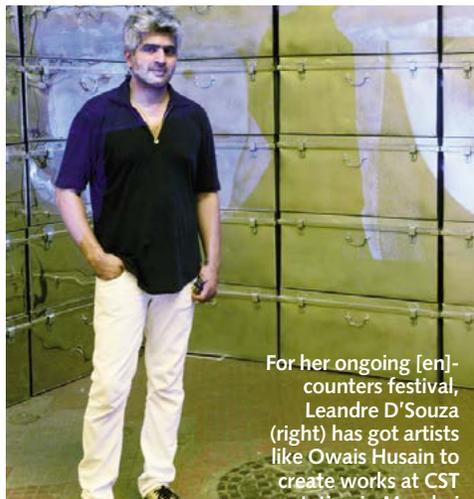
On any given day, Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) station is a blur of movement. So the halting of human traffic near Platform 8 one Saturday morning last month was unusual. The crowds had gathered to gaze at a video projected onto an L-shaped wall of stacked steel trunks.

"We were almost thrown out from the site," says artist Owais Husain, whose installation art work, *You are Forever*, had drawn the crowds.

TRENDS

10 GRAPHII

Photo: Gajanan Dudhalkar



For her ongoing [en]counters festival, Leandre D'Souza (right) has got artists like Owais Husain to create works at CST

Photo: Gajanan Dudhalkar



Baluchari

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Exhibition Period : Friday 18th November 2016 to Sunday 4th December, 2016
Gallery Timings: 3-8 pm (Mondays Closed)

Field-trip to Bishnupur : 26-27 November 2016.
(By prior registration)



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St+art India's WIP show in Delhi this year drew in a massive 30,000 people

by turning its walls into an art gallery.

"Street art is still nascent in India. But it's growing tremendously, and newer artists are coming in," says St+art India's co-founder Akshat Nauriyal.

The art organisations are taking all kinds of contemporary art from installations to performance and sound art into the open. Elise Foster Vander Elst, who founded Asia Art Projects in Mumbai, has taken photography to streets and cafés with the Focus Photography Festival. She also explored issues related to power in the urban context when she curated the 2013 [en]counters festival.

"We find that when you take interesting, world-class art into spaces over which the public has a sense of ownership, exciting conversations happen. Citizens who'd never dream of stepping into an art gallery or visiting a museum engage with the work in surprising ways," says Elst.

So, she got Australian artists, PVI Collective, to do a performance work, Resist, during [en]counters 2013. Hundreds of people cheered on as PVI got audiences to wage a tug of war over contentious issues on Juhu Beach.

Similarly, D'Souza, who co-founded [en]counters in 2009 as an experiment to see "what happens when we move works

Senior artist Navjot's Nalpar public art collaboration with four Adivasi artists and community persons transformed this handpump site in Kondagaon in Bastar

to the outside space", has taken Bori Bunder as the theme of this year's [en]counters festival. She has got 11 artists to reflect on the connection between the railway, its people and the city. Bori Bunder was a warehouse of traded goods before it became Victoria Terminus and now, CST. So, Korean artist Wong Chun Hoi took over the airwaves at CST with a sound work that included interviews with travellers.

And Husain, who lives between Dubai and Mumbai — he is M. F. Husain's youngest son — explored ideas like "displacement and memory" in his video projection on steel trunks with its images of transportation and "symbolic narrative of three rivers".

"My own idea of CST deals with displacement, memory and the manipulation of history. Various narratives came out of it and I've tried to deal with some

of them in a simpler way," he says.

"Just because we're intervening in public spaces, it doesn't mean that the work needs to be diluted," says D'Souza. She's interested in seeing "what the work brings to a site and how the site enriches and stimulates the work and the artist".

Senior artists like Navjot have been engaging in public art for years. She first did a public art project, Politics of 100 Mahua Trees in 1999, where she planted 100 mahua trees in Modinagar with the forest department.

Then, in 2000, she began her Nalpar public art intervention at handpump sites in Bastar along with tribal artists, the local community and municipal officials. The idea was to improve hygiene by creating drainage and tanks for re-using wastewater and to transform the handpumps aesthetically.

"Public art is not only about constructing an object," says Navjot. Sometimes, it can be "a symbolic action" like in her Barakhamba 2010 intervention in Delhi, when she de-choked 180 trees on Barakhamba Road with

the municipal body. "Artistic intervention in public spaces can be about introducing an idea to be carried out by the concerned officials," she says.

Undoubtedly, public art faces huge challenges like permissions, security and funding. D'Souza recalls sitting at CST for hours for permissions "in my seventh month of pregnancy". Navjot says: "Public spaces are quite complex because many stakeholders are involved so you can sometimes face conflict."

But that's not stopping the public art evangelists. So St+art India is taking street art to more cities. And Modi, who also sculpts, says: "My long-term ambition is to make sculpture parks in India." As Elst says: "Art needs an audience and bringing it out into the streets gives it a truly diverse one." ♦

Street art's just coming of age in India but it's growing rapidly



Photo courtesy: Navjot