

Note from Editor

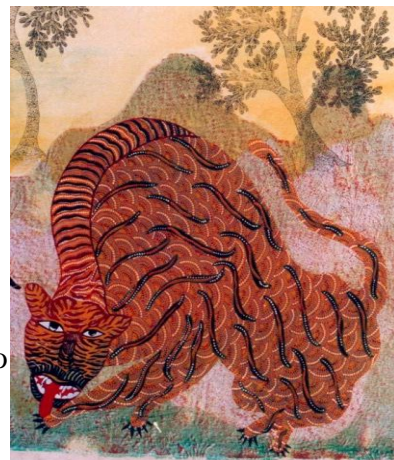
2007 ends with our Extending Arts Practice programme opening itself out to projects that look at contemporary art-making practices from the artist's point of view. Filmmaker Amit Dutta who is exploring the life and death of Gond artist, Jangarh Singh Shyam, is aware of the tentative nature of his questions and at the same time their crucial implication for his own practice. "It is important to highlight the fact that I would like to undertake the project not from the point of view of an art critic, art theoretician, or academician... I am interested to see this from the point of view of a contemporary art practitioner in a state of confusion," he writes. Carnatic musician TM Krishna, on the other hand, talking in *Slant, Stance* about his mission to popularise Carnatic music, raises questions about the very significance of the 'term' contemporary. "How do you define contemporary?" he asks. "Unfortunately today, contemporary is linked to western. To be considered contemporary, music should have drums, rhythm board and a guitar... But we have also held on to some crazy ideas about our own culture. For instance, we are unable to separate art and religion when we talk about music. When I talk about Carnatic music, I don't want to talk about Rama and Krishna. If you think about Rama and Krishna, good for you."

Also scroll down to read about the exciting new IFA-funded work that has recently been in the public eye.

Anjum Hasan

Recent Grants

Recent grantee Amit Dutta wishes to focus on the trajectory of Jangarh Singh Shyam who died in tragic circumstances at the height of his artistic career. At the same time, Dutta would also like to explore the broader question of what it means to be a 'modern' Indian artist, a question that acquires urgency in the case of an artist like Jangarh who was compelled to make the transition from 'folk' to 'contemporary' even while having to maintain an identity "as an exotic painter of tribal origin". Dutta eventually hopes to write a book on the subject.



P Madhavan, a documentary photographer and photography teacher, researching into the art and science of daguerreotype photography, is especially interested in attracting interest back to this

early technique of photography. He hopes to eventually write a manual on how to make daguerreotypes.

Meanwhile, **Rudradeep Bhattacharjee** is researching towards a screenplay on the Hindi writer, Nirmal Verma with special reference to his years in Europe, a period that apparently had deep personal, political and artistic implications for the writer's life. The challenge of developing a screenplay on the life of the writer in a way that language is fore-grounded is among Bhattacharjee's main preoccupations. "In the usual adaptation process, concerns of narrative structure and visual imagery override the question of language. In fact, the choice of language in cinema has very rarely been a creative decision," says Bhattacharjee.

Public Eye



Recognition for City of Photos

Filmmaker **Nishtha Jain's** IFA-funded documentary film *City of Photos*, on the culture of photo studios and the aesthetics of studio portraiture, has been voted by audiences among the top twenty films from the past twenty years screened at the IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival of Amsterdam). Considered the 'Cannes of documentary filmmaking', IDFA is celebrating its twenty year anniversary with a special screening of the films that have made it to the top twenty list. It will also issue a package of DVDs of these films.

Carnatic Music database

On November 25th a comprehensive, searchable database of Carnatic music compositions, composers and books compiled by **KS Nagarajan** was released in Bangalore by Ananya GML Cultural Academy.

The CD is the first outcome of a long-running project, partially supported by IFA, to collate information about Carnatic music and make it publicly available through a cross-referenced computer database which can be regularly updated.

The CD is available for sale through Ananya and will soon be uploaded onto the Ananya website. Ananya promotes Carnatic music, among other things, through its concerts, festivals, journal and archive.



Delhi on October 23.

New Performances

Two IFA-funded performances premiered recently. Barefoot Production's *Pink Balloon*, directed by **Shena Gamat**, is a unique combination of art, theatre and dance, and is based on a book of drawings and text by Gamat. *Pink Balloon* opened at the Sri Ram Centre for Performing Arts, New Delhi on October 22.

A Theatre Roots and Wings production of *Quick Death* directed by **Sankar Venkateswaran** also opened at the Sri Ram Centre for Performing Arts on December 7. *Quick Death*, written by the Australian playwright Richard Murphet, belongs to a genre of dramatic literature which depends on written transcriptions of physical actions and gestures to construct theme, plot, character and spectacle.

Quick Death also featured at a National Theatre Festival organised by the Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of Kerala held in Trivandrum on December 29th.

A review in *The Hindu* said of *Quick Death* (where the actors do not speak but express through physical movement), "The performance powerfully captures the playwright's vision of a disjunction between word and action."

Visual culture of the Thiyyas



Janaki Nair received an IFA grant in 2004 to document the visual culture of the Thiyyas of North Kerala. Photographs, paintings, letters, family trees, marriage albums and videos, genealogies and myths of creation would all feed into the recreation of the visual world of this diasporic community. The main outcome of the project is the recently-launched website www.malabarvisuals.co.in where a large body of visual material collected over the course of the project has been uploaded. The site invites visitors to post photographs, share stories and respond to the material exhibited.

Announcements

With partial support from IFA, the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), New Delhi, will hold a three-day, international conference titled *Reviewing Disciplinary Agendas in Theatre Studies: Cultural Arenas, Policies, Institutions*. The conference addresses a crucial phase (1930-1970) in the history of theatrical activity in India. The conference will be held in IEG from January 23-25 and is to be followed by a research and translation project.

Slant, Stance

TM Krishna is a well-known Carnatic musician actively involved, through the various organisations he has co-founded, in the research, writing and education in the field of Carnatic music. He served as president of the Youth Association for Classical Music (YACM) from 1996-1999 during which time he organised lecture-demonstrations in over 100 schools in Chennai. He talks here about his passion for promoting an appreciation of Carnatic music among young people.

What inspires you to go beyond performance and write books, conduct workshops and work in the field of music education?

TMK: I believe Carnatic music must reach every nook and corner. That's my primary passion. The problem is not that people don't like Carnatic music. They just don't know about it. So it's my job, I think, to make them aware of it. I remember going to a corporation government school when I was in YACM (Youth Association for Carnatic Music). The only thing the children knew about was cinema culture, but they were all willing to learn. I try to bring fun and interaction into my school sessions—I get the children to sing what they want, chit-chat, stuff like that, and not make the subject heavy and serious.

So the problem is ignorance. There is usually no one around to tell children about Carnatic music. It's my job, more than anything else, to take music wherever I can. That's what makes me do all those other things in addition to performance. If it reaches a thousand people and five of those just come and listen to one concert, I'll be happy.

What are your views on the methodology of Carnatic music education?

TMK: There are two things to it—one is the methodology and the other is how we understand the methodology. I think the problem now is that we tend to view the existing methodology negatively. There are lots of people trying to develop new methodologies, which is because they don't understand the original methodology.

I think the music education system by itself, whether it is the saralivarisai or the jantivarisai system is a phenomenal system, for the voice and for the music. It is a very

scientifically constructed system. People say, 'It's so boring. How can you ask an eight-year-old to sing it?' But actually there are so many things in the tradition that can be used to teach children. Dikshitar's songs like 'Shyamale Meenakshi', Tyagaraja's kritis, small bhajans—all these are fun songs for kids. We say, 'Today sa ri ga ma. Tomorrow next lesson. Day after next lesson. And in two years you'll sing a concert.' That's how we look at it. We want a fast food kind of response.

Tell us something about Matrka—an organisation that you co-founded with Bombay Jayashri.

TMK: Way back in 2001 we wrote this book called *Voices Within* [a coffee table book on seven maestros of Carnatic music]. We went to many publishers and asked 'Will you publish it?' They said 'Yes, it will be a paperback with four photographs in the middle.' You must have seen those paperbacks with a few pages of art paper with photographs in the middle. We almost signed for publication but at the last minute Jayashri and I said, no, we won't do it. We were very clear that the book had to have a pictorial format and be of a very high quality.

It's not about wanting to do something expensive. It's about how much we value our music and our musicians. You should be proud to have a book on Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar in your house. All the publishers we approached said, No we can't do it. Too expensive. So the manuscript lay with us. Then in early 2005, Jayashri called me and said 'Look. Lets publish it ourselves.' So that's how Matrka came to be.

It started with the intention to publish the book but once we'd done that, we felt that there was lot more that Matrka could do—whether it be publications or programmes for children. It could be anything. The passion behind Matrka is creating platforms to present Carnatic music in different ways to reach different people. We have a lot of ideas. But I don't want to discuss them before they're concrete. And even beyond Carnatic music, I think we need to work at promoting Indian art and culture—whether it is folk art, drama, music.

We are not competing with anybody. If you have ten people doing it, it's good. The more the better. Today people have to see something in the paper or on television to remember it. If more people keep seeing the names of, say, Carnatic musicians, Hindustani singers, folk dancers, art forms of which they have never heard, then the awareness level increases. So that's the drive.

Do you find yourself constantly having to argue for the contemporary relevance of a form like Carnatic music?

TMK: How do you define contemporary? Unfortunately today, contemporary is linked to western. To be considered contemporary, music should have drums, rhythm board and a guitar. I think as a society we are encouraging this perception. But we have also held on to some crazy ideas about our own culture. For instance, we cannot separate art and

religion when we talk about music. When I talk about Carnatic music, I don't want to talk about Rama and Krishna. If you think about Rama and Krishna, good for you.

We also keep propagating preconceived, hackneyed ideas. Parents say to their children say 'Oh, you listen to rock and roll. That's bad. But this [Carnatic music] is great'. That's wrong to my mind. They are both great forms of music. We have to be very clear when we talk about these things.

A question people often ask me is: Why don't you have non-devotional lyrics? This is a very, very relevant question. I have thought about it a lot. Unfortunately, I don't believe that we have people today who can write about non-religious subjects in such a way that they can be musically sung in the idiom. Bharatiyar's poetry, for instance, goes, because the poetry lends itself to the music. I am willing to sing a full concert on any subject other than the gods, if somebody can give me matter that is aesthetically acceptable. You can write in Sanskrit. You can write in Kannada. But the Kannada must be musical Kannada. Another problem with poetry today is that, in order to write poetry in a contemporary fashion, people use contemporary language. Contemporary language need not be musical. It's a trap.

So you need to write text for music which is contemporary in content but may be a little older in style. Because the musical idiom has an older connection.

But perhaps this question about 'contemporary content' has got to do with how we present Carnatic music. If we talk about Carnatic music in a religious fashion, then people will look for content. If we stop making the performance into a religious event, then they will come to just listen to the music. It's a question of how you present it. It may not be necessary to change the content. If it is a personal religious celebration for you, that's fine. If you come to my concert on Ramanavami day and think that it is a religious day for you, that's for you to do. But you cannot force that on everybody.