

India Foundation for the Arts

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In the last three months, IFA support has gone out to three new projects including an unusual new multi-disciplinary arts residency based in Bangalore called the Bengaluru Artist Residency or bar1. Christoph Storz, one of the organisers, says, describing the potential of bar1, “A residency can create, at least for a moment, the nice illusion for an arriving guest that life is starting anew. Nothing is done, nothing is said yet. This is an unknown place in a maybe unknown town in an unknown air.”

Echoing him Parvez Kabir, critic-in-residence at Peers - another IFA-funded artists' residency - writes, “Practitioners come to search with a chilling uncertainty... This very uncertainty... leads to the refusal to settle with the obvious, which marks the character of Khoj.”

Scroll down to read more about these and other recent and upcoming IFA projects and events.

Recent Projects

Theatre Infrastructure Cell

A Theatre Infrastructure Cell, funded by a grant from the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust, is a recent addition to IFA's programmes. Built sites for performance in India tend to be poorly designed and managed, and infrastructure that can in others ways facilitate performance is also generally poor. The Theatre Infrastructure Cell will start by developing model projects that demonstrate imaginative approaches to the creation of infrastructure, and will also build and disseminate knowledge about best practices in this area.

Conference on Archiving

Why do we archive objects and materials and what happens to our understanding of these objects and materials once they are archived? The Vadodara-based Association of Academics, Artists and Citizens for University Autonomy (ACUA) has recently received an IFA grant to prepare for a conference (to be held in February 2009) that will survey archiving, research and teaching practices of art history in Indian art schools.

Speakers at the conference - which is titled *Archiving the Art Histories: Exigencies and Challenges in Pedagogy and Research* - will also think through and devise ways of improving the present state of visual archives in art teaching institutions.

bar1

The Bengaluru Artist Residency 1 or bar1 kicks off on July 1 by hosting seven artists from different fields for a period of three months. Funded by IFA, visual artists Shreyas Karle, Chandrakala MN, Atul Mahajan, Malvika Mankotia and Banita Bhau; writer Rahee Dahake; and filmmaker Nilanjan Bhattacharya will live and work together, present their work in non-formal salon-like situations as well as familiarise themselves with the Bangalore art scene.

bar1 is a non-profit exchange programme by artists for artists to foster the local, Indian and international exchange of ideas and experiences through guest residencies in Bangalore. IFA is funding the India-India exchange segment of bar1. To learn more about the residency scroll down to read our interview with Christoph Storz and Ayisha Abraham - two artists who are part of the collective that has set up bar1.

Public Eye

Award for IFA-supported Film

Amitabh Chakraborty's *Bishar Blues* on the fakirs of Bengal has won the Golden Lotus award for the best film in the non-feature film category at the 54th National Film Awards. It also won awards for Best Editing and Best Audiography. *Bishar Blues* examines the music of the fakirs and their deeply spiritual everyday life as representative of a living practice of radical syncretism. The film was applauded for "courageously treating a sensitive subject in a poetic form. It demolishes the myth that the practice of Islam is monolithic..."

Peers at Khoj

Peers, the IFA-funded young artists' residency run by Khoj, New Delhi, recently completed its latest edition. Each year Peers artists are joined by a critic-in-residence. This year's critic, Parvez Kabir, reflected interestingly on the relationship between alternative arts institutions and mainstream ones, pointing out that sometimes the oppositional stance taken by the former offers "no real resistance in the long run". Because of their tendency to simply try and bypass the mainstream, such institutions "willingly shy away from real interventions".

Khoj does not fall into this trap points out Kabir because the Peers residency brings together artists involved in a wide variety of 'searches' and the fact that Khoj takes responsibility for initiating dialogue between such artists suggests that it is "willing to move ahead of the comfortable status of being alternative". To read Parvez Kabir's commentary and see more images from the recent Peers Open Day at the Khoj Studios click [here](#).

Out of the Box

The Mumbai-based Centre for Environmental Research and Education has taken a lead in developing creative approaches to classroom-based environmental education. In 2005 the centre received an IFA grant for an 'Art-From-Waste' project that would eventually result in a workbook for middle-school children. The recently-published *Out of the Box* reminds teachers and parents that while the arts "give children their power back", the versatility of waste makes it an ideal material for arts and craft, even as it helps children develop an awareness of their environment. Thirty well-illustrated and clearly-explained exercises follow. To order *Out of the Box* write to Rashneh Pardiwala at cere_india@yahoo.co.in

Announcements

Screening of *Bishar Blues*

IFA will organise a screening of the award-winning documentary film *Bishar Blues* (directed by Amitabh Chakraborty) at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on July 3 at 6.30 pm. The director will be present at the screening. All are welcome.

Girish Karnad play as IFA fundraiser

The Wedding Album, written by Girish Karnad and directed by Lillete Dubey, will be performed in support of IFA at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore on July 10 and 11 at 7.30 p.m. For more details on the play and information on how to buy tickets email Joyce Gonsalves on joyce@indiaifa.org or call 080-23414681/82/83.

Subscribe to *ArtConnect*

The third issue of *ArtConnect*, to be out shortly, includes essays on the pros and cons of the architecture of Indian artplaces, an unusual form of 19th Marathi theatre called Farce, and two leading Bhakti poets from Kerala who represent two faces of Malayalam literature. [Subscribe Now](#).

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Slant Stance

Bangalore-based artists Christoph Storz and Ayisha Abraham are moving forces behind bar1 - the Bengaluru Artists' Residency. Here they talk about the vision behind bar1 and the hoped for synergy between the residency and the Bangalore art scene.

bar1 is, rather unusually for India, a multi-disciplinary arts residency. As visual artists, have you yourselves benefited from interactions with practitioners from other fields? Do you find that inter-disciplinary collaborations are taken as seriously as work by individual artists?

Christoph Storz: We normally decide about residencies case by case. Our India-India project from July to September 2008 with 7 participants is indeed a multi-disciplinary arts residency. This was possible because we discussed the project options and shaped our aims in discussion with IFA from an early stage. I find that networking with other cultural initiatives is vital.

In the last few years, the bar1-residency programme normally had the capacity to only invite one artist at a time and we preferred to invite visual artists mainly because all of us bar1 members are visual artists ourselves. Therefore we can meet the requirement of connecting the guests to the visual art scene of Bangalore in a most direct and personal way.

But if you want to see 'visual arts' as a discipline at all, then just look at what we bar1 members are doing. Some of us work with video and sound, some draw, some sculpt, make social interventions, installations, performances, documentary films, photographs, some work with words and texts and with the internet. Some of us teach art. Here you already have a vast multi-disciplinary range. The 'visual' arts are not concerned with visual phenomena alone and have developed, since Cabaret Voltaire, as a platform to investigate and celebrate language in all possible ways.

Ayisha Abraham: It can be a productive experience - interacting and learning in interdisciplinary residencies. I won't say that such residencies are necessarily spaces that initiate interdisciplinary work, because forcing a relationship in a short period of time can be rather stressful for some. But it constitutes a space where you can learn to look into the practice and work process of another creative person. Being a part of such residencies, besides the friendships that are made, can then expose you to different ways of thinking, and whether you incorporate the influences immediately in your work is hardly the point.

bar1 puts no pressure on residents to produce finished work or exhibit. On the other hand, you are keen to document conversations and encounters between residents. Is the idea to strengthen ways of talking/thinking/writing about the artistic process, as against the push towards the production and sale of art?

Christoph Storz: A residency can create, at least for a moment, the nice illusion for an arriving guest that life is starting anew. Nothing is done, nothing is said yet. This is an unknown place in a maybe unknown town in an unknown air. I think this is a precious moment, even if it might mean that the artist has to finally grope her way back towards what she has been before. She can test her old routines and justifications. Will they hold? She has to listen and imbibe first. This can trigger off a process, intense but not necessarily secure, which almost certainly will be productive. Pressure is not needed. I personally dread the moment when it will no longer be possible to find artists for a residency other than those who, like salesmen or soldiers, come only as executors of prefabricated finalised plans.

Ayisha Abraham: It should not be one or the other. To reduce all forms of practice to an outcome of written words is somewhat limited. I think there are bound to be conversations and interactions and friendships formed and some of it can be documented, because there is such a paucity of good conversations with and between artists in India over the years. The idea is really to provide artists the time and space and support to pursue their work and, additionally, to contribute to a lively discussion that can bring local and visiting artists of the city together. Such a gathering can result in many possibilities and the idea is not to control it!

There is a history of visual artists in Bangalore coming together to protest against certain local as well as national events - from the language riots in the '90s to the Gujarat riots in 2002 to last year's persecution of Baroda art student Chandramohan. Does bar1 see itself playing a role in such political responses?

Christoph Storz: In 2002, the Bangalore stay of the first Indian guest at our residency, Tushar Joag, led, thanks to the active involvement of many Bangalore friends and our group, to the 'Gujarat-Raffle', hosted at Gallery Sumukha, in which 63 Karnataka artists participated by donating a work for the riot victims fund.

But I have to say here, that bar1 does not have an official outlook. It's only a baby, the common baby of a bunch of artists, each one with his/her political views. One wrote, paraphrasing the sentence that a work of art is finalised only by the beholder: "A mob does not finish a work of art, even when finishing it off!"

Ayisha Abraham: The residency would like to follow in this tradition of artist-run spaces that are outside of the marketplace, state or industrialist funded venues. It is an opportunity to create a context for sophisticated dialogue between artists who live in different parts of India. There is a need to have more structure and support for these initiatives, so they can be visible enough for the public to interact in lively ways. I guess the point is to respond to

events as an artist but to not only find an identity as a collective in times of emergency, but to build up dialogue, exchanges, over sustained periods of time, and to make the flow of ideas possible.

bar1 is a means for artists from elsewhere in the country (and the world) to, among other things, gain exposure and respond to the Bangalore art scene. How would you describe this scene?

Christoph Storz: The Bangalore visual art scene is today in a peculiar situation, mostly because of its growth and because of the newness of a larger international exposure. The days of a small transparent artist community, easy to survey, where information spread easily, seem to be over. Many artists are too busy evaluating the offers they get. They don't have much time and not many spaces left for socializing. There is a lot of openness, enthusiasm and energy; but the constrictions of this particular historical moment lead away from transparency, feed rumours and confusion and don't necessarily help young artists to set their priorities right. bar1 understands itself therefore as a platform for local artists, stressing the collaboration and use of synergies with other similar spaces.

Ayisha Abraham: Bangalore has much to offer because it is quite a culturally diverse city. A lot of it can be quiet underground activity. The cultural landscape could be said to resemble many springs bubbling to the surface of the ground. Some initiatives survive for longer than others do, but they could potentially become a model of self-reliance, sharing and interdependency, outside of big state and commercial funding. Contrary to what many think the image of Bangalore is, i.e. as mainly a Silicon Valley of South India, it is also a small town in a flux with experimental ways of doing things.

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