



Recent Activities

New Thinking on Arts Education

The past achievements and future directions of IFA's decade-old **Arts Education programme** were recently the subject of an in-depth discussion. Our grants under this programme have supported a whole gamut of approaches to arts education. Research on teaching methodologies, sustained classroom interventions, and the creation of resources for arts education have been some of the areas covered.

A review panel consisting of Ashoke Chatterjee, ex-Director, National Institute of Design, Maya Menon, Founder-Director of The Teacher Foundation, and Jeroo Mulla, senior teacher of Film Studies, conducted a comprehensive review of the programme. The review strongly highlighted the need for IFA to focus on advocacy as the primary goal of its arts education funding. It also emphasised the generation and gathering of knowledge to enrich efforts at advocacy. Finally, the panel asked for stronger links between arts education and environment education, taking the view that cultural diversity is as fundamental to vibrant civil society as natural biodiversity is to the well-being of the global environment.

For more information on our Arts Education programme contact Sanjay Iyer at sanjay@indiaifa.org

Public Eye



Theatre Infrastructure Cell launched

IFA's Theatre Infrastructure Cell (TIC), funded by the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust, was formally launched on August 8 in Bangalore. The event was attended by about 45 guests representing the performing arts, architecture and the media. The focus was a discussion on infrastructure for the performing arts led by the TIC advisory panel: Bansi Kaul (theatre director, Bhopal), Himanshu Burte (architect, Goa), Jagan Shah (architect, Delhi), Naveen Kishore (publisher and lighting designer, Kolkata), Sunil Shanbag (theatre director, Mumbai), and Vivek Patankar (architect and acoustics expert, Nashik).

How does one animate existing spaces for performance? How can public spaces that are put to other uses be claimed for performance? How can performance spaces become cultural hubs and not just sites for performance? What are the ways in which such spaces can be sustained? These were some of the questions raised during the launch—issues likely to be addressed by the TIC in the years to come.

Bar1 Final Salon

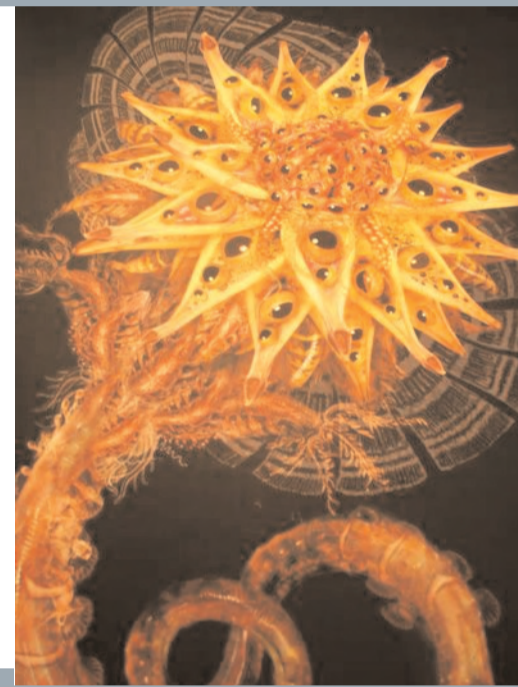
Seven artists from across the country were part of the first edition of the IFA-funded Bengaluru Artist Residency 1 or bar1. Visual artists Shreyas Karle, Chandrakala MN, Atul Mahajan, Malvika Mankotia and Banita Bhau; writer Rahee Dahake; and filmmaker Nilanjan Bhattacharya have shared their work with the public in a series of salons over the last three months. The fourth and final salon was held over 3 days starting September 19 in an old bungalow (shortly to be demolished) in Bangalore's Frazer Town. This gave a special edge to especially those works that had a direct reference to Bangalore. Atul Mahajan's installation Ooru Neeru: Hesaraghatta—Once Upon a Time for Bangalore, for instance, was a comment on the vanishing of many of Bangalore's water reservoirs, while Shreyas Kale's Bengaluru Watching took off from his fascination with the demon heads placed on houses to ward off the evil eye.

Other artists furthered existing concerns, such as Banita Bhau's rope installations which like her previous work drew on forms connected with textile, thread and needle, or Chandrakala's installation—part of her ongoing study of light and shade—which combined evocative paintings of nightscapes with light bulbs. The singular experience of being in a new city and on a residency led Nilanjan Bhattacharya and Shreyas Kale to collaborate on Men in the Kitchen—a fictionalised, comic take on cooking and on forging new friendships.



Shreyas Kale's demon heads atop the old bungalow where the final Bar1 salon was held

Six Years of Peers



Rohini Devasher



Prathap Modi

Peers is an IFA-funded young artists' residency run by the New Delhi-based art collective Khoj. Khoj recently celebrated six years of Peers by hosting an exhibition of select work created by nine Peers residents during this period. Titled *Filament*, the show was curated by Latika Gupta and the artworks on display ranged from the organic exploration of clay and metal to internet and digital art. Rohini Devasher's artistic exploration of the digital image or Surabhi Saraf's inventive use of internet and computer technology to create piano notes contrasted interestingly with Prathap Modi's tongue-in-cheek reprint on metal of newspaper advertisements from the 1920s and 30s, with the audience invited to 'turn' the pages of this heavy metal catalogue.

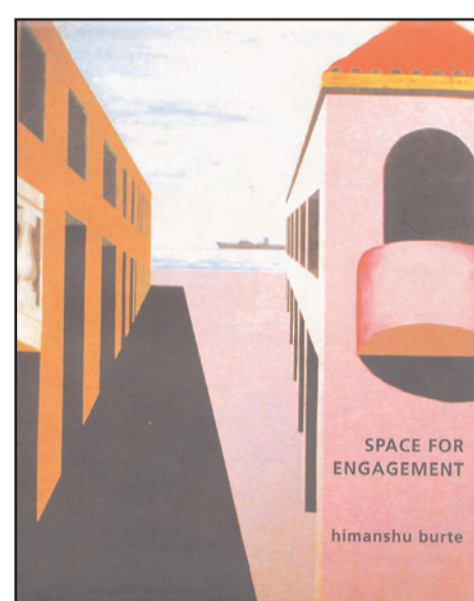
Click [here](#) for a review of the show.

New Books

IFA grants to architect Himanshu Burte and writer Scharada Dubey have recently resulted in two new books.

Himanshu's *Space for Engagement: The Indian Artplace and a Habitational Approach to Architecture* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2008) addresses the question of how architecture can foster an engagement between people and public places. The book "... focuses on contemporary Indian cultural institutions, or artplaces, as a special kind of public place. Offering a critique of contemporary architectural and institutional approaches to 'place-making', this volume proposes an alternative approach to thinking about architecture centred on our experience of inhabiting spaces." Click [here](#) to buy *Space for Engagement*.

Scharada's *The Toymakers: Light from India's Urban Poor* (Chennai: Oxygen Books, 2008) is the result of journeys she undertook across India meeting the itinerant makers and seller of toys who are a common sight on many Indian streets. Scroll down to read an interview with Scharada on the process of writing the book and her views on the toymakers.



Himanshu burte

Family Tree, IFA-grantee Shumona Goel's site-specific installation of film, video, photographs and sound, was exhibited in a south Mumbai apartment on August 25, 26 and 27. Shumona's project was an exploration of the psychological consequences of migration. By choosing a lived-in and apparently hastily abandoned apartment as the setting for her installation, she sought to portray the emotional turbulence caused by dislocation and flight. The installation itself—by presenting the visual and aural elements of film separately and yet in conjunction—was also an attempt to fragment the film form so as to reflect the fragmented lives being portrayed.

Shumona was recently one of the two awardees of the Foundation for Contemporary Indian Art's Emerging Artist Award 2008. According to the jury, Shumona's work "was found to exhibit a great deal of maturity with regard to [her] medium and approach." Click [here](#) for more details.



Shumona Goel's Family Tree

Announcements

Just Out: the latest issue of ArtConnect



ArtConnect Number 3 includes a discussion on the pros and cons of Indian artplace architecture, a stunning set of prints by Manjula Padmanabhan, a wide-ranging essay on two leading Bhakti poets from Kerala, and a new photo-essay by Manas Bhattacharya. [Subscribe Now](#). Click [here](#) to read *ArtConnect* Number 2.

Events

Wedding Album—a comic drama on the Indian marriage written by Girish Karnad and directed by Lillete Dubey—was performed as an IFA fundraiser to large audiences in Bangalore on July 10 and 11.

We also organised a series of sponsored performances for select audiences in Bangalore over the last three months. These included Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah performing *Dear Liar* for the Confident group; Manav Kaul's *5 Grains of Sugar* performed for the Young Presidents' Organisation, and Mahmood Farooqui and Danish Husain presenting Urdu dastans on September 21 in a performance celebrating fifteen years of IFA.



Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah in *Dear Liar*.

Slant/Stance

Writer Scharada Dubey received an IFA grant in 2000 to research and write a book on Indian toymakers. Her recently-published *The Toymakers: Light from India's Urban Poor* is a celebration of the resilience, resourcefulness and creativity of this self-employed community. In this interview she talks about what drew her to the toymakers and how she continues to be involved in their lives.

The Toymakers is priced at Rs. 120/- and is available at all Crossword and Odyssey outlets. Copies can also be ordered from the author with additional costs for postage. Write to scharada@gmail.com

You've chosen to write about a community that is poor, marginalised and invisible. As you point out, toymakers receive no institutional support, their creations are fragile and improvised, and they often travel great distances to find markets. Can you say a little about what drew you to these men and women?

Scharada: I would say it's the fact of their reinventing themselves time and again in response to the conditions of their lives. That part of the urban poor that is referred to as the 'unorganised sector' is made up of many freelancing communities. People sell vegetables one year, then they find the capital to start a small tea-shop (with absolutely no help from the regular financial institutions!) and they take to doing that. Often, upward mobility is represented through successively better and more profitable occupations. Toymakers are those freelancers whose response to the challenges of urban poverty is not driven by totally prosaic factors—they are doing what they choose to do because it is most important to them to live by whatever creative skills they possess, and be in control of their time, place and nature of work. Of course, the prices of things, demand and supply, do affect them, and they adapt accordingly. But the quirky, ingenious part of the toymaker's response to his life conditions struck a chord in me. After all, I've been a freelancer myself all my working life, and in the toymakers, I saw ample expression of both the factors that drive me forward: a need for autonomy, and an often playful creativity.

You humanise the toymakers by having conversations with them, narrating their life journeys, going into their homes, and describing their toys. Would you consider this itself a form of activism— writing about the urban poor from a ground-level perspective instead of a top-heavy one?

Scharada: Yes, of course. Unfortunately however, it's an approach that has yet to acquire the respectability of a more academic or theoretical enquiry in our country. When you look at the books being written (especially in English, because I'm not sure about the scope of regional writing, which could be considerably larger), you either have the much-lauded works of fiction that engage with some section of Indian society, or formal academic works that use data or observations to hammer home some lofty premise. What if you want to cross genres, or social classes, write a book that occasionally touches a reader's heart, yet does not need him or her to suspend critical thinking? I think of mine as just such a troublesome book! Its long ordeal as a manuscript before finally being published is another pointer to this crossing of genres. It would have made the grade sooner if it was a children's book, or fiction about the toymakers of Varanasi, or a beautifully illustrated tome about 'khilonas'. If there's any form of activism in the writing, it's a demand that each one of us individually engage with the problem of poverty and survival that defines life for so many people around us.

You point out that those who fetishise the greatness of India's traditional heritage would not admit these "sometimes undeniably tacky" toys into the category of Indian craft. You also emphasise how there is, in the toymaker's spirit of confronting the odds and in his ingenuity (jugaad), something instantly recognisable to an Indian. Why this need to pin down the 'Indianness' or otherwise of the toymaker?

Scharada: I think this is connected to the time in which the book was written—2002. For some time, we had been collectively pre-occupied with notions of identity and Indianness. Even today, on one side there is a great need to re-affirm the growing global brand equity of India, and on the other there exist ideological threads in our political mainstream that trade in questions of who is more Indian, or Maharashtrian, or patriotic or whatever. In the midst of such self-congratulation and delusion, and as an antidote to both, I thought it was more important to focus on what people want to sweep under the carpet—'jugaad' that is sometimes art, and skills that help people survive in the fiercely competitive landscape of urban India. Street toymakers have rarely received their due, except from the work of Aravind Gupta or Sudarshan Khanna. In the past several years there has been so much hoopla on the Bollywood-is-beautiful theme or advertisements that endorse the desi factor. Toymakers represent all that is desi, yet people scarcely give them a thought. When I celebrate the "sometimes undeniably tacky" it is to subvert the designer desi with which we are constantly being fed by all manner of agencies and media.

You outline some possible ways of improving things for the toymaker, such as providing him with working capital and design inputs. Do you see your own involvement with the toymakers continuing into the future?

Scharada: Yes, definitely. I have recently relocated to Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh and am in the process of setting up the Sahridaya Samiti—my initiative to help toymakers, rickshaw drivers and other poor self-employed communities. In October, I am looking forward to going to Varanasi and connecting with some of the subjects of my book. What I would like to do for them is arrange exhibitions of their toys in cities and archive their work at a single venue, perhaps Faizabad itself, or Lucknow. I am also keen to have them covered by insurance—it is fatal for a toymaker to fall sick during the build up to a festive or 'mela' season, and yet, illness is a grim punctuation for most of them all their professional lives. Finally, in terms of communication and outreach, I want the stories and struggles of toymakers and other marginalised communities to become part of the urban middle-class Indian's knowledge base, increasing the possibilities of people's engagement with the lives of toymakers and others. If these efforts lead to more toymakers staying with their craft, or more individuals taking to making toys for a living, it will be wonderful indeed.

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