Voices from the Field 2020

*An Overview of Scenarios and Needs
for Current Creative, Infrastructural and Support
for the Visual Arts and Film in India*

A report by **Chithra K S**

Summary of the *Voices from the Field 2020*

The Arts Practice Programme is an important grant by the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) available in the country that supports visual art practitioners who are engaged in critiquing the normative paradigms and practices that generate newer discourses. The *Voices from the Field* is a survey conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the current needs in arts funding in visual arts that can help shape the future-path for the significant role the grants-making bodies can play. By reaching out to the select practitioners and professionals, the information and views on various aspects of arts practice and funding in general to the Indian context and specific to the IFA were gathered. The feedback has ranged from the opinion on the IFA's Art Practice Programme to the functioning of the funding bodies; the existing gaps in arts funding and emergent needs; different ways of supporting projects/ art production/ practice and the challenges and opportunities ahead for the visual arts in the current situation.

The objectives of the research aimed at gaining knowledge on two broad areas: the functioning of the funding bodies by looking at the various operational aspects such as kinds of practices supported, selection criterion, their involvement in the process of the art production, evaluation of success and failure by offering critical viewpoints on their engagement with the art practitioners; and, identifying the current needs of the artists in India and the kind of support they require. Another important objective was to gather feedback on the IFA's Arts Practice program that could potentially help in identifying areas for self-reflection and internal reviewing. Within these objectives, I have attempted to gain a nuanced understanding of the significance of support systems for arts practitioners, and the crucial role the funding bodies can play in the field of visual arts and in the careers of the creative practitioners, and how this ecosystem is socially and culturally relevant and necessary.

The respondents chosen for this study hailed from different professions within visual arts including video art, photography, design and other fields such as theatre, film and literature. It included scholars, artists, academicians, curators, and cultural managers, many of them concurrently involved in various roles as mentors, jury members and board of trustees for funding agencies. Many of the respondents have had their engagement with the IFA in different capacities over the years that reflected in the retrospective feedback on certain aspects.

Hotspots of the study can be identified as the following:

What works: Arts Practice programme is a great opportunity for artists; new forms of art

supported; regional and linguistic diversities promoted; good documentation and archive on practices created

What doesn't work: the categories specified within the grant; the information and clarity on what fits in and what fails to fit in; the insufficiency of fund amount and the lacuna in expenses it covers; stress on tangible outcome

What needs to be added: specialized and focused grants for specific practices; building intellectual infrastructure; creating peer structure; encouraging a cohort system; identifying newer areas of creative expressions; building and fostering networks between individuals and organizations.

It could be concluded that the study brought out to the fore the gaps in the support scenario for the visual arts at various fronts. I have categorized them into three main areas stressing the need for the IFA to invest more deeply: a) the need for an enhanced and focused funding that is also liberal in supporting the creative process and learning rather than projects that with definitive tangible outcomes; b) building of the mentorship structure for the practitioners that aims at providing intellectual and peer support which extends beyond the limits of the individual/ individualized projects; and finally, c) focus on building and supporting the smaller networks and cohorts at grass root levels and a system to keep these initiatives connected.

Introduction

The survey of the existing creative, infrastructural, and support scenarios and needs for the visual arts in India, carried out for the India Foundation for the Arts, envisages to gain an in-depth understanding of the necessities as expressed and voiced by the individuals who are actively engaged in the field. Such study, coincidentally also became more relevant because of the global crises of the pandemic COVID 19 which has disturbed the social and economic life. As the conversations were taking place between the researcher and the respondents, the uncertainties about the survival of artists and the anxieties about the future of their practices were strongly in the air. In this backdrop, *Voices from the Field* examines the concerns, challenges, needs, and aspirations of the practitioners across the country while also seeking to understand the relevance of IFA's current *Arts PracticeProgramme*. The outcome of this study will feed into IFA's review of the Arts Practice Programme scheduled to take place later this year.

It is useful to relook at the IFA's Art Practice programme here. The Art Practice programme is a grant that supports practitioners from various planes: performing artists working in music, sound, text, dance, movement, theatre, puppetry, storytelling, magic, circus, and other performance arts; visual artists working across all forms including painting, sculpture, installation, photography, film, graphic art and new media; curators, especially those working outside of the gallery context; poets, novelists, playwrights working with literary arts and practitioners engaged in interdisciplinary work. This is an immensely broad spectrum to tap into and it has produced an impressive body of works and scholarship. To understand the current needs, the respondents invited to contribute to this study belonged to various fields from different regional, cultural and professional backgrounds. They were also at different

levels of their careers that fruitfully enriched in understanding the needs of the art community.

The names of respondents with their designations are given below:

Sl No	Name	Details
1	Amita Malkani	Arts Administrator, InlaksShivdasani Foundation, Delhi.
2	Gautam Das	Assistant Director, Programmes, Kochi Biennale Foundation.
3	Jeebesh Bagchi	Artist, Curator and Member of Raqs Media Collective, Delhi.
4	Jignesh Khakhar	Head, Master's programme in New Media Design, NID, Ahmedabad.
5	Jyotindra Jain	Art Historian and Curator, Delhi.
6	Orijit Sen	Graphic Artist and Designer, Delhi/Goa.
7	Paromita Vohra	Filmmaker and Writer, Mumbai.
8	Rahaab Allana	Curator, Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, New Delhi.
9	Rahul Kumar	Ceramist, Gurgaon.
10	Ronny Sen	Photographer and Film Director, Kolkata.
11	Sandeep Hota	Project Manager, Utsha Foundation for Contemporary Art, Bhubaneshwar.
12	Samina Mishra	Documentary Filmmaker, writer and Teacher, Delhi.
13	Sharmila Samant	Visual Artist and Associate Professor at Department of Art & Performing Art, Shiv Nadar University, Delhi.
14	Shaunak Mahbubani	Curator, Delhi.
15	Shilpa Gupta	Visual Artist, Mumbai.
16	Shwetal Patel	Arts Writer & Researcher, Consultant – International Partnerships, Kochi Biennale Foundation, London.
17	Surabhi Sharma	Filmmaker and Curator, Mumbai/Abu Dhabi.
18	Varun Gupta	Managing Trustee and Co-Founder of Chennai Photo Biennale Foundation, Chennai

Methodology
The comprehensive questionnaire (see Annexure-1) that was set by the IFA team was shared in advance with the contributors based in various parts of the country. The interviews were held via internet video calling facility, one-on-one basis, through email exchanges, and via telephonic calling facility as preferred by the respondents. The data gathered from these interactions forms the core of the report. I have used the information and understanding gathered from these conversations in providing an analytical view on the subject.

The questionnaire and conversation with experts aimed at gathering feedback on five broad areas. This also consisted of sub-queries within them touching upon all relevant aspects

concerning the funding bodies and the practitioners:

- Feedback on the IFA's Art Practice Programme
- Gain an understanding of the general functioning of the funding bodies
- Identify the emergent needs in the visual arts – training, capacity building, technology, infrastructure, and others and recognize gaps in arts funding
- Envisage parallel ways of supporting projects/ art production/ practice
- Understand the challenges and opportunities ahead for the visual arts in the current situation

This report is laid out in two parts, followed by the conclusion:

Part I: General and specific feedback from the interviewees on different aspects highlighted in the questionnaire.

Part II: Criticalquestions and potential aspects emphasizing the emergent needs of the time for the visual arts.

The Conclusion presents the challenges for the IFA and directions the funding for visual arts can take for the future.

With my understanding gained through these conversations I have summarized the general concerns while also voicing the specific matters by the respondents. It is hoped that this report elucidating on the set of responses to the identified questions provides an understanding of the needs of the artists while also throwing some self-reflections on the funding bodies with the way they perceive what art practice is and artist. The findings are described in the following parts of this report.

Part I: Feedback on the Questionnaire

1.1.   Opinion on the IFA's Arts Practice program

I would like to open out the report with the opinion gathered on the IFA's Art Practice Programme.In general, the IFA's relevance in the field of visual arts and contribution in supporting artists and arts in general has been highly appreciated by all the respondents. IFA is seen as one of the few organizations that support good artist's projects and projects that concern itself with broader social mandate than inward looking artists' projects. Various trajectories the IFA as a funding body has traversed is significantly noted and valued in the field by practitioners and persons involved in the funding agencies alike. The IFA's success in reaching out to the complex diversity of the art practitioners stood out in all conversations. The thoughtful ways in which the grants are made accessible, such as the availability of information in regional languages, the option of writing proposals in vernacular languages, the facility to share applications in the form of video or audio format are noteworthy steps that address the issues of access to the mainstream language and norms. The range of practitioners and kind of art forms/ art making the IFA has reached out to was commended. The respondents reflected on several other aspects of the Arts Practice programme that in

their views needed rethinking. The points ranged from the way the program is conceptualized to the manner in which the deliverables are envisaged. I consider these inputs as highly valuable to think through going forward and have tried to elaborate them in the following section.

The general feedback on the Arts Practice program has been that the aim of the grant seems clear in the title, but it comes across as an overwhelming and confusing category in terms of what it is looking for. There is a strongopinion thatsince the area supported is very vast the focus is blurry providing lack of clarity as to what kinds of projects fit into this grant. Filmmaker Surabhi Sharma says, 'it (call for proposals) doesn't give a clear idea of what fits in and what doesn't and what it is'. She goes on to explain how the agenda (of supporting various kinds of arts) gets contradicted and says 'the latest call for proposals of Arts Practice Program seen on websitegives the impression of an open-ended project, but the conversation with the individual grantees doesn't.' The Arts Practice Program also doesn't come across as a grant that supports visual arts has also been pointed out by many of the respondents. Artist and curator Shilpa Gupta, with her experience of being on board for other funding agencies, speaks about the information provided on the website, saying, 'it is confusing', adding that the 'information is intimidating while language came across like a wall.' She says 'there is a need for rewording the terminologies and the redesigning of the website to be user-friendly navigation and show relevant information at the right juncture with more guidelines giving clarity is required'.

The other important aspect I consider to be highlighted is regarding the categories/ genre listed under the Arts Practice program. In artist and curator JeebeshBagchi's view, 'the categories referred on the website under Arts Practice programmefollow orthodox ways of looking at art practice and reaffirming the academic categories.' He further explains, 'this may have served the purpose when this program was instituted, the field itself has grown out of it now and the program needs to reinvent itself.' JigneshKhakharacademician from National Institute of Design says in his response, 'the proposal leans towards practitioners and, although IFA has an Arts Research programme, the possibility of how Arts Practice can be opened up to academicians and students should be thought about.'

The application process that involves the IFA's feedback and queries and conversations between the funding body and the artists was found to be very demanding, laborious and time consuming especially compared to the amount of grant or the time period of support the artists receive. In other words, such a process and commitment from artists in fulfilling this to satisfy the funding body would be worthwhile if the support is bigger or covers a longer period of time.Connected to the concerns of the lengthy process of conversations expected from the applicants, the role of Programs Managers who at some juncture start shaping the project that can fit into the IFA's agenda views get into shaping the project was another concern. It was observed that this process contradicts the way grant is described in the call-for; once the conversation begins, the views of the IFA team start getting imposed. Many of the respondents urged for a clear set of questionnaires to get clarity from applicants, which is followed by many international funding bodies.

The budget and the scale of the projects was another important factor that figured

prominently in the conversations. Is funding sufficient was also a doubt raised by many of the respondents. The common concern was that the support amount by the IFA and most other funding bodies in general does not cover living costs taking care of the sustenance. Sharmila Samant points out, 'the practitioners are assumed to be having a source of living elsewhere. In everyone's view - be it filmmakers or academicians, this forces the practitioners to take up other kinds of work for their livelihood and limits the time and energy they can devote to their own practice/projects.' Surabhi Sharma says, 'the practitioners opt for non-professional help from friends or peers. In many cases, artists are forced to manage all the roles by themselves, such as images, audio-video editing, designing and so on as reaching out to experts in those areas remains inaccessible.' This also brought out interesting questions like: should artists charge/ budget for the roles they play filling in the other kinds of supports and will the funding bodies accept that. The general limitations of the grant in covering living costs and professional technical assistance,(be it the IFA or other such organizations) in providing technical aids, for example, the restriction of acquiring equipment have been seen as a burden to the practitioners.

Filmmaker Paromita Vohra expressed her opinion saying the IFA grant 'is donorish in its approach and the program lacks contemporaneousness in it' while also saying the need to 'provide more funds for fewer artists for a deep outcome'. This suggestion was made by other respondents. According to their view, it allows the projects to grow to the scale envisaged by the funding body, serving the very purpose of the funds. Besides, individual funds to artists, a necessity for a different approach for supporting institutions and art festivals, in the form of partnerships and collaboration was also significantly raised. The initiatives that support art practice too need funding. It was observed that the IFA's expectations of the outcome are directed more towards a tangible product stressing more on documentation of the practice and process. The primary questions were raised as to what extent the burden of completion of the set deliverables go with the creative practices which are driven by ideas. In JeebeshBagchi's words, 'the demand for producing documentation results in making artists self-conscious of their process - adversely affecting the outcome.'

I would also like to bring in here the expectations from the IFA expressed by the respondents:

- Throw your mantle wide and keep supporting newer initiatives, research, public art initiatives.
- Dedicated funding for artists.
- It's not a job of the funder to do everything and the funding bodies should focus. on providing funds and should not deviate from their primary mission.
- Seed grant and development fund.
- Create a platform for conversations around practice.
- Conduct rigorous examination of the interventions created by the practice/process orcompleted project and construct a critique.

1.2.   Functioning/ Operational Norms of the Funding Bodies

Moving on to the aspects with regard to the way funding bodies operate, be it in terms of setting eligibility criteria, age limits to the participants, evaluation process and the way the

applications are solicited which were mentioned in the questionnaire for reflecting upon by the respondents. The factors such as regional, cultural, geographical and linguistic backgrounds, and whether they function as a determining factor in getting grants was another important question put forward.

To begin with thebroad eligibility bench mark, the nationality of the applicant. "The questions of nationality also because we also are trying understanding the culture of the field." opines Rahaab Allana.

The age as a criterion for eligibility has been an argumentative aspect in fund-giving. What defines early and mid-career and should there be an upper limit of age for applying for grants is a critical question. Given how the access to audience and means of dissemination of the creative work is far easier to the current generation than the earlier practitioners, who didn't have support and means of technology   to the current generation, the bench mark of age requires rethinking. "There is something that it eschewed about cut-offs and eligibility because of opportunities and economic and financial history." Says Rahaab Allana.He suggests "diversifying who you consider to be the voice now." His example of Alkazi Photo Book grant, that sets age bar as 'above 25 years', aiming for candidates to have finished their MFA programme. There is no upper age limit. He explains, "We are trying to cater to certain level of pedagogy that we expect from our project. We also want people to be able to engage with discourse when they are talking to us, and that is why the age group matters. We do not cut age group off but we keep it open."

'Criterion such asthe politics of the practice/ practitioner does limit the spaces one can reach out for support', says Sharmila Samant, at the same time, agreeing that 'all funding bodies have their own agenda and politics.' Individual biases of the jury members and funder's agendas are also significant impediments in accessing funding. This only reiterates that there is always a selection and choices involved in this process.

Accessibility to resources and people continues to be a challenge to the artists from smaller cities and underprivileged places. The factors affecting the selection criteria remain language and knowledge. Sharmila Samant distinguishes between artists who work within their own geography of origin and artists who move out to different geography, and says 'many funding bodies make generalized choices by supporting the former rather than the latter.' The selection based on familiarity/ known persons getting opportunity is a common pattern observed. This is also connected to the urban, institutionally trained jury members who get drawn to support the known and familiar.

Language is seen as a big issue in the application process for the grants. Shaunak Mahbubani says, 'leaning of the funding bodies towards impressive write-ups is common'. The well-written concept note is a determinant factor in the selection criterion. With a society such as ours, with its own hierarchical structure and differential access to institutional mechanisms and knowledge, a large number of artists remain in the periphery. The funding bodies need to be sensitive to the factors that were stressed upon. People who are disadvantaged, who need the structure that allows more time; help people with less mobility;

While the art making and art practice is process oriented and to fit in the idea of a 'final product' seems like a difficult exercise and it comes with the 'risk' of not achieving the proposed 'result'. But, the funding bodies that support arts practice, do not support the failure of a predetermined outcome - as unanimously pointed out by most respondents. It is possible to produce new terrain of exploration only if the anxiety of failure is not imposed on the artists. While the Government agencies support safe kinds of projects that fit into their agenda, the private funding bodies tend to focus towards deliverables where outcome defines the project - the artist gets caught up in making reports. The conversation gets taken away by the reports. The burden of completion is always there. In Orijit Sen's view, "There is too much of emphasis on art more as an end project than art as process. Existing infrastructure, galleries and other things they too focus art more as an end project than art as process and allowing that process to become clearly defined and recognized within the less privileged sectors of urban."

The IFA strongly comes across as a risk-taking body that supports newer initiatives and kinds of projects focusing on little known areas in comparison to many other funding agencies. Besides, organizations like KHOJ, FICA, few of the other funding bodies that were mentioned as those who support development of newer kinds of projects are: IAWRT (The International Association of Women in Radio & Television (mentioned by Samina Mishra who is part of this initiative) supports smaller projects, pilot projects on experimental basis to test out ideas. Jignesh Khakhar says Ford Foundation and Hivos (Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries, headquarters is in The Hague) are important funding bodies.

Prof. Jyotindra Jain spoke at length about the factor of risk. In his words, 'the chances of failure should be allowed and must be inbuilt.' While speaking about the exhibitionary practices around the art, he warned about the false results if the curators are threatened. In his view, 'the endeavor is important and that the failures and the outcome become intellectual property. And the value of outcome of failure of a risk-taking project is much higher than a tame project.' Jignesh Khakhar expressed how 'funders are 'unsympathetic' to failure whereas in reality the artists (and designers) need multiple failures.' A word of caution was strongly put forward by many that the performance anxieties of the funder should not be imposed on the grantee.

"It is not a failure, it's a matter of delay' says Rahaab Allana while pointing out various circumstances of targeted outcome being shifted – such as overestimation of result, or shifts due to contrary evidences or situations like pandemic and 'how do funders and participants realize as they go ahead' is a question.

Funder's (including the IFA) involvement in the projects has been a debatable issue. 'Interest in the interest of the project can easily become and interfere in development of the project' says Prof. Jyotindra Jain. These conversations have only highlighted that any interference/ interventions that need to be done should be carried out at selection level and letting the project develop organically following its own course/ cycle.

1.3.   Visible Trends in Grants Giving and Gaps in Funding

I have compiled a list of topics/ areas that receive more proportional funding within India as pointed out by the respondents. The traditional arts and crafts, and heritage is observed to be favored especially with reference to government funding bodies. The research and concept oriented practices are seen to be prioritized over the process based work. The projects that promise to bring out the 'unseen' as opposed to projects that focus on things that are commonplace attract funders. The collaborative projects between the educated urban artists and rural/ indigenous arts and this were with special reference to the IFA's grants. Issue-based art practices are also seen as the trending topics.

Additionally, artist Sharmila Samant pointed out how 'Public art is receiving a weird kind of funding - as there is no clear definition of what constitutes public art and how there has to be an understanding of ethics and values within pedagogy.' She suggests saying 'there should be sociological understandings and that can be only facilitated if there is a mentorship program within the grant for younger artists.' This comment related to mentorship was expressed by several others and this came across as a significant gap in the funding scenario.

There have been several areas of gaps that lacked support as pointed out by the respondents, that included: performance, lecture-performance, graphic novels, photography; newer forms of art such as the exciting work is happening on platforms like Instagram by graphic designers, writers, and designers where all practices are coming together blurring the boundaries - faster and more seriously now in the pandemic period; conceptualizing art for public and interpreting; support for painters; Performance based practice and projects related to LGBTQ communities and issues; graffiti, Interactive AI and gaming spaces; design/ contemporary design; public art initiatives for art interventions;Communication Development and Digital anthropology.

The intellectual gaps in the field especially the lack of connection between different practitioners' work was also pointed out. For instance, between art educators and art practitioners; or be it the gap between the local photographers and artistic practitioners who work with photography. Varun Gupta explains how 'The CPB Foundation has been attempting to bridge this gap with reference to photography.' This attempt could be expanded to other art practices also and it ties up with Sharmila Samant's point of creating a system for bringing together artists and art educators. For instance, there is a gap in questioning of the ethics of collaborations between the educated urban artists and rural/ indigenous arts.
Prof Jyotindra Jain pointed out the gaps in exhibition/ museum sectors. He says, 'missing infrastructure for study for provenance research on arts heritage; the lack of special exhibitions of the highly researched exhibition; curating culture and professionalism in curatorial and exhibition practices.'

Moving on to the emergent needs in the visual arts, I quote here Shwetal Patel, who says 'As the government sector doesn't support the required infrastructure (unlike in other countries) and the responsibility falls on the private bodies.' This is a significant point to be noted as to why art practitioners majorly rely on private funding bodies. And within this funding scenario, there is a need to develop the infrastructure further individually and collectively. The areas

identified that need special attention are: lack of physical space such as studios and technical infrastructure for the practitioners. The other supports that are crucial are access to libraries, access to writing, publications, access to people who are working in the field. A strong support system for young graduates who come out of college, especially for those who do not fit into the gallery system is a must to be looked into. Similarly orientation in research methodology is also very crucial in the growth of the artists and their practice. With the lack of alternative institutions, a network system for the groups from smaller towns and practitioners from less-privileged backgrounds in non-formal ways will be a very important contribution the funding bodies can make;funds for establishing smaller institutions/ collectives at the grass-root level comes across as an important suggestion. The funding bodies should be capable of supporting the art students from lesser privileged places or institutions providing them access to infrastructure and knowledge by conducting conferences, seminars where the knowledge can be shared and network can be developed. It is a fact that except for dominant places like Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai – other places lack in supporting elements – curatorial expertise, arts programming, art research; needs for creating access and ecosystem. Certain fields like photography or design continue to exist outside the mainstream art field. While resonating on this, 'we need to support an institution that looks at photography as an art form' says photographer Ronny Sen while urging that 'the funding bodies should build a team of experts and collaborate with institutions partnering in building courses, possibly courses bachelors and masters in photography.'

Support to smaller collectives especially artist run initiatives and initiative for creating and supporting digital platforms at local levels become crucial here. Finally, active engagement with the public that addresses the there is a huge gap between public and artists which institutions like Utsha Foundation and initiatives like BAT (Bhubaneshwar Art Trail) try to bridge', says Sandeep Hota. The fundamental gap in art education from the school level shows how this has a longer history to it. 'There is an emergent need for art teachers who are trained in arts education', says Sharmila Samant points out how that 'there is a dearth of art educators and there are a lot of artists taking the role of pedagogue.' Media for children is one potential area/ gap that needs special attention. 'Certain kinds of books that fit into developmental agenda get funding' but experimental books that do not necessarily fit into existing boxes, says Samina Mishra.

There are different groups of artists that need support. For example, older generations of groups of 60+ have fewer places to rely on. Similarly older practitioners who want to work with technology face challenges handing the new medium. An infrastructure and support system can be developed to assist this system. There are also need for grants that are not age-based: for women and mid-careerartists 40+ / 45+age groups to encourage practitioners to come back to art making.

While envisaging parallel ways of supporting projects/ art production/ practice, an emphasis on mentorship program was clearly suggested by most respondents. Funding bodies to lay-out a defined role of mentor helping artists to create proposals and take their work further. Some areas of focus could be: support for developing mentors network and network for the artist from different parts of the country; providing links to infrastructure; funding for dissemination and distribution; funders could initiate support groups; building partnerships between

practitioners; tips for grantees; media labs for public use; darkrooms for public use; for younger students who are not connected to practicing artists; generating workshops for sharing their works and practice-based artists provides a chance to interact with practicing artists is a very potential area to build to foster the upcoming generation. Similarly, grants for solo shows can also be another special focus area. There is a dire need to support younger writers and art historians who are in their early careers.

The gaps in infrastructure were also pointed out by many respondents. Orijit Sen explains how, "Infrastructure building should be more about may be empowering existing organizations and groups that are functioning already among communities, identifying them and perhaps supporting them with financial and as well as other kinds of support. Perhaps taking the work of these kind of org into further into the communities that are creating the kind of exhibitions, festivals where communities and organizations can access these kind of projects from other communities as well, a kind of network of small festivals which take art to people of diff part of country.Further, reflecting on the role of metro cities, he says, 'metro cities should look at less privileged and empowered people in the cities." stressing that "our cities are full of underprivileged people, one has to go and work with those people than anything else."

The infrastructure to support the artisanal communities was another important aspect potentially to be developed. "There are no festivals or residencies or retreats or programs which aim to bring people together; because we expect crafts people to be give them the space and time to create; space for dialogue, the crafts people have to brought centrally into this conversation" says Orijit Sen, who has worked with the artisans. He further adds that "Corporate and business world has to learn to be more proactive. They need to understand that the money that they invest in developing arts enriches the entire society including the giver also." – While stressing how "Art and culture is the glue that creates the society, gives it an entity and allows it to flourish."

1.4. On the Current Scenario

The current pandemic scenario is seen as an opportunity for slowing down and for self-reflection by artists and cultural managers. Curator Rahaab Allana's views resonated strongly with this. He spoke elaborately about how, "This is the time to enhance your understanding of the audience andworking towards viewership and spectatorship more closely, rather than focusing on content generation." He further adds that "thedirections of Arts funding can go into enhancement of viewership rather than artists creating content."He also advises that "Apart from financial aid, strengthen your own point of view and do self-assessment. This is the time to assess what is really required, which findings are most necessary."

There is an urgent need of supporting artists to produce work at the time of the pandemic which was expressed by most of the respondents. The recently graduated artists are facing a crisis not knowing where to go or whom to approach for job or sustenance. Short term funds for research, for practices that may not necessarily be monetized should be conceived.At the same time, certain respondents did express the way they have felt important during the pandemic period.

About tackling the current scenario, as filmmaker, author Samina Mishra aptly states, 'pandemic has only exacerbated the existing problems.' and that the 'the world is divided into two segments - privileged and underprivileged and the inequalities are wide open.' Several professionals felt the need to sit back and reevaluate about making art more relevant to society. As one can feel, the disruption in art production and exhibition has created a severe crisis. Survival has been the crisis of the moment. A network of counselors who are creative individuals themselves, and also understand those engaged in creative fields would be great should be brought in. As far as opportunities are concerned, art and technology junction was seen as a potential area to be developed.

The aspect of mental health is increasingly becoming pertinent with reference to the current scenario that. Art is a very powerful tool to deal with mental health. OrijitSen aptly puts it: "Mental health is a social thing, and we have to address the question of mental health at a social level and art is really good for doing that." While connecting it to his approach to art as social entity, he further says, "The idea of taking art into the community, seeing it a process of life rather than product we chose to decorate homes and galleries; that part needs to be paid attention and mental health is part of that process, especially community mental health.Promoting art as a community practice will actually address the problem at the root rather than individual." These views call for a larger mandate and approach to the funding bodies.

Part II: Analytical Views

In this section, I have attempted to open up analytical questions indicating the potential areas for rethinking about IFA. The areas in question stem from and resonate with my own understanding as a researcher in the field of visual arts. The key questions proposed by me are intended to function as entry points into thinking towards catering to the current needs.

Besides the IFA, there are several funding bodies including private and the governmental agencies that support the art practitioners: Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Prasar Bharti Trust, Ministry of Culture Government of India, Films Division India, FORD Foundation; Devi Art Foundation, Tata Institute for Social Sciences, Tata Trusts, National Center for Performing Arts, National Culture Fund, Government of India and Kochi Biennale Foundation have to be noted as prominent funding bodies.

The new players in the field who are actively funding arts practice are: The Chennai Photo Biennale Foundation, Serendipity Art Foundation, Piramal Art Foundation, Azim Premji Foundation, Sarmaya Arts Foundation, Alkazi Foundation, Raza Foundation, Art First, Shiv Nadar Foundation, Asia Art Archive, The Sher-Gil Sundaram Arts Foundation, Museum of Art and Photography Foundation (MAP Bangalore), MASH Foundation, Utsha Foundation, Khoj among others. Spaces like National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore are also collaborating with contemporary art practitioners setting up an interesting model.

2.1. Why Grant Making Should be Making Genre-Specifications?
The picture emerging from the aforementioned funding bodies is a spectrum of practices each

of them supports. While categorizing visual arts, the critical question to be asked is should funding bodies endorse these limiting categories? Should the academic categories be replicated by the funding bodies? How funding bodies should engage with art practices and what could the newer possibilities and approaches be is a larger challenge ahead of the IFA.

2.2. How to engage with the Idea or Practice?

How to situate ideas, creativity and concepts as tangible outcomes is a huge challenge for funding bodies. Regarding outcomes, there is a change happening in institutions between students and faculty in the last ten years, like in the School of Creative Expressions at the Ambedkar University, Delhi. It is a critical question, how the artists hailing from experimental pedagogical backgrounds be accommodated by the funding bodies. To what extend art making process be documented as a successful narrative, needs to be thought about.

2.3 Reimagining the Idea of the Artist

There is a certain idea of the artist that each funding body imagines. It often translates as artists to be scholars, writers, specialists, activists, academicians, and archivists and so on. This kind of idea overrules artists' practice, putting a pressure on them to fulfill these demands in order to fit into the funding structures. How to provide a healthy atmosphere for the creative practices to evolve from the artists' own journeys, is another big challenge.

Part III: Conclusion

In the section above I have tried to provide a holistic picture of the ways in which much talked about 'ecosystem' for the visual arts can evolve itself robustly with the material and intellectual investment of the funding bodies such as the IFA. In this concluding part I propose structures for re-visioning the modes of funding and a fresh approach to the fellowship structure that can accommodate the needs of the art practitioners.

- Need for growing out of the genre-specific approaches in funding
- Support for creative processes rather than product/ tangible outcome
- Developing an ecosystem for practice to emergecollectively
- To develop intellectual public infrastructure
- To develop peer-structure that have longer life-span
- Foster a cohorts system to emerge by bringing together different professionals
- Different modes of dissemination to generate an afterlife for the artistic outcome/process

By listing out these areas I reemphasize and believe that the change in approach to certain important aspects with regard to funding visual arts can bring in significant changes to the art scene and the artists.

Appendix I: Questionnaire

1. What is your opinion on IFA's current Arts Practice programme? http://indiaifa.org/programmes/arts-practice/request-for-proposals.html

2. What according to you are the specific emergent needs in the visual arts – in terms of training, capacity building, technology, and infrastructure?

3. Is there a specific topic, type of practice or style of project that in your opinion is more attractive to funding agencies? Do you think the pandemic has altered / will alter some of these preferences for funders?

4. Are there visible trends in the proportional availability of funding for these streams in the visual arts: film &video(documentary & fiction), animation, photography, new media, Artificial Intelligence-interactive arts-gaming, folk-tribal-traditional arts & crafts, painting-sculpture-printmaking, graphic novel-artist book-literature?

5. Are there major variations in how funding bodies operate, for example in the setting of eligibility criteria, evaluation processes or modes of soliciting applicants?

6. Are there factors such as an artist's age and/or politics, the medium adopted, or nature of their practice that negatively impact the likelihood of attracting funding? Conversely, are there certain privileges of language, city living, or educational background that help in accessing funding?

7. To what extent, if any, is regional geography and language a determining factor in grant allocation?

8. Who are the funding agencies that you are aware of, who engage with the risk of supporting the development of new work? By contrast, which funders are more invested in supporting work where the artwork is a bankable output?

9. How do funders perceive and respond to 'failure' in your field?

10. What according to you are the gaps in arts funding, specifically in your field, that need attention?

11. What are your expectations from a funder like IFA?

12. Apart from financial aid, in which ways could a funder help your projects?

13. Given the current situation, what do you see as the short and long term challenges facing the visual arts?

14. What do you see as the new opportunities that have arisen due to the current situation?

15. In the present time, that has foregrounded concerns around mental health and the need to address them, what role can funders play in this regard?