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A Tale of Two Artscapes

A growing interest has made city-based art festivals popular with locals, while putting the hosts firmly on the global map

By NOOR ANAND CHAWLA



"Our theme for the festival this year, 'City in Flux', aims to explore Mumbai's relationship with water. We feel that even though the city is built on the sea, it's relationship with this element isn't very strong. By encompassing the city in beautiful art, we wanted to provide an opportunity for people to explore this heritage site, and to see the docks through the perspective of art," says artist and artistic director of Sit-art India Foundation, Haaf Kosebi.

Elsewhere, in the northern part of India, the arid desert city of Jaipur transformed into a literary's delight through the recently concluded Literature Festival. This year, organisers capped off the festival through art created by contemporary local artists at select locations across the city as part of Jaipur Art Week.

Chawla is the artistic director of the non-profit organisation Public Trust of India (PTI), the second edition of the art affair was recently inaugurated in collaboration with the Jaipur Literature Festival.

WHEN & WHERE
Mumbai Urban Art Festival, Season Docs, Mumbai, 18 February 22



a community-driven project to draw in local artists and institutions. This year, the focus was on folk-art based contemporary artists, who are either born in the region, are part of the community or have been inspired by the area," says Sara Berman, Principal, PTI. After living abroad for 30 years, Berman, now based in New York based The Art Lab Studio, an art



marketing agency specialising in strategy and partnerships, returned to India to join her family business. Once here, she envisioned a platform that would encourage local creativity and engagement, with the objective of encouraging arts education and the creation of jobs in this field. These city-specific events are heralding an important change in Indian art. They



glorify local institutions while patronising artistic practices that often escape the purview of traditional gallery and institution-led patronage. Both Mumbai and Jaipur have plenty to offer locals and visitors alike, yet this is where their similarities end. The MCAF almost exclusively showcases installations of varying sizes, such as Jantosh and



Althosha at Season Docs; an alternate idea of 'what home' could be in the Asian Paints Art House (which is also located on the dock); urban tactical interventions like edible gardens, multipurpose seating, sports courts, and more at the Mahin(E) Art District; and other landmark artworks around the city. These are things, which, in Kosebi's words, "respond to the place they are located in", because traditional art can limit access on long to its precursors

materiality. Thus, in a manner of speaking, the location is the fulcrum of the festival, more so than the art. A tie-up with the Mumbai Port Authority, which is celebrating its 100th year, ensured that the art would work to spread the meaningful message on the changing dynamics of the Season Docs.

Jaipur Art Week's focus, however, was on engaging with local craft-based enterprises like an art and design intersection at Process Music and a group show of women artists at Jaipur Flux. Institutions like Jaipur's oldest museum Albert Hall shows contemporary artist Lachan Upadhyay, Rajmahal Palace Jaipur, and a display of third-generation miniature artist, Riyaz Udin. The intention was to "showcase works of art informed by the concerns around the perspectives nurtured by aesthetics, architecture, and cultural conservation of Jaipur," in Berman's words.

Another striking difference between the two art events is their scale—where Mumbai has over 80 participating artists hailing from 15 countries of Asia, Africa and Europe, Jaipur picked 17 artists from a pool of 50 applicants, each of whom are local or connected to Rajasthan in a way that makes a strong case for more regional art events to take place in the rest of the country.

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Sana Berman