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/art/arts_features_details.asp, line 128

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Jaaga ray

A handful of artist groups in the city have woken up to the idea of collaborative community projects, finds Jaideep Sen.



On Friday, August 7, the slow-moving traffic reported from Church Street, on the stretch between Koshy's and Brigade Road, was for reasons slightly different from the usual. For about a fortnight till then, the group called Blindboys had been sending out emails, alerts and Facebook notifications about their planned "photographic street intervention" project called Blowup. "Blowup wants to take photography to where it belongs - to the streets," said one such message. "Most of us have been shooting streets at one time or another. Now it is time to take our photography - shove our hands in some adhesive 'wheat paste' glue - and plaster away. Take back what is ours." A few people who received

these notes weren't too certain what the event meant to do exactly.

Akshay Mahajan, co-creator of the group, said the idea was to engage people on the streets with photography. Blindboys (named from an essay by photographer Charles Harbutt) is an online magazine that provides a platform for photo-essays and aims to build a nationwide community. "We wanted to put up pictures on a street, because this effort isn't meant to be exclusive in any way, and it's not restricted to a gallery setup," explained Mahajan. The response on that Friday evening was just what they expected: "We had people slowing down, looking, asking about the pictures, and appreciating them," he said. To get the show up, the group had sought permission from the authorities and storeowners in the area, and there were five sets of photographs that they took prints of to plaster across the street - on walls and post boxes, in coffee shops and paan shops. "The prints were A3-sized and cheap, from the local Printo shop," said Mahajan. The works included a series titled Surely You're Joking, Mr Mahajan of portraits shot in the city by the group's other creator Kapil Das, and another titled Lady Boys of Siem Reap shot in Cambodia by Ying Ang, a photographer of Singaporean descent based in Melbourne. Mahajan had two of his series on display - The Last 17 Days, about a German 17-year-old named Leon who turned 18 a day before the event on Church Street, and No time for Love in Srinagar, based on Kashmiri youth. The show also featured the work of a bunch of city-based photographers like MS Gopal.

The idea of creating a sort of dialogue also sits at the core of a bunch of experiments hosted by the group City Spinning. One of their projects, called Spirited Caravans, led to an exhibition in July on the concept of mobile spaces, displaying design proposals sent in by architects and artists from around the world. The stated intention was to organise "a series of interventions in Bangalore and Delhi which looks at expanding the nature and use of public and unused spaces in the cities". Co-hosted by Prayas Abhinav and designer Meeta Jain (of the Bangalore-based group MapBee, or Mobile Architecture Practice), the project first began with an initiative called Porous City this January, which sought to identify "alternative cultural spaces" in the city. The group threw open a call for designs proposals on "mobile cultural spaces" - or mechanical vehicles that the group called The Dot, "Demonstrating Outdoor Tactics" - which could be moved from one neighbourhood to another. The purpose was to park at a different site for about a fortnight each time. And all proposals needed to be adaptable, preferably created with handmade and



recyclable materials, in dimensions of less than 8x15 feet, at a cost of less than Rs 40,000. By the end of March, the call resulted in about 25 submissions, while the website clocked nearly 3,000 visitors.

The show Spirited Caravans, held in July, presented 15 short-listed design proposals (see box), all tied in with the question: "Does the city move or do you move around in the city? Maybe, it's both." The agenda spoke about how cities have turned into spaces that "exude an impersonal, dry and functional energy", and how to feel at home, and how people often "try to own a patch here and there to hide away, to console ourselves". The hosts went on to propose ways of creating "parallel realities" in a city of "glass, concrete and trash", to build possibilities that are "parasitic and symbiotic" in nature, a lot like the manner in which gypsies, street performers, circuses, and melas function. Visitors at the show were urged to comment on proposals, annotate in margins, doodle on the guides and contribute to the designs. The group then hosted a two-day workshop, which forged a "Mobility and Culture Think Tank 09" to discuss the prospects of mobile cultural spaces. They also announced "Protospace", a "shared working space" initiative located in Sanjay Nagar, which works on shared resources and networks, and has already hosted an exhibition, workshops, and a one-off gig by the new band Azaad Roots. City Spinning is now inviting people to share their ideas on expanding the project.



Archana Prasad, the artist who helped form the art collective Samuha earlier this year, has also been working on the idea of a community project, in an initiative called Jaaga, along with city-based architect Naresh Narasimhan and technologist Freeman Murray. Earlier this August, the group hosted their first event, or "urban community art-architecture experiment". A stated "do-it-yourself building project", the event is looking to make a "creative common ground" in a plot off Richmond Road, which was donated temporarily by Narasimhan. The building effort is led by Murray, whose earlier projects include the installation of studios built with warehouse shelving, or pallet racks, for gatherings of artists, performers,

filmmakers and members of the indie film community in Los Angeles. Jaaga hopes to have a three-storey structure ready to be thrown open sometime towards the end of August.

Prasad explained that the idea was for designers, artists, and anyone interested in building an affordable and accessible community cultural space. "Together we will construct and run a temporary, modular and mobile structure," said Prasad, "where the neighbourhood is deeply engaged with the activities of the Jaaga inhabitants. It's a structure that can someday move into your part of town." Prasad also spoke of how the concept took shape given the problems they faced while forming Samuha, highlighting "the problems of finding suitable and affordable shared spaces for creative communities" in the city. "There are several empty plots scattered around," noted Prasad. "Thus, the question of how they could be used to solve the problem of affordable creative community centres was born."

Jaaga's partners include a host of international architects and designers, and in the hope of supporting larger community efforts, the group has announced an open call for collaborators. "It will roughly take about two weeks to assemble or dismantle this structure," explained Prasad. "We're open to people helping us, from ideas on solar energy and water conservation or utilising materials, to artist groups and organisation looking to host workshops, performances and cultural programmes." Prasad added that they were determined to keep things non-commercial, and that they hoped to sustain the project through partnerships.

Ultimately, the only difference between the three projects is in their way of engaging communities. While the Blindboys are also inviting people to join their plans of regular events in the city, the group is also keen on hosting projections and multimedia features in places like Cubbon Park. City Spinning and Jaaga, on the other hand, with their shared community spaces that can be "assembled, disassembled and then re-assembled", might just land up at the empty plot of land across your doorstep. By nightfall, on August 7, the only thing that hindered proceedings was a spot of rain, although they weren't overly concerned about what would happen to all the posters they'd put up. "We weren't sure what to expect. We're fine if people want to take the pictures, or vandalise them, or do whatever they want to do." The rest of the effort is essentially about striking into by-lanes and back alleys through nooks of the city to find things that are interesting, and could be worthwhile distractions for ambling masses of pedestrians and crawling seas of traffic.



To learn more about the Blindboys initiatives, visit www.blindboys.org. The next series of events hosted by City Spinning is scheduled to happen at a site owned by The University Women's Association, Bangalore (UWAB) in New Thippasandra. For more details and to view discussions of the Mobility and Culture Think Tank 09, visit www.cityspinning.org. Protospace Bangalore is located at 6, MR Garden, 2nd Cross, KEB Layout, Sanjay Nagar; for details visit www.protost.ation.in. For details and updates on the initiatives hosted by Jaaga, visit www.jaaga.wikidot.com.

The City Spinning design shortlist

Pavilion by Elina Moreau Braunstein from Sydney, Australia

A dismantle-able structure made of chipboard platforms, plastic and acrylic tubes and a fabric roof canopy.

Cyber-Birds by Benoît Maubrey from Brück, Germany

A wearable electronic multimedia screen fitted with loudspeakers, amplifiers, sensors, microphones and samplers.

Forum by Harshavardhan, Shyamanta Shekhar, Srinivas, Sujay Kuncham and Vishnuvardhan, Bangalore

A giant 15-foot wheel made of bamboo and steel pipes.



Khel: The Interactive Learning Cart by Azeer Attari & Dominic Anthony, Mumbai

A rickshaw-style space for performances and interactions with street crowds.

The Dot Matrix by Amrita Ravimohan and Ekta Idnany, Mumbai

Meant for yoga, reading and painting, this construction consists of rotating and removable panels of chatais or woven mats.

Art Bar by Jimini Hignett from Amsterdam, Netherlands

Involves ten cyclists, adjustable seats, stretchable awnings and tractor parts.

Balloon by Miguel Valério from Amsterdam, Netherlands

A four-storey-high structure made of fabric, plywood, and a pumping system.

Art-Closet by Joao Caria Lopes from Lisbon, Portugal

A mobile space with retractable doors that open up mini stages.

PPMT by Jelena Grujic and Lea Skrinjar from Novi Sad and Belgrade, Serbia

A "pedal-powered modular pillow tent" that combines a trailer and a bamboo frame.

Slinky Rig by Petar Bojovic and Slobodan Krsmanovic from Belgrade, Serbia

A six-wheel platform that unfolds like the juggling toys on bamboo brackets.

Body Suit by Harry Westbrook and Nash Colundular from London, UK

Lightweight frames that can be strapped on like a harness onto participants's backs.

Crate Culture by Nick Tobier from Detroit and Ann Arbor, USA

Plastic milk crates form a screen for projections, or a DJ stand for street parties.

Momo by Stewart Hicks and Allison Newmeyer from Illinois, USA

A mobilised garden deployment module that reuses discarded billboards, and uses kits to install gardens in apartments.

Six Scripts by Heron-Mazy Studio, USA

Combines the skills of shamiana merchants and kite flyers to make custom Hosseini-esque floating displays.

Untitled by Joseph Choma from New York, USA

Fitted with multiple wheels, this is a moulded cellular enclosure of bamboo, fabric and PVC.

Source : Time Out Bengaluru

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