An Art Fair To Remember

The annual event was the hub of every art enthusiast, artist, curator, student, and collector

By SARAH AHMAD | 15 Feb 2023 10:08 AM

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What does art mean to you? As one entered India Art Fair 2023, one asked and answered such questions. The fair was about art, also about life and love. We were surrounded by connoisseurs, painters, artists, and curators. The paintings, installations and sculptures, made us stop, and observe.

The winter sun too paired beautifully with the art on display and added a calm, quaint, light. Then there was love, there is so much of that wherever art, its creators, and observers are present. In a way, love united us Art Fair visitors too. The crowds wandered, clicked photographs, had creative conversations, sipped artisanal coffee, and talked about uncomplicated relationships with art.

Also Read - Oppenheimer's Moral Confusion

The India Art Fair 2023, took place over a Delhi winter weekend this month. The sunlit Delhi skies were the perfect backdrop for creative pools of talent to show their best work. The façade of the fair was a beautiful piece of art, a Warli mural titled – 'Forests of the Future' by Vayeda brothers.

Right from paintings, prints, sculptures made of found objects, social-political art, abstract, performance, and digital art, to zines, and much more; the art event was indeed a fair, a celebration of creativity, life and endowment. There were booths and halls dedicated to galleries, the artists they were representing, to institutions, digital artists, technology in art, to performance art pieces, walks, talks, outdoor art projects, workshops and more. The Citizen visited the many works, and galleries showing at the grand four-day affair.

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There were the celebrated works of iconic modern Indian artists such as MF Husain, SH Raza, FN Souza, SK Bakre, Jamini Roy at well-established galleries such as DAG, Dhoomimal Gallery, Crayon Art Gallery. Those looking for art that spoke about contemporary issues, using new materials and methods thronged booths displaying works by many renowned and emerging, contemporary artists.

Nature Morte Gallery had artworks like Reena Saini Kallat's 'Pattern Recognition', Subodh Gupta's 'Space Bioscope', Polish Artist Alicja Kwade's paper and sculpture works 'Rocking and Rain', Lorenzo Vetturi's large textile assemblages, Asim Waqif's wall sculpture. Neha Choksi's work at Project 88 was a set of seven woodcuts titled 'Repeat Integrity (Oak)', created in her distinct style of cutting and inking woodcuts.

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Asim Waqif

Sharmi Chowdhury's 'Invisible Reflections' at Gallery Veda, created with paper and old wooden furniture, and Yuvan Bothysathuvar's 'I'm Alive' were two other engaging pieces of works at the Fair, encouraging interaction with the pieces.

Chemould CoLab's first participation at the Fair, brought a vibrant set of artworks together, carefully displayed around the booth and on the booth walls. One saw works by emerging artists Gurjeet Singh, Rithika Pandey, Shailee Mehta, Vinita Mungi. The artworks followed varied disciplines from metal to ceramic, painting and textiles.

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Chemould CoLab's Space

Gurjeet Singh's works recalled past traumas of bullying and discrimination, and shared what it means to be a queer man living in Punjab. Shailee Mehta's figures embraced intimate ideas of desire, solitude, idleness and care; animal, women protagonists and domestic spaces appear in her paintings.

Rithika Pandey used painting to create a theatrical stage onto which her protagonists entered and Vinita Mungi's ceramic sculptures were filled with ecological representations that recalled her time spent close to nature while growing up in Nashik.

As one walked around the lively, colourful paths of the halls at the fair, bright artworks of cobalt blue and reds popped up, some talked about strife and struggle, and moved away from the visual connotation of the colourful palette used. One such was a body of works by Vikrant Bhise at Anant Art. Bhise is a visual artist who lives and works in Mumbai. At the forefront of struggle against caste-based discrimination and its vertiginous implications on land, liberty and labour, Vikrant's artistic practice iterates his commitment to the revolutionary spirit inherent in the Ambedkarite consciousness.

Rakesh Patel's wooden wall sculptures made of found objects at Iram Art drew many visitors. We had a tête-à-tête with the artist, and he elaborated on how his family's business in hardware and scraps inspired his art. It led him to create experimental mixed media works like 'Red Eye in my Courtyard' which was at the Fair. He uses discarded, found objects from flea markets to create his works and re-purposes materials. One saw cultural references in the shape, patterns, textures and colours in his works. He also uses the form of eye and bindi as a narrative sketch of focus, faith and diversity.

Displayed against a striking wall of yellow and white, Ahmed Ali's and Madan Mahatta's black and white photographs at Photoink's booth showed the industrialisation of India. They brought forth varied voices on industries and industrialisation in Independent India. Ahmed Ali's work showcased women working in industries, while Madan Mahatta's works were predominantly about architecture and machineries in factories. Photoink also showcased Raghu Rai's black and white photographs of everyday people and public spaces, along with other renowned artists and photographers.

Ahmed Ali

Also seen at the fair, at the Experimenter Gallery were Rathin Barman's sculptures, 'Notes from Lived Spaces, Repurposed Living Spaces – Room No.1 and Room No.2'.

We wandered by Akar Prakar where we spotted Jayashree Chakravarty's works, one noticeable artwork was the 'Alien Sphere', a sculpture shaped like a tent made using Nepali paper, tissue paper, brown paper, cotton fabric, seeds, jute, acrylic paint, synthetic glue, tea and coffee stain, everything coming together to give the sculpture a luminescent quality.

Sajan Mani's works or rather performances at Shrine Empire employed the element of water to address ecological issues particularly related to the backwaters of Kerala, as well as to the common theme of migration. His recent works considered the correspondence between animals and humans, and the politics of space from the perspective of an indigenous cosmology.

Other notable pieces at the fair this year were Andy Warhol's 'Mao Zedong' series, Antonio Santin's painted rugs with an almost 3D like quality, a life size MF Husain sculpture and his painting 'Valmiki's Vision of Sunderkand', 'Mahakali' by Paresh Maity, Parag Sonarghare's 'Portraits of the Self' at Gallery Maskara, poster Zine 'Fire in the Belly' featuring eight women artists talking about issues of sexuality, class, caste and ecology.

Omar Rodriquez-Graham

Prashant Pandey's Untitled piece made with discarded cigarette buds, thread and cane at Gallery Maskara, Lakshmi Madhavan's Hanging by a thread III at Devi Art Foundation, Anne Samat's work titled Daughter (Weave through Eternity) made by using Rattan sticks, wooden and plastic ornaments, metal, beads and washers, Omar Rodriuez-Graham's Atlantico, Vikram Goyal's The Tree of Good Fortune, were some other artworks of interest.

Lakshmi Madhavan

Another piece that caught our eye was Jignesh Panchal's 'Paradise' at Zoca Art, a gouache, golden/silver/copper leafing on paper, as multiple 30cm square artworks spread out on an entire booth wall. These vibrant paintings as the artist told us were a result of him working around patterns which he saw in different parts of the world and being inspired to create artworks born out of the cultural references.

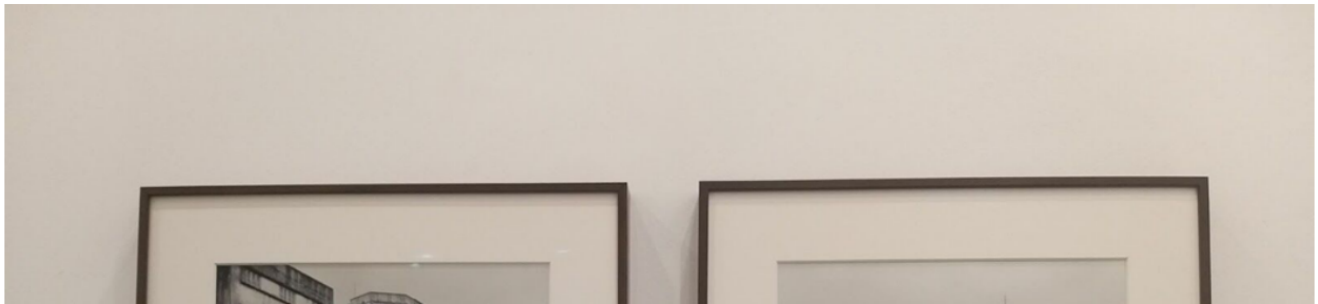
Jignesh Panchal

Digital Artist in Residence, Mira Felicia Malhotra through her work 'Log Kya Kahenge' which discussed the Indian family system through vibrant digital illustrations showed us two different faces and facets of the Indian family, through the Apple iPad. The original illustration showcased a normal family, but when viewed through the iPad the characters and images turned into faces of rage, fury and plight.

Also seen at the Fair is the art car by BMW, part of the Future is Born of Art Commission, where artist Devika Sundar presents a striking vision of the future.

Walking through the outer grounds of the Art Fair one saw many Outdoor Art Projects too, some of the notable ones that we spotted include Prashant Pandey's 'Kama (Wish)', supported by Gallery Maskara and Parag Tandel's 'How to Cook a Bombay Duck in Various Ways?' Supported by TARQ.

Pandey's work is a powerful tribute to womanhood through a sculpture of a female pelvic bone, made from leftover marble blast stones used to create deities. The artist through the work creates a positive space to honour the place of origin.



Raghu Rai

Parag Tandel's work was a large-scale sculptural installation that reflected on the impact of human need on the ecology of the artist's home city, Mumbai. Through the sculpture one can explore the older map of the city's seven original islands and examine the current orientation of the city's landscape and confront the consequences of our actions on the environment.

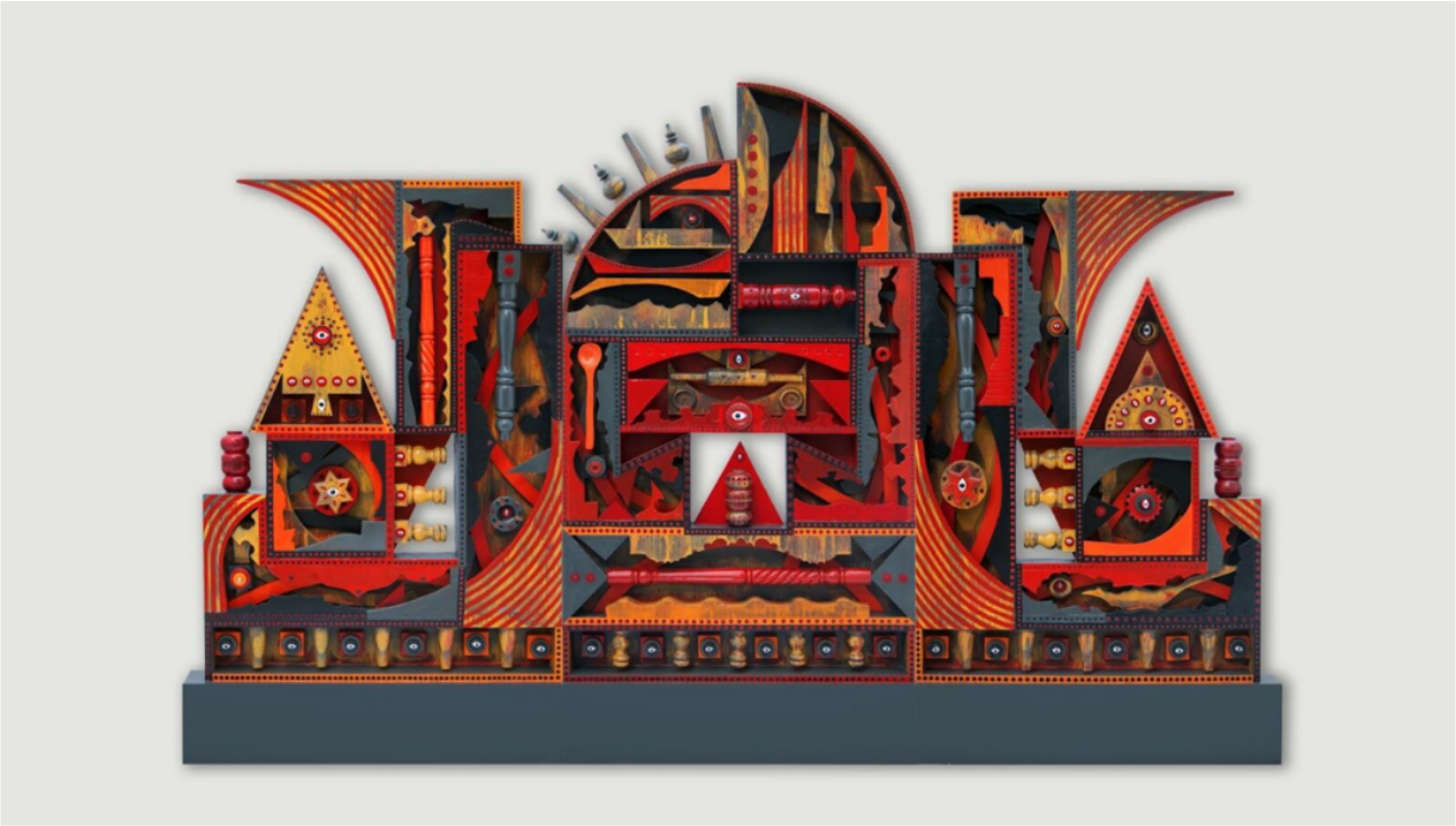
The other outdoor projects spoke about art and technology, the 'Food Lab Project' talked about the forces that shape our relationship with food, from labour and the environment to politics, trade, ethics, culture and business. Sonia Khurana's 'Container Project' supported by Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Vayeda Brothers 'Façade Project - Forests of the Future' and Osvaldo Gonzalez's 'Camino' supported by Gallery Continua. Osvaldo Gonzalez's used adhesive tape that assists in the achievement of transformation from "everyday" to a messenger of poetic ideas.

Osvaldo Gonzalez

The art fair had a plethora of activities for art students, art enthusiasts and collectors. Through he Align & Disrupt: Talks Series curated by independent curator and educator Shaleen Wadhwana and supported by Shiv Nadar – Institution of Eminence, the talks programme aimed to align voices of leading artists and art professionals on critical issues in the arts ecosystem, and collectively disrupt the status quo to shape a more aware and inclusive art world of the future.

From talks on Philanthropy, Collecting & The Art Market, to Textiles & Textile Art: Curating & Collecting India's living heritage,

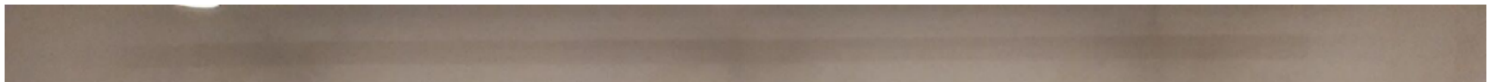
Behind the Canvas talking about the changing role of a curator in the art world today. Other talks included a discussion and conversation between India Art Fair's Digital Artists in Residence Mira Felicia Malhotra, Gaurab Ogale and Varun Desai who spoke about the intersection of art, technology and storytelling with curator Veerananakumari Solanki, another talk on technology, on art & law, and art, environment & sustainability.



Rakesh Patel

The Art fair concluded with talks on Disability (With)In the Arts, Queer Voices in Art. British Iranian artist Laila Tara H, Delhi-based artist and filmmaker Khandakar Ohida and others shared lessons and learnings from their first 10 years in art. 'Zabaan aur Pehchaan', was a talk on how the privilege of the English Language prevents many artists from growing their careers in regional languages, there was also a discussion on magnifying marginalised voices in art, society and art history.

The Art Fair also hosted the Rediscovery: Workshop Series curated by the arts education organisation LAND (Learning through Arts, Narrative and Discourse) and supported by ArtBuzz. Some of the many workshops over the four days of the fair included – A Young Collectors Masterclass on how to make the most of an art fair experience – from building connections with artist and galleries to finding the perfect piece for a collection; Baithak where young artists got together for meaningful conversations and to share their experiences – a special place curated for students where one could learn from fellow artist; an art appreciation workshop led by researcher and writer Sanchit Toor, a Millennial Roundtable bringing together art stars like Harman Taneja, Puja Mondal among many to share their thoughts on how the new millennial generation can come together to create a fresh cultural voice for India.



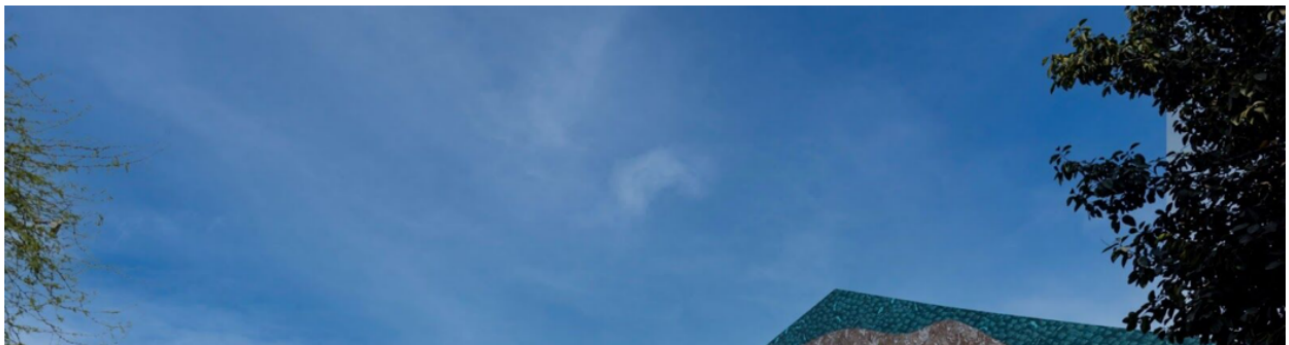
RR Bhardwaj

There were also sessions by Apple, led by many Creators and India Art Fair Digital Artists in Residence, and Inclusive Art Workshops like the Blindfold Experience, also a workshop where participants were blindfolded and encouraged to experience art works through underutilised senses such as touch, smell and sound.

The India Art Fair also had many performance art pieces, one such was by Debashish Paul – Me & My Pets where the artist evoked the joy of childhood in his performance by holding conversations with imaginary pets, characters and his many internal selves. The artist wore a sculptural dress during this performance, made by drawing and painting on paper and textiles, bringing his ideas to life directly on his body.

“The scale and diversity of the fair in 2023 reflects the expansion of the contemporary and modern art market across India and South Asia, as well as burgeoning interest from the international community,” explained Fair Director, Jaya Asokan. “We’re particularly proud of all of our artists who are testing the boundaries of contemporary and traditional arts or digital innovation.”

What is art? Perhaps we will never have a solitary answer to this but multiple responses, and maybe more questions, conversations, stories, theories and beliefs. Events like the India Art Fair, every year, introduces us to art from different eras and perspectives, and artists to its vibrant audience. Every art enthusiast, artist, curator, student, collector tries to respond to what art means to them by observing an artwork, communicating with an artist, learning an art skill, investing in contemporary, emerging, experimental and iconic art pieces.



Exterior View. India Art Fair

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Oppenheimer's Moral Confusion

After the atomic bomb's creation , the world was never the same again

By NARGIS NATARAJAN | 30 July 2023 11:24 AM

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“Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds”: Bhagavad Gita. This ambiguous quotation became enshrined as Oppenheimer’s signature line. Even though it speaks of awful ruin, godly power and endless glory in the same breath, it also suggests Oppenheimer’s own moral confusion.

He quoted it when he started to tremble at the dark power he had helped to create, insisting that his main purpose was to confront and master the “serious business of life, which is growing wise”.

Before watching the film, I had no idea who Oppenheimer was. But as a human being I had always wondered about the morality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, its consequences and whether the brains behind the bomb had any qualms about how it was used.

Did his scientific bent of mind ever try to understand the workings of nature, or was he not at all affected with a sounder grasp of humanity? Did he ever agonise about the devastation his brilliance had helped to unleash?

Did he ever feel he was complicit in profound evil? I got my answers in the scene when after the bombing, the Scientist meets with the President of the US and announces in pure Shakespearean style: “Mr. President, I feel I have blood on my hands.”

President Truman, who probably despised such theatrics and felt that nuclear wars should be conducted without tears, takes out his handkerchief and presents it to the blood-soaked ‘cry baby’ scientist, saying, “Well, here, would you like to wipe your hands?”

This exchange of words, of a heartbreakingly sincere confession and a caustic reply, between a remorseful scientist and a hard headed statesman portrayed a beautiful marriage of politics and humanity. To see the light of truth as an agent of some dark majesty, is not a grace but an ordeal.

As a student of art, I always thought scientists were not only guided by their intellect but also worked with an ethical culture. For me they were the white knights consecrated to the cosmopolitan ideals of perpetual peace, rapturously discovering things for the greater use of mankind.

They were endowed with an acute sensibility and technical expertise. And they did all this for the sheer pleasure of knowledge and satisfaction. Not for the glint of envy in other men’s eyes.

Unfortunately, Oppenheimer was not graced with this pure-mindedness. The multiple forces driving him were tangled and complicated.

Oppenheimer lacked the professional single-mindedness essential to a scientific career because he had too many talents, none of which he concentrated on sufficiently. He would break in snidely on seminar presentations to explain matters more lucidly than the distinguished guests.

His champagne mind sparkled, fizzed, and sprayed in all directions and his quest for wisdom led him far beyond the confines of science. Apart from being a superb theoretician, teacher and administrator, he also learned Sanskrit, a notoriously difficult language.

Perhaps this breadth of intellectual passion of dabbling in mysticism was a diversion from serious work. Or perhaps he was in search of knowledge that physics alone couldn't provide him.

What I found puzzling was that even with all his whirlwind energy, he himself was a thoroughly confused soul. When the disenchanted physicists had initial misgivings about the morality of Project Atom Bomb in Los Alamos, Oppenheimer did his best to curb their doubts.

With gentle eloquence he proclaimed that if the creation of atomic bombs would make fear a permanent feature of ordinary life, it would also mean an end to war.

But the actual sight of the Trinity test explosion, prompted the beginnings of a change of heart when he lamented his decision in an address to the American Philosophical Society. "We have made a most terrible weapon, that has altered abruptly and profoundly the nature of the world", he said, adding, "An evil thing by all the standards of the world and by so doing so, we have raised again the question of whether science is good for man".

In this public admission his personal despair at the moral collapse was nakedly visible. He later went on to oppose the development of the Hydrogen Bomb, a weapon thousand times more powerful, and an act that brought about his political disgrace and downfall.

Modern science (like Artificial Intelligence), has perhaps permanently altered the nature of moral and political life.

After watching 'Oppenheimer', it has become clear that this distressing human fondness for the occasional blood-feast may accelerate in future impeding man's progress. History has taught us this bitter truth time and again.

When Alfred Nobel had hoped that his invention of dynamite would put people off war forever, it didn't happen. Albert Einstein, equally peaceable but more discerning, believed that entrusting humans with guns, artillery and modern technology was like putting a meat axe in the hands of a psychopath.

He is also believed to have said that "Man invented the Atom Bomb. But no mouse would ever construct a mousetrap'. Oppenheimer and Einstein were not great friends. And yet they did meet. In the movie, when Einstein asks him, "What of it?", Oppenheimer's answer is the final line of the film, "I believe we did," he says. And then we are shown a sequence depicting the world being destroyed by modern nuclear weapons.

The Manhattan Project bomb makers are often despised by many as the evil geniuses who made life more perilous than it ever was before. With the creation of the atomic bomb, the world will never again be what it once was.

The general sentiment is that they shouldn't have done it. They were scientists, after all, and they should have known better than to lend their intelligence to such a terrible undertaking.

But then like my husband says, if Oppenheimer wouldn't have created the Atom Bomb, probably someone else would have. And then probably I wouldn't have been sitting here typing this out. And you wouldn't be sitting there reading it.

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