A World-Class Creative Arts Lab Makes Mumbai Its Base

TOI NEWS DESK
TNN | Feb 4, 2019, 12:31 AM IST

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A state-of-the-art creative space, residency programmes, and proximity to the largest base of literary where art, architecture and literature flourished from the 14th to 16th centuries. There's nothing more an artist could ask for if they land an opportunity with Hangar Art Labs, which will open on Feb 8. Located near CSM Vishwanagar Township in Andheri, a house dotted with 50 ranges and bunkers, the Venice Art Lab is evidently a deliberate attempt to cede the tradition of setting urban spaces dictate terms to art and artists.

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Urban areas are expensive for artists, says Radhavi Gore, one of the five artists chosen for the first cohort of the 3-month residency programme that began on Jan 3. "It's not easy for artists to find affordable spaces to work and cannot find a healthy vibe," says Gore, a visual artist engaging the language of alienation in her drawings, paintings, performances and certified self-portraits.

Anirudh Shetkeval, a BFA graduate from The Art Institute of Chicago, finds the residency programme to be a place where it provides a platform for production of the art for three months, instead of more display. Anirudh is a sculptor who prefers to use waste materials and debris to produce his art.

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The architecture of Hangar Art Labs is inspired by the meandering curves of river Sangabhatta, which flows through Hangar. It provides artists on residency with unique production facilities, an environment to creatively interact in, and gathering for world-class display.

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Drawings on recycled paper punctuate the walls of Pronish Hussain's studio. Motifs of nature — gulmohar flowers, insects, birds, cows, plants — are a recurring theme in her works. "I used things that I use. I am trying to find the significance of insignificant things around us," says Hussain. Pronish studied painting at Kalakshetra, the fine arts department of Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata.

Sitting about equidistant in his studio, contemporary fine arts graduate Shantanu Ok says he experiments with elements like magnetic material, interpretation of dreams and loneliness. He was a finding fellow at Harvard University in 2003.

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Bhasha Chakraborti, another resident, wants to do her work using banana fibre. She graduated with an MFA from the Nalsar School and prefers to do her work on a research basis.

The five artists for the residency were chosen by a jury. "They are provided with the platforms according to their areas of interest. Artists from across the world can apply for the programme, but Indians will get a preference," says Sangeeta Singh, the founder of Hangar Art Labs. The artists are being provided a stipend.

Tarini Sehgal Handa, the creative director of the Lab, says the residency does not necessarily mean the creating of a best artwork or a global stage.

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The residency will conclude on March 31. An open studio day will be held on March 23 and 24. The inaugural public exhibition 'Right Foot First' will end on May 31.

(The author was in Hangar at the invitation of Hangar Art Labs)

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Started a century ago, the college has made remarkable contributions in the field of education. "Back then, there were no opportunities for women. But things have gotten better now. Further, with families turning nuclear, we believe that it is important that we strike a balance, so that students are also learning to collaborate with a diverse group. The alumni who went out to the job market also raised the need for a similar atmosphere on the campus," says Sister M Venissa, principal of St Agnes College.

The faculty were initially worried about a possible dilution of the quality in academics — whether attendance issues would arise, or the college would be able to maintain its track-record of 100% results. "But we soon realised that our fears were uncalled for," says Sr Venissa.

WILL JOSEPH'S OPEN FOR ALL?

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One of Bengaluru's flagship schools, the St Joseph's, opened its gates for girls in 2007 for Class 11 and 12. With girls comprising 35% of these grades currently, the school now plans to open up the rest of the classes too for girls.

"The National Education Policy clubs grades 9-12 as one unit. So it is only natural that we open up other grades too. The issue for us has been lack of infrastructure. We are now constructing a new building that will add more classrooms. It is expected to be ready by 2025. After that, we could likely have a co-ed system for all grades," says Father Sunil Fernandes, principal of St Joseph's Boys High School.

The 165-years-old school admitted only boys for close to 150yrs, and was called St Joseph's European School until 1968. "Now, once we open to girls, we will have to change the name again, which is a la borious process," says Fr Sunil. He adds that a mixed classroom offers healthy and holistic growth for students.

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Modern education for girls in Karnataka began in 1842, when Missionaries started one such school, says A S Seetharamu, former faculty of the Institute of Social and Economic Change. Within a few years, a vernacular school for Hindu children was founded. The first co-ed school, then called mixed schools, was set up in 1868 in Mysore state. "A report of DPI for 1875 includes a count of 168 mixed schools, which increased to 341 by 1880.

Since then, there has been a growth of mixed schools, colleges, and universities as the economy of scale and shortage of women teachers hindered separate education of girls," he says. "Impetus for co-education got a fillip after 1956, the year of the reorganization of states, along with demand for separate girls schools, colleges etc," he adds.

In July 2022, the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights recommended the Kerala govt to convert all schools into coeducational institutions from 2023-24. It came in response to a petition, which argued that gender justice was denied in genderexclusive schools. The Commission has observed that having separate schools for boys and girls can be seen as a turning away from advanced education and psychological theories.

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