

Making Room for New Art

Space 118 addresses the pressing need for artists' studios in Mumbai. Gillian da Costa gives the project a thumbs up.

Tucked away in the heart of Mazagon's Wadi Bunder is Space 118, the entrepreneurial venture of art collector Saloni Doshi. This refurbished warehouse consists of four much-in-demand studio spaces. Since its opening in February 2010, Space 118 has evolved into a place for both emerging artists needing affordable workspace in the city and established artists looking for a mix of quiet and convenience.

As part of her research, Doshi travelled to many studios in India and abroad and also spoke to a number of artists and curators about what might constitute a good studio space. She quit her 9 to 5 job to focus her energy on turning Space 118 into an infrastructural landmark that could be known for its creative output. This was also an attempt at addressing the absence of studio spaces in Mumbai, filling in the vacuum and contributing to the art ecosystem.

While Doshi doesn't have a very stringent process for selecting applicants, they need to have a "convincing track record in the arts". At the moment, Space 118 is the main attraction for art lovers in Wadi Bunder but Le Mill, a lifestyle concept store located nearby, is getting to be quite popular too. With a few other galleries looking to relocate to this part of Mumbai in the near future, Wadi Bunder might turn out to be another version of Kala Ghoda. And those who scoff at the idea should know that even Space 118's four studios aren't quite enough. The kitchen space has recently been converted into a studio due to popular demand.





For some artists, Space 118 is a base for exploring the city; for others, a site for artistic introspection; and for still others, it is a 9 to 6 workhub. When multimedia and performance artist Neha Choksi moved from Los Angeles to Mumbai, she worked out of Space 118 and made her cement sculptures that were part of the Sculpture Park at the India Art Summit 2011, New Delhi, and later of the Frieze Art Fair, London. The work comprised a column of cubes that shrunk from the base to the top. Myriam Omar Awadi from Réunion Island, France, used Space 118 in 2010 for a residency that was managed by the What About Art? company and supported by Galerie Béatrice Binoche. Her project titled *lin)acte VI: broder* featured a video installation that included a bed, an embroidered sheet and a video of a man sitting on the bed embroidering a sheet. In Awadi's video, the studio space was used as the bedroom and the storage room as the embroiderers' workshop.

Around her at that time were three other artists working with different media. Neha Choksi was working on her cement sculptures, Sareena Khemka on her canvases, and Shilpa Mukerji on a photography project. This created a stimulating environment that Awadi enjoyed and benefited from. She continues to be a Space 118 loyalist and is back this year with a project that involves a silkscreen print workshop. Though she works in other places in the city, Space 118 offers her the opportunity to work on her drawings away from the bustle and the clamour of Mumbai.

Another international artist who benefited from Space 118 is Charwei Tsai from Taiwan who had an exhibition at The Guild, Mumbai, in October 2011. Tsai found the location of Space 118

beguiling – you worked away from the city centre, but still were able to feel the pulse of the metropolis.

Close to the time that Tsai worked at Space 118, Sharmistha Ray was preparing for her first solo show with Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai. Living in South Mumbai, Ray needed a space that was close to home and could accommodate her largest canvas, which was fifteen feet long. Her saturated abstracts had densely layered chromatic applications. Though there was a lot of bonhomie between the artists at Space 118, Ray chose to adhere to her work schedule. Ray hopes that this space will evolve beyond the individual studio format to become a community-type setting for artists in Mumbai.

In November 2011, while Ray was in the midst of preparing for her exhibition, Allan Binns and the 1%-ers Art Collective made use of Space 118 when they came visiting from England. Their project was facilitated by Elise Foster Vander Elst of Asia Art Projects and

Facing page: Saloni Doshi at Space 118, Wadi Bunder, Mumbai. Photography by Shilpa Mukerji. Image courtesy Saloni Doshi.

Top: Charwei Tsai. *Bonsai Series IX*. Black ink on a lithograph. 10" x 12". 2011. Image courtesy the artist and The Guild Art Gallery, Mumbai.

they worked on a cross-cultural collaboration with a few Indian artists including Charmi Gada Shah and Shreyas Karle. This work was later exhibited at Studio X, Mumbai, and various locations across India. Since their residency was only two weeks long, they spent much of their time away from the space. However, Binns feels that Space 118 served as a good base for meeting and exchanging ideas with artists and curators.

At present, Nyela Saeed is one of the emerging artists working at Space 118. Ray, Shrutti Garg and Jenny Bhatt are some of the artists working alongside Saeed. The experiences, techniques, conceptual processes and expressions of each of these artists seem to help add new perspectives to her work, and stimulate her thought processes in innovative ways.

In terms of advice for young entrepreneurs looking to set up art ventures in India, Doshi suggests starting out with a business plan right from the beginning. Space 118 was set up out of a desire to add to Mumbai's art infrastructure. Doshi believes that sustainability is as important as belief and vision. And for those inspired by her work, the fact that there is little competition in the field is reason enough to join in.



Sharmistha Ray, *Forbidden Pleasures*. Oil on linen, 72" x 96", 2011. Image courtesy Galeria Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.