

# THE INSTA-MUSEUMS

Instagram is the new exhibition space breathing life into the relationship between the artist and the audience

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For Mumbai-based Sakshi Doshi, director, Space11, a few minutes of quietude before driving into the factory of the day means going through her Instagram feed. These moments allow her to stay connected with exhibitions across the world and, at times, reveal interesting work by historic unknown artists as well. Space11 offers studio spaces and coaching residence to artists. "Until now, I had only discovered artists at fairs, institutes and at final year displays of art schools," she says. "But recently, I came across the work of artist Sharam Swain on the last page of Delhi-based gallery Art District X11." His unique rendition of clouds in cement fascinated her, after which she started following him on the image-sharing platform. "He is my hero, discovery," she says.

Over the past couple of years, there has been a rise in Instagram's influence within the art world. It's being used extensively by artists, institutions, collectors and galleries to network and make connections across borders and demographics.

It is also being used to reach out to a section of the audience which earlier perceived the art space as intimidating. On Instagram, curators and artists are speaking in a language that this demographic connects with. "People are finding it easier to approach us. It also offers easy access to those who might not have any personal contact details," says Bhama Katar, founder, Delhi-based gallery Lullaby& and Take One Art Institute.

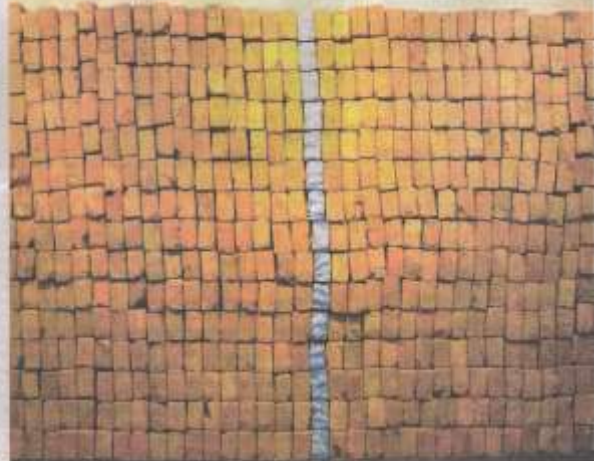
It is a view shared by Jagdeep Juggal, director, India Art Fair, who feels Instagram offers an opportunity to see art in a way which was not available earlier in the public sphere. The fair uses Instagram as a tool of outreach, making its page a one-stop shop of information on exciting South Asian artists and shows taking place in the country and beyond. "It is a perfect companion to our website, where



You can read more about those visuals and videos that you see on Instagram," she says.

It has also made the world a lot smaller for artists, who are now reveling in the open, democratic space that Instagram offers. Through the platform with 500 million daily active users, they can showcase the length and breadth of their practice, curating their page in a manner that they want. "Artists are spreading their wings across the world. For instance, I may be showing in Scotland and Dubai. But my Instagram page allows people,

who can't be physically present for my exhibition to see my work," says Anshu (Delhi-based installation artist) who was Oneofthe55 Emerging Artist of the Year 2012. He also uses his page as a space for experimentation, where he can offer a glimpse of his process. "My art depends on my immediate surroundings. Hence, I take loads of photos and post them on Instagram. It helps people understand how I am looking at things, and then interpreting them in my work," he adds.



"Transformation" by Mahabub Rahman, and (above) "There Was A Sky Before" by Steven Scalet

For many, the appeal lies in the interactive nature of the platform. It's not a one-way street with people following an artist or curator—rather, it takes the shape of an intimate conversation, replete with personal stories and anecdotes. "And also, because of the hashtags, you end up learning and discovering so many interesting formats, artists and styles," says Sandhya Mittal of Delhi's Qm Art Gallery.

Instagram has also become an emerging new space for buying and selling art. According to a 2015 Arty survey of collectors on Instagram, an incredible 51.5% had purchased works from artists they had originally discovered through the app.

Arty is an online resource for art collecting and education. "There is business connection happening, it's not like we are putting up prices of the artworks. But because art and Instagram are both visual mediums, they tend to draw people closer, who are open to long conversations and learn about the stuff they like," says Nath. In fact, recently a collector saw a work on the Instagram page of Qm Art and wanted to commission a work to the artist immediately. The India Art Fair page too gets a fair share of queries, which are then passed on to galleries.

"Last year, in September, I put up all the works from the Space11 open studio on Instagram. The good thing was that a lot of it got sold on WhatsApp, after being viewed on Instagram. The bad thing was that a chunk of people didn't turn up to see it physically," says Doshi. She ended up getting messages from buyers in Hong Kong, Dubai, Hong Kong and Mumbai. To list all the works by artist Anshu Bhatnagar got sold, thanks to Instagram. "In 10 years of Space11, I have never had as much activity. The thing is we had no affordable price points and the artists are

not platform," she says. Manjira Lamba of Ghazalart, Delhi, was also witness to the potential of the platform while she was showing Mahabub Rahman's Transformation, at the Modern Art Museum, Shanghai. She uploaded an image of it on Instagram as well. "Within an hour of the show opening, someone saw my post, messaged on Instagram and the work got sold. Imagine the web of connections: the artist is in Shanghai, the show is in Shanghai, the gallery is based in Delhi!" says Lamba. Lullaby& has also got several queries regarding the work shown as part of the recent show, Akbar Ali Gai.

However, many feel the biggest advantage is the element of transparency Instagram has brought to the art market. According to Delhi-based photographer Honey Sen, the app has built a critical bond between the viewer and the creator. There is now a direct interaction, which is extremely liberating. "It's also really good for artists who don't have gallery representation. It combines the element with a commercial aspect as well," says Katar.