

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

The Development and Importance of Art Residencies in India

Introduction and Overview

Patronage of the arts has been an important feature throughout history, and is most notable during the Medieval and Renaissance periods in Europe. Patronage was also popular in Feudal Japan and other Southeast Asian kingdoms and societies with a prominent aristocratic society. Artistic patronage was used liberally by the ruling classes to endorse political ambition, social positions and prestige.

Patronage of art in India is best exemplified by Raja Ravi Varma, who is still celebrated as one of the country's finest painters from the 19th century. Raja Ravi Varma garnered profound success and praise for his style of blending European Academic realism and the Indian context. With his marriage into a prominent society as well as the numerous awards he won with his art, Ravi Varma attracted the attention of British and Indian rulers alike, marking the start of his royal patronage from all across India, and leading to immense fame and success. He was lavished with spacious mansions and other luxuries by the rulers of Mysore and Baroda and was asked by numerous royal families across India to paint their portraits. Following a highly successful exhibition in Bombay, Varma launched his very own Lithographic Press Business. Raja Ravi Varma gained even more praise for his beautiful oleographs of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Artist-in-residence programs and studio residency opportunities were created and established to invite artists, academicians, curators, writers and all kinds of creative folk for time and space away from their usual environments and practices. These spaces provide a time of reflection, research, presentation and/or production. Residency programs also allow an individual to explore his/her practice within another community; meeting new people, using new materials, experiencing life in a new location. Art residencies emphasize the importance of meaningful and multi-layered cultural exchange and immersion into another culture.

Artist-in-residence programs have a history that stretches back much further than is often thought. With its present popularity, it seems as if it is a fashionable phenomenon that owes its explosive growth solely to the globalization of artists' 'nomadic' behavior. Quite contrary, artist-in-residence programs have been part of the international art world for over a century and continue to experience growth and evolution in the contemporary context. In India, artist residencies have experienced tremendous growth since Independence in 1947. The Sarabhai Foundation in Ahmedabad was among the very first to establish the concept of working spaces for artists in the country in the 1950's. Since then, numerous artist residencies and working spaces have emerged across the country, attracting local and international artists from diverse backgrounds and a wide range of disciplines. Each space offers its own unique range of facilities and programs to foster the growth and development of the artists.

Thus, the residency space serves an important aspect in an artist's life by enabling them to work on a concept or project without the constraints and interruptions of daily life. Artist residencies have enabled the interaction and exchange of ideas between practitioners and professionals all across the globe and provide a stimulating platform for emerging and established artists alike.

Saloni Doshi
Director, Space118



An Overview of Artist Residencies in India

Sarabhai Foundation

Founded in 1959 by Sarladevi Sarabhai and Ambalal Sarabhai, the Sarabhai Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to the enhancement of science, art and culture and to promoting India's heritage in a contemporary manner. The Foundation provides artists with time, work spaces and art material in exchange for half the work they produce during a residency. Some of the prominent artists who worked there were Howard Hoghkin, Francesco Clemente, Alexander Calder and Isamo Noguchi. With the Sarabhais pioneering the concept of artist working spaces in India, other artist residencies began to slowly emerge across the country.

Bhulabhai Desai Memorial Institute

The Bhulabhai Desai Memorial Institute was set up in memory of Bhulabhai Desai, a freedom fighter, prominent lawyer and congressman on his sprawling estate, in the year 1952. It was at the Bhulabhai Memorial Institute at Mumbai where Gaitonde, Ambalal, Tyab Mehta, Hussain and other painters were using the studio at a rent of rupee one per day. The Institute was the hub of painters, musicians, dancers, photographers and artists. Soli Batliwala, the trustee, looked after all of them. Madhuriben, widow of Bhulabhai Desai, was a gracious host and welcomed artists with warmth and affection. Sachin Shankar worked on his ballet in one room and sculptor Pilo Pochkhanwala worked in a shed. Bombay's first art gallery, 'Gallery 59', started by Bal Chhabda in 1959, was on the ground floor of the Institute, but was later destroyed. There was a true flowering of art and theatre at the Institute in the early 1960s.

Cholamandal Artists' Village

Established in 1966, Cholamandal Artists' Village is the largest artists' commune in India, whose artists led by KCS Pannikar are credited for the Madras Movement of Art (1950s-1980s), which brought Modernism to art in South India. Their work is widely recognized as some of the best art produced in post-war India, and is shown regularly in galleries across the country and all over the world. 'Cholamandalam' in Tamil, which literally translates as 'The Realm of the Cholas' is situated at Injambakkam Village, 9 km from Chennai. It is one of the only true 'by the artists, for the artists and of the artists' communes in India today.

The Kasauli Art Centre

Founded in 1976 by artist Vivan Sundaram in Kasauli, a hill station in Himachal Pradesh, North India. The Centre is known to have organised artist camps, international artist residency programmes, seminars and theatre workshops, all designed to explore common ground between artists, filmmakers, critics, architects, playwrights and performers. In 2011, Geeta Kapur and Vivan Sundaram's digitized archive of modern and contemporary Indian art brought a broad range of material collected by Kapur and Sundaram since the 1960s into the public eye. The collection not only documents the artwork and writings produced and published during Kapur and Sundaram's prolific careers, but also documents events in India's art community over the last 50 years.

The Lalit Kala Akademi (Central Fine Arts)

Founded in 1976 under the leadership of late Sankho Chaudhury and has since become the go-to for printmaking in the capital. At a time when Delhi did not have any working facilities for the artists, the Akademi floated the idea of establishing an Artists' Studio at Garhi, where a medieval archaeological site that lay in ruins was reconstructed for the purpose. The studios were built by the Delhi Development Authority on 4.2 acres of land. Later, the Lalit Kala Akademi took over these studios and equipped them with the proper technical infrastructure to be used as community workshops.

Image: Studio 2 at Space118
Courtesy of Space118

The Kanoria Centre for the Arts

Founded in 1984 by Urmila Kanoria, and is situated amongst the foliage within the KL campus, CEPT University, Ahmedabad. Kanoria is a Fine Arts institute offering workshops and studios to various artists and children. KCA is first and foremost a working environment for art students as well as professional artists. It provides young artists a platform in the field of art and helps them unleash their creative ideas. KCA enjoys the advantage of being a self-funded institution.

Space Studios

Baroda has developed an impressive name for itself by fostering many of the most talented modern and contemporary artists India has ever produced. Founder Malika Amin, who is a Non-Executive Non-Independent Director at Alembic Ltd., converted a defunct chemical factory into Space Studios. Its promotion and patronage of the arts dates more than a century from the commissions of Raja Ravi Varma ordered by the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad, to the present day multifarious activities of both public institutions and private patrons.

CHHAAP - Baroda Printmaking Workshop

Established on a cooperative basis in 1999 with a mission to create and promote wider appreciation of original prints and print making techniques. CHHAAP is a non-profit making organization promoted by three Baroda based printmakers and artists - Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Vijay Bagodi and Kavita Shah. 'CHHAAP' is a colloquial Indian word for 'print making' or 'printing'.

Site Art

The brainchild of Manish and Piyush Maheshwari, two brothers with a vision for a space that invites art and ideas to be showcased in Baroda, who understood the need for a residential studio facility so that they could engage in their creative pursuits without any constraints. Site Art has been catering to artistic and architectural fabrication needs since 1999. Baroda-based businessman Rakesh Agrawal, a chemical engineer by profession, has been passionately collecting art for the last 20 years. Over the years, he has built up a collection of roughly 2,500 works. Agrawal, who has formed the Uttarayan Art Foundation (UAF), has already developed 12 acres of a 50-acre plot of land on the riverfront for UAF. Artists are invited to practice various forms of art in the present complex. Over the last few years, over 150 artists, including 35 international artists, have worked there. The museum, currently under construction, which will occupy around 60,000 sq ft, will be a standalone structure and will be a closed building.

Sandarbh

A non-profit art initiative founded by Chintan Upadhyaya in Partapur, a town in the Vagad district of Western Rajasthan in India. Since 2003 Sandarbh has organized residency programmes, site-specific art projects and community-based interactions. It encourages the participation of local communities during these programmes thus involving them in the current art practices and helping them understand and accept ideas from around the world. In its own way, Sandarbh has taken contemporary art practices to places where it would otherwise not have ventured.

Khoj

From its modest beginnings in 1997 as an annual workshop, Khoj has built an international reputation for outstanding alternative arts incubation. It was founded by Ajay Desai, Anita Dube, Bharti Kher, Subodh Gupta, Prithpal Singh Ladi, Manisha Parekh and Pooja Sood, collectively known as the 'working group'. Director Pooja Sood is committed to developing the infrastructure for the arts in India and promoting an ongoing dialogue in South Asia.

Kashi Art Gallery

An old Dutch house converted by Anoop Scaria and Dorrie Younger, opened in 1977 with an exhibition by Mr. C V Ramesh. Over the last 12 years Kashi Art Gallery and Café became the hub of Kochi's contemporary art scene and the most popular hangout in the area for young locals and tourists. Kashi Art Café is located on Burgher Street, Fort Kochi and has been loaned to Kochi-Muziris Biennale by Edgar Pinto.

Bengaluru Artist Residency One (BAR1)

A non-profit exchange programme by artists for artists to foster the local, Indian and international mutual exchange of ideas and experiences through guest residencies in Bangalore. Founded in 2001 by an artist collective as a registered Public Charitable Trust, it was probably the first of its kind in India.

Periferry

Collaborating since 2004 as the Desire Machine Collective, Sonal Jain and Mriganka Madhukaillya work through film, video, photography, and multimedia installations. Initiated by them in 2007, the project Periferry creates a nomadic space for hybrid art practices. Through their practice Jain and Madhukaillya confront the many forms of fascism that lead to violence and injustice, both regionally in Guwahati, Assam and around the world.

CONA

An artist-run initiative situated in a residential area in North Mumbai, which is also an area densely populated with practitioners of art. Founded in 2012 by Shreyas Karle and Hemali Bhutia, CONA-meaning corner, edge, periphery, or, as a verb, a place to gather- is located on the edge, not only of Mumbai but also of the visual arts. Previously working at Sandarbh in 2007 and becoming director in 2011, Shreyas stepped down from his designation and started CONA in 2012. For him and wife Hemali, the experience of teaching at an art school became a catalyst to looking at CONA as an alternative pedagogical practice.

Jaaga

Providing space for tech entrepreneurs, artists and social service organizations to meet and share their work with their peers and the public. Co-founded in 2009 by Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath graduate Archana Prasad and tech evangelist Freeman Murray, Jaaga's growth so far has been organic, almost need-based, rather than planned. Rather like the revolutionary, "Lego-like" pallet-rack architecture that has variously defined its successive spaces (and currently shelters the Kanakapura outpost), Jaaga, which began as an artists' collective, has now evolved into three verticals: Study, Startup and DNA. They focus, respectively, on helping software developers, incubating new tech companies, and creating an interdisciplinary platform that segues into art, design, research and community-building and, in the process, embraces the best of cutting-edge Bangalore.

1, Shanthi Road

It's unusual to find an art gallery that isn't just that, and named after its own address. 1, Shanthi Road was once a building that was not initially an art space; but was built up into a multi-use space to include an art gallery, living spaces for the artists to work in, and domestic spaces as well. This unusual journey was undertaken by artist and auteur Suresh Jayaram in 2003. Suresh's ideology stemmed from the need to have a living space that would also work as an open house in every sense of the word.

Space118

Established: 2010
Location: Bombay, India
Website: www.space118.com

Founded in 2010, Space118 provides studios and residencies on a short-term basis to artists as part of its commitment to supporting emerging art practitioners from all parts of the country and the world. Space118 aims to foster the exchange of ideas and experiences amongst artists who work across different fields of art. Located in the heart of industrial Bombay, in a warehousing compound, a 15-minute drive from Kala Ghoda and the art district in Colaba, artists have the freedom to experience the rich art and cultural scene on a daily basis.

Interview with Saloni Doshi, Director

— What is the role of art patrons in supporting art spaces and residency programs?

The artist community has a unique ecology, which is highly international, multi-disciplinary, experimental and critically engaged. Artists are supported with a studio, a stipend, a wide range of artistic and technical advisors, including artists, curators and thinkers, and have access to well-equipped workshops, libraries and discursive engagement. There is a deep commitment to diversity, to working with a global perspective and with sensitivity to the local environment.

As an artist, you are ready to make the most of these resources. You are open to challenging yourself, to working alongside positions that are vastly different from one another, and to engaging with wider social and discursive programmes. Artist spaces are also interested in practices that maximise the social and transformative power of art.

— How do you make these initiatives sustainable (i.e., funding models)?

Hosting an artist residency comes with both organisational and financial challenges. What resources will your organisation commit to hosting a resident artist? Beyond confirming that you have the necessary time, physical and staffing resources, there are a number of financial considerations that must be taken into account. In terms of financial support, one must consider whether the residency opportunity you offer will include an artist stipend. If so, how much will you offer and to what purpose? Will a stipend help attract higher profile artists? Is it intended to make the residency more affordable for a targeted group? Which costs is it meant to support? Will it be paid as a lump sum or regular payment? You may also like to consider whether the residency will support artists' travel. If so, for how much? Will the amount vary between Indian artists and international artists?

In terms of non-financial support, host organisations can add value to an artist residency in a number of ways. Consider the networks that you can draw upon to increase the attractiveness and value of a residency opportunity for artists. Will you assist resident artists to make connections with local peers, senior artists, curators, gallerists and provide introductions to arts events and organisations? Is there an opportunity to assist resident artists to access

tutoring work within local teaching institutions or artist communities? Can one provide artists with opportunities to sell their work or conduct art related- skill based workshops during the residency?

Additional funding. While there are many benefits in hosting artist residencies, your organisation will also bear some of the costs involved. Other associated costs may be the responsibility of the artist. Applicant artists may be able to apply to their local council or arts funding body from their country to support them to take up residency opportunities. Additional funds to support an artist residency may be available through business or philanthropic sources, but keep in mind that there is significant work involved in identifying, winning and managing sponsorships. Government funding may also be an option for support but one must look at the purpose behind your proposed residency and how it might fit with the stated objectives of potential funding bodies.

— What are the residency models for the future?

'Art for art's sake' is insufficient, and today the arts advocacy landscape is littered with economic impact studies and graphs on the so-called creative economy. But these do not tell the whole story, and are inadequate for small organizations, particularly those that seek to fill a niche or support an underserved community. Artists' residencies need better data to support their cause, to be sure, but statistics and anecdotes must go hand-in-hand, and we can't have enough of either to make a compelling case for supporting artists in their creative work. Rather than contort the field into a series of numbers to show the impact of artists' residencies on society, we should envision a field that is better able to articulate its value (qualitatively and quantitatively), an arts sector that is willing to challenge the notion that we can and should measure everything in numerical and financial terms, and a society that is willing to invest in the intangibility of process by sharing our trust that providing artists with an environment in which creativity thrives will generate new work and ideas that will rock our world.

— What's next?

With as many different types of artists and ways of working, there is no single approach to artists' residencies. Over the last century, the field has adapted to meet the changing needs of artists, with each program finding its own balance of solidarity and solitude, public and private. For some artists, a month in a secluded cabin in the woods is exactly what's needed to push his or her work forward, while other artists thrive on shorter bursts of intense collaboration and exchange, or a year's immersion in a new community. Artists' residencies are addressing other changes as well: meeting the needs of interdisciplinary artists that challenge the selection process, facilities, and resources of the organization; adapting to new technologies; remaining accessible to artists who may be under-the-radar as the art world becomes increasingly professionalized and networked.

— What research are you currently working on?

My research over the past 8 years will soon be culminating into a book on mapping residencies in India post-Independence, starting from the Sarabhais to today. This book will be a visual and factual treat to those interested in learning about the existence of such artist spaces in India's past, present and future. As this is a first of its kind in the country, the book will elaborate on the functioning, modes of working, the *raison d'être* of their existence and the illustrious happenings of these community spaces all over India. It aims to archive the past and document the present for the future generations to learn about it.