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# Artist residencies help young art practitioners adapt to the new normal

From novel stay-at-home residencies to new programming around changing intimacies and social media trends, the time of covid-19, residencies are giving young artists a space to respond to the pandemic



Chandrashekar Koteswar's work on display at 'All is Not Lost 20.20.20'. Courtesy: Sakshi Gallery and Space 118

By **Avantika Bhuyan**

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The words 'new normal' have become an inextricable part of our vocabularies since the covid-19 outbreak. Across the world, individuals and groups have adapted to these unprecedented times in their own unique ways. What does this period mean for artists—is a question that residency programmes across the

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country are seeking answers to. Through extensive conversations, various residencies are trying to understand the challenges that the pandemic has posed to young artists, and are creating exhibitions and programming to give them a platform to express their feelings about this time. For instance, Space 118, an arts residency programme based out of Mazgaon, Mumbai, together with Sakshi Gallery has put together an exhibition, *All is Not Lost 20.20.20*, featuring 20 young artists and their response to the crisis.

“The work is intended to be a meditation on the uncertainty of the times we live in, and our very human, but futile attempts to hold on to experiences and memories,” writes Saloni Doshi, founder, Space 118, in her curatorial note. The physical show, on view till 28 November and featuring 150 works by Arjun Sara, Chandrashekar Koteswar, Chinmoyi Patel, Madhu Das, Purvai Rai, and more, is being held while following the physical distancing norms. 25 percent of the proceeds will go towards Space 118’s Fine Art Grant 2021.



P.S. Jalaja's 'Untitled', watercolour on paper. Photo: courtesy Sakshi Gallery and Space 118

Meanwhile, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia in New Delhi has decided to continue residencies in another format. It’s now looking at a ‘home-not-alone’ residency. According to Akshay Pathak, head, Pro Helvetia New Delhi, instead of having artists travel to and from Switzerland as part of the normal format, artists can now continue their artistic work from their respective countries. So, you have artists like Fazal Rizvi, Layla Gonaduwa and Dharmendra Prasad continuing their residencies from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India respectively.

“Another programme that Pro Helvetia New Delhi launched was the *Now On* open call, which invited artists to come up with new formats and ideas to continue or imagine futures of arts practice and collaboration despite the restrictions that the pandemic posed on mobility and artistic exchange,” he says. The knowledge and models created from these projects are going to be available as formats for anyone looking for similar solutions. “The grant is for a proposed budget by each applicant for four months ending this year. Following this, we hope that the outcomes and learnings will lead to collaborations and the adoption of these models wherever it makes sense,” says Pathak.



Tejas Pande’s project 'WhatsApp-Free University'. Photo: courtesy the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, New Delhi

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TIFA Working Studios, another multi-disciplinary platform for creativity and culture, too has put out an open call, titled Future of Intimacies. “With covid-19 home bounding numerous lives across the world, the need for digital connectivity has never been more apparent,” reads the studio’s Instagram post. The programme seeks to offer artists a space to pause, reconnect and rediscover the meaning of intimacy in this changing world.

The process of creating works at both *All is Not Lost* and *Now On* has helped artists absorb and assimilate the effect of the pandemic in their lives. “The initial three months were spent in trying to understand where to get the vegetables from, how to get the domestic chores out of the way,” says Doshi. “In Mumbai, buildings were locked out for weeks in case of cases of covid in the area. So, they couldn’t visit studios.”

There were other practical problems as well—for instance, several artists who worked with fabricators, couldn’t get their work going as the latter had left for their villages. “So, the lockdown was spent adjusting, accepting and thinking. It is this process that is reflected in our show,” says Doshi. “We have already sold out 90 percent of the show and nearly half of the artists have got representation from galleries. Which is why we have titled the show, all is not lost. Artists should not despair.”

For *Now On*, artists across south Asia were invited to submit applications with new formats and ideas. The open call received over 130 applications, out of which eight were chosen. One is Delhi-based photographer and curator, Anshika Varma, whose *Guftgu Talk Series* are a set of conversations around images and photo books with experts and non-experts. Through this, very different notions of a “photo book” are explored.

Then there is Bengaluru-based Tejas Pande’s project, *WhatsApp-Free University*, follows the flow of information in WhatsApp conversations and studies how elements of bias, misinformation, and more, may play a role in these. Pande’s video works started at the time of the lockdown and helped him make sense of the moment. A research communication analyst, the 33-year-old grew up in Maharashtra but didn’t have as much a strong social media connection with Marathi content as his mother did. He soon became a *de facto* fact checker for his mother and other family members for content being shared on social media. “There is not much understanding of non-English social media among people. Volunteering as a fact checker also allows me to understand how people communicate. The title *WhatsApp-Free University* is a play on WhatsApp University, a pejorative phrase implying lack of trustworthy information, that is used liberally these days,” he says. Pande has flipped it on its head to look at the user at the centre of things and the culture that emerges from regional social

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media usage. He puts the video out through a group of chosen volunteers, based in tier 2-3 cities, hailing from a mix of professions. They, together with Pande, observed reactions to the video, the biases in play, and more. The findings will seep into the subsequent videos that he makes.

Some of the other projects in *Now On* include *Idée Fixe: Anticipating Crafts Futures* by Jaipur-based Dhruv Saxena and Praveen Sinha, which imagines various trajectories that the crafts industries futures might take. Maybe newer tools and techniques could replace current ones. Then there is the *Sister Radio* by Aquí Thami, which celebrates a community of sisterhood through the medium of podcasts. *Virtual Segments* by Anubhav Syal - Round them Oranges provides a 3D virtual gallery space where artists can showcase their work. "*Curatorial Collaboration as Method* by Ke ba kahara Collective brings people from different artistic practices together to collaborate around one physical monument. We're very excited about all these eight projects and look forward to showcasing them around the new year," says Pathak.

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