

ART JOURNAL



MAKING SPACE(S)

Artist and art writer **URVI CHHEDA** remarks the decade long story of **SPACE 118** as an effort to avail a studio space for the artists in then and now high-rising Mumbai though temporary, but engaging enough ecology built within the residency premise

Making Space; Celebrating 10 years of Space 118 signed a dual celebration—reopening of Sakshi Gallery's whopping area, inclusive of a floor and a decade commemoration of Space 118 residency, located at Mazgaon, South Mumbai. Although the boggled mind did rest immediately to peacefully view the queue of artworks, the gallery exhibited 33 artists that had been residents to Space 118 over the last decade. Teeming with art, apolitical as well political, abstract as well as empirical, moving as well still, *Making Space* did need a multiple viewing. The frequent visits finally permitted a thorough grasp of a few unconventional practices.

I could distinctly comprehend traditional divisions in the exhibited artworks. These divisions may not address about artists and their methodology of expressions but may be represented as a subconscious farrago of bio-diversity. To start with, either way, the exhibition showcased minimal as well geometric abstracts by Parul Gupta, Ankush Safaya, and Arvind Sundar while representing an array of cityscapes in the meticulous expressions of Pratap Morey, Mustafa Khanbhai, and Dheer Kaku.

The style moulds towards an organic narrative in this celestial gallery. We'd see organic forms presented by

Installation view



Richi Bhatia, Sarasija Subramaniam, Aiushi Beniwal, Chinmoyi Patel, and Juan Requena. Now, these forms had sub-narratives like the fortnightly waxing and waning of the moon as seen in the sky. The bio-diversity of the floating images is subjected to these daily alterations. The robust stories by Schoen Mendes, Gauri Gill, Tarini Sethi, Viraj Mithani explicitly addressed the concerns; the same concerns embarked on hazy and trippy vistas in the works of Neha Choksi, Minakshi Nihalini, Baptist Coelho, Remen Chopra, Parag Tandel and Tejal Shah. The concreteness of concerning forms was replaced by the tokenistic ready-mades and available objects in Tanya Goel, Shivanjini Lal and Raymonde April's re-creations.

At the same time, Farah Mulla's study of chairs and abruptly shifting the same to altogether an indifferent identity is riveting. While the possibility of the Stellarium is unimaginable to the human mind, the glimpses had been restored in the attempts of Mithun Gopi, Nandita Kumar and stunning abstracts by Radhika Wader. These sub-narratives undulated either on waxing slope or a waning one—the balance was maintained by the vast and ethereal aura of the gallery.

While the stars are uncountable, the constellations bring to us undeciphered stories. These abstract stories follow the rivers of thoughts in an individual and not in the mass. Abstract artworks of Sharmistha Ray, Al-Qawi



Baptist Coelho, Ribbons I, 6 bars of Siachen soldier's clothing, sponge and wood, 2015



Saloni Doshi, Founder, Space 118 and Geeta Mehra, Director, Sakshi Gallery

Nanawati and Maripelly Praveen served as floating debris of space whose origin is unclear but they are extant and significant.

Apart from the absorbed paraphernalia of art in this expansive and roomy gallery, the first thing that caught our eyes on the first floor was the way and considerably large installation, *Avatran – Sabarmati*, hanged on the ceiling. Created by Mrugen Rathod utilizing rice paper, it parallelly extended with ceiling measuring 27 feet.

The opening of the gallery and the exhibition had witnessed many art enigmas of the city. Multiple events did garnish this month-long celebratory gesture of making and sustaining through Art by budding artists. Saloni Doshi, the curator of the show, had presented an amiable walkthrough of the show, interacting with the participating artists.

Notable to mention, the opening day recognised an interesting performance by Richi Bhatia, titled *Hamlet without the Prince*. While it was a comparative, quirky and sarcastic account, Mansi Bhatt levelled up the intensity by a political performance called *Bastard's Callings To Her Last Inheritance: Conservative Landscapes*. Mansi was clad in uniform-kind attire with a mask, glove, surrounded by heaps of earth, tiny effigies of houses and other props. The effort to distinctively render the invisible object-work in the performance did mark her efficacy in the genre. Mansi



Mrugen Rathod, *Avatran – Sabarmati*, Stainless steel, fabric, rice paper, 324" x 216" x 288", carpet area: 324" x 60", 2019



Saloni Doshi's walkthrough at Sakshi the gallery

has been performing for the past many years and tends to keep the political heat at the surface which I think it to be quite commendable.

During the inception of Space 118 in 2018, Saloni Doshi, Founder, had organically thought of it as a studio space for the artists in then and now high-rising Mumbai. Realising the trickiness to sustain in the upscale city she later made accommodation arrangements for the visiting artists, too. It was remarkably a noble endeavour. Zealously anticipating Saloni proudly compares Space 118 with erstwhile Bhulabhai Desai Studio where, in the 1950s, modern artists and performers had exchanged contemporary energies. In the coming decade, she will endearingly submit herself to Space 118 Fine Art grant and Contemporary Artists and Writers residency programs.

Intent to pompously shape the residency culture in India, Saloni is presently working towards a tome titled, *Mapping Residencies in India, Post-Independence starting from the Sarabhai's until today*. Through the book, she aims to present realistic narratives that battle to sustain the mechanism of art residencies and re-imbue awareness about varied similar spaces, erstwhile and extant, that allowed artists to experiment, implore and elaborate.

Curating 33 artists is a task but it limits the aesthetics until you provide a valid and intellectually distinguished characteristic to it. Making Space advertised rather than a solicited displaying the accessible artists who made either static or progressive attempts.



Mansi Bhatt, *Bastard's Callings To Her Last Inheritance: Conservative Landscapes*