

Art on the house

OPEN SPACES ▶ Artist residency programmes at specialised centres are becoming an established part of India's artistic world, says **Chitra Anand Papnai**



It was a moment of inspiration for German artist Christian Engelmann. One day in Bangalore he saw a slow-paced bullock cart passing by a hi-tech gadget shop. Immediately, he knew that he had to turn out a piece that reflected the two extremes.

The result has been a remote-controlled bullock cart installation made at No.1 Shanthiroad, an art studio-cum-residency-cum-gallery in Bangalore where Engelmann has been living for almost three months.



Also in residence here is Australian Janet Meany, who is researching some of India's performing arts. Both are exploring the city, meeting local artists and other artisans.

Engelmann and Meany are just two of the many Indian and foreign artists benefitting from well-organised residency programmes at specialised centres across India. So you have artistic havens like No.1 Shanthiroad and Space 118, and other art studios like Jaaga (Bangalore), Studio Verve (Ahmedabad), Zorba the Buddha (in Delhi, previously called Global Arts Village) and Kalanirvana (Secunderabad), offering residency programmes to artists for different lengths of time.



These are emerging with the aim of providing young and established artists a space where they can work with ease and let their creative juices flow. "An artist needs his space to create his best works," says Saloni Doshi, who started Mumbai-based Space 118 to support emerging art practitioners from India and abroad.

The centres aim to pull in artists at all levels. The younger ones apply to be part of the residency programmes while the more established stars are usually invited by the galleries to participate in their programmes. "They might even apply if a project really interests them," says Raghu Tenkayala, programme coordinator at No. 1 Shanthiroad. The young artists also get an opportunity to learn and work with the established

(From top) An Albanian artist paints an India-inspired piece at Kalanirvana; Zorba the Buddha offers artists serene surroundings to work in; Artist Deviba Wala at work in Studio Verve ones.

The residency programmes offer various new experiences for the artists. At one level, they see new sights in India — which, hopefully, stimulates them to new heights of creativity. At another level, they are expected to deliver lectures to students and members of the public and interact with local artists. In return, the residencies provide basic facilities like food, lodging, the space to work and also links with the local community.

“Such spaces enable artists to work, exhibit and interact with people, experience a different culture and to know different places,” says Ashis Pahi of Kalanirvana. Once the residency is over, most studios put the artist’s works on show. “At the end of the programmes, the artists leave the studios enriched and better-networked, which is useful for them to grow personally and professionally,” says Tenkayala.

ALL ABOUT STUDIOS

In cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Baroda, there are art studios — some in greener and quieter corners, and others in bustling areas. “This allows artists to get a better feel of city life,” says Pahi.

On Bangalore’s Double Road, an interesting free-standing structure constructed with huge steel racks, plywood and recycled billboards is where artists work. Named Jaaga, the community space with residency programmes was founded by Freeman Murray (an entrepreneur-investor) and artist Archana Prasad in 2009. It’s a hub of workshops, exhibitions and events including performing arts events, book readings or even talks.

No. 1 Shanthiroad, the brainchild of Suresh Jayaram, a visual artist and art historian from Bangalore, is another well-known art residency centre. Jayaram converted his family house into a mix of art studio, gallery, office space and rooms for artists to stay. The gallery doubles up as Jayaram’s home. “The courtyards and other spaces offer an open-ended maze with ample possibilities for creative collaborations,” says Tenkayala.

Doshi, a keen art collector who became an art studio owner after quitting her job as a brand and product manager, keeps her studio open to artists all year. She converted her father’s secluded warehouse space in South Mumbai to start it. “The idea was to give to the artist’s community something that was much required — a peaceful space,” says Doshi.

In Delhi, you’ll find Zorba the Buddha, another serene, three-acre eco-lifestyle village where artists or non-artists can enjoy workshops in art, music and spirituality. It also offers the venue to people for their own workshops and events. “We offer world class programmes with international facilitators in a beautiful setting away from the noise of



(From top) Jaaga hosts different kinds of creative events like book readings and performing arts events; Zorba the Buddha organises art workshops for children and art enthusiasts

programmes with international facilitators in a beautiful setting away from the noise of Delhi," says Ashwin Bharati, founder and director.



For Ahmedabad-based artists, Arpit Bioria and Deviba Wala, Studio Verve started as a place to work during weekends and holidays when they were art students in 2001. The studio has since grown into a fully functional art studio.

Started by artist Pahi, Kalanirvana, on the other hand, offers the option of staying in different cities like Secunderabad, Bhubaneswar and also Auckland in New Zealand and Easton in the US. "We have different venues to select from at different times of the year so that the artist gets the option to experience different cities in India and abroad," he says.



Pahi started Kalanirvana venues in various parts of the world with like-minded artists and enthusiasts to promote art and encourage intercultural exchange. "All the properties are owned by different people but they follow all of Kalanirvana's principles and functions," says the artist.

MOTTO MATTERS

These studios and residency programmes let talented artists with limited resources to grow. "The idea is to nurture the interdisciplinary impetus for collaboration and collective exchange," says Doshi.

(From top) Mumbai-based Space 118 provides artists free studio space for upto three months; (below) A Norwegian artist paints the gallery walls of No. 1 Shanthiroad with texts compiled from notes of her residency in Beijing

According to Wala of Studio Verve, the motto of such studios is to foster an exchange of ideas among artists working in different fields of art practice. "It changes the way art studios are viewed," says Wala.

Sometimes, these studios invite designers, filmmakers, architects, photographers, art entrepreneurs and other professionals to present and share their work. It's an open house where artists, connoisseurs and people interested in art come to interact with the artists. "The purpose is not only to advance the arts, but to make it accessible to people," says Wala.

Tenkayala says that it's the challenges of a residency, which encourages artists to work in new circumstances.

WORKING IT OUT

Most galleries have a planned structure of working and offer a gamut of experiences. Some artists are even opening their houses and studios to international guests and

universities, creating exchange programmes to share resources and expand networks. Some studios have programmes for children and non-artists who can attend workshops with the artists.

To invite participants, the galleries advertise residency programmes on their websites. "Sometimes according to their specialisation, artists are invited by the gallery to come and work with other artists," says Murray. Jaaga even offers mentorship to small tech start-ups, fellowships and expert collaborator opportunities to those interested in an amalgamation of art and technology.

While most artists who come for these programmes are funded by art institutions, others may bear their own expenses. The studios survive on rentals they get from the programmes or private grants.

"At times, for some art projects we get funding from the institute commencing it," says Tenkayala. These art studios then invite artists from the field relevant to the project to work in the studio.

"We allow the artists to stay with us for their own research at a subsidised rate," says Bharati. Some programmes cover all costs, others offer stipends and some don't cover any costs at all.

At Kalanirvana, the cost of residency is Rs 1,700 to Rs 1,953 per day, per person. For international venues the cost is Rs 2,440 to Rs 4,880 per day depending on the centre. At Zorba the Buddha, the cost varies between Rs 1,200 for a half-day workshop and Rs 6,000 for a two-and-a-half day workshop. While all presentations, art appreciation lectures and talks are free in Studio Verve, the cost of courses like metal casting, terracotta, ceramics, *papier-mâché*, drawing and painting ranges from Rs 3,000 to Rs 10,000.

At Space 118, the artists can use the studio for free but need to find accommodation. Also, the artist must donate one of his works to the studio before leaving. At No.1 Shanthiroad the cost of the residency can be as low as Rs 1,000 per day to Rs 30,000 per month to Rs 40,000 per month on twin-sharing basis for a double room.

At Jaaga, anyone can use the space at no charge, assuming their event is open to all and has social, environmental, technological or artistic value.

IN RESIDENCE

During the residencies, artists not only find time to read, reflect and create new works but they also get full support in terms of finding materials and assistance they may require for work. "The artists in our studios have the opportunity to work with us on various projects that impact local and global communities and transform society," says Wala.

Pahi personally takes the artists on a city tour, introducing them to the culture, food, people and lifestyles. "It's important that the artists know their surroundings, which should reflect in their work and inspire them to think differently," says Pahi.

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The time spent in a residency is crucial for artists because during most of the programmes, they get to interact with art dealers, buyers, gallery owners, art critics and the media. "Sometimes they sell their works directly to buyers from the same or different countries," says Pahi.

Photographs courtesy: Isha Shah, Ashis Pahi and Archana Prasad