

Peers 09 by Natasha Ginwala

I'm very excited to be engaging with five young artists who work in varied formats and modes of expression. We come from diverse social and geopolitical realities, yet there appear to be common concerns emanating from a connective cultural ethos and the rapidly changing built environments that surround us. There are overlaps as particular issues like mass violence, cultural identity; gender and sexuality become resonant themes. Though each artist here has a unique way of conceiving and charting leitmotifs - they seem to combine an approach that blends social investigation with personal narratives and experiential tonality.

Coming from art schools across the country, at this juncture we gather to escape academic rigour, and work in a syncretic manner. PEERS is an opportunity that encourages us to be unafraid to question some of the things we have been taught to take for granted, where we can think outside quotes and where expression is not guided by entrenched conventions and commercial currents.

Though I have been labeled critic, I perceive my role here as a collaborator working towards amalgamating disparate creative journeys. This residency provides me a chance to closely observe thought trajectories and ideation, serving as a laboratory to probe and participate in creative processes. I see myself deriving great value and insight from working closely with emerging artists as we maneuver through discussions, intentions and obstacles as a collective.

In a discursive space such as this – the visible culmination maybe an essay, a blog and audiovisual documentation but it is the intangibles – questions and dilemmas raised during this time that become exploratory possibilities and avenues for fresh debates. The past ten days here and my interactions with the resident artists have already got me thinking of a whole range of issues. I'm significantly interested in looking into the manner in which traditional knowledge is merged with contemporary art practices, and in how community related processes can be ethically and effectively displayed in an exhibition space. Further, with emerging artistic trends that blend research methodologies and technology related approaches, I believe it is time to create new habitats for art-works. While institutional inertia continues – much else can be done to capture the present creative moment. The six of us, hope to start here...

Artist's Statements

RABINDRA PATRA

I always experiment with materials as well ideas. The central theme of my work is the notion of power. My constant involvement with people and their lives led to an urgent need to interrogate various existing power structures and expose the systems and the actual practice of justice in multifarious socio-political negotiations. With this I hope to explore the idea of the self that is located in the world from my vantage point, thus also deriving from the intimate resources of energy in human lives. These concerns have shaped my practice and intensified both my social commitment as well as my inner journey.

During the Peers Residency at KHOJ, my studio has been a relentlessly changing environment. I have used the architecture of the chosen space as a part of the work. I used the door, put colour on the walls and try to treat the space as a personal theatrical experience, where characters are introduced, blend and altered. I have been consciously working toward distorting the dimensions of the room and trying to generate new meanings.

My KHOJ project has been a personal investigation of the power contained in the urban experience; about the journey of cities. I have lived cities for the last few year, so cities are not new for me. As I moved from one city to another, and as I moved within the city, I was forced to feel its power at a psychological level (karm karte jao fal ki apeksha mat karo).

I take photographs and collect objects where ever I travel and each object is given distinct life as the artist purposefully blurs ontological boundaries between works of art and commodities. In addition, there is a strong element of fantasy instilled in the visualization of form. The material itself formulates my visual vocabulary; for instance the use of material such as electronic waste/parts communicates the notion of power in an abstract way. The manner in which power plays out in journeys through the layers of cities, the lanes and bylanes, the intense desire of individuals searching and finding the intended and unintended- these are stories that I try to narrate visually.

Working at KHOJ as a Peers resident with other artists was a very interesting and exciting experience for me as a person. I learned a lot of things as an emerging artist, professionally and practically. It was first big project which was shown to the public and the interaction with a larger audience that Khoj provided was valuable. After finishing my residency I feel like departing from one level to another level of my journey as an artist and I am thankful to all members of Khoj. It was a nice experience working at KHOJ and with KHOJ members.

KHOJ provide ample space and freedom for individual research; experimentation and practice for an artist like me, with the feeling of freedom it provided during residency instilled in me the strength to do something new and relevant at the same time.

BHAVIN MISTRY

Objectives: an in depth artist's statement about the practice undertaken during the residency.

I have spent almost all my artistic years working in Baroda so the news of a Residency with KHOJ was a great thing and I was quite excited and looking forth to communicate with the co artists and make maximum use of their respective backgrounds. We were artists from textile designing, sculpture, new media as well as a cartoonist. The challenge to be able to conceive an idea in a new environment and execute it was sort of scary at first but I knew that I had to show my best here. I quickly started sorting out the possibilities.

Once at KHOJ our time table was scheduled. On the very first day we were told of our regular visits to artist studios along with 'Delhi Darshan', so we had to manage our working hours accordingly.

First was the Khirkee Walk with Andy. Andy is a social worker living and working in Delhi. She showed us the surroundings with the tinge of her social perspective which was helpful in understanding the local politics; for eg. The local mosque is an acclaimed heritage site and according to the rules any construction in and around it is prohibited. However none of this has been practiced by the locals and the authorities have turned a blind eye to the extent that one finds a massive mall just across the road.

After this experience a lot of ideas poured in. however, every one of us was looking for that perfect stimulator. Another hurdle was of getting the resources, without the knowledge of which one cannot work freely; our next planned trip was The Old Delhi Walk. Himanshu Verma volunteered to be our guide. Thanks to him to make the experience whole. He took us to Chandni Chowk, Chaudi Bazaar, Khadi Baouli etc. and with that the question of knowing where to get what was over. Now the mind had really started rolling.

As it was the first time I was visiting Delhi, the heat took a toll on me, what I saw was a lot air coolers working as heat relievers. These machineries formed a part of every architecture. No sooner I reached my studio, I started working on the same idea, some paper works which then were supposed to be transformed into functional installations. But the idea was very raw; I had to filter it before reaching to any conclusion.

My encounter with the second idea happened when I saw this really small room on the roof of our guest house, these rooms were pretty small 6ft h x 5ft l x 3ft w. When I inquired about those rooms I found that they are given on rent and many families have already lived there.

I wondered how can one whole family live in a space where one can't even stand and sit properly. From there my whole concern of what I wanted to do started changing. While moving around one can find many migrants managing their livelihood on the streets. For example the food stalls will carry a gas burner, dishes and other ingredients required and can serve end number of people. The garage does not have any wall but just a box of tools on the street and they are ready for work, all this to me is "jugaad". Jugaad is what? It is like changing the primary

use of any object to suite one's particular requirement. Since this practice has been a part of my daily life on a personal level, so nothing better than extending into a work. So I started walking around Delhi and Khirkee looking for such jugaadu elements, clicking images and forming it into a composition. As I said that the particular practice can be observed everywhere, but for me its more striking when I come to a metro city like Delhi.

With the photography on one side I also planned a costume which I had now started working on, and after trying a lot of tailors who would either refuse to do or would ask for too much money, I zeroed in on the one who works just opposite to the KHOJ Studios. This robe has a number of compartments which can carry all my things which I normally use in the whole day, along with it I had also planned to meet the locals there to understand their daily requirements and designing more costumes. However this idea could not be made into a finished work and since the working days were less and I had to make a decision to move away from it as for me to execute any idea it has to reach a level of maturity which it lacked at that moment.

However the final work was totally different. It was not any display of these costumes and jugaadu photographs or any functional installation which I mentioned as my first idea but it is a sound and video installation using the small room on the roof of the guest house.

The video consists of the tripod shot footages of myself performing in it. This video runs around 30 layers in time duration of 3 minutes. The video is a nearby sarcasm on the process of any activity undertaken for e.g. If a painter is painting a canvas his performance will go like this... He will get a canvas, a stretcher, stretch the canvas on it, will then apply the coats over it, prepare it thoroughly before starting to paint.

The footages also run in a similar manner. All the necessary brooming and washing is done, a bulb is fitted with loose hanging wires acquired from here n there, then there are a few clippings where am rendering my own body with charcoal and this whole process completes a day. The video is titled as Line Space Composition Etc... since in our academic learning these are the first things which are taught also because I have tried to create a space and worked with over all composition through the editing of footages. The video is projected on the floor within a white wooden frame. The four walls of the room consist of line drawings which create a second space. The drawings are minimal representation of the surroundings. The threads which are connected with frame on the floor with the drawings on the wall result in creating an atmosphere of claustrophobia. The projected video is now overlapped with the minimal line like shadow of these threads passing over it conjoining the various spaces.

I had managed to have friendly relations with the members of host institution as I mostly stayed in my studios during the second half of the residency. Its difficult to justify their help and what role they played during our stay at KHOJ. But I can say without them this residency wouldn't have been be successful for me.

Manohar and Ramesh helped me always to find out the nearby resources and many a times getting the work done for me. Whenever I needed technical guidance in editing my video, Saran was always available. And of course Latika who made me think over and over again on an idea helping me to shed away the excess and keeping the relevant.

KHOJ has nearly helped us in developing in all the professional aspects. The idea of presenting one's work to an audience creates a dialogue which also helps in understanding the significance of his practice through others and of course the change of location adds to the differing sensibilities towards interpreting the works, this aspect gets clearer when khoj managed for us to visit studio of contemporary artist like Manisha parek and Jagannath Panda. Apart from all the other shared knowledge from them it was inspiring how they presented their works to us. Moreover, when it comes to the work done in residency, I have broken many notions about my own capabilities by attempting a video art.

Presently I am back to my base in baroda, all geared up to take further the experiences of the residency and realizations of my own capacities. This was a much needed break in my practice. I shall keep you updated about my future engagements and leads.

Thanks for the wonderful experience to all of you.

MALIK SAJAD

The one month long residency In KHOJ Studio was an incredible experience for me to grow as an emerging artist. During the residency I was able to concentrate on the new forms of visual communication. Interaction with the other young artists from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds provided an advantage of experimenting with fresh ideas and techniques to communicate with the wider audience through my art. Being from Kashmir where curfews, censorship and casualities dominate the daily life, Delhi provided me an opportunity to share my experiences in the form of art with the people from different parts of India that are unknown to them. I used the creative platform at KHOJ to focus on a short cel animation movie about Kashmir. It was because of the cross-cultural interaction with other artists in the guesthouse and Khoj Studio that I was able to shape the narration and execution of the movie to communicate to the wider audience.

The animation movie titled "Hopscotch" is about the Line of control (LoC) that divides Valley of Kashmir into two parts. In Kashmir thousands of families are divided due to this loop of concertina wire. The LoC has also affected the fragile eco system in Kashmir and many species of wild life are endangered now. The 2 minute long animation movie made with 800 hand drawn images, depicts the impact of the loc on Living being be it human or wild life.

Apart from the artwork, the presentation at FECA and visits to the advanced contemporary artists inspired me to delve into the new advanced forms, ideas and techniques of art.

During the residency i made new friends and broadened my networks that I need in future to grow as an emerging artist.

During the residency the guidance and the helping hand of the members of the host institution made our Journey easy. But I missed a critic to deepen my knowledge of art.

I am working on a Graphic Novel about experience of living in Kashmir.

I have planned to pursue my MFA abroad so that I can have the experience of global contemporary art and culture. This will also provide me a platform where I can see my homeland and culture from distance so that I can concentrate on my artwork with a global perspective.

AGAT SHARMA

As a graduate of design, participating in an art project was a conscious step to understanding inter-disciplinary practices and the alternative process based practice that comes out of it. The main purpose of undertaking the residency was understanding the city, its relationship to consumption and people. Through understanding the city and its nuances the residency created a space to look at consumption and its role in the lives of urban dwellers.

The visits of the old city and the markets organised by Khoj provided a great deal of insight to the project since the area of interest was the city. To understand the evolution of an artist, and to create one's own body of work, the interactions with artists like Jagannath Panda and Manisha Parekh worked as eye-openers, dialogue about the concepts for the residency with them helped in the development and process of the project. Interactions within the residents and their projects put in perspective one's own project within the residency and its relationship with the city.

We live in a make believe world created by consumerism. To create a sense of order we base it on models, which create rules and etiquettes, which we must consume to fit in. The project reflects on this gap between the ideal and reality. Consumption is pushed through images that seem to be model, where one is expected to be perfect by consuming in the right way. It places a sense of power in the consumer, where one is able to believe that one can get whatever one wants. The residency and the project looked at the city and the role of consumption in filling the voids of the urbanists' lives. By initially looking at cosmetics and make-up and referring to words like foundation which are emphasised both in the city and on the consumer, the project drew comparisons at both parallels. Through the course of the residency, the project evolved into a reflection of consumption its role in the life of the consumer in the city. Taking the 9-10 emotions and feelings like envy, empathy, optimism, guilt etc. that are sometimes lax or become naturalised to our identity because of the effects of the city; the project looked at evolving consumption into a mode of introspection.

Interacting with people through the course of the residency and on the open day, many felt that these cosmetics could exist in the market, and the project achieved a sense of ambiguity that it was trying to create. These positive but somewhat ambiguous reactions to the project will be explored through future work for which peers residency has provided the foundation.

Peers 2010 was a great learning experience and I hope KHOJ will continue to support emerging artists and practitioners in the time to come.

NEHA THAKAR

The whole program was really good, as it was meant for beginners. The Old Delhi walk, visit to the Lalit Kala Gallery, visit and talk at well-known artist studios etc. I think the artiststudio visits

were the best part because we got a chance to see how they work and also get suggestions for our own works.

I was visiting Delhi for the first time and the people at the host institution were really very helpful to me—in my search for strange chemicals for my smell preparations etc. Also, I would not be able to create a tent for the final Open Day on my own. The co-ordinator also helped me to develop my idea to its final stages by having a regular dialogue with me.

For me, the most important achievement on a personal level is that the residency program improved my confidence by giving me space to work on such material. The interaction with the other artists in the residency and with the co-ordinator and the critic helped me to understand my works. All artists came from different regions and KHOJ was extremely helpful both in terms of technical help and also in searching for material.

I displayed two works on the Open Day; but what was more important for me was the research during the residency. At the first stage, I was inspired by the Masale Wali Gali in Old Delhi and wanted to create work that was inspired by that visit and also subsequent trips to search for material and mechanisms. The direction it evolved in and the form it finally took taught me the importance of research and the role it plays in the final presentation (the repeated visits to old perfume shops, interviews and dialogues with the critic and co-ordinator etc).

I am presently working in a studio space in Baroda. I plan to apply for other residencies and wish to further develop the project that I worked on at KHOJ.