

City is the canvas

Indulekha Aravind / November 13, 2011, 0:12 IST



A festival that will take performance art into the streets and to the people.

Bangalore may not know it yet but the city is going to be the venue for an art show like no other. Art will step out of the galleries and into the streets, engage with people and will look to provoke, question and stretch the boundaries. And that's because Live Art 2011 is a festival of performance art — the first of its kind in the city.

Performance art is something that evolved against the commercialisation of art itself and materialism, and threads of dissidence and subversion are an essential part of it. It is perhaps more intangible and transient than any other form. That may also be why a festival of such art has come to Bangalore, rather than the more well-known art “hubs” of Mumbai and Delhi. “The city itself is young, ever-changing and perhaps that is why we do more experimental cutting-edge work than any other,” says Smitha Cariappa, performance artist and curator and chief organiser of the festival.

Spread over a fortnight, the festival brings together artists from Switzerland, Israel and South East Asia as well as artists from Bangalore and other parts of the country. Kicking off with video presentations and talks that will culminate in a discussion over the weekend, the festival moves on to a dawn-to-dusk (7 am to 7 pm) performance by various artists in the neighbourhood of KH Road, including the spaces of 1, Shanthi Road, Jaaga and BAR1. Other performances will be held throughout the two weeks in the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Venkatappa Gallery. The festival will feature veterans of the genre, such as Ratnabali Kant from Delhi and Vijay Sekhon from Mumbai, as well as artists from the city. International artistes include Ma Ei from Myanmar whose works are based on feminism and Buddhism, Bulathsinalage Janani Chandima Cooray of Sri Lanka, who has a background in visual art, Indonesian artist Surya Darma and Swiss artists and co-curators of the festival, Dorothea Rust and Monica Klinger.

The festival also, in a sense, raises a question of whether there are enough spaces in the city for up and coming artists and experimental art, for both of which gallery space might be a distant dream. Student groups and young artistes are very much a part of the festival, points out Cariappa. Live Art 2011 apart, are there adequate venues in the city for young or experimental artists? “Yes and no,” says Suresh Jayaram, artist and founder of 1, Shanthi Road. “We ourselves provide a space for that kind of extremely edgy art” but there aren't too many others in the city, he says. Jayaram's gallery, which is situated above his house, does not take any money from artists for exhibiting — one reason why it is always fully booked. Instead, it survives on grants, money from artists in residence and whatever other donations come its way. The other gallery associated with Live Art, Archana Prasad's Jaaga, itself came into existence because she felt there weren't enough venues in the city for talented artists who could not afford hefty fees. Live Art by itself may not be a solution for the lack of adequate space for art that defies convention. But it may well put Bangalore on the map of global performance art, which could in turn attract more support and interest, material or otherwise, for experimental art.

(For the full schedule of Live Art 2011, log on to www.bar1.org/liveart)