

AFRESHDAWN

A NEW LIFE FOR ARTS IN INDIA'S EAST

THE OPENING OF THE KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY AIMS TO MERGE DIFFERENT ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES UNDER ONE ROOF AND SHOWCASE INDIA'S VIBRANT ARTS SCENE

by Archana Khure-Ghose

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The gift shop on the second floor of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity.

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From left: chief executive officer and head of Kolkata Centre for Creativity, Richa Agarwal with her husband Akshay.

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Kolkata, still referred to by many by its former name of Calcutta as the British christened it, was the original cultural capital of India. It lost that claim to Mumbai and Delhi gradually after Independence, but its contribution to the cultural repertoire of India is so immense that purists in this eastern metropolis can still win an argument — over tea and with a good measure of animated desk-thumping — on the city's first right to be called the cultural capital of the country.

Given the new wave of cultural institutions being founded across the country by newly minted billionaires and even old established names, Kolkata may actually get back into the reckoning in the cultural race of the subcontinent. On November 21 last year, the city saw the launch of Kolkata Centre for Creativity (KCC) — a multidisciplinary interactive arts center — that will go a long way in making the city a preferred arts destination.

KCC is the latest baby of Emami Art, one of Kolkata's long-established cultural spaces (also the city's largest) that belongs to the Emami Group; the latter is an FMCG conglomerate headquartered in the city. The center, called by its founders as the “champion of the cultural landscape of contemporary India,” is spread over an area of approximately 70,000 sq ft (approx. 6,500 sq m), of which 10,000 sq ft (approx. 929 sq m) is the premier gallery space for Emami Art. It is designed by Pinakin Patel, known for pioneering the “India Modern” movement in interior design in the country, who

IMAGE COURTESY: EMAMI ART, KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY



London- and Athens-based design engineer Nassia Inglessis, of Studio INI, inside her “Disobedience” installation at KCC. “Disobedience” was Greece’s entry to the 2018 London Design Biennale.



Works at the Exhibition Space at Kolkata Centre for Creativity.

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The Dashrath Patel exhibition at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity.

Decorative art works on display at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity.



IMAGE COURTESY EMAM ART KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY

is also KCC's creative director now. The KCC is headed by the Emami Group director and the Emami Art chief executive officer Richa Agarwal.

Besides Emami Art, KCC features an exhibition space to showcase art, craft, antiquity and product design, a conservation studio, a skill development maker section and an exhaustive library.

The inaugural show at Emami Art at KCC is an exhibition titled "School." It is the first-ever solo exhibition of the late Indian modernist, Dashrath Patel (1927-2010), a sculptor and designer who was also the first secretary of India's premier design school, the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. Curated by Pinakin Patel, the exhibition features Dashrath Patel's line drawings, ceramics, collages and photography from the 1930s to 2000s. A contemporary of well-known Modern masters such as Tyeb Mehta, M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza and V.S. Gaitonde, Dashrath Patel collaborated with several international figures such as the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, the architects Louis Kahn and Frei Otto, and the engraver William Hayter, to name a few.

On the occasion of the launch of KCC and its inaugural exhibition, the center's head Richa Agarwal spoke to BLOUINSHOP on a range of topics.

How and when did the idea for an art center of this scale come about and when did you get involved in it?

Through collecting art over the last decade, my desire to nurture and promote creative talent from the region and internationally has grown and developed. Opening a permanent

A design work at the Exhibition Space of Contemporary Culture at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity.



“It is important that the Kolkata Centre for Creativity finds its own individual space within the cultural scene of the country...”



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space such as the Kolkata Centre for Creativity has been a dream project. It provides a space to broaden conversations about creativity and for creative people to connect. Plans for the center were really put into motion around five years ago, with the appointment of Pinakin Patel as architect and creative director in 2014. Since then, we have worked together to bring our collective vision to life. By merging different artistic disciplines under one roof, we hope there is a vibrant dynamic throughout the distinct spaces in KCC.

Was there a specific reason for choosing Dashrath Patel's retrospective to launch KCC?

Known as India's "Renaissance Man," the late Dashrath Patel was a friend of Pinakin Patel, who has also curated the exhibition. His work encompasses a great range of creative disciplines — from photography, collage to ceramics and more. Opening an exhibition showcasing a spectrum of talents from one individual is way to foreshadow the forthcoming program at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity and Emami Art.

A Bidri art work on display at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity.



Bidri art works on display at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity.

In the past few decades, some of the most exciting art initiatives in India have come from private museums/ galleries/ art institutes rather than the state-run bodies. That has also given them the added responsibility of taking on the role of nurturing the rich cultural heritage of the country. In this context, what space do you visualize KCC fitting itself in, in the general cultural scene of the country?

It is important that the Kolkata Centre for Creativity finds its own individual space within the cultural scene of the country and establishes itself as an open cultural institution, that offers a creative learning experience for all who visit. Through the different spaces housed within KCC, such as the Children's Corner, Exhibition Space, Conservation Studio and Emami Art, the center provides a large array of facilities for the local area and wider world. We hope to broaden what art institutions are

defined as, and provide a platform for the possibilities whilst offering our local audiences a holistic and comprehensive art experience.

Scholarship/rigorous archiving and academic discourse are some areas in Indian art that have suffered neglect over the past several decades. Could you share if KCC has a specific program to address these issues?

It is the early days for KCC, and over the coming months our services will continue to evolve. We will encourage and host visits from educational groups across the region, allowing access to our resources such as the Material Library on the fifth floor. Through the Exhibition Space, visitors have an opportunity to participate in a living dialogue with creativity, with audiences being asked philosophical questions about important areas in human culture. The center aims to

eventually publish the results online every year, offering a window into a general opinion on various topics.

Could you share some of the highlights of KCC's 2019 program?

The next exhibition planned for Emami Art, "The World is My Family," will showcase Modern and Contemporary art from international and national artists in dialogue with one another. Across 2019, we look forward to bringing four stimulating exhibitions and new experiences to our audiences, through presenting some of India's leading established and emerging talent. Some specific highlights will include exhibitions by Ravinder Reddy, Bose Krishnamachari and Jogen Chowdhury. Other displays across KCC will range from traditional Indian artisans, to internationally significant craft and design objects. ◀