

BLOUIN **modern** painters

ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

FEBRUARY 2019

TOP 10 AFRICAN ARTISTS TO WATCH

A LOOK AT LUCIO FONTANA'S CAREER

INDIA'S NEXT WAVE KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY ALL SET TO BRING A PARADIGM SHIFT



CAI GUO-QIANG AND POMPEII:
DESTRUCTION AS A
SOURCE OF CREATION



Pranav A.S.
Kolkata Centre for
Creativity

The Kolkata Centre
for Creativity caps
several years of
high-profile
cultural openings
around the
country

BY ARCHANA KHARE-GHOSE

INDIA'S NEXT WAVE



For the past few years, the world of arts and culture in India has been experiencing a low-key yet unprecedented buzz. Almost every year, a new cultural institution or event — pan-India in scope and scale — claims a permanent place in this landscape, most of them funded by private money.

Most recently, in November 2018, the Kolkata Centre for Creativity (KCC) opened in the eastern Indian metropolis, infusing an energy in the field that has the potential to bring about a paradigm change in the way arts are practiced and promoted here. More important, the KCC seems set to lift the city out of its cultural stupor and put it back in the reckoning for the title that it enjoyed long before Mumbai and Delhi charged ahead to become the new cultural capitals of India.

The KCC was founded by the Emami Group, a consumer goods conglomerate headquartered in Kolkata, and is spread over an area of about 6,500 square meters including about 900 square meters for its well-established art gallery, Emami Art. Besides the gallery, the KCC has space to showcase crafts, antiquities and product design, plus a conservation studio, a skills-development section and an exhaustive library. The center was designed by Pinakin Patel, who pioneered the “India Modern” movement in interior design; he is also now KCC’s creative director. The CEO of Emami Art, Richa Agarwal, heads the center.

While the excitement over the launch of the



Pooja Sood



Ashvin Rajgopal



Emami Art chief executive officer and head of Kolkata Centre for Creativity, Richa Agarwal with her husband Aditya.

LEFT: COURTESY PIRAMAL MUSEUM OF ART; RIGHT: COURTESY EMAMI ART, KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY.



SHI HOON
GALLERY
PIRAMAL MUSEUM
OF ART



Jawahar Kala
Kendra

KCC settles down, the art world is already abuzz over the Museum of Art and Photography in Bangalore, which is currently under construction and is due to open next year. The two join the three-year-old Piramal Museum of Art in Mumbai in changing the way art is experienced in the country's museums through their innovative programs.

Then there's the three-year-old Serendipity Arts Festival, held annually in December in Goa for a week, which celebrates the broad sweep of Indian culture — from visual arts, performing arts, crafts, and theater, to photography and food.

It is the biggest festival of its kind in South Asia and is already on the top of annual must-do lists.

In addition, some older institutions, such as Jaipur's Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK), have been revitalized. In mid-2018, the JKK underscored the newness in its programming by hosting the first Indian Ceramics Triennale.

A common thread through these private initiatives is the fact that most of them are funded by generations-old business families, who were some of the biggest beneficiaries of the economic liberalization that India rolled out in

the beginning of the 1990s. Besides the Emami Group's KCC, the industrialist and collector Abhishek Poddar is the force behind the Museum of Art and Photography (he is also one of the co-founders of India's first photography gallery, Tasveer); and Ajay Piramal of the conglomerate Piramal Group is the name behind the Piramal Museum. Serendipity Arts Festival, for its part, is the personal passion of Sunil Munjal, chairman of Hero Enterprise, which has interests in insurance, steel, real estate and corporate training.

The trail blazer, however, is the



Jawahar Kala Kendra

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) which opened in January 2010 in New Delhi as the first private museum of Modern and Contemporary art in India, spearheaded by Kiran Nadar. She is the wife of the IT magnate Shiv Nadar of the Indian multinational HCL Technologies Ltd. Nadar is universally acknowledged for her role in paving the way for other wealthy Indians to take cultural investment to the next level. The first step was buying Indian Modern and Contemporary art at global auctions at record prices. A substantial amount of that art is now surfacing at some of these new

museums.

“Private investment in arts and culture has taken off in multiple directions in India and a range of institutions are coming up — from single apartment-size museums to the sprawling ones,” said Ashvin Rajagopalan, director of the Piramal Museum, which recently hosted an acclaimed retrospective on the Modern master S.H. Raza. “The country needs more private investment in arts because it cannot be left alone to the government and non-profits. Moreover, government funding has come down drastically in the past few years, due to various

political and other reasons. The crux is that the industrial/corporate houses are utilizing CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funds that is helping the arts and culture scene in India in a big way.”

Indeed, private initiatives have created a diverse dynamic with institutions that speak to various elements of Indian culture in different, non-overlapping ways. The Piramal Museum is evolving into a repository of Modern and Contemporary Indian art with a heavy focus on collection, preservation and documentation; while the Museum of Art and



Finomi Art, Kolkata Centre for Creativity

COURTESY OF FINOMI ART, KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY

105 BLOUNARTINFO.COM

BLOUNARTINFO.COM FEBRUARY 2019 MODERN PAINTERS 105



Finomi Art, Kolkata Centre for Creativity

COURTESY OF FINOMI ART, KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY

“The country needs more private investment in arts because it cannot be left alone to the government and non-profits. Moreover, government funding has come down drastically in the past few years, due to various political and other reasons”

Photography will help lend focus to a rather neglected genre of art.

The Kolkata Centre for Creativity, on the other hand, with its massive space, opens up the possibility of engaging various art forms in dialogue with one another. Said Agarwal, the head of KCC, “It provides a space to broaden conversations about creativity and for creative people to connect. By merging different artistic disciplines under one roof, we hope there is a vibrant dynamic throughout the distinct spaces in KCC. 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.”

Jaipur’s Jawahar Kala Kendra is different in conception from the others as its revitalization, undertaken by the New Delhi-based non-profit Khoj International Artists’ Association, is an initiative of the state government of Rajasthan. Established in 1986 and housed since 1992 in a sprawling campus designed by the renowned architect Charles Correa, Khoj infused

the JKK programming with contemporary energy. “The JKK revitalization proves that it is possible for government institutions to partner with private parties and rejuvenate cultural spaces,” said Pooja Sood, Khoj’s director, citing the first India Ceramics Triennale as an example.

Besides the big-ticket cultural spaces, there are also several smaller initiatives that have taken root in various corners of the country in the past few years. Rajagopalan of the Piramal Museum points out some examples, such as the country’s first music museum, the Indian Music Experience, which opened in Bangalore in 2017 and has a highly popular Sound Garden. Then, there’s Chennai’s DakshinChitra, a living-history museum dedicated to the heritage and culture of the South Indian states.

While these examples may seem small in a country the size of India, and the subcontinent may never experience a museum frenzy similar to other parts of Asia, the slowly escalating cultural energy here does show hope of striking deep roots.MP