

Collective Energy

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 Artworks that gain in meaning in relation to each other liven up a group show at the KNMA, notes **Premjish Achari**.

It was at the beginning of the last century that Futurists provoked the art world about the role of art museums with the statement, "Museums, Cemeteries!" but its echoes still resonate in various parts of the world. The institutional history of the museum, as we know, is fraught with colonial modes of collecting and displaying imperial archives; the museum is also seen as a fossilized edifice, which has become dormant and unable to adapt to changing times.

On the other hand, we witness the rise of contemporary art museums in a globalised world with diverse objectives and strategies to redefine their roles in the 21st century. In the past two decades, they have presented exhibitions foregrounding the role of collections, redefining them for viewers. The attempt of many of these ventures has been to situate art between the historical and the contemporary and shift the perceptions about how we are to look at it. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) in Delhi, with its profound investment in research, art history, curatorial processes, educational programmes and outreach, has been constantly trying to recast the role of museums from being monumental institutions to more accessible and participatory places.

Hangar for the Passerby curated by Akansha Rastogi from the 19th of April to the 15th of November, presents artworks, acts, words, incomplete propositions and creative products of more than 45 collectives, co-operatives and individuals and covers a large span of history and geography. Rastogi deploys a novel curatorial strategy, allowing the works to be part of a chaotic narrative that moves anachronistically. The curator takes many leaps and liberties in blurring boundaries across mediums and generations. What unites them is the nature of collaboration and collective acts. For example, K. Ramanujam's drawings juxtaposed with works by the Raqs Media Collective, Nicholas Roerich's paintings against works by the Desire Machine Collective, Pablo Bartholomew's fine black and white photographs of an erstwhile hipster generation placed along with Arnika Ahldag and Amitesh Grover's low resolution photographs from the series *Kafka's Castle*, displaying the precarious conditions of labourers at a corporate house, are seamlessly arranged leading to new interpretations and meanings. What lies before us are not only the material interactions and the inherent tensions involved in the creation of artworks in collaborative spaces but also an exposition to understand the conditions and means of the cultural logic of collectives and collaborative ventures.

Hangar for the Passerby is a shape-shifting labyrinth, a performing and evolving exhibition of newer ways of looking at art and art practices. At the entrance of the exhibition we encounter the backyard of an

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SARAI READER IN EXHIBITION

The last episode of the Sarai Reader is a collection of essays that explore the complex and often contradictory nature of the contemporary Indian art scene. The essays are written by some of the most prominent voices in the field, including artists, critics, and curators. The collection is a must-read for anyone interested in the current state of Indian art.

Ravi Varma Collection

Exhibition view from
Hangar for the Passerby
 K. Ramanujam's drawings,
 Prabhakar Barwe's textile
 piece with an accordion
 book from *Sarai Reader 09*
 Episode 2
 2017
 Image courtesy KNMA

art college in a highly provocative and self-reflexive installation titled *College Backyard* (a project with art students from art colleges in Odisha led by Paribartana Mohanty). This allows a subversive entry into the monumental institution of the museum. Realizing the constraints of mentioning all the participants of this show, I would take the liberty to mention a few of them that strike a chord. Arnika Ahldag and Amitesh Grover's *Back to Work* needs an entire article on its own, not to mention the resonating charge of the political works done by Sharmila Samant and Tushar Joag for Open Circle, the explorations of the Mono Gobbet Society, and works from *Sarai Reader 09* about the democratization of participation in exhibition spaces. Rastogi's protagonist is a transient passerby, an elusive presence, an antithesis to the collective or the mass. Would such a passive figure do justice to the radical potential of many of these collective spaces and collaborations which are imbued with a spirit of active engagement? Also, how would a non-initiated person bereft of knowledge about the narratives of art history make sense of these juxtapositions and interruptions? There are a few more months for the show to close and I hope to find answers to these by then. As the curator implies – the show is not over yet and she would like to provoke the viewer to keep this incomplete show with them. /