Dr Alka Pande

The global COVID pandemic has been both a boon and a curse. In many ways, the irreplaceable loss of precious lives, opportunities, interactions and most importantly the long months of isolation has changed the world in many ways. The Indian Art Fair 2022 opened after missing out on one edition, in spite of the gruelling heat, the absence of almost all foreign galleries except a couple, people thronged to the fair. It was considered socially and commercially successful. Being a curator of one of the biggest public art spaces in the country, the India Habitat Centre (IHC), I decided to curate the three spaces of the Visual Arts Gallery, IHC in a singular and deeply thoughtful manner.

Inside the main 3800 sq. feet Visual Arts Gallery, Mitchell Shelby Crites showcases 150 works of indigenous artists from the length and breadth of the country with the show entitled BHUMIJAN: Artists of the Earth (April – 7 May 2022). Each of the works startles the viewer with its fresh, vibrant, expressive use of colour, composition, and form. Although drawn from a lexicon of tribal and folk traditions, these paintings demand a reassessment of previous attitudes, requiring the viewer to participate and interact with the strong visual, often emotional messages conveyed. These paintings haunt the mind, enter our dreams, and pull us out of our lethargy.

On myriad levels, they are transcendent, vital, and timeless. Spanning a breadth of idioms and themes, BHUMIJAN’s many artists and traditions also reveal resonances and interconnections among India’s Adivasi (tribal), lokpriya (folk) and neo-Tantric artists. While celebrating long established, master artists, this groundbreaking exhibition also champions emerging talents. Richly diverse and offering myriad gems, some of which have never been seen in public before, BHUMIJAN: Artists of the Earth is a masterful tribute to an often neglected field in Indian contemporary art. The eponymous book published in conjunction with the exhibition speaks in detail about the significance of indigenous artists and their art. To mention, the authors including Mitchell Shelby Crites Dr. Aurogeeta Das Dr. Stephen Huyler Minhazz Majumdar Dr. Alka Pande celebrate the indigenous art practices while also keeping an eye on the challenging field faces.

Indian art has long been defined by its traditions, by the repetition of successful, highly marketable designs, concepts and forms. While the subcontinent has been famed for its creativity, fine crafts and art for millennia, most attention has been focused on court art or trade crafts. The past century has also seen a rapidly growing acknowledgment of personal artistic expression. Museums, galleries, and homes worldwide exhibit contemporary Indian art that has gained recognition among the world’s finest. But critics have long dismissed the arts of rural India, particularly those of India’s indigenous peoples, as primitive or purely decorative. BHUMIJAN defies such categorizations.

The artists included in the exhibition are: Dilip Bahota, Bhuri Bai, Lado Bai, Jodhaiya Bai Baiga, Karia Baiga, Sakun Bai Baiga, Santoshi Bai Baiga, Sughara Baiga, Mantu Chitrakar, Santosh Kumar Das, Suchitra Das, Bharti Dayal, Baccha Dai Devi, Chano Devi, Heera Devi,
Serpents Mating by Sakun Bai Baiga

Lion By Dilip Shyam
Bholenath (Lord Shiva) By Jodhaiya Bai Baiga
At the 2025 sq. foot Open Palm Court Gallery, Myna Mukherjee has curated an exception show entitled *Techne Disruptions* (30th April - May 6, 2022). Technology primes every aspect of a post-COVID art world for digital disruption. Evidence of this disruption abounds in the exhibition *Techné Disruptors*, an unprecedented epistemological art and tech show in India that will not only reshape sedentary categories of art but also radically shift the way art is viewed, understood, experienced, and sold. From elemental lightboxes to a complex prototype Non-Fungible Token launch powered by a global nexus of innovators and futurists.
in coalition for a regenerative project across the world; Techné Disruptors features works imagined with the most future-forward technologies of our times, including Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, holographs, and a brand new minted collection of Global South NFTs.

Conceived, engendered, and supported by the American Center and Italian Embassy Cultural Center, the show has been conceived through the lens of urbanism in the Global South countries, Indian futurism and cultural perpetuity, post-colonial art, the Anthropocene as global discourse, indigenous technologies, and future-forward aesthetics. The works in Techné Disruptors question the past, the present, and the social spaces we navigate in our daily lives—the private, the public, the inner, the market, and the imaginary. They upend political narratives around gender, feminism, art as resistance, environmental rights, freedom, and access, as well as subverting notions of identity, contesting social norms, critiquing consumer culture, and imagining dystopian alternate realities.

The show features more than ten of the most cutting edge, tech-forward pioneers and digitally native artists in India and the Global South: Adil B. Khan, Babak Haghi, Harshit Agrawal, Dr. Mandakini Devi, Minne Atairu, Nandita Kumar, Raghava KK, Rochelle Nembhard & Gemma Shepherd, Satadru Sovan, Seema Kohli, Shilo Shiv Suleman, and The Fearless Collective. Collectively, these works interrupt expectations and unsettle conventions, inviting visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which artists challenge norms and push boundaries through disruptive actions. An excellent article Techné Disruptors: A Preview by Akshat Sinha on an online digital portal “art armour” further elucidates upon this:

https://www.artamour.in/post/techn%C3%A9-disruptors-a-preview

“(Un)StillLife” by Harshit Agrawal
“Genesis” by Rochelle Nembhard & Gemma Shepherd

From paradigm to paradigm, Into the Biomic time by Nandita Kumar
Igun, Prototype V, by Minne Atairu

Moonshine by Dr. Mandakini Devi
Since I believe passionately in public art, I invited Ambika Berri, who runs Art Ichol, a cultural centre in Maihar, Madhya Pradesh and a contemporary art gallery called KAEE: Contemporary in Kolkata, to showcase the work of one of the finest artists Narayan Sinha with the exhibition *Imbue* (April 26 – June 30, 2022). The artist works in the genre of Arte Povera with a variety of materials. Narayan Sinha worked almost a year in advance keeping in mind the architecture of India Habitat Centre, designed by Joseph Allen Stein. The exhibition is a way to bring art closer to the number of people who visit the IHC in droves whether the staff of the 36 institutional offices or come to see the regular active cultural programming- dance theatre, discussions, talks and books.
Narayan Sinha’s sculptures, part of the exhibition *Imbue*, explore ideas of desire and excess through materials of brass and stone. He imbues this series of works with a sensibility of deep formlessness and fluidity. He uses stone as sweeping as water, and brass as pliable as clay, creating forms that seem impossible in the material that they are in. His sculptures overlap, intertwine and unfold in multifaceted layers and dichotomies revealing his angst and passions culminating in the ultimate exultation of spirit. He meanders and traverses nature’s scheme of things and celebrates his belief in positivity with the hope that it will accomplish the realization of a purpose – a state of being that shuns all rigidities. The *Imbue* series melts, merges, and ultimately flows beyond form.

Democratising of art is a key area of my interest and it is for this reason that I planned the curation of the three art spaces at the India Habitat Centre to coincide with the India Art Fair when a large art loving public consisting of artists dealers, curators and gallerists from every nook and cranny of the country visit the national capital New Delhi.
Nature- III by Narayan Shina
Carnation by Narayan Shina

Free- III by Narayan Shina
The three shows at the India Habitat Centre are very much part of the spirit of the times. Bhumijan a word from the famed Indophile anthropologist Verrier Elein’s definition of Indigenous art. He defined it as the art of the earth. It is very much part of the living culture and heritage of India. Techne Disruptions where different streams of technology become very much part of the language of the arts. Technology is very much part of the practice of contemporary art. And Narayan Sinha’s public art installation in the outdoor spaces of the India Habitat Centre is the epitome of the democratisation of art and the use of everyday materials in the creation of three dimensional art. For me the three shows at the Habitat Centre are the best testimony of the arts of India which straddles between tradition, modern and the contemporary spirit of the plural and cultural rich eco system of art.