

ARTslant



Project Cinema City: Research Art & Documentary Practices by Paroma Maiti

Project Cinema City: Research Art & Documentary Practices, which opened to a gala reception at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Bombay, strikes you at the very outset with the massiveness of its scale. Perhaps, that is only to be expected, considering the fact that it deals with the core idea of the intermesh between cinema and the city – the twin products of the 20th century. More so, because of the choice of its first display – Bombay – the fulcrum of the cinematic experience, of the film ‘industry’ in India.

Project Cinema City seeks to bring together the parallel, interconnected, often symbiotic development of the city and the phenomenon of the cinema in 20th century Asia, beginning with Bombay. Cinema has been largely viewed as an independent art/industrial form/practice, to be appreciated on its own merit, from an intellectual, artistic perspective – a distanced association, in other words. But this project tries to explore the nuanced connections the world of cinema has with the very blossoming of a metropolis, its imagination and its reality. It tries to probe how the two feed on each other, derive sources of sustenance and converge or diverge in terms of inspiration, imagination and hope.



Mukhopadhyay, Kausik, and Sakalker, Amruta, *Bioscope*; Courtesy of Cinema City and the artists.

Spread across the sprawling three floors of the NGMA and also including the ‘Dome’ as exhibitionary space, the exhibition is divided into a number of themes, sub-themes, modes and interactive forms that does not allow it for a second to relapse into a run-of-the-mill show dedicated to cinema.

Because cinema, especially the popular mainstream variant, is manufactured with a view to offering an alternative world, a world of relief and escape from the mundane world of drudgery, a large part of this exhibition is dedicated to icons, images and processes of that very creation. Atul Dodiya’s ‘Fourteen Stations’ that paint fourteen iconic villains of Bombay’s cinema on fourteen of Bombay’s station signboards, is a vibrantly pithy manner of fusing two of Bombay’s most pulsating nerves.

The Calendar Project deals with iconography and iconization as it grows from the world of cinema to find itself in every home as calendar. Often perceived as the precursor to the poster, the images of this project, made by artists like Archana Hande, Sudhir Patwardhan, Shilpa Gupta, Ranbir Kaleka, Chintan Upadhyay among many others, is a throwback to the times gone by, focusing on the production process, by comparing them with contemporary readings and understandings. This is a visually stimulating section and holds the promise of drawing in the viewer, perhaps much more than even the interactive installations. And interactive installations, there were aplenty. Most of them held the spectators in awe, much like innovative playthings in circuses around gleeful children! *Bioscope*, by Kausik Mukhopadhyay and Amruta Sakalker, for instance, was just that – a bioscope that people peered into to stitch together as they fancied, cogent narratives, out of layers of gossip or lore that ordinarily surround urban icons.



Mukhopadhyay, Kausik, and Sakalker, Amruta, *Bioscope*; Courtesy of Cinema City and the artists.

But what held me in complete enthrallment was Anant Joshi's untitled work – an installation comprising a series of wooden objects vibrantly painted in the style of matchbox labels, so as to resemble firecrackers from a distance: firecrackers – a popular label for superstars. These objects then move around their own axis and when they do, they resemble spinning spindles, their dizzying speed giving off the air of being transient and yet desirable at the same time. This was a fascinating work, both for the clockwork efficiency with which it was designed as also for its aesthetic subtext.

All in all, this is a show that is not to be missed. Kudos to curators Madhusree Dutta and Archana Hande for coming up with such an elaborate, yet complex theme and then executing it with such painstakingly meticulous attention and care. Must Watch!

(Image on top right: *The Calendar Project*; Courtesy of Cinema City and the artists)