

The Indian Express:

Mogambo as Muse

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Project Cinema City pays a tribute to 100 years of Indian cinema with multiple initiatives celebrating its icons, cliches and kitsch

Spread over more than three floors of the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai, Project Cinema City is an exhibition of epic proportions. Marking 100 years of Indian cinema, the show, apart from being an ode to the occasion, looks at the relationship between Mumbai and Indian cinema, as the two have evolved over the years.

Project Cinema City began in 2009 and has since included a number of events. After its Mumbai run till June 29, the show will travel to Delhi and Bangalore. “The project has been envisaged with the belief that in cinema-producing cities the presence of cinema is much larger than the films produced,” explains Madhusree Dutta, curator, and the executive director of Majlis, the organisation responsible for the project. “Cinema influences demography, labour inflow, migration, neighbourhood structure, fashion, desire, public cultures, ancillary industries and so on. So, this is an attempt to foreground these other stories about cinema.”

Produced over the last four years by over 60 artists, the works in this exhibition were created for the larger project and not this particular show. The walls of the ground floor of the gallery are dominated by a series titled “The Calendar Project”. Considering the theme of the exhibition, one might expect these calendars — painted in a retro fashion — to be reminiscent of the Bollywood posters of yesteryear, but that isn’t the case. Painted by artists such as Arpita Singh, Bhupen Khakhar and Chintan Upadhyay, these feature advertisements for builders, pencils, contraceptives and others. “These calendars are created now but dated after various years in the 20th century,” says Dutta. “These works are based on a timeline text that we have evolved through research on the city, which is then converted by the artists into date calendars.”

On the same floor is one of the many interactive installations in the show, a work titled Bioscope or A Game of Cinema-City-Modernity Timeline. Look into this object, using one of the six viewing points and you’ll see “snippets of information, gossip, lore and tales swivel around the cityscape and images of urban icons”. Adjacent to this is a large table — Table of Miscellany — containing, as the name suggests, a number of miscellaneous items. A stack of transparent ‘books’ symbolise “books that are not written and magazines that are fossilised”, while small, constantly rotating cube structures display images and text.

The show on NGMA’s first floor has a rather intriguing name, WWW@FF that stands for wanton, wayward, wicked @ footloose and fancy free. One part of this display is a series of captivating photographs that tell the story of Return of the Phantom Lady or Sinful City, the

sequel to artist Pushpamala N's 1996-98 work, Phantom Lady or Kismet. Another, an interesting installation by Paromita Vohra, titled So Near Yet So Far: Ruby allows the viewer to pick up a telephone, plug a wire into a socket and listen to bits of conversation from films. The idea behind this installation is to reflect on the importance of the telephone in both cinema and everyday life.

The installation continues on the second floor, the walls of which feature a series by Atul Dodiya titled Fourteen Stations. The faces of some of Bollywood's iconic villains — one of which is Mogambo — have been painted on one canvas each, alongside the name of the stations on Mumbai's Central Railway Line. Besides the obvious — the villains belong to Bollywood while the stations represent Mumbai — the connection between the two is impossible to understand.

The dome of the gallery is, perhaps, one of the most interesting aspects of the exhibition. As a tribute to Dadasaheb Phalke, the maker of first Indian motion picture, this floor has a speculative museum of cinema with fetish objects "foregrounded by Bollywood". This installation invites the viewer to cycle and, in the process, produce images that are then projected onto a screen.