

Project 560

Final Evaluations

These six grants support artists to create performances in found spaces in Bangalore city. Titled 'Project 560', this initiative enables artists to creatively explore spaces that they find interesting in the city, engage with their narratives, reimagine them and bring them alive through performances. All the six projects will culminate into a festival and a set of conversations in June 2014. Grant funds will pay for honorariums, professional fees, materials, production, publicity, documentation and an accountant's fee.

The eight-months of Project 560 has been a very exciting and enriching experience for IFA. For the first time, IFA got an opportunity to connect intimately with artists, arts organisations and spaces in Bangalore, a city that has nurtured us over the past 19 years. The project created quite a buzz in the city attracting curiosity and interest from a wide cross-section of audiences. Six Project 560 hoardings, both in English and Kannada, went up in prominent junctions across the city. The entire IFA team was on its feet, especially during the last three production months, watching rehearsals, performances and bringing

back insightful learnings into the office. Needless to say, this has been one of the most exciting periods at IFA.

The three month production period from March to May 2014 culminated with the four-day Project 560 Festival. On the first day was a seminar that included conversations of the six grantees with the experts they had chosen. Rangasiri was in conversation with B S Ramamurthy; Ram Ganesh and Mallika Prasad with Lawrence Liang; Mounesh Badiger with Vikram Hatwar; Dimple Shah with Suresh Jayaram; Jeetin with Lina Vincent and Naveen Mahantesh and the 080:30 group with Dilawar Ramdurg. While some of the conversations were a bit trite and straightforward, a few others were reflective and brought out interesting views on what it means to engage with a found space in a city. This was followed by the screening of the film 'Carnival on Wheels', a documentation of the bus project by Sadhana Centre for Creative Practice that IFA had supported in Thrissur as part of our New Performance Programme. Martin John, Saji and Shaji from Sadhana also engaged in a conversation with the audience. This session was followed by panel discussion with experts/ artists who have engaged with various spaces in their artistic processes. The panel comprised of theatre actors and directors Maya Krishna Rao, C Basavalingiah and Kirtana Kumar and performance and visual artists Nikhil Chopra and Suresh Kumar. The panel sparked off very interesting debates that included questioning the idea of 'performance' and what it means to work in found spaces, the role that critical thinking and rigour of practice plays in such performances and unpacking what engaging with audiences might mean for these artists. The audience fully participated in the debates and expressed their points of view and concerns about the role the arts could play in urban city life. The debates led to conversations that set the tone for the rest of the festival.

Here is a short note on each of the six projects that were supported under Project 560:

1. Dimple Shah:

Dimple created a series of performances throughout the three months of the grant. She was able to bring in several collaborators from across the country and create very thought-provoking performances. Centred around the Basavanagudi area, Dimple's works mostly evoked the history of Basavanagudi by engaging with the area's specific educational and cultural affiliations, its flora, its transforming landscape and current concerns. Several senior people in the audience responded enthusiastically with more anecdotal history of the area.

2. Jeetin Rangher:

Jeetin, along with collaborators Katarina Rasic and Bhuvanesh Kumar worked inside a broken down marriage hall on Bellary Road. They had conceptualised a series of visual and performance art interventions that would reflect on ideas of marriage, memory and the changing city. Although on paper the ideas that were proposed sounded exciting, their actual execution raised serious concerns among the audience, including IFA staff. Jeetin made some attempts to engage with narratives regarding the marriage hall from its owners, couples that got married there, migrant workers that currently live in the space and other people that claim the space at different points of the day and night. However, none of these engagements transformed into an artistic expression or experience. The community residing in the vicinity of the space remained aloof and disdainful of the activities in the space; the owners of the building at one point had asked the artists to leave the space; and much of the interventions lacked thought, reflection and meaning in the context of Project 560. IFA staff had several interactions with Jeetin over the three months, pushing him to reflect on the work that he was doing in the space. However, he seemed very obstinate and closed to any such engagements.

3. Naveen Mahantesh:

Naveen and his 080:30 team created performance art interventions through the three months of the project. About ten artists of the 080:30 collective individually and collectively worked in interesting locations across the city. For instance, interventions were made on sand trucks at the Nayandahalli Circle which is the hub of the city's sand lobby, in the city market, on Commercial Street and so on. While some of these were quite trite, there were some that were thought-provoking. As young visual / performance artists, the team in general showed promise in their sensitivity towards and their engagement with the city's changing landscape. For IFA, these interventions raised several questions about the history and practice of performance art in India, its connections to international ideas in contemporary arts and those street/ community forms that have existed in India for centuries, its connect with audiences and its documentation. Staff discussed these concerns with the 080:30 team over many sessions during the process.

4. Sandeep M:

Sandeep's team Rangasiri had chosen the Kempegowda Tower in Mekhri Circle to create a performance based on the history of Bangalore and its founder Kempegowda II. As part of their research, Rangasiri members conducted

interviews with Bangalore's historians, visited archives and collected historical information about the building of the city, which then led to the writing of the play script. As a lead up to the performance, Rangasiri did *Rangageete* (theatre songs) performances in some of the public parks in the city. The final performance took place in the park in Mekhri circle where the tower is located, on an elaborately designed set. Along with general audiences, several groups of school children watched the performance during the three-day morning and evening runs. The elaborate sound, lights and sets naturally enthralled the audiences. However, IFA staff wondered about its alignment with the concerns of Project 560. The performance itself was quite juvenile and lacked content. Also the creation of such an elaborate set when the original tower and its precincts were available to them, seemed absolutely redundant. Staff did have some conversations with the team during their rehearsal process. However, they did not seem too open to feedback.

5. Ram Ganesh Kamatham and Mallika Prasad:

Mallika and Ram Ganesh created a site-specific performance on a climbing wall in Phoenix Market City mall in Mahadevapura. As part of the process of creating the vertical set, Ram and Mallika accessed old maps and photographs of Whitefield, gathered stories from some of its old residents, studied the flora that existed in that area and attempted to recreate all that on the wall. They worked closely with a team of visual artists who helped them create a colourful 'watermark' of an old map of Whitefield on the wall, as an allusion to its forgotten history. The performance itself was centred around four primary characters – a shopkeeper, a commuter, an ornithologist and a local resident. At regular intervals, these characters, played by Mallika and Ram, would climb up the wall, not perpendicular but parallel to the ground, creating a kind of a spectacle for people visiting the mall. While there was some skill involved in creating what they called 'vertical theatre', it did fall short in terms of performance itself and its engagement with the wall space.

6. Mounesh Badiger:

Mounesh's project was to create a performance based on the life and works of eminent Kannada writer Masti Venkatesh Iyengar. The initial idea was to stage the performance in the quadrangle of Masti's house in Basavanagudi. However, the family members who currently own the house were not open to letting it out for the performance. So Mounesh finally decided to stage the performance in the amphitheatre inside the Bugle Rock park. As a run-up to the performance, Mounesh did readings of Masti's short stories at the 'Sahitya Sanje', the monthly reading sessions at Suchitra Film Society. On the day of the performance itself, an actor, dressed as Masti, walked through the streets of Gandhi Bazaar reminiscing the writer's daily routine. The Masti-actor, dressed in a typical black coat, a white dhoti, weiling an umbrella, walked briskly through the streets, distributing chocolates to people. A huge following including eminent literary and theatre personalities as well as lay audiences, followed the Masti-actor as he visited all the places in that area that Masti would frequent. The actor finally arrived at the amphitheatre where the performance titled 'Masti Chocolate' took place. Interestingly, the day the performance opened, happened to be Masti's birth anniversary. The performance itself was very good and was very well attended. However, one of the questions that this project raised both for IFA staff as well as

the audiences was the manner in which it addressed the idea of Found Space. It could have done much more to engage specifically with the chosen space for the performance.

With all the concerns and the questions that each of the projects have individually raised, Project 560 has without doubt been a bold step for IFA as well as for the grantees. Without institutional support of this kind, it might have been very difficult for individual artists and groups to embark on projects like these.

Special mention needs to be made about the support of the media. Throughout the entire period of Project 560, the media showed immense interest in the work and provided consistent and quality coverage. Project 560 received wide publicity both in English and Kannada newspapers and magazines in Bangalore and was also featured nationwide in NDTV's section called Art Matters. Not only was there reportage, but also articles that captured the debates such as those on found spaces, the city and performance art. In fact, the media participated actively in these debates by providing independent viewpoints thereby connecting audiences, artists and IFA in interesting ways.

Soon after the festival, the entire IFA team went through the exercise of reflecting on the pros and cons of project 560. These reflections and learnings have been consolidated and are appended here with this evaluation. A report on the Project 560 festival prepared by the IFA-intern Mridula Rao and the project co-ordinator Pavan Kumar would also provide additional insights into the Project 560 process which are also attached here.

IFA certainly sees great value in sustaining this project for a few more years. There are already queries from artists across the country requesting for a similar initiative in their respective cities. Taking Project 560 outside Bangalore might not be feasible at the moment. However, IFA is keen on a second edition of Project 560 in Bangalore. This, of course, will depend on the availability of large funding from a donor.

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