

Visthar

Final Evaluation

This grant supports the second stage of a collaboration between a visual artist, a dance/choreographer and a photographer/visual artist, leading to two installations/performances, one around an open well and the second in a gallery in Bangalore. The proposed installations/performances are expected to challenge and stretch the formal parameters of visual art and dance. Funds have been earmarked for honorariums, travel-related, equipment hire and audio-visual documentation costs, studio rentals, communications and supplies.

It is difficult to close out the full-fledged grant to C.F. John, T.M. Azis and Tripura Kashyap because this has been a project where the collaborative work has spilled over each designated phase, blurring process and outcome, and making the next phase indispensable. While the seed grant enabled the three artists to develop a foundation for collaboration and explore their visual and choreographic ideas, the full-fledged grant supported the execution of those ideas. However, implementation was only partial since it did not culminate in an installation/performance at the two sites chosen by the artists. The grant funds were expended in constructing and giving shape to the conceived installations, but did not include the dissemination of the collaborative work in the form of events at the well and in Gallery Sumukha. Therefore, the termination of the full-fledged grant made a dissemination phase indispensable.

The visual artists created and photographed a series of 15 installations around the open well. Many of these were translated from the workbook sketches they did during the seed grant phase. A range of materials like mineral water bottles, plastic sheets, buckets, dry leaves, bricks, thread and bandage cloth were used. The installations were photographed and then dismantled in different ways and re-photographed to arrive at new meanings. One set of installations was specifically designed to complement the performance in the well. The other set was created for a photo-exhibition in the Visthar campus. Sixty photographs were selected for use in the installation at Visthar.

The visual artists explored the idea of photographing Tripura's moving body in relation to the installations. In the process, the installations themselves were considerably altered as new ideas and themes suggested themselves during the explorations. The artists also arrived at an agreement about the scale of the photographs and the display techniques.

A miniature well was constructed for housing temporary installations and photo-sessions. A half-hour dance duet in the well was conceptualised for the performance. Music for the performance was composed. Lighting for the installations and performance was worked out. Repairs were undertaken to re-build the damaged parapet wall around

the well to accommodate the audience for the event. C. F. John initiated a discussion around the project with students at the Srishti School of Design, Art and Technology, Bangalore and with the artist community in the city.

The installations on the quilt cohered around a metaphorical weaving together of images from earlier art events in Bangalore. Keeping Gallery Sumukha in mind as the venue for the installation/performance, the collaborators decided on a maze-like structure comprising a montage of drawings, sketches and forms from earlier installations in Bangalore through which the audience will walk to the performance space, mimicking a journey of recollection. Projected images would be used in juxtaposition with a choreographed piece for the performance. Much of the work around the quilt, done during the period of the full-fledged grant, was conceptual as opposed to the actual creation of installations for the well, since the ideas could be executed only in the gallery in relation to the specificity of the space.

During the arts collaboration review meeting in March 2002, the three artists had presented a short choreographed piece in relation to some installations in the well at Visthar. This trial installation/performance, at best, allowed one to imagine what the final installations/performances will look like. With regard to the well, which generates a very powerful experience, one had expected that the artists would respond visually and choreographically to the richness and architectural complexity of the site, limiting their use of external props. On the contrary, the installations demonstrate an enormous accretion of images and props that amount to exoticising and decorating a site that inherently has a lot to offer. What was most striking, however, was the photographer's engagement with the well. Through his photographs of the installations, the photographer and visual artist, T. M. Azis, was able to evoke a remarkably sensitive understanding of the myriad shades, tones and textures that characterise the well at different point of the day, under specific light conditions. His work is self-contained and can stand alone as a photographer's response to the site. In fact, while one can argue that there was nothing site-specific about the installations and the choreographed pieces, the photographs, to say the least, demonstrate the process through which an artist can animate the idea of site-specificity while taking from and contributing equally to the site.

The arts collaboration review meeting was productive in generating interesting critiques of the installation/performance ideas from a peer group of visual artists. Both Navjot Altaf and Pushpamala felt that the installations and performance pieces were loaded with an ecological nostalgia and sentimentalism that was a hurdle to the artist's negotiation with the specificity of the site. One hopes that the critique would enable them to rethink what they finally install and perform at Visthar and in Gallery Sumukha.

Learnings for IFA

In attempting to evaluate what came out of this grant, one is also compelled to look at what did not. Probably the most important learning for IFA was that a full-fledged collaboration grant should include the outcome of the project or else we would be repeatedly caught in a strange bind where another grant becomes mandatory to make the work public. IFA does stress that projects it supports should result in tangible and

publicly accessible outcomes. The act of supporting a process should thus be commensurate with the significance of what that process finally results in.

The learning acquires more significance because IFA had to deal with a similar situation with regard to the collaborative public art project in ceramics. Though in this case, there was no seed grant phase, the full-fledged grant enabled the four ceramic artists to create the public sculptures but did not support their installation outside the National Gallery of Modern Art. Unless a dissemination grant facilitated the installation, the sculptures would have remained in the artists' studios and never been installed in public space.

Such insights have also enabled us to dialogue with our next set of grantees. In fact, the collaborators in the digital arts project supported under the arts collaboration programme in 2002, had come to IFA with a budget that would have facilitated them to develop a body of work without committing to a specific outcome. Though the artists had suggested that they had an exhibition, a short animated sequence of images, a website and a visual poem in mind as possible outcomes, none of these were provided for in the budget. Through discussions, IFA nudged the collaborators to think about what appeared to them as the best ways of making their work public and ensured that the grant to the digital arts project encompassed those outcomes.

In contrast to the arts research and documentation programme where there is, more often than not, a significant and unavoidable time gap between a grant's closing out and its outcomes making a public appearance, the arts collaboration programme's facilitation of artistic processes is more sharply product-driven. In essence, the rationale for artists to come together is their desire to collectively work towards tangible outcomes like an exhibition, a performance, an installation, a film and so on, and the process of work is determined by what they wish to create. Ironically, collaborators often complete and deliver work in record time, and we have on occasions felt that they seem to pay scant attention to the collaborative process in their hurry to arrive at the outcome. Therefore, under the arts collaboration programme, process and product need to be considered together as animating a collaborative idea, rather than as one consequent upon the other.

Madhuban Mitra