



# **FLAME ARTISTS' RESIDENCY**



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In today's world, art residencies act like a cocoon for various art practitioners providing them a space away from the pressures and humdrum of everyday life.

When an artist stays in a residency either at an art center, university or any other place s/he is presented with an opportunity to immerse herself/himself into the art practice in a unique environment that is both time and place specific.

The artist can use this time and space to research, reflect and practice either in line with her own thoughts or work around the content and context provided.

Historically, art residencies have sustained through private funding or supported by artist communities. Academic institutions also invite artists to reside on their campus thus providing an environment, a milieu for its community, sensitizing them around art practices and creating dialogues between the artists, teachers and the students.



Team members and artists, from left to right, Kunal Ray, Roshan Chhabria, Garima Gupta, Ashutosh Poddar, Gauri Gandhi and Priyanka Bardiya

Gauri Gandhi, Kunal Ray and Ashutosh Potdar have initiated this tradition at FLAME University, Pune with the support and encouragement of Vice Chancellor, Dr. Devi Singh and Chair, FLAME School of Fine & Performing Arts, Dr. Vinod Vidwans.

The inaugural edition of the FLAME Artists' Residency was held from January 8-29, 2018. Through a rigorous process of selection, artists Garima Gupta and Roshan Chhabria were chosen for the programme. The invited artists for the residency were asked to evolve their work around Fabric, which was the theme for the first edition of the residency. The artists could interpret the theme in line with her sensitivity and content.

The 21 days residency also saw a series of talks, presentations, open studios, discussions etc. Contemporary artists, curators and other eminent people from the art world shared their thoughts and experiences on the role of art, artists and residencies. The residency and its events were open for all to create a space for dialogue amongst art educators, artists, art enthusiasts and students.

Suresh Jayaram, the founder of 1 Shantiroad in Bengaluru shared the inspiring journey of creating an alternative art space in the heart of the city. He talked about the role of this private-public art space in nurturing various art practices - from performances to screenings, informal gatherings to national and international residencies. This space also promotes participatory projects where the active involvement of the community is sought. Suresh Jayaram emphasized on role of residencies and such art spaces to create a positive communion between the society and art enthusiasts.

Renowned contemporary artist Manish Nai presented the progression of his artistic oeuvre and shed light on the creation of a personalized artistic idiom by employing jute extensively in his work. The weave of jute with its vertical and horizontal lines play a very important role in development of Nai's pictorial language. Manish pointed out how complete involvement with certain material can bring in new elements in one's art work. His involvement with Fabric and his own life made him look at the pile of discarded clothes that is part of every family; but for Nai this was a sculpture in making with its beautiful colors and forms hidden and waiting to be unlocked.

Latha Tummuru from Dastkar Andhra spoke about the challenges faced by weavers across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and shared some experiences of her long collaboration with the weaving community. She also mentioned the lack of incentives for the weavers which might potentially endanger the craft.

FLAME Artists' Residency culminated with a week-long exhibition on the campus. Both the artists used spaces on campus to display their art works. Roshan Chhabria used the lounge space adjacent to the library café while Garima Gupta used the open space near a water body facilitating a dialogue around art, life and their respective works of art which will continue to inspire students.



Suresh Jayaram



Manish Nai



Latha Tummuru

“As an art educator in a liberal education university, my role is that of initiating the art process in students’ lives. The need for students to indulge in the art making and creating a connection with art made me initiate the FLAME Artists’ Residency. Students and colleagues not only witness the process, the art works created during the residency adorn the campus and continue to engage the community forever.” - Gauri Gandhi



The exhibition gathering with Ms Bhavana kakar as chief guest, Dr Devi singh, FLAME University VC and guests and colleagues



Garima Gupta

Perhaps we have seen *beautiful birds of paradise* from New Guinea on social or print media; perhaps we have also seen the video of its exquisite mating dance performance where it completely transforms itself while exhibiting its beautiful plumage. But we may not be aware of the fact, that this bird from the Moluccas or Spice Islands was known to the west as a valuable trade commodity that travelled from the South-East Asia to Europe. The trade most likely peaked during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This obscure, heavenly creature became a symbol of rarity, exoticism, power and material wealth across Europe and made its way to the cabinets of curiosities. The human desire to own some exotic object by trans-

forming a living being into a curio was the driving force behind this trade. Extensively documented across Europe in natural history journals and travel catalogues as well as appearing in contemporary paintings, this bird was also used as embellishment on headdresses sometimes signifying the socio-cultural importance or symbolizing the mysticism attached to its wearer. Interestingly one of the tribes of New Guinea island who imitate the mating dance of this bird as part of their wedding ritual also realize its utility as a trade commodity. This trade though is not limited to a certain time- period and continues to date.

Who are the people who buy these birds today? This was the persistent query with which Garima Gupta, artist in residence, started her work - now an in-depth project which she has been pursuing for over 3 years. She is keenly interested in the psychological, social and historical aspect of the trade of the bird from New Guinea.

Garima has been thoroughly researching on these aspects, staying with the locals on the islands of Indonesian Archipelago trying to understand the significance of this trade to the area and the socio-political reasons behind it all.

A research-artist, she carries a neat diary with her, documenting the information in the form of drawings with an acute naturalist's eye. Some of the interactions with the locals have culminated in short films.

One short animation film beautifully captures the story of how the locals "deceitfully" or as the artist says "skillfully" kill the bird and dry it for trading. The black and white drawings and the voice-over of a Papuan man describing the process in a matter of fact manner gives the film an irresistible life.

As the artist's approach is didactic/information based, the art form rather exists as a support for her research.

Her interest in the trade of this bird made her look into fabric, which earlier was used as a form of currency. To emphasize the significance of fabric in the trade of wild life, Garima used it as a canvas for drawing the birds of paradise in one of her art works. At the FLAME Artists' Residency, the artist got the opportunity to reexamine the role of

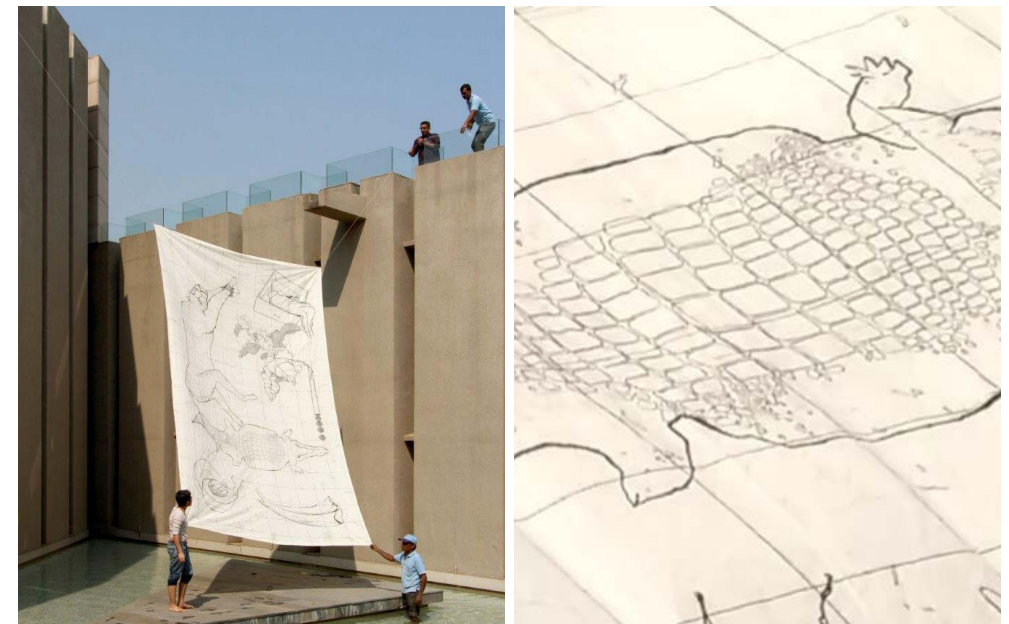
fabric in the trade of exotica.

Garima says the south-east trade route was very important for the trade of wild life and plants. Fabric was an important item that was used to trade these things. The east was a source of exotic things – clove, nutmeg, heavenly birds with or without feet, majestic tigers and elephants, various kinds of fabric etc. Fabric became a key product used to exchange exotics from Southeast Asia.

To depict this narrative, the artist chose Manjharpat, a fabric with colonial history, as her canvas to draw an imaginary map of what is traded and its route. The awe-inspiring, larger than life charcoal drawings of the exotica- an elephant, a crocodile and a tiger along with nutmeg and Burma teak are drawn on a grid. The grid represents the world map; the animals and plants constitute the landmass thus reinforcing the idea of trade and trading route in pictorial language.

The fabric is hung from a tall building over a water body at FLAME University campus representing the sail of the trade boat and a triangular stone formation in the center of the water body acts as a visual pedestal. Come a little breeze the entire installation transforms into a boat with the movement of the sail and reflecting water – becoming a visual symbol, an allegory of the trade that was carried across Southeast archipelago stretching all the way east to New Guinea.

It is sort of a Noah's Ark where archetypal species of exotic wild and plant life is carried to be seated in the cabinets of curiosity.



Garima Gupta at work



Roshan Chhabria

A keen observer of life, Roshan Chhabria looks at everything with a sense of humor and his middle-class milieu with its dichotomy presents him with ample opportunities. The simple objects, experiences and conversations find a way onto his canvases but here are retold with subtle humor and satire. Roshan uses sensitive line drawing and light color washes achieving a kind of realism that narrates the story of popular culture. Time and again, one finds references to pop artists like Richard Hamilton in Roshan's works. Sometimes he would even write the artist's dilemma to illustrate the process of art making, taking a leaf from Dadaist

practices. The artist indeed is influenced by some of the Dadaist images and re-presents them in his paintings like the Iron by Man Ray. Roshan like Man Ray plays with object, word and its meaning. The language, taste and nuances play a very important part in his art making.

The sensitive line of his drawing delineates every curve, fold, nuance of the subject. The human forms who inhabit his canvas are real people that he has observed from close quarters or seen in some sort of advertising that holds a certain appeal for him. These characters then become the actors for the dialogue that the artist wants to create about life, tastes, wishes, dreams and experiences of the urban middle-class. This section of society thrives in a dichotomy, a flux, a polarity that Roshan constantly encounters at home and the outside -this becomes the artist's fodder.

When invited to the FLAME Artists' Residency, Roshan seized the opportunity to work with fabric.

Fabric has a story to tell – how we choose a certain fabric, why we choose it - our choices are guided by our socio-cultural interactions thus developing into taste. What is tasteful for one section of society might not be so for the other. This duality is what brings a certain humor to Roshan's work.

Two short advertising films both reflecting Indian middleclass' tastes and desires became the reference point for Roshan's art work. These films along with his own experience of fabric, what is liked and disliked was the vantage point for his work.

Circumspect about capturing the apparent humor that was present in these short advertising films; the artist chooses a frame where two salesmen are seen discussing why a piece of clothing is a perfect buy. Painted in a bright pink, the clothing being sold at once speaks about newness and a certain aesthetics that will have an irresistible appeal for its audience. The salesmen painted here are **real** characters with a careful rendition of their physiognomy. Interestingly, they could be any urban middleclass salesmen convincing the customers very hard to buy their products. The painting is executed with great charm and detail. Looking close, one can see faint typography as well as some under drawing which is left undisturbed, uncovered - giving an entry route to the process of painting. The conversation between the two gentlemen appears in a comic kind

of speech box and the spiral dotted arrows guides our eye to other such conversations giving us a clue about the on goings.

This painting is installed with two other painted visuals, both drawings that a cloth maker would use to stitch a piece of clothing. Along with this, the viewer finds herself watching a video by an international clothing brand Diesel (part of the installation) that is particularly kitschy and humorous, telling you its denim will not wear and tear like the other local brands. The video is kind of a spring board helping the viewer to dive in the entire story that unfolds here.



Painting by Roshan Chhabria



Concluding ceremony

From left to right - Dr Vinod Vidwans, Prof Gauri Gandhi, Garima Gupta, Roshan Chhabria, Prof. Ashutosh Potdar, Bhavna Kakar, Dr Devi Singh, Prof Kunal Ray, Virender Sharma, Prof Ashutosh Mishra, Dr Hemant Trivedi



Prof. Kunal Ray



Prof. Gauri Gandhi



Prof. Ashutosh Potdar



Rupali Patil



Priyanka Bardiya

Text prepared by – Priyanka Bardiya, Art Historian & Writer

We would also like to thank Rupali Patil for her support and participation in the programme.

FLAME Artists' Residency Team – Prof. Gauri Gandhi

Prof. Kunal Ray

Prof. Ashutosh Potdar




## GET IN TOUCH





### FLAME Campus Address

GAT No. 1270, Taluka Mulshi, Village  
Lavale, Off Pune-Bangalore Highway,  
Pune - 412115, India

### Mailing Address

401, Phoenix Complex, Bund Garden  
Road, Opp. Residency Club, Pune -  
411001, India

 1-800-209-4567  
 [www.flame.edu.in](http://www.flame.edu.in)  
 [enquiry@flame.edu.in](mailto:enquiry@flame.edu.in)

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