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Artist as initiator

A series of events across the city will focus on use of public spaces as sites for artistic practice



Taipei-based artist Yao Jui-Chung's "Mirage"

It is difficult to assign a category to Insert 2014. It is neither an art fair nor a conventional exhibition. What it is is a series of conversations initiated by artists from all over the world who will congregate in the capital this fortnight. With Raqs Media Collective as its artistic director, this month-long art event will include an exhibition at the Mati Ghar complex at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, artist-led workshops, talks, exhibits, symposiums, performances and readings.

Around 30 artists from different international cities such as Nairobi, Taipei, Berlin, Ramallah, Shanghai, London, New York, Zagreb and Stockholm will participate in this event. Eight Indian artists will showcase their work as well.

The idea behind Insert 2014 is that of seeing the artist "as a generator of ideas, not as an illustrator" who "through his/her curiosity is able to pull together questions that otherwise would not have been asked", said Shuddhabrata Sengupta of Raqs Media Collective. The point of departure for this event, therefore, is not the artwork but the artist. Jeebesh Bagchi, another member of the collective, said that it concerns what ought to become normal practice looking at "the way that an artist interacts with the world". Insert 2014 presents an opportunity for this kind of engagement.

The trigger for the series was an invitation that Raqs received from INLAKS Shivdasani Foundation. At that time, they had just inaugurated the *Sarai Reader '09*, a nine-month-long exhibition organised in collaboration with the Devi Art Foundation that dealt with what the future art scene in Delhi could be.

They selected Delhi as the site for Insert 2014 for both "conceptual and logistical" reasons, said Monica Narula, another member of the Raqs Media Collective. Delhi is where the collective was founded in 1992 and has been based ever since. Earlier, Raqs had co-founded the Sarai programme at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, where they led interdisciplinary research and discussions between artists and researchers for more than a decade. For Azad Shivdasani, chairman of INLAKS Shivdasani Foundation and the sponsor for this event, the idea was to see how an international show of contemporary art would fare in Delhi, after he came across one in Los Angeles. The main concern for Shivdasani, however, was that the event should be socially relevant. This is reflected in the kind of artists who have been invited to be a part of it, such as Yao Jui-Chung, an artist from Taipei.

For the last two decades, Jui-Chung has been fascinated by abandoned buildings, and those that have been built but never used. In an email interview with *Time Out*, he said that he has photographed abandoned factories in the past. These, according to him, reflect the migration of labour from Taiwan to China as a result of globalisation. "There has always been a lot of social unrest in Taiwan, and the atmosphere has been such that magnificence can potentially arise out of ruins," he said. At Insert 2014, Jui-

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Chung will be presenting “Mirage: Unused Public Spaces in Taiwan”, comprising photographs of these abandoned factories and a video. Sengupta hopes that the interaction with Jui-Chung may inspire people to look at such edifices in Delhi with new eyes. Jui-Chung’s exploration of abandoned buildings finds resonance with a proposition put forth by the collective that was pivotal in planning for Insert 2014.

“We said to ourselves that instead of thinking of Delhi as a city with hardly any place for art, what if we were to invert this statement,” said Sengupta. “What happens if we think of all the dormant sites that can be used for artistic activity?” Consequently, Raqs identified 17 sites in Delhi such as the Skipper Tower on Barakhamba Road, Delhi Public Library and the Dolls Museum, that could be seen as sites for speculating on the future of Delhi’s cultural infrastructure. Additionally, through Insert 2014, Raqs is trying to rethink Mati Ghar – the gallery at the IGNCA – as a site for contemporary art. Mati Ghar is where most of the art work will be exhibited, including Berlin-based artist Ivana Franke’s work “Celestial Invitation”. Franke, who works with transparent material and light, will fill the dome with a sculptural matrix of illuminated wires that will form patterns that aim to remind people about “the wonder of looking at stars”.

Insert 2014 explores not just what is showcased, but also about how artists communicate their experiences. Symposiums are an example of this. “They involve conviviality, disagreements and conversation, and are not necessarily occasions for people to dress up and take each other seriously. The idea is to think aloud and discuss,” Narula said, pointing out that one approach is Eyal Weizman’s daylong symposium.

Weizman, an architect from Haifa, Israel, analyses architecture from a “forensic point of view” – as a scene of crime. He takes a building and examines it as a dead body – looking at the cause of death, the condition of the cadaver, any signs of violence etc. He has applied this same concept in his analysis of socio-political events using the bearings it has had on its structures, such as the drone attacks in Pakistan and the 1980s genocide against Mayan people in Guatemala in his new work. He will be presenting his investigations through an art installation at Mati Ghar and at a symposium at the India International Centre.

Artist and photographer Gauri Gill will produce small books that contain collections of photographs from the 1984 riots and responses by writers, artists, and poets to these images.

Visitors can take these books with them – an instance, Narula pointed out, of the art work being explored as a “takeaway”. Using the artist as the pivot and Delhi as the site for artistic production, Insert 2014 is likely to be an exciting moment for comprehensive and engaging talks about, but certainly not limited to, contemporary art in India.

By Meher Ali on January 17 2014 11.48am

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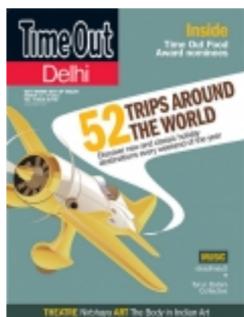
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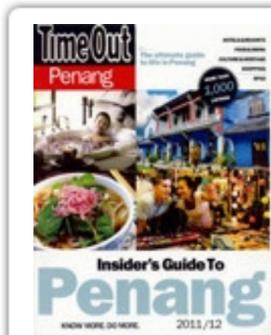
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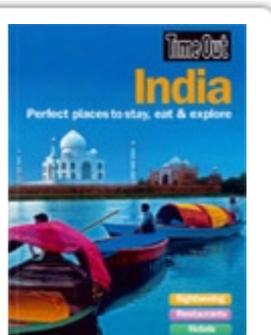


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