



ABHISARAN

A JSW INITIATIVE



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Art has the power to dissolve cultural differences and bring people together. The first edition of Abhisaran residency in November 2014 created an air of excitement in Vijayanagar, bringing the local population of Bellary district in direct connection with South Asian artists. The aim to create this annual residency is to provide the people of our steel plant an opportunity to engage with art and culture. Not only will our workers, managers and their families get drawn into the fine act of appreciating art but it will also inspire them to look at their environment anew. Likewise, the artists would have an opportunity to work in a new and challenging environment, both technically and culturally. In the next few years, the Vijayanagar initiative will develop into one of the best public art residencies and its result would be seen in public installations across our steel plants in India.

Literally translated as 'convergence', Abhisaran is a residency for artists from SAARC countries, with the aim of providing industrial and financial



Sangita Jindal with artists at Vijayanagar.

support to create large-scale projects. The artists, who are invited to participate, draw inspiration from the various historical, cultural and industrial inputs that have been identified and incorporated in the residency structure by the residency curator, Amit Kumar Jain, whom I invited in 2014 to lead the project. Amit, very ably assisted by Geetika Arora, managed the entire residency from start to finish with great enthusiasm. He tapped into all the available resources and local talents to bring out the best results for this first edition.

The residency has a very strong relationship to the CSR activities of JSW. In fact, many of the

ABHISARAN: A CONVERGENCE OF SOUTH ASIAN ART.

Sangita Jindal, Chairperson, JSW Foundation

artists that participated in the first edition were inspired by 'Womb to Womanhood' - the motto of the JSW Foundation. The O.P.Jindal Center became a resource centre for the artists as they interacted and collaborated with the trainee teams in the welding units, the apparel department as well as the Suraksha Sanitary Napkin initiative, resulting in an immense learning experience for both collaborators. For the members of the JSW team, it was also an occasion to challenge themselves beyond their usual workload and the results were overwhelming.

I was also very excited that the residency provided an opening for the children to engage with

art. Grace Murray, an education specialist from the United States conducted various educational and outreach programs with Mahbubur Rahman (Bangladesh), Baptist Coelho (India), Sanjeev Maharjan (Nepal) and Sheelasha Rajbhandhari (Nepal). She also led a workshop with JSW employees that led to the inclusion of one of the employees Ms.Vijal during the open studio. This reconfirmed my belief that education and outreach programs should continue to be an important aspect of the residency.

I am very excited to present Abhisaran at the India Art Fair and hope that you will enjoy viewing the works as much as I did.

Richard Sennett has defined the craftsman as an obsessive individual who is engaged in the process of creation to an extent that, to him, precision, detail and quality matter the most. This individual can remain engrossed and absorbed in one minor act, which may go un-noticed to others, until his eye and hand have ensured that even the most insignificant detail has been given a purpose. He cites the example of the conductor who will work on a single note with his orchestra, without the concern for the overtime he is paying for at the theatre.

Who is this craftsman?

The craftsman can be anyone who has painstakingly rehearsed a role for years to master it. A craftsman is not only the one who sits on his potter's wheel for years churning out terracotta cups for local *chai* shop, but also includes musicians, drivers, engineers, parents, kings and also industrialists.

A similar obsessive desire to create is seen in two individuals belonging to different times. It was Hari Hara I and his brother Bukka (cited here as one person) who converged smaller kingdoms into one large Vijayanagar Empire in the 14th century and in his continued desire created South India's largest empire, with its capital at Hampi. The city was established in a detailed and well-thought precision of quarters that served different purposes, which included the royal pavilion, sacred quarters, the markets and the houses of the town dwellers. Each and every building was planned with an eye for detail, making Hampi one of the richest and most flourishing centers of trade and commerce from the 14th to the 16th century.

In reference to Vijayanagar of the 20th century, the craftsman can be identified in Mr. Sajjan Jindal, who like the Vijayanagar kings, established the JSW Steel Plant on a completely barren land on the



Lambani women, Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra, Bellary.

A DESIRE TO CREATE, COLLABORATIVELY.

Amit Kumar Jain, Residency Curator

outskirts of Hampi. Over the last twenty-five years, the plant has grown into a significant industrial town, with every detail looked into- comfortable housing across three townships, cultural and recreational centers, educational institutions as well as the various not for profit initiatives like the OPJ Center. The change in landscape is a remarkable one.

The above mentioned craftsmen are artists who, according to Sennett, questioned both the 'how' and 'why' in his labor of creation. Hari Hara 1 and Sajjan Jindal are two individuals who created their townships by always giving preference to their surroundings. The Vijayanagar kings used the local rocks brilliantly for their defense and devised techniques to ensure that the river water reached each and every citizen. The Jindals devised ways to reuse waste energy within their plants and ensured that the city, once abandoned as an infertile region for an industry, becomes a green patch in northern Karnataka.

The backbone of the residency is in the historicity of the two cities, which were established on similar motives. The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hampi lies abandoned and in ruins but travelers to this region can get a glimpse of the rich history it beholds. Similarly, the JSW Steel Plant provides the traveler, in this case, the artists, the raw material (iron ore, steel and scrap), which is innate with materiality and historicity. It provides an arena of 'residues', which come alive in the form of the artworks.

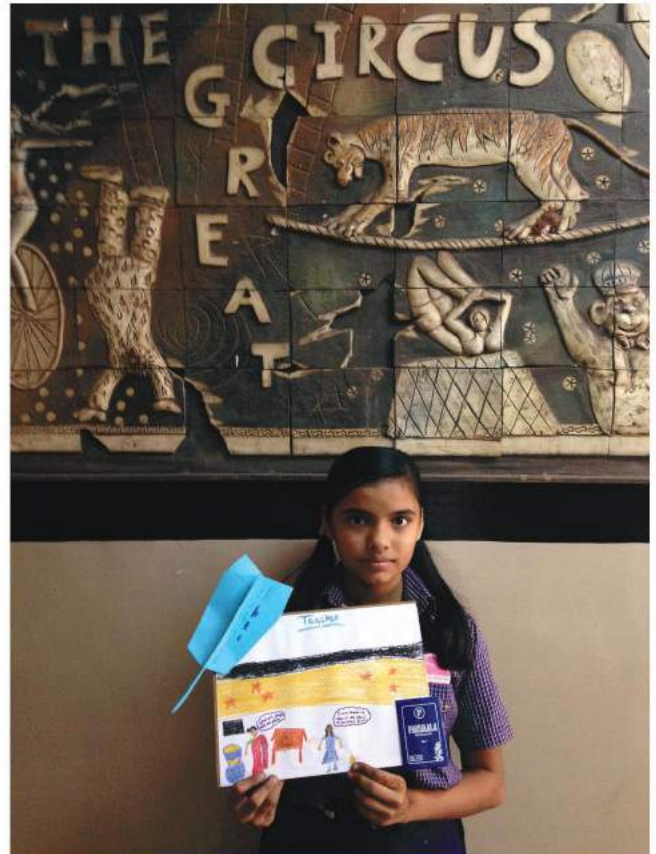
The interaction between the significant pointers of the cultural past of Vijayanagar kingdom and the recent scrap from the steel plant will evoke a new life into objects, which had finished their journey of meanings, and begin a new cycle of creation and destruction. Here the artist too becomes the obsessive creator, the Homo Faber, who would question the 'why' of creation through multiple community and outreach initiatives, looking at each work as a collaboration with the various engineering teams. Just like the two cities were always a center of convergence of people of different backgrounds, ideas, motivations and goals, the South Asian experimental residency will imbibe the nature of a workshop, where the process of creation will hold prominence that the product itself.

and eventually resulted in its success. The 'concert in the park' event which was held two days before the open studio at Kaladham, became a platform to mix local talent with the resident artists. The concert, which included a tabla recital by a musician from Sandur, also saw the opening of Preksha Tater's land art work as well as included an orative performance by Muzummil Ruheel inside the O.P.J.Memorial. This



Orientation tour at the JSW Steel Plant, Vijayanagar.

The first edition of Abhisaran was held from November 10th 2014 to November 30th 2014 and included the following artists: **Baptist Coelho (India)**, Preksha Tater (India), Mrugen Rathod (India), Mahbubur Rahman (Bangladesh), Pala Pothupitiye (Sri Lanka), Chinthaka Thenuwara (Sri Lanka), Muzummil Ruheel (Pakistan), Seema Nusrat (Pakistan), Sheelasha Rajbhandari (Nepal) and Sanjeev Maharjan (Nepal). Various educational and outreach programs by the artists and led by Ms. Grace Murray from the United States created an arena for collaboration and exchange which provided the structure and direction to the residency



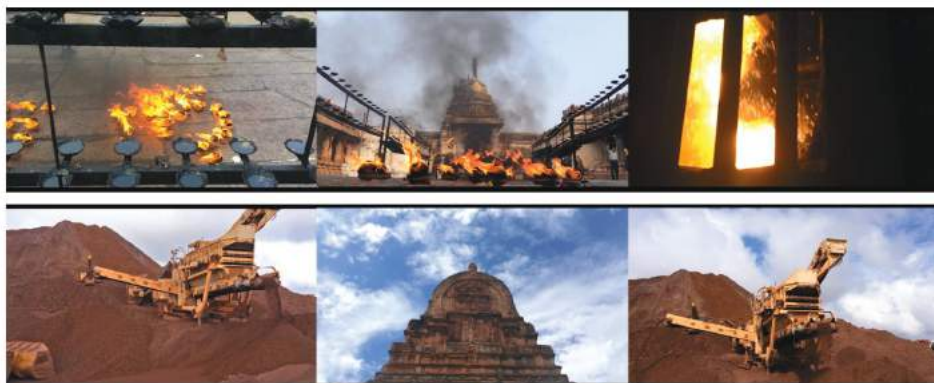
Baptist Coelho's Paper Plane Project at Jindal Vidyamandir, Vidyannagar, Bellary.

event, not only served as an ice breaker but also aroused curiosity amongst the locals, who visited the open day in large numbers.

The response and support that we received from the team at JSW was overwhelming and in particular I would like to thank Mr.Gouda and Mr.Kaushik for their assistance. In closing, I would like to thank Mrs.Sangita Jindal for providing me with this opportunity to create one of the most exciting residencies in the country.

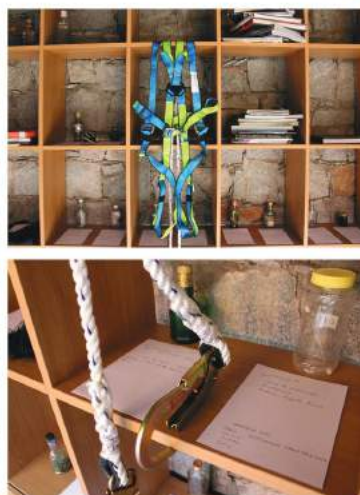
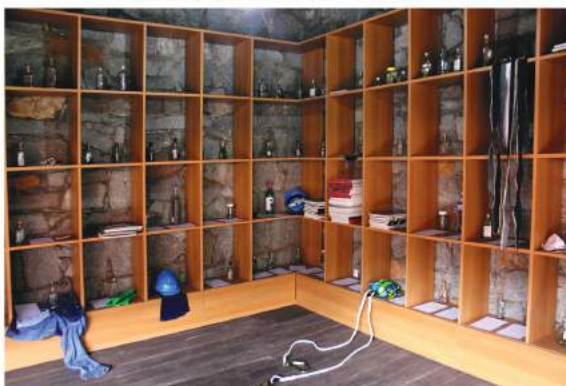
REFERENCE

1. Sennett, Richard. 2008. 'Prologue: Man as his own maker' in *The Craftsman* (Page 1-18). Yale University Press. New Haven & London.



Mahbubur Rahman, 'Era'. Three channel video installation. 12.30 minutes. 2014.

Baptist Coelho, 'Stone to Steel'. Site-specific installation with health and safety gear, glass and bottles with metal and plastic lids containing leaves, stones, mud various objects and air along with notes on paper. Installation dimensions: variable. 2014.



Ameya Balsekar finds South Asian artists at the Vijayanagar residency responding energetically to the majestic ruins of Hampi and the mammoth JSW steel plant.

A BOUQUET OF VOICES.

Review by Ameya Balsekar

Visions of India's past and future overlap interestingly as you travel in the Bellary region of northern Karnataka. If the ornately carved ruins of Hampi, the capital of the erstwhile Vijayanagar Empire, dominate the area's historical narrative, it is a humming steel factory and its surrounding township - connected by blemish-free streets and impeccably manicured lawns - which signal the iron-ore rich region's projected industrial future. The area seems to exist both geographically and temporally in the space between two empires.

This is a manifestation of the larger transformation taking place within India today, one which gives rise to a desire to reconcile the apparent achievements of the pre-industrial past with the dreams of an industrialised future. It was this quest for reconciliation that inspired Abhisaran, a 21-day long residency in the month of November, curated by Amit Kumar Jain at the invitation of art patron Sangita Jindal. It was held at Kaladham, an oasis for the arts that abuts JSW's enormous Vijayanagar steel plant.

The ten participating artists, invited from across South Asia, were expected to represent the 'convergence' that the residency's name signifies through both, their presence and their work. The residency was an attempt at initiating a pan-South Asian conversation about the Vijayanagar experience, communicated through a range of artistic forms. The artists were invited to seek inspiration from the 'residues' of both empires - the ruins of Hampi and the scrap material generated by the steel factory - and to live sociologist Richard Sennett's concept of the obsessive 'craftsman' during the three-week sojourn.

According to Jain, a sense of creative obsession connects the region's past with its present in that both were shaped by the will of committed visionaries. If Hampi was the product of the imperial vision of Harihara I, then the Vijayanagar steel plant is the product of the dedication of Sajjan Jindal, the founder of JSW. Of course, nobody can gainsay the contribution of the workforce in translating this vision into reality.

To Jain's credit, the project was conceptualized in a way that attempted to work through this proposition. First, the invited artists were strongly encouraged to engage with the broader

community as they conceptualized and created their works; a move which, in turn, encouraged and made visible ordinary people's engagement with the creation of art. And second, the curatorial push to incorporate industrial materials and scrap taken from the steel plant into the produced artworks made for a potentially fascinating response to Sennett's observations regarding the negative effects of modern industry on craftsmanship.

The artists - all of whom have had some experience creating site-specific works - appeared to have interpreted Abhisaran's expansive brief in a variety of ways. Among the more promising works was one conceptualized by Baptist Coelho. In a fascinating interpretation of what a participatory artwork might be, the artist asked JSW employees to 'collect air' from their work areas and to place it with one souvenir in a glass jar. The jars, along with short personal notes written by the employees, were then installed in bookshelves at Kaladham's library. The work presents a poignant view of the diverse individuals whose lives have come to intersect in the creation and maintenance of the modern industrial empire; the preservation of their personal moments and experiences in the bottles seeks to ensure that they register their presence in unique ways. It is also a reflection on raising awareness about environmental issues and poetically summoning up the intangible variables that make life in the township interesting.

A number of artists used found materials from the plant to create interactive works which reflected on the nature of the industrial process. Preksha Tater's land art made use of the contrasting colours and textures of black coke and red iron ore in two concentric circles carved out around a tree on the lawns of the Vidyannagar township, which adjoins the steel plant. A gap in the circle leads the viewer into the centre, presenting an opportunity to reflect on the process by which seemingly nondescript raw and intermediary materials come to be



Abhisaran, 2014. Work in progress. Vijayanagar, Karnataka.



The success of Abhisaran is attributed to the following people:

Sangita Jindal, Chairperson, JSW Foundation
Abhay Sardesai, Ameya Balsekar, Grace Murray & Geetika Arora

Baptist Coelho, Chinthaka Thenuwara, Mahbubur Rahman, Mrugen Rathod, Muzummil Ruheel, Pala Pothupithiye, Preksha Tater, Sanjeev Maharjan, Seema Nusrat, Sheelasha Rajbhandari

Alok Mehrotra, Balu, Bejal, Charan Raj, Christopher, Dr. Jayshree Kulkarni, Jyoti Chetal, Dr. Kedar, Kiran, Manjunath Prabhu, Mukund Gorakshkar, Partha Chowdhury, Pradeep Das, Pradeep Kaushik, Prakash Mirpuri, Priya Nindawat, Raghavendra Rao, Rajsekar, Rohini, Rupesh Pandey, Severina Fernandes, Srinivas, Shailendra, Suryakant, T S Gouda

Amarjeet Kumar, Jayram, Manjunath Rangannanavar, Meka Sai Ram, Naveena, Nivruthi Madhukar Shishave, Pramod Suresh Bhor, Rahul Kadabagi, Ramalisamy, Ramappa, Reshma, R P Chaitanya, Sahana Acharya, Sanukha, Shiva Kumar, S Saravanel, Sushant Mohanty, Tarane Amrut Kasinath

The entire team at JSW Mumbai & Vijayanagar.



Abhisaran, 2014.

Curated by Amit Kumar Jain.

Photo credits: Pradeep Kaushik, Suresh, Amit Kumar Jain & the artists.

Catalogue design by Aparajita Tiwari.

Printed on Natural Evolution, 145gsm.