
PRESS RELEASE

ON THE CUSP OF THE EIGHTH DAY

Celebrating 9 years of Aravani Art Project

- Gallery XXL presents the first solo exhibition of the **Aravani Art Project**, collective led by transwomen and cis-women based in India
- The exhibition opens on **Thursday, January 9, 2025** for **Mumbai Gallery Weekend 2025**
- The curation celebrates the **9 year anniversary** of the collective's work that has traversed through streets as well as studio spaces

Gallery XXL is thrilled and honored to announce ***ON THE CUSP OF THE EIGHTH DAY***, the first solo exhibition of **Aravani Art Project** opening on **January 9, 2025** during **Mumbai Gallery Weekend**.

ON THE CUSP OF THE EIGHTH DAY, summons the life and works of Aravanis, the transgender community in India, through the Aravani Art Project – a trans and cis women art collective. Celebrating the 9 years of the collective's art practice and praxis, the exhibition presents canvases, photographs, testimonies and narratives that work towards the bringing down of severe discrimination, social stigma and systemic inequality faced by the Transgender Community in India through the medium of art as its vehicle, voice, and tool to create a space for intersectional voices in the society.

The title of the exhibition finds its root in the story of Aravan's sacrifice, the central deity of Aravanis. This sacrifice, which is necessary for the victory of Pandavas in the 18 day war of Kuruskshetra in the epic of Mahabharata, becomes a pivotal point for the transgender community to commune together in the month of Chaitra (April/May), and celebrate the 18 day Koovagam festival. The festival holds a ceremonial marriage of Iravan to the people of the community and is followed by their widowhood after the ritual re-enactment of Iravan's heroic death on the eighth day of the war.

With this threshold on the eighth day of a war where a sacrifice is necessary for a new beginning, the curation puts forth different dualities at the stroke of midnight – binding the doubleness of how gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexuality is conceived, perceived and lived. Collapsing days and nights, individuals and communes, home and the world, cosmos and dreams that exist in the undergrounds and subcultures to crack open dreams and constellations that exist on streets, in homes, on mirrors and bodies, these dualities become guiding impulses for co-existence; ultimately provoking a fold in reflections, identities, and norms that entail the society.

In the confines of Gallery XXL, the Aravanis come with joy, resistance and pride to expand the meanings of desires into modes of survival, the meanings of belonging with respect to chosen families, the meanings of work vis-a-vis art, unabashed expressions, the body, and the meanings of art into praxis, culture work and living.

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About Aravani Art Project

Aravani Art Project is an artist collective from India led by transwomen and cis women. The name of the collective is derived from Lord Aravan, the patron god who is a significant figure for transgender communities called Alis (also Aravani in Tamil, and Hijra throughout South Asia).

With a practice based primarily in public spaces, Aravani Art Project's mission is to bring visibility, challenge stigmatized ideals and subvert systematic discrimination perpetuated against transgender, gender non-conforming and queer individuals. The collaborative and participatory approach toward making art enables access for the community to congregate and create a space that celebrates intersectionality through visual art. It becomes a tool for expression, story telling and consciousness.

Using their work as a platform, Aravani Art Project encourages members to participate in the process of creativity and voice their opinions to be an active part of society. The visual stories that surface; of lived realities and freedom, become the voice for rights and empowerment to imagine a more colourful world.

The collective's work of integrating contemporary public art through activism in the urban fabric has awarded them grants and fellowships from **India Foundation for the Arts, Khoj International Artists' Association, Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), India Art Fair, and the 60th Biennale Arte 2024 in Venice**. Their oeuvre has embraced a multitude of collaborations with for-profit and non-profit entities. They have worked with brands such as No Border Shop, SoHo House, Microsoft, JP Morgan, Levis, Goldman Sachs, Araku, among others. And some of their institutional collaborations include IIM Bangalore, RMZ Foundation, RPG Foundation, India Art Fair and Sandbox Collective.

About Steevez

Steevez is a visual artist and curator based in Chennai. His photography emphasises social and environmental narratives, and has garnered international recognition. Steevez's educational background includes a B.Sc. in Visual Communication from Loyola College and advanced photography studies from the Pathshala South Asia Media Institute, Dhaka and Speos Photography Institute, Paris.

His work has been published extensively, with notable features in Mongabay, Cosmopolitan India, and a variety of national news outlets. Steevez has been an active participant in the global photographic community, curating significant exhibitions such as the World Refugee Day show at Loyola College and co-curated Nitham 2022, 2023 part of Vaanam, celebration of Dalit history month organised by Director Pa. Ranjith's Neelam cultural center. Through his camera lens and curatorial projects, Steevez continues to work in the landscape of contemporary photography.

Since 2017, Steevez has been working on an ongoing project with Aravani Art Project titled ***Portraits of Home*** presenting portraits of transwomen through the medium of photography.

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Members of Aravani Art Project

Bangalore Team :

Chandri
Shanthi Muniswamy
Jyothi
Purushi
Prarthana
Raji
Shwetha
Thara
Sandhya
Noushad

Chennai Team :

Kanchana
Varsha

Mumbai Team :

Aishu
Mayuri
Vicky Shinde
Kajal
Shyamli
Mona
Ayesha
Deepa
Sowmya

Delhi Team :

Karnika
Alish
Vinni

Current Supporting Artists :

Poornima Sukumar
Nandini Rajaramanathan
Shobhana Kumari
Ghana
George Deepak
Murugan Gopi

Current Society Members :

Poornima Sukumar
Sharanya Ramprakash
Murugan Gopi

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Aditya Ranade
Nila M
Kumari
Nischita

Past Team Members :

Sadhna Prasad, Art Director from 2016 - 2022
Aditi Patkar, Production head and artist from 2018 - 2022
Priyanka Diwakar, Artist from 2016 - 2020

About the Gallery

Established in 2023, Gallery XXL is an urban contemporary art gallery based in Mumbai, India. The gallery represents and showcases a roster of Indian and international artists whose practices are rooted in a variety of disciplines that broaden the understanding of established categories and catalyse diverse exchanges through processual exhibitions, treating the gallery as a fluid institution which presents dynamic negotiations to the idea of a 'white cube.'

With its name echoing Jean-Michel Basquiat's city walk from Downtown 81 (Dir. Edo Bertoglio,) when he described his medium as "extra large," Gallery XXL extends a desire for imaginations to be XXL, an abbreviation for 'extra, extra, large' and brings it to the city of Mumbai in order to examine the ambitious scale of visuals and conversations prevalent in urban art.

Arjun Bahl, Giulia Ambrogi, Thanish Thomas and the late Hanif Kureshi, the founders of St+Art India Foundation joined hands with Joe Cyril (Director, Gallery XXL) to start the space-time for Gallery XXL. Founded in 2014, St+Art India has been supporting street art in the country through public art projects. With the experience of creating artistic interventions in public as well as private spaces coalescing in order to widen engagement with urban art, aesthetics and culture work in the Indian context, St+art extends its vision to facilitate institutional representation for urban contemporary artists through exhibitions at Gallery XXL.

Team XXL

Giulia Ambrogi, Arjun Bahl, Thanish Thomas, Sarah Malik, Vidur Sethi, Faraz Khan, Akhil Kattamanchil, Guru Pednekar, Aarti Jain, Ashu Khanna, Shweta Rathaur, Harsh Choudhary and Babu Gundanoor.

Annexures

The attached annexure includes the artist's portraits, artwork captions and the drive consists of the invite and high resolution images of the artworks. For any more information, please contact sarah@galleryxxl.com.

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