



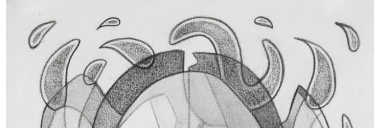
CULTURE

Mumbai's newest gallery in Colaba aims to democratize art on a global scale

Gallery XXL is in a century-old bungalow that aim to take the dialogue on urban art to the next level.

By Aarushi Agrawal

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In Colaba, one of India's most revered art markets, stands The Kalanjee Project, a 100-plus year-old bungalow. The 7,000 square feet heritage site has recently been converted into Gallery XXL, which brings the flavour of urban contemporary and post graffiti art to this traditional art market, adding another layer of dynamism to it. "One of our goals is to let viewers experience urban art. We felt that someone needed to take the initiative to represent this very important art movement," says gallery Director and CEO Joe Cyril. The gallery opened on 13 April with the show Outsiders, where over 20 artists' work has been displayed, and is curated by Amitabh Kumar.

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AIKO, *Bunny Love 1*, 2023, Mixed media, spray paint and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 33 inches The artists and Gallery XXL

As an artist himself, Kumar has been part of the urban art movement since 2012. Trained in art school, with his work exhibited at galleries, he was among the artists looking for more avenues to showcase their work. “It felt very restrictive at that time to have this straitjacketed idea of an artist. We had other ambitions and when we started painting in public spaces what really drove us at that time was a connection with the people,” he adds.

With this mindset, several artists in India took to making art in public spaces. It was also around this time that Guesswho shot to fame, putting India on the global urban art map. With the emergence of the St+art India Foundation in 2014 that works to make art more accessible and with a focus on art activism with the coming of the Aravani Art Project in 2016, street art has steadily grown in India over the last decade. “What we’ve witnessed is a range of artists really blurring the boundary between accepted notions of where people make images,” says Kumar. The coming of XXL is the next big landmark in the story of the global art movement in India.

[Guesswho, 2023, Stencil with spray paint on metal, 40 x 30 inches](#) [The artists and Gallery XXL](#)

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With its first show, XXL is already introducing a new dimension to India's urban art. While many of the artists participating in Outsiders have shown at galleries before, having this dedicated space offers them a space to explore their art more intimately. Art in public often involves consent from a lot of parties, and largely works as public service, above all else. But exhibiting in a gallery allows artists a space to introspect, create art for themselves, and better understand their practices. "A lot of these artists are using contemporary art contexts to evolve their practices," says Kumar.

As a viewer, how one responds to this growing movement is also important, bringing audiences into the fold and erasing the distance between art and viewer. XXL allows viewers to engage intimately and closely with an art form that's generally seen in public and enjoyed from afar. The name of the Gallery also references the scale of street art, that's often large, and the gallery partakes in this ethos of displaying art that's larger than life, even as it brings such art within the folds of its walls.

The artists of Outsiders range from AIKO to The London Police and from Martha Cooper to Trespassers. Also on show are the Aravani Art Project, Daku, Guesswho, Khatra, Paola Delfin, and Papi Nevla, among others. Their practices cover a range of approaches, from text and abstract expressionism to embroidery, and from different types of portraiture to ink and stencil artworks. Through the show, one will be able to experience the intense diversity of perspectives that together make up the urban art movement. Overall, the show aims to highlight the story and history of urban art, and exhibit its various facets and ideas. "Once you enter the exhibition what we'd like you to experience is you being part of the story," says Kumar.

Aravani Art Project, Deepa in Colaba I, 2023, Acrylic, cloth and embroidery on canvas, 48 x 24 inches The artists and Gallery XXL

From Banksy to Keith Haring, graffiti and street art is recognized as a globally renowned movement, and XXL aims to be part of this international dialogue. It plans on doing this through developing a network with similar urban galleries around the world. Through having shows abroad and setting up travelling shows with the partner galleries, XXL hopes to break the inherent geographical hierarchy of the art world, giving South Asian artists an equal stage. It also plans on hosting residencies where renowned international artists can visit the country and participate in community projects.

“Another goal is to change how art is perceived as an exclusionary or intimidating thing,” says Cyril. Through having a shop in the gallery, it’s encouraging everyone to take something back home, irrespective of how much the artworks cost. They also want to give prints their due place in the art world. “While it’s considered less valuable in the traditional art market, printmaking is one of the strongest ways of expression in the urban art world,” adds Cyril.

At its core, XXL aims to evolve as a strong Indian addition to this global

movement, offering urban artists more freedom and space for creativity, familiarizing viewers with the many possibilities and definitions of urban and graffiti art, and giving urban art a larger space in the contemporary art dialogue globally and here at home.

Senkoe, 2023, Spray paint on canvas stretched on plywood, 41 x 57 inches *The artists and Gallery XXL*

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