

Practice: in transitional space

Workshop conceptualised by Shruti Ramlingaiah

Supported by Sher-Gil Sundaram Arts Foundation

Practice: in transitional space

Duration: July- October 2016

Art institute: Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art, Mumbai

Overview- July- August 2016

The workshop started in July where initial thought was to address interaction within public realms with local artisan/person involved in the making and repairing kinds of products. As exercise intended to interact and intervene within ones immediate surrounding. Each student had identified an individual in their neighbourhood- cobbler, blacksmith, bakery, name plate maker, bag maker, tea stall, metal fabricator and garage workers. The students' analysing, annotating furthered on the basis of prior interactions or recalling from everyday experiences passing at their shop in the locality, meeting places (bakery), material that interests to observe them making/melding things, compelled with noise in the chaos or so intimidated by location of their shop/stall in the city. The workshop begins from research and visual- documentation, videos, clippings from conversations, making notes. This was to unwind to further ways of intervention in personal space, language as lead, observing, expertise as access and so on. They were given a day or two in week by sub-ordinates/makers to meet in their free times from work. The work in progress from their visits to places opened dialogue and conversation threads and parts from that will follow at end of this report.

Session#1: Students research and notes

This workshop culminated in two phases a mentor-session by Amrita Gupta Singh on 4th October and display of works as part of the workshop from 5- 7 October at the college campus. Facilitator opened the session as to have conceived after sessions of research visits and discussions by students and local artisan that followed on questions surrounding collaborations or individuality of making work. How

students look at subjective elements of viewing and rendering, interaction in-between spaces, need to oscillate within ones praxis of practice of how one observes things around?

- Students discussed and presented their work and research to resource person to have opened many questions - How did each of them break the iceberg, to enter another's space?
- How did they develop the form?

-Ways of interventions adopted by each of them.

Sanika (garage and metal fabricator) she discussed how she had known the owner metal shop, allowed her step into the space. However, what unfolded later was something she never thought of, Sanika's observations- 'I knew the owner of metal fabrication workshop and so he had allowed me to come and see'. She started going every day, sit and watch them working and slowly they started opening up asking her questions, why she is here for? They wouldn't call this artwork, for them it was job. They would say, 'Hey girl, since so long you are doing this job, when will you finish it?'

'When we sit in the car and go to these people to repair our cars we either think of them as 'poor' or 'uneducated'. We have all got our labels for them. We either look them with pity or as people that 'we don't want to be'. 'They came to me as happy persons, than what I used to feel.' And the owner of the shop, well, what can I say about him, he works out in the gym, very macho man, was sitting glued to his chair, scolding all of the workers from down there if they forgot to wear a safety belt. Once in the fabrication shop, the workers were supposed to climb up of the top of the shed because it was being renovated. I really felt good seeing that kind of relationship, the way the owner and workers bonded. And I am sure he must really care, but a very slight, for a fleeting second there he speaks to me under his voice, 'If one of them falls and breaks something, it's my ass that's comes in the line'. So maybe he is just scared about the union, and their lives don't matter much? The

treatment by the owner, he kept saying, (to worker at fabricator shop) as 'they are just robots' after all and would often murmur this to Sanika.



Amrita pointed- power structure, capital, and labour as three element index within the structure. One has to sensitise to their surroundings, lend empathy, and building relationships. She added, it is like power, capital and labour crossing thresholds in the city like assembly line- workers to produce something For her this everyday visits turned as entire process as

performative. She cut and moulded 700 pieces of iron plates to arrange in structured regime like arrangements, critiquing the city structures.

Ayushi (bakery collaboration): It all started as ideation around the material of bread making for her. The basic thought to learn and work in perishable material intriguing, where the idea steps at later point in time. She says, 'medium curiosity came way before the thought'. While it was known that she has to deal with technicalities of material. She began making a maquette of face as experimentation

to handle dough in flour. The owner was aware of art field she says. Years back M.F Hussain would visit the bakery he expressed once to her. He welcomed her to use all ingredients needed in making bread. Later, the idea of building structure as the bakery is old building that has seen high rise skyscrapers reaching and developed sudden in last decade, she adds. For this was



subverting the idea of perishable material is critique of city and development, growth and demolishment, decay a major element if placed around the area of

Crawford reaching towards, Marine Lines where the bakery is located, added Amrita.

Ashwam (tea stall): 'It was sound the noise in that cramped, chaotic place outside the railway station where I get off and take my local, Belapur in Navi Mumbai'.



Ashwam told how this noise is everywhere one would say, however, most of the people turn their heads as they pass this tea stall. The tea maker beats some cardamom (masala) which is unlike any *chaiwala* will make at most tea stalls in Mumbai. His is not a special one. But it compel passer-by, with the noise of it. And his works seek for small and simple instances observing at fleeting times, even so in rush hours of

the day. It was difficult for him to start talking or documenting the process of making tea as the owner of stall remained busy all day. He say, 'though sound was so different when the owner grinded the things in vessel'. Amrita discussed the elements of object and story used in this narrative and drawing smade from coffee stains and digital prints as context from space. The element of invisibility, as

common man, prevails still evident in the distinctness of the sound of grinding. Facilitator pointed to, level of performativity existing in the audio, Ashwam draws upon to be placed together, as low, but would compel the viewer to think about, build closeness.





Arvind (collaborated with blacksmith fifth generation of makers) in Kolhapur his native place. He narrated the family tree involved in making as traditional occupation passed from one hand to another to the person he met. He discussed prepping before starting to work, as told by blacksmith, 'preparing ones tools before starting work is very important'. Arvind adds, 'I recalled then how myself or all at the sculpture

department would prepare our own tools'. The idea of work that surrounds and unfold as book (in wood) comes from constantly, observing society at large, he adds. He worked on making tools, at the same time kept analysing the strength, and capacity for self as against blacksmith said, 'if I would have studied could have done a lot'. The visual book becomes narrative, allegory to poem he wrote in his vernacular Marathi, could be translated as, mother is needle, and father is like blacksmith, *lohar*. What further unfolded as poem/writing as way of intervention. Most of us concurred to presence of language with the work. Apprehension to material element like use of glass was mentioned by a student, in Arvind's works. The narrative formed seems to be borrowed from parallel histories of the city, that is Kolhapur.

Aman's (Cobbler- Rakesh Saket) he first visited this cobbler's son where the father-son worked on shift basis (quarterly or so). Where Aman met the son who left in a week's time for his home town in UP. To step in to father's (Rakesh's) space took him a while to explain what is he doing here? His idea as to inline his studio practice (in form

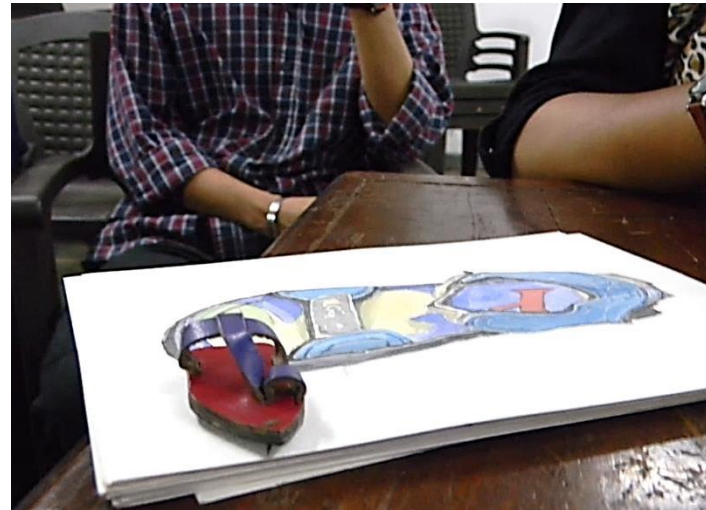


of drawing, painting on paper, needle making) was to render episodes of Rakesh's space, his use of tools, constantly shifting of space from workplace to living area on footpath.

He (Aman) recalls, his father stitching and mending, shoe or little things at home as he was growing. 'Some needle my father used to have with him' He says, 'I always felt like stitching one myself, but never did try, then'.

Amrita noted it as both makers interaction, as Aman trying to intervene different nature of mediums and visual forms, photograph book, GIFs, as to Rakesh's re-making miniature *chappal* shoe, from the waste materials at his shop. The questions that surrounds memory and repetition in time element, missing element, relationship formed experiential to emotional aspects.

Raavi engagement with the name plate maker, Aslam Sayeed derived as factor to know the person, she says, 'how much do we know him beyond his work?' Her interaction led from basis stream of thoughts around skilled hand of his, everyday had been cutting the brass plate. He learnt these techniques from his uncle some 15 years back. Earlier he had a shop in Bhendi bazaar, Fort to a shop and his journey to Colaba, Mumbai. He lives in Colaba, which he says, 'had been difficult to make my living initially'. The skill at his hand and his journey was to unfold and this idea put forth in collaborative



says, Raavi. She says, 'I knew I wouldn't be able to learn to attain his expertise in this short period of time'. For me, 'it became imperative to collate both the hands, my as well his'. The hand of maker is evident in the plate that Aslam cut out of brass of his name over it to the obscurity inculcated via wires making mesh-like crossing, over it.

Dheeraj shared- His visit started listening to at length story by bag maker in his locality, Talegaon, Pune. As he asked him, he kept saying where do I start telling you? He got overwhelmed that somebody is eager to listen to him. For he got deep in to the story told by the bag maker. Some

fragments he shared like, 'his parents were convinced of him from childhood (maker) as curse to have born on the day of new moon', How he kept switching jobs from factory in Byculla, to bus driver, helper in hospital back to his native in Pune as bag maker/repairer, which is on to present. To render this as narrative in visual form, Dheeraj was unable to ideate rather medium struck at later period of time, he said. He often, questions surrounding, 'why we do pictorial compositions in the classroom?' And to counter this act of aftermath of listening he went back to the classroom fundamentals to render stories in continuous form of narration. He was suggested by resource person, to bring back and re-visit the bag maker. To exercise the unlearning and process of arrangements in the shop, these stories are part from what and how it is been filtered in- between visits.



Question-session

I do not sketch much, but most often I see my classmates trying to render everything as 'beautiful', I don't comprehend to see everything around me beautiful, I have problem with rendering the models. How do I create interest? Few inputs suggested by Amrita were- While beauty could mean different to every individual, your definition of beauty cannot form in a day rather would need to enhanced and focus readings, and question things around.

While another question by a student, touched upon existentialism, 'we see these workers and keep feeling bad to have their lives in darkness, and this is what is problematic for me.' What as an artist can one do, we cannot change their life, but just paint or make artwork and this is what I have started to ask myself working with these workers in fabrication shop.

Amrita: how the reality and things surrounding us cannot be changed at sudden though we as artist could sensitize a group of people (may be small in number). One cannot be social change maker to larger audience at once. Here the role of artist as to open windows to larger audience

About Resource Person: **Amrita Gupta Singh**

Amrita Gupta Singh is an art historian and writer based in Mumbai. She was fellow, ARThink South Asia (2010-11). Her writings on art (art essay, art reviews) have been published in magazines like Art India, Art & Deal, Domus, Critical Collective, Take on art, Nandan journal and online platforms. Currently, she is the Programme Director at the Mohile Parikh Center, Mumbai.

Practice: in transitional space



workshop-exhibition from students of
Sir J.J School of Art, Mumbai as part of
the Students' Biennale an initiative of
Kochi Biennale Foundation

5 - 7 October, 2016
at Sir.J.J School of Art,
Fort, Mumbai-400001

Students' Biennale's Curator-led Workshops are
supported by Sher-Gil Sundaram Arts Foundation

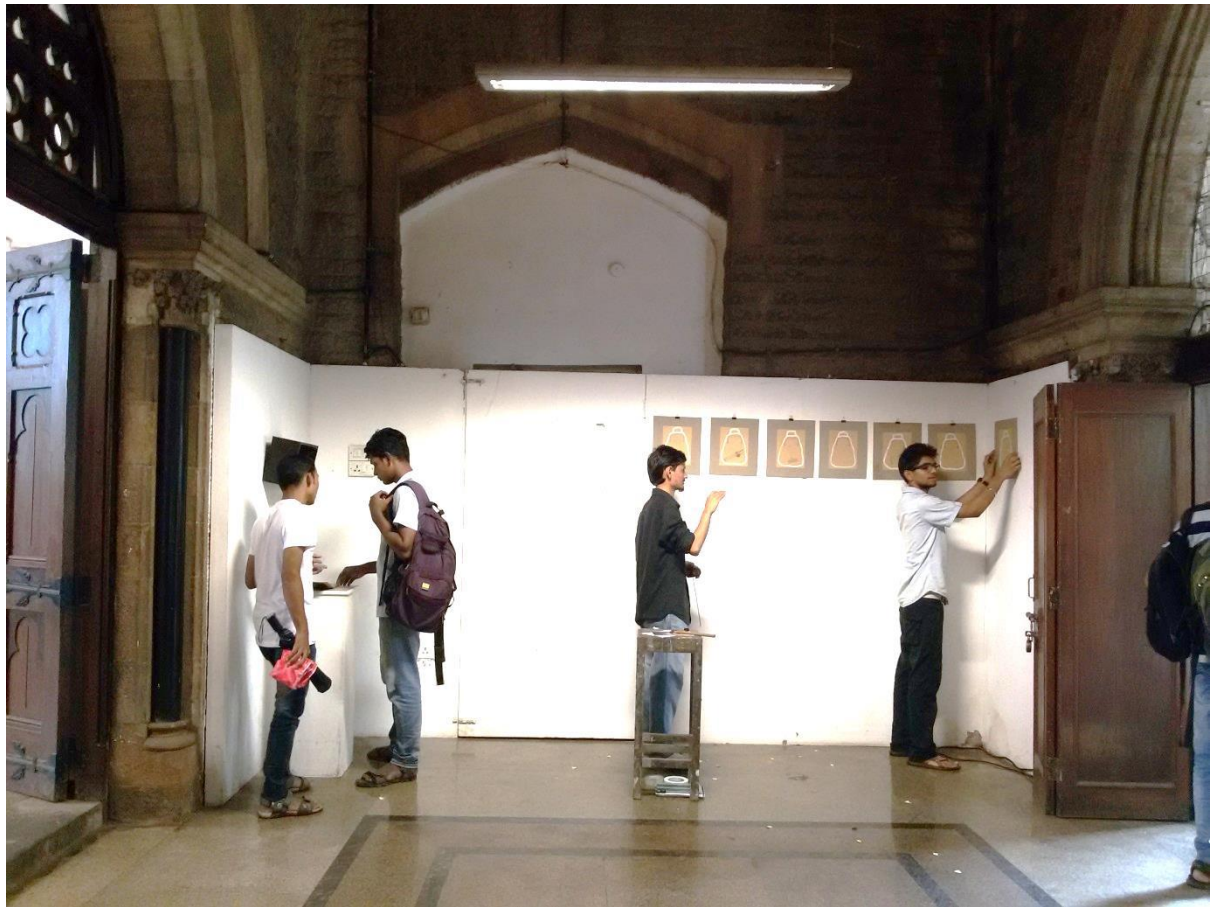


Display images from exhibition 'Practice: in transitional spaces' at Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai

5- 7 October 2016

Venue: Porch (old entrance), Fine Art Building, Sir JJ School of Art, Fort Mumbai 400001









Acknowledgement

Sudhir Patwardhan
Amrita Gupta Singh

Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art, Mumbai
Vishwanath Sabale
Staff and Peons

Goa College of Art, Goa
Mahendra Vengurlekar
Mahendra Chodankar
Kedar D K
Diptej Vernekar
Kalidas Mhamal

Surat School of Fine Art, Surat
Bhrihu Sharma
Preksha Tater
Rajarshi Smart
Krishnapriya Smart

S N Sujith and Sandhya Nair
Madhu Das
Pradeep Padmanabham
My friends and family

Workshop supported by
Sher-Gil Sundaram Arts Foundation