

Paribartana Mohanty

**Project Name: Chance-Dice: The question of “students’ work”
at Bhubaneswar and Kalikhote**

with students from seven art schools in Odisha: Govt. College of Art and Crafts, Khallikote, Ganjam, B.K. College of Art and Crafts, Bhubaneswar, Dhauli College of Art and Craft, Bhubaneswar, Balasore Art and Crafts College, Balasore, Bhadrak College of Art and Crafts, Bhadrak, Kalayatan , College of Art and Crafts Sundargarh and Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar

Resource Persons: Sanchayan Ghosh, Inder Salim, Sujit Mallick, Naveen Mahantesh, Babu Eshwar Prasad, Gagan Singh, John Xavier, Anpu Varkey, Mochu, Akansha Rastogi, Hrusikesh Panda, Suresh Samuha and many other Odia artists and intellectuals who lead sessions

October 4 to 14, 2016



'Chance Dice' was a workshop-exhibition proposal. The basic premise was to bring around 100 students from different art schools of Odisha in one common place. It was to prepare a spherical floating space where art-students, artists and other practitioners could meet peers, exchange thoughts and evolve creative processes, new methodologies of working and displaying. Through an intense ten-day long workshop, the gathering manifested into an exhibition event and other performative activities such as public performances, graffiti, and organized guided tours in the city. The gathering also provoked collaboration and other collective actions.

The provocation for this workshop-exhibition came from my ongoing research on art educational institutions in Odisha and my engagement with different batches of students and young artists from Odisha and elsewhere since the last four/five years. As one of the Students' Biennale curator, I got the opportunity to research on art schools in Odisha, that includes three government and four private art schools. In the process I have interacted with more than 500 students across the state, seen their art works and discussed their ideas, aspirations, questions and limitations. Owing to lack of resources and access, they are obviously less aware of many so-called 'contemporary' artistic practices and discourses and don't have the exposure of art students in the big cities.

However there are other simultaneous forces at work. There is plurality in thoughts, sensitivity towards mediums and awareness of the idea of local, political and environment. Through these interactions I was introduced to many innocent, curious, transitory and provocative art practices. I learned about their detailed interest in shifting values of the medium, site specificity, social issues and activism, vocabulary, philosophical time-jumps across geographies, anxieties with the city concept, references of other artists or inspirations, influences, little zones of affinities, personal space, questions relating to the self or individualism and other comforts that students were already exploring.





Conceptual Premise

The Big Question: What do we mean by 'students work'? What does the phrase imply? What comes to mind immediately when we use or hear this phrase? Does it undermine or do we see the possibility of this frame and what it implies? Is it about scope? Do we see 'potential'? Potential for what – 'exploration' or 'exploitation'? Are students vulnerable, are 'students' work' fragile? What happens when the student becomes conscious that they are a potential producer of images beyond the function of self-improvement? Is a student's ability to be exploited that defines them as a student? When they stop being (unconsciously) exploited, they stop being students? Does the phrase allow anyone to intervening into the work or process at given anytime or stage? Does it finish at any point or it refers to some kind of incompleteness or improvisation? Does 'student work' mean learning only?

My curatorial proposition for the workshop-exhibition is premised on Nietzsche's philosophical idea of 'eternal return', 'chance' and 'necessity'. He speaks of two distinct moments of a dice throw: the dice that is thrown and the dice that falls back. For a dice thrown up, the sky is an equal ground. The rotating dice in mid-air is an affirmation of 'chance', the combination which they form on landing is the affirmation of 'necessity'. One may consider this 'necessity' as a state of permanence or a kind of stability but it's certainly not the end of the movement. The moment dice stops rolling, someone else throws it up again towards the sky. It is like a student's life or thoughts, a rotating dice, continuous and transitory, always in a state of becoming, awaiting encounters and possibilities. Giorgio Agamben also points at the 'potentiality' in what is still unrealized, and is more in the imagination or in utopia.

If we freeze the rolling dice mid-air, then the very plane it touches becomes the new ground. My curatorial aspiration is to evolve one such platform that acts as a generator of 'n' number of planes, unstable surfaces and collisions for the proposed group, where the

invited artists and gathered students/practitioners, will float without the gravity of the 'event'.

The workshop was the first time that art students from eight different art schools in Odisha met each other. Like the collision of stars which merge through the force of gravity and make one larger unit or mass. The structuring of the workshop worked with many clusters that will merge and produce collectivities. On one level, this workshop exhibition responded to the new social imaginary emerging through student protests in Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and other parts of Delhi, and on another level it proposed to create a peer-group and a discursive field where artists aspire to think together and work.



Structure of the Workshop-Exhibition

The whole event was a 10 day long workshop. The first three days of the workshop took place at the Govt. College of Art and Crafts, Khallikote, Ganjam and the rest of the seven days was conducted at Lalit Kala Kendra, Bhubaneswar.

The Govt. College of Art and Crafts is situated in the rural place of Khallikote, Ganjam district, close to a friendly neighbour village. Students often use the villages around as a site for outdoor studies. Villagers are already familiar with art. The first few sessions focussed on drawing and making small videos in this environment. The college building itself became a subject - an old fort gifted by the local king. The space is full of stories. Recently government had a plan to rebuild the whole building. Before that a guided tour can build the deteriorating building in the participant's memory differently.

The second part of the workshop at Lalit Kala Kendra, Bhubaneswar also included students displaying their work while interacting and exchanging ideas with artist-mentors. There were many charged sessions with performance, painting murals on the wall and other kinds of experimentation that took place over the week at this site.

As Kochi Students' Biennale curator, the protocol was to choose three to four students and their work and bring this to Kochi. But I don't want to dismiss the plurality, friendships, inter-dependent structures, collective methods of working, student clusters, community and networks that always help a young artist to understand, connect and survive in the world.

Thus, this intense process of workshop and exhibition-making process, collaborating, discussing, debating and most importantly staying together for the duration was helpful in understanding and exploring intersections of each other's practices, thoughts and artworks. Each art school has a different socio-cultural and political background, and the students' works also differs accordingly. The structure of the workshop could be read as an antithesis to the anxiety and rigidity of the syllabi students face.

The workshop also addressed few basic inquiries – about different mediums, materials and practices and the second around language, theory and research.

Any mediums or materials are performative in nature. In any precision there are possibilities of encounters or accidents in the process of art making, which shift the very value of the medium or understanding of the material. In a given challenge a photograph may become a sculpture. The process and duration of painting becomes like a space jet to travelling elsewhere. Everyday sketching exercise becomes the register of daily life. The thin line between sculpture and installation merges. The body becomes material. And materials those are like raw language for artists can be replaced. I am attacked by the range and quantity of images produced by the students of the institution and the particular environment where the school is situated. We can see it as a huge documentation of that particular time and place.

From elaborately discussing the socio-political and performative aspects of the spaces or neighborhoods that students visit for their studies to dwelling, observing and encounters, another session will expound on the intersections between art making, execution and display process where every artist plays a curator in their own idiom. They will learn about exhibition making and explore the idea of exhibition as form.

One of the sessions will address student's relationship with the local, neighborhood, community, environment or ecology, dilemma in addressing the mainstream political, dialogue in contemporary, shyness and discomforts with languages through different guided tours in the city. Through more exercises and association games, we'll collectively analyze and go through the 'feelings', 'expression', needs or paths we choose to 'express', 'themes'.

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