

THE WORLD ATLAS OF PUBLIC ART

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SPROUTS by Vibhor Sogani

The word "sprouts" is both a noun and a verb. The noun form suggests a vegetal shoot, stunted or picked, already germinated in accommodating conditions. The verb form suggests ongoing action of continued growth, something that can be observed as future developments unfold. Vibhor Sogani's *Sprouts* captures both readings: Sogani's stainless-steel sculptures supply an image of new vegetation across the landscape while alluding to the advantageous forces inspiring this growth.

Touted by numerous press outlets at the time of its completion as the country's largest public artwork, *Sprouts* spans two traffic circles in New Delhi. The arrangement of the stainless-steel elements suggests seedpods, scattered and deposited by the wind, that are germinating across the dramatically furrowed lanes between the highway interchange of the Sri Aurobindo Marg. The elements share a common structure and

their varied heights suggest different stages of maturation. Botanical species. A straight steel post serves as the plant's stem, its surface catching the light and reflecting the sky above that surround the plant.

In the traffic circle to the east, more than two dozen stalks of these globular-headed plants rise in staggered arrangements from small circular beds. In the traffic circle to the west, a single plant is found. Reaching over 39 feet (12 m) at its highest point, the cluster is significantly taller than the sculptures on the other side. It is also an area that is occasionally frequented by those walking and visiting the All India Institute of Medical Sciences campus



to the south of the traffic circle, across Mahatma Gandhi Road. Thronging pedestrian trespassers do so only after navigating several lanes of traffic and the checkerboard brick sidewalks that terminate at the west circle's perimeter.

The concept of growth suggested by the work is not just in the literal forms rising from the landscape; it also applies to the idea of a country advanced by the project's commission. *Sprouts* was part of a government-sponsored beautification project for the nation's capital city. The sculpture fits into a plan to install walk-in freeway flyovers across Delhi in advance of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, with national and civic organizing bodies contacting contemporary artists to solicit their participation. The goal was to mark the arrival of a new India, sixty years after independence, on a global stage. This rapidly organized aesthetic endeavor, with an international rather than local target audience, used public art to project an image of what had already sprouted and would continue to grow across the country.

Sogani's work was, and continues to be, divisive. The form of the sculpture elements and their occupation of these greenpaces elicited polarizing reviews. *Sprouts* also continues to be subject to revision.

A decade after installation, online news outlets reported that the work was slated for demolition. Nevertheless, *Sprouts* has been retained, although not without modification. In early 2012, a round fountain was added around the sculpture on the west lawn, along with a new lighting system. This new basin with a circumference of 295 feet (90 m) was approved by the New Delhi Municipal Council as a further effort of site beautification. It was also installed to provide a more ecologically responsible program of using treated and recirculated wastewater to maintain irrigation to the lawn and surrounding plantings. Now, in the evenings, concentric rings of light illuminate the steel sculpture and the jets of water surrounding it.



by Vibhor Sogani, *Sprouts*, 2008, 100/100 Delhi