

ART FRIENDLY

IF PEOPLE THINK OF PUBLIC ART AS SOMETHING THE PUBLIC DECIDES, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE ANYTHING OF SUBSTANCE

ROBERT GRAMM, Sculptor

No place for art

EVEN THOUGH EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE BY ARTISTS TO SET UP INSTALLATIONS IN THE CAPITAL, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND LACK OF PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY BECOME A ROADBLOCK

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ANYONE LIVING in the city would be familiar with the 30-foot high, mushroom-shaped street sculpture near the AIDS Bhavan. Spread over six acres, 'Sprouts' is India's largest site-specific public art installation and has invited mixed reactions over the years.

Created by Vibhor Sogani, an Delhi government's initiative towards the beautification of the Capital, it has been over a decade since 'Sprouts' was installed. Yet if one takes a look around the city, there has not been much development, so far as public art installations are concerned.

While the responsibility of the matter towards these artists has even an issue with reports of vandalism, the government policies, need to be revamped to make it more conducive.

"To carry out any major project in public spaces, a system needs to be in place. The policies for public art installation and display are an obscure and complex and need to be addressed. The systems and policies have to become simpler and more effective. Only then can we have more public art displays in the country to make art more accessible to all," says Sogani. He also adds that the DDC are putting efforts in this regard.

In a discussion just last week, Public Art Policy Guidelines and Master Plan for Delhi, Union Minister Hardoop S. Puri said, "Public art not only beautifies the cityscape, it also captures its soul." The Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) proposed guidelines which provide details of the type of art forms and locations where they can be installed; a list of approaches that are required and other installation specifications.

One must note that while the public sector in Delhi has flourished quite well — the murals and wall paintings in Lodhi Garden speak for it — public installations, especially of stainless steel, are yet to take off in the city.

For a site-specific installation, there are several factors that come into play and perhaps drive its growth. For the 'Sprouts' installation, the process took almost a year, comprising initial conceptualisation to detailing of the installation, its placement in the larger landscape and the actual installation on the site. Various points, like vandalism, longevity, entry environment and maintenance, were kept in mind while working on it," explains Sogani.

Recently, he has unveiled another installation in Dubai. So why are public installations not as popular in India as compared to the ones in other countries?

"It will be incorrect to say that public art isn't popular in our nation. It's just that we haven't seen enough of it," he adds.

Taking a look at the global art scene, it is stainless steel that is writing a trend. While there are Indian artists, like Anish Kapoor who is credited for 'The Bean' in Chicago — one of the most celebrated steel sculptures in the world — there are lesser works of such artists that are displayed in India.

The few that are present are simply unimpressive. For instance, Subhash Gupta's 'Deeds in NCMA, is a crowd puller just as it was meant to be. This iconic steel sculpture of a tree, with its leaves made by arranging stainless steel pins, pens, ball pens and spoons in various shapes and sizes, is named Deeds (grandfather), symbolising a family tree.

However, steel is quite a complex material to work with, admits Sogani. A nano-age material, it requires an ingenious combination of new technology and hand skills. "This is one of the reasons why there are not many large-scale steel sculptures in the country. Hopefully, we will see more of this in times to come."

Agreeing with him, Deepika Jindal, director of Jindal Steel Limited Lifestyle (sponsor of 'Sprouts') says, "Stainless steel is a highly-engineered material which needs a knowledge and know-how to work with."

Deepika, who is also the founder of The Stainless Gallery in the city, believes that this material is becoming increasingly popular with artists. "If you look at the most iconic pieces of art, you'll notice that stainless steel is a popular choice for public art, sculptures and outdoor features. Although the popularity among Indian artists is yet to reach greater heights, artists like Subhash Gupta have worked extensively with steel."

However, things are changing slowly, albeit slowly. "The market for stainless steel art has been building over the years in the contemporary street art space. Today, the versatility and sheen of this metal offers a unique approach for contemporary art to entice the modern audience," adds Deepika.

Sogani too, sees a brighter future for sculptural art in the coming days. "With the kind of infrastructural growth and development in India, we are bound to see an upsurge in this domain. I am confident that with the support of government bodies like the DDC and increasing awareness in the art community, there will definitely be an upsurge in sculptural art," he concludes.



STANDING TALL: Artist Vibhor Sogani with India's largest site-specific installation - Sprouts

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ICONIC: Steel sculpture Deeds in NCMA by artist Subhash Gupta symbolises a family tree

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