



Arts

INTERDISCIPLINARY ART PRACTICES IN INDIA

Saba Rafi ^{*1}, Furqan Ahmad ²

^{*1} Research Scholar (UGC-JRF), Department of Fine Arts, Aligarh Muslim University, INDIA

² Research Scholar (UGC-JRF), Department of Fine Arts, Aligarh Muslim University, INDIA



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v4.i8.2016.2576>

ABSTRACT

Today in this fastest changing world of science, technology, inventions and information technology, every field is connected to one another in some way. Science technology and innovations are affecting almost all the facets of life and disciplines of knowledge hence art is not the exception. Today art is not limited to the paint and canvases instead it has different aspects. This study was conducted, referring to the changes in the art practices and examines some recent developments in contemporary Indian Arts. Interdisciplinary means combining, connecting or involving two or more academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines. It represents the fusion of two or more professions, technologies, departments, or the like.

Keywords:

Contemporary art practices, New media art, Installation art, Video art, Performance art, Indian art.

Cite This Article: Saba Rafi, and Furqan Ahmad, “INTERDISCIPLINARY ART PRACTICES IN INDIA” International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah, Vol. 4, No. 8 (2016): 168-175.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is evident through the discoveries that art has always remained with the existence of human being. In ancient period it was in the form of wall paintings such as in Ajanta and Ellora caves later on in Pala, Rajasthani, Mughal, & Pahari Period it was in the shape of Miniature and manuscripts, initially painted on Palm leaf, and clothes afterward on papers. In 19th century (Tanjore Art) paintings has been decorated with gold, precious stones, and glass pieces were studded to it. Bengal School of early 20th Century is world famous for the wash technique of painting on paper. Henceforth the most preferred surface for the painting which was canvas came into vogue with the work of progressive Artists groups.

Evidently, art has no definite language, and no individual mediums instead it changes with the passage of time, availability of mediums and the interest or knowledge of the artist. It depends upon creator that how he wants to convey his message and which medium he prefers. In this era of technology and novelties, artists are seeking their recognition and values their personal

expression. They have freed themselves from the bindings of ‘criteria’, other ‘constraints’ and use of conventional mediums while adopting the new ways of expression that are enhancing the vocabulary of art. The traditional style of painting with brush and carving/moulding stone/metal into sculpture has transformed into a vast interdisciplinary conjunction of practices. So entire scenario of contemporary art, which is ostensibly inviting a careful analysis of existing and ongoing art practices, has become a motivation for this study. The words of P. N. Mago that he has stated in his book about contemporary Indian Art: “What happened in the art scene of Europe yesterday, seems to be happening in India today” (Mago, 2001, p. 195) appears wholly accurate.

2. INCEPTION OF INTERDISCIPLINARY ART PRACTICES IN INDIA

Last twenty-five years witnessed many exciting, significant development in the medium, depiction, and the whole process of art making that changed the face of contemporary Indian art scene. Factors such as the growing discourses on art and contemporary artist’s reflective turn upon art and its past recorded history influenced the work of artists in different ways. Now, art is evolving from previously laid out barriers and has become a cluster of media such as installation art, video art, performance art, conceptual art and the new buzz of media art. Seemingly acting upon the wise words of the French author Marcel Proust: “*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes*”, contemporary artists are employing a myriad of media into their works to express themselves. (Lochan, 2010, p. 6) This is because they want to convey their message in a language that is prevalent nowadays and to create novelty in their stylistic manner. Through this myriad of media, they register their prominence into a media driven, techno-world which has become a global village. The art practices and its development does not happen in a vacuum, rather contemporary artists live in the society and respond to the events and issues of their time. They select their symbols, technique, medium, and style for a work of art from the wide variety of paraphernalia that is available today. The combination of newer materials and images with inclusion at international biennales and galleries since the late 1990s has proved to be heady. Paintings and mixed media sculptural installations made since the new millennium reflect the changing face of Indian art world: of older galleries refurbished into larger more expensive premises, in turn showing large masculinist formats in painting and installation. (Sinha, 2010, pp. 11-14)

Interdisciplinary art began to appear in India since the inception of the 21st century, but the conditions for the growth of this art approach existed in the works of Vivan Sundaram, Nalini Malani, Ved Nayar, and Romana Hussain in 1990s. The glimpse of Interdisciplinary art in India is apparent in the work of artist tactician M. F Hussain. Husain's artistic practices have crossed boundaries of traditional mediums of art and made installations for the first time later on it became a common practice in India. Husain strewn newspapers at the Jehangir Art Gallery in 1992 showing great devastation to the mounting of the Last Supper in Red and the Last Supper in Blue in 1993, his expansive oeuvre moves seamlessly from one medium to the other. (Artist Maqbool Fida Husain, 95, dies in London, 2016) He had also made films. He had made a highly innovative installation, Theatre of the Absurd, a perception of violence and its aftermath, at the Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi, in 1990 which created a stir among art lovers in the capital. In the same decade, Vivan Sundaram and Ved Nayar emerged as the most consistent practitioners of Installation art in India. Other artists who have been contributing towards creative installations and conceptual art include Amaranth Sehgal, Satish Gujral, Gogi Saroj Pal and Ratnabali Kant.

(Mago, 2001, p. 126) The work of these artists cannot be defined as painting, drawing, sculpture or Installation but has carved a niche for itself somewhere in between all these mediums. Their work is an ephemeral confluence of violence, nationalism, religion and femininity and questions each of their positions in contemporary India. (Lochan, 2010, p. 9)

The decade of the 1990s became the catalyst for a paradigm shift in the context of Contemporary Indian Art. There seems a lot of development, change and a kind of upheaval in art practices. At that time the country was facing a particular contradiction of technology and its effect across the nation. One phase of India was presenting the incomplete process of modernization and the complicated role of technology, its various possibilities, and applications. The mobilization of technology for political gain has acquired a colossal dimension. (Sinha, *Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007*, 2009, p. 21) At that very moment, contemporary Indian artists looked wisely at the existing situation, and they started to use technology in their artworks.

From 1990 onwards, the sculpture has become a hugely expanded horde of concerns, mainly regarding the use of varied materials in relation to expressive needs, and it developed gradually in harmony with new shifts in ideology and paradigm which is evident in the works of contemporary artists. Sculptors have broadened the criteria for selecting the materials and technique up to the limits of their own imaginations. The context and location of sculpture in India has considerably changed. The shift away from the unitary piece to installation, often incorporating other media, has brought fresh attention to bear on the use of material and form. The growing use of ephemeral material, light, and sound with sculpture has redefined the way in which a work is perceived. Fresh locations like international biennales, art fairs, global institutional buying as well as international collectors have encouraged incrementally ambitious indoor projects, which has blurred the line between sculpture and sculptural installation. (Sinha, *Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007*, 2009, p. 188) Traditional media like stone and metal changed into new treatments and unusual combinations, and inventive techniques like site-specific installations and kinetic sculpture gained popularity. Besides, boundaries between traditional disciplines like painting and sculpture were dissolved, with artists like Anita Dube, and Navjot Altaf, Sudarshan Shetty, Anandajit Ray, Jagannath Panda and G.R. Iranna, hybridizing the two through their practices. (Overview of Indian Art, 2016)

According to the Dutch curator Johan Pijnappel, artists in India began to work with video only after the 1990s, because of the established media of painting and sculpture remaining a dominant force in Indian cultural life. Initially, the video was employed as a component or element in a wider or more diverse approach. For example, Nalini Malani produced a single channel documentary of her site-specific installation *City of Desires* (1992), and Vivan Sundaram incorporated video screens into his sculpture and installation *House from House/Boat* (1994). However, since the mid-1990s there has been an increasing number of younger Indian artists working with video. Many of them first encountered the medium whilst studying abroad – mostly in the USA, the UK, and Australia, and on their return from their education continued to work with the medium. This group includes Ranbir Kaleka; *Man with a Cockerel* (2002), Subba Ghosh, *Remains of a Breath* (2001), Sonia Khurana, *Bird* (1999), Tejal Shah, *I Love My India* (2003), and *What Are You?* (2006), Eleena Banik, *An Urban Scape* (2004) and Umesh Maddanahalli, *Between Myth and History* (2001). (Meigh-Andrews, 2014, pp. 53-54)

Video art in India started at the time of political turmoil and 1992/93 Mumbai riots, and with its inception, the development and change took place in the content of visual arts. Artist like Nalini Malani who emerged as India's first video artist and Navjot Altaf thought that classical art mediums like the painting, sculpture are losing the vitality and will no longer make socially engaging statements. After few years the younger generation of artists who had already become acquainted with video whilst cramming abroad, found themselves in a similar dilemma at the time of the devastating Gujarat violence of 2002. The widespread riots, political conditions directly affected the society as well as artists and accelerated the demand for moving out of the "frame". So a large number of single channel videos produced by the artists at that time. The artists even first timers no longer focused the video camera on themselves, but on the horrific world outside, while trying to make sense of the insane situation. (Seid, 2007, p. 29) Other artists such as Vivan Sundaram and Rumanna Hussain broke out of the painting frame and started to present their ideas through the medium of installations with all kinds of materials including video, photographs, ordinary building construction material, ephemeral wall drawings and more. Over time, video matured into the preferred medium. (Seid, 2007, p. 26)

The debate around issues of identity, indigenism, communalism, rapid interference of technology in all disciplines, Indian social polity, and political upheaval up to the new millennium affected the art practices. Indian art has become increasingly global in its address through the effects of new media, international residencies, art fairs, biennales, galleries and a fluid globalized vocabulary to enter into the discourse. Through new media and installation, there is a reworking of the subjective/political space occupied by the artist. (Sinha, Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007, 2009, p. 19) This matrix of highly interwoven political, social and economic conditions having new questions, different concerns borne the idea of vex modernity in India. India's eager embrace of technology, the liberal and imaginative use of the photograph, and an alliance with international modernities contribute to the beginning of interdisciplinary art practices. The blur between street and studio, traditional and contemporary media, ideologies and practices, feeds back into the particular identity that Indian art has so consciously created. (Sinha, Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007, 2009, p. 22)

Robert Rauschenberg remarks about art in America during the 1960s, and the 1970s seem curiously to be true for the present day art scene in India:

“Today’s art is not merely shown; it puts on a show and solicits audience participation. Action paintings invites the spectator’s engagement in the artist’s creative act. Along with the active art appears the artist-actor. In happenings, painters and sculptors build props, compose scenes and perform.” (Mago, 2001, p. 195)

With the dawn of interdisciplinary art in India, the young generation of artist is producing their work by experimenting, combining, connecting, and involving different academic/scientific/artistic disciplines. In this way, they are parting from conventional mediums into modern mediums of art such as mixed media installations, site-specific installations, performance, Kinetic Sculptures, video art, interactive art, digital prints and mechanical art, found objects and photography. Rather limiting themselves to the traditional mediums of art, they are frequently using metals, wood, glass, steel, plastic, light bulbs, fibreglass, concrete, stone, video and digital art, etc. These artists are undisputedly creating a hegemony in

contemporary art. Following lines contains a separate and brief account of the works of some interdisciplinary Indian artists.

3. THE VANGUARDS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY ART PRACTICES IN INDIA

Among young generation Subodh Gupta (b. 1964) popularly known as 'Damien Hirst of India.' He is better known for incorporating everyday objects that are ubiquitous throughout the country such as steel tiffin boxes used by millions to carry their lunch, as well as thali pans, (Contemporary sculptures in metal by Subodh Gupta, 2016) bicycle, milk pails, cow dung and found objects. One cannot overlook his performative works in a video piece like Pure (1999), which involved the ritualistic act of washing his cow dung-covered body. (LEAD FEATURE, ART INDIA, 2016) Gupta highlights the distinction between notions of purity and impurity through the material he uses, and thus satirizes the Indian obsession with caste boundaries. Gupta's photographic works include capturing his petroleum jelly smeared body in Vilas (2000), and the nude Indian cowboy act in Cowboy (2001).

Shilpa Gupta (b. 1976), a Mumbai-based artist has occupied streets, built websites, sang songs, strung up fairy lights, handled cloth stained with menstrual blood- all to create art that will be striking to both a connoisseur and a spontaneous onlooker. Her art often described by art critics and writers as "unpredictable". It is hard for anyone to predict what the artist will produce out of her creative faculty of mind; however, her specialty lies in viewer interactive installations. In 2002 she created an interactive installation Your Kidney Supermarket from which one could supposedly buy the perfect kidney online via the internet. In her performance cum installation Blame (2002), that she made in reply to the 2002 communal riots in Gujrat, she sold bottles of simulated "blood/blame" on the Mumbai local trains which read "Blaming you makes me feel so good. So I blame you for what you cannot control, your religion, your nationality. I want to blame you; it makes me feel so good." Gupta exploits market economy rules of buying and selling and greed to critique some of the inherent principles of globalization that undervalue human and social relations. (Sinha, Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007, 2009, pp. 255-256)

Jitish Kallat (b. 1974), is one of the creative interdisciplinary contemporary artists based in Mumbai. He sometimes uses public speeches by prominent personalities as a subject for his artworks. In the fifth edition, of India Art Fair the highlight was a light-projection of a historic letter written by Gandhi to Hitler in 1939, urging him to reconsider his violent means. The work by Jitish Kallat at the Nature Morte booth appeared like a flat illuminated document at the end of a tunnel. Viewers go through the fog-laden tunnel with their bodies touching Gandhi's words. He also prepares video based works and often incorporates photographs, LED bulbs in his works. Kallat also exploits the powerful referential meanings of found objects, metals, and other goods in some manner by using them in his works. There is another work by Raqs Media Collective which had the words 'Sold Out' in neon seemed to be a commentary on how commerce overwhelms art these days. (The Times Of India –The Crest Edition, 2013 page 20)

Sudarshan Shetty (b. 1961), is another multidisciplinary contemporary artist best known for his enigmatic large-scale sculptural, kinetic installations and multimedia works. He was amongst the first artists to make this innovative shift of producing new, hybrid visual forms that crossed sculpture, painting and user interaction, which later became a generational shift in art practices.

Another important feature of Shetty's work has been his experiments with the mechanical animation of objects. He has been interested in the philosophical implications of such automata for the understanding of ourselves in a world marked by a profusion and abundance of objects that are not human yet not inert. (Rao, 2010, pp. 136-137) He continues to his trend of ornate architectural forms, moving image installations, photographs and mixed media work up to his recent exhibition Shoonya Ghar, in 2016 at NGMA, New Delhi. (Sharma, 2016, p. 62)

Other artists such as Sheela Gowda, Hema Upadhyay, L.N.Tallur, Pushpamala N., T.V.Santosh, Nalani Malani, Bharti Kher, Rina Banerjee, Anita Dube, and Sheba Chhachhi to name a few, are on the forefront who employs new media to convey relevant issues of the world in their own distinctive way of expression. These are the artists whose interests spans various modes of thought and expression. These artists are the vanguard of interdisciplinary art practices in India. Their art practices constitute the contemporary art, what it means in a real sense at international level. The works of these artists have new hierarchy of materials where found and ready-made objects, video and software technology, join marble and oil paint in the realm of installation.

4. INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLECTIVE ARTIST-RUN GROUPS IN INDIA

There are also other avant-gardist art practices going on from other artist-run groups: The Raqs Media Collective, a trio (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) located in the city of Delhi, have been working since 1992, as artists, media practitioners, curators, researchers, editors and catalysts of cultural processes. Their work, which has been exhibited widely in major international spaces, locates them in the intersections of contemporary art, historical inquiry, philosophical speculation, research and theory often taking the form of installations, online and offline media objects, performances and encounters. (Bio | Raqs Media Collective, 2016) They have developed a theory and practice of documentary, video, new media art to generate extended allegories of subversion and site them punctually in cyber-mohallas (neighborhoods) and international expositions alike. Given their preferred tropes of migration, displacement, and marginality, surveillance, they function across the trans-cultural zone of global art and bring a unique conceptual-discursive politics into the Indian art scene.

Open Circle, a Mumbai-based artist's initiative, is engaged in the activist genre of public art on the streets of Mumbai protesting/ 'performing' along with people's resistance movements or at sites such as the World Social Forum in Mumbai and other cities of the world. They addressed social and political issues in their local manifestations as well as in their global ramifications. They organize transnational workshops to bring visual artists and theorists together to exchange ideas through discussions and praxis. They make interventions in public spaces in response to the current social and political happenings in India. They had concentrated on local and more immediate concerns.

Youthful, nonpolitical organizations such as Khoj (Delhi), break ground with workshops and residencies hosting eccentric and transgressive artists from all over the world. New initiatives are also now being encouraged in the private sector where all art, even radical art, is subject to rapid commodification. (Kapur, 2007, p. 437)

Other art fairs and festivals are also acting as a catalyst for the promotion of interdisciplinary interventions in the art such as India Art Fair happening every year in New Delhi, the annual Kala Ghoda Festival held in Mumbai, India Art Festival held annually in two different cities Mumbai and New Delhi, and The Kochi-Muziris Biennale held in Kochi, Kerala. There are several public art projects (those done during the annual Kala Ghoda Festival in Mumbai, Khoj initiatives in New Delhi, and projects founded by India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore are a few example) which share characteristics with installation art in their use of space and in their desire to motivate a public response. (Sinha, *Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007*, 2009, p. 255)

5. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that interdisciplinarity is a defining characteristic of contemporary art practice, and it is a necessity for those artists who will shape the future of the creative practice. In addressing social, political, and related concerns by blurring the boundaries between different disciplines ‘interdisciplinary art practices’ has become a tool for the artist as well as for the viewer. Though continuously increasing multidisciplinary practices in the art have begotten certain issues and challenges related to the exhibition and preservation of artwork. Presenters often do not have suitable technical facilities to exhibit innovative work involving advanced digital technologies. Nevertheless, galleries and museums are expanding their proficiency to represent these multidisciplinary artworks but still at this juncture; contemporary Indian art needs to be reviewed in the context of interdisciplinarity and plurality and against continuities and discontinuities with traditions. Thus, a systematic, defined and fruitful development could be facilitated by the demarcation on the rampant interdisciplinary art practices.

6. REFERENCES

- [1] *Artist Maqbool Fida Husain, 95, dies in London.* (2016, 07 18). Retrieved from <http://www.livemint.com/>: <http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/SqCqONqn367d31L3kBoYkM/Artist-Maqbool-Fida-Husain-95-dies-in-London.html>
- [2] *Bio/Raqs Media Collective.* (2016, 07 23). Retrieved from <http://www.frithstreetgallery.com/>: http://www.frithstreetgallery.com/artists/bio/raqs_media_collective/
- [3] *Contemporary sculptures in metal by Subodh Gupta.* (2016, 07 21). Retrieved from [www.http://iloboyou.com/](http://www.iloboyou.com/): <http://iloboyou.com/contemporary-sculptures-metal-subodh-gupta/>
- [4] *Kapur, G. (2007). Secular Artist, Citizen Artist. In W. B. Esche, Art and Social Change (p. 437). Tate Publishing.*
- [5] *LEAD FEATURE, ART INDIA.* (2016, 07 16). Retrieved from <http://artindiamag.com/>: http://artindiamag.com/quarter04_04_10/lead_featureMeera04_04_10.html
- [6] *Lochan, R. (2010, June). The Eye and the Mind: New Interventions in Contemporary Indian Art. India Perspectives, p. 9.*
- [7] *Mago, P. N. (2001). Contemporary Art in India: A Perspective. National Book Trust, India.*
- [8] *Meigh-Andrews, C. (2014). A History of Video Art. Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.*

- [9] *Overview of Indian Art. (2016, August 1). Retrieved from www.saffronart.com: <http://www.saffronart.com/sitepages/overview.aspx>*
- [10] *Rao, V. (2010, 06). Sudarshan Shetty. India Perspectives, pp. 136-137.*
- [11] *Seid, B. (2007). New Narratives. Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd.*
- [12] *Sharma, K. (2016). Being and Nothingness. Art India, XX(II).*
- [13] *Sinha, G. (2009). Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007. Marg.*
- [14] *Sinha, G. (2010). Voices of Change: 20 Indian Artists. Marg.*
- [15] *The Times Of India –The Crest Edition. (2013 page 20, 02 02). p. 20 .*
- [16] *Turner, C. (n.d.). Art and Social Change. Pandanus Books.*