

## *Instituting Artists' Collectives: The Bangalore/Bengaluru experiments with "Solidarity Economies"*

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It often comes as a revelation to art observers who are searching for an alternative to the commerce-driven contemporary art worlds of Mumbai and Delhi, with their imposing art spaces and booming auction houses, that much unusual and interesting work can be found in Bangalore, a city known internationally as a thriving information technology hub and far removed from the world of spectacular art fairs and large exhibitions. This surprise is unsurprising. As an artist and academic who has been involved for several years in putting together collective manifestations within the university and as a working group member of KHOJ International Artists' Association for seven years, I am only too familiar with the conservatism of a market-driven economy of art—where size, spectacle, and rarity form the currency of artistic worth—which is even more potent when large, warehouse-size spaces have to be filled and growing demand for speculative collectables has to be met. The emergence of global exhibition circuits and an art market where the works of select contemporary artists from Asia enjoy high visibility and higher prices has reinforced a phenomenon that has been observable since the very beginnings of modernism. This phenomenon is a paradoxical one where being oppositional generates cultural capital that, in turn, translates into market value. Today a similar trend can be observed among a large number of artists and curators who, on the basis of their "alternative" status, have made their way into the speculation-driven art market with its proliferating auctions, fairs, and art funds. Art as entertainment manages to effect a neutralization of contexts and to assimilate a reputation built on being alternative.<sup>1</sup>

The term "alternative" is therefore something of a misnomer when it is used uncritically to describe an art practice with little contextual life of its own other than as an empty commodity sign.<sup>2</sup> But it is precisely this kind of practice that has come to dominate the art worlds of Mumbai and Delhi in the last few years where works are being tailor-made for transaction as peripatetic objects with signature value in the "big top" of the art fair.<sup>3</sup> Even more baffling are the recent explanations offered by critics who now speak of a "post-critical" turn in art.<sup>4</sup>

Yet there are art worlds that thrive on the periphery of the art fair and auction house circuits. In Bangalore, for example, where there are few galleries and the support from state-run organizations is rudimentary, a culture of artists' collectives flourishes. This comprises an extensive network of creative energies and works in diverse areas of the visual arts, performance, and film, all of which provide a rich field of experiences and exchange on a regular basis. The alignments within this art world are, for all intents and purposes, non-hierarchical. Self-organization is a key feature that gives artists the necessary flexibility to become a significant presence. While most formations reflect solidarity across class and gender lines (or at least attempt to), participation and directional roles vary from time to time with individuals taking on active, ideational responsibilities for specific projects. Loosely bound and often engendered by the technophilia of a generation that learned its alphabet on a computer keyboard, this "solidarity economy" has led to numerous collaborative initiatives in the city.<sup>5</sup> They range from gallery- or apartment-based projects, to annual festive gatherings in public parks and streets, as well as collective manifestations of close-knit communities of peers.<sup>6</sup> These formations came together in the experimental art schools that emerged in the 1960s and blossomed in the 1980s right in the heart of Bangalore.

Their work is often temporal, at times existing only in a dematerialized manner or as a web-based venture, or even as a social project involving interactive events that leave no physical residue. This is a practice that has been legitimated through curatorial and art historical discourse. Two of the most visible New Delhi based organizations supporting it are SAHMAT and the KHOJ International Artists' Association, both of which have long been associated with "alternative" practices and have recently released publications that document their histories (accounts that, oddly enough, elide all internal disagreements, opposition, debates, and ruptures within the formations and offer a wrinkle-free narrative of their existence).<sup>7</sup> This is in keeping with the recent intensification of a commerce-based art exchange, in which histories of debate are being obliterated by critics and curators who, subscribing to a connoisseurial notion of an artwork's worth, prefer to valorize objects that reside in museums or have ended up as collectibles in the homes of the privileged few. This tendency to bypass historical and social processes and to ignore works that fail to reach the exalted status of collectability, or are not premised on the physical shaping of material but exist as concepts with a temporal physical life or site specific address or even simply as human networks that impact the way we think, has meant that we are being exposed to only a partial art history of our times. Any attempt to put a counter-narrative on record, however, is difficult because of the probable lack of archival material; often the artists themselves were not really concerned with their own place

in history. And even when the artworks that emerge from “non-collectable” contexts do take the shape of an object, find their way into a museum, or feature in one of the elaborately choreographed shows that form an integral part of the cultural exchange between India and its economic suitors,<sup>8</sup> very little attention is paid to the framework from which they emerge or the numerous unconventional structures that have nurtured and supported the emergence of these groundbreaking works. In short, the artistic formations that are often artworks in themselves go mostly ignored.

It is therefore important to carefully differentiate between the large, disembodied formations that pose as “alternative” structures or democratic artists’ associations and the networks of solidarity that engender a different economy of art based on reciprocal exchange and collaboration. A corporate body that controls and directs art’s social functions is usually behind the former,<sup>9</sup> while the latter rejects any form of *a priori* hierarchy.

I have long been interested in collaborative modes of working and the inclusionary impulses of the Bangalore art world. However, given the communitarian spirit of the work and the above-mentioned fragmentary nature of the available archival material, it is difficult to trace this history through a narrativization of the permanent and tangible artifacts assignable to individual figures. I have therefore had to rely to a great extent on oral traces, conversations, and fieldwork to piece together a coherent narrative.

My focus on Bangalore is in no way intended to suggest that the collective efforts there represent some kind of “radical” intervention or are marked by a desire to upset the status quo by a challenge to the prevailing order using institutional critique as the core motivating factor. Such a claim would be self-defeating, especially considering Griselda Pollock’s argument that such schemes have become a part of well-established and rehearsed art-historical convention.<sup>10</sup> According to Pollock, such interventions have become so integral to the notion of the “avant-garde” that today “radical” and “revolutionary” have become commonplace terms that are liberally adapted to promote the novelty of the “latest, the newest, the most up to date” art product.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the current experiments in Bangalore, premised as they are upon a desire for public comprehension, outreach, collaboration, and interactivity, perplex us because we have been conditioned to regard art as an oppositional practice upon which base we may draw up lists of art historical milestones.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, the critiques posed by feminist and post-colonial studies of the nature of the “radical” modernist must be considered in any discussion of developments in contemporary art. It is just as important to understand the

possibilities of what collaborative formations can achieve in order to press a critical position and to avoid reading them as some sort of compromised arrangement. It is therefore crucial to distinguish between art practices that use *collaboration to maintain the status quo* through a series of invisible, coercive mechanisms and those that *genuinely seek to make a difference* by mobilizing social forces for meaningful interventions in the ways we think.<sup>13</sup>

### Towards a dematerialized art practice

The collective efforts that have unfolded in Bangalore during the last two decades of the last millennium, specifically the adopted modes for art-making and audience-building, reveal a quest to re-examine the role of art in society through the distinct shift from object-based works to dematerialized art practice.<sup>14</sup> John Devraj, a dedicated grassroots activist who uses art to address social ruptures (especially communal divides) by means of participatory action, initiated one outstanding early experiment. The most remarkable feature of his work was the manner in which he embraced interactivity and rejected art as a self-contained aesthetic domain.



Fig. 1: The making of *Born Free*, a sculpture created by John Devraj with 3000 school children. Photo courtesy of Devraj, 1994.

This was followed by a series of interventions made by C.F John and his extended surrogate family of artists, *Vistaar*. This flexible group worked from project to project with meager resources, often engaging with site-specific mediations outside of the gallery space.



*Fig. 2: Walls of memories, a site-specific intervention in an abandoned well by C.F.John, Tripura Kashyap and Azis T.M. from the collective Vistaar. Photo courtesy of C.F.John, 2003.*

Acting as a curator in 1999, the artist Pushpamala N organized *Sthalapuranagalu*, a dialogue with the city of Bangalore, its public spaces, statuary, and ecology.<sup>15</sup> Shamala, one of the featured artists, created a floating installation on Ulsoor Lake (one of several water-bodies in the city, which are slowly drying out due to public encroachments and indiscriminate use of underground water aquifers) from bamboo shafts and wax casts of plastic hearts.



*Fig. 3: Bihisti, an installation on the Ulsoor Lake, Bangalore by Shamala, a part of the Sthala-puranagalu project curated by Pushpamala. N. Photo courtesy of Shamala, 2003.*

Inviting members of the public to express their sentiments about the dying lake, Shamala—using a pop cultural emblem and an interactive approach—was able to stage a symbolic intervention and thus direct public attention to a challenging environmental issue. In 2001 the Bangalore *Hubba*, a state-supported street festival on the city’s main shopping thoroughfare, became the context for an artistic intervention when the artists Surekha and Suresh Kumar G inserted their own projects into the state’s somewhat paternalistic program of “fun and frolic” aimed at the middle classes. Suresh, for example, expressed his environmentalist concerns by gifting plants to passersby and plotting the new homes of these adopted green lives on a map of the city. He sought to nurture a re-signification of the city as a green sanctuary by creating a network of surrogate care and positioning himself against those elements that had turned the city into a concrete landscape. Aiming to draw the attention of Bangalore’s citizens to the lack of civic amenities in the city, Surekha chose

to resuscitate a street alcove that was covered with grime and often used as a shelter by the homeless. Cleaning and inscribing the surface with text allowed her to remind the thronging crowds of the many contradictions in the neo-liberal agenda that was altering the city's landscape and pushing it towards unsustainable, overindulgent consumption.



*Fig. 4: "Do Not Urinate!" A site-specific installation by Surekha on M.G. Road, Bangalore, during the Bangalore Hubba Festival. Photo courtesy of Surekha, 2001.*

Over the last decade Bangalore has witnessed a sea change during which these early efforts have coalesced into the artists' residency model that sees a physical studio space as the nucleus of experimental attitudes. *No 1Shanthiroad*, a space leavened by the presence of the artist and art historian Suresh Jayaram, is perhaps the fulcrum of this interest group and a key part of the cycle of reciprocity that informs the Triangle Arts Trust network and its sub-continental affiliate KHOJ.<sup>16</sup> However, through the voluntary nature of their participation and through the infinitely mutable process of creative collaboration, the artists at *No 1Shanthiroad* have managed to minimize institutional delimitation



*Fig. 5: A performance by Suresh Jayaram in Cubbon Park, Bangalore. Photo courtesy of Jayaram, 2005.*

Cross-fertilization is not limited to the parameter of the group itself. Constant crossovers between different groups of artists have led to initiatives like the 2009 *Samuha* experiment. This experiment featured a “time share” studio venture in which a shared space was supported by many artists in the city and coordinated by the artists Suresh Kumar G, Archana Prasad, and Shivaprasad S. It turned into a 441-day programmed project with twenty-three artists and activists investing their time and capital in diverse artistic undertakings.



*Fig. 6: A performance by Suresh Kumar G during the Samuha project. Photo courtesy of Suresh, 2009.*

Besides these initiatives, there are several other, often cross-cultural, residencies and collective efforts like the BAR 1 project, which is sustained by the low profile yet enduring support of Swiss artist Christoph Storz.



*Fig. 7a: Open day at the BAR 1 space. Photo courtesy of Suresh, 2011.*



*Fig. 7b: An installation by Mithila Baidur as part of the The BAR 1 collective's India-India Residency show held at Samuha. Photo courtesy of Suresh, 2010.*

Another example is the JAAGA Combine that was initiated by Archana Prasad and Freeman Murray from the United States. JAAGA hosts a cosmopolitan hub in a nomadic, pellet architectural structure that has a peripatetic existence.



*Fig.8: The JAAGA Space for co-working. Photo courtesy of Prasad, 2012.*

However, what complicates the picture is the fact that some formations are quasi state sponsored, while others are funded by international cultural organizations as a part of the latter's "diplomatic" initiatives; still others are supported by galleries. All three sponsors implicate each other in an interlocking relationship. Yet, the bottom line does not seem to be one of mere individual profit but rather the weaving together of a complex social fabric that leads to what may be termed a *commonwealth of an art economy* generating a network of possibilities through collaborations.<sup>17</sup> This network benefits from the cooperative and voluntary nature of the exchange and "barter" that has developed between artists. It helps them to generate visibility that would otherwise be lacking. The question of whether profitability automatically implies that the cooperative arrangements are compromised remains an open one. Grant Kester argues that without weighing the outcome of such initiatives it is futile to disparage every form of collaboration with mainstream agencies. He suggests that while the current art world retains a residue of high modernist attitudes that allow it to be quite comfortable with the idea of maintaining a critical distance from institutions, its attitude towards alliances is more ambiguous as it often deems such initiatives to be a sign of intellectual concession. Kester is, however, also attentive to the subtle coercive mechanisms that are brought to bear through such collaborative means. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the "embezzlement" of representation, Kester alerts us to the thrust and parry of power that can result in collaborators appropriating a platform for their own ends.<sup>18</sup>

Collectivized efforts have a long history in the city of Bangalore. The current formations therefore cannot be viewed as isolated, recent occurrences. To properly contextualize them it is necessary to look to the city's cultural past and to analyze the role that catalytic institutions and individuals have played in the shaping of this distinctive art world, including the recent attempts at new ways of making and experiencing art. To what do we attribute the abundance of initiatives that have cropped up in Bangalore in recent years? How are we to recount the art history of a period that is impossible to convey through an enumeration of objects that can be catalogued and displayed? Can this recent past be recounted by bringing to light the often silent, invisible, and magnetic force fields that direct and shape the way we think rather than the sum of objects that were created?

### **Alliances on the margins and their historical precedents**

In an attempt to answer these questions I propose to examine earlier formations and their structural constituents. This is no easy task as there all kinds of complex motivations at work in their formation in Bangalore/Bengaluru. At

times there seems to have been a need to carve out a regional identity that is premised on a linguistic affiliation to the larger world of literary practices and the formation of a “Kannada” identity as a distinguishable characteristic within the contemporary. Given the fact that the borders and boundaries of linguistic taxonomy that precluded the notion of fluid, networked identities are the problematic legacy of modernist administrative exigencies, one needs to examine more minutely the flows of ideas that inform the making of the visual-art world and the diversity of their active participants. Any forced assimilation into a linguistically or ethnically determined character that precludes the possibility of a layered identity or multilingualism (as was the case before the 1950s and the drawing up of territorial markers based on linguistic numeric majority) leaves little room to understand aesthetic practices that are informed by dialogue.<sup>19</sup> For example, examining the careers of some of the key figures who have played a vital role in the formation of Bangalore as an intercultural node reveals that many were recipients of bursaries to travel and study in institutions that fall outside the political map of present day Karnataka. Many of them continue to have widespread cosmopolitan connections. Paradoxically, the resurfacing of anxieties about identity in the late 1990s was accompanied by an increase of connections with the artist-led workshop model that was proposed not in the metropolises of the West but in apartheid-torn South Africa. This led to the formation of the Triangle Arts Trust and its attendant solidarity chain of workshops that stretches across continents.

In a similar manner, collectivized efforts in Bangalore were set in motion when artists began to speak out against the strictures of colonial education. The consolidation of colonial education in the nearby city of Mysore and its institutional critique (through a parallel formation of localized institutions) in Bangalore are near simultaneous events. In recent years the role of organized art education has been the subject of close scrutiny among art historians who offer thorough analyses of the institutions that laid the ground for a colonially conceptualized art education in Bengal and the Bombay Presidencies in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Their richly nuanced work has countered the persistent thread that permeated earlier accounts of modernism in India; namely, that the work produced by artists adhering to norms of imperial pedagogy was unworthy of inclusion in art historical accounts because such works were incapable of critical messages or conceptual breakthroughs.<sup>21</sup> These narratives, however, focus mainly on specific geographical regions. There is an urgent need to expand the parameters of their enquiry and to include developments in the southern part of India, particularly because the two art worlds intersected and overlapped in the former princely state of Mysore. This region included Bangalore and acquired the nomenclature “Karnataka” only after the organization of the subcontinent into linguistically determined

administrative units in 1956.<sup>22</sup> Still, most students of contemporary art in India would be hard-pressed to name a single artist from the region prior to the 1990s whose reputation and success (in terms of exhibitions, publications, art historical accolades, and auction house sales) could match that of Raja Ravi Varma, Amrita Sher-Gil, Rabindranath Tagore, M.F. Husain, Manjit Bawa, or Subodh Gupta.

It may come as a surprise that one of the earliest attempts to appropriate the colonial form of education for critical objectives was undertaken in Bangalore. *Kalamandiram* (Temple of Art), an artist-led center that was envisaged as an educational facility and professed an adherence to Gandhian ideas, was founded in 1919, the very year in which Kala Bhavana, the institute of fine arts in Rabindranath Tagore's visionary arts center *Santiniketan*, was inaugurated.<sup>23</sup> It is important to recall that Rabindranath Tagore visited Bangalore in 1919 and delivered public lectures on his educational project. He used this opportunity to raise funds through public contributions for his newly formed Viswa-Bharti University.<sup>24</sup> Bangalore's own *Kalamandiram* was initiated by A.N Subba Rao, who was a "staunch believer of Gandhian principles" and had taken part in the "freedom movement as a citizen of India."<sup>25</sup> Subba Rao, who in his youth had received his education at a *Cooli Matha*,<sup>26</sup> later studied art at the Chamarajendra Technical School in Mysore.<sup>27</sup>

In 1892 the British established the Chamarajendra Technical Institute in Nazarabad. This was an educational facility that aimed at enhancing the economic viability of art through its industrial application to the production of tradable goods. The institute officially moved to its current location in Mysore in 1913, seven years after the visiting Prince of Wales laid its foundation to commemorate the late Maharaja, H.R. Sir Sri Chamarajendra Wadiyar Bahadur of Mysore. The institute was one of the many gestures of munificence bestowed on the public by the colonial administration to ensure a loyal following in the region.<sup>28</sup> The institute became the focal point of all early challenges to the colonial educational system. Subba Rao, disappointed by the lack of opportunities that this colonial training actually offered (the only artistic success that came his way was as a modeler of three-dimensional maps for geographical surveys), contested the exclusionary processes through which some students received bursaries for further education and some did not; he made it his goal to set up his own institution<sup>29</sup>

After a brief stint of teaching in a school, he decided to set up his own teaching facility in Bangalore to instill in artisans the confidence they needed to pursue a professional career. The *Swadeshi*, or the self-reliance movement, was on the upswing at this time and Subba Rao's call was a motivating force for many.

In its initial years, the school was essentially a loosely structured facility that was largely sustained by the artist's own income. He seems to have followed the *Cooli Matha* system, in which the students paid no fee and instead offered labor in return for instruction in painting. In other words, the students assisted him with the day-to-day functioning of the school and with the commercial work he undertook to support himself and his venture. In effect, it was an apprentice system with a curriculum based largely on craft-oriented, utilitarian skills. Until 1927, when an official visit by the then Diwan of Mysore, Sir Mirza Ismail, led to the institute being given a state grant to cover its running expenses, it was essentially self-supporting.<sup>30</sup> Despite his modest background, Subba Rao had considerable organizational and promotional abilities with which he sustained the school during this precarious phase. He managed to establish an independent circuit of trade for the craft objects he and his students produced outside of colonial exhibitory mechanisms. In matters of educational outreach, the institute, despite its fragile finances, also brought out the first art journal in Kannada called *Kala*, which included articles in English from time to time.<sup>31</sup> Subba Rao also organized regular independent art expositions. The Kalamandiram Arts and Crafts exhibition, for example, drew artists as distinguished as Abdul Rehman Chughtai, Nandalal Bose, and D.P. Roychoudhury as well as young women artists like Ambika Dhurandhar into its fold.

Despite its professed association with the nationalist cause, however, the institution's educational curriculum remained entwined with the methods of art instruction that were followed by the art schools initiated in the late nineteenth century by the British in the trading port cities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. In fact, the Mysore administration had sent a number of aspiring artists from the region to these colonial art schools so that they might acquire the skills of academic training. Most crucially, however, it can be inferred from the range of articles published in the journal *Kala*, that the intellectual world of the time exhibited "chaos of heterogeneity." The journal placed essays on German expressionism next to articles on perspectival drawing and intriguing biographical descriptions of artists that ranged from stalwarts of the Baroque period to bland Royal Academicians.<sup>33</sup> The larger intellectual world that was forming around the *Swadeshi* ideal also found its way into *Kala*. Articles by Ananda Coomaraswamy, Rabindranath Tagore, and Abanindranath Tagore were translated into Kannada for publication in the journal. This was in addition to the mainstay of the publication comprising contributions on craft techniques that spanned from metalwork to wood carving, which reflected the legacy of colonial education. The Kalamandiram nonetheless provides an early example of the search for an appropriate cultural model to replace the British administered industrial arts schools in India, which were

promoted as economically viable options to replace the “traditional” forms of courtly patronage that were in decline. It is clear from the inception of Kalamandiram that once “natives” appropriated colonial institutional structures they also began to harness their potential to serve wider social and political objectives.



*Fig.9: The Kalamandira studio complex. Photo courtesy of Sawant, 2011.*

In keeping with imperial attempts to check an idle working class that was considered “profligate, indigent and intemperate; ready to starve but not to [...] work hard,” colonial authorities institutionalized learning and mobilized regulatory regimes of training in the arts. They were “aimed at inculcating habits of sobriety and industry.”<sup>34</sup> This attitude, as has been pointed out by several scholars,<sup>35</sup> was maintained towards the local artisanal communities who became the first “beneficiaries” of institutional education. However, even loyal subjects of the empire often met this process of social engineering with resistance. For example, despite his loyalty to the Mysore court, the career of K.Venkatappa, who would become the preminent artist of his time, is a tale of determined refusals and boldly asserted bids for autonomy in the face of a system of straitjacketed education.

K. Venkatappa's career has been the subject of close scrutiny and much admiration in Karnataka; the most prominent museum in Bangalore was named after him. But perhaps the most analytical assessment of his career has come from the historian Janaki Nair. By mapping his tempestuous yet loyal relationship with the royal family of Mysore and keeping in mind the fact that he received royal support for his education from the maharaja, Nair provides interesting insight into the struggles over artistic autonomy in the early twentieth century.<sup>36</sup>

The eccentric but brilliant Venkatappa began militating against colonial restrictions in education fairly early in his career, when, after his initial schooling at the Chamarejendra Technical Institute, he insisted on being trained by Abanindranath Tagore, the initiator of the New Indian Art style of painting, at the Government College of Art in Calcutta. At a time when students in search of higher education in art were either sent to the Jamshedji Jeejibhoy School of Art in Bombay or the Government College of Art in Madras, his audacious demand to study under Tagore was met with skepticism. Nevertheless, the Mysore administration eventually relented. For Venkatappa, however, this was only a partial victory. He was convinced that in order to be fully qualified as an artist, he would have to obtain a higher education in England; This plan was thwarted by the outbreak of the First World War. I emphasize this point in order to draw attention to the fact that in his search for knowledge, Venkatappa remained unconstrained by the dictates of the time and did not succumb to the division between a nationalist outlook and a cosmopolitan position. After completing his education in Calcutta, Venkatappa initially declined work commissioned by the Mysore palace and instead worked as an independent artist. One motivating factor was the yogic vow of *Aparigriha* (austerity and autonomy), which he had taken in 1913.<sup>37</sup> Although he was expected to embark on a successful, official career, Venkatappa refused employment offers from the government and proposals to teach in the newly emerging art institutions. Instead, by offering training in his studio he created a coterie of followers who had significant impact on the art world of the time. Combative by nature<sup>38</sup> and unable to fit into any institutionalized system, he nonetheless remained invested in the idea of fine craftsmanship and skill; in addition, in spite of his pledged devotion to the aesthetics of the "New Indian Art" initiated by Abanindranath Tagore in Calcutta, he never shed his overriding tendency towards naturalism.

In Venkatappa's personal diaries over fifty years of his detailed, daily chronicles reveal an apparent wish to create a structure that avoided the oppressiveness of a dry, regulated colonial education, and yet retained the level of orderliness and discipline required to master any art practice. Toward the end of his life he attempted to realize his project by investing his energies in teaching young students free of charge and in setting up a museum of his own work that was

unmediated by the juried process of competitive selection and elimination, which had been the procedure in the salon exhibitory spaces where he had made his initial professional career.

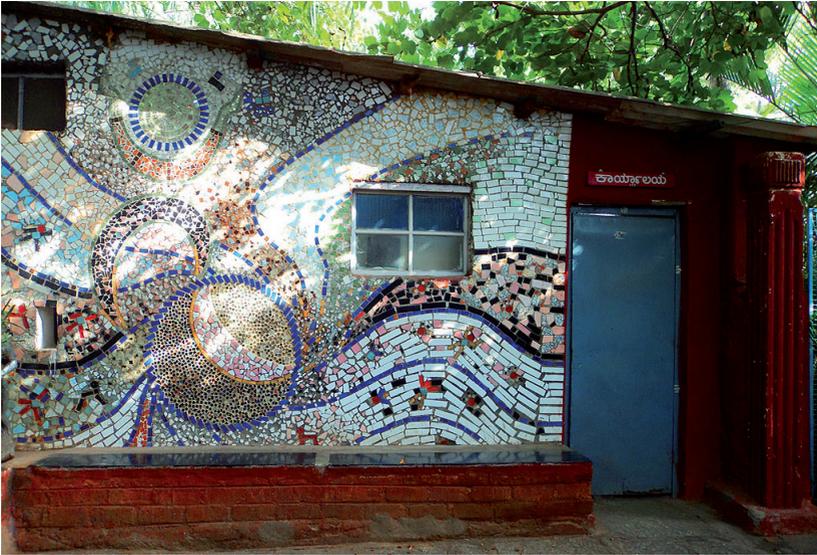
This spirit of self-confidence seems to have informed the work of the generation that overlapped with the last years of Venkatappa's life. In the 1960s, a group of proactive individuals raised the necessary seed capital and lobbied the government to create environments where artists could flourish. As a consequence, several organizations were instituted in different parts of Karnataka. Unlike their much-lauded counterparts in the Bombay Progressives Group, none of the artists behind these initiatives acquired commercial standing in the greater art world. Still, their spirit of collectivity and collaboration lasted much longer than the brief life of the "canonical" progressives.<sup>40</sup>

### **Fostering a new, collective consciousness**

The recent surge of interest in collaborative ways of working to achieve common goals owes perhaps most to the legacy of the maverick artist and educator Rudrapa Mallapa Hadapad, whose importance to the Bangalore art world became apparent in 2003 when he passed away. In a gesture befitting his stature, the art press (including *Art India*, which was the only magazine with a nationwide distribution at the time) ran a series of tributes written by artists and critics demonstrating the reverence felt by a whole generation of cultural activists.<sup>41</sup> This veneration was on display once again in 2011 when *Varta*, a new art journal from Kolkata, put out a special edition on art education that was guest edited by Indrapramit Roy. Hadapad was the only artist whose work received a special section devoted entirely to his art-educational venture—the Ken School of Art in Bangalore.<sup>42</sup> It is evident from the extensive writing about the school by former students like Sheela Gowda, BV Suresh, and Surekha (now all significant figures in the field of Indian contemporary art) that Hadapad's communitarian view of life and art, which he put into practice during the three decades that he led the Ken school, had a deep impact that continues to resonate in the manner in which the Bangalore art world functions. Hadapad, who studied at the Jamshedji Jeejibhoy School of Art in Bombay in the 1950s and briefly at the venerable Nutan Kala Mandir,<sup>43</sup> set up the Ken School in Bangalore in 1968. This undertaking was similar in spirit to the creative utopian collectives within modernism that sought respite from the relentless consumerism engendered by economic modernity.<sup>44</sup> The Ken School, which derived its nomenclature from the German word *Kennen* (knowledge or perception),<sup>45</sup> began in a modest, even rudimentary complex of sheds that had been pared out of the fruit and vegetable market in the heart of Bangalore. Over the years the school, which had no landmark architectural structure, became a hub for interdisciplinary

interactions between diverse art practices and creative figures from different generations. This conceptual artwork called “The Ken School”, may not have acquired the dominant physical presence of its counterpart, the Chitra Kala Parishad (created around the same time by civic and economic elites of the city), but its ideology of spreading art into everyday life came to inform the way collectives in Bangalore were formed in the decades that followed. Cutting across institutional affiliations and social class backgrounds, networks radiated from this nerve center and created a complex of connected communities that now have a thriving presence in the city. In keeping with Hadapad’s notion of art as a way of life rather than as an object-based practice, a number of these communities concentrate on pursuing art as a means of re-crafting society through public intervention and educational intent.<sup>46</sup>

In her tribute to the artist, Sheela Gowda, herself an alumna of the Ken School, notes: “Hadapad did not place much value on the art object as a collectible commodity. He never attempted to be a contender on the art market. Neither its language nor its social circuit was familiar to him.”<sup>47</sup> Lacking the pragmatic approach required to build the physical and administrative edifice of an institution through bureaucratic governmental channels, he resorted to a hands-on creative method of building a structure in which the bricks were people and the mortar, a way of thinking.



*Fig. 10a: A mosaic mural made out of waste material at the Ken School of Art. Photo courtesy of Sawant, 2011.*

This alternative model of an artist-centered school flourished for three decades; it had various educational outlines that could cater to hobbyists as well as to students who were invested in the idea of art as a way of life. Because of his rural background and his familiarity with the pain of penury and the sense of loss that a migrant to the city experiences, Hadapad understood the difficulties faced by the young artists from marginalized communities who were invested in the idea of educational accomplishment as a way of extracting themselves from their social quagmire.<sup>48</sup> The school thus served as a home away from home for many young migrants who lived in its open spaces until they became self-supporting. Using recycled industrial waste and discarded urban detritus to fashion basic studio infrastructure and communitarian living spaces, the architecture of Hadapad's school was as organic as its curriculum. Because of the school's openness to a wide range of disciplines, the courtyard would often function as a performance space, an art gallery, a lecture room, or a dormitory for visitors. In this fluid space, students encountered authors, playwrights, poets, social activists, and filmmakers in the mediating context of art education. In the informal way of imparting ideas that he adopted through commentary, lectures, dialogical interaction, and witty repartee, Hadapad created a space for emancipation and transformation of the self that was unrestricted by a curricular meta-structure. In his artistic practice, which involved an eclectic choice of referential visuals and an emphasis on technique and methods, he differed very little from a number of art educators in the period whose concerns were principally formal ones.<sup>49</sup> His works quote Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Piet Mondrian, and Paul Klee alongside the sculptural and architectural heritage of Karnataka. Hadapad considered modernism's emancipatory promises to be a core value; his efforts were not merely directed towards yet another restaging of modernism's "universalist" language.

Today, the Ken School of Art is ailing from problems such as a rundown infrastructure. In comparison, the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, which was established around the same time, is doing quite well. This difference in the two institutions' state of affairs is due in part to Hadapad's steadfast refusal to compromise with the commercial side of art, at the core of which lay a romantic belief in an autonomous art world that would function through an internal dynamic process, as long as there was a need for it.



*Fig.10b: The artist Surekha—an alumna of the Ken School—in the lithography studio of the school. Photo courtesy of Sawant, 2011.*

After his death in 2003, Hadapad's ideology permeated deep into the creative circulation system. Yet the institute itself became a family-run establishment that attempted to keep his beliefs alive despite facing indigence due to a lack of support. On the other hand, under the astute and pragmatic leadership of Prof. M.S. Nanjunda Rao the Ken School's contender, Karnataka Chitra Kala Parishath, became the most prominent art establishment in Karnataka. Therefore, despite its academically insular curriculum that features only an occasional nod towards changing attitudes in art-making, its history demands closer scrutiny.

The sprawling campus, situated in the part of town where the politically influential live, had a humble start as the Mysore Pradesh Chitrakala Parishath located in the residence of the artist Aryamurthy who, like Nanjunda Rao, was associated with the Chamarajendra Technical Institute at Mysore. At the same time in Bangalore, Svetoslav Roerich, the acclaimed Russian artist, and H K Kejriwal, the business magnate, attempted to lay the foundation for a cultural center and began to lobby with the political establishment for support. Their plans came to fruition after Kejriwal offered a seed corpus grant from his

family foundation. In return, the government offered the institute prime land and additional funds to build a statement architectural structure that would match the ambitions of an emergent regional cultural identity. All this was carried out under the watchful eye of Prof. M.S. Nanjunda Rao, who by then had become the founding secretary of the fledgling organization. In keeping with the linguistic demarcation of the state, the new institute fused with the Chittrakala Vidyalaya —an art school that had been founded by Nanjunda Rao— and eventually came to be called the *Karnataka Chittrakala Parishath*.

This pioneering group's ability to harness corporate funds and to convince the state apparatus to be the central agent in its functioning led to its phenomenal growth over the decades. Today, the institute comprises an impressive museum complex along with temporary display galleries, workshops, and airy studios. The museum collection and display, however, tells the story of a project of personal aggrandizement undertaken by the founders, who through an adroit weaving together of government subsidy and personal wealth claimed to be working all the while in the public interest. It is interesting to note that a large section of the museum eventually became a memorial to Nicholas Roerich and his son Svetoslav Roerich, with a vast collection of their work on permanent view. The imposing gallery that was named after the Kejriwal family eventually housed the family's art collection, which was "donated" to the state in 1995. In other words, it is hardly a museum where a collective memory of modernism's diversity resides. At the same time, Nanjunda Rao built up a significant collection of traditional paintings from Mysore that, along with puppets and other artifacts from the region, came to occupy the same platform as the contemporary collection. The result is a sharp contrast within the Chittrakala Parishath's various collections. Within the school differences emerged between different interest groups and litigation and political wrangling often led to temporary closures and lockouts until the government stepped in and appointed a central authority from the Indian Administrative Service. At that point the Parishath eventually settled into a routine of producing competently trained artists.

In some sense the Kalamandiram, Venkatappa's independent *aparigriha* stance, the Ken School of Art with its utopian outlook, and the Karnataka Chittrakala Parishath all represent different schools of thought about how art worlds function and project ideas about themselves. Their histories offer ways of looking at the numerous artist-led initiatives that dot the art-making landscape in Bangalore and increasingly crop up elsewhere as well. It would be naive, however, to suggest that merely by virtue of being artists' associations they are somehow either free of the constraints imposed by funding structures or, conversely, completely controlled by them. With government establishments

appearing staid and predictable in their approach, with budget freezes limiting what they can achieve, and with the rarity of receptive administrators, the reality of having to work towards productive ends with meager means has brought more and more artists together in a voluntary effort to raise funds. Through contributions and personal efforts they seek to support a complex but richly abundant art scene. Even the nomenclature of the groups suggests the notion of bringing together people and ideas. Samudaya, Samuha, Jaaga, CoLab Art & Architecture, Sombrikatte @ 1Shanthiroad, each of these titles celebrates the idea of collectivity, or the notion of bringing people together. Often small in scale and sparse in capital investment, and thus the very opposite of “corporate aesthetics” with its lavish inputs (in which the “distressed look” of an abandoned building is often an artifice for effects), the functioning of these collectives encodes all the tensions that exist between the order of the market: notions of artistic autonomy, an oppositional stance versus collaboration, and a multiplicity of identities defining the artists who work in these fluid spaces. Critics have lamented the lack of cohesion that a professed agenda in the form of a declaration of intent or manifesto would prove.<sup>50</sup> But that is precisely the main contradiction of modernism: How is it possible to declare in advance one’s future goals and yet claim that one searches for new modes of aesthetic meaning making? As the ominous clouds of economic uncertainty hang over the world and the threat of collapse troubles the art market, artists’ communities may do well to renew and strengthen the patterns of “solidarity economies,” which offer the promise that another art world is possible.

### **Selected websites of artists’ initiatives in Bangalore/Bengaluru**

[www.jaaga.in/](http://www.jaaga.in/)

[www.1shanthiroad.com/](http://www.1shanthiroad.com/)

[samuha.wikidot.com/](http://samuha.wikidot.com/)

[www.bar1.org/](http://www.bar1.org/)

<http://www.attakkalari.org/>

<http://maraa.in/>

<http://www.bornfreeart.org>

<http://www.cfjohnart.com/>

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for many ideas to Richard Bolton, “Enlightened Self Interest: The Avant Garde in the ’80s” in Grant H. Kester, ed., *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from “Afterimage”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 23–50. My analysis of artists’ collectives also draws upon Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Several arguments in this essay are also the result of classroom discussions

with students at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi, especially Rajshree Biswal, a PhD candidate. I have also engaged for some time with the writings of Martha Rosler, Julian Stallabrass, Miwon Kwon, and Okwui Enwezor. I will be referring to some of the issues they have raised in relation to the contemporary art world through a colloidal mix of ideas.

2 It is a well-established fact that the practice of organizing exclusive solo shows of artists with identifiable “signature” works was initiated by the French gallerist Durand-Ruel in the early twentieth century by leveraging their production through bank loans. (These banks eventually collapsed, leading to great economic hardship for artists). We have seen a similar tale unfold with the recent advent of galleries contracting artists to produce bodies of work that are leveraged in advance of exhibitions.

3 I wish to make it very clear that I am not contesting the place of the art fair and the auction house. They are relevant within the art economy. However, I do wish to question those artists and curators who participate in the relentless production of “art” as branded, empty objects to be traded and transacted, rather than as a practice of creating compelling meaning. Even a cursory glance at the press reports about fairs reveals that their primary objective is trade, and a majority of the vast crowds that throng art fairs are, without a doubt, drawn to it because of the relentless publicity conflating art with money. The only exhibition in Delhi that has witnessed crowds as large as the ones at the India Art Summit (now India Art Fair) was the display of the Nizam of Hyderabad’s jewels at the National Museum in Delhi in 2001. In her presentation at the India Art Summit in 2009, Geeta Kapur also argued that art fairs are about money.

4 See, for example, Kavita Singh, “A History of Now: Contemporary Art Museums,” *ART India* 15, no. 1 (2010): 26–33. For an astute reading of the of the art fair paradigm, see Enwezor Okwui, “History Lesson,” *Art Forum*, September, 2007, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_1\\_46/ai\\_n28045892/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_1_46/ai_n28045892/) and Martha Rosler’s “Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-critical Art ‘Survive’” *E-Flux Journal* 12, no. 1 (2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/107>.

5 Some issues pertaining to collectivized efforts in the economic sphere were debated in a panel discussion on “Solidarity Economy” at the fourth World Social Forum in Mumbai, India, January 20, 2004. I am attempting to use that filter to look at the manner in which art practitioners have organized themselves in recent years. For further explanations see the website for the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and Solidarity Economy, accessed March 12, 2012, [http://aloe.socioeco.org/index\\_en.html](http://aloe.socioeco.org/index_en.html).

6 At the end of this essay is a list of websites detailing the wide-ranging activities of some of these collectives. I have also drawn on extensive discussions I have had with the artists Pushpamala N, Suresh Jayaram, Sheila Gowda, Surekha, Archana Hande, Suresh Kumar G, and the critic and art historian Anil Kumar H.A, whose writings are accessible on his blog, accessed March 09, 2012, <http://www.anilkumarha.com>.

7 Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, *SAHMAT 20 YEARS 1989-2009 A Document of Activities and Statements* (SAHMAT: New Delhi, 2009), and Pooja Sood, ed., *The KHOJ BOOK: 1997-2007. Contemporary Art Practice in India* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2010).

8 For example, in a recent presentation of his work on June 29, 2011 at the Goethe-Institut/Max Muel-ler Bhavan in Bangalore, the artist Amar Kanwar drew the audience’s attention to the arms deal that the French government had brokered with the Indian government. This deal led to an enhancement of the cultural capital of contemporary art in India that manifested when the Centre Pompidou in Paris hosted the exhibition *Paris-Delhi-Bombay*, which opened on May 25, 2011. *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou), May 2011. Exhibition catalog

9 The *Corporation*, a 2003 Canadian documentary film directed by Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott and scripted by Joel Bakan, provides a humorous, yet hard-hitting account of how corporate bodies

function. It is my contention that today even gargantuan cultural organizations employ similar mechanisms that are coercive and lack transparency in their way of functioning. The film was screened by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) during its *Open Frame 2004* film festival at the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi on August 29, 2004 and widely discussed in the art circles of Delhi. Mark Achbar, Joel Bakan and Harold Crooks, *The Corporation*, directed by Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott (2003; Vancouver, British Columbia: Big Picture Media Corporation 2004, 2005), DVD.

10 Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993). With this seminal text Pollock provided many points of departure for an understanding of how sexual politics and racist discourse inform the making of art and the writing of its histories.

11 Note, for example, how neatly the notion of the avant-garde and today's market dovetail. The director of the India Art Summit (now India Art Fair), Neha Kripal, was recently quoted as saying "Oh certainly, Bangalore redeems its status as a city that uses technology to its advantage. Again that's what adds to the city's flexible approach to art." Aparna Chandra, "The New Avant Garde," *Bangalore Mirror*, December 18, 2010.

12 For a complex reading of the "alternative" art scene in Bangalore, see H.A Anil Kumar, "Visual Collectives, 'Others' & their effect in Bangalore," *Art & Deal*, 29 (2009): 13. Some state organizations, such as the Karnataka Lalit Kala Akademi, have done some exemplary work when helmed by administrators like N. Marishamachar. Marishamachar also runs the Samyojitha trust to promote the arts and artists from Bangalore and Mysore.

13 In an interview with Mick Wilson, Grant Kester points out that the *modus operandi* of right wing and conservative forces as well as the market often involves floating organizations that replicate governmental means purporting to build communities through cultural channels, all the while keeping their narrow agendas intact. See Grant Kester, "Autonomy, Agonism, and Activist Art: An Interview with Grant Kester," by Mick Wilson, *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (2007): 107–118, <http://www.grantkester.net/resources/Art+Journal+Interview.pdf>. On the relationship between corporate self-interest and cause-related marketing through cultural avenues see Bolton, "Enlightened Self Interest".

14 I borrow the term from John Chandler and Lucy Lippard who coined it in the late 1960s to describe a discursive shift in art practice that emphasized concepts over formal attributes of material and physical longevity. John Chandler and Lucy Lippard, "The Dematerialization of Art", *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson. (London: MIT Press, 1999), 46–50.

15 In Kannada, the local language, *Sthala Puranas* are traditionally written by scholars to describe the importance and significance of pilgrimage and temple sites, thus giving visitors an insight into the history, local traditions, and culture of the site.

16 The studio is linked to KHOJ International Artists Association, which started out as a non-hierarchical artists' collective in 1996. It is now structured as an institution with a director at its helm and an advisory panel of artists. In its early years the activities of KHOJ gained ideational shape and were collectively realized by a flexible "working group" of artists, art historians, and critics with a diversified support system of funding that was based primarily on the donation of artworks by artists. KHOJ was initially an annual, fifteen-day workshop held in Modinagar, an industrial town close to New Delhi, which hosted artists from across the world. The residency model with a permanent studio space in New Delhi came into being in 2001.

17 Interestingly, commercial galleries as well as private foundations and international cultural organizations often assisted such initiatives with technical equipment and know-how, and actively coordinated and participated in organizing open days and walkabouts in studios. Moreover, many artists

often exhibit their works in venues other than galleries and are not affiliated with just one organization. Websites, blogs, and newsletters detailing each other's activities also help in generating visibility for all concerned.

18 Grant Kester does voice his exasperation at the one-dimensional critique of collaborative art practices, which suggests that artists forfeit their capacity for self-determination through such alliances. He points out that market forces have perhaps a far greater bearing on diminishing an art world's capacity for self-determination. Kester, "Autonomy, Agonism, and Activist Art," 107.

19 In fact, the catalytic figures in Bangalore include an earlier generation of artists like S.G. Vasudev, who was originally from Mysore and one of the founder members of the iconic 1960s artists' collective at Cholamandalam near Chennai. The current chairperson of the Lalit Kala Akademi in New Delhi Balan Nambiar has also been instrumental in nurturing an art eco-system in Bangalore, despite being from the neighboring state of Kerala.

20 During India's colonial period, the British administered the region through geographically determined provinces called Presidencies of British India, which remained in place until 1947. Although the first art schools were set up in these regions, they were emulated in the princely states of India on a smaller scale. For an in-depth analysis of art education in colonial India see Tapati Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

21 William Archer's influential book *India and Modern Art*, for example, completely eliminates all references to academic artists. William Archer, *India and Modern Art* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959).

22 For a detailed account of the States Reorganization Act of 1956, see Vappala Pangunni Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

23 While the institute continues to function even today with a sizeable student body, records pertaining to its history are scattered and scarce. For my account I have primarily relied on the journal *Kala* published by Kalamandiram from 1923 onwards and the unpublished MVA dissertation by A.M Prakash, "Bangaluru Kalamandira Ondu Ithasika Adhayaana" (MVA thesis Hampi: Kannada University, 2010) which is the only detailed historical account of the school currently available. Translations from Kannada were provided by H.A Anil Kumar, Department of Art History, Kannada Chittrakala Parishath, Bengaluru.

24 Dr. S. Radhakrishnan ed., *Rabindranath Tagore: A centenary, Volume 1861-196* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961), 475.

25 An office memorandum of Kalamandiram dated 25/07/1975, available in the institute, describes its early history in some detail. Kalamandiram Collection. Memorandum, 1975, Bangalore.

26 It was a system of education in rural Karnataka, where young boys would live in *Mathas* or spiritual retreats to obtain an education. In return they would fulfill domestic duties for a village household in exchange for a daily meal. See G.K Karanth, *Rural youth: a sociological study of a Karnataka village* (New Delhi:, Concept, 1981), 42.

27 A.M Prakash "Bangaluru Kalamandira Ondu Ithasika Adhayaana," 5-8.

28 I am not trying to account for an originary moment for these efforts in a historicist mode, but merely suggesting that more work needs to be done to study the networks that informed the intellectual world

of the time. The historical details of the origins of Chamarejendra Technical Institute can be gleaned from a guidebook Constance E. Parsons, *Mysore City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930). The book also details the history of the Chitrashala Art Gallery at the Jaganmohan palace in Mysore.

29 A.M Prakash, "Bangaluru Kalamandira Ondu Ithasika Adhayaana," 7–9.

30 An allegorical lesson may be learnt from the fact that the grant was withdrawn when it became known to the British Government that the school was ideologically opposed to colonial rule. The grant was withdrawn at the behest of a Mysore University functionary who complained of anti-colonial activities at the school. Interestingly, he supported their stance but felt his own position within the government would be compromised. This happened when the Mysore Diwan (chief administrative officer), Mirza Ismail, had gone to London and was not in a position to offer support. A.M Prakash, "Bangaluru Kalamandira Ondu Ithasika Adhayaana," 13.

31 Due to lack of archival care in preserving these issues, only six-odd volumes of the journal are currently available at Kalamandiram. The office memorandum dated 25/07/1975 laments that its publication made losses which had severe financial consequences for the institute. Memorandum, 1975.

32 I borrow a phrase from Gyan Prakash. See Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32, No. 2. (1990): 397.

33 The journal, for example, featured the work of German expressionist artist Käthe Kollwitz. See *Kala*, I, Issue 6 (1923):141–147.

34 Parsons, *Mysore City*, 24

35 See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 29–31 and Gulammohammed Sheikh, ed., *Contemporary Art in Baroda* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1997), 48–51.

36 In her close reading of Venkatappa's diaries, which are housed in the Karnataka State Archives, Janaki Nair examines his struggles for independence as an artist in colonial India. Janaki Nair, "K.Venkatappa and the Fashioning of a *Mysore Modern in Art*," *Mysore Modern: Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 165–195.

37 *Aparigraha* in Sanskrit means to be non-grasping or practicing an ideology of limiting possessions through self-restraint. It is a vow taken by those who practice Raja Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga. Venkatappa took his vow while on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas. See S.K Ramachandra Rao, *K. Venkatappa, the Man and his Art* (Bangalore: Directorate of Kanada and Culture, 1988), 145.

38 Rao, *K. Venkatappa*, 85–88.

39 The diaries are housed in the Karanataka State Archives in Bangalore.

40 The progressives disintegrated as a group soon after their first collective show in 1949. Many members opted to relocate to Europe to seek a place within international modernism. In fact, the art critic Jag Mohan labeled Souza's 1948 show in Bombay as a farewell show in anticipation of the artist's imminent departure to London. See Ratan Parimoo, "F.N Souza and the Bombay Art Scene during the 1940s" *Historical Development of Contemporary Indian Art 1880-1947*, eds. Ratan Parimoo and Sandip Sarkar. (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 2009), 489–500. The art societies set up in Karnataka during this period include the Ideal Fine Art Society in Gulbarga founded by Jagadevappa Khanderao; the Karnataka Art Society in Dharwad run by D.V Halbhavi; and the Hubli Fine Art Society initiated by Madivallapa Minajigi, who later established an institute in Bangalore as well.

41 See, for example, Sheela Gowda, "Portrait of a Guru" *Art India*, 9, Issue I (2004): 108–109.

42 *Art Varta*, 3, Issue 1 (2011): 29.

43 The Nutan Kala Mandir, an art school that tutored students who were not accepted by the J.J. School of Art, Bombay's premier art institute, was set up in Bombay in 1935 by G.S. Dandavatimath, a Lingayat Kannadiga.

44 Of the numerous collectives that emerged around this time across the world, the Gutai group from Japan, the international network of artists called Fluxus, and the Arte Povera movement in Italy are among the best known. Unlike these movements the Ken School curriculum remained rooted in painting.

45 This was conveyed to me in a conversation with his son, the current director of the Ken School of Art.

46 Today, Karnataka has the largest number of art schools in India. Bangalore alone has sixty art institutes. See R.B. Desai, "Art Offers a Wide Canvas of Jobs," *The Hindu*, Tuesday, Feb 1, 2011 and Anilkumar H.A., "Trends, Motifs & Affinities in the Contemporary Art of Karnataka," *LKContemporary*, no.46, ed. Amit Mukhopdhyay (2002): 7–15, accessed May 21, 2012, <http://www.anilkumarha.com/?p=45>.

47 Gowda, "Portrait of a Guru," 108.

48 The Hadapads are a socially marginalized community of barbers, and even though they were absorbed into the Lingayat reformist movement the ground realities of social ostracism have dogged them for centuries. See Laxman Siddappa Ainapur, *The dynamics of caste relations in rural India*, (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1986; 1st edition), 56 and "Treat Lingayat Hadapads as Backward Community" *The Times of India*, Hubli edition, Aug 6, 2010, accessed August 1, 2011, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-08-06/hubli/28282078\\_1\\_community-barbers-social-justice](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-08-06/hubli/28282078_1_community-barbers-social-justice).

49 This is apparent from an interview he gave to the artist Yusaf Arakkal. Yusaf Arakkal, *National Herald*, October 21, 1984.

50 For example, in a panel discussion on artists' collectives at the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan (Bangalore) on June, 19 2009, the art historian and critic Shivaji K. Panikkar presented an extremely critical view of the formations in Bangalore; he strongly maintained that they lacked radical intent or a professed goal.