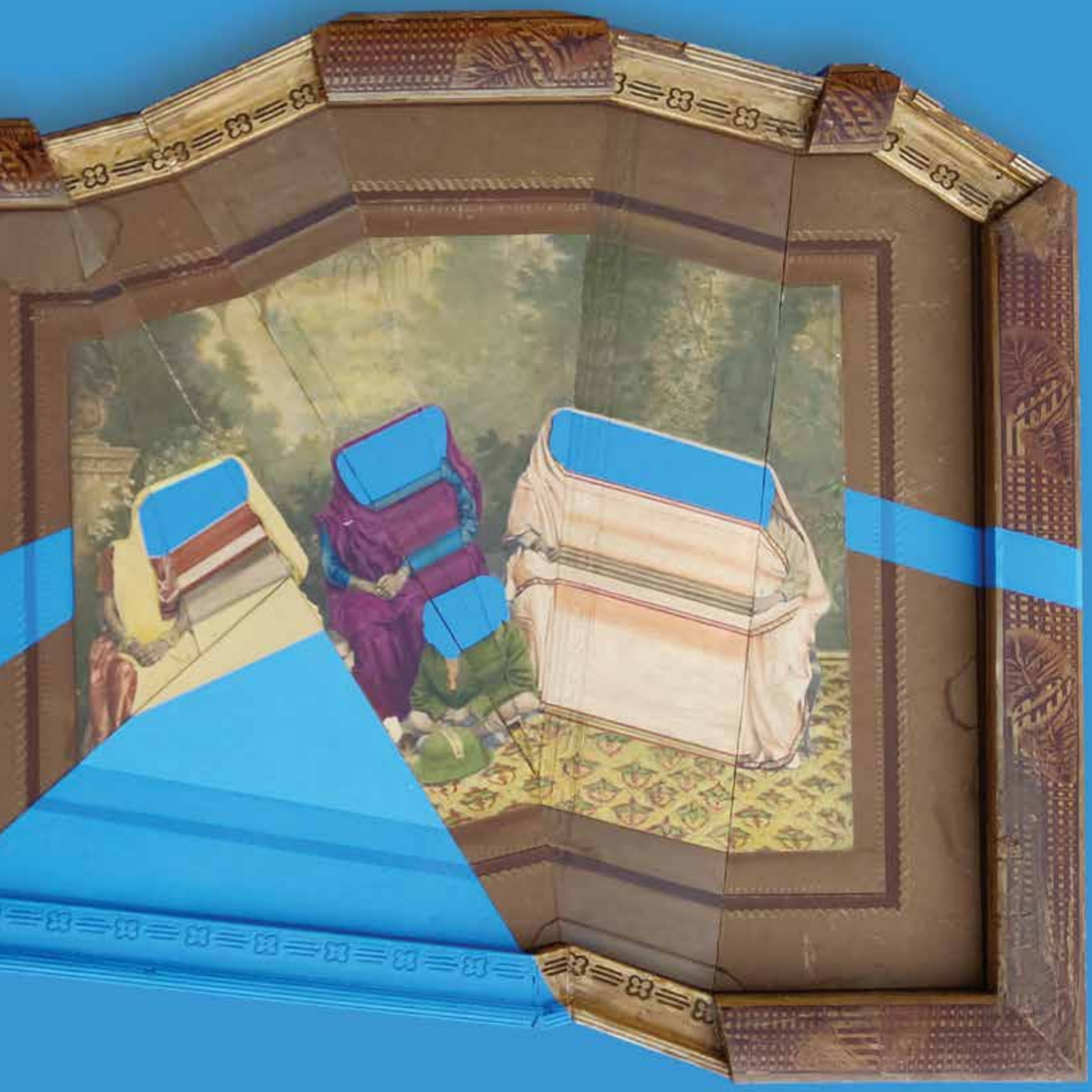
ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

The theme for this issue arrived with Norwegian-British documentary film-maker Deeyah Khan's 'White Right: Meeting the Enemy'. The film, which traces the rise of white fundamentalism, has some disturbing interviews with neo-Nazis as Khan asks quite simply 'I am a woman of colour, I am the daughter of immigrants, I am a Muslim, I am a feminist, I am a lefty liberal, and what I want to ask you is, am I your enemy?' By the end of the film, you are surprised and overwhelmed with how a simple act of crossing the divide with no judgement, no prejudice or bias or expectation, and by purely listening with the need to understand, change begins.

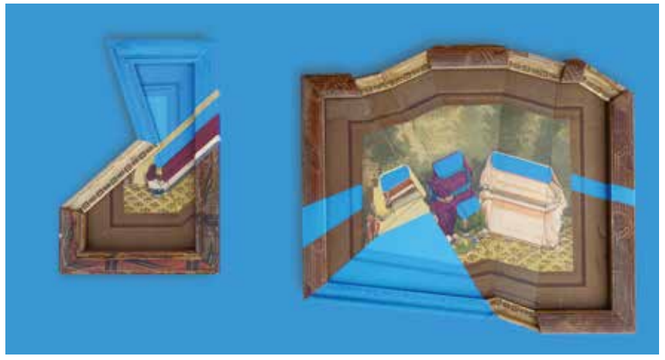
We knew instantly this was what our theme should be this issue: Of humanising divisions that by virtue of their separateness allow us to build bridges. It was a hard issue to work on because it meant meeting head-on the divisions in our minds, in our cultural contexts, our social-political realities and questioning the parts that make us individuals without leeching the individuality of the other. We had a heightened sense of awareness and consciousness while putting this issue together, but, as always, the magazine took a life of its own, choosing the stories it wanted to tell. (For instance, despite several e-mails to Deeyah Khan, the interview we wanted never happened. But the magazine, smug in its all-knowing avatar, continued nonetheless. Sore point, obviously, for me.)

But the stories that did make this issue are each mini revelations of what deep convictions can do and undo, of what art can create and destroy, and how ideas, simple in texture, can have profound implications. And, how, everything begins with a question.

How will we cross the ocean? We will build a bridge of stones...oops, sorry, wrong example, clearly, for the statuesque times we live in.

Praveena Shivram
praveena@artsillustrated.in

Cover Artist



The original photograph used for the cover

Whenever my father travelled on work, *Amma ji*, our old landlady, would taunt my mother, '*Ghiya ji ki bahu, mero miyo ghar nahi, mujhe kisi ko dar nahi*'. It literally translates to – 'I fear nothing, because my man is not home'. When the men were at work, the women were free to do as they pleased. They could step out, meet up with friends, hang out. Much like in the photograph that I chose to create the cover image for this issue of Arts Illustrated. Three women posing with two children...I could not help but imagine them to be my mother, my *mausi* (my mother's sister) and my *maami ji* (my mother's sister in-law), and the children as though they were my brother and I. I recall going to places with them as a child, to the beauty parlour, the blouse tailor, the temple, walking narrow lanes, eating *paani poori*, and orange candies. And *Amma ji*'s prying eyes at the end of the day.

I grew up believing that women must remain scared of their husbands. That is why they step out only when the men-folk were not around. For most of my life I have witnessed issues about liberty for women around me. I have questioned their relationship with men – with their fathers, husbands, co-workers, or mere co-passengers in public transport. I assumed that I would grow up to be more empathetic.

The cover of this issue is about this strange dichotomy that a woman's life is. Between time and space where she can be as she pleases to be, and where she must confer to forced rules. Between a virtual world and the real one. Between tradition and modernity. Between what is intimate and what is public. And often this divide does not exist in the physical space. It is intangible, one that is born in the mind, constantly fed to the heart through centuries of cultural conditioning.

And now, in my work, she ushers in a new era through some kind of a Blue Screen – embracing and rejecting, adapting and shifting through a multitude of dimensions. In a state of transit. Painting a reality that she likes, finding a safe space, escaping into nothingness. Celebrating the divide that has been a foundation of sorts. Resetting. Refreshing. Rebooting.

Nandan Ghiya

Studio assistants: Mukesh Vijay and Sitaram Jangid
Profile photograph: Vigyan Anand
Cover page curated by Rahul Kumar

Architecture

Bridging the Gap

The G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture situated in a reconstructed warehouse is more than just a venue; it is a space where innovation and collaboration come together to find expression.

SARITHA RAO RAYACHOTI

G5A Black Box.

In the punishing afternoon heat of Mumbai's infamous second summer, I find myself in the gridlocked Saat-Rasta intersection that falls midway between the recently dismantled Delisle Road Bridge and my destination – the G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture. Stuck in the thick of traffic, I have time to ponder about this bridge that the city took for granted all these years, and about G5A, an adaptive reuse project in a reconstructed warehouse, that I've been curious about ever since it popped up on my radar for its collaborations on unusual contemporary performances and programmes in Mumbai.

It has often been said that the work of a good architect or a space planner stands out for the way it combines form and function. But I find context an interesting variable in this mix. That's another bridge that we take for granted. It becomes almost imperative when we speak of a space like G5A that we begin with the context of how it came to be.

In 2013, Anuradha Parikh, architect and film-maker, inherited a warehouse with a 3300 sq ft footprint, attached to a printing press for name plates at the Laxmi Mills Estate in Mumbai's Shakti Mills Lane. 'I had no immediate use for it,' says Anuradha. 'In 1990, my mother, Shaila Parikh, started the Mohile Parikh Centre at the National Centre for Performing Arts as a space to bring students and young professionals together to share information and conversations about international and national contemporary visual arts. Art schools not only had limited resources but lacked imagination and bandwidth. I decided to enlarge the scope to include the performing arts, language arts and design and architecture, and create a new not-for-profit Foundation for Contemporary Culture in 2013.'

After winding through the alleys of the Shakti Mills Lane, it is disorienting to open the doors of G5A and find a stairway that soars from the entrance up to the terrace with two wings on either side acting as a mezzanine. But before we go up, we must pause at the cafe on the ground floor that has, since May 2018, become PORT Kitchen & Bar. PORT has a living room vibe,

PORT Kitchen & Bar.

G5A Warehouse, after.

designed in slate grey and dark wood, with chick-blinds lending warmth to the full-length windows. A piano presides over the room, even as it awaits repairs on a couple of keys that plink at their own whim. A conference call is in session at one end of the 12-seater communal table, and the panel running down the centre of the tabletop has ornate carvings that could have come from an old door, or a beam. I later learnt that the panel was part of a lot of Burma teak wood that was sourced from a scrap wood merchant.

The G5A Warehouse is a refurbished warehouse, retaining the original form rebuilt as a more efficient steel and concrete structure. Being in the old mill district of Central Mumbai, permissions to reconstruct were not easy to come by. But the location's rich cultural legacy made it the ideal place to set up a Foundation like G5A. Anuradha says, 'The textile mills fostered a unique culture that shaped Mumbai during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Mill workers patronised literary traditions, theatre, folk and popular arts. Since the decline of these mills, the cultural landscape has also been impacted. G5A will in a small but memorable way revive some of that spirit. For instance, two-thirds of the ground floor has the first ever Black Box theatre in the country, above which is the Terrace where performances and after-parties can be held.'

A black box theatre has none of the stringency of layouts like the Proscenium or Arena. The stage, seating and lighting are flexible, and can be adapted to the needs of the programme – be it screenings, conversations, performances, presentations, workshops or courses.

When I say that the Black Box is the throbbing dark heart of G5A, I mean the dark in the literal sense. The Black Box is 2200 sq. ft., with black-curtain-lined walls. The curtains when drawn or shut in varying length, give the performers/artists their desired sound/acoustic preferences, especially for music, theatre and dance. The seating can go up to 200, depending on the configuration. It can be moved around to better enable breaking barriers between performer and audience. If the performance requires the audience to be at the centre, with the area surrounding them becoming a stage, that's

G5A Warehouse, before.

All Images Courtesy of G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture, Mumbai.


G5A Artist Tent.


G5A Study.


G5A Terrace.

possible in the Black Box. If the performance requires a stage in the very centre of the room, that's possible too. This fluidity is a necessary part of the creative process of putting together an experimental performance at the Black Box.

Nestled between the ground floor and the terrace above, two rooms lead off the stairway to form a mezzanine. One is an Artist Tent (that also leads down to the Black Box) with its reed screens, low seating and a cheeky sign about the absence of a restroom here. The other room leading off the stairs is called the Study. It is ensconced in full-length glass windows on three sides, and a skylight that must surely cast light-patterns on the floor at a different time of day. Many of the windows across the space can be opened, and this apparently comes in handy to cajole the resident feline to come in from its perch on ledges outside the windows.

'Our mandate,' says Anuradha, 'has been non-mainstream, experimental programmes that force you not to remain a passive audience, often dissolving the 'fourth wall' between performer and audience. We're looking at reinforcing the role of art and culture as a way to share conversations about form (arts) and values (culture and community).'

On my way out, across the alley, work is in full swing to convert the factory into an office for G5A. As I slip through a gap at the side of the space leading to a pedestrian path linking into Tulsi Pipe Road where another traffic snarl awaits me, I get a glimpse of a packaging unit with stacks of flat-packs in the process of being assembled as small cardboard boxes. I realise then, that these spaces – the old mills and industrial units – are the bridges that span what was then Bombay and what is now Mumbai.

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