

The Streets of Kolkata as Inspiration

by Lipika Bansal

Artists Bonno van Doorn, Sumantra Mukherjee, Henri Jacobs and Arthur Stokvis found inspiration for their work in the streets of Kolkata.

Van Doorn, Stokvis and Jacobs from the Netherlands constructed their pieces from the overwhelming number of impressions that Kolkata left on them. Mukherjee, who worked from own city, made images that both reflected and deconstructed his surroundings.

Van Doorn came back from India with an overdose of impressions. He turned them into a colorful super shrine and dedicated it to the people of Kolkata. His installation consists of numerous images that he collected in Kolkata during his residency, ranging from bricks, posters, logos and street temples. With his work, he wants to entice people to let go of classifications and look at objects with a free mind.

"The bricks in Kolkata have various words imprinted in them: 'Power', 'Krishna', 'Lucky', 'Dreams'... the first brick I encountered said 'Super'. Nowadays, everything is 'super' - the expression is used worldwide, in any context, all the time - 'super nice', 'super cool', 'super this', 'super that'. To reflect that, how omnipresent the word is, I made stamps and placards with it, and it also comes back enlarged in the sculpture."



The wall painting by **Stokvis** is inspired by the energy he found in Kolkata, where layer upon layer of graffiti, Ashoka inscriptions, and directly drawn impressions appear on top of each other. The work at Marres combines earthy colors of homemade paint of ochres, red earth and clay with bright neons.

While spending time in Kolkata, Stokvis felt that everything revolves around making: "From the giant painted billboards to the wrought-iron railings on the windows, sometimes entire parts of this metropolis seem handcrafted. It provides a kind of ubiquitous tangibility to the city. The workshops are very accessible, there is strong craftsmanship that ensures that people can experiment with materials. It turns the city into a gigantic open studio and that is fantastic for an artist!"



"I was inspired by the whimsical mix of profane and religious scenes on the streets of Kolkata. The painting on the right shows the blow-up snake heads of a small terracotta altar, the painting on the right shows a small workshop where syringes are made."



Jacobs' work at the exhibition developed in multiple phases. While he was in Kolkata, he spent a lot of time walking to grasp the stark contrasts he was confronted with. During his numerous walks, he noticed the clinkers with all the different striking patterns made in concrete, triangles, rectangles, circles and derivations. He remembers: "I was especially fascinated by the tattered pavement and the gaps in-between, which were filled with a different pattern stone. The remaining space, the colliding stones and the gap created a beautiful tension. With these patterns, we got wooden blocks carved that were then printed on textiles and paper. In 2016, I did a residency in Japan at Arita. There, I used the pavement patterns on porcelain plates. In 2018 at a residency at 'European Keramisch Werkcentrum' (EKWC), I further used the pavements and got them made in colorful 3D tiles

casted in clay. Finally, the square tiles were produced with minor DWARS students and colleagues at KASK – Conservatorium Gent (B) in Spring of 2022.

In his latest work, **Mukherjee** satirizes the concept of masculinity used in popular entertainment culture. "I develop posters to address themes such as (toxic) masculinity in Kolkata streets, while attempting to engage audiences in the public domain. For example, I painted a chimpanzee on a tank holding a bottle of vodka with the slogan 'four bottles of vodka, is your daily work'."

The image making of an acceptable man has created this power relation, leading to an imposed behavior that is thought necessary to be accepted as a typical male.

Mukherjee's murals are overlapped with parallel ideas and techniques derived from Indian folk cultures mixing with contemporary Indian imagery. It shows gods and goddesses being washed away of their glory, abstract figures with their human traits withered away.

