



**BBDS**

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**Drawing and  
Sketching**

Scientific Journal

Art in the Public Realm:

Notes from the Indian

Subcontinent

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Special issue by Shriya Malhotra

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## Editorial Note

### Art in the Public Realm - Notes from the Indian Subcontinent

Keywords: India, Decorative Art, Street Art, Public Art, Fonts, Wall Art, Graffiti, Sri Lanka, , Resistance, Propaganda, Civic Art

The Indian subcontinent has a unique street art context rooted in traditions of everyday decorative arts, and marketing which in recent years converged with global street art and graffiti that emerged from the West.

Thanks to information and communication tools of globalization, and the flows of people and ideas — the East and the West now encounter each other in terms of ideas and aesthetics in virtual as well as real space.

However the contexts of street art or of art in the streets and in the public in the East is different. In the Indian subcontinent, art is often an under-appreciated and laborious economic livelihood for many. In recent years it is also hand-crafted resistance to digitization and a decolonized response to what is considered art in other places—a distinction that was rooted in a colonial exploitation.

Art in the streets is often theatrical and image-laden. The following interviews and reflections barely scratch the surface of the rich heritage and diverse traditions behind types of performance, interventions wall art and public art forms that exist in the Indian subcontinent. It also enables a voice of critique and a way of creating a dialogue with the public. All of this in the context of resource-constrained inventiveness, referred to as *jugaad*.

1 Ranjit Dahiya, the founder of the Bollywood Art Project, has been beautifying walls of Mumbai which in recent years served as monumental propaganda-like murals.

2 Dhanya Pilo one of the founders of the Wall Project, reviews civic beautification and community-building through a unique artistic service in action which has given way to leveraging site specific technology into immersive performances.

3 Berlin's famous graffiti inspired street artist, the Wa, reflects upon how the West and East often culturally collide during festivals.

4 Muralist Anpu Varkey shares the experience of creating works in public and reflects on the perceptions surrounding women in urban spaces across India.

5 BasicShit reveal social issues specific to Indian cities and *jugaad*-like responses which have resulted in creative problem solving through site-specific upcycled product design.



6 Sign-painter Kafeel discusses his functional calligraphic signs which represent the diversity and plurality in a vast subcontinent that has a rich history of Islamic aesthetics.

7 Samia Singh reflects on creating nature-inspired art on walls as part of municipal projects across cultural contexts.

Daily, one encounters assorted forms of art in the public realm. From superstitious truck decorations, to the signatures of repairs-men on shawls, to the near spam-like hand-painted and printed advertisements: annotations of personal expression, civic engagement and political propaganda.

Here, art in the streets or in the public realm for many reasons remains a way of living or surviving each day, in a

manner that is inspired by the street in which it unfolds. It is so diverse and layered that even the thoughts in this journal are at best a drop in the vast ocean of people, knowledge and practices that exist.

I'm grateful to the various artists who shared their time and experiences with me, allowing for this unique compilation of interviews and texts.

I hope that like me you will enjoy exploring the thoughts behind the acts of what feels like the truest art of people; street art is a voice.

Shriya Malhotra