

Smashing Cars, Scrubbing Blood

New media brings you art on the floor, in a mill, off the wall – but never on it

SALONI DOSHI

Have you ever known the thrill of smashing a car in the middle of a 100-year-old mill facing the sea? That's what multidisciplinary artist Mukul Deora's most unusual participatory performance was all about at the opening of a hip conceptual art space in Mumbai — the Volte. The autodestruction was performed not in the gallery but in a nearby mill, as much of an industrial relic as the car ended up being. Hammers were handed out, and all had a go at an old Contessa that stoically held its own as the blows rained for over an hour. The dented carcass was then transported to the gallery.

Volte founder Tushar Jiwrajka, a passionate proponent of the mantra that 'the canvas is dead, long live art', wanted to build something that was a radical shift from the conventional gallery model, a space that allowed exhibitions, events and audiences to intermingle in a dynamic way. Jiwrajka, 31, a culture vulture who has travelled extensively to biennales, art fairs and festivals, recently wrote a piece in the art advisory Japa Arts arguing that painting was essentially an act of isolation that was out of sync with today's enmeshed world of "collaboration and cooperation". He was echoing Duchamp's view that the creative act is not the preserve of the artist alone but that the spectator, through his interpretation and analysis, is an equally important contributor.

Volte's stated aim is to give wing to artists who challenge the norm in a heroically experimental way. Apart from Deora's assault on battery, another participatory work was viewing a large inflatable penis which responds in real time to the collective sexual activity on the internet and a group of grieving funeral mourners (rudaalis from Rajasthan) who, for all one cared, could well have been singing the requiem of art as we knew it.

Interestingly enough for the art scene in Mumbai, Volte opened within a week of another experimental space, the high-end Gallery Bose Mehta Birla in Fort Area, housed in the same building as one of the city's oldest galleries, Chemould. Gallery BMB, in which the artist Bose Krishnamachari is a partner, started with a truly international offering called The Dark Science Of Five Continents, with provocative images of photojournalist George Osodi (Africa), painted bronze realist death machines of Jake and Dinos Chapman (Britain), celebrity swan interactive sculptures of Jon Kessler (America), the massive Fiat engine-on-the-table sculpture of Riyas Komu (India), the sprawling lampshade sculpture of Tunga (Brazil) and powerful political video works of Wang Qingsong (China).



Mukul Deora's Break, for Volte