

Times out Mumbai December, 2011

GROWTH SPURT (excerpt)

By Shibani Mitra Saigal

2011 was the year that children started being taken seriously in the cultural scene, says Shinibali Mitra Saigal. Photography by Mohnish Dabhoya

The children's cultural scene for Mumbai's children this year was marked by an unusual – and welcome – maturity. The trend was especially marked in three areas: theatre, books and art. Publishers, theatre directors and event organisers all made an effort to put aside childish things for more nuanced fare that catered to older age groups and recognised the increasingly complex world that children live in today.



Drawing it out

Sitting in the beautiful lawns adjoining the Bhau Daji Lad museum at Byculla, 11-year-old Romil Kothari is putting the finishing touches to a painting inspired by contemporary artist Sheba Chhachhi's works. The Bhau Daji Lad museum first began organising workshops for children in 2009. Initially these focussed on the museum's permanent collection, but the Museum has recently started workshops that revolved around the more complex new exhibitions.

The first workshop was linked to *Something That I'll Never Really See: Contemporary Photography from the Victoria & Albert* and *A Century of Olympic Posters*, both of which came from the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Structured into three parts, the children are taken on an interactive walk through the exhibition by art educator Purnima Sampat; then given worksheets to express their understanding and finally they do an art activity inspired by these works. The V&A workshops were followed by ones focussing on Jitish Kallat's exhibition, *Fieldnotes: Tomorrow was Here Yesterday* and most recently, Sheba Chhachhi's *Evoking The Pause*, an exhibition of photo and video-based objects and installations.

The workshops are intended to further the museum's educational agenda, said BDL managing trustee and honorary director Tasneem Mehta. "These days we are moving more towards a creative economy and the focus is on how to create ideas," she said.

The response to the workshops has been slow but encouraging. The Kallat workshops attracted 58 children and 357 children participated in workshops linked to the Chhacchi exhibition. Sampat said that these exhibitions might seem adult, but she tries to make them relevant for children by getting them to respond to the images. "I prod them to think and come up with their own ideas and these may be quite different from what the artist is trying to say," she said