

THE ART PACK

Meet the new breed of young crusaders who are rejigging the art world to make it inclusive, sustainable and democratic through co-working spaces, research programmes and apps
By PRIYANSHI SAXENA

AMISHA CHOWBEY (30)
ANUBHA JAIN (28)
CO-FOUNDERS,
ARTBUZZ STUDIOS, DELHI

Most freshly minted artists are a tad baffled by the realities that hit them once out the art school door. The mundane commerce of living in a city do not exactly lend a yeasty rise for creativity. An exclusive professional work environment for artists can, therefore, sound like a dream come true. Amisha Chowbey and Anubha Jain realised a gap in the unstructured art market and decided to launch ArtBuzz Studios in the capital. "We needed to flatten the playing field in the art market, make it easier to access, and more fun to engage with," says Chowbey. And, over time, they have created a co-working space with multiple studios up for rent, and an open work area for design and other creative pursuits—all togged up with etching press, hot plate, aquatint machines, and acid room. Hardly surprising, that this studio has turned into a hotspot and comfort zone among newbie artists, enthusiasts, and even collectors. Indeed, this duo have their eye on the bigger picture, Jain explains. "We need to have more galleries, and build a sustainable network of art markets across Tier 2 cities. We also need to create an infrastructure to help artists show more work." >

COURTESY SHILPI SHARMA

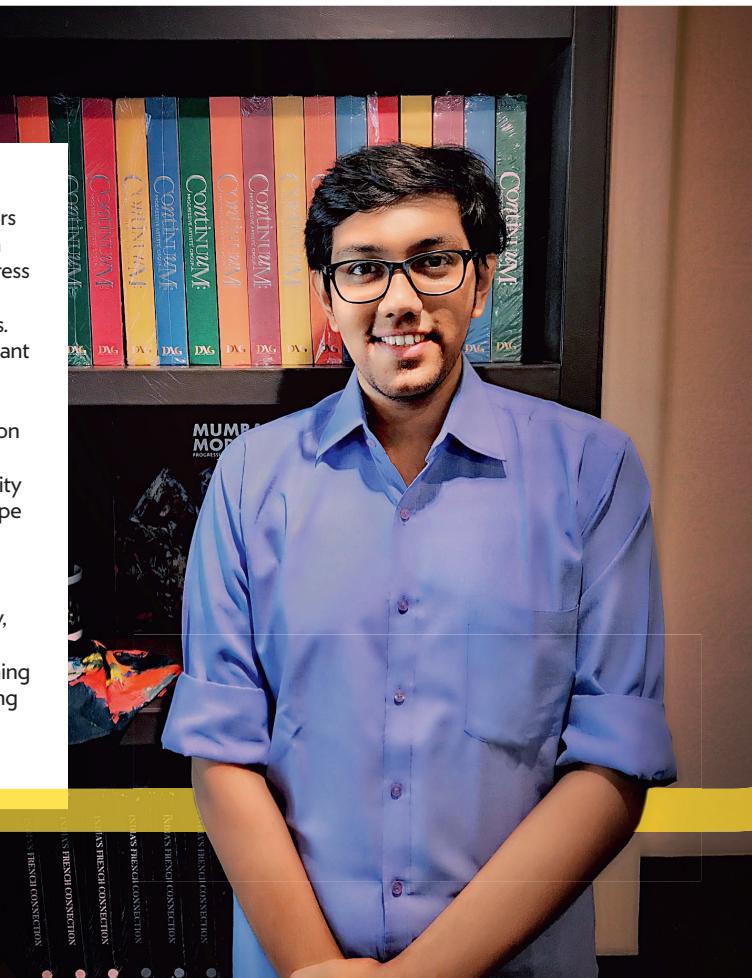


RASHMI
DHANWANI (34)
FOUNDER-DIRECTOR,
THE ART X COMPANY,
MUMBAI

people towards them. Rashmi Dhanwani strode into the spotlight with her work for the Mumbai Midtown Arts Collective (MMAC), where galleries, museums and auction houses in midtown Mumbai came together to develop and nurture a community of art lovers and cultural connoisseurs, with events such as Art Night Friday and Art Sundays to buff up the buzz. Dhanwani has been more than instrumental in mobilising curiosity in the arts in Mumbai. For some years now, she has been striving to make the arts accessible as well as desirable, besides being merely exclusive. Dhanwani founded The Art X Company, which undertakes research, consulting, curation, strategy, and management, all focused on the cultural industry in India. The company has worked with the CSMVS (Mumbai) and the Piramal Museum of Art (Mumbai) among others, consulting on design, communication, events, programmes, strategic partnerships, and measurement and analytics. At present, she and her team are working with the British Council on a primary research-led, five-city consultation with professionals from music, dance, theatre, visual arts, museums and heritage, digital content businesses, design, and other creative sectors, to help with the Council's upcoming five-year strategy for arts and culture programmes in India.

SIDDHANT
SHAH (27)
FOUNDER/DIRECTOR,
ACCESS FOR ALL,
MUMBAI

his mother's sight was affected some years ago. Since then, Shah has been consumed with reorienting the discourse that relegates the differently abled on the margins. He and his team work with museums, galleries, foundations, and monuments to create a hospitable art environment where people with disability can 'experience' and enjoy the exhibits. "The aim is to make the visual art-scape accessible to the visually impaired, by bridging the gap between arts, cultural heritage, and disabilities through inclusive art appreciation programmes and interventions," says Shah, whose works have already won over audiences at the Serendipity Arts Festival (Goa), India Art Fair (New Delhi), DAG Gallery, IGNCA (New Delhi), National Museum (New Delhi), and the CSMVS (Mumbai), among many big-ticket venues. He has also ventured into publishing of art and culture literature for the visually challenged, and is now busy working on programmes to sensitise 'the abled' and help them look beyond the visual aspect of art. >



TRISHLA TALERA (28)
ROSHAN TALERA (30)
CO-FOUNDERS, TIFA, PUNE

Recently, Aqui Thami, a Darjeeling-based artist and activist, toured across seven cities in India with her 'Sister Library' of books by women authors, poets, zine-makers and graphic novelists. In Pune, Thami chose TIFA Working Studios as her exhibition venue. Women gathered in droves to discuss the representation of the female sex in literature. For studio founders and siblings, Trishla and Roshan Talera, this unusual event was a smug moment of triumph and hammered in their goals neatly in place. Four years ago, when most people would have complained about the lack of opportunities in art in small cities, the duo set up their multi-disciplinary creative space in Pune. Today, TIFA is a lab-cum-retreat for young and old talent—both local and international—where they gather to work, learn, and dissent in peace through wide and extended brackets of time. "We need to concentrate on training people in arts management and administration, and strengthen the existing art network through collaborations and interdisciplinary practices," says Trishla. And they have begun with a range of projects that include events and residencies—from theatrical performances and film screenings to exhibitions on memes and 'board game Sundays' that foster community interaction in a city that is besotted by its smart phones. >





REHA
SODHI (33)
CURATOR AND
EXHIBITION
DESIGNER,
DELHI

Inspirations In Indian Textiles From 1947 To 2017, Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur (2018), and *A Search In Five Directions: Textiles From The Vishwakarma Exhibitions*, presented by National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum in collaboration with Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi (2018). Right now, she is busy with a large project to be held at the Moda Goa Museum next year, and other major exhibitions. Her way forward is linked closely to her environment, she says, "We need to increase the volume of platforms for people to show and view art, and spread out beyond mega cities."

Two years ago, Reha Sodhi received a fellowship for the International Curators Programme at the 7th Glasgow International in Scotland. It was a prestigious win for someone who had first made her presence felt, emphatically, as curatorial assistant for *Whorled Explorations* at the 2014 Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Sodhi has brought to life the grand textile exhibitions such as *New Traditions: The Influences And*



MENAKA
RODRIGUEZ (42)
HEAD - RESOURCE
MOBILISATION AND
OUTREACH, INDIA
FOUNDATION FOR THE
ARTS (IFA), BENGALURU

In a country where the idea of a non-profit organisation is often conflated with a struggle for survival and funding, and where culture and heritage command space in palaces of pride, but fall out of favour with philanthropists, it is champions like Rodriguez, who have injected a hefty dose of optimism and strategy to the endeavour and drill of fund-raising. Rodriguez, as part of the India Foundation for the Arts, a grant-making organisation that supports practice, research, and education in various disciplines of art and culture, raises the resources to support the foundation's diverse programmes and initiatives, and plans for its long-term financial sustainability and growth. For her uncommon zeal and accomplishment, she was awarded 'Fundraiser of the Year' at the India NGO Awards 2016-17, instituted by The Resource Alliance, India and the Rockefeller Foundation. Her efforts have helped build a rich compilation of works that provide access to the country's diverse regional and cultural histories (through the work of the grantees), and stack up a robust archive of books, films, performances, publications, exhibitions, and educational material, which will now be accessible to the public via the IFA Archive (launched in October 2018). ■