

Art in the belly of the city

Peter Griffin spends a rain-soaked evening on a powl with the Mumbai Midtown Arts Collective

Slightly drenched from a sudden heavy burst of rain, I clatter into the silence of a small art gallery. A short, slim man in sneakers, jeans and shirt is drawing with a dry marker on the glass wall that separates the entrance area from the main gallery; a half-dozen or so visitors watch in silence, their phones raised in the tribute of this era; the staffer on hand makes no attempt to stop him or them, so this is no guerrilla graffitist.

His lines are confident, sure; they are the shapes and forms that feature on the many large canvases on the walls around us, only monochrome. He moves around to the other side of the glass and continues. The door behind us opens, and a group laughing at its own mildly bedraggled state bustle in, but quickly, they form a silent semi-circle. The man steps back, studies the lines, steps forward to add a few more, then back again. He is satisfied. He moves to the top corner of the glass and signs his name and the year: Pisuro, 1918. The audience – for that is what we are in the current moment and not gallery visitors – applauds.

This is the first Art Night Friday, an initiative by the Mumbai Midtown Arts Collective. The member organisations are spread out over too large an area to cover in one evening, even over several hours (though all are staying open past usual closing times), so MMAC has split it into two walks. This one covers the Worli area, and I've missed the first gallery. On the suggestion of Rashmi Dhanwani, one of the organisers, I had started with the first stop on the other walk, the auction house Saffronart



Art attack: (Top) Walkthrough conducted by Kit Hildyard at Volte Gallery; (below) works on display at Tao Art Gallery. ■ KARAN SARAF AND COURTESY TAO ART GALLERY.



in Prabhadevi, where she said I'd get to see art usually unavailable to the public.

Getting acquainted

There, a Saffronart representative took us through works that will shortly be on sale by Saffronart's StoryLTD wing in a 'no reserve' auction (the art is sold to the highest bidder, with no minimum or reserve price) of modern and contemporary art, with names even those barely familiar with art would recognise: Hussain, Raza, Souza, Padamsee. A mild criticism here: the walkthrough covered about two-thirds of the exhibits before we had to move to the next stop; one needs either more time for this space, or less time spent on each work, which would be sad. Before we left, we got a quick run-through of how to bid on the

website, and then we headed to Sarika Bajaj's installations at Anupa Mehta Arts, and the big S.H. Raza show at Piramal.

Or rather the others did. I intend to devote an entire evening to the Raza soon, so I defected to Tao in Worli. Only to be intercepted by heavy rain and lashing winds. By the time I get in, semi-drenched as my umbrella lost its battle with wind gusting in from the Haji Ali sea face, the other walkers had left for Art & Soul, where Pisuro was showing as well as putting on a show. Shivering in the hyper-ACed space, we peeped out the door to see the fickle rain had stopped. But ten minutes later, as we set out for the last stop of the evening, the heavens open up again and once more we were all semi-sodden.

Last stop, Volte, in one of

the bylanes near Doordarshan, is too far to walk in this downpour, so cabs and cars are shared. Regrouping at our destination, Dhanwani notes, pleased, that while some people had visited only one or two of the stops, there seemed to be at least 15 who had stayed through. "Not bad for a rainy day!"

Volte is small, the least gallery-like, if there is such a descriptor: the building has the feel of a repurposed industrial estate, and the gallery is bare walls, several paintings and a couple of installations. The walkthrough was correspondingly brief, but informative. A quartet of Anish Kapoor paintings, we were told, are available quite cheap, at three lakh a pop. We are encouraged to stay, sip wine and nibble chips, and chat, even though we are probably the last people still in the building, and most of us do, breaking into smaller groups, discussing the artists, art, and accessibility, which is what these walks are about, versus gatekeepers, which these spaces usually are. And then we walk out into more rain.

The second Art Night Friday is today at 6 p.m.. The walk is free, transport and a post-event mixer are on offer for a price. More details at facebook.com/groups/mumbai.midtown.arts.collective/ or via email (info@art-x.co).