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## PHENOMENON OF DISTRICT ART IN KALA GODHA FESTIVAL, MUMBAI

### **Indah WIDIASTUTI**

Doctoral Candidate - Department of Architecture, School of  
Architecture and Planning, Anna University - INDIA  
*widiastuti\_indah@yahoo.com*

### **Rajiv BHATT**

Independent Researcher, Promoter of Sustainable Development,  
Mumbai - INDIA  
*bhatrajivv@yahoo.com, rajivbhatt@hotmail.com*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Mumbai, a City of ethnic and cultural diversity, the financial and economic hub of India is also at the forefront of the Art scene in India. Art exhibitions keep happening in the city regularly right from the small galleries to the most prestigious ones.*

*Owing to British colonization, colonial buildings are scattered throughout the island city. But the highest concentration is in the South Mumbai area which is the main business district known as "Kala Ghoda", (virtually meaning Black Horse), deriving from a black equestrian statue of Edward VII, Prince of Wales in the area. Prestigious Art galleries, Museums, Libraries, and foreign cultural centers are concentrated in this area which make it melting pot of art lovers and intellectuals.*

*In 1998 a non profit organization called 'Kala Ghoda Association' was formed to further develop Kala Ghoda as an art district and to preserve the colonial buildings of the area. Since then, the Association annually organized the Kalaghoda Festival. This festival covers Visual and Performing art events, and is attended by artists from all over India as well as from abroad. They display their art on the pavements and in the nearby art galleries. There are events that cover dialogues by literary figures. Among the Visual and Performing art, the Culinary art also gets its' place. Kala Ghoda Festival is the most prominent congregation of art lovers in Mumbai. This is also a unique effort to preserve the colonial architectural heritage of the area.*

*This paper is a descriptive discourse that try to uphold the globally growing discourse of creative society in urban area where urban space, is functionally discussed more than engineered physical object. Street, district, landmark contain more than cognitive and artistic value as conventionally understood. It molds multi-facet social relations between space and people as stake holders and participants, simultaneously or specifically for artistic, social, religious and cultural motive. The events of Kala Godha festival is a case where urban space articulate participative and holistic designed object and in return contribute to the shaping of identity, place-making as well as awareness for environmental preservation.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Public Art and Space**

City is, as described by Manuel Castell (1996), a ground where events and their various actors are accumulated, reflecting the power

constellation that endures them by means of local and global policy. In mainstream level within the scope of the elite, different properties of power ( stability of the state, economy, social welfare, and role of Industry) define the way city is run and controlled. At grass-root level participations and voices of people are central agent of changes. Both levels are always interacting and modifying to one another and as a result directing the urban life and form to certain expressions and activities.

Context for this paper is 'urban life as a mutual synergy between space and its' living activities. The context sets the understanding of urban space away from conventional discussion of engineered physical built-environment as a mere cognitive and artistic object. The context also posit urban space as more than about emphasizing the importance of maintaining urban life, by accommodating society and their living culture. This context maintains ideas of urban development strategy that incorporates society and their living culture as determining tools. Currently this consideration has been increasingly felt following the evolving discourse of creative society in which the notion of people is more than just as socially understood as independent tenant, consumer or user. Notion of People, within co-relational context of space and its' living activities, is much closer to Deuleuzian perspective-Rhizome [1] on living environment where events and space are seen as dynamic net of participation that hold decisive role in defining social and cultural operations. The notion of people would progressively contain both cultural as well as economic value, both at utility and conceptual level.

The themes elaborated for art or district festivals are usually the most recent social-cultural phenomenon that is widely popular, representing local value, or popularized in academic discourse, such as minority, ecology, feminism, farmer movement, preservation, and also art. Within this standpoint, we tried to draw Kala Godha festival as a model of urban life in space that stand more than a physically designed space that accommodate multi-facet social relations, but as part of net space-people-activity articulating itself in a festival that take place in Kala Godha district. The spatial arrangement and programmed activities in return contribute to the shaping of integrated identity, place-making as well as grow awareness for environmental preservation. For this aim we would examine several aspects of Kala Godha festivals which could describe; Phenomena of Art festivals and District and District Art.

### **Phenomena of Art Festivals**

To understand how people art and spaces are integrated in urban life we would base our argument on text written by Malcolm Lewis (1991), Art Space and the City - Public Art and Urban Futures, where he put the discourse of sustainable urban future on the establishment of holistic network of people-activity-space, by which strategies could be participatively evolved in order to enable the city to be celebrated, the publicness of urban space to be reclaimed, dwellers to be empowered, as well justifying change as continuous tradition. Lewis' model of Art Space and the City indeed closely explains the events of Kala Godha festival, in Mumbai.

To clarify the context of art, in the discussion Lewis suggests two different roles of art in urban space, which are: 1) art as decoration within a field of urban design in which the needs of users are central; 2) art as social process of criticism and engagement, defining the public realm not as public sites but as complex field of public interest. He emphasizes that the tension between these roles result in various types of spatial modification in urban context, yet he obviously inclined more to the later role.

Indeed, Lewis' ideas of bridging contemporary practice of art and design for urban public spaces is Marxist in nature, in such a way that his statements clearly opposes the increasing encroachment on public space by corporate basically consumer interest. His ideas challenges a seemingly heroic and "liberal" ideas such as "livable city", which is formally constructed by professionals for their supposition of the benefit of users, stability of rational city, and resort to notions of historic nostalgia, so as to superficially perform conviviality that was once existent. He encourages spontaneity of people power in agenda for urban renewal, and justify that formal physical design should be flexible rather than permanent or mute. His models maintained principles that public art acts in the public realm must extend to series of overlapping issues, such as the diversity of urban public and cultures. His idea also arises from ecological and

emancipation concerns and reactions against the dehumanizing effects of consumerism

Lewis' model refers to some cases that goes back to last 1960s" in USA and Europe when works of contemporary art and craft had increasingly been located in urban public space, such as: city squares, government buildings, corporate plaza, parks and garden festivals, schools, hospitals, railway stations, and on the external walls of houses. It used to be exhibited by many different language with broader scope of setting, in the form of of statues, and memorials and memorials in 19th Century. The public art in UK has been initiated by the public sectors and much had been commissioned through public bodies. The works are usually commissioned for sites of open public access; the term "site-specific" is also used, both for art made of installation in a given site, or the design of the site itself.

In his model, the Public art discussed might be taken from cases that include the works of artists undertaking residencies in industrial or social setting and the community of arts programmers which began in the late 1960s. The model also refer to cases of community wall painting which, in the service of black power, women's right, or movement for national liberation from central America to the north of Ireland, who made visible the repressed voices of "the ground" through media such as broadcast television. The difference between the conventional public art and community art or new genre public art is that the later did not only express their creativity but moreover, act as catalyst for other people's creativity. Here, political imagination can be perhaps more valued then drawing skills. This is a reaction against the commoditization of art by its' markets and institutions, a rejection of the self contained aesthetic of Modernism and reflects a critical realism derived from Marxism, Feminism and Ecology which implies that artists act for and with others in reclaiming responsibilities for their futures.

### **District and District Art**

However, aside than apprehending the role of art festival in urban space, when notifying some earlier architectural precedence of urban-space design we should draw discursive questions of: whether it is the role of festival in the city that matter, or whether it is the role of city in accommodating festivals that we should maintain?

We believe that it should be a moment of questions whether incorporating festival, and artistic feature in architectural setting is really an effort of "attaching alien feature" into the available set of space or apparently "retrospection towards the important feature that was once lost from urban design", such as: events, people, celebrations, r; detached by value of functionalism and determinism as embedded in paradigm of Modernism

India is like most of places which hold on strong roots of cultures. She has been seeing through histories of civilization development reflected in the founding of ancient urban development that were borne out and governed on base of events of religious ceremony and folk's festivals. Agora[2] in Greek is more than a market place, a spatio-structural typology that is developed into shelters and districts that accommodate gathering spaces where exchanges of economic, aspirations and knowledge in arts took places. Spatial concept of Bazaar in the city of isfahan in Iran is not initially designed as complex of urban-set where exchanges value transaction happened, it is a festive gathering place that developed into certain architectural set, called Bazaar. Middle age cities in Mediterranean articulate their urban characters whose scale and spatial dimension maintain festivity. It is the fact that most vernacular and pre-modern and traditional cities were developed from their festivals and celebratory events. It should invoke awareness that the potential architectural approaches to solve the design problems is available but it has been muted by the sterile and mechanistic characters of Modernism. And therefore as Malcolm Lewis also underlines that at the end the ideal goal of public-art-space in urban space is to retrieve the echo of conviviality of place, as once was there. The term district art appears while notifying that the term art is not an adjective that explain the term district. The term district art imply that art is a characteristic that was once lost, and currently being re-attached to the object of district.

## **KALAGODHA**

### **History of Kala Godha District; Kala Godha Festival Mumbai**

Mumbai, a city of ethnic and cultural diversity, the financial and economic hub of India is also at the forefront of the Art scene in India. Art exhibitions keep happening in the city regularly right from the low-cost galleries to the most prestigious ones.

Owing to British colonization, colonial buildings are scattered throughout the island city. But the highest concentration is in the South Mumbai area which is the main business district and known as "Kala Ghoda", (Black Horse), deriving from a statue of black horse in the area. Prestigious Art galleries, Museums, Libraries, and foreign cultural centers are concentrated in this area and make it melting pot of art lovers and intellectuals. This festival covers Visual and Performing art events, and is attended by artists from all over India as well as from abroad. They display their art on the pavements and in the nearby art galleries. There are events that cover dialogues by literary figures. Among the Visual and Performing art, the Culinary art also gets its place. Kala Ghoda Festival is the most prominent congregation of art lovers in Mumbai.

### **History of Kala Godha Festival Mumbai, why Kala Godha is chosen?**

In 1998 a non profit organization called -The Kala Ghoda Association (KGA) was formed to further develop Kala Ghoda as an art district and to preserve the colonial buildings of the area. Mr. Rahul Mehrotra, Ms. Shirin Bharucha, Ms. Sharada Dwevedi, Mr. Sabavala and Mr. J. G. Kanga were some of the founder members. Urban Design Research Institute had done a study and divided few areas in Mumbai in district. The reason for selecting Kala Godha as a venue for the festival is that there are more art spaces such as museums, galleries etc. in this area than in any other comparable in the world. As Kala Ghoda had many museums and art galleries, it got to be called the Art District.

Kala Godha festival is a unique effort to preserve the colonial architectural heritage of the area. The idea behind the setting up of Kalaghoda association and the festival is an effort to establish awareness about Kala Godha as the Art district of the city. Although unclearly specified, they also mentioned that the ideas and themes were taken by references from many cases of the art festivals abroad. The mission of the first festival was held with an attempt to raise funds and restore and revive the Kala Ghoda area. The degree of participation in Kala Godha festivals is obvious noticing that there are no permanent members. Although the committee of Kala Godha did not give sufficient information about the appointment of executive committee, we are informed that the members of the Executive Committee are elected annually.

Since then, the Association annually organizes the Kalaghoda Festival. Every year the Festival teams are formed from its own Committee and voluntarily from others who would be able to contribute. Work starts during November or December each year as the festival is held in February each year. All permissions from the Authorities as well as sponsorships for funding are obtained by KGA.

Every year the preparations, design and execution of the programs is programmed according to the available fund raised. The program are elaborated in the proposals with mission of both for conducting the festivals events and running the restorations projects. Many buildings in the precinct have been restored with KGA's initiative. Noteworthy among these are the pavements, complete with signage, history plaques, the parking lot, restoration of the Elphinstone College facade and the KR Cama building which is underway.

## **PLACE MAKING**

Ultimately, the program is designed and planned by the appointed festival team, within the team, showcasing the arts and crafts of India, according the available budget obtained.

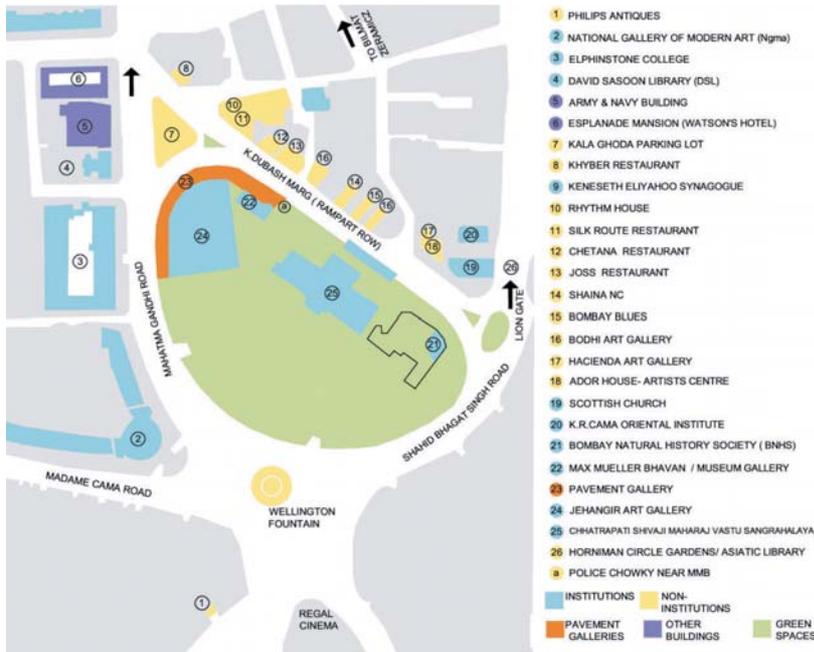


Figure 1. of Kala Ghoda Precinct Map  
 (source: <http://www.kalaghodaassociation.com/precinct/map/> )

Every year, the Association hosts the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival for nine days in February. Gallery and pavement shows, exhibitions, literary events, film screenings, music concerts, dance performances, theatre shows, workshops, heritage walks, a food fiesta, and a buzzing street festival bring in audiences and participants from all over the city. The Festival has grown in size and popularity, winning a reputation for its diversity and vibrancy, for the platform it gives to talent, and, heck, for being a fun place to be. The fans, contributors and participants aren't just in the city; creative people from all over the country want to participate and showcase

their talent. And more recently, in addition to the tourists who time their visits to be able to catch the Festival, we've had guests from other parts of the world on stage as well.

During the festivals, entry to all events is free to all (only restricted by the size of the venues) and as explained earlier costs are met through corporate sponsorship. Venues include The Jehangir Art Gallery, The National Gallery of Modern Art, the David Sassoon Library, Max Mueller Bhavan, Elphisnstone College, the K R Cama Institute, the M C Ghia Hall, and the street area of Rampart Row. [3]



1



2



3



4

Pictures 1-4 Serial Pictures of Visual Arts Events (no titles)  
 (Source: [http://www.kalaghodaassociation.com/gallery/visual-arts-events/#picture\\_nav](http://www.kalaghodaassociation.com/gallery/visual-arts-events/#picture_nav))

Rampart Row is closed off to vehicular traffic for the duration of the festival, with the entire area becoming a street mela [4], with food stalls, artisans selling their creations, artists who sketch instant portraits, street art installations and the like. In recent years, the Festival has expanded beyond the Kala Ghoda crescent, with events being held in Azad Maidan and Horniman Circle as well. Mela is a Sanskrit word meaning 'gathering'. It is used in the Indian Subcontinent for all sizes of gathering and can be religious, commercial, cultural or sports. In rural traditions melas or village fairs were (and in some cases still are) of great importance. This led to their export around the world by south Asian diaspora communities wishing to bring something of that tradition to their new countries.

Some participants as noted from various sources express their appreciation on the festival, while underline the importance of getting reach- reach for their artworks to every kind of people, from professional artists, art connoisseurs, art lovers and even the passer-by stopping to scrutinize an artwork that caught his attention. The relative positions and distance between the stalls and existing museum or art gallery or any accumulations of gathering places determines the access of people to the art stall. [5]

The success of the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival has, arguably, encouraged the setting up of several other arts and cultural festivals at that time of the year, when the weather in Mumbai is cool and the sun sets early. These include the Mumbai Festival, the Celebrate Bandra Festival, and in 2007, the Kitab Festival. The Kalaghoda festival puts together an interesting mix of the visual arts, theater, film and literature, the montage- quick impressions of the festival, digital art and Pop-Art, It is a pot-pouri of urban festivity and celebrations, dressed in generally Pop-Art, Pastiche, Kitsch and Parody and as a whole any themes of Post-modern Art

## CRITICAL DISCOURSE

### **Presence of Another Role: Virtual Media as the Medium of Continuation**

Kala Godha is case of of urban ethnography phenomenon in India which expose the meaning of "public space" as is more than just "public" and "space", but about how they are socially bridged and regularly gain new social-cultural value to people of the place or the regions. It also implicitly display a retrospection to traditional notions of public space, where "social exchanges in events of gathering" is the essence. The existence of Colonial architecture and district has been itself once produced by the British to alter former traditional landscape into their Western spatial-frame. Presently this British-Colonial set-up is re-framed by means of art festival activities, that ultimately revived the Colonial heritage, intellectual and artistic life, and the social-value of public gathering in urban space.

To extend more hints on the continuity of art-district phenomenon, we shall address another example of art-festival as comparison, "Braga Art Festivals", in Bandung Indonesia. Here artists from many places, regional, national and international gather in huge celebration and festivity, reviving both ideas of Bandung as center of artistic activities and development and Bandung as one of the finest Dutch-Indies colonial town. Both "Braga art Festivals" and "Kala Godha" stand on a strong "collective memory" [6] of the citizen toward their place, Kala Godha for Mumbai, and Braga for Bandung. More systematic planning for the Kala Godha district in Mumbai, and its' steady urban zoning as cultural functions since Colonial period sustain the Colonial ambiance of the place. On other hand the the drastic functional alterations from community center district in Braga to personal shop-houses change Braga into different profile. More aspect to be considered to on how the activities in Bandung is not yet as much developed as in Kala Godha district: the institutionalization of activities. No matter how fluid and participative is Kala Godha, the frame of activities is institutionalized under a non-profit organization, the artists are not tenet but partially participants and member of the organization.

Another aspect of concern is the use of information media to disperse the idea and express the appreciations and critic. It has been a long discourses on how the internet and other virtual media serve as extension the body of real urban life. It has been very much well admitted in business enterprises, international social networks, and even in education. In "The information

age: economy, society and culture: volume 1- the rise of the network society” Manuel Castells makes an analytical distinction between an 'information' and an 'informational' society. While information has always played a part in social and economic developments, he argues that 'the term informational indicates the attribute of a specific form of social organization in which information generation, processing, and transmission become the fundamental sources of productivity and power, because of new technological conditions emerging in this historical period'. In this way he admit that virtual media and the network that were built on it has been one or other way the society is organised and mobilised. Through this social organization the presence of social body is maintained. And moreover, adopting another term of Manuel Castell (1997) regarding how the notions of the hip events of the country, image of the artistic potpourri, and its following organization and operation assimilated, in an ethnocentric way, to the social forms of liberal capitalism, created what he calls modern “Urban Myth”.

We can see how obvious it is for the case of Kala Godha festival events. There are news and discourses that has been continuously updated through Kala Godha association web (<http://www.kalaghodaassociation.com/gallery/>), official personal Blogs (<http://www.caferati.com/kgaf/author/addytutorials/>) of the Kala Godha Committee. Wikipedia also define it in their popular dictionary ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala\\_Ghoda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala_Ghoda)) . How deep the discourse building about “Kala Godha festivals” calling for social attachments can be seen through numbers of personal Blogs, homepage, web-photo gallery that discuss the event. Presently, web-media can become another measure to see how society invest their attachment to the events. Therefore Web-media here has become socially a virtual extension of the congregations from the real and scheduled-festivals.

### Notes

- [1] The rhizome is a conceptual framework that assumes a very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions. It maintain principles of connection, heterogeneity and multiplicity in dynamic and holistic system.
- [2] Agora is a typical of gathering place in Greek, sheltered in lines of pillared hall. Here public speech, intellectual discourses and market activities took place.
- [3] Kala Godha Festival; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala\\_Ghoda\\_Arts\\_Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala_Ghoda_Arts_Festival)
- [4] Mela; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mela>
- [5] Yo.Art, Calcuta (see.[http://retiary.org/idea/idea3/idea/yo\\_sho/aartfest.htm](http://retiary.org/idea/idea3/idea/yo_sho/aartfest.htm))
- [6] Concept of “Collective memory” is coined by Christina Boyer to describe embedded framework of a city on their citizens based on memory accumulated along their life. The aspect of “collective memory” define how a person draw a meaning from their own place and city, and thus justify personal spatial difference for each part of the city.

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