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Cornucopia of ideas

Dibasri Mazumdar writes about 'Periferry 1.0', a project which provides a platform to those who wants to engage in hybrid art practices



The busy south bank of Brahmaputra in Guwahati brims with life. As you negotiate the long stretch of MG Road running by the side of south bank of Brahmaputra your eyes might fall at the rusty and cumbersome vessels harboured on the riverside throughout the year. It is anybody's guess that these vessels belong to the Assam State Water Department basically meant for inland water transport. However, one of these vessels provide space for art. The static vessel on the river has proved to be a space where innovative ideas flow.

The ferry *MV Chandardinga* might appear like any other vessels. But if one takes a closer look, a spiral structure made of bamboo, popping out of the deck of the ferry, might catch your eyes. For the creative minds, the ferry is a platform to showcase their amazing creations and the bamboo structure is one such example. All this has been made possible by the project 'Periferry 1.0' initiated by the Desire Machine Collective, an organisation which attempts to work with interdisciplinary mediums and encourages various forms of experimentation.

"Periferry 1.0' is the name of the project and we also call this space (*MV Chandardinga*) as Periferry. Our main objective is to encourage people performing interdisciplinary activities. We want to move beyond mainstream art and create a third space where hybrid practices are fostered," says Sonal Jain, co-ordinator of 'Periferry'.

Under the project, residency programmes are arranged wherein art practitioners from various parts of the world can participate and exchange their ideas. The project also involves an endeavour to develop the ferry into a model of an alternative space using eco-friendly material and power sources. This year, the residency programme has been joined by Bart Vandeput, a mixed media artist and Christina Stadlbauer, a shiatsu practitioner, who is also doing research in alternative medicine and traditional healing methods. Both of them have come all the way from Brussels to work in Assam and the duo come up with new ideas and artistic creations.

Staying in Assam for the past three months, these two artists have involved themselves in various projects and have come up with interesting products which loom in the transitive space - between science and arts. Christina has worked on a health project, healing and aspects of energy, where she dealt with the medical practices and home remedies that are practiced in the Assamese households from time immemorial. However, Christina's project moves beyond the boundaries of academic works and attains the character of a piece of art. "My project is not based on scientific data but I have rather deliberated with people and gathered knowledge on medicinal herbs from them. I have selected 14 medicinal plants grown in Assam, from *neem, tulsi, amlakhi, mani-muni, brahmi* to *jaluk* and have made the imprints of these plants in tussar silk and

have translated the knowledge I gather on them onto *gamochas*. Myproject is not only on scientific investigation but is an artistic creation too," says Christina.

Christina further says that her interest in medicinal plants and traditional healing methods has brought her to Assam and her research is the result of "day to day quest undertaken in backyards, kitchens, plant gardens, tea stalls and public houses."

The text written on *gamochas* (on the medicinal plants of Assam) is more like little pieces of verses and riddles. It does help us to look into the natural resources of our state from a new perspective.

Bart's project PhoEF: 'The Undisclosed Poesis of Photovoltaic Effect' is also an amalgamation of different disciplines. The project basically deals with conversion of light into electrical energy but the approach to his subject is different. It is not academic in its approach but PhoEF is more of a "personal, transversal flight through the interconnected worlds behind and around photovoltaics."

Bart has worked on a very innovative idea of making solar cells with the help of natural dye, which can be a source of alternative energy in a petrol-driven world. He has also installed a spiral structure made of bamboo on the top of the ferry where one can grow plants. "Guwahati is turning into a con-

crete jungle. The whole idea behind making this structure is proper utilisation of space and coming up with something which is eco-friendly," says Bart. The bamboo structure called 'space optimising plant spirals' can be utilized to grow plants in a limited space. Bart's project is more of a philosophical discourse on man and matter, space and energy, art and science.

In fact, Bart's and Christina's creations are not just about practicality and utility, but opens before our eyes a world where strict demarcations have been blurred and fresh ideas prevail, no matter how quaint and queer.

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