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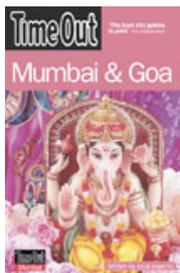
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### Space exploration

A new collective of city artists will have a corner of the ADA Rangamandira all to themselves, reports **Margot Cohen**.



Relying on a dash of microfinance, a new collective of Bangalore artists has plunged into a year-long experiment on JC Road. For 17 days, each artist will be given free rein over 1,260 square feet of raw space. In turns, they can exhibit their own work, curate shows by other artists, offer live music, organise poetry slams, dabble in improv comedy, or simply switch off the lights and mutter to themselves.

"There are no rules, no boundaries, no limitations," exulted Raghavendra Rao, one of the 20 artists participating in the collective Samuha, which will launch its makeshift gallery on Monday, June 22 at the ADA

Rangamandira, across the road from Ravindra Kalakshetra. Actually, there will be a few no-no's: visitors can't smoke or eat non-vegetarian food on the premises, according to conditions set by the Amateur Dramatics Association, the benevolent landlord that is subsidising Samuha's rent. Each artist in the collective has agreed to chip in Rs 2,000 per month, over the next 12 months, to bring the venue to life.

It's hard to predict whether the initiative will evolve into a springboard for creativity, or an exercise in serial anarchy, or perhaps a bit of both. In any case, the birth of Samuha highlights a desire to make more opportunities available to a broader pool of artists in Bangalore – and move beyond some of the stilted encounters at gallery openings to a more freewheeling public exchange of ideas.

One of the prime movers behind Samuha is Suresh Kumar G, who was active in theatre before turning his attention to sculpture, video and performance art. "Bangalore has always had a history of artists being autonomous and independent," he noted. "I wanted to rekindle this model." Having taught in rural schools, the 35-year-old artist maintains a studio in Iggalur village and is keen on fostering an informal, grassroots vibe in the new gallery. Non-English speakers, art students and visitors from rural backgrounds will be welcome, along with more seasoned artists and collectors.

Artists will be free to sell their work directly to anyone who wants to buy. But the Samuha collective will not seek any commissions. "It's not about money," said Suresh. "It's a concern for the next generation."

Artists involved in Samuha range from recognised names like M Shanthamani, SG Vasudev and Sheela Gowda to relative newcomers such as Mangala AM, a 30-year-old artist raised in Davanagere. Mangala will take charge of the first 17-day slot, beginning on Wednesday, July 1, with a planned series of installations and performances. As for Rao, who teaches at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, he plans to curate a show later this year based on experimental work emerging at various art schools around the city.

"It's a community-building exercise," added Samuha member Archana Prasad, who is handling communications for the collective. That means building up contacts for artists who may be struggling to gain exposure and elicit feedback. The collective promises to churn out 200 printed invitations for each show, send out notices via email and invite reporters and art critics to turn up on a regular basis.

Still, the enthusiasm is not universal. Dozens of artists turned down Suresh's invitation to join Samuha, partly out of concern that the logistics could prove too overwhelming. Over time, various Indian art collectives have risen up, fired with idealism, only to burn out on managerial and administrative details. Sustainability remains the Holy Grail.

By limiting their efforts to one year, however, the Samuha artists are optimistic about their capacity to stay the course. At this stage, they don't seem terribly sensitive to criticism, either. "I don't know how it's going to end up," said Rao. "It might bomb. I just find it extremely exciting."

As a matter of principle, Samuha is not soliciting or accepting funds from donor agencies. Banging the drum of self-reliance, the artists are operating on a minimal budget. So far they have spent Rs 51,700 to renovate the space on JC Road. But they did decide to accept some donations "in kind" – including a few spare cushions in case anyone requires a highly artistic nap.

*Third Floor, ADA Rangamandira, JC Road (No phone). [www.samuha.in](http://www.samuha.in). Daily 11am-8pm. See Exhibitions in Art.*

**Source :** *Time Out Bengaluru*

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