

Bombay's Spaces of Sociability (Mumbai, 13–14 Dec 19)

Sir JJ College of Architecture, Mumbai, Dec 13–14, 2019

Rachel Lee

Bombay's Spaces of Sociability: Exile, Migration and Contact Zones

On Friday 13 December, METROMOD and the Sir JJ College of Architecture will convene a workshop to discuss "Bombay's Spaces of Sociability: Exile, Migration and Contact Zones"

In her analysis of the development of Bombay's modern art scene in the 1930s and 1940s, Karin Zitzewitz draws on gallerist Kekoo Gandhi's narrative of the significant role played by spaces of sociability, noting that: "Gandhi's account privileges the salon and the cafe as the key spaces for the casual debates that drove the production of the artistic community."¹ The artistic community that Gandhi was referring to included the Progressive artists, many of whom had migrated to Bombay from other parts of India, as well as the local, often western-educated intelligentsia to which he belonged, and exiled European artists escaping Nazi occupation and war.

In this interdisciplinary workshop we intend to investigate links between migration and cultural production in the famously cosmopolitan port city by foregrounding the importance of spaces of sociability as contact zones: spaces that facilitate the exchange of ideas, foster debate and the formation of discourse, and encourage the construction of personal and professional networks across many borders. In addition to cafes and salons, clubs and hotels seem to have also provided opportunities for performance, debate, exhibition and exchange.

During the workshop we seek to address questions such as: How did cafes, salons and other architectural typologies and urban places encourage intercultural exchange? How did they create spaces of inclusion as well as of hierarchy and exclusion? Were gender, race or sexuality factors? Where were these spaces located within Bombay's urban fabric and why? Were there differences in the spaces depending on the neighbourhood? Who commissioned, designed, built and operated them? How did minority communities contribute to this? Did temporary or ephemeral spaces, such as festivals, play a role? At what scales did these spaces operate and what type of resonance did they have - within a neighbourhood, throughout the city, regionally, or even internationally? How did their built form or architectural language contribute to their function?

¹ Zitzewitz, Karin. *The Art of Secularism: The Cultural Politics of Modernist Art in Contemporary India*. London: Hurst, 2014. p. 81

PROGRAM

FRIDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2019

09:00 am Registration & Tea

09:20 am WELCOME & INTRODUCTION: Mustansir Dalvi & Rachel Lee
(Sir JJ College of Architecture, Mumbai and LMU Munich)

09:45 am KEYNOTE: Kaiwan Mehta (Editor, Domus)
Where is the City?

10:45 am REFRESHMENTS

11:00 am Swati Vijaya (Ohio State University)
Rethinking Mumbai's Queer Heterotopia: Situating Suburban Spatialities and Subaltern Socialities

11:40 am Pranoo Deshraj (TISS, Tuljapur)
Traces of the Insomniac's City: Studio 29 and the Beginnings of Disco in Bombay

12:20 pm Rachel Lee (LMU Munich)
The Taj and Green's as Spaces of Sociability

01:00 pm LUNCH

02:00 pm Daksh Jain (KRVIA, Mumbai)
Queerness / Public spaces in Bombay

02:40 pm M. Raisur Rahman (Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem)
Social as Spatial: Anjuman-e-Islam and Muslim Sociability in Colonial Bombay

03:20 pm Margit Franz (University of Graz)
More than "Languages – Key to International Understanding": Charles Petras' Institute of Foreign Languages as a Cosmopolitan Meeting and Art Discussion Space in Bombay

04:00 pm REFRESHMENTS

04:30 pm Mustansir Dalvi (Sir JJ College of Architecture, Mumbai)
Poetry on Urban Social Spaces in Bombay

05:10 pm PANEL DISCUSSION: Citizenship and Space
with Sameera Khan (Independent Journalist, Mumbai), Kaiwan Mehta (Domus, India), Simin Patel (Bombaywalla), Shilpa Phadke (TISS, Mumbai), Sarover Zaidi (Jindal School of Art and Architecture, Delhi)

05:50 pm VALEDICTORY: Mustansir Dalvi & Rachel Lee (Sir JJ College of Architecture, Mumbai and LMU Munich)

06:00 pm CLOSE

07:00 pm DINNER: Chetana (Participants only)

WALKING TOUR ON
SATURDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2019

09:00 am Simin Patel (Bombaywalla)

Gentlemen Prefer Hotels: The Early Hotel Trade in Bombay, 1850-1903

Meeting Point: Rhythm House, Kala Ghoda

(Places are limited to 15, so register fast!)

Reference:

CONF: Bombay's Spaces of Sociability (Mumbai, 13-14 Dec 19). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 1, 2019 (accessed Jul 13, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/22202>>.