Future of Practice: Artists and Art in 21st Century (New Delhi, 19-20 Aug 26)

India International Centre, New Delhi, Aug 19–20, 2026
Deadline: Mar 15, 2026

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Globally, artistic practice is shaped by art education, art world institutions, and digital media, all of which are driven by logics of value production. This conference, a collaboration between the project ANTHROFUTURE (anthrofuture.com), which is hosted by the University of Vienna's Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, and Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence's Department of Art, Media and Performance, invites discussion of how the future is articulated through artistic practice in India in a time of complex and interrelated social, political and ecological crises.

Since the 1990s, the region has witnessed a tidal change in practice in tandem with the transformation of art's infrastructure, made visible through dramatic changes in mediums, artistic form, and artists' careers (Zitzewitz 2022). Yet, these transformations have occurred unevenly because 'practising creativity' is anchored to a country's vision of its cultural economy (Chumley 2016). Simultaneous developments in digital media have generated unique affordances for and representations of the art world that are as much a product of national as of global conventions, languages and governance.

Against this backdrop, the conference asks whether and how an emerging generation of artists can leverage the existing physical-digital infrastructure to address the multiple crises of the present, and whether their practices require new conceptual frameworks. The conference places artistic creation and contemporary understandings of creativity at the center of its inquiry.

We invite individual papers and multimodal submissions from artists and scholars concerning key projects, sites, and methods by which artistic practice addresses the future. Our conference combines discussions of contemporary art practice with the social life of art, and so we invite all contributors to reflect upon issues of hierarchy and power as they constrain or inform the practices they discuss.

Of particular interest are engagements with the following questions:

1) Anthrofuture focuses on the dynamics of the digital and physical (art) worlds. What sorts of limitations and productivities can we find in (art) infrastructures? How might these digital and physical realms interact? What is their relative significance, durability, or longevity?

2) Technology, in particular digital media, appears to be increasingly vital to the social life of creativity. What roles do digital media play in art making, display and circulation? Is analogue practice possible?

3) In India, the artistic landscape is increasingly enlivened by the work of art collectives. How can we evaluate the contemporary significance of collectives vis-à-vis individual art practice? What are the ethical and artistic productivities or limitations of individual, collective and collaborative art practices?

4) Anthrofuture aims to understand how artistic practice reveals or addresses what is new about the crises of the present moment. In what ways are artists shaping art infrastructure through their participation in or withdrawal from the market, other forms of art infrastructure, or the digital world?

5) Time and temporality are essential concepts to Anthrofuture. How are these ideas explored in artistic practice in the present? Drawing on these reflections, how are imaginations of the future manifest in art practice through and beyond utopian or dystopian impulses?

In order to participate in the conference, please submit a 250 word abstract and a short CV via Google Form by 15 March 2026 (see website https://www.anthrofuture.com/news for link). You will receive a notification regarding your participation just after 15 April. The call is open to academics and practitioners at all seniority levels and we particularly encourage younger applicants to contribute to this event. The project has limited need-based funding for selected participants from within India.

We envisage a publication including a selection of conference presentations. By submitting your abstract and CV, you also agree to be part of this publication. All submissions must be previously unpublished.

About the project
ANTHROFUTURE is the short name of 'The anthropology of the future: an art world perspective', a European Research Council (ERC) sponsored project hosted by the University of Vienna Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology that uses multimodal methods to examine how understandings of the future are generated through art in South Asia and the Gulf. The project has emerged from a set of intertwined concerns, namely anthropology's fundamental difficulty of applying the ethnographic method toward studies of the future; scholarship suggesting that the global south's current dystopic political and social conditions increasingly shape—and therefore predict—the future norms of the global north; scholars' calls to look past the preoccupations of a global north and towards decolonised futures; a significant absence of engagement with the future in South Asia; and the combination of art's thematic engagement with imagining the future and the art world's structural commitment to the production of future value.

Reference:

CFP: Future of Practice: Artists and Art in 21st Century (New Delhi, 19-20 Aug 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 15, 2026 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51762>.