

Dance Witness the emergence of the iPad as a new Indian dance platform



Once in a while, a presentation comes along that forces a fundamental questioning of the very nature of performing arts. Bangalore Fictions is one such presentation, and it begs the question of how art is consumed. Though it encompasses an utterly fascinating mélange of media and artistic genres, the show is loosely a dance performance, but one that is accessed via a digital platform rather than the conventional stage. Besides the choreographer, dancer, musician, artists, and tech consultants involved in Bangalore Fictions, the fact that it is both a digital installation as well as an iPad app means that the piece is, in a sense, created afresh every time someone accesses it. The app itself won't be online until April of this year, but a preview exhibition is on this fortnight in Delhi.

So what is Bangalore Fictions really all about? According to Anjum Hassan, the show's writer, the collection is "a set of 12 poems in prose, each connected to a particular experience of Bangalore. This could be the languages one hears in the city; the feel of a railway station at night; street life; how an outsider to the city might negotiate it and so on. At the same time, they are philosophical reflections on the very idea of the city and what it means to live in one." On the performance front, Bangalore Fictions brings together movement, music, text and calligraphy across the dozen stories it comprises. The show's official statement describes it as something of a moving graphic novel, where "text and images hybridize in a narrative process and build the imaginary body movement".

From the conventional stage to the iPad, it's been quite a journey for n+n corsino (Nicole and Norbert Corsino), the French choreography team behind the piece. Norbert, in a conversation with Time Out from Marseilles, explained that while the two are choreographers in the conventional sense— they established a dance company back in the early 1980s – they have always experimented with different forms of presentation and attempted to challenge the boundaries of dance.

"We have always done contemporary dance, but mixed it up with different mediums. We would combine comediennes with theatre persons on the dance stage," he said. "Today our results are not seen on the stage but through installation or film. We combine the skills of a choreographer with that of a researcher, and work with science labs to imagine different types of presentation, with and without robotics and imaging."

What is exciting for the Corsinos is that they get the opportunity to interact with different kinds of audiences. "Today's youth form perceptions through different media. They may not attend a stage performance, but [chances are that] they will access [the dance] on their iPad if they see an interesting app." The Corsinos began tapping into this kind of interest as early as 1989, when they started using substitutes for the dance stage as platforms. For example, in 1994, they won a grant to make a film called Totem Pole, in which they used real dancers whose movements were correlated with digital replicas. Their first Indian experience was a challenging one. "We came here in all humility and discovered that there was a repertoire and strongly entrenched tradition of dance, which was way beyond our comprehension initially," said Norbert. "It was challenging and exciting to negotiate that and create something new." The array of possibilities of the vibrant Indian dance scene stayed with them. "We met so many different people and dancers and scientists and see so many new possibilities for art, music, dance and technology..." In Bangalore Fictions, the Corsinos brought together, besides author Hassan, dancers Revanta Sarabhai and Pooja Purohit, composer Jacques Diennet, musicians, photographers, technical developers and illustrators, translators and even a calligrapher.

The drive to bring together all sorts of creativity – pushing boundaries and curiosity – is common to the best artists in each of these fields. "We are like children," said Corsino. "We discover different possibilities in play and experimentation with the freedom of the body. Dance is always in the process of becoming, rather than a beginning or a culmination. It is always evolving, like technology... [Dance and technology] is not a fight of two territories. It is the same territory, but the shape is different."

Bangalore Fictions preview exhibition is on from Sun Mar 10-Thur Mar 14 at Lalit Kala Academy.

By Richa Dubey