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This mobile jaaga has room enough for all art

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There's hardly any space in Bangalore city for artists rich in talent but short on funds. Archana Prasad — a National Institute of Design alumna and Bangalore-based artist — realised this when she, along with her artist/designer friends, tried to find space in the city to exhibit their art.

In the company of fellow artists Suresh Kumar G and Shivaprasad S, Archana set out in search of solutions. The trio soon came up with an artist collective — Samuha.

With 23 artists of various disciplines like painting, sculpture, new media arts and performance arts as its members, Samuha managed to strike out a deal with ADA Rangamandira. The latter rented out a space at Rs15,000 monthly rent and the a 414-day show began on June 22, 2009. Each Samuha artist owns 17 days at the space. Besides that, Samuha has guest artists and speakers making presentations, workshops and conducting talks on art practices.

But Archana's thirst for a "creative common ground" was yet to be quenched. "By pure chance, I met Freeman Murray, an American technologist now in India," she recalls.

Murray suggested building a sturdy sound structure using pallet racks (warehouse shelving), usually used for heavy duty industrial purposes. He had used them successfully earlier in the US. They chalked out a plan together. Architect Naresh Narasimhan gave them a piece of land. And thus was born Jaaga — meaning space in Kannada.

An eight-member team, assisted by several volunteers, built the entire modular, multi-level structure in seven days. The flooring is plywood, the roof and walls are made of recycled billboards, which are also used to make beanbags. The billboards — Korean refuse — have huge Chinese characters, drawing instant attention. And the key factor is that it is entirely mobile — it can be dismantled and reassembled at any empty space in a short while. The first event held at Jaaga was the Robert Bosch Art Grant ceremony.

Jaaga has no foundation. It just sits on the ground, yet is very sturdy. Since its inception, Jaaga has hosted various events, mostly to packed houses. The Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts had eight dancers performing at Jaaga's eight modular spaces, with over 200 viewers. Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology held one of their graduation ceremonies here. Jaaga is wifi-enabled. So, Archana says, they would consider giving it for office purposes during day-time.

The space isn't charged for. Artists, or anyone interested, are invited to submit proposals with ideas on how they would want to use the space and the Jaaga team reviews it and gives the space to worthy causes.

Those who have used it so far have repaid them in nice ways, says Archana. "Students of Srishti had made LED lights to display their work better, and after their ceremony left it behind for us."

"We try to get people to come and see what we do and people are coming," Archana says. "It's been a pleasure mostly."

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