

Jaaga - Space for Art

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Archana Prasad and Freeman Murray at the Jaaga community center

Archana Prasad — a **National Institute of Design** alumna and Bangalore-based artist and **American technologist Freeman Murray**, found cure to the lack of space with the community space and art gallery “Jaaga”. It means space in Kannada, and awakening in Hindi, and also stays away from being your your everyday ‘champagne and cheese’ art gallery. It gives artists, technology whizzes, new media artist, sculptors etc, long term space to exhibit and work on their art. Due to its immense popularity, Jaaga is being renovated to make it more modular and spacious and developing it in “nomadic gallery” format.

It began with the artist collective called ‘Samuha’. With 23 artists from various disciplines like painting, sculpture, new media arts and performance arts as its members, Samuha struck a deal with ADA Rangamandira. The latter rented out a space at Samuha and a 414-day show began on June 22, 2009 where each Samuha artist had the privilege to own 17 days at the space. Besides that, Samuha has guest artists and speakers making presentations, workshops and conducting talks on art practices.

Because Samuha wasn’t enough space for Prasad, she struck gold when architect Naresh Narasimhan gave her a plot of land for another community space. It was then by Murray’s suggestion that they decided to construct a modular building using pallet racks (warehouse

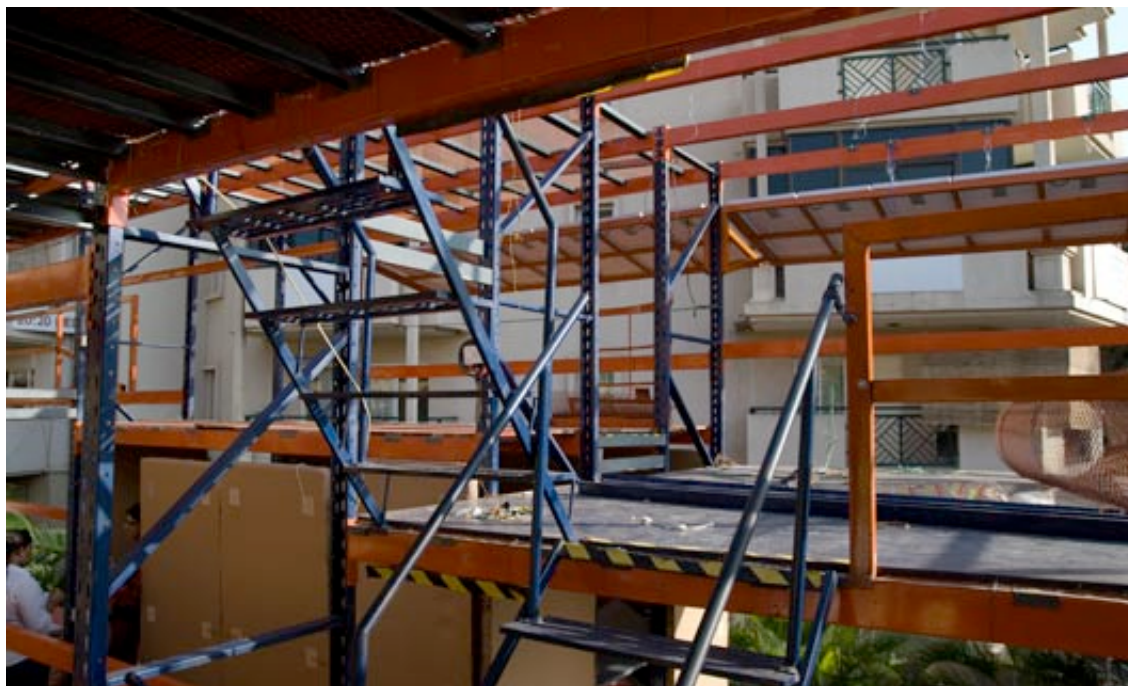
shelving), usually used for heavy duty industrial purposes. His experience of using this kind of warehouse shelving from various projects he had worked extensively on earlier in the United States.



Jaaga is a sturdy structure of red and blue pallet racks put together and clearly looks like something straight out of a movie set. And to add to its functionality, with the assistance of volunteers, 'Jaaga' with its elaborate pallet racks was built up in all of 15 hours. The flooring is plywood, and metal wires, and the walls are made of billboards. The most important factor in the structure is that it's completely mobile. It can be dismantled and reassembled in a matter of hours. Jaaga's redesign involves the spaces being made more modular, and each division of the four story building will be used for different purposes. Catching up with Murray at the center, he said, "the front section will be necessarily used by designers and techies,

basically people who use computers for a living. The back section will be used as a residency section, where there will be LED lighting, and we are thinking of putting up an electronics lab, for software and technology start ups. We also want to have lockers for our users. And the bottom front section will be a little more private. He added that the entire structure will be a dichotomy between, a natural earth and airy space; and a cyber industrial space. The upper floor of Jaaga will be used for screenings, artist exhibitions and events that can host up to a 100 people or more.

The first event held at Jaaga was the Robert Bosch Art Grant ceremony. 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. Srishti also donated a very interesting vertical garden system to Jaaga, which are plants in cylindrical bamboo shoots, which has a thin piping mechanism in them to help water the plants. The pipes are covered by rope.



The make-shift and versatile gallery space at "Jaaga"

Archana said, "I wanted it to look like a Lego building, and Jaaga in itself is more of a community activity. When we got this, 3000 sq.ft plot, we had to clean it up because there was a lot of garbage and weeds that had grown around it. Volunteers came in and helped us remove the garbage, and weeding the place out. We use folding chairs and tables in the building, and the space isn't too large, but it being modular and compact makes it big enough to host an event for over 400 people."

The space is available free of cost and artists, or anyone interested, are invited to submit proposals with ideas on how they would want to use the space. After which the Jaaga team reviews the proposal 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 made LED lights to display their work better, and after their ceremony left it behind for us." Jaaga is also considering starting a membership program, and a media library for its users.

More details on Jaaga can be found on <http://jaaga.wikidot.com/>.

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