

# AT AIRPORT TERMINAL A DEPARTURE

Want to admire a Mithu Sen or a Gond sculpture at 3am? The best place may be the airport's new terminal, which will showcase Indian art. And with 40 million passengers passing through every year, it could best Louvre's footfalls

Manju V | TNN

**T**he art works, artefacts and installations which will showcase the best of local culture at the city's airport's new integrated terminal T2 have been

sourced in the last four years from the cities, villages, markets, collectors and museums of India.

The idea of marrying art and airports is not new, Europeans landed there first. Amsterdam airport exhibits the Rijksmuseum collections, France's Toulouse airport began hosting contemporary art in 2012 and Paris airport's in-house Espace Musées, which opened last year, displays works by French artists. But none of these projects are as prominent or ambitious as this one.

The potential audience for the art at T2 is staggering. Once the terminal opens its doors to the public on January 15, the terminal building, to be used initially only by international passengers, can claim to be the most visited museum in the world. With a capacity to handle 40 million passengers annually, T2's 'Jaya He' museum could comfortably nudge Paris' Louvre, currently the most visited art museum in the world with 9 million annual visitors, off its top slot.

The collections form part of six thematic compositions that employ collaborative works by about 100 artists to depict India's many facets (see box). The installation, 'Thresholds of India', in the departure area, uses mediums like wood, glass, canvas, fibre glass, ceramics, papier-mache, terracotta, metal, stone and cloth and is viewable from all four levels of the terminal.

"Many objects, like the 19-century wooden totems from Morung in Nagaland needed restoration. Those had a thriving ecosystem of insects and worms inside it. All the finds have been catalogued, their provenance established and currently they are in the process of being registered with the Archaeological Survey of India," says an art industry insider.

The arrivals corridor has commissioned works by noted contemporary artists including Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, Mithu Sen, Nek Chand, Riyas Komu, Nilima Sheikh and Desmond Lazo, done along a wall that is 18 metres high and 1.2 km long. Like the departure wall, it is viewable from all levels. Titled "Layered Narratives", the series of installations capture the artists' interpretation of Mumbai, urban India's dreams and the disappointments that often come along.

"Many of the works incorporate kinetic elements and interactive technologies which makes for an interesting

**The mask, the guru, the dwarpaal and Yaali are among 7,000 artefacts sourced and bought from collectors, museums, art dealers and sellers across India. Many of them needed restoration and repairs. They were catalogued, their provenance established, and currently the airport's art programme team is in the process of registering them with the Archaeological Survey of India**

viewing experience, especially for those on the travellers," says an art consultant.

Bollywood's presence in the city's collective consciousness is registered here in a mobile art work that, among other things, includes a magic box. Common men go into the box only to come out as Amitabh Bachchan, in his angry young man avatar. Then there is emerging artist Akshay Rajpurkar's huge Google map of India, distinctly pixellated in appearance as it is made of computer chips, e-waste and blue buttons.

"Jaya He will be one of the world's largest art programmes in public space. For a country where art works are largely relegated to the status of investments and public art is almost unheard of, T2 will be a revelation," says an art consultant.

The expert says that it was way back in 2006 that Sanjay Reddy, vice-chairman of GVK group, which runs and operates the Mumbai airport, thought of using it as a space to showcase the country's diverse and its rich heritage. After all, the airport offers a traveller the first and the last impression of a country. "In each of the preceding centuries, Mumbai has produced one iconic public building that grandly symbolized the city's entrance, whether by land -- the CST railway terminal -- or the sea -- the Gateway of India. Reddy wanted the airport to have a similar iconic status," says the consultant.

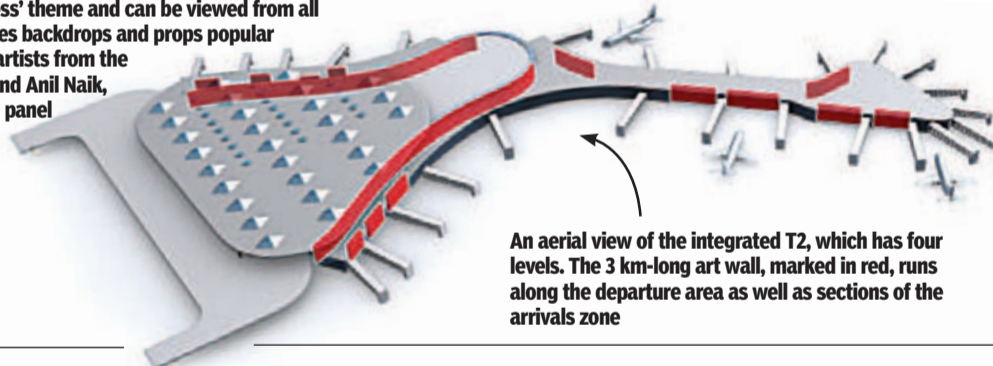
To give the inchoate idea a definite shape and destiny, Reddy roped in Rajeev Sethi, one of South Asia's leading curators and scenographers. A 15-day road trip across India preceded the project. "A team comprising Reddy, his wife Pinky Reddy, Sethi, fashion designer Sandeep Khosla and GVK's design team did the trip to get a feel and sense of India's culture. The trip defined the overall components of T2's art programme," says an insider. Thereafter Reddy gave Sethi a free hand.

"Never ever in India has any art project been done on such a grand scale and in such a short time. For Sethi, it was both an opportunity and a challenge as there is no place quite like an airport to showcase art. It is temperature-controlled, with 24/7 security and gets millions of viewers. T2's architecture also lend itself well to the job," says an art consultant.

But way before T2 started taking shape, artists from across the country -- Patua artists from Midnapore, West Bengal, potters from Malaiyur, Tamil Nadu, Bastar pillar craftsmen from Kondagaon, Raipur -- came down to Mumbai and began work at a workshop in Andheri.



An 18m-tall installation, called 'Theatrical Screening' which is part of the 'India Seamless' theme and can be viewed from all four levels of T2, recreates backdrops and props popular in Marathi theatre. Two artists from the state, Moreshwar Patil and Anil Naik, have created the curtain panel



An aerial view of the integrated T2, which has four levels. The 3 km-long art wall, marked in red, runs along the departure area as well as sections of the arrivals zone

## THE ART OF VIEWING

The art wall can be viewed from any level or can be viewed from the perspective of its artists, makers. There are QR codes printed for different works and a passenger who wants to learn about a certain piece can aim his/her mobile, capture the code and view the relevant films on the works. iPhones were given to the family members of regional artists and they have themselves made films about their work. Then again, to assist and guide the passengers through the art program, information kiosks have been placed along the wall

It was here that regional artists undertook, perhaps for the first time in their lives, works on such a scale. For Sethi, the work ground extended way beyond Mumbai. An art museum in Kochi was to be sold off to a client abroad when Sethi intervened and bought up all its rare and valuable artefacts for T2, says an art industry source.

At T2, Sethi broke more new ground. For instance, the installation, in the departure terminal demolishes common hierarchies in the art world. Works of art are not treated as more valuable than crafts. Regional artists and eminent ones not only share the same pedestal, but also collaborate on ideas that are mix of old and new, rural with urban, traditional with contemporary.

Elephants with wings, fish-like helicop-

## LONG-TERM PROGRAMME

Sethi has called Jaya He an art programme and not an art project. Unlike a programme, a project has a beginning, middle and an end. The museum is planning a comprehensive public outreach program to promote Indian art, craft and culture globally and in India. In 2015, when the terminal opens to domestic passengers as well, there will be many more programmes

The guru



ters, fire-breathing mythical creatures carrying passengers in their belly -- all images conceived by Gond tribals have been brought to life as metal sculptures by Mukul Goyal, a Delhi-based product designer. In a few months' time these figures will be spotted in the company of metal clouds in one section of the departure installation.

Up above these mythical flying figures, the fuel-guzzling A320s and Boeing 737s may continue to circle in the congested airspace, waiting for their turn to land. But once they do, passengers will have no doubt in registering that T2 is different from the glass, steel and concrete structures that have come to define airports the world over.



This huge wall, located in the departure area, represents the 'India's Silent Sentinels' element of the art wall. The upper section is titled 'Celestial Realm,' and the lower half bears about 17 totem poles, all sourced from the villages of the North East

## THE NEW T2 80,000-SQ-FEET INSTALLATION HAS SIX THEMES

**India Elemental** | Based on the concept of panch mahabhutas, the five elements. Water is represented in an interactive installation by Sethi and film director Shekhar Kapur. It flows from ancient water spouts sourced from across the country and on touching, it seems to produce a musical note

**India Seamless** | depicts the myths, histories and popular culture of different regions of the country



The mask

**India Greet** | a tableau of doorways, facades, jharokas, windows, porches sourced from across the country

**India's Silent Sentinels** | comprises totems, gables, pillars, brackets, torans, figures of dwarpaals (guardians), etc

**India Moves** | ancient modes of transport such as vaahanas, palanquins, carts and rathas

**India Global** | new urbanscapes and lifestyles



'Heptad the 7th,' an installation by Sharmila Samant made from 500 kilos of bottle caps and put up near the immigration counters, is part of the 'India Global' theme and juxtaposes the global against the local and notions of waste against recyclable materials