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(Clockwise from far left) An artist working in Hampi Art Labs; international artists at Art Ichol, observing weaving on the charkha in Surkhama village; artists at Space Studios Baroda in a factory compound; Palette People Art Residency in Vagamon, Kerala; artist Jayeeta Chatterjee at Chemould CoLab. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Tucked away in technicolour

From a biodiversity hotspot in Kerala to a factory compound in Vadodara, artist residencies in India nurture the community and encourage creativity

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Colaba's Chemould CoLab bursts into a chaos of aesthetics every summer when it doubles up as an artist residency. In the backdrop of French windows with glass-stained fanlights, painters colour canvases resting on easels. When they are not creating art, they tour Mumbai's famous neighbourhood, including The Taj Palace and The Gateway of India, which skirts the residency. It is not just the touristy spots of Mumbai that offer diverse locales to inspire emerging artists and art practices at India's artist residencies. These sanctuaries of creativity extend to a wider landscape – from the ancient site of Hampi, an urban village in Delhi and an artist's parental home in Bengaluru to a bucolic heritage home near Khajuraho, a factory compound in Vadodara and a biodiversity hotspot in Kerala. Sculptor Anirudh Shaktawat applied to the inaugural residency programme of Hampi Arts Labs in January to take a break from his back-to-back exhibition schedule. "I picked up printmaking and ceramics there to see how these expensive and technical processes extend to my existing practice," he says. Hampi Art Labs is a nine-acre architectural marvel near the UNESCO World Heritage Site. A CSR initiative of Mumbai-based JSW Group, it has been designed by Sameep Padora, dean of the faculty of Architecture, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, and his studio sP+a. "The building is inspired by the Tungabhadra River. It is not in a city where you have access to art galleries. Artists engage with local communities through cultural events and workshops on pottery making,



embroidery by Lambani women and the stone carvers of Hampi," says Meera, residency director, Hampi Art Labs. Chemould CoLab cannot accommodate more than three artists for its annual four-month residency that lasts till August. "We invite artists. They can network and use the city as an inspiration," Atyaan Jungalwala, director and gallerist, Chemould CoLab, illustrates with examples of artists Kuldeep Singh and Jayeeta Chatterjee: "Last year, Jayeeta made a work on the Koli fisherwomen of Mumbai, while Kuldeep, who is based in Brooklyn and is an Odissi dancer too, collaborated with local musicians here." This year, the residency, which began in 2022, is hosting two visual artists. **Art's sake** With no standard guidelines, all residencies have different working models. For instance, Chemould CoLab covers artists' stay and tiffin service, but does not allow them to part with works made during the stay. The residency culminates into

You can visit too
Most art residencies open their doors to the general public on open-studio days.

Chemould CoLab
When: June 13, on every second Thursday of the month

Hampi Art Labs
When: June 21, 22 and 23; 10am to 6pm

Khoj Studios
When: July 13 at 6pm

1ShanthiRoad
When: August 29 to 31; 11am to 8pm

Space Studio Baroda
When: Visitors are allowed from 10am to 7pm; Next residency's artworks are on view from October 2, 3 and 4

Palette People
When: September onwards; 9am to 5pm

Art Ichol
When: The residency is open to visitors from 9am to 7.30pm
Entry fee: ₹100 (summer discount: ₹50)

an exhibition-cum-sale of their works. Artists are given a part of the profit from their artworks. There are residencies, though, where artists are neither expected to make art nor leave creations behind. Hampi Art Labs is the newest addition. On the other hand, Khoj Art Residency Program is among the older ones. It began in 2002 at Khoj Studios in Delhi's Khirki Extension. It has hosted artists like Ravi Agarwal, Atul Bhalla, Cuba's Tania Bruguera and China's Song Dong. Pooja Sood, curator and director, Khoj International Artist's

Association, says, "Before Khoj there were residential workshops such as the Kasauli Art Centre by Vivan Sundaram – or residencies for international artists at Sanskriti Foundation started by OP Jain. Artists camps were a regular – where a group of artists would live and work together for two-four weeks normally at the behest of a patron". A residency, she adds, is a time-bound sojourn for artists to work, contemplate their practices, engage with other artists, attend workshops or travel for inspiration. In that sense, Khoj has regaled intersectional themes by creating crossroads where art meets subjects like ecology, food, fashion, gaming, films, institutional critiques and technology. "Take Delhi-based artist Asim Wakif for example. Bored and disillusioned with architecture, he visited the studio long ago, saying he loved working with bamboo. He made the most fantastic installation, where an artist danced and kids crawled through it. Today, he does the most spectacular work with bamboo. This is a place to experiment and it allows an artist the space to fail, which galleries don't because they focus on selling," she explains. For those who can afford or are funded by their country's cultural agency, Khoj charges a fee. But for young Indian artists, it announces an open call and pays a stipend of ₹50,000-₹60,000, and production fee against bills. This financial model is adopted by Bengaluru-based 1ShanthiRoad too. Its director Suresh Jayaram tells us about the Next Step residency for Indian artists, which is funded by Sher-Gil Sundaram Art Foundation. "This year, Takshila Education Society pledged to support

administrative costs for three years. Our strongest institutional support comes from Goethe Institute, Max Muller Bhavan, Bengaluru, who have initiated an international residency with German artists," he says. 1ShanthiRoad was once home to Suresh's parents. Designed by architect Meeta Jain, it has grills, pillars, doors and windows which Suresh collected from demolition sites. The residency still houses a rosewood table that belonged to Suresh's father and has weathered the scratches left by blades used for cutting the canvas. "So, this is the cost that you pay for being open, but it's a minor thing. It also teaches me to be patient, understanding and non-judgemental," he says. **Beyond the conventional** While Khoj allows six artists for a six-week residency, 1ShanthiRoad makes room for five for a month. "We give a stipend of ₹40,000 to a resident," he says, adding that the residency also looks for artists who have a cutting-edge art practice, through material exploration or lens-based practice, and critical content that does not fit into conventional gallery context. In a way, residencies act as incubation centres for fresh-out-of-college artists, and equip them with skills needed before they head to galleries. "Artists need to formulate their work, or they will succumb to the pressures of the market too early in their career. We do Peers Share, where young artists receive a crit session (critical feedback on artwork) from senior artists/curators," shares Pooja. Numbers also draw an interesting sketch of the artist residency scene. Krupa Amin, director, Space Studio, Baroda, says, "In the last 10 years, we would have housed over 200

artists. We receive 200-300 applications for a programme." Space Studio, which began its residency programme in 2005 and is a CSR vertical of Alembic Pharmaceuticals, offers a minimum of two residency programmes a year. Cyril Jacob of Palette People International Art Foundation in Vagamon, Kerala, says they have hosted nearly 40 foreign artists and over 250 Indian artists in five years. While Space Studio is encased in a factory compound of Vadodra's Alembic Museum Square, Palette People Art Residency spans an 80-acre tract of land in the Western Ghats – a biodiversity hotspot. "We take artists out for walks to study, photograph and document rare plants, insects, birds, moths, butterflies and wildlife," he says. Art Ichol too makes for an interesting venue. Located in Maihar district of Madhya Pradesh, the residency shares its premises with Maihar Heritage Home and Amaria Writer's Retreat. "We have studios for ceramics, bronze, stone, printmaking, fine art and metal. We attract at least 200 visitors a day, and have brought art out from an elite space to the common man," says Ambika Beri, director of the residency. It has commissioned two artists to create works for the sculpture garden in July. Unlike Khoj and 1ShanthiRoad, Palette People Artists Residency and Art Ichol are self-funded. "We were funded by Inlaks Foundation, but at the moment, we are depending on our corpus," says Pooja, adding, "A good, sophisticated art scene mainly has a good public art sector, galleries that help artists with money and many not-for-profit spaces that promote experimental works which may never be sold but will be seen and experienced by people."





Instapick

World's best: Spain solidified its status as a fine dining capital with six restaurants on the World's 50 Best Restaurants for 2024 list. Barcelona's Disfrutar claimed the top spot, known for its imaginative dishes by chefs Oriol Castro, Eduard Xatruch, and Mateu Casanas. Chef Victor Arguinzoniz's Asador Etxebarri ranked second.



Talkingpoint

Camus conundrum: A handwritten manuscript of Albert Camus's classic French novel, *L'Étranger*, has sold for over €650,000 (£553,000) at a Paris auction. This 104-page draft, handwritten in 1944 — two years after its first publication — lacks first-draft corrections. Instead, Camus copied his book, adding doodles and notes.



PLAN AHEAD

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As a music enthusiast, seeking new artistes and music genres in a sea of digital audio spaces could be tad overwhelming. A lifetime is not enough to discover all the sounds, but you could start your journey at the Bir Music Festival (BMF). Its 10th edition will celebrate original music, accompanied by experiences like a cyclothon, star gazing, yoga, art workshops, and more.

"Bir is Asia's largest paragliding destination, but that's not all there is to this village. It has a rich culture and we, as a community of artistes, are coming together to promote it,"

Sing to the mountain

The 10th edition of the Bir Music Festival promises a unique weekend of live music, art, adventure, and sustainability

says Alakhananda Sharma, founder, BMF, adding that the festival originated in 2020 after the pandemic. It has been hosted twice or thrice a year, sometimes in other cities, as a way to

promote tourism in the village. "Across the previous seasons, we have hosted over 300 artistes from across the country," she adds. This edition will play host to Indie band Agnee among

several other lesser-known bands and musicians, like DIY Disruption (a Kerala-based rock band), Rajasthani classical and ghazal singer Prakhar Jojan, and Likhari, a poet from Delhi. The festival does not play recorded or electronic music on both its stages. "Our music is 100% live, and everyone plays and performs their original compositions," says Alakhananda. The music plays non-stop for 56 hours, the festival's duration. Tickets cover accommodation and meals. However, day passes, which allow entry into the festival, are available exclusively for the residents of Himachal Pradesh. "We started the festival because we wanted to promote original music, especially from the mountains, and eventually

artistes from other locations started reaching out to us," she says. "We also have an art stage where we do painting as well as perform fire and slow art." The festival will also be hosting activities that focus on promoting local businesses and culture, as well as locally-made food and beverages, especially alcohol. "The festival is for all ages, but since the venue is spread out, we have a separate bar area. We also encourage people to go into the village and experience local alcohol for themselves," says Alakhananda.

Explore on two wheels Those into fitness could participate in a cyclothon at BMF. Bir offers tranquil views of the Himalayan mountains, and a cycling track of 24 kilometres is a great way to explore the village. "We take registrations according to the level of experience people have, and they can also choose to ride e-bikes," says Alakhananda. Interestingly, the festival does not allow the sale of drinking water. Kiosks with earthen pots filled with drinking water are set up at various places around the venue, and the audience can fill their own water bottles. *The Bir Music Festival will be held from June 15 to 17 at Hipostel, Bir. Book your tickets on birmusicfestival.com, starting ₹8,925.*

A sneak peak into the country's biggest events and festivals before they happen. So, you want to travel more? Watch this space.

pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours, and everything else you need to plan your social calendar. For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Crafty creations

Always on the hunt for a good bag? Take matters into your own hands at **Backyard, Adyar**. Hotch Potch is hosting a workshop where you can customise and make the bag that fits your requirements. Pick your own material, colour, and style, and you will be guided by an expert designer to bring your vision to life. The workshop is free and open to all. RSVP on +91 9884057198.



Artistic escapades

Spend a day at **Art Kin Centre's Art Market**. Artistes and homegrown brands will showcase their works from June 14 to 16. Indulge in paintings, resin art, baked goods, pizzas and more. For an art show by Yusuf Arakkal and Shibu Arakkal, head to the **Sandeep & Gitanjali Maini Foundation**, Bengaluru until July 10. The exhibition highlights the explorations of the Ganga and its boatmen.



Laughter therapy

If you can use a laugh at life's expense, head to comedian Daniel Fernandes' new special, **Do You Know Who I Am?** After a personal upheaval, he hilariously explores life's oddities in an unconventional therapy session...with the audience! Expect a night that will leave you questioning everything at Medai the Stage, Alwarpet. Tickets on in.bookmyshow.com starting ₹499.



Time treasures

Looking for the perfect Father's Day gift? Pick the **Tudor Ranger** timepiece featuring a 39mm steel case. Shop at Kapoor Watch Co. and Ethos Watch Boutique in India starting ₹2,89,400. For another timepiece, check out the classic multi-eye watches from **Daniel Wellington** with an interchangeable grey mesh strap. Shop on in.danielwellington.com starting ₹18,699.



Melodic magic

Music lovers, get ready for Nee Singham Dhan, a live concert featuring singer **Sid Sriram!** Experience his soulful fusion of Indian classical and contemporary western music and sing along with hits like 'Adiye', 'Inkem Inkem Kavale', and 'Srivalli'. Sid Sriram has collaborated with legends like AR Rahman and showcased his versatility at Coachella and Tiny Desk Concerts. Tickets on insider.in starting ₹1,099.



Sunny styles

Shopping for a summer friendly wardrobe? Head to an exclusive showcase of Ilkal and Khana sarees from northern Karnataka and Maharashtra by Geeta Patil of Kubsa handcrafted at **Samasta boutique**, Alwarpet until June 12. To accessorise for the summer, check out footwear from Anaar's new **Citruses by the Sea** collection. Shop sneakers, pumps, heels and more starting approx ₹11,990.



Puducherry plunge

Unable to find the time to visit your favourite French town? Head to The Westin Chennai Velachery for a taste of Puducherry! Embark on a culinary journey with their **Pondicherry Food Festival** until June 9. Savour signature dishes like Puducherry thirukkai meen kuzhambu and karupatti paniyaram and classic French quiche, pastries, and entremets. Call 8939892072 for reservations.



Ann-Sofie Johansson, H&M's head of Womenswear Design, talks about circularity in fashion, sustainable fabrics and why she does not believe in fast fashion

Priyadarshini Paitandy
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From stables to the power corridors of fashion, Ann-Sofie Johansson, H&M's head of Womenswear Design, has had quite a journey. Growing up in Sweden, she says she was always in the stables, taking care of horses and going on rides. "I wanted to become a vet but I didn't have the grades for that," she laughs, adding, "At the same time, I was also interested in fashion. I drew a lot of sketches, did a lot of design. My mom was a seamstress and stitched them for me." In 1987, 25-year-old Ann began her career with H&M as a



All by design



"I buy a lot of menswear — slouchy trousers, shirts — and add jewellery and big rings for that extra touch"

ANN-SOFIE JOHANSSON



salesperson at a store in Stockholm. Sure there were other brands she could have joined but H&M for her was "this magical place" where she always found everything sartorial she was looking for. "They could read my mind. I thought, being a designer at H&M must be the most amazing thing," she says. So, she joined evening

H&M's Summer 2024 collection comprises bold prints and shapes

classes in design and pattern making. Eventually, Ann put together a portfolio and bravely sent it to the then head of Design, Margareta van den Bosch. And soon, she started off as designer assistant. Ann's association with H&M spans 37 years. She is also the creative advisor. "I am growing with the company. Back then the brand was present in six countries — Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Germany, the UK, and Holland. But now, it is in 70-plus markets," she adds over a video call from Delhi; she visited the capital as part of her global inspiration trip. In the last three decades she has seen a lot of change and been part of it as well. "Fashion is more fun today, also more challenging. When I started it was dictated by the fashion runways of Paris, for example, and there was just one trend. Today, there is so much fashion and so many trends. Nothing is right or wrong. It's all about expressing and communicating through fashion and mixing styles and looks. As a result, it's more liberating." Ann believes that, in general, fashion reflects what is going on in the world. Which brings us to the question of sustainability, landfills, and how a fast fashion brand like H&M is faring on that front. "H&M is not a fast fashion brand," she insists, while pointing out that sustainability is an endeavour that H&M embarked on 25 years ago. "It's a big subject. It's incorporated in business ideas, fashion, quality, price, all through our value chain. We also look at how to cut garments in a better way, how to store, what sustainable fabrics (they use cotton, organic and recycled cotton, recycled fabrics, sustainable wool) can be used or are there recycled fabrics that we can use, how to produce them, how to transport them (a lot of the clothes are made in China, India, Turkey

and Bangladesh), how can we inspire customers to care for the garments so they last long and be reused," she says adding that there are tough goals ahead and while they are working towards them, this is an issue that cannot be solved individually and requires collaboration with other fashion companies. Circularity in fashion is important. This means not just how a garment is created but also how it is broken down and recycled is crucial, she says. Brands need to invest time in the product so it is long lasting and can be reused, reused, and reused, the 61-year-old further adds. And given how trends keep coming back, this maybe a great idea. Over the years, Ann says she has seen styles come back but in a new context. The Y2K trend with its crop tops, low waist denims, the grunginess of the 90s — like the Kurt Cobain grunge look — are all back. While Ann has tried every single trend in the book, the Swedish fashion designer says she will never wear hot pants and leotards. "I am completely over that," she laughs. She is more pragmatic in her choices now. Her style is a little tomboyish. "I buy a lot of menswear — slouchy trousers, shirts — and add jewellery and big rings for that extra touch," she says. Like most people, she has also got used to comfort after the pandemic. Meanwhile Ann and her team of 300 designers are putting on their fashion forward caps for the upcoming season with collections that aim to make the wearer look and feel good. "We work far ahead and are already starting to look at Autumn '25. We have special collections for H&M Studio (clothes made of high-end fabric, higher price bracket, and limited collection) and will be doing something for Paris Fashion Week."

Experience the essence of a Goan summer with this fresh and fruity cashew drink that is redefining the spirit of the season



Urrak's sunny serenade

Gargi Guha

Feni is a drink, but urrak is an emotion. It has a cult following as Goa's official summer drink. After the first harvest of cashew apples at the end of February, the first batch of fresh urrak hits the market by mid-March. Urrak fever gains momentum by May-June, although purists claim that it is best enjoyed young and fresh, during the earlier phase. I sit down for lunch one afternoon with Mac Vaz, founder-president of All Goa



Cashew Feni Distillers & Bottlers Association, and director of Madame Rosa Distillery, a pioneer within the industry. Their flagship brand, Big Boss, is recognised globally for fruity feni, packaged in Chianti Classico style wicker basket bases. "Given its popularity, we are bottling urrak for the last eight years or so under our PVV brand and the US is a big export market," he tells me. Approachable and pleasing to first-time users too, urrak is obtained with a single distillation process of cashew juice. With an ABV of 20-25% (as opposed to feni's 40-45%), it is fresh, fruit-forward, and most importantly, hangover-free. "It goes down deceptively smooth, and because of the

absence of the strong, pungent smell, has enjoyed a certain mass appeal. Urrak is also affordable, with prices starting at a mere ₹200 a litre," concludes Mac. Served as Goans prefer it, urrak is mixed with Sprite, a pinch of salt, twist of lime and a slit green chilli perched wickedly on the side of the glass. Throw in a few ice cubes. However, given its flexibility as a spirit base, some mixologists are being playful with it. "We have been serving



(Clockwise from left) Bonding over urrak in Goa; urrak sorbet ice cream; and urrak mixed with Sprite, a pinch of salt, twist of lime and a green chilli. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

urrak cocktails since the year we started. Popular ones are Panje Classic, where urrak is infused with orange and basil, which is then milk washed, lending it more character. And Uzou, where we mix urrak with lime and homemade jalapeño brine," shares Dev Narvekar, bar head, Petisco Kitchen & Bar. Dev is a local Goan boy from Vasco, and this year, he has created a special imli pop, with urrak, tamarind, jaggery cordial and a spice mix. "It's a take on imli candy which I used to cherish after school, so it brings back the childhood memories of summer afternoons," he says, showing me his imli pop reel on Instagram, which has gone viral. Talking about urrak's popularity and reach, it may soon be elevated to a premium status globally with a well-deserved GI tag, due to the thrust it has received from Deviya Rane, MLA and Goa Forest Development Corporation (GFDC) chairperson. The second edition of the Cashew Fest,

inaugurated by Deviya recently, saw the celebration of urrak or Goa's 'jungle juice' as a signature drink true to the culture. "Urrak and cashew feni are original 'Make in India' products made by our forefathers exclusively in Goa. For over 300 years, we in Goa have honed our craft to coax out a cheerful spirit that is Goa's favourite summer drink. There is no drink like urrak that exudes the flavour of summer and Goans take immense pride in it," sums up Deviya. The love of urrak recently took me on an exploratory trail through the taverns in Panjim. During my stop at Cifa, a tavern open since 1976, its owner, Savio Raposo, mentioned, "more and more tourists are stopping by to taste urrak, due to its seasonal charm and no-fuss appeal". My urrak adventure reaches a crescendo with an urrak sorbet ice cream from O'mio Gelateria. To ensure that the urrak heritage remains well-preserved, Deviya says that a multipronged strategy has been formulated, and the Cashew Fest is the first stepping stone to drum up enthusiasm. He adds, "Our next step would be to establish points of sale like an exclusive duty-free outlet for cashew-based items like feni, urrak and cashew nuts."

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Dubai's

AI revolution

Aparna Pednekar

Known for its towering ambition – reflected in glitzy high rises and gilt-edged luxury – Dubai has been setting its AI wheels in motion way before the term ‘artificial intelligence’ entered everyday conversations.

In 2016, the government, in

From courteous robots to generative AI art; the city’s determinedly futuristic landscape makes for a transformative holiday destination

collaboration with IBM, launched an AI-based service for the business community, and in 2017, the UAE established the world’s first Artificial Intelligence Ministry. “The country is investing billions in technological innovation and plans to become a world leader in AI development by the late 2020s,” says Omar bin Sultan Al Olama, Minister for Artificial Intelligence Digital Economy and Remote Work

Applications, UAE.

Thirty-three-year-old Omar finds AI very interesting on a global platform, while still in its fledgling state. “It’s very broad right now, so every country is going to look at specialising in their own fields. The key to our strategy is creating AI services that enhance the experience of residents and tourists in the UAE’s futuristic cities, led by Dubai,” he states.

Shop till the avatar drops

On your next shopping trip to Dubai, do not be alarmed when a tall, slim assistant silently glides past you without as much as a nod. UAE’s leading retail developer Majid Al Futtaim (MAF) has appointed a fleet of 12+ Tally Robots at its

(Clockwise from left) Refik Anadol’s Glacier Dreams; Majid Al Futtaim’s Mall of the Metaverse; and Vault of Life at Museum of Future. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



development stage, Mall of the Metaverse – currently hosting Carrefour, VOX Cinemas, THAT Concept Store, Ghawali Fragrances, and Samsung Store – ushers your virtual avatar into a retail frenzy, driven by behavioural science data.

Past-future connect

Perched on a hill in the city’s financial district, the resplendent doughnut-shaped Museum of Future is now on every Dubai holiday itinerary.

Aya, the museum’s luminous digital technologist (an avatar) guides you across seven floors of futuristic exhibits and installations which envision life in 2071. While children and adults alike can expect to be tickled by spacecraft, a simulation of the Amazon (forest, not company), the Future heroes ‘play area’, and a bald and steel lady is likely to evoke mixed reactions.

Stationed outside the Tomorrow Today exhibit, Ameca, the humanoid robot mimics human expressions. Brendon McGetrick, creative director of the museum wanted to move beyond the tired cliché of immersive experiences to building “expansive experiences” for audiences to feel differently about the world. “We’re trying to explore

supermarkets to assist with stock management. Swing by their Carrefour City+ at Mall of the Emirates to shop at the region’s first AI-powered checkout-free store, which employs 97 in-store cameras and an app that automatically updates your virtual baskets.

Taking online shopping a step ahead, MAF launched Dubai’s first virtual retail and entertainment destination last spring. Still in the

this kind of relational intelligence in our artistic projects, pushing our own boundaries of human cognition and capacities,” says Anab Jain, co-founder, and director of Superflux. Anab and her partner Jon Arden’s More than Human manifesto attempts to foreground the deep ecological relationality of our planetary species.

A date with art

Dubai’s historical Al Fahidi district (formerly known as Bastakiya) is home to a vibrant art scene, including XVA Art Hotel. But if you are looking to be amazed, check into the vibrant Indigo Hotel, just minutes away from Dubai Design District. The contemporary boutique hotel showcases eclectic art, from graffiti walls to oriental tapestry and sculptures.

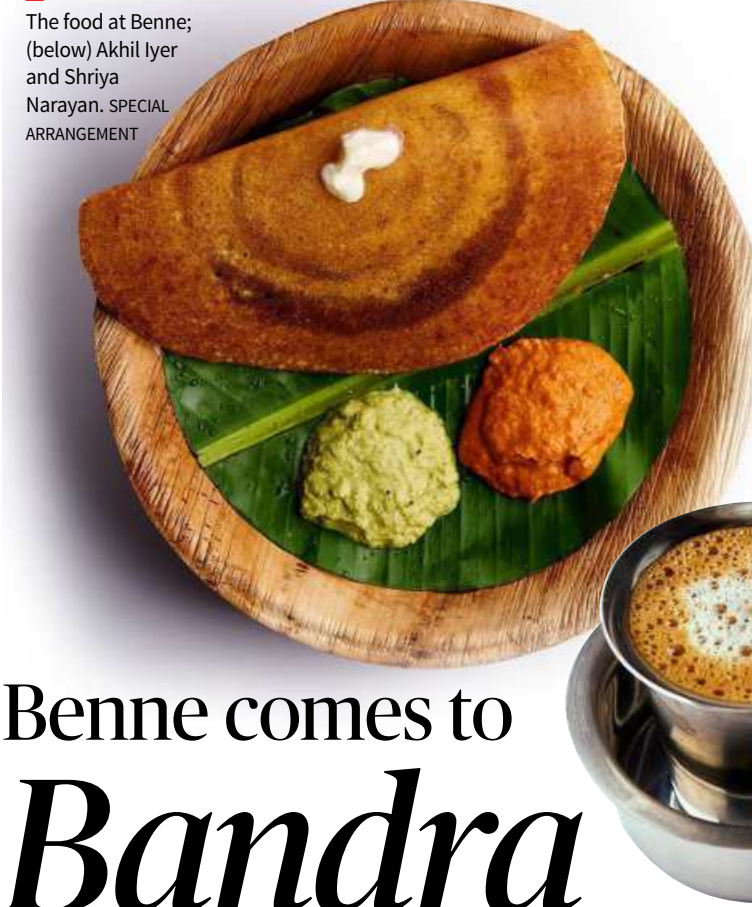
The most curious of them all is a minimalist installation behind the reception desk. Titled Wind of Dubai, it is the UAE debut of Turkish-American new media artist Refik Anadol. The installation comprises a year’s worth of data on Dubai’s wind speed, direction, gust patterns, and temperature captured by an algorithm and embedded into the canvas.

Benedetta Ghione, executive director of Art Dubai calls Anadol “a pioneering superstar in the aesthetics of data and machine intelligence”. With a dedicated digital platform since last year, Art Dubai encourages artists who utilise new technological tools. Amongst cutting-edge local art galleries like Galloire at City Walk Mall, generative art is all the rage.

“Unlike other cities, the market for AI-powered generative art is growing faster in Dubai, as the city truly is a global hub for crypto and digital entrepreneurs, artists, and enthusiasts. With the support of the government, there is an increasingly sophisticated understanding about how this sphere is developing,” Benedetta says.

Her optimism trickles down from the top tier. The UAE government is aiming at an AI immersion for every visitor to the City of Gold. Concludes Omar, “We want every single resident and tourist [to] feel like they are in the city of the future.”

The food at Benne; (below) Akhil Iyer and Shriya Narayan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Benne comes to Bandra

A first-time venture for the co-founders, the tiny café is creating waves in Mumbai for its butter dosas and ghee podi idlis

Deepali Singh

Founder of production house The Artist Collective, Akhil Iyer and psychologist Shriya Narayan made Mumbai their home a couple of years ago. The couple, born and raised in Bengaluru, missed their dosas so much that they decided to venture into the hospitality space and open Benne, a café in Bandra that specialises in what is colloquially known as Bengaluru style Benne dosa. This type of dosa, clarifies Akhil, should not be confused with the popular Davangere Benne dosa, which has a more watery batter and contains puffed rice. “In our dosas, we use IR8 dosa rice (a variety of rice), poha, fenugreek, and chana dal,” he says, adding that they have plans to expand the menu by including Davangere Benne dosa as well. Benne, which translates to



butter in Kannada, serves different varieties of benne dosas, idlis, vadas and beverages including filter coffee, iced filter coffee, and more. “Growing up, we had darshinis (quick-serving food joints in Bengaluru mostly serving South Indian fare) near our respective homes that served clean, simple, vegetarian food and

Benne is an ode to that,” says 36-year-old Akhil.

Housed inside a 150-square feet space in Bandra with a wooden door and bird-shaped wall-decorations crafted out of banana leaves, the minimalist interiors feature a small community table and alcove seating. Through a glass panel separating the kitchen, chefs – all trained in Bengaluru – can be seen expertly ladling dosa batter on the custom-made 300-kg cast iron plate as well as making soft idlis and crisp vadas. A self-ordering kiosk lets the customers choose and place their orders.

The food arrives on the table in plates made from areca leaves. A plate of vadas, another of ghee podi idli and of course, the Benne plain dosa. Unlike some cafés, Benne stays true to the Bengaluru tradition of serving dosas only with chutneys, offering a spicy tomato-onion chutney and a refreshing coconut-mint chutney for dipping.

The ghee podi idli is a marriage of textures – steaming hot and soft idlis drenched in a rich ghee and podi (spice powder) mixture. But we are here for the famous Benne dosa. This beauty arrives with a captivating caramel-golden glow on its crisp exterior, contrasting beautifully with the soft, spongy white interior, almost resembling a honeycomb. It is undeniably rich – a testament to the generous dollop of creamy white butter nestled in the centre. The meal is perfectly complemented by an iced filter coffee, with its slightly bitter notes cutting through the richness of the dosa and providing a refreshing cool-down in Mumbai’s hot and humid climate.

Akhil and Shriya are overjoyed by the positive response they have received. Currently open for a few evenings a week, they plan to expand their hours, menu, and operational days soon. Benne is a delightful find for those seeking a taste of authentic Bengaluru in the heart of Mumbai.

Benne is at 16th Road, Bandra West, Mumbai. A meal for two costs ₹400

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Telugu

An ambitious gangster drama



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A few minutes into *Gangs of Godavari*, the Telugu gangster drama written and directed by Krishna Chaitanya, the protagonist Ratna (Vishwak Sen) states that he does not know if he is good or bad, and does not want to give a false impression of being a good man. As the film progresses, it is evident that it is not a throwaway statement. The story revolves around his character who is dark, messy and on the wrong side of the moral compass. *Gangs of Godavari* is ambitious and tips its hat to films such as *Nayakan*, *Vada Chennai* and *Gangs of Wasseypur*. Though its writing and execution do not always match up to the ambition, there is enough to explore and engage with.

In a village on the banks of Godavari, we are introduced to a purported practice of *kaththi kattadam* or people placing a trident to avenge a character. The belief is that no one who has had a trident in his or her name has been able to escape death. The one who has evaded this, so far, is Ratna, but the odds are piling up against him.

Moving back to a period when ballot boxes were in use, the film narrates the journey of Ratna, a shrewd opportunist who swiftly rises from being a small-time trader to having his say in sand mining and politics.

His story unravels with a generous mix of humour as he crosses paths with arch rivals Doraswami Raju (Goparaju Ramana) and Nanaji (Nasser). Integral to Ratna's story are the parts played by sex worker Ratnamala (Anjali) and Buiji (Neha Shetty), whose lineage, when revealed, doesn't come as a surprise.

The first hour proceeds briskly. Ratna takes everyone and everything in his sweep, and his rise sometimes plays out like a satire on politics and people.

At one point, Ratna gives himself the title Tiger and implies that what might sound odd initially will be accepted by people if repeated many times. Such small things work as sharp observations of society.

In the later portions, however, as we know more about the 'monster' that Ratnakar is, the narrative wobbles. As expected, he has a backstory. Thankfully it does not overtly justify his actions; he is still made accountable. Vishwak Sen sheds his urban demeanour and portrays Ratna's swag, rage and vulnerability with conviction. This is one of his noteworthy performances, especially when the chinks in his armour are exposed and he realises his vulnerability and comes face to face with fear. What would have worked further in these portions is the presence of a stronger antagonist.

As usual, Anjali is dependable and enacts her part without a false note. She fits the character of a woman who has roughed it out. Neha comes into her own by and by; what seems to be a decorative role at first paves the way for a slightly stronger character and she is effective.

Gangs of Godavari is an interesting attempt. With more focus on its writing, it might have been a solid gangster drama.

Gangs of Godavari is currently running in theatres



A tale of friendship, loyalty, deceit

The minor shortcomings in Durai Senthilkumar's script feel like a speck in the sky where *Garudan* flies, thanks to an intriguing plot and impressive performances

Tamil

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After a brilliant makeover from a comedian to a lead actor in Vetri Maaran's *Viduthalai: Part I*, Soori's sophomore outing as a protagonist, *Garudan*, proves that his transformation is not a flash in the pan. With a neatly woven script that has enough brawn to overcome its minor shortcomings, director RS Durai Senthilkumar makes a splendid comeback with this raw and intense rural drama.

In *Garudan*, Soori plays Sokkan, an orphan who finds solace in Karunakaran's (Unni Mukundan) solidarity, turning him into a living embodiment of the word 'loyalty'. Meanwhile, Aadhi (Sasikumar) is Karuna's best friend and the duo also professionally works in tandem. Akin to a marksman's deafening gunshot disturbing the tranquillity of a peaceful forest where its inhabitants keep their animal instincts in check, trouble brews in multiple forms. The film catalogues the rift in these bonds down to the proverbial 'mann, ponn, penn' (greed for land, wealth and women). When these events rattle his perfect world, Sokkan is forced to take it upon himself to restore balance.

A cop wants to resign, a minister wants to swindle away a large piece of temple land, a character from a once-affluent family has a hard time making ends meet, a couple is distraught about their inability to conceive, a relationship leads to unplanned pregnancy, a cordial relationship between two people blooms into romance.... *Garudan* discloses all its cards with breakneck speed and introduces us to a plethora of characters. While it takes a while to settle within this world, the screenplay goes against its title to put us amidst the action instead of giving us a bird's eye view of happenings. Soori is arguably at the cusp of his career's apogee. At a stage where a little

Garudan

Director: RS Durai Senthilkumar

Cast: Soori, Sasikumar, Unni Mukundan, Sshivada, Samuthirakani, Revathy Sarma

Storyline: A man stuck between fidelity and fairness is forced to take a side

'mass' would do wonders amidst a lot of 'class' (three of his films are having a dream run at film festivals), the actor could not have asked for something as bespoke and vivifying as *Garudan*. Not only does the film play to his strengths and does a brilliant job with the 'rise of an underdog' trope that we enjoyed in *Viduthalai*, but it also gives him enough space to showcase his talents across aspects like action, romance and even a little dance.

But *Garudan* does not break boundaries with its plot; it offers the usual tropes of brotherhood, deception and retribution that we have seen often, and scenes do remind us of its own actors and director's films like *Kidaari*, *Subramaniapuram* and *Kodi*. In fact, if *Maamannan* can be interpreted as the perspective of Vadivelu's character Isakki from *Thevar Magan*, *Garudan* is the equivalent of Isakki taking it upon himself to end the feud with those he considers his bosses. However, despite looming over familiar territory, *Garudan* manages to give us something fresh thanks to its treatment and performances.

Director Durai etches the three primary characters brilliantly and it starts right from their very names; Aadhi is the all-giving do-gooder and a ray of hope from the above, Karuna takes in a nobody

under his wings and values fellowship more than anything, and Sokkan – keeping with the title of the film – is the bird that lives between these two entities. Soori is picture-perfect as Sokkan; the character is often called a dog because he is faithful and dependable, but the same man's best friend can turn rabid when pushed into a corner.

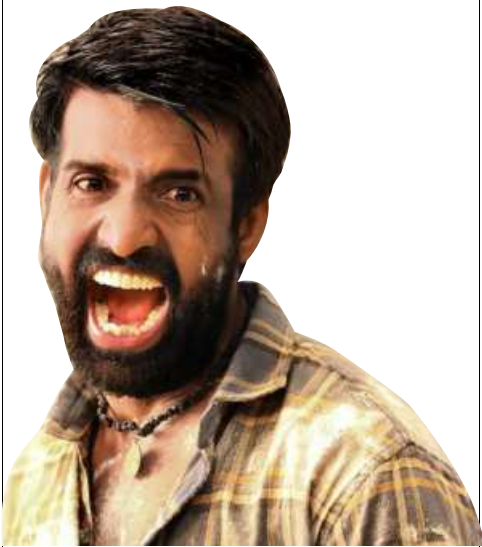
A character elaborates on a dream she had featuring horses, elephants and men with weapons; a scene straight out of the Kurukshetra War. But in this game of chess, what's often overlooked is how a simple pawn, when it reaches the other extreme end, can transform into something powerful and Soori aces that transformation. His distinct monologue of truth bombs that he delivers to Karuna, the humourous side that often comes out during his escapades with lady love Vinnarasi (Revathy Sarma), his show of allegiance to the families of Karuna and Aadhi, and the impressive action sequences featuring him make for some of the best scenes in the film. Sasikumar also fits perfectly in the role of Aadhi, a dignified character who is an extension of several lead roles he has previously played. A pleasant surprise comes in the form of Sshivada pulling off her limited but salient character with poise. But what feels like a miscast is Unni Mukundan whose dialect does not help with his rushed character arc.

The film has its fair share of issues ranging from painfully convenient twists to unnecessarily gory and violent action scenes. Still, they end up as mere speed-breakers in an otherwise enjoyable joy ride. Add to it an in-form Yuvan Shankar Raja whose scores elevate the mood of the film and Arthur A. Wilson's well-crafted frames, the technical prowess successfully push the film over the finish line. It would not be a stretch to call *Garudan* as director Durai's best work, and leaves you wanting more of this metamorphosis of Parotta Soori to protagonist Soori!

Garudan is currently running in theatres



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This partnership doesn't quite land

Hindi

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These are strange times, cinematically speaking, for fans of Rajkummar Rao and cricket. In his last release, the biographical drama *Srikanth*, the actor played a visually-impaired man who gives up his cricketer prospects to pursue higher studies abroad. "Education is more important to me, not cricket," he explained. As though to make amends, Rao returns, three weeks later, in *Mr. and Mrs. Mahi*, where he plays a cricket-crazed monomaniac named Mahendra. "For me, cricket is life; life is cricket," he asserts. Mahendra clings on to cricket, even though cricket sails him by.

Sharan Sharma's film opens in Jaipur in 2017, with Mahendra slogging in local club tournaments, jockeying for a spot on the state team. His father (Kumud Mishra), who owns a sports shop, has given



him an ultimatum to progress in his India-representing dream or join the family business. Mahendra comes close: maneuvering slyly and overzealously on the pitch but blowing it by a squeak. He is grounded for good, and, in due time, wedded to sweet, trusting Mahima (Janhvi Kapoor). She is a doctor who falls for his innate 'honesty'.

Rao and Kapoor commit to the comedy of a newly married couple

finding common ground; in addition to a shared nickname – Mahi – they discover they have a shared passion: cricket. They start attending games wearing matching No.7 jerseys (after former Indian skipper MS Dhoni). The song 'Agar Ho Tum' picks up, and Mahendra, for once, seems contented in his sad, uncherished life.

Yet this lightness soon evaporates as the film takes a markedly

dramatic (and dark) turn. When Mahendra learns of his wife's cricketer talents – she played gully cricket as a child but was forced to pursue medicine by her father – he pushes her to try again. He turns bossy and manipulative, convincing her she is following her heart but secretly hoping to frame her success as his own. He coaches her successfully onto the state women's team, in record time, yet turns rude and resentful when his name is not mentioned on TV by Mahima.

Mahendra, in this stretch, becomes a specimen of the sour, sulky, petulant Indian male. His sudden ill-treatment of his partner stems from his own inadequacy and sense of failure. He could not fulfil his dream, so he imposes it on his wife. "Was I just a *seedhi* (ladder) to you?" Mahima demands of her husband, in one of several blunt metaphors in the film.

Sharma and co-writer Nikhil Mehrotra show interest in unpicking the personality of Mahendra, a jealous has-been struggling in his role as coach and cheerleader. The trouble is, having revealed its hero as

petty and self-absorbed, the film sets him on a flat learning curve. Mahendra's self-examination is traversed over the course of a single sad song and an improving speech by his mother. The film could have made its point better by focussing on Mahima's individual growth, benching her sourpuss husband for a while.

It is difficult to concentrate on *Mr. and Mrs. Mahi* without being constantly reminded of other films.

Mr. & Mrs. Mahi

Director: Sharan Sharma

Cast: Rajkummar Rao, Janhvi Kapoor, Kumud Mishra, Zarina Wahab, Rajesh Sharma

Storyline: Mahendra, an also-ran, coaches his wife to become an ace cricketer; yet, as her star rises, he grows petty and resentful

There's nary an idea, visual or soundtrack choice that feels particularly fresh. Early on, "Dekhha Tenu" from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* is recycled. Mahendra has a successful brother his father dotes on, a cliché at least as old as *Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar*. Rajkummar Rao ran a small-town sports shop – though with evident enthusiasm – in *Kai Po Che!* (2013).

The cricketer action in *Mr. and Mrs. Mahi* is nearly as forgettable as the combat sequences in *Gunjan Saxena* (2020). Kapoor, nine films old, struggles to access the requisite ease in performance, both on and off the pitch. Rao effectively sells the frustration and peevishness of a dunce like Mahendra. He is skilled with character psychology; as a romantic lead, however, he casts less of a spell. He soldiers on regardless, trying to imbue some plausibility and heart into this ho-hum tale. He is playing a one-man inning, and he knows it.

Mr. and Mrs. Mahi is currently in theatres

Eric

Creator: Abi Morgan

Cast: Benedict Cumberbatch, Ivan Morris Howe, Gaby Hoffmann, McKinley Belcher III, Wade Allain-Marcus, Mark Gillis, Dan Fogler.

Episodes: 6

Storyline: When his son goes missing, a brilliant puppeteer's mind comes unravell'd as he is forced to confront his failings



Addictive exploration of redemption

Streaming

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Since the time he played Sherlock Holmes in the BBC show, Benedict Cumberbatch has played different versions of the socially awkward genius. In each iteration, his eccentricities were glamorous and endearing rather than toxic. In Abi Morgan's *Eric*, however, Cumberbatch's Vincent shows the other side of brilliance. How, despite his extraordinary creativity and wit, Vincent is impossible to live or work with. Though the driving force behind a successful children's puppet show, Vincent's acerbic tongue lashing at all

and sundry including his co-creator Lennie Wilson (Dan Fogler) have the team shying away from him. At home he is no better, bringing his ego and infidelities to his dealings with his wife, Cassie (Gaby Hoffmann), and his artistic and withdrawn nine-year-old son, Edgar (Ivan Morris Howe). Matters come to a head one morning when Edgar vanishes on his way to school. Vincent's personal and professional life fall apart. Cassie wants out, and Vincent's downward spiral into an alcohol and drug-fuelled haze finds the suits gunning for him. Through all this, Vincent is convinced if he gets the puppet Edgar drew, a seven-foot high, blue shaggy monster called Eric, on the show, Edgar will return home. As Vincent gets increasingly isolated, Eric becomes the manifestation of his hopes and failings. It is the 1980s in New York. Vincent's journey to rock bottom echoes the homeless living in subway tunnels. The rich and powerful build shiny new condos while depriving people on the streets a place to live in the name of gentrification. The policeman in charge of finding Edgar, Michael Ledroit (McKinley Belcher III), is gay and Black and as much an outsider as the talented

graffiti artist living rough, Yuusuf (Bamar Kane). Though another boy, Marlon Rochelle, has been missing for close to a year, his mum Cecile (Adepero Oduye) accuses the NYPD of not looking hard enough for him because Marlon is poor and Black unlike Edgar who is white and has rich parents. Vincent has privilege in spades considering he is a successful professional and the son of a real estate mogul, Robert Anderson (John Doman) and society lady Anne (Phoebe Nicholls). His privilege is sharply contrasted with Cecile. *Eric* is a luminous look at the birth of a city from the ruins of earlier settlers, the desperate measures taken by distressed people, of love and grief, hope and despair. And in case none of that floats your boat, there is an elegant mystery at the black heart of the mini-series, extraordinary period detail and Cumberbatch's virtuoso turn as Vincent which goes like a spike into your vein. And there is another reason to be thankful for *Eric* – rediscovering The Velvet Underground's blistering 'Heroin'. Eric is currently streaming on Netflix

Snippets



Brad Pitt and George Clooney reunite for Apple TV's Wolfs

Brad Pitt and George Clooney are set to reunite on screen in Apple TV+'s upcoming thriller, *Wolfs*. This project marks their first collaboration in over 15 years, rekindling a partnership that captivated audiences in the *Ocean's* film series. A teaser for *Wolfs*, directed by Jon Watts, debuted yesterday, giving us a brief look at upcoming film. The clip features Clooney and Pitt in a rain-soaked car, with Clooney driving and Pitt amusing himself by tinkering with the car's sun visor and glove compartment. The full trailer is set to release on Wednesday. Alongside Pitt and Clooney, the movie stars Amy Ryan, Austin Abrams of *Euphoria*, and Poorna Jagannathan.



Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar renewed for Season 2

Netflix has renewed *Heeramandi* for a second season. Within the first week of its May 1 launch, the series made its way up Netflix's worldwide non-English TV chart in 43 countries. "In *Heeramandi 2*, the women now come from Lahore to the film world. They leave Lahore after the Partition and settle in the Mumbai film industry or Kolkata film industry. So that journey in the bazaar remains the same. They still have to dance and sing, but this time for the producers and not for the nawabs. So that's the second season we are planning, let's see where it goes," Bhansali said.



Suriya 44 goes on floors; Karthik Subbaraj unveils first shot of film

Director Karthik Subbaraj on Sunday released the first shot of *Suriya 44*, his upcoming film with Suriya, to announce that the film has gone on floors. The first shot begins to show Suriya, sporting a funky T-shirt and jeans, sitting on a wall facing the ocean. As we close in, he turns and faces the camera, revealing his new look with a moustache. Earlier on Sunday, the makers of the film announced that actors Pooja Hegde, Jayaram, Joju George and Karunakaran had joined the cast of the film. Meanwhile, the film's crew features cinematographer Shreyas Krishna, and editor Shafique Mohamed.



Glorious modern-day monsterpiece

Witness how TOHO's gargantuan nightmare strips away Gojira's past 'iguanification' and subsequent pink-washing, returning our favourite kaiju to ground zero

Japanese

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Takashi Yamazaki's latest Oscar-winning entry in the storied *Godzilla* franchise reclaims the beloved kaiju's roots, melding an awe-inspiring spectacle with a potent exploration of survivor's guilt. It is a historical reckoning that would make even the most jaded kaiju cynic sit up and take notice. Behold, its glory. It's finally here. Godzilla has been through quite the career since its 1954 debut with Ishiro Honda's first-of-its-kind monster flick, morphing from a symbol of nuclear horror into a sometimes hero, sometimes villain, and always a box office draw. But in *Minus One*, Yamazaki strips away dear 'ol Gojira's past 'iguanification' and subsequent pink-washing, returning our favourite radioactive reptile to ground zero: steeped in the anxieties of post-war Japan and a scathing critique of American imperialism. If we were fooled into believing that an atomic dinosaur could not possibly get any more terrifying, here, for the first time in 70 years, Gojira serves as a colossal, scaly therapist of sorts, forcing Japan to confront its darkest hours and some uncomfortable questions (a true 21st Century nightmare). The film opens in the immediate aftermath of the second World War when Japan is counting its losses and reeling from the aftereffects of the war. The story follows Kōichi Shikishima (played with gut-wrenching vulnerability by Ryunosuke Kamiki), a man plagued by survivor's guilt, wandering through the rubble of his homeland, and haunted by the spectre of his past deeds...or misdeeds. His journey, which could very well have continued as a solo sob story, instead intersects with Noriko (Minami Hamabe) and an orphaned child. This unlikely trio forms a makeshift family, symbolising the fragile hope of a nation trying to rebuild from the ground up. Yamazaki uses this human drama to anchor the film's larger themes – a historically tried and tested formula for success when crafting compelling kaiju

Godzilla: Minus One

Director: Takashi Yamazaki

Cast: Ryunosuke Kamiki, Minami Hamabe, Munetaka Aoki, Hidetaka Yoshioka, Sakura Ando

Storyline: Japan has barely recovered from the Second World War when a gigantic peril emerges off the coast of Tokyo

flicks. Kōichi's struggle is not merely with a monstrous Godzilla but with the remnants of a militant nationalist ideology that glorified sacrifice and heroism at the cost of individual lives. Where the iconic behemoth had previously served as a sharp allegory for the devastating aftermath of nuclear warfare, *Minus One* mixes it up a little as a metaphor for the destructive force of jingoism and the heavy burden of survivor's guilt. The film's brilliance lies in its ability to weave these psychological threads into the fabric of a blockbuster, giving us characters who are as compelling as the monster that threatens them. The narrative does not shy away from firing a few rounds of atomic breath at the Truman-era nuclear proliferation either. The reawakening of Godzilla, fuelled by the infamous Bikini Atoll nuclear tests, is a not-so-subtle jab at the lingering presence of American military power and its catastrophic consequences. Yet, Yamazaki is too clever to descend into didacticism. Instead, he employs the giant lizard as a means to explore Japan's fraught relationship with its own history, presenting a revisionist take that is provocative, perceptive and poignant. But let us not get too bogged down in the heavy stuff. After all, this is a Godzilla movie, and Yamazaki spectacularly delivers the goods. The kaiju himself is a marvel, rendered with a tremendous amalgamation of CGI and practical effects that pay homage to the creature's Tokusatsu incarnations. When Godzilla rises from the depths, its glowing spines cutting through the ocean's surface, it is a sight to behold – both terrifying and beautiful. When Godzilla stomps through the city, the ground shakes, buildings crumble, and the camera captures it all with a mix of fluid dynamism and brutal clarity. It is as if the screen can barely contain the kaiju's indomitable intensity. This new Godzilla may be dwarfed in size by the likes of Legendary's take on the King of the Monsters, but what it lacks in size, it more than makes up for as a horrifying force of Nature, with nothing but malice in its eyes; its looming presence rendered with a tactile realism makes Godzilla more menacing than ever before. But it is not just the big moments that

impress. The film's attention to detail is extraordinary, from the way the kaiju's skin reflects light and texture, to the intricate design of the decimated cityscape that does not neglect the hundreds of rag-dolling bodies being flung around like puppets. The destruction is seen through the eyes of characters who feel real and relatable. Whether it is the desperate scramble of civilians or the determined faces of the ragtag team trying to stop the beast, the visuals serve to heighten the emotional stakes. With a momentous build-up to the awaited atomic breath, each jagged, protruding scale closes in on the impending doom of a familiar droning hum. The blast's glorious mushrooming shockwave, with its ripple effect of destruction, is quite simply breathtaking: a perfect encapsulation of the film's ability to marry awe with horror and an appropriate response to the convenient sanitisation of a certain Oscar-winning Trinity Test sequence of late. Amidst this second-levelling of Tokyo, we are constantly reminded of the human cost, of the lives disrupted and the dreams shattered. A reminder that behind every monster movie trope lies a kernel of truth about our own fears and failures. Kōichi and his makeshift squadron of scientists and sailors provide much-needed levity with their banter and camaraderie. These moments hardly undercut the film's gravitas, rather, enhance it, spotlighting the resilience of the human spirit even in the face of unimaginable horror. *Minus One* is a film that manages to bake its radioactive cake and eat it too. It is a boisterous action adventure that never loses sight of its deeper themes, a rare creature feature with a soul. By blending historical critique with personal redemption, Yamazaki crafts the 33rd iteration in the longest-running cinematic franchise in history that feels epic and intimate. *Minus One* is not just the greatest Godzilla film since the 1954 original – it has undeniably left a crater-sized impact that reaffirms Gojira's status as the undisputed king of monsters and makes a compelling case for itself as a modern monsterpiece.

Godzilla Minus One is now streaming on Netflix.