



Harsh Goenka recently unveiled his first public installation, a 10-foot-tall baby's head (right) created by Chintan Upadhyay



Goenka (left) and Upadhyay

# AESTHETICS ROUND THE CORNER

Art is moving out of the museum and into the street, beginning with installations at four of Mumbai's traffic junctions. **Ranjita Ganesan** checks them out

While most artists whose works are installed in public spaces hope to achieve such things as generating conversation and greater engagement with art, Jaideep Mehrotra voices a much simpler ambition for his next pieces. "When people see Sachin Tendulkar's face at a traffic island, they will, hopefully, stop peeing there."

Artist-sculptor Mehrotra's tribute to the little master, which will soon be unveiled in Worli, is part of an RPG Group initiative to set up installations at four traffic junctions in the city. Through it, RPG Chairman and ardent art collector Harsh Goenka aims to "take art out of a sterilised environment" and place it "out there". Four works inspired by recognisable elements of Mumbai, including the *dabbawala* and the Bandra-

Worli Sea-Link, have been commissioned in the first phase. Goenka is identifying more venues and wants to develop the project into an "art map" of the city.

There is a strong case for bringing art into public spaces in a city where most galleries and museums are clustered in the toniest neighbourhoods. At exhibitions that he has hosted in the Jehangir Art Gallery and the National Gallery for Modern Art, Goenka notes that only a niche audience was usually in attendance. The environment at such spaces, he says, is esoteric and dissuades the common man from stepping inside. He hopes that these works will become the city's landmarks.

The project's first installation, a 10-foot-tall baby's head created by Chintan Upadhyay, was recently unveiled to mixed reactions. The striking red sculpture features circles depicting aspects of Mumbai such as the *vada pav*, Jawaharal Nehru Port Trust, the Sea-Link and the 2008 terror attacks. Some see the chubby child's head as cute, while others like reviewers at *MumbaiBoss.com* found it unimpressive. The reaction to a piece is always subjective, reasons Anupa Mehta, who curated the RPG initiative.

Apart from Upadhyay and Mehrotra, contemporary sculptor Valay Shende was also chosen for the job. He will raise a 13-foot-tall *dabbawala* studded with stainless steel discs, carrying golden stomachs instead of tiffin boxes. His works often offer vivid commentary on capitalism and consumerism. Mehrotra will build two Tendulkars from materials sourced from a city in Gujarat that is named Sachin. One structure includes disjointed bars that converge at one point when you drive by, into a fleeting glimpse of the cricketer. The second is an image of Tendulkar formed by his quote: "When people throw stones at you, turn them into milestones."

The subjects of the pieces seem somewhat predictable but Goenka's justification is that public art cannot be too cryptic because it should appeal to a wide range of people.

Art is gradually coming out of conventional spaces and into commercial buildings, offices and even the airport. Art Guild House, an upcoming business park in Kurla, is part of a project by Gayatri and Atul Rula of Phoenix Mills.

Jiten Thakral of artist duo Thakral and Tagra, whose works are on display there, says this is because there are not enough museums and not enough people going to them. "Malls are the new museums," he chuckles.

Public art comes with its share of bureaucratic hurdles. A range of permissions are required from

Sculptor Valay Shende (below) pays tribute to Mumbai's *dabbawala* where he shows him carrying golden stomachs instead of tiffin boxes



Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to install art. Goenka's original idea was to have a massive monument referencing the attack of 26/11 but some politicians were not in favour of it. He says there is need for single-window clearances to fast-track the process. There is also the practical fear of vandalism and theft of the metal for sale as scrap.

It still is a long way before the reach can be called democratic. The new T2 terminal building at Mumbai airport, for instance, includes 7,000 pieces that are open to those who can afford flight tickets. Also, unlike in galleries, where the artist is generally close at hand to explain his process, there is nobody in public places to talk to the audience except brief notes that accompany the artworks. Mehta says seeing the pieces regularly will make people engage with them on a subliminal level. Artist Justin Ponmany, whose work is on display at the Art Guild House, is glad that the first steps are being taken. "Art is a mirror to society but people need to look into that mirror. Otherwise, it ceases to exist."

Artist Jaideep Mehrotra's (below) tribute to Sachin Tendulkar

