

Art street in an urban village

With eclectic gallery spaces coming up in the area, Lado Sarai is the new hub for contemporary Indian art in Delhi



THE ART DISTRICT: (anti-clockwise) The F-lane houses most of the major art galleries in Lado Sarai; Art Konsult, helmed by Siddhartha Tagore, shows a selection of contemporary and folk art; Kakar of Latitude 28 curates a special ART NITE at Lado Sarai, in which most galleries in the area participate

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"Painting wall gali jaana hai?" a grocer asks as soon as one enters the urban village of Lado Sarai in south Delhi. That's how the "F-lane" is commonly known around the village. The whiff of history that is so strong in the neighbouring areas of Mehrauli and Lalkot gets fainter and fainter as one gets to the heart of Lado Sarai; the tombs and ruins of the two medieval cities give way to a mishmash of grocery stores, chemist shops, bakeries, ayurvedic medicine shops and machine repair shops catering to modern day necessities. And yet, out of this chaos emerges a pristine lane dedicated solely to art. With galleries like Latitude 28, Gallery Art Positive, Artbull, Artkonsult, Art and Aesthetic, Exhibit 320 and Gallery Art Motif present in the area, one is spoilt for choice — there is a mix of cutting edge contemporary and classical on display. And with the recent opening of Art District XIII, a much-awaited eclectic gallery space, the spotlight is back on Lado Sarai.

It was in 2009 that Lado Sarai had its first tryst with art when Mamta Singhania opened Anant Art Gallery. The gallery has shut shop in the area, but a lot of other gallerists sensed the opportunity that Lado Sarai had to offer. "I moved to Lado Sarai a little after Anant had opened. Threshold and Art Motif were already present in the area. Exhibit 320 opened soon after," says Bhavna Kakar, director and founder, Latitude 28. "But some of the earlier galleries like Threshold have moved to other areas. Now only Latitude and Exhibit remain of the first art settlers of Lado Sarai." Today there are around 10 top notch galleries that populate the area, besides some upcoming names and art shops.

Low rentals are part of the charm of the area. For a reasonable sum you can now rent out spaces spanning 1,500 to 2,300 sq ft. From the outside, it seems that a cramped space awaits within. But the reality couldn't be more different. For instance, if you walk up the stairs of the SIS House to the first floor that houses Artbull auction house and Art Konsult gallery, you will be amazed by the sheer size of the space that is elegantly popu-

lated by installation pieces, sculptures and paintings. Siddhartha Tagore, director of the auction house and gallery moved to Lado Sarai from Hauz Khas village two years ago. "The rentals were the reason that I moved. Here I pay 35 per cent lesser than the amount that I used to shell out in Hauz Khas," says Tagore.

The attraction of Lado Sarai also lies in the fact that it has made art accessible. "Earlier the younger art enthusiast would feel hesitant to enter an art gallery. But Lado Sarai cuts through that elitist image of where a person should view art. It has emerged as an alternate, underground, cool kind of a place," says Neha Kirpal, founder and director, India Art Fair.

As a result the kind of art that is on display at the galleries is very cutting edge, very *avant-garde*. "Latitude 28 and Exhibit 320 are doing some even exciting contemporary work like video art, performance art, so on and so forth. Hence they are drawing international, likeminded people," says Kirpal. "Besides these, there is a segment that is showing decorative classical kind of work."

Art District XIII too has made an impact with its recent exhibition of Australian artist Paul Davies' work. In an interview to UK-based *Daily Mail*, Kapil Chopra, mentor of Art District XIII and president of The Oberoi Group, said: "Art District XIII's presence in the world of art aims at showing art beyond the ordinary, where art is universal in its outlook and yet not out of bounds for an influential collector."

The area carries a lot of weight in the art world with the galleries working as a conglomerate. The gallerists meet regularly to discuss creative ways in which they can work together, one of these being the ART NITE at Lado Sarai curated by Kakar. The most recent of these was held in February as a collateral event of the India Art Fair. "There is no specific date set for it, we have kept it flexible," says Kakar.

2013 was a dismal year for Indian contemporary art and that had an influence on Lado Sarai as well. "Last year was terrible in terms of traffic. But things are improving now and newer galleries are coming up," says Tagore. Kakar too hopes that the art street continues to flourish. "What's lacking in the area is a presence of a good cafe. That would really make a lot of difference."

Galleries like Latitude 28, helmed by Kakar (right), are doing cutting-edge, contemporary work and are drawing likeminded people

