

# The map of a city's journey

Three artists, who will exhibit their works in Mumbai, use unique narrative styles and palettes to trace the evolution of the cities that they live in

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Maps can be more than just two-dimensional sheets of paper showing locations and geographical features. In 'Urban Cartography', an upcoming group exhibition featuring three artists, bits of the city are recreated with a lively commentary on its structure, condition and development.

The artists Mitali Shah, Shrikant Kadam and Neeraj Patel are from Vadodara, Pune and Udaipur respectively. Not all of them had visualised their pieces as maps *per se*, but the common effort to explore changing urban scenarios struck curator Vibhura Kapoor as cartographical. He had been tracking the three artists' work at Jehangir Art Gallery and other local galleries for periods up to two years. "Their narrative styles, palettes and materials were different but they were essentially reflecting on or reacting to the same thing — the city."

It's two days to the show and Gallery Beyond, which focuses on new art and

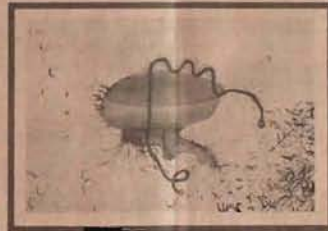
young artists, is preparing to get a fresh coat of paint. The 40-odd pieces that will go up soon afterwards are temporarily spread out on the floor. They are a mix of works on wood, paper and vast canvases. Starting prices have been kept at about ₹15,000 a piece, which Kapoor reckons "is a steal."

Unlike in photographs seen online, the detail and inventiveness of the smaller works becomes apparent when you come face-to-face with the pieces. Kapoor is quite pleased with his selection. "Bigger artists can get boring after a while. But the younger ones are always trying something different and you can watch them grow," says the curator.

In one set of paintings, Shah looks at cities as organisms, biotic beings with cellular and vein structures. She has always been interested in how cities come together and how they fall apart. The last monsoon in Vadodara and the laying of drainage pipelines are images that have inspired her work. Another set, which uses materials including jute, handmade paper and threads, treats the surface as skin and depicts the effect that constant digging and high-rise buildings have on it.

For Patel, who moved from Udaipur to Vadodara some years ago, the base subject is

the local environment. While he painted abstract canvases last year, which are also part of the exhibition, he has lately been working with wood, brass and iron nails. "If it is part of the surroundings, I use it." In *Somebody is Hurting Me*, the artist recreates a battered wall on a piece of metal complete with pockmarks, multiple paint jobs, shoddy plaster work and nail wounds.



In another of Patel's pieces, small bits of cloth are rolled and stacked in a way that gives them the appearance of a long fire-cracker. Some crackers appear to be falling out of the bunch. But, as Kapoor points out, this could stand for the city's tendency to cramp and shove.

The third artist, Kadam, left sports and

engineering behind to engage with his childhood interest in art. Now an arts professor and practitioner, he often travels to the hills and lakes around Pune. He has moved from making realistic landscapes with paper and watercolours to depicting nature in abstract forms on canvas.

There is an evident distortion of angles in his paintings, which use colours in a way that does not make them seem dull. Kadam's aim is to show nature "not from a distance but from deep within. That is where the fun is." Ultimately, they are an appeal to preserve the environment, instead building "jungles of cement."

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A standout participant in the exhibition is Shah's series of 3D artworks, in which the artist has delicately burnt holes into layers of wafer-thin paper and painted over them with

water colours. The effect conveys the rather systematic damage inflicted on land over time. These pieces are very fragile, quite like an abused city.

The exhibition is on view at Gallery Beyond, Mumbai, from May 19 to June 25