

^{sk} Eat, Paint, Repeat

The newly opened Outsider Arts Centre and Cafe is a space for self-taught artists

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WHILE self-taught artist Nek Chand was a road inspector in 1958, he would spend his spare time collecting materials from demolition sites. He was not internationally famous just yet as the man behind the famous Rock Garden in Chandigarh. For 18 years, he used recycled materials in secret to sculpt dancers, musicians and animals on a small piece of land near Sukhna lake, using toilet bowls, bangles, tea cups and bicycle parts. In 1975, it was turned into a garden. It is for many other artists like Chand, who is perhaps one of the few faces representing outsider art in India, that Shubhadarshini Singh has set up the Outsider Arts Centre and Cafe in Shantiniketan.

Singh got Chand to inaugurate the cafe in January this year. Her idea is to "spread awareness about outsider art". "It is basically art created outside the



The vibrant interiors of the gallery-cafe

boundaries of established art practices, without commercial interest. These artists have no contact with mainstream art institutions. Outsider art made its presence felt during the early 20th century with works made by asylum inmates and children," says Singh, an artist, writer and television producer.

Both a gallery and a cafe, Singh says, "This is not a fast food joint or fine dining. I wanted to create an *adda* for artists practising outsider art to come, paint, chat, hold workshops and talks. Those who practise outsider art are not folk artists or untrained artists. They are hugely talented and mostly do not have access to materials most of the times. In many cases, their works are discovered after their death." The gallery beneath the cafe, which is wi-fi enabled, serves as an exhibition space and is free of cost. For now, most of the paintings on display have been created by Singh.

Even the sandwich is a work of art, though this has been done intentionally, keeping in mind seasonal fruits and vegetables. The highlights include Chef's Open Sandwich, with fillings of prawns, oranges and pomegranates. Apart from this, the pocket-friendly menu boasts of finger food, French toast, coffee and smoothies, mostly priced between Rs 75 and Rs 200.

Internationally, the Outsider Art Fair has been on New York's annual calendar since 1993, which shows its growing popularity on the international front. But India, Singh says, still has a long way to go. "Not much is known about it here and we do not have many artists representing this art. I am hoping to find more people like Nek Chand through this cafe," says Singh.

The cafe is open between 12 pm and 7 pm. Address: 1/13, Shantiniketan, near Moti Bagh. For details, visit outsiderscafe.in