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Art installations show support towards the Save Aarey Movement

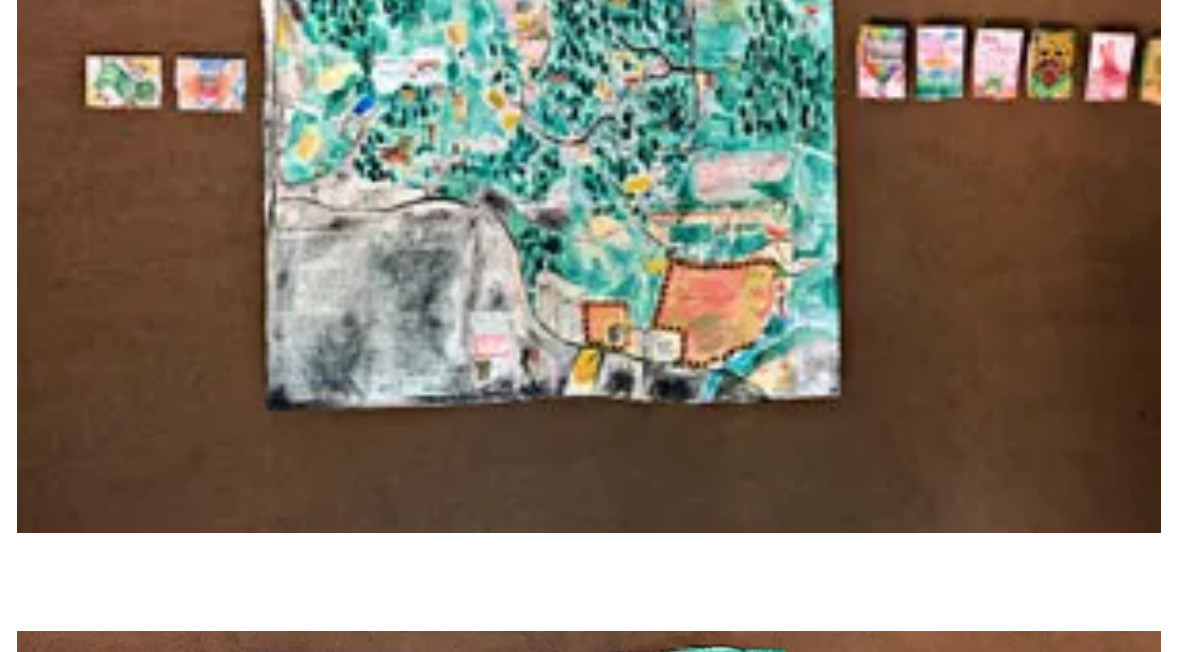
Updated on: 22 May,2018 03:52 PM IST | Mumbai

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The team of the artists that hail from Hong Kong and Serbia spent the last week in the interiors of the forest, understanding the lifestyle of the inhabitants



Art Installation. Pic/Abigail D'Souza

To show solidarity and support towards the Save Aarey Movement, and to reflect on the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Goregaon's Aarey Forest - the city's largest green cover - jeopardized by private encroachments, five international artists, along with one from India, set up their art installations in the adivasi habitat of Keltipada.

The team of the artists that hail from Hong Kong and Serbia spent the last week in the interiors of the forest, understanding the lifestyle of the inhabitants. The eight art installations that were put on display since Sunday morning in the front yard of the second house in the pada's 18th Unit were based on the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the forest. The intention of the artists was to invite others from abroad to show the serene interiors of the forest and to give momentum to the movement to save the forest on an international level. The exhibition was curated by ArtOxygen with the support of Aarey Conservation Group (ACG).

The highlight was a handmade map of the entire Aarey forest region. A visual print of the map put up on the wall of the house was later distributed among the visitors. Interestingly, the artists, along with a few visitors followed the same map later in the evening to sow some indigenous seeds that the artists had carried with them. Another highlight was a pie, inspired from Savelya, a tribal sweet dish. "The pie was to make people aware about how Aarey is being consumed piece-by-piece by encroachers," said Vikram Arora, explaining the significance of the pie.

The other installations included a peacock made out of plastic trash that the group of artists from Hong Kong and Serbia collected while exploring the capillaries of the forest; Chinese-style bowls and plates, and a collection of 33 containers full of soil gathered from various parts of the forest over the week, which were wrapped by a white cloth designed by Warli painting. Drawings of the view that the locals would want to see every morning covered one of the exterior walls of the house.

Speaking to the crowd that poured in throughout the day, the artists fondly spoke about why the forest must be saved and why they would keep visiting Aarey from abroad. "I wasn't aware about this green beauty till I arrived here. And now, it feels like home in here. We have slept here, danced and feasted with the locals," said Michael Leung, one of the artists. "I hope everybody realises that this is a precious place that shouldn't be altered," said Gum Cheng.

"Development doesn't mean concrete development only. We also need to preserve our culture, the greenery and ensure the locals do not get displaced," said Amrita Bhattacharjee, a core-member of the Aarey Conservation Group (ACG).

Prakash Bhoir, a tribal artist and an activist himself, who had given one of his own houses to the artists, said, "Just like fish cannot survive without water, we tribals cannot survive without our Aarey. We have taken care of each of our trees and plants like our kids. The artists and the visitors from this morning have made us feel important and valued."

"The focus on the project was on the relationship with the tribals of the Aarey. It is a creative approach to understand the tribal lifestyle and reflect it through artwork. Artists are in closer proximity to the city, where as the life away from the city is also crucial and needs our focus," said Leandre D'Souza, co-founder and curator of ArtOxygen.

