

An Ode To Bhubaneswar: 'City In A City' Masterpiece By Manav Gupta

By Ananya Pattnaik

One of India's top ten eminent contemporary artists, Manav Gupta, who has established himself as an ambassador of contemporary art, culture and evolution in the creative field has now created another first-of-its-kind Public Art Museum on Water and Sustainable Development in Bhubaneswar.

Having created the six most revolutionary solo art shows of the decade on Indian soil, the iconic Delhi-based artist has invented the use of pottery for mega installations, starting an avant-garde art movement that transforms local craft to cutting-edge international contemporary language for sustainable development.

Currently, Gupta, who has been in Bhubaneswar for nearly two months, is building his Public Art Museum on Water and Sustainability as his first set of installations in the city. Rendered as 'An Ode to Bhubaneswar. Tribute to Odisha', the artist has succeeded in creating a 'city in a city — sustainable city, smart city'.

When he was invited for the task of creating one of his unique installations at Rasulgarh, Gupta conceptualised and created a first-of-its-kind city as an extension of his signature Travelling Museum from his 'arth — art for earth' statement. As he puts it: 'arth in Devnagri means 'wealth' and 'meaning' — the true wealth of humanity is earth's resources, hence my public art project across the world.' And he made it by recycling waste construction material from the site scrapyards.

The Permanent Museum installation covers almost all the aspects of the smart sustainable city as well as the cultural aspect of Odisha through his cutting-edge language of contemporary art blending in traditional icons to give the vital message of sustainable water as earth's precious resource. The public art museum project being built under the Rasulgarh flyover shows the culture, history, and the progress of the city along with the need to save the environment.

Not only has he been a former Expert Committee Member of Republic Day celebrations and first artist-in-residence at the Rashtrapati Bhawan invited personally by Dr Abdul Kalam, but also is the only artist to be invited by Environment Ministry to create one-minute films on climate change. He is listed by Financial Times among the top ten contemporary Indian artists whose works would fetch good returns.

Some of his iconic artworks include a ten-thousand-sqft world-record, five-floor mega mural 'Tree of Life' at Airtel, the Indo-Bhutan friendship mural in Bhutan commissioned by the External Affairs Ministry, the giant Ganga 'Waterfront' Installation in Delhi at India Habitat Centre, the Mega 'Museum in a Mall' Yamuna Public Art Project at DLF Mall of India, the iconic 'arth — art for earth' hosted by Ministry of Culture in Delhi for six months in 2018, a private one-acre Sculpture Park at Amrita Shergill Marg as a prototype of a permanent museum of clay; as also his pioneering collaborative interdisciplinary projects including the 'concept of art and music Jugabandi'.

'The denizens can witness the culture and the rich history of the city on the load testing concrete blocks, placed one on top of the other to create the seven-tower-buildings-of-the-city of the smart city. On the other hand, the 20 feet tall giant tube well-built of scrap material shows how precious water is for humankind. Giant tube well, as a metaphor of pure life-giving water of Mother Earth, which is fast becoming a museum entity. As water is the most precious resource that is blessed to us by the Earth, the tube well is painted in the colour gold to represent its value.' — Manav Gupta

The River Water pathways connecting the tube well and the 'city' nourish the city which recycles its water. The white patches on the ground represent snow. 'Though Bhubaneswar has not witnessed snowfall, if we do not take care for our nature then someday it might be an Ice Age,' Gupta said.

The artist has especially also painted a version of three of his signature paintings that are already auctioned by Christie's from his 'umbilical cords of earth' series. While many artists had used Public art as a medium to showcase the state's culture on the city's walls with mural art, this masterpiece is a unique epic in the artist's idea, innovation, creativity, scale, diversity and the message to save our environment, for which artist was glad and feels humbled that he got a chance to engage with the people of the state through his art and its message.

For Gupta, nature has always been his muse, as also his work of two decades conveying the message of environment. So when the extremely severe cyclonic storm FANI struck Odisha and tore through Bhubaneswar, Gupta just prayed to nature to spare his project from its wrath. Believing in the 'power of thought' he submitted his art to the Universe and feels blessed at the miracle that the 20-foot-tall installation with metal scrap and the artistic blocks remained completely unscathed by the giant storm.

The other side of the genius architectural construction with concrete blocks shows the Dhauligiri, Lingaraja temple and Lord Jagannath's imagery, a representation of the Temple City, along with the vast art and culture of the state.

Having been regularly quoted by critics, leading experts and luminaries from various walks of life as 'one of India's most erudite and versatile contemporary artists', the 'maverick genius' of 'pioneering innovations', 'piped to be the next big thing in international art' and 'a master of light and colour', the latest iconic creation by the artist should go a long way in adding to the assets and attractions of the state for its local people as well as a must-visit contemporary attraction for international tourists visiting Odisha.