

## Artists Rev Up for Kochi Muziris Biennale 2014

KOCHI: With only 12 days remaining for the second edition of Kochi Muziris Biennale, artists from India and abroad have begun converging to the art extravaganza and are giving finishing touch to their art works.

"Kochi Muziris Biennale, the 108-day mega art event will showcase the works of 42 artists from India and 52 from 30 other countries. The Kochi Biennale Foundation has unveiled the list of the artists on its website and on US-based artist publishing platform known as e-flux," Jitish Kallat, artistic director, Kochi Muziris Biennale (KMB) said.

The second edition of the biennale has been titled 'Whorled Explorations', he said, adding that the curatorial process of the event started a year ago.

"It has been a process of frequent travel, dialogue and self-reflection," Kallat said.

International participants include artists from neighbouring Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and China to those in the Middle East besides western and far eastern countries, he said.

Delhi-based Gigi Scaria, one of the participants, is bringing 'Chronicle of the Shore Foretold' to his home state. It will find a place in Fort Kochi's Pepper House, where Sumakshi Singh, another Delhi resident, is working on a project that mixes animation with mythology, where visitors can end up being the characters.

Some 200 metres away from the placid locales of Pepper House is the equally quaint old Aspinwall House, the main venue of this year's KMB.

Much like Pepper House which is a sea-facing heritage property built in Dutch style, the 1867-built Aspinwall is a waterfront complex, much bigger and dense with English architectural aesthetics.

At Aspinwall, young Sahej Rahal is working on a variety of clay figures to mould out what he conceives would be a curious representation of the 'absent city' that is Muziris, which was a port city the peninsular India lost in a suspected tsunami in 1341.

"I have brought the clay from a village near Thrissur," said 26-year-old Rahal from Mumbai.

"The weather here facilitates their slow cracking and perhaps eventual crumbling. I won't mind that," he adds about his work that is on since this mid July and took dramatic turns in conception after seeing two Malayalam movies shot in the Aspinwall compound. Among the foreign artists, 55-year-old Hew Locke from UK is working on a five-image fresco. The sketches on the white walls have been emboldened with black plastic threads.

Another Mumbaikar Sudhir Patwardhan says that "art should go beyond galleries because people's exposure to art is very limited".

"KMB 2014 is of an international level but it does not exclude the common man. I am looking forward to spending three weeks at the Biennale," says the 65-year-old icon who has produced a lithographic triptych in response to the curatorial theme.

Kallat notes it had been "invigorating" to be in a prolonged dialogue with numerous artists that have extended over months and at this moment to see the discussions take shape as art-projects.

Over the last few months, artists have visited sites on the eight venues, including David Hall and Parade Ground in West Kochi besides Durbar Hall Gallery in downtown Ernakulam.

As for Gigi, a native of Kothanalloor off Kottayam in south-central Kerala, he is creating a piece different from his usual work. For, it references Kerala's history, myths and labour, thus is "very much in context to the place", says the 41-year-old artist.

About 70 per cent of the works at 2014 KMB are new. Some of these are produced on site, while others are being shipped from within and outside the country.

Some of the other artists from India include Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, Dayanita Singh, N S

Harsha and Unnikrishnan C from the Thrissur College of Fine Arts. The international participants include Xu Bing, Mona Hatoum, Adrian Paci and Rafael Lozano Hemmer.

The project will also see the presence of legendary artists such as Akbar Padamsee, K G Subramanyan and Yoko Ono, while including works of recent graduates such as Rui An from Singapore and Andrew Ananda Vogel from San Francisco.

Kallat notes he kept meeting artists and scholars in various parts of India and around the world as part of the curatorial process, regularly punctuated by days in Kochi to reflect on the project from the ground.

The curator's letters of invitation did not propose a singular theme, but "a cluster of ideas and references with which we might rethink the world we inhabit", he said.

"Thus, Kochi's maritime history linked to the 'age of discovery' during the 14th and 17th centuries and the study of astronomy and mathematics in Kerala at this very moment became points of reference for the project," informed the director.