

Spread across the environs of Terminal 2 of Mumbai's international airport, the Jaya He Museum houses a diverse collection of art and installations, blending it with various aspects of the architecture, design and culture, thus creating a unique experience for those transiting through this large space

Indian Aesthetics Museum in transit

Text and photos by Sudha Ganapathi and Anuradha Shankar



A celestial being flies across a cloud.
Painted faces stare balefully through wooden bars.
A train chugs its way along the slope of a staircase.
Hot air balloons, cars, and space shuttles share space with the Moon riding a flying chariot drawn by antelopes.
A fountain engages with the senses of sound and touch, music playing as the hand is moved through the water.
A giant patchwork quilt stretches on endlessly.
Beautiful wooden doors with kolams and mandanas on the thresholds beckon you inside
A flock of noisy parrots fly past
A giant web entices you to come closer and explore

All this and more, is part of the unique and diverse collection of art and installations that make up the Jaya He Museum, within the unlikely environs of Terminal 2 (or T2) of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai. As with any airport, T2 is designed to allow for the constant flow of passengers, and most of this space is used for the necessary amenities, intended for the comfort and ease of those in transit. The Jaya He Museum brings art within this milieu, blending it with every aspect of the architecture, design and culture, thereby creating an aesthetic experience for those transiting through this large space.
The Museum has been conceived as "an initiation into the immediate environment and the larger context of the airport, the city of Mumbai, and of India as a whole."^[1] There are

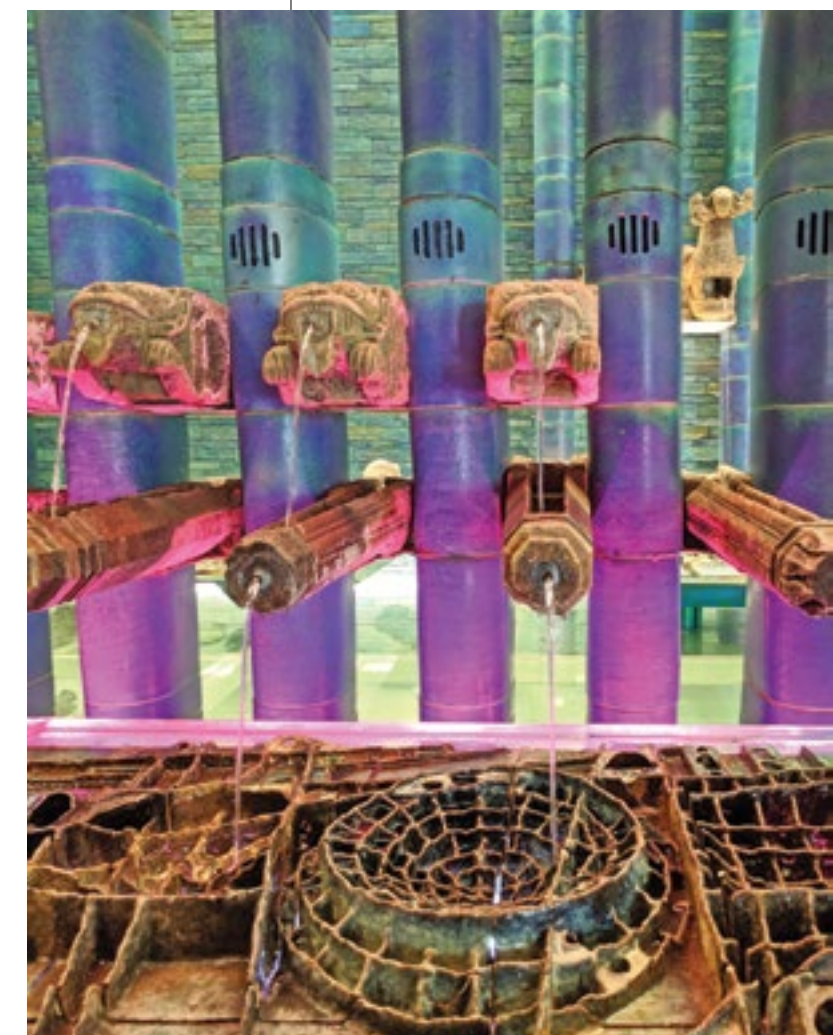


This page, clockwise from left: A celestial being flies through a cloud, a train chugs its way along a staircase, upside-down, and other means of transport crowd the space on the walls, as they do in any busy lane in the city; a musical fountain; a large wooden Nandi, the vahana or vehicle of Lord Shiva, and used for temple festivals is

placed before a mural that depicts people travelling by bullock cart
Opposite page: A low-relief depiction reminiscent of the Buddha's Great departure as portrayed at the stupas in Bharhut, Amaravati and Sanchi is superimposed on a Kalighat-style mural, again depicting travel and transport



over 5500 artefacts, spread across a distance of 3.2 kilometres, making it one of India's largest art initiatives. The exhibits are displayed in three distinct areas, each with a specific theme. The Departures section is themed around *Thresholds of India* and presents India's long-standing tradition of art and crafts right up to contemporary times. The Arrivals section has a local theme titled *Layered Narratives*, it provides an introduction to the city of Mumbai, its urban landscape, obsession with cinema and cricket, and more. The Baggage Hall is the third section and is rather appropriately called *Baggage Acclaimed* and is themed around costumes, props, vintage bags and trunks.
The bulk of the exhibits are in the Departures, considering that is where travellers spend maximum time at the airport. They extend





from the domestic to the international section and are displayed on or around a 40-foot-high curved wall with different sections visible from different levels and departure gates. The displays combine ancient sculptures, antiques sourced from all over the country, as well as commissioned artworks, together reflecting the multi-layered and multi-cultural identity of India.

Located as it is within the airport, transport and movement figure prominently, spanning both space and time in the imagery of the exhibits. Footprints, representing the most basic form of travel and movement, are seen in various forms – from hand-drawn footprints to paisley patterns, and even *padukas*. There are paintings of different modes of transport – in the form of charts (hence familiar to school students), murals, miniature paintings, and fantastical images of flying machines. Processional vehicles of the gods, normally seen in temples, are placed all around the Departures section, reinforcing the sense of travel and combining the mythical, the historical and continuing traditions.

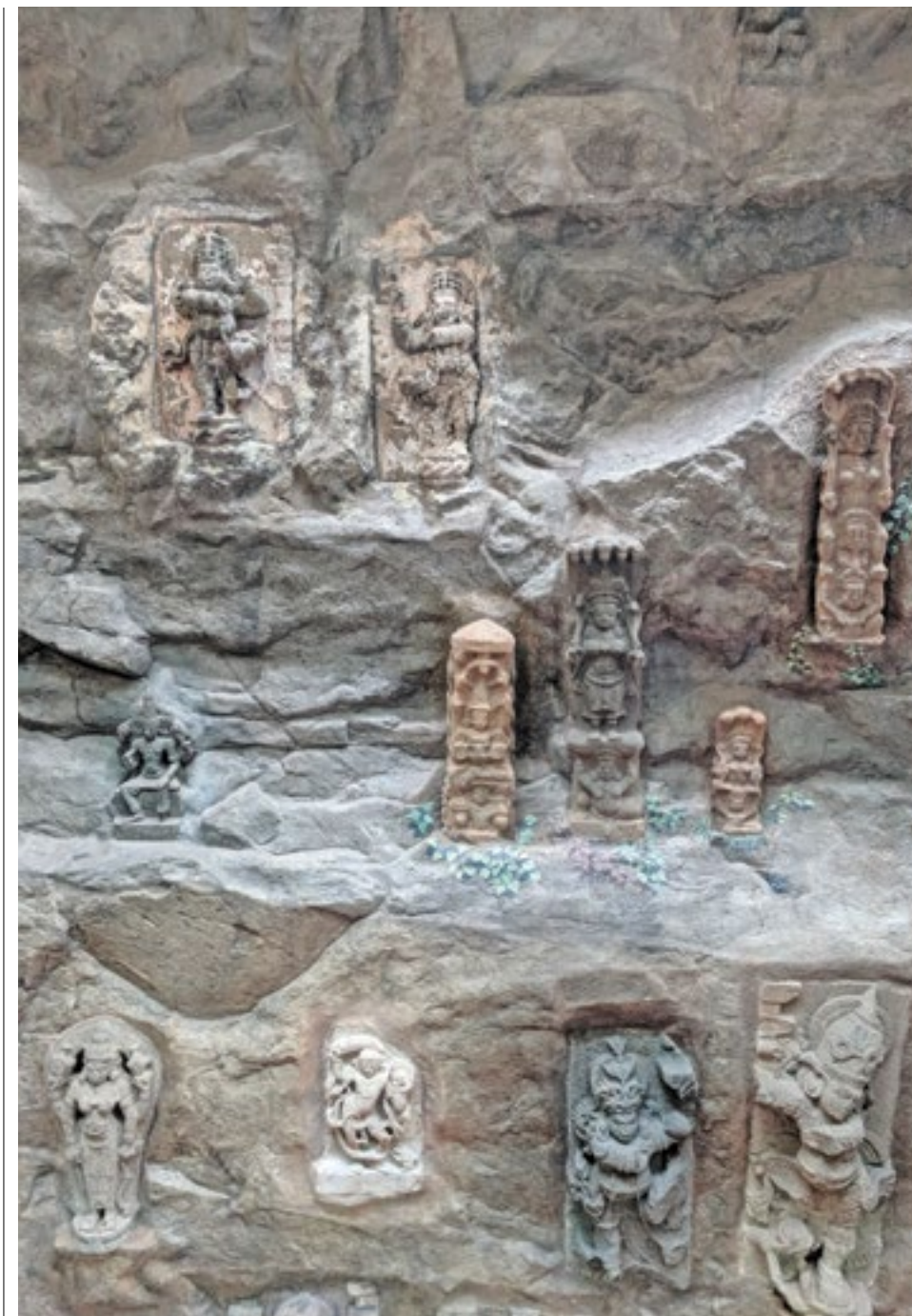
Keeping to the vision statement ^[2] of the Museum, in reflecting the many layers of India, the displays bring together a number of themes, highlighting India's rich handicraft and art legacy and engaging the senses, with materials playing an important role. For example, metal lamps simulate the idea of fire, while the many aerial displays represent air. The gentle sound of water from fountains, or represented through displays, highlights yet another element. The façade of a clay (earth) house brings the rural environment into the picture, a plane drawn in white in the *mandana* tradition of the Meena tribe of Rajasthan juxtaposing the modern with the traditional.

Ancient sculptures line one wall, forming a sacred cliff, while another wall recreates the ambience of a Kerala temple, covered with murals depicting the gods. A large map of the Jain pilgrim site, Palitana, gives minute details of the route that pilgrims take from the time they arrive by train there. A modernistic yet imaginary representation of a flying vehicle hangs as a piece of Gond art with passengers painted in the windows and the tail of the plane imagined



This page, clockwise from left: a low-relief panel of a seafaring expedition indicating India's long and rich maritime trade and history; an aeroplane drawn on the wall of a mud house, juxtaposing

the rural and the urban (Fortress of Clay, India Elemental, Rajeev Sethi Scenographers); Gond art depicted on a fanciful aeroplane, one of the wings imagined as a leg



as a leg! A painting of a shimmering theatrical backdrop makes the solid wall appear fluid, with a sense of motion. Forming the backdrop of one section are motifs of huge ships, such as those seen on the temple walls in Cambodia, representing the connections of trade, and transport, with the rest of the world. But, perhaps, the most visually stunning exhibit is a section that showcases the Mysore and Thanjavur traditions of painting.

Not all exhibits are eye-catching though; many are subtle and can easily be missed or overlooked, for example, India's textile heritage. The Naga weaves are prominent thanks to their bold colours and patterns; but the *chikankari* and *phulkari* are easily missed. Same is the case with two panels that showcase Kashmir's wood carving heritage.

The Jaya He Museum is an intriguing combination of the ancient and the modern, bringing together the rural and the urban, disparate as they are, to celebrate the idea of India in all its diversity. Its setting is equally intriguing, in plain sight in the terminal, as well as in nooks and corners, encouraging the



This page, top: *Moving Constant*, an installation that pays homage to the journeys of the body and the mind incorporating and re-interpreting the Tanjore and Mysore styles of painting (Artists: N. Ramachandran and V.

Anamika); left: ancient sculptures on a fabricated rock face (*Sacred Cliff*, Pundalik Shetty); below: a latticed screen or *jaali* made up of several smaller *jaalis* found in monuments all over India





traveller to seek out more. However, it is too vast a space to take in at once. It is meant to be a museum seen in transit, exploring a small part at a time with new facets being discovered in oft-seen displays.^[3]

The Jaya He Museum is not a conventional museum in the sense of visiting one to see its exhibits. At Jaya He, the whole experience is inverted for it is situated in a place that is a transit space for travellers. Also, the artworks on display are not only museum exhibits, but also the part of T2's décor and ambience. It is the latter that is apparent initially, and it is only over multiple visits that the Jaya He Museum reveals itself little by little. Transiting through T2 and seeing the Jaya He exhibits is an experience in progress.

Notes:

1. <https://www.csia.in/atcsia/jayahe.aspx>

2. Ibid.

3. The photographs were taken over a period of three years and whenever we transited through the airport. One of the reasons we kept going back to see the exhibits is the way different aspects struck us with every viewing. There is very little information on most of the exhibits, so it is, in a sense, a journey of discovery.

This page, top: The installation pays homage to the Durga Puja in Kolkata and the Kalighat painting tradition (Artists: Rajeev Sethi, Probir Das, Anwar, Rajesh Deo and others); right: Rani Laxmibai, the queen of Jhansi
Opposite page, clockwise from top-left: vintage sculptures of women cover this wall; an installation that mimics a giant spider's web, made from polypropylene price tags (Artist: Smriti Dixit); at the Arrivals section of Terminal 2

