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Making Mumbai’s Emerging Art World through Makeshift Practices

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ABSTRACT

India’s art world has garnered significant attention as an ‘emerging art world’, but we know little about how such worlds emerge and are experienced by those working within them. This article explores this question of ‘emergence’ through an ethnography of the Mumbai art world. Gallerists, artists and other insiders generally perceive local conditions as insufficient and in-the-making. They juxtapose Mumbai against idealised, more established art worlds, and engage in creative, improvised ‘makeshift’ practices to remedy the limitations they see. Despite their provisional nature, these makeshift practices produce new spaces, networks and mediators in the Mumbai art world: in other words, art worlds emerge through practice.

KEYWORDS

Art; world; art markets; scenes; artists; galleries; emerging; emergence; improvisation; India; makeshift; Mumbai; practice

One afternoon in February 2013, I met Mansha in her office.1 Mansha is the director of the Centre for Indian Aesthetics2 in Mumbai, and our conversation turned to the state of affairs in the local art scene. ‘I’m not enamored of the contemporary art world’, Mansha said. ‘It is almost all extremely mediocre’. She was referring to the constellation of artists, dealers, critics, curators and brokers working in the city, which, alongside Delhi, is one of the country’s centres of art. What the Indian art world needed, she said, was ‘a big shaking up’. However, times were changing. Mansha went on: ‘A lot of [art]work is now being produced. In ten years’ time, a lot of good things will come out. They (Indian artists) do feel the need to be global artists, after all’. The mediocre status quo was not entirely the fault of artists, she felt. ‘The art infrastructure here is very limited. There is no philanthropy; there are no museums. So they feel a huge amount of vulnerability, when you have to show your work to an international audience’.

Accordingly, Mansha was working for change by contributing to art education and infrastructure. She has a PhD in philosophy, but, disillusioned, had left Indian academia, which she found antiquated and conservative. Established in a highly-finished space inside a dilapidated colonial building in Fort, South Mumbai, in 2010, the privately-run Centre for Indian Aesthetics provides postgraduate courses in Indian art and aesthetics,
and its students are art aficionados, local gallerists and curators, among others. Lecturers included Mumbai curators and art critics, as well as Mansha herself. Promoting ‘critical thinking in the arts’ in India, the Centre also regularly hosted talks by visiting artists and international scholars.

Although critical, Mansha articulated how Mumbai artists, gallerists (locally, this referred to an art dealer who also ran a gallery), curators and critics generally experienced their professional world. First, the Indian, and specifically Mumbai, art world was seen as insufficient and lacking. Second, it was provisional, on its way to becoming something else that was more sophisticated, better elaborated and more confidently established. Third, these changes were happening within the context of the Indian art world’s deepening and extending connections with the global art world and market. One prominent art critic remarked that ‘thirty years ago, there was no art world to speak of [here]’, highlighting the newness of the scene. Another, an established artist, said that India’s art world was ‘immature’. National art periodicals commonly note how the art world suffers from a chronic lack of infrastructure such as public museums and a lack of public funding for art. In other words, Indian art worlds are emergent and in-the-making.

Since the 2000s, India has received global attention as a site for ‘emerging art’. The country is a developing centre for contemporary art, alongside nations such as Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa. Art world components like the market, the scene and museums emerge in developing economies when newly-wealthy buyers purchase art for ostentatious display and to further their social prestige. Ancillary businesses emerge to cater to them, including art investment funds, art advisors, auction houses and white-cube galleries. Rapid market growth and new buyers, brokers and artists are understood to encourage local and global investor speculation, leading to price volatility, which is detrimental to art’s longevity. This discourse of emergence constitutes these art worlds in terms of potential, especially potential capital. Emerging art worlds also index artistic production from places less traditionally associated with contemporary art, often in the global South. In this regard, ‘emerging art’ facilitates the rise of what art historians term global art—the decentring of hegemonic Euro-American norms, histories and aesthetics in favour of a recognised plurality of local art histories and practices.

Mansha’s narrative dovetails with this global discourse insofar as both cast India’s emerging art worlds as embryonic and not yet fully realised. Her example also diverges, instead foregrounding the individual, agentive and eclectic practices underlying art world emergence. Indeed, despite ‘emerging art worlds’ being an apparently self-evident

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3. The term ‘art world’, used throughout this paper, encapsulates all processes related to making art happen: conception, execution, dissemination, reception and critique. It also refers to the ‘co-operative networks’ through which art is done, including the actors, their social networks, the art market where art is priced and exchanged, as well as art scenes, the spaces where art world relationships unfold. See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); and Elizabeth Currid, *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art and Music Drive New York City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

4. Neha Kirpal, ‘India Art Fair’, *ArtTactic* (21 Jan. 2015) [http://www.arttactic.com/podcasts/emerging-art-market-series.html, accessed 22 Dec. 2015]; and I. Robertson, *A New Art from Emerging Markets* (London: Lund Humphries, 2011).

5. Thierry Ehrmann, ‘Contemporary Art Market: The Artprice Annual Report’, *ArtPrice* (2013) [http://imgpublic.artprice.com/pdf/artprice-contemporary-2012-2013-en.pdf, accessed 22 Dec. 2015]; Olav Velthuis and Stefano Baia Curioni (eds), *Cosmopolitan Canvases: The Globalization of Markets for Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Anders Petterson, ‘Booming Art Markets’, *The Telegraph* (20 June 2014) [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/culture/barnleys-auctions/10915104/Booming-art-markets.html, accessed 5 Dec. 2015].

6. Hans Belting, ‘Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate’, in H. Belting et al. (eds), *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets and Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), pp. 39—73.
category, we do not know much about how art worlds emerge. What does this process look like on the ground, and how do actors with stakes in the art world experience emergence? I explore these questions here, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Mumbai art world between 2012 and 2014. This involved interviews with gallerists, artists, curators and critics and participant observation in galleries and related spaces. The article first examines how Mumbai art professionals conceive and represent their world, contextualising these views historically and in relation to market transformations. Thereafter, I examine how gallerists and artists respond to what they see as transient art world conditions through what I describe as *makeshift practices* in two sites: a cluster of private galleries in the arts hub in Colaba, South Mumbai; and an artist-run alternative space in Borivali, a northern suburb. I suggest that makeshift practices are necessary remedies for perceived inadequate art world conditions; are *ad hoc* and provisional; and constitute the productive making of the art world. The messy, unfinished practices by which the Mumbai art world is emerging suggest that art worlds are perpetually incomplete and in-process.

### Articulating Art Worlds in Mumbai and India

Emergence signals newness and ongoing evolution. Commentators remark on the Indian art world’s still ‘amorphous shape’;7 that the national market’s ‘emergence’ indicates the ‘potential of art blossoming into an asset’;8 and that the coming years will bring a ‘natural burgeoning audience who will appreciate art’ in India.9 Such statements echo Mansha’s sentiments, yet are misleading, given that Indian art is hardly new. If the contemporary Indian art world is characterised by change and shifting terrains, how can we delineate it? At its most basic, the art world is the context in which artworks are produced, and the rationales and labour that enable their very definition and validation as art.10 Art is thus social; what can and cannot be art is subjective and contingent. Sociologically speaking, art worlds are routinised patterns of collective activity through which art ‘happens’.11 The individual artist’s symbolic primacy aside, art is a fundamentally collective process. It unfolds through spatially and temporally defined ‘co-operative networks’ that have highly specialised divisions of labour (from manufacturing paints to installing works to selling artworks in a gallery or reviewing an exhibition).12

In the Indian context, varied histories challenge any static definition of national art. ‘Art’ and ‘artist’ emerged in their modern form in the mid nineteenth century, and became the object of British colonial redefinition, patronage and intervention.13 In the colonial period, art worlds grew in cities like Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay (now Mumbai). The British fostered the Westernisation of Indian aesthetics, privileging naturalistic academic Company painting; they set up art schools in the 1850s, including

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7. Zeenat Nagree, ‘Outside In & Inside Out’, in *ARTindia*, Vol. XVII, no. 3 (2013), p. 98.
8. Manoj Nair, ‘Art as an Investment: Fear of the Faithless’, in *Art&Deal*, Vol. 8, no. 21 (Sept. 2012), p. 23.
9. Tanya Abraham, ‘Marching Forward—Galleries and Their Plans’, in *Art&Deal*, Vol. 8, no. 21 (Sept. 2012), p. 41.
10. Arthur Danto, ‘The Artworld’, in *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, no. 19 (Oct. 1964), pp. 571—84.
11. Becker, *Art Worlds*.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
13. Earlier, art patronage had centred round regional royal courts, with painters belonging to certain communities, but these declined in the late eighteenth century. See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New ‘Indian’ Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, 1850—1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
the Sir J.J. School of Art in Bombay in 1857 to ‘properly’ train indigenous artists in these traditions. These schools and related colonial art spaces helped establish the artist as having a chosen profession, informed by romantic notions of ‘artistic individualism’, rather than holding an inherited position as a courtly ‘artist-craftsman’. In Bombay the art school cultivated the elite gentleman artist. Simultaneously, expanding city-based art producers and technologies, like lithography and printing, fostered a market for both wealthy European and Indian patrons and for mass-produced ‘bazaar art’.

The art world evolved in Mumbai in the late 1930s and early 1940s, led by three refugees from Germany and Austria, Rudolph van Leyden, Walter Langhammer and Emmanuel Schlesinger, respectively a critic, artist and art collector. Reaching out beyond the colonial ‘White Town’ of wealthy South Mumbai, they patronised local artists and created new spaces, like salons, for the display and discussion of modern Indian art outside institutions like the art school and the Bombay Art Society (est. 1890). As important patrons of painters such as K.H. Ara and S.H. Raza, they helped bring together the noted Bombay Progressives Group, expanding the art scene beyond European and Indian society painters, who were primarily the ‘bored wives of colonial officers or the idle rich’. These developments illuminate some of the Indian art worlds’ co-operative networks: links between institutions, professions and spaces.

Several of the nation’s few public art museums were established after Independence in 1947, including the Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai (1952) and the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in Delhi (1954). In India, modern art was simultaneously informed by universalising avant-garde concerns and anxieties about national identity. Painters had to navigate this ‘modern Indian paradox’: the competing, contradictory demands to embody both a timeless, culturalised Indian-ness and a modern universalist identity. After the 1980s, questions about national identity and cultural particularity, while remaining unresolved and not disappearing altogether, became less relevant as the national economy, as well as confidence and recognition on the global stage, grew.

Among those I spoke with in Mumbai, however, Indian art was often seen to have been neglected between the 1950s and the 1990s. Many described how the stars of the art world began their careers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, artists like Atul and Anju Dodiya, Sudarshan Shetty, Subodh Gupta and Bose Krishnamachari. Meanwhile, post-Independence initiatives like the NGMA, while progressive at the outset, soon became about preserving national, pre-colonial pasts rather than fostering new cultural production.

14. Art schools were set up in Calcutta, Lahore, Bombay and Madras (now Chennai). Ibid., p. 64.
15. Partha Mitter, ‘Indian Artists in the Colonial Period: The Case of Bombay’, in Gayatri Sinha (ed.), Art and Visual Culture in India 1857–2007 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009), pp. 24, 30.
16. Ibid., p. 28.
17. Guha-Thakurta, The Making of a New ‘Indian’ Art.
18. Karin Zitzewitz, The Art of Secularism: The Cultural Politics of Modernist Art in Contemporary India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 78.
19. Ibid., p. 81.
20. The Jehangir Art Gallery is run by a private trust, the Bombay Art Society, but is Mumbai’s best-known gallery. Unlike other private galleries, it is easily accessible to the public, has a higher footfall, and a mixed clientele. Two other city museums, the Bhau Daji Lad Museum and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, have historical and cultural exhibits, but show limited amounts of contemporary and/or modern artworks.
21. The NGMA has had an outpost in Mumbai since 1996.
22. Geeta Kapur, When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000).
23. Rebecca Brown, Art for a Modern India, 1947–1980 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
24. Kavita Singh, ‘A History of Now’, in ARTIndia, Vol. XV, no. 1 (2010), pp. 26–33.
Studies of India’s art world end their investigations at the 1980s, suggesting that it changed radically after this.25

Despite the long history of art worlds in India, many art insiders in Mumbai perceive their world to be something new, articulating little connection with the past. When those in Mumbai insisted that the Indian art world was still ‘new’, this perhaps indexed not so much that there was nothing before the recent past, but rather that the present was constitutionally different from what had existed before.

India’s art world is part of the post-liberalisation story of a globalising art market, with new actors and art circuits.26 The national art market began to grow in the 1990s, displacing earlier motivating concerns such as modernity and national identity. At the same time, more money in the art world enabled new art infrastructure to develop. A growing middle class with an increased disposable income has stimulated new status consciousness enacted through aspirational and conspicuous consumption.27 However, although considered a luxury commodity, prices for Indian art vary considerably, making it widely accessible to a range of people beyond the rich, ‘High Net Worth Individuals’ often cited as the key group driving emerging art markets.28 Reflecting global trends, Indian artworks have also become investment goods, reflecting art’s unprecedented financialisation in the twenty-first century.29 In Mumbai, this shift is commonly described as being from earlier established collectors, who bought art out of passion and interest, to newer, investment-oriented buyers.30

Catering to rising demand, the first auctions of Indian contemporary and modern art were held in 1988 and 1992 in Delhi. The auction houses Christie’s and Sotheby’s each held annual auctions devoted exclusively to Indian art in London and New York from 1995 onwards,31 reflecting the growing number of buyers of Indian art who were Non-Resident Indians.32 The wealthy in India began purchasing art from the 2000s, and tended to buy only Indian artists.33 The topography of India’s art world changed swiftly after this. The number of private galleries multiplied, with around fifty each in Mumbai and

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25. See Brown, Art for a Modern India; and Zitzewitz, The Art of Secularism.
26. See Ranjit Hoskote, ‘The Age of Shape Shifters’, Livemint (25 Dec. 2009) [http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/9tUSBRn3hlGBMEZUuF1IFP/The-age-of-shape-shifters.html, accessed 22 Dec. 2015]; and Manuela Ciotti, ‘Post-Colonial Renaissance: “Indianness”, Contemporary Art and the Market in the Age of Neoliberal Capital’, in Third World Quarterly, Vol. 33, no. 4 (2012), p. 638.
27. Leela Fernandes, India’s New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Nita Mathur, ‘Shopping Malls, Credit Cards and Global Brands: Consumer Culture and Lifestyle of India’s New Middle Class’, in South Asia Research, Vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 211–31.
28. For example, at the India Art Fair in Delhi in 2013, works generally ranged between US$3,500 and US$10,000, but did go as low as US$60 and as high as US$500,000. Filip Vermeulen, ‘The India Art Fair and the Market for Visual Arts in the Global South’, in Olav Velthuis and Stefano Baia Curioni (eds), Cosmopolitan Canvases: The Globalization of Markets for Contemporary Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 42–3.
29. Olav Velthuis and Erica Coslor, ‘The Financialization of Art’, in Karin Cetina and Alex Preda (eds), The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 471–87; and Noah Horowitz, Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).
30. See also A. Lokhandwala, ‘Treading with Caution? Art Markets in Uncertain Times’, in TAKE on Art, Vol. 2, no. 6 (2011), pp. 20–2.
31. A. Kazmin, ‘Christie’s Takes Maiden Art Auction to Mumbai’, Financial Times (16 Dec. 2013) [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8fd9a3d4-6609-11e3-a27d-00144f0abdc0.html#slide0, accessed 20 May 2014]; and Lain Robertson, Victoria Tseng and Sonal Singh, “Chindia” as Art Market Opportunity, in Lain Robertson and Derrick Chong (eds), The Art Business (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 82–96.
32. Robertson, Tseng and Singh, “Chindia” as Art Market Opportunity’, p. 91.
33. The collectors I met told me they only bought Indian art; nearly all Mumbai galleries showcase Indian art exclusively.
Delhi by 2012. In Mumbai in 2014, fourteen out of the nineteen top galleries opened in the 1990s or 2000s, and another three were operational around the market peak in 2005–08. Ancillary art businesses also emerged in this period: two Mumbai-based auction houses, Osian’s and Saffronart, began in 2000; art consultancies and independent advisors set up shop; India’s first international art fair, held annually, began in 2008; and art investment funds were established. In 2005, the auction sale of the painting Mahishasura by Tyeb Mehta for more than a million dollars signalled the start of an art market ‘boom’ that lasted until the global financial crisis of 2008.

In Mumbai, then, the art world has changed rapidly, fuelled by new capital and increased linkages with global networks. The art world is now more institutionalised around private galleries and art businesses, and around certain events, organisations and spaces. There is a denser ‘atmosphere of artistic theory’, marked by commonly shared ideas about what art should be, and more established channels for making art ‘happen’. Yet, it is difficult to assess the long-term effects of these changes given that they are germinal and ongoing. While there has been some market recovery since the recession, these fluctuations highlighted for insiders the youthfulness of the Indian art world, and its unstable and shifting boundaries, actors and conventions. Alongside critiques of over-commercialism and financial greed during the ‘boom’, insiders agreed that this period also brought unprecedented and welcome international attention to Indian art and artists.

In my introduction, Mansha described emerging art world conditions in terms of insufficient infrastructure and resources, art ‘mediocrity’, and ongoing evolution. Such evaluations relativise the Mumbai and Indian contexts vis-à-vis ‘better’, more ‘properly functioning’ art worlds. Harsha, a curator in his early thirties who runs a non-profit art space in South Mumbai, expressed this sense of the Mumbai art world as under construction and so ‘not working properly’. One afternoon, I accompanied him on an errand at the NGMA. A public institution, it shows some modern (but not contemporary) art and often has historical and cultural exhibits as well. Harsha wanted to organise an event with the NGMA and left me by the exhibition area while he went to meet the management. Several minutes later, he rushed out, calling to me curtly, ‘Come on, let’s go’. We left the museum in silence. Once on the curb, he said:

I hate this kind of fucking bullshit. See, this is typical… I went back there, and there are these two women, these Dutch women, saying, ‘We would love to do this and this with you, exchange with the Netherlands, blah blah’, and the whole time I am just standing there. He knows that I am there but he makes me wait, he doesn’t care. And then, when he finally talks

34. Christine Ithurbide, ‘Marché de l’art contemporain indien: Territoires et réseaux en construction’, in Transcontinentales, Vol. 12/13 (2012), document 6 [http://transcontinentales.revues.org/1347, accessed 22 Dec. 2015], p. 3. Gallery numbers are difficult to assess definitively, both because of high turnover and of varying definitions of what constitutes a gallery (some businesses are geared to decorative art for interiors, for instance, while others feature avant-garde art). For a thorough mapping of Mumbai’s contemporary art institutional landscape, see Christine Ithurbide, ‘Beyond Bombay Art District: Reorganization of Art Production into a Polycentric Territory at Metropolitan Scale’, in Belgeo, Vol. 3 (2014), pp. 1–16 [http://belgeo.revues.org/13199, accessed 27 Dec. 2015].
35. See Olga Kanzaki Souodi, ‘Art Patron as Taste Scapegoat? Complicity and Disavowal in the Mumbai Contemporary Art World’, in Ethnofor, Vol. 24, no. 2 (2012), pp. 123–43.
36. Danto, ‘The Artworld’, p. 580.
37. Becker, Art Worlds.
38. See Anders Petterson, ‘Indian Art Market Confidence Survey’, ArtTactic (Sept. 2015) [http://www.arttactic.com/market-analysis/art-markets/indian-art-market/722-indian-art-market-confidence-survey-september-2015.html, accessed 3 Jan. 2016].
to me, he’s like, ‘No’. He won’t even talk to me… but with these foreigners, he’s all smiles and like okay, okay, okay. This is how things work in India!

Harsha crossed the street, his feet as fast as his words. Afternoon was fading into twilight, and he stopped at a tobacco stand and purchased a single cigarette and lit it with a lighter hanging from a string. Pausing to exhale a stream of smoke, he continued: ‘They judge you. They just judge you. They don’t care about the work; he just sees me, and already he knows he’s not going to give me the time of day’. Harsha was university-educated, fluent in English, and upper-middle-class; had he been of a lower class or caste background, he said: ‘Can you imagine, they wouldn’t even look at you’. Such an interaction, where one would be ignored and dismissed because of one’s background and appearance, would never happen in a similar institution in Europe, he told me.

Harsha’s story suggests how those in Mumbai understood their art world to be different from established art worlds in places like New York, Berlin, London or Paris. Elsewhere, Harsha and his peers said, professionals like gallerists, artists, curators and critics were committed to producing and promoting the best art. There was extensive government funding, ample infrastructure like national art museums, and art appreciation among the public. Nor would art’s stewards allow other motivations such as social discrimination or material greed to impede the best art production.

By articulating the Indian context in contrast to places elsewhere, Harsha, Mansha and others in Mumbai inadvertently reproduced sociological, idealised models of art worlds, rather than realities. Art is supposed to happen via relatively stable patterns of activity and shared norms—about art vocabularies, genres and materials, ideas about what constitutes good art, and professional roles. In art worlds’ ‘civic order’, there are ‘some rules to the game [everyone is] playing’. Yet, in Mumbai, these rules were not commonly followed. When he acted through his co-operative network to collaborate with another gallery, as if to reaffirm shared norms, Harsha was unsurprised yet very dissatisfied by the rebuff he received at the NGMA of fines. If it is through standardisation and shared norms that art is able to be recognised as such, as something with special social status, the failure to achieve standardisation of conventions in the Mumbai art world seemed to compromise its ability to make art happen.

Pierre Bourdieu elaborates this idea that there are rules to the game one is playing in his influential work on individual and institutional behaviour in cultural economies. Successful actors in the artistic field such as dealers and galleries must systematically downplay or disavow economic interest, instead articulating an ideology of art for art’s sake in professional performances and exchanges. In so doing, actors accrue symbolic capital—that is, a good reputation—in the art world, thereby boosting their status in the long run. Harsha saw his professional encounter with the NGMA as being dominated by considerations of status, power and inequality that outweighed those of art promotion. This

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39. For instance, national museum collections are a benchmark of the best and most culturally-valuable art in the Euro-American context. See Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
40. Becker, *Art Worlds*.
41. Ibid., p. 5.
42. Ibid., pp. 28–30.
43. Pierre Bourdieu (Richard Nice, trans.), *The Logic of Practice* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge/Oxford: Polity Press, 1993).
44. Bourdieu’s ‘artistic field’ is analogous to my use of the term ‘art world’.
is similar to widespread accounts of financial wrongdoing in 2005–08, with unsavoury new investors and some art professionals acting unethically. Galleries and dealers were accused of price-rigging at auctions; some artists were said to have overproduced mediocre artworks; and those without the ‘right’ intentions—who sought profit, not the good of art—or the proper credentials were said to have entered the art world as gallery owners or collectors.45

Conventions and rules thus enable art world coherence and function. The desire to constitute and defend art as something special to a society is paramount in an art world. In Mumbai, insiders considered such values important, but regarded their milieu as different. They reproduced a Eurocentric model of how an art world was supposed to work, displacing it outside India. Vis-à-vis the West, the Mumbai art context was evaluated negatively in terms of lack and unevenness. At the same time, people described it as an in-between state in a kind of evolutionary process: there was an art world in Mumbai, but it was not yet fully realised. Actors there reflected upon their everyday context in relation to the global context, even if the local was seen to limit their capacity to fully participate in the global.

So how did people make art happen under such conditions? In anthropology, rule-governed behaviour is commonly opposed to practice, yet the latter can complicate the former because individuals relate in contradictory ways to rules and norms, relying on them both for legitimation of their creative practices and subverting them in order to create new forms.46 Closer attention to practices will illuminate how Mumbai art insiders made art happen under conditions in which rules and standards mattered, but were unevenly shared and changeable.

Doing Makeshift in the South Mumbai Gallery Scene

On a balmy Thursday evening in February 2014, the galleries on Arthur Bunder Road, a short street in South Mumbai a stone’s throw from the Gateway of India, stayed open late. This small thoroughfare in the Colaba neighbourhood is the heart of the city’s contemporary art scene and is comprised of private galleries. Nothing at street level indicates the galleries’ presence, however: Muslim vendors sell cigarettes, sandals and costume jewellery from stalls, gazing indifferently at passers-by; several stores sell perfumed oils, or offer bespoke clothing services, displaying bright fabrics studded with sequins and rhinestones next to sample outfits to Indian and African clients who walk in and out of the establishments; alongside these shops are a couple of cafes and an Italian restaurant. Nevertheless, six galleries occupy the second or third floors of the long block of buildings. On close inspection, small signs indicating the galleries are visible amongst the jumbles of other signage and electricity wires. Up darkened flights of stairs, galleries lie behind tall heavy doors, buffered by intercoms. Even during opening hours, visitors are often buzzed in and visible via security cameras. Such spatial barriers obscure the visibility of the art

45. See Sooudi, ‘Art Patron as Taste Scapegoat?’, and Nisha Susan, ‘The Mismanagement of Neville Tuli’, in Tehelka, Vol. 7, no. 22 (5 June 2010) [http://www.tehelka.com/2010/06/the-mismanagement-of-neville-tuli/, accessed 22 Dec. 2015].
46. Eitan Wilf, School for Cool: The Academic Jazz Program and the Paradox of Institutionalized Creativity (London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 19–20.
world and deter greater public visits. Undemocratic access is one way the layout of these galleries might be interpreted. It might also be read as a visible expression of the Mumbai art world’s *makeshift* qualities: galleries cluster on Arthur Bunder Road less by design than as a way of ‘making do’. Galleries constitute only one subset of the institutions and groups that occupy the area, by no means dominating it.

I propose that the notion of *makeshift* offers a productive way to conceptualise the negotiation of emerging conditions by art world actors. *Makeshift* is that which serves as a ‘temporary substitute’ or an interim measure:″ such things and practices are impermanent and unsystematic—they are a kind of ‘making do’ until a more lasting arrangement, an enduring state of things, is achieved. The term allows us to emphasise the pervasive sense among art insiders of their world as unfinished, incomplete and provisional. At the same time, *makeshift* refers to the making of ‘theatres of improvisation’ in order to compensate for and reinvent adverse conditions, thereby emphasising the agency and creativity inherent in such practices. With this framing, I avoid the tropes of deficiency or underdevelopment often used to describe emerging art worlds by the media and art professionals. *Makeshift* highlights the adaptation and improvisation through which actors respond to conditions not of their own making, and over which they feel they have little control, such as the lack of infrastructure and form.

I first visited Kush’s gallery that evening. He evinced this sense of makeshift-ness as he described how galleries came to be concentrated in Colaba. Kush told me that when he opened his gallery in 2003, after working for an auction house, ‘Anyone with even the least business sense could see the opportunity in art here [in India]”. One of the neighbouring galleries had been established in 1997, while another five in the area dated from the 2000s. While market growth and international attention had brought some visibility as more galleries and upscale businesses (like a lifestyle store also on the road) came to the street, rents had risen precipitously. ‘We are a victim of our own success’, Kush said. Two galleries had recently closed due to financial constraints; a third prominent gallery was moving in because it could no longer afford its bigger, pricier space nearby. Every month, Kush said, it was a struggle to pay the rent.

Such difficulties are compounded as the Indian art market has not fully bounced back since the global recession of 2008, something almost every gallerist mentions. Kush describes the ongoing change in the art world. At an earlier moment, art was perceived as a good, even easy, business opportunity, but in 2014, the Colaba galleries were preoccupied not just with individual commercial viability, but with the question of how to collectively enact an art scene. Kush stated: ‘There are only a few of us; we realised that when competition gets rough, you can do one of two things. You can either tear each other apart, or you can help each other and come together. We decided to do the latter’. By locating themselves in the same strip, galleries hoped they would come to embody an ‘arts district’ by creating a density of presence. In the remainder of this section, I outline some

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47. *Makeshift* can be used as both a noun and an adjective. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2013) [http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/1126627isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=u7m7988, accessed 22 Dec. 2015].

48. Kim Hopper, Ezra Susser and Sarah Conover, ‘Economies of Makeshift: Deindustrialization and Homelessness in New York City’, in *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, Vol. 14, nos. 1—3: Declining Fortunes: Anthropological Perspectives on Deindustrialization (Spring/Summer/Fall 1985), p. 194.
of these galleries’ scene-building practices, and the possibilities and limits gallerists perceived in them.

The evening I visited Arthur Bunder Road was Art Night Thursday, an initiative by local galleries to increase foot traffic. On the third Thursday of each month, galleries stay open late—until 9:30 pm—so that more people can visit, hopefully after work. These evenings, advertised online and in city publications, were a kind of scene-building activity. Conceptually, a scene refers to the ‘range and configurations of expressive meanings evinced in various places…the locatedness of cultural life’. 49 To approach an urban space as a scene means to approach it as a consumer, rather than as a resident or worker. Unlike simple neighbourhoods or industrial sectors, in a scene, one can find others who share the same ‘dreams and ideals’ and forms of enjoyment, and have a certain kind of experience. A scene is a ‘distinct territory’ devoted to certain shared pleasures and ideals. Its success depends on how well these are enacted. 50

The imaginative and aspirational dimensions of scenes are articulated both spatially and socially, via specific neighbourhoods, particular places, certain kinds of people who frequent them, and the activities they engage in. 51 These generate symbolic meanings that delineate the type of experiences available, like the indie (independent) music scene, the fashion scene or, in Mumbai, the art scene. Although activities centre on particular groups, scenes are commonly public, (partially) open to passers-by, and have porous boundaries. 52 Furthermore, they unfold through face-to-face interactions in actual spaces such as the gallery, art spaces and adjacent ones that enable this sociality, like cafes, bars and restaurants. 53 Scenes thus constitute an important means by which an art world (re) produces itself, socially and spatially. To create Colaba as a happening place for art, one needed not only galleries, but a scene, involving a wider, more complex network of people and spaces.

The South Mumbai gallerists recognised the importance of this fundamentally spatialised and experiential aspect of scenes for enacting the Mumbai art world. This was evident in the composition of the Art Night Thursday visitors. After I left Kush’s gallery, I walked some metres down the road to another set of buildings, and up a staircase. As I entered one of the only Mumbai galleries that showed non-Indian art, I ran into a young artist from a local arts residency. Inside, I saw three other familiar faces—a curator and two artists. Besides these, there was a young foreign couple, backpackers. As well there was a very famous senior artist I had seen just the week before at another opening. A young gallery assistant was giving her a guided tour, explaining each artwork in detail. This quick snapshot shows how intimate and small the Mumbai art world is, and the challenges of increasing the number of visitors. People with similar interests congregated, but gallerists lamented that this group was far too small. Obvious commercial interest notwithstanding, galleries feel obliged to engage in such scene-building activities despite not generating any direct material benefit. Visitors during opening hours are rarely potential buyers gallerists

49. Daniel Silver and Terry Nichols Clark, ‘The Power of Scenes: Quantities of Amenities and Qualities of Places’, in Cultural Studies, Vol. 29, no. 3 (2015), p. 428.
50. Daniel Silver, Terry Nichols Clark and Lawrence Rothfield, ‘A Theory of Scenes: The Structure of Social Consumption’ (2007), pp. 8—9, unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago [https://sites.google.com/site/tncresearch/atheoryofsc enes, accessed 8 May 2015].
51. Silver and Clark, ‘The Power of Scenes’.
52. Ibid., p. 427.
53. Currid, The Warhol Economy.
told me, but, rather, ‘regular’ people who are interested in art. Nevertheless, by increasing footfall, galleries attempt to create a ‘buzz’ about art in Mumbai because the meanings of cultural goods are produced as much by social context as through the production process. ‘Buzz’ promotes art consumption through word of mouth and via the media and generates value, both aesthetically and financially.54

Alia, a gallerist in her late forties and one of Kush’s neighbours, explained how Mumbai’s ‘core galleries’, including her own, tried to generate buzz:

We came together last year (2012) and brainstormed. We were like, ‘Let’s make sure we’re visited, even if people don’t buy art’. So that’s how we came up with Art for Sunday, which shut down because there weren’t enough people, and Art Night Thursday…. It’s a loose association.

The late Thursday openings were just one of many initiatives taken by the group of local galleries. Others included a ‘Mumbai Gallery Weekend’ in the suburb of Bandra, a free monthly Mumbai Art Map listing current events and galleries, and regular talks by artists and intellectuals.

Why did the gallerists feel obliged to engage in these kinds of art world building activities that carried little immediate economic benefit? A few days earlier, I had met Shruti, another gallery owner and curator based on Arthur Bunder Road, in her small, white-walled space with a tiny back office. Shruti began her gallery in the 1990s when galleries were sparse in Mumbai. She then went to the United States for many years to do a PhD in art history, and had recently returned to Mumbai. Shruti re-opened her dormant gallery in 2012, not only as an art business, but as a research-led space for critical art practice and reflection. ‘In India’, she said, ‘we suffer from amnesia. We only know history because there is an archive. And in India, there is none. We’ve no museums! There is no government support for art’. Shruti’s lament was heard frequently among South Mumbai gallerists, curators, critics, art advisors and artists. How could one articulate and represent India’s art world when it deviated from Euro-American institutional models; when it lacked much of the infrastructure considered basic to art worlds; and, finally, when it had only nascent international recognition? How was one to make this art world and delineate one’s own professional role in Mumbai today?

Shruti continued to tell me about what was wrong in India: ‘We have no non-profit structure…. It’s not our [galleries’] responsibility to create the infrastructure needed to foster a healthy art world, you know? I mean, the non-profit sector’. It was the latter’s role, she felt, to lead and promote criticality in contemporary Indian art, not the ultimate financial interests of the private sector. She, therefore, saw her efforts as substituting for activities that ought to be performed by non-existent or currently insufficient institutions. Of her own practices, she said: ‘It’s good, but it’s not enough’.

This lament recalls an earlier moment when the nearby Kala Ghoda neighbourhood was designated an official arts district in 1998, due largely to the efforts of a middle-class citizenry that sought to create an urban district that catered to their own transnational, consumer-oriented aspirations.55 As had happened then, the creation of an arts district in

54. Elizabeth Currid and Sarah Williams, ‘The Geography of Buzz: Art, Culture and the Social Milieu in Los Angeles and New York’, in Journal of Economic Geography, Vol. 10, no. 3 (2010), pp. 423—4.
55. Andrew Harris, ‘Branding Urban Space: The Creation of Art Districts in Contemporary Mumbai and London’, unpublished dissertation, University College London (2006), pp. 301—10. Obtained from author.
Colaba was taking place through private initiatives. Despite its relatively recent development, those I met referred to Kala Ghoda and its galleries as the ‘traditional’ arts district, in contrast to the newer Colaba. Thus, Shruti struggled with how to increase her gallery’s financial ‘success quotient’ while retaining her criticality, factors that were both important. To address the need for more criticality in Indian art, she held several free public events at her gallery, including a lecture series and what she called a ‘research pod’, where people spent the night at the gallery while engaging in art discussions. Shruti’s perspectives reflected how many city gallerists perceived their position as being tugged between having a business identity and maintaining a role as a materially-disinterested art world builder.

Galleries are at the centre of the Mumbai scene for artists as well, who seek above all to be represented by one of them, to make a living, and to achieve artistic validation. There were few opportunities in Mumbai for artists to exhibit or achieve visibility outside the gallery circuit. Although galleries naturally seek to attract profitable, high-profile artists to their stables (one major Indian artist in his fifties described to me how ‘every gallery has one or max two milking cows’), they only more tentatively embraced their roles as central gatekeepers of the Mumbai art world. Most gallerists and those who worked with them stated that it was not their job to stage cultural events or promote art as a public good; nonetheless, they felt they had to do so in the absence of any other institutions.

Sangeeta, a curator working with local galleries, put it this way: ‘We don’t have validating institutions like in the West… the only validation art has is economic’. Not only did the market play an important role in determining the economic and cultural value of artworks, private galleries were the main art world gatekeeping institutions as well. In contrast to what had happened in the West, Sangeeta said, ‘everything in India happened backwards. Usually you have the museums first, and the art canon, but here, the market came first, and only after that are we defining what Indian art is’. Yet, as described above, Indian art worlds are not new. Rather, Sangeeta and Shruti articulate emergence as a new art world configuration, in which artworks, institutions, individuals, priorities and hierarchies are rearranged due to a heightened awareness of market demands and global art conventions. That these shifts are rearrangements, and not the sudden birth of an art world per se, is further illustrated in a study that found that ‘modern Indian art’ emerged as a classificatory category with consistent meaning in scholarship and auction catalogues only in the 1990s.56

Nevertheless, gallerists felt they were fighting an uphill battle because of inadequate public measures, so they had to engage in art world-making through a range of makeshift practices. First, they sought to build up the urban art scene by increasing foot traffic, by clustering an art world presence in particular neighbourhoods, by inciting buzz about art, and by increasing their visibility, but they did so in a very partial and informal fashion via sporadic events led by a few galleries. Second, they filled infrastructure voids by adopting primary gatekeeping roles, determining the benchmarks of Indian art in the absence of other major art institutions. Their practices were makeshift because they were understood as compulsory, yet improvised and interim efforts to produce the Mumbai art world until more lasting state-derived funding and institutions could be achieved, something they struggled to envision. In one interview, a collector opined that in Indian art, ‘reputations

56. Mukti Khaire and R. Daniel Wadhwani, ‘Changing Landscapes: The Construction of Meaning and Value in a New Market Category—Modern Indian Art’, in Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 53, no. 6 (2010), pp. 1281 – 304.
are built and destroyed instantly and what was, ...just until yesterday, considered avant-garde is banal today. Indeed, in Mumbai publications and media, the art scene achieved a fixity that was undone by reality. The constellation of galleries in South Mumbai was constantly in flux: over four fieldwork periods between 2012 and 2014, four galleries either moved or shut down within this small radius.

**Makeshift Practices in the Suburbs**

Several miles north to the seaside centre of the art scene in South Mumbai, a dozen or so young artists are gathered on the second floor of a white-walled bungalow in Borivali, a commuter suburb, on a Sunday afternoon. The bungalow sits atop a hill, above a national park, so the air is fresher than in the city. The doors to the spacious terrace are open, letting in the breeze and sunlight. An adopted stray cat and her kittens lap at a pan of milk on the bungalow’s stoop, and two dogs, also former strays, lol in the shade of the afternoon sun near piles of casually kicked-off sandals by the door. Two of the group of artists have just finished laying out their respective portfolios on the white marble floor: collections of several pieces of paper, of different types and sizes, some paintings, some pencil drawings; there are even portraits done in blue ballpoint on lined leaves from a notebook. The two young mustachioed men stand back, while others pace the room quietly, arms hugging their chests, looking at the works. Occasionally, someone kneels to pick up and closely inspect a piece. After several minutes, the sound of padding bare feet is broken by a man who asks one of the portfolio owners why his use of colour is so dark. ‘I can see a pattern in your themes’, he adds. Next, a woman comments in Marathi to the other artist exhibiting his work. Soon, the room is buzzing with conversation.

BOMU is the pseudonym for an artist-run space begun in 2012 by an artist couple in their thirties, Alok and Hema. Both are from Mumbai and professionally successful: their work sells and they show regularly in galleries, including internationally. Despite their own success in navigating India’s ‘gallery system’, at BOMU, Hema and Alok pursue different aims, engaging in their own makeshift art world building practices. In 2013 and 2014, I visited BOMU gatherings four times, following up separately with some of the artists later. Alok explained BOMU’s identity: ‘We are like a kind of parallel system. To the galleries, the art centres. If you’re not in the system, you almost don’t exist. There’s lots of names like that that don’t exist because they’re off the mainstream’. One of this ‘parallel system’s’ functions was pedagogical. Like many, Alok and Hema felt that Indian art colleges were too traditional, lacking resources and up-to-date teaching styles. Every Sunday, BOMU held ‘student reviews’, where two young artists studying at nearby colleges came to share their portfolios and receive feedback and critique from more senior artists as well as from other students. The gatherings were a kind of informal peer review to compensate for a perceived lack of mentorship at school. One student described his college as ‘a little outdated, the teachers really don’t care what we think or do’. College teachers were not necessarily practising artists, said Alok, which, combined with an antiquated

57. Alka Pande, ‘From the Medicis to the Maharajas: In Conversation with Nitin Bhayana’, in *TAKE on Art*, Vol. 2, no. 6 (2011), p. 61.
curriculum, meant that students had to find their own opportunities for exposure to recent, international and avant-garde art practices. Accordingly, students came for feedback and advice from currently-practising artists.

Furthermore, BOMU sought to build the Mumbai art world by changing its composition. Unlike the gallery-dominated art centre of South Mumbai, where English is the lingua franca and those working there are often from upper-middle-class backgrounds, much of the conversation at BOMU took place in Marathi. English was used for specialised art vocabulary like ‘residency’, ‘post-modernism’ or ‘practice’, and switched to Hindi when necessary to include non-Maharashtrian artists also present, many of them from Kerala or North India. By eschewing English in favour of a local language, BOMU was made accessible to a rather different pool of artists than the South Mumbai gallery area, thus drawing art world boundaries in new ways. For instance, Alok and Hema made it a point to reach out to students from Vasai, an art school located on the far periphery of the city whose students did not have the same access to shows, events and contacts in the city centre. BOMU’s Borivali location and affordable public transport made it easier for students to visit. To give a similar example, many events in the art scene’s South Mumbai centre occur in the evening, making it very difficult for young artists living in the more remote suburbs to attend because they would miss the last train home, leaving them stranded for the night. While I could afford a taxi to my home in the more central Bandra suburb if necessary, for those with a restricted income reliant on trains and buses, such simple structural limitations had significant ramifications for who could and could not participate in the Mumbai art world.

Tejal is a regular at BOMU. Lanky, with a pencil-thin moustache and always dressed in a T-shirt and shorts, 27-year-old Tejal graduated recently from the L.S. Raheja School of Art in the suburb of Bandra. He explained his introduction to BOMU: ‘When I finished college there was no way for me to expose (show) my work. So me and seven of my friends decided to make an open studio. And Hema came to it. And from there she asked me to come to BOMU and there it started’. He continued, faltering a bit: ‘I like meeting people, new mediums of art at BOMU…’. Like many artists there, Tejal did not speak English well: it was his third language. He switched to Marathi and another artist translated:

After passing out (graduating), he started visiting galleries and applying for scholarships. But there was a blockage where he couldn’t speak. Because he comes from a vernacular background. That’s resolved by himself since coming to BOMU and he’s applying to different things now (sic).

Several of the artists I met in Borivali related similar difficulties regarding self-presentation and communication in the Mumbai art world. Membership in art worlds is often mediated through forms of distinction, such as knowledge of art and art history, educational pedigree, appearance and style of speaking. In India, one curator told me, ‘Accessibility to contemporary art is shaped by caste, language, and class—many factors come into play’. Many of those who came to BOMU were disadvantaged in the South Mumbai art world because they lacked fluent English, a top art school pedigree or the right connections—in short, cultural and social capital. Another young man, Vishal, said that he

58. Paul DiMaggio and Michael Useem, ‘Social Class and Arts Consumption: The Origins and Consequences of Class Differences in Exposure to the Arts in America’, in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (1978), p. 153; and Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* (Cambridge/Oxford: Polity Press, 1991).
avoided approaching the private galleries with his portfolio because, like Tejal, he ‘[didn’t] know how to talk’ and being rejected repeatedly depressed him. Alok explained linguistic complexities in the Indian art world like this:

English has really become the mother tongue here. Because of that centre, people shy away from putting out their ideas in a certain way. We’re trying to figure out how those barriers can be broken down. The Chinese and Japanese [art worlds] have totally declined to use English. They’ve done this successfully. They are the only ones. That doesn’t work for an Indian.

Here, Alok was relating both the strong sense of marginality felt by non-English-speaking Indians and, especially, Maharashtrian artists of non-elite backgrounds, as well as the belief that such art world conventions were as yet open-ended and indeterminate in Mumbai. Language was merely one aspect of a larger problem. Artists also had to translate their work from the visual and artistic medium and communicate it to the world. Alok said: ‘One of the most important aspects of contemporary art is articulation. How to talk about it. You keep analysing it to yourself, again and again’. Learning to convey one’s ideas in English and using Eurocentric art historical and theoretical vocabularies was one part of ‘articulation’. Articulation also included the conceptualisation and packaging of one’s work in performance and self-presentation. Accordingly, BOMU’s founders provided both intellectual inspiration and practical advice—such as through workshops on writing artist residency applications.

Tejal, too, struggled with conceptualising his art practice, something that the artists told me was expected of them. Simmie, a twenty-year-old student, said: ‘We are always being asked, what is your issue, what is your issue? So you have to have an issue, something you are researching’. Her friend added: ‘You can’t just make art. It has to be about something’, referring to how contemporary art practice is analogous to academic research because it is an exploration of larger political or social themes. Despite this being a professional prerequisite, the students received no training in it at school, and claiming to research an ‘issue’ was hardly natural to them. Both Tejal and Simmie were from Mumbai’s indigenous Kolis community, whose traditional occupation was fishing. From fisherman families, they explained how the decline in ocean fish supplies was pushing many of their kin to look for work outside the village. In college, Tejal had only ever thought about ‘drawing and painting’: ‘There were many limitations before. [At BOMU] I started thinking differently, I learned about research-based works. About public art, site-specific art, anthropology!’ He gestured towards me. ‘All these things help my work. The possibilities and ways of making art changed for me’. Inspired by the Sunday student reviews and public talks BOMU held, Tejal decided to research Indian fishing implements and changing state policy regarding nearby fishing areas.

In this way, BOMU created opportunities for those who would otherwise be marginalised in the Mumbai art world because of their caste, language or class background. However, Alok and Hema did not perceive BOMU as being in opposition to the gallery scene. Feelings of exclusion notwithstanding, artists’ careers depended on the galleries, so Alok and Hema felt it was necessary to acknowledge their importance and to teach artists how to navigate these institutions successfully.

According to Alok, the Indian art world was comprised of ‘failing institutions’, ranging from an antiquated education system to limited art world infrastructure to lack of
government support, views similar to Mansha’s. ‘These failing institutions are not able to live up to your expectations. They expect you to live up to them. They don’t need you to survive’, he told me. Even if the private galleries rendered art as a narrow, elitist and financially-driven terrain, the artist had to learn how to work on the galleries’ terms to succeed: ‘Though they are failing, they are not going to stop ruling you. So what are you going to do? Situations like this should arise. There is no need to rebel. No matter what, you can’t change the rules’.

Alok and Hema were not professionally-trained teachers; what they did at BOMU was bricolage, creatively improvising activities and resources from what was already available to them. The bricoleur’s creativity lies precisely in his or her ability to ‘make do with “whatever is at hand”’, improvising using a heterogeneous, yet limited, set of tools and materials. 59 For instance, both had had art residencies abroad, which gave them ideas on how to engage with students at BOMU, helped build networks on which they drew, and had provided experience in the international scene. Their residencies were also a material resource, allowing them to save money they then put into running BOMU. Like the Colaba galleries, BOMU was about building a scene, this one centred on artists. Alok and Hema used social media to attract participants, but also relied on word of mouth. In addition to the Sunday reviews for students, they invited guest speakers and held evening discussions on the challenges artists faced, such as how to reconcile art-making with pedagogy. These, too, had a makeshift quality, as the organisers invited not only art-related speakers, but also took advantage of visiting acquaintances like marine biologists or engineers, seeing them as sources of creative inspiration too. BOMU’s eclectic practices mixed necessity with aspiration and drew from diverse sources, illustrating how any social world is always in the act of becoming and is open-ended. 60 Analysing how social worlds come into being through the notion of emergence runs the risk of collapsing the distinctions between new infrastructure or technology, and the social relations that are remediated through them, thereby ideologically naturalising both. 61 Examining how new kinds of art world relations are made in spaces like BOMU enables us to avoid this, and allows us to see how the emergence of new art world spaces, relationships and mediators is predicated on individual agency and makeshift practices.

After the Sunday review sessions, the bungalow turned into a gathering space as artists living nearby mingled with students and out-of-town visitors, drinking and smoking late into the night on the terrace, eating potato chips and idli. Since the space was self-funded, visitors were asked to contribute money for food and drink via a small box and notepad for names passed around by one of the students. Like the Colaba gallerists, Alok and Hema saw their work as interim and improvised efforts under imperfect conditions. By helping artists master, not rebel against, the ‘rules of the game’, their attitudes reflected the power relations within which they existed vis-à-vis the South Mumbai art scene. At BOMU, young artists learned how to package and present themselves to local and international art world institutions—how to write residency applications, ‘articulate’ their art

59. Claude Lévi-Strauss (George Weidenfield and Nicolson Ltd, trans.), The Savage Mind (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 11.
60. Karen-Sue Taussig, Klaus Hoeyer and Stefan Helmrich, ‘The Anthropology of Potentiality in Biomedicine: An Introduction to Supplement 7’, in Current Anthropology, Vol. 54, no. 7 (Oct. 2013), p. 56.
61. William Mazzarella, ‘Beautiful Balloon: The Digital Divide and Charisma of New Media in India’, in American Ethnologist, Vol. 37, no. 4 (Nov. 2010), pp. 783—804.
practices, and use specialised English vocabulary. BOMU was also an aspirational ‘utopian kind of thing’, as Hema put it. It re-imagined the art world along less commercial, more democratic lines than what currently existed—lines of language, caste, community and class—and as artist, rather than gallery, dominated. Nevertheless, these future-oriented practices were intertwined with practical, present-oriented ones.

**Emergence as Practice**

What, then, do these two sites in Colaba and Borivali tell us about emerging art worlds? This article has shown how Mumbai art world actors understand their world in terms of insufficiency and lack of infrastructure and form, contrasting it with an ideal, ‘properly functioning’ art world in other countries. Despite Indian art worlds’ long history, artists, gallerists, curators and others felt that their world was new because much of the current art world had come into being following market growth in and after the 1990s. This new art world is a globalised one centred around the private sector, and insiders felt older institutions such as the art school or museum had failed to meet its needs.

In Colaba and Borivali, gallerists and artists enabled emergence by engaging in makeshift practices—what they saw as *ad hoc*, improvised, temporary measures. Although the gallery scene and BOMU seem to be completely different kinds of sites in terms of key actors, financial interests and location, art world-making happens in both. Makeshift practices such as the galleries’ efforts to build the scene via monthly events, publications and mutual collaboration have been productive, resulting in concrete new activities and brokers in the art world. Over time, an arts district had indeed ‘emerged’ through this heightened visibility. Similarly, at BOMU, artists created new spaces that offered pedagogical feedback to young artists, expanding their own roles to those of teachers and mentors, as well as mediators of information and resources between local artists and curators and the global art world. This was accomplished by helping people apply for international residencies, inviting foreign speakers, and having a resident artist. Through these makeshift practices, art world actors were able to enact, unevenly, an idealised art world in Mumbai. The world in which art was publicly supported and appreciated, in which people worked in art for the ‘right’ reasons, and where artistic creativity was nurtured, came into being, indeed, emerged, in moments like the Sunday review sessions at BOMU, or in the hubbub in the galleries on Art Night Thursdays.

Global discourses on emerging art worlds deem the latter important for the potential they embody—financial, artistic, creative—rather than for what they are in the present. Like an embryo, the emerging art world has potentiality; its future is already inherent, waiting to be realised without external intervention. What this article has shown is that emergence depends fundamentally on practice, and that art worlds emerge through insiders’ practices. In this sense, all art worlds are makeshift. For instance, while many I spoke with lamented that the Indian art world was too porous, letting in people who wanted only to speculate in art, or those who were not in art for art’s sake, allegations of speculation, fraud and price-fixing are rife in art worlds in Western Europe and the

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62. Tine M. Gammeltoft, ‘Potentiality and Human Temporality: Haunting Futures in Vietnamese Pregnancy Care’, in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 54, no. S7 (Oct. 2013), pp. S159–S171.
United States as well. Particularly in relation to transactions, insiders lament the art world’s longstanding opacity and resistance to regulatory oversight, in part because of the importance of personal relationships and closed-door transactions. As we have seen, art scenes also unfold through a mixed gathering of different individuals and kinds of institutions: both for and not for profit; artist or gallerist-led; and other ancillary cultural and consumption spaces in an urban locale. Thus, they are always contingent, unfolding through face to face interactions rather than uniform, overarching structures. This dimension, then, tempers the frequent statements by Mumbai art insiders (and the media) that culturalise emergence in developing art worlds, such as the assertion that this is merely an ‘Indian’ problem of failed infrastructure and post-colonial lag. An ethnographic focus on experience shows how we cannot understand emergence simply in terms of people’s subjugation to structural effects and unequal power relations. Instead, it illustrates how art worlds, like all social phenomena, are perpetually becoming and incomplete.

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63. Paul Ardenne and Michel Vale, ‘The Art Market in the 1980s’, in International Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 25, no. 2 (1995), pp. 100–28; and Sarah Thornton, ‘Top 10 Reasons NOT to Write about the Art Market’, in TAR, Issue 8 (2012), p. 82.
64. Velthuis and Coslor, ‘The Financialization of Art’, pp. 471–87; and Velthuis, Talking Prices.
65. See João Biehl and Peter Locke, ‘Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming’, in Current Anthropology, Vol. 51, no. 3 (2010), pp. 317–351.