

Artist Riyas Komu's football counterpoint

"Subrato to César", a mixed media exhibition in Mumbai, lures football fans onto the art field where they're likely to get hit by Komu's critique of the lamentable state of pro football in India

By Sita Wadhvani 24 June, 2010



COURTESY GALLERY MASKARA

This month I found the most interesting World Cup related event in Mumbai in the unlikelyst of places.

In Colaba's 3rd Pasta Lane, Kerala-born artist Riyas Komu teams up with gallerist Abhay Maskara to build an art exhibition at Gallery Maskara's big space over the duration of World Cup month. You may recognize Komu's football fascination from a series of portraits of Indian National Team soccer players he produced titled "Mark Him" in 2007, exhibited at The Guild in Mumbai. But in 2010, the "Subrato to César" exhibition takes him further, drawing Mumbai into football via art in a way that's never been done before. Playing with space within the gallery, the entire show comprises site specific sculptural installations (which includes a 32 feet long cement wall, 20 feet high and 12 inches thick), 11 photographs that Komu is sending from South Africa that will go up one by one starting Friday June 25, and the occasional live match screening on the gallery's unfinished walls.

Once you get past the spectacle of sport and notice the crumbling cement and predominance of iron Komu uses as a medium for the installations, you see a message that's hard to ignore, because it's a bit big -- in terms of size and as an issue.

The issue being not to neglect football stars in our backyards while we cheer on another country this World Cup. The Indian football team were at the art opening and it drove home the point.

Writes Manoj Nair in his exhibition note, "As you know we are about to enter a state of apoplexy. We will soon be mouthing nationalist slogans though we don't belong to any of the nations we will be shouting hoarse for...Don't you think then we should be inviting attention of those glued to the universal spectacle to our own backyard where some forlorn feet are kicking up dusts of despair as they push an iron ball around?"

"[W]e should ask what a football fan says about the self. Does it mean looking for a hero elsewhere while there are possibilities of having a homegrown one? It is true that our infectious interest is a reflection of our faux-cosmopolitanism as the game itself is so international. Ironically, we do that at the expense of our own local flavor...The World Cup is a dream. The banal bylanes back home is the reality."

<http://www.cnn.go.com/mumbai/life/subrato-cesar-274693>