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## Graffiti, but without any cuss and thrust

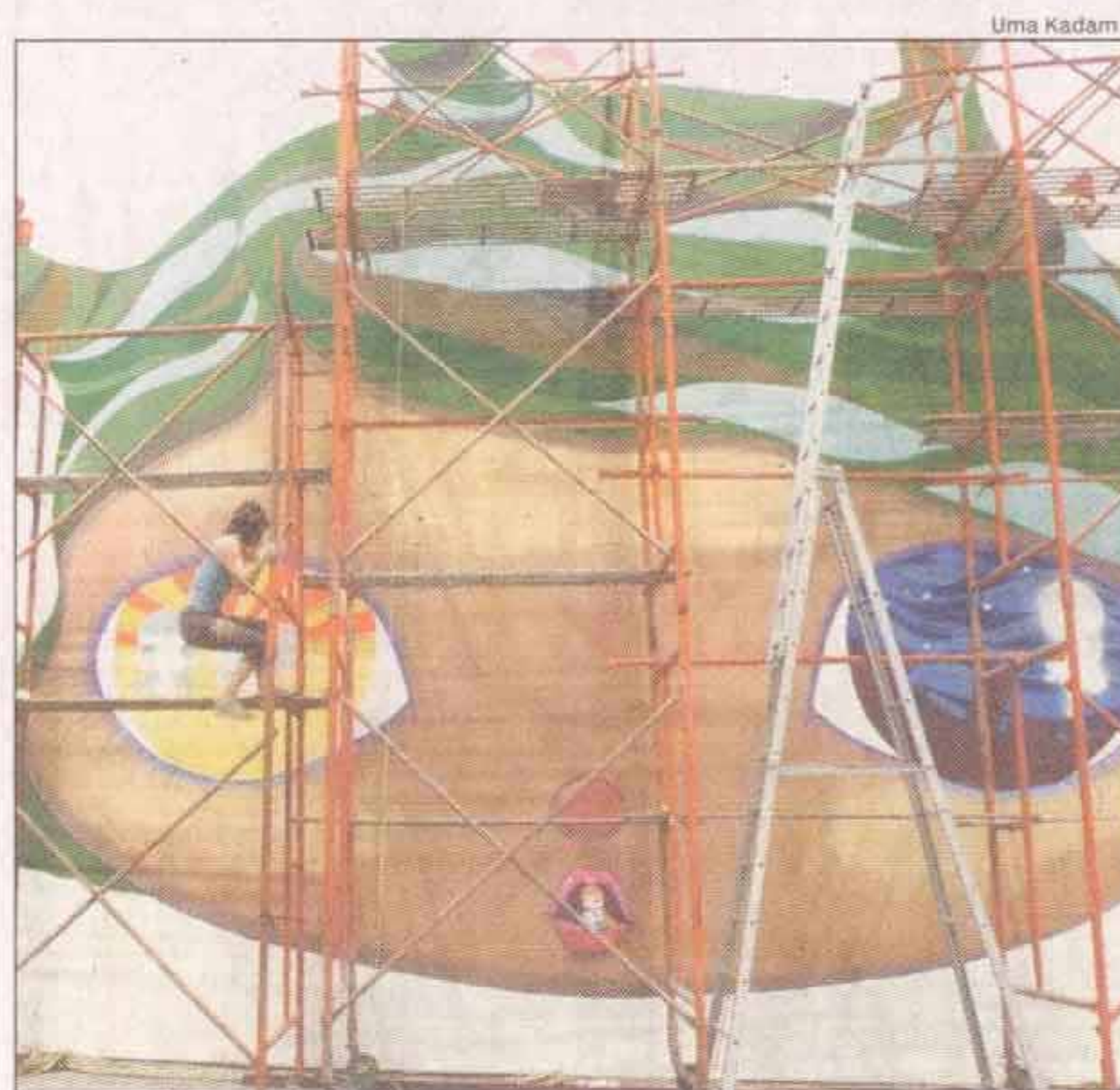
Pronoti Datta | TNN

**Mumbai:** A young, wide-eyed girl hanging upside down from the branch of a tree greets visitors of Gallery Maskara in Colaba. One hand waves while the other holds down the hem of her dress. More pretty, young girls with eyes like moons fill the gallery. They're the work of Brazilian graffiti artist Nina Pandolfo, whose solo show *Between Us* will be displayed in the gallery till December 31.

On one wall, which measures 100 feet in length and about 40 feet in height, is a gigantic face that took Pandolfo a week to complete along with an assistant. The earthy-complexioned face is framed by twisted, green branches that sprout strawberries. Her crowning flora is home to lit-

tle animals—a curled up cat sleeps at one end, a pink elephant dangles from branch by its trunk. The earth-child's eyes are studies of day and night. In her left eye are two nymphs framed by the rays of a rising sun while her right eye has a ghostly girl hovering about the dark skyline of a city. On the opposite wall, are four brightly coloured canvases with playful girls in pretty dresses.

The children, Pandolfo explains, signify simplicity and happiness, things people forget as they grow older. "When we are children, we want to be beautiful and play a lot," said the 31-year-old, who has been painting little girls since the time she was one. "As women, we forget about being happy." Reminiscent of female Japanese anime characters, the girls



Uma Kadam

**VISUAL DELIGHT:** Brazilian artist Nina Pandolfo's work is full of pink elephants and nymphs

embody the innocence and cheeriness of childhood but are also highly sensual. "When we're younger, we want to be older," Pandolfo explained. She tries to keep her figures ambiguous so that people could equally read innocence or sensuality in them. Though often, she said laughing, people are unnerved by the mildly adult quality of the children.

That's not the only reason the show might surprise many. For most, graffiti is about edgy n-type-faces shouting anti-establishment slogans, not nubile girls who look like they've stepped off the pages of children's colouring books. Graffiti is also usually associated with underground, street culture. Can it be called graffiti if it's being sold on canvases? Gallery owner Abhay Mas-

kara believes it can. "It's a medium of expression," he said. "Why should it be limited to trains and walls? It has legs that can go beyond." He cited the example of British graffiti artist Banksy who became famous for his gritty, satiric art that fetched thousands of pounds. Graffiti, Maskara, said is "also something you can take home and enjoy".

Highly detailed and joyously colourful, Pandolfo's work is fun to browse. A native of Sao Paulo, Pandolfo has been painting on the walls of her city since 1992. "The city is a big gallery," she said. Collectors of her works are often familiar with her art as they've seen it on walls scattered throughout Sao Paulo. On the other hand, Mumbai sorely lacks street art. All we

have are beanbag adverts and The Wall Project, a number of graffiti-filled walls in Bandra courtesy film-maker Dhanya Pilo and her friends.

However, more walls in the city will soon get makeovers by Pilo and company as organisers of festivals such as the Mumbai, Chembur and Bandra Festivals have invited them to participate by painting walls.

"The only need for the project is to let people know that anyone can contribute in any way to make the city nicer looking (and cleaner)," Pilo said. "The city is an open canvas, and also in need of a lot of colour and respect." Amen to that.

*(Between Us will show at Gallery Maskara at Third Pasta Lane, Colaba, till December 31)*