

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Theensex may have tanked and the markets may seem gloomy, but a local gallery is importing Brazilian ecstasy by the truckloads using a Sao Paulo-based street artist



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With the recession looming large over us, the buzzword is 'happy'. In keeping with the times, Gallery Maskara is hosting some Brazilian mirth to help us tide over the gloom. Sao Paulo-based graffiti artist, Nina Pandolfo seems fit for the job. Her sizably-more-than-doe-eyed protagonists should cheer you up. *Between Us* features a mammoth graffiti that is spread out against an entire wall of the titanic expanse of the gallery. Spread over 35 feet in height and 50 feet in breadth, it may seem that Nina Pandolfo is being a tad too gleeful about childhood, comics, animals, sunshine. But then again, she has good reason: the lady's from Brazil, a famously celebratory culture. She is also part of the group of artists who took graffiti from the streets and put it into museums and art galleries. Excerpts from an interview:

The whole point of street art or graffiti is that it subverts the idea of an art gallery. Do you find it self-defeating to present your work in an art gallery?

When you do street art, you are bringing the art gallery out to the street. People don't usually expect to see works in the course of a walk, en route to

shopping trips, coming back from school. In bringing graffiti to the gallery, it's a reversal of the same procedure. The street helps as in the ambience is set; the cars, the bystanders, the street itself all play part of the ambience. In a gallery, you isolate the work for what it is.

How did you start working with street art and graffiti?

My introduction to art was always rooted in democratic platforms. Well before I became a full-time artist, I was into street theatre. From a young age, I liked the idea of engaging the public in a direct manner. So while at 12 or 13 years of age, art in the traditional sense was my scene. As I grew older (may I say that?), I found myself moving towards graffiti.

The idea of graffiti itself is sketchy for many: it's squiggles on a wall, below bridges, inside grungy quarters: angst is the leitmotif. Your works are decidedly exuberant.

I know where you're coming from. I think India and Brazil are somewhat similar societies, and sometimes the popular consciousness processes graffiti through a very Americanised lens. Graffiti even to me at the start seemed to be squiggles on a wall, confined to a code, a cant trapped in words. I wanted to break the 'New York' mould

of what graffiti was perceived to be and depict shiny, happy people. As adults, we lose that crucial quality of pure happiness, of retaining positive imagery. We become closed as adults. I like my works to be a merry, fantastical ecosystem where the innocence or the memory of the inherent happiness we felt as kids is not tainted. For instance, there is no black in my works. Do you know that children never use black when painting? At best, for me, it's a dark blue that I employ if need be.

You've taken some good care to paint this huge work for the exhibition. How do you feel about your work being wiped out once the exhibition ends? If you have chocolate selectively, you'll savour its taste. If you were to live for two days, you'd go all out to absorb what life has to offer to you. If you were to live for 18 years more, you'd be like, 'ah, I'll do this tomorrow, or the day after.' The irony being that you won't do anything at all, because you'll take things for granted. When something is fleeting, ephemeral, it has meaning. You learn to cherish the happy, vanishing moment.

Between Us by Nina Pandolfo will exhibit at The Warehouse/Gallery Maskara, 3rd Pasta Lane, Colaba, from November 15.