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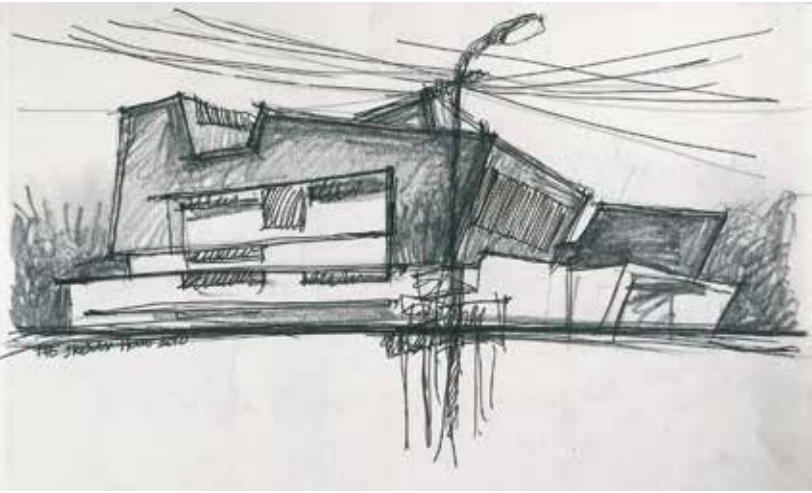


FREI OTTO (1925-2015)  
THE PRITZKER ARCHITECTURE  
PRIZE 2015

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Cover: Frei Otto passed away a few weeks ago, shortly after being awarded the 2015 Pritzker Architecture Prize, leaving behind a legacy of pioneering life-work in lightweight buildings. The cover is a dedication to the life and work of a master such as Frei Otto. Pictured here is his design of the roofing for the main sports facilities in the Munich Olympic Park for the 1972 Summer Olympics, 1968–1972, Munich, Germany, one of his seminal and path-breaking works.  
Photo © Christine Kanstinger  
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A sketch of the Skewed House in Palakkad, Kerala by LJO.RENYarchitects. The abstracted form may look chaotic, but was meant to reflect the chaos of the surroundings – the traffic, the noise, dust, heat, several cluttered signage, the kitsch-ridden surrounding architectural-scape, the chaos of the overhead electrical wires etc.

## DOES ARCHITECTURE MATTER? Kaiwan Mehta

Architecture practically shapes the man-made, physical world we live in, it probably constitutes the most material and most present of all things designed to provide for human life and sustenance on earth, yet, you rarely see architects as influential personalities within the sphere of culture or everyday politics. At times, architects are involved in committees set up by State administrative bodies, where they serve as experts on issues relating to planning or development. However, the question is about architects as active participants in everyday politics, through architecture, but beyond the job of an architect. This question that has always lingered around comes up again in the context of two things – firstly, recently architects have featured on covers of lifestyle magazines, posing as makers-and-shapers; well, within the profession, sure, some of them are so, but what kind of public figures are architects? How have architects shaped or influenced public imagination or cultural discourse? Some architects flashed on these magazine covers and hoardings have indeed fed into popular taste and created more of the same because it sells in a real-estate-driven economics of development, but that is a one-off case and so it does not even create an iota of debate or discussion in popular press. Secondly, a series of recent exhibitions on architecture through the works of exemplar architects from India – Charles Correa, Raj Rewal, and then B V Doshi – in India and abroad. These exhibitions, in some ways, brought architecture and the discourse around it in public sphere through the mode of the exhibition; however, that did not go a step further into opening up discussions in popular press or such other forums. At the recent India Art Festival in Mumbai, Ranjit Hoskote curated a series of conversations and panel discussions, and the theme this year was museums and the exhibitionary mode of practice and discourse – he, in fact, triggered the discussions by referencing A K Coomaraswamy's *Why exhibit works of art?* One of the panels in the series had four architects – Mustansir Dalvi, Smita Dalvi, Yaswantrao Pitkar, and myself – moderated by Ranjit Hoskote; the paper that Smita presented at that discussion she kindly converted to an essay for this issue, featured here with the title *Why exhibit architecture?* Architects have, for too long, loved being professionals with flair; some of them easily call themselves 'artists', and there are some no doubt who have actively contributed as educators and pedagogues or activists and writers or editors. But somewhere the struggle between the iconic and everyday has taken away from the architect being the everyday professional who through her/his work actively contributes to public life. This often comes up in discussions like why are we making bad buildings today? Or why is there no single iconic building in a city like Mumbai... and so on. Architect Charles Correa has pointed out how often bad cities are great places; architect Kamu Iyer has discussed how a city is about its fabric rather than one or many iconic structures. So it is indeed a struggle to resolve this question between the iconic and the everyday; and architects often get projects that are one building on one site, and so where is the scope of a larger influence, would be the question. As we struggle with these dilemmas, we have also forgotten the tenacity of what we call 'design' and the scope of this action

and practice. The exhibitions that one just mentioned above were surely opportunities for the professionals to ask questions and debate them, but also somewhere engage the public sphere in these debates. The large spread and intensity of work one studio-practice can do in a lifetime was strikingly remarkable and evident in these exhibitions. To not build up momentum around them through various seminars and symposiums was indeed a lost opportunity. There have also been exhibitions by architects, where essentially objects – left-overs and some obsessively created (trying to escape their nonsense-value by trying to call them art) from the studio – are dumped and piled up in a gallery space, and called an art-architecture exhibition. In such shows, which often feed on the exotica-quotient of objects from older buildings, or imagined lost practices and miniature models of the same, create an aura (hollow though) for themselves and the kind of practice they fetishise. Let us not count them for now, as a clear and strong critique of such activities will need more room. However, there are also architects who see their studio space as the ever-changing exhibition; while some have now started seeing the idea of an architect's lecture as an exhibition itself, presenting a lecture as an exhibition (we will be bringing to you more on this soon). And as we discuss more recent attempts at exhibitions in architecture, we should not forget *Vistara* or *The Architecture of India* exhibition for the Festival of India in France; it is only now that we are able to evaluate and measure of their influence, good and bad, misunderstandings and relevance, and we have already had some discussion on these in our earlier issues. At one point, forums such as the Urban Design Research Institute in Mumbai or SARAI in Delhi were active platforms for engaging with issues of public concern. The establishing of relationships and equations between the professional discourse and the everyday public sphere is somewhere important. One is reminded of figures like Mulk Raj Anand or Laurie Baker in these conversations. Mulk as a cultural figure, and as an editor, was influential in two new cities that independent and Modern India saw – Chandigarh and New Bombay/ Navi Mumbai. Laurie Baker, a slowly forgotten figure (and sadly so) connected the question of architecture to everyday life in a manner rarely done, and a way that is most important to understand as a methodology, as a design approach, rather than as a style of design or construction. A recent conference at the IES School of Architecture raised an important question – the space of design in peri-urban and rural India, an issue that was also taken up by the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services, India about two years ago (reported in detail in *Domus India* (15) February 2013). What happens to these discussions? Some of the experience-sharing at these conferences, and the practice-biographies that one is able to understand in the process is invaluable; so how do they feed into our education systems, or further the architect's engagement with public life? At one level, all the exhibitions on the masters were a collection of their monumental and iconic works, along with the more smaller projects too... and so on. But what these exhibitions surprise you with (not that you were not aware of it earlier, but just when an exhibition brings all together in a

curatorial conversation) is the intellectual life of architecture, its richness, its depth, its intensity, its struggles – and this we have yet not tapped in our understanding! The core questions we are yet not able to pick up – not those of form and function, or those of space and geometry, or space and time, but the question of design, of architecture itself, of life and space, memory and visuality, discourse and form. A recent show on exhibition at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai and the Max Mueller Bhavan, titled *In Order to Join: the Political in a Historical Moment* showcased the photographs of Mies' Barcelona Pavilion (reconstructed now) by Shelagh Keeley. A panel discussion between the artist Shelagh Keeley and myself, along with Ranjit Hoskote, brought forth various questions on the history of architecture's intellectual and received life, its staple ways of imagination and its after-life; a strong reference for us in this discussion was also Beatriz Colomina's recent text on the subject, *Manifesto Architecture: The Ghost of Mies*. This issue features Ranjit Hoskote's essay detailing the many chains of thoughts, that strike conversations as one witnesses the iconic pavilion in a set of images different than the ones they are habituated to seeing in books on history and theory of architecture. The artist's photographs create a fresh discourse not just about the historic icon but indeed about architecture per se, and this was something that beautifully emerged in the panel discussion - form, ornament and spatiality, drawings and photography, and so on. Then Ranjit Hoskote in his own way produces another biography, another journey of the work – Keeley's as well as Mies'. This, I would suggest, is the true strength of an exhibition as a discursive space; however, these topic would be more relevant within professional circles, but they had the strength to reformat working and thinking in architectural practice. The same exhibition invited me to present a talk with the reference of Robert Venturi and his iconic text – *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* – a project and work relevant to the time period and practices central to this exhibition. This trigger led to a presentation titled *The Ethics of Space and Design – Complexities and Contradictions* elaborating on the question of spatiality and the role of space and visuality in the way we act and behave as users of a city, and important subject especially when the city is being forced to change its avatar overnight; this would have been an occasion for a much larger public involvement in the discussion on space, urbanity, and change – which indeed it was – as evident from the discussion that followed the presentation. As a profession, we have largely missed both, understanding the intellectual life of architecture (within its production, and making, as well as in its after-life) and the public life of architecture. Architecture, indeed, does matter. We have to let go of the 'iconic' for sometime – iconic architecture, as well as the iconic architect. Only when we let go of these, will we give some time and space to architecture, and ourselves to be able to pick on, and explore, the tenacity of design in architecture, the breathing capacity of architecture, its sensibility to shape and act-within public life. **km**

CONFETTI

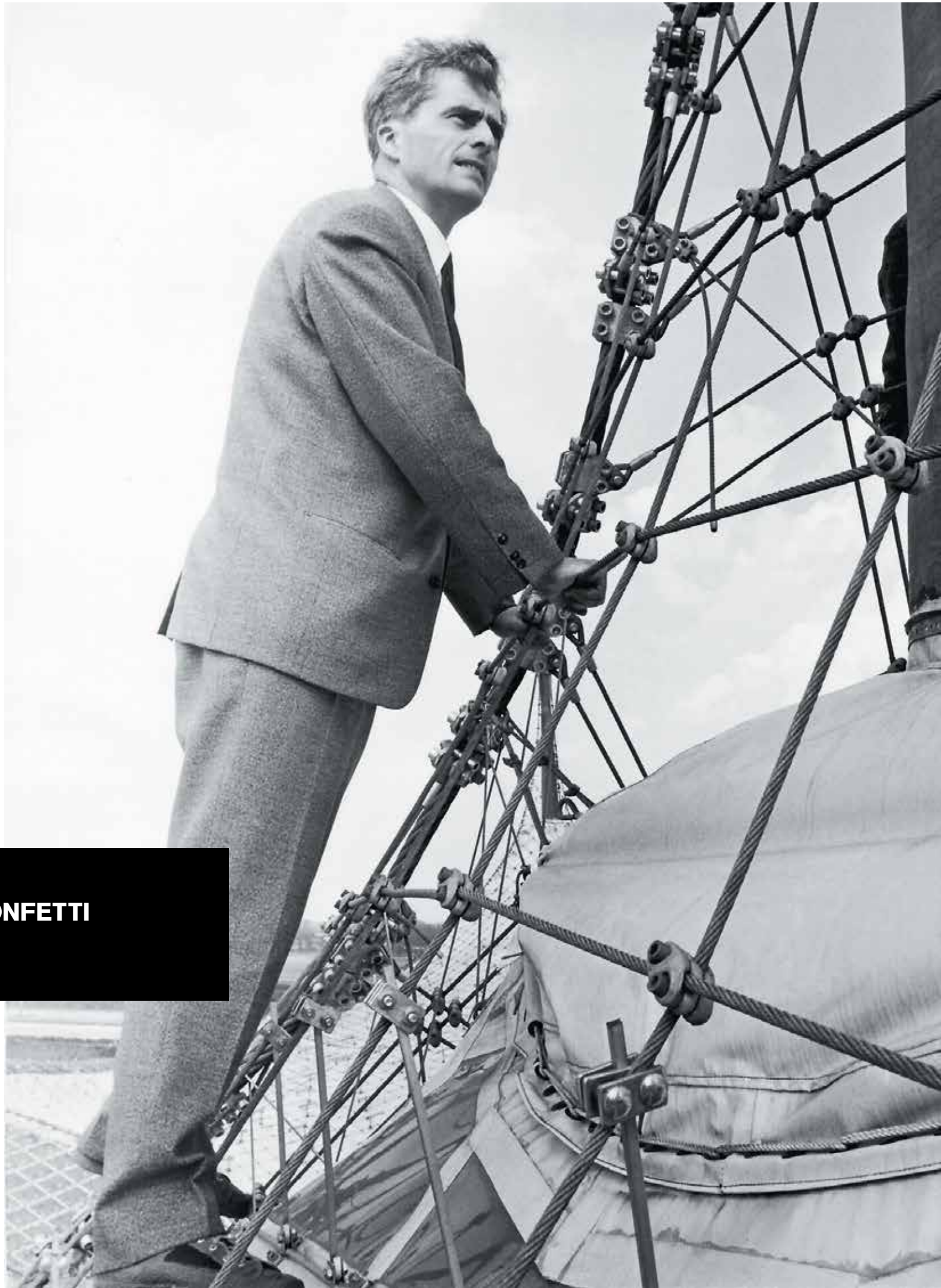


Photo © von Schlach

In this famed photograph of Frie Otto, taken while the Montreal Expo 1967 pavilion was under construction, he can be seen as the heroic architect-pioneer, invincible and accomplished, staring into an optimistic future. Frei Otto passed away a few weeks ago, shortly after being awarded the 2015 Pritzker Architecture Prize ©2015 The Pritzker Architecture Prize / The Hyatt Foundation

A STORYSEEKER'S GUIDE

A series of booklets aimed at enhancing cultural engagement with the city we call home, uses intricate watercolour illustrations, urban legends and eccentric stories to establish a renewed sense of wonder at the city, its museums, its landmarks and monuments, and the various other influences that have shaped its story so far

Sharmila Chakravorty



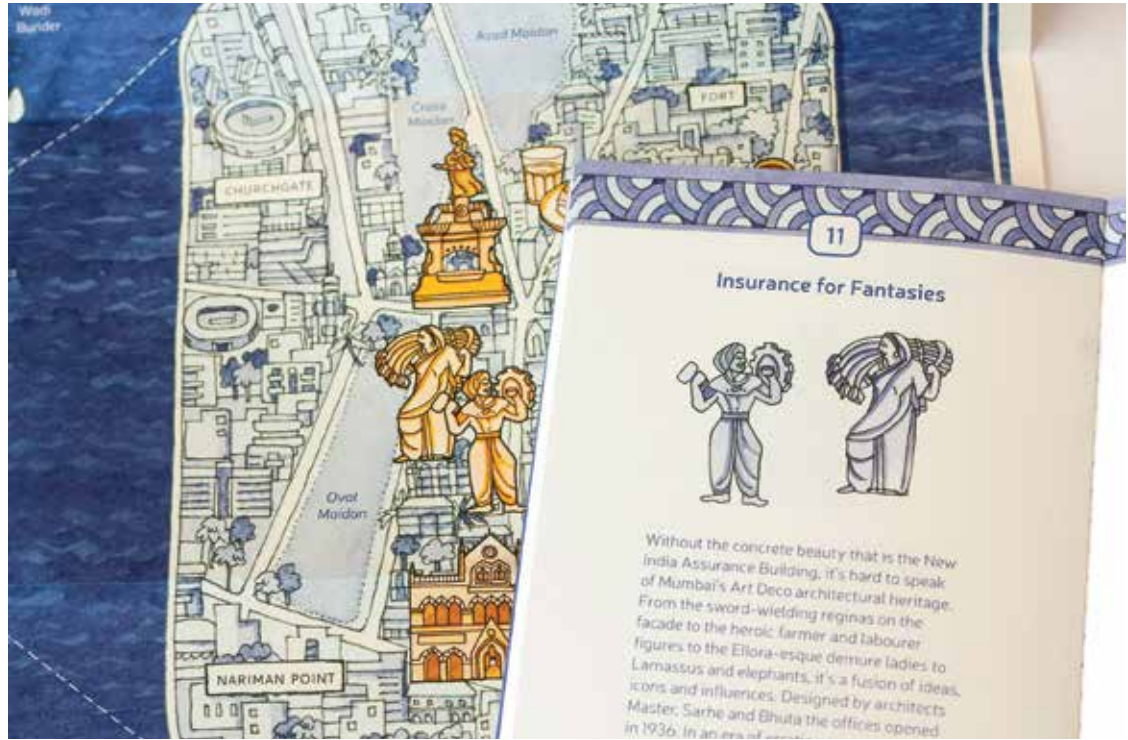
This spread: the *Storycity* project by Kahani Designworks uses various hues of blue to establish Mumbai's connection with the sea. The project endeavours to promote and encourage cultural engagement with our cities. Opposite page, right: the map of Mumbai city which highlights the unconventional spots which enhance the 'Mumbai experience'

What defines the idea of a city, more than anything else, is its culture – its past, its present, and its speculated future. While popular culture can only generally outline the vibe of the city, the onus of officially recording this intangible yet immensely important pointer of what a city is all about, the evolution of its culture through the long-winding course of its own history, is on museums. Yet, as important as they are, as witnesses to a city's transformation over time, museums as often pushed into the background as places that only 'tourists' would perhaps be interested in visiting.



Even otherwise, there are hardly any resources to access detailed information on city museums, all in one place. However, the *Storycity* series by Mumbai-based communication design studio Kahani Designworks might just be the answer. The *Storycity* series is a set of illustrated booklets, guides and maps that intends to promote and encourage cultural engagement with our cities. With Mumbai and Delhi editions as of now, *Storycity's* booklets include information about the city's major museums, tips on viewing the museum's collections, quirky stories about the city

that one would expect to hear from a seasoned 'local', as well as activities to engage in while taking in the sights and sounds of the city. What distinguishes *Storycity* from other city guides is the intimate link these stories share with the city, and the endeavour to debunk the intimidating, almost 'boring' image that museums project, highlighting the odd yet endearing narratives that can enthuse one to see museums, as well as the city, in a different light – as spaces that house wonders, spaces that inspire one to marvel at the city's journey through time.



The almost-kitsch aesthetics of the detailed watercolour illustrations immediately appeal, maybe more to art-lover, book-collector sensibilities than as a definitive guide to the city; which it doesn't claim to be, too. The design employs various hues of blue as an instant connection to the sea, much as the name of the Mumbai edition suggests *Storycity Mumbai: Exploring a city by the sea*, drawing from the most obvious perception of Mumbai by both locals and visitors. *Storycity Mumbai: Exploring a city by the sea* is a set of two booklets — *Storycity Mumbai: Exploring a city by the sea* and *A storyseeker's guide to Mumbai Museums* — and a map. The *Storycity* series doesn't attempt to replace traditional city guides or city maps, yet gives one an intimate insights into a city which might be a fleeting destination for some, or a more permanent one for others. 'This booklet contains 24 stories about things and places that are unique experiences across Mumbai. For visitors to the city, this collection presents an uncommon way to traverse the urban experience and for the local resident, a chance to see a formal habitat from a different perspective,' announces the opening page of the *Storycity Mumbai: Exploring*

a city by the sea booklet. And rightly so, inside, the book jots down 24 places which might not fit the usual bill as 'tourist destinations'; yet somehow complete the 'Mumbai experience'. From tales of the rundown Yazdani Bakery, naps in the David Sassoon Library, Naresh Fernandes' book *Taj Mahal Foxtrot*, the banyan tree at Horniman Circle, Gandhi's letter to Hitler, Dhobi Ghat, BEST route number 56, Salaam Balak Trust, to Kanheri Caves in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, everything quirky finds a mention. The *A storyseeker's guide to Mumbai Museums* booklet maps out the nine museums across the city of Mumbai, outlining the unique experiences each of them can offer, the close connection of the museums to the ever-unfolding story of the city, and the contrasts and contradictions that shape it. The map, a brilliant illustration of the island city with most of its unusual pulse points emphasised on one side, and the words "A city is a lot like a person — both have a past laden with stories that have made and moulded them — it's for us to learn their secrets and discover their magic" on the back, sets the tone for rekindling the lost sense of discovery and adventure, the search for newer stories, the

Storycity Mumbai: Stories from a city by the sea is designed and published by Kahani Designworks, with text by Sourav Roy and Ruchita Madhok. All images used for this feature here are by Aditya Palsule

quest for newer sub-plots. One can easily imagine this map, or even the words on its reverse, framed and displayed across a room, adorning a wall, as homage to the work of art that it truly is! The fact the island city of Mumbai has nine museums, of which most go unnoticed and might be unknown even to the most ardent city-fans, is a disappointing indicator of our cultural engagement with the city we call home. As a 'local', one is inclined to think that they must 'know' the city well. After all, why wouldn't they? They've perhaps lived in the city for long enough to know its pulse, the pace, most of the quirky stories that seem so fitting because the know the city so well, the trivia,

and the popular landmarks that, to a transient traveller, define the city, shape the image of the city in their minds. But that itself is the drawback of considering oneself a 'local'. The sense of novelty, of everyday discovery gives way to a sense of familiarity, and eventually to that of taking the city and its culture for granted. But just when one thinks they've probably seen it all, *Storycity* serves as an all-new starting point for one to renew their perceptions of their city, with the promise of newer discoveries around the corner, newer adventures waiting to be explored and newer stories waiting to be written down the pages of the city's contemporary history, constantly in making. @

This spread: the *Storycity* project uses quirky trivia and stories — usually the kind one would expect to hear from a seasoned 'local' — to set the tone for a renewed sense of discovery and adventure within the city that one starts to take for granted after having lived there for a considerable amount of time

