LIVE EXHIBITS

Outside the (glass) box

City museums are reaching out to a new generation with interactive exhibits, live performances and innovative events that bring history to life.

By Pankti Mehta

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Just about dead dinosaurs. There have been creature hunts, visual adaptations of history workshops, films at Mumbai’s museums.

Muhiyee adds that since the museum is an apothecary, secular institution, it has an important responsibility to educate society. “We take pride in our diversity, but we need to move from a multicultural society to an inter-cultural one, in which different sections learn from each other and influence certain aspects of their cultures,” he says.

Even the NGMA’s (National Gallery of Modern Art) has been making a conscious effort to appeal to a wider audience. For its exhibition on Tagore paintings in July, the NGMA had organized a series of talks and a performance by the famous dancer, Rukmini Sanket, which was popular with the younger audience.

“Mumbai is so diverse; you need to cater to many age groups and income levels,” says Maitiha Parikh, art consultant, former director of Sotheby’s India and now advisor to the union ministry of culture.

And the effort to reach out continues. Last month, CSVMs invited management students from the Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies to make recommendations about how to make their space more attractive to younger.

“We visited different galleries at the museum in teams and made suggestions. We were pleasantly surprised at how the museum has changed already,” says Suhail Singh, a JIMS student, who was part of this project. “One suggestion was to create a virtual archive of the museum’s audio files, to take it out of its physical space. Another was ‘Wear your art campaign’, where traditional art styles could be emblazoned on T-shirts, laptop sleeves and other youth-friendly merchandise.”

In three times, the museum should be treated like a product, says museum director Mehta. “If you don’t reach out to people, it’s like you haven’t made a sale.”

Niche museums, too, are making the effort to make their exhibits more interactive. “Some of our pieces are kept behind glass, so people can touch and feel them, even though they are antique pieces,” says Walter Fikus, director of the Archdiocesan Heritage Museum. “When people touch roses, they have a much more historical significance. For instance, they are much more likely to remember the experience. In addition to the exhibits, we also host expert seminars and other activities, which really adds to the stories on stained glass paintings last week.”

Over the past couple of years, Mumbai has seen the number of niche museums grow too. For a great city like Mumbai, two museums are not enough,” says Alka Narain Lambah, a conservation architect who will soon launch a museum dedicated to Mumbai’s textile mills. “A city has many layers to its history which don’t end at its art and architecture. While one visitor may be interested in that, another may want to know about its socio-economic growth.

Any museum needs to be dynamic to attract repeat visitors. Lambah adds, “A museum should transform every few months so that people can come back.”

In keeping with this philosophy, Lambah plans to make the textile museums a cultural destination where visitors can spend an entire day. “There will be lectures, seminars, performances and creative workshops designed around culture,” she says. “We will also have street food kiosks to show how much of Mumbai’s fast food comes as a result of mill workers.”

SHOWING RESULTS?

CSVMs had 75,000 visitors between April 2012 and March 2013, up from 5,500 in the same period in 2011-12.

The Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum had 26,000 visitors in August 2013, up from 9,000 in August 2012 and 8,000 in August 2011.

WANT TO SIGN UP?

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja museum at Fort is conducting a bus tour across four synagogues as part of an exhibition titled ‘Faces: Weaving Indian Jewish Narratives.’

When: October 20 (Sunday)
Cost: Rs 500 per person

At the Bhau Daji Lad museum in Byculla, you can attend workshops on pottery or Ragusa paintings on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. A special workshop on candelabra has also been designed around a current exhibit, Missives, by Israeli architect Ghia Anaheri.

National Gallery of Modern Art, Fort, is hosting a series of events, including film screenings, based on the artist Prakash Dasgupta and Sarbani Roy Choudhury, whose works are currently on display.

An artefact at the niche Archdiocesan Heritage Museum in Goregaon, a repository of Christian artefacts.