

# Around Town



**At the movies** The Rex theatre has been a Bangalore landmark since the 1940s

## Next change

A new art project is trying to collect memories of one of Bangalore's iconic theatres, finds **Asawari Ghatage.**

In a city with consistently diminishing archaic landscapes, finding cultural spaces reminiscent of the yesteryear is difficult, if not impossible. Now Showing – The Matinee at Rex, is an art project started by the students of the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology and facilitated by its faculty Smriti Mehra, Tahireh Lal and Kruti Saraiya. The project, according to the professors, hopes to bring people together and create works of art celebrating the once glamorous single screen movie theatre Rex.

Kicking off with a public seminar this fortnight, the project will invite Srishti professor Laju Balani, feminist historian and cultural critic Lata Mani, playwright Girish Karnad, oral historian Indira Chowdhury, performance artist Deepak Srinivasan, art historian Suresh Jayaram and filmmaker Aiysha Abraham as key speakers.

Rex was built sometime during World War II and was known as The Paul's Rex (after the Englishman who built it), until Rai Bahadur Nand Lal Kapur bought it in 1963 and renamed it Rex. Part of a group that consists of the last remaining single screen cinemas, Rex underwent several infrastructural changes such as introducing online booking, a new canteen and bringing improved sound, but the business of the cinema itself continues to face stiff competition from multiplexes.

The seminar will focus on the cinema hall's rich history and will include inputs from movie-goers, the staff at Rex and the panel of speakers. The speakers at the seminar, Mehra hopes, will bring about a multifarious discussion

about Rex, and the kind of change the city has seen over the last few decades. For instance, Mani will talk about the changing city, particularly Bangalore, and how globalisation and the IT sector affect identity; Balani, who teaches at Srishti and has studied the history of religion, will explore a more philosophical perspective of dealing with change and loss; Chowdhury, who started the Centre for Public History at Srishti, will talk about collecting stories and asking the right questions.

“**It's about saving memories of a city that is losing so many things**”

“After the seminar the students have no restrictions on the form of art they choose to present in the final output,” said Mehra. The project which aims to connect people, memories and the cinema will culminate in an exhibition of the artworks produced by the students in October this year. This will be a lot more than a limited exercise in preserving the living memory of a place that carries meaning for those who have watched the city traverse into a hyper-developed cosmopolitan bubble. According to Mehra, the conversations triggered in the

seminar will help students shape artistic intervention in this public space. The unknown nature of the final output will enable the students to incorporate, into whichever medium they choose, stories of the theatre for which reconstruction plans are underway.

For Mehra, this project will not end when it ends for the students. “This has given me a starting point for my own work, and it's about saving memories of a city that is losing so many things. The project is also about being able to have something tangible of it to keep,” she said. Rex, as a single screen cinema itself, has a more public connection, according to Mehra. “It carries an experience that is removed from commercial aspects of malls. In conversations about the space, students had a lot to contribute about the experience of the food, the kind of independence the theatre has with running its canteen and the experience of sitting in the stalls amidst the hooting and whistling,” she explained.

**Now Showing – The Matinee at Rex** will be held at **Rococo Gallery & Exhibition on Fri Aug 2.** See Around Town.