

LaVA : ART, ECONOMY, PEDAGOGY

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For taxonomists of art, *LaVA*—Laboratory of Visual Arts conceived and executed by Bose Krishnamachari—is an installation project. It is, but much more. As *LaVA* flows through the Indian metros, and Vadodara and Fort Cochin, an alternative pedagogy of art education and appreciation is being advanced. At once, *LaVA* is a powerful statement on the possibility of a different circulation of funds in the art economy.

Viewed as a set of things, *LaVA* comprises a vast collection of books —of all sizes and shapes, and themes —covering a range of visual art practices including cinema, architecture, painting, photography, design, and fashion as also philosophy and cultural studies—stacked in innovatively and variedly designed, multi-colour shelves of plywood and veneer; multiple rows of music CDs and DVDs— on major galleries of the world, interviews with contemporary artists, film makers and intellectuals; headphones and high-definition LCD panels; and quadruped wooden cubes and benches. These are interestingly ordered against infrared panels that yield a soft, sea-green hue.

LaVA, however, is not a set of things. It is a peopled installation that traverses varied sites of relations —among things, among things and people, and among people—and comprises diverse sets of flows—involving varied art practices and disciplines. At Fort Cochin, its most recent place of exhibit—from 15th December 2006 to 15th January 2007 —*LaVA* was housed in the Kashi Art Gallery. The gallery itself is an interesting visual : a one-time colonial warehouse on the backwater side. As you enter *LaVA*, you find people engaged in varied activities—loners standing, exploring the bookshelves and browsing books, or sitting on the wooden cubes immersed in reading or listening to music; small circles of friends sitting on the floor together flipping through books; friends and strangers sitting in a row on the benches watching DVDs; groups of people viewing these from behind, standing, and occasionally moving from one to another. A silent excitement pervades the space. With small gatherings of people outside the gallery, discussing what they saw/browsed/read/listened to/watched, *LaVA* overflows its enclosing panels. Especially interesting is the overwhelming presence of teenagers and young people, men and women. Obviously, the show does not limit itself to the social minority of ‘art-educated’—formally or otherwise. Even for them *LaVA* marks a different pedagogy.

LaVA has a memory-tag. Krishna-machari says that in conceiving *LaVA* he was also inspired by the need “to make available what I missed during my student days”. Yet, the implication of *LaVA* is certainly not confined to merely making available a set of things otherwise unavailable. If so, its relevance would have been restricted to art academies in the economically deprived regions. A contemporary sensibility—not merely of art—makes *LaVA* universal. Its pedagogic value is not confined to art schools either. By bringing into conjunction varied art practices, *LaVA* emphasises transdisciplinarity. At a time when transdisciplinarity is rigorously pursued in social sciences, literary studies, and law—to name a few —*LaVA* qualifies as exhibit in any institution of advanced education and research anywhere in the world.

LaVA forges a new relationship between art and money. Art market in India is now in boom. Speculation rides high but the flourish of art market is also related to cyber communication technologies facilitating an expanded and fast-paced market. The ‘prosperity turn’ in the art world is such that high prices are no longer confined to the few masters. A younger generation of artists with proven talent also sell high.

Krishnamachari is one such. The entire *LaVA* collection of books, CDs, DVDs and other resources—monetary value Rupees Two Crores—Krishnamachari has picked up from across the world. Source of funds? Proceeds from sale of own works. *LaVA* thus boldly re-defines the circuit of funds in the art economy. ✍✍