

## THE PLANNER

## Get a taste of clay

At this first-of-its-kind festival, catch a glimpse of some of the best ceramic art in the country, take a crack at kulhad trivia, and enjoy a meal cooked in clay pots

DEBJANI PAUL

CLAY means different things to different people. For one person, it might evoke childhood memories of shaping clumsy figurines with play dough. Another person might be excited at the thought of exquisitely crafted dinnerware and tableware. Whether the first thing that comes to your mind is the humble chai ka kulhad or exquisitely sculpted high art, both are authentic interpretations of clay, says Shayonti Salvi, artist, ceramic sculptor and curator.

There are infinite ways to experience clay, and this seems to be the underlying philosophy behind Maati-Putr, a first-of-its-kind ceramics festival curated by Salvi and hosted by Kathiwada City house in Worli between October 18 and November 30.

From sipping on tea served in terracotta kulhads during a trivia game session designed around ceramics and tasting authentic Kathiwada cuisine made in ceramic cookware, to the auditory pleasure of hearing ceramic folklore and a ghatam performance, the premise of this festival is "to offer a variety of engagements and interactions with ceramics through multiple sens-

es," says the artist, whose works will also feature in the exhibitions planned as part of the event.

Following a preview on October 18, the festival kicks off the next day with a showcase of functional but artistic tableware, where visitors can view and purchase the ceramics. From November 10 to 28, there's another show—this time for sculptural ceramics, or "art for expression's sake", as Salvi puts it. "[The ceramics are] all by con-

temporary artists of our time. There are a bunch of Mumbai stalwarts who'll be showing their work—Devyani Smith, whose work is both functional and artistic; Rekha Goyal who does a lot of sensitive work that's heavy on concept; IIT professor Raja Mohanty, who teaches at the Industrial Design Centre, and practises a technique called crystalline glazes," Salvi says, adding, "As [Kathiwada City House founder] Sangita is from Madhya Pradesh, MP ceramics is one of the festival's themes. So there are quite a few MP artists coming in, such as Mudita Bhandari, a young contemporary artist whose terracotta sculptures are inspired by the experience of space."

Salvi highlights another MP artist, Nirmala Sharma, known for her moving work that was triggered by the loss of her son, a military doctor, while on duty in Jammu and Kashmir in 1994.

After his death, Sharma's husband would lay awake at night, thinking of a poem. She painted that poem on a clay pot she had moulded earlier, and that piece became a solace to the

bereaved couple. Sharma is now well-known for her clay pots, on which she paints poems written by her husband.

Also on display will be ceramics by Adil Writer from Auroville, and Ruby Jhunjhunwala as well as Veena Chandra from Pune, along with many other artists.

Both exhibitions are free of

Shell architecture series 17 by Shayonti Salvi. Stoneware fired over 60 hours in an Anagama kiln; (right) Sumathi Bandepalli's Ceramic Flowers



(Above) Shayonti Salvi's work, inspired by earth architecture, will be on display at Kathiwada City House in Worli. PIC/KIRTI SURVE PARADE



charge, as is the lecture series taking place on November 22, when expert ceramists will talk about ground-breaking techniques being adopted in India. Those interested in ceramics shouldn't sleep on the talks, says Salvi, adding, "Whenever you put a bunch of potters in a room you will be amazed by the variety of technique. New-age studio potters have mastered techniques that were previously unheard of in India."

Another attraction is the venue itself—Kathiwada City House, which normally operates solely on membership basis, will open its doors to all visitors during this

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festival, so it's also a great chance to catch a glimpse of this lush, green space in the heart of the city. Apart from the showcases and the lectures, however, the other events will include varying entry fees.

While ceramic festivals are held quite frequently abroad, what sets Maati-Putr apart is the inclusion of all the other activities aside from the exhibitions. "There are workshops [October 25-27] that will entice enthusiasts to get their hands dirty, while a game night over kulhad chai [October 20] will tickle the child in them," says Salvi, adding that the festival has been organised with the help of the Aarti Singal Foundation



(From left) Erosion 2 by Motan Sankalpana and a terracotta lamp by Yashashri Shildhankar

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Shayonti Salvi, ceramist-curator

and an anonymous benefactor identified solely as "SA". A can't-miss event is the musical evening on November 15, when visitors can catch a ghatam [clay percussion instrument] performance by Sumana Chandrashekar, one of the few women in the country to perform on this ancient instrument.

Preceding the ghatam performance on the same evening, is a ceramic folklore session conducted by artist and curator Shampa Shah. "If you think of the history of clay being used as a tool, it originated from the time when humans stopped being hunter-gatherers, and became settlers. They needed pots to store grains and water, and to eat out of. Over time, this evolved into high art.

If you look at Japanese and Chinese pottery, in their traditional tea ceremony, the pot is highly valued because it is linked to culture. We Indians don't realise how much of our history and culture is linked to ceramics. If you spend time with tribal folks, you realise how important mitti or clay is to them—it's an almost spiritual relationship. They use it for tools, of course, but they also mould clay figurines for worship," says Salvi, adding, "Shampa, who has spent time with tribes in MP, is like an encyclopaedia of such folklore. She will narrate some mythological tales around clay, and share some rituals she has witnessed in tribal life. It will almost be like a storytelling session for the enthusiast."

Whether they're beginners or aficionados, the festival is meant for anybody who wants to get a taste of the world of ceramics, figuratively and literally. "Ceramic artists, of course, live and breathe clay. There's not a single artist who hasn't tasted clay at some point while working in their studio," jests Salvi.

There's a more palatable way to enjoy the flavour of clay, though, with the finale of the festival on November 30, which will feature an exclusive dinner with Kathiwada cuisine cooked in ceramic fire pots.

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WHERE:  
Kathiwada  
City House,  
Worli

WHEN:  
October 18 to  
November 30

COST:  
Exhibitions  
and lectures  
are free;  
other events  
start from  
₹1,600  
onwards

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