

Novel project on short films takes off

[Lisa Mahapatra](#)

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HYDERABAD: The divide between what is considered high-culture and low-brow entertainment is growing smaller everyday.

In fact, it is the second somewhat derogatory term that gave rise to one of the more interesting art movements in the 70s, also known as pop surrealism. Hyderabad too, is striving towards democratic, when it comes to arts and culture.

Take Manohar Chiliveru's sculptures in Sanjeeviah park, for instance — they aren't hidden away in a gallery somewhere, they're right out there in the open, for everyone to enjoy. Another good example is La Makaan, a cultural space open to anyone interested in the fields of "arts, literature, theatre, debate and dialogue".

A Wall Is A Screen, an endeavour that began seven years ago, and several continents away, is one that has similar goals at heart. "Most people don't watch short films — people think that shorts films are only to be watched by the type of people that attend short film festivals. But that is a complete misconception. Short films are great fun to watch! Our project makes short films accessible to everyone," says Sven Schwarz, who works as a sponsoring and event manager at the Filmfest Hamburg, when he is not organising *A Wall Is A Screen* events.

I arrive at Chowmahalla Palace a little early, and find several people wearing reflective vests bustling about a bright blue cart loaded with light and sound equipment.

I bite into cucumber-mint sandwiches and wait in anticipation. Also in attendance are Hans-Burkhard Sauerteig, Consul General, Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany, Jayesh Ranjan, secretary to the state government, Tourism, Archaeology and Museum, and Amita Desai, director of the Goethe Zentrum, and instrumental in coordinating the event.

"I am so nervous," frets Kerstin Budde, another member of the team, adding, "What if something goes wrong? This is the first time we are doing this in India. Also, we have never used this particular type of battery before."

And then it's back to work for her — she taps a few keys on the laptop, and a few more on the projector. I hunt down Sven once again, only to pepper him with more questions. What kind of films are they planning on screening? Will dialogue be properly audible over the hustle-bustle of Hyderabad street life? Patiently, he answers, "We will be screening movies in many languages, and from different nationalities. Many of these films do not have much dialogue, and there are always subtitles. As for the street sounds, we feel that they add to the experience!" Soon enough, against a wall adjacent to the entrance of the Chowmahalla Palace, the first film begins.

A German film, it is an experiment with the illusion of movement of the inanimate structures that we live in and around.

Changing light and expert handling of the subjects by the cameraman gives a surreal impression that everything is alive.

The second movie, also screened at the same location, is an Indian documentary, titled *Prakash Travelling Cinema*, that follows the lives and livelihoods of two men that run a small hand-cart cinema business.

We then move to a nearby location, in front of a local kirana store. Almost immediately, at the first flickers of light from the projectors, we attract the attention of many passersby.

Barely a few seconds into the screening, we hear the sounds of evening namaz from a nearby mosque, and are requested to pause the programme until the prayers are finished.

We halt, and are joined by a motley bunch of excited children. A few others on two-wheelers stop, and decide to linger and watch.

The third film of the evening is *Moore Street Masala*, an Irish interpretation of the typical Bollywood love story, narrated in the style of an item number song. Delighted squeals and laughter follow.

The next screening is a wall, half a stone's throw away. This time it is an Australian production of dancing trash cans, titled *Bin Can Can*.

Sven, playing the part of Pied Piper perfectly, leads the way to the next location, shouting directions on a megaphone.

The fifth film is screened against a wall adjacent to an apartment building. Children, passers-by and the original few crowd around the cart, while the residents of the building lean out of their balconies to see what all the excitement is all about.

We watch a German film, the epitome of dry humour, that depicts a typical German family weekend — that is, a typically dysfunctional family of people, added with nervous disorders, who enjoy washing street signs! We follow Sven to a narrow street where we watch a funny Romanian short titled *When The Lights Go Out*. The seventh, screened on a wall next to a building lit up with fairy lights, is an evocative Brazilian film that brings to mind William Blake's *The Tiger*.

The last movie of the night, screened at a playground next to the gorgeous Municipal Corporation building, is a Spanish short film about basketball and the folly of jumping to snap judgements. There are over 175 people watching, hooting and cheering.

Somehow we had managed to add over 130 people to our procession, many who had never seen a foreign film in their lives. And that is what *A Wall Is A Screen* is all about.