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'Smooth Runnings': Photo exhibition on Mumbai's potholes

As the monsoon departs leaving the pavements pockmarked, an art gallery sends photographers to freeze frame the damage

By [Amana Fontanella-Khan](#) (/author/amana-fontanella-khan) 28 September, 2010

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[Gallery BMB \(http://gallerybmb.com/\)](http://gallerybmb.com/) is running a curious show in its Banyan Tree Cafe. Entitled Smooth Runnings, the show is based on the miserable state of Mumbai's roads.

Kanchi Mehta, curator of the show, commissioned a few young photographers to go out and take pictures of Mumbai's potholes.

"You know, I live in South Bombay, which is meant to be a posh area," she says. "But it is covered in potholes during monsoon time.

Everyone feels frustrated with the situation but no one raises their voices."

The show is lighthearted in tone, and does not constitute a formal campaign of any sort, Mehta explains.

But the gallery does label the exhibition "a wake-up call for the people of Mumbai to express their frustration, anger and helplessness."

Asked whether she is hoping to attract attention from the city's municipal authorities, she says, "I haven't contacted the BMC directly about this, but I'd definitely like them to see it."

She goes on to add that it's a "great embarrassment to the city. The road with the most potholes is the one that connects the airport with town. All foreign dignitaries and diplomats who travel this road then get this as their first impression of India."

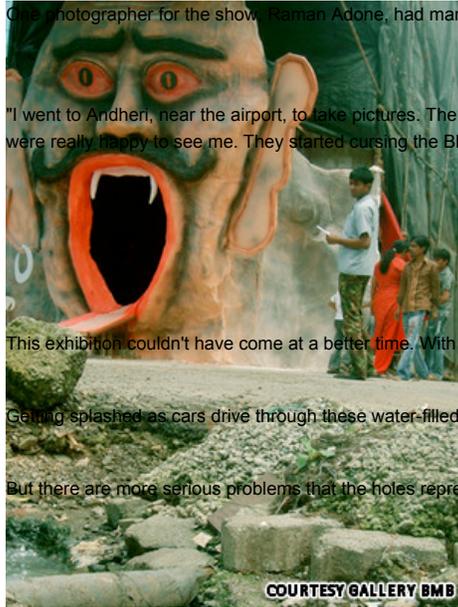
Shooting in the hood

The photographs, which number over 400, will be presented in a small format on the cafe walls and the exhibition will contain an interactive component, in which viewers can share their own strife about the state of the roads.

"There are 400 potholes in the exhibition just staring you in the face. This can be ugly, but what we've done is turn it into art by creating a collage of the images," Mehta explains.

While many of the photos will be in a realist style, Mehta says that some of them will be conceptual in nature. "In one of picture, for example, there is a large hoarding with a politician on it, and right below was a massive pothole. In another photo, a cat was curled into a large pothole, showing how we've become so used to them already."

Far from thinking the artists had lost the plot, many local residents welcomed the photographers with open arms when they descended with their lenses onto their lanes.



One photographer for the show, Raman Adone, had many people offer him chai and snacks thinking he was a journalist coming to report on the shoddy condition of the local streets.

"I went to Andheri, near the airport, to take pictures. The roads there are in a miserable state. When I arrived, people were really happy to see me. They started cursing the BMC officials and telling me how much they suffer because of the roads."

The JJ Art School graduate added, "I've never done a project like this before. I really enjoyed it!"

Artistic intervention

This exhibition couldn't have come at a better time. With the monsoons just about over, Mumbaikars have already endured more than three months of swamped nuisances.

Getting splashed as cars drive through these water-filled holes and having to endure the countless jolts and bumps in taxis.

But there are more serious problems that the holes represent. The Hindustan Times reported a while back that an increasing number of women were suffering miscarriages as a result of extreme bumpiness of Mumbai's roads.

If citizens feel they have no channel to get this persistent problem solved, let's hope artists can do the trick.

Banyan Tree Cafe at Gallery BMB, Queens Mansion, GT

Marg, Fort; tel. +91 (0) 22 2200 0061. The show will run from September 20 - October 14, between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m.



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