



**IHT**Sites

Documentary film-maker Madhusree Dutta is in a hurry packing all sorts of Bollywood paraphernalia for Berlin. As Dutta talks about *Cinema City*—the exhibition being put up by the Bombay-based NGO Majlis at the 60th Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale)—in her chic office in Santacruz, images and ideas seem to tumble out and fill the room.

The scope of *Cinema City*— comprising seven previous exhibitions put up by Majlis and four 15-minute films—is wide and varied. But the show centres mostly around Mumbai, the film industry and the relationship the two have shared over the years.

City-bred: Mumbai's 'angry young man' juxtaposed with a poster. Courtesy Majlis

The art show *The Western Suburb: Installation on Sweatshops of Cinema*, for instance, looks through photographs and artworks at 13 small ancillary business units that cater to the film industry. Dutta compares Bollywood to a multinational company with manufacturing operations in developing country slums and says the term “sweatshops” has been used in this context. “Wig shops, editing studios, food suppliers, prop agencies, all of these are Bollywood’s sweatshops that go into making the glamorous product of a Hindi film.” The installation is called *The Western Suburb* since most of these units are located in the western suburbs of Mumbai.

*Cinema City Lived: Book of Spatial and Textual Cartography* is based on a similar theme. The book contains photographs and computer-generated images of people engaged in different jobs, coming together to make a film sequence happen. Such as a horse supplier who brings his horse for a stunt scene and a chef who prepares meals for the leading lady.

*Phantom Lady on Light Boxes: Performance Photography*, comprising a set of photographs by artist Pushpamala N., features her dressed as the yesteryear actor “Hunterwali” Nadia and posing in settings reminiscent of her films. One doesn’t necessarily need to know about Nadia to grasp the import—aesthetic or socio-political—of the black and white photos. “These dangerous settings and this dominance of character are not available to ordinary women,” says Dutta. “It’s only in films that we play out these fantasies and Pushpamala’s photographs capture these fantasies.”

Another fascinating set of artworks, *Calendar Gala: Iconography in 20th Century*, feature “calendar art” images based on a researched, yet imaginary Bollywood timeline.

Every year between 1900 and 2000 is represented by an image from the films considered iconic for that year. “But the projection of what would have been iconic is based on the principle of refraction,” says Dutta. *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, for instance, was considered a disaster in 1959, the year it was made. But after Guru Dutt’s death in 1964 it gradually gained iconic status. Hence, the 1969 calendar image depicts images from the film.

Dutta points out that the symbiotic relation between a city and its film industry is not limited to Mumbai. Chennai, Hong Kong, Seoul and Tehran have their own cinema-city relationships. “These cities have cinema intricately woven into their history and consciousness,” she says. But the passage of time has altered the larger-than-life aura that was central to cinema, both on- and off-screen. Making films earlier, for instance, required more paraphernalia. Technology and a space crunch have led to shrinkage—cans of celluloid have become tiny digital tapes and rain is computer-generated so there is no need for tankers, pipes and showers. Mumbai’s film studios are now renting out space to real estate owners.

Meanwhile, Bollywood’s uncredited heroes are heading to Berlin.

*The 60th Berlin International Film Festival, or Berlinale, will be held in Berlin from 11-21 February.*