



HOME AWAY

Author Thomas Mann's house in Los Angeles has been bought by Germany for \$13.25 million. Mann had fled Germany during Hitler's rise to power. The purchase follows an online petition signed by 3,000 writers and curators, after fears that the house would be sold for its real estate value.

SNAP SHOTS



Art Deal

AUCTION HOUSE Christie's will hold its fourth live auction in India on December 18. To take place in Mumbai, the auction will have 150 lots on sale. This includes 71 lots of classical Indian art. Among the highlights is a 12th century grey stone statue of Vishnu, which is expected to fetch between Rs 15-20 lakh, as well as 42 court paintings from the collection of Colonel RK Tandan, dating from the early 1700s to 1810.



Gender Play

PUBLISHING HOUSE Zubaan has launched "Women in India: Unheard Voices", in association with Google Arts and Culture Institute. The online project celebrates women who have had an indelible impact on the history and culture of India. It features online exhibitions, including an illustrated history of Savitribai Phule, the first practicing woman doctor in India, and a visual story of a milk co-operative run by women.



Green Screen

AIMED AT bringing to the fore environmental challenges faced across the globe, the NGO Toxics Link and India International Centre (IIC) are organising the seventh edition of "Quotes from the Earth", an environmental film festival. To be held at IIC on December 2 and 3, this year's edition will feature 17 films, themed on biodiversity, waste management, toxic chemicals and climate change. The programme includes *More than Honey*, directed by Oscar-nominated Swiss director Markus Imhoof, National Award-winning film *Valiya Chirakulla Pakshikal* directed by Bijukumar Damodaran and *Bhopal Express*, directed by Mahesh Mathai.



India, Uncut

While films of veteran directors appear to be missing from the Indian Panorama section at this year's IFFI, jury members say they choose only on merit and talk about inviting uncertified entries for the first time



(Clockwise from above) Stills from *Ishti*, *Baahubali* and *Pinky Beauty Parlour*

ALAKA SAHANI & HARSHA RAJ GATTY

WHEN UNION Minister for Information and Broadcasting Venkaiah Naidu inaugurated the Indian Panorama of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), Goa, on Monday with the screening of *Ishti*, a Sanskrit film directed by G Prabha, he called the section a platform for "young, aspiring and independent filmmakers" to showcase their work. Notwithstanding such assurances, eyebrows have been raised over a Sanskrit feature film inaugurating the Indian Panorama for the second consecutive year — last year *Priyamanasam* was the opening film. Addressing the media, the Indian Panorama jury, however, maintained that all the movies in this section — which comprises 26 feature films and 21 non-feature films this year — have been selected on basis of "merit".

In a significant step taken for this section, the movies which had not received a certificate from Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) were encouraged to apply this year. According to filmmaker Rajendra Singh Babu, head of Indian Panorama's jury, nearly

20 such uncertified entries were received and some of them, including *Pinky Beauty Parlour*, have even made it to the final list. Such entries were required to furnish an affidavit saying they would apply for certification soon.

The inclusion of mainstream commercial movies was frowned upon while the latest work of some veteran masters, such as Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Pinneyum* and Buddhadeb Dasgupta's *Tope*, are missing from the list. Babu said though they had received these movies as entries, the final selection was made on the basis of what the members of the jury believed were the best. Officials of IFFI had received 255 entries for the feature section and 199 in the non-feature segment.

Every year, the Film Federation of India along with Film and Television Producer Guild of India evaluates up to five films based on popular appeal and box-office earnings, to be shown as part of the Panorama. This year, they chose Raja Krishna Menon's *Airlift*, Ali Abbas Zafar's *Sultan* and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Bajirao Mastani*. As per the guidelines, SS Rajamouli's *Baahubali*, winner of the National Award for Best Film, was included in this section as a direct entry.

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While saying that the quality of films shown has improved significantly over the years, Babu acknowledged that the Film Federation of India (FFI) must make the process of selection of mainstream movies for the IFFI transparent. Pointing to the omission of *Kabali*, a blockbuster starring Rajinikanth, he said, "We don't know about

the process used by FFI for the selection as we were not consulted about it. Since the South Indian film industry produces around 1,000 films a year, there should be at least two movies from there in the Panorama."

The jury also recommended that there be a special section for children's films. "Although seven to eight children's movies were shortlisted for the second round of selection, they did not make it to the final list," he said. Bengali movie *Sahaj Paather Gappo* (*Colours of Innocence*) is the only children's movie which is a part of the Indian Panorama as well as International competition. The features section will screen movies such as Saibal Mitra's *Chitrokar*, Sanjib Sabhapandit's *Dikchow Banat Palaax*, Ananya Kasaravalli's *Harikatha Prasanga*, Nagraj Manjule's *Sairat* and Pawan Kumar's *U-Turn* among others.

The Panorama's non-feature film section, which showcases films which are less than 70-minutes long, will open with Ima Sabitri's Manipuri film *Bobo Khurajam*. The 21 films to be screened under this include Hardik Mehta's *Amdavad Ma Famous*, Pankaj Johar's *Cecelia*, Umesh Mohan Bagade's *Chaukat* and Nishant Roy Bombarde's *Daaravtha*.

Crime Files

Director Hadi Ali Abrar on why *Dongri Ka Raja* is not just a Bombay story, putting love at the heart of a crime saga and why he is open to a sequel



Stills from the film *Dongri Ka Raja*

EXPRESS FEATURES SERVICE

"THIS ISN'T a Bombay-Bombay story — and that's what attracted me to the script," says Hadi Ali Abrar, director of the film *Dongri Ka Raja* that hit the screens earlier this month. "In the past, a lot of noted filmmakers such as Ram Gopal Varma and Vishal Bhardwaj have explored the milieu of the Mumbai underworld and they've done a great job in films such as *Satya*, *Company* and *Maqbool*, respectively. I wanted to specifically look at Dongri, which has been the hub of criminal activities in Bombay, and Lalbaug. But what drew me to the film the most was the love story," he says.

Written by M Salim, *Dongri Ka Raja* is set in the downtown Mumbai neighbourhood that is ruled by Mansur Ali, a ganglord played by Ronit Roy. "He was cast before the lead pair. In the beginning, he was apprehensive because I was a new director for him and Filmy Keeda is a new production house. But once he heard the narration of the script, he came on board. We didn't agree on the first two days but from day three, Ronit and I discussed the scenes and he became Mansur," says Abrar. The lead pair of the film, Gashmeer Mahajani and Reecha Sinha, were selected after they auditioned for the roles. "I'd heard of Gashmeer because of his work in Marathi cinema, and that he is a very sincere actor. What impressed me is that he was interested in knowing about everybody else's character as well. Reecha is somebody who submits to the director, without question," he says.

Abrar is now working on another film but is not closed to the idea of a sequel. "We can go ahead but only if the story is right. I don't want to disappoint the audience that has liked the film. It makes sense only if we can take the story a step ahead," he says.

ON THE RECORD

On Common Ground

A new book on India's public spaces draws attention to the Indian way of life

SHINY VARGHESE

WHAT IS a city but the people? **Architects Archana and Anshuman Gupta answer the question in *Celebrating Public Spaces of India* (Mapin, Rs 1,800).** They have chosen nearly 50 landmarks across India — from city squares to waterfronts — and analysed the socio-cultural palette of the places. With eloquent sketches and telling photographs, they have documented four years of their research in this 168-page book, looking at India's varied public spaces. However, the book could have had better representation from south India, and more insights into site behaviour. Excerpts from a conversation with Archana:



**during your visits across India's public spaces? Does design prompt more crowds?**

Any good space is not about design but how it is part of collective memory, and acquires layers of meaning for its people. Sometimes appropriation is what makes it a public space. For instance, Edward Lutyens



(From left) Archana Gupta; Anshuman Gupta; crowd at India Gate

never imagined India Gate to be a space where people would come for ice cream.

**In the book, you mention soft and hard edges of a public space. Please elaborate.**

I think Manek Chowk in Ahmedabad is a

case in point. It's a great example of a multi-functional urban space. There we saw paved paths, people spitting and throwing things. Imagine the Ramliha Maidan or any local fair, where the roads are not paved; the mud floors are dusty but they absorb the dirt and

chaos. Our question was how hard and how soft should our landscapes be, both from a climate and usage point of view. Also, while working on the Humayun's Tomb, we learnt that grass was never part of these historic buildings. Yet, most of our landscapes are

manicured and high on maintenance. We wondered if there was something in a mud platform, which changes with seasons, and is shaded by trees.

**Your book also talks about the 'gaze' that needs to shift.**

Our references have often been Western, both in education and practice. We asked ourselves, what if we change the nature of looking. AK Ramanujan's *Is There an Indian Way of Thinking* says that the Indian way moves from context sensitive to context free, while in Western thought, it's the other way around. So first you make a grid and then define the space, while in India it's more organic. We need to look at our public spaces keeping this in mind.

**Did you see a change in the way interactions happen in different cities?**

We got a good idea of public spaces at historic sites, where things were not messed with. For example, as you walk into the area of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, you feel you're walking into a wind tunnel. The crowds can be overwhelming since the shops are close to each other, but you never lose contact with the left and right of the street. And it's this eye contact that makes it democratic. I have felt unsafe in designed parks but never in the middle of a busy street or a *maidaan*. It's about getting eyes on the street.

