

leaves Telangana art frat fuming



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A book that was meant to showcase Telangana art to the world has, ironically, left the art fraternity in the state divided. It all began when news spread that the coffee table book *art@telangana*, would be released in Japan, at an art camp that would feature artists handpicked by the art@Telangana Trust. In a letter addressed to Hyderabad Times, senior artists contend that art@Telangana, the trust, is not truly representative of Telangana art.

Questioning the author manner in which participants for the camp have been chosen, a senior artist says, "Artists such as Laxman Aelay, Priyanka Aelay, Anand Gadapa, his wife Nirmaia, Bharat and his wife Priti Samyukta, and young artist Masuram have been selected for the camp. It looks like a family tour with father-daughter duos and married couples being invited to the camp. And all this on government's expenses? This looks like a plan to promote artists from the same caste and keep money within the same community. This is unfair to young artists and disrespectful towards seniors."

In the name of the book, the Trust has laundered a lot of money from different sources, artists allege. "Nothing is clear or official with this trust. Now, we hear that Laxman Aelay has also been given a grant of a couple of lakhs to shoot a film about Telangana's folk art forms. Aelay was also chosen to design the state's logo. For this, he was honoured with a state award as part of the Telangana celebrations. Why only Aelay?" fumes a senior artist, who has worked for decades for the cause of Telangana.

Justifying their right to question the workings of this art trust, another celebrated artist, says, "When the art trust projects itself as the flagbearer of Telangana art, every artist from the region has the right to question. We want to know why they didn't take senior artists in confidence when they decided to launch this book which supposedly represents all of us?"



I HAVE NOT CHARGED THE GOVT FOR THE STATE LOGO; IT'S BASED ON MY WORK THAT I GET THESE PROJECTS...

I am aware of these rumours that artists are spreading about me and the Trust. They need to understand that whatever projects I am getting, or the awards that I have got, are on the basis of me being a practising artist. My projects with the government is separate from the Trust and its work. Also, I have not taken any kind of fee for the Telangana state logo. The only thing I got from the government is the recent award given on the Telangana formation day. I know that people are talking behind my back about the recent documentary I was commissioned to do on the oral and visual traditions of Telangana. As much as I work with art, I am also immersed in filmmaking. Not only am I pursuing my PhD in filmmaking, I have also worked with several other filmmakers on feature films also. It's based on my work, that I got this commissioned project from the Department of Culture. Sadly, artists are like this! They like to complain about everything even if something good is being done for them.

— Laxman Aelay, artist and trustee art@Telangana

THE CAMP IS IN PLANNING STAGES, SO WHY ARE THESE ARTISTS ACTING LIKE A FEW HAVE ALREADY LEFT FOR JAPAN?



I started with the idea to release the book in Japan, USA, and Europe. So, I wrote to the Indian Ambassador of India to Japan, who also happens to be my friend, Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa on the Trust's intention to release the book. She suggested an international camp instead, as part of the Festival of India. I have asked her to pick the artists herself. If she doesn't, then I will constitute a committee for selection. And all the allegations of bias are baseless. The artists need to understand that just because I am part of the government doesn't mean that I will mix the Trust which I started out of on personal interest with my official duties. Please note that the Trust was planned even before the new state was formed and before I got appointed as an advisor with the government.

— Papa Rao, IAS, trustee art@Telangana

LETTER FROM ARTISTS

We are writing to you about Telangana art trust and their decision to send a few artists to Japan for an art camp and seminars on Government expenses. All those who are selected are close to politicians and bureaucrats. Laxman Aelay, Priyanka Aelay, Bharat and wife Priti, Anand Gadapa and wife Nirmaia, and artist Masuram. Are they going for holiday on Government expenses, without any knowledge of other artists?

WE NEED ANSWERS!

1. Who selected this group for the Japan camp?
2. Why did the Trust not inform all Telangana artists to apply?
3. More than 100 artists contributed their valuable paintings to support Telangana Art Trust. What happened to those paintings?
5. Even if the Trust is a private body, it still promised to be a body for the artists. So, don't we have the right to have our say?
6. Why aren't they consulting seniors for major decisions?

Warm regards,
Artist community of Telangana

THE MAIN GROUSE...

The first cracks in the art fraternity appeared over the coffee table book, *art@telangana*, released during the Metropolis World Congress in October 2014. The book features 150 Telangana artists. At that point, a group of artists protested against the book alleging nepotism and lack of transparency over how the book was curated. They also felt sore about that fact that a lot of artists were left out of the book. The problem arose due to the fact that this book was promoted as one that will give artists of the state international exposure. It is perceived as a flagbearer of Telangana art. With so much sentiment and power attached to the book, it continues to be the point of contention.

