

PRESS RELEASE

Kolkata Centre for Creativity hosted 'Learn Togetherness, Beyond Binaries: Sensing Art through Queer Lensing' A series of exhibition, performances, webinars and film screening

Kolkata, 30 June 2021: Kolkata Centre for Creativity (KCC) in association with Sappho for Equality and supported by British Council held its virtual program 'Learn Togetherness, Beyond Binaries: Sensing Art through Queer Lensing' from 19th to 27th June, 2021. It was one of the initiatives under KCC DEAI (an umbrella under which KCC works for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion). The programme encompassed a virtual exhibition, performances, webinars and film screenings. The virtual inauguration on 19th June was graced by Reena Dewan (Director, Kolkata Centre for Creativity), Debanjan Chakrabarti (Director East and North East India, British Council), Sumita Bithi (member of Sappho for Equality), Paramita Chaudhuri (Head Arts East and North East India, British Council) among others. Ms Dewan explained the fundamental purpose behind 'Learn Togetherness' as "an inclusive environment where diversity of choices in gender and sexuality could be appreciated and accepted."

The exhibition of artworks, photographs, sculptures and performances were live on the KCC [website](#) from 19th to 27th June. Also available for the audience was a film screening 'Radical Intimacies' (24th – 25th June) that incorporated three short artist films from UK exploring queerness and LGBTQI+ rights. Organized by KCC and curated by Tendai Mutambu, (New Zealand-based writer, editor, curator who have curated the three films for 'Radical Intimacies'), the film screening was also followed by an online talk session with the curator. The compilation of the films focused on queer lives and experiences amidst varied locations and socio-cultural and political backdrops. As a part of the Learning Togetherness programme, webinar series were held from 20th June to 26th June from 06:00 pm to 07:00 pm on Zoom and Facebook live where the discussion focused on several topics of relevance to the queer community.

The programme ended on 28th June with the hope that 'Learn Togetherness' has been successful, as Ms. Reena Dewan, the Director of KCC mentioned, "in initiating more dialogues to make the society a little more inclusive, a little more tolerant."

Details of the event:

Exhibition and performance

The exhibited artists present at the inauguration appreciated the progressive approach of KCC and emphasized the need for such platforms. While Sreelakshmi (a selected artist) spoke about owning a space to explore the breaking of boundaries especially in classical or traditional dance forms like Mohiniyattam, Apurva Kothari (a selected artist) believes having her work ('EVE and EVE') on the KCC platform has provided validation and transformed it from 'vulgar' to 'bold and beautiful' in the eyes of her family and other people.

Webinar Series

Gender-Sexuality in Art (Sunday, 20th June, 2021)

Panellists- Rosemary Parkhil, Rudra Kishore Mandal and Monami Nandy

Moderator- Madhu Raghavendra

The first session addressed the topic 'Gender-Sexuality in Art'. Three eminent panellists- Rosemary Parkhil (Programme Manager Creative Economy and the Programme Lead for British Council, South Asia), Rudra Kishore

Mandal (visual artist) and Monami Nandy (senior repertoire at the Odissi Vision and Movement Centre, Kolkata) resonated and exchanged ideas on the subject which were moderated by Madhu Raghavendra (founder of Poetry Couture- a poetry movement in India). Rosemary's focus area of work covers cultural policy and mainstreaming gender equality through all arts programmes. She casted light on queer artists and some of the issues they are responding to in UK. While involving concisely the UK context, she explained the UK Law: Section 28: 1988-2000 that inhibited artists from "intentionally" promoting homosexuality. She went on to underline how this establishes a link between queer arts and activism.

Rudra Kishore Mandal began with a glance at the history of the expression of gender and sexuality in art and Monami said generally, a dancing body has to be gender-less, it shifts as the situation demands. But there are certain postures which are assigned based on particular gender. We need to question these structures; we need to question our understanding of gender.

Gender-Sexuality in Poetry and Lyrics (Tuesday, 22nd June, 2021)

Panellists- Mícheál McCann

Moderator- Manidipa Singha

The second webinar, on 'Gender-Sexuality in Poetry and Lyrics', was a dialogue between panellist Mícheál McCann and moderator Manidipa Singha. It was an endeavour to understand the queer community through Mícheál's poetry and his experiences in Northern Ireland.

Gender-Sexuality in Literature (Wednesday, 23rd June, 2021)

Panellists- Niladri R. Chatterjee, Paramita Chakrabarty and Afshan D'Souza-Lodhi

Moderator- Rushati Mukherjee

The next webinar on 'Gender-Sexuality in Literature' was moderated by Rushati Mukherjee (a Producer of the news podcast BBC Minute India, for BBC World Service). The panel consisted of Niladri R. Chatterjee (Professor, Department of English, University of Kalyani, West Bengal), Paramita Chakrabarty (Associate Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University, West Bengal) and Afshan D'Souza-Lodhi (Programme Manager for South Asia in British Council Literature team). The panellists discussed several issues including those faced by the professors themselves while trying to introduce queer studies in their respective departments and the experiences thereafter. Afshan shed light on the situation in the UK and how the studies were focused mainly on white and male experiences. She stressed the need for "Diversity of perspectives" in writing.

Gender-Sexuality in Schools (Thursday, 24th June, 2021)

Panellists- Koyel Ghosh, Satarupa Santra and Yvette Hutchinson

Moderator- Arna Seal

The fourth webinar addressed yet another significant topic – 'Gender-Sexuality in Education'. The session began with Koyel Ghosh (Managing Trustee of Sappho for Equality and educator of young children) and Arna (Sociologist, Teacher-Educator, Child Rights and Cultural Activist, Lyricist and Story-teller) providing a detailed idea about the state of queer students in Indian schools and progressed with Yvette explaining the situation in UK. According to Yvette, they "started the journey earlier than others" so it seems that they have progressed a lot but even they have a long way to go. Some solutions were suggested by her to make schools (and society) more queer-friendly including not addressing children through gendered nouns, having diverse role models, sensitizing parents and so on.

A talk with Tendai Mutambu in conversation with Reena Dewan (Friday, 25th June, 2021)

The next webinar was a discussion between Reena Dewan (Director, KCC) and Tendai Mutambu (New Zealand-based writer, editor, curator), the curator of the three films for 'Radical Intimacies'. Ms. Dewan's insightful questions gave the audience a view into the world of film curation through Mutambu. He skilfully explained the

reasons behind his choice of the three films (Beatrice Gibson's 'I hope I'm Loud When I'm Dead', 2018; Rehana Zaman's 'Sharla Shabana Sojourner Selena', 2016; Stephen Sutcliffe's 'Casting Through and Scenes from Radcliffe', 2017) for 'Radical Intimacies'. The conversation focused on various perspectives, from a range of work that affirms lives lived outside of the norm resisting the age-old axis of heterosexual male power.

Gender-Sexuality in Policy Making (Saturday, 26th June, 2021)

Panellists- Kolika Mitra, Kaushik Gupta and Ruth McCarthy

Moderator- Shreosi Ray

The webinar series concluded with a discussion on the topic of 'Gender-Sexuality in Policy Making' on 26th June. The webinar, moderated by Shreosi Ray (social worker, member of Sappho for Equality and Senior Programme Officer of the organization), consisted of the following panellists: Kolika Mitra (Program Associate at Sappho for Equality), Kaushik Gupta (advocate at High Court, Kolkata for the last 22 years in the field of criminal, matrimonial and human rights law) and Ruth McCarthy (Artistic Director of Outburst Arts in Belfast). While Kolika shed light on the state of queer life in India, Ruth spoke about how in Europe things look progressive on the surface but have undercurrents of intolerance. Kaushik Gupta brought forth the legal aspects and state of queer rights in India and mentioned landmark judgments that changed the scenario for the queer community in India. Ruth stated that while law and policymaking can provide the queer community protection, it does not necessarily usher in any change. Real change comes from arts which can be empowering. She stated her belief quite clearly – "Arts is Activism". All the webinars were followed by Q&A sessions with the registrants and Facebook audience putting in their questions. All the questions were answered by the panellists quite thoroughly, leaving no room for doubts.

About Kolkata Centre for Creativity (KCC)

Kolkata Centre for Creativity (KCC) is a multi-disciplinary interactive art and creativity Centre located in Kolkata, West Bengal. It is the first in Eastern India to make Art accessible to visually impaired and differently abled under their 'Art for All' initiative. Spearheaded by Richa Agarwal as it's Chairperson, the 70,000 sq. ft. Centre champions the art and cultural landscape of contemporary India since November 2018. It comprises of an Amphitheater, Exhibition & Learning Spaces, Dance studio, Conservation Lab, Books & Materials Library, Creative Culinary space, Craft & Design outlet and a Skill Development Maker's section. Integrating several expressions of art and design to highlight their common creative core – KCC encourages visitors to explore, interact and design ideas on various art forms. KCC works in the areas of Capacity Building, Well-Being, Conservation & Restoration, Craft & Design, Culinary, Visual and Performing Art. It acts as a catalyst for Artistic enhancement through Displays, Presentations, Fellowships, Laboratories, Residences, Conservation, Research and Discourses.

The programs at KCC are designed on the principles of Cultural Diversity, Gender Equality, Conservation of Environment and Inclusion of people with different abilities.

The Centre offers free entry to the public and is open between 11 am to 6 pm from Tuesday to Sunday. For more information about exhibitions and the conferences, please visit www.kolkatacentreforcreativity.org
