

# MUMBAI SLUM HOLDS ART BIENNALE

## AIMING TO PROMOTE HEALTH THROUGH CREATIVITY

**MUMBAI:** The Mumbai neighbourhood made famous by the film "Slumdog Millionaire" is set to host its first "biennale", aiming to promote health through creativity, although it will be very different to some of the world's grander art fairs.

The three-week festival, opening today, will showcase works created by

residents of Dharavi, the densely populated settlement in the heart of India's financial capital that is known as one of Asia's biggest slums.

From hand-painted pots arranged to show how sexually transmitted diseases spread, to a quilted map marking known locations of domestic violence, the Dharavi Biennale is designed to raise

awareness without being "preachy", say the organisers.

But they also want to celebrate the neighbourhood itself, home to an estimated 750,000 people from all over India, which has been held up over the years as a symbol of both grimy destitution and flourishing industry.

"What we see is that Dharavi is sitting on a lot of wealth and a lot of talent and art that gets missed out when you want to show squalor and slum," said festival co-director Nayreen Daruwalla.

Britain's Prince Charles in 2010 cited Dharavi as a role model for sustainable living, praising its habit of recycling waste and the "order and harmony" of the community, in contrast to Western countries' "fragmented" housing estates.

Guided tours around Dharavi's mini-factories-producing all manner of goods from clothes to pottery-are now a popular tourist attraction, while initiatives such as the SlumGods, a group of hip-hop street dancers, have challenged outsiders' negative perceptions.

But the difficulties facing the community remain stark, and "there is a danger of going to the other side and romanticising", said Daruwalla, pointing out the cramped conditions, poor ventilation and lack of toilets.

With such issues in mind, the Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA) held an exhibition in Dharavi two years ago called "Dekha Undekha" ("Seen Unseen"), aiming to foster discussion, through art, about themes such as sanitation and maternal health.

Its success led SNEHA to develop the biennale, a more ambitious project funded by the British charity Wellcome Trust, which culminates in the exhibitions and events this month at various locations across Dharavi's maze of alleyways.

### Different spirit

Aside from being held every other year, the festival has little in common with some of the world's better known art fairs, said co-director David Osrin, who in a presentation this month described the name as "slightly a joke, and slightly ideological".

"The spirit and the way that our biennale is structured is very, very different," he told AFP.

While other festivals simply ask artists to submit works, the focus in Mumbai has been on participation with Dharavi residents, particularly through workshops led by "mentor" artists.

The results include the "Immunity Wall", a depiction of the body's immune system using recycled materials and everyday items: red hair bobbles for red cells, scouring pads for B cells and flexi bracelets as antibodies.

Another exhibit uses traditional blockprints on cloth to illustrate the various levels of depression, a problem thought to be widespread but under-diagnosed in Mumbai's slums.

Thousands are expected to attend the exhibitions over the coming weeks, but social scientists will be conducting surveys to try and assess the festival's qualitative impact as well as footfall.

"It's quite an ambitious thing to try to



**MUMBAI:** Project co-director, Professor David Osrin (2R) speaks on his phone as workers discuss outside the "Colour Box", one of the venues of the Dharavi biennale starting today, in Mumbai. It's a long way from the glamour of Venice, but India's most famous slum Dharavi is hosting a biennale this week, aiming to use art as a tool to raise awareness about health and sanitation. —AFP

develop artworks that speak to a health agenda without being preachy, and we think we've achieved it, but it would be very interesting to know what people actually think about that synthesis," Osrin said.

A festival on this scale has proved a logistical challenge, be it finding space to display art amid the crowded dwellings or financing projects in the cash-based informal economy.

Sticking to sustainable, pro-health agendas while creating the exhibits also proved tough, said urban gardener Adrienne Thadani, who worked on the project "Growing Fresh Air in Dharavi" promoting the use of plants indoors to stay healthy.

"By using locally crafted clay pots to create easily replicable home gardens, we were working with kilns fired with synthetic scraps and used oil rags, which was polluting the area further," she said.

However much it raises health awareness, the biennale appears to be boosting morale among Dharavi's residents, such as student Saraswati Bhandare, 21, who helped to create giant puppets for the opening show about tuberculosis.

"People think this is just a slum area where we aren't educated, but the truth is that it's a place where so many talents come together. We're proud to be from Dharavi," she said. —AFP



**MUMBAI:** Foreign volunteers set up the "Colour Box", one of the venues of the Dharavi biennale starting today in Mumbai. —AFP

## STUDY TIES MORE DEATHS, TYPES OF DISEASE, TO SMOKING

**NEW YORK:** Breast cancer, prostate cancer, and even routine infections. A new report ties these and other maladies to smoking and says an additional 60,000 to 120,000 deaths each year in the United States are probably due to tobacco use.

The study by the American Cancer Society and several universities, published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine, looks beyond lung cancer, heart disease and other conditions already tied to smoking, and the 480,000 US deaths attributed to them each year.

"Smokers die, on average, more than a decade before nonsmokers," and in the U.S., smoking accounts for one of every five deaths, Dr. Graham Colditz, an epidemiologist at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis wrote in a commentary in the journal.

The report shows that current estimates "have substantially underestimated the burden of smoking on society," he wrote. About 18 percent of US adults smoke. More about the report.

### WHERE DO THE NUMBERS COME FROM?

Researchers looked at nearly 1 million Americans 55 and older taking part in five studies, including the National Institutes of Health-AARP Diet and Health Study, since 2000. They tracked the participants' health for about 10 years and compared deaths from various causes among smokers, never

smokers and former smokers, taking into account other things that can influence risk such as alcohol use.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Death rates were two to three times higher among current smokers than among people who never smoked. Most of the excess deaths in smokers were due to 21 diseases already tied to smoking, including 12 types of cancer, heart disease and stroke. But researchers also saw death rates in smokers were twice as high from other conditions such as kidney failure, infections, liver cirrhosis and some respiratory diseases not previously tied to smoking.

### WHAT ABOUT BREAST AND PROSTATE CANCER?

The report strengthens evidence tying them to smoking. It finds that female smokers' risk of dying of breast cancer is 30 percent greater than for nonsmokers. Male smokers have a 40 percent greater risk of dying of prostate cancer than nonsmokers do, the researchers found.

### HOW DO THEY KNOW SMOKING WAS THE CAUSE?

One strong sign is that the risk of dying of these other conditions declined among people who quit smoking. The longer ago they stopped, the greater the drop in risk as time went on. —AP



**PHILADELPHIA:** This Tuesday, July 15, 2014 photo shows the tobacco in cigarettes in Philadelphia. A study ties a host of new diseases to smoking, and says an additional 60,000 to 120,000 deaths each year in the United States are probably due to tobacco use. The study by the American Cancer Society and several universities is published in the Thursday edition of the New England Journal of Medicine. It looks beyond lung cancer, heart disease and other conditions already tied to smoking and adds breast cancer, prostate cancer and even routine infections to the list. —AP

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Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem  
فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال  
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368