

'I have a dream will highlight farmers' problems'

[Barkha Mathur](#), TNN | Jun 29, 2014, 01:34AM IST

City artist Shweta Bhattad takes her art away from the confines of a studio to connect with the community. Through art residencies in India and abroad she has always picked up social issues. Food, women empowerment, saving the girl child and more recently problems in rural areas are some themes she has highlighted during these events. An invitation to be a part of the prestigious art residency, Biennale 2014-2016 to be held at Vancouver in Canada has spurred her to take farmer issues to an international platform. Before leaving for the event she shared the details with TOI.

Excerpts from the interview...

What exactly is this invitation all about?

The Vancouver Biennale is a prestigious art event held every two years and this year I am one of the participants from nearly 100 who have been invited from across the world. The theme this year is 'I have a dream'. I was asked how I would be interpreting it and I picked on a global farming initiative.

How was this idea born?

During an art residency at Taiwan I met another artist Shuloon Wu. We had long discussions on farmer related issues. We had thought of a farmer exchange programme also during an art residency held at my village in Paradsinga (MP) earlier this year. But, unfortunately, the farmer from Taiwan who was supposed to be coming was not granted a visa. We had decided to collaborate with the farmers from different nations and this Biennale offered an excellent platform to do so.

How are you developing this idea?

I am working on this along with artist Lalit Vikamshi who has helped develop the idea and, searched for artists and farmers via Internet. The idea is to have each farmer sow the seeds in a pattern that will show the phrase 'I have a dream' when the crop grows. They will be helped by a local artist for forming the pattern. The crop will take three months to be ready and then aerial shots will be taken. During three months the artists and farmers will collaborate to have discussions, events and initiatives on global peace. When the crop is ready to be harvested it will be used to prepare a community lunch and entire village will be invited to be a part of it.

Is the project underway anywhere at the moment?

It began in March and has been very successfully executed in Italy at two places. The local artist Tatiana Villani held seminars on problems of land and seed mafia in there. In India the project is underway at Darjeeling where an Indio-Nepa poet meet was held to discuss farming issues at Rampuria village. In Orissa, artist Satyabhama Majhi has launched the project in ten villages. In Japan, School kids were involved in the project as there is a shortage of farmland. The saplings are being grown in plastic bags placed in large milk containers. Other places where it is also taking shape are Taiwan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Hawaii, Holland and Canada.

What would you be doing at Canada for the next one month?

I will be staying at a village called Squamish. There I would be working on a huge wooden installation which will bear the letters 'I have a dream'. The final display will be in the form of videos and images which artists will upload from all over the globe. These images and videos will be installed in the wooden structure. Different video screens, one for each country will be displayed in Biennale, where videos will keep running showing the process of the project. Each screen will be titled by the name of collaborating artists and farmers and the videos will be heard through head phones.

What according to you would this project ultimately achieve?

It will be a compilation of various farm related issues across the world. I have prepared 25 questions in consultations with experts, which have been sent to all participants to use in their activities. This is an effort to bring out issues, traditions and customs related to farming. Like in Pakistan, artist Faiza Khan will put together folk songs and traditions around sowing of seeds and harvesting. She will create events around these and ticket them. The proceeds will be given to the farmers. In Taiwan there is a Paiwan tribe which has been stripped of their rights and privileges. Shuloon would be gathering them and helping them to discover their identity. Across the world farmers are facing similar issues. This effort will give a voice to them.