

A Daily Practice in Memories of a Lived Experience: Bridging Pune and New York City

Sruthi Atmakur-Javdekar

Abstract

What happens when the present (perceived or real space) is 'conceived' (as artwork) from memories of a lived experience?

According to Lefebvre, 'representational space' is space as directly (or lived) experienced by users through "associated images and symbols" (p. 39); one that is passively experienced or felt – "a space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (1974/1991, p. 39).

Like New York City and perhaps other cities in urban India, Pune has been experiencing rapid transformation where the urban landscape is dotted with high-rise developments in residential, industrial, institutional and commercial sectors. However, Pune has a unique urban landscape given its geographical locational advantage of being nestled in the rich and biologically diverse Sahyadri mountain range or the Western Ghats. As a result, the city boasts of small hills that are marked by urban planners, technocrats, and those in power as bio-diverse areas - spaces where no urban transformation may be permitted. This leads to

a type of development that constantly struggles between accommodating the demands of the influx of migrants from other towns and cities and Pune's natural landscape.

In this context of urban transformation of Pune city and my personal journey of moving from New York City to Pune in 2013, I use painting as a medium to unpack my decade long personal journey of change. In total, there are five artworks, where each piece reflects 'representational space'— i.e., space as directly experienced by me using vivid colors and abstract shapes.

The five paintings are chronologically positioned based on the year of completion. As a result, when viewed in order, the artworks tell a story of change – of crossing over (the bridge) from a life of a graduate student /researcher /lecturer in New York City to a life of a PhD scholar/ mother/ wife/ daughter/ working professional in Pune city. Through each art piece, I lean into the theme of 'urban nature' to share my subjective experiences. When you look closer, each art piece, much like Pune's demanding urban landscape, represents a story of change, challenge, acceptance, and resistance.

Keywords: sound, music, walking, being, urban nature, landscape, painting, representational space, Lefebvre, art, New York City, Pune



Across the Bridge 2015, photo by the artist. Acrylic on canvas. (91.5 x 61.5 cm)



Nature-nurture 2017, photo by the artist. Watercolor on cartridge paper. (21 x 28 cm)



Losing Touch 2021, photo by the artist. Poster color on textured paper. (29.7 x 21 cm)



Lotuses on roof 2021, photo by the artist. Poster color on textured paper. (29.7 x 21 cm)



Urban Hills 2021, photo by the artist. Poster color and oil pastels on cartridge paper (42 x 29.7 cm)

About the artist

Dr. Sruthi Atmakur-Javdekar is an architect and landscape architect with a PhD in Environmental Psychology from the CUNY Graduate Center, New York City.

For over a decade, Sruthi worked as a research associate and project director with the Children's Environments Research Group (CERG) at the Center for Human Environments (CHE), CUNY Graduate Center. Sruthi's CERG portfolio includes development of children's participatory assessment toolkits and management of global projects related to child friendly cities, communities and schools with UNICEF, Bernard van Leer Foundation and Plan International alongside Dr. Roger Hart and Dr. Pamela Wridt. In fact, she continues to hold her scholarly affiliation with CERG after moving back to India, her home country.

Currently, Sruthi is the founder-director of 'GRIT: environmental design + research studio' that bridges people and places. Here, she examines the physical and social affordances of the built and natural environment to promote healthy people-place interactions. Through the work at her studio, Sruthi aims to improve play, home and learning environments for children, young people and adults in urban areas of the developing world. <https://sruthi.org/>