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Culture in the time of corona: Sitting at home, audiences zoom in on art

Artists, working on the belief that a pandemic is one of the most powerful reasons to turn to art, have found a way to reach audiences.

Written by **Dipanita Nath** | Pune | Updated: April 11, 2020 12**EAGLE IN THE SKY**

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PAVAN KHENGRE

Organisers of the event are expecting a bigger crowd at this month's edition owing to the anxiety around the lockdown being extended. Express Photo: Pavan Khengre

The people could not go to the majlis, so it came to them. The Urdu literary event by Pagdandi Bookstore Cafe is a cultural tradition, and has taken place, uninterrupted, every fourth Saturday since it began four years ago. The lockdown is no reason to stop, and so 30 people from across the city came together online and shared gems of Urdu literature — from stories to poems to anecdotes — for more than four hours. Organisers of the event are expecting a bigger crowd at this month's edition owing to the anxiety around the lockdown being extended.

“Tanhaaiyaan aur Urdu ka gehra rishta hai. Urdu has the magic of being the language of emotion. During the lockdown, people want to express their feelings through their own writing or something they have read and want to share. At the end of the majlis, everybody went back to their mind,” says Vishal Pipraiya, founder, Pagdandi

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Artists, working on the belief that a [pandemic](#) is one of the most powerful reasons to turn to art, have found a way to reach audiences. Pune is among the cultural hubs of the country and the calendars, at this time of the year, are packed with performances, workshops, readings and exhibitions. Galleries, halls and experimental spaces closed their doors — but brainstormed on new ways to reach their clientele. People are adjusting to the next best thing to experiencing art live — watching a play, hearing a lecture or attending a comedy on screen. On Saturday at 6 pm, for instance, the Mad Bai, who can bring the house down with her quirky, comedic and satirical comments, will be on [Facebook Live](#). Mad Bai is a creation of Niki Ray, a performer and mental health worker, among others.

“Due to the current [COVID-19](#) situation in India, TIFA has decided to cancel all offline events for the coming months. Being an arts organisation, this is a massive challenge for us not just for now but for the rest of the year. We have transitioned to doing online events and adapting to new platforms and trying to reach audiences in new ways,” says Trishla Talera of TIFA.

The arts organisation is the Pune chapter host of a series of sessions organised with Arts Cultural Resources India and British Council, Pune, on professional opportunities in the cultural and creative sector. The highlight of these sessions is

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instead of a packed offline hall. “We have a Play series of art education coming up on our website soon too,” adds Talera.

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Swatantra Theatre, one of the first to respond to the changed situation, has been uploading its plays on YouTube and getting numerous hits. On April 11, it will premiere the play, Jab Shahar Hamara Sota Hai, and, on April 12, Mujhe Amrita Chahiye, both based on well-known scripts.

“We are also working on audio dramas and e-books to tide our followers through the lockdown,” says Abhijeet Choudhary from the theatre group.



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