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CULTURE BUILDERS:
IN CONVERSATION
WITH NERI&HU



MARTAND KHOSLA

Drawing parallels in art and architecture

FINDING CONNECTIONS

Award-winning architect **Martand Khosla** gets candid about his creatively inspired design principles

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ART, ARCHITECTURE AND BEYOND

Surreal twisted doors, towers reaching for the sky, and minimalistic yet intricate drawings! Artist and architect Martand Khosla's recent exhibition titled 1:2500 was an engaging play of scale, dimensions and configurations.

His works, while profoundly philosophical, are also a practical commentary on the city, its structures and its people. "I used the title 1:2500 because it is a common scale used for survey plans of cities. The title alludes to the idea that it is not just physical aspects of a city that are scalable; the more intangible aspects align to the idea of scale as well," he explains.

To the onlooker, it might seem as though the two roles, that of an artist and architect, must collide. But for Khosla, art and architecture are two parallels. One doesn't inhibit or influence the other. "I see them to be distinctly different in their practice, but they do attempt to address similar conceptual concerns about the nature of our cities and the futures that lie ahead of us."

As far as architecture is concerned, he prefers to define the profession in a broader sense than purely as construction of buildings. While for us, architecture might seem to be more pragmatic and scientific, and art more fantastical, Khosla has the most interesting theory. "I believe that conceptual architecture, theoretical architecture and abstract architecture are just as vital as built architecture.





Both art and architecture can have aspects of pragmatism and fantasy. They exist as distinctly separate entities and sometimes occupy spaces that are more ambiguous, where perhaps they can exist as two simultaneous objects.”

To him, the definition of architecture or design is simple – Reimagining the future!

THE BIRTH OF AN ARCHITECT

For someone who once crawled through drafting tables and rotring pens (his father Romi Khosla worked from his home studio), being an architect came as no surprise. “In our summer holidays I saw one grandfather doing carpentry and the other, writing. My mother was a professor of Russian Literature and is a wonderful watercolour artist. She is the one who first introduced me to art. As I grew older, I would accompany my father to building sites and play in the heaps of sand.” Architecture and art came as a natural choice, or it may seem. Though he studied art, physics and mathematics

at school, a combination that would point to a natural progression to architecture school, Khosla was always undecided about what he wanted to pursue at university. “I took a year off after school and travelled extensively, working as a graphic designer, photographer’s assistant as well as in an architectural studio. At the end of the year I remained as undecided as I was the previous year,” he says. His tour of art and architecture colleges in England led him to the Architectural Association. “I found myself mesmerised by the energy of the place and the teaching methodology. I was clear that I wanted to study there.”

After graduating in 2001, he worked briefly in London at a firm called Allies and Morrison before returning to India. He started his practice by designing structures and sets for theatre, fashion and public events and soon moved on to a variety of projects. Romi Khosla Design Studio (RKDS) was set up in 2001-2002 with a project to design patient accommodation for a hospital in West Delhi.

Today, the consultancy engages in creative and contemporary design with a wide range of projects including luxury hotels, educational buildings, retail locations, small specialised interiors and urban planning. The studio, in its present form, was rebranded as a dynamic design centre intended to be scale agnostic, and particularly, class agnostic.

“Our intention was to design a large variety of spaces for users from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Over the last two decades, we have designed ephemeral event spaces, retail interiors, buildings for charitable organisations and educational institutions, urban sculptural installations and a host of furniture and products,” says Khosla.

From a design perspective, RKDS always wanted to explore new solutions for the continuously changing Indian milieu. Khosla was very clear right from the beginning that he wanted to be identified with or tied to larger architectural trajectories.

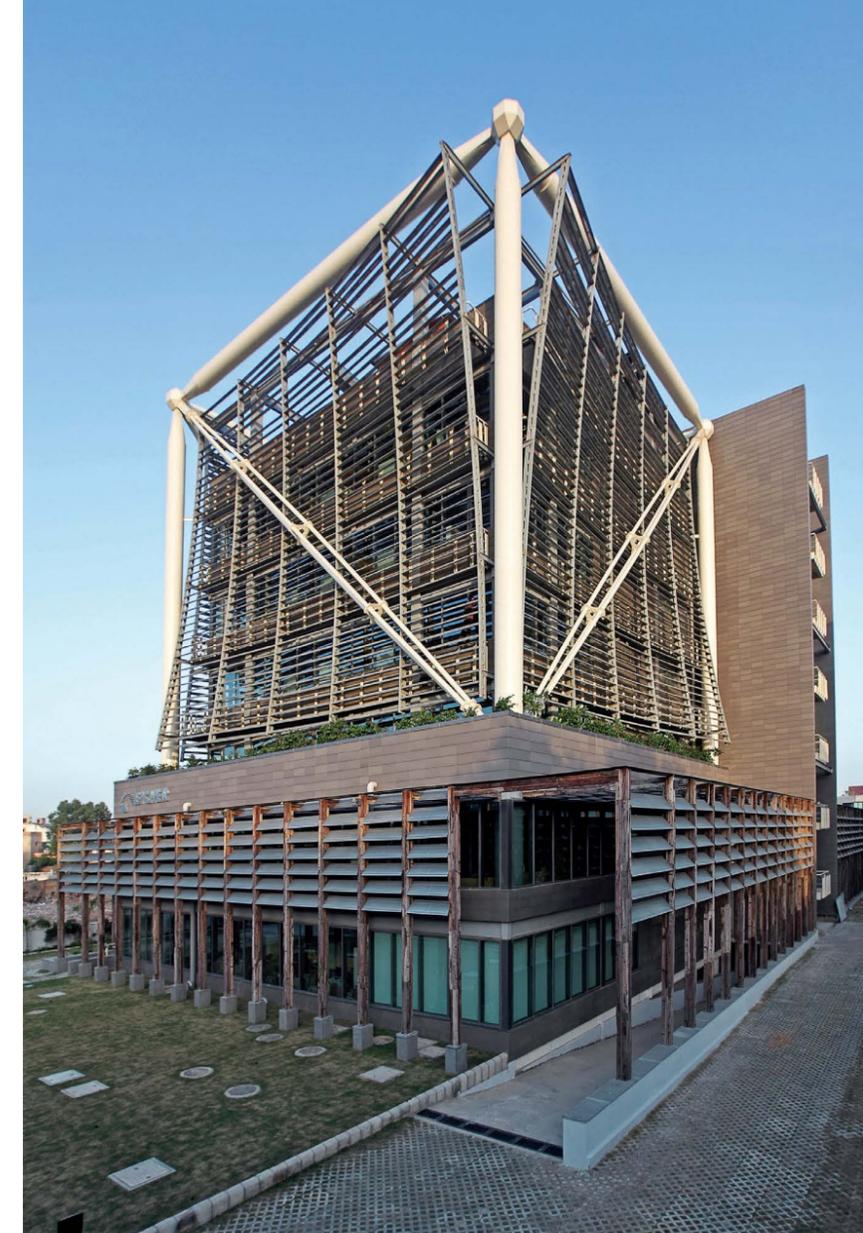
“As a practice, we wanted to be involved in the pursuit of more intimate individual architectural searches that are driven by climate, modernist forms, sustainability and explorative materiality.”



As an architect practicing in India, there was a slow realisation that our engagement with the city is going to be limited to a series of singular buildings.

– Martand Khosla, *Partner, Romi Khosla Design Studio*

Facing page:
(Top left)
The Flying House in
Dharamshala
(Far right)
Volvo-Eicher
Corporate
Headquarters
in Gurgaon
(Middle left) The Twist
& Shout installation
in Rotterdam
(Below left)
Castro Cafe
in New Delhi
(Below right)
Polyclinic for the
Destitute in Delhi





The ideas and theory behind the art, and the centrality of the city as a zone of artistic exploration originates from my architectural education and engagements with practice and theory.

– Martand Khosla, Partner, Romi Khosla Design Studio



Cafe was one of the earliest such buildings where the studio used waste stone from construction sites across Delhi to create a climatically complex, low-energy consuming building. “The Polyclinic in Lahori Gate was a turning point in my understanding of the fractured nature of our cities; it propelled our studio to be further committed to working with the less privileged sections of society. The VECV headquarters challenged us greatly to design a building of international specifications for India, setting several path breaking precedents for steel buildings in India.”

Currently the studio is working on a large Indian Embassy, a cultural centre and housing in central Asia apart from several residential and commercial projects. The most interesting projects however, are the waste sorting sheds designed for the waste pickers’ collective in Pune, and a community forest research centre in rural Maharashtra.

THE TRANSITION TO ART

“Art is a more recent practice for me. I showed my work for the first time in 2012, whereas my architectural studio is now nearly 20 years old. During my architectural education, we had to learn everything from carpentry and concrete casting to model making and drawing. It was here that I learned skills I use in my sculptural and drawing works,” Khosla informs.

It was during the early years of limited and small projects that his engagement with the nature of architecture and the working labour increased. “There were certain frustrations at not being able to engage with the larger narrative of the cities around us. This coincided with the Commonwealth Games being hosted in Delhi. In order to get a better understanding of the changes happening within our country, I had begun to read about migrant labour, farmer distress, and construction labour. I returned to making small sculptures and drawings exploring these issues. This was also the time when we had started work in our studio on a TB and HIV hospice in Delhi. So, several events led to the beginning of making art. It took another two years before I showed it in public though,” Khosla elucidates.

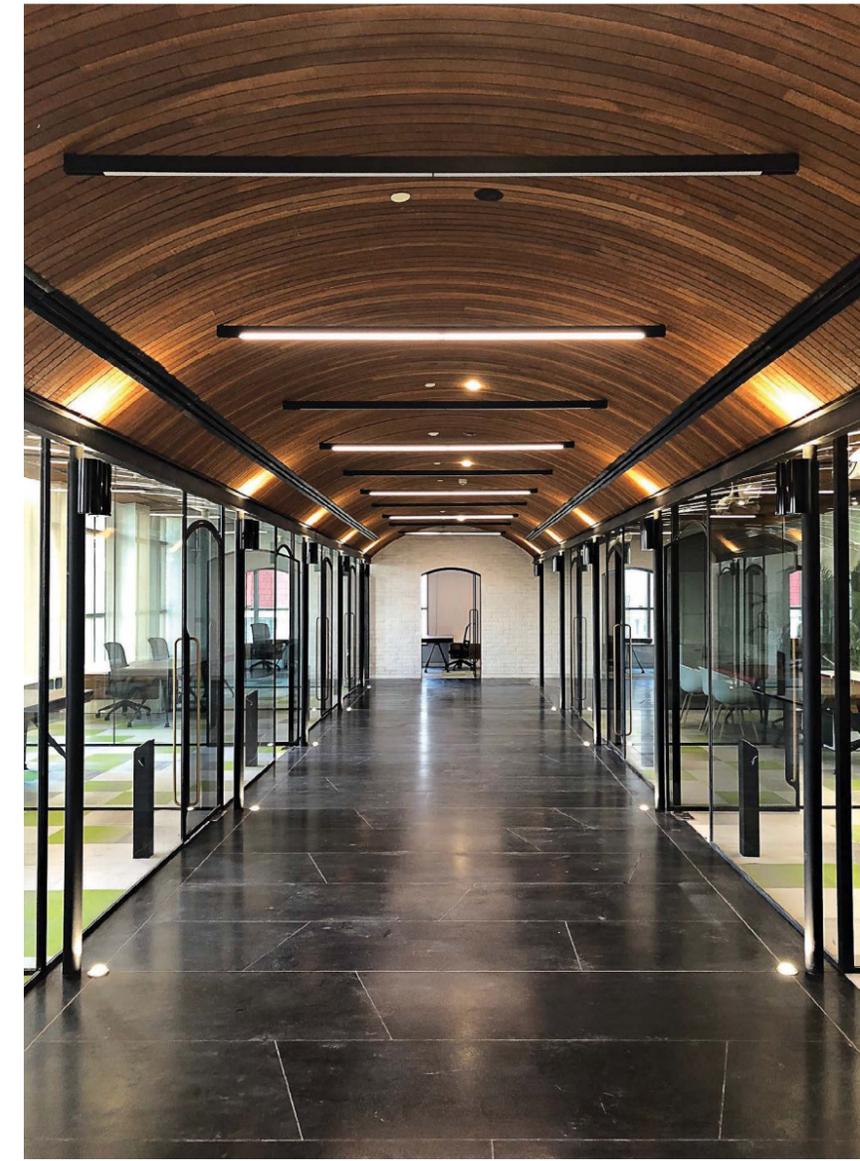
The idea of the contemporary is central to the design philosophy. “Our approach would be to respond to the conditions of a site and situate our building within the context in a modern yet extremely local manner,” he says.

Speaking of influences, Khosla cites a variety, leaning heavily towards cinema, literature and art - Le Corbusier, Peter Zumthor, Marcel Duchamp, Berthold Romanovich Lubetkin, Andrei Tarkovsky and the theory of Constructivism.

THE WORK STRATOSPHERE

“I think our studio is guided by the basic tenets of modernism, so program is central to the design process, but increasingly, climatic conditions have begun to influence the form of our buildings,” says the architect. This is evident in the Volvo-Eicher Corporate Headquarters (VECV) in Gurgaon and the Flying House in Himachal Pradesh. The Castro

(Below) Tower House in South Delhi
(Top Right) Headquarters of Greenpanel Industries in Gurgaon
(Below right) Shantanu & Nikhil showroom in New Delhi
(Below left) Suneet Varma showroom in New Delhi



ALL ART IMAGES: SHOIVAN GANDHI



THE ARTIST AND THE CITY

“As an architect practicing in India, there was a slow realisation that our engagement with the city is going to be limited to a series of singular buildings. Larger forums have not emerged within the architectural discourse where individual architects have representative voices in the discussions and decisions on the future of the cities,” says Khosla.

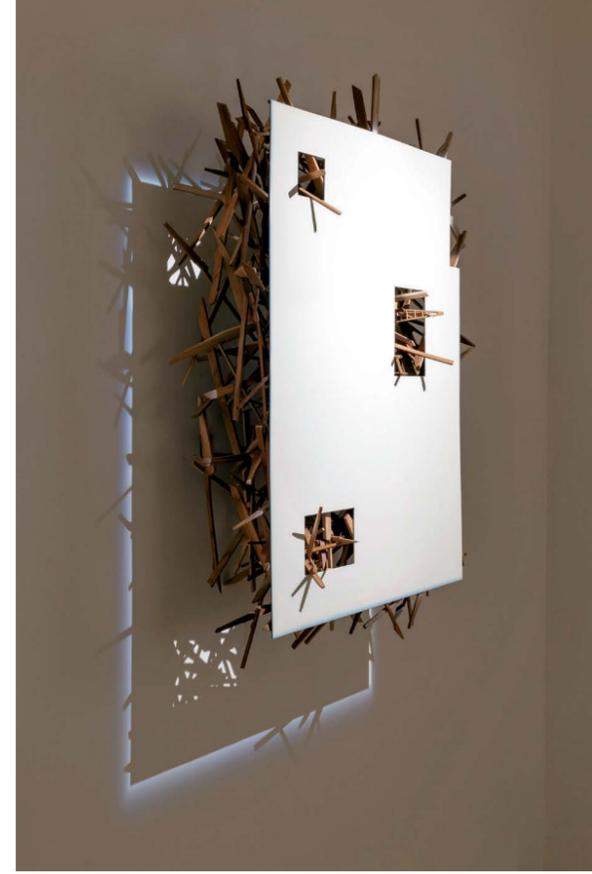
His work over the past decade has explored varied aspects of the city -- labour and its relationship with the administrative powers of the city and the change in the attitude of the judiciary towards migrants within our cities. “Some of my work has looked at migration from rural to urban India, and more recently, the impact of global warming and resettlement within the urban peripheries.” Khosla alludes to the story of 10 blind men describing an elephant by just touching various parts of its body. The person describing the elephant from only touching its tusks does so very differently from those only touching its hide, eyes or tail.

“I see myself continuing to explore and engage with the different aspects of a city. I believe that the ideas I am exploring should be in a material language that speaks to the art works as well as my concerns of the city. My initial works on paper that explored the relationship with the state and the locally displaced migrants were all made using government rubber stamps and stamping ink.”

He has worked extensively with brick dust to make sculptures and works on paper. The more recent explorations include use of concrete and reclaimed wood from demolished housing colonies in Delhi. “The central idea of materiality within the modernist architectural discourse about material truth remains central to my art practice,” he concludes. **H&DT**



Facing page:
Untitled
This page:
(Right) Upwards 2
(Far right) Maximum
Capacity 3
(Both below)
Pascal 1 and 2



The very nature of architecture is antithetical to sustainability. Sustainability within the profession must be redefined, as minimising environmental impact while designing.

– Martand Khosla, Partner, Romi Khosla Design Studio

