
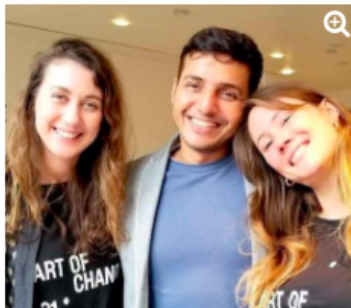


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## Tackling air pollution, one mask at a time

By Akhila Damodaram | Express News Service | Published: 15th December 2017 10:34 PM |  
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Erica Johnson, Maskbook programme director; Afroz Shah, patron, India; Marguerite Courtel, secretary general

BENGALURU: Create a mask from recycled waste, have your portrait taken and join the online gallery that is Maskbook.org. Through such workshops, Maskbook hopes to resolve environmental crises. Launched in 2015 by Art of Change 21, ahead of the COP21 in Paris, Maskbook is an international, participatory and artistic action project that tackles the impact of air pollution on our health.

Artist Erica Johnson says, “Using the mask as a symbol, Maskbook takes the anti-pollution (or dust) mask, a symbol of pollution, and transforms it into a means of expression and symbol for solutions for the crisis.” She claims the project has already mobilised thousands of people. “Over 70 workshops have taken place in more than 12 countries, and its

portrait gallery counts over 2,500 participants from over 40 countries,” she adds.



A participant displays her creatively decorated mask

Through mask creation workshops, exhibitions of Maskbook portraits, the online gallery (Maskbook.org), the mobile app (available on Apple Store and Google Play) and Mask-Trotter, anyone, anywhere, can get involved. “With a blank mask in hand, participants search for ‘ingredients’ to personalise their mask with plastic packaging, vegetation or small toys. Ingredients are always locally sourced, and come from recycling circuits,” she says.

The workshop in Bengaluru is the first in India. They are usually organised in different locations — from art centres to corporate offices, public spaces, festivals and universities. She says, “Even though we find common elements in portraits, every person’s mask tells a different story.”

The reactions of the participants differ based on the air pollution levels of their country and awareness on climate change. These reactions show through each mask. “In China, people are dying from air pollution. There is a deep anger towards polluting industries and this anger fuels a strong creativity. In Bhutan, participants’ masks reflect respect for Nature. In France, there is more focus on our consumption and the waste we produce,” she says.

Art is a universal language that has the power to affect everyone on a visceral level. “Participants of the project can reverse their role from victims of climate change to actors of change. Through creating with one’s own hands, there is a lived experience to create, and participants, now sensitised to environmental issues, are more ready to believe in their power to create change.” Participate in the Maskbook workshop at BeFantastic, the tech arts festival that is open till December 17 at Rangashtala Metro Arts Centre, MG Road.

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