



Alfred Bast and his impromptu art

Description

On the evening of 7 March, as Ram and Suresh Kishna mesmerized the audience at Aurodhan Gardens with their unique interpretation of Bharatnatyam, the Inquirer team chanced to meet a surprise visitor who was there to capture the energy of the dancers in his paintings. Alfred Bast made no less than three paintings during the two hours of performance of the Kishna brothers, titled [Heavenly Illumination](#).

Alfred Bast is from Germany, but has been a regular visitor to Pondicherry and to Auroville for the last forty years. He loves and excels in his impromptu art, using hardly anything more than crayons. He loves to paint during performances, he said. When asked, he admitted to having been doing it all his life. Lalit Varma of Aurodhan Gardens an hour before the performance called up Alfred Bast an hour before the performance and asked him, “Would you like to make some paintings during the performance?” Being the artist that he is, Bast could not say no.

Alfred Bast loves to begin his work on a blank canvas where he doesn’t know what is going to come and when it does it is a surprise even to himself. With the complicated and different movement of the dancers, it is, in the beginning, very challenging for him, he said. But once he does start, it all begins to come to him naturally. He told that it is his energy that he brings out in his paintings, but this energy in turn is brought out by the music and the performance.

When asked about the dance performance of Ram and Suresh Kishna, he expressed that he is not unfamiliar with Bharatnatyam and that he is fond of the spiritual tradition in the dance form. In Europe, Bast said, one could not find traditional dances like these. He also added that young dancers and performers like the Kishna brothers always like to experiment, which is what made their performance such an “interesting experiment.”

Alfred Bast visited Pondicherry for the first time in 1974, and in these forty years he has kept on coming back to Pondicherry and Auroville for the same reason: to paint, to write, and to research art. As a visitor who has had the time to look at Pondicherry for the last forty years, Bast had a lot to say about the town. He spoke of how Pondicherry used to be much quieter before. But those times, he accepted were his first in India, and he was not quite as awoken as now. To him the difference between Pondicherry then and now is in two folds, the first being that principally nothing has changed: the clouds, the sea, the light, the deep heart of the town and its people. But the outward appearance of the city has changed, for example the multitude of cars. He feels it has gotten more quicker, and is now much more consumer driven than before. In the deepest of feelings, Alfred Bast cites, the town to him is like the sea, always the same but eternally moving.

Photos: Tathagata Mitra

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Date Created

March 8, 2014

Author

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