

Rangskhembor Mawblei is a Master of Fine Arts graduate from Viswa Bharti, Shantineketan, West Bengal. He is an incredibly talented and innovative artist who would experiment with various forms of art and was one of the resource persons in the recently concluded Art Appreciation Week wherein he gave a demonstration on Installation Art. The following are snippets from the conversation that Rangskhembor had with our correspondent:

Q: How was your experience in this program as a resource person?

Rangskhembor: I deal with Installation Art whereby I go to a place and understand what is going on. So I used the entire first day to understand my setting and how I can deal with it and that gave me an idea on what to do in the following days. Installation Art is about integrating the space itself and I work with various materials like paper and thread but because we have so many students participating, I had to engage them in the process of dealing with the space. When I went home on the first day, I got the idea of how the students themselves including me can arrange ourselves in such a way that we could utilise the space. For example, when talking about space, various factors come into play like the pillar, the wall, the floor and some of the students even mentioned Wi-Fi. On the second day, things got interesting. Some students used the window as a metaphor for a mirror or a pillar as a metaphor for death. So you can see that even narrating an object is one kind of an art form in itself. Seeing the students grab the experience with space was really interesting for me and I hope it was so for them as well.

Q: Can you elaborate more on Installation Art, the art form that you deal with?

Rangskhembor: To put it very simply, it is the relation of the artist to the space. For example, I am an artist in Martin Luther Christian University the question is, Who am I as an artist in the University and how can I deal with the University regarding the artworks that I do? This is what I do, whenever I go to a place I love to integrate the aspect of that place in my works. These past few days when I worked with the students, I tried to make them understand the value of the space that is given to them and I hope this would contribute towards making them love and value their stay here in the University.

Q: What are the initiatives that can be taken, especially in North East India, to give artists like you more space and scope for improvement?

Rangskhembor: Firstly, the good news is that artists are no longer a minority in the North East as there are quite many artists out there doing very well in their respective fields. I feel the first thing that we need as artists is a proper art gallery. However, in the long run, I feel we need to nurture the love of art at an early age starting from schools and colleges or maybe introduce a dedicated Bachelor's degree for art. To really develop a person as an artist, an art institute or an art department is a must. Because seminars and programs like the one we are having now will last for only a short period of time but for the all round development of an artist, it requires a long term dedicated initiative.

Q: You also teach in Mairang Vidya Jyoti Inclusive School which happens to be the only inclusive school in West Khasi Hills District. Can you tell us a little bit about the school and what you do in the school?

Rangskhembor: When I go to school everyday, I don't go there viewing myself as a teacher but I look at myself as a space and I like to go and create a space for students in which they can exercise their creativity. This also stems from a very personal experience. You see, most of the students, after passing out of their school, would say that they miss their school and their schooldays but that has never happened with me. For me, I don't really miss my school because as a kid, I never really got the space to exercise and execute my interest and creativity. Keeping that in mind, I try to create an environment for my students wherein they develop a sense of belongingness to their school by letting them represent the school in various competitions or even involving them in everyday tasks like decorating for the various events in the school. That way, they not only enjoy their time in school but also miss it when it's time for them to leave. My experience with the students with disabilities is also a wonderful one. I have noticed that we cannot just force them and make them do our bidding. We have to be very patient and incredibly sensitive with them and the beauty of working with them is that they have no pretensions; you will be able to tell if they're fond of you and even if they dislike you, they will show that openly irrespective of whether you are their teacher or friend. Working with them has really taught me to be more attentive, patient and most importantly, it has taught me to value life more.