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Season of Culture

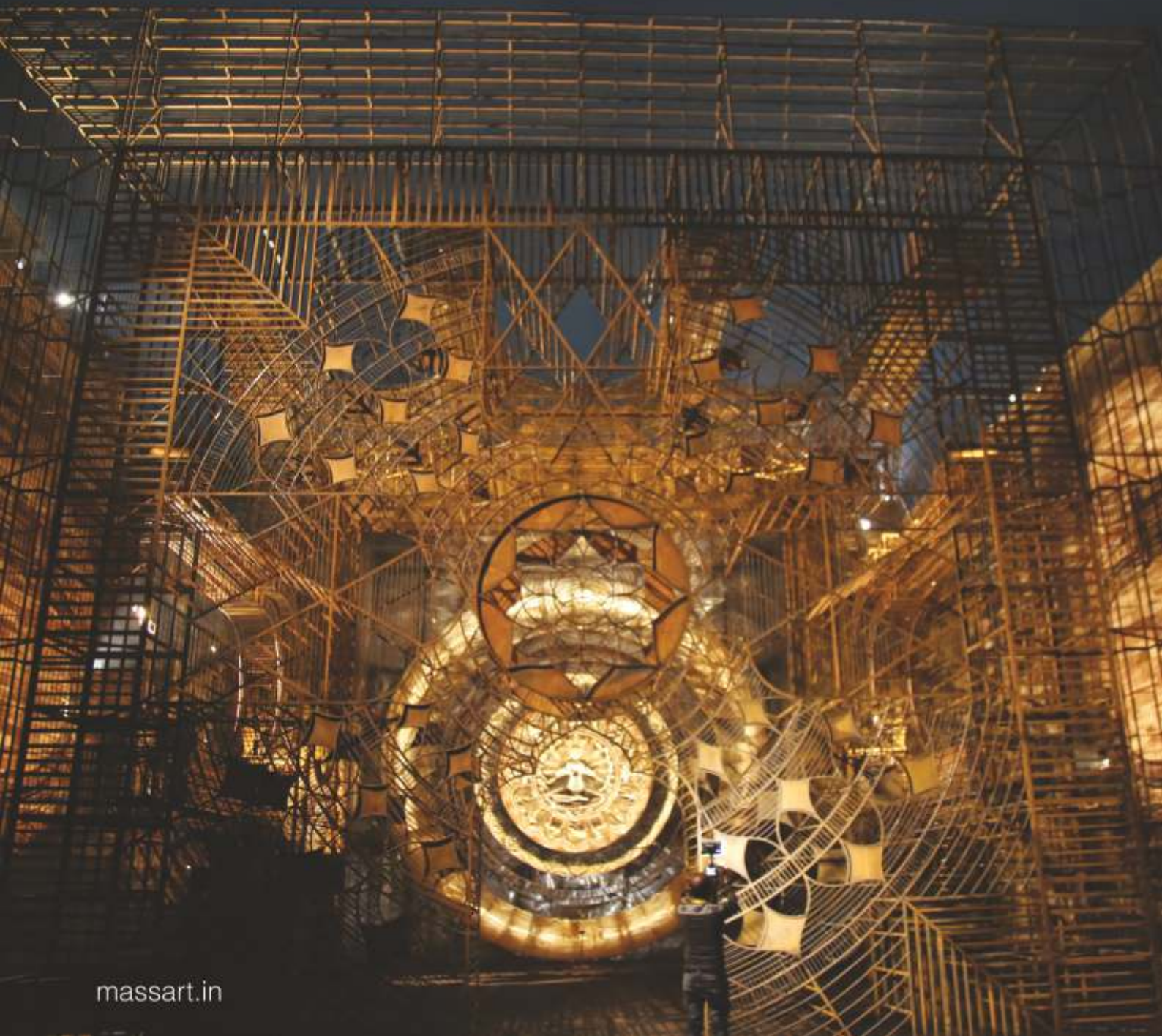
a report

world's biggest public Art festival

# DURGA PUJA ART

## PREVIEWSHOW2022

a first-of-its kind initiative to celebrate the festivity



“what i believe would be wonderful is to take these pavilions to other places of the world, because the world is going to be totally in love with these pandals. they are fascinating. i understand that they are not made in this way anywhere else in india. so this is a mystery that you have to come to kolkata to see.”

—andre aranha correa do lago  
ambassador of brazil

*interview in the telegraph, 21.10.22*

“conferring of intangible heritage tag by unesco has brought so much joy to the city. durga puja is not only about faith and religion—it’s a celebration of life.”

—dr. soumitra mohan, ias  
secretary, tourism dept.  
govt. of west bengal

“having spent years living in kolkata and soaking up the durga puja each year, i was very impatient for a chance to return. but getting the most out of the experience as the outsider was not easy, and the crowds are not for the faint-hearted either—so i really was delighted to be part of the preview programme. i think it is a brilliant idea and offers an accessible window to a truly unique event to anyone passing by.”

—laura amalir  
author, calcutta: lens and bylanes

"perhaps in another life , shakespeare in stratford would be writing about calcutta and the city of joy and durga puja and its joy."

—jonathan kennedy  
director, Arts india  
british council

"it is the highest show of Art and culture anywhere in the world. you cannot find so many types of culture, Art and artisans.  
we destroy, dismantle to create new things every year. so we are the creators  
—the people of bengal."

—firhad hakim  
mayor of kolkata &  
minister, govt. of west bengal

"in italy and europe we have many historical and traditional endeavors, but i had never witnessed such a diffused performance as durga puja, a real work of Art."

—alfonso tagliaferri  
consul general of italy in bangalore



# index

- preface
- the catalyst
- in the spotlight
- impact
- the challenge
- the reality
- idea - out of the box
- i to i
- bond with the best
- the implementor
- partners on board
- the build-up
- viewing process
- plan of action
- smooth passage
- demographics
- through the lens
- a pre-preview show bonus

## preface

durga puja in kolkata is a socio-religious celebration that has spilled out of the courtyards of aristocratic mansions to the street corners of almost every locality. over the years, this celebration has metamorphosed into a carnival of aesthetic expression with Art college graduates working shoulder to shoulder with traditional craftsmen to turn the city of joy into a public Art gallery—with myriad Art installations interpreting a single narrative, the victory of good over evil—during a 10-day period in the months of september-october.



## the catalyst

the unesco inscribed durga puja on its representative list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity in december 2021.






## in the spotlight

with the unesco inscription, durga puja was suddenly in the national limelight, making it to newspaper front pages, headlines of television news & social media communications.



## impact

a thanksgiving rally was brought out on december 22, 2021 drawing participation from puja organizers, artists and enthusiasts as also local ngo(s) working in the socio-cultural sector, walking a 2 km stretch carrying the message #THANKSUNESCO2021 with *dhakis* drumming, women performing *dhunuchi* dance, and performers dressed as goddess durga and her entourage in *chhau* masks, it was a colourful affair. signatures were collected and handed over to the unesco representative in delhi, india.



"for international visitors, sometimes there's a reluctance to go to mass events like kumbh mela. they feel a bit uneasy, especially in covid times. mass events are not going to be so easy to popularise."

—eric falt  
director, unesco, for india, bangladesh,  
bhutan, nepal, maldives & sri lanka

*interview in the telegraph, 28.08.22*

## the challenge

to leverage the global honour and draw tourists from elsewhere in india and abroad to experience durga puja, the biggest hurdle is the crowd. the best of puja pandals can only be reached through a test of patience, after negotiating snaking queues. this is only to be expected with half the city out on the streets hopping from pandal to pandal at any given point of the day or night, on the five festival days and thousands coming into the city from the districts by bus, train and private transport.

## the reality



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how then to showcase  
the creativity and cut  
out the crowd ?

since this is a community festival, the crowd cannot be kept out on the festival days. the heavy traffic on the streets, however well-managed, and the stiff traffic regulations near the big pandals diminish the viewer-friendliness of the occasion.



## idea - out of the box

bring the tourists and the dignitaries in before the crowd starts coming.

even if some of the pandals are still nearing completion, watching the craftsmen at work would be of interest to the visitors.

based on this out-of-the-box idea, massArt organised the unique preview show of durga puja Art in kolkata, exclusively for tourists, ending a full four-five days before the pandals are traditionally opened to the public.

the streets are still relatively noise-free.

parking regulations are not in place yet. this means visitors' cars can be parked close to the pandals.

feelings of locals are not hurt if they are kept out of the pandals as admission is traditionally barred in big pandals till the formal inauguration.

coordination is easier as the number of showcased pujas is limited to the best among the 3,000-odd pujas in the city.

the prior selection ensures maximum satisfaction for visitors instead of the trial and error that random and uninformed pandal-hopping entails.

the show is limited to the hours after sundown (6pm to 5am) so as to offer the full impact of the illumination that is integral to most thematic installations.

## i to i idea to implementation

the idea was conceived in june 2022. with less than three months in hand, massArt hit the ground running to put together the first-of-its-kind preview show of durga puja Art in kolkata, from 22 to 24 september 2022.

instead of having viewers crisscross the city, a selection was made. from a pool of over 3,000 pujas of different budgets and wildly varying artistic merit, 26 pujas were chosen for the preview show, keeping quality and variety in mind.

the final count

contemporary durga puja Art: 22

distinguished household (*bonedi bari*) durga puja Art: 2

traditional durga puja Art: 2







## bond with the best

the most important—and equally challenging—part of the planning was to shortlist the pujas and get their organizers on board. this was vital as they had to be ready to complete the installations way ahead of the schedule of the ritual and also agree to the condition of exclusivity of entry for the preview show visitors.

selection was based on:

1. track record of the puja Art.
2. track record of the artist helming the year's puja Art.





## the implementor



massArt, an organisation set up in June 2022 with the objective of promoting Art and culture of bengal, decided to take up the challenge.

a highly competent, experienced and it-enabled team of professionals from different creative and social spheres.

a socio-culturally inclined not-for-profit organization registered under the west bengal societies registration act 1961.

massArt has been encouraging and enhancing indigenous and contemporary Art, culture and heritage, and expanding their reach to global arena.

## partners on board

to achieve national and international connect and reach, the preview show needed reliable and respected partners.



the most obvious choice as it is they who had already recognized the festival, triggering the initiative.



they had a connection with durga puja as they had undertaken a project to map the creative economy around durga puja in 2019. that made them eminently suitable as the show's knowledge partner.

## the build-up

to get guests from abroad : face-to-face presentations were made at many embassies in delhi to familiarise the envoys and invite them to the show in kolkata. they were also requested to broadcast the communication back home through their channels.

to get guests from india's Art community : organisers of kochi biennale, an international exhibition of contemporary Art which is said to be the largest in the country, were contacted and a road show was put up with audio-visual and virtual reality presentations in kochi in the presence of invitees from their guest list.

this was the first in a series of roadshows which continued through june-august in chennai, bengaluru, mumbai, delhi... massArt held 16 roadshows and promotions all over India to spread the word about the initiative. tie-ups were done with top Art galleries in respective cities to draw the local Art lovers.



pepper house | kochi | 31 july 2023



## viewing process

entry to the preview show was to be strictly by online pre-registration. a submission form for securing an invitation was floated on the organisation's website, [massart.in](http://massart.in), where one had to specify whether one was a foreigner, non-resident indian or indian. the form also sought information on the applicant's occupation and age, other than contact details to send the preview show invitation card. each successful applicant was to receive a mail with one's exclusive qr code. there was no fee involved. altogether 26,184 online registrations for securing invitation cards were received, out of which 19,243 were sent the coveted cards.

# PREVIEWSHOW2022

of

## DURGA PUJA ART

KOLKATA

22 | 23 | 24 September 2022

### DIGITAL ENTRY PASS



22 contemporary durga puja Art  
6pm to 5am

2 distinguished household (bonedi bari)  
durga puja Art - 12 noon to 6pm

2 traditional durga puja Art  
12 noon to 6pm

& "making of durga puja Art" - an exhibition  
in kolkata town hall - 12 noon to 6pm

**ADMIT TWO**

### IMPORTANT GUIDELINES

- This digital entry pass allows you and a guest access to all venues
- This pass is for the entry to one venue for one time only
- This digital pass can not be transferred or sold
- Please present the downloaded digital entry on your mobile phone at the entrance
- Face Mask is mandatory at all times in the venues
- Any non-compliance, fraudulent use or distribution will lead to immediate confiscation of the pass
- The organisers of the show reserve the right to admission and to carry out health, safety and security inspections at any point
- Please carry your Photo ID along with this card

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## plan of action

an army of 263 associates was trained for deployment on the ground during the preview show.

some were to escort the dignitaries as they travelled across kolkata through the three nights.

some were trained to man the gates of the 26 puja Art sites, smart phones with scanning apps in hand. each card was carrying a qr code which the associate was to verify before allowing entry. this was to ensure order, exclusivity and documentation of attendance.

## smooth passage

one of the biggest challenges in organising the preview show was to ensure a smooth passage for the dignitaries from one installation to the next. that difficult transportation problem was handled through meticulous planning.

along with the list of the Art venues with their route plan, applications were placed before the commissioners of kolkata police and bidhannagar police, requesting them to arrange pilot cars and police assistance for the smooth movement and viewing of the visitors travelling through the respective jurisdictions of different police stations. the government of west bengal approved the proposal and guided kolkata municipal corporation and the police department to provide all kinds of assistance.



## demographics

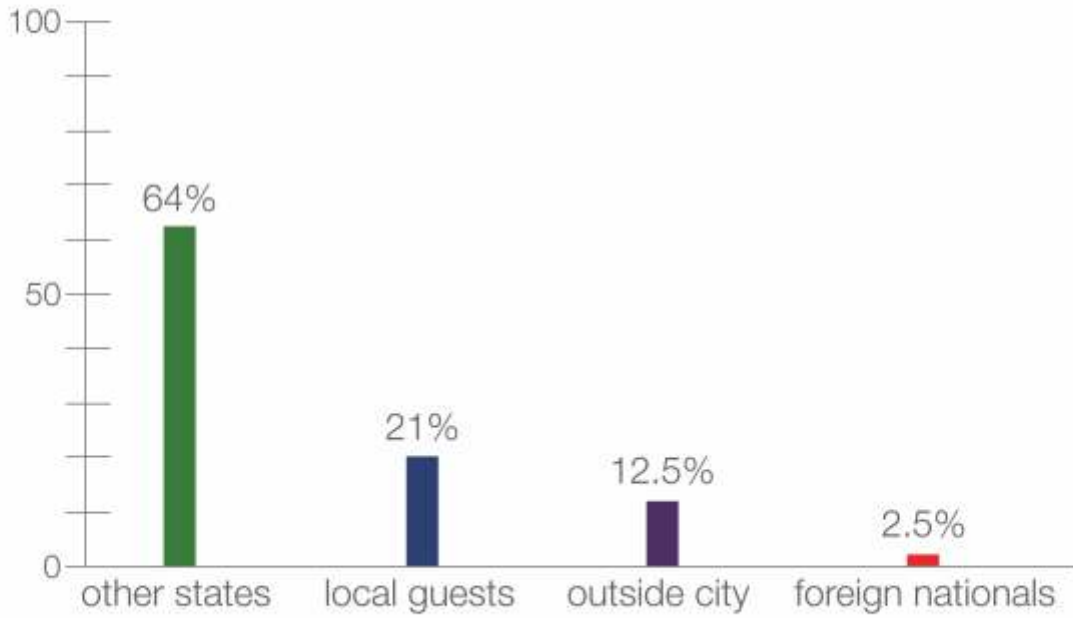
the 26 pujas that participated in the preview show saw well-coordinated and controlled footfall over the three nights. most visitors from outside the state checked into the city for the entire duration of the event. foreign nationals came over with family, indians staying outside bengal coupled the trip with work, and a few were registered as visitors by their friends and relations in the city and invited over.

while some chose specific time periods for their visit, others crisscrossed the city through the evening, the night and dawn.



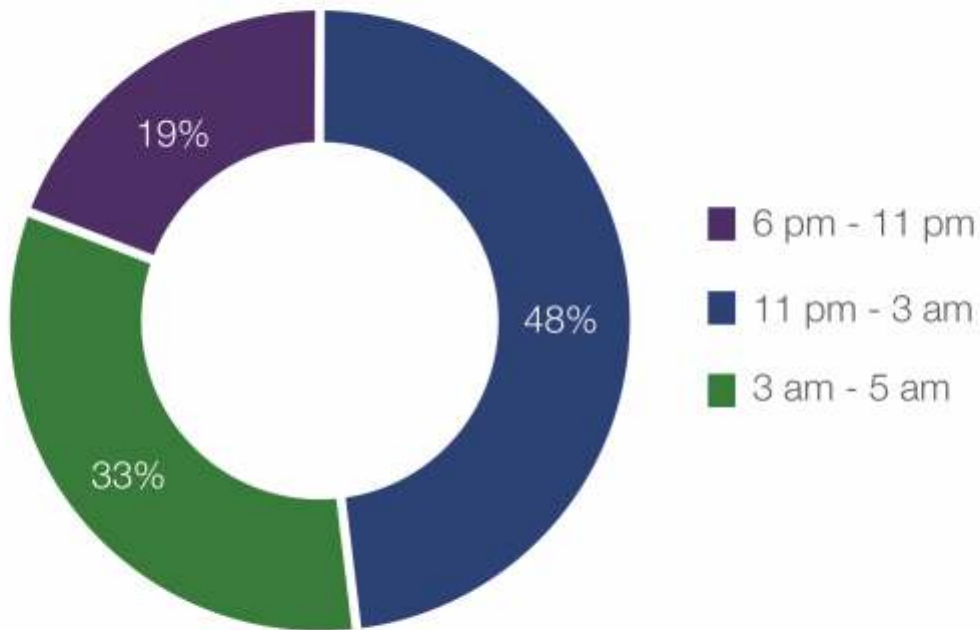
### data sheet

#### type of visitors



# total number of visitors - 19,243

#### visiting time



# visiting hours - 6 pm to 5 am

## through the lens

a photography contest was held, in association with kolkata international photography festival (kipf), on the preview show that drew close to 600 entries which were submitted online to our website [massart.in](http://massart.in). participants captured not only the beauty of the pandal structure as a whole but also highlighted specific aesthetic segments enhanced by careful framing. handsome prizes were up for grabs for the top three shots, selected by our panel of judges. an exhibition in 2023 provides a platform to contestants who captured and interpreted the show in their own ways.



©massArt | photo : chandrani kar



## a pre-preview show bonus

to showcase the idol-making process and various local traditional Art forms, an Art hub was created at kolkata town hall, an iconic 210-year-old venue in the city centre.

here from noon to 6pm, a giant screen provided a time-lapse audio-visual document of how a mound of clay, a bunch of straw and a wooden framework transform into an exquisite work of Art that inspires awe in the aesthete and reverence in the believer.

and right in front of the visitors' eyes in the town hall courtyard, idol-makers were in action through those three days creating a traditional idol.

inside the venue, traditional craftsmen from the districts and neighbouring states specializing in *patachitra*, *dokra*, basket-weaving and the like, displayed and sold their ware. these forms of craft are integral to durga puja pandal décor. the platform provided the craftsmen a chance to reach buyers from afar while visitors coming to the city could take home samples of our traditional craft that they would see and admire on the puja pandal walls.

and on the stage, rural artistes put up live performances of traditional dance forms like *chhau* and *raibeshe*.





massart.in

photographs used here are of the puja Art installations of the preview show participants  
namely vivekananda athletic club, bokulbagan sarbojonin, tala prattoy, kalighat milan  
sangha, arjunpur amra sabai, dum dum tarun dal, thakurpukur sb park.  
special thanks to the authority of kolkata town hall.