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Modi's India Does Have Public Funding for Arts. But It's All Going to Massive Statues.

Wednesday 9 March 2022, by [SENGUPTA Shuddhabrata](#) (Date first published: 7 February 2022).

The cost of installing the latest sculpture alone - Rs 1000 crore - is equivalent to one-third of the entire allocation of the Union government's culture ministry for this year.

Just as the Mughal Empire was known for exquisite miniature paintings, to the extent that the 'Mughal Miniature' is a recognised art historical term, so too the Narendra Modi years will be remembered as the season of gigantic, unaesthetic sculpture, mostly made in China.

The 66-metre tall 'Statue of Equality' sculpture project (yes, that's what it is called) [costs Rs 1,000 crore](#) (that's roughly \$130 million), all of which was raised, through donations, by the Sri Ramanuja Sahasrabdi Trust led by the Tridandi ascetic Chinna Jeeyar Swamy. It honours the medieval saint Sri Ramanujacharya, known for his contribution to the Vishishtadvaita school of Vedanta, and was unveiled by none other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself on Saturday.

To get a sense of the scale of the costs involved, bear in mind that the Government of India's budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Culture this year [is Rs 3,000 crore](#). In other words, the cost of installing this sculpture alone is equivalent to one-third of the entire allocation of the culture ministry.

Do you know how much each edition of the Kochi Biennale costs? It's [roughly Rs 26 crore](#). A back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that you could fund 38 biennales all over India with the same scope and ambition as the Kochi Biennale with the kind of money that was used to set up this one ugly statue.

Interestingly, the proposed statue of the Hindu deity Ram, that is going to be constructed near Ayodhya, is slated to be [235 metres in height](#). If that statue does get built, it will be the tallest in the world, of course after the 182-metre tall 'Statue of Unity' Modi has already built [at a cost of Rs 2,989 crore](#). The proposed Ram statue will cost the Uttar Pradesh exchequer Rs 2,500 crore. That is \$334,912,557. This will be paid for by the taxpayers of UP, as the statue is a state government project. That's equivalent to the cost of roughly 93 Kochi Biennale-sized interventions in the art and culture infrastructure of contemporary India.

The Documenta is considered to be the most important event in the world of global contemporary art. The sanctioned overall budget of the last Documenta (which is paid for out of German federal funds, funds from the state of Hesse and the city of Kassel) amounts to roughly \$44 million. Seven-and-a-half Documenta-sized festivals of contemporary art could be held in India for the price of one proposed sculpture of Ram at Ayodhya, to be built from public funds in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India's third poorest state. In terms of size, all of Germany is just 1.47 times the size of Uttar Pradesh.

This is a good indication of the contemporary cultural priorities (in terms of what gets patronage and

what doesn't) in our society. This, frankly, in sheer quantitative terms, is what contemporary Indian art and culture means. All those involved with contemporary art in India – as artists, critics, curators and scholars – could, if they wanted to, spend some time thinking about this. The first thing that they should discard is the tired lament about there being no private philanthropy and public funding for art in India. There is. For this kind of art. That is a more disturbing fact than the fiction of the absence of patronage.

Remember, the intense density and gravity of a black hole eats up everything that crosses its event horizon. The reason why the infrastructure for contemporary art in India is in the state that it is, is not because of neglect and lack of funding. It is what it is because of the black holes that populate the cultural universe of contemporary India. Let's face it, this is who we are, culturally. That is what the material evidence says.

I guess the art historians of the future will have to come up with a term like 'Modi-Maximal-Masculine-Monumental' (or 'MMMM') to signify, with brevity and candour, this regime's necrophiliac obsession with the size of the idols of dead icons.

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