

UnBox Festival » 2011

Feb 2011
British Council

www.unboxfestival.com



The UnBox Festival builds momentum around design thinking and interdisciplinary collaborations to drive sustainable innovation for businesses, society and culture in India.







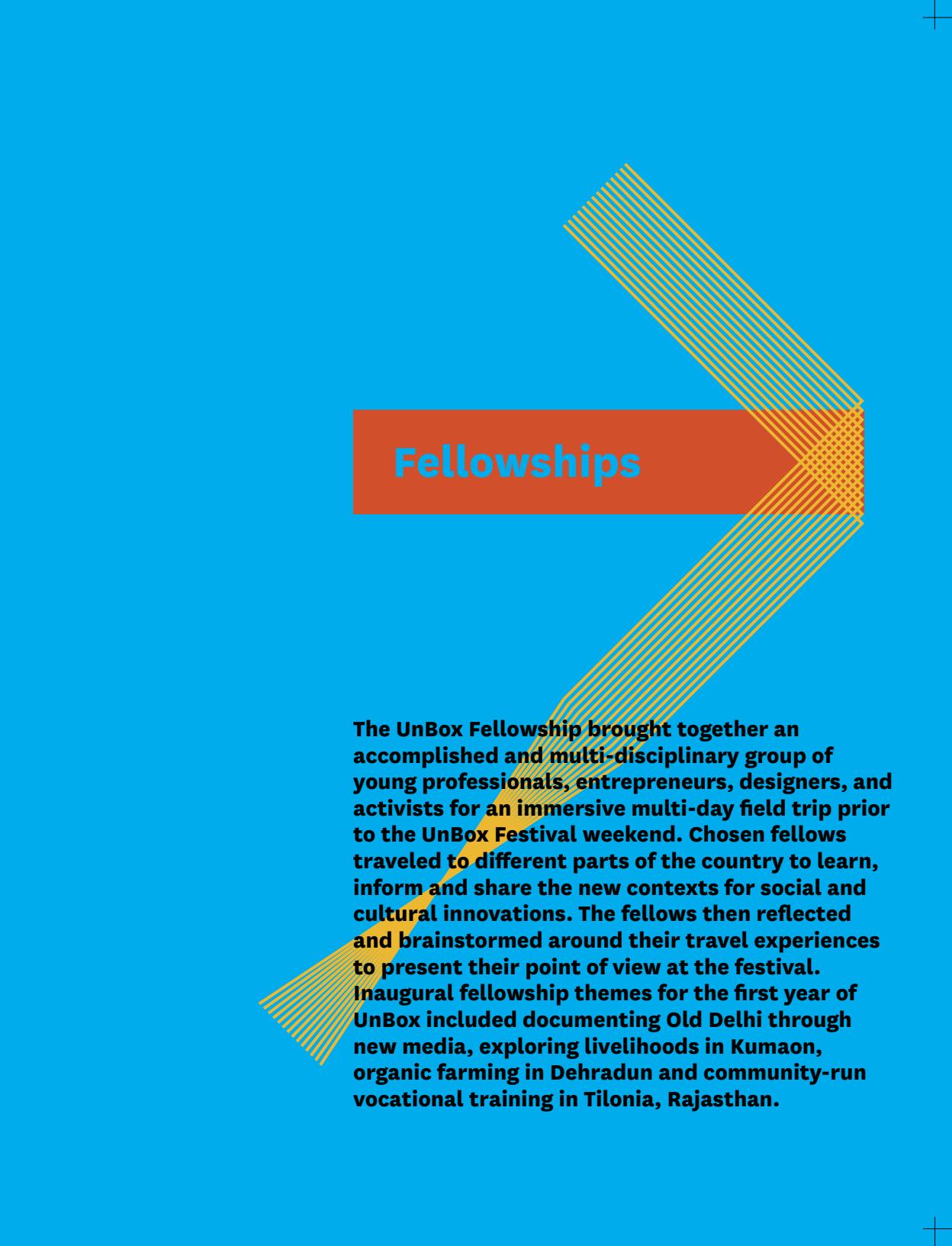
UnBox is a festival celebrating action at the intersection of different disciplines. It is an attempt to build momentum around design thinking and inter-disciplinary collaborations as the means of driving more sustainable and impactful social and cultural change in India.

The first edition of UnBox happened in Delhi between February 24-27, 2011. The festival blended work and play across contexts and mediums, bringing attendees, from across the world, together for lectures, panels, workshops, debates, brainstorms, performances and travel. While the conference created a space for practitioners to discuss and re-think the practice of design, business and development, four parallel cultural festivals gave participants a chance to explore creative platforms and emerging forms of artistic and cultural innovations.

The festival weekend was held at British Council, Goethe Institut, and Triveni Kala Sangam in New Delhi, conceptualized and organized by a creative collective comprising of Quicksand, Codesign, BLOT and Blindboys.

This booklet covers the key events of the festivals »

Fellowships, Conference, Workshops and Cultural events



Fellowships

The UnBox Fellowship brought together an accomplished and multi-disciplinary group of young professionals, entrepreneurs, designers, and activists for an immersive multi-day field trip prior to the UnBox Festival weekend. Chosen fellows traveled to different parts of the country to learn, inform and share the new contexts for social and cultural innovations. The fellows then reflected and brainstormed around their travel experiences to present their point of view at the festival. Inaugural fellowship themes for the first year of UnBox included documenting Old Delhi through new media, exploring livelihoods in Kumaon, organic farming in Dehradun and community-run vocational training in Tilonia, Rajasthan.



Livelihoods in Kumaon

Chirag (Central Himalayan Rural Action Group) is a rural development organization based in the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand in India since 1987. This fellowship project involved an understanding of Chirag's initiatives in the Kumaun region, focusing particularly on the activities of Kumaun Grameen Udyog (KGU). KGU is mandated to plough back all profit into rural development activities. With the aim of providing livelihood opportunities for the local community, KGU works with local artisans and sources from small farmers. Their product-range is based on a two-pronged approach: to work with locally available skills and resources; and to introduce new capacities. The fellowship project was an attempt to identify design intervention opportunities in KGU's endeavour to provide livelihood, education, and health.

Innovation in Context

Fellows from the fields of entrepreneurship, development economics and design spent three days at the Barefoot college in Tilonia, Rajasthan. Established in 1972, the Barefoot College is a non-government organisation that has been providing basic services and solutions to problems in rural communities, with the objective of making them self-sufficient and sustainable. The fellows experienced first hand the 'Barefoot solutions' in solar energy, water, education, health care, rural handicrafts and women's empowerment and reflected on a framework for participative, community driven solutions.



Organic Farming

The growth of organic food is a global trend that is slowly but surely finding its way into India. There is a nascent ecosystem of players: farmers, consumers, retailers, health and policy experts. Progress has been slow so far – hampered by lack of a national policy on organic farming, lobbying by seed, fertilizer and pesticide players, the perception that organic yields are lesser than that of chemical supported agriculture and a lack of understanding on the benefits of organic food by end consumers. Environmental film makers, Fulbright Scholars, management consultants and designers spent five days meeting organic food retailers, boutique organic product outlets, consumers of organic food and stayed at the Navdanya organic farms in Dehradun. The group presented the key opportunities at UnBox for catalyzing the growth of organic produce in India.

Old Delhi in New Media

Video artists, musicians, and academicians spent a week in Old Delhi looking for inspirational sights, sounds, and cultural practices. After several days of intense collaborative studio work, fellows produced an audio-visual and dance performance that was presented at Salon der Alchemisten, an UnBox venue for experimental arts.

UnBox Opening at Max Mueller Bhawan, New Delhi

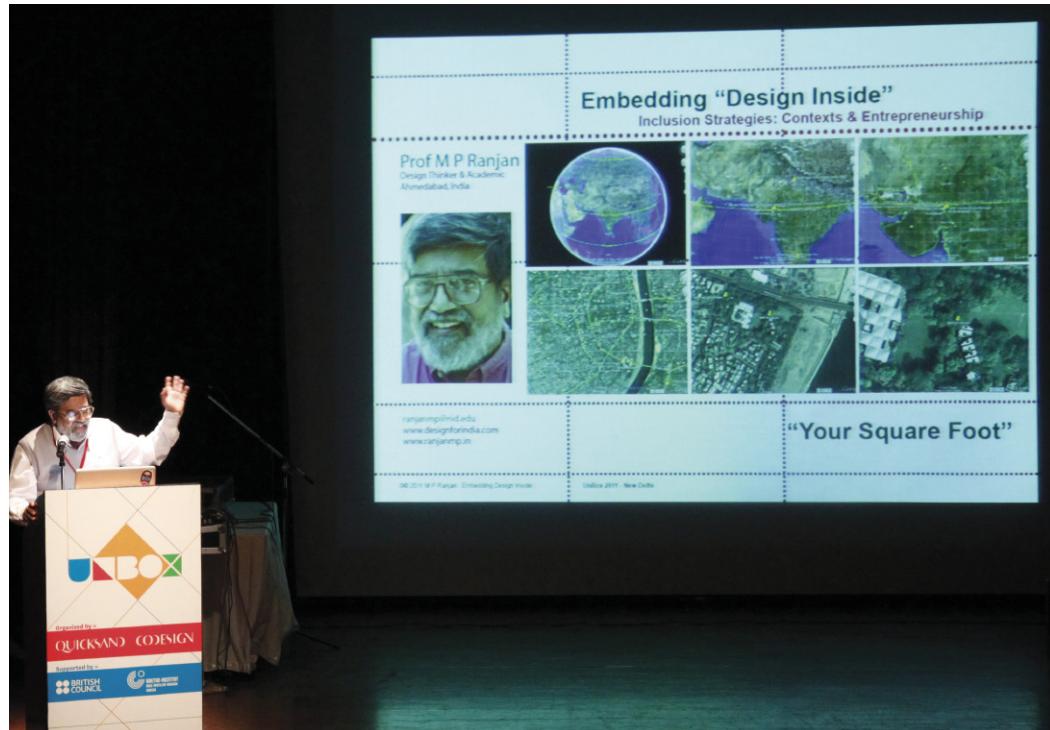


The festival opened with acclaimed Bharatnatyam Guru Jayalaxshmi Eshwar and her disciples performing *The Awakening*, a parable reflecting on Mother Earth's relationship with her children, time, technology and forgiveness. The performance created an immersive sound and light space with music by Sattyananda, visuals by Thiruda, and a bamboo and fabric theater structure created by Anagram Architects and Mia Morikawa. The performance also marked the opening of *Salon der Alchemisten*, one of the four parallel cultural festivals that were a part of UnBox.



Conference

A cross-section of established and emerging Design Thinkers, Entrepreneurs, Professionals, Educators & Enthusiasts from India and the world, lead and inspired conversations around innovation at the UnBox festival.



MP Ranjan, design educator who recently retired from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, kicked off the conference, urging participants to embed design in their lives. “To make the world a better place, start with your own square foot!”

Harsh Purohit, the co-founder of Cognito and a sustainability advisor, spoke about issues that are shaping the future of our generation and those that shall follow. Through his talk titled Business, Sustainability and Design - a delightful ménage à trois, Harsh re-emphasized the UnBox theme with his view of sustainability as action at the intersection of financial, social and environmental issues.





Creative Economies

Sustainability thinker John Thackara, innovation strategist Nico Macdonald, and service designer Richard Eisermann offered cases and concepts to take design beyond the making of objects to the making of events, ecologies, services, and experiences.

Sustainability thinker and founder of the acclaimed Doors of Perception, **John Thackara** assessed the grim state of the global consumptive economy and proposed an alternate ethical framework for design. India, he argued, has an opportunity to take the lead in developing this alternate conception of design.

Nico Macdonald, head of UK-based Creative Industries iNet, inspired audiences with case studies of using design, visualization, and brainstorming to bring citizens together to solve wicked public problems. “Visualization helps people quickly see possible futures.”

Richard Eisermann, founder of Prospect, a service design agency in UK, re-framed design as the craft of thinking about systems of relationships. “By recognizing the ecological, evolving relationships between people, business, and technology, designers can think beyond the artifact.”



Designing for Communities

These designers and activists spoke about how they embed their work in communities, making it responsive to those their interventions hope to serve.

Ayush Chauhan is co-founder of Quicksand, a multi-disciplinary design consultancy that partners organizations to research and conceptualize user-centered innovations. He presented research from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation supported Potty Project (www.pottypoint.in), a user experience study of sanitation for the urban poor in India. The project uses the social media & other rich media platforms to spark innovation in the sanitation sector.

Lakshmi Murthy, founder of Vikalp Design, develops social communications for low-literate Indians. Murthy has been designing communication around sexual health education by embedding herself in the villages she works in and co-designing visual languages that are understood by the women of those communities.

VK Madhavan, Executive Director of CHIRAG (Central Himalayan Rural Action Group), works in holistic development in the Kumaun region. With CHIRAG's efforts in education, agricultural development, employment, and policy advocacy, CHIRAG insists on interventions that address the complexity of poverty. "There's no one solution to poverty", he warned us!





Documenting Cultures

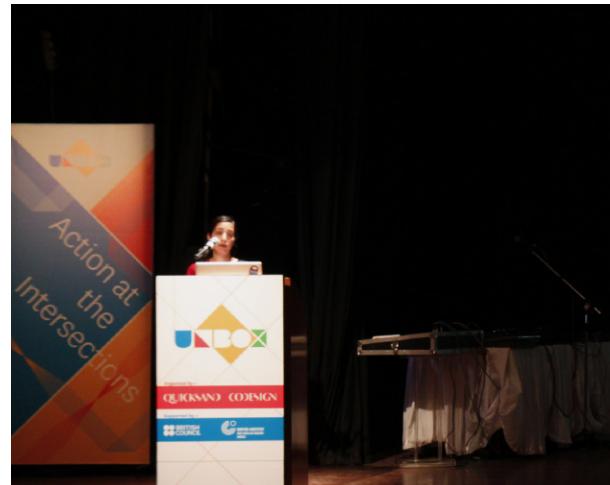
Panelists documenting Indian culture reflected on documentation not just as a way of representation but also as a powerful intervention. Documentation whether through books, blogs or other media, can offer platforms that create new possibilities.

Parmesh Shahani argued that books, websites, and stories offer people different ways of understanding their experiences. His book *Gay Bombay*, his online community *freshlimesoda*, and his Godrej Culture Lab, light uncommon paths that are being charted in modern India.

Santosh Desai, CEO of Future Brands, explored culture as that convenient simplification that helps us interpret and understand the times we live in - "Culture is a soap that washes away impurities from the daily struggle of living". Documenting culture offers us a way to ask, "Who are we? How do we explore ourselves?"

Rajesh Dahiya, founder of design studio CoDesign, spoke about expanding international understanding of what Indian design does. At UnBox, he previewed *Dekko*, a self-published journal that documents inspirational examples of visual communication with roots in the Indian context.

Apala Chavan of Human Factors International, spoke about the process of documenting professional practices in Indian user experience research and launching her book *Innovative Solutions: What Designers Need to Know for Today's Emerging Markets*.



Creative Platforms

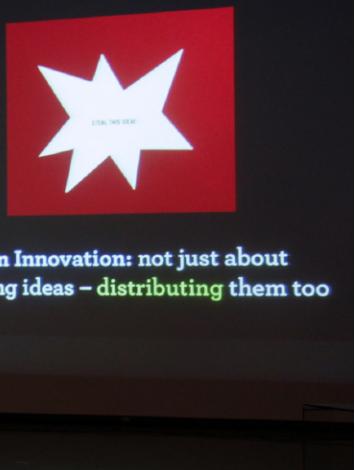
The Creative Platforms panel brought together organizations that have created platforms that are relevant, inspiring and interdisciplinary. These are platforms that bring people together using diverse tools, techniques and mediums, and have demonstrated the power to create alternate experiences.

Avinash Kumar, a member of renowned electronic audio-visualists B.L.O.T (Basic Love of Things) and co-founder of Greenhouse, used examples from his work to inspire audiences to “creatively use market modes to sustain alternative cultural spaces.”

Kapil Das, co-founder of photo commune BlindBoys, inspired audiences with the all-volunteer, wheatpaste-on-walls street photo exhibitions. He urged young photographers to “create your own systems.”

Ashutosh Phatak outlined the struggles of founding the Mumbai based performance space and music label Blue Frog. Key to the venue’s success? “Converting the crowd to music lovers by first giving them what they want - drinks and a place to hang out.”

Pooja Sood has, in directing Khoj and editing The Khoj Book, created a platform for South Asian art to gain international visibility. Khoj offers artists a space to collaborate with one another and with residents of Delhi’s Khirkee Village. She urged the audience to “create that space that creates the scene.”



Future Forms

Meena Kadri, community manager of OpenIDEO, showed how IDEO's web platform brings people together from across the world to brainstorm, ideate, and refine solutions to challenges like bone marrow donation, sanitation infrastructure, and sustainable food systems.

Ashish Rajpal, CEO of iDiscoveri, a social enterprise with a mission to renew education in India, shared his experiences of creating several platforms that have impacted perceptions and experiences of education in India.

Architect **Zameer Basrai** showed plans to conserve and regenerate the Bombay village of Ranwar.

Entrepreneur **Nirat Bhatnagar** offered MetaGood, a crowdfunding platform, as a way of funding projects on critical social issues in India.

Graphic designer **Satvinder Channey** showed his independently funded interpretive maps of Delhi's historic forts and monuments.

Tithiya Sharma showed her journeys to document everyday heroes across the world through the 100 Heroes Project.

Two of these projects have found additional collaborators and funders through UnBox.



Workshops

Workshops provided a platform for practitioners to interact with UnBox participants in small group discussions, brainstorms and hands-on activities and collaboratively think through challenges and problems that they were looking to find solutions for.



Re-Imagining Digital Learning with Quest Alliance

User interfaces for learning have largely stayed in the era of Powerpoint templates. For too long, the mouse click has remained the thin connection between students and the materials they are learning. Aakash Sethi of Quest Alliance, an NGO that uses technology to improve pedagogy, collaborated with UnBox participants to brainstorm directions for new learning systems.

Crafting Livable Cities with Ajith Mohan and Anagram Architects

Cities — bustling, booming, growing, and absorbing — are an intrinsic part of our lives today. This workshop brought participants together to collectively articulate a manifesto for possible urban futures. The workshop was facilitated by Ajit Mohan, author of McKinsey Global Institute's "India's Urban Awakening" report and Madhav Raman, co-founder and principal at Anagram Architects.



Theater and Creativity with Jeff Goodchild

Jeff Goodchild of Auroville led participants in improvisational theater exercises in Delhi's lush Deer Park. The workshop brought people together into an imaginative, temporary and intense collaboration that requires leaving egos at the door and never saying "no." Since the workshop, a group of participants have got together to start an improv group and continue the practice.

Design in the Social Sector with D-Impact

How do design and the social sector close the gap between them and work together to effectively implement solutions? Kate Hanislan and Ramsey Ford of Design Impact, a non-profit design organization for NGOs, offered participants an intimate setting to brainstorm around organizational and design challenges participants face in their social sector work.



Partner Festivals

The UnBox conference happened in parallel with four other cultural festivals which were cross promoted and coordinated to allow UnBox festival goers to intersect with these other vibrant experiences. These festivals were—TechnoDrome, a festival of emerging electronic music, VJing and dance; Beat Repeat, a festival bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to the spoken and written word using electronic music, cinema & new media; Eye Myth, a festival of visual music and experimental film; and Salon der Alchemisten, a festival of experimental media, performing arts and food.



Salon Der Alchemisten

Venue for the opening event of UnBox - a contemporary choreography by leading classical dancer, Jayalakshmi Eshwar - during the festival, Salon was host to Puma Creative Factory, a performance by the Old Delhi in New Media fellowship, a food lab by leading art cafe in Delhi and a dance interpretation of electronic music.

Technodrome

A platform for emerging art-forms including VJing, new-media and digital art, featuring Indian and international labels like B.L.O.T. (India), Astronivo (Israel), Nucleya (India), Kini Rao (India) and 4YourEye (Austria).

Beat Repeat

The festival witnessed an evening of exhilarating performances which included a classical guitarist (Shyamant Behl), an actor (Rehaan Engineer), a young writer (Sheba Karim), a painter (Abhishek Singh), Bharatanatyam dancers (students of Guru Jayalakshmi Eshwar), and an experimental theatre group (Tadpole Repertory).

Eye Myth

The festival curated and screened works from both established and emerging film makers, musicians, and new media artists from around the world.

Media Coverage

The Sunday Guardian

“Unbox festival is an attempt to build momentum around design thinking, interdisciplinary collaborations to make more sustainable innovation that impacts design, culture, social change, art and entrepreneurship.



“The UnBox festival “creates a space for practitioners to learn from one another and spark new forms of social and cultural innovation. The festival blends work and play across contexts and mediums, bringing attendees together for lectures, panels, workshops, debates, brainstorms, and travel...”



“A band of professionals—spanning fields as diverse as management, design and fashion technology—is organizing an unconventional conclave of designers. These will segue into parallel events open to the public such as TechnoDrome: a festival of emerging electronic music, visual arts and performances; BeatRepeat: a festival bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to the spoken and written word using electronic music, cinema and new media; EyeMyth: a festival of visual music and experimental film...”



“Unbox is a shrewdly amorphous domain, where innovative design thinking, electronic music, multimedia experiments and film all play together...”

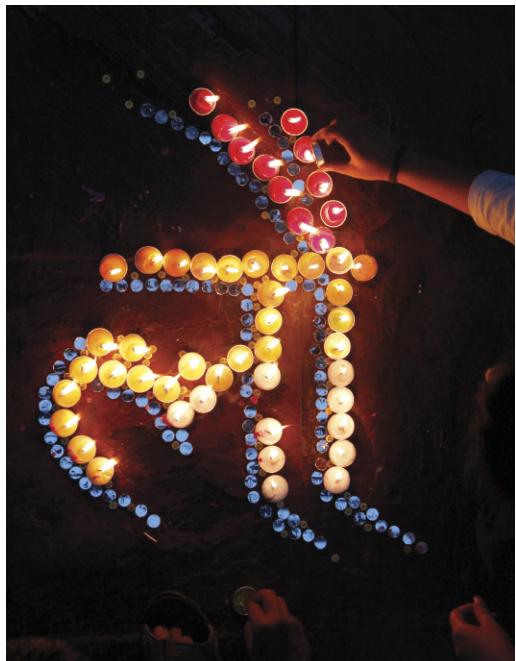
DESIGN OBSERVER

“The idea of UnBox is to blend work and play across contexts and mediums. UnBox therefore involves workshops, debates, brainstorms, picnics, literary readings, and travel. And it's not just for designers: a key theme will be how to develop productive collaborations with activists, entrepreneurs, artists, builders, and other dreamers and doers...”

Covered by independent blogs/websites

www.designwala.org
www.randomspecific.com
www.appapappa.com
www.verveonline.com
www.thebeginningofmydream.tumblr.com

Glimpses: Unbox 2011









UnBox 2012

The Box Collective is busily dreaming up the next edition of UnBox slated to happen in India in February 2012. We are seeking partners who will co-create the next edition with us.



Potential partners could include »

Content partners:

studios, professional practices, think-tanks, or activist groups that want to co-create the next festival. We believe that the festival should remain relevant to those it seeks to engage and, hence, we seek to collaboratively decide its scope and content. Write us if you are interested in becoming a content partner for UnBox.

Participants, whether

attendees or speakers, who would like to be a part of another week of working, playing, and rethinking. Write us indicating your preference for the time of the festival and more importantly, block that time in your calendars.

Institutions,

corporates, foundations

that can financially support this platform for new creative practices in India. Write to us if you are interested in sponsoring or providing support to UnBox 2012.

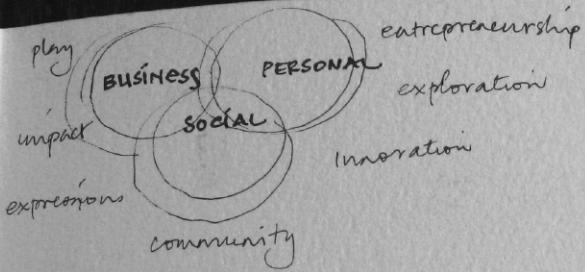
Founders Of Unbox »

UnBox is the culmination of efforts of four successful Indian creative practices that have exemplified the value of inter-disciplinary collaborations as the means of driving impact and change. Together these studios form the The Box Collective:

Quicksand (www.quicksand.co.in) **Codesign** (www.codesign.in)
B.L.O.T. (www.blottin.blogspot.com) **BlindBoys** (www.blindboys.org)

Unbox 2011 was supported by »





Most conferences revolve around the perspective of design being a tangible object / deliverable. We see design as in terms of systems thinking... in intersections. • actional they

*Beautiful things happen
when people meet
In the tiny spaces
between two people,
life's greatest — AVI THIRUDA —
pleasures exist*



www.unboxfestival.com