

The Auroville Art Service emerged from an introspection into how arts and culture could develop in Auroville.

Here are 19 questions that were posed to us by the Integral Sustainability Platform with a view to helping us develop a clear vision.

Q 1. What is the purpose of culture within Auroville?

1. To foster psychological/ spiritual regeneration on both individual and collective levels.
 - Participating in a creative process allows the spirit to feel and understand the cycles of devastation-regeneration, thereby healing the community.
2. Art is widely recognised as a therapeutic tool - for illnesses of the mental, psychological and vital.
 - Art is extremely valuable to the health (psychological, mental, vital, psychic, physical, spiritual) of the community.
3. To reflect back to the community their present state of being.
4. To express spiritual experiences through the sharing of creative expressions.
 - Art connects to the psychic body.
5. To articulate the inarticulable experiences of the spiritual search and the soul of nature around us.
6. To express diversity and unity in this diversity.
7. To promote Art as a tool to erase distinctions and barriers between different cultures.
8. To foster Art as a medium to peel off social conditionings.
9. To foster Art as a tool to question oneself and “go beyond” the known.
10. To bring the community together through cultural and artistic events.
11. To link the spiritual search and research of Auroville with the outside world through cultural and artistic events.
12. To develop art education – linking the right and left sides of the brain. Exercising sensory perceptions.
13. “The value of art in the training of intellectual faculty is also an important part of its utility.” (Sri Aurobindo). Aurobindo goes on to validate this statement in Chapter V of The National Value of Art.
14. “Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul;” (Sri Aurobindo).
15. To increase spiritual awareness of the world around us and foster the growth of spirituality in Auroville.
 - “But beyond and above this intellectual utility of Art, there is a higher use, the noblest of all, its service to the growth of spirituality in the race.” (Sri Aurobindo)
16. The enormous value of Art to human evolution: “To suggest the strength and virile

unconquerable force of the divine Nature in man and in the outside world, its energy, its calm, its powerful inspiration, its august enthusiasm, its wildness, greatness, attractiveness, to breathe that into man's soul and gradually mould the finite into the image of the Infinite is another spiritual utility of Art. This is its loftiest function, its fullest consummation, its most perfect privilege." (Sri Aurobindo)

Back to ISP-Culture

Q 2. What kind of cultural services should AV ideally provide?

AV should foremost encourage arts without utilitarian mentality

- A communal space for art creation with ateliers to encourage artists
- to work together (including studios)
- Financial support for the encouragement of arts in AV
- Physical and social spaces for informal conversations about arts
- Development of critique culture in AV (i.e. spaces to criticise and discuss art)
- Events for participation and exchange between artists and the community
- Events that make people question and reflect upon themselves and their position in the world
- Creation and appreciation of art through education

Q 3. What were Mother's ideas about Culture in Auroville?

Sri Aurobindo on Art

- "The value of art in the training of intellectual faculty is also an important part of its utility." (Sri Aurobindo)
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- The enormous value of Art to human evolution: "To suggest the strength and virile unconquerable force of the divine Nature in man and in the outside world, its energy, its calm, its powerful inspiration, its august enthusiasm, its wildness, greatness, attractiveness, to breathe that into man's soul and gradually mould the finite into the image of the Infinite is another spiritual utility of Art. This is its loftiest function, its fullest consummation, its most perfect privilege." (Sri Aurobindo)
- Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified.
- Poetry raises the emotions and gives each its separate delight. Art stills the emotions and teaches them the delight of a restrained and limited satisfaction, Music deepens the emotions and harmonises them with each other. Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keeps its movements purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious. These, therefore, are agents which cannot be profitably neglected by humanity on its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of the sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character. They are, when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilizing forces.
- The first and lowest use of Art is the purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual...
- But beyond and above this intellectual utility of Art, there is a highest use, the noblest of all,

- its service to the growth of spirituality in the race...
- Spirituality is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression.
 - Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance... What Nature is, what God is, what man is can be triumphantly revealed in stone or on canvas.
 - To suggest the strength and virile unconquerable force of the divine Nature in man and in the outside world, its energy, its calm, its powerful inspiration, its august enthusiasm, its wildness, greatness, attractiveness, to breathe that into man's soul and gradually mould the finite into the image of the Infinite is another spiritual utility of Art. This is its loftiest function, its fullest consummation, its most perfect privilege.
 - It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual masterpieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy. A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realises the fullness of the expanding spirit in itself.
 - Art is not only technique or form of Beauty, not only the discovery or the expression of Beauty - it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or, to put it otherwise, there are not only aesthetic values, but life-values, mind-values, soul-values that enter into Art. The artist puts out into form not only the powers of his own consciousness, but the powers of the Consciousness that has made the worlds and their objects. And if that Consciousness according to the Vedantic view is fundamentally equal everywhere, it is still in manifestation not an equal power in all things...
 - If we take these three elements as making the whole of Art, perfection of expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and essence of things and the powers of creative consciousness and Ananda of which they are the vehicles, then we shall get perhaps a solution which includes the two sides of the controversy and reconciles their difference. Art for Art's sake certainly; Art as a perfect form and discovery of Beauty; but also Art for the soul's sake, the spirit's sake and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty. In that self-expression there are grades and hierarchies, widenings and steps that lead to the summits. And not only to enlarge Art towards the widest wideness but to ascend with it to the heights that climb towards the Highest is and must be part both of our aesthetic and our spiritual endeavour.
 - The critic can help to open the mind to the kinds of beauty he himself sees and not only to discover but to appreciate at their full value certain elements that make them beautiful or give them what is most characteristic or unique in their peculiar beauty.

The Mother on Art

- Art is a means, not an end; it is a means of expression. And the artist then ceases too to believe that the whole world turns round what he is doing or that his work is the most important thing that has ever been done. His personality counts no longer; he is an agent, a channel, his art a means of expressing his relations with the Divine. He uses it for that purpose as he might have used any other means that were part of the powers of his nature.
- If you want art to be the true and the highest art, it must be the expression of a divine world brought down into this material world. All true artists have some feeling of this kind, some sense that they are intermediaries between a higher world and this physical existence. If you consider it in this light, Art is not very different from Yoga.

- If a man is truly led to express himself in art, it is the way the Divine has chosen to manifest in him, and then by Yoga his art will gain and not lose. But there is all the question: is the artist appointed by the Divine or self-appointed?
- The mistake of the artist is to believe that artistic production is something that stands by itself and for itself, independent of the rest of the world. Art as understood by these artists is like a mushroom on the wide soil of life, something casual and external, not something intimate to life; it does not reach and touch the deep and abiding realities, it does not become an intrinsic and inseparable part of existence. True art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement.
- True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life.
- Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds.
- For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision.
- There is a domain far above the mind which we could call the world of Harmony and, if you can reach there, you will find the root of all harmony that has been manifested in whatever form upon earth.
- True art is the expression of beauty in the material world; and in a world changed spiritually, that is to say, one expressing completely the Divine reality, art must function as a revealer and teacher of this Divine beauty in life;
- The Yogi's aim in the Arts should not be a mere aesthetic, mental or vital gratification, but, seeing the Divine everywhere, worshipping it with a revelation of the meaning of its works, to express that One Divine in gods and men and creatures and objects"
- Every painter, every musician, every poet, every sculptor has or ought to have a unique personal contact with the Divine, and through the work which is his speciality, the art he has mastered, he must express this contact in his own way, with his own words, his own colours. Instead of copying the outer forms of Nature, he takes these forms as the covering of something else, of his relation with the realities which are behind, deeper, and he tries to make them express that. Instead of merely imitating what he sees, he tries to make them speak of what is behind them, and this is what makes the difference between a living art and just a flat copy of Nature. There is a considerable amount of difference between the vision of the ordinary people and the vision of the artists. Their way of seeing things is much more complete and conscious than that of ordinary people.

Q 4. Which are the different projects that compose the arts/ culture sector in Auroville?

- Films screening: Cinema Paradiso, Aurelec, Sadhana forest, Bharat Nivas, Evergreen
- Dance events: mainly in Bharat Nivas
- New creation dance classes
- Two theatre groups
- Poetry readings: La Terrace, Creativity, Jocelyne's house

- Music concerts (different styles and many different locations)
- Three choirs
- Art and architecture exhibitions (Kala Kendra, Pitanga, Aurelec, Town hall)
- Pottery studios (Dana)
- University of Human Unity (art courses)
- Tamil Folk arts centre
- Centre for Indian culture
- Cripa (performing arts)
- Kalbumi studios (Aurofilm, Music)
- Libraries – music, video, books
- Archaeology
- Verite (courses)
- Sunshine recording studios
- Tai chi hall (martial arts)
- Pitanga hall (many courses and exhibitions)
- Many individual artists studios
- International zone pavilions (physical pavilions and organisations)
- Auroville performing arts
- Savitri Bhavan (exhibitions, Om choir...)

Q 5. What is the unique contribution of each project to the cultural sector?

Different artistic expressions are all equally important

Q 6. What ‘purpose’ does each project fulfil in relation to the purpose of the sector as a whole?

Each art expression fulfils the purpose – fulfilling the need for art, regeneration of the spiritual, psychological and vital health of the community. Artistic experience involves both creators and audience.

Q 7. Which projects are supported by Auroville and which function independently? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being dependent/ independent?

- Very little artistic and cultural events are supported by Auroville’s central fund
- No artists in AV currently get maintenances for their artistic work
- Some cultural educational projects are supported by SAIER
- Some are supported by international grants (including international pavilions) or by individual donations

Independent advantages

- Something deeper can manifest if you are free to create without the need to sell it, whether it is useful or not

- Not just working for money. Free to create what I want

- Creating beauty without buying it - opening possibilities to exchange art in Auroville

disadvantages

- Highly priced artworks for sale

- The need to do something else to make money (e.g, art education)
- The need to go outside to sell your art, because Aurovillians cannot afford it
- Not being able to anticipate your income from your art

Dependent advantages

- Being able to survive from your art

disadvantages

- There is a danger of becoming lazy or unproductive, if you get your necessities provided
- The expectation to produce something can block you
- There may be less freedom of expression when the authority pays you to create art
- Facing disapproval of people in AV who think that artists do not deserve “free lunch” in the solar kitchen because they do not work.

Q 8. How does the cultural sector function as a whole? Is it self-sustainable or dependent on external funds?

The arts/cultural sector in AV is very much dependent of external and individual contributions, but art’s nature is that it will exist no matter what.

Still, the fact that there is no support for cultural initiatives in Auroville means that our culture remains immature. There are no physical and social infrastructures for Auroville’s culture and arts to develop and evolve professionally.

Q 9. Which units are dispensable? Which units are missing? And why?

Dispensable

Nothing is dispensable. If it were dispensable, it would not exist.

Missing

- More and better organized physical infrastructure – studios and practice spaces (such as: Pitanga, verite, new creation studios, which are currently full)
- Better central organization, such as a board of artists/ an artists platform – to plan agendas, get funding, manage and organize discussions, etc.
- Get more (financial and infrastructure) support for projects
- Places for exchange between artists and the rest of AV community
- Youth centre – request for a dance hall and general development of youth centre according to their own plans.
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Q 10. Which projects are more significant in relation to others? And according to what criteria do we evaluate this significance? Is this a permanent or changeable situation?

We cannot say that one is more significant than the other (no “hub”) – all are equally significant. There are very few people between the ages of 18-30 in Auroville and this is reflected in a lacuna (absence) in the artistic/ cultural development.

Q 11. What kind of relations exist among the projects, if at all? Is there an exchange of information and resources? If yes, then to what extent and what purpose does it serve?

- There is a lot of exchange within the arts – different artists collaborate on projects, places of exhibition and practice which artists use to showcase their projects.
- The links among artists are organic, depending on what works for a specific project (i.e. music and theatre)
- In issues of finance, power and prestige there is competition.

Q 12. Which relations work better than others and why? Which relations don't work or don't exist and what are the reasons for that?

- The relations that work best are those between artists and performance/ exhibition spaces – they both need one another.
- When there is a project of mutual interest – then the collaboration works.
- There is little interaction between musicians because studio spaces are not located in proximity to one another.

Q 13. What would be the best cultural strategy for Auroville in the next 5 years and why?

Development of culture/arts in Auroville is needed in three main domains:

1. Facilitation of artists and artistic projects: create a group that facilitates the arts in Auroville (an arts platform/organization). This group should include people with an artistic vision, an ability to recognise the importance of cultural activities, an ability to generate funds and to influence the planning process.

2. Physical infrastructure to support the arts (i.e. studios, performance spaces, musical instruments, informal gathering spaces, etc.) It is beneficial to have artistic/ creative projects in close proximity so that the interchange of ideas can easily take place and encourage artists to collaborate with one another, as well as providing spaces for sharing their arts with the rest of the community.

3. Social infrastructure for sharing art (events, communal critique and discussion spaces, etc.); cafes and foyer spaces that encourage informal discussions; spaces in newsletters and internet that are dedicated to artistic critique and discussion;

- It is essential that the above development is created in collaboration with the artists otherwise it wouldn't work.
- It is important to recognise that artists often challenge the status quo

The culture team would like to incorporate into this strategic proposal 2 sketches (prepared by Pushkar) that illustrate a vision for the planning of the cultural zone, in a way that supports the above strategy (Please see attached file)

Q 14. How does this strategy reflect from the findings?

The strategy is built on the “missing projects” that were discussed in Q9, and also on the conclusions that were discussed from Q8 which stressed that artists should be fully supported in ways to enable them to freely pursue their creative projects.

Q 15. How does it built on previous Auroville experience?

- Lack of appropriate infrastructure has made it difficult for artists to perform and share their art with the community
- Lack of financial support has limited creative expression and development in AV
- Lack of spaces for sharing, critique and discussion has made it difficult for Auroville culture to further develop and evolve
- Lack of a centre with collective studios and café has limited possible collaborations among artists.

Q 16. Does the suggested strategy strengthen existing AV cultural projects?

Yes – It definitely wants to promote existing projects and enable better support and collaborations

Q 17. Does it enable new connections among them?

Yes – one of the main aims is to generate better collaborations among existing artists and artistic projects.

Q 18. What would be the benefits and drawbacks of adopting such a strategy?

Benefits

This will definitely generate great benefits for the community – we envisage it will contribute to the development and evolution of our community and for humanity as a whole.

It will also attract people from outside to come and work in Auroville. Auroville can become an artistic centre for the world.

Drawbacks

The only possible difficulty or challenge is creating a centralized power structure for the arts. But we believe that anticipating this difficulty can help us avoid its possible drawbacks in the way we design it.

Q 19. What would be its likely effects on further development in Auroville?

The planning for it should allow for flexibility and growth (i.e. like adding more studios in the future).