



Crocodile
Installation (2015)

BAADAL NANJUNDASWAMY

He is Bengaluru's favourite artistic crusader. His viral installations and performances haven't just won the Internet, but are also a wake-up call for civic issues, finds **Somak Ghoshal**



Nanjundaswamy's
moonwalk
performance went
instantly viral



Yama On An Open
Manhole (2014)

Yama, the Hindu god of death stares out of a pavement; an open manhole serves as his mouth, into which an unsuspecting pedestrian could be swallowed. A life-size crocodile seems to splash across a massive puddle on a busy thoroughfare. Most recently, an actor dressed up as an astronaut moonwalked across potholed streets, as though navigating craters on the moon. With his ingenious creations, the artist Baadal Nanjundaswamy has become a viral sensation on social media platforms—and by bringing attention to Bengaluru's bad roads, he

has become an unlikely hero for the people of his home city. The 40-year-old artist, born and trained in Mysuru, periodically intervenes in civic issues, since he suffered a mishap himself a few years ago due to bad roads.

"I was riding home late one night after work, when I met with a minor accident due to dysfunctional road dividers," he says. He wanted to draw the attention of the authorities, but the only language he knew, he says, was visual. This former employee of an advertising agency decided to take his art out in the open, in the service of his fellow citizens.

Over the years, Nanjundaswamy has stunned the internet (and, of course, the inhabitants of Bengaluru) with his life-size three-dimensional works, most of which are made in response to current events that people can instantly relate to. The moon-walking stunt, for example, was executed in the wake of India's space mission to the moon.

"As a kid, I worked at a library after school where I read *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* by Gabriel García Márquez, and novels by the Kannada writer Ramachandra Deva," Nanjundaswamy says. "That's how I was first introduced to magic realism." He lists *Asterix*, *Phantom*, *Mandrake*, *Bahadur*, *Tintin* and Disney's comics as other influences on his "foundation in understanding colours and expression." As an adult, Nanjundaswamy admired Kannada writers Poornachandra Tejaswi and Swami Vivekananda, while Don Martin's *Mad* magazine honed his taste for satire and sarcasm. "Not many know this about me, but I also write short stories for Kannada publications," he adds. Nanjundaswamy says he's proud to have taken art out of the white cube. "It belongs to everyone," says the champion of the art-for-all cause. ■