

Workshop Report

2022



Last School
Auroville



Workshop Report

Recording the work in progress

This document is a record and illustration of research done in Last School for SAIER's perusal. To be circulated to a wider audience it would need an introduction to Auroville, Integral Education, the Free Progress approach & Last School.

The document is organized in 3 parts:

- 3 The first explores what a Last School Workshop is and tells the story of an organizer's journey.
- 11 The central part offers a practical example of a workshop held in July 2021: 'Lines and Light' an exploration of the individual and the collective. This section is narrated day by day.

49 The third section introduces the context of art in Last School, and the attitude needed for a team to conduct such workshops as well as glimpses into six other workshops held since July 2019. The document ends with a concise introduction to Last School.



Last School
Auroville

Workshop Background



Part1



Introduction

What is a Last School Workshop?



An educational tool

At the start of each new term, for a week, the entire school, students and teachers, are brought together to take part in the same activities, and face the same challenges, to work through matter on qualities of concentration, patience and perseverance.

The workshops have become a crucial tool in our functioning, they are a way for the school to reconnect and interact, they set the themes which will be developed in different classes throughout the term, as well as set the tone for the attitude we wish to have as a collective.

Silence is a key attribute. We seek to

During workshop weeks groups, friends and constant chatter are left outside and the door gently closed.



create an environment in which the mind is distracted as little as possible, for we must focus on the tasks at hand. Each participant has the responsibility to be silent and allow the others to dive into the work. Even if reactions arise and there are emotions at play, the individual takes into account the collective and tries their best to give others their own best.

The work is twofold:

- 1) an installation & beautification of the space must be organized in the corridor of the school, the art center & each of the classrooms.
- 2) the workshop proper must be organized.



Last School's Attempt

The importance of the team

Common direction

One of the aspects which allows us to work in Last School, is that the team, as diverse as it is, has a clear sense of a common direction. Each in their own way works towards refining the elements of the being and seeks to call forth the inmost part of a student, so that it may grow to be their guide.

This allows for the educational experience to be varied and wide in its development. We understand that no subject is ever an end in itself, but a means through which to foster growth.

Complementary approaches

The school offers a space for each individual to exist and experiment so long as the focus is on the students' development. The adults are expected to grow along with the students.

In workshops

Workshops are organized by a few, but the entire team lends itself to the exercise. Bringing in complementary approaches to the themes chosen in the form of talks, presentations or other offerings, always ready to be experimented upon with a big smile, aiding students who find themselves struggling or simply and perhaps most importantly being present and diving into the work alongside the students.

Bringing in complementary approaches to the themes chosen in the form of talks, presentations or other offerings, always ready to be experimented upon with a big smile



The Approach

An organiser's journey



I joined Last School as a student in July 2013. I was welcomed to the school by a workshop, centered around the theme of model drawing. The concept of intensive workshops was new to me and soon I learnt it was a common occurrence, new themes and mediums of expression were explored in a tri-yearly rhythm at Last School.

At the start of each term, we would be greeted by an entirely new visual environment, enhancing the spaces of the school. These would be linked to the theme of the workshop, which was always kept a surprise.

And violà, each workshop I would discover another aspect of myself, through forms of art. It was a feast for my development.

A lot of care and presence was placed into the surroundings, into matter.

Beauty, harmony, attention, aspiration, receptivity, these building blocks of life were given the utmost importance. And even though at that point I was unaware of their presence, they worked in the subconscious. It was only years later that I started to take notice of the attention to detail and care poured into the physical space of the school.

Years passed and the importance of the workshops continued to grow, as our thirst deepened, we insisted on longer and more intense periods of exploration. Hence the workshop transformed from a two to three day welcome into the school, to a bit of a marathon lasting one to two weeks.

These experiences were only possible with the care that Lola, the main art teacher, provided: single handedly she set up an exhibition in the



corridor, prepare the whole workshop and organize the materials, research the themes and lay it all out in such a fashion that we would not notice the amount of effort and energy dedicated.

Experiencing this through my formative years helped create a practical approach to matter. Lola always said that matter takes time, in matter everything is twice as long and there are countless obstacles and hurdles between the idea and the implementation.

Stepping up

When I was still indecisive about my path in Auroville or Last School, the way was paved for me:

Lola had to leave, for an

undetermined amount of time and that meant that there would be no more workshops. The thought that the new generation of Last School students would not have access to tools the workshop provided was unacceptable to me; to deny that sort of nourishment was not possible.

Thus I took up the responsibility to create and organize the Last School Workshops. A team sprung up to support the process. Together we prepare the space, imagine the themes, and begin each term with the aspiration to bring out the best that we can offer in terms of quality and concentration.

Bhavyo



Lines & Light

The individual & the collective



Part2





Context & Preparation

Journey begins in June 2021

A graduating student had been working for six months on a final project as a conclusion to her years in Last School. Her exhibition 'A Walk in the Clouds' would open in July '21 to the public for two weeks and would remain as the installation in the space of the school for three months.

May and June 2021 went into assisting this student in her project, which initially started off in a small corner in the corridor filled with clouds, and grew into an installation within the entire corridor leading to the journey she wished us to take. The search for light was at the centre of it all.

The following workshop 'Lines and Light' was a direct result of her works in the cloud installation. Throughout these months she had demonstrated a capacity for poise, patience and kindness, creating a psychological base to tackle the difficulties of working as a collective.

With three weeks left to invent the exercises and organize the workshop, it was decided that the theme and root of the workshop was to be the **individual and the collective**.

Lines and light would serve as tools.

What is a line? An infinity of dots between two points, a line can be of any shape, size and can stretch to any distance, it can be curved or sharp, can be used as a tool to express anything,



Getting Started

Research & practical implementation

What were we looking for:

A variety of exercises, which would be challenging enough to demand silent focus and simple enough to allow the participants to observe the reactions going through them as they executed what was asked. The exercises would require simple instructions, and would need to include individual work, work in pairs and in groups of four or five.

Once the initial brainstorming was complete, and initial trials had been done on paper, we needed to test our instruments: a group of volunteers were asked to come and participate in a series of tests. This was to see if our instructions were clear enough and to observe and to prepare ourselves for the possible reactions of participants.

We gave the volunteers basic information and rules:

No figurative drawing, no writing and no talking.

Silence was the key to ensure that each one could work without distraction. Since we wished to focus on the quality of the line, we strictly avoided going towards the recognizable. Each line was to hold itself without the aid of the mind giving it a structure or a form. This proved to be quite a challenge for the participants, as we observed an inclination to slide towards known patterns and rhythms which one could understand and be comforted by.





The volunteers worked two by two, partners were swapped to see the results of various combinations. They were thrown in the deep end. They had no prior information as to why these exercises had been given or what we were exploring. They were unaware of the thread we were trying to pull in link to the collective, just as the students would be. They showed us the importance of pace and preparation. We needed to give the school a slower initiation into the theme and formulate the set parameters more clearly. This type of experimentation using the aid of external volunteers offered an insight into the psychological aspect of what was to come, the human reactions and the ways we could work with

them and not against them.

We needed to build a simple foundation using a tool which was easy to put into practice and which would facilitate dynamic interaction.

One of the rules of Last School Workshops is that no one may be left behind, every single individual must be helped towards a conclusion by the end of the week. Hence the exercises proposed are psychological rather than artistic practices.



Programme

Week of the workshop





- **Day 1**
Pencil and paper
Individual & in pairs
- **Day 2**
Pencil and paper
Developing techniques
- **Day 3**
Pencil and A1 papers
Group work
- **Day 4**
Materials found in nature
Introduction to Land Art
- **Day 5**
Materials found in nature
Finalising the works

Lines & Light

What was the base to be created from which the individual could enter the collective?



Lines & Light

Day One

The first two days of the workshop would serve as a foundation for learning the way of pencil and paper. We met in a circle in silence as we do every morning. A story of transformation, breathing exercises, followed by a short introduction to convey the steps clearly and everyone took a seat. The materials had been prepared in advance, and participants' names written on the table. The exercises would be given in intervals by sounding a small gong.

Individuals:

The first set of exercises had each participant working individually. They were asked to draw simple variations of horizontal and vertical lines, first with their dominant hand, then with the other.

Next, we worked with both hands at once. Four squares were handed to the students. The instructions for three of which were given. They were asked to write out the instructions they would follow in the last square. For their own square, they could use two hands or the non-dominant hand, the choice was theirs.





Two by two:

The first exercises had allowed the individuals to figure out their own pace and rhythm, to ease into the idea that concentration was key and that the awkwardness of the lines was simply something they had to take into their stride. We were not looking for something pretty, but for an effort in attention and observation of self.

Now, they would be placed with another individual. This process would build bases for what was to come in the days ahead.

To have the students listen to each

other without words was the motive, the paper would hold the conversation.

We created a series of steps, including blindfolds. This process opened a door to observe oneself and the reaction to the other.

The mind plays games: we think and we take control.

These steps were about letting that wish to control or to hold out, transform into something else, to find a space in which two people were both the guides and the guided.

The simplicity of the exercises can at times be an issue, the pace at which one goes is of utmost importance, do not rush the lines, observe and practice, develop the quality of the line. And each at their own pace.





Lines & Light

Day Two



We invited three professionals in the fields of art, architecture and design, who since several years have offered a few hours a week, to the students of Last school.

After a short introduction to the idea behind the workshop, we had asked them each to offer two hour sessions in which they would expose the student to technical tools with which to explore lines. We did not know what they would propose, other than the titles of the sessions.

The titles of the sessions were:
lines/light/value
lines/light/space
lines/light/emotion

The first two hours were focused on

fine tuning and observing our lines technically, understanding how long and how close lines could get, how fine and rough they need to be to convey a certain quality of light and shadow and a sense of depth. It was meticulous work and although the exercises were not technically demanding, they needed precision and concentration to bring forth the desired effects.

Next, we were asked to drop our pencils and dip into the third dimension, our lines became surfaces. We were to cut and paste and imagine how light and shadow would interact on the surfaces we created. Matter does not behave to our touch the way we tend to expect. Things in matter take time, they have





a pace and rhythm of their own. Paper will sustain only a certain amount of weight before collapsing onto itself, glue will take time to dry.

This process and the patience it encouraged would come to be of help in the activities we had planned for the last two days.

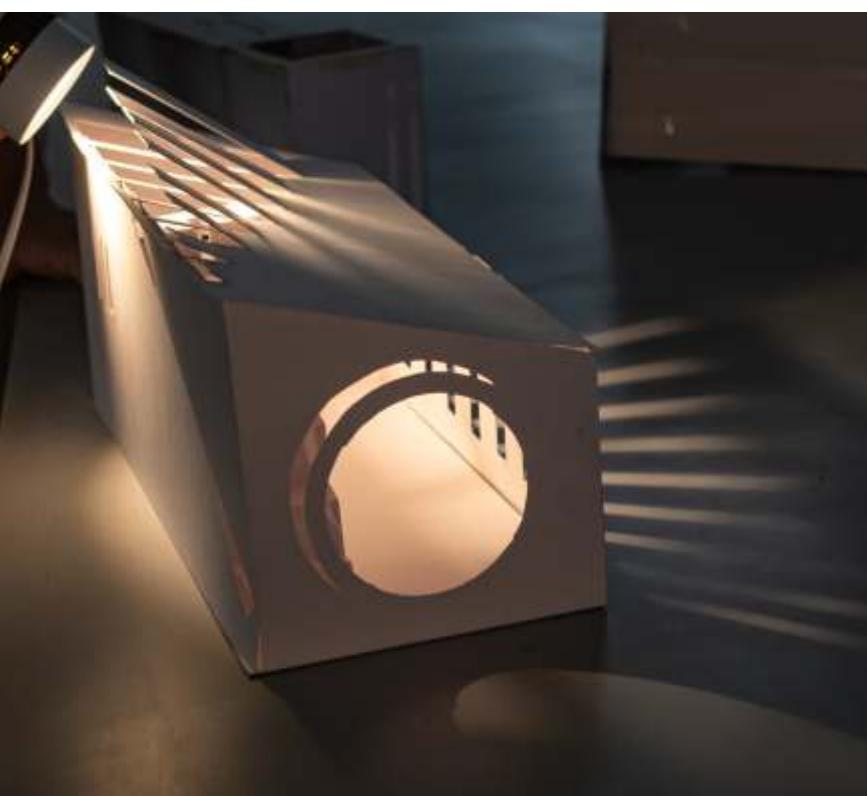
Finally, together in a large circle, we made a list of emotions and qualities. We then worked with the line as a tool

to transmit and translate specific emotions. Simple technical variations of thick and thin, jagged or smooth lines, the use of a single stroke or multiple, could convey a whole range of different experiences. With this new vocabulary we were asked to translate a burst of happiness, a stroke of excitement or a dash of regret.

Merging

The team holding the workshop had now to sit and synthesize the events of the first two days and to slowly introduce the students to working as a collective and prepare them to work in nature.

We sat together after Tuesday's sessions and took notes on what we had noticed, what worked and what we found interesting. How could we take the essentials of the first two days and combine them? There was a



lot of material to sift through, we had to choose a direction and push towards the collective. We had received from this day a toolkit we could apply to the next phase of the workshop.

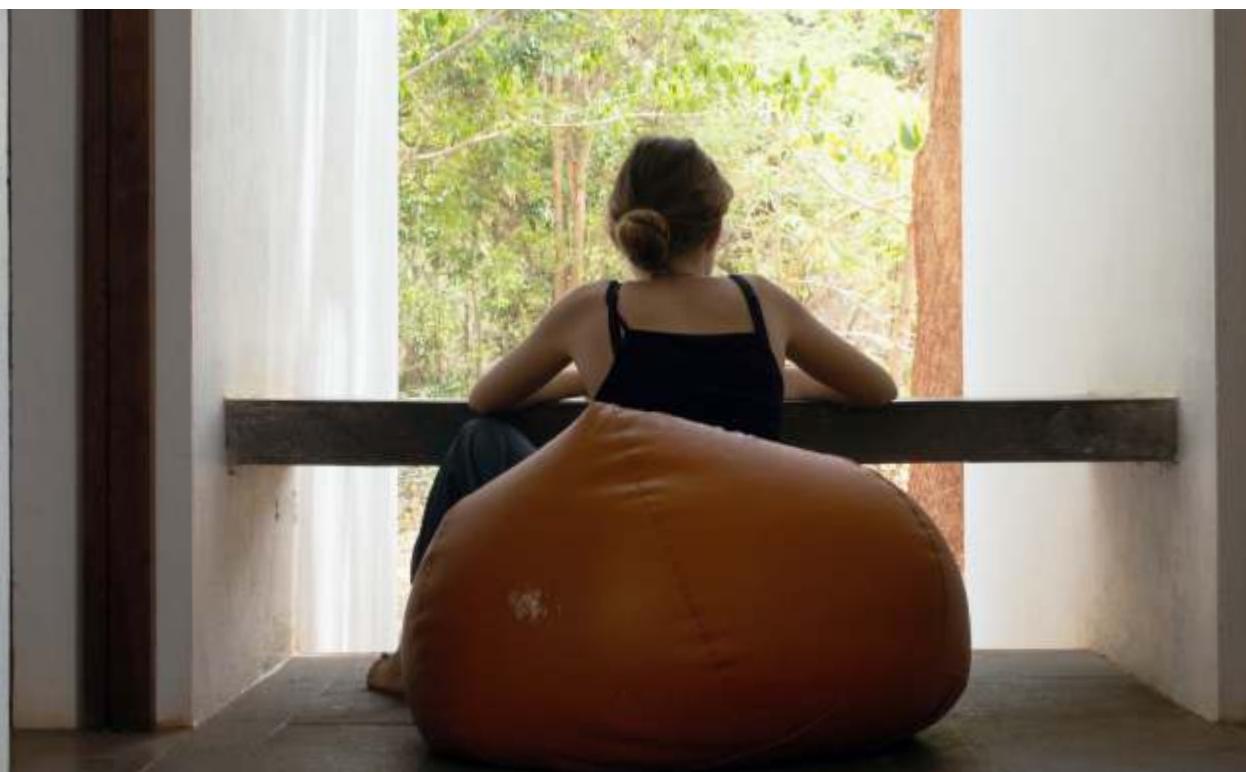
The structure of Wednesday started to take shape, and we could now see the next steps: we would make a series of groups combining students and teachers, carefully created and balanced to ensure that the group would hold together, work and take care of each other.

We created the groups based on experience from the previous workshops and our observations of classroom dynamics. We needed to make sure the space was there for those who had a small voice to be heard. We wished for those who were habituated to taking charge to listen and include, but not assert themselves too much.

This process and the patience it encouraged would come to be of help in the activities we had planned for the last two days.

Wednesday would be about the harmonizing of individuals and the forming of a collective.

We rearranged the physical space of the art centre as the individual exercises were now over and left, curious as to what would unfold.





Lines & Light

Day Three

In the morning we spoke a little about Auroville, and the role of complementarity in harmonizing different approaches and points of view.

The exercise

We explained the exercise and split into groups, each consisting of four or five members. The individuals were asked to look through the works they had done over the past two days and take notes, to select what was interesting and use it to create a template, a sort of guidebook of diverse line qualities. We wished for them to join the collective with a sense of what they could bring to the table.

Wednesday would be about the harmonizing of individuals and the forming of a collective.





From this toolkit, they then had to choose one of the elements, which would be their contribution to the group. It could be as simple as thick lines, or circular motion, or dots, etc.

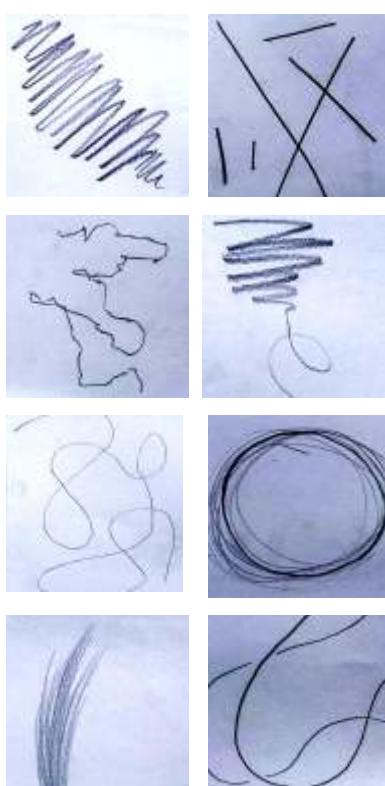
For the first exercise, each group was handed a large sheet of paper, each person had to bring one type of line, and work only with that. There would be no given structure or anyone to lead and follow, each group had to work towards a piece. Not a piece of

'art', we were not looking for that, we were looking for harmony. The groups worked in silence.

The exercise had no time limit, each group was to decide together, without speaking when the piece was complete and collectively decide to move on to the next exercise.

Every three minutes a bell was sounded to rotate the angle of the sheet. The interaction within each group was very important. We asked for there to be no 'I' but a 'we'. There would be no right or wrong, this was emphasized. The aim was to accept the other and their lines as our own, to let go, as perhaps, one set of lines was taken over and transformed by the other.

To breathe was key.



We reminded the students and teachers to breathe and immerse themselves in this experience. Observing themselves, their group and the work with scrutiny but without judgment, and this was no easy task.

Yet we asked them to take the leap, and to observe. There was an opening to dive into the spirit of the collective, with the understanding that the only way to become an interesting collective was to remain aligned within one's self.



*Silence,
again, was
key.*

Observe the silence and the pace
At times it grew too intense to push oneself to be aware of the other, to focus on each line and add only what was needed. Still we insisted on observation, to be aware and focus on each aspect of the whole.





As we watched

The groups began their journeys, the pace and approach varied drastically. We began to see patterns rise almost within minutes. There were unspoken rules laid out by individuals and they seemed to steer the ship of creation.

One group could not hold silence and began to use words to communicate, when the facilitators intervened and clarified the aspect of silence they

began writing on pieces of paper. The group wanted to create a cohesive piece and were determined to assign roles and to create a sort of direction so that each one could fit in their role and play their part.

Another struggled with how to communicate and agree that a piece was done – for some it still lacked substance, for others it seemed already a flood of lines. Space and composition in the eyes of a team have a pull and tug like effect, one member of the group might stop drawing completely so as to balance the lines of another.

A third had members focus on the details and the minute. We noticed that each member started in a corner, taking their time to orchestrate a small world and hesitated to interact with



others. This continued even after the bell was sounded and the paper was rotated. Like a safehaven in the midst of chaos, students focused on a small part of the piece and only had eyes on the pockets they had created, perhaps to avoid disturbing the other and face an invasion of different lines.

Borders had formed in the first round of this exercise, alliances were made with a smile and eagerness to interact with perhaps one or two in the group.

The fourth group crumbled as a teacher had to urgently leave, the five members slimmed to four and hesitation took charge. We watched carefully but did not intervene. And to our surprise one of the quiet voices began to invite the scattered members back to the conversation on paper.

This is a subtle example of growth we often witness during workshops. In this particular case the student was well aware of the progress made and

The facilitators were not needed, we could enjoy the sound of pencil on paper, the giggles or small frustrations and most importantly the eagerness to explore and experiment.

began to actively work to overcome their personal challenges and to ask teachers through the year for a steady push.





Finding solutions

Still another group of five had a lot of difficulty in communication, judgment hindered the group. The size of the paper was too large to unify the qualities of lines.

In this group, the larger the paper, the more dispersed the lines grew. The quality of line each brought had no place to interact because one of the participants had such a wish to

harmonize, that they took over the sheet. In one strong line, instead of inviting the others to participate, they gave an ultimatum.

This we saw and solved with a simple approach. As a rule, the simpler we can make the exercise, the better.

Each individual was handed a paper about an eighth of the original size on which to draw a single line and pass it on, until it had made a full circle. The process and results of this were harmonious. Now each paper had an element that tied it together instead of dividing it, each smaller format worked by itself and the collective was present. The quality of each individual was visible and the interaction fluid. This smaller format opened the door to having freedom in limitation. The shift in approach to the line was the



Our task as the facilitators is to first understand the team and their functioning, we have to see what works and the qualities each individual brings to the table. After this we can begin to formulate a structure which can help them overcome this hurdle.

One of the focal points is to not go against the students, we cannot deny any of their ways or ask them to change how they draw and respond to the paper, all we can do is propose a shift in perspective.



key factor, instead of doing more and more the individual did less and less, infusing purpose into each stroke. Thus what remained on the paper was without noise, just a line which needed a place to be.

The set of students who had begun each in their corner, were still working only with detail. Even after a discussion and having been asked to expand and interact, there was still a





hesitation. To jostle the dynamic, we had one of our facilitators join them. Here, we added an element that had the capacity to observe others and involve them, and include in a harmonious manner their lines. This person had the skill to unite and bring all the tiny worlds together to create one whole.

The new quality of line which was added was a circular motion, which resulted in a spiral of connections and spaces all meeting at the centre.

The circle can be used as a tool to connect, but its effect will depend on the qualities of the person who uses the tool. Insight can change the direction of the whole, if put to the service of the team.

In short, instead of fixing anything or anyone in their ways of drawing we have to make sure we can find a way to integrate.





Conclusion

The question for Wednesday was: how can we create a space which enables us to find a way to grow together and to accept every choice made and work with it, not against?

This question was translated perfectly on the large sheets of paper. Each student needed their time to adjust and understand their role within the group, and the fact that they could be supported and helped, if the structure was kept in place by the responsibility of each individual.

By the end of the morning the teams had begun to synergise and work more in stride.

To conclude, all the works were laid out in the central space and together we observed and discussed the process each group had undergone, from the initial smaller works to the larger formats we saw the evolution of the line.

What had been the meaning of their offering? What had been the significance of their line and what qualities had they wished to bring to the paper, to the collective?

Introduction to Land Art

In the afternoon, the tempo shifted, we watched a documentary on the artist Andy Goldsworthy, and dove into the world of matter and nature, through the passage of time.

After the film, the school split into three and went on a silent walk. Students were told to observe and notice the forest and nature, to reflect on the previous days and observe the





quality of light as the sun slowly slid towards the horizon.

It was a preparation into the world of nature and matter. For an hour and half they walked in silence before arriving at the gardens of Matrimandir. The day ended around 6pm, with a grounding that was necessary for the next part of the adventure.

In order to show or present any exercise, we have to understand its fundamentals, find the simplicity and complexity of it and work with it ourselves.



Final preparations

While the school was out on the walk, the workshop team had to delve into land art. We scouted the surroundings of Last School and took note of the different types of plants, seeds and other materials that could be easily obtained.

In order to show or present any exercise, we have to understand its fundamentals, find the simplicity and complexity of it and work with it ourselves.

The game with matter is such: we have to make the application simple, yet the initial idea may be wild. We have to narrow down and ground our idea into what is actually possible. The team has to ensure that we can utilize the different materials and tools to the best of our abilities to help the students' visions take shape. We are tasked with creating a net which can hold all the ideas and explorations with the insistence that each project has to find its place in matter.

The landart preparation came to an end. We found vines which could be used as a type of rope, thorns to attach leaves and such together, curved leaves to stitch into a circular garland and many more possibilities, all of these materials could be found within a few minutes from the school. When the students would be told to collect material, we would be able to give them certain directions.

As the sun set we finalized our approach and introduction to land art and put together a schedule for Thursday.





Lines & Light

Day Four

Thursday morning we gathered and the reins of the workshop were handed over to the graduating student who had prepared the exhibition in the corridor. We walked through her clouds. She spoke about her journey with this exhibition, the challenges it posed, her attitude through it, her growth.

Keeping in mind the previous day's lessons and observations, and inspired by the story they had just heard, it was time for groups of students and teachers to step outside. We invited each group to choose a spot in the garden of the school, brainstorm, imagine together what they could do with nature, and what materials they would need.

Once they thought that was done, we packed them off wherever in Auroville

they needed to go to collect the materials they would use.

The plan for the day was to collect and explore uses and properties



Push away the silent army
Emerging from ashy sheets.
Shine beyond their basened clouds
Put forth the dimmed sun.



elements in nature. The students would need to discover how branches and bark and leaves, or whatever they had chosen could be handled and fixed or joined together without the use of glue, tape, rope or such.

Working in matter is challenging.
So were the next two days.

For the point was not to decorate, it was to work together, support each

other, towards the aim of a common creation. And the difficulty increased as we stepped out of the protective and carefully curated, concentrated environment of the art centre into the garden.

And as excitement took over, rather than explore, the groups soon began working on what they hoped would be a final piece. Ideas started to crystallize prematurely, and this made it challenging to encourage the



We sought to look at a space and enhance it without putting too much of oneself in it, to observe nature, to be sensitive to what a space needed.

students to keep experimenting. We asked the groups repeatedly to simplify and take time to continue to experiment. This fell on somewhat deaf ears.

We reminded the individuals to realign themselves constantly as they slipped into agitation.

And breathe...





Lines & Light

Day Five

That night it rained and rained and rained. In the morning, at 6:30am, some students arrived early.

A lesson in adaptation

The rain had been a setback as well as a solution: to simplify and to work with what we had. The students a little crestfallen at first, regrouped and picked themselves up as the deadline drew closer.

However, it was the end of the week and we could see the poise was beginning to falter, fatigue impeded

clarity, and students looked to the teachers more and more to find solutions. This was expected: the materials they were working with were still unfamiliar, and gauging the completion of their piece was challenging.

Instead of stepping back time and again to observe what they had done, they had the tendency to continue to focus on details which not only exhausted them but also took away both from the collective exercise and the piece in itself.

The rain had been a setback as well as a solution





We noticed the uncertainty in the students, and instead of giving them the easier way out which was to use adults as a crutch, we asked the teachers of each team to step out and allow the last stretch of the marathon to come to a close without them. For the challenge of this workshop was not the artistic result but the process through which a collective solution could be found.

Once the teachers had been removed, with two hours left, the organizers of the workshop demanded from each group that they clarify once more what their base idea was, and to simplify as much as possible.

Drawing to a close

As the groups concluded their works they returned to the art center and helped physically organize and clean



What significance did this workshop hold within the context of life in Auroville? This theme of the individual and the collective would be a thread pulled throughout this school year.

the space, preparing it for a new school year.

Throughout the week students had been asked to take notes of the process, so as to keep track of what they observed. After lunch, they reviewed their notes and we sat together to discuss the workshop. How the individuals had felt in the collective and how the collective had responded.



Reflections

What we learnt



The challenge was the collective. We aimed to subtly bring in what we are trying to do in Auroville, scale it down and translate it into matter – a mirror of sorts, a simulation. For this we used a series of simple exercises and experiences, in order to gently lead the participants to embody the attitude from which it becomes possible to work in a collective. This shift was important to get right.

We learnt to be receptive and to adapt to the pace of the students and teachers and their individual capacities. The parametres of the

We dove into the microcosm of human interactions and the challenges of working towards a common aspiration within a collective.

exercises needed much clarity, yet had they been rigid and unable to be adapted to each arising situation, we would soon have hit a wall and found ourselves unable to manoeuvre past the conflicts which naturally arose.

As a team which organized this workshop we were constantly reminded of our own limitations, and had to make sure to use simple, grounded elements.

We watched as each individual began to articulate their abilities and qualities, to take into account their tools as they interacted with the group. Each individual had the challenge to offer to the collective what it needed, not what they wanted to give it. While the collective had to hold the space, to receive and implement the qualities offered,

synthesize them in a harmonious manner, and all of this without uttering a word.

It was confirmed to us that the conditions which created the base for such an experiment was, one, a setting of harmony and beauty in matter, attention to detail in every aspect of the physical space; two, a quality of concentrated silence. For years both of these have been insisted upon within the confines of Last School and this workshop proved to us once more the importance and necessity of nurturing and honing these qualities.

In this particular context, not using words as the primary means of communication snapped us out of habitual patterns and allowed for individual reactions to be processed, sifted, rather than flung unto the collective.

We found ourselves back to square one, re-examining many of the values and systems we had set in motion: what does it mean to be a Last Schooler, what is Last School, what are the types that we produce?

For several years, we have noticed that as we encourage our students to find their individuality, at times, in the process, they might become a little too self-centered and lose for a while the sense of service, and the importance of the collective within the Auroville experiment.

Although we do constantly speak of the collective, the tools we have developed in Last School focus on a well rounded development of the individual being. Going forward, we may need to widen our approach and find practical means to make ordinary, the attitudes necessary for a meaningful collectivity.



Further Resources

6 previous workshops



Part3





On art as a tool

And, the attitude of organisers

Why art?

When art was first proposed in Last School in the early 90's, it was with the intention not to teach kids art, but to use it as a tool to bring much needed discipline to the rather wild Auroville teenagers of the day, as well as refining the energies of life through the aesthetic sense of harmony and beauty. Thus, art came into Last School as a tool to channel rebellion and refine the vital being. We continue to use it as a medium to look inwards and to work on the self.

A space of beauty

Organizing matter helps to bring order to that which is immaterial. Just as one cleans one's home to restructure one's thoughts, so is it with the school's physical environment. Our insistence on beauty in all corners of the school has created a base we

consistently come back to, as the habit of caring for a physical space and materials we use quickly slips from our minds as we busy ourselves with routine. We seek to enhance the space, rather than decorate it, and through the attention brought, encourage the sense of observation and wonder.

Beauty has truly become a key in our approach to education.

Last School is not an 'art' school. We do not conduct art workshops.





A reversal

We have simply inverted the traditional schooling system which offers tests as a conclusion to a term or a school year to gauge what students have learnt: our approach begins with a quest. Workshops are designed to invite the students to explore a theme they will delve in all term and the five days of the workshop serve to understand the question. In addition, these workshops act as a sort of psychological test, an occasion which

demands from the students and teachers to develop qualities of goodwill, concentration, perseverance, a sense of responsibility and wonder which will aid us during the year.

Such workshops may be conducted through any means or subject: through the body using movement, theater, dance; through science and the exploration of the physical world and the sense of wonder; through languages and writing; through the lens of music or in the form of art through simple exercises and lines.

The choice hinges upon the inclination and capacity of the team or individual proposing and holding the workshops.

Attitude of the organizers:

The foundation of creating a workshop is the attitude one has



towards it. Both in the preparation and in the interaction with the students. Each step of the way has to be taken in a conscious manner, each decision is made with the students in mind, and each exercise has to have the room to evolve and adapt as per the need of the collective, not the preference of the team or individuals guiding it.

Simplicity is key. The complexity of the implementation is what we have to gauge so that every individual who participates can dive into it with the basic toolkit of their own capacities and build from there. It is important to create a base from which students can begin to explore new ways and methods rather than continue things they are comfortable with or 'good at'.

Each student is like a planet of their own, we have to be able to dive into their world, work with it instead of going against it. They need to be coaxed with care and to be guided to make their own decisions, according to what they can pursue within the

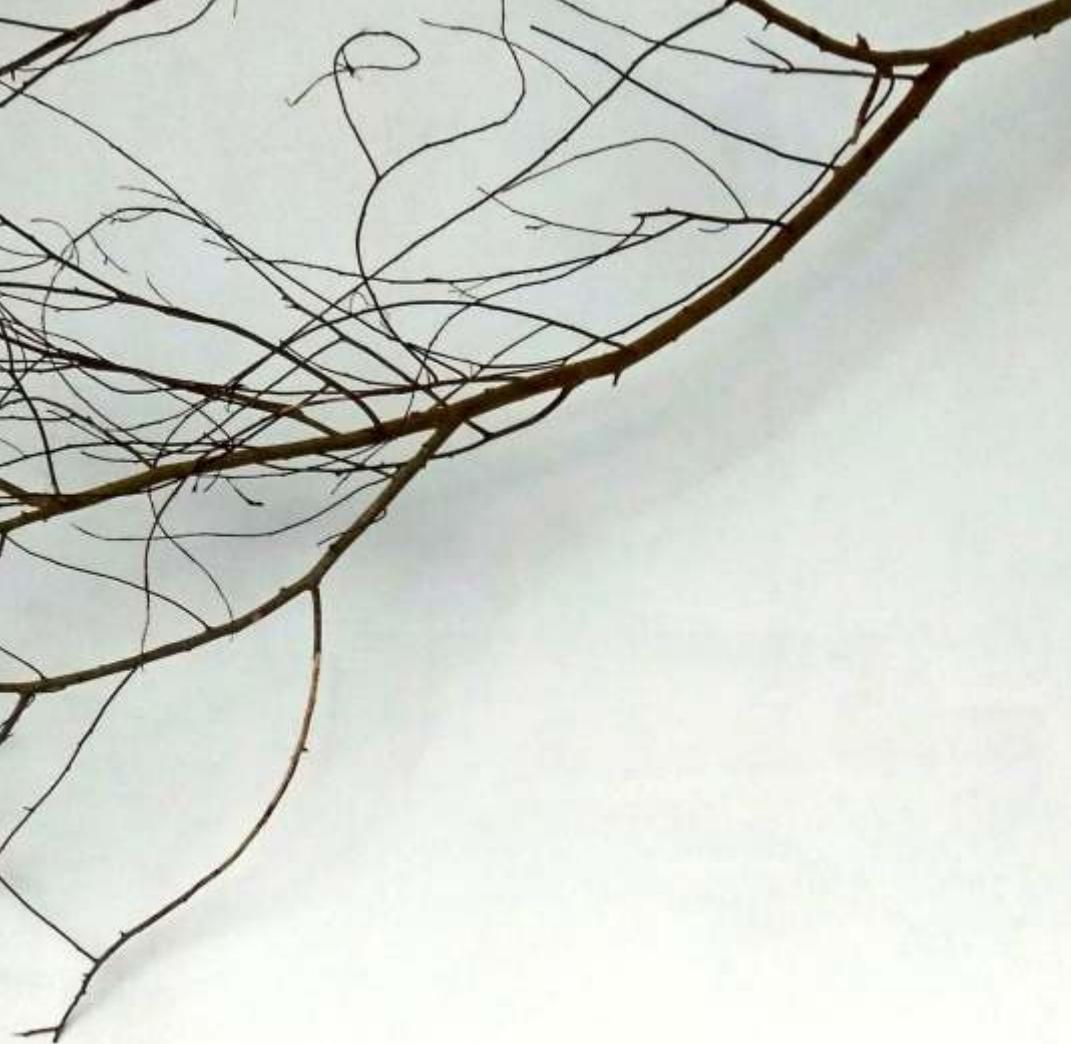
given bounds of their present development and the context of the workshop.

If one student shows a drive to push, we give them the opportunity to test themselves and their limits. We must remember that the glass ceiling is only as high as the capacities of the team to hold and to accompany. Thus once more, we insist on the importance of the organizers: we are here to sow seeds and hone skills using a number of practical methods. This allows the participants to go beyond the barriers and limitations of their own judgments. Phrases such as 'I like or I don't like' have no place in such workshops. We must create an environment in which it is possible for each individual to allow themselves to experience new things and become an observer of themselves, as of the canvases on which they paint.

In order to offer anything at all, the one who prepares the workshop may choose a theme close to their heart. From there, they must seek the whole, look at the chosen topic from every possible angle, see how that topic branches out to reach every other topic dreamed of. Then comes the challenge of stepping away from personal biases and preferences, so as to offer a space in which the students can immerse themselves and grow.

The next few pages offer a glimpse into the six other workshops conducted at Last School since July 2019.





A tree beside the Sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous,

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.

Branches & Growth

The tree is the Soul of man

This theme had begun with a curiosity on the structure and the meaning of branches: what is a branch and how are we all connected?

Each morning began with silent observation and still life drawing of branches placed in the art centre.

Once we were familiar with our branches, the exercises shifted to the understanding and practice of the basics of composition with lines and space. We then worked with ink observing full and empty spaces.

The last two days we followed the students as they branched out into different forms of expression using these elements.



The workshop concluded with reflections and oral presentations as each student spoke before the entire school about their pieces, and the process they had undergone.

How is empty and full space organized to bring harmony to a page? What does one prune in order to better grow ?





Clouds

*A step,
and all is sky and God*



The cloud workshop proposed three days of explorations of artistic mediums to translate clouds. We encouraged the students to meditate upon the quality and properties of clouds. Many were too absorbed in the fine art aspect to pay this much heed. Infact, some students invested themselves so much that they stayed in school several hours past class time and came in early in the mornings.

However, the morning of day four, all of the works were laid out in the centre of the room. And the collective was asked if they had noticed the words written below. One said,

- Yes, it is a line from a poem of Sri Aurobindo: 'A step and all is sky and God'.

- Did you notice that for the past three days, after each exercise ended and as each new one began images of clouds covered the text.
- Yes.
- And now, what covers it?
- Our works...
- And so what must you do?
- Go past the clouds, past our work?
- Yes, how?
- Destroy it?
- No, transform it.

Thus the dive into collage began. The more students let go, the more ideas flowed in. As they observed others tear up their work, they took courage and dove into the transformation. As we started tearing, we discovered the unexpected joy of letting go of what is ours.





The Body

Physical Education



We had noticed that some of our students were struggling with the upkeep of a regular sports schedule, so we prepared a weeklong intensive dive into the body. It was exhausting, exhilarating, painful, awakening, and challenging to say the least. Starting with Kalarippayattu all together first thing in the morning, everyone found and felt muscles they hadn't known before. Through Acroyoga we explored balance, trust, the acts of holding and release - supporting and helping each other. Through theatre, we learnt to observe the masks we put on.

Afternoons were spent at the art centre, sketching and live model drawing for the first three days. The last two afternoons we returned to

composition and simple black and white tracing work.

Everyone played the game. Overall it grounded the beginning of the term in matter, jolted the students back into their body, its strength and stability, and the endurance and discipline needed to develop it.

Monday morning – surprise! – a four hour test followed, in which students had to complete a mixed medium piece on an A3 format, without utilizing any previous work, as well as handing in a written evaluation.





Prints & Imprints

& the beauty of nature

‘Paint, newspapers and leaves. Back to play school, explore to your heart’s content. And with what you have made, create a new world.’

This workshop came after close to a year of lockdown, we felt the need to start afresh and dive into joy.

At the conclusion of the workshop a booklet was prepared, to offer a taste of the beauty and concentration we experienced. It contains an introduction to the multidisciplinary approach we like to take when exploring a workshop as well as words from the students and plenty of pictures.

In nature patterns repeat themselves – seemingly endlessly. Flowers unfurl, bloom and fade, replaced by others of their type. And a banyan seed grows only into a banyan tree.





Who Am I ?

An exploration



Based on the question 'who am I', this workshop reached out beyond the walls of the school and we met at CRIPA every day for sessions using theatre, body and voice to explore the masks we put on, and via the neti neti method slowly make our way towards finding that which lies behind all aspects of personality.

This week brought the school together in many ways, new friendships formed, tensions were released. And if we did not get any closer to answering the question, we discovered much about ourselves and sides of the people we spend every day of the week with.

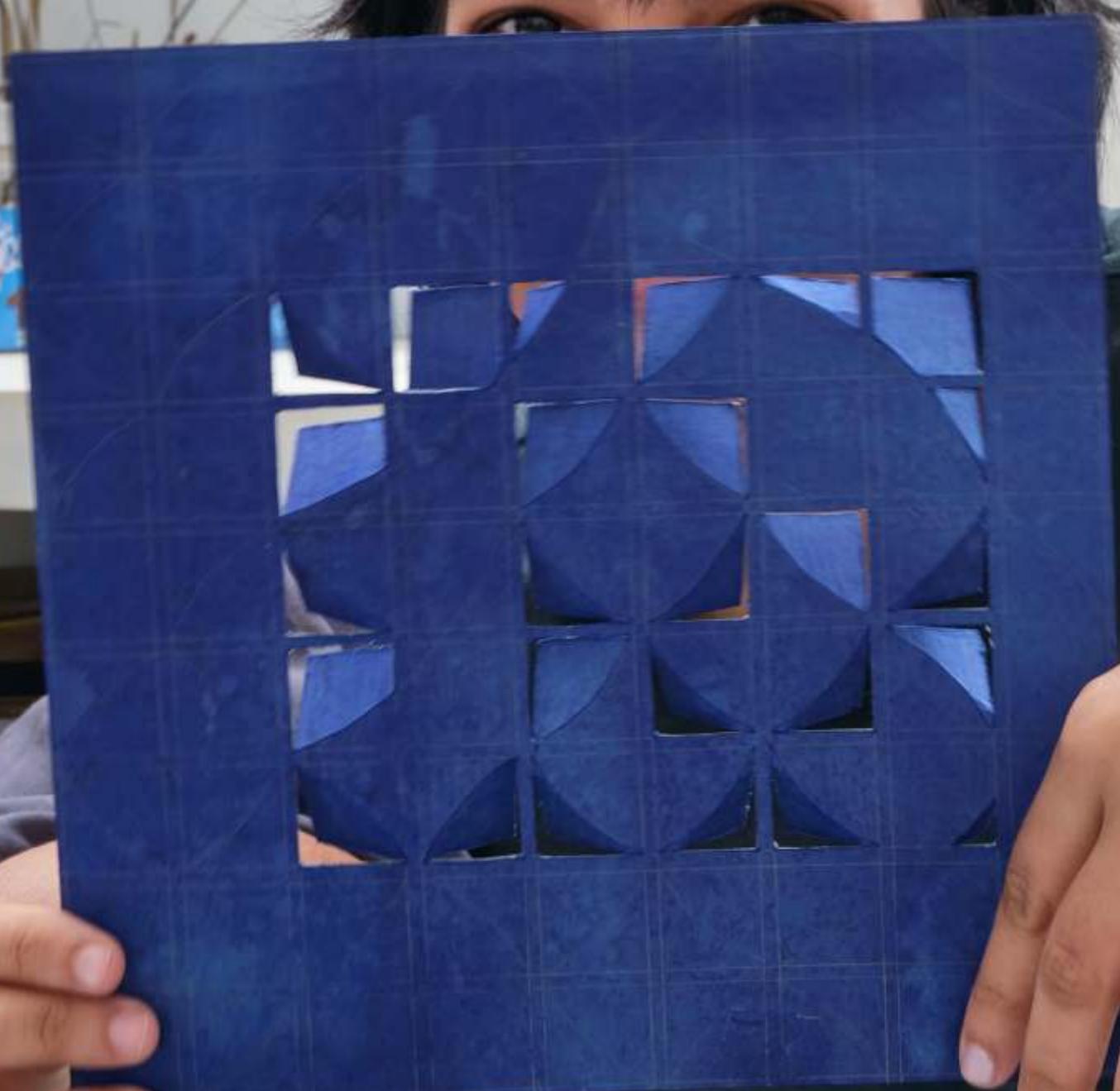
We invited seven external facilitators

and each brought something different to the workshop, tugging at the recurring question 'who am I'.

On the last day, as half the school headed towards lunch, about twenty remained behind for another half hour and danced and danced and danced. The day ended with reflections, challenges and joys of the week.

Many of our youngsters, for a week, stepped out of the discomfort of their teenage skins, as they witnessed the capacity to leap – of all ages.





Patterns

In self and the surrounding

This workshop arrived after a time of unease within the community. We wished to offer a space of beauty and quiet reflection in which one could come and be captivated by the wonder of nature, man's creation and how they intertwine.

It was a three day tour into simple patterns, lines on paper, a few rules and a few grids to draw on. This workshop was short and quiet, it worked well to deliver the simplicity of patterns and their presence everywhere, and to begin to understand the liberty found within tight confines.

The last day was an exploration of the Kolam which brought a more cultural approach, through our traditions and surroundings.

Immersed in tiny squares, we breathed into the vast.



About Last School

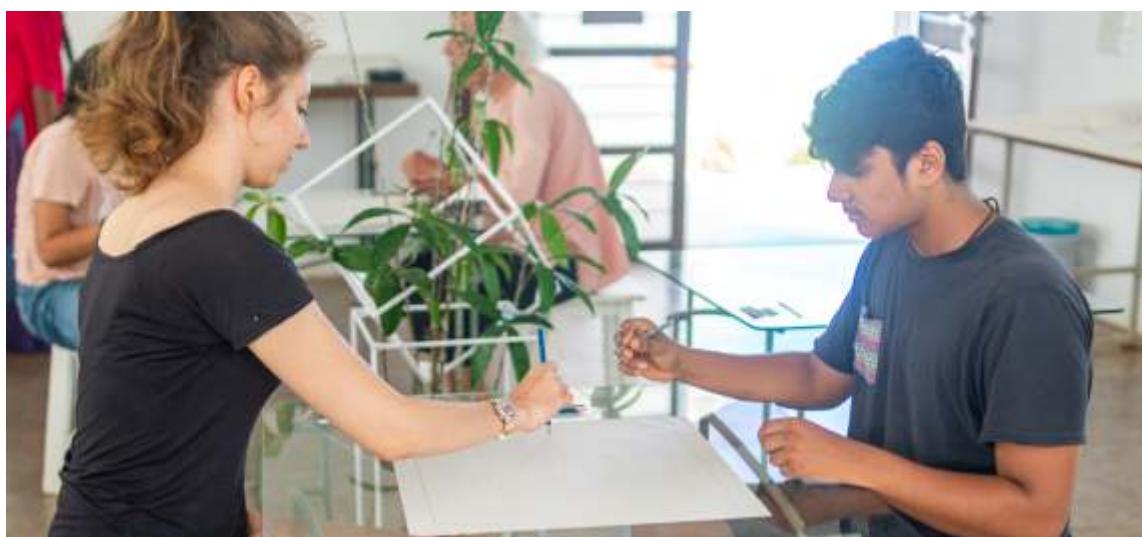
“In the physical the Divine manifests as beauty”

Anchored in Auroville, Last School has been working with teenagers since 1985, it relocated to the Cultural Zone in July 2014.

The school's educational process wants to develop the student's faculties of mind, the powers of will, the refinement of the aesthetic and emotional being, built upon a strong and balanced physical body. It aims at providing an environment to aid their journey of self-discovery.

The publication Passage, 2009, explores the fundamental approaches of the school.

*Dans le physique
le Divin se manifeste par
la Beauté.*





Notes







Last School
Auroville