

# A creative platform for the children, by the children, of the children

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KATHRYN YORK (PRODUCER): Hello and welcome to the Big & Little Podcast. My name is Kathryn, Podcast Producer and Digital Content Manager at the Museum. Next up, on our Creativity Series, we're welcoming the Children's Art Museum of India founders Manya Roongta and Krish Nawal, to the show. The Children's Art Museum of India or, CAMI for short, is an online platform and virtual museum space that enables young artists to submit their art and share their creativity worldwide. Manya and Krish founded CAMI in 2022 when they were 14 and 12 years old respectively. Since then, the two have been working tirelessly to create and expand CAMI's reach and continue to carve out this important space for children's creativity.

What began as a local initiative for Indian children to share their art has since grown into an increasingly global movement. Today on the show, Carole Charnow, the museum's president and CEO, talks with Manya and Krish about founding CAMI, the unique benefits of an online museum space, and how to engage and inspire kids to be creative through art. With that, let's get started.

CAROLE CHARNOW: Hello, Manya. Hello, Krish. Welcome to the Big & Little Podcast. We're so happy to see you today and to hear from you.

MANYA ROONGTA: Thank you so much for having Krish, me, and CAMI on the podcast. We're really excited.

CAROLE: OK, wonderful. So to start off, the two of you founded CAMI a few years ago, two or three years ago, and it would be fantastic for our listeners to hear a little bit about each of you. Manya, why don't you start? Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you are living, and where you're working from, and how old you are, and maybe a little bit about how old you were when you started this project?

MANYA: So hi. My name is Manya Roongta. I am 16 years old from New Delhi, India. And I'm a grade 11 student and have a very keen interest in sports and art. When we started CAMI, I was 14 years old.

CAROLE: Wow. And Krish, what about you?

KRISH NAWAL: Hi, my name is Krish Nawal. I'm a 13-year-old from New Delhi, India, and a grade 8 student interested in science and art. I was about 12 years old when we started CAMI.

CAROLE: Wow. That's extraordinary that you both at such a young age had this incredible vision. So tell me about CAMI. It's the Children's Art Museum of India. And this is part of our Creativity Series, so we're going to talk with you a lot about the importance of this project.

Manya, can you start by just telling us what was the vision for CAMI?

MANYA: Initially, when we started, we envisioned a very small project. It was started as a very small neighborhood project, and we aimed at providing a space for children from our local community to showcase their artwork to their friends and family. But then CAMI's impact really exceeded our expectations, and it went viral. We received responses from over 170 cities from all across India. And this really made us rethink our vision for CAMI. And we had to expand CAMI to meet the growing demand. We introduced features such as art fest tutorials, blogs, newsletters. And we even launched our own Roblox game. So now we have over 10,000 artists, and our Roblox game has had over 130,000-plus visits in a month.

CAROLE: Amazing. And Krish, what was the benefit to children that you thought about as such a young man in creating CAMI with Manya?

KRISH: So one of the main benefits with CAMI is that it provides children a museum platform, an authentic museum experience, a physical museum experience directly into their homes. And so we started this in 2022 when COVID was, of course, really prevalent in India. And so we were unable to take children to traditional museum, so we decided to bring the museum experience to them digitally. One of the unique components of a digital museum was that CAMI was accessible to children from all over India, including those children in rural areas who probably would not have had access to a physical museum. It helped eliminate geographical barriers and ensure that young artists from diverse backgrounds and locations could participate and showcase their work. And also, in a digital space, we can offer a wide range of educational resources like learning videos and tutorials. So it helped us ensure that every child had an equal opportunity.

CAROLE: That's just remarkable, particularly as maybe many young families aren't aware of the benefits of a museum. So this sort of introduces them to the whole idea of art and an art museum. So how does it work? Manya, maybe you can tell us. Tell us about the site and how the kids can get inspired, how they can upload their art, and access all these wonderful resources you have.

MANYA: Sure. So the Children's Art Museum of India is a web-based portal with a domain ID [www.childrensartmuseumofindia.com](http://www.childrensartmuseumofindia.com). Visitors to the portal can view the artwork displayed in the museum tab of the portal. And the children who want to become members and submit their artwork, they can do so by signing up, which is completely free of cost.

When they sign up, they get access to their own back-end portal from where they can upload and manage all the artwork that they submit and share. Besides this, there are a host of other features such as learning tutorials, blogs, newsletters, monthly art fests, and much more on the portal, which anyone can explore.

CAROLE: Wow. So basically, they can make a work of art. Do they take a picture of it, and then they upload it? Is that how it works?

MANYA: Yes.

CAROLE: Now, how do they learn about your website? Do you do sort of marketing, or is it word of mouth? I mean, how have you expanded to so many children and so many cities?

MANYA: So when we started actually, it just spread through word of mouth. So we told our friends and family about it who told their friends and family. And it just kind of spiraled from there. And suddenly, we had so many kids registering from cities we hadn't even known about. And then we even started our marketing from social media like Instagram, Facebook. And yeah, that's pretty much how it worked.

CAROLE: Yeah. It's such a great idea. I can see why it would go viral. Krish, can you tell us a little bit about these resources that you have?

So in addition to uploading the art, you're saying that you have blogs and newsletters and tutorials. What are those all about, and what do they do for kids who are interested in art?

KRISH: Yeah. So we have, of course, tons of resources on our platform. Aside from the actual main gallery itself, we have our art fest, our blogs, our newsletter, of course, which is a monthly newsletter. We send the articles to children, informing them and giving them exposure to different art forms and different, of course, techniques. And it helps them with their technical skill as well.

So at CAMI, with all of these resources, we're trying to improve on the children's creative process rather than just the creative outcome. And it's in the creative process wherein we can make the most difference. So these diverse range of artistic mediums which we try to encourage children to use can help them explore different forms of expression and enhance their problem-solving skills. And just yeah, it gives them exposure, and it encourages them.

CAROLE: Wow. Can you tell us, Krish, what is Art Fest?

KRISH: Art Fests are a monthly competitions we host where the topic is usually about some social or civic issue. And we host them so that young artists can give their opinions and give their inputs on these social and civic issues to really expand our concept of child citizenship and children being members of society. So recently, we had an art fest on the G20 Summit, where we got excellent depictions of the G20 summit through children's eyes, through their art.

This approach really helps encourage children to become active participants in society from an early age and helps foster a sense of agency and responsibility. And in essence, CAMI help empowers children to become more informed and engaged citizens who will eventually, of course, contribute to shaping the world that they will inherit.

CAROLE: Wow. That's a huge vision. It's almost like the United Nations. Do you see yourself sort of as helping children develop agency and working towards a better world and world peace? Manya, is that kind of what your vision describes?

MANYA: It's to provide a platform where children feel safe to share their artwork and just be free to express themselves.

CAROLE: That's extraordinary. So you talk a little bit about creativity and getting the children to try different art forms. How do you feel that you can inspire kids to make art? I presume that you have some children that have always been artists. They sort of grown up drawing and painting, but probably you've got a lot of kids excited who have never done art before.  
So Krish, how do you get kids inspired to make art?

KRISH: We believe that creativity and inspiration is first about their own ideas and feelings. It really doesn't matter where the child comes from. They could come from a massive metropolitan city or a rural village, but they will always have such amazing ideas and feelings that we really hope that they incorporate in their art and in their process of creating.  
Any activity that allows us to undertake a joyous, authentic self-expression can really be considered like a creative pursuit. And a lot of my own creative influences come from life, may it be quality time with family, friends, experiences, still objects, nature, et cetera.

CAROLE: That's so interesting. I was reading an interview in The Daily Guardian, and you talk about the importance of exposure to art. Here's something that you said, "Exposure to the arts significantly encourages creative and analytic thinking in young Indians. It nurtures their imagination, develops problem-solving skills, fosters creative thinking, and promotes self-expression".  
So going back to this G20 Summit, how did you utilize that as an inspiration for kids to make art? What was the connection there? So for example, what did they draw? What did they paint?

KRISH: So as you know, the G20 Summit this year was really about the environment and environmental issues like climate change, global boiling, et cetera. And so we received a lot of artworks with environmental connotations, natural connotations. And oftentimes, I see the children draw inspiration from the creative works of their peers as they have the opportunity at CAMI to see what children in their peer group are making. And this influence really helps foster a sense of camaraderie and healthy competition, motivating young artists to really push their creative boundaries.

CAROLE: So interesting. Now Manya and Krish, I know that you are both artists. And so Manya, why don't you tell us a little bit about how you got involved in making art and what type of artist you consider yourself to be?

MANYA: So in the beginning, I really got my inspiration through my elder sister. She used to do a lot of artwork. And every time I used to see her, I would be inspired to like do the same thing as her because

elder siblings are always the sort of role models for young children, right? So then I would just look at her, and I would be like, I also want to do that.

So she used to go for these art classes. And I decided that I want to do it too. And then when I went to them, I fell in love with art. And yeah, that's basically what happened.

CAROLE: Wow.

MANYA: Normally, I usually work in acrylic paints or oil pastels, but I try to experiment with different mediums sometimes.

CAROLE: And do you get-- where do you get your inspiration for the works of art that you create?

MANYA: Normally, I just get it from anything, like from everything and anything that you see. Like some-- when you go to the market, you see-- or when you see something lying on your table, anything, like just still life. It really inspires me and just anything that you see.

CAROLE: Wow. And what about you, Krish? What kind of art do you do, and how did you get started on it?

KRISH: So I actually got started in art where when I was a kid, I used to watch a lot of cartoons. Like, I was hooked to the TV. And so one day, I just decided to start drawing those characters on a piece of paper. And that's really how I got started in art.

I took a couple art classes. And that just really helped motivate me. And so I usually do digital art and sometimes pencil sketches as well. I try to-- I like to sketch portraits and sometimes landscapes.

CAROLE: That's fascinating. Do you notice now that you have so many children across India? Do you notice a difference in the way children express themselves in the different regions of your country, or are they all kind of just all different, you can't, you couldn't describe that? What do you think, Manya?

MANYA: Yeah, definitely. They're all really different. One of the things I really like about our platform is that one day, I was just scrolling through it-- and this was during July, which was the monsoon season. And I realized that there was this one child who had uploaded his scene from outside his window during the rainy season, which was just a picture of his view outside his balcony. And then there was another kid who was in Kerala, which is in Southern India, who uploaded his view. And I realized like different places but how you can view the world through the lens of-- through their lens. It is really-- it was very heartwarming to see.

CAROLE: Wow. Krish, do you have a favorite work of art you've seen in all of the 10,000 or a couple of favorites? What stands out in your mind as something that really surprised you?

KRISH: Yeah. One of my favorite works of art at CAMI-- of course, there are so many. But one of my favorite-- like my favorites are always coming out the portraits that people make around-- like, when the G20 Summit happened, there came a bunch of portraits of prime ministers and presidents. And, of course, I love all the art that comes through on the art fests because I like-- it's really interesting to see how different children interact with the artwork, what mediums they use. And so yeah. But I have to say the portraits that come in are definitely my favorites.

CAROLE: Wow. So now let's talk about the Roblox and the virtual museum. This is a very, very interesting feature that you have where children can curate their own exhibition essentially. Manya, why don't we start with you? Tell us what this Roblox site is like and how this works.

MANYA: So our Roblox game is basically a method for CAMI to become part of the metaverse. And as you all know, the metaverse is the future of technology. And Roblox was just a medium for us to be on it. On our game, it's like a physical museum experience where we make up with the virtual museum. So on a game, it's like you're in a physical museum, but it's through a computer screen. So you get the experience of a physical museum, but you're at home.

CAROLE: Wow. And Krish, what did the kids do? Like, how does this actually work?

KRISH: So basically, it's like a full-- it's like a reconstruction or a construction from our imagination of what we think like a physical CAMI museum would look like. There's these different wings to the museum as you see in real life. And there's artwork, just like a real visual artwork on the walls and stuff. But to make it a little more fun and engaging for the kids, we added mini games and just these little games. Like, for example, we have one where you won't be able to see an artwork and you have to find clues around like the little map, your mini map. And you have to find your clues, and you to piece them together to be able to find-- like look at the artwork and see it like a puzzle piece. And so that small improvement in user experience really helps and really helps to engage kids and make it a better experience for them overall.

CAROLE: Now you have 10,000 works of art which is hard to contemplate, but that's a lot in 170 cities and villages. Manya, you have a vision to expand this CAMI site throughout Asia, throughout the world. How would you make that happen? And how big can this actually grow?

MANYA: There's actually so much more for CAMI's future, or like you said, we want to make the platform available to students from all countries. We actually even have a small platform, [childrensartmuseum.org](http://childrensartmuseum.org), which is available to children from the countries of Brazil, Malaysia, Bangkok, Pakistan, UAE, South Africa, Nepal, and the Philippines. But now we want to invite students from all over the world to participate.

We want to partner with museums and children-related organizations to spread the word in CAMI and make it available for each and every child. And as for how big it can grow, I mean, only our imagination can really limit it.

CAROLE: My gosh. What a vision. Krish, do you find that the same children come back over and over, or is it children upload one or two pieces of art and then they move on? Or do you see the same people returning?

KRISH: We've seen a lot of children returning and a lot of children-- so like, there's one instance which I would really like to point out. We had gone to visit a school, a nonprofit school for underprivileged children, School in Gurgaon. It was a great experience because that was the first time that we actually met CAMI artists in real life. And so we'd known them. Like, we knew their names and whatnot. And we knew the type of art, but we never met them in real life. And so that was just an amazing, amazing experience. Like, there was a little young boy. And he and his family actually depended on his art and his commission for their entire family income. And so that's when we decided [INAUDIBLE] we had it-- we needed to add a feature on the CAMI so that these children could help their families and to create a social impact and just really help our community out. So we added a button where you could commission art if you really like the work from an artist. And so just as a way for these children to help out their families.

CAROLE: That is absolutely extraordinary. So now you've expanded it to be almost like an art marketplace for children. I mean, I'm sure you have some adults that help you make sure that there are some controls and safety. Manya, how does that work? How do you manage all the tactical and technical aspects of this?

MANYA: So we have a really dedicated team of five members, adult artists who really helped us throughout the process. They help us curate the artwork, fix any glitches, just help us in the whole process.

CAROLE: That's just amazing. This could bring world peace, I think, Manya and Krish. For our listeners, how would you encourage them to foster creativity in children? And we have many parents listening. We have educators. Probably have some children. I mean, how would you encourage people to get started on this and get kids started? Manya?

MANYA: So I believe that exposure to different forms of art or just maybe exposure to art in general is one of the most important parts of creativity, and it really sows the seeds for it. The way our parents exposed us to museums and concerts, it really helped foster our artistic side and opened us up to those endeavors. Secondly is just to make available tools to discover and explore art and just really tap into the children's creative side, whether it be through different mediums like art, dance, or music. Whatever it may be, just let them express themselves and feel free. Thirdly, I feel that we should always encourage children to chase the feelings that inspire them. Maybe just discuss with the children when they see something nice and ask what moved them, what feelings are stirred when they say they like something. Like, you should definitely ask your children to explore exactly what it means. So in my case, if I liked a certain thing, my parents would always ask, why did you like it? Was it the shape that was interesting? Was it the use of the thing that was interesting? What really drew you towards that? So I feel that this really helps open up the creative mind.

CAROLE: So they're kind of drawing you out to think about your own creative process?

MANYA: Yeah.

CAROLE: On a similar topic, Krish, how as an artist yourself working in a digital medium-- how do you know when one of your artworks is done?

KRISH: So it's really about that feeling where after a while, you feel like you're adding too much to the artwork and it's getting too cluttered after a while. And so that's just that little Goldilocks zone, that sweet spot between too little and too much on the canvas. And so yeah, that's really how—

CAROLE: That's fantastic. So it's the inspiration. It's the doing. And it's the knowing when the artwork is complete. And it's ready to show to the world.

And I presume that both of you upload your art to the CAMI website, right? Yes, I bet you do. So what is next for you both? I mean, here you have a podcast so more and more people in America are going to learn about CAMI. Is that part of your interest to expand to other continents?

MANYA: Definitely. We really want to-- like I said before, we want to make CAMI available for each and every child in the world, regardless of their location, regardless of their background. We just want to make sure that each child has a safe platform where they feel safe to just express themselves and share their artwork with their community.

CAROLE: And what about you, Krish? You have quite a big vision for children to become great citizens of the world, so I can see a lot of potential with this project.

KRISH: We are definitely-- there's a lot of potential to be tapped into, of course. And that's why-- that's another big main reason why we want to go global and why we want to increase or we want to grow on Roblox, et cetera so that we just really want to get as many kids become-- make as many kids a part of the CAMI family as possible. Different countries, you'll have different thoughts, different ideas, different perspectives from these children.

And so that'll just be really, really interesting to see if we grow on a global scale. Just see the different people from different areas or different countries, how they interact using their art. That'll just be really, really interesting to see.

CAROLE: Wow. I just want to remind our listeners that we have two guests today who are 16 years old and 13 years old, and it's extraordinary. The vision and the ability to execute on this just awesome project that I think everyone should find out more about. So Manya, why don't you tell us how our listeners can find your program and how they can get involved?

MANYA: So you can sign up for our monthly newsletters. You can also reach us at our two sites. It's [childrensartmuseumofindia.com](http://childrensartmuseumofindia.com) for Indian students. And for international students, you can reach us at [childrensartmuseum.org](http://childrensartmuseum.org).

You can even interact through our Roblox game, or you can even become a CAMI ambassador, where you basically promote CAMI to your friends and your family and you earn an official CAMI ambassador title.

CAROLE: That's fantastic. Krish, in closing, can you just talk a little bit for us about what you feel is the power of art?

KRISH: Oh, there's so much power that's there in art. Art is definitely one of the greatest medium. It doesn't have to be even like pen and paper, sculptures, performing arts. Just art in general is one of the most powerful mediums. And there's so much to be said, so much to be done in the artistic world. And so yeah. And so on behalf of myself, CAMI, and Manya, I would really like to thank you for letting us share our journey of art with you. And yeah, it's just this podcast is a very special platform.

CAROLE: Wow. Manya, did you want to add anything to that?

MANYA: I would just like to say that CAMI is a special platform dedicated only to the voice of children. So just pick up a pencil or crayon, draw, and share. And don't forget to have fun also. And CAMI is for the children, by the children, and of the children.

CAROLE: Well, I can't tell you how thrilled and inspired I am by this talk, and I'm going to go right away to become a CAMI ambassador. And I really hope all our listeners do, too, because what you two are doing is extraordinary. And I want to thank you for your dedication to such an important art topic and such an important effort. So thank you so much for joining us today.

MANYA: Thank you so much for having us.

KRISH: Thank you so much for having us.

KATHRYN (PRODUCER): Thanks for listening to this episode of the Big & Little Podcast. And a special thanks to PNC Bank for sponsoring this podcast. Stay tuned for more in our Creativity Series. And comment, like, or subscribe to share your thoughts on creativity and hear what's coming next.