Animal Instinct

Wolves, a visual jockey duo, is pushing boundaries in the genre by creating content and experiences that transform a regular night out.

Written by **Kevin Lobo** | Published: October 12, 2014 1:19:37 am

Jash Reen and Joshua D'Mello got together to form the visual jockey project, Wolves.

In India, visual jockeying is commonly regarded as an unessential accompaniment at music gigs. But the art form took centrestage last week with an installation by electronic music producer Sanaya Ardeshir aka Sandunes, and Wolves, a visual jockey (VJ) project. On a strip of organza silk that suspends from the ceiling at TARQ gallery in Colaba, Ardeshir's dark ambient sounds provide a background score to pulsating visuals by Wolves, which move around the sheet, drawing the viewer into its 3D hypnotic dance. With this piece, currently showing at the gallery, Wolves

broke an unspoken barrier — they didn't just break into the art world, they also gave their art form a seriousness that a gallery demands.

Since they formed in early last year, the duo — Jash Reen and Joshua D'Mello — has been challenging norms, perceptions and the scope of what a VJ can do. And they have arrived at an interesting time.

Visual jockeying has been all but dead in the city. Most VJs are relegated to playing stock video on screens without any connection with the act on stage. With low budgets, the role of a VJ has been marginalised over time. "When we were starting out, we used to rehash a bunch of clips too. It was kind of like what DJs do with their track selections, but it just wasn't fulfilling to us as artistes," says Reen, who writes occasionally on music for blogs, is a graphic designer, and a qualified sound engineer.

Two years ago, they performed at their debut gig at the now-defunct Cool Chef Cafe where they mapped a logo with visuals on a wall. Earlier this year, they set up a giant hologram of Sahej Bakshi for a Dualist Inquiry gig that imitated every movement he made on stage. The learning curve has been swift for the duo whose canvas for visuals extends beyond a simple screen.

They've had gigs at Blue Frog where DJs have played ensconced in a wave of light. At a recent show at High Spirits, Pune, they made cut-outs of UFOs moving through space while a DJ played his set. "When we started, no one was dabbling in visual-heavy production set-ups," says D'Mello, the quieter of the partners and also the technical brain behind the project. "In fact, the lack of it made me want to start Wolves," he says. Reen, who has known D'Mello since childhood, says they were "just two nerds trying to mess about with a new software, Resolume Arena, used for

mapping." It helps that D'Mello has been working with his father's company, Amigo Sound and Lights, since he was 15. "We think of something outrageous to do, and we know we can get close to the original idea because Joshua is good with technology," says Reen.

Earlier this year, the duo was booked for a gig in Kuwait, where they worked with electronic music artiste Zahed Khan for the launch of his album, Eye Am Sound. They consider it their best show yet. They created a giant eyelid and iris made of MDF (medium density fibre board) to project the visuals. They also got some mesh material drop down in front of the eye. The scale of the project was astounding — Indian organisers don't have budgets for visual setups that are this elaborate.

With festivals focusing on providing an experience rather than just music, this might soon change. But Reen believes it is the smaller venues that will push the art form forward. "I foresee alternative and middle-ground venues adapting the experience as an honest translation of the artistes they feature," he says.

Other than music gigs, corporate shows keep the moolah running for the duo. Also, since their tryst with art at TARQ, they are looking for more experimental work. Reen says, "I was also thinking of rounding up some of our concept art and exhibiting it so that people get to see how we come up with our narratives."

kevin.lobo@expressindia.com