

THE ATELIER MAGAZINE

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Volume-1

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Sept 2025

INSIDE THE ISSUE

THREADS OF CULTURE: FROM KERALA TO SPAIN

There is unity in celebration; From blossoms to tomatoes, festivals bring joy as they transcend borders and unite people.

AN EXPERIMENT WITH AI AND ARTIST HOKUSAI'S PAINTINGS

Where technology meets tradition: reimagining the master's art to merge the past with the future.

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Editor-in-Chief
Dr. S. Beena Unnikrishnan

Write to us: reach@theateliermag.com

Website: www.theateliermag.com

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Address

4, Jayson Krishna, 5th Crosss Street,
Wood Creek County, Nandambakkam,
Chennai - 600 016, Tamilnadu, India

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EDITORIAL



Executive Editor
Dr.Sandhya Rajasekhar



Managing Editor
Dr. Abirami Vivek



Editorial Coordinator
Falak Neaz

Col. K. Unnikrishnan- Proofreader
Sri Raghav -Video Editor

Welcome to this vibrant space that we call The Atelier. Each issue of this magazine is a meeting place; a circle where stories, images, and voices come together. It is here that we begin to see how a community takes shape, when people connect, share, and thrive together.

This third issue is especially meaningful to me. For the first time, it has been completely envisioned, curated, and created by my team. To witness their energy, their commitment, and their creativity come alive in these pages has been a moment of strength for me as Editor-in-Chief. It reminds me that a magazine is never the work of one person; it is the collective spirit of those who build it.

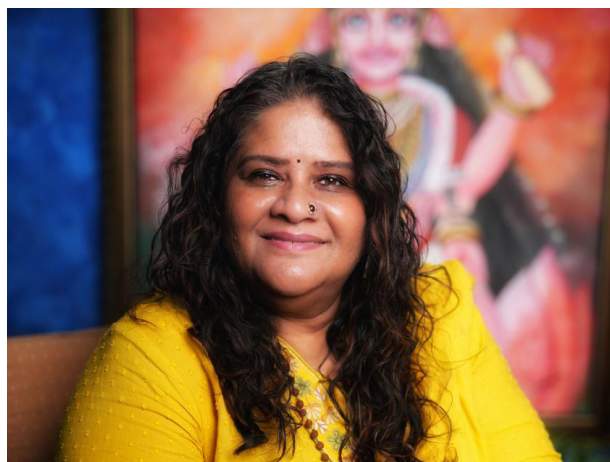
The mood of this issue is strength and leadership. Every page reflects the idea that when we come together, we do not just create—we grow stronger. We find resilience in each other's voices, and we carry that strength back to the communities we belong to.

At its heart, this issue also asks: What does art leadership mean? To me, it is the courage to use creativity as a way forward in your life, to inspire, to question, and to build. True leadership in art is not about standing apart, but about creating spaces where others can step in, take root, and flourish.

As you turn these pages, may you experience The Atelier not as a magazine alone, but as a living community, one that gathers strength with every connection it nurtures, one that grows stronger with every connection it makes.

Beena Unnikrishnan

FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Prismatica

A curated space where visual arts meet the cutting edge. From traditional brushwork to digital installation, this section captures the full spectrum of global artistic expression.

Artist In Focus

Louise McIntosh

Artist In Focus

Violanie Thierry

Artist In Focus

Lizl Bode

Artist in focus

Natasha Ruffio

Painting memory, Identity, and The sacred threads of life

Diana kurz



TRAVEL ARTWORK: COLOURING CITIES ON CANVAS

Since the age of six, I have had a fascination with pencils, pens, notepads, and at my young age, all my pocket money would be spent on stationary in Woolworths in Corby Town Centre. Growing up, I would watch my late father draw life size cartoon characters on my bedroom walls, Donald, Mickey and Daffy to name but a few. My father also wrote poetry and screenplays after work and at weekends typed line by line on a typewriter, using tippex to correct his mistakes.

I remember scrunched up A4 paper covering the kitchen floor when he worked and was inspired to become an author. My mum was always supportive creatively; she noticed my artistic talents and wanted me to follow the art road, but I felt that my calling was writing. From the age of 17 for almost three decades, I worked in various capacities whilst writing and painting in my spare time. In 1998 I enrolled part-time in a painting/pastels class in Dundas Valley School of Art, near Hamilton, Ontario. The tutor likened my style to Fauvism, the early 20th century movement which focussed on strong colour as opposed to the realistic values retained by Impressionism.

From my teenage days, I admired artists like Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Georges Braque, John Lowrie Morrison and Joan Eardley among others, and their use of colours heavily influenced my own art. During the course of my life, I took to painting as a hobby, painting lakes in New Zealand to still life in my flat in

Louise McIntosh





*A Saunter Around Stockbridge,
Edinburgh, Scotland*

Aberdeen, Scotland.

It was a way for me to seek solace during both tumultuous and happier times in my life. In 2004, aged 30, I went backpacking around the world for almost a year, and wrote emails and letters of my experiences home to my friends and loved ones.

One of my bookshop colleagues and friend, author Dorothy Phillips, printed all of my emails, and handed them to me as a surprise gift to encourage me to write a travel novel. In 2018, I spent a year writing the first draft of my non-fiction travel novel and put it aside for what was intended to be a few months, whilst I worked on my second, a fictional novel.

During this time, I also picked up my paintbrushes and began painting again, as a hobby. My paintings, Edinburgh Castle, The Claddagh in Galway, Pittenweem, Crail got me a following on my social media platforms, and my art took off. Friends and family began purchasing my art and as the weeks passed by, new clients followed suit. I made the

tough decision to put my writing on hold, perhaps combine it with art; and set up my art business in January 2020. Based in Ireland, for the next five years I focussed on business and travelled to Edinburgh city, Scottish villages, Ireland and New York. In 2021, I entered a competition and won a place alongside many local artists at Luan Gallery, Athlone to exhibit an artwork that I painted of the Tullamore Dew Distillery.

In 2023, Scottish Comedian the late Janey Godley, spotted my artwork on X and supported my art by sharing it, alongside many other creatives, with her large following, gaining me new clients, and commissions.

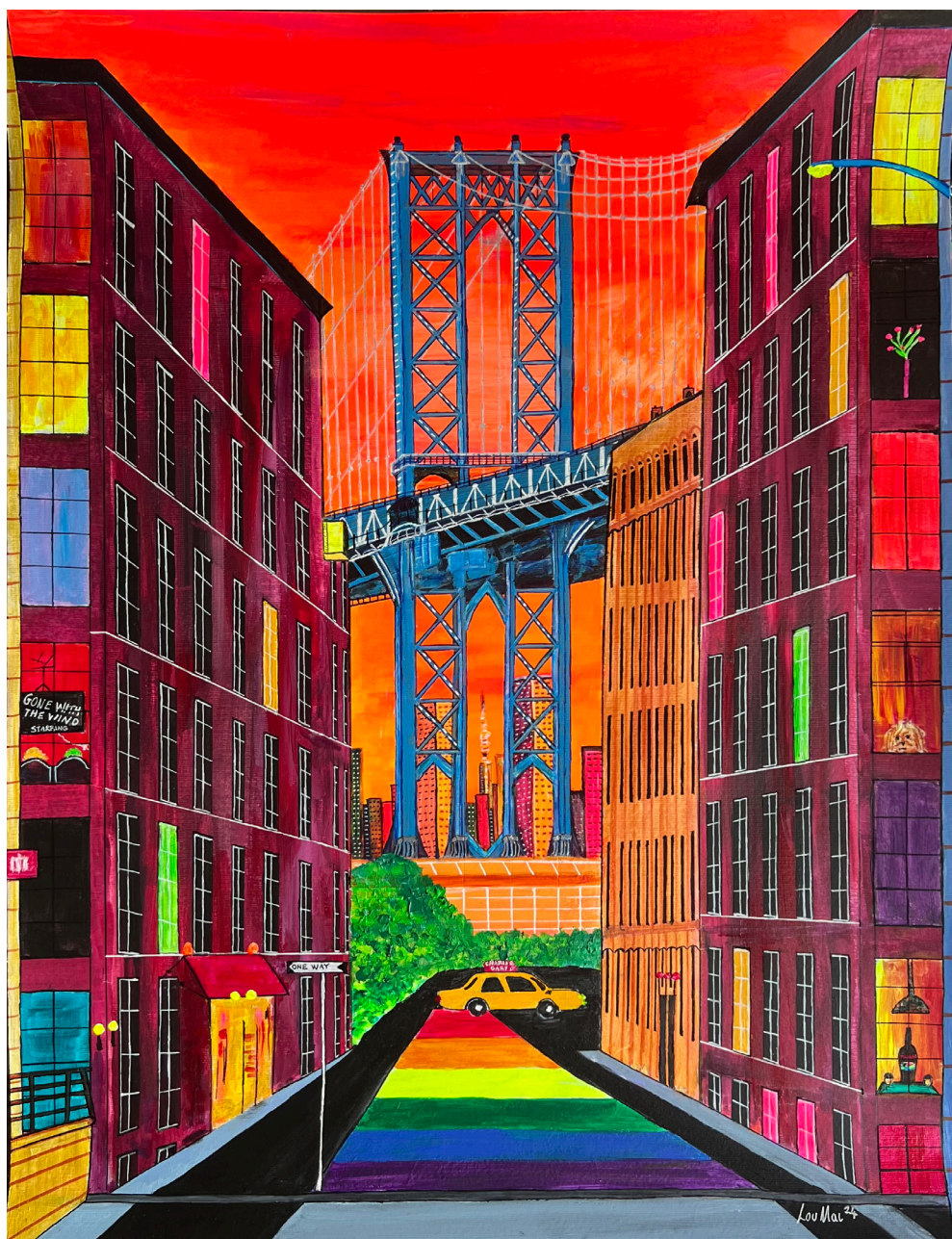
I plan to venture further afield with my travel artworks, and look forward to working my colours into artworks of London, Thailand, New Zealand, Norway, Mexico and many more places. A self-taught artist, I am grateful to my supporters and clients on social media, who helped my small art business flourish.

A Saunter Around Stockbridge, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Stockbridge is a wonderful area of the city of Edinburgh, with its boutique shops, art galleries, fine dining, bars and restaurants, cobbled streets and the Water of Leith running through it. I had the pleasure of living in the infamous Circus Lane for some time and working in the now closed Stockbridge Bookshop—many moons ago—which was across the road from Mellis Cheesemongers.

I visit Edinburgh often as I have friends and family living there. In October 2023 I captured a photograph outside of Mellis in the evening time and transported it onto canvas paper in 2024.

As a bookshop assistant in 2004, looking across at the many cheeses, I never imagined that 20 years later, I would be an artist painting it in Ireland. A full circle moment.



Dumbo Bridge; Brooklyn Bridge

This was my client Charlie's seventh painting commission from me. Charlie is also a friend and he gave me my brief, a few personal touches and I was able, like many clients allow, to have the freedom on the paper. The bridge was not easy for me to navigate; I even surprised myself, but the beauty was I had a plan of how I was going to achieve it and I followed it through to the end.

Let me tell you the process I try to go through with my artworks. I look through photographs I have captured first and foremost, then I research online, printing out photographs from all angles. I tape them all to my art desk and I spend the next day or two staring at them or at my blank canvas. I begin with the pencil drawing; I always use a ruler, and I would be ever so lost without an eraser. I try to be 100% happy with the drawing before I add the paint because it makes my life easier in the long run. I hunt for a morsel of colour in the buildings and bring it alive with my palette. I appreciate and love other artists' artworks that have layers upon layers of paint but I adore the neatness and control

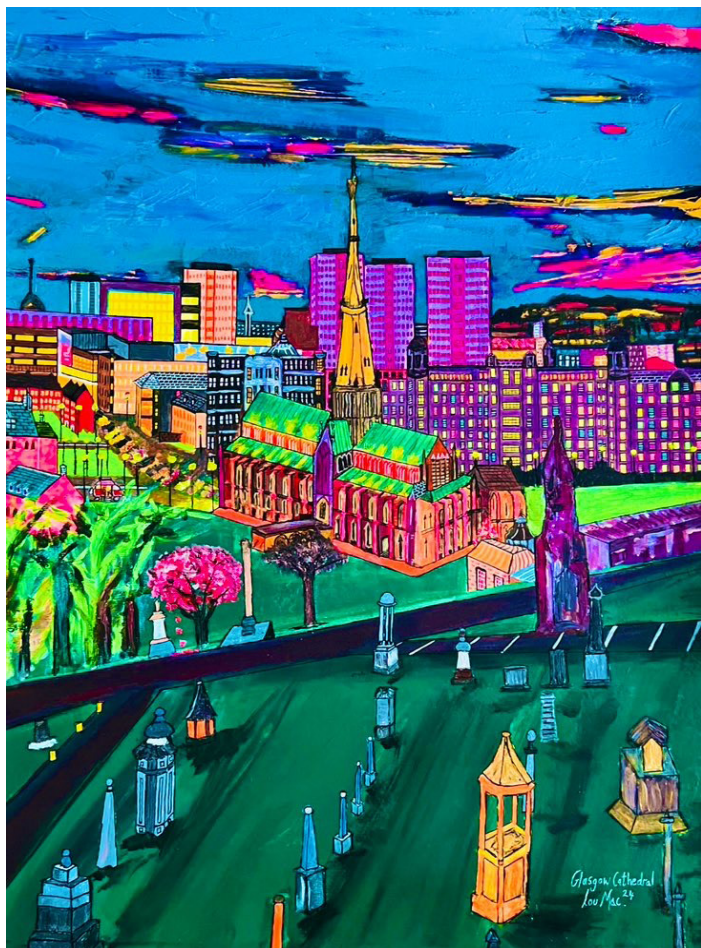
I ink the entire painting at the end, mostly black but I also use white for the windows and other colours. Inking is like putting a postage stamp on an envelope, it seals its fate with an elegant send off.

In time I may become freer with my style, less regimented and lather my artworks in paint but for now, I love it this way; it brings out my absolute best. Charlie my client, requested to have his favourite film, *Gone With The Wind*, which I featured in a window scene, a tippie of Bailey's, Ben, Charlie & Gary's dog, who sadly passed away recently; an iconic yellow cab and the LGBT flag which I painted into the road.

I did come across obstacles—the bridge for example was too high in the air and there were window issues—but I promptly fixed them and was very proud at how it all came together. Charlie and Gary have commissioned me to paint two more paintings of New York city, making them my largest collectors to date. The paintings are exhibited in their home in Aberdeen, Scotland.

Glasgow Cathedral, Glasgow, Scotland.

A client from my hometown who discovered my art purchased two original paintings before commissioning me to paint the Glasgow Cathedral. The photograph that I received—I will be honest—did not fill me with confidence. I shared my concerns with my client Ray throughout and found this commission to be extremely challenging. I began without an initial plan which ended up creating more difficulties for me, but Ray was very understanding and continued to believe in me.



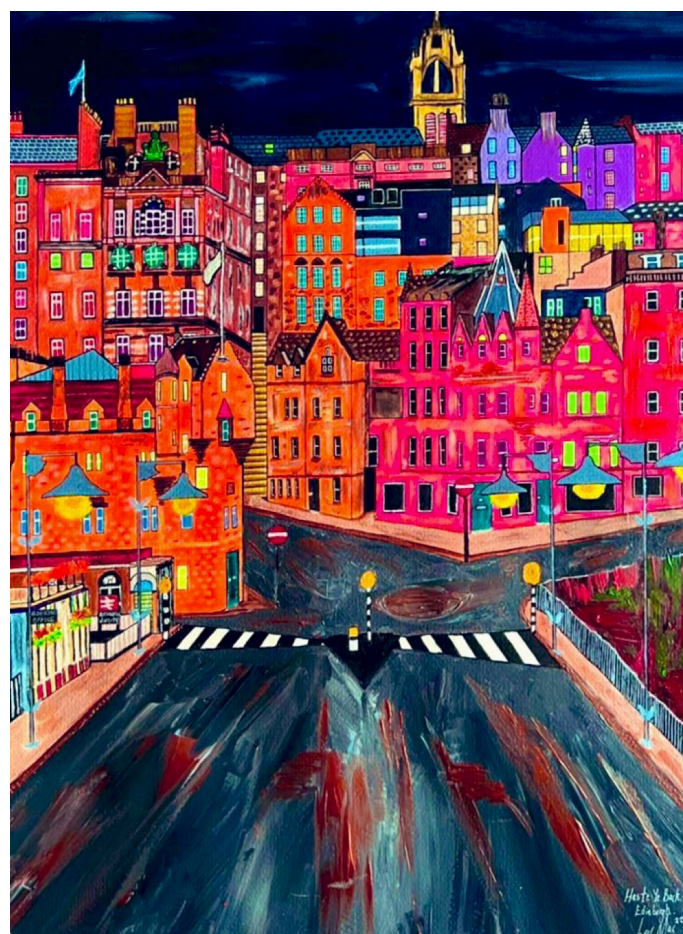
Glasgow Cathedral, Glasgow, Scotland

I was quite behind my own deadline and it was not until the end that I realised that I had pulled it off in quite a spectacular way. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to be commissioned to paint but they are an extraordinary amount of pressure for most artists and I find it difficult to say no. I have not declined a commission so far, but I know that in time, I will. I now take on only a couple of commissions a year. I am grateful to Ray for never giving up on me as Glasgow Cathedral turned out to be one of my favourite paintings

Haste ye Back, Edinburgh Waverley, Scotland.

This is one of Edinburgh's most iconic scenes that I had the pleasure of painting. My favourite paper to work on with acrylics or mixed media is Fabriano Pittura 400gsm which I chose to paint this scene on. Edinburgh is my favourite city in the world to paint, having worked, lived and had the best collection of experiences and memories in. This was my favourite subject to paint for this reason, and the stars literally aligned: Haste ye Back flowed beautifully. I pencilled the scene from right to left, drawing all the nooks and crannies. The way I operate with colour is that, if I see a spark—it maybe a bright colour in a building—I hone in and accentuate it. In this scene, a speck of pink and orange created my palette for my painting. This painting is now hanging in the client's home in Glasgow

“Cities become
canvases
where timeless
story
unfold”



Haste ye Back, Edinburgh Waverley, Scotland



Wish You Were Here, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Wish You Were Here, Edinburgh, Scotland.

This was a very special commission as it represented a man called Robert Livingstone who sadly passed away after a short illness aged 46 in April 2024. Robert's mother, Ann Holliday, spotted my art on social media, and asked if I would create a painting of the three pubs Robert worked and flourished in. At first, I was going to do them as individual commissions but after talking to Ann, we agreed they should come together as one. I made a trip home to Edinburgh to do some research, where I visited one of the pubs, to get a feel of it. I met Rob's friends and captured photographs of the interiors and exteriors of all the three pubs. Once home in Ireland I phoned Rob's husband Jose to understand a little more about Rob's personality so I could incorporate it into Ann's commission.

The three pubs—The Mitre, The Conan Doyle and

The Last Drop—are not located together, but they are in the centre of the city and I opted to place them side by side in my artwork. I captured the beauty of Rob's personality: his love for the Teletubbie Dipsy and The Beano, a half bottle of Cherry Pepsi Max that he always left lying around, roast chicken dinner that he loved, Peter Rabbit books, Kylie Minogue and so on. I found ways to feature these into the pub windows bringing the painting to life.

I used acrylics and inks on Fabriano Pittura 400gsm paper. It was an extraordinary amount of effort to be asked of me and I felt my own self-inflicted pressure to nail this brief and do justice to Rob. As I finished the painting, I cried; one of the only three times that I have cried after the completion of my paintings. My client Ann was over the moon and is in the process of ordering fine art, limited edition prints of it too, gifting them to loved ones. ✦



ART AS AN ECHO OF THE SOUL

Touched by the plight of women; having experienced abuse, mistreatment, and humiliation during childhood and later in my married life, I chose freedom over ten years ago. Painting has been an incredible form of therapy; it allowed me to put words and colours to different stages of my life, a variation from red and black to pink and blue: sometimes pain, sometimes softness.

The evolution of my artwork reflects the healing journey towards serenity and the fulfilled woman that I am today. Sharing and conveying hope for a better life through my art is essential to me. I want to tell women who are suffering, persecuted, and humiliated, that our voices come together to support them and honour them. Advocating for women's rights is a mission dear to my heart, never to silence the unspeakable. Art is universal; it travels beyond borders, cultures, and religions to transmit courage, and love throughout the world.



Violanie Thierry



Born into a modest family in central France, I lost my mother at the age of 19. That immense grief deeply impacted my life and, much later, gave profound meaning to my existence as a woman and a mother. After a painful childhood and a married life marked by humiliation and a lack of freedom, I gave my children and myself a fresh start in 2013 and left that life behind.

For the four of us, it was a journey into the unknown, but filled with hope and love, a rebirth in colour, reflecting who I have always been. I fought battle after battle, driven by my role as a mother. A self-taught artist, I began painting 10 years ago, and in 2022, Enia was born. In June 2023, Enia officially came into being.

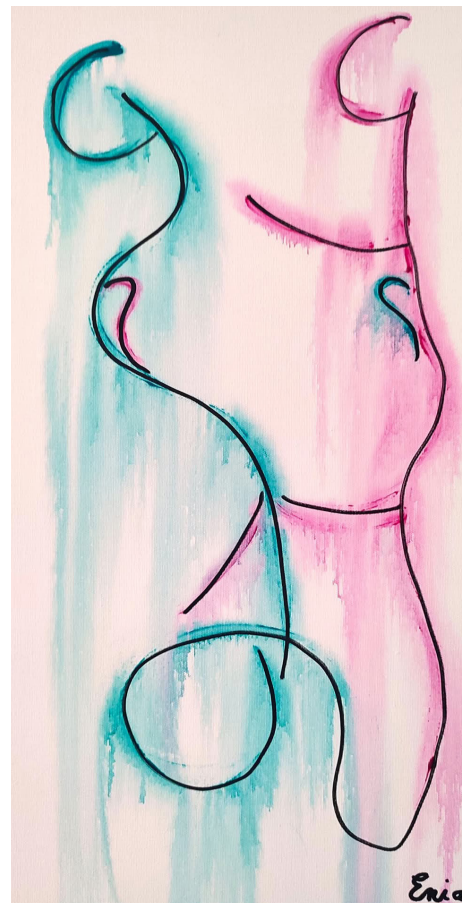
In May 2023, I was honoured to be approached by a member of YourArt to be part of their selected group of artists. For the first time, I exhibited my work on a global virtual art platform and made my first sale. It was an incredible first experience that brought great visibility. I was later selected by the ARTBOXPROJECT committee to participate in the SWISSART EXPO in Zurich in September 2023, where Resurrection was presented. In 2024, the same committee selected me for an exhibition at the Cipriarte Gallery in Venice in April 2024, where The Queen of Hearts was presented with This was my last project in collaboration with Your Art. In January, I was pleasantly surprised to

receive a new proposal for collaboration. It came from Loïc Troyes Dubois, director of Paris Créations Virtuelles, who personally contacted me to offer a virtual gallery exhibition, an offer I naturally accepted with much emotion. This new adventure has opened doors to multiple connections and opportunities, gradually leading me toward fulfilling my dream as an artist.





Violanie Thierry is an artist who transcends the boundaries of the tangible to explore the depths of emotion, movement, and identity. Her art is a dance between abstraction and symbolism, a visual language where each line, each shade, tells an intimate and universal story. Violanie draws inspiration from femininity, transformation, the invisible bonds that connect us, and the duality inherent in existence: between passion and silence, chaos and harmony. Through vibrant colors, bold contrasts, and instinctive strokes, she captures the very essence of change, the quest for self, and impermanence. Each canvas is an invitation to feel, to question, to be swept away on an inner journey where emotions take shape and dreams become matter. Violanie does not just paint artworks; she creates fragments of the soul suspended in time, reflections of stories waiting to be discovered. ✦



Artist in focus

Lizl Bode



WHAT DO WE CARRY FORWARD, AND WHAT ARE WE
ENTICED TO WEAR ANEW?



(TR)additions_Lalela (Listen)



(TR)additions_Pandora

(TR)additions_Lalela (Listen)

The impact of globalisation and modern technology on traditional cultures prompts important questions. As modern culture spreads worldwide, it raises concerns about whether it erodes local traditions or integrates with them. This artwork explores whether adopting modern conveniences means losing cultural heritage or if a harmonious coexistence of old and new is possible.

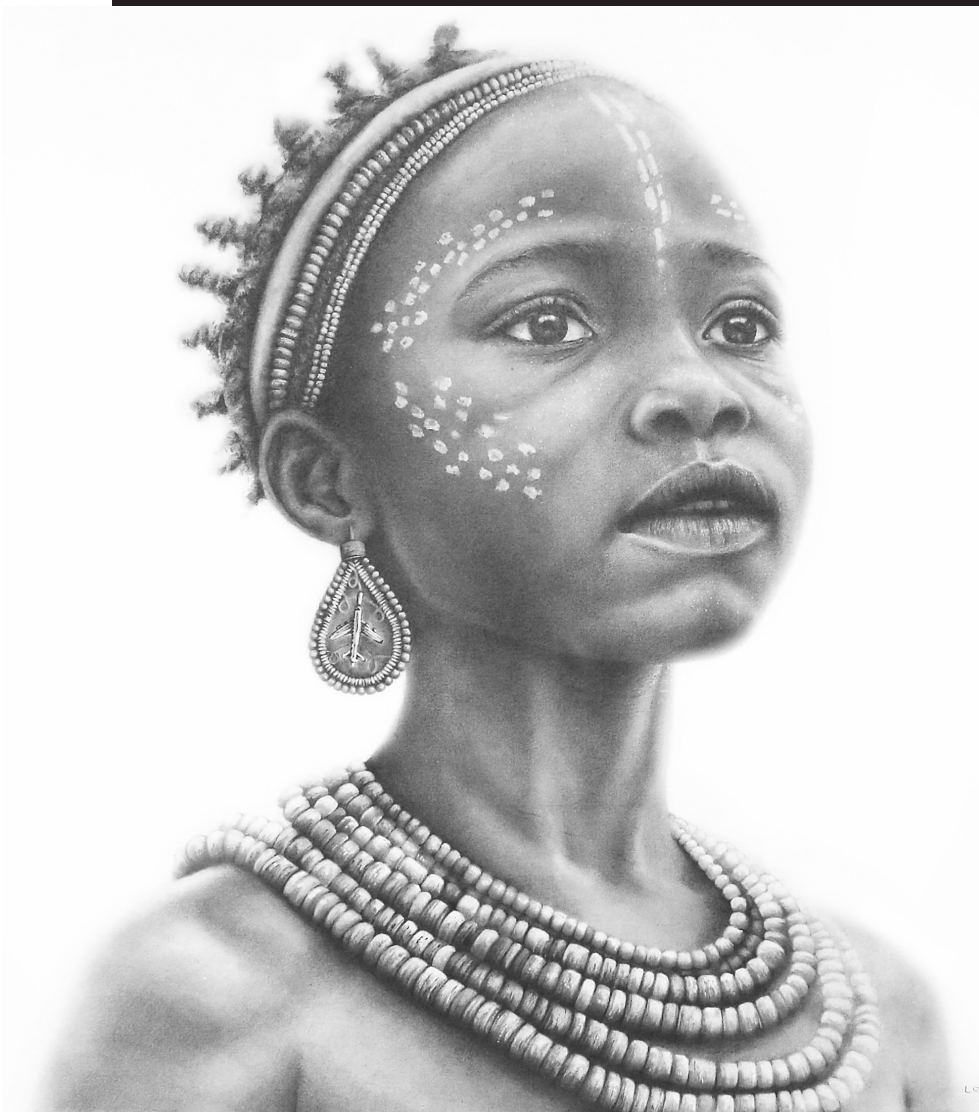
(TR)additions_Pandora

Pandora wears her traditional beads and a crown of leaves, symbolising her cultural heritage and connection to nature. Modern elements, like the Pandora charms, are seamlessly woven into her necklace and headband, blending tradition with contemporary flair.

Her serene expression and proud stance celebrate the fusion of history and modernity, honouring her roots while embracing new influences. This captivating piece highlights the beauty of balancing cultural pride with the evolving world around her.

(TR)additions_Ayanda (She who grows)

Ayanda's gaze skyward captures a blend of wonder and curiosity, symbolising the interplay between tradition and progress. Her traditional beads reflect a heritage passed through generations, while the modern touch of a silver airplane in her earring represents innovation and adaptability. In her, the past and the possible sit side by side where tradition is not left behind, but carried forward, embellished with contemporary symbols.



(TR)additions_Ayanda (She who grows)

Ayanda is not departing from her roots; she is arriving at a version of herself shaped by them

TR)additions_D&G

In this portrait, a young girl gazes forward; still and certain, yet layered with quiet complexity. Her head is crowned with leaves and berries, a nod to nature, ancestry, and the organic rituals of traditional adornment. Around her neck, strands of beads speak to cultural continuity—handed down, worn proudly. But nestled among these symbols of rootedness, a modern interruption gleams: a pair of bold Dolce & Gabbana earrings. Branded. Ornamental. Aspirational. They do not clash with the traditional elements—they coexist. And yet, they ask a subtle question: What do we carry forward, and what are we enticed to wear anew?



TR)additions_D&G

Lizl Bode is a self-taught graphite and ink pen artist based in Cape Town, South Africa. With a careful attention to detail, she creates “photo realistic art”, giving a strikingly realistic effect in her paintings. Her keen attention to detail transforms familiar, ordinary objects into extraordinary paintings. Her artwork explores the possibilities of a co-existence of local traditions with modern culture. ✦



CELEBRATING THE EMOTIONAL AND EXPRESSIVE POWER OF FLOWERS THROUGH ART

Natasha Ruffio



Flowers bring vitality and joy to any space—and for emerging Australian artist Natasha Ruffio, they are a boundless source of inspiration. Her vibrant, contemporary botanical paintings celebrate the beauty and expressive potential of flora, capturing nature not merely as it appears, but as it feels—alive with emotion, rhythm, and spirit. With a style that dances “between the whimsical and the sophisticated”, Natasha’s work bridges the gap between classical Impressionist influences and a fresh, modern sensibility.

Deeply inspired by the expressive power of colour and form, Natasha draws from the visual language of late 19th and early 20th-century artists such as Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, and Pierre Bonnard. Their ability to fuse nature, imagination, and emotion resonates strongly in her practice.



While echoes of these masters are present in her brushwork and palette, Natasha's art offers a distinctly personal interpretation of the botanical world—infused with joyful energy, sensitivity, and narrative depth.

With over 30 years of experience in graphic and book design, Natasha's artistic path has been shaped by a life dedicated to visual storytelling. Her early career saw her directing, designing, and illustrating art for leading garden and lifestyle publications in Australia. These formative years honed her refined sense of composition, taught her the nuance of colour relationships, and nurtured her love for botanical forms. Working with horticultural content not only deepened her understanding of plant life but also shaped her appreciation for how imagery can educate, communicate, and inspire.

This unique crossover between design and fine art has given Natasha's paintings a distinctive edge. Her works often blend accuracy with imagination, evoking not just how flowers look, but how they feel—how they sway in a breeze, bask in sunlight, or transform a forgotten corner into a luminous scene. Her compositions often tell subtle stories, inviting viewers to pause, reflect, and reconnect with the quiet beauty of the natural world. Natasha formally studied fine art at the National Art School in Sydney, immersing herself in traditional techniques while developing her own voice as a painter. She later continued her studies at the Waverley Woollahra Art School, where she was mentored by acclaimed artist, the late Stavros Papantoniou

His mentorship was pivotal in her development as an expressive painter, encouraging her to push boundaries and embrace the emotional dimension of her work. Although Natasha has only recently begun to present her paintings to a broader audience, her work is already gaining attention both locally and internationally. She exhibits on digital platforms such as Bluethumb Online Gallery and Saatchi, and regularly connects with art lovers and collectors through Instagram, where her audience continues to grow.

Her artworks have been recognised in both online and offline art competitions, and earning awards—she won the Randwick Council International Women's Day Art Prize in the open category in 2023—a meaningful milestone in her creative journey.

As Natasha's profile expands, so does her vision. She currently paints from a light-filled studio at home, but as her body of work grows, she envisions establishing a larger studio space that can accommodate her evolving practice. The idea of creating an immersive environment—a place for painting, exhibiting, and even teaching—is central to her future goals.



A keen conversant French speaker with family ties in France, Natasha also dreams of travelling to the French countryside for a painting sojourn. Inspired by the landscapes that once moved the Impressionists, she hopes to reconnect with her French family while exploring new themes and techniques. This journey, she believes, will add a fresh layer of depth to her work and offer new perspectives on the timeless dialogue between art and nature.

While flowers remain at the heart of her practice, Natasha's inspiration can come from anywhere. "Each painting begins with a moment of connection—whether found in a wild garden or a fleeting light on petals—and evolves into a layered, intuitive composition," she observes. She seeks to constantly evolve and perfect her art, staying open to new influences and ideas while remaining grounded in her passion for botanical beauty.

Ultimately, Natasha Ruffio's work is a celebration of nature, of joy, of colour, and of life's quiet, poetic moments. Through her art, she invites us to slow down, to notice, and to feel the emotional resonance of the world around us. "My work invites viewers to pause, reconnect with beauty, and experience a sense of joy, wonder, and quiet reflection through the natural world," she says. Whether hung in a collector's home or viewed through a screen on the other side of the world, her paintings speak a universal language, one rooted in beauty, creativity, and the enduring allure of the natural world. ♦



DIANA KURZ; PAINTING MEMORY IDENTITY, AND THE SACRED THREADS OF LIFE

By Falak Neaz



In the constantly changing realm of modern art, where trends come and go like the waves of the sea, Diana Kurz's art is a beacon, a steady lighthouse, shining and profoundly human. Her career has not been one of chasing fleeting fashions or riding popular waves; it has been a trajectory plotted with inner determination, personal integrity, and a steadfast commitment to seeing the world, past and present, through eyes of unobscured and living vision.

Born in Vienna in 1936, Diana's early life was one of disruption. Like so many Jewish families living in Nazi-occupied Austria, hers sought to leave the darkness of persecution behind. They left for the United States, weighed down by the heavy burden of loss and the remnants of a life left behind. As a child, even, the seeds of memory and displacement were unwittingly sown in her awareness of art, seeds that would come to bloom in her hauntingly powerful Remembrance (Holocaust) series. But Diana's is a story larger than suffering; it is a story of resilience, of joy, and of a continuing quest for meaning in beauty. Her paintings tell what words so frequently fail to: longing, dignity, and presence.

Diana studied at Brandeis University and has a Master's degree in Fine Arts from Columbia University, but her greatest teachers were her insatiable curiosity and enthusiasm for adventure. Her earliest works were abstract, heavily influenced by Mondrian and the New York Abstract Expressionists. It was only in the late 1960s that she started working on still life paintings. Diana approached each brushstroke as a syllable in a poem of seeing. She painted what was important, what fuelled her fire or broke her heart.





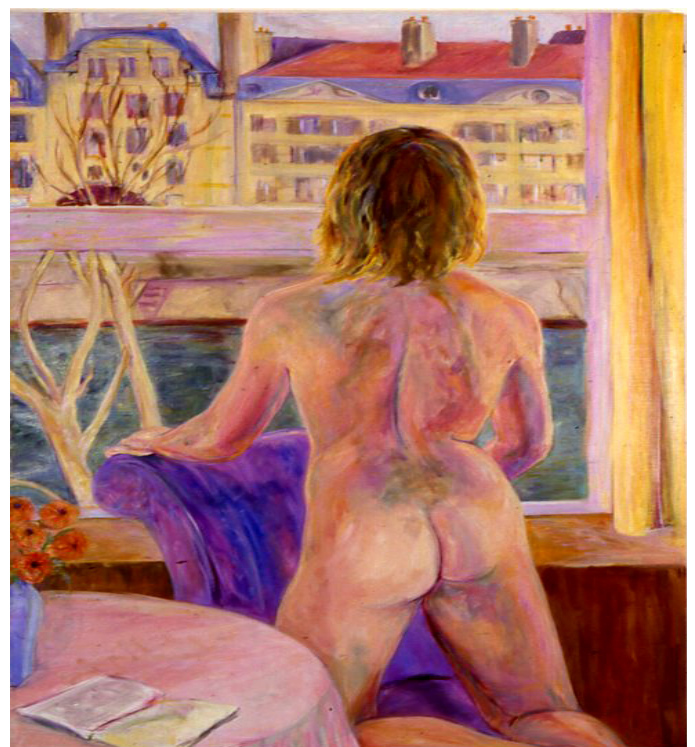
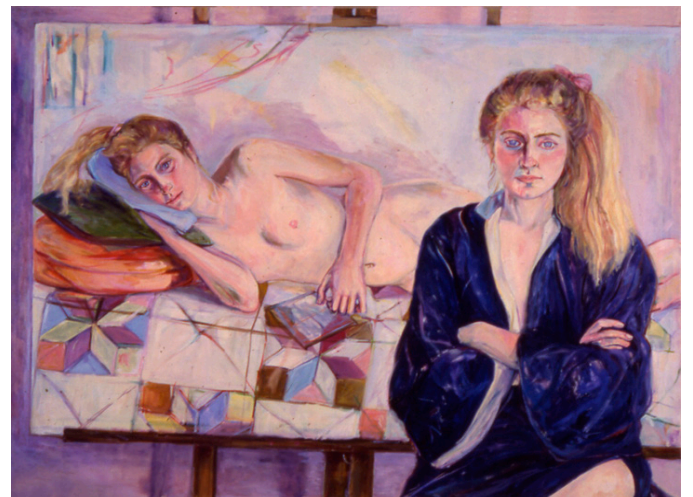
Her body of work spans decades, but her unwavering commitment to form, colour, and emotional truth has remained unbroken. Arguably the most moving set of her work, the Remembrance (Holocaust) series is more than a series of portraits. It is a tear-inducing elegy, made real with the use of vibrant colours. First, the contrast is jarring.

How does one put into words such vivid colours depicting such dark histories? But upon closer examination, the truth is revealed: these are not portraits of death. Rather, they are memorials to lives lost, to be sure, but lived to the fullest. Each canvas is inspired by photographs of relatives who were killed in the Holocaust, often taken in formal wear, frozen in perpetuity.



Diana brings their black-and-white silences to life with splashes of colour, refusing to let them disappear into the grey mist of history. This is not a personal act of remembering; it is political. In a world increasingly desensitised to atrocity and to forgetting its past, Diana will not forget. And in not forgetting, she asks us to remember as well. Aside from her memorial art, Diana examines the female form. Her female nudes are unposed, unflinching, and uncompromisingly realistic.

They express themes of independence, vulnerability, and strength. Here, the body is not to be objectified; it is a topography of memory, emotion, and truth. The women she paints are not painted for the viewer's gaze, but for their own being. They are mothers, survivors, thinkers, lovers—complete human beings drawn in outline and colour. Even in her paintings of still life, Diana reveals the sacred in the mundane.





A bouquet of tulips lying in a vase. A lemon cut in half. A cluttered dinner table left after supper. In her mind, these ostensibly mundane moments are contemplations silent reminders that life is made up not just of milestones, but of fleeting minutes. And perhaps that is Diana's most valuable asset as a painter: that she is able to pay attention. She paints not what she sees but what she feels, what stays with her, and what she refuses to let go. Today, as her painting becomes newly celebrated visible in shows like

A Journey of Discovery at the Lincoln Glenn Gallery it is clear that Diana is more than an artist. She is a keeper of memory, a feminist historian, and a quiet revolutionary. In an era marked by ephemeral internet stardom and viral lightning bolts, Diana is a reminder of an eternal truism: that art, when executed with authenticity and informed by empathy, is able to pierce the noise. In every way, she has built a life well painted. Not just on canvas, but in the spaces that she has created for others to be seen, heard, and loved.

(This article is sourced from the exhibition and essay A Journey of Discovery on Diana Kurz, courtesy of Lincoln Glenn Gallery. More information: lincolnglenn.com) ✦



About the Author

Falak Neaz holds a master's degree in Microbiology, along with diplomas in Fine Arts and Food Science. She currently works as a Peer-Review Administrator with the Amnet-Wiley JEO team and also serves as the Editorial Coordinator for The Atelier magazine. Passionate about creativity and knowledge, Falak enjoys reading, painting, and writing in her leisure time. In addition to her editorial and scientific expertise, she has a strong foundation in digital marketing, blending analytical thinking with artistic sensibility in all her pursuits.

Ecosystem of Art Diplomacy Law & Economy

A space where art meets economy—exploring Diplomacy, copyrights, sustainability, marketing, and creative growth. Bridging tradition and innovation to empower artists in the modern world.

That is how Mexico is carried on the skin

Camila Espino

Walls That Speak: The Power Of Public Art In India

Madhuri Garg

**A Platform for Change: The Empower Her Art
Forum (EHAF)**

Shereen Badr

**An experiment that uses AI and Japanese art
legend Hokusai's work to merge the past with the
future**

Anna Shvets

**Neera, The 'Bamboo Lady' Who Transformed
Sticks Into Tales**

Falak Neaz

'ASE SE SIENTE MEXICO EN LA PIEL' THAT IS HOW MEXICO IS CARRIED ON THE SKIN

Camila Espino



It was not until I stood under the grey skies of London that I appreciated the sun in Mexico. In the distance, I felt closest to home. Growing up, we take so much for granted; at least I did. Quesadillas for breakfast were just part of the routine before running late to school. Latin music got skipped on my Spotify playlists. When we would go out to eat, I rarely craved Mexican food, and I would push for Italian or Sushi. Even beach trips in Mexico were sometimes overshadowed by the excitement of a “fancy” trip to Europe. So many of us grow up wishing to move away someday, to start fresh somewhere new. It comes from the belief that opportunities abroad are endless, that something greater exists “out there.”

We are taught by society that a dream life is something you do not have, and that far away is the place to find it. For me, going away to university became Never has the chant of a mariachi given me more goosebumps than the day I heard them echo along the River Thames, celebrating the arrival of a Trajinera in London. I have never savoured a taco as deeply as I did, the day I saw a freshly pressed corn tortilla brought to my table at a Mexican restaurant here.



It is so easy to take the life we are born into for granted. The food we eat every day becomes repetitive. The landmarks that surround us fade into the background. The traditions that define us blur into routine. Yet the moment we step away, even momentarily, we are suddenly hyper-aware of the fact that what once seemed mundane was magic and a blessing. We travel to foreign countries and eagerly

take in their colours, flavours, languages, and customs. We marvel at their music, their streets, their history, and their spark. And then, when the trip ends and we return home, we feel “normal” again. But if our “normal” was always someone else’s dreams? Now I see tourists in Mexico falling in love with the colours in the street, the warmth in every smile, the music that spills from homes and markets.

I watch them soaking in what I used to overlook, and I wonder how long it took me to appreciate the same. We often associate privilege with economic comfort. But lately, I have been thinking about another kind of wealth, the wealth of being born into culture, tradition, and belonging. I was raised in Mexico City, and now more than ever, I feel deeply privileged to carry its stories in my veins. There is nothing that makes me more emotional these days than meeting another Mexican in London and instantly bonding over a shared craving for taco night and Luis Miguel karaoke.

The Mexican community here makes me feel closer to home. We all carry the same kind of nostalgia, not for just the food or weather, but for the warmth: the smile from a stranger on the street, the fresh bread from a local panadería in a Pueblo Mágico, the feeling of being seen, welcomed, and embraced. The traditions we hold in Mexico are so rich in culture and community that they have spread around the globe as mysterious beauties. Day of the Dead is one of my favorite holidays in the world.

If you get the chance to visit Mexico during this time, please do not sleep on the opportunity of going to a Pueblo Mágico and visiting the altars of the people who open their homes to the public as they pay tribute to their loved ones, an act of memory, love, and community.

You will leave truly moved and changed. In honoring those who have passed, you will feel closer to the present and connected to life. It saddens me to admit that I did not always see this. I thought I had to go far to find magic, when really, I was born into it. Now, every time I land back in Mexico, I tear up when I hear the immigration officer say, “Bienvenida a casa.”

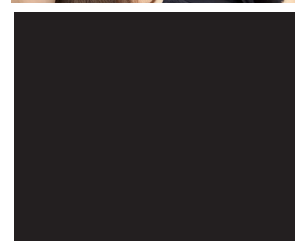
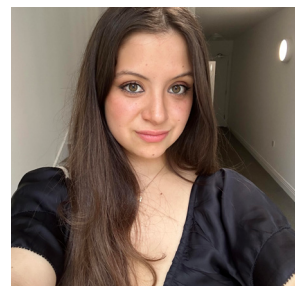


Because now I know, Mexico can never really leave you. It is engraved in your blood, values, and identity and carried throughout you to the rest of the world. Even though I am far from the calm waves of Quintana Roo, the culinary marvels of Oaxaca, and the artistry of San Miguel, I feel closer to my culture than ever before. The distance has not made my love for Mexico drift away; it has deepened it. I have always been proud to be Mexican. But now, I carry that pride with admiration, knowing that even oceans away, Mexico lives in me, and in every corner of the

world, and in the hearts of the people who it quietly touches. I miss Mexico so much every day, but then I remember, I am Mexico, and I carry Mexico with me every step of the way. Así se siente México en la piel. ✦

About the author

Camila Espino Fernandez is a Mexican creative writer and communications enthusiast. She has recently completed her BA in Drama with Film, earning a degree from Royal Holloway University of London, deepening her love for writing and storytelling.





WALLS THAT SPEAK: THE POWER OF PUBLIC ART IN INDIA

Madhuri Garg

There is something about public art that just stays with you. Maybe it is the surprise of stumbling upon it in the middle of a chaotic street. Maybe it is the scale. Maybe it is the message. But whatever it is, when done right, public art has the power to stop people in their tracks and make them feel something. As the founder of Studio Ideoholics, I have always believed that design should not be confined to clean, curated spaces. It should spill out into the world. Onto walls, into lanes, and across spaces where everyday life happens. That is where it can really make a difference. That is where it becomes a part of people's stories

Mural art as a living canvas

Over the years, we have seen public art in India evolve. What used to be limited to political slogans or generic "beautification drives" has now become an expression of culture, resistance, pride, and social awareness.

Murals have become the voice of communities, and in many cases, silent protests against the rapid, impersonal urbanisation of our cities. Cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, and Chennai have become

hotspots for this creative movement. They have given rise to artists and collectives who are turning grey walls into vibrant, thought-provoking canvases. Public art, by its very nature, is democratic. It is free, open, and visible to all. And that is what makes it powerful: it breaks down the invisible walls that often separate 'art' from 'audience'

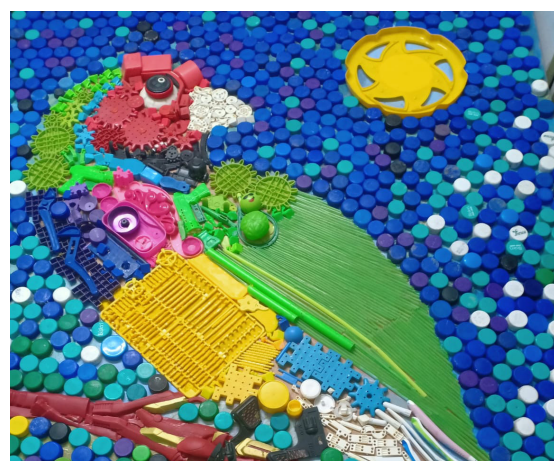
Our journey: telling stories through walls

At Studio Ideoholics, public art has become a natural extension of our design philosophy. We work with brands and institutions to craft stories visually, but when we step into the world of murals, we design for the people, not just for clients. One of the most meaningful projects we have worked on is the Pragati Express mural. This mural, created for Prag Industries, manufacturers of railway spare parts in India, stands tall on the outer wall of their manufacturing unit in the Talkatora industrial area in Lucknow.

This is a life size—96 feet wide, 10 feet tall and 10 feet wide—three-dimensional image of a real train. But, The Pragati Express is no

ordinary train. It carries with it the soul of India. Inside, we have painted lives in motion—a young man setting off for a new job in a new city; women engaged in cheerful chatter; children blowing bubbles in pure delight; a little boy, wide-eyed, talking to his dadi—each passenger represents a slice of life, filled with hope, memories, fears and ambition. All moving forward together on the Pragati Express. And of course, no tribute to Indian train journeys would be complete without the Bollywood moment, that iconic DDLJ moment where Simran runs to catch the train, and Raj holds out his hand. Because trains do not just take us places, they connect hearts.

At the end of the mural, the train guard waves his green flag: a signal of departure. Of movement. Of progress. Of Pragati. The idea was to create a narrative of collective growth, painted in bold strokes and layered visuals. What made the project special was not just the scale, it was the engagement. People stopped, asked questions and some even shared stories. It became more than a wall; it became a conversation



Looking ahead

While large-scale murals like Pragati Express have given us the opportunity to express larger narratives, we are also beginning to explore new directions. One such exploration is our Plastic Art Project, an evolving initiative where we are experimenting with using waste materials, especially plastic, to create public art that raises awareness about sustainability. It is still early days for this initiative, but the intent is clear: to spark dialogue, provoke thought, and maybe even shift behaviour, all through the medium of art in public spaces.

The bigger picture

At the end of the day, public art is not just about beautifying spaces. It is about humanising them. In a world where we are constantly surrounded by noise, clutter, and concrete, a painted wall can feel like a breath of fresh air. A reminder that art is not a luxury; it is a necessity. India has always had a rich visual culture, varying from the murals of Ajanta to the tribal art of Madhubani.

What we are seeing now is a contemporary continuation of that legacy, adapted for modern cities and modern struggles. And it is only just beginning. As Studio Ideoholics, we are honoured to be part of this movement. Whether it is transforming spaces, experimenting with waste as a medium, or collaborating with like-minded artists, we will keep doing what we believe in: telling real stories on real walls, for real people. Because when walls start speaking, the world listens. ✨



About the author

An artist at heart and designer by profession, Madhuri Garg hails from a creative background with a specialisation in Applied Arts. She has worked with advertising agencies, an animation production house, marketing agency and web agencies, gaining insights and experience supporting various startups build brand identities. As founder of Ideoholics Design Studio, and The Plastic Art Project, she has found joy in experimenting with different mediums to create art and tell stories. She is also deeply interested in spirituality, painting, writing poetry and singing for joy.





A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE :THE EMPOWER HER ART FORUM (EHAF)

Shereen Badr

As founder and CEO of Artoday, I started The Empower Her Art Forum (EHAF) to address the persistent gender disparity within the art world. While women are a vibrant force in the arts, their voices and opportunities are often limited. EHAF was established as a direct response to this observation, with a clear mission to champion female artists, curators, and art professionals.

The forum's recent edition, held at the majestic Grand Egyptian Museum, was a major milestone. This landmark event brought together over 200 female artists from around the world, transforming the iconic venue into a modern arena for international art and cultural exchange. The esteemed German artist and founder of the Bonn Women's Museum, Marianne Pitzen, was the guest of honour, underscoring EHAF's commitment to supporting global pioneers in female art.





EHAF is more than just an event; it is a movement dedicated to providing women with the resources, networks, and the visibility they deserve. The forum offers a platform where female artists can not only exhibit their work but also engage in meaningful dialogue about the challenges and triumphs they face. Discussions cover a wide range of topics, from navigating business aspects of the art world to finding one's unique artistic voice. The forum is designed to foster mentorship, collaboration, and a supportive community.

The success of the forum in connecting young artists with mentors and helping curators discover new talent has underscored its essential role in promoting gender equity in the arts. EHAF reflects Artoday's core mission of building bridges between artists and art lovers, with a specific focus on the urgent need for gender equality. The forum stands as a tribute to the resilience, creativity, and power of women in the arts.





AN EXPERIMENT THAT USES AI AND JAPANESE ART LEGEND HOSUKAI'S WORK TO MERGE THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

Anna Shvets

"Just as hokusai claimed he wouldn't truly become an artist until the age of 100, perhaps the true potential of AI art is only beginning to unfold."

The May 2025 virtual exhibition, AI HOKUSAI: LEGACY ENCODED, offering a multi-platform immersive experience for viewers worldwide, was presented as part of the AI HOKUSAI ArtTech Research Project, which merged the past and future through AI. The exhibition was an ode to the visionary artist Katsushika Hokusai, best known for his globally acclaimed woodblock print "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" (1831), the first in his series of Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji, for which he used Prussian blue, revolutionising Japanese prints. By this time, he was already renowned for his 15-volume Hokusai Manga, a collection of sketches portraying various aspects of daily life, animals, and the supernatural

Born in 1760, Hokusai's innovative techniques, breaking down complex forms into basic shapes,

prefigured algorithmic thinking used in artificial intelligence training. In 2024, in appreciation of this uniqueness of Hokusai's artwork, curators Anna Shvets, Evgeny Merman and Vladimir Opredelenov launched the AI Hokusai ArtTech Research Project, with an aim to merge the past and future through AI, and 'to cut through the noise (the hype surrounding AI) by examining this phenomenon from cultural, technological, anthropological, and philosophical viewpoints.'

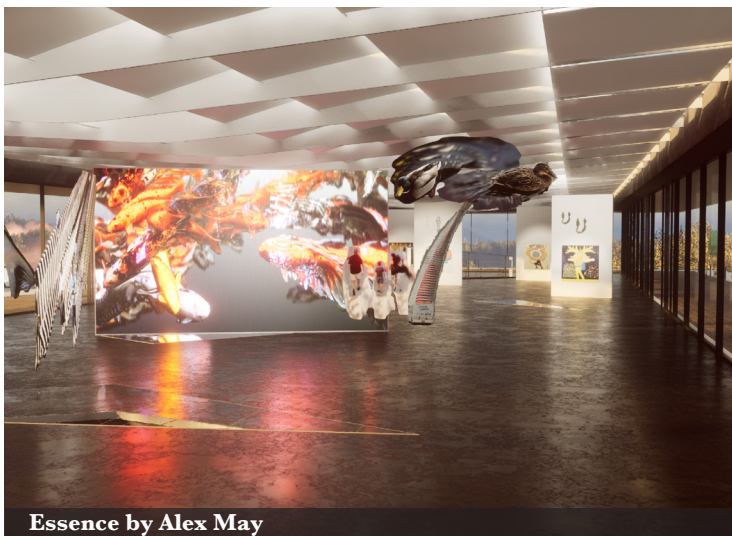
The project is a radical research and residency initiative combining the revolutionary pedagogical methods of a Japanese master with cutting-edge technology to explore how AI shapes the future of creativity. The goal is to explore new horizons by blending modern artistic practices with AI; raising questions about

ethics and the role of artists in a society going through technological change.

In 2024, the project launched an open call for artists to train neural networks based on Hokusai's legacy, followed by another open call for the online residency/laboratory. Eight artists, selected from 400 applicants from 60 countries and working across various media, were chosen to participate. Participants worked with AI text-to-image and video tools, generative sound and motion systems, and hybrid data structures to reinterpret Hokusai's legacy. The curatorial team and invited experts provided critical mentorship across domains, including digital curation, ethics, and art history.

Outputs ranged from algorithmic photography to digital performance, data-driven installations, and immersive audiovisual worlds, integrated into a 25 km² virtual environment. Developed over several months by a global team of curators, artists, researchers and technologists, the exhibition marks the culmination of a hybrid research initiative and experimental online residency. The result is a fully immersive digital experience that brings together tradition and innovation across platforms, accessible via computer, tablet, smartphone or VR headset.

More than just an exhibition, AI Hokusai: Legacy Encoded is an experimental ecosystem—a living archive in motion—composed of digitally rendered terrains, AI-mediated storytelling and speculative visual poetics. Visitors navigate this world not merely as viewers but as participants traversing temporal layers that blur the digital, historical and organic.



Essence by Alex May

Essence by Alex May

Alex May channels the spirit of Hokusai's ukiyo-e (school of Japanese art) by using AI to fragment and reassemble visual reality. Working with YOLO and COCO datasets, he creates dynamic video compositions from isolated object segments, evoking the impermanence of perception.

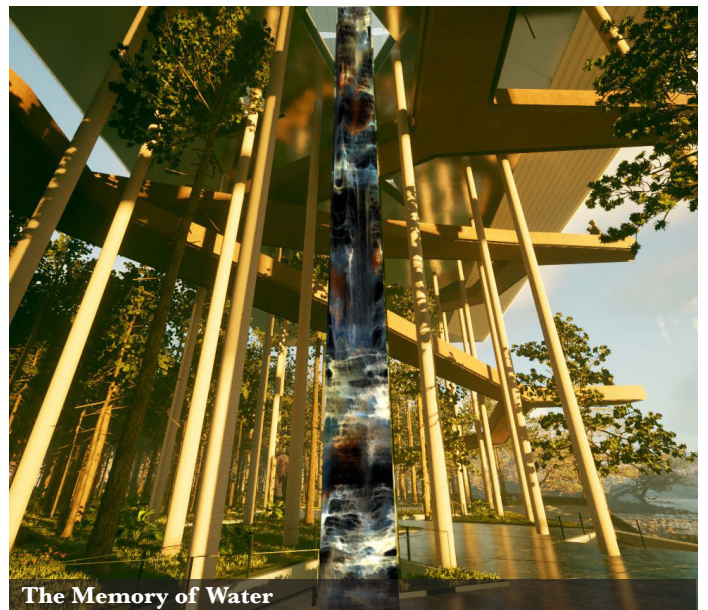
The work questions whether AI captures essence or simply reflects human abstraction.



Demons and Monsters by Saint Denis

Demons and Monsters by Saint Denis

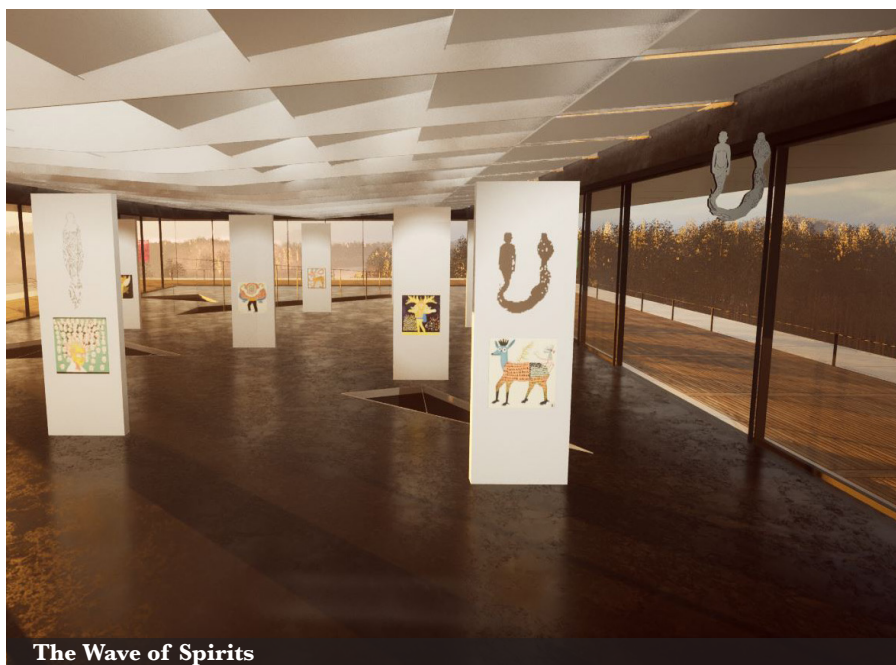
Reimagining Hokusai's One Hundred Ghost Stories, Saint Denis uses AI to animate spectral forms within modern Tokyo. Iconic tales like Sara-yashiki and Kohada Koheiji are rendered through uncanny visuals where folklore meets code. This haunting collaboration between artist and algorithm explores authorship, digital memory, and the spectral afterlife of tradition in contemporary art.



The Memory of Water

The Memory of Water – Hyphae Collective by Roxana Vázquez & Carlos Wyszogrod

This 38-meter digital waterfall installation flows through a building's architecture, merging with real water to evoke Hokusai's landscapes. One side celebrates natural beauty; the other reveals its inner data-driven mechanics. With AI-generated visuals and an evolving soundscape, Hyphae reframes water as a metaphor for perception, transformation, and the delicate balance between nature and technology.



The Wave of Spirits



The Wave of Spirits by Oksana Fedchyshyn

Blending traditional painting with 3D digital techniques, Fedchyshyn reinterprets Hokusai's ghost stories through a hybrid Ukrainian-Japanese lens. Her use of AI enriches rather than replaces tradition, exploring how ancient myths mirror today's fears and hopes. The result is a timeless dialogue between folklore, identity, and digital rebirth.

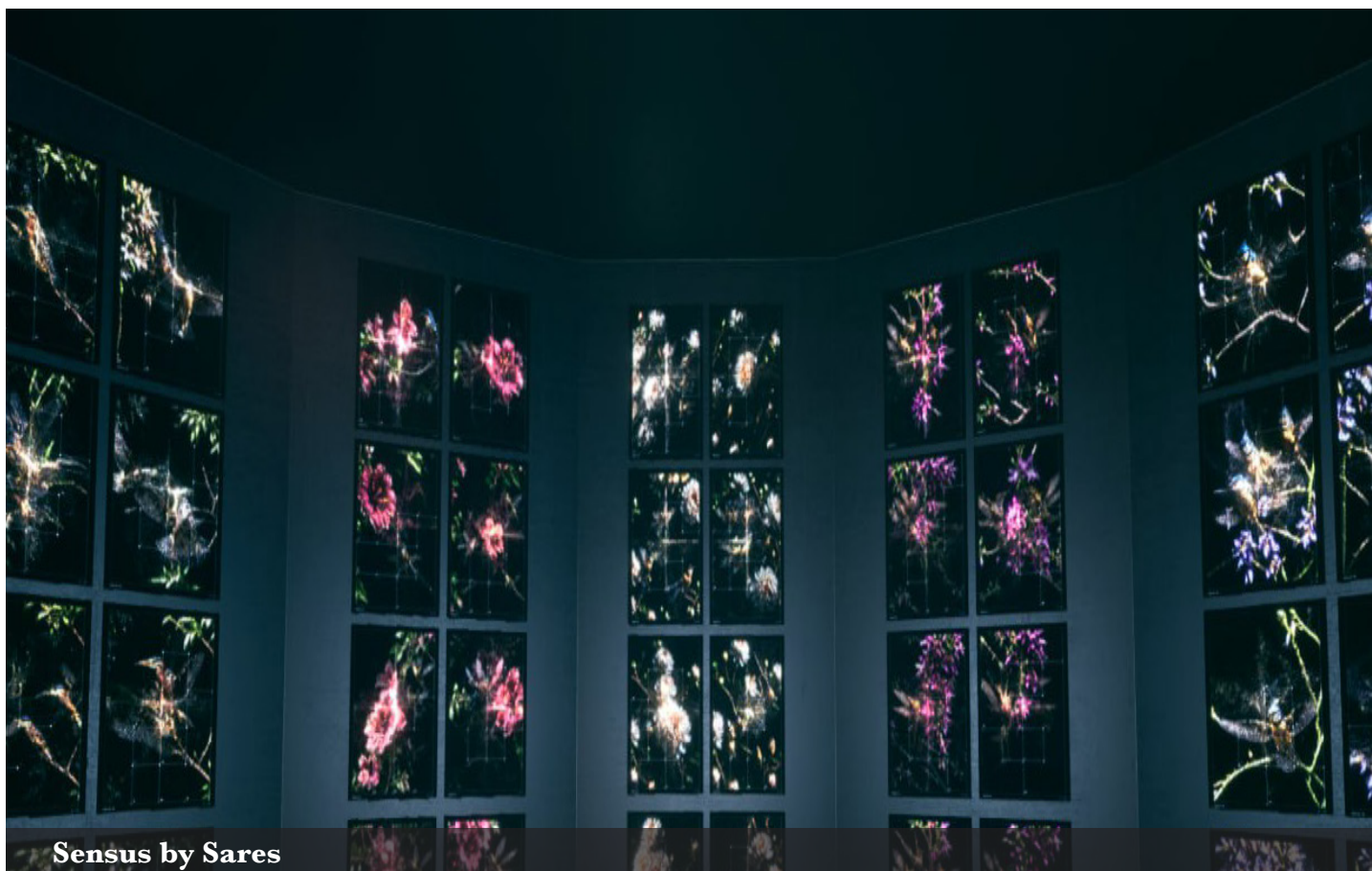


The Sounds Of The Floating World

The Sounds Of The Floating World By Julio Cesar Palacio

Palacio translates Hokusai's visual poetics into immersive soundscapes. Using field recordings, modular synths, and AI tools like Suno, he weaves memories and myths into ephemeral compositions. His work treats sound as storytelling, connecting natural rhythms and digital pulses in a sensory echo of ukiyo-e's transient pleasures





Sensus by Sares

Sensus by Sares

Sares presents a digital triptych—Humilis, Admirari, Sensus—inspired by Hokusai’s studies of life and nature. Combining machine learning, mythological imagery, and generative art, the works reflect on fragility, wonder, and emotion.

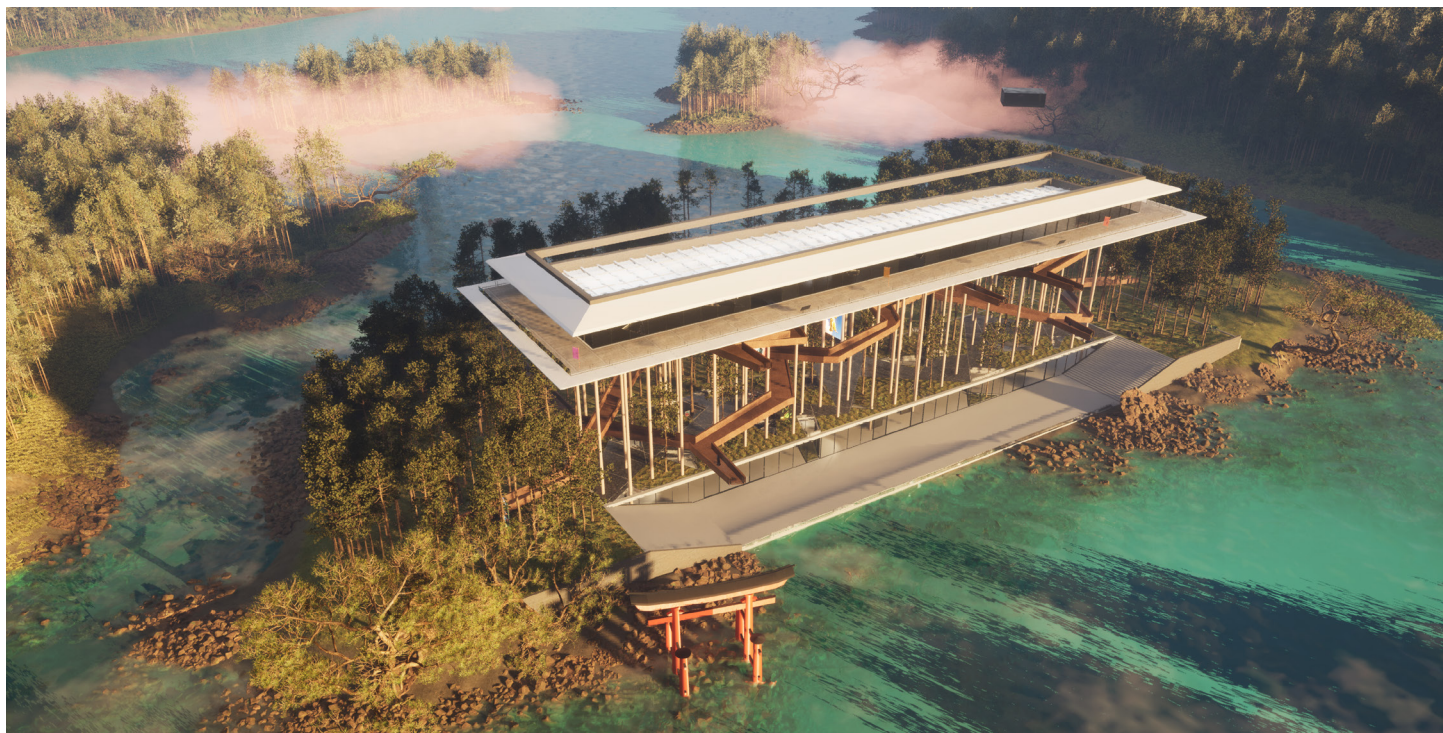
The project explores how tradition, technology, and time coalesce to shape human perception and legacy.

Nature’s Voice by Tomo Sone

This 3D video sculpture integrates AI-generated choreography with classical Japanese dance. Six interlinked video pieces and sculptural forms reinterpret Hokusai’s themes— birds, flowers, the sea—through movement and emotion. Sone’s work questions authorship in the digital age, inviting reflection on our evolving relationships with nature, technology, and one another.



Nature’s Voice by Tomo Sone



Alongside the exhibition, we documented the process, conducted interviews, and designed a cross-sectoral survey to gather insights from curators, critics, and technologists. Our mixed-methods, practice-based research combines qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the AI Hokusai project. It draws on iterative fieldwork, collaborative experimentation, and public engagement to explore the intersection of art, AI, and cultural policy.

At a time when AI-generated content floods our feeds and undermines trust in authenticity, AI Hokusai stands apart. It is not an output factory, it is an inquiry into the process. In embracing both tradition and speculation, it offers an imaginative space for artists, researchers, and audiences to rethink creativity itself.

Welcome to explore the exhibition from your computer, tablet, smartphone, or VR headset - <https://www.aihokusai.art/vr-space>

We invite all actively practicing professionals working across art, technology, curation, and cultural innovation to participate in our online survey at <https://forms.gle/w9ZrYx1euz4FvSHR7>. These insights will contribute to an upcoming research publication on the evolving role of AI in artistic practice and the conservation of cultural heritage. ✨

About the author

With over 20 years of experience and more than 150 projects across the globe to her credit, art professional, independent curator, producer of international art and cultural projects, Anna Shvets is a strategist in the art business, public relations, and cultural diplomacy.

As CEO of TAtchers' Art Management and founder of the Art Ambassadors Association, her work is placed at the intersection of contemporary art, digital technologies, and interdisciplinary research. Anna also serves as Chief Communication Officer and mentor at FUELARTS, an Art+Tech accelerator; business mentor at IED (Istituto Europeo di Design); facilitator of ARTSI (Art and Social Impact); and producer of Dos Islas Estudios and the Dark Paradise Project. Additionally, she is an ambassador of the .ART domain and the Arte Laguna Prize. She lectures internationally and teaches art business, management, and public relations at several academic institutions. Her contributions to art and business publications reflect her ongoing research in contemporary art theory, interdisciplinarity, and the evolving relationship between art and digital innovation. She is based in Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador.





NEERA, THE 'BAMBOO LADY' WHO TRANSFORMED STICKS INTO TALES

Falak Neaz

In the heart of Assam, where tea gardens caress the distant hills and bamboo groves stand tall against the winds, the imagination of a woman has grown as lushly as the green shoots that surround her. Neera Sarmah, popularly known as the 'Bamboo Lady of India', is no ordinary entrepreneur; she is a source of inspiration and enterprise for thousands throughout India.

From humble beginnings

Neera was born on 20th March 1968 in Tezpur in a family with close association with law, education, and social activism. Her father, a well-known personality locally, and mother, the backbone of the family, taught her the importance of empathy and hard work. A childhood spent amidst the endless greens of Assam and dynamic tea gardens had Neera surrounded by the splendour of nature. The daily sight of bamboo used as material for baskets, mats, and furniture, fascinated her. For the rest of the world, bamboo was just a utility plant, but for Neera, it symbolised limitless possibility.

Sprouting an idea: from grass to grace

Stepping out of her comfort zone, Neera tried out bamboo, pushing its usage beyond the traditional. Her creative mind thought up something entirely new: bamboo jewellery; trendy, green, and delicate. With a taste for fusing the old with the new, she shaped beads and pendants out of bamboo, blending Assamese patterns with modern designs. In no time, bamboo earrings and necklaces were the fashion. What had begun as a small start in one pocket of Assam set off a movement, and Neera's simple bits of jewellery became the bread and butter for countless rural women.

The art and craft of bamboo jewellery

Neera's bamboo jewellery is not just a product; it is a process that provides new life for modest material. Crafting jewellery out of locally cut bamboo and forest products, she converts into charming trinkets, what

most would regard as rubbish. Her distinctive process involves everything from selecting the right bamboo shoot to designing intricate patterns and blending seeds, twigs, and wild fibers for finishing touches. What sets Neera apart is her dogged insistence on sustainability; and her work is a representation of the circular economy. Every item is eco-friendly, and recycled pieces can be used. She has made over 800 designs, and her jewellery is not just well received at local celebrations but at global ones as well. Her jewellery comes in all shapes and sizes—rings, bracelets, brooches, hairpins—and the price ranging from a mere Indian Rupee 10 to over Rupees 10,000.

From Assam to the global stage

Neera's dream took hold, and soon went beyond village boundaries. She started conducting workshops and training sessions, showing villagers, mainly women, the skill of transforming bamboo into masterpieces. In more than 400 programs across 16 Indian states, her method has reached more than 10,000 individuals. Bamboo jewellery orders began flooding her, from Bollywood stars to other celebrities. Her items have been showcased in front of dignitaries such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Neera herself is known as the 'Mother of Bamboo Jewellery'. Her goal is lofty: "One bamboo, one lakh rupees", professing the faith that bamboo, used aptly, can fetch huge sums of money to artisans.



Spreading the roots: training and empowerment

Neera's job is an open book to poor artisans and women. She not only shares age-old art skills but also modern marketing skills, enabling her students gain access to markets all over the world and "strike while the iron is hot." Her job has been amplified through her Neera Sarmah Foundation (NSF), which disseminates support for environmental protection and sustainable development. Students are educated to make the most of every part of the bamboo: nothing goes to waste. Even forest floor pieces, seeds, and fibers are recycled into useful items and decorations. Her training ensures skills to be handed over, not only preserving Assamese culture but blending it in synthesis with worldwide trends.

A legacy rooted in green

Adorned in her favorite traditional Mekhela Chadar, Neera is a living example of the worth of heritage. And always, she is experimenting, breaking boundaries where tradition and innovation intersect. The designs are about Assam's heart; the craftsmanship is reflective of international sensibilities. Diversifying from jewellery designs and foraying into utility products, she has provided jobs and earning potential to communities that once had nothing. With each handcrafted ornament, she is a shining example that says, "Where

there's a will, there's a way."

Recognition and impact

Neera's achievement has won her many national and international awards and she is an active consultant member of women's entrepreneurship and craft organisations worldwide. Her real success lies not in the awards, but in the smiles of rural craftspeople earning a living, children attending school, and women gaining the confidence to stand tall. Her bamboo jewellery now lights up galleries and adorns houses far and wide. Orders still come in torrents, but Neera remains humble and earthy like the bamboo that bends without snapping.

Words to grow by

To every woman with vision and every craftsman in quest of an exit strategy, Neera Sarmah is the proof in the pudding. She transformed humble bamboo sticks into breathtaking possibilities, visible in every strand of a necklace and every piece of a bracelet. She did not just create jewellery; she created livelihoods, self-sufficiency, and change. Neera's journey is as much a tale of personal success as it is the story of an entire community brought up by one woman's vision. Her legacy increases with every workshop, every new piece, and every craftsman she inspires. ✦



Performing Arts



Performing Arts – where movement heals, music connects, and stories breathe life. From classical traditions to contemporary expressions, every performance is a celebration of the human spirit. Discover how the arts build bridges to community, well-being, and joyful living.

**Interweaves ; Interdependency Of Indian
Cinema And Classical Dancing**

Dr Radhika Shurajit

Queen Trap : Reclaiming the Board Through Art

Juga Di Prima



INTERWEAVES ; INTERDEPENDENCY OF INDIAN CINEMA AND CLASSICAL DANCING

Dr Radhika Shurajit

Irrespective of whether we are artists or not, we all love cinema. Films reflect our dreams, fantasies, joys, and sorrows. We associate ourselves with the characters on screen, and dance and music transport us into a different world of magic. Indian cinema, unlike any other, has always been interwoven with music and dance—particularly our classical traditions.

The early influence of dance in cinema

Indian cinema is the largest film industry in the world and stands next only to Hollywood in global influence. Its story began in the silent era and gradually embraced sound, technology, and colour. From its earliest days, Indian films distinguished themselves with music and dance sequences, in sharp contrast to Western cinema where musicals were confined to specific genres. In India, song and dance became a natural mode of storytelling, drawing from our strong traditions of narrating mythology, history, and folklore through performance. D.G. Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), India's first full-length feature, and subsequent mythological films introduced audiences to divine worlds where music and dance became essential. Since actors were rarely trained dancers, companies hired professionals like Sitara Devi and later Gopi Krishna, who brought classical authenticity to the screen. Elaborate sets and



costumes recreated devaloka (abode of the gods), immersing viewers in a spiritual-visual experience.

Classical arts enter the silver screen

A milestone arose in 1948 with Uday Shankar's *Kalpana*, a visionary film centred on dance itself. It showcased Kathak the North Indian classical dance form, Bharatanatyam the South Indian classical dance form, and folk idioms, proving that classical dance could not only embellish cinema but drive its narrative. The entry of dedicated dance masters in the 1950s brought greater sophistication. Abhinaya (expressive storytelling) was highlighted through close-up shots, while rapid footwork was cleverly adapted for the camera. Films in this period featured six to eight songs, giving ample opportunity for dance.

The Bharatanatyam legacy

Bharatanatyam, the ancient dance art form of Tamil Nadu, synthesises music, poetry, rhythm, and spirituality. Once preserved in temples by Devadasis (women dedicated to divine service) the art transitioned into cinema during the early 20th century. For many Devadasis, cinema became an alternate livelihood, though the community faced stigma until revivalists like Rukmini Devi Arundale, E. Krishna Iyer, and Dr. Raghavan restored dignity to the form. Tamil cinema was also shaped by cultural nationalists like writer Kalki Krishnamurthy and director K. Subramanyam, who used film as a medium for reform and patriotism. *Thyaga Bhoomi* (1939), scripted by Kalki, questioned caste and colonialism, while *Meera* (1945), featuring M.S. Subbulakshmi, immortalised the saint-poetess on screen. Subramanyam's unfinished project *Nartana Murali*, conceived as a national integration dance film with contributions from multiple gurus, led to the founding of Nrityodaya, later nurtured by his daughter, Dr. Padma Subramanyam. By the 1940s and '50s, Bharatanatyam was embraced by middle-class women, moving from ritual to respectability. Cinema played a pivotal role in this transformation, offering a new "reel space and time" for an art form traditionally tied to temple and stage.



The golden era of dance in cinema

The 1950s and '60s are rightly called the golden age of classical dance in Indian films. Kamala Lakshman, Vyjayanthimala, and Padmini lit up screens with choreography by masters like K.N. Dhandayudapani Pillai. Group dances and innovative camerawork—close-ups of eyes, feet, or layered frames—redefined how audiences experienced Bharatanatyam. Music, too, blended classical ragas with orchestral innovations, while playback singers and stalwart composers created immortal dance numbers. Kathak simultaneously rose to prominence in Hindi films, driven by virtuosos like Gopi Krishna, Kumudini Lakhia, and choreographers from Lucknow and Jaipur gharanas. Their work expanded Kathak's visibility beyond courts and stages to mass cinema audiences. Over time, the fusion of classical, folk, and Western influences gave rise to a distinct "film style"

Shifts in the 1970s and beyond

By the 1970s, classical dances in films began to decrease in number. Glamour and commercial considerations overshadowed aesthetics. Except for a few trained artistes like Hema Malini—an accomplished Bharatanatyam dancer who balanced film stardom with classical performances—most actors were not grounded in the tradition. The mantle of integrating classical arts into mainstream cinema was carried forward by visionary directors like K. Viswanath. His masterpieces *Sankarabharanam* (1980) and *Sagara Sangamam* (1983) portrayed classical dance and music not as embellishments but as central themes, bridging popular cinema and spiritual



artistry. The hero Kamal Haasan's brilliant dancing in *Sagara Sangamam* brought authenticity and passion to these films, inspiring a generation. Yet, as popular taste leaned towards fast paced entertainment, classical dance found fewer spaces in mainstream cinema. What remained were occasional influences like gestures, rhythms, or motifs woven into film choreography that increasingly drew from hybrid styles.



Dance beyond cinema

Today, while classical dance rarely dominates films, it thrives on other platforms. Television, YouTube, and social media have become powerful mediums for artists to showcase their craft. Virtual classes and digital productions extend the reach of classical dances far beyond geographical borders. Even films shot on smartphones experiment with classical idioms, proving that technology, once again, offers new ways to reimagine tradition. Though the presence of classical dance in films has diminished today, its essence continues to shine, sometimes in fleeting sequences, sometimes in full-fledged artistic tributes. What remains undeniable is this: the interweaving of Indian cinema and classical dance has created a unique cultural legacy that still inspires, uplifts, and connects audiences across generations. ✦



About the author

Bharatanatyam dancer Dr. Radhika Shurajit is one of the first and senior most disciple of the legendary dancing couple The Dhananjayans. She is an established performer, teacher, choreographer, media visualiser and television director. Radhika trains students at her institution "THRAYEE" in Chennai. She is currently the President of the Madras Chapter of the International Dance Alliance (NY). Radhika has choreographed several national award-winning songs for feature films and has had the rare opportunity to work with the music of Maestro Ilayaraja, Oscar Awardee A R Rehman, Vidyasagar, and Ramesh Vinayakam among others.





QUEEN TRAP: RECLAIMING THE BOARD THROUGH ART

Juga Di Prima

As an artist in love with chess, creating the audio visual art piece *Queen Trap* has been one of the most transformative experiences of my life. Chess is transversal, it symbolises intelligence, strategy, culture and decision-making, and for a long time it has been my fountain of inspiration. But this project was not just about filming a new chess music video.

It was about reclaiming space, rewriting narratives, and celebrating women who, like me, have chosen to play their own strategy in life. Filmed inside the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts during the only free day of the Budapest Chess Olympiad, and produced in collaboration with the International Chess Federation's Women's Commission (FIDE WOM), I had the honour of being joined by nearly 200 women from over 60 countries: grandmasters, Olympic teams, leaders and icons. Judit Polgár, the best female chess player in history, along with legends

such as Alexandra Kosteniuk, Pia Cramling, Tania Sachdev and rising stars like Divya Deshmukh joined this vision, bringing it to life in ways I never imagined.

On May 31, 2025, I stood before a global audience as *Queen Trap* premiered at Norway Chess—the world's most prestigious chess tournament—sharing this dream come true. For me, chess has always been a metaphor for life. It is about resilience, vision, and the courage to step into leadership. In *Queen Trap*, I wanted to show the power of the queen—not just as a chess piece, but as a symbol of transformation. A pawn can become a queen if she keeps advancing, and that is exactly what this piece embodies; women supporting each other, strategising, and leading from the boardroom to the studio, from classrooms to communities



From chessboard to ceremony

Right after the premiere, I travelled from Norway to Rapa Nui (Easter Island- Chilean Polynesia), a beloved island where I once lived and that continues to inspire my creativity. There, I co-founded the first Rapa Nui Chess Festival, with Javiera Gómez, Chile's top female player, local leaders and organisations. We inaugurated the festival with a live performance of Queen Trap, joined by renowned Rapa Nui pianist Mahani Teave, her daughter Tahai on the violin, and girl cello students from the Toki Music School for Children. It was a heartfelt offering to the Rapa Nui community, a moment of collective power and ancestral connection.

That week, we also founded the Mama Piru Chess Club for children, named in loving memory of a revered local matriarch and environmentalist. This was not just about chess; it was about legacy, empowerment, and education. Watching the children's eyes light up as they played their first chess games reminded me why

I started this journey in the first place.

Uniting my passions

Music and chess were always present in my life, but for many years they lived in parallel. In 2017, when I was going through a personal crisis, I had a profound revelation: I had to bring my greatest passions together to fulfill my purpose. Both disciplines shared a dramatic narrative, a tension, a beauty that could speak through art. That is when I committed to creating songs and scripts inspired by chess, and doing so in English to speak to a global audience. Chess finally became my muse.

In my performances, I blend music, poetry, and visual storytelling to create immersive experiences. Whether it is through my past albums and theatrical concerts like *Juga di Piaf* or *Mis Universos*, or through my chess-inspired music videos like *Oh Capablanca*, *Tactical* and now *Queen Trap*, my aim is always to connect deeply—emotionally, symbolically.



QT

QUEEN TRAP
BY JUGA



International chess legends and upcoming stars take part in filming the audio-visual art piece 'Queen Trap'.



QUEEN TRAP BY JUGA - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © PICTURES BY OLÁH GERGELY MÁTÉ



The queen as archetype

The queen on the board is more than the most powerful piece; she is a symbol of potential fulfilled. She can begin as a pawn, humble and overlooked, but if she crosses the board, she transforms. Pawns can promote and become a queen. So, there can be multiple queens on the same team, collaborating and amplifying each other's power simultaneously. That symbolism runs through every layer of Queen Trap. It is a tribute to women who lead with vision and heart, who challenge old structures and rewrite the rules. Collectively, we are stronger.

Filming and editing the 200 women in this project were like orchestrating a symphony of perspectives. Every participant brought her own style, her culture, her rhythm. Despite our differences, we shared something sacred: a desire to be seen, to be heard, to be celebrated.

To bring visibility and recognition to the incredible women who not only compete professionally in chess but also contribute to its growth and development. That is what Queen Trap became—a ritual of alliance and power. Through this project, I want to highlight their talent, dedication and invaluable role, those of the

already established champions and those playing their first Olympiad.

An ongoing journey

I see Queen Trap not as a final product, but as a living project. Through my Queen Trap live music plus chess performance, singing while women champions play high-level chess onstage—as well as with my keynote lecture, 'Chess for creative strategy and empowerment'—I want to bring chess to the world's leadership stages, as well as open up spaces of empowerment for girls and women. I dream of transforming it into a global performance—combining live chess, music, and choreography storytelling. I hope to bring it to India, the birthplace of chess, to Latin America and to countries in Africa, where I feel a profound resonance with the strength of women leading change. Ultimately, my hope is that every girl who touches a chess piece for the first time feels the same spark that I felt. That she knows she can move, grow, lead, and become a queen in her own right. As women, our resilience, intuition and capacity for analysis makes us natural strategists. Queen Trap is an invitation to envision the future. It is my offering to all of us who have ever felt

underestimated, but who knew, deep down, that we were meant to reign ♦

About the author

Juga Di Prima is a composer, singer, scriptwriter from Chile, and Vice President of the Chilean Chess Foundation. She is renowned for songs and music videos such as Oh Capablanca, hailed as “the greatest chess song ever written” by ChessBase India.

Juga was awarded the Public Life and Art prize by the Women Economic Forum, Chile for Queen Trap, her audiovisual and performative art piece that turns chess into an aesthetic and emotional manifesto. Juga recently became Global Advisor of the G100 Art Leadership & Films Wing, as her work is an international reference at the intersection of art, culture and female empowerment.



Film Magic

Film and arts are the soul's mirror, where emotion, memory, and meaning converge in every frame and stroke. They unravel the seen and unseen, offering layered narratives that stir thought and awaken the senses.

Reshaping African cinema
How women led stories and healing Narratives are reclaiming the frame
Thabang Makgakwe
The Poetics Of Everyday Life:
Why Women-Directed Films Matter More Than Ever
Natalie Kerman



RESHAPING AFRICAN CINEMA HOW WOMEN-LED STORIES AND HEALING NARRATIVES ARE RECLAIMING THE FRAME

Thabang Makgakwe

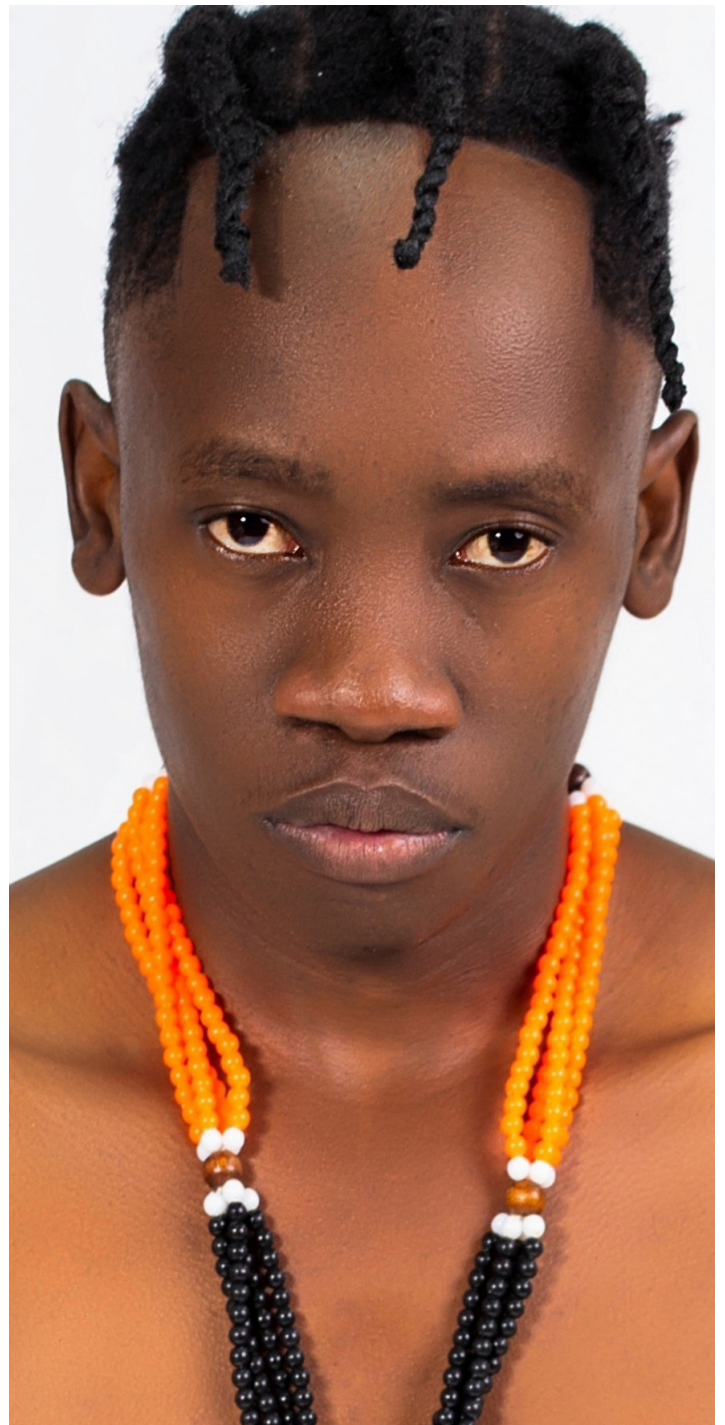
Growing up in a so-called Rainbow Nation here in South Africa, I have always known that storytelling is more than entertainment. It is a lifeline. It keeps our history breathing. It fights against silence. It reminds us of where we come from and more importantly, who we truly are. I am part of the generation they call Born-Free, those of us born after the dark clouds of apartheid lifted, the ones meant to inherit a nation stitched together with hope. Some call us Generation Z. I call us the ones with wide eyes and restless hearts, carrying both the dreams and the unfinished wounds of our people. With my eyes, my experiences, and the stories whispered by my grandmother, I have come to believe one thing: storytelling is not just words on paper or images on a screen. It is a lifeline. It keeps our history breathing. It fights against silence. It reminds us of where we come from — and more importantly, who we truly are. But for too long, many of our stories especially those of African women were hidden, watered down, or told by

outsiders who could not capture the depth, struggle, and beauty of what it means to be a woman in this continent. As a young filmmaker and creative, I have felt that absence deeply. The faces I saw on screen rarely reflected my world—the quiet strength of my grandmother, the sacrifices of my mother, or the resilience of the women who raised me. But lately, something is changing.

I see it in the new wave of African cinema, where women are no longer background characters. They are the heartbeat. The heroes. The leaders. The dreamers. They tell their own stories, and in doing so, they reclaim their power. Films like *Lingui: The Sacred Bonds* hit close to home. Watching that film felt like hearing my mother's voice—fierce, protective, never backing down when it comes to defending her daughter's right to live freely. Or *Queen of Katwe*, where young girls quietly shatter glass ceilings, not through rebellion, but through raw determination and heart.

And right here at home, stories like Shaka Ilembe on Mzansi Magic remind us that women have always been part of power, not just as whispers behind the scenes, but standing tall in history. The series paints a vivid picture of our ancestors, including women who shaped kingdoms with wisdom and courage. I see the same in Queen Modjadji, the Rain Queen, a woman whose strength comes not from force, but from nurturing, leadership, and deep cultural pride. These stories gently remind us that African women's power is persistent, spiritual, and unshakable; it flows like rain, it grows like roots. But my understanding of women's strength did not start on a film set. It started at home, with my grandmother. She grew up under apartheid, a time designed to break spirits, yet she stood firm. After apartheid, she built a life rooted in peace and unity.

She managed her household with grace and wisdom, raising us with love, discipline, and quiet strength. I often say, if you want to know the true definition of a leader, look at the women holding households together, building futures, running small businesses, managing entire families, often with very little, but never lacking in faith. My grandmother taught me that. She would always say, "Mosadike thari ya Sechaba", "A woman is the backbone of the nation." She also reminded me constantly of one of our most sacred African principles: *Motho ke Motho ka Batho*, "A person is a person through other people." It means we rise through unity. We are shaped by the love, respect, and support of those around us. It is that same spirit that flows through our stories, through our films, and through every woman who dares to tell her truth. African cinema is at a turning point. We have a chance to shape how our people are seen not only here at home, but across the world. It is not just about making films; it is about reclaiming our identity. Every frame, every colour, every song, every detail in costume or dialogue, all work together to rewrite the narrative. For young creatives like me, this moment is a call to action. To tell stories with honesty. To celebrate the resilience, the love, the complexities of African women. To use film not only to entertain, but to heal. Because I have seen it firsthand—storytelling can mend wounds, spark understanding, and remind people of their worth. As I walk this filmmaking journey, I carry hope. That through art, we can return dignity to our communities. That no story is left unheard. That no woman's voice is silenced. That our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters are no longer sidelined, but stand proudly at the centre. This is our time to reclaim the frame and to tell our stories, in our words. To honour our grandmothers' wisdom. And to heal, together, through the power of film. ✦



About the author

Thabang Makgakwe is a dynamic, all-round artist, creative director, actor, visual artist, filmmaker, writer, poet, innovator, and cultural activist from South Africa. He is a creative, inspiring leader, passionate about storytelling, youth empowerment, the arts, and the environment. Thabang holds a qualification in Television and Film from the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA) and is an ACT and Global Citizen alumnus. He is the founder of Peu Creatives, a multidisciplinary platform and film production company that blends visual arts, filmmaking, writing, leadership, and advocacy to inspire and uplift communities through authentic African narratives. He is also a Greenpeace Africa volunteer and Bevisoneers Fellow.



THE POETICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE: WHY WOMEN-DIRECTED FILMS MATTER MORE THAN EVER

Natalie Kerman

As someone who works in a deeply personal and intuitive way, I have always been drawn to films that reflect emotional honesty and poetic realism. These are the kinds of films that do not rely on spectacle or shock to tell a story—instead, they invite the viewer into quiet, internal worlds that unfold slowly but leave a lasting impact. This is why the work of women directors such as Isabel Coixet, Ann Hui, and Nadine Labaki resonates strongly with me. Their films speak not only to the universal human experience, but also to the often-overlooked nuances of female emotion, resilience, and perspective.

I believe there is something uniquely powerful about the way these women approach storytelling. In their hands, ordinary moments become emotionally charged—a glance, a hesitation, or a walk down the street can communicate volumes.

Isabel Coixet, for instance, masterfully captures intimate psychological landscapes in films like *The Secret Life of Words* and *My Life Without Me*. Her characters are often soft-spoken and reserved, yet they carry profound emotional depth. The camera lingers, allowing us to inhabit their silences and internal struggles.

It is a style that might feel minimal on the surface, but it pulses with raw humanity. Similarly, Ann Hui's work explores everyday life in ways that feel both grounded and transcendent. In films like *A Simple Life*, she meditates on themes like aging, care, and dignity with a gentle realism that is rarely seen in mainstream cinema. Her narratives are not about dramatic twists but about subtle transformations—the way love and loss shape a person over time. As a viewer, you do not simply watch her films; you live alongside her characters, absorbing the weight and warmth of their experiences. Nadine Labaki brings a different but equally compelling sensibility to her films. With *Caramel* and *Capernaum*, she tells stories rooted in Lebanese society while capturing emotions that transcend geography. Her use of non-professional actors, natural lighting, and improvisation creates a visceral connection between the audience and the screen. Her characters are never reduced to stereotypes—instead, they are complex, messy, and deeply human. Labaki's films challenge social norms while holding space for tenderness and vulnerability, particularly in the lives of women and children.



What connects these filmmakers, beyond their gender, is a shared ability to make the ordinary feel profound. Their work does not beg for attention—it earns it through authenticity and emotional resonance. They understand that the smallest moments can be the most revealing, and that storytelling does not have to be loud to be powerful. This quiet confidence is, to me, a distinctly feminine strength—one that defies the often aggressive and fast-paced rhythms of conventional cinema.

As a woman working in the creative industry, I cannot ignore how difficult it is to navigate a space that has long been dominated by male voices and perspectives. There is pressure to conform to certain formulas, to produce work that is easily marketable rather than emotionally authentic. when you work in an unconventional

or instinctive way, it can feel like you are constantly pushing against the grain. That is why the success and brilliance of these women directors mean so much. They prove that there is room—and a need—for different kinds of storytelling. They validate the power of emotion, subtlety, and feminine insight in a world that often undervalues those qualities.

Their films have helped shape not just how I see cinema, but also how I see myself as a creator. Watching their work reminds me that you do not have to sacrifice depth for accessibility, or truth for aesthetics. You can tell stories that are raw, beautiful, difficult, and personal—and those stories will find their audience. You can be quiet and still be heard. There is also something healing about their approach. Whether it is Coixet's introspective heroines, Hui's portraits of intergenerational care,

or Labaki's fierce compassion for the marginalised, these women direct with empathy. They offer emotional space—something rare and necessary—for both the characters and the audience. In a world that often rushes past complexity in favour of simplicity, their films ask us to slow down, to feel, and to reflect.

In writing about these directors, I hope to not only highlight their artistic contributions but also emphasise the importance of preserving and promoting female voices in cinema. Their work is not just artful—it is essential. It creates space for vulnerability, for emotional truth, and for perspectives that too often go unheard. And in doing so, it redefines what cinema can be. Their influence continues to inspire me as I navigate my own path in the creative field. It is a reminder that storytelling is as much about presence as it is about plot—and that the most powerful stories are often those that trust the audience to listen with their hearts. ✦

About the author

Natalie Kerman is an Iranian-born filmmaker and screenwriter based in Spain. After beginning her creative journey in Madrid with her debut short film in 2010, she has gone on to write and direct a range of short films, video art pieces, and screenplays for both film and television. Her work has been recognised at numerous international festivals, reflecting her distinctive, emotionally-driven approach to storytelling. Deeply inspired by Persian poets such as Rumi and Omar Khayyam, her films often explore spiritual and poetic themes woven through everyday life.

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Art At The Boundaries

Fashion| War |Cities

Daughters Of The Earth

Eva Maria Horstick

Photo series By

Anja Bohnhof

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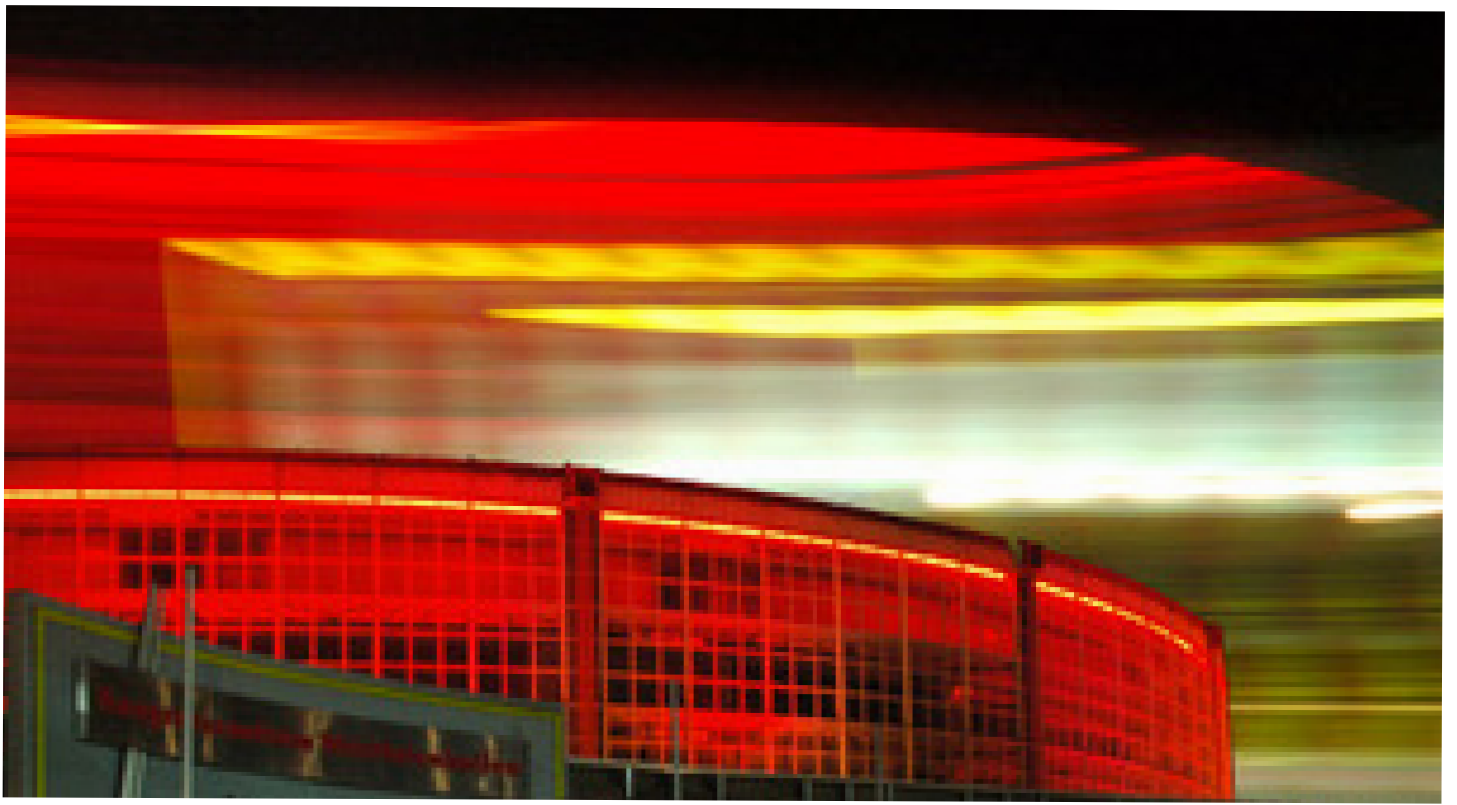


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Eva María Horstick

ART AT THE BOUNDARIES: FASHION| WAR |CITIES DAUGHTERS OF THE EARTH

Fashion and humanity, war and dignity, documented reality and poetic transformation: Eva María Horstick unites apparent opposites in an artistic practice that knows no blind spots. She is a border-crosser; going between surfaces and depths, between image and experience, between light and darkness. Her life has led her through different worlds, from the lights of fashion to the front lines of the Balkan war, from urban nights to emotional landscapes that no camera can fully capture. All of this becomes visible in her work, quiet, intense, and unmistakable.

War witnessed, not imagined

Eva María does not speak about war from a distance; she has seen it. In Kosovo, she was not just a witness, but part of a reality where humanity was tested. Amid destroyed cities and traumatised people, she began her first documentary work against human trafficking portraying images, interviews, and footage that refuses to be forgotten. She documented issues that must not fade from memory: violence, exploitation, and loss of human dignity.

These experiences are not a footnote; they are central to her artistic approach. Her art asks: how do we preserve human dignity in a system that strips it away? How do we speak about pain without betraying it? Her answer: by showing the invisible, by listening, by telling stories, with empathy, not spectacle.

Fashion as code, not escape

Eva María is familiar with the fashion world. She has worked within it and staged it; she has also deconstructed it. In her projects, fashion does not stand for consumption or beauty for its own sake, but for a surface that speaks of something deeper. In her series like *Daughters of the Earth*, models and non-models meet as equals. It is about presence, humanity, and making diversity visible and not about body norms or aesthetic standards. *Daughters of the Earth* is a project that brings together women from different realities not to highlight their differences, but to reveal their connections. It is a counter-narrative to the traditional fashion ideal: women carrying stories in their gaze, in their posture, in their scars. Each image becomes a quiet act of dignity.

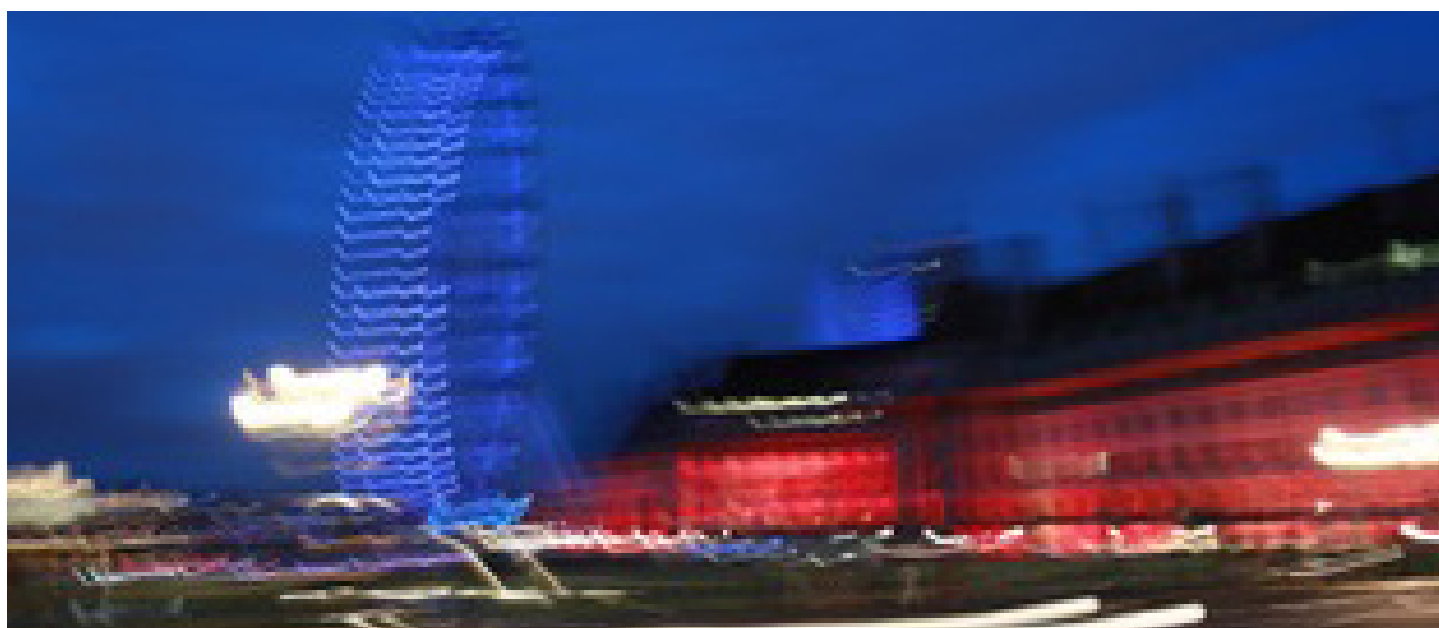


Nocturnal cities: when places lose their face

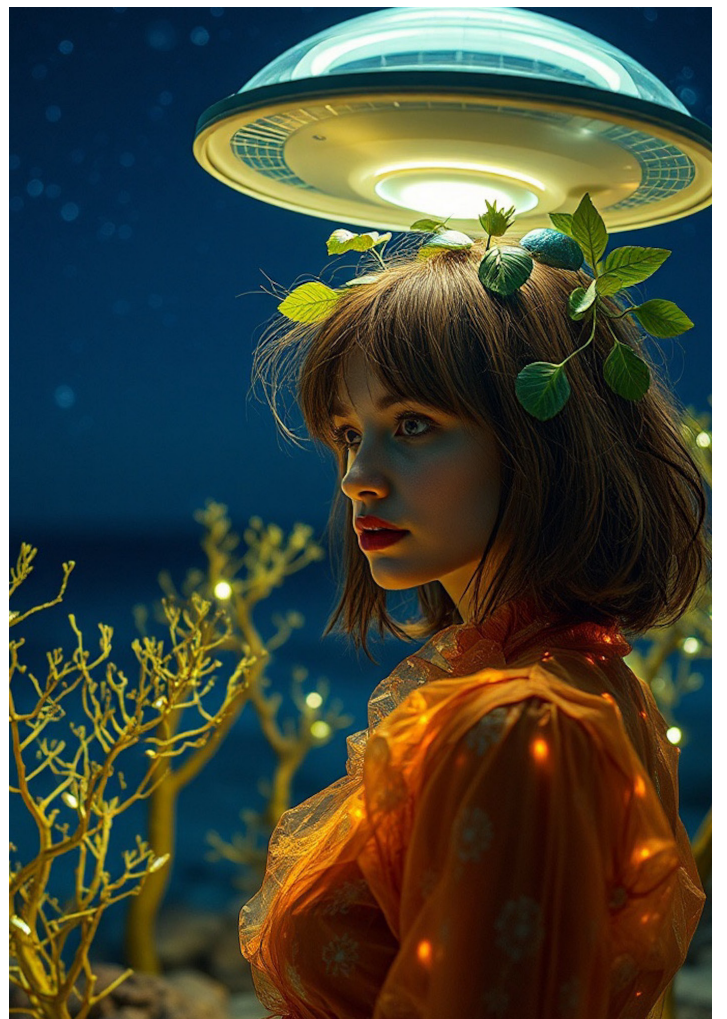
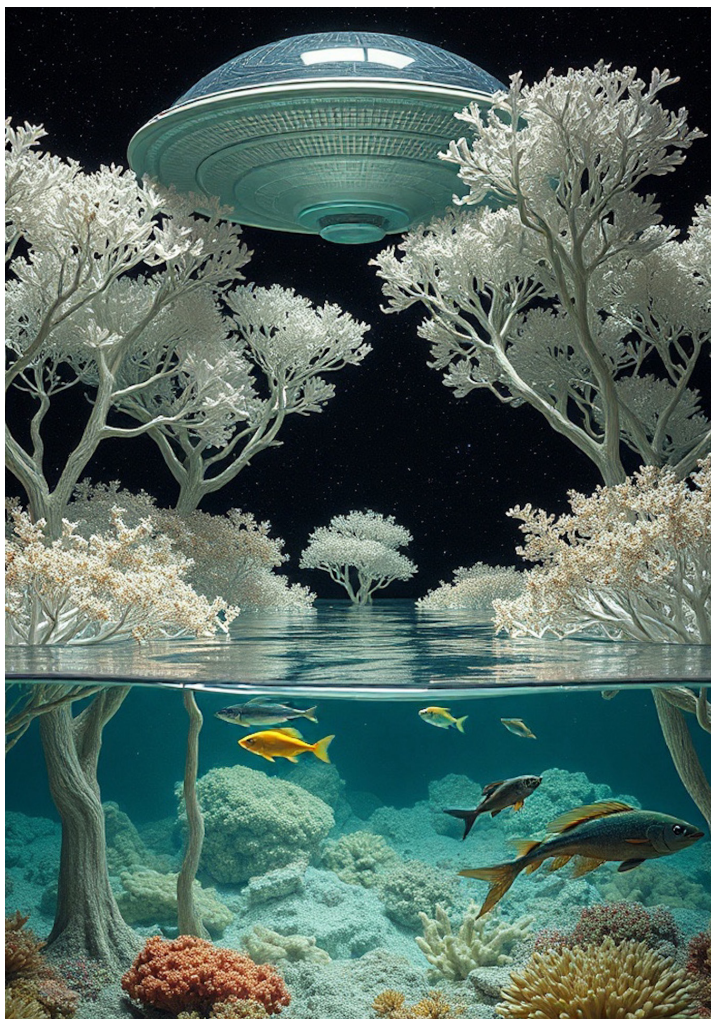
Another central element of Eva María's work is her photography of nocturnal urban landscapes—not blurred images of women, as is sometimes mistakenly assumed—but cities that have lost their face. In darkness, they lose structure, orientation, definition. Clear lines dissolve, light points flicker, facades blur. What remains is atmosphere; a sense of isolation, restlessness, or silence imprinted on the urban space. These works are neither strictly documentary nor surreal, they occupy an in-between space, like much of her work. Here, too, they become 'landscapes of the soul' not of individuals, but of collective states. The disappearing city stands for a world in which identity dissolves and meaning becomes fragile.

Documentation, deconstruction, dignity

The contrasts that Eva María explores are not artificially constructed; they arise from her own life. The contrast between war and fashion is not an aesthetic device, but a biographical truth. Between documentary work against exploitation and aesthetic explorations of identity lies no rupture, but a connecting line, an ethical thread, that runs through her entire practice. Across all her projects, one theme remains central: dignity. Whether in the portrayal of women, the documentation of violence, or the visual treatment of cityscapes, Eva María is always searching for what remains when everything else is stripped away. Her art is not a place of spectacle, but that of reflection, of questions, of humanity.









Art as stance, not decoration

In a time when art is often reduced to likes, trends, or market value, Eva María represents a different stance, that of art as a position. Her work demands attentive seeing, pausing, empathy. She asks questions where others offer answers. She reveals where others distract. Her images are uncomfortable and deeply inviting, because they do not dictate, but open up space for thought.

Working with AI

Since 2021, Eva María has been exploring the intersection of art and artificial intelligence. She works exclusively with her own photographic archive—some images dating back decades—and combines them with poetic language. For her, AI is a tool of transformation, not replacement. It is not about technology, but about artistic freedom; about taking new paths, regardless of age; about allowing visions that are often ahead of their time. Eva María Horstick is not an artist of one discipline, but a creator of experiential spaces. Her works speak in many languages — social, aesthetic, political, poetic. And they all say: it is worth seeing. ✦



Eva María Horstick is a renowned German photographic artist based in Dortmund, known for her work across photography, sculpture, AI art, NFTs, installations, and performance. Her art explores documentary and socially critical themes: peace, feminism, tolerance, and war-rooted in her early career in choreography and modeling



PHOTO SERIES BY ANJA BOHNHOF

The works shown here are excerpts from the ‘Typosphere’ series, which I created in Kolkata in 2023, as well as selected pieces from my project ‘Krishak’, which features portraits of small-scale farmers during the rice harvest in West Bengal.

My ‘Typosphere’ project focuses, among other things, on the so-called pavement typists in front of the High Court in Kolkata, who have often spent their entire working lives on the sidewalks outside the courthouse. An era is coming to an end. Most of these men are already of retirement age. Their typewriters—often American-made Remingtons—have accompanied them for thirty to forty years. Lived history and countless written stories are bound to this faithful and reliable companion, which has aged just as much as the low work tables where the daily borrowed machine from a nearby depot finds its place.

The ‘Tables’ series, part of ‘Typosphere’, presents photographs of the work tables, typewriters, tools of the trade, and some personal belongings of the typists.

For the shots, tables and machines were temporarily brought into a rented space near the High Court and photographed under professional studio conditions.

The ‘Krishak’ portrait series addresses the lives of small-scale farmers. Worldwide, millions of farmers produce the majority of all food on very small plots of land. This stands in contrast to the parallel rise of increasingly large-scale, resource- and energy-intensive agricultural practices, promoted globally by open markets and subsidies.

In West Bengal, rice is still often harvested manually. At first glance, little of India’s rapid economic transformation is visible here. With visual intensity, the images reflect the harshness of rural life particularly for women capturing a way of life that appears frozen in time, yet raises globally relevant questions:

What could sustainable agriculture look like in the face of ecological and social challenges?







Anja Bohnhof resides and works in The Hague, Netherlands, and Dortmund, DE, Germany. She pursued studies in Visual Communication and Fine Arts at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, following her training in photography. Since 2004, she has worked as a visual artist. Between 2006 and 2014, Bohnhof held a position as a lecturer in Photography & Editorial Practice at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne. Her work has been exhibited and published internationally, garnering numerous accolades, scholarships, and awards. Her pieces are housed in prestigious collections, including the Collection of Contemporary Art of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Art Collection of the German Bundestag. After a decade dedicated to exploring themes related to recent German history, Bohnhof turned her focus to India in 2009, producing several book and exhibition projects. Notably, her long-term project *Tracking Gandhi* (completed in 2019) traces the significant locations in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. This work has

been also exhibited at the National Gandhi Museum in New Delhi and the Satya Art Gallery in Ahmedabad. In recognition of her exceptional contributions to German-Indian cultural relations, Bohnhof was awarded the Gisela Bonn Prize in 2015 by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), New Delhi, and the Deutsch-Indischen Gesellschaft (DIG).



Fashion

Wear your story — not as a trend, but as threads of wearable art. Here, fashion meets art to create pieces that speak, move, and inspire.

What the Valley remembers
Amruthalakshmi Rajagopalan
Siddi kavand sewing tradition into contemporary textile art
through collaborative effort
Anitha N Reddy





WHAT THE VALLEY REMEMBERS

Amruthalakshmi Rajagopalan

Tsugden carpets once warmed every household in Lahaul. This winter, they returned to the loom with new purpose.

Winter settles heavy over the Lahaul Valley in Himachal Pradesh, India. Snow buries the fields, roads vanish beneath drifts, and the long months pass in a muffled stillness. In that stillness, people once turned to wool. Hands spun fleece by the hearth, looms clattered softly in corner rooms, and carpets known as Tsugden took shape knot by knot. Thick, warm, and made to last, they carried both function and memory.

For families in Lahaul, a Tsugden was never just a carpet. It was the heart of the household spread out in their living and dining space, around a tandoor, woven in the months when fields lay silent. Each piece carried the work of shepherds, spinners, and weavers, all bound together in a cycle that once defined the season. Over time, the rhythm faltered. Tsugden, once common to every home, was replaced by rugs hauled up from the plains. Skills frayed, being passed on less and less. The valley remembered Tsugden, but only faintly.

This past winter, the craft of Tsugden weaving found its way back to practice. Through The Wool Knitters, a social enterprise working with Himalayan textiles, and

with the support of the Himalayan Knot program by Eicher Group Foundation, we began a pilot in Jispa, a small village in the Lahaul Valley. Eight women gathered in the community hall to learn the Tibetan knotting technique that defines the Tsugden. Some carried fragments of memory, others began with fresh hands.

To teach design, we improvised. Our field designer guided the women in person through knotting and trimming, while I joined from Bangalore, my voice projected onto a flickering screen. Power cuts were frequent, and the internet often froze mid-sentence.

Yet lessons carried through. Colour theory, graph reading, and simple pattern drafting entered the room. By the end of winter, Jispa had its first new carpets: modest, but steady in their lines and confident in colour.

From there, the program crossed the valley to Goshal, an hour away. The introduction came through Sunitaji, one of Jispa's first trainees, who carried finished carpets door to door and explained the process. Thirteen women joined without hesitation. The Goshal training was different.







We had only a month before farming season returned, so the approach was compressed and direct. This time, the work also used wool from within the valley itself, fleece from the local shepherds, spun on the peti charkha by familiar hands. The circle closed neatly, every step contained in the same landscape. Elsewhere this might be called a model of sustainability. In Goshal, it was simply practice. By the time the snow melted, rugs were stacked in neat piles, their patterns trimmed close. The looms folded away as seeds went into the ground. Yet something had shifted; five women kept weaving alongside their farming and more joined soon after. What comes next is harder. These carpets must find their way into homes and gallery spaces. They need to be seen, touched, and valued for the work they hold. That will take time, the right allies, and patience. Villages at this altitude do not offer easy routes to

markets, and craft is too often celebrated in words but in reality, paid poorly. Even so, the rhythm is back. Tsugden is not just memory; it is being made again, one rug at a time. When I think back on this winter, I see women at the looms. Quick hands, quiet voices, wool pulled tight into rows. Revival is not a grand comeback. It is a grind, knot after knot, day after day; one Tsugden at a time, built with patience and grit. The looms are quiet now, folded away until the snow returns. The knots remain, carrying their stories outward. ♦

About the author

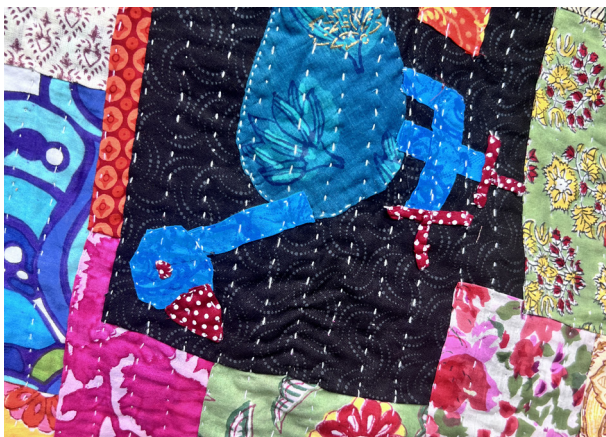
Amruthalakshmi Rajagopalan is a Bangalore based textile designer trained at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. She works with brands and craft communities to create contemporary home textiles rooted in traditional making practices.



SIDDI KAVAND : SEWING TRADITION INTO CONTEMPORARY TEXTILE ART THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Anitha N Reddy

In a sunlit courtyard in rural Karnataka, a burst of colour spills across the earth—crimson silks, soft cottons, and worn fragments of sarees—each carrying the scent of another life. Around them, women from the Siddi community sit cross-legged, their hands moving with practiced rhythm, stitching memory, migration, and meaning into a kavand (a multi-coloured patchworked quilt). Once a humble household tradition, it now emerges through our collaborative process as a living work of contemporary art. As a textile artist and cultural historian, I bring fabrics gathered from across the world into their hands, and together we create something that is both archive and art; a story stitched in cloth.





Preservation to innovation

The Siddi kavand is not decorative for decoration's sake. My role has been to help bridge the space between this deeply rooted practice and the language of contemporary art

An archive sewn in cloth

The kavand has been part of the Siddi community's cultural fabric for generations. Made from remnants of household garments—a mother's saree, a child's shirt, a blouse worn for special occasions—these quilts are more than practical coverings. They are tactile records of family history, visual diaries of a life lived in colour and pattern. In the collaborative Siddi kavand, each stitch holds a fragment of story. Women often work from their homes, though at times they gather in small groups, exchanging conversation and laughter as they join fabrics into intricate patchworks.

The process is as social as it is creative, a shared act of care that strengthens community ties while producing something both functional and beautiful. My engagement with this tradition

began not as an outsider looking in, but as a collaborator seeking to honour and extend it. Through conversation and collective creation, I began to understand the Kavand not only as an object but as an archive, one that records resilience, migration, and adaptation.

A global fabric, a local hand

To include this tradition in the realm of contemporary art, I began sourcing fabrics both globally and nationally, from upcycle markets, tailor boutiques, and generous donations. The cloth that reaches the Siddi makers carries with it a wide geography: South Asian cotton, African weaves, and European prints. All are natural materials, chosen to maintain the tactile honesty of the refurbished tradition while introducing new textures, patterns, and possibilities.

When these global fabrics meet the Siddi women's skilled hands, the results are extraordinary.

Local knowledge of stitching techniques merge with unfamiliar materials, producing quilts that are at once rooted and experimental. Each quilt becomes a meeting point between worlds, a textile conversation in which each piece of fabric has its own journey to tell. The power of making together While many women create kavand from home, there is a special energy when small groups gather to work collectively. Fabrics are spread out on the floor, patterns are debated, colours are chosen, and personal histories emerge in the telling. These gatherings are a form of social exchange, where skills are passed between generations and stories become part of the creative process.

The act of making together blurs the line between tradition and innovation. In my role as a community art practitioner, I see this collaborative process as the work's beating heart. It is not simply about making a product; it is about building relationships and creating shared ownership of an art form that has historically been overlooked.

From preservation to innovation

Preservation is central to this work, but so is transformation. By introducing fabrics from beyond the community, we open the door to reimagining the kavand as more than a functional household item. In this extended vision, it can become an installation piece, an exhibition centrepiece, or a conceptual artwork. It can speak to issues of migration, environmental sustainability, and cultural exchange. Placing kavands in galleries and contemporary art spaces invites audiences to see them not as craft confined to the domestic sphere, but as part of a global artistic conversation. This shift challenges long-held distinctions between art and craft, and between the visible and invisible labour of women. It affirms that textile traditions—especially those carried by marginalised communities—deserve to be valued as art in their own right.



*Women seated with fabrics around them
Hands in conversation with cloth — where memory is measured in stitches, and time is marked by colour. Sewing kavands with bundles of fabric gathered from across the globe and India.*



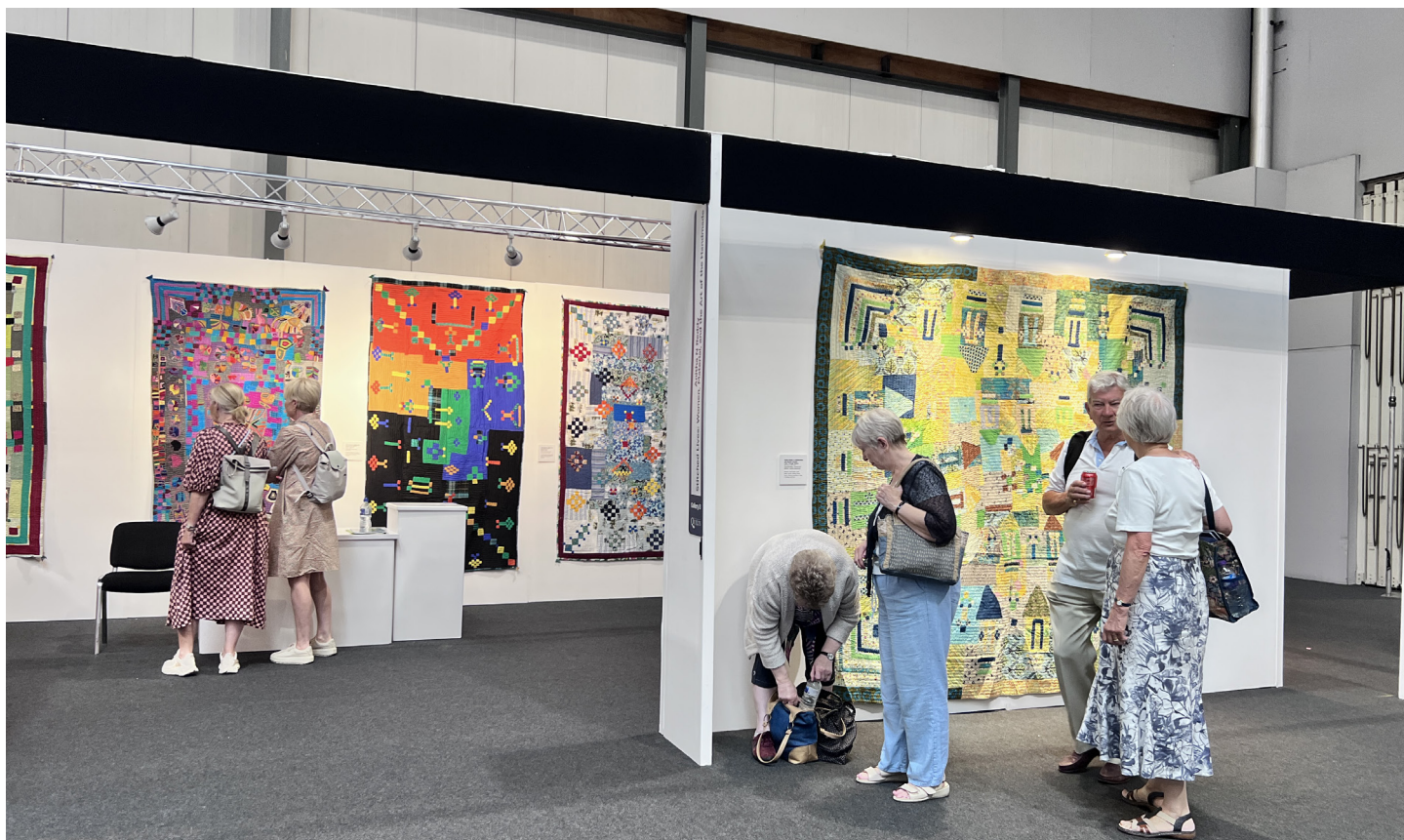
Quilt draped in outdoor sunlight

The wind moves through the fabric as if to carry its stories further. From village courtyards to global museums, the kavand travels with me — a stitched language I share in workshops across continents, teaching its rhythmic art to students, makers, and dreamers, each adding their own voice to the quilt's evolving story.



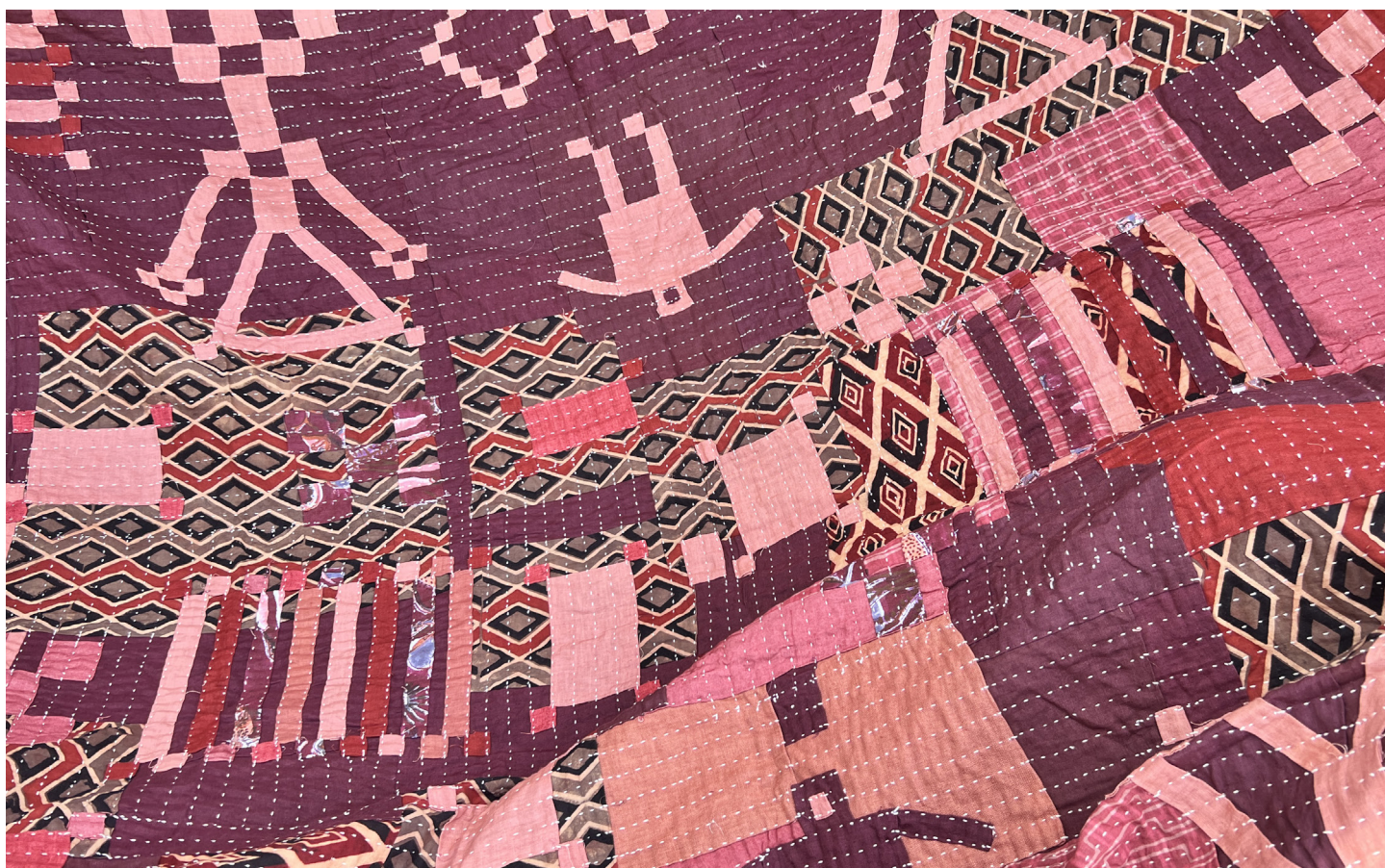
Closing threads

In the end, the Siddi kavand is not just something you can wrap around yourself on a cool night. It is something you can wrap your mind and heart around; a story told in fabric, a tradition reimagined, a testament to what happens when makers' hands reach across worlds to create something entirely new.



A quilt of many journeys

The fabrics travel farther than most people ever will. From the patterned looms of distant lands to the intimate spaces of Siddi homes, they carry the memory of other hands, other lives.



Close-up of patchwork quilt

Every square a page; every seam a sentence in a story only fabric can tell. A swatch of indigo-dyed cotton might sit beside a fragment of bright African wax print; their conversation stitched together in running seams



From homes to gatherings
The work begins at home, in quiet moments between cooking and caring for children. Yet often, the women gather in small groups, spreading the cloth across the ground like a shared canvas.



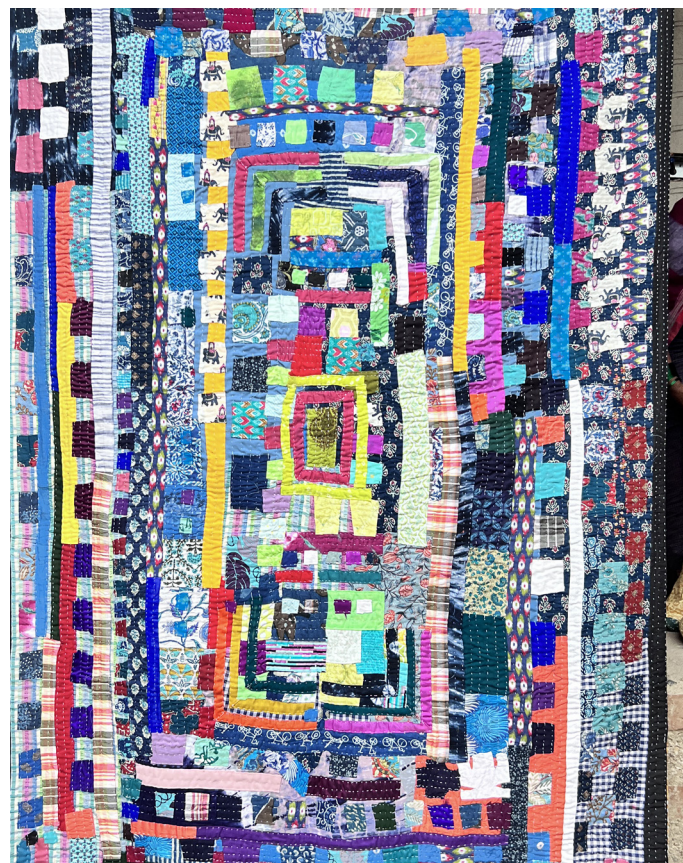
Women laughing while working together
Laughter stitched into every fold; joy travelling along each thread.

Expanding horizons

For both myself and the Siddi craftswomen, the impact extends far beyond the final quilt. Access to new materials, exhibition opportunities, and collaborative projects open doors previously unreachable. For many, it is the first time their work has been displayed in a public or professional art setting. These moments of visibility matter. They invite recognition of the skill, creativity, and cultural significance of the kavand. They also create space for dialogue between the makers and audiences, between tradition and innovation, and between local and global narratives. The kavand, in this context, becomes a living conversation that redefines how community-based traditions can exist within contemporary art spaces. For me, the collaborative process is inseparable from the finished work. It is in the shared decision-making, the exchange of fabrics, and the collective problem-solving that the art truly happens.

The collaborative process as art

My role is not to impose an aesthetic but to create conditions in which the makers' voices are central. This involves finding and curating fabrics that will inspire, challenge, and expand the possibilities of the kavand. It means facilitating workshops, coordinating group making sessions, and ensuring that each participant has access to materials they might never have encountered before. I also work to connect the Siddi makers with wider artistic networks, collaborating on installation projects where the quilts are presented alongside soundscapes, photography, or oral histories. In these contexts, the kavand becomes part of a multi-layered artwork, telling stories of place, identity, and resilience. This process is about more than aesthetics; it is about agency. It is about who gets to tell the story, and how that story is seen, heard, and valued. Each kavand is a celebration of resourcefulness, cultural memory, and artistic imagination. It honours the domestic labour from which it emerged, while stepping confidently into the realm of contemporary art. ✨



*Quilt as an art installation
From bed to wall — a journey from utility to the
gaze of the gallery*



About the Author

Anitha N. Reddy is a textile art practitioner, art and cultural historian, and community collaborator. Her work with the Siddi community in Karnataka transforms the traditional kavand into contemporary art. By sourcing fabrics globally and nationally, and facilitating participatory processes, she creates collaborative artworks that merge heritage with innovation. Her projects explore identity, memory, and shared creativity, situating community traditions within the global art landscape.

Soulful Spaces

Soulful Spaces celebrates architecture rooted in art, earth, and emotion. From temples to offices, every space holds the power to inspire and heal. It's not just design—it's the art of living with intention.



Where the sky meets the heart the story of SMAA Design

Dr. Muhra Al Mohair



WHERE THE SKY MEETS THE HEART THE STORY OF SMAA DESIGN

Dr Muhra Al Muhairi



When you step into the world of SMAA Design, you are stepping into a space where modern artistry meets the timeless poetry of impressionism. Every brushstroke, every colour choice, every carefully crafted design element is infused with meaning, emotion, and a deep sense of connection to our roots and our vision for the future. SMAA Design is more than a design company; it is a living expression of creativity, cultural storytelling, and personal inspiration. The name itself holds layers of meaning: Smaa means sky in Arabic, a nod to infinite possibility, boundless imagination, and the freedom to dream

without limits. But there is also a more personal, grounding layer: SMAA is made from the first letters of my four daughters' names—Shamma, Meera, Aisha, and Al-yazia—they are my inspiration on earth, and the sky is my inspiration above. Together, they remind me every day that creativity must come from both love and vision. **A blend of modern and impressionist worlds**

SMAA Design occupies a unique place in the design landscape, merging the clean lines and bold concepts of modern art with the emotional richness and textured beauty of im-

pressionism. This is not a forced fusion but an organic evolution of my artistic journey. My work, whether it is a large-scale mixed-media painting or a refined digital branding concept, carries the signature balance of energy and calm.

The impressionist influence appears in the soft layering of colors, light, and texture, while my modern sensibility emerges in bold compositions and innovative use of materials.

This balance is present across the five main categories offered by SMAA Design:

- Art. Original mixed-media paintings that tell stories through colour and texture, often inspired by the UAE's landscapes, traditions, and contemporary spirit.

- Décor. Artistic upgrades to interiors, from statement wall art to mindful design and organisational touches that elevate a space.

- Fashion. Unique patterns and wearable art that bring design into daily life.

- Art workshops. Group and individual workshops that explore creativity, self-expression, and skill-building.

- Media. Digital design, branding, and social media elements that give businesses and creators a visual voice

The creative philosophy

What makes SMAA Design stand out is not just the variety of its offerings but the guiding philosophy behind them. For me, art and design are not separate from life, they are ways of living it fully. I believe design should touch the heart before it pleases the eye. People do

not just want to look at something beautiful; they want to feel something real. My approach starts with storytelling. Every project—whether a portrait commission, a fashion print, or a corporate brand identity—begins with a deep dive into the story behind it. This ensures that the final work is not just aesthetically pleasing, but also deeply personal and resonant

Featured works: stories on canvas

Some of SMAA Design's most celebrated paintings capture the intersection of tradition and modernity in the UAE:

- Shades of Blue.

A series of flower paintings awash in tranquil blues, evoking the calm and clarity of open skies.

- Yen and Yan.

An abstract portrayal of male and female figures walking side by side, a visual metaphor for harmony in differences.

- Marching Pride

A striking depiction of Emirati

figures walking forward with dignity and determination.

- Sunset by the Harbor. Boats basking in the last light of the day, where the golden sun meets rippling water.

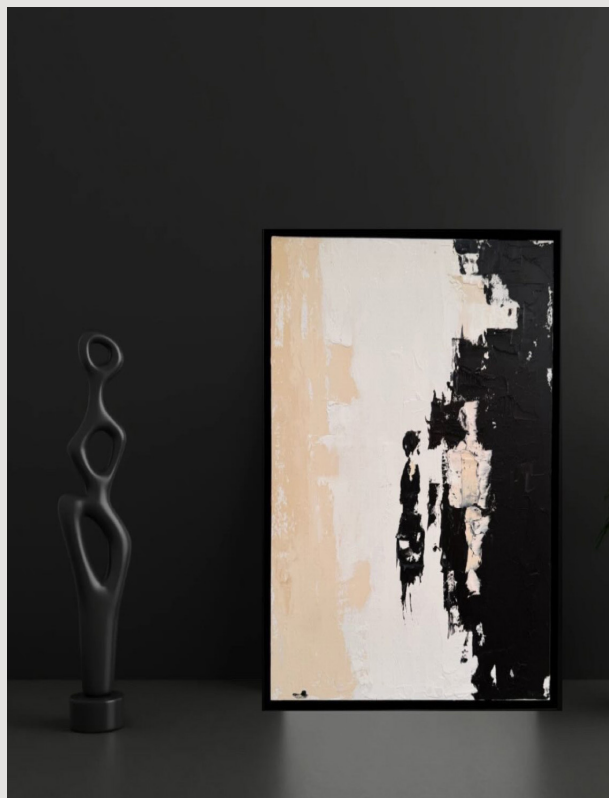
- Love the Beach Twice. Two companion paintings that capture the sensory joy of shoreline moments.

Each of these works is a reminder that art can be a mirror to culture, emotion, and human experience.

Customisation: making art personal

The hallmark of SMAA Design is its embrace of customisation. In art, this might mean creating a bespoke portrait that captures a family's history or a scene that holds personal significance.

In fashion, it could be a custom digital pattern that turns into a one-of-a-kind garment. Even in media and branding, the design process is highly collaborative, ensuring that the final outcome reflects the client's authentic identity.



To me, customisation is not just about putting your name on something. It is about making the work part of your story: something you can see yourself in, something that belongs to you in a way no one else can claim.

From canvas to community

While SMAA Design's work is intensely personal, it is also deeply connected to community. Art workshops create spaces where people can discover the joy and therapeutic power of creativity. These workshops are not restricted to traditional art lessons; they explore themes like leadership, values, mindfulness, and personal branding, often blending reflective exercises with artistic activities.

When people create, they open a door to themselves. My workshops are about helping them walk through that door with confidence and curiosity. The mindful design projects also reflect this community focus. These include artistic interior touches that promote calm, focus, and well-being, proving that design can be as functional as it is beautiful.

Media and modern storytelling

In an age where visual storytelling defines brand identity, SMAA Design's media services bring the same artistic touch to the digital world. From logo design to full social media branding, the company ensures that every element is infused with creativity and intention. For instance, I look at a logo not just as a mark; I look at it as the beginning of a conversation with the audience.

Looking ahead

SMAA Design continues to evolve, with upcoming projects that span from international exhibitions to new fashion collaborations. Yet, the heart of the brand remains the same; grounded in love, inspired by the sky, and committed to creating beauty with meaning. Art is my language, and design is my way of speaking it to the world. Whether you encounter one of our designs through a painting in a gallery, a fashion piece on the street, or a digital logo on your screen, the message is clear: creativity is boundless, and the most powerful designs are the ones that meet you where the sky meets the heart. ✦



About the Author

Founder and CEO of SMAA Design, Dr. Muhra Al Muhairi is a distinguished Emirati leader. She has a Doctorate in Business Administration, has three master's degrees to her credit, and is a graduate from Harvard University, where she is currently a research fellow. Earlier, Dr. Muhra served as a faculty member, advisor, and Chair of the Business Department at the Higher Colleges of Technology. Dr. Muhra is an entrepreneur, and creative visionary whose work bridges art, education, research, and leadership. Her two initiatives, SMAA Design and The Art of Being Academy, reflect her passion for empowering individuals and organisations through creativity, knowledge, and self-leadership. Her story is a testament to resilience, vision, and authenticity.

Poetry & Literature

A vertical composition featuring a quill pen in a glass inkwell, a fountain pen, and a manuscript. The background is a teal-to-dark-blue gradient with a grid pattern.

Poetry and literature hold the pulse of language, where silence speaks and words find rhythm beyond reason. They carry the weight of time, capturing fleeting moments, untold truths, and the depths of human experience.

**Telling stories through words, images,
or the quiet spaces in between**
Pankhuri Bansal

A close-up photograph of dried, pressed pink flowers and leaves, showing their delicate texture and vibrant color. The flowers are arranged in a cluster, with some stems and green leaves visible.

TELLING STORIES THROUGH WORDS, IMAGES, OR THE QUIET SPACES IN BETWEEN

Pankhuri Bansal

Absent Presence

No head to think;
no hands to hold, my story here
remains untold.
I used to be a whole,
now parts of me are gone,
each leaving a crack of memory,
a line of agony.
Within this vessel of
remembrance,
lies the impermanence of
existence. In the heart of stone,
the emotions still evoke.



Memories: An Escape Route

Sitting alone; reading 'bout
love,
I suddenly remembered you,
The night, switching of apps,
12:00 moment;
the smile and shyness on
my face, I suddenly
remembered
everything. The soreness in the
wake of remembering you,
and the smile straight from
my heart, bewildered me,
if I still love you?
Or If it is your bereft that
makes me smile.
They ask me about you;
to tell them the reason for this
grin, but what if, they took hold
of this again?
Deferring the conversation,
I apprise 'em muttering,
"Nothing, it's just my
escapism, I 'm thinking 'bout".





This art work embodies the tension between confinement and escape, serving as a visual metaphor for the silent struggles imposed by both society and the self. In this piece, human features—eyes, nose, lips, eyebrows—create a presence that feels real, yet fragmented. They belong to a person, but they do not form a complete face. Instead, they exist in pieces, mirroring the complexity of identity and emotion.

The thread winds through the composition, carrying the weight of taunts and blame, voices that linger long after they've been spoken. It restricts movement, weaving itself into the struggle. But beneath it all, a hand reaches, pushing against the forces that threaten to hold it at will. The

crumpled sheet beneath these elements is not just a background—it is a map of lived experience. Each crease, each fold, holds the imprint of struggle, imbalance does not move in a straight line, and this surface reflects the turbulence of existing within uncertainty.

Perhaps the most powerful confinement is the one that exists within the mind. To feel trapped in one's own thoughts is to move endlessly without finding an exit. There is an ache in wanting to break free but not knowing how. And yet, amid all this, there is resilience. The hand beneath the thread is not passive; it is reaching. It is proof that even within restriction, there is the possibility of escape.



Pankhuri Bansal is an art practitioner passionate about story telling—"whether through words, images, or the quiet spaces in between". Pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Chandigarh University, she has built a strong foundation in painting and contemporary art practices while continually exploring "the tension between presence and absence—forgotten objects, fading memories, and unspoken emotions". Her work is a conversation between what is seen and what is felt, weaving together paintings, poetry, and prose, to evoke connection and contemplation. Through each piece, she strives to create a lasting impact, inviting others to pause, reflect, and immerse themselves in the fragile yet profound interplay of time, memory, and emotion

Inner muse

"A journey through art and spirit—unfolding how creativity connects us to our higher self and a more meaningful life."

On Self exploration through art with Beena Unnikrishnan

Harini Rajasekhar

Data, Emotion, And The Art Of Shared Presence

Beatrice Giordano

**Holy houses: art as bridge to the divine
Lauren**

**Expressing Transformation Through Art
Inger Smith**

Sacred resonance: rebirthing the body as a temple of sound

Priyanka Mohan and Siranjothi K



“Art is a tool I use to know myself “

ON SELF EXPLORATION THROUGH ART WITH BEENA UNNIKRISHNAN

Harini Rajasekhar

Through her Art exhibition Ekaa: The One, artist Beena Unnikrishnan explores divine femininity, self-discovery, and the inward journey of art. What started decades ago with an emotion, an idea, has grown into 64 paintings of Yoginis; a pilgrimage across India; a book; a documentary; and finally, the exhibition itself. For her, art is inseparable from life—it is meditation, exploration, and healing.

In your words, what is Ekaa: The One? And why did you choose this name?

I was looking for a name that defines my journey with the 64 Yoginis. I started this journey with 64 yoginis focusing on the feminine powers, but I realised that what truly matters is co-existence. We talk about the two sides of the coin, two perceptions. But at the end of the day, there is a oneness. Ekaa, the one, the only one. The journey is from duality to oneness. At the exhibition I felt very happy. When a lady from Egypt told me that my name “Beena” in her language means ‘united’ or ‘union’.

A seed of an idea that led to 64 paintings, that led to a pilgrimage across India’s temples, that led to a book and a documentary film about the journey, and finally culminating in Ekaa. If you were to trace it all the way back to the very beginning, almost a decade ago, before all this— is there a single moment, or a phase, where this journey began?

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment where the whole journey began. While shooting my documentary “Y64”, I had to dig through my old photographs where I found some from my first exhibition in 1998/99 in Shillong, Meghalaya. It was called ‘Me in Me, In search of Myself’. That is where my journey with art began; I think that I was in search of myself. It has evolved step by step at different stages. Even as a child I used to sketch more of portraits of women. With regards to the 64 Yoginis, it was an exploration of femininity. I do not know what led me to it, but it was an inward journey towards knowing myself.

3. In your book, you talk about how the experience of painting each new Yogini was different, and channelled a different energy. Do you have a story to share about a particular Yogini? Do you also have a favourite painting from all of your work, one that is closest to your heart?

Yes, each painting, each Yogini was different. Every Yogini had her own story. I like and I am attached to all of them, because each Yogini holds something I relate to. Of course, I should say, my favourite is Bala Tripura Sundari, since I have signed my paintings as Sree Bala. I feel I am most connected with Bala Tripura Sundari, for a few reasons. The innocence. Egoless, like a child. She is always ready to learn. I find these qualities reflecting in me. I am always ready to learn. I like to keep my heart empty, or my plate empty, or my canvas blank, ready for something new to be written, new values to be added. Bala is nothing but pure love, in a sense. She is the goddess I am attached to.

4. Tell us about your journey as an artist: you first began, as you write in your book, under the guidance of a mentor. Through your journey as an artist, what are the art styles you explored, and what made you choose this particular style for the Yoginis? Can you explain exactly what materials you used?

I used to do small sketches as a child, copying from magazines. But I was most drawn to sketching portrait faces and female figures. I used to explore my artistic

talents in my record books, being a science student. I had never thought that I would become an artist. Absolutely not. The talent was never important enough to nurture, and I did not go to art classes or learn drawing. When I got married, being an army officer's wife, I had a lot more time. We wanted to decorate the house, and I began painting. But I realised I needed a teacher. My neighbour, Mrs. Rajkumar, used to paint, having studied at the JJ School of Arts. I asked her if she could teach me. She said I could watch her paint. So, I did. She was very skilled with drawing the human figure. One day, she told me I can start painting. We went and bought all materials, and oil paints. She began painting roses, and taught me color mixing. We made the three roses, in oil.

When I told her I wanted to do portraits of human figures, she smiled and said, in her art college of three years courses, portraits of human figures are the last you learn to do. I was still determined to do it and I started on my own with oil paintings. They came out quite decent, and I was happy. I eventually changed to acrylic when I started to paint geometric figures.

My dream is to paint in water colour, because I like that texture, but I have never tried it. I feel Water colour artists are incredibly skilled. Acrylic, like oil, takes less time to paint with. However, it is more difficult to make corrections like how one can with oil. And so it needs focus. I am very fond of painting faces, as you can tell from my paintings. I spend a lot of time on it, and once I do the face, I feel the soul of the painting is reflected. Creative energy is a real force for me; exploring techniques, making mistakes, learning.



Mandala Workshop during EKAA-THE ONE Exhibition

As an artist, I try to explore the creative energy in any field; art is my form of meditation, of spirituality. Now, that I sit back and think, that creative force is what has helped me all my life. It has helped me to groom myself to be a good human being, and to be an artist I want to explore that space, connecting art and spirituality. There is so much that I do not know and I want to keep learning.

5. *Why do you paint?*

Why do I paint is a question equal to, why do you breathe?

6. *Now that Ekaa: The One is complete, and was a success, tell us how you are feeling about this endeavour.*

Ekaa: The One is not complete. This celebration of five days is just one step of a continuous journey. Like they say, 'kahaani abhi baaki hai!' ('There is more to this story!'). It is not over with this exhibition. I feel so blessed. Seeing people connect with my art gave me so much happiness. It felt so good to know that my art communicated with women, men, people of all ages. Everyone could connect with the goddesses. They connected to the self. And to me, that is enough of a testimonial to my work. It tells me that the path I have taken is right. And this is just a step in the right direction.



Interacting with college students of MOP Vaishnav ,Chennai



7. What is next? Have you planned your next collection of art work, or your next exhibition?

I am planning to take this exhibition to 16 states of India to start with. I really want to present the subject as a paper in universities. I want to reach out to more people. Right now, I want to convey about the power of the feminine energy and a magical power of co-existence to a wider audience. If you ask me what is next as an artist to paint, I do not have a plan for it right now. But yes, from form to formlessness, I will say that. My journey should be form to formlessness. That is what I want to explore. It is not a very defined path for me. I only want to paint forms if somebody wants a form on a request basis. But I really want to explore formlessness and the energies around. I want to present that as an artist. It is back to a blank canvas for me now.

8. What advice do you have for people who love art, want to get into painting and have a passion for it?

Believe in your passion, work towards the passion. Selflessly. It is important to reach the pinnacle where you feel truly connected with yourself. I know sometimes we may not be able to take on art as a profession. I travelled around the world, explored very different spaces, business and entrepreneurship. But here I am, back to art.

It pulled me back to it. Perhaps it is my inner fire. It makes me happy to paint. So, one should never leave their creative space, no matter what it is. Even if you are not able to make it your profession, you should take it along as a meditative tool to guide you. To stay connected with yourself. And to connect with the society. A real passion can never be greedy. A real passion will be more spiritual. For me spiritual is not being religious. For me spiritual is being yourself, being a good human being.



Your creative passion helps you be a good human being. So to whoever that needs to hear this, art should be taken with you as a creative force in your life, regardless of whether it becomes your profession or not. And for a person who loves art, or wants to have a piece of art: buy art for yourself. Keep a piece in your room. Choose a painting which speaks to you, which connects to you. You never know what it may heal. Art is healing. It can refresh your soul.



About the author

Harini Rajasekhar is a writer and filmmaker. She has a degree in Writing for Film, TV and Games from Vancouver Film School, Canada and has worked on production crews for regional Indian Star TV shows and as creative head of a Bangalore-based advertising company. Currently, she lives in Berlin, and is working on her first independent short film as director and script writer.





DATA, EMOTION, AND THE ART OF SHARED PRESENCE

“People often create relationships when they have a shared experience. Art brings people together to have a memorable experience.”

Beatrice Giordano

The Quantified Self as a canvas

There is something quietly powerful about seeing your heart beat reflected in a room full of strangers. It does not happen often. Most of the time, our biological rhythms live buried, beneath to-do lists, tension, silence. But every now and then, we step into a space that listens differently. A space that turns the intangible into something luminous, visible, and shared. That is what happened to me the first time I stood in front of a screen that pulsed in time with my breath. For a moment, it felt like the room was breathing with me.

Rituals of recognition: a foundation

One of the earliest and most iconic explorations of biometric art was *Pulse* by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, a trilogy of installations developed between 2006 and

2018, still exhibited today as a foundational work in this field. Inspired by the artist’s experience of watching his unborn children’s heartbeats, *Pulse Index*, *Pulse Room* and *Pulse Tank* transformed participants’ biosignals into light, water, and collective rhythm.

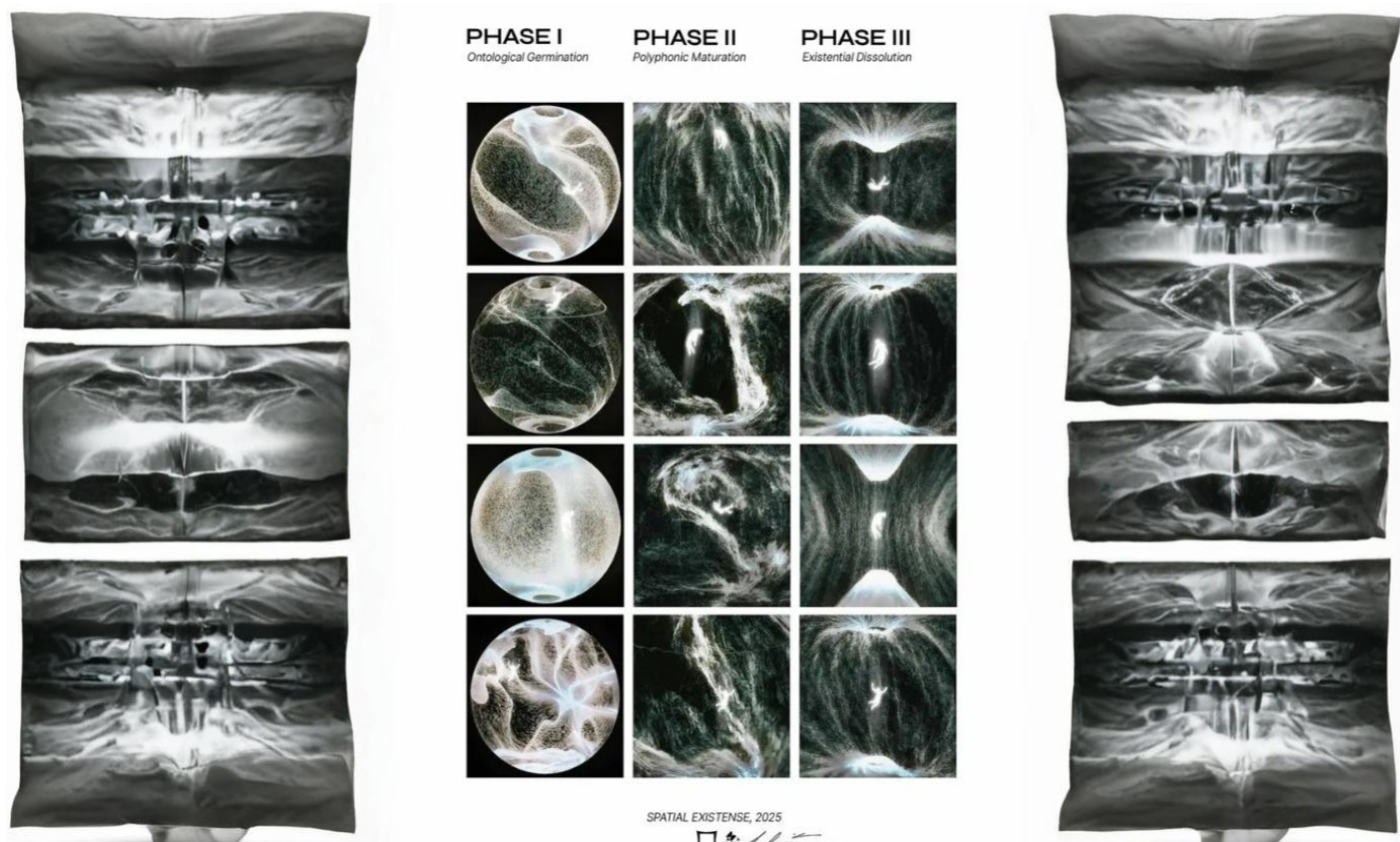
Though now part of the canon of media art, *Pulse* remains a vital reference, not for its novelty, but for the intimacy it unveiled. It asked: Can the beat of a heart become a form of storytelling? More recently, *Pulse Topology* was presented during Art Basel Miami Beach (2022–2023) in collaboration with Superblue and BMW, an immersive installation that invited visitors to experience the poetry of a human-centric approach to technology, resonating with themes of sentience and sustainability.



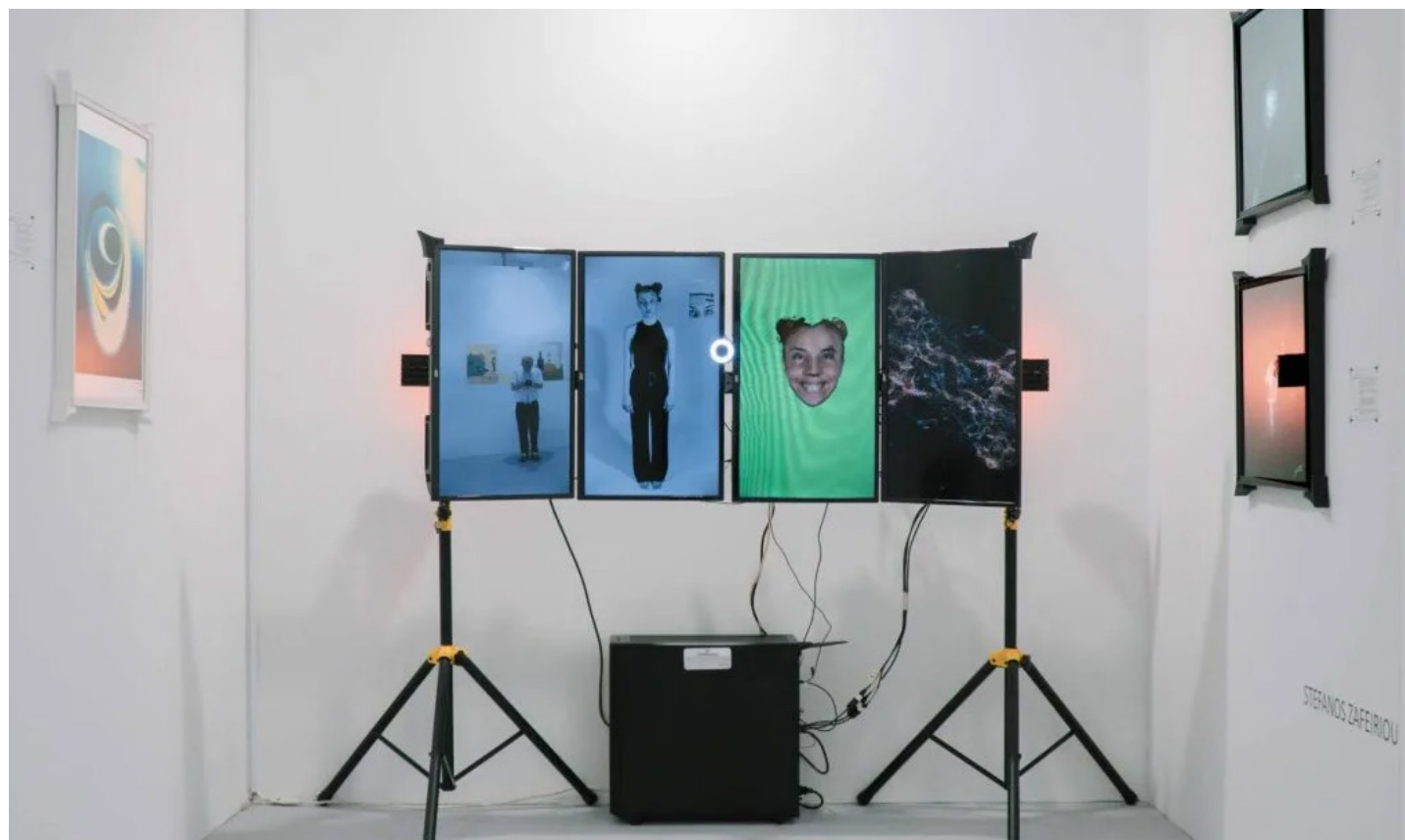
*On the occasion of Art Basel in Basel 2022,
Superblue and BMW presented Rafael Lozano-Hemmer:
Pulse Topology installation view with the new BMW i7. Photo: Enes Kucevic (06/2022).*

Composed of 6,000 light bulbs suspended from the ceiling, the installation captures the heartbeats of participants and turns them into a collective choreography of light, what Lozano-Hemmer calls “a chorus of vital signs”. The piece becomes both an intimate memento mori and a landscape of shared aliveness. Technology, in Lozano-Hemmer’s view, is

not a neutral tool but a cultural language that must be understood, questioned, and shaped responsibly. Pulse Topology invites us into that dialogue, not as passive observers, but as living data points whose fleeting presence illuminates the space around us. In an age of infinite options and ephemeral attention, this work reminds us that clarity, care, and consciousness may be



Spatial Existence, by Steve Zaferiou, 2025. Created with Touchdesigner, Adobe Photoshop.



Sensorify1, by Steve Zaferiou, 2023. Interactive Installation.

The Quantified Self as artistic medium

What began in the early 2000s as a personal practice of self-tracking, popularised by the Quantified Self movement, is now evolving into a vibrant field of creative experimentation. Today's artists are using biosignals like heart rate, breath, brainwaves, skin conductivity and attention levels to create artworks that are co-authored by the viewer's body. This transformation, from data as control to data as expression, opens new frontiers. In *Sensorify* (2024), artist and researcher Steve Zafeiriou created a participatory EEG installation that visualised visitors' brain activity as generative clouds. Each person's neural rhythms became visible, then merged with others in real time, turning mental states into social textures.

Among the most philosophically ambitious projects of recent years is Zafeiriou's *Spatial Existence* (2025), a collection of generative digital artifacts rooted in biometric temporality and decentralised logic. Each phase of the work unfolds in 120-day algorithmic cycles, authenticated via blockchain timestamps and structured to mirror natural rhythms of emergence, maturation, and dissolution. The result is a layered visual symphony where the observer's gaze becomes part of the artwork's own unfolding logic. Each piece in the trilogy explores a distinct phase of temporal experience: *Ontological Germination* reveals the fragile moment of becoming, *Polyphonic Maturation* visualizes experience as divergence and synthesis, where identity becomes a vibrating mesh of memories, expectations, and temporal entanglements, and, *Existential Dissolution* is about how things are always changing, and how they can become something else. It is not about getting rid of everything, but it is an invitation to reflect on the cyclical and fragile nature of meaning itself. By materialising time as a generative medium and existence as a process of perpetual reinterpretation, *Spatial Existence* enacts an ontological experiment. It externalises the act of perception and turns it into a visual choreography of presence, loss, and becoming. Here, the Quantified Self is no longer only a pulse or a graph. It is a metaphysical question: Who are we, in the space between data point and awareness?

Beyond measurement: dual roles of biometric data

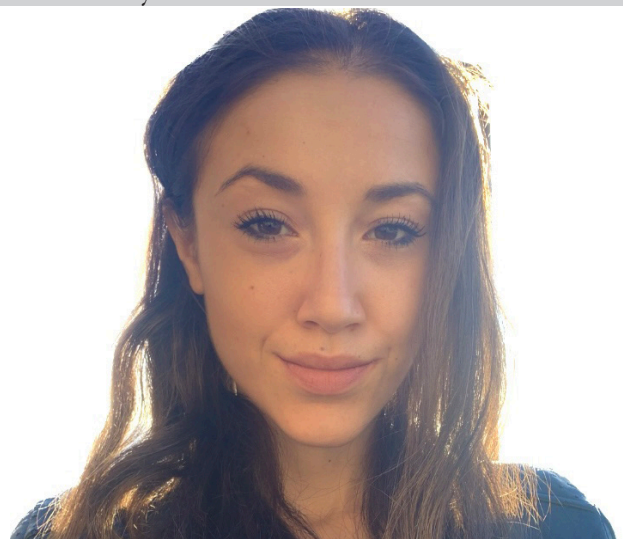
In these works, biometric data plays a dual role. It can measure engagement, attention, arousal, proximity, and it can generate the artwork itself. The data is both sensor and brushstroke. This invites a shift in how we experience art: from passive observation to

embodied participation. We are being watched by the work, and it is shaped by us in return. Of course, this new form of intimacy raises crucial questions. When our breath, pulse, or neural activity become part of an artwork, what are we consenting to? What does it mean for vulnerability to become visible? The most sensitive and impactful projects in this space treat biometric data not as information to be harvested, but as a fragile offering, a gift. What is emerging is a new form of artistic ritual, one that does not rely on symbols or scripts, but on signals. It asks us to show up with our bodies, our nervous systems, our unspoken truths.

The Quantified Self becomes a canvas not just of the individual, but of the collective. As biometric data and generative technology continue to evolve, could pulse, gaze, or breath potentially become as expressive, as a tattoo, shaping both personal meaning and shared experience. ✦

About the author

Eternal dreamer, curious by nature, and driven by purpose, Beatrice Giordano explores how creativity, innovation, and wellbeing can come together to create meaningful and human-centered impact. A strong mental health advocate, lifelong athlete and promoter of sustainable, holistic wellbeing, she is currently working on a project at the intersection of AI and sustainability, with the goal of shaping innovation that serves both people and society as a whole. Fluent in four languages, and with a background in media, communication, and digital transformation, Beatrice is a project manager and communication strategist who has led cross-functional teams and creative initiatives for major companies and institutions. She is a member of the European Youth Parliament, was named one of the Top 99 Italian graduates of 2022, and is the author of a personal narrative on inner transformation and self-discovery.





HOLY HOUSES: ART AS BRIDGE TO THE DIVINE

Lauren Ren Witherspoon

It took my moving to Japan for me to feel the synergy of art and the sacred. I moved in the summertime, when the heat was sweltering at best, but the sheer amount of nature in that small mountain town threatened to burst and spill over onto the connecting highway leading to larger cities and thicker human density. I did not visit the centuries-old shrine until winter, where I was unprepared for the sheer cold and depth of snow and the darkness of it all. I remember parking my car and walking towards the entrance. The moment I stepped through the gates, the hush that settled created a shift within me. It was different from the hush in predawn, following a proper snowfall, where everything is still and quiet, muffled. This was a sharpening of senses and heightened awareness with a rapidly beating heart. Even now, I struggle to describe the awe that passed through me at the sight of the pristine snow, the beauty of the temple, and complete silence. It felt like stepping into another world. It was the sacred that rekindled my art practice after I had left it and my childhood behind. Truthfully, art had never left me, and it is through the aesthetic of these sacred houses that something I had been sensing throughout the years became clear: we are steadily trading away our capacity for wonder

in exchange for the illusion of complete understanding. That in our relentless pursuit of explanation, categorisation, and control of every aspect of human experience, we are in danger of losing something: our comfort with mystery.

The great disconnect hypothesis

We live in an age of biohacking and obsession with longevity. We live in an age where we are so connected through social media that we are overwhelmed and achingly lonely. And we live in an age where we are obsessed with demystification. The study of the origin of religion spans disciplines from anthropology to neuroscience, encompassing the classification of religion and its evolutionary effects on brain chemicals and Darwinism. We map the brain and study the effects of prayer and meditation. Certainly, these are important questions to ask and theories to interrogate; I do not seek careening into the opposite direction of incuriousness and anti-intellectualism. I do worry that we have created a culture that approaches the sacred like a puzzle to be solved, a thing to be dissected to build in our image, rather than a mystery to be experienced.



This drive to know everything stems from our need to control and make meaning, but it has become a form of spiritual materialism: the belief that understanding the mechanics of transcendence somehow brings us closer to it. We explain away every moment of awe with evolutionary psychology or cultural conditioning. In doing so, we miss the very thing these spaces were designed to provide, an encounter with the ineffable that transforms us precisely because it cannot be fully grasped. The result is what I call the Great Disconnect—a severing not just from the divine, but from our capacity to be moved by forces beyond our comprehension. We live surrounded by information yet starved of wonder, connected to everything yet isolated from the presence that art in sacred spaces has channelled for millennia. In short, we have become so very heavy.

The sublime as medicine

I focus on sacred spaces as sacred art, symbol, and

portal wrapped into something difficult to define. Stepping within the bounds of holy grounds transforms and transports—no matter when you leave—you are transfigured. The holy house serves not only to illustrate religious concepts but to induce direct experience of what Kant called the Sublime. It is, I argue, intertwined with the divine and our experience of it. Beauty is peaceful—and our holy spaces certainly possess it—the Sublime is challenging. When I approached the temple for the first time, I felt a taste of the Sublime. In a split second, my mind disconnected from myself utterly, floating in some strange space while my body short-circuited, triggered by leaving the mundane into something other. It was a mix of spiritual wonder and physiological side effects. A well-crafted holy ground creates a space where the rational mind, confronted with beauty or vastness it cannot fully process, temporarily surrenders its need to understand. In our current moment of technological saturation



and scientific materialism, these spaces offer something irreplaceable: permission to not know. While social media provides the simulation of connection and scientific explanation offers the illusion of complete understanding, these hallowed houses invite us into a never-ending relationship with forces that resist both reduction and digitisation. And it is through these forces that the great disconnect can be healed. We connect back to ourselves where we had gone numb from being overwhelmed, and therefore, reenter into community with others. The shock of the Sublime becomes a psychological reset.

Moving towards the divine

This is not a mini-treatise on the anti-intellectual. The goal is not to abandon reason; rather, I want us to recognise its limits, to cultivate what John Keats called “negative capability”, the ability to remain in uncertainty and doubt without reaching after fact and reason. Our sacred spaces teach us that some truths can only be appreciated through direct experience, that some forms of knowledge come not through analysis but through encounter; furthermore, some knowledge may be beyond us entirely. The path forward does not require religious belief or institutional affiliation. It requires only the willingness to approach certain spaces with an open

mind and heart. ♦

About the author

Lauren “Ren” Witherspoon is a yoga instructor, teacher, and aspiring artist from the mountains of North Carolina. She is a lifelong student who explores the relationship between art, creativity, and divinity, and is seeking to recreate the Sublime in representational works. Her vision is a world of innovation where vibrant, interconnected communities of people have access to education, resources, and platforms, all in harmony with nature.





EXPRESSING TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ART

Inger Smith

A Secret

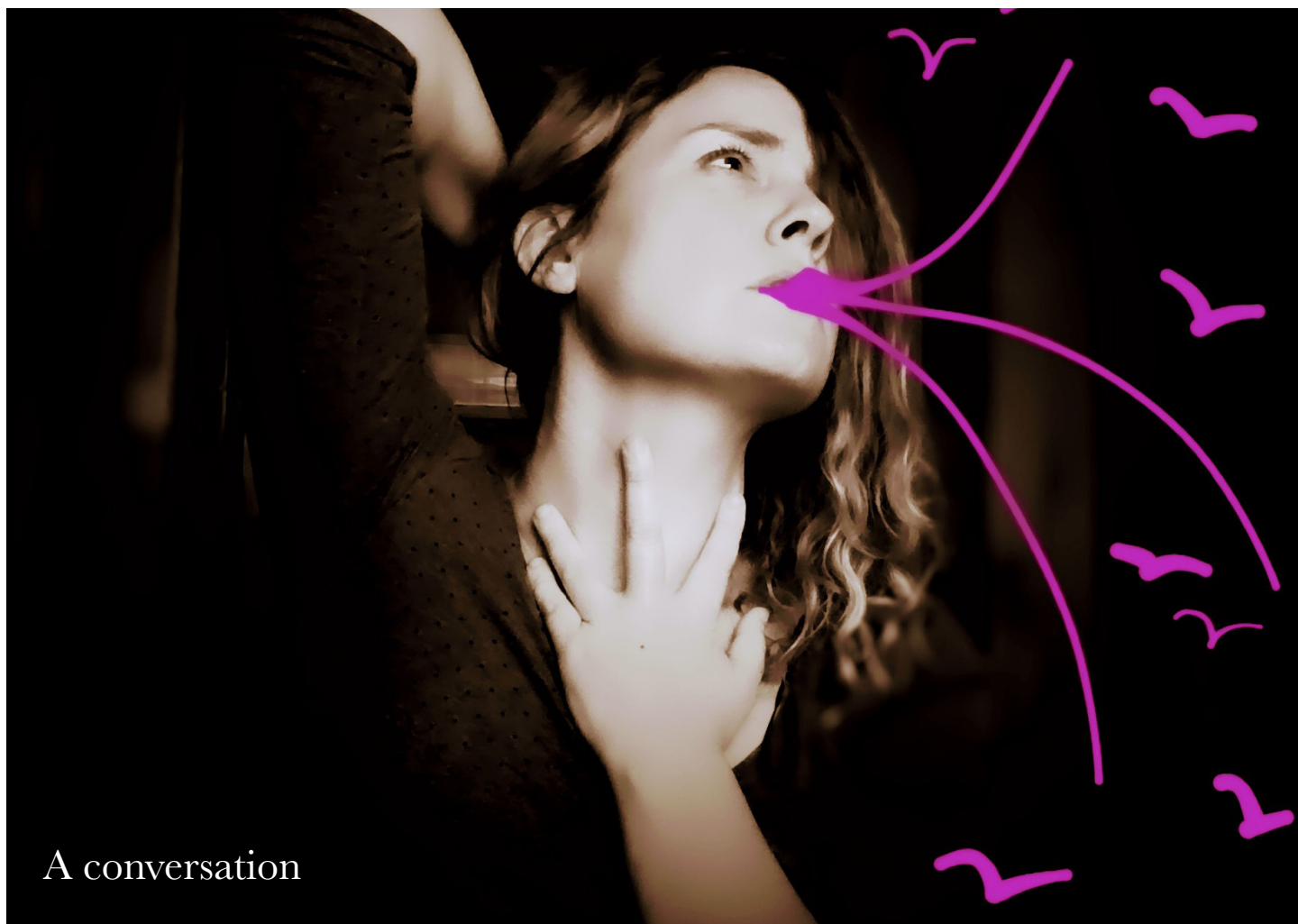
I am going to start with a secret... one hidden in the depths of my belly where hope and desire built a potent story of my creative worth belonging to that of an unborn child. A child I so desperately dreamt of having, a child that I thought was the ultimate experience of creation. I was always an artist; through songs, poetry, paintings and performance, but I was sure that this would all pale in comparison to how it would feel to create a life inside of me and I wanted it so very desperately.

A death

It is difficult to describe the pain and disillusionment that comes with infertility; the self-loathing I felt towards my own body that did not work “right”. There is a kind of death I experienced: a death of a life I expected, a death of the person I thought I should be; but it is after that death, that something new began. Sometimes it is only in the moments of darkness, where our understanding of the world turns upside down and we suddenly see a completely different perspective. After years of disconnection from my body, years of trying to control my life in order to feel okay, I hit rock bottom. I had the marriage, the job, the kids (not birthed my me) I had it all, and I realised I hated myself.



A death



A conversation

A conversation

I still remember the moment vividly; sitting across the sofa from a woman who called herself a Dakini. Her porch doors wide open, letting in a warm summer breeze that licked my skin. I wrapped my arms around my body fiercely, like an armour to protect itself. We spoke for hours until she finally invited me to lay down and talk to my body. It is a kind of a strange feeling to have a conversation with the pieces that make up your being after so many years of silence. It is like finally saying hello to the person who has been sitting next to you on the bus after 40 years of silence. You knew their features, their smell, but you had never heard their voice and all of a sudden, they have an Australian accent and you were absolutely positive they were British!

My cheek asked to be touched first, she needed care; just to be held. The woman placed her delicate palm on my cheek and I felt like a child being cradled again. It was so very familiar and so very foreign at the same time, and I realised it had been a very long time since my body had felt care like that.

My heart called to me next and oh, how she wept in great big sobs that escaped through my mouth like years of pain waiting to be voiced. I felt each gasp fly out of my throat and float away on that summer breeze and into the sky. It felt like...relief.

Then my womb asked to be held, and she surprised me the most. Instead of feeling her pain, I felt an insurmountable rush of joy! She laughed so hard that my body vibrated and tears fell from my eyes and then she said with such confidence and clarity "I'm not here to make babies!"

A Realisation

I tell you this story, because this was the moment when I realised that creativity was not at all what I thought it was... this was the moment when I was no longer the painter or the singer or the performer... this was the moment when creation became my being, when art was meeting the sun and feeling its warmth on my skin, when expression was moving my body through the world and sensing the world moving with me.

I realised that I am a poet not because of my published words, but because of the words I weave together when speaking to a stranger on the street. I am a singer not because of the song I perform on the stage, but the one I quietly sing to my child to lull them to sleep. I am a painter, not because of the colours I choose for my canvas, but because of the colours I witness when I open my eyes and see clearly how this world is art, every inch of it; and I am a creator not because I created a life in my belly, but because I am a living and breathing part of this incredible universe.



A realisation

There is something very humbling in appreciating our own magnificence, and something very liberating in realising that my womb is not here to make babies.

The secret of my womb is no longer a story of shame or brokenness, the secret of my womb is a deep fire that burns within me, a place with her own voice, her own inner knowing, her own creative power. And when I sit quietly into my body and feel myself there, I am an observer and the observed... of the artist and the art, all in one. ✦



About the Author

Inger Smith is an artist and teacher who has worked with various mediums including painting, photography, music, writing, performance art and film. For many years she developed and taught a creative arts programme for young children which incorporated elements of music, dance, drama and art to inspire creativity, confidence and self-expression. Her short films and documentaries have travelled across the world to film festivals such as the Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland and the Commonwealth Film festival in Manchester, UK. In 2012 she was published in the book *South African Cinema* by Dr Martin Botha and named as one of the “exciting directorial voices ... (to) hold immense promise for future feature film-making in post-apartheid South Africa”.

For Inger, art is about finding beauty in the obscure and the mundane, giving a voice to the voiceless, questioning perspectives and challenging mindsets. She is currently working on a number of exciting new projects and continues to be awed and humbled by art in all of its expressions and the vehicle of connection and growth it provides. Her art photography delves on the transformation that she went through with her inner muse.



SACRED RESONANCE: REBIRTHING THE BODY AS A TEMPLE OF SOUND

Priyanka Mohan and Siranjothi K

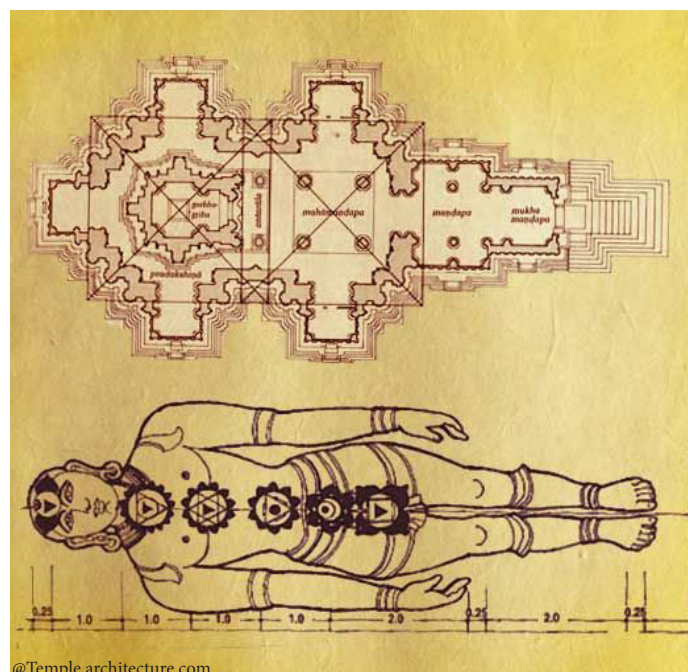
In the beginning, there was vibration

Long before language; long before belief systems, the universe was already speaking: through frequency. Galaxies spun, oceans pulsed, hearts beat, all following a rhythm not created, but inherent. This ancient music still lives within each of us, waiting to be remembered. In the world of healing, this remembrance is called resonance. And today, it may be the most important medicine we have for anyone and everyone.

Your body is a temple, a temple that feels

For centuries, seers and healers have called the body sacred. ‘Your body is a temple’ is not just metaphor, it is instruction. Temples are places of care, silence, and presence. But in the rush of modern life, we often forget. We push our bodies like machines, ignore their signals, and tune out their rhythms. Resonance healing gently invites us to listen again. At its simplest, resonance means vibrational harmony. It is when one sound or frequency gently causes another to vibrate in tune. In human terms, it is that feeling of being in sync: with your breath, with your body, with the Earth.

Tools like singing bowls, gongs, tuning forks, even silence and voice—are not just instruments—they are resonance portals; bridges that help us reconnect with our natural state.



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Three sacred principles of resonance healing

1. Everything is vibration

Modern physics confirms what ancient wisdom always knew: everything is energy in motion. Every cell, thought, and emotion carries a frequency. When those frequencies are harmonious, we feel well. When they clash, we feel tension, illness, or unease. Sound helps restore that harmony.

2. The body knows how to heal

Sound does not force change; it *invites* it. When the body is bathed in calming high and low tones, from singing bowls/ gongs, the nervous system energetically shifts and relaxes. The parasympathetic system (the 'rest and restore' mode) switches on. Breath deepens. Stress hormones drop. The body begins to repair, not through control, but through remembrance.

3. Resonance healing is holistic with sacred experience

Sound does not just affect the physical; it touches the emotional, the energetic, and the spiritual. Many people experience visions, emotional releases, tingling, laughter, or deep stillness. These are not side effects; they are signs of realignment. Resonance healing happens at every level, and the effects are often profound.

A global tradition of sound healing

Sound as healing is not a new idea. It is ancient, widespread, and deeply spiritual.

- In Ancient Egypt, temples were built to echo healing tones.

- In India, the sound Om has been chanted for thousands of years to align with the vibration of universal consciousness.

- Tibetan monks use bowls and overtone chants to quiet the mind and dissolve the ego.

- Indigenous cultures across Africa, the Americas, and Australia use drums, rattles, and voice to restore balance in body and spirit.

Modern sound healing is not a trend, it is a return, a remembering, a bridge between science, art, and soul.

What a resonance healing session feels like

At Spanda Ankh, we offer immersive sound sessions using therapeutic singing bowls under the name Meditatones. You lie down, covered in a soft blanket, while the bowls are played gently around and sometimes on your body. The sounds are felt as much as heard. Your aura, fascia, panchabhootas, chakras, meridian channels, skin, muscles, bones—even your organs and cells—receive these vibrations. You may begin to notice a shift in body, mind, and energy. As sound

begins to weave through your system, your body does not just hear—it remembers. You may experience, not limited to:

- Softening of the body:** Muscles loosen. Jaws unclench. Shoulders drop. You feel held, without needing to hold on.

- Stillness in the mind:** Thoughts begin to slow down. The inner chatter quiets, not by force, but by presence.

- Silence in the throat:** Your vocal cords may naturally choose rest over speech. Words feel unnecessary.

- Dissolving boundaries:** The edges between thoughts, emotions, and sensations blur. You feel more fluid, less separate.

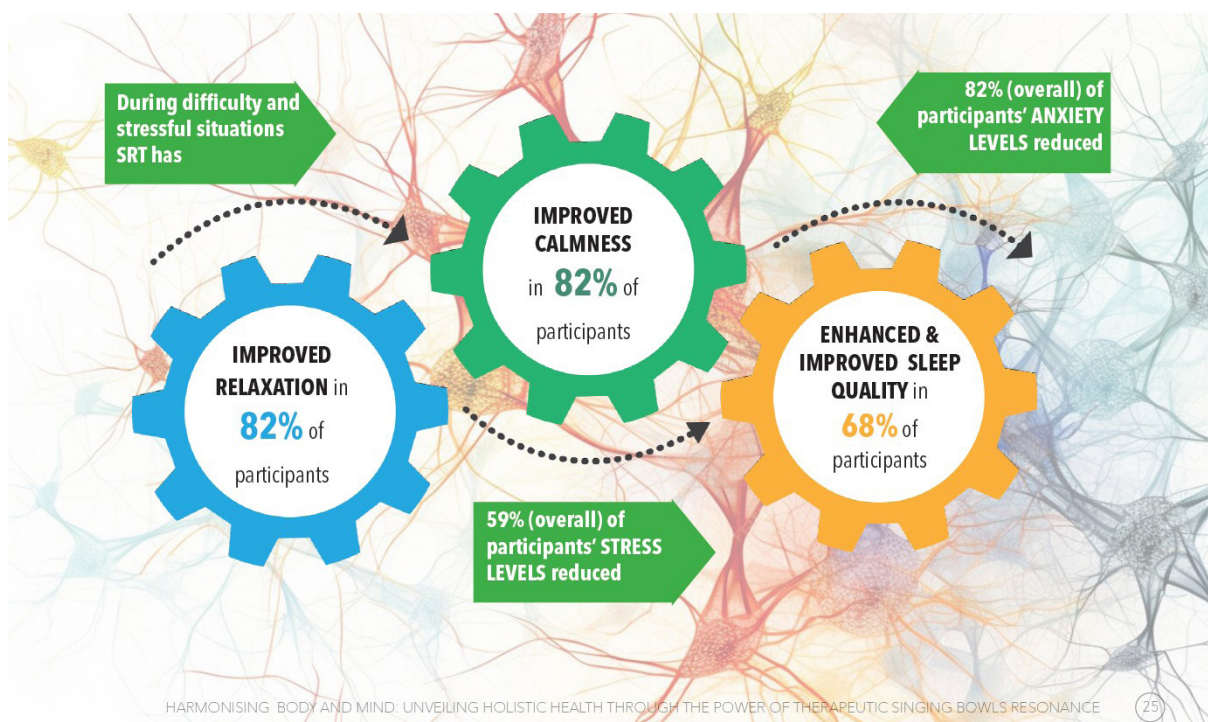
- Deepening of breath:** Your inhale lengthens. Your exhale slows. Breathing becomes spacious, effortless.

- Vagus nerve activation:** You may sigh, yawn, or feel subtle releases; signs your nervous system is shifting into rest and repair mode.

- Instinct to stretch or expand:** The body may gently arch, twist, or stretch, releasing held patterns and moving from control to flow.

- Resetting natural needs:** You might feel mild hunger or thirst, not from habit, but from honest internal cues. Sometimes, the body may choose hydration over food. Sometimes, sleep arrives like a wave.

- Sudden rest mode:** You may drift into a sleep-like state, even for a few minutes. This is not fatigue; it is your system rebooting from within.





These sensations are more than reactions. They are signs of realignment to the innate self: listen and feel your body reawaken from within. As the frequencies meet your body, a quiet restoration begins, not from the outside, but from deep within. This is what we call the rebirthing moment. Not dramatic, but deeply real. It is the moment you return to your body not as a burden or project, but as a sacred home. You may feel lighter, clearer, more present. Not just relaxed but restored.

What the science is now proving

While sound healing has ancient roots, modern science is catching up. A ground breaking study from India, titled Harmonizing Body & Mind: A Resonant Breakthrough led by Manan Sharma, a pioneer in sound medicine, revealed the positive physiological impact of just 10 minutes of sound healing daily using two therapeutic singing bowls.

A new age of bodywork and mind flow.

In a world where stress is constant and screens dictate our pace; resonance healing is a quiet revolution. It is part of a larger movement where well-being means more than productivity. This is not regression, but it is soul evolution. As ancient tools meet modern awareness, a new healing paradigm is born.

One where the body is not fixed, but felt. One where healing is not separate from spirit. Coming home to inner harmony with the soul Resonance healing is not a luxury or escape. It is a return to your rhythm, your voice, your breath, your body. In a fragmented world, it offers wholeness. So next time you lie in a sound bath, or feel a bowl's hum wash over you, remember:

You are not tuning out.

You are tuning in.

Let the frequencies move you.

Let the old self fall away.

Let the new self, hum into life.

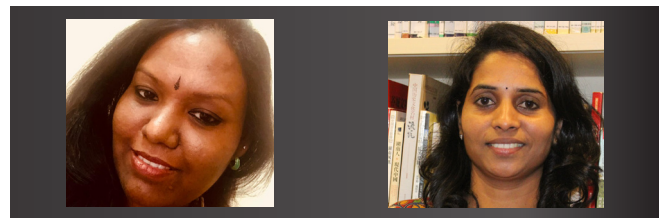
Let yourself be reborn; not into something new, but into who you truly are. ✨



@meditatones

About the authors

Priyanka Mohan, co-founder of Spanda Ankh Well-Being is a sound trainer, coach, energy mentor, and author. She had her training at the prestigious Indo-German Institute under Peter Heiss and at Meditatones. Priyanka has over 15 years of experience in international development and has partnered with communities to restore wetlands, nurture agriculture, support fisheries, and build resilience, in a sustainable manner. Siranjothi K, co-founder of Spanda Ankh Well-Being, is sound trainer, coach, healer, author, and researcher. For over 15 years, she has worked with communities across rural India and South Asia, fostering resilience, education, women's empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, agriculture, and fisheries.



Magnet Minds



Magnet Minds: Decoding the Language of Art and the Human Psyche – A Journey Through Stories, Reflections, and Expert Insights

Colouring outside the lines

Art therapy in post-traumatic contexts

Nomfundo Innocentia Ncanana

The silent power of creative expression in underserved communities

Kamiya Dargan

The silent symphony: awakening the inner muse through sound therapy

Vinay Kumar

How art therapy opens up feelings to help overcome the empty nest syndrome

Tania Scheepers



COLOURING OUTSIDE THE LINES

ART THERAPY IN POST-TRAUMATIC CONTEXTS

Nomfundo Innocentia Ncanana

Trauma as described by Talwar (2007) is an event or circumstance resulting in physical harm, emotional harm, and/or life-threatening harm that leaves a lasting emotional response, shattering one's sense of security. This can occur to an individual through witnessing the event, even indirectly, or via repeated exposure to distressing details (Talwar, 2007). I was born in the post-Apartheid era in South Africa where democracy had now taken charge. It is not lost to me how past generations lived during Apartheid—I have had the privilege to be exposed to, theorise and reflect on different stories and experiences of people who lived during the period in South Africa.

The likes of Franz Fanon, Steve Biko, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and Keorapetse Kgotsitsile, have used their writing to challenge the apartheid regime, giving voice to the oppressed and contributing to the eventual dismantling of the system. Learning about my history was the beginning of my journey. The biggest challenge for marginalised communities is the systemic factors that have been in action since the Apartheid project came into power in 1948 in South Africa.

These systemic factors include segregation, land dispossession, educational and health inequalities, economic disparities, as well as social and political disparities (Mzileni & Diko, 2022). In South Africa today, we are still enduring the residuals of the project despite the 1994 democratic era that has attempted to put in laws, rights, and regulations for a just society. There is still a long journey to travel if we want to look at emancipating marginalised groups as historical and socio-economic factors still linger in post-colonial contexts.

Who knew something as simple as play would be a trivial subject? We live in these contexts where we do

not even realise the simplest things have been colonised and our beliefs around them shape our interactions. When I began my research on play in black communities, I came across an article by Pedro Mzileni and Vuyo Diko, who were analysing how land displacement has played a role in perceptions and access to play in black communities. This knowledge came to me at a time in my career where I wanted to investigate why black bodies do not realise the luxury and healing effects of play. I also asked myself the same question and because of my career as an art therapist, I was able to take the initiative that would allow me to explore this phenomenon.



It was a challenge to me as well because moving my body, engaging in storytelling, and creating artistic reflections of my journey was introduced to me when I began my career in art therapy. Being vulnerable in community was a new thing for me and that is when I became curious about discovering what others who look like me and live in the same region as me feel about engaging with the arts as therapy. I always come across people in my community questioning what I do and how exactly does it work.

When I get a chance to engage in play with adults, I am met with challenges that reflect the oppression that insists play is a luxury afforded to children only and that using the body of an adult to consciously engage in play is a mockery towards what adults should be focussing on. We had to go back and engage with the inner child of these adults because to understand how you feel today, you have to travel back to how you were made to feel yesterday. Living in South Africa as a black woman born post-Apartheid has been an experience that has radicalised how I view myself, my community, and the environments I am exposed to. When I was a child, I used to love activities of colouring in.

Every time we were tasked with adding colour, I could already imagine what I want the page to look like and I would tell myself that I am creating a masterpiece. I would begin colouring the page with the first few colours I remember from my imagination of how I would want the image to look; however, it all changed as I continued to engage with the image. As much as I had an initial plan, it changed to fit the feeling at the time and form the true reflection of what I feel about the image. Feeling is being.

My 'heART' is reflected. This to me reflects a society living in a post-traumatic context, more especially those living with significant generational trauma that has been carried out physically, spiritually, and systematically. We have images of how our ancestors lived before we were born. We are the images of our ancestors today. We have been given access to particular images that already have their own colour and we choose to colour in new images or change the colour of how the past images have been painted. How do you know of something you have never experienced before? Through feelings. Through memories. Through thoughts. Through doing. Through being. Feeling is being. ✨

About the Author

Nomfundo Innocentia Ncanana is a Johannesburg-based applied drama practitioner, facilitator, and emerging drama therapist whose work explores the intersection of art, healing, and social justice. A graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand with an MA in Drama Therapy, Nomfundo has facilitated workshops, performances, and training programs across educational, community, and professional spaces. Her practice is grounded in themes of identity, transformation, and collective healing, drawing from her background in psychology, theatre, and cultural leadership. She has presented original research at national conferences, led projects funded by the National Arts Council, and worked with institutions like Drama for Life, Lefika La Phodiso, and ASSITEJ SA. Her recent research, *The Awakening: Makudlalwe*, explores how play reconnects black indigenous African adults with their inner child.



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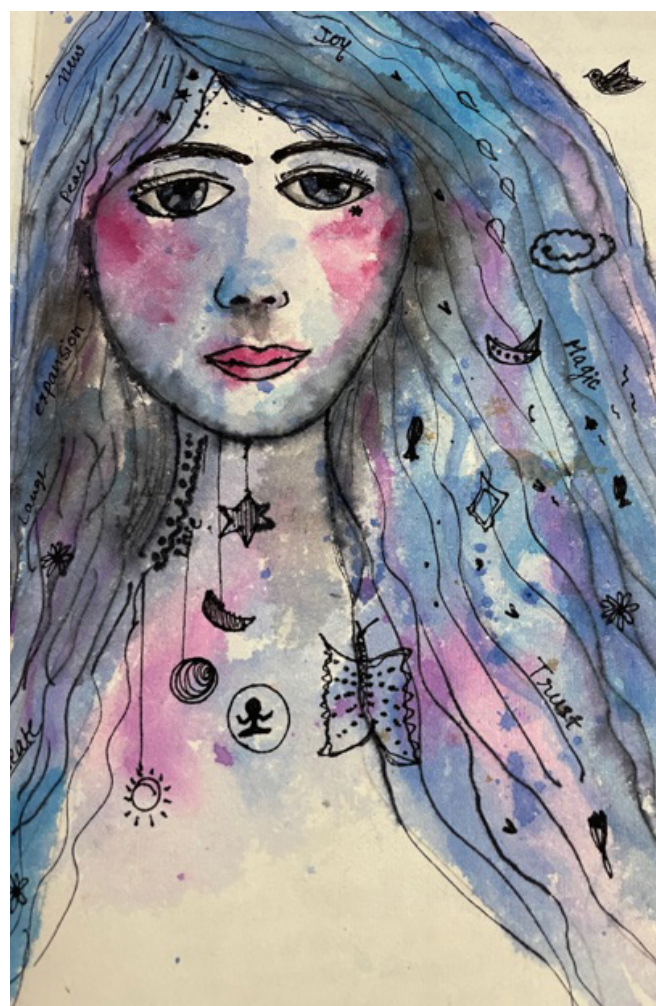
THE SILENT POWER OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Kamiya Dargan

Long ago, in a quiet village, women walked miles each day to fetch water. The path was long and exhausting; but it was theirs. The journey was its own kind of freedom. Along the dusty paths, they sang together, traded stories, laughed, and that one-hour walk passed by in no time at all. Then came the change: well-meaning visitors, eager to help, installed a handpump right in the heart of the village. No more long treks, no more aching shoulders. It was progress, or so it seemed.

But soon, something unexpected began to happen. One by one, women started falling ill; not just in body, but in spirit. The village puzzled over it, some even whispering that the handpump was cursed. How could something designed to ease hardship bring with it such quiet despair? The answer lay not in the water, but in what had been lost. That daily walk, once seen as toil, had been a lifeline; a time to breathe, to connect, to be more than a role or a duty. Stripped of that shared ritual, the women lost not just exercise, but a sacred space for expression and release. And with it, slowly, their sense of well-being declined.

In many ways, having a space to express oneself is a privilege; one that is often invisible until it is lost. This is where art becomes our ally—an open, judgment-free space for expression, whether through colour, movement, rhythm, or storytelling. At first, many come hesitantly, unsure of what it means to “make art.” But once they step into the process, something shifts. Slowly, art stops being an activity and becomes a part of their lives.



A participant explores painting for the first time, expressing feelings of freedom and joy.



"I feel bad when people remark about my dark complexion"- shared by a 9 year old boy.

What is expression, and how essential is the space to express?

For the past ten years, I have been working in underserved communities. I began in the education sector, believing that teaching children to read, write, and gain skills for financial independence was enough. But I soon realised something was missing. Many children, despite learning these skills, carried a heaviness, anger, confusion, even aggression. They were not lacking ability; they were lacking a safe space to express who they are and how they feel. Over the years, I have seen women reconnect with forgotten parts of themselves—childhood memories resurfacing in a splash of paint, a moment of joy in shaping clay, or the simple pride of creating something that is entirely their own. For some, it is the first time they have felt truly seen and appreciated. For children, these spaces are windows into their inner world: their fears, their gratitude, their sense of wonder, and sometimes, the pain they rarely voice. Through their drawings and stories, we glimpse how they see their world, what hurts them, and what gives them hope. From these experiences, certain themes keep emerging: threads that speak of resilience, belonging, and the quiet power of expression.

Art as a voice

One theme that emerged strongly was how art became a safe outlet for expression that words often held back. Women poured suppressed anger, unspoken desires,

and untold stories into their paintings and crafts. Children, too, translated their fears, hopes, and hidden emotions into drawings; expressing what they could not easily say aloud. Many children shared that adults often call them names like “शरारती,” “लापरवाह,” or “नकिम्मा,” (derogatory terms in Hindi language), which makes them feel bad.

Some were teased about their skin colour, clothes, or looks, and this made them feel judged. Only a few remembered being praised, mostly by friends. Many children found it hard to say good things about themselves because they kept thinking about the negative words they heard. But those who got support from teachers or family felt more confident about who they are.

Belonging through art

Another powerful theme was belongingness. In our paces, women and children from different religions and backgrounds sit side by side, creating art together. Their struggles may differ, yet the emotions they express joy, pain, hope create a common thread that connects them. This shared creative process builds empathy and trust, fostering a sense of community where everyone feels they belong. One woman, who rarely spoke in groups, quietly worked on her painting one afternoon. When asked how she felt, she said, “At home, my presence is only seen as work, making food and providing. Here, when I paint, people look at what I’ve made, they ask about it... it feels nice, like I’m more than just work.”



“I feel light, colourful, and free,” a woman shared while creating her artwork.



“I am angry and bad like this black mess”—shared by an 11 year old boy.

Finding calm in the chaos

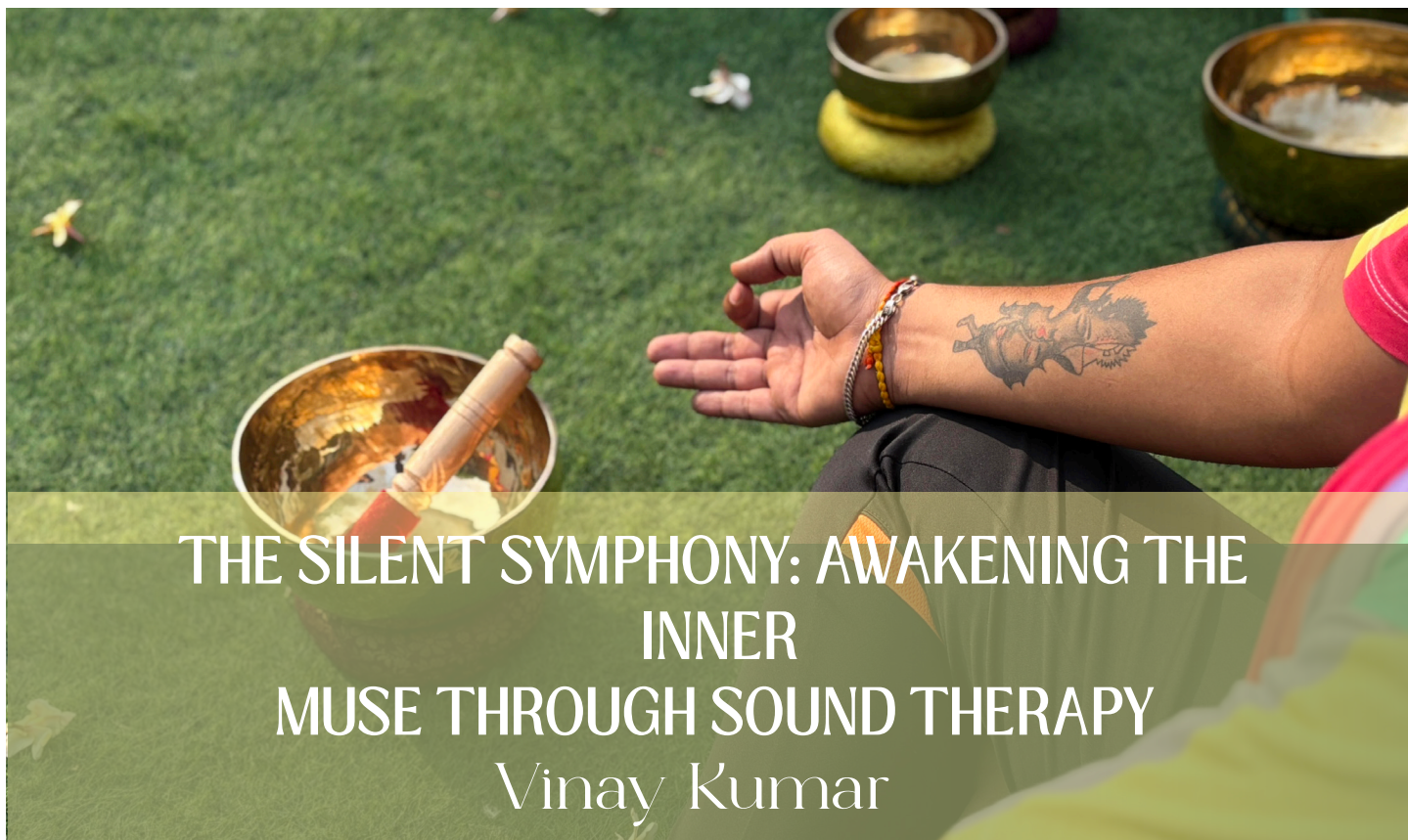
A recurring theme was how art became a pocket of peace in the middle of life’s noise and struggles. For many women juggling work and home, and for children navigating crowded, stressful environments, these sessions offered a rare pause, a chance to breathe, focus, and simply be. The act of creating—mixing colours, shaping clay, or strumming a tune—turned into a form of meditation, a break from their daily stress. In those moments, art was not just expression; it was therapy, stillness, and a gentle reminder that calm can exist even when life feels overwhelming. One woman shared while colouring, “Outside feels scary sometimes..., too much noise, so many problems. But here, when we sit and draw and laugh, it feels light... safe. Like for some time, my mind stops running.” ✦

About the author

Kamiya Dargan is an art therapist and community development practitioner with over a decade of experience working with children and youth. She holds a master’s degree in Art Therapy and a diploma in Counselling. After working across rural and urban communities with various organisations, she identified a critical gap: a need for safe spaces

where children and youth can freely express and explore themselves. Driven by this vision, she founded My Perch in 2015 to create nurturing environments for creative engagement, self-expression, and well-being.





THE SILENT SYMPHONY: AWAKENING THE INNER MUSE THROUGH SOUND THERAPY

Vinay Kumar



In a world echoing with constant noise, true silence has become a luxury. Yet, within this silence lies the deepest sound, the vibration that connects us to ourselves and to the universe. This is the heart of sound therapy: an ancient art and a modern science that invites us to listen not just with our ears, but with our entire being. My journey with sound began not in a concert hall or a studio, but on a quiet morning before dawn, what we in yoga call Brahma Muhurtham, the time when creation stirs and the mind is most receptive. I realised then that sound is not just heard, it is felt. It moves through us like a river, clearing blockages, dissolving old patterns, and awakening what has long been asleep.

Sound as medicine

For centuries, cultures around the world have understood that sound has the power to heal. The chants of Vedic sages, the Tibetan singing bowls resonating through Himalayan monasteries, the soft hum of Gregorian chants in ancient cathedrals, all carry an intention: to tune the body, mind, and spirit to a higher frequency. Modern science echoes this wisdom. Neuroscientists now study how certain frequencies can calm the brain, reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, and even aid cellular repair. Sound therapy is not just relaxation; it is deep work. It brings the subconscious to the surface,



quiets the mind, and reconnects us to our own inner rhythm. A session of stillness In my sessions, I often begin with breath, the simplest sound, the one we forget to hear. Then come the instruments: crystal singing bowls, Tibetan bowls, chimes, gongs, and sometimes the human voice itself. Each note carries a vibration. Each vibration enters the body like a wave, touching places that words cannot reach. Sometimes tears flow. Sometimes silence follows. In these moments, people meet their deepest selves, the part that remembers that we are not just flesh and thought, but frequency and light. Sound and the creative spirit For artists, writers, and seekers alike, Sound therapy can awaken the dormant muse within. We all carry blocks—fear, doubt, past hurts—that cloud our creativity. Sound cuts through this fog. It does not analyse or argue. It simply vibrates, dissolves, and realigns. I have seen dancers find new fluidity, poets rediscover forgotten words, and ordinary people remember they were artists all along. In a world obsessed with doing, sound reminds us to simply be. In that state of being, the muse whispers again.

A practice for the reader

If you wish to experience this, you do not need fancy instruments. Sit quietly. Close your eyes. Listen to your breath: its rise, its fall. Hum softly on the exhale, feel it vibrate in your chest, your throat, your skull. Notice how the body responds.

Sound is your birthright. It does not belong to the stage or the temple alone. It belongs to your living room, your meditation cushion, your everyday moments of pause. The symphony within As an artist of life, you are already attuned to sound; the laughter of friends, the rustle of trees, the patter of rain on your roof. These are not just background noises, they are reminders that you, too, are an instrument in this vast symphony. When you allow yourself to truly listen—inwardly and outwardly—something magical happens. The chatter softens. The heart opens. Inspiration flows not from force, but from Closing thoughts In my work, I often remind people: healing does not mean becoming someone new. It means remembering who you were before the world told you to be someone else. Sound has the power to peel away those layers, gently and beautifully. May you find moments in your day to pause, listen, and tune yourself to the quiet song always playing beneath the surface. May sound be your teacher, your healer, and your muse. Let the world be noisy; your inner symphony is waiting. ✦

About the author

Vinay Kumar is a multi-style yoga teacher, sound healing therapist, with a passion for merging ancient practices with modern well-being, Vinay guides individuals to rediscover their inner harmony through yoga, sound healing, and mindful living.



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HOW ART THERAPY OPENS UP FEELINGS TO HELP OVERCOME THE EMPTY NEST SYNDROME

Tania Scheepers

The joy of starting, working on, and finishing a work of art, is something not easily surpassed by any other means. Today, in a world filled with strife and overexuberant technology, art making offers an escape and fulfillment to people that is not to be taken lightly. In my years of being an artist and art teacher, combined with psychology, I have found that the positive outcome of art therapy is very important and of extensive value. The problem that most therapists experience is that patients or clients do not open up completely during a session. Introducing art therapy in the course of a client's assessment and recovery makes the process more open and accessible for both the therapist and the client. The client does not have to be artistically talented or practiced in any art form to enjoy and benefits of art therapy. The practice of art therapy opens up a new domain of self-exploration that need not to be looked at as pure art making. Art therapy is a process within a process.

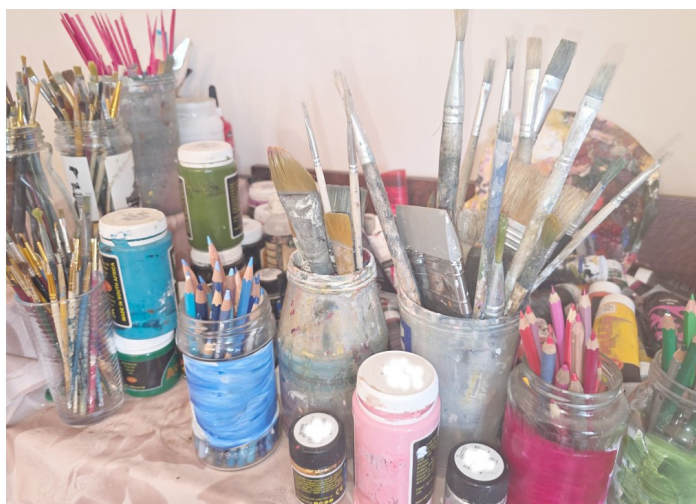
The empty nest syndrome

The transition to an empty nest—when children leave home to pursue their independence—can be a bittersweet milestone for many parents. While it often signifies personal growth and new opportunities for the children, it can also bring feelings of sadness, loneliness, and a loss of purpose for parents, collectively known as the empty nest syndrome. For some, these emotions can be overwhelming, affecting mental health and overall well-being. Symptoms a parent may experience include feelings of grief, depression, anxiety, and a sense of identity loss. These feelings stem from the sudden change in daily routines and the shift in their role within the family structure. Many parents do adapt over time, but some may find the transition particularly difficult. While art therapy does not replace medical attention to treat depression and anxiousness in a patient, it offers a creative and effective approach to navigate this challenging period in parents' lives.

What does art therapy do?

Art therapy combines the principles of psychotherapy with creative artistic expression. It provides a nonverbal outlet for emotions and thoughts that might be difficult to articulate through words alone. For individuals experiencing the empty nest syndrome, art therapy can facilitate emotional processing, promote self-





discovery, and foster a renewed sense of purpose. In my experience, the effect of easing out verbalisation and replacing it with music, especially Barok, assists the client to focus and be fully conscious of their feelings. Again, this is a safe space to explore yourself, without the threat of judgement and criticism.

How art therapy helps overcome the empty nest syndrome:

1. Helps express emotions safely. Art therapy allows parents to explore and express complex emotions such as sadness, grief, or anxiety, in a safe and supportive environment. Creating visual art can help externalise feelings that might be difficult to voice; reducing emotional burden and fostering understanding.
2. Enables the parent to reconnect with self-identity. Many parents derive a significant part of their identity from their role as caregivers. When children leave, they may struggle to redefine themselves. Art therapy encourages self-reflection and exploration, enabling individuals to rediscover passions, interests, and aspects of their identity beyond parenthood.
3. Aids in processing grief and loss. Creating art can serve as a form of mourning, helping parents process feelings of loss in a constructive way. Artistic projects such as collage, painting, or sculpting, can symbolise the transition and aid in acceptance and healing.
4. Encourages building new routines and goals. Engaging in regular art therapy sessions can introduce structure and purpose, replacing the void left by children's departure. Setting creative goals can motivate parents to pursue new hobbies, community involvement, or personal growth.
5. Enhances mindfulness and stress reduction. The act of creating art fosters mindfulness, helping individuals stay in the present and reduce stress. This can be particularly beneficial during emotionally turbulent times, promoting mental clarity and emotional stability. Art therapy can be done in more than one way,

depending on the need of the individuals participating: individual art therapy includes personalised sessions tailored to address specific emotions and goals; while group workshops create opportunities to connect with others experiencing similar transitions, reducing feelings of isolation. Creative projects at home encourage parents to continue artistic pursuits independently or with loved ones. While the empty nest can evoke feelings of loss and uncertainty, art therapy offers a compassionate and empowering way to navigate these emotions. Through creative expression, parents can process grief, rediscover themselves, and embrace new chapters in life with resilience and hope. As a versatile and accessible form of therapy, art provides a pathway toward healing and personal growth during one of life's significant transitions. ✨



About the author

Tania Scheepers was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, in 1967. She obtained her BA degree in Fine Arts in 1989 at the University of the Free State. During the next decades she was busying herself as an art teacher, graphic designer and lecturer in South Africa and Mozambique, while raising a family with her husband. She pursued a BA degree in Health Sciences and Psychology in 2020 from the University of South Africa. She also obtained a qualification in art therapy. She is now a volunteer at an NGO called Helderberg Beradingsentrum as a psychological counsellor. She also has a private practice in psychological counselling and art therapy

Roots & Rhythm

From ancient roots to modern rhythm - a journey through living culture!

Metro stories in Moscow

Uma Vangal

Threads of culture: Kerala to Spain Unity in celebration

Beena Unnikrishnan





It is May 2025 and the Moscow metro is a mere decade away from its centenary year. The Moscow metro combines the practical with the dream, the everyday with history, utility with art; weaving an aesthetic magic on commuters. The 17 lines that crisscross the vast city, cover 267 miles with 270 stations and is a living, breathing history. Along with comfort and speed, the commuter can expect a multitude of stories on the complex history and rich culture through the displays, plaques, art and architecture. Built on the principle of svet or light, the Moscow Metro was designed to showcase the brilliance of the artists and architects of modern Russia as a harbinger of svetloe budushchee: a radiant future.

The dream project of Joseph Stalin, the spectacular stations were meant to impress the world. And impress they do. One can spend leisurely hours steeped in the artistic ambience and forget the present and take a step into the various milestone moments as a full-time activity. There are walking tours for those interested to do just that. Or one could embark on an adventure to explore this architectural marvel by oneself. Like I did. All stations are easily identifiable by the prominent M above the many entrances in red with grey serifs across the city. I stepped into some of the oldest and newest stations with a sense of wonder at this ambitious, enduring industrial 'project'.





The Revolution and beyond

The domed inverted U entrance with two semi-circular arches on either side welcomes one into Kropotinskaya metro station, the oldest line in Moscow's rapid transit system, named after geographer and philosopher Pyotr A Kropotkin. The white marble pillars are inspired by the Temple of Amun at Karnak, with lights atop, mimicking the lit torches, standing on a grey and orange checkered floor. It is no surprise that a model of the station won two Grand Prix awards at the Paris and Brussels expositions in 1937 and 1958.

The Ulitsa 1905 Goda station is named after the nearby street, where the first revolution against aristocracy took place, and is an enduring tribute to those brave souls. The entrance sports a rotunda building that underlines the significance of this location. The metallic artwork by Yuri Koroley, have the date 1905 glimmering in its geometric perfection on the wall along with the torches, symbolic of the herald of a new dawn. The walls, the floors, and the vestibule, all shimmer in grey tones. Near the exit to the street, there is a mosaic depicting moments from the revolution in a 'Frisian' style.

The **Barrikadnaya** metro station is also closely linked to the first revolution and marks the place where the protestors were held at bay with several barricades erected by the Tsar's armed forces on Krasnaya Presnya street. Gazing up at one of the famed seven sisters of the Stalinist era, our eyes are drawn to the bas reliefs of the struggles of the rebels on the walls leading to the station. Bouncing off the pure white wall, the overhead vertical white lights dangling from a zig zag fixture gives us a sense of the chaos and navigating amidst jostling crowds during a riot. The **Aeroport** metro station, named after the first airport of Russia that is no longer operative, was one of the principal shelters during World War II. In line with an aviation theme, the single vault edifice resembles an airplane hangar. The Soviet art deco is on display in the ceiling that looks like

an elaborate ribcage. These ridges spread out across the ceiling calling to mind the wings of an aircraft.

Ancient cultural roots

The **Arbatskaya** station is a joy to walk through. It captures the Eurasian identity and ancient cultural roots that still inform the Russian aesthetic. The extended trade relationships with Arab and Tartar merchants gave this locality and the station its name.

The Intricate carvings of cherubs and floral motifs, the ornate light fixtures, even the red brick tiles embedded in the wall, hark back to the time of handmade kiln burnt technique. Small detailed etchings on the bricks are testimony to the painstaking work of artist of yore. The 'Khudozhestvenny' movie theatre, one of the world's oldest cinemas still in operation—the 1925 silent film, *Battleship Potemkin* was screened here—

is located near the station. In contrast, the **Izmaylova** station—one of the few surface level stations—that also connects to the trading with Central Asian and Arab worlds, is a simple station. The white marble faced pillars with a canopy above is stark and utilitarian, minimal design elements, shiny white granite floors, beige, cream and white tiled walls and overhead lights embedded in circular orbs.

Kitay Gorod metro station, named after the sector where it is housed, also known as old town, could also be a reference to the fortified walls that made it 'a town within a town'. The torches on the walls etched as if the flame is fluttering in the wind, the round chandeliers with candle like lights dangling from the ceiling and the broad steps and wide floors, recall the fortifications of the old city that transports one to a medieval space that bustled with merchants, nobles, armies and workers.





Kuznetsky Most translates to Blacksmith's Bridge, referring to a bridge that connected the factory to the workers settlement in 18th century Russia. The bridge became a symbol of the French influence on Russia. The marble archways resembling the arched bridges over rivers, the black granite floors in stark contrast to the pure white marble walls all fit in beautifully with the theme of the tri-vault that is visible in the three vaulted entrances to the hallways. The large cornered squares that welcome our footsteps also create a sense of purpose true to the location in the business and financial district of Moscow.

The Soviet dream

Mayakovskaya is a station replete with references to futurism dreamed of by the Russian poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky. The Stalinist era architecture comes to life here in all its grandeur. It is world famous for the ceiling art of mosaics depicting the '24-hour Soviet Sky'. Apart from being the command post and an air raid shelter during World War II, it is the first station where designer Alexey Dushkin moved away from the tri-vault into a two-column design. It is rumoured that Stalin addressed party leaders and the people of Moscow here. It is the world's most beautiful metro by any aesthetic yardstick.

Byelorusskaya is a central point of connect since it is right next to the Belorussian rail terminal that is home to out of city metro lines. It is also bang in the middle of shopping centres and malls and a busy intersection. The station is an example of Belorussian thematic art.

The 12 octagon shaped ceiling mosaics showcase everyday lives of Belarus while the floor mimics a Belarussian quilt.

The name **Begovaya** metro station is a reference to the Central Moscow Hippodrome. Designed by architect V Cheremin, it lives up to the name, inspired by equestrian sports stadiums across centuries. The Mighty Horsemen, a metallic masterpiece, looms large in the hallway.

The **Dinamo** metro station is easy to identify, being named after the nearby Dynamo stadium which in turn is named after FC Dynamo Moscow. It is patterned on a sport theme and the vestibules and central hall showcase sportspersons engaged in sporting activities in bas reliefs by artist Ye. Yason-Manzer.

The marble and onyx pylons sport medallion like porcelain artwork depicting sportspersons. **Komsomolskaya** station is the most spacious and can take one hour to traverse. Not just because it is big, but also because one stops to see and read the plaques and mosaics that celebrate historical figures such as Alexander Nevsky, Kuzma Minin, Dmitry Pozharsky, Alexander Sukhorov, Mikhail Kutuzov and V I Lenin. Though initially it was designed on the lines of Dutch art, Stalinist art took over. There are also mosaics of Red army troops and the commanders, the society troops at the Reichstag Building, Mother Russia as maidens holding the hammer and sickle and a palm branch.



Novoslobodskaya gets its name from the nearby street. The round lobby is a designated historical site today. A three-story structure, it is designed like a temple, a grotto style almost. The outstanding element of the station's decor are the 32 stained glass in steel and brass. Artist Korin is credited with the floral, plants and astral designs, and the small medallions of the pastoral that life stand out. The glass mosaic of the mother and child in the world peace panel in the central hall also draws one's attention.

Literary legacy

Pushkinskaya station is named after the great Russian writer, Alexander Pushkin. The interiors capture 19th century essence. The chandeliers in the central hall give an opulent look to the station and the candle like lights on the walls in the platforms match the ornately decorated ceiling. The palm leaf reliefs decorating the unique white 'Koelga' marble columns, are offset with several brass plaques based on Pushkin's writings.

Dostoesvskaya station is named after the celebrated Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky. The black, white and grey bring to life the settings of most of his work, depicting the brooding grey shades of human emotions and actions. The wall murals portray scenes from his works, most prominent among them being the ones from Crime and Punishment.

Park Kultury honours the writer and Nobel Prize nominee, Maxim Gorky. Located near the Gorky Park which hosted some of the Moscow Olympic events, the theme here is fitness. The standard tri-vault grey marble pylon entrance, arches with geometric motifs

and black and grey granite tiles that was designed like a carpet made with the flamboyance typical of the 50's Soviet era, is on display here. The Maxim Gorky bas relief on the marble wall is accompanied by bronze letters of the original name of the station.

Contemporary Moscow

The **Elektrozavodskaya** station, named so because of the electric bulb factory nearby, features 12 marble pylons with bas reliefs on them, designed by artist Georgiy Motovilov. The vestibule is hexagonal and the domes on the niches feature medallions of well-known proponents of electricity and engineering including Benjamin Franklin, William Gilbert, Micheal faraday, Alexander Popov, Pavel Yablochkov and Michael Lomonosov. The sculpture pays tribute to the metro builders and the station's decor and design marks the transition from Soviet Art Deco to post war influences in architecture. At **Park Pobedy**, a relatively new, sixth generation station, the three-minute escalator seems to go on forever. At 128 metres, it is the longest escalator in the world and opened to the public in 2003. Also known as Victory Park, it is Neo-Stalinist in design. It is also the deepest metro station of the city, going 84 metres below the ground. The thin rectangular mounted lights on the escalator light reflects off the steel balustrades giving off an eerie metallic sheen. The marble mosaic that glows with yellow, orange and red, depicts the French invasion of Russia (around the 19th century) and World War II, featuring angular figures. The platforms designed are binary with opposite colour schemes.



Prospekt Mira, with floral elements in art and colour tones, has an agriculture theme. Facets of agricultural development in the Soviet Union feature in the medallions. The facade of the entrance showcases sculptures and a clock tower over the archways. In the hall, Kuznetsov's artwork Mothers of the World catches the eye.

CSKA, a recent addition to the Moscow Metro, is located inside the Aviapark named after the CSKA Moscow sports club nearby. The station is modern and has red, blue and white colour schemes on the ceilings and smooth floors and steel finish pillars on the platforms. The ceiling features players in motion as do the lobby sculptures of famous CSKA players caught in the middle of action on the field.

The **Polezhayevskaya** is named after Vasily Polezhayev, the man who worked silently to build this massive network of railway lines and stations to transport the Muscovite throngs to work, home and play.

It is only fitting that I end with these two stations. They were my entry points to the magical underground universe of the Moscow metro. Though a relatively simple design defines the station, the Polezhayevskaya metro station was my window into the art and architecture and aesthetics of one of the finest Metros of the world. The Moscow metro is indeed the 'peoples palace' it is touted to be, and is an integral aspect of life in the capital city of modern Russia. ✨



About the author

Dr. Uma Vangal, Associate Dean, Sai University, Chennai, has 32 years of experience in media education and has worked across the domain including Journalism, Advertising, Media Production and Media studies, Film and Film studies. She is a two-time Fulbright Fellow and an International Visitors Leadership Programme fellow. She is also, as she puts it, "an intrepid traveller."



THREADS OF CULTURE: KERALA TO SPAIN, UNITY IN CELEBRATION

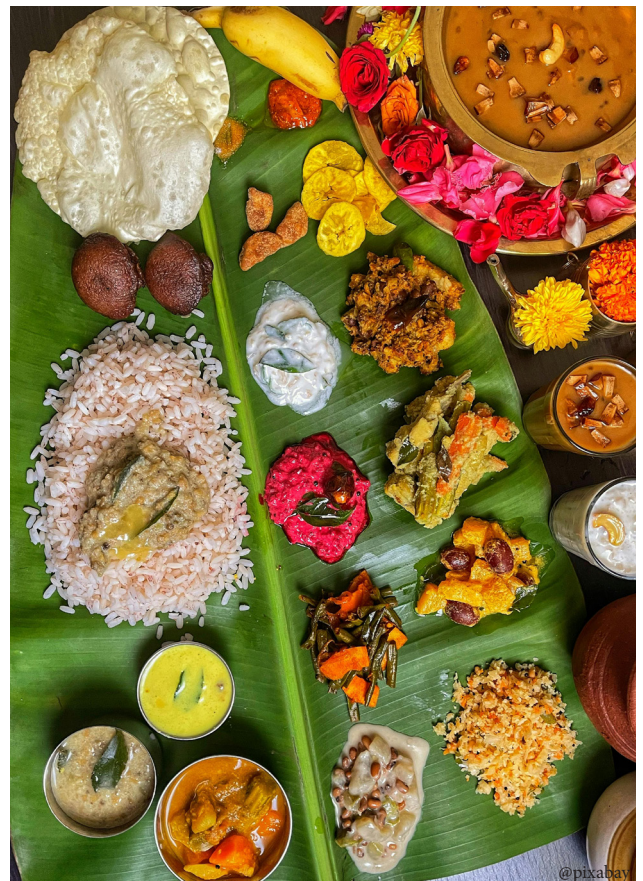
Beena Unnikrishnan

"Festivals serve as reminders that human joy is not found in isolation, but in shared experiences."

Languages, food, art, and festivals are the invisible bonds that hold a community together, and we refer to this as culture. Culture is the pulse of character, beating quietly yet shaping who we become. Sometimes we are born and raised in one culture and later move to another, where we learn to live with and adapt to different traditions; we meet, mingle and evolve. A country may progress in terms of technology and economy, but its culture carries stories, values, and emotions that shape it; otherwise, it loses its soul. Culture is like the heartbeat of a people. It exists beneath every conversation, every ritual, every shared memory. And nothing expresses it more beautifully than a festival. A festival is not just about the rituals performed, but about the people who come together to perform them—neighbours, family, strangers—who become friends.

Onam, Kerala festival of memory and myth

For me, Onam has always been the season of togetherness. As a child, the ten days of the Onam festival were a time when our grandparents' home came alive. Schools close for ten days after the mid-year exams, giving children the freedom to revel in the season. Cousins arrived days in advance. Each morning, we eagerly gather blossoms for the pookalam (floral rangoli). At the same time, elders prepare



Onam sadya (Feast)

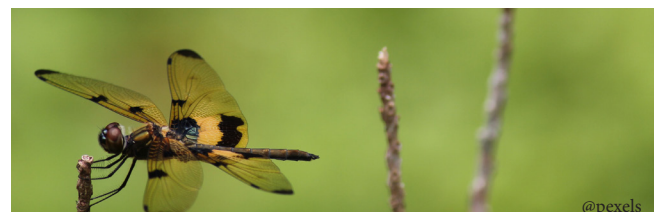


Vallam kali - Snake boat Race



Puli kali-Tiger Dance

the grand Onam sadhya (feast) served on fresh banana leaves with dishes that reflect the abundance of the land, which is the highlight of the Onam Celebration. Afternoons come alive with cultural delights like Kummatti and Pulikkali (traditional masked dances), carrying the spirit of Onam through every home and street. Onam is celebrated to honour King Mahabali, the mythical ruler who once ruled Kerala with justice and prosperity. Legend says that the gods were jealous of his popularity and sent Lord Vishnu in the form of Vamana to test him. Mahabali, known for his generosity, granted Vamana's wish for land, only to be pushed down into the netherworld. Yet, because of his love for his people, he was permitted to return once a year. Onam is the homecoming of this beloved king, and every flower, every meal, every smile is offered in his honour. Later in life, when my husband army career took us outside Kerala, Onam still found us. Relatives gave way to friends, and our table welcomed people from other states. It was no longer just a Malayali festival; it became a celebration of unity and love itself, a way of sharing the essence of Kerala with the world.





Spain's La Tomatina: A sea of red and laughter

At the same time of year that Kerala celebrates Onam, another part of the world—Spain—erupts into festivity of a very different kind. In the town of Buñol, near Valencia, thousands gather for La Tomatina, a festival that turns the streets into a playground of red. The story dates back to 1945, when a quarrel during a parade led young people to throw tomatoes at one another. What began as mischief soon evolved into a tradition, and today, La Tomatina is one of Spain's most renowned cultural spectacles.

On the last Wednesday of August, trucks dump over a hundred tonnes of overripe tomatoes into the streets. At the signal of a cannon, people from around the world hurl them at each other—not in anger, but in laughter. For an hour, the town is drenched in red. Strangers become companions, differences dissolve, and all that remains is joy. What fascinates me is the contrast between the two festivals. Onam is a breaking down of barriers—during this time, people are free to celebrate, to share, even to sell what they have created to celebrate—with no divisions of caste or creed. Its essence is unity. Onam binds people through flowers and feasts, while Tomatina binds them through tomatoes and play. Both tear down walls and remind us that life is always meant to be celebrated, not endured.

Bridging Worlds: From Kerala to Spain- Conversation with Sarath Krishnan

While writing this article, I came across a unique traveller, Sarath Krishnan, who journeys with his mother and shares their experiences on Instagram. I first saw his photographs of celebrating La Tomatina in Spain and Onam outside India. At that point, I realised how apt it would seem to blend this article with his note.

When I spoke with him, I felt an immediate warmth. Sarath is from Thrissur, Kerala's cultural capital, and that spirit seems to flow in him. He told me the seed of inspiration came from his father, a traveller and author of many Himalayan travelogues. Sarath himself never plans his journeys; he believes places call him. Even Spain, he said, was unplanned. After travelling with his mother to the Himalayas, he felt his bucket list was complete—everything else was a bonus. Their journey makes me believe even more strongly that culture is not confined by geography. It travels with us, adapts, and meets other cultures halfway. When we celebrate Onam in Kerala, or La Tomatina in Spain, we are really celebrating the same truth—that humanity thrives when it comes together in joy.



Sarath Krishnan with his mother Smt. Geetha Ramachandran Celebrating Onam



Sarath krishnan with his mother
Smt. Geetha Ramachandran at the La Tomatino festival

Excerpts from an interview with Sarath Krishnan:

1. On culture and travel: What role does culture play in your travels? Do you seek festivals and traditions wherever you go, or do they find you along the way?

I am not always able to define the role of culture in travel, but I always carry my culture with me—and take even my mother—during all my journeys. Wherever we go, my mother always wears a saree, and I am always in my dhoti, my traditional attire, whether at the Eiffel Tower or riding a motorbike in Ladakh, the highest motorable road in the world. I view my culture and

Traditional values as an integral part of who I am. Wherever I go, I carry my pride and say with pride that I am from the city of Thrissur. I recall that when I visited Kailash Manasarovar, I took a flag with a picture of the famous Vadakkunathan temple Gopuram on it, and the name on the flag was “Thrissur.” I did the same in Ladakh. When I visited Padmanabhaswamy Temple, I gifted a photograph of the Vadakkunathan Temple during Thrissur Pooram to Lakshmi Bhai Thampuratti. This is how I combine my tradition, culture, and travel.

2. On celebrating Onam abroad: You have celebrated Onam outside Kerala. How different does it feel compared

to celebrating at home? What remains unchanged for you?

What hasn't changed for me is the feeling I had when I attended Onam celebrations in Düsseldorf, Germany. I saw people dressed in sarees, half-sarees, and men in dhotis. Almost 10,000 people attended. Although it cannot compare to Kerala, people there managed to recreate Onam with an Onam sadhya (feast) and Athapoo (flower rangoli). I felt happy that at least this festival reminded those living outside India of our culture and traditions. They did it perfectly, lighting lamps, someone dressed as Maveli (the king), and even local Germans came to attend. They were very curious about our culture. I explained the story of King Mahabali to one person, and I always enjoy sharing stories about my city, state, and country. I felt deeply moved that people took the effort to organise this so far away from home.

3. On La Tomatina: How did it feel to be part of La Tomatina in Spain? What surprised you most about the experience?

For me, there were no surprises; it was simply the fulfilment of my desire to be part of that festival, after dreaming about it since my college days. It was a great feeling to live that scene from the movie “Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara”. The movie featured the La Tomatino Festival, and being there in person, with my mother, so far from my city, made me feel good.

4. On similarities and differences: When you think of Onam and La Tomatina together, what connections do you see between them? Did one remind you of the other in any way?

I didn't find an identical feeling, because the two festivals are so different. La Tomatina celebrates one day of tomato-related festivities.

Onam, by contrast, is about art, rituals, culture and a long season of festivities. On a lighter note, we also use tomatoes in our feast! Their festival is about gathering, and so is ours, but Onam lasts for ten days, followed by Kummatti Kali, Pulikali, and many more. Yet, at their core, both festivals are about gathering, celebrating, and breaking down barriers between people. Onam honours the memory of King Mahabali, while Tomatina is a playful harvest carnival. Both in their own ways remind us that life is richer when shared.

5. On travelling with his mother: Your travels with your mother are unique. How does sharing these cultural experiences with her shape the way you see festivals and traditions?

Yes, travel has shaped me—especially travelling with my mother. In our own place, we feel like kings. Being from Thrissur, the cultural capital of Kerala and home to one of the largest festivals, Thrissur Pooram, we feel ultimate pride. However, through many journeys and encounters with different people, I realised that we are nothing. My journeys have taught me that we are like elephants roaming only in our own forests, thinking we know everything. Earlier, I believed I knew the history of Thrissur well, and that was an accomplished feeling. But travel showed me how little I knew. When I met established individuals who gave their time, welcomed us with humility and hospitality, and did so without a desire for personal gain, I learned a great deal. Even in small villages, strangers helped me: a little puppy guided me when I was lost on the way to Babaji Caves, Badrinath, or while walking to Mana, India's last village. At the last tea shop, a boy named Anunooop helped me find the path to Swargarohini. All these experiences showed me that there is always a divine touch, that someone will come, hold my hand, and show me the way. I always take this as a blessing.

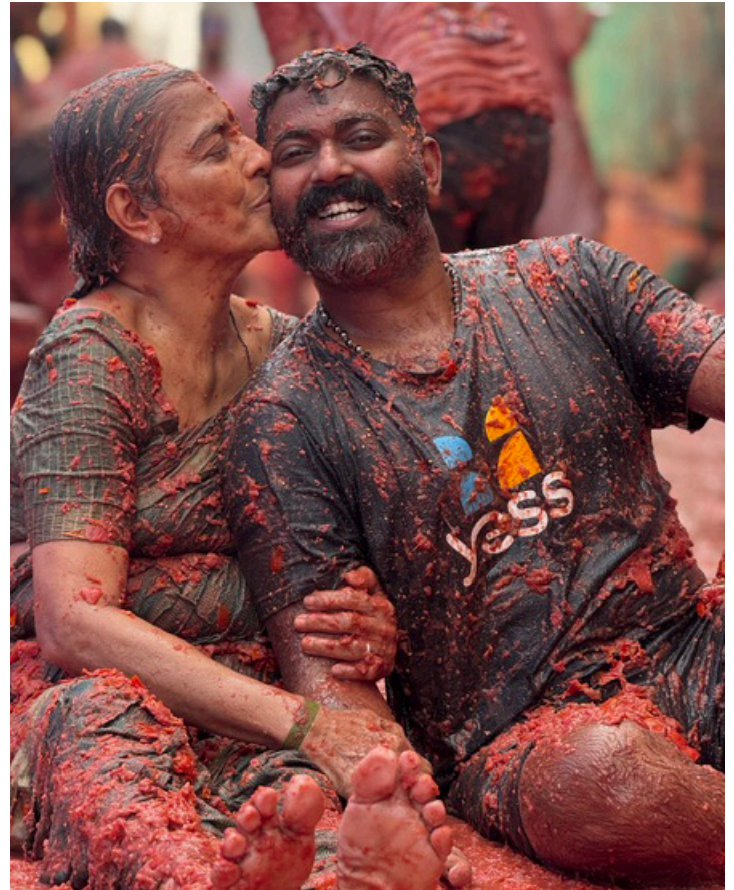
6. On personal meaning: *If you had to describe in one sentence what festivals—whether Onam or La Tomatina—mean to you personally, what would you say?*

In one phrase, it is Thrissur to La Tomatina. That's why I wrote that caption on my Instagram story, showing as if I were buying one tomato from Sakthan Market in Thrissur and then my journey to La Tomatina; just for fun.

7. On message for readers: *Finally, what message would you give to people—who may never have been to Kerala or Spain—about the importance of experiencing cultures beyond their own?*

My message to people who haven't seen Kerala's culture or India's festivals is: take the time to see them

before you travel abroad. Our rituals and traditions are rich. In La Tomatina, they celebrate a harvest with tomatoes. For us, in Kerala, our harvest festival is Vishu. During Vishu at the Guruvayur temple, we place our harvest offerings before God, and then they are cooked and served to thousands of people. I want to tell those who haven't seen Thrissur Pooram that at least once in your lifetime, you must. If you see it once, it becomes an addiction, you will want to see it again and again. I honestly don't know of any other festival in the world that gives the same feeling.



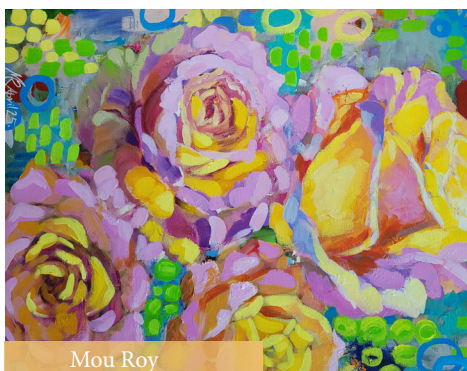
Culture is the quiet strength of a people. It is not just what we inherit, but what we carry forward with pride and responsibility. It gives us the courage to stand rooted while the world around us changes. Without culture, progress is empty; with culture, even the simplest act becomes meaningful. Festivals show us this truth.

They serve as reminders that human joy is not found in isolation, but in shared experiences. When one community gathers around a floral carpet in Kerala, and another gathers in the streets of Spain with tomatoes, they are both answering the same call: the need to connect, to belong, to celebrate life together. In every journey, in every celebration, culture gives us language without words, a way to recognise ourselves in others. It teaches us that though we may look different, laugh differently, or pray in various ways, the essence of humanity is the same. That is why culture matters. It is not only about remembering the past; it is about ensuring the future still has meaning.

GALLERY



Mou Roy



Mou Roy



Mou Roy



Trisha Lambi



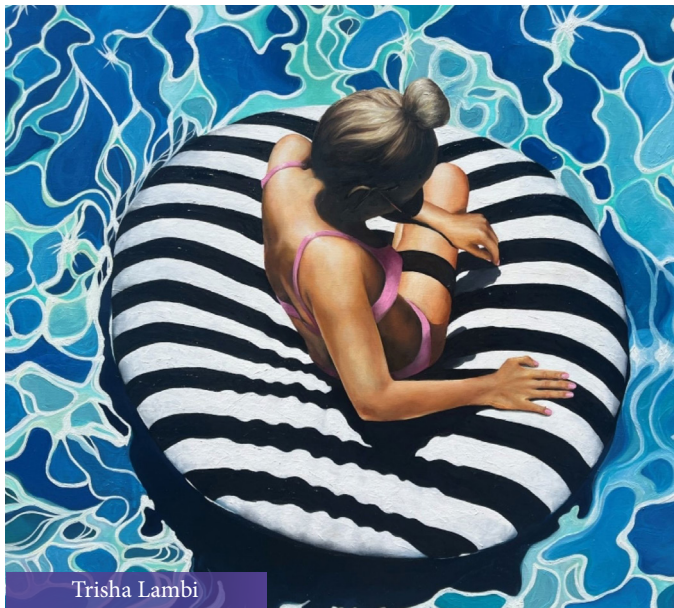
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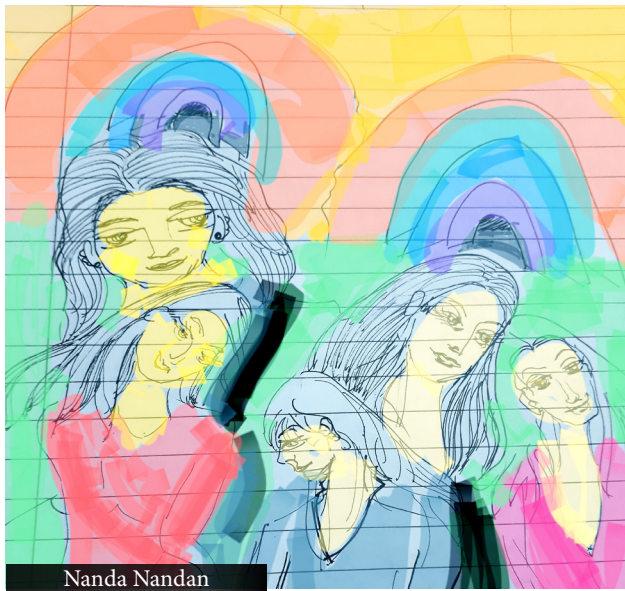
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