

## DESIGN PERSPECTIVES



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Editors

Banatanwi Dasmahapatra  
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Department of Textile Design,  
Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati

in collaboration with

KHOSRA KHATA

Dedicated to Gouri Bhanja

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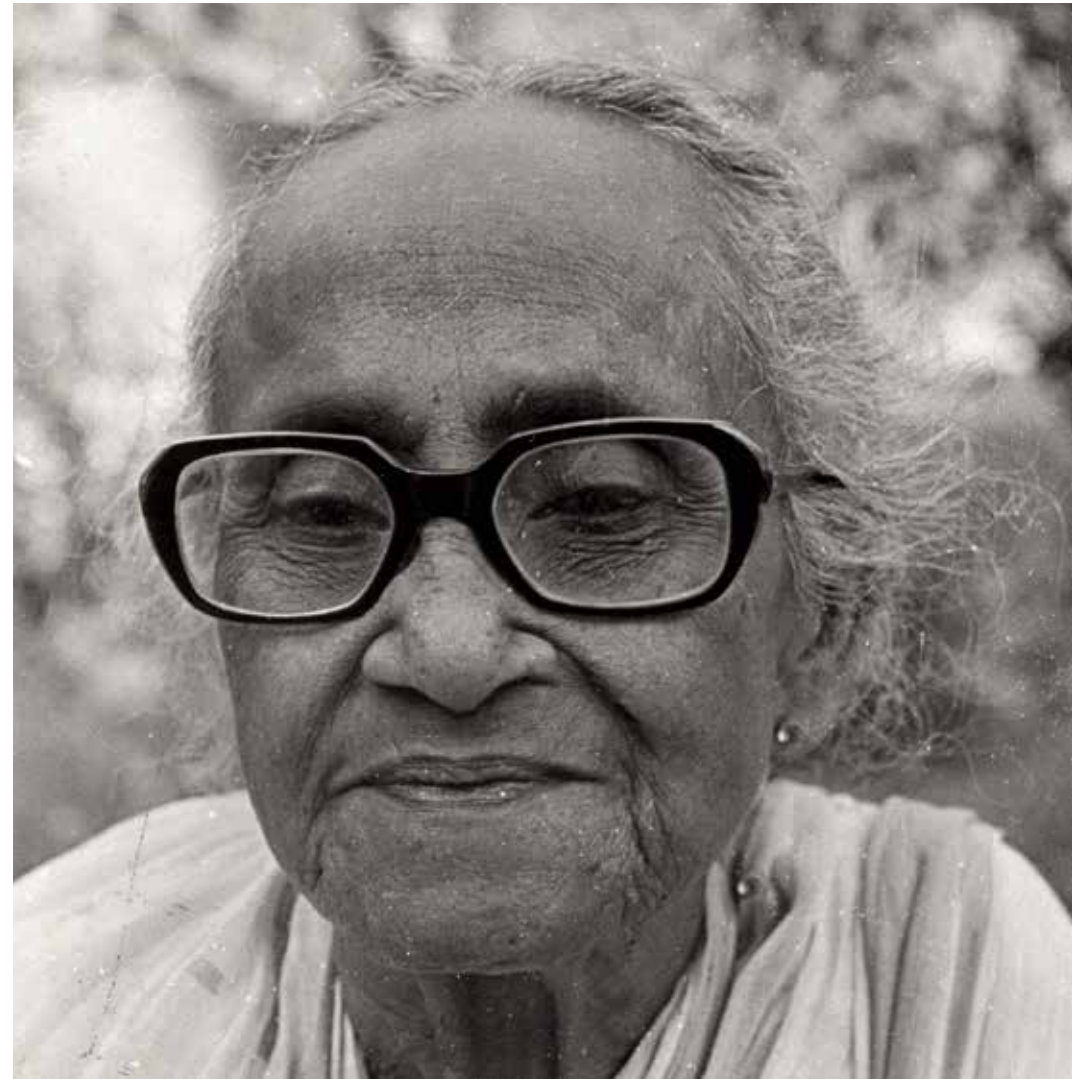
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Picture of Gouri Bhanja, Courtesy: Gouri Bhanja Family Collection

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## Editors' Note

**D**esign imbibes different meanings of the notion of dexterity in every existential realm of the reality and allows us to re-create the reality in subjective, objective and subjective-objective ways. Design plays a very important role in the academic, aesthetic, creative and social ethos of Santiniketan. The functional and expressional qualities of design dig deep into the quest of knowledge.

The idea behind this publication is to foster upon varied design perspectives from multiple areas of practice and disciplines which would be helpful in thinking, inquiring and analyzing multi-dimensional qualities of design. This is also an attempt to make a design archive of the B.F.A and M.F.A final year students which will be helpful for an empirical study on textile art & design in future, to analyze the growth of the department over the period of time and to create a broader

platform in sharing ideas, experience, understanding and knowledge. Having an in-depth exercise on various design perspectives will open-up many more windows for explorations.

We are extremely thankful to Prof. Ashoke Chatterjee, Crafts Council of India, Centre for Heritage Management, Ahmedabad University, Gujarat, India; Prof. Sophana Srichampa, Centre for Bharat Studies, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand; Dr Rahul Pandit, Department of Translational Neuroscience, Brain Center Rudolf Magnus, University Medical Center Utrecht, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands for their generous contributions and the publisher for agreeing to be a collaborative partner for the publication of the second volume of “Design Perspectives”.

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## Design Beyond Artists: A Non-Artist Perspective on Local Folk Art and Sustainable Development

Sophana Srichampa

### Abstract

**D**esign discourse has long been dominated by artist-centric and Western-modernist paradigms that privilege individual authorship, formal aesthetics, and professional expertise, often marginalizing vernacular and community-based practices. This article challenges such hierarchies by reconceptualizing design as a collective human activity embedded in everyday life, cultural practice, and ethical relations. Drawing on Rabindranath Tagore’s Eastern humanist philosophy, it contrasts Western modernist notions of creativity with Tagore’s relational understanding of art as socially grounded, non-egoistic, and inseparable from nature, education, and moral imagination. The article advances an ethical and systematic approach to selecting local cultural identity for cultural product design, emphasizing cultural mapping, community validation, respect for sacred and restricted elements, and the translation—rather than replication—of tradition through contemporary design languages. It further argues that cultural identity generates

sustainable economic value when aligned with modern use contexts and local production capabilities. To address questions of scale, the article proposes an integrated strategy for advancing local identity-based products from community contexts to national and international recognition through tourism and organized cultural events, foregrounding community-led governance, safeguarding mechanisms, and intellectual property protection for traditional cultural expressions. Focusing on Santiniketan and the wider Bengal region, the study illustrates how Tagorean humanism, Visva-Bharati's pedagogical legacy, and cultural-academic diplomacy can provide credible pathways to global recognition. Overall, the article reframes folk arts and non-artist practices as dynamic design systems central to inclusive and sustainable creative economies.

**Keywords:** Cultural Entrepreneurship, Participatory Design, Rabindranath Tagore's Humanist Philosophy, Sustainable Creative Economies, Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs)

### Introduction

Historically, design has been conceptualized and institutionalized within frameworks that privilege artistic authorship, visual aesthetics, and individual creativity, positioning professional designers and artists as the primary legitimate agents of design. Early design education and theory developed in close association with fine art, architecture, and industrial arts, particularly in Western contexts, where design was framed as an extension of artistic practice rather than as a broader socio-technical or problem-solving activity (Cross, 2006; Margolin, 2002). This orientation foregrounded

originality, form, and stylistic innovation, often at the expense of functionality, context, and everyday use.

The influence of prominent Western institutions further entrenched an artist-centric paradigm by emphasizing formal composition, visual harmony, and the synthesis of art and craft. While these movements contributed significantly to modern design language, they also reinforced a hierarchy in which aesthetic mastery and professional training became prerequisites for design legitimacy (Droste, 2002). As a result, design knowledge was largely codified within elite educational systems and professional domains, marginalizing vernacular, indigenous, and community-based practices that did not conform to formal aesthetic standards.

Within this paradigm, design outcomes have often been evaluated primarily through visual and stylistic criteria, privileging appearance over social function, usability, or sustainability. Scholars have warned that such an emphasis risks reducing design to surface aesthetics or symbolic differentiation, particularly in market-oriented contexts where branding and visual identity dominate design discourse (Papanek, 1985; Norman, 2013). Consequently, design has frequently been detached from the everyday practices of non-artists—such as artisans, farmers, community organizers, and informal producers—whose design decisions are embedded in lived experience, material constraints, and ecological adaptation.

Critiques of the artist-centric model also highlight its Western-centric epistemological bias, which presents design knowledge as universal while neglecting culturally grounded ways of making and problem-solving in non-Western societies (Escobar, 2018). This bias has led to

the systematic undervaluation of local folk art and craft practices, often labeled as “traditional” or “pre-modern,” rather than recognized as evolving design systems capable of innovation and sustainable change. As Margolin (2002) argues, such narrow perspectives limit design’s capacity to address complex social and environmental challenges, especially in contexts where professional designers are absent or inaccessible.

In response, contemporary design scholarship increasingly calls for a decentering of artistic authority and a redefinition of design as a collective human activity. This reconceptualization frames design not as the exclusive domain of trained professionals but as an inclusive process involving decision-making, negotiation, and resource allocation within everyday life (Buchanan, 1992; Manzini, 2015). Reframing design in this way creates conceptual space to recognize non-artists and local folk practices as legitimate contributors to design knowledge, particularly within sustainability-oriented and community-based contexts. This article builds on this shift by proposing a non-artist perspective on design, grounded in Rabindranath Tagore’s Eastern art philosophy and its implications for participatory art, cultural entrepreneurship, and sustainable local development.

### **Western Art and Tagore’s Eastern Modernity: Contrasting Foundations of Creativity**

#### *Western Art from the Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century*

In the late nineteenth century, Western art remained strongly shaped by academic realism and naturalism, traditions that emphasized accurate representation, linear perspective,

anatomical precision, and fidelity to observable reality. These principles were institutionalized through European academies of fine arts, where artistic value was measured by technical mastery and the ability to convincingly imitate nature (Nochlin, 1971; Honour & Fleming, 2009). Art was largely understood as mimesis, reflecting Aristotelian aesthetics in which visual representation mirrored the external world.

Around 1900, however, this representational paradigm was increasingly challenged. Movements such as Impressionism and Post-Impressionism marked a decisive epistemological shift away from objective depiction toward subjective perception. Artists including Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, and Vincent van Gogh destabilized the authority of naturalistic realism by foregrounding light, sensation, emotion, and structural experimentation (Gombrich, 2006). These developments laid the groundwork for modernism, in which art was no longer conceived primarily as imitation but as an autonomous inquiry into form, vision, and consciousness.

By the early twentieth century, Western modernist discourse increasingly framed art as an exploration of the artist’s inner reality rather than a faithful transcription of the external world. Greenberg (1960) later theorized this trajectory as a process of self-criticism in which each artistic medium sought to define its own essential properties. Although the radical avant-gardes had not yet fully emerged, the late nineteenth century already witnessed the erosion of academic authority and the rise of experimentation that would define twentieth-century Western art.

In contrast, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was not yet engaged in visual art during this period. Instead, he was establishing himself as a poet, philosopher, educator, and cultural reformer within the context of colonial Bengal, where Western academic models of art and education were promoted as symbols of civilizational progress, often at the expense of indigenous epistemologies and aesthetic traditions (Mitter, 1994; Chakrabarti, 1995).

Tagore was deeply critical of both colonial academic classicism and narrow cultural revivalism. He rejected colonial art education for its mechanical imitation of European models and its separation of art from lived experience and ethical life. At the same time, he resisted revivalist nationalism that sought to essentialize “Indian tradition” as static or purely spiritual (Tagore, 1917). Instead, Tagore articulated a humanist and cosmopolitan vision in which culture was dynamic, relational, and dialogical.

Tagore’s thinking on art was closely linked to his broader educational philosophy, later institutionalized at Santiniketan (founded in 1901). He conceived creativity not as professional specialization but as an integral dimension of human development, rooted in nature, community, and ethical self-cultivation (O’Connell, 2012). When Tagore eventually turned to painting in the late 1920s, his visual language emerged not as a delayed imitation of Western modernism but as a distinct form of non-Western modernity grounded in ethical, relational, and experiential conceptions of creativity (Dalmia, 200; Mitter, 2007).

For Tagore, art was a means of expressing the universal self (*Jivan Devata*), emphasizing emotional resonance, moral imagination, and inner freedom rather than technical skill or formal perfection (Tagore, 1922). Art functioned as a humanistic practice that cultivated empathy and spiritual connectedness, valuing sincerity of feeling over stylistic virtuosity. By contrast, Western art traditions have historically oscillated between classical ideals of beauty, proportion, and harmony, and modernist emphases on innovation, rupture, and intensified individual expression. Across these traditions, art has often been evaluated through object-centered criteria such as formal achievement, originality, and technical innovation.

Aesthetically, Tagore’s approach departed sharply from dominant Western visual conventions. He privileged fluidity, ambiguity, and suggestive expression over linear perspective or anatomical realism, embracing imperfection and spontaneity as integral to creativity (Tagore, 1922; Coomaraswamy, 1956). Western art, even in its modern and abstract forms, has typically retained underlying formal systems and theoretical rigor as benchmarks of artistic value (Gombrich, 1995). This divergence reflects deeper differences in how art, knowledge, and meaning are conceptualized.

Tagore also articulated a non-egoistic conception of creativity that contrasted with Western valorizations of individual genius. He viewed the artist not as a self-glorifying originator but as a medium through which universal and collective meanings flow (Tagore, 1922). Western art institutions and markets, by contrast, foreground authorship, branding, and individual distinction as sources of artistic and economic value (Bourdieu, 1993;

Becker, 2008). These contrasting paradigms have profound implications for how creativity is organized, evaluated, and mobilized within society.

### *Nature, Knowledge Systems, and Pedagogy*

Tagore's artistic philosophy was inseparable from his view of nature as living, sacred, and co-creative. Art emerged through dialogue with landscape, seasons, and natural rhythms, an approach institutionalized at Santiniketan through open-air learning and ecological attunement (Tagore, 1917; Sen, 2012). Nature was not merely an object of representation but an active participant in creative practice.

Pedagogically, Tagore rejected rigid academic training and Eurocentric hierarchies by founding Kala Bhavana as an alternative educational model. Artistic knowledge emerged through engagement with everyday life, craft, folk art, and local cultural practices, dissolving strict boundaries between fine art and vernacular production (Das, 2011). Western art education, by contrast, has historically emphasized standardized curricula, technical mastery, and hierarchical distinctions between art and craft (Efland, 2002).

Tagore's Philosophy as a Foundation for Participatory Art and Cultural Entrepreneurship

Tagore's Eastern philosophy conceptualizes creativity as socially embedded and relational, anticipating contemporary participatory art in which communities function as co-creators rather than passive audiences (Bishop, 2012). His pedagogical experiments framed art as a lived social process, aligning with participatory approaches that prioritize dialogue, shared authorship, and ethical responsibility (Kumar, 2010).

Importantly, Tagore did not oppose economic activity but envisioned culturally grounded livelihoods that sustain communities without reducing culture to mere commodities (Tagore, 1931; McGuire, 2014). This perspective resonates with cultural entrepreneurship literature that understands culture as a living resource embedded in social relations and place-based contexts (Hausmann & Heinze, 2016). Participatory art practices inspired by Tagorean principles can therefore contribute to local economic growth by generating employment, skills transfer, and community-based enterprises while strengthening social cohesion and cultural identity (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; UNESCO, 2013).

### **Selecting Local Cultural Identity for the Design of Cultural Products**

Selecting local cultural identity as a foundation for cultural product design requires a systematic, ethical, and context-sensitive approach that balances cultural integrity, creative innovation, and market relevance. Rather than treating identity as a decorative resource, this process must recognize culture as a living system of meanings, practices, and social relations.

First, the core cultural meanings of a community must be identified through cultural mapping of both tangible and intangible assets, including rituals, symbols, craftsmanship, narratives, landscapes, and everyday practices. Cultural identity should be understood as lived practice and collective memory, embedded in social life, rather than as surface aesthetics or visual motifs detached from context (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2006).

Second, local cultural identity must be validated by the community itself. Participatory and co-design approaches are essential for ensuring cultural accuracy, ethical representation, and long-term sustainability. By actively involving cultural bearers in decision-making, designers can avoid misrepresentation while strengthening the social legitimacy and authenticity of cultural products (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Escobar, 2018).

Third, designers must carefully distinguish between sacred, restricted, or sensitive elements and those cultural expressions that are appropriate for public sharing and adaptation. Not all cultural symbols are suitable for commodification. Respecting cultural boundaries and avoiding symbolic extraction are central principles of ethical cultural production, particularly in contexts involving heritage, ritual, and indigenous or marginalized communities (Kurin, 2004; Harrison, 2013).

Fourth, cultural identity should be translated rather than copied through processes of abstraction and reinterpretation. Successful cultural products do not replicate traditional forms verbatim but reinterpret them through contemporary design languages, materials, color systems, and symbolic narratives while preserving their underlying meanings. This approach allows tradition to remain dynamic and relevant rather than frozen or folklorized (Dormer, 1997; Ratten, 2020).

Fifth, the selection of cultural identity must align with contemporary use contexts and market conditions. Cultural value becomes economic value when products are meaningful, functional, and adaptable to modern lifestyles without losing their symbolic depth. This alignment is crucial for transforming cultural expression into

sustainable creative-economy outcomes (Throsby, 2001; UNCTAD, 2010).

Sixth, selected identities should be producible using local skills and resources in order to retain economic value within communities and strengthen local capabilities. Emphasizing local production reduces dependency on external actors and supports inclusive development by expanding the capabilities and agency of cultural producers themselves (Sen, 1999; OECD, 2018).

### **An Integrated Strategy for Scaling Local Identity-Based Products Across Markets**

Scaling selected folk arts identities to national and international recognition requires their strategic integration into tourism and organized cultural events in ways that (1) protect community ownership, (2) create repeatable and high-quality visitor experiences, and (3) generate credible signals of authenticity through standards, intellectual property (IP), and recognized platforms. A foundational step in this process is the development of a community-led identity and governance framework that clearly defines the cultural form, identifies legitimate knowledge holders, specifies which elements may be shared publicly, and delineates those that must remain restricted. This approach aligns with UNESCO's safeguarding logic, which emphasizes that living heritage is sustained through community agency and intergenerational transmission, thereby reducing the risk that tourism transforms heritage into decontextualized performance (UNESCO, 2003).

In parallel, intellectual property and ethical-use protections should be established to prevent misappropriation as visibility

increases. Mechanisms such as collective marks, certification marks, community protocols, and licensing arrangements help ensure that designs, motifs, names, and narratives are not reproduced without consent or benefit-sharing. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) explicitly frames traditional cultural expressions (TCEs) as integral to community identity and highlights the role of IP in supporting responsible cultural tourism and heritage-based economic activities (WIPO, 1985).

The next step involves translating selected identities into tourism-ready experiences that are curated, teachable, and scalable. Rather than focusing solely on product sales, communities can develop experience bundles such as artisan workshops, live demonstrations, heritage trails, studio visits, seasonal rituals (where appropriate), and “meet-the-artisan” storytelling sessions. Each experience should be supported by clear scripts, time structures, safety and comfort standards, and quality controls. Community-based tourism frameworks emphasize participatory planning and local benefit-sharing as essential for sustainability and for preventing value leakage to external operators (UN Tourism, 2006). To enable scaling beyond one-off encounters, experiences should be designed in replicable formats—for example, standardized workshop durations or modular festival programs—delivered by trained local interpreters who ensure narrative consistency while allowing living heritage to evolve (UNESCO, n.d.).

Organized events then function as “visibility engines” linking cultural meaning, market access, and media attention. Event strategies can be structured across three tiers: local signature events (such as community craft days or village festivals), national-level showcases (including national craft

fairs, museum exhibitions, and university-hosted cultural festivals), and international-facing platforms (such as trade fairs, embassy-hosted cultural weeks, and transnational creative festivals). In this context, place branding becomes critical. Monitoring reports from the UNESCO Creative Cities Network demonstrate how festivals and creative-district initiatives can elevate folk arts identities, raise public awareness, and position cultural practices within wider creative-economy networks (Al-Ahsa, 2024).

For Santiniketan and the wider Bengal region, pathways to recognition should align folk arts identities with Bengal’s cultural–intellectual heritage and India’s established cultural, academic, and diplomatic networks. Santiniketan’s historical association with Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati University, and a humanistic philosophy of learning through art, nature, and community provides a globally legible narrative that can anchor folk arts tourism and event-based scaling. UNESCO’s recognition of Santiniketan as a World Heritage–related cultural landscape strengthens its international visibility and provides a credible framework for presenting regional folk arts within a globally recognized heritage context (UNESCO, n.d.-a).

At the national level, integration should prioritize curated participation in India-wide cultural platforms such as national craft fairs, museum exhibitions, university-hosted festivals, and heritage circuits associated with Bengal’s artistic traditions, including bāul music, kantha embroidery, terracotta, and patachitra. Embedding community-based folk arts within such platforms allows artisans to engage audiences not merely as performers or vendors but as cultural educators, reflecting Tagore’s vision of art as a living social

practice rather than a commodified artifact. UNESCO's safeguarding framework underscores the importance of contextualized presentation, where meaning, transmission, and community agency remain central as visibility increases (UNESCO, n.d.-b).

For international recognition, Santiniketan and Bengal can leverage cultural diplomacy and transnational academic-cultural networks rather than relying solely on commercial tourism channels. Collaborations with Indian cultural centres abroad, international universities, museums, biennales, and curated cultural weeks create structured spaces for performances, workshops, exhibitions, and dialogues. These formats are particularly effective for folk traditions grounded in philosophy, ritual, and pedagogy, as they allow depth of interpretation alongside experiential engagement. UNESCO and UN Tourism guidance emphasizes that international exposure should be linked to local capacity building and long-term transmission, not merely to visitor numbers or export volumes (UNESCO, n.d.-c; UN Tourism, 2006).

To ensure that scaling through tourism and events delivers sustained benefits to communities in Santiniketan and Bengal, institutional safeguards and IP mechanisms are essential. Collective or certification marks, community protocols, and licensing systems help protect traditional cultural expressions from misappropriation as recognition grows. WIPO emphasizes that Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) can support sustainable tourism and creative economies when communities retain control over how their heritage is used, interpreted, and monetized (WIPO, n.d.-a; WIPO, 2015). Embedding these safeguards into event programming—through consent procedures, benefit-

sharing agreements, and community representation—helps preserve cultural integrity while enabling national and international recognition.

In combination, integrating Santiniketan- and Bengal-based folk arts identities with tourism and organized events requires a culturally grounded scaling strategy: anchoring visibility in Tagorean humanism and Visva-Bharati's pedagogical legacy; leveraging national cultural institutions and festivals for recognition; mobilizing international academic and cultural-diplomacy platforms for global reach; and embedding intellectual property protection and safeguarding mechanisms to ensure that growth strengthens, rather than dilutes, community ownership and cultural meaning.

## Conclusion

This article has argued for a fundamental reorientation of design thinking away from artist-centric, Western-modernist paradigms toward a more inclusive, relational, and ethically grounded understanding of creativity rooted in everyday practice, community knowledge, and cultural ecology. By juxtaposing Western art traditions with Rabindranath Tagore's Eastern humanist philosophy, the article demonstrates how Tagore's conception of creativity—as socially embedded, non-egoistic, and inseparable from nature, education, and ethical life—offers a robust theoretical foundation for participatory art, cultural entrepreneurship, and sustainable local development. Building on this perspective, the article has shown that local folk arts and traditional cultural expressions are not residual or pre-modern forms but

dynamic design systems capable of innovation when cultural identity is carefully selected, community-validated, ethically translated, and aligned with contemporary use contexts. The proposed framework for integrating local identity into cultural product design and scaling it through tourism and organized events emphasizes community governance, safeguarding, and intellectual property protection as essential conditions for equitable growth. In the specific context of Santiniketan and Bengal, anchoring cultural scaling strategies in Tagorean humanism, Visva-Bharati's pedagogical legacy, and national and international cultural-academic networks enables pathways to recognition that strengthen, rather than dilute, cultural meaning and community ownership. Overall, the article contributes to design scholarship by reframing design as a collective human activity and positioning non-artists and folk practices at the center of sustainable, culturally grounded creative economies.

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## Understanding Medicine through Design

Rahul Pandit

In today's world, the healthcare systems confront a wide range of challenges, including rising chronic disease burdens and with it, rising costs of care, and widening inequities. They must also contend with fragmented care models, resource constraints and outdated professional roles (Frenk et al., 2010). Despite these pressures, medical education has remained largely unchanged for decades, continuing to emphasize the traditional biomedical model (Khan et al., 2024). In this biomedical model, students focus primarily on understanding the structure and function of the human body and the mechanisms underlying diseases. Alongside, students are trained in core clinical skills: taking patient histories, conducting physical examinations, communicating effectively, clinical reasoning and performing hands-on procedures such as administering medications, or conducting medical procedures. While these knowledge and skills remain essential, they are no longer sufficient for preparing physicians to navigate the complex challenges of modern healthcare (Frenk et al., 2010). Addressing the complex challenges of modern healthcare requires physicians to be creative so they can generate new ideas and act innovatively, iteratively translating those ideas into

practical, workable solutions (Badwan et al., 2018; Van De Grift & Kroeze, 2016). It is precisely at this intersection where the concept of design becomes relevant (Badwan et al., 2018).

Although design may seem like a relatively new concept within the medical discourse, it has long been embedded implicitly within medical practice. In this chapter, I argue that design is not external to medicine but already embedded within it: in the architecture of the human body, in the ways disease disrupts biological patterns, and in how physicians learn, reason, and intervene. By making design explicit, particularly its human-centered and purpose-driven nature, I suggest that medical education can better prepare future physicians for the complexity of contemporary healthcare

### Design: Definitions and Foundations

To anchor the discussion, it is important to clarify what is meant by design in this chapter. Design is not limited to aesthetics or artistic expression; rather, it encompasses a broader way of thinking and acting (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Design (*noun*) refers to the way something ultimately looks, functions, or unfolds in practice. Design (*verb*) refers to a process the act of conceiving, planning, and shaping something toward a desired outcome (Madson, 2021). Interestingly, the act of designing (*verb*) also encapsulates the outcome (*noun*). In this regard, design could be considered as a mode of inquiry, that is not restricted by any disciplinary boundaries (Archer, 1979). Design can be understood as a science when it explains the world we live in, or as part of the humanities when it helps us interpret that

world. This unique positionality of design comes from its nature that is anthropocentric, aspirational, and operational, concerned with appreciation and purposeful shaping of artifacts and systems (Archer, 1979). For me, it's this human-centeredness and purposefulness of design that binds the different dimensions and will be considered in this chapter. In what follows, the concept of design is used in interrelated ways: *design* as biological organization, encompassing patterned structures and functional processes; as cognitive schemas through which physicians recognize and interpret these patterns; and finally, as *designing*, the deliberate, human-centered construction of interventions. Making these definitions explicit allows us to see how design is woven into medicine, and we therefore begin with the human body itself: its architecture and functioning.

### **Design as Biological Patterns in the Human Body**

Within the human body, design first appears as pattern: recurring structures, symmetries, and organizational principles that give biological form its coherence. The body presents itself as a tapestry of recurring motifs: the branching trees of vasculature and the airways, or the layering of tissues from superficial to deep. These patterns are usually orderly and neatly arranged. Even with the naked eye, one can appreciate the designs expressed in the ridges of the palms or in the symmetry between the right and left halves of the body. Many of the patterns we observe are not unique to humans or even the animal world; rather, they reflect design principles shared across living systems, indicating an overarching and shared nature of design

within the living world. The branching of blood vessels in our organs resembles the branching of roots or twigs, each following a repeated pattern of large to small, center to periphery, a structural strategy optimized across nature.

The design of the human body is also not static; it is mechanical, biochemical, thermal, and electrical all at once. Every second, countless feedback loops regulate temperature, pressure, and chemical and electrical gradients, allowing the body to sustain a constant milieu (homeostasis) while remaining responsive to its environment. It is almost impossible to comprehend that the simple act of typing letters on a keyboard involves innumerable biochemical reactions occurring within each cell, breaking down glucose to produce energy, generating and conducting electrical impulses that enable us to think, generate ideas, orchestrate movement, and perform actions. This brings us to the question: should design have a purpose? In biology, design is almost never arbitrary; it serves functional goals that support survival and efficiency. The branching of blood vessels and airways maximizes surface area to deliver oxygen and nutrients. The heart's valves guarantee one-way blood flow, opening and closing with precision to sustain circulation without leakage. Muscle fibers are arranged in parallel or circular patterns depending on functional demands: parallel fibers support long, smooth movements, while circular fibers create tight closures around bodily openings. Another clear example is the hepatic portal vein, which routes nutrient-rich blood from the digestive tract to the liver for processing, detoxification, and storage before it enters general circulation (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The design of the human portal venous system from Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543, Public domain image). Courtesy National Library of Medicine (U.S. government, n.d.). This figure depicts the portal vein (*vena portae*) and its extensive branching throughout the abdominal viscera. The portal vein functions as the major vessel transporting nutrient-rich blood from the gastrointestinal tract, spleen, pancreas, and gallbladder to the liver, where these substances undergo metabolic processing and detoxification. The branched vasculature reminds us of the roots of plants, transporting substances from one part to another.

## Diseases as a Disruption of Biological Design

Health and disease are two sides of the same coin, invariably bound to each other. Most of our lives we oscillate between these two ends. In health, the body operates with coherence: cells communicate seamlessly, biochemical cycles regulate energy, and organs coordinate their functions. Disease can be understood as a disturbance in the body's underlying design, a breakdown in the patterns, rhythms, and symmetries that normally sustain life. Illness emerges when these design elements lose their harmony. Inflammation (response to injury), necrosis (cell death), hypertrophy (increased cell size), hyperplasia (increased cell number), ischemia (reduced blood supply), degeneration (structural deterioration), and neoplasia (autonomous new growth) are examples of processes that denote disturbances of design. Malignant tumors, for instance, reflect a collapse of architectural order as cells abandon their regulated growth and create chaotic structures. Disturbances in cardiac rhythm, such as atrial fibrillation, show how impaired electrical signaling in the heart disrupts coordinated contraction, transforming a synchronized process into chaotic and inefficient activity. Similarly, metabolic disorders such as diabetes arise when biochemical design fails, allowing glucose, usually tightly controlled to accumulate and damage tissues.

When we view disease through the lens of disrupted design, it becomes easier to appreciate why physicians must think creatively, interpret ambiguity, and work with incomplete patterns, much like artists and designers. The patient visits the physician with a set of complaints. The physician must interpret these complaints, ask further

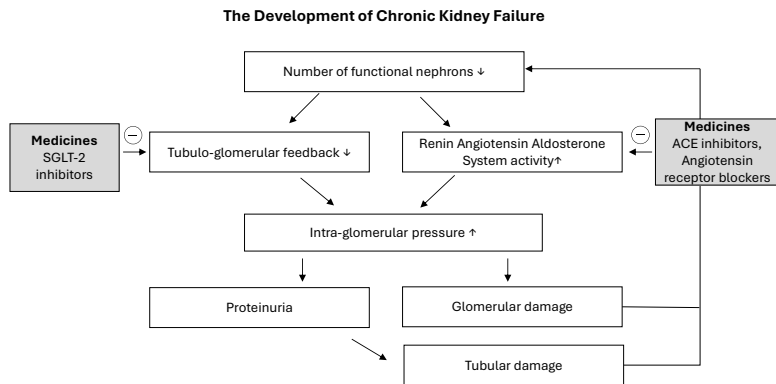
questions, and perform the necessary investigations before discussing therapeutic or preventive options with the patient. Navigating this pathway: from the patient's initial problem to an appropriate therapy, is far more complex than it first appears. It requires recognizing patterns, identifying disruptions, and mentally organizing information in a way that mirrors the process of designing. This is what we discuss next: how the pieces of the puzzle are put together during clinical decision-making, and how design plays a crucial role in this process.

### **Design as Cognitive Organization in Medical Training and Practice**

If biological design appears as pattern, medical training concerns how these patterns are learned, represented, and recognized. A solid grasp of the body's anatomical and physiological designs forms the essential foundation of medical training. It is therefore unsurprising that anatomical drawing has been central to the study of medicine for centuries (Hajar, 2011). Anatomical illustration was common to almost all ancient civilizations. It flourished during the Renaissance through the work of artists-anatomists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Andreas Vesalius (Figure 1) and has remained central to medical education ever since. This visual tradition also reflects an epistemic movement that has shaped modern medicine for centuries: a reductionist approach in which the body is first understood by breaking it down into its constituent parts (Beresford, 2010). By isolating structures, depicting them clearly, and studying them in detail, reductionism allows learners to grasp anatomy piece

by piece before considering how these elements function together as an integrated whole. Here, design operates at a cognitive level: as mental organization rather than biological structure.

Interestingly, educational literature shows that design in any form be it sketching, modelling or creating schemas as means of learning is not only for artistic representation, but it also actually aids learning. Studies have shown that student-produced anatomical drawings deepen learner's grasp of anatomical structures, support more effective use of dissection sessions, and may even contribute to better retention of anatomical knowledge over time (Bertrand et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2025). Even surgeons continue to rely on drawing in their daily practice, using sketches to communicate findings, support patient consent, clarify operative planning, and teach trainees (Kearns, 2019). Like the field of anatomy, design also guides how we study physiological function. Feed-forward and feedback loops follow recognizable patterns, and mind-mapping helps learners visualize these relationships (Sajadi et al., 2024). For example, mind maps organize complex physiological concepts to clarify interactions among regulatory mechanisms. These schemas are used not only to understand how physiological processes relate to one another, but also to reveal where processes can be blocked with medications. In my teaching, I use such schemas to help learners visualize these relationships and identify potential points of intervention (Figure 2). Such organizational structures facilitate understanding of the integration and interrelationships among physiological processes (Bhat et al., 2022).



**Figure 2:** Simplified overview from my teaching material on how chronic kidney disease develops over time. Loss of functioning kidney units (nephrons) leads to changes in normal control mechanisms (e.g. tubule-glomerular feedback), increasing pressure within the kidney filters. This higher pressure causes leakage of proteins and further damage to kidney tissue, which further worsens kidney function. The figure also shows where commonly used medicines act to slow this process.

As human cognition relies on building and recognizing patterns, using such techniques to cluster information is known to aid learning (Choudhari et al., 2021). It is known that the mind groups information into chunks, schemas, and scripts (Swanwick et al., n.d.). Such organization enhances both the speed and accuracy of thinking by enabling basic cognitive processes to function automatically through patterned structures. Detecting the absence or presence of patterns is a cognitive skill used by physicians to diagnose diseases, a term called as pattern recognition. Interestingly, novice learners tend to rely heavily on isolated pieces of

information, however, as they gain experience, their detailed biomedical knowledge becomes condensed into broader clinical concepts. This step known as encapsulation, enables them to recognize symptoms as patterns rather than isolated facts. As students begin practicing, the encapsulated concepts reorganize into illness scripts (Schmidt & Rikers, 2007). These scripts function as organized mental representations that carry only a small amount of detailed knowledge, because much of that information has been encapsulated, but they contain clinically relevant information about the enabling conditions of disease, as a product of growing experience. The scripts allow clinicians to rapidly interpret clinical cues and make efficient diagnostic decisions.

### **Designing as a Human-centered Process of Intervention**

These examples demonstrate that design and medicine are invariably intertwined, even if this relationship often remains implicit. This observation brings us to a third definition of design: design as a process (Badwan et al., 2018). Designing occurs through the steps of *discovery*, where the problem is viewed from new perspectives to generate fresh insights; *definition*, where these insights are distilled into clear and feasible solution directions; *development*, where potential solutions are iteratively refined through testing; and *delivery*, where the finalized solution is implemented in practice (Badwan et al., 2018). A familiar and highly visible illustration of this process is the design of medicines. Through reductionist analysis of the body's underlying mechanisms, clinicians and scientists determine where targeted actions

may restore physiological function, an approach that ultimately underlies the development of medications, one of the largely employed medical interventions.

Across each of these stages, design is inherently human-centered: it requires sustained attention to human needs, meanings, and contexts, rather than to technical feasibility alone (Melles et al., 2021). In practice, however, this orientation could be easily overlooked. While the development of medications has helped to cure and prevent diseases and led to many positive outcomes over the past century, this success has come at a cost. In this process, the human-centered orientation of design is often narrowed or displaced, as emphasis shifts toward biological targets, standardized protocols, and measurable outcomes (Beresford, 2010). Although medical science relies heavily on the natural sciences, such as biology, chemistry and physics, to understand disease, it also relies on the social sciences and humanities to understand human interactions (Repko & Szostak, 2025). From a design perspective, however, this scientific emphasis tells only part of the story. These latter disciplines are often overshadowed in modern interpretations of medical science. Medicine is not only about restoring defective biological designs; it is also fundamentally shaped by human emotions, belief systems, sociocultural contexts, and the lived experience of illness. Despite this, contemporary practice frequently defaults to reductionist frameworks, protocol-driven care, and narrow interpretations of evidence-based medicine (Beresford, 2010; Ratnani et al., 2023). When this happens, care is replaced by cure, and patient narratives, the very stories that give illness its human meaning, risk disappearing (Simon et al., 2020).

Some authors argue that although this approach of observation and experimenting in science tackles ‘tamed problems’ it falls short of addressing the ‘wicked problems’ such as the perils modern health care currently faces (Madson, 2021). Design, when understood in its full human-centered sense, offers a complementary way of knowing that is better equipped to address such complexity. A defining feature of design is its anthropocentric orientation toward purpose and meaning (Archer, 1979). Designing requires attending to human needs, contexts, and experiences, values that resonate with the goals of humane medical practice (Badwan et al., 2018), rather than treating these elements as secondary or optional. Integrating these elements into designing can cultivate empathy, perspective-taking, and a mindset of growth and holism among medical professionals (Madson, 2021), which can help re-center medicine on its human foundations. By doing so design can support future physicians in engaging not only with mechanisms of disease, but also with the human stories that give medical practice its ethical, emotional, and social depth (Ashby & Exter, 2019; Madson, 2021).

### **Final Words**

Often two seemingly different worlds have more in common than one might expect. Only through a deeper reflection and letting the thoughts simmer in our minds, the non-existent begins to appear and connections, that one did not expect, surface. Working with seemingly different viewpoints or epistemologies could offer new ways of thinking, breaking old patterns, discovering new ones or rediscovering forgotten ones.

This reflective process has shaped the argument of this chapter: that design is not external to medicine but already embedded within it. Design is visible in the organized architecture and regulatory systems of the human body, and as an anthropocentric process of designing, in which physicians intentionally shape interventions in response to human needs and contexts. Making these dimensions explicit allows us to view medicine not only as a science of explanation, but also as a practice of purposeful action. Understanding design both as biological pattern and as human-centered process may offer physicians a valuable tool and provide a shared language between disciplines for addressing complex healthcare-related challenges. Recognizing design in this broader sense does not replace scientific rigor but complements it by helping physicians engage with complexity in ways that are both technically sound and human.

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## Design Education in India: Finding a Language, Tracing a History

Ashoke Chatterjee

“Unfortunately, a lot of design schools emphasize aesthetics, but design is a way of thinking, a way of approaching a problem...If I am trying to improve education, public health, or transportation, none of these require aesthetic skills”. Prof Don Norman, *Design for a Better World: Meaningful, Sustainable, Humanity Centered* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023).

When Visva Bharati talks about design, India’s design community should listen. When that community talks about design, Visva Bharati should listen. This piece is written in response to a gracious invitation to contribute to Kala Bhavana’s “Design Perspectives” Vol. II. The 2025 volume was shared, rich with artworks of great quality—each revealing a personal vision, yet presented here as ‘design’ achievements. The accompanying text uses ‘design’ in ways that are in striking variance with what ‘industrial design’ has come to mean as contemporary pedagogy and as professional practice. Of accompanying comments, only a few mentioned the distinguishing mark of design as a service, as problem-solving through service to clients. Indeed, for these contributors, design seems an aspect of art, not an

independent calling. This came as no surprise. Indeed, it was my reason to accept the kind invitation came from the editors of “Design Perspectives”. No one has a monopoly on language. A semantic challenge starts with the reality of a civilization unique for its unbroken history of design stretching back thousands of years and yet lacking any word in any of its myriad languages that quite captures industrial design as it is understood and practiced today. I have wondered what terms and meanings are used when Kala Bhavana and Shilpa Sadana’s design school are in conversation as allied institutions sharing a hallowed location. Should I withdraw my offer to write, to avoid trampling on sensitive corns? Then came that photo of K G Subramanyan working at his famous mural on Kala Bhavana walls. KG, or Mani Sir, was my colleague at the National Institute of Design (NID) for well over two decades. He served NID as mentor, teacher, member of the Governing Board, and as a caring friend. His background in building a network of Weavers Service Centres gave KG a deep understanding of design and of markets, as well as of distinctions and synergies represented by art, craft and design. For him these were sources of creativity, not silos, to be enriched through teamwork. KG never asked a design student to don an ‘art’ hat. Instead, he would quickly identify any such attempt as humbug by those seeking escape the rigours of client service. The photo gave me courage to attempt this conversation on what design should mean as pedagogy and as profession, particularly when Kala Bhavana and Silpa Sadana’s design school talk to each other, as surely they must. Here too was a chance to pick up once again my long-lost efforts through Mani Sir, Pupul Jayakar and Riten Mazumdar to link Indian design education with Visva Bharati’s unique legacy.

### *Beginnings*

A common assumption connects the Indian beginnings of a Bauhaus movement to the 1958 *India Report* by Charles & Ray Eames\* and to the establishment of NID in Ahmedabad five years later. Yet actual beginnings date back much farther, to Santiniketan in 1919 and to a history inadequately known even there. Extraordinary events happened that year. Tagore visited the just-established Bauhaus. It can be assumed that he met Walter Gropius, the revered founding spirit of contemporary design. What might they have discussed about a Bauhaus vision that would prove transformational? Silpa Bhavana and Sriniketan were soon established to support rural reconstruction, which for both Tagore and Gandhi were central to their vision of a truly liberated India. At Santiniketan, as at Sabarmati, supplementing rural incomes through craft was a key strategy. Rathindranath Tagore took charge after his studies in Illinois. Handmade utility products were developed, to influence middle-class Bengali taste with an Indian modernity that was also traditional in its understanding of function and of aesthetics. Designed products must be sold, earnings generated to reach village households, and profits invested to keep a production cycle in motion. It is not known if the 1919 *Bichitra* studio started in Calcutta by members of the Tagore family assisted as a retail outlet, yet an understanding of entrepreneurship appears to have taken hold, astonishing given its time. The term ‘design’ may never have been used, yet a grasp of the design process appears evident.

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\* *India Report*, 1958. National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad [www.nid.edu](http://www.nid.edu).

### *Prasanto Roy Puzzles, Shifting Attitudes, a Visva Bharati Pilgrimage*

Facts or assumptions, these Visva Bharati connections came to attention when I visited, quite by accident, the Birla Academy in Calcutta (now Kolkata) several years ago. The Academy was hosting an exhibition in memory of the late artist Prasanto Roy who taught at Kala Bhavan. In one glass case, Roy’s notebooks lay open for inspection. In my memory are several pages with sketches of industrial products including tableware, furniture and electrical devices. This was before smartphone cameras, and I left the exhibition hall with only a memory. The significance of what I was witnessing would dawn on me much later, through conversations at NID in Ahmedabad. What I had chanced upon seemed pure gold in terms of design history. Were these products designed in Santiniketan? If so, by whom and for whom? I was informed that Roy took interest in automobiles and bicycles, yet efforts failed to trace actual evidence. Tagore’s experiments returned to attention in 2016 when the Crafts Council of India (CCI) held its national meet at Santiniketan, generously hosted by Visva Bharati. That meeting addressed the impact of globalization which had thrown markets for Indian craft into turmoil. Once-supportive authorities in New Delhi were now heard describing hand production as a ‘sunset sector’, irrelevant to new notions of economic power. Never mind the millions dependent on the eye and hand for survival. They should be shifted to IT, we were advised. This absurdity was a shock to CCI, founded on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya’s conviction that handcraft was a perennial and sacred space within the Indian psyche and landscape.

Gurudev was recalled and the challenges he faced in his own revival efforts which, with Gandhiji's *svadeshi* movement, created a craft renaissance and all that would follow as 'Indian design'. A 2016 CCI pilgrimage to Santiniketan was arranged, recorded in a monograph *Life in Its Completeness*\*.

The publication offers clues and further mysteries surrounding Santiniketan design activity under Rabindranath and Rathindranath. These are recalled because much needs to be done to reveal design developments that may have occurred between 1920 and 1940, at and through Tagore, his son and others, including perhaps, Prosanto Roy. While handcraft has remained identified with Santiniketan to this day, somewhere along the line experiments in industrial design and marketing were wound up. Why did this happen? I had shared my Prosanto Roy anecdotes with the late Pupul Jayakar. She offered her own speculation about a possible absence of support within a community where production and markets might be viewed with distaste, and Tagore as an exhausted crusader. Mrs Jayakar urged that the search be sustained into design roots at Santiniketan.

Another question remained: why did it take outsiders to rediscover Visva Bharati in India's design history? Perhaps this question offers clues to answering the first one. Was there a prevailing attitude that imposed a hierarchy, a caste system if you will, that placed 'fine art' at the top of Visva Bharati's intellectual pyramid, followed by performing arts, with handcraft somewhere below, and 'applied art' relegated if at all to a distance, as an outsider reeking with filthy commerce? As my efforts continued, something else came

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\**Life in its Completeness*: Rabindranath Tagore's legacy of thought and action on artisans and crafts. Crafts Council of India, Chennai, 2018. Editor: Ashoke Chatterjee

to mind: the influence of language on the beginnings of industrial design.

### *Lessons from a Career*

My career had begun in Calcutta in the mid-1950s, linked to engineering and communication activities in post-Independence India. As a young manager in a company\* that pioneered consumer packaging, I was in touch with the Institute of Art in Industry founded by Ajit Mookerjee, and with advertising agencies where 'commercial artists' engaged in 'applied art' or 'commercial art'. Within Calcutta's ferment of creativity and leftist thought, 'commercial artists' lacked the respect that 'fine artists' received as their due. Yet stomachs had to be filled. Art-school graduates felt driven to 'sell out' to capitalist systems, routinely attacked in those days with red-flag gheraos. Design did not yet exist as a sector, a profession or as marketplace opportunity. The word design had connotations of patterns, and occasionally with what engineers and architects did. In my company, industrial design was actually practiced, but under another term: product development. A 'design studio' existed on a Chowringhee top floor. There 'commercial artists' used art-school skills to 'apply' images and information on the surfaces of packages created by engineers to serve consumer industries. Engineers and salesmen, not artists, had contact with factories and customers located across the country.

These early experiences were recalled when in 1975 I came to NID as its Director. One of the first reforms was to break the Institute's isolation and link NID to the rest of

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\*The Metal Box Company of India Ltd. A multinational corporate, it folded some years ago.

India. Calcutta seemed an obvious location. The idea was resisted, both in Ahmedabad and in New Delhi. Political unrest and the exodus of industry from West Bengal, we were advised, would make wasteful any investment in that geography. We turned to the West Bengal government. It displayed little interest, misunderstanding NID as an art school. After persistence, a dingy room was assigned in what was then Dalhousie Square. There, NID's first outreach beyond Gujarat was established as the NID Calcutta Cell. Efforts began almost immediately to link student exchanges with Visva Bharati. These collapsed, and I was soon to realize that in Bolpur, as in Calcutta, NID's pioneering design experiments evoked little interest. Yet Calcutta's immense creative resources were too important to let go. Advocacy continued, under the inspired leadership of the late Raghunath Goswami and with the blessings of Satyajit Ray. Both understood the potential of NID's effort and both shared the vision of what design could do for the nation, and more specifically for the eastern region. With the credibility that Goswami enjoyed at Visva Bharati, NID was able to collaborate on designing its museum. Forging deeper links proved difficult. The very term industrial design had connotations that seemed to threaten the integrity of art practice. It would then take years and other adventures to enable a handful of qualified designers to bravely enter the eastern space and make their mark, while Kolkata would give India some of its most seminal design experiences including the Metro, the fashion talents of Ritu Kumar and Sabyasachi, and Pujo, an annual design celebration that has no parallel anywhere in the world. (India's design schools are yet to wake up to it). Eastern India remains neglected as a design destination, and this is what needs to change. Visva

Bharati should be there at its center, reclaiming the origins of industrial design in India and embracing both the term and the Indian profession it represents today.

### *Back to Semantics*

This excursion into personal history helps reveal how terms were once used—fine art, art in industry, commercial art, applied art, art and craft, design—and what these should mean today. The semantic challenge actually starts with the reality of a civilization with a unique, unbroken history of design stretching back thousands of years and yet lacking any word in any of its myriad languages that quite captures industrial design as it is understood and practiced today. Semantic challenges should thus be expected, including mistaken twinning of 'art and craft' as two sides of a single coin. This continues now with 'art and design' used to convey aspirations at institutions that intend to graduate artists as well as designers on the risky assumption that these are twins. Design semantics were explored at the ConFAD 2025 Conference\* in Kolkata. Discussions at Sister Nivedita University underlined why language deserved serious attention, with design education spreading at a disturbing pace.

### *Professionalism: The Non-negotiable Core*

A first challenge is to understand the true nature of design as both process and service. While art and design education have often been linked in the history of design education

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\*Art and Design Education in India: 150 years of Evolution, Legacy and Impact. June 2025. [www.snuniv.ac.in](http://www.snuniv.ac.in)

overseas as well as in India, this reflected an era before design professionalism was better understood through industrial experience. An Indian foundation was laid at NID in the 1960s through its curriculum for a Professional Education Programme. This underlined a need to distinguish both the inter-disciplinary nature of design education as well as the ‘generalization’ that is its specialization. The emphasis was on establishing a *profession* with standards of *professionalism* which in turn offered indicators of quality in education.

The early priority for understanding design as a discipline in its own right demanded that design educators be created afresh, recruited from different backgrounds (including art, engineering and architecture), trained as designers, established as practicing designers, and only then as design educators capable of bringing hands-on experience of client service into classrooms and workshops. The hallmarks of design education thus emerged as apprenticeship, mentorship, co-creation and mutual learning. With this requirement of actual service emerged the importance of workshops (wood, metal, ceramics, textile) and of artisan educators who could familiarize design students with materials, technical skills and India’s heritage of craftsmanship. The key need was for educators who were qualified not by exams and degrees but rather by the quality of their service to others.

#### *Service to Others Distinguishes Design as a Profession*

One returns to the relationship between design education and art education, and to terms used to understand these disciplines. While art and design are not silos, they are distinct. The qualities demanded of a design student are different to

those required of an art student. Creativity in art celebrates self-expression. Creativity in design is all about *service* to others, rendered through inter-disciplinary teamwork. The culture of teamwork, apprenticeship, mentorship and *service* distinguishes design. Design careers depend on clients. Clients look for problem-solvers, rather than for personal visions. While aesthetics in design is key, these are technical aesthetics, always related to a client situation and to the quality of service required by a client, and ultimately by a user. The design student should thus emerge from her education as a creative professional capable of assembling teams, moving comfortably between disciplines, and subjecting her design solutions to the ultimate test of the market – the ‘market’ understood as any space within which needs and solutions are brought together in real life.

#### *Process Above All*

Design education focuses on process above all. Teamwork focuses on analyzing a situation, testing alternative hypotheses, prototypes and solutions, and demonstrating these in real-life spaces toward client satisfaction. Inter-disciplinarity and respect for the marketplace are therefore at the very core of design education, demanding that those who teach design earn their credibility through actual design practice that qualifies them as mentors and guides.

#### *Building Blocks*

A robust design curriculum should include a strong foundation programme to initiate a process of awareness/

unlearning/learning afresh from the environment and from every source of wisdom. This hands-on dimension offers a particular Indian advantage: the heritage of craft that remains the foundation of Indian design capability, just as Tagore had urged over a century ago. In every corner of India there are artisans rich with traditional knowledge and wisdom that can both inspire design and demonstrate how inherited wisdom and new knowledge can combine to create solutions that are uniquely Indian and distinctly modern.

### *Art & Design: Market Distinctions*

It should be clear by now that while design and art have much in common, including shared preoccupations with aesthetics and culture, the two disciplines travel separate paths, while meeting and interacting constantly. The aptitudes and attitudes these streams demand of young entrants are distinct. Design is always, repeat always, about serving the needs of others. These others demand respect as *clients* driven by their own perceptions of need, survival and progress in today's competitive environments. Whether a product or a service, without any apology, design is market-driven—be it a smartphone, a surgical device, a handmade basket, or a fabric embellished by hand. Unlike art which places its highest value on personal vision and imagination, design is seldom about 'I'. Design is preoccupied with 'we', bringing teams and streams of knowledge together toward imagining and prototyping the future, using the past as a resource of experience, always comfortable with scientific attitudes and technological processes, and using the everyday environment as its prime resource. Thus, drawing for a designer is less

an art form and more a capacity for recording what she sees, illustrating alternative solutions for issues at hand, and communicating these effectively to teams and to clients.

These distinctions become important in understanding the history of design education in India and the inherited vocabulary that has accompanied it from colonial times. Terms like 'applied art' and 'commercial art' can confuse and mislead. *Design is never applied. It is always integrated.* Design is unapologetically commercial in the sense that its validity has to be tested in the marketplace through the design *process* of analysis and experimentation. Design clients look for minds capable of identifying problems and alternative solutions, minds comfortable with rapid changes in needs, markets, materials and technologies – of which AI is the most recent example. Learning by doing is thus non-negotiable in any design school that wishes to be taken seriously. 'Doing' needs laboratories, workshops and unlimited opportunities for engagement with the real world. This in turn requires a stamina for flexibility and adjustment – flexibility in curriculum design, faculty recruitment, student admission, performance evaluation – requirements that can be unacceptable to one-size-fits-all Ministries and Commissions now at the commanding heights of India's design education.

### *Tomorrow: Learning from the Past, not Replicating it*

It is here that challenge as well as opportunity arise for every serious design school. The roots of Indian design education need awareness and understanding. When independent India began its pioneering experiments in design education at NID, it did so outside the constraints of a university system obsessed

with specialization and competitive systems of assessment. Instead, it recognized the need to begin early, to attract school-leaving candidates with the hope of ‘unlearning,’ and to ensure that education was linked to serving the real world. A second school, the Industrial Design Centre (IDC), would take its experiment into an IIT framework, demonstrating alternatives possible even within mainstream constraints. These efforts attracted global attention and were held up in 1979 as an Indian demonstration of global significance. The UNIDO-mandated *Ahmedabad Declaration on Design for Development* and the Recommendations\* made in its support detailed ways forward that could build on India’s demonstration. Years later as design education spread beyond two pioneer design schools to estimates today of over 2,000 (another estimate goes above 4,000), the movement has witnessed an inexorable shift as design education is forced into the rigid university mold which it had deliberately rejected six decades earlier. A pressure for numbers reflects growing demand for design service in a huge and expanding market. Can apprenticeship, mentorship and co-creation be ensured in classes now measured in hundreds if not thousands? Where are the attempts to understand how basics of design education can be preserved and strengthened in a new technology-driven age that demands as never before the ability to imagine, to create, and to test? Where will educators be built as professionals as well as mentors? A capitalist argument is invoked: if design is indeed market-driven, why complain if education is measured in numbers,

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\*Ahmedabad Declaration on Industrial Design for Development / Major Recommendations for the Promotion of Industrial Design for Development. UNIDO-ICSID INDIA 79. National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad 1979. www.nid.edu

and success by bottom-line profit? The answer comes from history, first from Gurudev and then from the free India’s demands on a new profession to help lift the quality of Indian lives. That argument was never more urgent, with India’s reality compounded by global challenges of sustainability in an era of conflict, rising inequality, climate change and technological changes unfolding at astonishing speed. Design schools need to ponder on what built those who are today’s role models of Indian design. They are almost all products of the Indian experiment in design education that began decades ago, proved its global worth, and today contributes to every design education effort worth its name. Far from being strengthened, that achievement has been largely trashed. Design education now moves as files on Ministry desks and a National Design Policy has a single focus: market competitiveness. Why is this so and what can be done about it? Can a worthy design school become a Trojan Horse, disrupting from within education models enforced from above? That the challenge is not new gives significance to recent findings linked to Rabindranath Tagore and to those first elements of Indian design education which he introduced at Visva Bharati over a century ago. Gurudev’s seminal design efforts may not have been sustained, yet in a nation and on a planet transformed by change, it should not be forgotten that design education first came to India on his vision of ‘life in its completeness’ and then on an ethic of “service, dignity and love”, celebrated in the *India Report*\* that inspired the founding of NID. That ethos is at risk of oblivion. Design education for tomorrow needs to bring it back in ways that relate to new generations in new times,

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\*Ibid

demonstrating relevance in an era that seeks to protect an endangered planet and to deliver a quality of life to all those it shelters. Visva Bharati is in an enviable position: it has not been overtaken by a mindless rush for scale. It is capable of accommodating qualities once non-negotiable in design pedagogy and now at risk through mindless expansion. Shilpa Sadana operates a recognized design school that merits attention and care. Visva Bharati institutions are unique in their direct connections with rural, tribal and craft economies, where enormous design opportunities are situated. Bolpur offers ease of access to the incredible craft resources of the north-east as well as to cutting-edge technologies available nearby. Kala Bhavan's immersion in art offers unmatched possibilities for personal growth as well as for healing in this age of doubt and anxiety. In these times, wellbeing is finally emerging as the ultimate purpose of design. Perhaps as no other location, Visva Bharati can embody both the value of life as Rabindranath Tagore lived it and the ethic once offered as the core of Indian design: service, dignity and love.

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B.F.A 4<sup>th</sup> Year

2024-2025





Ali Hossain Khan, *Construction of Soft Home*, Natural Dyed Cotton Clothes  
Stitched Through Appliqué, 244 X 396 cm

For me, home is my first school. After coming to Santiniketan and getting admission to Kala Bhavana, a diverse area of learning opened up for me. I began to understand the construction of the space GABAA, which became another source of learning for me. As I was engaging with my seniors involved in the making of GABAA, I learned that the construction of the space initially started as a home, but later, through the intentions, it became an institution-like space. Because of this, I started to document the making and construction of this space, which for me is becoming a language or subject. I spent my childhood days at Dangal Para, Dubrajpur, in the Birbhum district. And presently I have been living in Santiniketan for the past six years. While growing up in my village, the surrounding environment and culture were not suitable for education, which is why my learning, or even understanding of education, began very late. After coming to Santiniketan, I started to observe and learn from institutions like Kala Bhavana and also from the surrounding area. When a space, a home of our own, was beginning to be constructed, I was engaged and witnessing it from the very start. The multiple layers of making are portrayed in my works through exploring textile-based and related materials and techniques.

The transformation of materials from hard in nature, which are from the construction site, to soft materials like threads and fabric, which I am using in my works, carries

the expressions of my living experiences. The relationships between a home and its residents reflect their long-term association and memory. Similarly, I am metaphorically connecting the long-term relationship between us and clothes or fabrics, which carry the intimate gestures, memories, and associations of every aspect. My work portrays those mappings through the memories carried by fabrics, and the layers of the materials reflect times and the relations. In some of my recent works, I have explored different possibilities of appliqué, fabrics, and different shades; through that, I am using different drawings of the architectural construction of the space that I have been living in.

As I have been witnessing and participating in many ways with the construction of our home, my relationship with the space is as intimate as with the garments or clothes. For example, I have portrayed architectural drawings on pillow covers, and for drawing, I have used stitching as a medium through naturally dyed cotton threads. I am working with natural dyes and exploring different variations and shades in the process, and I am more interested in exploring diverse dialogues through my present materials of work.

— Ali Hossain Khan





Pritam Bag, *Ardhanārīśwara*, Tapestry, 137 X 104 cm

Being an art practitioner recently, I'm developing artworks based on some self-experiences and memories. Also, I work based on my self-emotion and fictional and non-fictional thoughts. Before, I used to paint stories and spiritual characters from Indian mythology; recently, a quite significant change of content is visible in my works. I try to connect my own feelings and emotions with spirituality, and I create layouts according to that. Recently, over the last four years, I've been merging my content with the tactile quality and flexibility of textile medium. I have worked on different surface designs following techniques such as quilting, appliqué, etc. Tapestry weaving is also a highlighted medium in my artwork. I have developed layouts following the silk screen printing technique as well. Besides, I have learned and worked on different types of weaving, colour theory, interior designing, designing fabric for apparel, batik printing, and more resist dyeing techniques.

—Pritam Bag



Pritam Bag, *Among the Pine Family*, Silk Screen Print, 152 X 91 cm

My art practice is deeply personal—shaped by lived experiences, emotional transformation, and a constant search for meaning through making. My journey with art began as a way to process life’s quieter, often unseen moments, and has since evolved into a space for reflection, healing, and self-discovery.

Recurring symbols like the lotus and the moon are central to my work. The lotus, rising through murky waters, reflects my own growth through adversity—a symbol of resilience, beauty, and inner clarity. The moon, with its shifting phases, mirrors the emotional cycles I move through, embodying change, intuition, and the passing of time. These motifs are more than visual elements; they are deeply spiritual markers that guide both my creative and personal life. I’m drawn to softness, repetition, and the tactile nature of materials, by using different materials such as jute, macramé thread, cotton fibres, and woollen thread in one work.

Textiles allow me to translate feelings into form, often through slow, meditative techniques. For example, *Jāmdāni* and *Tāngāil* weaving, the process needs utmost patience and time, then, the experimental art piece was natural dye batik, an experience of life time, very minimally practised, secondly, Tapestry one of the finest forms of textile art, being able to learn it, and working on it is an experience itself, and there are also mediums like Silk Screen printing, *Kalamkārī* printing, Surface designing, all these mediums

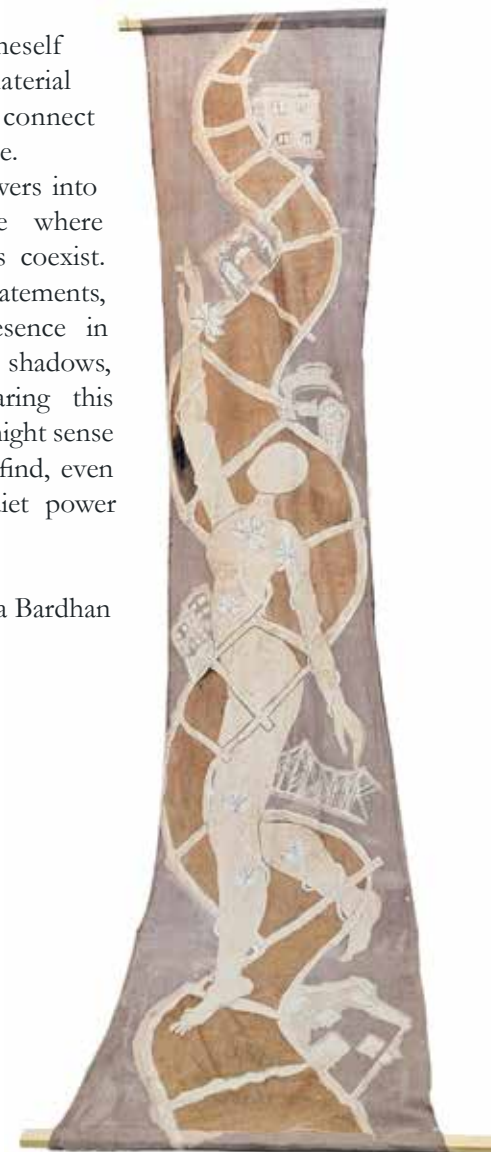


Puja Bardhan, *Missing Piece of a Night*, Appliqué, Kantha Stitch and Quilt, 168 X 91 cm

taught me to trust in oneself and the process. Each material becomes a way to connect memory, touch, and time.

My work invites viewers into a contemplative space where symbolism and softness coexist. It's not about grand statements, but about finding presence in small details—stitches, shadows, layered forms. In sharing this practice, I hope others might sense a shared humanity and find, even for a moment, the quiet power of becoming.

—Puja Bardhan



Puja Bardhan, *A Journey Towards Better Me*, Natural Dyed Batik, 61 X 305 cm



Shatabdi Roy, *Colours of Cloud*, Tapestry, 135 X 144 cm

I usually work more with different types of landscapes and different shapes of clouds. My home is on the east bank of the Bhagirathi in Murshidabad, so when I came to Santiniketan to study, I found a lot of differences in the landscapes between the two places. The distance between the two places is not much, but even within 100 km, the difference is quite noticeable. Also, I love, especially, the wash painting of Nandalal Bose, which has left a different impression on me. At Kala Bhavana, I have been learning many techniques and media on textiles, but I am particularly passionate about various kinds of structural weaving and tapestry. In my work, I try to create compositions by breaking down the shapes of landscapes and clouds, and some specific shapes taken from traditional paintings. I think if I can add some old traditional forms like Indian painting, Chinese painting, Thangka painting, etc., to my work, then a different style will be created in my work.

—Shatabdi Roy



Shatabdi Roy, *Winter Land*, Silk Screen Print, 213 X 152 cm



Suraiya Hossain, *Stepping Out with Pink Heels*, Tapestry, 120 X 120 cm

**M**y works are primarily based on my everyday experiences. I use the Kalamkārī technique to capture my observations, human activity, and corporal gestures through line drawings of textiles. I also use batik printing, weaving, and appliqué techniques to represent my thoughts. My artworks are not directly representational, but I do use figurative components in a semi-realistic way in the visual depictions. I want to show how people in my surroundings get engaged in activity in their everyday lives; in other words, I can say that I am making a visual documentation of the ordinary lives of common people of my society. My visually documented observations regarding common people's lives are mainly depicted in Santiniketan and Kolkata.

—Suraiya Hossain





Tapasi Mahata, *The Garland of Hibiscus*, Tapestry, 148 X 102 cm

**M**y works are usually based on nature and different natural objects, along with various related objects. I mostly work with different flowers and leaves, etc., which I use in different techniques like silk screen, block printing, surface design, stitching, and weaving tapestry. I am extremely fond of flowers. My hometown in Jhargram is surrounded by beautiful natural scenery. This love grew when I came to Santiniketan and saw more new flowers and leaves, which I had not even seen in my hometown or anywhere else before. Nature is present in all my works in some way. In the future, I want to explore it more and try to bring the softness of textiles and nature into my work.

—Tapasi Mahata

M.F.A 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

2024-2025



Tapasi Mahata, *The Big Flower*, Quilt, 183 X 122 cm





Peang Or Sudjai, *“The Eye is the Door to the Heart”*, Fibre Sculpture, 158cm Height

There is a Thai phrase called “The eye is the door to the heart”. It means that we perceive feelings by seeing. I wondered how the heart and the eyes are connected. An eye can hide many mysteries beneath it. The eye has been represented as the outer self of a human being in the fibre sculpture. Though the front side is beautiful, the backside reflects wounds, suffering and anger that no one can see. The heart represents the inner self of a human being. Each colour shown on the front of the heart represents different emotions. A red thread that connects the two sculptures was inspired by Chinese mythology, which holds that two people connected by the red thread are destined lovers, regardless of place, time, or circumstances. This magical cord may stretch or tangle, but never break. It is used here to represent and promote self-love, as only one can truly love oneself.

The work titled *My Family* is a heartfelt tribute to my late mother. The cloth used for the appliqué pieces comes directly from my mother’s everyday garments, fabrics that once carried her warmth, scent, and presence. I have woven her memory into a new form that endures. The small, symbolic home portrays my family. It represents the bond and warmth of our family, our shared memories and love. I’m hovering protectively with a symbol of the evil eye, with its powerful talisman against harm and misfortune. Through this inclusion, I express my deepest hope and blessing that our family will always remain protected, surrounded by love, and guided toward lasting happiness, even though my late mother is no longer with us physically.



My artistic practice is rooted in the places I lived and the traditions I grew up with. Those places include Mirik, Siliguri, and later on Santiniketan.

In my childhood, I often saw the beautiful terracotta temples around Bengal and the delicate woven tapestries made by local communities in the hills. I didn't fully understand their value back then, but they left a deep mark on me. The red clay figures, the detailed carvings, and the storytelling hidden in walls and fabrics all of those stayed with me.

In the Darjeeling hills, the Lepcha and Bhutia communities are known for their unique weaving traditions. Their textiles are full of meaningful colours and patterns that speak of land, weather, belief, and ancestry. These woven stories are quiet but powerful. Later, when I came to Santiniketan, I saw a different kind of textile practices. The Kānthā embroidery, practiced mostly by rural Bengali women, uses thread to draw and tell their personal and local stories through old fabrics. Here, craft becomes both personal and expressive.

My work brings together these influences from the terracotta storytelling of Bengal temples, the tapestry traditions of the hills, and the narrative textile arts of Santiniketan. I use textile as my main medium, weaving not just thread but memory, geography, and identity.

In my pieces, you may see figures inspired by terracotta forms, suspended or embedded within textile frames. This is not just about decoration. It's about holding history in a

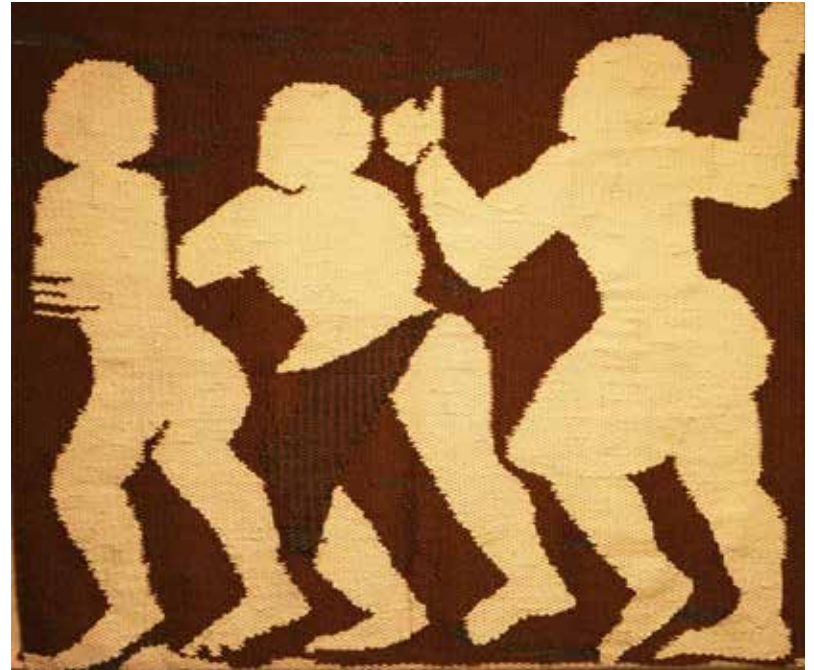
soft, moving form. The hardness of clay and the flexibility of thread come together to reflect their strength, fragility, and permanency enclosed in each other.

This is a journey of returning, looking back at places I've lived, crafts I've seen, and stories I carry. Mostly, my idea is to create a space where materials speak, where local practices meet, and where past and present are woven together.

—Rakesh Das Bairagya



Rakesh Das Bairagya, *Untitled*, Tapestry, 122 X 97 cm



Rakesh Das Bairagya, *Untitled*, Tapestry, 102 X 97 cm

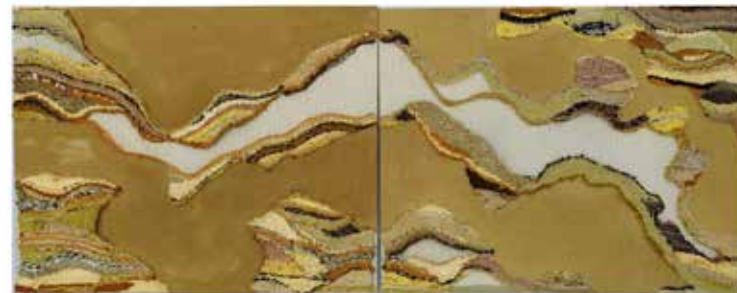


Inspired by the timeless tradition of Bengal *Kānthā*, my work flows between memory and imagination, where thread becomes a storyteller. I use hand stitching as a meditative act—drawing with needle and thread to capture the quiet, shifting beauty of water. From ripples to reflections, currents to stillness, each form I create carries the illusion of movement, echoing the gentle rhythm of waves. While rooted in the heritage of *Kānthā* embroidery, my art moves beyond narrative into abstraction, where patterns dissolve and reappear like light dancing on a river's surface. These stitched surfaces are not just textiles, but terrains—fluid, layered, and alive. Through this language of thread, I aim to blur the boundaries between tradition and contemporary expression, illusion and reality, surface and depth. My practice is a tribute to water—not only as an element, but as an emotion, a motion, a mirror.

—Sangita Roy



Sangita Roy, *Driftlines*, Stitch, 40.64 cm



Shivani Yadav, *Untitled*, Tapestry and Natural Dye on Canvas, 142 X 61 cm

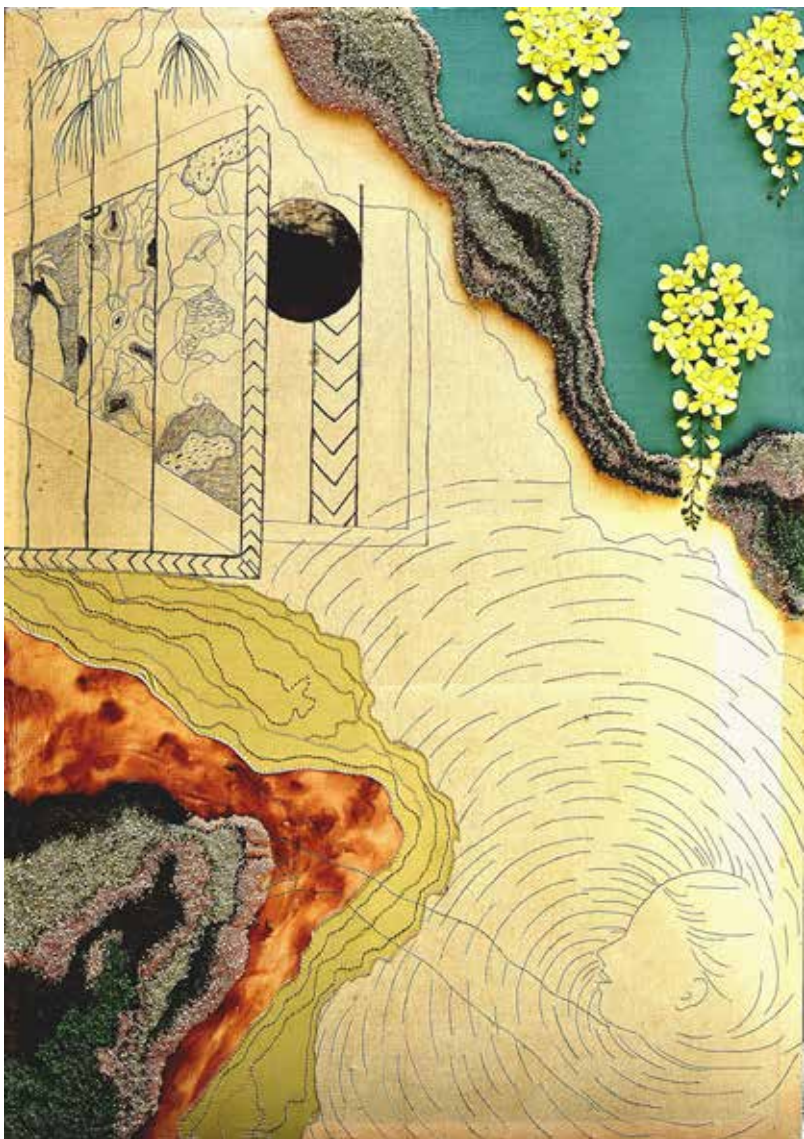
Sometimes, I find myself deeply moved by how ordinary things hold extraordinary stories. Take soil, for instance—it's not just a foundation beneath our feet, but a living memory. I am working on the theme of Memory, History, and Identity through soil, land, and the interplay between soil and Humus. For example, a tree grows from it, flourishes, and when its time is over, it returns to the earth, forgotten by most. The land remembers. It holds the story of everything that came from it, everything that left in it, and everything that will one day return to it.

I began to think about this cycle—the way everything will eventually merge back into the soil, leaving behind only traces of its existence, just like it holds the existence of earlier civilisations within it. The places we laugh, cry, or make memories hold something special. Time may blur those moments from our minds, but the land, the soil, doesn't forget. It keeps those memories alive in its quiet way. When we return to a place of significance, the land seems to pull those emotions back to the surface, making us feel as we did before.

I use discarded and waste textiles collected from different places in my work. They carry a strong sense of memory. These leftovers carry a story and history about the person who used them, or how these textiles became waste.

—Shivani Yadav





Subha Bharti, *Untitled*, Stitching, Tufting, Appliqué, *Kalamkari*, 213 X 152 cm

My artistic practice explores the intricate relationship between nature, memory, emotion, and human connection. Nature, with its cycles of renewal and rebirth, serves as a profound catalyst for personal transformation. Flowers, in particular, continuously shift in form and colour, never allowing monotony to settle. Each day, they offer fresh perspectives, new motivations, and an ever-evolving rhythm, mirroring the fluidity of life itself. Through my work, I engage in an introspective dialogue that translates fleeting moments and deep emotions into tactile experiences. The people around us leave imprints, woven from both joy and sorrow, into the fabric of our consciousness. I express this complexity through traditional textile techniques such as *Kalamkari*, stitching, tufting, and appliqué, layering textures and organic movements to reflect the depth of human perception and the malleability of memory. My creations are not merely artistic representations; they are emotional landscapes, immersive spaces where viewers can witness the cyclical dance of transformation. Each piece embodies resilience, renewal, and the deeply personal act of expressing identity through craft. By intertwining nature's wisdom with artistic storytelling, I invite others to reflect on their own narratives, relationships, and the way nature offers us constant opportunities for renewal, healing, and growth.

—Subha Bharti



Subha Bharti, *Dark Landscape*, Kalamkari & Tufting, 91 X 123 cm



Susmita Mondal, *Untitled*, Tapestry, 158 X 165 cm

**M**y artistic practice is a tribute to the women in our lives -those who selflessly nurture their families and surroundings with love and care. Through soft hues and varied textures, I weave intricate narratives exploring themes of protection, nurturing, and resilience. Inspired by the women who shaped my journey, I reflect on the distinct phases of their lives and the layers of their roles.

The colours, forms, and textures in my tapestries symbolise their diverse experiences, from fragmented shapes reflecting life's intricacies to fluid forms representing a yearning for freedom and self-expression. The knotting signifies connection and memory, adding emotional depth to each narrative. As colours shift in a gradient, they reveal the beautiful evolution of a woman's life through every age.

My artistic approach starts with spontaneous arrangements of colour, shape, and line that transform my experiences and memories into colourful, textured tapestries. Through the meditative process of weaving, I am able to observe the intricacies of women's lives and connect with my thoughts and feelings. By doing this, I honour the beauty, perseverance, and power of women who look after and nurture others.

My tapestries acknowledge women's hardships and victories while pointing to the complicated and diverse nature of their lives. Through this practice, I am able to explore the richness and beauty of women's experiences and use my art to communicate that to others.

—Susmita Mondal



Susmita Mondal, *Untitled*, Tapestry, 152 X 152 cm



Vinay Singh, *Untitled*, Batik on Silk, Indigo Vat Dye, 90 X 76 cm

My artistic journey is deeply rooted in my relationship with nature and the ordinary rhythms of daily life. Nature is always a source of inspiration, a mirror of reality, and a vessel of aesthetics. Through my work, I seek to reflect on the evolving relationship between humans and nature, particularly the distortions it suffers over time. Birds, in particular, captivated me. Their vitality, grace, and instinctive way of living freely and beautifully provide a profound metaphor for human life. They symbolise fragility and strength, solitude and community, focus and freedom. By observing their movements, behaviours, and roles in the ecosystem, I learn invaluable lessons on attentiveness, dependence, survival, and liberation. By capturing their moment of life, my current body of work is presented through the traditional *bātik* technique—a process involving wax and dye that imposes a limited colour palette yet opens vast expressive potential.

I am always curious to know the outcomes of the process. The limitation of the process becomes strength over the period of time. It enables me to explore subtle tonalities, rhythm, and texture, while visually communicating themes of purity, constraint, and transformation. The works reflect my concern with the toxicity of modern life—its overwhelming pace, artificiality, and detachment from the natural world.

Each piece seeks to represent how we can overcome this toxicity by reconnecting with the simple yet profound

wisdom of nature, embodied in birds. Through these works, I aim to celebrate the beauty of avian life while also inviting the viewer to reflect on the urgent need to preserve nature and restore balance in our everyday existence. This work is not only a showcase of visual narratives but a heartfelt dialogue between inner consciousness and the natural world.

— Vinay Singh



Vinay Singh, *Untitled*, Batik on Silk, Indigo Vat Dye, 90 X 76 cm