THE ATELIER MAGAZINE

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Artful Minds



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Transformative art and AI ethics; creativity shaping brands and communities; healing therapies; and the spirit of festivals and hidden cultures.

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on traditional sacred art and truths that transcend time.

FASHION ICON VIVEK KARUNAKARAN | IDAM

Tamil Nadu—redefined, reimagined—woven into the fabric of today.

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AN INITIATIVE AT THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD



SACRED ART: PORTAL TO HIGHER REALMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS



KHATII: WEAVING HERITAGE, EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SPORT



THEYYAM, THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED



ART AS A MEDIUM FOR TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Founder's Note

While curating the pages of this magazine, I felt like I was stepping into a living painting — one where each brushstroke carries the colours of countless voices, cultures, and fleeting moments.

Art is never confined to a canvas; it breathes through our health, whispers through our streets, flourishes in our fields, and transforms into stories we wear, films we cherish, reflections of our spiritual essence, and photographs we hold close to our hearts.

As the founder and editor-in-chief, I am guided by a single, enduring curiosity: How does art shape our world, and how do we, in turn, shape art?

Through these pages, we travel together, discovering how agriculture becomes culture, how a festival becomes the heartbeat of a land, how water turns into poetry, how cinema becomes memory, and how art empowers us to be unapologetically ourselves.

This magazine is a small universe, inviting you to pause, feel, and reflect on how art threads through every facet of life — be it healing, marketing, fashion, tourism, or our quiet, everyday thoughts. It is a collective voice, a shared breath, and a celebration of the beautiful, ever-evolving dance between creativity and daily living.

In today's uncertain world, surrounded by conflict and restlessness, I believe art and culture stand as voices of peace and healing forces. They are languages of quiet diplomacy, reminding us that our shared humanity always finds its expression in beauty and creation.

I invite you to join the journey with us — to discover, question, celebrate — and, above all, to remember: art is not apart from us; it is us.

With warmth and wonder,

Beena Unnikrishnan

FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



PC:Karla Guiterrez

Prismatica

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



Artist In Focus
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Artist In Focus
Jean Habeck
Wielding The Paint Brush to Fight Ocean Pollution
Uma Mani
Raja Ravi Varma - Father of Modern Indian Art
Beena Unnikrishnan
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Andisheh Moghiaderpour

Born in 1971 in the United States, of Iranian and Swiss nationality, Andisheh spent her formative years in Iran from 1976 to 1997. Encouraged by her parents from a young age, to pursue her passion for art, Andisheh took drawing and painting lessons for 10 years before graduating with a Bachelor of Painting from the Faculty of Art and Architecture at Azad University in Tehran in 1997.





Following her marriage, she travelled and lived in Cambodia, Colombia, Cameroon, South Africa, and Madagascar; experiences that have profoundly influenced her artistic journey. During this time, she showcased her work in solo exhibitions in Villavicencio, Colombia; Yaoundé, Cameroon; and Antananarivo, Madagascar. In the Pretoria Eisteddfod competition in South Africa, six of her pieces were awarded certificates.



Andisheh is a certified artist with the Museum of the Americas (MoA) in Miami and is a member of the Women Artistes Space in Lausanne, Switzerland, as well as the Academic Society of Arts-Sciences-Lettres in Paris. She is a Newcomer member of Visarte Geneva. Since 2023, she has received several international diplomas and awards and is listed in the Investable Artists Directory by Art Market Experts. She is represented by the 'Paris Créations Virtuelles' gallery and the 'Parcus Gallery' in Austria.

Andisheh's artworks are deeply rooted in her life experiences, showcasing a diverse range of expressions. When words fail her, painting becomes her voice; art serves as an escape from the complexities of life. Painting is not merely a hobby; it is a liberating force that brings her inner peace and harmony in a chaotic world. Through her art, she seeks to inspire hope and embrace life fully.





Painting, music, and meditation function as therapeutic outlets for her emotions, allowing her to communicate through her art and positively impact others. These practices help her connect with her spirit and find tranquillity. Her preferred medium is oil painting, which enables her to convey the richness of her imagination. She draws inspiration from the beauty of nature, spirituality, and the emotions evoked by music and photography, blending these influences with her creativity.

Geneva has been her home since 2008. In 2016, Andisheh began volunteering with migrants and refugees, subsequently collaborating with various organisations to provide support to these communities. She held a part-time position of coordinator and language teacher for migrant students in elementary and middle schools. She went on to take up a part-time role as an interpreter for the Geneva Red Cross a few years later. Although she found fulfillment in her work, she sensed something was missing and in 2023, she left her jobs to become a full-time artist.

Thus began a personal journey of spiritual awakening for Andisheh, as she gained new insights that inspired her recent work. Today, she tries to combine these two experiences; on the one hand, artwork becomes a form of spiritual practice, and on the other inspiration from spiritual experiences helps her create deeper artwork.

Andisheh is also co-author of the book, Art Without Borders: Impactful Women Artists, in which 16 women artists from around the world share their artistic journeys and experiences. ✦



Jean Habeck

Jean Habeck's artistic journey did not begin with accolades or exhibitions—it began in silence. After contracting German measles as a baby, Jean experienced significant hearing loss, a life-altering event that would quietly shape her path. In the absence of sound, she discovered a new language —color, form, and imagination. What began as a child's instinct to connect with the world became a lifelong pursuit of creative expression through visual means in fine art, mainly painting.





Today, she is an accomplished Colorado-based artist known for her expressive acrylic creations, intricate hand-painted tile murals and decors, and a visionary blend of photography and digital design of nature inspired art. Her work, marked by emotional resonance and spiritual depth, draws viewers into vast landscapes, serene seascapes, and soulful wildlife portraits reminiscent of her environment.

Her signature work is developing a hybrid creative process that bridges traditional fine art with modern digital techniques. After completing a painting, she photographs it and then enhances it digitally—adding graphic elements, special effects, reimagined backgrounds, and textured overlays.

The result is something entirely her own: dynamic, layered compositions that retain the tactile warmth of brushwork while pushing into the digital realm of ingenuity.

Jean's artistic evolution mirrors her adventurous life. Raised with a deep love for exploration, she spent her youth travelling across the US with her family. She has travelled widely across Europe, the US, South America, and Canada. The natural world became a basis for her work.

Her educational path is just as diverse. She began her art classes at the acclaimed Minneapolis College of Art & Design, with Graphic Design and Illustration before changing her focus to Painting and Drawing. She later pursued art education from Colorado State University and completed her studies in Baroque and Rococo art at the prestigious Palais Kinsky in Vienna, Austria. From there, she explored the cultural richness of northern and southern Europe—including 12 countries, from the island of Corfu to Spain, then all the way up to the Netherlands with a breathtaking stop in Iceland.

In Keystone, Colorado, while working at a ski resort, Jean launched her freelance business—originally Graphix Studio, now Graphix Studio17. Her entrepreneurial spirit took root, leading to commissioned projects that spanned the country and beyond. She became known for her custom tile paintings, many of which were installed in private homes and public spaces

Nature remains her greatest muse and Jean draws constant inspiration from the world around her. Her camera is never far—ready to capture the textures and colours that later find their way into her work.

Jean's life has not been without profound challenges—she has survived two near-death experiences—defining moments that deepened her spiritual connection and redefined her artistic purpose. Her work, often imbued with symbolic and emotional undercurrents, is an invitation to pause, reflect, and feel. Jean's art is not just a feast for the eyes; it is a language of healing.

In 2024, one of her works, 'Pegasus', was sold through the distinguished Wall Street Art Auction in New York and a copy of her original is set to be launched into space aboard the Astrolab FLIP rover to the moon in late 2025—a surreal milestone for an artist who once dreamed of becoming an astronaut



That same year, Jean contributed to Art Without Borders: Impactful Women Art, spotlighting a collaborative book celebrating 16 global women creatives who transformed trauma into power through art.



Currently studying Art Therapy, Jean is preparing to offer guidance and emotional healing to others through the same tools that helped her navigate her own life. With her diverse educational and artistic background, Jean continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to nurturing young minds and creative thinkers, to contribute to the next generation of artists and visionaries.

In October 2025, her journey comes full circle as she prepares to exhibit at the Salon International d'Art Contemporain at the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris. It is an invitation that underscores her evolution as both an artist and a visionary—a milestone built not just on talent, but on resilience, reinvention, and purpose.

Through Graphix Studio17, Jean continues to explore new mediums, styles, and subjects, but her mission remains the same: to create art that speaks when words fall short. ✦







Uma Mani

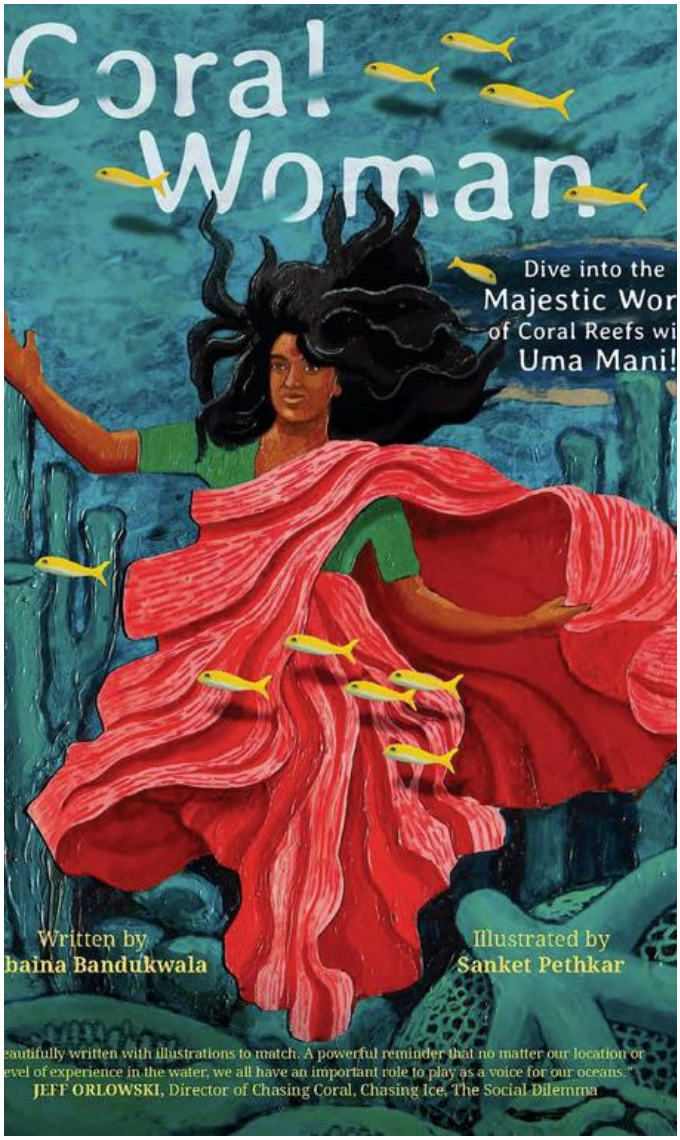
WIELDING THE PAINT BRUSH TO FIGHT OCEAN POLLUTION

In April 2010, at the age of 45, Uma Mani's childhood love for drawing and painting resurfaced when she watched a documentary on coral reefs, screened at Alliance Francaise, Maldives, inspiring her to paint these ocean gardens as the theme. This time, though, it was on paper and canvas instead of on walls and in rough notebooks. Her first painting exhibition of Coral reef gardens was at Shangri La, Maldives, for their World Earth Day 2012.





An artist from Kodaikanal, a popular hill station in Tamil Nadu, Uma's passion towards coral reefs prompted her to take up scuba diving at the age of 49. Since then, her love for coral reefs has known no bounds and she has had diving expeditions in three countries so far. Her coral reef paintings include fish that she witnessed swimming amongst the reefs, playing and taking care of the young ones. She added fishes to her earlier paintings too.



What started as an interest, turned into curiosity, passion and an unstoppable concern towards reefs and oceans. The condition of coral reefs and the atrocities humans cause to oceans became an abiding focus of her diving expeditions. It formed the theme of the documentary film Coral Woman directed by independent documentary film-maker and television producer Priya Thuvassery. The director asked her to summarise her diving experiences on canvas, and provided her with canvas and the other art supplies.

This was the first time Uma painted on a large canvas, 3 x 3 feet in size—she visualised all that she saw under water, the plight of the coral reefs, bleached and dying devoid of their colour; diapers showering above her head; very few fish and the seabed that looked like an underwater graveyard with plastic and all other kinds of pollutant..

The painting, called Hope for the coral reefs reflected her sad state of mind, and brought the activist in her to the fore. "Watching the coral reefs suffering under water due to pollution, heating up of the ocean, acidity and hazards created by humans to the oceans, I became an 'artivist' to fight for the ocean with my paint brush," she says.

. Her paintings are inspired by her diving experiences. Uma realised that she was not able to live in the present and experience the dive while taking photos or videos with her underwater camera. So made it a practice to write down the names of the corals and fishes she saw under water, once she reached the boat. Sometimes, she is inspired by a "mere look at the diving log book" in which she has recorded details of her expeditions.

She also wrote a book titled Coral Woman, published by HarperCollins, wherein she talks about the coral reefs and her journey with these beautiful sea gardens.

As an activist painter, Uma now focuses on ocean health and pollution, painting dead and dying corals and the polluted oceans. She has held 11 solo painting exhibitions so far. "These exhibitions initiate dialogues about conservation of the ocean's species," she says. "A lot of visitors at the exhibition ask questions and some of them have started to take the lives of marine beings seriously; some students have taken up courses on marine health; and a few of them have started diving," she adds. Art has always been a powerful tool to bring in change, be it social or economic, and now we need "a great change regarding our environment," she asserts

Stressing that ocean health is very important to all beings on land too, Uma believes that waste management on land, sewage treatment at source, chemical pollutants treated appropriately on land and saving rainwater are important steps to take right now. Recognised by Sony BBC Earth as an Earth Champion in 2024, India's 'Coral Woman' continues to wield her paint brush for the cause of protecting and preserving coral reefs.✦

RAJA RAVI VARMA

FATHER OF MODERN INDIAN ART

Beena Unnikrishnan



As a child growing up in Kerala, some of my earliest memories of art are the vivid imagery of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings. In every Hindu household in Kerala, one would surely find a print of Goddess Lakshmi standing gracefully on a lotus, her silk sari rendered in exquisite detail, as if the gentle flutter of her sari might suddenly break the silence. At the time, I did not know it was a painting, nor did I think about it, but I was captivated by how real she looked. I had no idea this image was the creation of a legend, Raja Ravi Varma, who has significantly shaped our culture.

It was when I visited the museum in Trivandrum on a school trip, that I understood it was a painting by Raja Ravi Varma; and it truly embedded itself in my heart. I still remember being entranced when I first saw his Shakuntala and Damayanti; both works portrayed love at different levels—Shakuntala's longing for her absent lover and Damayanti's profound connection as she listened to a celestial messenger of love—it felt like a scene from an epic come to life. When I first felt the spark of interest in art, I was drawn towards portraits. In my mind, it was always Raja Ravi Varma's paintings. I learned to paint by observing his work, just the way any self-taught artist from Kerala would do.



Hamsa Damayanthi



LAKSHMI OLEOGRAPH – RAJA RAVI VARMA
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Raja Ravi Varma was born in1848 in Kilimanoor, Kerala. There is a popular tale of him that as a boy, he drew on walls with charcoal, and a servant kept wiping them clean so he could start again. Whether the story is true or not, the image of such relentless creativity struck a chord in me as an artist. Recognising his talent, his family arranged for him to train at the Travancore royal court, where he quietly observed a Dutch portrait painter at work. Although never formally tutored, he mastered European oil painting techniques—a rarity in India at that time—and gained the ability to portray Indian themes with a lifelike realism rarely seen before

By his early twenties, Raja Ravi Varma's fame spread beyond Kerala. In 1873, he won a gold medal at an exhibition in Madras for a portrait of a Kerala lady adorning her hair with jasmine flowers. Soon, princely states across India were commissioning him to paint their maharajas and noblewomen. He travelled widely to paint these portraits, becoming one of the first Indian artists with a truly pan-Indian presence. His reputation bridged regions and languages; an extraordinary feat in that era.

Yet, it is his mythological paintings that have captured popular imagination; and certainly mine. In each of these works, the emotions on the characters' faces are so genuine and human that they bridge the gap between ancient myth and a viewer in modern Kerala.

It is said that Raja Ravi Varma's paintings almost make you hear the rustle of silk sarees, and this rings true whenever I look at his paintings. The women he painted—Hindu deities, heavenly nymphs or aristocratic ladies—wear flowing garments with intricate gold borders and jewellery that gleam with life. He captured every ornament and textile pattern precisely, displaying a strong appreciation of Indian craftsmanship. His dramatic use of light and shadow added depth and texture to each scene: one can almost feel the cool marble floor or the softness of lotus petals. Such realism was revolutionary for Indian art, adding a new immersive quality to visual storytelling.

Beyond his canvases, Raja Ravi Varma transformed how art reached people. In the 1890s, he set up a printing press in Bombay to produce affordable colour prints of his work, the very prints that hung in homes like mine. Owning a picture of a beloved deity or epic hero was no longer a privilege of the rich; ordinary people could afford art. Through these lithographs, his art travelled beyond palace walls and became part of the visual memory of a nation. Indeed, the way Indians visualise Hindu gods and goddesses today owe much to his paintings. They were treasured images that brought fine art and devotion into everyday life.



Radha in the moon light

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Over a century later, as we celebrated his 175th birth anniversary on April 29th this year, Raja Ravi Varma remains a cultural icon. In Kerala, he is part of our collective identity; the state's highest art award is named after him as a reminder of his enduring influence. Across India, he is often hailed as the father of modern Indian art.At a personal level, Raja Ravi Varma's influence on my art is profound. When I set up my easel, I recall the vivid colours and graceful figures from his artworks that inspired me while growing up —how he gave form to intangible feelings, like the tenderness in a mother's eyes or the resolve in a goddess's stance—and I learned that art could speak a universal language.

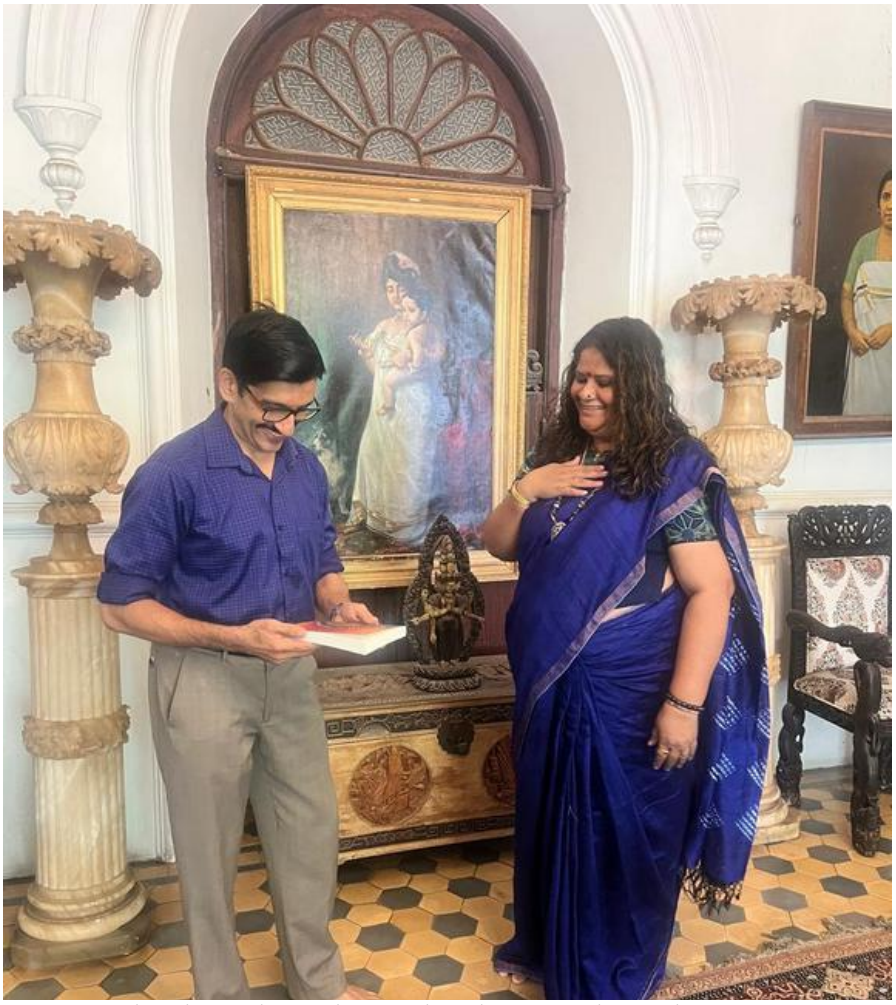
I felt overwhelmed when I had the honour of presenting a copy of my book to the present Raja, Aditya Varma, in his palace, in front of my favourite painting, Here Comes Papa. I felt it was a blessing.

Writing about Raja Ravi Varma feels like writing about a mentor who shaped my artistic outlook. His paintings were my first window into the possibilities of art; they showed me that a canvas could capture not just a likeness but an atmosphere and a story. As an artist, I am grateful for the path he paved. As I stand in front my canvas, I silently thank Raja Ravi Varma for showing that art can be deeply personal and profoundly universal. ✦

About the author

Beena Unnikrishnan wears many hats: she is an artist, entrepreneur, creative strategist, spiritual traveller, filmmaker and author. Based in Chennai, she is Founder, Kankali Trust (KT-ACED), G100 Global Chair Arts Leadership & Films, and Founder, Editor in Chief of The Atelier Magazine.

All paintings belong to private and museum collections, and the source of the images is from the Internet and are for representational use only.



With Prince Avittam thirunal Raja Aditya Varma in kowdiar palace Thiruvananthapuram,Kerala



TAKING ART TO PUBLIC SPACES

RAKSHA S.

As a young artist in Bangalore, I am on a mission to take art directly to the people with an aim to foster insightful conversations; and thereby change popular mindset that fine art is just another hobby and meant only for the rich and the privileged, confined to gallery spaces.

As an emerging artist, getting into fine art galleries takes decades of consistent practice and a body of artworks that is unique and appeals to the art market. But do we need to only rely on galleries to get the exposure or the recognition we need? Why should art be confined to gallery spaces? Only people who are interested and know art visit galleries. What about the rest of them?

A regular visitor to the park near my home, I realised the potential of public parks. Public spaces can be a powerful tool for art in terms of interaction and it works well for everyone, the artists, the non-artists, and the common man. Local parks are one such public space which provides the best platform for artists to not only display their works but also for the visitors to engage with something meaningful and interesting. All sorts of people—middle class, lower class, the retired, the working class, kids, college students, and elders—visit parks, making them ideal for artists to make an impact through their art.

The gazebos and spaces with roofs where visitors sit, gossip, read newspapers, or do yoga, inspired me to use the space to exhibit my paintings. In January 2025, after two years of procrastination and armed with permission from the area corporator, I showcased some of my artwork at the neighbourhood park under a roofed space meant for yoga practice.





My first exhibits were a series of drawings I did in 2022, titled Metonymy of Bark & Sinew — paintings of trees that resembled human body parts like hands, feet, nerves, blood vessels, and more—inspired by the trees in the park. The concept revolved around finding similarities between humans and nature and using them to find a deeper connection with things around us.

The response for my first exhibition was quite good, and I had the opportunity to explain the idea behind my artwork. Park goers who visited the exhibition were quite intrigued because they had never seen trees from that perspective. I felt that I was able to make more impact here than I would in a gallery. Not that I think galleries cannot help me, but I believe we should align art with places according to its message. For my series, it had to be among nature.

The exhibition at the park created conversations around the topic and encouraged visitors to be more involved in art. It was not just glance and go, it gave the artists an audience who not only appreciated their efforts to show them something new in a place they regularly visited but was also a platform to expand their contacts.

Following the positive response, I went a step further and held art shows with other artists in the same park. It is now a monthly event where a group of local artists display their artwork of different styles, ranging from Kalamkari drawings to mandala art, contemporary art, figurative art, and landscapes. The most recent exhibition was in May, a full day event with artwork displayed by four artists: Akhila Haranahalli, Shashidhar C, Sinchan Paul and myself.

I hope to inspire other artists in the city to use local parks and similar spaces to do the same and start a movement where art is not just restricted to galleries and treated as commercial products.





I plan to expand this initiative to other parks in the city and team up with more non-commercial artists who struggle with exposure and recognition. This will not be limited to just art, but will also include music, dance, and other cultural activities with the intention of building a community where art is impactful and deeply appreciated, and where artists foster interest among the general public in art.✦

About the author

A graduate from the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Raksha has exhibited her work in Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi in group shows. The Metonymy of Bark & Sinew series were exhibited earlier by her at the Alliance Francaise de Bangalore in March 2023, for her debut solo show. She is currently working on a series revolving around the relationship between ancient architecture across Asia and the traditions, cultures, and stories associated with them.

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HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN AI-DRIVEN SPACES



Dr Milan LaBrey

There is a quiet revolution happening in the art world, a blend of code and creativity, algorithms and imagination. As artificial intelligence begins to generate poems, music, art, and design with lightning speed, it challenges our most fundamental question: "How does human innovation exist in a space where machines can now create?" The answer to this question isn't just about AI emerging in the space of art or creativity. It's about ethical responsibility.

AI-generated art has opened powerful doors, offering tools that democratise creativity and spark inspiration. Yet, with this rampant evolution of technological innovation, we are faced with an urgent need for authentic leadership, values-driven education, and ethical AI to be implemented at the heart of our industries, nations, and causes.

If we fail to lead and create with integrity and foresight now, we risk erasing the very soul of creativity and our unique human expression.

Unlike human artists, AI does not feel. It does not experience rejection, broken dreams, hopes, excitement, or transformation. It does not wrestle with meaning. And while it can mimic some of those emotions with astonishing accuracy, it still does not understand why it is creating.

This is where we, as humans, have the responsibility to direct it ethically.

We must ensure that AI is guided with the intention of supporting human creativity rather than replacing it. AI should be used as a collaborative tool, an amplifier of our ideas, not as a substitute for the human spirit. The moment we begin to use AI to cut corners, mass-produce art without credit, or replace jobs that rely on deeply personal, emotive human creation, we cross into dangerous territory.

In order to do this effectively, we will need integrity as our North Star. That means being honest about the source of creative work, paying artists fairly, and honouring the human behind the inspiration. It also means establishing ethical frameworks and policies that prevent the exploitation of AI for profit without accountability.

Imagine an art app that uses your favorite artist's work to train its AI, without consent, compensation, or credit. This is not innovation; it is theft. If we do not create guardrails now, we risk hollowing out the creative industries that have nurtured culture and told our stories through multimedia for centuries.

That is why leadership in the AI space must come from those who understand both technology and humanity. We need educators, artists, developers, and policymakers working together to build a future that is not just efficient, but rooted in ethics and integrity. We need to cultivate a future that protects the mental health of creators, the dignity of work, and the richness of our diverse perspectives.

Values like empathy, integrity, transparency, and accountability must be woven into every AI tool we design and every decision we make about how that tool is used. This is not optional. It is critical.

Slowing down to ensure we are using AI ethically is not about halting progress; it is about guiding it wisely. Artists and AI have a real opportunity to beautifully co-create. Imagine AI tools that help painters explore new textures or generate story prompts for writers with creative blocks. Imagine art spaces where AI enhances accessibility, bringing creation into the hands of people with disabilities or limited resources. The possibilities are limitless. That is the world we should be building: one where AI is our creative partner, not our replacement.

In the ever-evolving world of technology, we must also begin to guard against nefarious uses of AI, such as deepfakes or AI art used for political propaganda, stolen likenesses, and biased training data that erases marginalised voices. Without regulation and industry-wide standards, we invite manipulation and harm. Sadly, we are already seeing this happen along with the negative implications. To mitigate a crisis of epic proportions, we need protections in place to support both humans and AI systems so that the tools we use are safe, equitable, and trusted.Creativity is more than aesthetics; it is a deeply personal human act. It is a reflection of our inner worlds, our struggles, and our evolution. As we move into an increasingly AI-assisted future, we must curate the code and prompts with care.

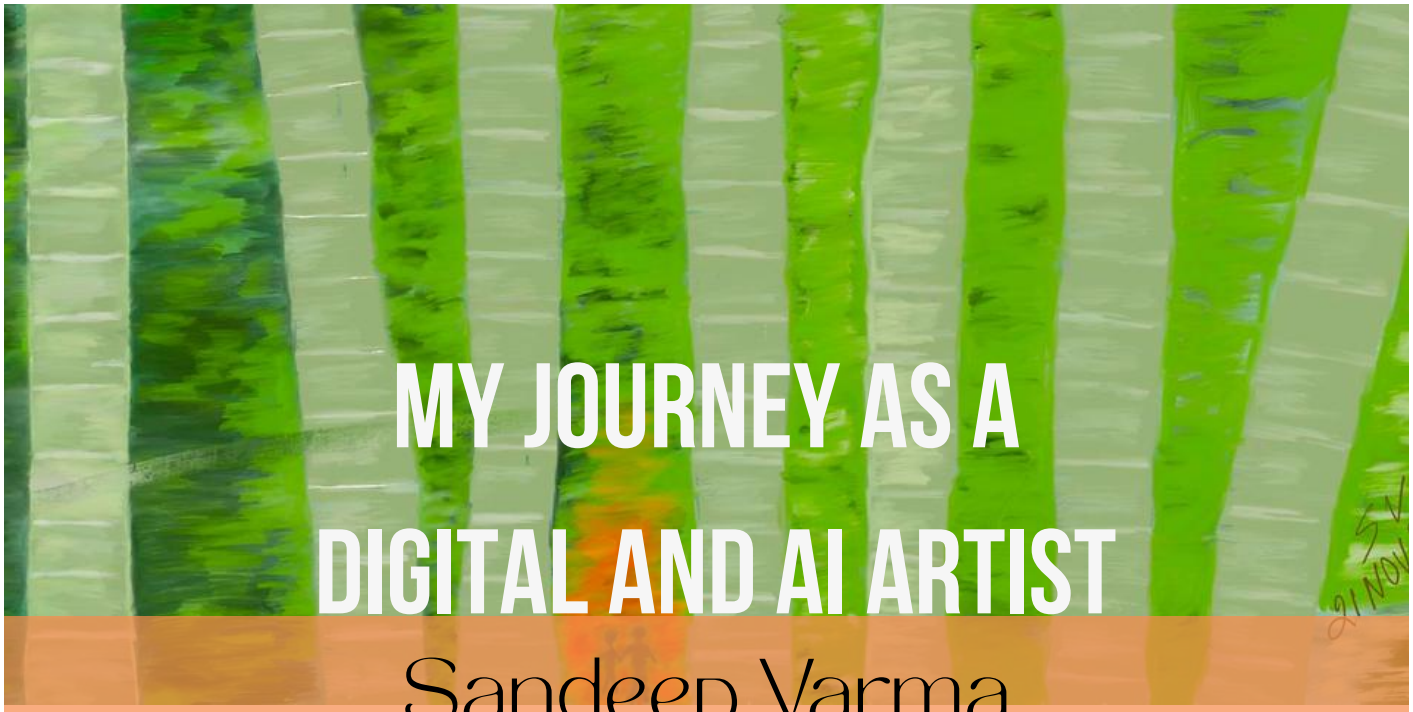
The choices we make today will shape the cultural, ethical, and emotional landscape of tomorrow. So, let us lead with values. Let us educate with purpose. Let us create with ethics. And let us remember: it is not just about what AI can do; it is about what we choose to do with it.

The future of creativity depends not on what machines can make, but on how humans choose to lead with integrity, empathy, and the courage to protect what makes us most alive, the soul of our human creation.✦

About the author

Dr Milan LaBrey is an AI ethics specialist and emotional literacy consultant, visionary educator, award-winning writer and thought leader, based in Los Angeles, California, US.





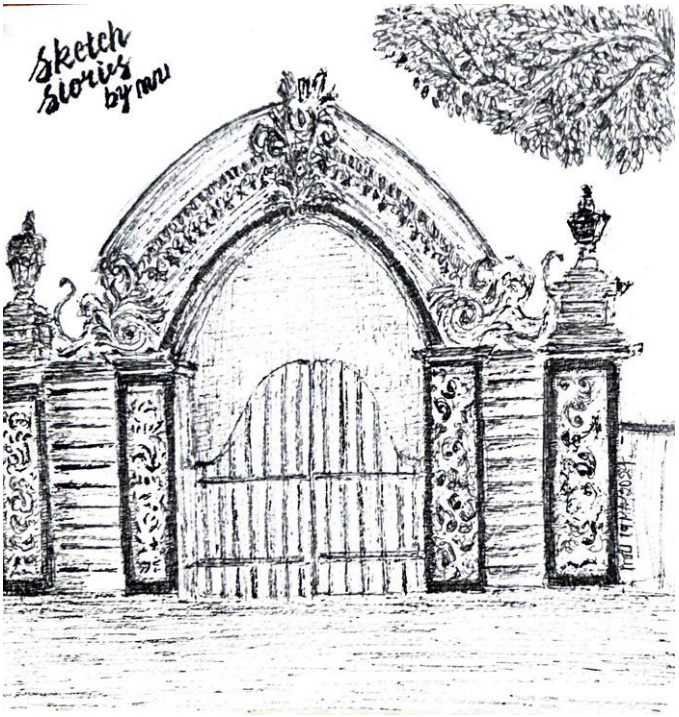
MY JOURNEY AS A DIGITAL AND AI ARTIST

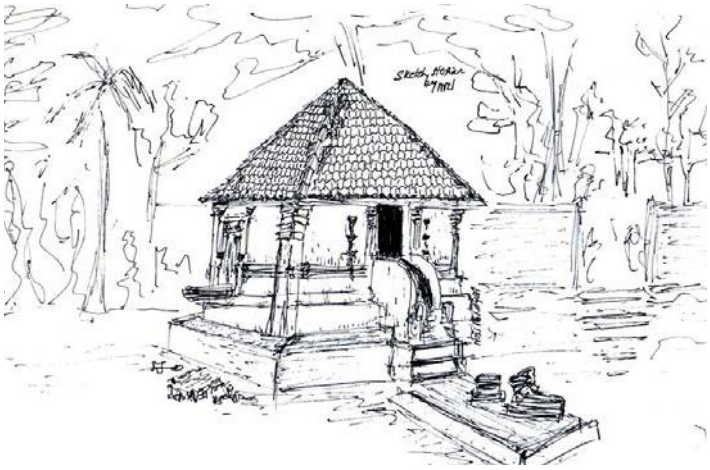
Sandeep Varma

I have always been fascinated by stories. I come from a family of writers and artists, and I grew up surrounded by books, stories, and creativity. My father had a huge collection of books, and I would often get lost in them. Some books were filled with adventure, some with magic, and some made me laugh or cry. From a very young age, I fell in love with the art of storytelling.

I never really wrote any stories myself. Instead, I picked up a pencil and started drawing. I found joy in sketching things around me, from animals to people to scenes I made up in my head. It became my way of telling stories—through lines and shapes..One big influence during my childhood was the legendary artist Namboothiri. His beautiful line drawings in the Malayalam weekly

Mathrubhumi fascinated me. I would often try to copy his illustrations. I did not know if I was doing it right or wrong, but it made me happy. For most of my school life, sketching was something I enjoyed deeply. It made me feel calm and focused.





But like it happens with many of us, as I grew older, life started pulling me in different directions. Studies, responsibilities, career plans; slowly my sketchbook started gathering dust. By the time I reached college, I had almost stopped drawing. Life moved on, and I forgot how much joy art once brought me.

Then something unexpected happened.. In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, everything slowed down. The world hit pause. And in that quiet time, I found a chance to look inward. That is when I picked up drawing again, after almost 27 years. But this time, I did it a little differently. I started sketching digitally, on a tablet.

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At first, it felt strange. But soon, I began to enjoy the ease and freedom digital tools gave me. I made a promise to myself: I would sketch every single day, even if it was just for a few minutes. I did not have any formal training in art, but I kept going. I was not trying to be perfect; I was just trying to stay connected to something I loved. And that made a big difference.

Around the same time, artificial intelligence, or AI, was making a mark in the creative world. I was already working in a digital advertising agency as the head of content, so I had to explore these new tools as part of my job. But it did not remain just a work thing – I got personally interested in it.

I started playing around with different AI tools. I was amazed at how AI could help bring ideas to life, from generating images to mixing styles to imagining scenes that I could not draw by hand. I felt like I had unlocked a new way of expressing my imagination. That was when I also picked up a new skill, calligraphy. Soon, I began combining calligraphy with digital art. Some days I would write quotes in beautiful scripts, and other days I would mix words with AI-generated visuals. Every day felt like a new creative adventure.









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Even though I embraced digital tools and AI, I did not give up sketching with a pencil and paper. There is something special about it. The feeling of holding a pencil—the sound it makes on paper, the way the lines slowly take shape—is more personal, more real. It clears my mind. It is like a quiet conversation with myself. Even today, I carry a sketchbook wherever I go.

AI as an Art Form

Many people ask if AI art is really art. Some even say digital art is not real art either. But here is what I believe: AI is just a tool, like a brush, a pen, or a camera. It does not have emotions or ideas of its own. But when a human uses it with purpose, creativity, and heart, it becomes a part of the creative process. With AI tools, your thoughts can turn into images in just a few minutes. That is amazing, especially for storytellers and artists. We often say in advertising: "AI will not replace you. But a person using AI might." That means it is not about man vs. machine. It is about how we use tools to make better things. Instead of seeing AI as a threat, we should see it as a helpful partner.

To me, art is not about how it is made, but why it is made. Whether it is with a pencil, a tablet, or an AI tool, what matters is the emotion behind it. Does it tell a story? Does it make someone feel something? Does it spark a thought or a smile? If the answer is yes, then it is art.

A Journey Still in Progress

So, this is my journey, from a child lost in books and fascinated with old sketches, to a college student who let go of drawing, to someone who found his way back through digital and AI art. I do not know where this path will take me next.

But I do know one thing for sure: I will keep creating. I will keep telling stories. One sketch at a time. One idea at a time. Because art, at its heart, is about sharing, and I still have so much to share. ✦

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Ecosystem of Art Diplomacy Law & Economy

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



Art as a Medium for Transformation and Social Change
H.E. Josefa González-Blanco Ortiz-Mena

How Art Tells a Brand's Story - When Creativity and Commerce Collide, Culture Happens
Iro Matta / Christina Boutsouki

Rethinking How We Value Work: The Art of Reshaping the Narrative
Lucia De Luca

Red Tree: Promoting Careers of Emerging Artists Around the World
Julio Noriega



ART AS A MEDIUM FOR TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

H.E. Josefa González-Blanco Ortiz-Mena

Art does not just imitate life—it transforms it. At its most powerful, art becomes a mirror, a bridge, a call to action. In a world filled with noise and division, it offers connection, empathy, and purpose.

As representatives of Mexico in the United Kingdom, we have been privileged to witness this truth not only in galleries, museums and theaters, but in the everyday expressions of a creative, resilient diaspora who carry their culture like a flag and whose creativity speaks a universal language of transformation and hope.

When we arrived in London, we set out to establish a new paradigm—one rooted in openness, inclusion, and participation. We envisioned a diplomatic space not limited by protocol, but activated by community. That vision came to life through the transformation of the official residence of Mexico into La Casa de Todas y Todos los Mexicanos:

The House of All Mexicans. No longer a private residence behind closed gates, it became a living , breathing cultural and artistic hub, welcoming everyone—emerging and established artists, creatives, scholars, students, families, and friends—into a shared space of dialogue, expression, and belonging.

The House of All Mexicans has hosted over one hundred events: solo and collective exhibitions, concerts, readings, talks, and workshops that invite both introspection and interaction. We have witnessed the threads of the community being rewoven with Mexicans from across the UK meeting, collaborating, and seeing their stories reflected in each other.

It has become a true home, open, accessible, and deeply rooted in the belief that culture can heal, unite, and ignite lasting change. Among these initiatives were collective exhibitions with a strong social focus, such as Hues of Crisis, where artists explored their experiences of the pandemic through the healing power of art; three

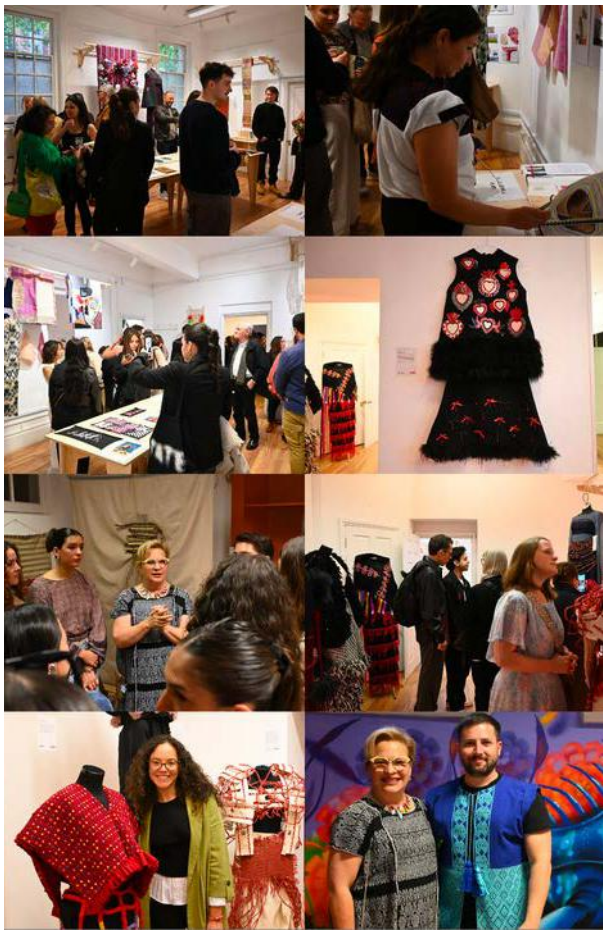
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editions of The Power of Identity: Queer Art, which has become one of the most celebrated queer art exhibitions of its kind in the UK; and our annual editions of I Present, which continue to grow as vibrant platforms for diaspora narratives and creative collaboration.

The" I Present" series is a collection of powerful art exhibitions that delve into themes of identity, migration, resilience, and the rich complexity of life. The inaugural edition featured over 40 emerging artists bravely offering glimpses into their worlds. The second, I Present 2.0, expanded to more than 60 artists, including four celebrated guest artists and a remarkable collective of Mexican talent from the Royal College of Art. The opening night welcomed more than 400 guests—Mexican community members, British officials, and cultural leaders—into a celebration that bridged two nations, two cultures, and many life experiences.

These exhibitions reminded us of the essential role art plays in migration—it becomes both memory and future, both anchor and sail. It helps us make sense of longing, of reinvention. Through these powerful works, artists transformed la nostalgia into belonging, and isolation into community.





The third edition of I Present marked another milestone. Titled I Present 3.0: Celebrating Women in Arts, it aligned with Mexico's feminist foreign policy and our presidency of the Women in Diplomacy Network in the UK.This was more than an exhibition: it was a movement.

Over 60 extraordinary women artists contributed more than 100 works, each one a declaration of presence, strength, and vision. We were especially moved by the participation of fellow women ambassadors and diplomats —not only as guests, but as creators. Their works affirmed that leadership and creativity are intersecting forces.



As part of I Present 3.0, we also hosted Diplomatic Visions: Collage as a Medium of Expression, an innovative and deeply personal collection of collages made by women from diplomatic missions across the UK. These works were born from a Collage & Margarita workshop, where women diplomats came together to explore empowerment, identity, memory, and transformation using recycled magazines and printed materials. Each piece was an intimate testimony—a visual story told through fragments and layers, celebrating the power of reinvention.

Through these exhibitions—and through every workshop, performance, and gathering—The House of All Mexicans has become more than a cultural hub. It is a space for healing, for celebration, for social change. It is proof that diplomacy is not only carried out in official meetings, but in shared laughter, in collaborative art, in a child seeing themselves reflected in a painting.

We believe that cultural diplomacy is a central, transformative force in building bridges between nations and within communities. And we believe that artists are not just creators of beauty, but architects of empathy and catalysts of change.

As we look ahead, our commitment remains clear: to keep opening the doors wider, to keep making space for every story, every voice, every brushstroke. Because when we come together through art, we do more than observe; we understand, we connect, we transform.

Let this be our lasting message—art is not just for galleries or grand openings—it is for kitchens and street corners, for embassies and schools, for all of us. It is how we remember who we are, how we imagine what we could become, and how we build a world where everyone belongs✦







About the author

H.E. Josefa González-Blanco Ortiz-Mena is the Ambassador of Mexico to the United Kingdom and G100 Global Chair, Diplomacy and Negotiations, and Fernando G. Champion, Mexico's Cultural Attaché in the UK and Denim Club Diplomacy and Negotiations Advisory Member.

HOW ART TELLS A BRAND'S STORY WHEN CREATIVITY AND COMMERCE COLLIDE, CULTURE HAPPENS

Iro Maïta & Chrisiina Boutsouki

There was a time not long ago when brands would simply sell products. A logo slapped on a T-shirt, a catchy tagline printed on a billboard, a commercial on TV. But those days feel like an outdated memory nowadays. Today, brands do not want to simply be noticed, they want to be felt. They want to be part of the culture; they place emphasis on storytelling and creating narratives that truly resonate with people and become a meaningful part of who they are.



Iro Matta

Art is often at the heart of this shift, not just as decoration or design, but as a language of emotion and identity. Art has always been about more than aesthetics; it is a way of interpreting the world, challenging norms, expressing the unspoken, and creating meaningful connections. The brands that understand this are no longer simple marketers; they are storytellers, cultural curators, even provocateurs.



Christina Boutsouki

The fashion world is a representative example of this. Alexander McQueen, a visionary ahead of his time, revolutionised fashion by merging it with art, spectacle, and storytelling long before it became the norm. His Spring/Summer 1999 show stands as a landmark moment—not only for its groundbreaking designs but for the performance that redefined the very concept of the runway. Supermodel Shalom Harlow stood on a rotating platform, in a plain white dress. Robotic arms emerged, spraying her white dress with black and neon-yellow paint in a mesmerising display.

The moment was spectacular—part fashion, part painting, part performance art, part rebellion—the dress became a canvas, and the runway transformed into a stage for storytelling. It was not about selling a product; it was about creating an experience.

More recently, Coperni's Paris Fashion Week show in 2022 echoed that blend of technology and creativity, creating a modern counterpart of that moment. Top model Bella Hadid was literally sprayed into a dress mid-runway, the fabric materializing in real time thanks to the innovative spray-on textile technology. The dress was not just worn; it was made before the audience's eyes. The spectacle certainly generated buzz—and that was part of the goal—but more importantly, it positioned the brand at the intersection of art, innovation, and culture



PC :https://www.vogue.com/article/past-present-alexander-mcqueen-spring-1999-rtw-shalom-harlow
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Moments like these remind us that fashion is not just about clothing; it is about expression. It is where art, technology, and identity can collide and surpass its functional role.

This interplay is not just confined to fashion. Looking into the art world itself, it is prominent that collaborations with brands have become a vital part of artistic storytelling. Artists like Yayoi Kusama have reimagined Louis Vuitton's iconic trunks, turning them into immersive worlds covered in her signature polka dots. Takashi Murakami's vibrant, psychedelic flowers blend street art with high fashion, blurring the line between pop culture and luxury. These partnerships don't just add aesthetic flair; they inject brands with cultural capital and emotional depth, by weaving values into their identity, creating connections that go beyond products. This approach transforms brands from mere commodities into symbols that resonate on a personal level, fostering loyalty among their audiences.

Similarly, museums and galleries are evolving. No longer silent temples of art history, many now embrace brand storytelling as a powerful tool to engage and connect with wider audiences. Exhibitions now come paired with digital campaigns and merchandise drops.

The traditional gatekeeping walls of high culture are slowly dissolving, replaced by a dynamic dialogue with the audience.

Culture, too, plays a pivotal role. Consider music festivals that double as brand showcases or streetwear labels that emerge organically from the streets, rooted in authentic cultural expression. The lines between art, business, and culture have really become blurred. Brands that genuinely connect with culture are not just selling products – they are sharing values and shaping identities. They become part of the soundtrack and the everyday fabric of our lives.

With the rise of social media, the stakes have never been higher. A brand's Instagram feed is no longer a simple catalogue; it is a curated gallery, a mood board, and a storybook all in one. TikTok reels do not just showcase products; they create narratives, spark trends, and invite participation. Marketing and art merge in real time, creating meaningful cultural moments.

Yet, this relationship requires nuance. When brands borrow from art or culture without genuine understanding, the result can be shallow at best and offensive at worst. In an era marked by superficial activism, audiences have become more discerning than ever. They crave authenticity and meaning, not empty gestures. Art infused branding must come from a place of respect and genuine engagement, otherwise, it is just noise.

That said, when done well, the convergence of art and marketing is a powerful force. It enables brands to move beyond mere transactions and become integral to the cultural landscape. It lets art breathe beyond galleries and museums, reaching everyday lives in new, unexpected, more accessible ways.

Consider the work of designers like Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, whose creations disrupt traditional fashion norms. Or Dries Van Noten, whose collections are like walking exhibitions, rich in texture, color, and cultural references.

In visual art, this fusion extends to the way works are both presented and perceived, blurring the lines between exhibition, experience, and expression. Exhibitions are no longer static; they are immersive experiences, using lighting, sound, and interactivity to tell a story, thus inviting viewers not just to look, but to feel and connect.

Meanwhile, cultural movements, from Black Lives Matter to climate activism, have influenced how brands communicate. Social responsibility has become inseparable from brand identity, and art offers a way to articulate these commitments with nuance and impact.

In this landscape, creativity is currency, and storytelling is the language. Brands that harness art authentically do not just survive; they shape culture. So next time you scroll past a campaign or attend an event that stops you in your tracks, look closer. It is not just a pretty picture; it is a story being told, a feeling being shared, and ultimately a whole culture being shaped. ✦



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About the Authors

Iro Matta is based in Thessaloniki, Greece, and holds a BA in English Language and Literature and an MSc in Strategic Marketing from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She works at a lifestyle magazine and has a strong interest in fashion, culture, and communication.

Christina Boutsouki is a Professor of Marketing at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, where she also leads the MSc in Strategic Marketing. Her research explores the intersections of advertising creativity, cultural communication strategies, and the evolving world of fashion management—bringing a uniquely artistic lens to the science of marketing.



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File:Comme_des_Garcons_at_the_Met_(62473).jpg (Rhododendrites)
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RETHINKING HOW WE VALUE WORK

THE ART OF RESHAPING THE NARRATIVE

Lucia de Luca



At the G100 (an influential group of 100 women leaders from across the world, with 100 different wings and sectors) Pay Parity & Corporate Transformation Wing, we believe that rethinking how we value work is the key to building stronger, fairer societies. Our mission is to shine a light on pay inequalities in every sector—from boardrooms to art galleries—and to show that closing the gender pay gap is not just a women's issue; it is a societal and economic necessity.

Awareness: The Spark for Change

Awareness is where change begins. Too often, the existence of pay inequality is not known. Too often, it is dismissed as someone else's problem. But we are here to create awareness. We do this by fostering global conversations, showcasing positive examples, and advocating fair working practices and policies—everywhere.

While we rely on reliable data from organisations like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Bank, and International Labour Organisation (ILO), we wish to look beyond the numbers. We listen to stories of those that manage to create equal working spaces, those that allow companies and societies to thrive. We amplified those stories where decisions are taken, like Davos, Munich Security Conference and other high-level encounters.

Pay Inequality Knows No Boundaries

Pay gaps do not just exist in corporate offices or factories. They are found in every field—including the arts, where biases can be subtle but powerful. To celebrate the recent visit of artist Beena Unnikrishnan to Luxembourg, we were hosted by Delphine Munro, Head of Arts and Culture at the European Investment Bank (EIB), where our delegation saw firsthand how gender stereotypes shape even the art world.

Artists are society's storytellers. But as we explored a textile art exhibition at Luxembourg, we learned that only 30% of artists use textiles, most of them women. Textile art has long been associated with femininity and domesticity, discouraging many male artists from exploring this medium. This is just one example of how deep-rooted biases can dictate not only how people are paid, but even what they are allowed to create

. Thanks to initiatives like the EIB's Artists Development Programme, and the passionate work of leaders like Shiva Dustdar and Carmen Niethammer, more artists of all genders are being given the freedom and support to break these moulds. But that was only the beginning, there is still much work to do.

The Art of Negotiation: Awareness in Action

As Nobel laureate Claudia Goldin's research shows, gender pay gap is shaped by many factors: career choices, caregiving, workplace policies, and—crucially—the art of negotiation. Negotiation begins with awareness: knowing that there are unconscious biases in rewarding systems, understanding the system, and having the courage to ask for more.

Yet, women often face extra hurdles. Lack of salary transparency, unconscious bias, and the "motherhood penalty" all make negotiation harder. In the arts, as in business, women may be less likely to push for higher pay or recognition, especially in fields traditionally seen as "women's work."

Five Reminders to us all

- The pay gap is more than a number: It is about recognition, opportunity, and dignity throughout an entire career. Barriers are everywhere: Stereotypes, caregiving, lack of mentorship, and inflexible policies hold people back in every sector.
- Promotion, networking, and negotiation are tough: Women face unique challenges, from "office housework" to being overlooked for leadership.
- Flexibility is not enough: Flexible work must be normalised for everyone and do not penalise those who use it.
- Practical hacks work: Practice negotiation, find allies, and use data to drive fair policies. Companies should make promotions after maternity leave standard and measure performance fairly.
- Acknowledge those companies that ensure equal working and paying conditions, support them; they also need our support.

Art as a Mirror—and a Catalyst

Our experience in Luxembourg reminded us that art does more than reflect society; it can change it. When we challenge stereotypes in the arts, we open doors for all artists to express themselves freely and be rewarded fairly. When we challenge pay gaps in business, we create stronger, more innovative companies.

The G100 Pay Parity & Corporate Transformation Wing is committed to driving these conversations everywhere. We highlight leaders who are making a difference, share best practices, and advocate for policies that create real change. We work across sectors and continents, building a movement where everyone—regardless of gender or field—can thrive.

Join Us

Every day, we discover new ways to challenge stereotypes and close pay gaps. We invite you to join us—whether you are an artist, a business leader, or someone who simply believes in equality.

Let us make awareness the spark that lights the path to pay equity, in every sector and every corner of society. Together, we can rethink how we value work and build a future where everyone's contribution is recognised and rewarded. ✦

About the author

Lucia de Luca is an equity champion and currently, Global Chair of the G100 Wing dedicated to Pay Parity & Corporate Transformation. She has over 20 years of experience in international cooperation and strategic communications. She has empowered organisations to expand globally, attract sustainable funding, forge powerful alliances, and operate with governance models that boost performance, turning missions into measurable, lasting impact. She has managed reputational crises and international relations and worked in policy, media, and public relations across European Institutions.





RED TREE

PROMOTING CAREERS OF EMERGING ARTISTS AROUND THE WORLD

Interview with Julio Noriega

*"**I see** the artist community as branches of a large tree, from which everyone springs but also overlaps. Some branches flourish and others wither over time, yet they all receive the same amount of water and endure the same climates. That's the metaphor for the tree, and the colour red is because we all bleed into that same colour."*

Julio Noriega began his career in 1998 as a sculptor in Lima, Peru, making small objects which he exhibited in a gallery in Miraflores. A few years later, in 2002, he moved to Córdoba Argentina, where he established himself as a maker of sculptures for third parties—for great Argentine masters such as Seguí and Claudio Gómez, among others—from the metallurgical workshop that he directed at the time. After a while he began to make his own sculptures until he decided to start giving other artists the opportunity by promoting them and selling their work. He founded Art Container in Córdoba, Argentina in 2012, an art space where he exhibited the works of some local artists. In 2014 he moved to Punta del Este, Uruguay where he founded Outdoor Gallery.



Two years later in 2016, he founded Red Tree, a cultural artistic platform created to promote the careers of emerging artists around the world. Today Red Tree holds around 20 art events per year and in its history has promoted more than 120 artists from 40 countries.

Apart from working with South American artists, he has also worked with important European and Asian artists. Since 2018, he toured with Red Tree on international exhibition tours called 'Global Tour' featuring various artists in major cities of the world. Global Tour 2025 will hold art exhibitions in Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Italy, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In 2021 he was named Brand Ambassador of Qatar International Art Festival for Peru. He is currently Director of Strategic Alliances and Revenue Growth of QIAF, a position in which he currently works.Since 2024, he has served as art director of the Mission Zero Hunger program, which is supported by the Word Economic Forum, through which he invites visual artists from around the world to collaborate with their art work so that they can be auctioned and with the procedes, help alleviate world hunger. Excerpts from the interview:





Can you take us back to the moment when the idea of Red Tree first sparked?

As a Sculptor, I have been linked to the art world since 1998. I have always noticed the need for artists to market their art but also to go out into the world and my intention when I created Red Tree was to be able to give that possibility to emerging artists.

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What gap in the art world did you aim to fill?

Lack of visibility and access to exhibition spaces. Difficult access to galleries and art fairs that usually prioritise already established artists.Limited reach on social networks or digital platforms if they do not have marketing knowledge or a clear strategy. Little institutional representation: museums and cultural centers often do not bet on new talents.

Red Tree has made its mark across 15 countries. What key principles do you believe are necessary to bridge cultural and artistic diversity on a global scale?

Most of the artists have absence of contact networks, scarce access to curators, critics, collectors and cultural managers. They also feel geographical or social isolation, especially in peripheral regions or with little support for the arts. For emerging artists it is challenging to find mentors or to enter to professional circuits that open doors to them, so Red Tree offers emerging artists the opportunity to have global visibility through short-term exhibitions, where we focus more on the impact that these can have on each of the communities where we carry them out offering artists different ways to promote their work not only through exhibitions but also through activities such as workshops, master classes, live paintings, or collaborations with products or brands.

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Why "Red Tree"? Does it represent a particular philosophy or vision that drives your work?

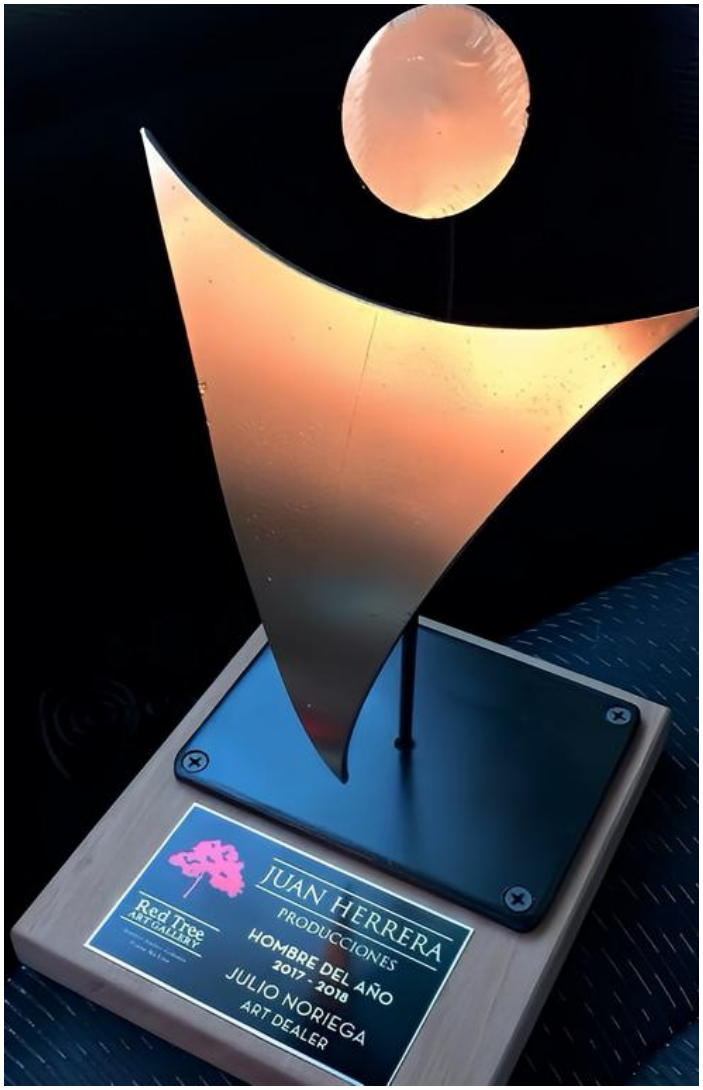
I think I see the artist community as branches of a large tree, from which everyone springs but also overlaps. Some branches flourish and others wither over time, yet they all receive the same amount of water and endure the same climates. That's the metaphor for the tree, and the colour red is because we all bleed into that same colour.

Expanding internationally is not easy. What were the most unexpected cultural or logistical challenges you faced, and how did you navigate through them?

Financial problems is the first challenge every emergent artist need to face. High production costs (materials, study, transport, printing, etc.) and the Lack of state or private support: scholarships, residences or grants are often not available or are very competitive.

Putting together an international exhibition not only represents a logistical challenge; the costs of shipping paintings abroad are very high. In this regard, Red Tree offers artists a service where they ship rolled canvases and low-cost stretcher bars are made for them at each of the venues where we hold exhibitions. While the labour is certainly significant, we often take it on personally out of a simple commitment to the artists who trust our work. For an emerging artist, participating in an international fair is almost impossible, but the way we manage artist promotion makes it more convenient for them.





With over 120 artists from five continents, what qualities do you look for in an artist to represent Red Tree? Is it purely about talent, or do you consider their story and vision as well?

In principle, Red Tree makes no distinction or discrimination against artists based on their career or the "quality" of their work. Throughout our history, we have been fortunate to represent artists who have won the Salon de Versailles, others who have restored paintings in the Vatican, or even been global icons of multinational brands.

However, we have also had and continue to have emerging artists with very little experience who have started painting during the pandemic, for example. For Red Tree, the most important thing is the hunger, desire, will, and enthusiasm that the artist has to be able to make a living from what they love and succeed in that process.

In my personal opinion, discipline usually surpasses talent because constant effort and dedication are key to success, while natural talent, although it may be an initial advantage, may not be enough without discipline.

How has the rise of digital platforms and non-fungible tokens (NFT) influenced Red Tree's approach to art exhibitions and artist collaborations?

Since the pandemic and quarantine, many art platforms have gone digital because public gatherings were prohibited, making exhibitions unviable. However, the work we do gives artists the opportunity to have a physical presence at each exhibition. We rely heavily on social media, but we are more focused on public exhibitions because we believe that, especially for emerging artists, it's very difficult to sell a painting from a photo. Perhaps for more established artists, this is more feasible because their work is already known and commands a global price, but for artists just starting out, it is absolutely essential to showcase their work and be able to perform on the world's best stages.

NFTs emerged as a need to continue marketing art. However, over the years, the marketing of intangible assets has been devalued, mainly due to the number of scams that many artists have fallen victim to in recent years.



Can you share a transformative experience during one of your exhibitions that redefined your perspective on art and its global impact?

I remember once doing a solo Vipers exhibition, with two artists from two bordering countries, Argentina and Uruguay. I called that exhibition Orillas del Plata, referring to the River Plate that divides the two countries. The exhibition was held at the Sheraton Golf Spa Resort, a spectacular hotel in Colonia del Sacramento, one of the oldest cities in South America. The artist, who came from Argentina, made a huge effort; he brought many paintings, came with his wife, and they danced tango because we had a tango singer with his musicians. One hundred and twenty people attended, including mayors, members of the Argentine Consulate, prominent residents, many artists, etc. That evening was fantastic, but the artist could not sell a single painting. During the event, he seemed very enthusiastic and happy, but when it ended, I saw that he was overwhelmed because the effort he had made, mainly financial, had not paid off. That same night, I spoke with a friend who owns a boutique hotel in the same city. We organised a two-day exhibition so the artist could have a chance to sell something. Only 14 people attended, and we sold over $8000 dollars. The happiness on that artist's face was beyond words. This explains why, at least in art exhibitions, success is not always guaranteed by the number of people who attend, but rather by the quality of the exhibits and people who come for the opening.









Art transcends boundaries, yet it is deeply rooted in culture.How does Red Tree ensure respect and authenticity when showcasing diverse artists across different regions?

Art transcends cultural boundaries by expressing universal themes and fostering dialogue, allowing diverse groups to connect emotionally. While artistic expressions vary across cultures, the shared human experiences found in art promote greater understanding. Organising group exhibitions with artists from different countries is a challenge. However, we always strive to find a balance so that the pieces we display engage in a fluid dialogue and create that essential connection for the exhibition to achieve visual harmony.

Red Tree emphasises unique monetisation strategies like live painting, masterclasses, and brand collaborations. What inspired you to explore these avenues, and how have they shaped artists' journeys?

As I mentioned earlier, Red Tree offers artists the opportunity to participate in various additional content before, during, and after exhibitions. Just as not all exhibitions are for all artists, not all artists take advantage of opportunities in the same way.

Aside from my role as director, curator, and the ultimate leader of Red Tree, I identify the artists who "fly the highest", the artists whose spark drives them to great achievements. We primarily offer these artists the opportunity to participate in various activities to promote their work in a different way and have greater opportunities to not only sell their work but also monetise it in different ways.

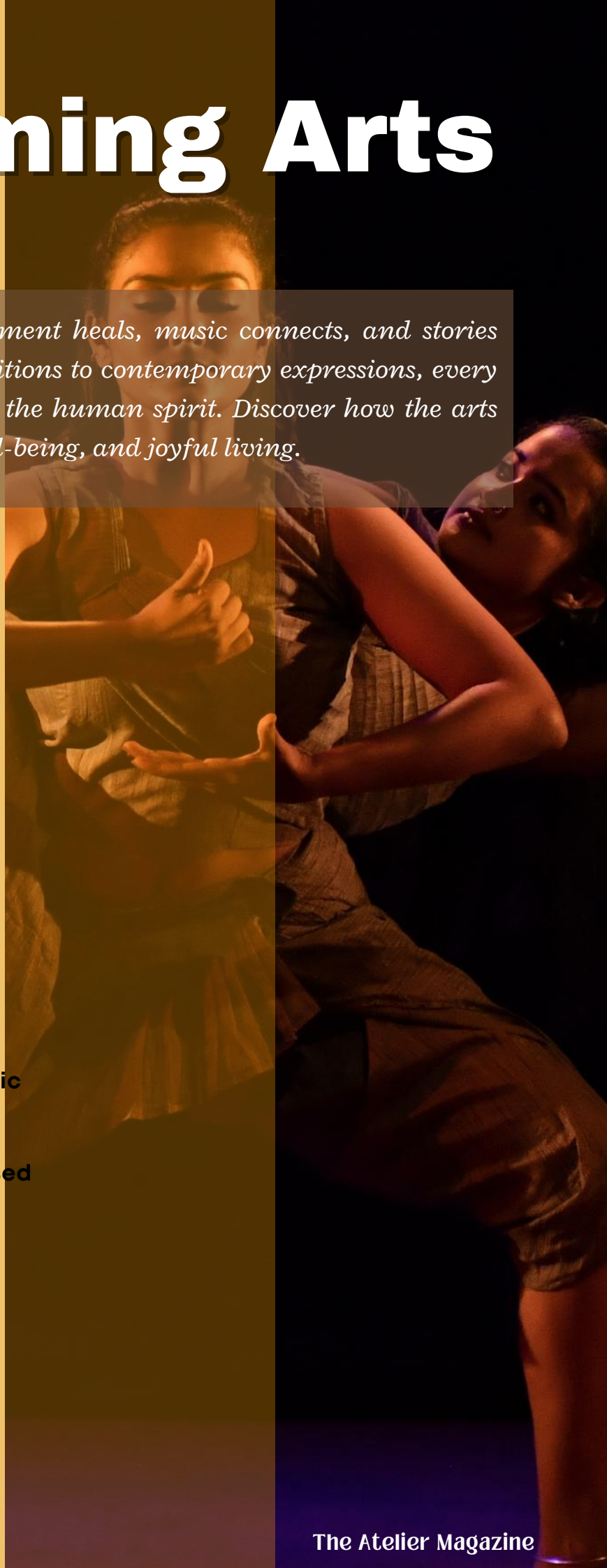
If you could fast-forward a decade, where do you see Red Tree standing in the global art community? What legacy do you hope it leaves behind?

Satisfying a person or meeting their expectations is very difficult; imagine hundreds of them. Since we started with Red Tree more than 10 years ago, the mission has always been focused on providing artists with new and different spaces of visibility and at the same time globalising their work. We take art to places where before, it was not even thought that exhibitions could be made. We collaborated with hotels, restaurants, real estate and real estate companies, shopping malls, wine cellars, contests and awards, parties and private events, that is, we gave them and continue to give artists a wide variety of visibility spaces so that from this different opportunities arise not only to be better known but also to monetise their work I think art is everywhere and even more so in the time we live in. You can see murals anywhere in any city, on cars, buses or in public transport subways, planes, that is, you can find art from Times Square to any wall in the smallest neighborhood of the most remote city in the world.

I think that in 10 years Red Tree will be recognised as a platform that gave the possibility to hundreds of artists to be visible not only for their community but also for the rest of the world since being an international platform and having artists from different countries, the same artists become known and are invited to participate in different scenarios for the simple interaction they have with their peers within our platform. ✦

Performing Arts

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



JNana Theatre – Immersion into Magic
Nana Sumrada Slavnic

Theyyam, The Theatre of the Oppressed
Sanjai Velayudhan

JNANA THEATRE IMMERSION INTO MAGIC

Nana Sumrada Slavnic



Have you ever wondered what it would be like to walk into a scenery that looks like a film set placed in the middle of a forest, a quarry or deep in a cave, but it is actually a live performance pop-up theatre play of myths and legends with some of Europe's best actors, dancers and performers? If yes, JNana Theatre performances will entrance you just as much, with selected locations, elaborate messages, artistic expression, and technical ingenuity.

JNana Theatre started as a gathering of nine friends, all women, in my mother's garden in 2017. While the solstice rain interrupted the outdoor dinner among cherry trees, there was laughter, meditation and promises to gather each year and above all, to contribute to the idea of continuous gatherings. So started the storytelling in various locations, mansions and castles, marshes and meadows, a stud farm, various quarries, lakes, waterfalls and caves. Until 2000, all performers and contributors were women. Every time, friends could invite more friends and up to 2023, the events were strictly private, almost secret and ladies-only.

From there on, the theatrical performances have grown to invitation-only audiovisual spectacles, combining up to 40 performers and up to 350 guests per event. While a few events are created for corporate clients—the customisation of the Slovene Expo pavilion in Dubai in 2022, for instance—the vast majority are theatrical performances for closed circles. Despite the growth, the events have been fully self-financed and yes, they still feature meditations after each play.



JNana: Unique Preferences, Unique Performances

The unique nature of immersive performance at JNana has very much to do with unique preferences: the early events were created exclusively for close friends and the circle of trust was allowed to widen gradually. In 2023, the name 'JNana Theatre' was given to the plays, and a website was set up to showcase some of the 23 original events and performances that was created so far.Daughter of a professor of history and a diplomat, I grew up listening to Greek, Nordic, Indian and Slavic myths instead of traditional bedtime stories and preferred art history books to some of children stories. The inspiration came from imagining sceneries and movement when listening to music and visiting places.

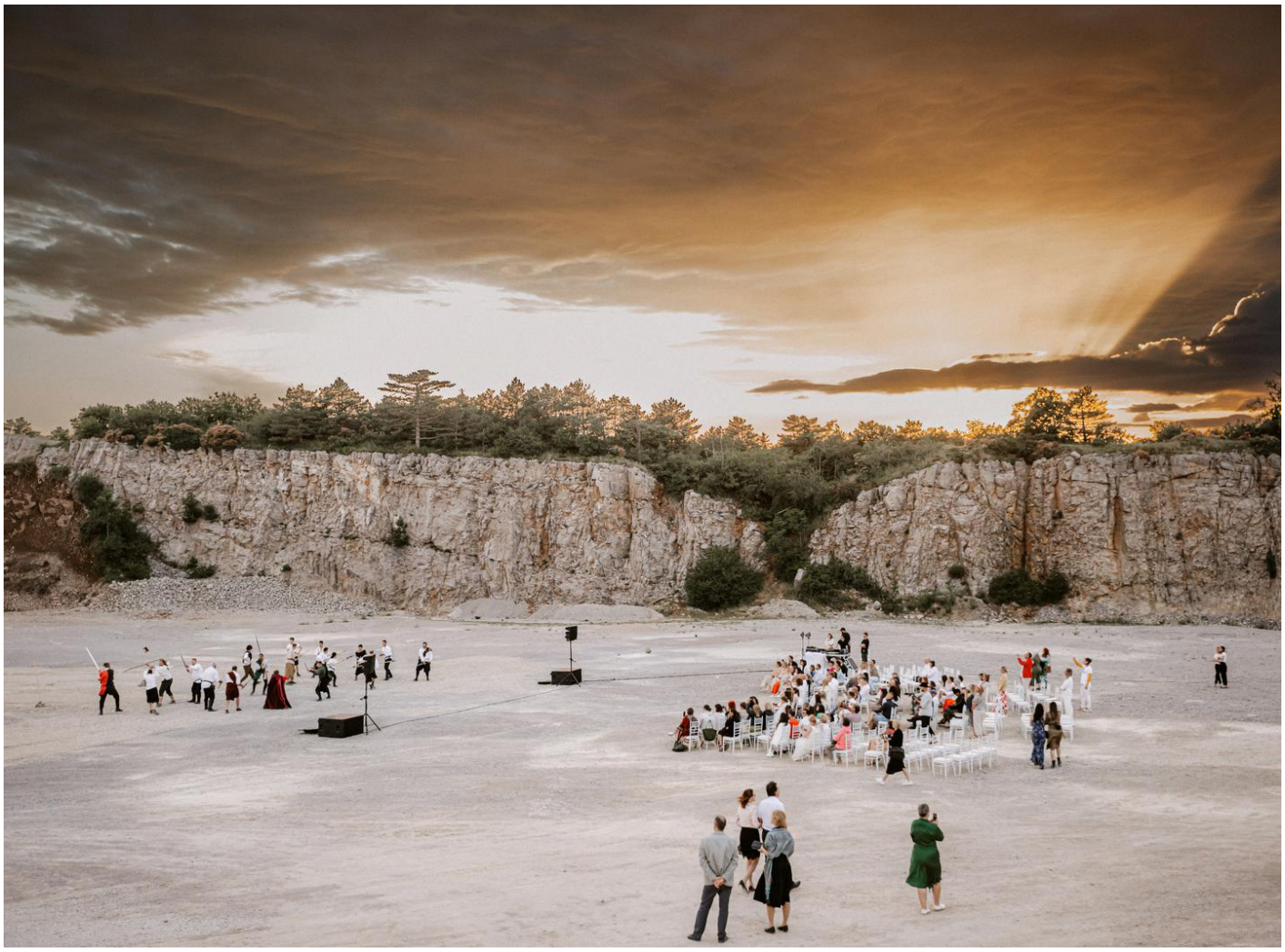
I saw and dreamed of theatrical plays in the forests I visited and saw the characters walk on lake shores and bathe in waterfall pools before I created the plays and breathed life into them. All the costumes are designed by me, while choreography is entrusted to long-time collaborator and friend, Anja Möderndorfer. Other choreographers and co-creators are invited for specific plays.

The plays combine acting, dancing and vocal performances to address many myths and biographies of prominent individuals—mostly women—and are usually staged at solstice or equinoxes. This means that the events must be planned not only with performing and technical teams' requirements in mind, but also in line with nature and the weather. We thus experienced many challenges of the elements, mostly rain and wind, featuring as prominent collaborators in the performances.









The Upcoming Age of Jaguar

While plays are almost exclusively placed in the pristine surroundings of national or regional parks, a few are held in indoor stages.

The upcoming event of JNana Theatre, Age of Jaguar, tells the story of a Mayan priestess and her son, a jaguar. The story came to me in a meditation in 2023, as a vision, from detail to detail, like an imaginative discovery, just as it has happened with other stories too. The play Wakan! about the return of the White Buffalo Calf Woman in Logarska valley in Slovenia had just been performed, and preparations were going on for the 2024 event Genesis— whose theme was the rise and fall of civilisations— to be held in a sand quarry in Slovenia.

Only the third event to be held indoors, Age of Jaguar features ballet and contemporary dancers, a rhythmic gymnast/acrobat, a male choir, voice actors for Mayan historic native language incantations and an actress. The performance will have a 170degree audio-video installation as the background, catapulting the audience into quantum and light speed travel between worlds and space that the two main characters will take.







Among JNana Theatre's future acts are a 2026 dragon fantasy performance and a 2027 play based on an inspirational interpretation of the Ramayana. ✦

About the author

Nana Sumrada Slavnic, founder of JNana Theatre, is an Ivy-league educated lawyer, holding a PhD in tax law from a renowned European University and above all, a very private person. In Nana's own words, she avoids the spotlight and prefers creating—at her day job as well as at the theatre—in the background, almost incognito. There is, however, a clear link between her two types of work, a quest for innate universal laws and knowledge. Nana is currently General Counsel and ESG Officer, Leanpay, at Slovenia.





THEYYAM, THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Sanjai Velayudhan



While growing up, I was closer to my mother's family, most of whom were women. My mother, grandmother, great grandmother, aunties, all of them were strong, independent women of agency. I watched them fight against adversities.

Sometimes they won, sometimes they did not, but they fought with all that they had. Thus, in my mind, the female was always a fighter with a mind of her own.

So, when I planned to write a novel, the subject was clear: it would be about women who took a contrarian stand against established norms. This not only inspired me to explore the complexities of Kerala's social dynamics but also led me to Theyyam, a magico-religious ritual—a combination of dance music and mime, performed by elaborately dressed dancers with painted faces—that is endemic to the Malabar region of Kerala.



Emerging out of an asymmetric society where the caste system was implemented with particular brutality, and where patriarchy was oppressively dominant, Theyyam was a response to the lopsided world created by the brotherhood of 'upper caste' patriarchs. Over time, Theyyam came to feature a pantheon of ferocious and vengeful spirits, many of whom were women who has suffered unnatural deaths at the hands of patriarchal forces. These spirits can be seen as symbolic representations of resistance, challenging the existing social hierarchy and power structures.

In kerala's historical society, women from the 'upper castes' faced significant challenges. Marumakkathayyam, which traced a lineage through the female line, theoretically granted women inheritance rights and enhanced social standing.

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However, the oldest male in the family, the Karanavar, typically held real authority. While some women exercised agency and controlled wealth, patriarchal norms often limited their power.The traditional assignment of men as providers and protectors were a means of retaining power and control.

They explored all means of limiting women's opportunities and perpetuating gender-based inequalities.

To curtail female influence, new taboos were introduced, such as the practice during the Ramayana month, where 'lower caste' men could throw stones at 'upper caste' women. If the stone hit the unfortunate woman, the man shouted "konde, konde," meaning his stone hit the target.

The male members would then handover the woman to the man. This practice served as a means of social control, with men from 'upper castes' colluding with 'lower caste' men.

The vulnerability of women to exploitation and enslavement, regardless of caste, underscores the pervasive nature of patriarchal oppression.

One notable legend that exemplifies the struggles of women in Kerala society is that of Muchilottu Bhagavathi. She was a highly intelligent and knowledgeable 'upper caste' Brahmin woman. During a ceremony to select her groom, she challenged potential suitors to engage in logical debates, stipulating that she would marry only the man who could intellectually surpass her. None of the men were able to defeat her.

Subsequently, the frustrated suitors conspired against her, posing two provocative questions. The first question pertained to the greatest pleasure in the world, to which she responded candidly, citing sexual intimacy. The second question was about the greatest pain, and she replied confidently, referencing labour pain.

The audience reaction was immediate and severe. The men criticised her character, questioning how she could possess such knowledge without personal experience. The collective condemnation culminated in her expulsion from the community. With even her parents rendered helpless, the societal ostracism led her to self-immolation.

The brutality of her death instilled terror among her tormentors, who believed that her spirit would exact terrible revenge. In an attempt to appease her spirit, they deified her, transforming her into the Muchilottu Bhagavathi and crafted a Theyyam performance to propitiate her.

According to legend, while she was benevolent to her devotees, she inflicted horrible punishment on those who wronged her; some died of leprosy while others became mad.

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This phenomenon reflects a fundamental aspect of human psychology, wherein people often respond to entities they fear or perceive as powerful through attempts to marginalise, control, annihilate or revere them. This dynamic is evident in the way societies have historically interacted with women, employing strategies ranging from subjugation to deification

The Theyyam ritual, despite its predominantly female deities, is notable for being performed by male practioners, with the exception of the Devakoothu ritual. This dichotomy highlights the complex interplay between gender, power and cultural expression.

The study of Theyyam reveals the profound impact of myths and folklores on human psychology. As a sacred performance art, Theyyam has historically served as a platform for social commentary and catharsis.

During Theyyam, performers from marginalised communities don elaborate costumes and adornments, gaining temporary access to 'upper caste' households. As embodiments of the divine spirit,

Theyyam performers are momentarily elevated to a status equivalent to that of the goddess, constituting a significant—albeit temporary—shift in caste dynamics.

The incorporation of 'Aryan deities' like Bhiravan and Vishnumurthy into the Theyyam Pantheon highlights the ritual's adaptability and cultural significance. Theyyam plays a vital role in the Malayali society by capturing the struggles and experiences of marginalised groups, including women and 'lower caste' people. ✦

About the author

Sanjai Velayudhan is a marketing consultant who has worked with leading global brands. His debut novel Dance of the Spirits has Theyyam as its backdrop and is available on all leading online stores.

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Film Magic

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



Frida: On Art, Pain, and the Politics of Endurance
Harini Rajasekhar

Filming in my Father Tongue
Catherine Wray

FRIDA

ON ART, PAIN, AND THE POLITICS OF ENDURANCE

Harini Rajasekhar



With beautiful thick eyebrows, a crown of flowers in her neatly braided hair, and an unrelenting gaze—artist Frida Kahlo is one of the most recognisable faces in recent history. Looking back at Frida, the 2002 film starring Salma Hayek based on the artist's life, as well as the circumstances under which the film was made, brings up questions about the relationship between women and the act of creating art from pain.

The film, directed by Julie Taymor and championed by Hayek's conviction to bring diverse stories to the forefront, dives into the world of the Mexican artist who painted vivid, unforgettable canvases that have remained relevant and truly magnificent even to this day as we mark her118th birth year on July 6th.

"Feet, What do I Need You for When I Have Wings to Fly?"

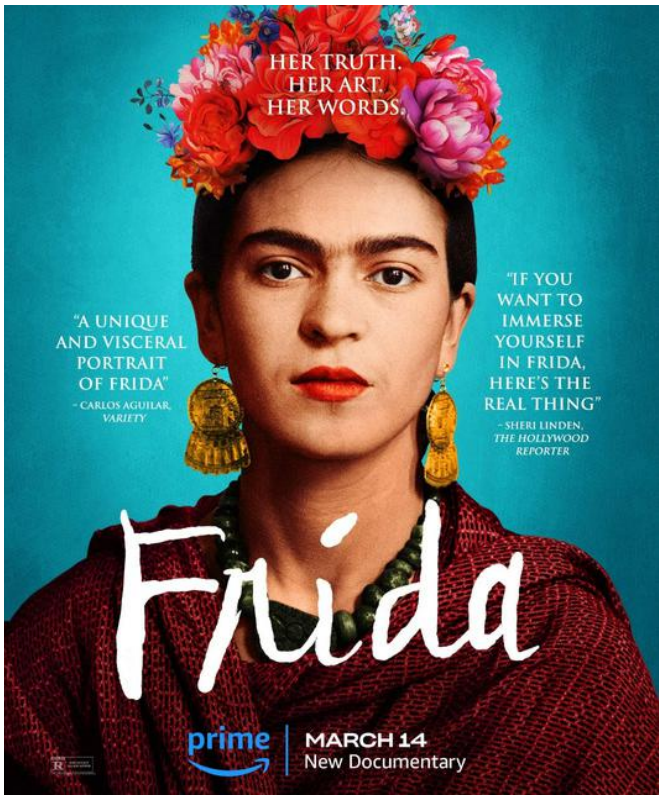
Frida Kahlo was born in 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico City. She grew up in a bright cobalt-blue house filled with contradictions: conservative Catholicism, volatile politics, and art. At the age of six, she contracted polio, which left her right leg visibly thinner than the other - a detail she later masked with flamboyant Tehuana dresses.

In 1925, when she was 18, a streetcar collided with the bus she was riding in. A metal handrail impaled her pelvis, shattering her spine, collarbone, ribs, and leg. Doctors said there was little hope. Bedridden in a full-body cast up to her chest, Frida turned inward, grappling with her pain and identity. She began to paint. In an effort to encourage this outlet, her parents installed a mirror above her bed and gave her art materials. And so, she began painting the subject she had uninterrupted access to—herself.

Surreal Animation and Sun-Drenched Hues: The Look and Feel of 'Frida'

The film is interspersed with surrealist animation sequences. These interludes—puppetry, stop-motion, shadow play—act not as decorative oddities, but as extensions of Frida's fractured, dreamlike inner world. Skeletons dance. Objects bleed. A miscarriage becomes a nightmarish mechanical tableau. The animations visualise what Kahlo painted: a world where the line between reality and hallucination is not erased, but embraced. In doing so, the film pulls us into her perceptual logic, her language of metaphor, and her magical, merciless imagination.

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Visually, Frida is saturated in warm, earthy hues - ochres, terracotta, blood reds, sunburnt yellows. The cinematography mimics the tonal richness of Kahlo's paintings. From Mexico's dusty courtyards to the golden interiors of her home, every frame sets the mood.

An Unflinching Gaze: Artwork in the Film

But it is the representation of her actual paintings that is the best part of this film. Paintings bloom out of scenes like symptoms. Her body, fragmented and bleeding, gives rise to some of the most iconic portraits in modern art.

Take The Two Fridas (1939), painted during her divorce from Diego Rivera. The film does not just show the painting; it places Frida into it. Two versions of herself sit side-by-side: one in a colonial European dress, the other in traditional Tehuana clothing.

Their hearts are exposed, connected by a single artery, and one Frida's heart bleeds openly into her lap. It is an anatomical autobiography: Frida as artist and muse, Mexican and European, wife and political radical.

Henry Ford Hospital (1932) is another moment where the film dares to look directly at the grotesque. It recreates the blood-stained bed, the floating fetus, the broken pelvis, the machine parts. Frida is not afraid to make the body literal, and the film does not flinch either.

Her art exists at the impossible intersection of vulnerability and control, deeply personal yet universally political. Her use of indigenous Mexican iconography, her embrace of her bisexuality, her anti-colonial politics; these were not accessories. They were the medium. And the film, in its best moments, lets this complexity show.

Women, Pain and Art

But even as Frida reveres her paintings, it is not immune to the forces that tried to reduce Kahlo to something consumable. In 2017, Salma Hayek wrote a personal essay for The New York Times detailing the deeply abusive conditions under which the film was made, particularly the coercion and sabotage inflicted by producer Harvey Weinstein. What was meant to be a celebration of a woman's agency became, off-screen, a reenactment of the power structures Frida herself would have raged against.

And that is visible in the film, too. There is a strain of voyeurism running through it: the frequent nudity, the dramatised lesbian scenes, the lingering gaze on Frida's suffering body. It aestheticises her injuries, romanticises her sexuality, and often hovers a beat too long on moments that should feel private. In a cruel irony, Frida Kahlo, the woman who painted her own narrative to reclaim her autonomy, was again repackaged in a Hollywood system obsessed with tolerable suffering. The film honours her brilliance, but it also betrays it.

Telling Diverse Stories: An Act of Resistance and Defiance

Frida was born of Hayek's determination to tell the story of a disabled, bisexual, Latina artist, but much of the film is marred by Weinstein's influence and abuse of power. Frida went on to win two Academy Awards for Best Makeup and Best Original Score, and was nominated for six, including Best Actress for Hayek and Best Art Direction. Frida Kahlo turned agony into art with breathtaking clarity. Salma Hayek, decades later, did the same. But the thread connecting them—one of suffering as a prerequisite for expression—remains disturbingly taut. Maybe the question is not whether art can come from pain. Clearly, it can. The real question is—why must it? ✦

About the author

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

FILMING IN MY FATHER TONGUE

Catherine Wray



At the close of summer 2023, a group of students and professionals from Cambridge flew into Italy to film a short feature in the Campobasso region of the South. I was among them, having agreed to play the female lead and co-write the script of the short feature. I was delighted; after my first year at Cambridge, including a run at the Edinburgh Fringe for a theatre production also written and set in the South of Italy (this time in Sicily), I was thrilled to venture to a new region to produce a new project with a team of people I had every faith in.I was also nervous. Something multilingual individuals sometimes struggle to articulate is that languages do not develop unilaterally.

You can speak a language fluently, without an accent and with precision, but struggle to communicate in writing in the same language your voice has long since mastered. I know this is the experience of many of my friends whose parents or grandparents are immigrants. You can also be exposed to a language without being taught it, which means that—if you later try to teach yourself—you begin three steps ahead. You can also read and write and consume the language with ease but rarely speak it.

These last two experiences are what happened to me with Italian.I grew up in The Hague, a stone's throw away from the Italian part of the town, where all the restaurants and shops were run by Sicilian and Neapolitan owners who were endlessly patient and friendly with me and my little brother.I also grew up with a big family with strong ties to Italy on my dad's side; my dad spent his teenage years living in Naples and my aunt and uncle lived in Italy for many years in the Dolomites as adults. . I borrowed books from them, read the menus and the newspapers in the Italian cafés my Mum took me to and then—when I grew older and was told it was not possible in my British school to study more than two languages (French and Spanish, in my case)—resolved to teach myself the rest of the language.

Early exposure to Italian and consistent studying of French and Spanish helped me to advance much more quickly than I would have done otherwise. I tracked down the Italian versions of popular films on YouTube—Wonder Woman, The Hunger Games, Ocean's 11—and also found books on Amazon that I would order and work through one at a time, working my way up from translations of older children's or young adult books to Italian classics like The Leopard. I was lucky to have traditional parents who kept me and my younger brother firmly off social media until our late teens.

Bored in a small English village, a far cry from the multilingual, international environment of The Hague, and living an hour away from my school and my friends, I found books—and languages—to be a window on the world.

A well-loved copy of Jhumpa Lahiri's In altre parole from a second-hand bookshop in Southampton found its way into my hands and resonated deeply, encouraging me to persist through the pleasures and pains of learning a foreign language by myself.

Since I knew no one who could help me, I taught myself through books and through watching Italian series online. I advanced rapidly, quickly reaching a point where I could read books and watch films without needing to pause every five minutes to look things up.

Yet I rarely, if ever, spoke Italian aloud and understandably, I was uncertain how memorising and even improvising whole sections of an Italian-language script on camera would work.

The director and producer both spoke Italian as their heritage languages, and the male lead was an Italian man who spoke no English. The beauty of filming, though, is that the director and production team can take as many shots and takes as they wish. Yet, the camera demands vulnerability and the part I was playing—Lucia, young and brilliant and broken—was no stranger to situations where she was exactly that: a stranger.

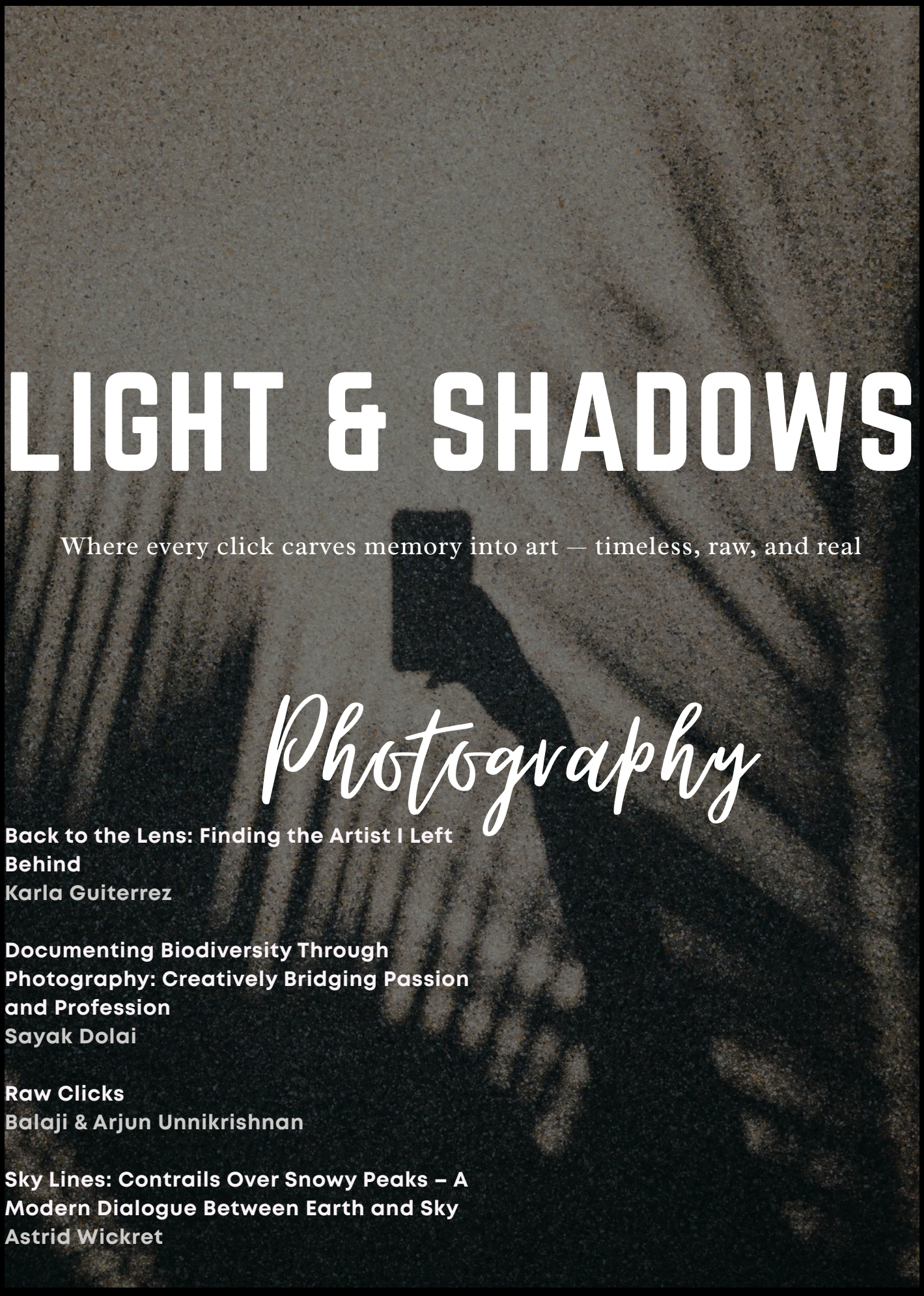
When I spoke to the male lead sitting across from me, speaking his mother tongue not mine, it occurred to me that this—filming in a foreign tongue, or, in my case, a father tongue—was a kind of method acting only possible in front of the camera. After we returned to England, I found that the anxiety I had felt on the plane to Milan was replaced by a desire to go back to Campobasso and film freely in my father tongue again. ✦





About the author

Catherine Wray is the founder of Sisters Without Borders UK, an organisation created with the aim of providing mentorship and resources to girls from around the world who are out of school. A multilingual literary translator, she studied French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian at Cambridge. She is Europe Editor for the Cambridge Language Collective and also U.K. Country Chair for Youth Empowerment for G100.



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Photography

Back to the Lens: Finding the Artist I Left Behind
Karla Guiterrez

Documenting Biodiversity Through Photography: Creatively Bridging Passion and Profession
Sayak Dolai

Raw Clicks
Balaji & Arjun Unnikrishnan

Sky Lines: Contrails Over Snowy Peaks – A Modern Dialogue Between Earth and Sky
Astrid Wickret

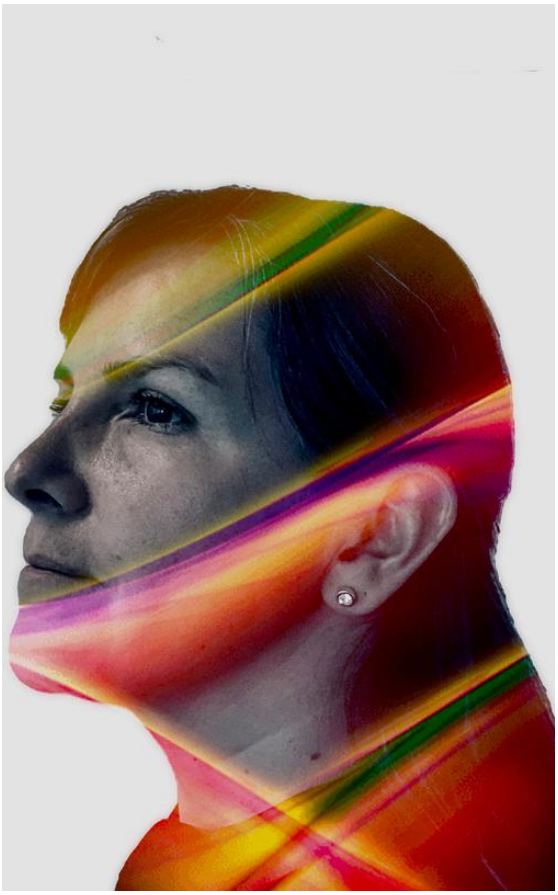
BACK TO THE LENS: FINDING THE ARTIST I LEFT BEHIND

Karla Gutierrez



There Was a Time I Thought I would Be an Artist.

I studied design not because I wanted a job, but because I wanted to express something I could not yet say with words. But very early on, I understood what many (female) creatives learn quickly: art does not always pay the bills. So, I took another road—advertising design, branding and communications—work that I respect and love, as it has allowed me to be where I am now. The creative part was always there, but it entailed giving a focused and strategic direction based on results for the clients.



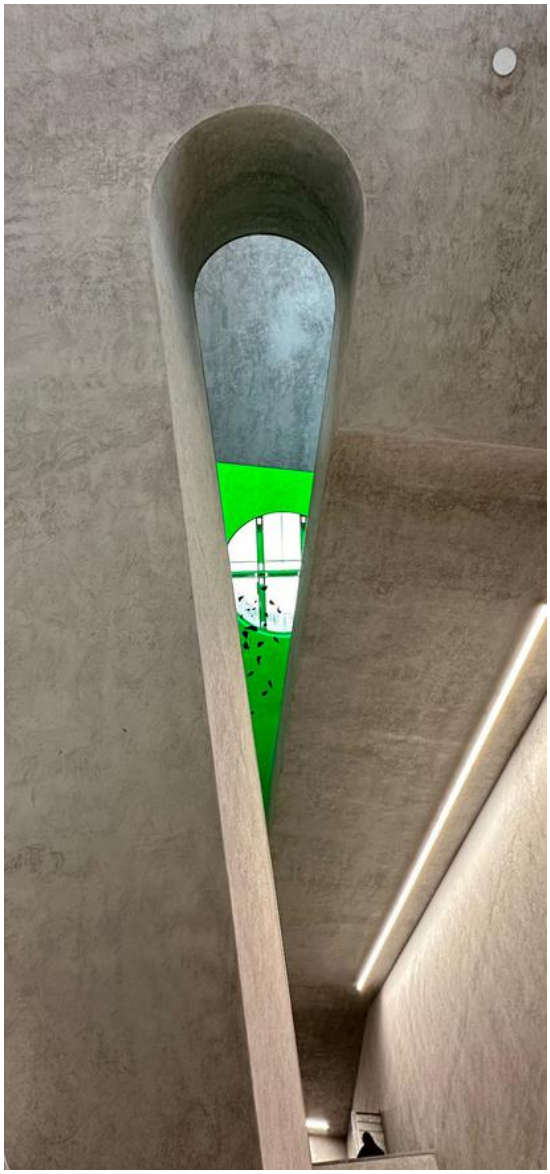
It has been a good career. But there was something missing. I stopped making things just because they moved me. I stopped seeing light the same way. I stopped playing. And I almost forgot what it felt like to see the world through my own lens, not for a client, not for a campaign, just for the sake of seeing.

But that is the part of the story that has changed over the past years.Maybe it is life, maybe it is time, maybe it is something deeper. But little by little, my camera, just my iPhone, really, has become an extension of my eyes again. I have started taking pictures. Not perfectly. Not to perform. But to remember. To reconnect.

Capturing While Working

My return to photography did not happen in a studio. It happened between meetings. On client trips. During moments of pause, on sidewalks, in museums, in quiet corners of buildings no one else seemed to notice.

What I photograph is tied to the projects I care about. They are part of my work, but they are also outside of it. They are personal. They reflect something I could not have seen when I was in my twenties, fresh out of university.









Now I see shadows differently. Architecture differently. People differently. I no longer aim for perfection, symmetry, or the rules of composition we were taught. I look for tension. For silence. For the in-between moments that do not always get noticed.

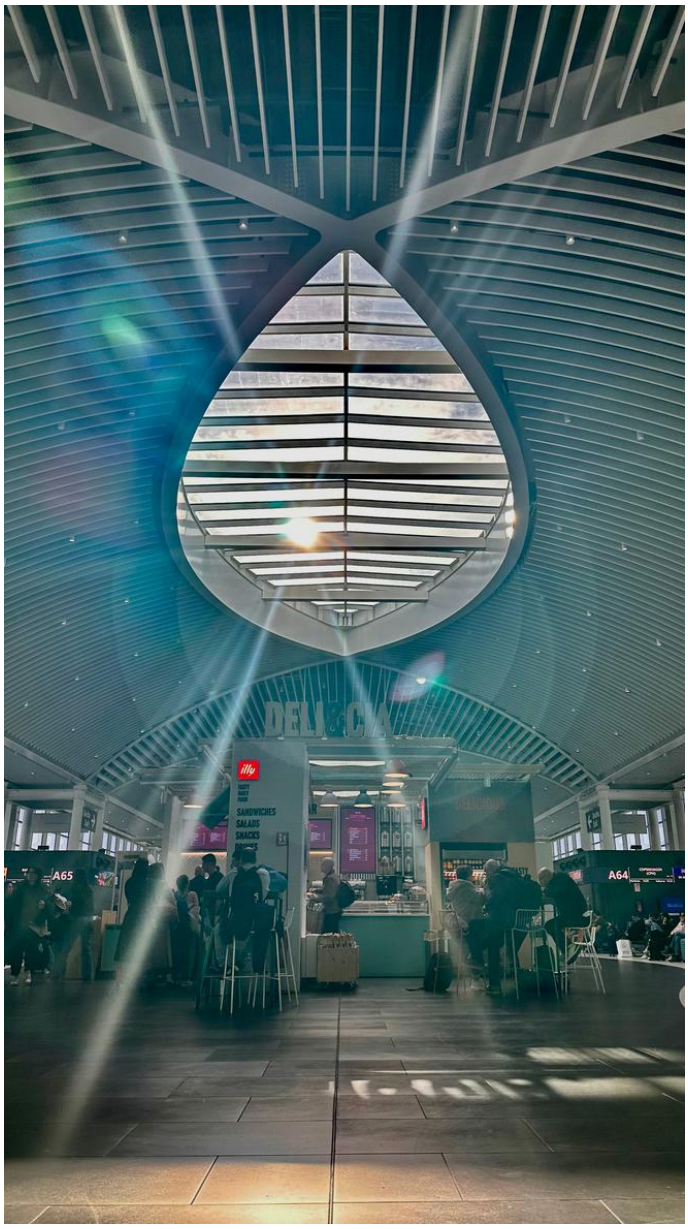
Sometimes it is a reflection in a museum window. Sometimes it is a woman in traditional dress standing in golden light, holding her thoughts like a shield. Sometimes it is a strange shape cut out of the sky by the curve of a building. One day, I stopped on my way to a meeting and saw the sun casting long tree shadows across a brick path of the Mudam Museum. Nothing dramatic. But the way the light broke through the leaves, the quiet geometry of it, called me. I took out my phone, shot it, and that image lives in my memory as clearly as any campaign I have launched. These moments allow me to stop and breathe, to slow down, to look again, to stay curious.



Unlearning to Learn Again

When I was younger, I thought the right training would make me a better artist. Now I know the best thing I can do is to forget the rules when I shoot; I simply follow my instincts. I trust my gut more than a grid.

The photos I take now are not always clean or perfect. But they say something. I do not shoot for beauty. I shoot for presence. That is what I think art is now, not mastery, but attention. I take pictures like I listen to people. With care, with attention. With silence between words. With a kind of respect for reality, for the ordinary.This shift has changed how I see my entire creative process. Even the way I lead strategy, or build brand narratives. I am less interested in controlling perception; I am more interested in creating connections.



Art, Motherhood, and Memory

A.s a mother, I often wonder what my children will remember about me. Not just what I did, but how I saw the world.They see my work. They see the hours spent, but they also see me stop and capture something no one sees. To admire the softness of someone's face in a quiet room. These are small acts, but they are part of what I hope they inherit: the right to pay attention. To create without a reason. To feel without having to explain it.

For a long time, I did not think I could afford that luxury. But now, I realise, it is not a luxury. It is survival. It is presence. It is a way to stay human in times that are feeling mechanical and even artificial.



What Comes Next

I never imagined I would come back to this, to this feeling, to this opportunity. And I know it is the same feeling for many women, especially mothers and entrepreneurs, who have had to set aside parts of themselves to raise their children, pay the bills.

This return to the creative side feels like reclaiming something I did not know I missed so much. Photography is helping me speak in a different way. I do not know if I will ever call myself a photographer. I do not know if I need to.

But I know this: I am creating again. With my hands, my eyes, my heart. Not just for work, but for myself. For the joy of it. For the calm joy of freezing something that would otherwise be lost, and turning it into something lasting.That, to me, is art. That, to me, is enough. And maybe, just maybe, it is the beginning of something new. ✦





SAYAK DOLAI:DOCUMENTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

CREATIVELY BRIDGING PASSION AND PROFESSION

Sayak Dolai is a passionate wildlife enthusiast and emerging researcher with a strong academic foundation in microbiology whose journey beautifully illustrates how creativity can blend passion and profession. Driven by a deep love for nature, he actively engages in biodiversity documentation and conservation initiatives, especially on Odonata, Lepidoptera and Avifauna.

A key part of his work is field documentation. He takes extensive field notes and uploads observations to citizen science platforms like iNaturalist, eBird, India Biodiversity Portal, etc.





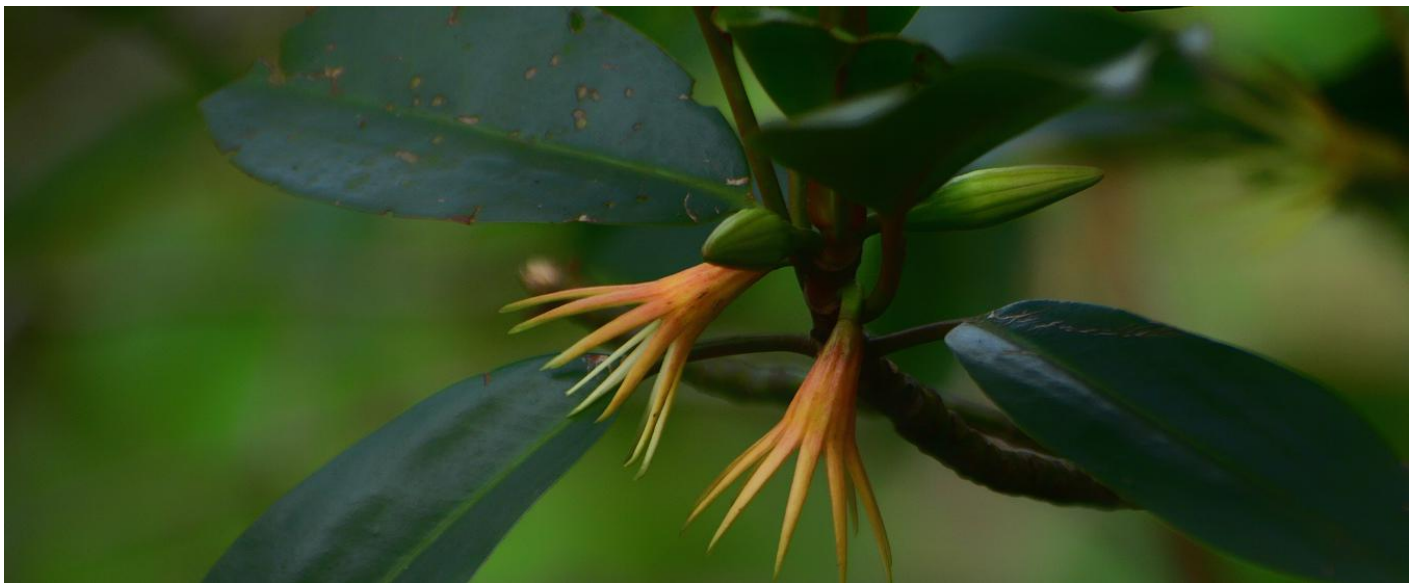












Initially, he started documenting with just a smartphone. Over time, he moved to a digital camera and sound recorders, learning the technical aspects of photography and sound recording to improve his documentation. Understanding aperture, shutter speed, ISO, and white balance helped him capture wildlife more accurately beyond art to portray habitats and species in a way that supports research, identification, and awareness.

Sayak's work bridges scientific research and field-based conservation, with a special interest in sustainable waste management using microbial consortia. Through continuous fieldwork and public engagement, he hopes to inspire a deeper appreciation for wildlife and the need to conserve our natural world. ✦







PC :Balaji



PC :Balaji



PC :Balaji

RAW CLICKS



PC :Arjun Unnikrishnan



PC :Arjun Unnikrishnan



PC :Arjun Unnikrishnan

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SKY LINES

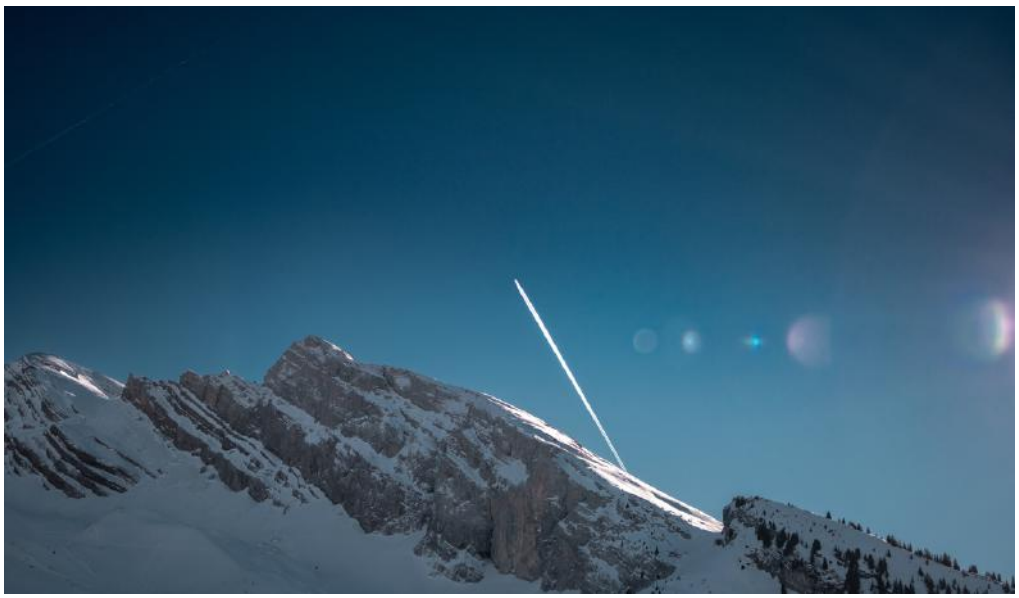
CONTRAILS OVER SNOWY PEAKS

A MODERN DIALOGUE BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY

Asirid Wickeri

In the hushed grandeur of the snow-laden Alps, silence often reigns supreme. The peaks stand as timeless sentinels, their ancient forms sculpted by wind and ice.

Yet, piercing this profound stillness, another kind of mark frequently appears; the stark, ephemeral lines of contrails stretching across the vast blue canvas above.

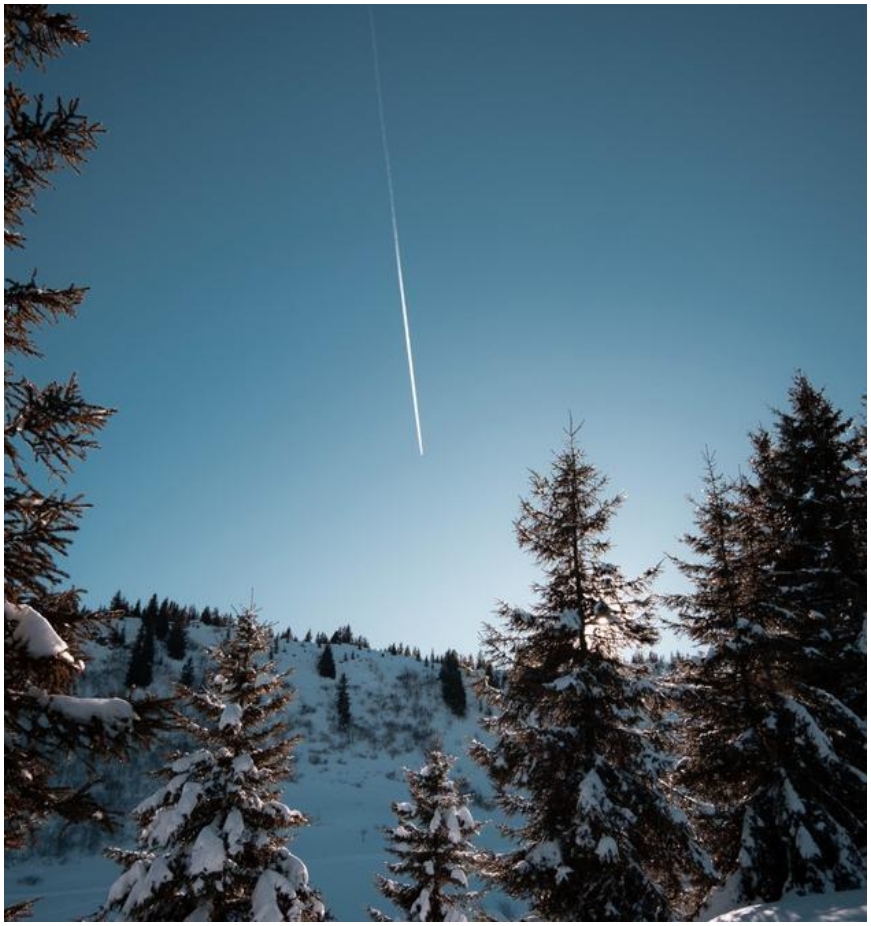


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These geometric white ribbons offer a striking juxtaposition to the organic curves of the mountains below. They are fleeting etchings of human ingenuity, each line a silent testament to distant journeys, to global connectivity traversing continents. From the quiet solitude of a mountain path, I often find myself gazing upwards, reflecting on the unseen lives and stories contained within those metallic cocoons high above.

The beauty of this contrast is profound: the crisp white of the contrails echoes the untouched snow on the ground, creating a visual harmony despite their disparate origins. They appear, linger for a while, and then slowly dissolve, much like moments in time, leaving only the memory of their passage.

They serve as a constant reminder of our dual existence - rooted in the ancient earth, yet perpetually reaching, connecting, and soaring beyond it.





These ‘sky lines’ are more than just vapour trails; they are a modern imprint on an ancient canvas, a testament to humanity's drive to explore and to connect, constantly reaching for new horizons, even from the quiet solitude of a snowy peak. They transform the vast expanse of the sky into a dynamic space, filled with narratives of movement and human ambition, contrasting beautifully with the quiet majesty below. ✦



About the photographer

Astrid Wickert, known artistically as Buldo, is a French photographer whose approach is distinguished by her discretion and her pursuit of authenticity. Armed with her telephoto lens, she captures candid scenes, revealing the natural and spontaneous beauty of the moment. Whether in the intensity of action sports or the tranquility of landscapes, her photography is a constant exploration of light, which she uses as a guide for the viewer's eye. Complementing her photographer's eye, Astrid also expresses herself through video, with interviews and documentary work, enriching her ability to tell profound visual stories. She is currently Head of Digital Marketing at AEVIS VICTORIA SA, Switzerland.





Fashion

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



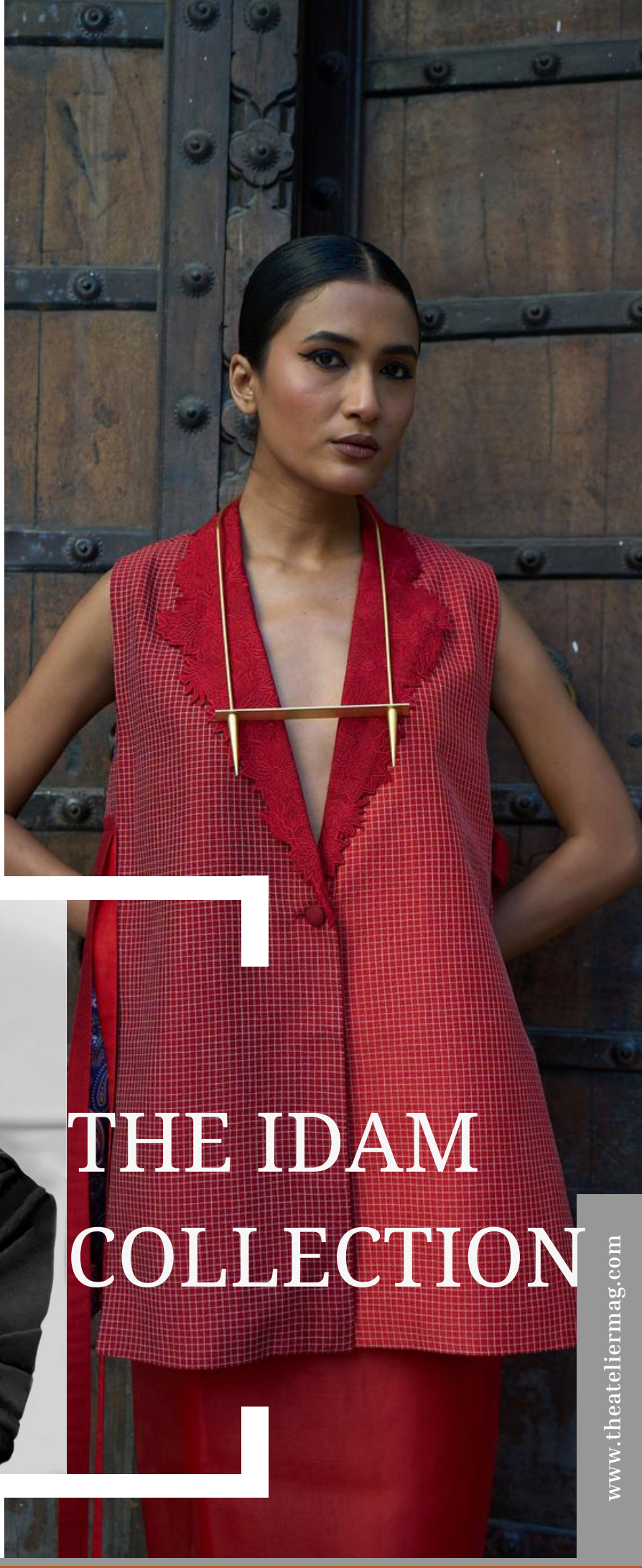
IDAM | SS25 Collection-
A tribute to a place, identity and belonging
Vivek Karunakaran

Emerging Threads
Nithiya Shree – Teejh Collection

Karunganni Cotton and the Indian Cotton Legacy
Swaminathan

VIVEK KARUNAKARAN





THE IDAM COLLECTION

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A tribute to a place, identity and belonging







Language defines a place. For me, Tamil is the heartbeat of Tamil Nadu—its rhythm, its depth, its poetry—each syllable carries the weight of centuries. Among its greatest literary treasures, the Thirukkural (an ancient classic Tamil text comprising 1330 short couplets with teachings on virtue, wealth and love) stands timeless, a guide to life, morality, and human connection.

As a fashion designer, my work is rooted in the cultural soul of Tamil Nadu, interpreting the region's enduring legacy through contemporary fashion. Inspired by the wisdom of the Thirukkural, once etched in stone and now reimagined on fabric, to me, each piece becomes a canvas for history, a reflection of home.

Quintessential to my design aesthetic, each ensemble by the VK Fashion Label is designed to reflect the essence of the state, honouring tradition while embracing modernity. The Idam Collection features impeccable tailoring, the label's signature shakets, tuxedos, veshtis, fluid palazzos and draped kurtas in a luxurious range of silk organza, taffeta, linen and Egyptian cottons.

Madras checks, deconstructed and re-imaged as textures, echo the layered history of Tamil Nadu, while intricate embroidery reflects the craftsmanship seen in ancient scriptures and temple carvings.

As the collection evolves, South India's rich textile legacy takes centre stage with Kanjeevaram textiles reimagined in contemporary silhouettes, representing a refined sartorial narrative which is a fusion of heritage craftsmanship and modern elegance.

A delicate yet powerful motif weaves through the collection: the jasmine flower. A symbol of purity and devotion, this motif ties the collection together. Inspired by the fragrant strands sold outside temples, adorning women's hair, and gracing every ritual, its presence comes alive through soft drapes, organic textures, and delicate embroidery, capturing the soul of Tamil Nadu.

A colour palette of ecru, vanilla, scarlet and crimson grounds the collection in sacred symbolism, representing purity, resilience and strength. Block printed and immaculately handcrafted, each detail transforms these garments into more than just clothing; they become a bridge between past and present, an expression of pride and a celebration of identity.

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#STANLEYPAULPHOTOGRAPHY


#STANLEYPAULPHOTOGRAPHY






VIVEK KARUNAKARAN







To me, Idam is more than a collection; it is my homage to Chennai, the city that shaped my journey and continues to inspire me; it is for all those who carry their roots with them, who wear their heritage with pride and who belong, wherever they go. Idam is Tamil Nadu—redefined, reimagined—woven into the fabric of today. ✦



About the author

Vivek Karunakaran has carved a niche for himself in the world of fashion with his impeccable creations featured on the catwalks of Lakme and India Fashion Week over the last many years. He has been instrumental in putting Chennai on the Fashion map with his clean, minimal and structured design aesthetic.

Be it clothes or decor, the VK Label's aesthetic represents a new minimalistic culture of refined and progressive design depicting gender equality and cross-cultural expression relevant to both India and the world. A top favourite among celebrities and fashionistas, VK has styled the likes of Christian Louboutin, Ranveer Singh, Sonam Kapoor, Anil Kapoor, Shankar Mahadevan, AR Rahman, Amy Jackson and many more.



TEEJH BY NITHIYA SHREE | MODEL-VIBHA VIVEK





EMERGING THREADS









KARUNGANNI COTTON AND THE INDIAN COTTON LEGACY

A CIRCULAR REVIVAL ROOTED IN SOIL AND SOUL

Swaminathan

In a world of fast fashion and synthetic fabrics, cotton, especially in its indigenous forms, remains a textile of memory, meaning, and material intelligence. In India, cotton is not merely grown; it is lived; woven into rituals, livelihoods, and identities.

From the soft-spun threads of the Indus Valley to the rhythmic pit looms of Tamil Nadu, India's cotton story is both archaeological and contemporary, scientific and soulful. As sustainability becomes more than a buzzword in fashion, there is renewed interest in indigenous varieties like Karunganni cotton, whose revival is being led by regenerative initiatives such as Kaskom, a social enterprise.

Cotton's Ancient Origins

Archaeological evidence tells us that cotton was already domesticated in the Indian subcontinent by 5000 BCE, with finds at Mehrgarh, and later at Harappan cities like Mohenjo-daro, Dholavira, and Nausharo. Remnants of cotton cloth, preserved on copper tools and pottery shards, alongside spindle whorls and loom weights, reveal an early, sophisticated textile culture.

What is striking is the ecological context of this early cotton that is grown in diverse, rain-fed cropping systems and processed using community-based, non-industrial methods.

The technology of cotton cultivation was embedded into local knowledge systems, passed down through generations.

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Old World Cotton: Ecological Intelligence in Every Boll

India's native cotton varieties Gossypium arboreum and Gossypium herbaceum, collectively termed 'Old World cotton'—being first cultivated in Asia and Africa—are remarkably well-adapted to monsoon-fed, marginal lands. Resilient to pests and requiring minimal water or external inputs, they represent what agroecologists today call low-external-input sustainable agriculture.

As highlighted in the Khadi Movement and early cotton reform discourse, these varieties were praised for their spinnability and regional suitability, qualities often overlooked in the rush toward uniformity and industrialisation.

Unlike contemporary cotton, indigenous cotton varieties evolved in dialogue with climate, soil, and handcraft traditions. Their decline is not merely botanical, but a story of displaced ecosystems and interrupted rural wisdom

Karunganni Cotton: Tamil Nadu's Forgotten Fibre

A jewel among Old World varieties is Karunganni cotton, traditionally cultivated in the semi-arid zones of Southern Tamil Nadu. Historically grown in rain-fed multi-cropping systems, Karunganni was rotated with millets, pulses, and oilseeds, creating food security alongside fibre production. It thrived in low rainfall regions without irrigation or chemicals and was hand spun into breathable fabrics ideal for the Tamil Nadu climate.

However, the rise of mill-spinnable cotton and price-based policies favouring hybrid long staple cotton marginalised these native varieties. The shift not only eroded biodiversity but also disempowered small farmers and craftspeople, leading to systemic fragilities both ecological and social.





Kaskom: A Regenerative Renaissance from Soil to Shelf

In this context, Kaskom emerges as a slow fashion brand with a bold vision: to revive desi cotton holistically, not just as a raw material but as a rural ecosystem.

Kaskom works directly with smallholder farmers and seed custodians, promoting non-GMO (Genetically Modified Organism), locally adapted cotton; and reviving the traditional multi-cropping models. These not only reduce dependency on external inputs but also restore microbiome of the soil, improve soil structure, and enhance climate resilience. By focusing on seed sovereignty, soil health, artisan livelihoods, and biodiversity restoration, it offers a model that moves beyond sustainability, toward regeneration.

The story of Kaskom is not just about fibre revival, but also about re-envisioning the future of fashion as circular, ecological, and community-embedded. Unlike centralised supply chains that separate cotton from its community, it supports local ginning, hand-spinning, and weaving units, especially those led by women artisans.



As noted in the history of Indian cotton technologies, many crises—including farmer suicides and loss of handloom livelihoods—are rooted in the disconnection between cultivation and craftsmanship, seed and soil, land and labour. Kaskom's soil-to-shelf approach seeks to rethread those connections; gently, respectfully, and with design-led vision.With initiatives like Kaskom, the past is not preserved in amber—it is alive, evolving, and wearable.✦

About the author

Seed saver, systems thinker, and founder of Kaskom, Swaminathan is a biotechnologist by education. Deep into his PhD research in cancer biology, he encountered a realisation: the sharp rise in cancer cases was closely tied to the long-term abusive use of agrochemicals. This insight became a turning point. In 2012, he decided to leave academia and dedicated himself to organic farming, indigenous seed systems, and ecological revival.

His early work took him across India's paddy growing regions, where he documented landrace biodiversity, helped develop community managed seed systems, and coordinated the 'Save Our Rice' campaign in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. His efforts ranged from seed collection and multiplication to creating value chains for native paddy varieties.

Since 2015, Swaminathan has focussed on the rainfed cotton belts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, where he pioneered the revival of Karunganni cotton. Working with both farmers and handloom weavers, he reviewed the value chain for Old World cottons through a decentralised, regenerative model that integrates food crops, livestock, and rural livelihoods.



Soulful Spaces

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



Slow Art in a Fast World
Treesha Datta

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SLOW ART IN A FAST WORLD

INSIDE THE LIFE, ART, AND ECOSYSTEM OF RIMLY BEZBARUAH

Treesha Datta

" Perfect is boring," Rimly Bezbaruah tells me, her voice lilting with amusement. "It is the imperfection that makes life spicy and worth living."

She says this not as a quip, but as a philosophy. One that pulses through her multidisciplinary art practice from earthy woodwork to botanical installations, and a rare sculptural form called a Paludarium—miniature ecosystems that bring together land, water, and often, a touch of whimsy.

It is also the driving spirit behind her brand MOI, a creative venture rooted in slowness, sustainability, and soul.

Rimly is a study in contrast. With her short-cropped hair, wrists stacked in beads and Afghani silver, and a few striking pendants swinging from her neck, she is vivacious yet grounded, warm yet strong. A creator in the deepest sense of the word —part poet, part gardener, part sculptor — and always quietly observing the world for her next idea.

A Childhood in the Hills

Born in Guwahati in Assam, Rimly grew up moving across towns. She spent her early years in the industrial city Duliajan before heading to Shillong at age nine to study at Pine Mount School. Her college years took her to Darjeeling's Loreto College where she studied literature, followed by a master's degree from North East Hill University in Meghalaya.

But even before the degrees and cities, creativity had taken root. The house in which she lived as a kid had a lovely garden, she recalls, "I would watch the gardener so closely — every manicured detail fascinated me. And then at home, I learned knitting, crochet, and even tatting from my mother. She was a perfectionist. Me? I have always tried to hide the flaws." That early friction between precision and play became a signature.

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The Romance of Creating

Much of Rimly's artistic journey unfolded organically. Reverse glass painting, decoupage, woodcraft, concrete casting, aquascaping; most of it was self-taught. "It started when my son was just a year old. A neighbour was doing reverse painting and I asked her to teach me. I think we were both trying to distract ourselves from our own emotional struggles... and art gave us that escape."

Later, she started a poetry blog, writing verses that spoke of heartbreak and healing. "I wrote for three years straight," she says. "Then suddenly, the words stopped. I just dried up. No inspiration, nothing." But creativity never stopped; it simply changed form.

Today, her home in Guwahati is an artwork in itself. The rooftop garden almost feels like a lush mini forest. "There is an outdoor shower, small water bodies with fish in them, and even a grass lawn. It took years to become what it is, but each corner was made with thought. And I did look at Pinterest for some inspiration!"

Rimly's creations under MOI range from rustic wood mirrors, trays inlaid with handpicked tiles, driftwood lamps, benches and bird houses — to concrete bird baths molded from real colocasia leaves, and more. Her husband, Robin, has become an indispensable partner in the process. "He has helped me look for raw materials, tools, and even handles the social media side. I have received a lot of orders through groups he has shared my work on. He has really been my rock."

Paludariums and Found Beauty

Perhaps the most striking piece Rimly has created is her Paludarium — a glass-encased microhabitat with flowing water, lush moss, driftwood, and fish that dart in and out of tiny caves. "I started in February and finished by May. It would have taken two months if I had not travelled in between," she says. "But it takes that long because you need time for the structure to stick and be sturdy, for the water to cycle, for the plants to root, for the ecosystem to stabilise." It is a slow, meticulous process, but the result is stunning.

The sense of reuse and reinvention runs deep through Rimly's work. She has made natural pigments from turmeric and beetroot, and often works with reclaimed and found wood, pressed flowers, or discarded materials she reimagines into beauty. "I am always looking around when I walk — for stones, broken logs, whatever I can turn into something."









MOI: Me, Mine, and More

Why MOI? "My son, Ron, pushed me to start my own brand and we came up with the name together. It means 'me' in Assamese, and also in French. My official name is Moitreyee, and friends in Goa used to call me 'Moi.' So, it just felt right

The brand's tagline 'Imperfectly Perfect' is both a nod to her own creative journey and a gentle rebellion against polished, cookie-cutter design. "I have always believed that it is the imperfections that make something truly yours," she says..

MOI's other offerings include miniature terrariums, kokedamas, wood chandeliers, candle stands, wabi-kusa arrangements, and paper mâché art. But Rimly is choosy about commissions.

"I am not in it for the money anymore. If an order excites me, I will take it. But I like these slow periods, I pick up a new technique, or just let something evolve. Right now, I am obsessed with tiny terrariums."



An Artist, a Gardener, a Gatherer

At heart, Rimly is a creator. Watching Rimly work—slowly, soulfully, and with a deep reverence for both nature and craft — it is clear that she has mastered something far more precious: the art of living beautifully and deliberately.

In a world of speed and spectacle, Rimly Bezbaruah reminds us of the quiet power of slow creation. Of muddy feet, weathered wood, and the joy of watching moss grow.✦



About the author

Treesha Datta has spent over 15 years in media, starting out as a lifestyle journalist before branching into copywriting, video direction, and brand storytelling. She has worked on a range of things - from digital ads and OTT content to a sports documentary, and has helped shape several startup brands - most recently as Creative Lead at OZiva.





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Poetry & Literature

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

PERFECTLY SEASONED ~ EMPOWERED SHE
Anita C Powell

Was he my Anchor?
Beena Unnikrishnan

How Poetry and Literature Are Healing Minds in Botswana
Ophadile T. Gofhamodimo



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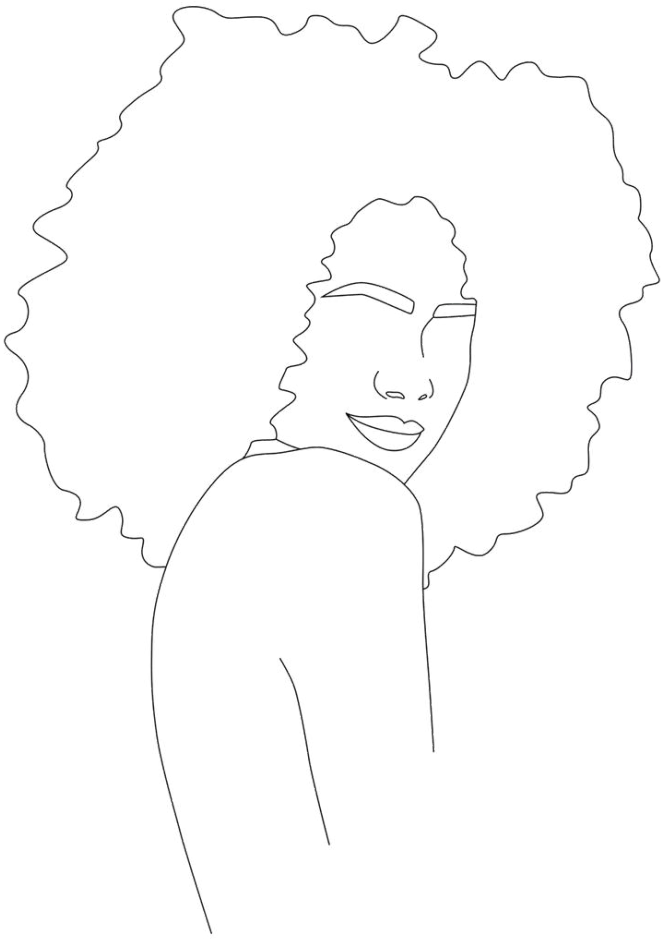
Perfectly Seasoned ~ Empowered She

Anita C. Powell



TAPN2U* and touch on trust.
Believe in you and in your prosperity.
Believe in yourself and in the skill of your efficacy.
To doubt what you can do
is truly being out of touch with reality.
Now there will be some that'll say it just ain't true,
that what you cannot and should not do
is believe in you.
Pay that no attention

Believe in your Wealth, that's including
Peace
Love
Courage
Prosperous Good Health.
SoulBeautifulMiracle YOU...
Express in states of Happiness.
We all have dreams, yep...
That's what life
(your Love, Imagination, Faith, Expression),
your life is made of. So, believe in You and
in your Dream, your Prosperity.



No matter how impossible it is, you may be told.
One thing for sure ~
it will not be seen if you don't elevate
that self-esteem.
Raise appreciation
in the skill of your Hands and Head
instead visiting or staying stuck on doubt and dread.

Dream on, SoulBeautiful ~ don't hesitate.
Have courage - touch on trust
faith will continue to see you through.
Expand the inside of your hope
your scope, your vision and believe.

Believe prosperity always AND in all ways is well
within your reach.
You just gotta greet and meet where it resides.
And without question...
it's the Miracle of You inside.
And while you're at it,
touch on the Creative within you.
Believe how you want it;
how you need it IS Your life's reality...

You will touch stars,
if you'd only go beyond the norm...see,
you gotta embrace within the depth of your Soul,
*Greatest Miracle in the World,
your dream, living in prosperity
is the lesson to learn,the session in life
represents the journey...the destination
the reason you were born.

Now, it doesn't matter if it looks like
the valley or the bottom of the sea.
Touch on Trust – TAPN2U and believe...
believe within
and whether or not it's clear to you
the win, the heritance...
the right of Abundance is yours.

The Source Supply, Support and Substance
Is the Divine in You.
Laced by your heart,
embraced by your Soul,
Lined with the attributes of the Divine,
patiently waiting to contribute through You
to humankind.

You are
the Excellence
with ideas placed in your mind.
That's cause, SoulBeautiful...
You are the Masterpiece,
The Creator's Design.✦



About the author

Dr. Anita C. Powell, MSc. D., Energy Principle Practitioner specialising in metaphysical self-awareness, wears many hats. She is a poet, Doctor of Metaphysics, Metaphysical educator, speaker, advocate and creator of the Global *TAPN2U, a movement for peace and empowerment. Anita has received numerous awards and is affiliated with several international organisations.

WAS HE MY ANCHOR?

Beena Unnikrishnan

A TRIBUTE TO FATHER ON FATHER'S DAY

Was he my anchor?
I didn't know it then.
But now,
in this strange, breathless hush—
three days since he left
I feel the pull,
a weight beneath my chest,
a silence that won't settle.

Something in me shakes.
Not just grief—
but a raw question rising:
Have I lost the place I called home?
Not the walls,
not the blood,
but the gaze that steadied me
when no one else could.

But I see it now—
it was him.
It was always him.
The quiet storm
in the corner of the room.
The yes,
the no,
the silent "I'm here"
even when his lips said nothing.

Her voice—
it carried his spine.

And I—
I stand alone on this thinning thread,
unsure where to go.
Will I always reach
for his invisible hand
in the dark?

This house will breathe again.
It will laugh,
it will echo with stories,
it will glow at dusk
with the ember of his memory.
But will it ever be mine again
as it was,
just three days ago?

My home
was mapped in his footsteps,
his cough down the hallway,
his presence at the door—
waiting.our in sight.

Now I feel
the coldness of his hand
burned into my chest,
tightening my breath,
slipping my grip—
as though I've lost
the one hand
that never needed to hold tight
to keep me close.

In this new world,
I will have them all—
mother, brothers, husband, sons—
but still,
my heart will ache
for the one
who never asked me
to explain myself.

Am I losing that tether?
That silent pact—
between a daughter and a father,
the unseen force
that never needed light
to keep me grounded?

Maybe it's my mind
playing tricks.
Maybe grief casts shadows
on everything it touches.

But I know this—
He was the voice
when I had none.
The wall
I leaned on
without knowing.

And now—
this ache,
this void,
this free fall—
it threatens to swallow me.

Was he my anchor?
Yes.
And now I drift—
in a sea of familiar faces,
with no harbour in sight.

About the author

Beena Unnikrishnan wears many hats: she is an artist, entrepreneur, creative strategist, spiritual traveller, filmmaker and author. Based in Chennai, she is Founder, Kankali Trust (KT-ACED), G100 Global Chair Arts Leadership & Films, and Founder, Editor in Chief of The Atelier Magazine



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POETRY AND LITERATURE ARE HEALING MINDS IN BOTSWANA

Ophadile T. Gofhamodimo



In the heart of Botswana, where tradition and modernity walk side by side, a quiet revolution is unfolding—not on the streets, but on the pages of journals, stages of open mic nights, and between the lines of verses. This revolution speaks of grief, healing, resilience, and above all, mental health.

With mental health issues increasingly affecting youth and adults alike, literature and poetry have become more than creative outlets. They have become survival tools—sacred spaces where emotional chaos finds clarity, and silence turns into speech.

Poetry is the cry behind the curtain and the calm after the chaos. It captures emotional complexity in compact lines, offering writers and readers alike the freedom to feel, process, and release. In a country where mental health conversations are often subdued, poetry is emerging as a bold, unapologetic voice.

Travelodge Poetry Nights, held every last Thursday of the month in Gaborone, have become sanctuaries for expression. Here, young Batswana gather not just to entertain but to be vulnerable. Poets step up to the mic with trembling voices and powerful verses that speak of depression, anxiety, heartbreak, and healing. What unfolds is not merely performance—it is collective therapy.

Stories have power. They do more than entertain—they allow us to see ourselves. Through the experiences of characters battling inner demons or surviving trauma, readers find language for their own struggles. Literature builds empathy and bridges the gap between isolation and understanding.

Two Botswana-based literary voices stand out in this mental health narrative: Phodiso Modirwa and Juby Peacock.

Phodiso Modirwa, a poet and author known for her vulnerable, soul-touching writing, crafts pieces that centre emotional wounds and healing.

Her poetry does not shy away from the deep end of emotions—it dives in, swims, and surfaces with clarity. For many, her work is a mirror of their own mental health journeys. Phodiso is an award-winning poet and writer whose work has been published in magazines and the African Anthology of Contemporary Poetry.

She has also graced national and international poetry stages. Her chapbook, Speaking in Code, was selected by the African Poetry Book Fund and Akashic Books to be published as part of Tisa: New-Generation African Poets alongside 10 other African poets. Phodiso recently published a new poetry book Crossing Roads, which is making waves in Botswana at this point.



Juby Peacock, another standout name, is a speaker and spoken word performer who uses storytelling to challenge societal silence around mental wellness. Her narratives reflect the lives of everyday Batswana, revealing the battles fought behind polite smiles. Her work is a call to see people—really see them—and honour their unseen struggles.

She is a member of Poetavango, an arts NGO which celebrates years of proven impact in education, the arts, and the cultural development space in Botswana.

In workshops, schools, and online forums, writing is being reintroduced as a form of self-care. Young people are learning to journal their emotions, write poems as prayers, and create characters that speak the words they cannot.

Therapists and life coaches alike are using literary exercises to help clients confront and cope with their pain.

Organisations and initiatives are beginning to see the role poetry and literature can play in emotional recovery. Book launches, poetry podcasts, and community publishing projects are paving new pathways for expression and healing.

An example of an organisation supporting local poets/writers is Gaborone Book Festival, conducting writing workshops to educate, and holding book launches to support works of writers and poets.

Organisations like National Arts Council of Botswana, Local Enterprise Authority (LEA), First National Bank of Botswana, and Botswana Telecommunications Corporation Ltd., are actually holding events and having poets as paid performers. They also do poetry and writers competitions.

Botswana is witnessing a cultural shift. Mental health is slowly shedding its shame. More voices are rising—loud, lyrical, and honest. And while there is still much to be done, the literary community is leading the way. One poem. One story. One open mic at a time. ✦

About the author

Ophadile T. Gofhamodimo is a transformational speaker and founder of The Urge Promotions, known for turning burnout into purpose and frustration into action. She speaks across Botswana on healing, resilience, and mental wellness, and hosts the podcast 'Life on The Other Side of My Perspective', featuring real, powerful stories of growth and recovery.

Recognised among Africa's Top 30 Leading Women, she also champions youth mental health as G100 Botswana's Youth Engagement Chair—creating safe, empowering spaces for the next generation to thrive.

Inner muse

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

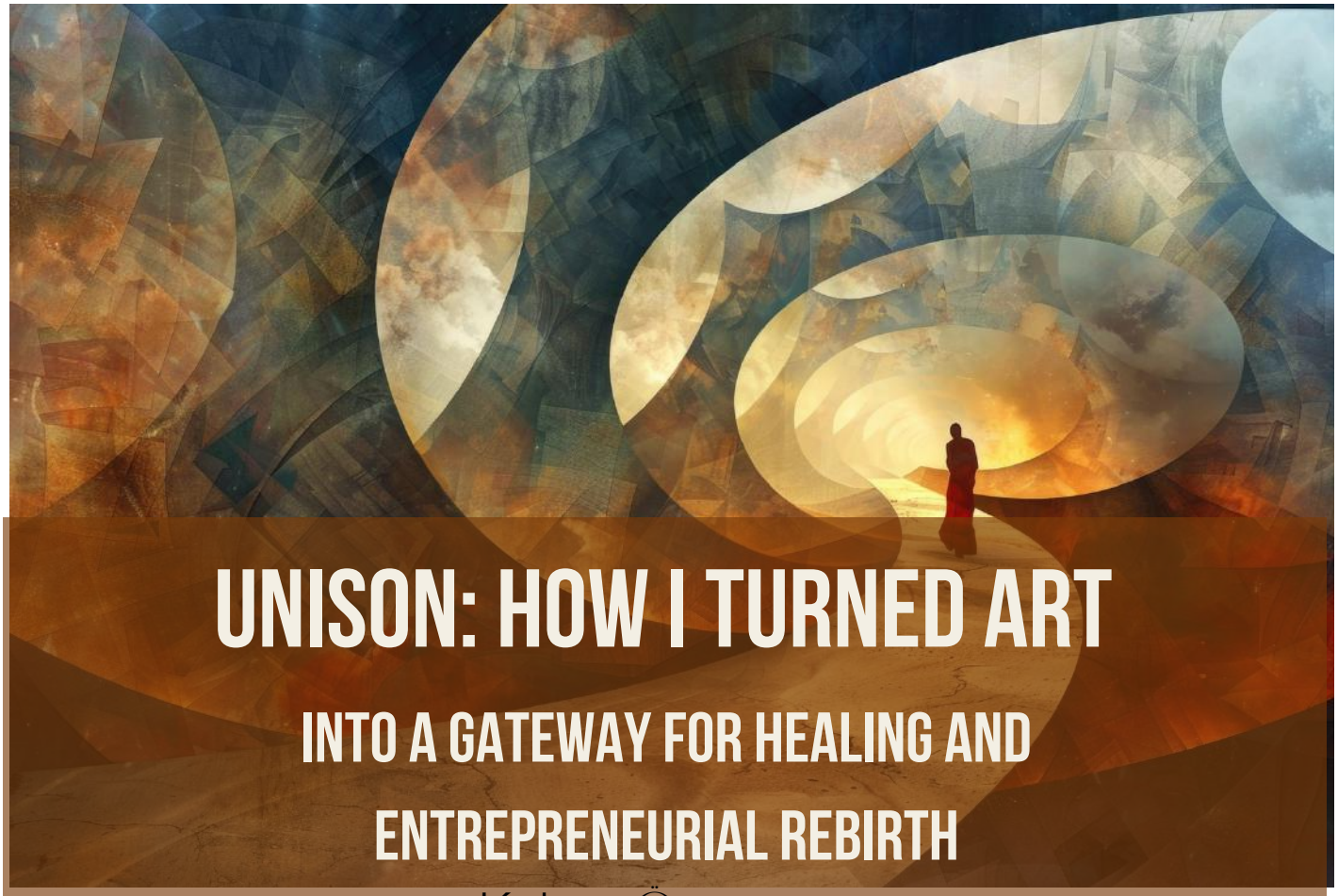


Unison: How I Turned Art into a Portal for Healing and Entrepreneurial Rebirth
Kübra Özgüvenç

Sacred Art: Portal to Higher Realms of Consciousness
Mithun Salila

“Traditional Sacred Art Conveys Truths that Transcend Time”
Ekabhumi Charles Ellik

Pc:Freepik



UNISON: HOW I TURNED ART

INTO A GATEWAY FOR HEALING AND ENTREPRENEURIAL REBIRTH

Kübra Özgüvenç

I was not born into art. I was born through it.

My first brush with creative magic was not on a canvas, but in a fourth-grade classroom where we were asked to design imaginary characters. I drew a bear, not just any bear, but one dressed in my own handmade fashion. My classmates loved it so much they photocopied it. One of them even asked me to sign it as if I were a real artist.

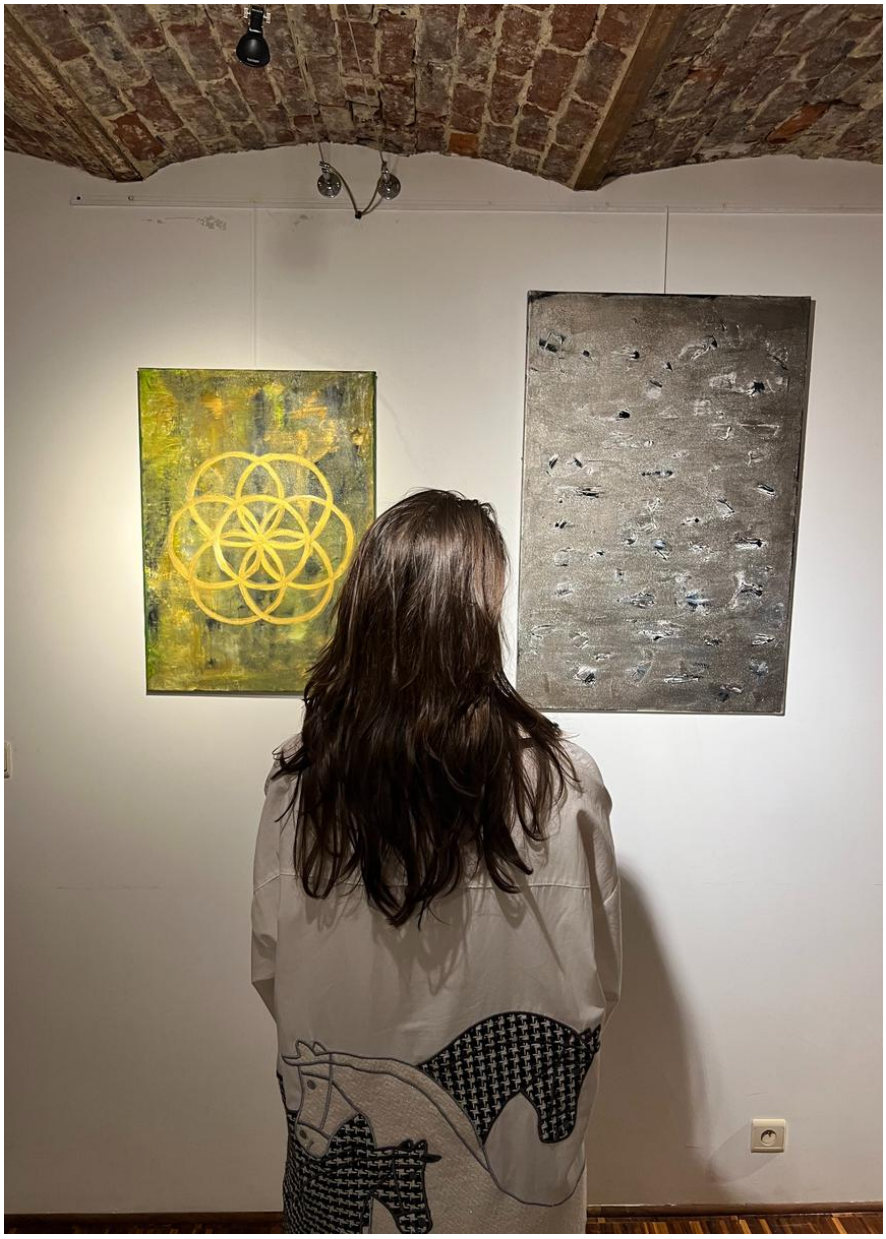
That moment stuck with me. But still, I didn't claim the title "artist." Not then. Not for a long time.

Originally trained as a scientist, I spent my early adult life solving equations and honouring the logic of things, until life, as it tends to do, cracked me open. A series of health issues and emotional abuse led me to the spiritual realm at 19.

It was not a peaceful awakening. It was raw. Uncontrollable. Initiatory.

And yet, my hands had always known something. Since childhood, I have been drawing. My mother, a self-taught artist, was my first mentor. Art was my secret garden. I painted in silence, often for years, never sharing. It was mine, my inner sanctuary.





Then in 2022, something shifted. During a spiritual practice with a friend, I began receiving what I now understand were downloads, visions, codes, and emotional transmissions. I started translating them into paintings. It happened fast. For the first time, I was not afraid to share. I did not ask, “Will they get it?” I simply released it. My art was no longer just mine. It was a channel.

Art as Transmission, Healing as Creation

Unknowingly, I had been following a ritual for years. Each piece starts with a kind of heart attack, a gripping emotional wave that pulls me toward a certain song. I listen to that song obsessively, sometimes for weeks or months while painting. I do not choose when a painting starts or ends. But when the emotions become too intense to hold, the brush moves.

After each painting session, even a short one, I leave the room as a different woman. And that is when I realised: this is not just art.

This is healing. This is a rebirth.I began offering this experience to friends, then to clients. Each painting carried a message. A truth. A frequency. What started as deeply personal became profoundly universal.

I Call It: Unison

Unison is the name I gave to this transmission, this philosophy, this practice. It is not a brand. It is a being. A pearl of wisdom. A field. Unison teaches us that while oneness sounds poetic, it is not something we can truly experience until we become one within ourselves first. That means dropping judgment, not just of others, but of every version of you that you have cast away.

In Unison, we channel. Not just visions, but emotions. Because the truth is: everyone channels. If we do it consciously, we become artists, visionaries, and psychics. If we do it unconsciously, we create emotional patterns and trauma loops.

From Science to Soulwork:

My Work with Entrepreneurs. Today, I work with entrepreneurs who have tried the business checklists; done the affirmations; “aligned their energy” and still hit walls. Unison helps them move beyond mindset and into emotional alchemy. Through guided sessions, visionary art, and timeline channelling, we identify the emotional patterns they have been unknowingly looping, and transmute them into power.

The Artist's Impact

I never thought I would be here, creating healing art, coaching entrepreneurs, releasing an album, and building a movement. But the artist in me always knew.

She whispered through the drawings.
Through the oil paintings. Through the songs I could not stop replaying.

Now, I create with full presence. With permission. And I invite others to do the same. Unison is not a method. It is a remembering. And art is not a product. It is a portal.

Unison as a Portal: Reconnecting Entrepreneurs to Their Soul

Unison is not just an art technique. It is a healing transmission. A soulful rebirth. A remembering. With Unison, I help entrepreneurs reconnect with the parts of themselves that suffered, the ones they pushed aside to "perform," "launch," or "be visible." It is not because they do not know what to do. In fact, most of my clients are incredibly self-aware. They have meditated, healed, journalled, invested in coaches, followed strategy after strategy.

But still...
Something feels off.
Something is missing.

That "something" is often an emotional loop from a timeline they have not fully healed or merged with yet.

That is where Unison enters. It meets you at the edge of your logic and invites your soul back in.
Sometimes it takes weeks.
Sometimes months.

Sometimes the energy arrives before you even know what is being healed.We were taught we are one fixed self, moving through time. But what Unison reveals is that we are already existing across timelines. And when one version of you is stuck, your higher self begins to channel it, because it wants to merge.



That is why you can "do everything right" and still feel off.
Your higher self is not trying to fix you.
It is trying to bring you back to yourself.
You are not broken. You are the bridge between timelines.

And when we bring those timelines into unison, through art, emotion, and frequency, that is when real wholeness begins. I call this work Unison Soulful Rebirth because it is exactly that: A return to the parts of you that have been waiting to be seen, without judgment.Because when you stop judging yourself for who you used to be, that is when you become everything you came here to be. ✦

About the author

As spiritual guide, astrologer, artist, worthiness coach, and scientist; Kübra Özgüvenç brings together science and spirituality, offering transformative ways to empower people to embrace their true potential She is based in Belgium.



SACRED ART

PORTAL TO HIGHER REALMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Mithun Salila

Each Stroke of the Brush is a Psychic Transmission

The act of creating is inseparable from prayer. In traditional Kerala mural painting, the space transforms into a sanctum, and the brush becomes an instrument of invocation. I observe niyama (discipline) by maintaining silence, fasting, or reciting mantras while I paint. This practice transforms my studio into a temple, and painting becomes sadhana —a meditative discipline aligned with devotion. Thus, my process is not just about representing the divine but about communing with it.

My paintings act as portals to higher realms of consciousness. Most of my paintings begin not from visual references but from visions: intuitive downloads experienced during meditation or dreams. For example, the painting of Durga seated atop Shiva in the Srichakra was born from such a psychic transmission. It was not planned intellectually; it revealed itself through inner seeing.

When I paint, I feel as though I am holding open a gateway through which subtle energies flow, encoded through color, form, and geometry. Symbols like the thrisula, kapala, or the intricate positioning of deities are not merely decorative; they serve as vibrational keys. Each stroke is a transmission, turning the canvas into a yantra—a visual mantra—charged with frequency and presence.

An Artistic Journey Rooted in Spiritual Exploration

I believe that painting divine forms is akin to alankara: the sacred adornment of the deity. When I painted Tripurasundari, it was not just a composition; it embodied nourishment, protection, and cosmic balance. As I layer the colours—especially using natural pigments like yellow, vermilion, and gold—I feel their energies manifesting in the form. There is a palpable presence. Sometimes, I feel guided by the deity itself, particularly in detailing the eyes or bhava (expression). It is as though the form speaks, breathes, and sometimes even blesses.

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There have been pivotal moments that guided me toward this path of sacred art. One was during a temple visit in Kerala, where I was captivated by an ancient mural of Bhagavati. I found myself in tears, overwhelmed by an inexplicable sense of belonging.

Another moment was while I was working on the Kamadeva painting, where each of the five floral arrows represented a season and emotion—I experienced a transcendental state, as though nature and divinity were merging through me.

These moments were not just artistic inspirations; they were spiritual awakenings that crystallised my path—not just as an artist, but as a medium for sacred storytelling.

The act of painting is a spiral that moves inward and then outward. Inwardly, I explore my subconscious and karmic layers, seeking stillness. Outwardly, I become a vessel for divine expression.

When I paint, I lose the sense of "I." A silent surrender occurs, allowing something larger to move through me. Insights about my own life, emotional patterns, or spiritual lessons often surface during long painting sessions.

It feels as if the divine speaks not only to the viewer but first to me as the painter. It is a sacred dialogue between the soul and the source.

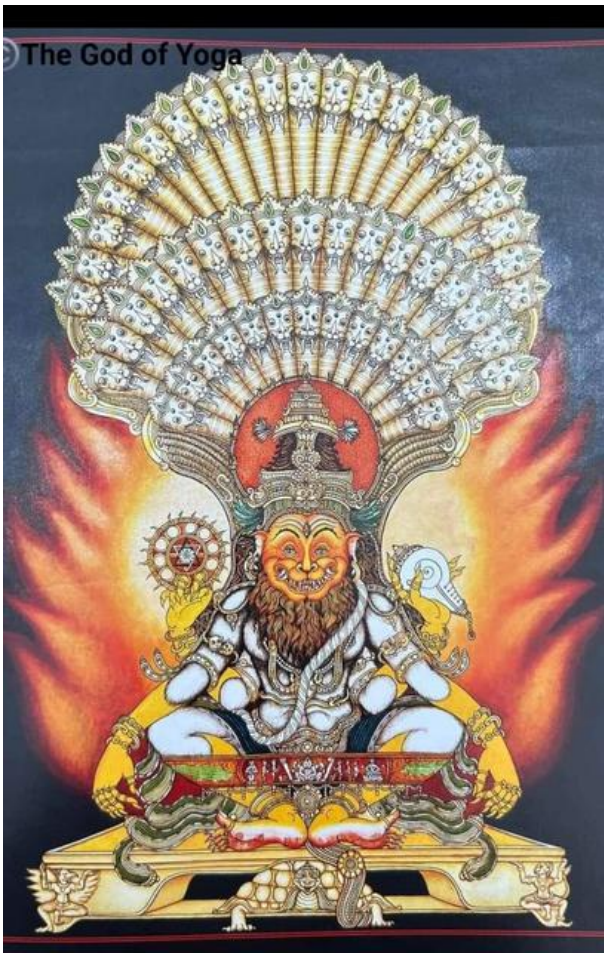
Sacred Art is a Mirror for the Soul

I have seen emotional reactions from devotees when they see my paintings, and such moments are profoundly humbling.

I recall a devotee who sat in front of the Annapurna mural during the neertrolmeelana (eye-opening ceremony) burst into tears, saying they felt as though the Goddess was alive.

Others have shared experiences of clarity, emotional release, or even visions while contemplating my Kamadeva or Durga paintings. In one instance, a yoga practitioner meditating with a print of my Durga painting reported a surge of Shakti (divine energy) in her spine.

These are not just coincidences; they remind us that sacred art carries prana (life force), and when aligned correctly, it becomes a mirror for the soul. ✦





About the author



Mithun Salila is a mural artist from Ernakulam, Kerala. A former Kerala mural teacher and yoga educator, he studied at Malayala Kalagramam, New Mahe and Nift, Bangalore. Known for his spiritual paintings, his vision is guided by "shastra (scriptural tradition), bhava (emotive inspiration), and spanda (spontaneous vibration)." While he respects the canon—especially the Agamas, Puranas, and Kerala mural conventions—he does not limit himself to rigid forms.

Mithun Salila is involved in the recent Ekadashi Mookambika Mural Project, a new artistic collaboration with renowned artist Ekabhumi Charles Ellik for the ancient Kollur Mookambika temple in Karnataka. He coloured and processed the intricate and detailed sketching of Goddess Annapurna Devi alongside Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, sketched by Ekabhumi.



"TRADITIONAL SACRED ART CONVEYS TRUTHS THAT TRANSCEND TIME"

An interview with Ekabhumi Charles Ellik.

Ekabhumi Charles Ellik is an award-winning painter, poet, author, illustrator, yoga instructor and arts educator. He specialises in the figurative images and geometric icons (yantras) of Hindu deities. Through a ritualised and meditative creative method, he makes artworks for ceremonial, therapeutic, and educational use. His work may be found in temples, yoga studios, private homes, and on altars around the world. A mural project for the legendary Sri Mookambika temple in Karnataka, India with collaborator Mithun Babu is currently in progress. He is founder of One Earth Sacred Arts, co-founder of Mystic Art Retreats, and currently part of the core faculty of online school Living Sanskrit. His instructional adult coloring books Shakti Coloring Book and the uplifting Bhakti Coloring Book are now available world-wide from Sounds True Press. On weekends, he can be found in his garden practicing silence and learning directly from Nature.

"Traditional sacred art conveys truths that transcend time. It isn't trendy. It's time-tested and proven itself to be inspiring and useful to generations of brilliant and highly-realised beings. It remains relevant because it speaks to the experience of being in a human body. It answers questions that remain relevant: What is the goal of spiritual practice? How do we navigate across a spiritual landscape to that goal? How do we recognise when we have arrived, and what do we do there?"

Excerpts from an interview with The Atelier:

Let's begin at the root what first awakened your understanding that art could be sacred? Was there a moment or experience that changed the way you see creativity itself?

My mother raised me with reverence for art in general. We regularly took family trips to art museums as well as notable architectural and historical destinations. My father loved camping, so we also visited areas of tremendous natural beauty. They both love gardening, and our family home is surrounded by beautiful shrubs and flowers. So, I've always been filled with a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of our manifest world as well as those who are manifesting things within it.

But it wasn't until after I began studying and practicing Yoga that I made a distinction that some art was more "sacred" than other art. It took years for me to realise that making sacred art is more about participating in transmission of wisdom across generations than it is about personal expression. It's trans-personal. This realisation dawned on me during an early morning meditation in Haridwar, overlooking the river Ganga, on my first trip to India. In this sense it is quite different from conventional Modern Art.

Just as teaching tales describe the intensity of divine Ganga being filtered through the locks of Shiva's matted hair before gently descending to Earth, so too the artist who receives divine inspiration and must use personal discipline and training (symbolised by the locked hair) to translate that revelation into a form (sacred art) that is both recognisable and nourishing to other humans. Traditional forms give the artist a vocabulary for this process of translation. The iconography and iconometry of traditional dharmic art (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain) is a cultural treasure. Dharmic art is a visual language that allows artists to visually depict abstractions like "consciousness" and "power" in recognisable form.

Your work often weaves together spiritual philosophy and visual precision. How do you experience the act of creation as meditation, invocation, or something else entirely?

Making sacred art is primarily a spiritual discipline (utilising creativity), made in a ritualistic manner (that could be meditative), to invoke, hold, and direct divine powers (if made skillfully). I like to think of sacred art as the fruit of spiritual practice. Or perhaps the distilled nectar of personal discipline.

I would like to make a distinction between creativity, in the sense of making something original as an act of personal expression, versus creation of sacred art as a spiritual discipline. Artists don't make sacred art. We are vehicles for divine intelligence working through us to manifest in the world for the benefit of sentient beings. But because of the limitations of language and the need to speak to modern readers, we need to address the appearance of a creative individual, making something new, experiencing something spiritual.

Sacred art is more like literature than visual art – or at least what most modern people are conditioned to think of as visual art. The primary concern of the sacred artist is the legibility of their work, not their personal creativity. The secondary concern is the functionality of the icon. Is it suitable for use in ritual invocation? This is far more important than how the artist felt while they were making the artwork. In this sense, modern art as personal expression is exactly opposite in its orientation (the experience of the artist) versus traditional sacred art (the experience of the deity).

In sacred art, the primary concern is (also) legibility. The viewer must recognise the deity and what the deity is doing. The posture of the deity and the implements held by the deity cannot be altered without dramatically changing both the meaning of the artwork and the function of the artwork as an icon for use in ritual. The artist is allowed much more freedom in the ornamentation and location, but even then, there are many restrictions. These limitations are like a distillation process for the artist's raw personal creativity, resulting in a purified nectar of sacred art that is digestible for many people across a vast stretch of time.



In your view, what makes a piece of art "sacred"? Is it in the symbols, the process, the intention or something less tangible?

Well, it would be easy to just say religious art is sacred. Or artworks depicting a deity. But these are very restrictive views. On the flip side, ALL art is sacred to some people.

To me, sacred art is art which expands awareness. Artworks made in a ritualised manner for use in spiritual practice.

Over years of study, I've come to believe that "sacred" means more than just "special" or "precious" or even "holy". Sacred Art is a designation for art (and ritual objects) that orient us toward god(dess). Or we could say sacred art is art that functions to direct awareness beyond basic materialistic concerns. By filling the mind with wonder, by opening the heart to compassion, by reminding viewers that divine consciousness pervades all manifestation, sacred art serves a vital functional role for humanity.

Sacred art reminds us of who we really are. It helps to give life meaning. It's not just decorative, or culturally significant, or illustrating tall tales. Sacred art shows us that we are more than just beasts mindlessly surviving. We are children of god(dess). We are emanations of a loving creator, here to discover one another (and ourselves) in an enchanting and sometimes terrifying world of awesome beauty. Sacred art directs our attention towards the goal of spiritual fulfilment.





Sacred geometry appears across cultures, traditions, and time. How do you interpret its universal language in your own work and why do you think it continues to resonate so powerfully?

Sacred geometry relates to the way the universe operates. Therefore, it is universal, timeless, and will continue to resonate powerfully for any being conscious enough to make the connection between the symbol and the principle it invokes. A triangle doesn't just represent "three", it IS three. It is three lines grouped in the most simple, natural, and elegant manner. The word "four" may have four letters, but so do many other words. The symbol "4" is made of three lines and results in four points, but a square is the most elegant way of being four. This is what makes it sacred geometry.

It is said that Truth is that which does not change over time. Sacred Geometry has power because it is True. It doesn't just represent True. We experience sacred geometry as powerful and resonant because it cuts through distraction and delusion and re-orients the mind towards what is True, timeless, and universal.

In my traditional work making yantras and mandalas, there is no personal interpretation. They mean what they mean and serve specific roles that have been established over millennia. Their primary purpose is functional. Too much deviation (interpreting creatively) can compromise the intended function. I serve the deity by making the yantra, I don't make the yantra to serve my personal views.

By adding colours, elemental forces are invoked. Colours have symbolic meanings, of course, but in the traditions in which I was trained, colours relate to fundamental principles of manifestation – most specifically, the five elements (Mahabhutas). Gazing on them meditatively can shift the balance of elements in the viewer's subtle body. In other words, colours can be used medicinally. I find it deeply nourishing and even exhilarating to make these artworks. It is my sincere hope that these artworks will have a similar restorative effect on viewers.

You work extensively with Tantrik iconography. How do these ancient forms speak to modern seekers, and what relevance do they hold in today's spiritual landscape?

Traditional sacred art conveys truths that transcend time. It isn't trendy. It's time-tested and proven itself to be inspiring and useful to generations of brilliant and highly-realised beings. It remains relevant because it speaks to the experience of being in a human body. It answers questions that remain relevant: What is the goal of spiritual practice? How do we navigate across a spiritual landscape to that goal? How do we recognise when we have arrived, and what do we do there?

As we've already discussed, sacred geometry is primordial, timeless, and universal, transcending language and culture. But it's so abstract that it is challenging to relate the truth it conveys into human terms. It conveys Truth, but what about meaning? Geometrical shapes don't really give the mind much to hold on to in terms of personal direction or behaviour.

When deities are depicted as human beings (or human-like), they give us models of enlightened embodiment. These icons are templates of enlightened activity that we can emulate. They are shown with symbolic flowers, fruit, ornaments, and tools that we can recognize and relate to. It takes a certain frame of mind and deliberate practice to use a bow and arrow effectively.

So, a deity (like Lord Rama) who holds a bow and arrow demonstrates focus, strength, perseverance, and a certain amount of restraint (keeping some arrows in reserve in the quiver, pulling the bow back, and holding it to aim). If you want to be like Lord Rama, you need to practice these virtues. And when a deity holds a sugarcane bow and five flower arrows (like Kameshvari) then these same characteristics are directed toward sweetness, beauty, and delight. Those five flower arrows represent the five senses, by the way. So, to emulate that deity, you must direct all five senses towards your target.

Of course, the symbolism of a deity's attributes is interpreted differently by different teachers in different lineages, and even at different stages of a devotee's development. That's part of the elegant utility of these icons; they are poetic and metaphorical. They are flexible, adaptable tools which remain useful in a wide variety of applications. Including today's spiritual landscape.



As someone who also works with psychic astrology and ritual practice, how do you see the relationship between cosmic forces and artistic inspiration? Do you believe certain times or transits affect the creative process?

Certainly, there are traditional times for making certain icons. Fundamentally, this is natural wisdom. It's based on how the world operates, and how the spiritual practitioner can align themselves with cosmic forces and natural cycles of time for maximum efficacy and minimal effort.

Dawn is the time of freshness and arising light, the qualities of enlightenment and expansion. This is why it is customary to worship the deity in the early morning... if the goal is enlightenment. It is also traditional to face East, the direction of the rising sun.

A principle in interpreting Vedic astrology, is that the very first action towards a specific goal has greatest influence on the outcome. The first step over the threshold towards your destination. The first mark made on the blank page.

The first action, and when it is made, sets the karmic trajectory. It's a snowballing effect.



So, for most deities, I start drawing their icon in the early morning while facing East. Some ritual icons must be made during a specific window of time and there may be an entire list of prescribed actions and tools to ensure maximum efficacy. But these rules boil down to natural wisdom. Either aligning with, or re-directing cosmic forces to help improve the odds of a successful outcome.

Any icon manufactured with the correct materials, shapes and colours may be utilised with relative safety and reliability. But when the icon is made intentionally by a skilled artisan, when it is crafted reverentially in a ritualised manner, it has intrinsic power (Shakti). You can feel it. It's like a battery that has been pre-charged.

You can use your imagination and willpower to invoke these qualities anytime and anywhere, facing any direction, but it is easier when you have the right tools and the right outer environment to support your practice. It's more efficacious when the icon is empowered. Even if you don't believe in magic, the ritual will have greater impact on your psychology. Even modern science has found that when you believe you're lucky, you are statistically more likely to succeed. Precisely-made ritual tools help to give more precise results. It's natural.

Using astrology to choose an auspicious time (muhurta) is simply a more elaborate and sophisticated way of applying these same basic principles. We are using the inherited wisdom of generations of practitioners to guide us in skilfully selecting the best possible time to initiate and execute the work.

When you're creating a yantra or deity form, is there a moment when the image begins to "come alive"? How do you know when a piece is complete, spiritually and aesthetically?

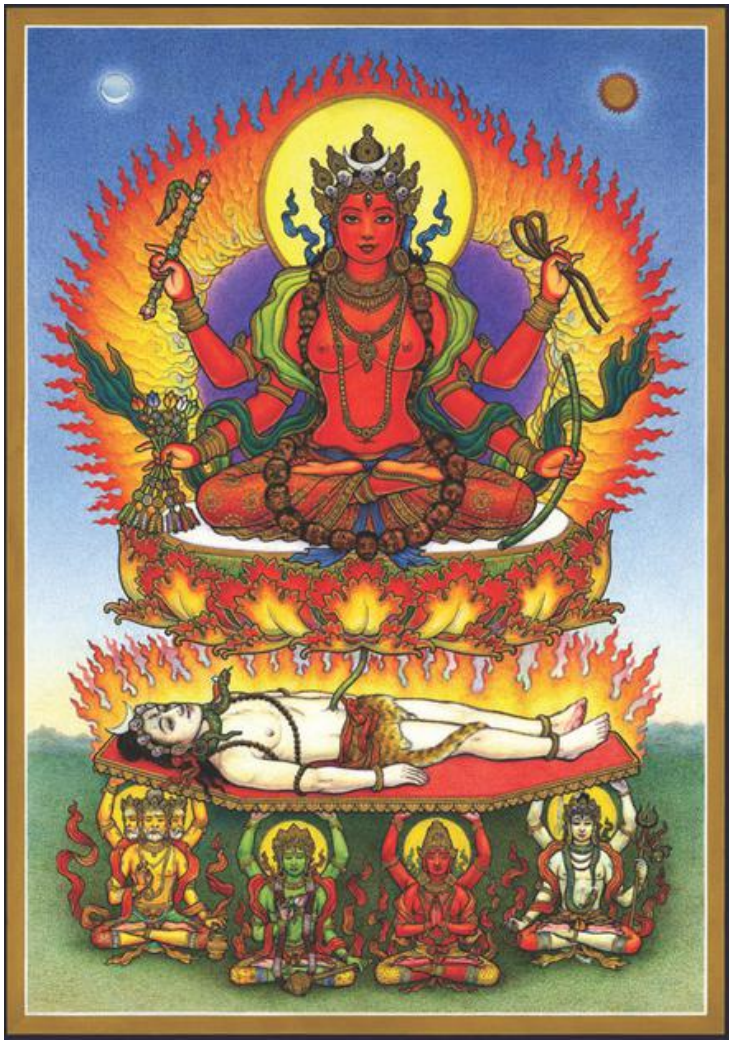
Traditionally, the icon is complete when the pupils of the eyes are drawn in, or the center-point (Bindu) of the yantra is added. When the icon is complete, is customary to install the spirit of the deity into the icon with a specific ritual (Prana Pratishta). In practice, however, most images of deities begin to have a kind of presence long before they are complete. It says in scripture (Shastra) that a rosary (Mālā) is empowered (a "Siddha") after it has been used to chant a mantra one-thousand times. I believe the same basic principle applies to any artifact or artwork.

If the artist is chanting mantras while working (typical) then this number is usually surpassed in the first day of work. It usually takes longer for an elaborate work of art to start to feel alive, but out of an abundance of caution it is wise to begin treating the artifact respectfully as soon as this number has been reached, even if the deity isn't yet recognisable. For me, the artwork will begin to have a kind of presence. I might even feel like I'm being watched. It will have a subtle vibration, a hum like a high-voltage transformer. At this point, the presence in the artwork begins to guide my hand. If a line or colour is wrong, I will feel it in my body.

This is also how I know when it is done. The deity will let me know when they are ready inhabit the finished icon and compel me to draw in the pupils of the eyes. There is a kind of excitement and anticipation up to that moment, and a kind of calm equanimity afterwords. Even a sense of non-attachment. It is usually easy for me to deliver a completed icon to a client. Sometimes I have even forgotten to photograph it properly. The icon doesn't feel "mine" anymore.

Your art isn't confined to one tradition, yet it feels deeply reverent. How do you navigate honouring tradition while remaining open to innovation and global collaboration?

Everything is in service to the deity. Any innovation is only considered in relation to whether it is helpful in coaxing the deity into form for the benefit of all beings. Even tradition (for me) is only meaningful if it serves the deity and the spread of the Dharma. I revere the deity first, the wisdom transmission (dhyanas, shastras, oral teachings) second. Cultural norms are less important to me. My own preferences are only considered after these spiritual priorities are satisfied.



Collaboration is natural when goals are aligned. I believe that the deity itself orchestrates such collaborations. If I'm feeling any doubts, I'll pray and wait for auspicious signs and synchronicities. It should be easy (at least at first), like water running downhill. It will feel natural. There will be a synergistic reward - when the effective output of working together is greater than the sum of each artist's separate efforts.

One of my sacred art teachers' teachers, Harish Johari, was a big advocate of collaboration. He directed his students to work together. Collaboration antidotes the isolation that most artists fall into out of habit. Collaboration fosters non-attachment to the outcome, which is totally in alignment with a fundamental teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita. Mr. Johari argued that collaboration helps sublimate the personal ego into a collective trans-personal consciousness which benefitted the spiritual practice of everyone involved.

The same basic spirit applies to innovation and the use of technology. It must be motivated by spiritual goals, not for the sake of saving time or increasing profit. Modern tools materials must be considered from a spiritual perspective. The artist can use a modern pigment like Pthalocyanine (Prussian Blue) instead of Indigo, but it will affect the functional quality of the artwork.

They are both greenish-blues, but unlike Indigo, Cyanine is poisonous. So, it is inappropriate to use on icons. Nothing poisonous should be put on the altar (puja). Nothing that you would be unwilling to put in your own body. That's because the altar is meant to be an outer reflection of your inner experience.

Some deities require greater purity, while others actually utilise poisons. So, understanding the deity, the ritual, the goal of your client, and the function of the icon is necessary before innovating. If there are gaps in understanding, then best to stick to tradition and avoid innovation.

Sacred art often moves people emotionally, even those unfamiliar with the symbology. Why do you think the unseen power of such images speaks across belief systems and cultures?

The human body is a universal metaphor. Depicting the deity in a human body, with human expressions, and with familiar tools and ornaments speaks to our collective experience of being born and living in this world together. The image of the deity is like a spiritual road sign that helps us to orient toward our spiritual goals. It's aspirational.

Of course, the culturally-specific attributes can also have a limiting or even alienating effect. What if you don't see a deity who looks like you? What if you find it difficult to relate to a youthful person in a healthy body, or to some foreign person wearing ancient aristocratic ornaments? What if you don't recognise the tools they are holding?

This is where icons like yantras and mandalas, which are based on sacred geometry, may be beneficial.

They may be more abstract and challenging to relate to on a personal level, but they are also less likely to be alienating. They may not inspire the same emotional responses initially, but they transcend personal and cultural limitations. In practice, this means that yantras and mandalas usually have less attractive power and emotional impact at first, for most people most of the time.

But there is also less unconscious resistance and the deity's power is transmitted more effectively. This is one reason why yantras are widely considered to be more powerful than figurative icons.

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The beauty of traditional iconometry is that the figures of deities are based on principles of sacred geometry. The geometry is hidden in the proportions and arrangement of the figure. South Indian iconometry is more related to sound, music, and harmonics, while Himalayan iconometry is more related to light. But in both cases, there is a rigorous system of proportions that make the icons function like yantras and mandalas. These proportions and postures generate harmonious relationships of forms that have a subtle yet profound effect on the viewer. That's a big part of why they feel timeless and universal, even if the deity is dressed in the aristocratic garb of a 16th century aristocrat from a distant land.

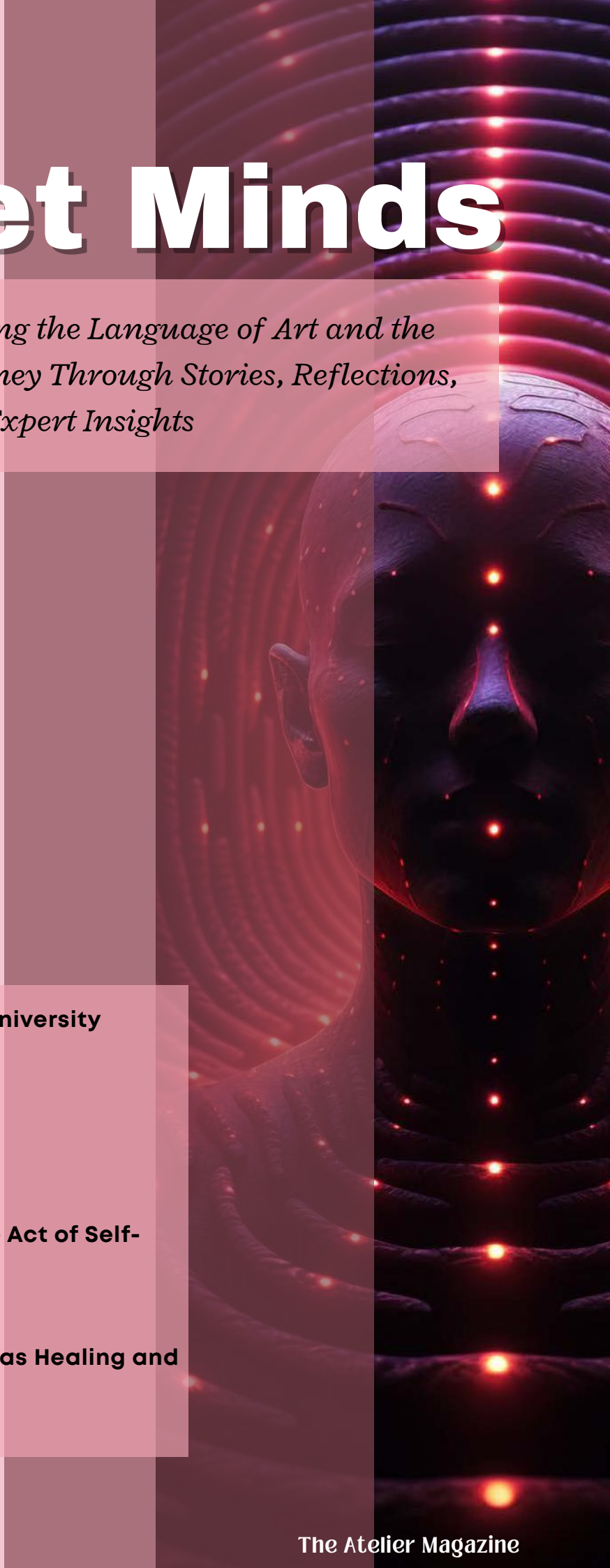


And finally, when you are not immersed in sacred forms and philosophy, where do you turn for beauty, restoration, or inspiration? What keeps your own creative spirit nourished?

Nature. Spending time outdoors. Walking in the woods, going on retreats, even gardening. I strive to see the goddess in all phenomena and arising experiences. But I find it easier to be nourished by appreciation of natural beauty and spending time outdoors and in wild places. Meditation and ritual help me to melt my personal attachments and aversions into a state of wonderous appreciation for just being born. So that I can have that restorative experience most anywhere. Sadhana helps me to recognise the truth: Everything is food.✦

Magnet Minds

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



Stress Busting with Art Therapy for University Students: Colour Outside the Lines
Ketaki Bali

The Science Behind the Healing Arts
Saba Hussain

From Feeling to Form: Art as a Gentle Act of Self-Care
Anupama Ramachandran

Where Words Fall Short: Art Therapy as Healing and Self-Discovery
Nada Shanti

The Atelier Magazine



STRESS BUSTING WITH ART THERAPY FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: COLOUR OUTSIDE THE LINES

Ketaki Bali

University life is often portrayed as an exciting journey filled with new experiences and opportunities, a milestone before they enter the professional world. However, for many students today, it also brings a multitude of challenges: academic pressure, the need for high scores, social expectations, peer pressure, struggles with personal growth, and parental pressure. Various researchers and academics indicate that the educational system also plays a significant role, leading to the increased stress levels that students experience.

Some of the contributing factors include overcrowded lecture halls, a semester grading system, inadequate resources and facilities (Awing & Agolla, 2008), the vastness of the syllabus (Agrawal & Chahar, 2007; Sreeramareddy et al., 2007), and long hours accompanied by expectations of rote learning (Deb et al., 2015).

Decoding student stress

Stress is now understood as a lifestyle crisis (Masih & Gulrez, 2006) affecting any individual, regardless of their developmental stage (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2016). According to the American Psychological Association, experiencing stress is also the body's holistic response, encompassing emotional, physical, social, mental, spiritual, and behavioural changes within the environment. Among university students, depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, irritability, etc., are a few of the reported issues, with high academic stress (Deb, Strodl & Sun, 2015; Verma, Sharma & Larson, 2002)

Investing in mental well-being can ensure that students have the emotional strength to navigate the pressures of university life; the use of art therapy can help students break the stigma around mental health, build resilience, and reconnect with themselves.

Art Therapy and the Art Therapist

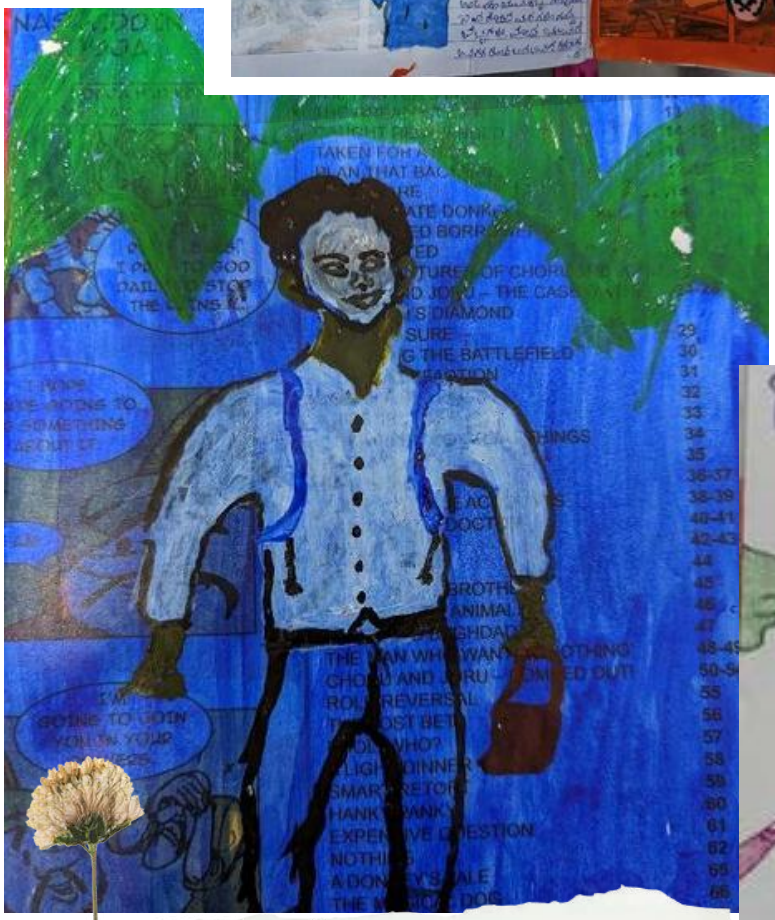
Art therapy combines creative expression with psychology, and its practice can be viewed from a holistic perspective of psychological, social, physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. This field utilizes art-making—drawing, painting, collage-making, and more—to help people explore emotions, develop self-awareness, reduce stress, and heal from trauma, thereby building connections between the mind and the body. You don't need prior training in creating art. In art therapy, it is not just about what we create, but how we feel as we create it. The process helps us stay present, while the final piece becomes a mirror of our inner journey—both are equally meaningful.

The significance of creative expression is that it can be used as a tool to open dialogues, normalise 'failures', or rather encourage improvements and growth at every step, by providing students a safe and non-threatening environment through art-making—a powerful form of expression that brings their invisible struggles to light.

visualise











STOP WORRYING
AND START
CREATING

A Personal Case: A Quiet Book in a Noisy Hospital

One powerful experience in this writer's journey as an art therapist involved a 17-year-old student from Chikmangalur, Karnataka, who was admitted in Narayan Health Centre in Bangalore due to medical-related issues. He felt invisible and disconnected from the outside world, including his family, friends, and relatives.

I introduced him to an altered book—a therapeutic technique in which an old or new book is transformed into a personal art journal. He learned to cut, paste, and scribble, as this was a powerful exercise to strengthen his motor coordination and hand dexterity due to a weakened physical system. Each page in the book was reimagined using various collage-making styles, painting, and writing poetry in his regional language. The morning sessions began with guided imagery meditation, focussing on one's breath, identifying any tension in the body, and promoting peace.

After two months of working together, this book became his 'Room with a View'; a way to express how it felt to be trapped yet hopeful. His pages changed from blank to brighter, story-like visuals that reflected hope and identity. He was able to process grief, boredom, and the fear of being forgotten.

The Bigger Picture

Art therapy is not a magic fix. However, it offers something essential—a chance to reconnect with yourself when life feels overwhelming. For university students, who often juggle countless expectations, engaging in creative processes can help develop coping strategies and foster resilience within this group. Whether through individual or group workshops and sessions, incorporating art therapy into student wellness programmes can significantly enhance mental health support on campuses. Early support can make a significant difference.

In a world that is constantly rushing in this competitive race, slowing down to simply breathe through mandala-making or playing with colours can be revolutionary. It teaches us that being messy or 'not there yet in life' is okay, and that life can't always be linear.

This to be placed as box

Self-Help Art Techniques for Students

Please note that these techniques are helpful for general stress management and self-care, but they are not a substitute for therapy.

Draw your safe space: Close your eyes and take three deep breaths. Visualis e a real or imaginary place that brings you peace. Open your eyes, gather your art supplies, and illustrate that vision using textures, patterns, or colours that comfort you.

Worry Doodles:

Draw your worries as monsters or demons. Next, draw them shrinking or changing their form, which releases the worry using a straw and paints. Healing Hands: Sculpt a pair of hands in a position that represents support, healing, or self-love. Compose a short poem or lyrics to honour these magical hands.

✦

About the author

Ketaki Bali is a consultant art therapist and mental health therapist at Mazumdar Shaw Medical Centre and Narayana Health Rehabilitation Centre, Bengaluru, India. She also has a podcast on Spotify called 'Talk it out', directed by Dr. Yakata Sharma.

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FROM FEELING TO FORM:
ART AS A GENTLE ACT OF SELF-CARE

Anupama Ramachandran

> There is something wonderfully bold and liberating about saying yes to our entire imperfect and messy life."
> — Tara Brach

I **have** always found comfort in the idea that our lives—our emotions, our struggles, our joys—do not need to be neatly packaged. They are wild, raw, layered. And the truth is, we are constantly bombarded with stress, whether from personal challenges or the weight of the world's chaos. It is tempting to turn away, to distract ourselves, to push difficult emotions aside. But I have learned that healing begins when we show up for ourselves, for others, and for the full spectrum of what it means to be human.

For me, art is one of the most powerful ways to do that. It is my bridge to understanding the emotions that feel too big, too messy, too complicated to put into words.

Turning Emotion into Art

When I feel overwhelmed, I start with a body scan. Where do I feel tension? Is it in my shoulders, my stomach, my breath? Instead of pushing past it, I sit with it. I ask myself—if this feeling had a colour, what would it be? If it had a shape, a texture, a movement, how would it express itself?

Then I pick up my art materials—sometimes water colours, sometimes charcoal, sometimes clay. I let my hands move without judgment, without pressure for perfection. The goal is not to create something "beautiful." It is to give the emotion form, to let it exist outside of me, so I can see it clearly.

When the artwork feels complete, I take a step back. I place it a little farther away, letting the physical distance offer emotional perspective. How does it feel when I look at it from across the room? What happens when I step closer? This is a way of witnessing my feelings without being consumed by them.



A Conversation with My Art

What I say next may sound unusual, but it has been one of the most healing practices for me—I talk to my art.

I ask it things like:

What do you want me to know?

Do you feel finished, or do you need something more?

What part of me created you?

Where do you want to exist in my space?

Sometimes the answers come as thoughts, sometimes as emotions, sometimes as quiet insights I did not expect. Writing them down helps me process them more deeply.

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Nurturing Myself Through Creative Practice

The very act of creating is self-care. Even on days when I feel stuck, picking up a brush or doodling in my notebook reminds me that I am here, present, engaged with my own inner world.

And if a feeling is too overwhelming, I let it rest. I say to it, 'I see you, and I will return when I am ready.' I imagine gently placing it in a safe container, knowing I can revisit it when the time feels right.

The Power of Bringing Darkness into Light

The beauty of art—whether painting, poetry, dance, or music—is that it gives form to the feelings we often leave unspoken. It allows us to have a dialogue with our emotions, to nurture and care for parts of ourselves that we might otherwise ignore.

When we bring our inner world into the light, it loses its power to hold us captive. Instead, we step into a space of ownership, of healing, of self-discovery.

So, I say yes—to all of it. The imperfect, the messy, the wildly human experience of being alive.

And maybe, just maybe, you'll say yes too.✦







About the author

Anupama Ramachandran is the founder of The White Paper Creative, a vibrant community art space in Thiruvananthapuram, India. With over two decades of experience as an art educator, Anupama has inspired students of all ages to explore their artistic potential and find joy in self-expression. At the age of 50, Anupama embraced a new chapter as an art therapist, bringing a deep understanding of the healing power of creative expression. Anupama's approach is grounded in the belief that when words fall short—especially in the face of trauma or stress—art offers a powerful alternative for healing and self-discovery.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE HEALING ARTS

Saba Sophiya Hasan



The contemplation and creation of art is a holistic experience engaging the presence of the art-maker with faculties of the head, the heart and the hands. It is a sacred platform that blends the cognitive, affective and kinesthetic aspects, promoting self-awareness in an integrated manner. There is evidence to show that art heals and transforms; and that paves way for celebrating Art Therapy, a thriving area at the intersection of Arts and Psychology. It is also known as Healing Arts to enable its differentiation from Fine Arts.

Healing Arts is a multidimensional sanctuary where art is not tagged as a product but is rather acknowledged as a process of reflection, imagination, observation, perception and expression in dynamic combinations. The projective processes are meant to unravel therapeutic benefits for clients, who travel with colours, shapes and forms to embrace internal transformation.

When art therapy knocked at my door by chance, I welcomed it with passion. It so happened that a couple of years ago, I designed a table calendar with Mandala images as the core theme. After a week, I received a thank you note from a physiotherapist friend, telling me that the calendar miraculously reduced her migraine. She further informed that whenever she faces mental fatigue after sessions, she just flips the pages of the calendar and looks at the mandalas for a few minutes, and her exhaustion vanishes. It sounded too good to believe, but that certainly piqued my curiosity to delve deeper into the connection between art and the psyche.

How can the visuals be so therapeutic that they give a healing experience to an individual? And yet, I am sure such a healing would not be experienced by many even if they immerse in those visuals the whole day. That is what made me look deeper into the not-so-ignorable kind of therapeutic aha! moment.

A review of research papers, helped me connect the dots between one's mind and one's art. Healing Art works like magic, a surreal word, which needs evidence-based delayering to find its scientific foundation.

There is a need to share the most basic findings in order to create awareness of the healing touch that art can give. This is quite achievable when therapists outgrow the one-size fits-all model to design customised interventions, based on individual needs.

This also sets the difference between Therapeutic Art (therapy by chance) and Art Therapy (therapy by design). A person- centered approach is key. The growing field of neuroaesthetics aims to understand the preoccupation of humans with art by studying the underlying mechanisms of the brain.

Let us look into the science that shows how art becomes therapy in multifaceted ways:

Connecting with the self. Since the Default Mode Network (DMN) in the brain involves pathways that are related to self- reflection, and are activated during the creative process too, it makes sense why one's own artwork can also be regarded as the mirror of one's self-concept.

Vessel, Starr and Rubin (2013) in their article Art reaches within: aesthetic experience, the self and the default mode network published in Frontiers, found that, 'in a task of rating images of artworks in an fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scanner, regions in the medial prefrontal cortex known to be part of the default mode network (DMN) were positively activated on the highest-rated trials.

This is surprising given the DMN's original characterisation as the set of brain regions that show greater fMRI activity during rest periods. But further research showed that DMN regions could be positively activated also in structured tasks, if those tasks involved self-referential thought.

Observers were asked to base their ratings on how much each artwork "moved" them. Each artwork was rated highly by some observers and poorly by others. This account is consistent with the modern notion that individuals' taste in art is linked with their sense of identity.'1

Emotional Wellness.

Given that engagement in and exposure to creative activities activates the DMN, it is apparent that creative arts would enhance emotional wellbeing, as the latter utilises the same neural networks. Some findings are given below:

fMRI studies have shown that healthy emotional processing utilises the Medial Prefrontal Cortex (mPFC) (Li et al., 2014, in Barnett and Vasiu, 2024).

This anatomical correlation may suggest that creativity improves emotional wellbeing by utilising similar 'high road' neural networks involving the mPFC of the DMN. Exposure to artistic creations also engages the mPFC. For instance, neuroimaging evidence indicates that activity in the mPFC is linked to viewing aesthetically pleasing images (Cattaneo et al., 2020; Kreplin and Fairclough, 2013 in Barnett and Vasiu, 2024).

Learning and Transformation. Creating Art involves neuroplasticity and so positive engagement with thoughtfully designed interventions can lead to useful learning experiences

Creativity appears to be supported by complex, interconnected brain networks rather than isolated brain regions (Beaty et al., 2014 in Barnett and Vasiu, 2024).

Engaging in creative tasks may stimulate similar integrative neural processes. For example, there appears to be a link between creative ability to the expression of genes associated with synaptic plasticity (Orwig et al., 2021in Barnett and Vasiu, 2024).

Unleashing the entire range of empowering benefits that art therapy can bring in for holistic wellbeing, gives a comprehensive ground to label it as Healing Arts. Let us use the science behind Healing Arts to design better interventions. ✦

About the author
An art therapy enthusiast and a certified life coach, Saba Sophiya Hasan is pursuing a PhD in Art Therapy, a Twinning programme offered by the South American International University in collaboration with Asha the Hope of Bangalore, India.

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WHERE WORDS FALL SHORT

ART THERAPY AS HEALING AND SELF-DISCOVERY

Nada Abu Qaoud Shanti

There are moments in life where language feels too heavy, too limited, or even unsafe to use. In such moments, art becomes more than expression—it becomes survival. Art therapy offers a pathway to healing that does not rely solely on words, allowing the individual to process emotions, confront trauma, and rediscover a sense of self through creative engagement. Rooted in psychological principles, art therapy bridges the worlds of emotion and cognition, helping people navigate inner experiences that are often too complex or painful to articulate. Whether through drawing, painting, stitching, or dance the act of making art becomes mirror, a refuge, and sometimes a form of resistance.

At its core, art therapy is based on the understanding that creative expression can support mental and emotional well-being. Guided by trained therapists, individuals can use art to reflect, release, and reframe what they're feeling. It is not about being a "good artist", it's about using creativity as a tool for healing.

Imagine painting a storm when you cannot explain your anxiety; or stitching together fragmented images when your memories feel disjointed. That is the power of art therapy—it gives form to what feels formless. Studies show that creating art can lower stress hormones, improve mood, and help people process difficult experiences like grief, trauma or major life changes. A teenager might draw their way through the confusion of identity. A refugee might sculpt feelings of displacement into something they can finally see and touch. An exhausted caregiver might find calm in repetitive brushstrokes, letting each one carry a bit of their burden. In these small, often quiet acts of creation, people find space not just to express, but to feel.



Art therapy does not just help heal; it physiologically changes the brain. Research using brain imaging has shown that engaging in creative activities can activate the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for decision-making, emotional regulation, and problem-solving. At the same time, it reduces activity in the amygdala, the brain's fear and stress center, which is often hyperactive during anxiety or trauma. One study conducted by Girija Kaimal et al. (2016) found that just 45 minutes of any kind of creative activity significantly lowered cortisol levels, the body's main stress hormone, regardless of participants' age, gender, or artistic experience. Artmaking also increases dopamine, a "feel good" neurotransmitter linked to pleasure, motivation, and reward. These neurobiological shifts explain why art therapy is especially powerful for treating anxiety, depression, and trauma; it calms the nervous system while allowing people to process deep emotional experiences in a safe, embodied way.

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What makes art therapy especially unique is that it does not require you to explain or even fully understand what you are feeling in order to begin healing. When words get stuck, whether from trauma, cultural pressure, or internalized fear, art gives them an alternate exit. A line, a smudge, a burst of color can carry emotion the way a sentence might, but without the burden of grammar or precision. That is why art therapy is often used with people who have survived war, abuse or loss—the brain stores trauma in ways that can block speech, but sensory and creative expression can unlock those frozen places. Even simple activities like colouring, collaging, or molding clay can restore a sense of control and connection to the body. Over time, this process rewires how the brain responds to stress. People begin to not only process what happened to them, but also imagine something new. And that is the quiet power of art: it can hold pain; it can also hold possibility.

In a world that often demands that we explain, justify, and endure in silence, art therapy whispers something different: you are allowed to feel. You are allowed to make a mess, to not know, to speak through color when language falls short. Healing does not always come in breakthroughs or bold declarations—it often arrives slowly, in layers, like paint drying on canvas. Through art, we begin to reclaim not just our stories, but our right to shape them. In that sacred, creative space, resilience takes root, not in perfection but in presence. And maybe that is what the world needs most: not people who are flawless, but people who have come alive. ✦

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About the author

Nada Abu Qaoud Shanti is a MAAT (Masters in Art Therapy) USA-certified art therapist with a double major in fine arts, sociology and psychology. She has worked at various places in Montreal, Amman, and Dubai, including refugee camps and shelters for domestic abuse and violence, and conducted group therapy for mothers of children with special needs and women empowerment groups. Nada has worked at the Psychological and Mental Disorder Department at Rashid Hospital, where she conducted individual and art therapy group sessions. Nada volunteered at Brighton College, Dubai, helping students with emotional and behavioral problems. She is also a freelancer and is doing her PhD in Expressive Therapies at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Roots & Rhythm

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



Songkran Festival: A Celebration of Gratitude, Kindness, and the Power of Women
Sirikul Nui Laukaikul

Moroccan Cubism: A Rebirth of Identity Through Art
Chaimaa Mellouki

Kyrgyzstan: A Hidden Jewel for Investment, Exploration, and Cinematic Inspiration
Esen Rysbekov

An Initiative at the Center of the World
H.E. Rosalía Arteaga Serrano

Seeds of Change: How Georgia and the Globe Are Rethinking Agriculture Through Innovation
Nino Zambakhidze

Khati: Weaving Heritage, Empowering Women Through Sport
Mapulane Phohleli



SONGKRAN FESTIVAL

A CELEBRATION OF GRATITUDE, KINDNESS, AND THE POWER OF WOMEN

Sirikul 'Nui' Laukaikul

April in Thailand is not just another month—it is a jubilant, soul-stirring celebration of life. As the sun climbs high and the heat of summer settles in, the country bursts into a water-soaked festival that is both playful and profound: Songkran, the traditional Thai New Year. At first glance, Songkran dazzles the senses with colorful parades, fragrant jasmine, and the wild, joyous sound of water splashing everywhere. But beneath the surface lies a festival of deep spirituality—a cleansing ritual, a family reunion, a reaffirmation of kindness.



The Soul of Songkran is Showing Gratitude

Derived from the Sanskrit word saṃkrānti meaning "to move" or "change," Songkran marks the sun's transition from Pisces to Aries. In ancient times, this cosmic shift was seen as a powerful symbol of rebirth and hope. Thai families embrace the change by cleaning homes, paying homage at temples, and bathing Buddha images in perfumed water, inviting prosperity and washing away misfortune.

While the exuberant water fights that fill the streets are a modern twist, the original act of water pouring—a gentle, respectful flow over the hands of elders—remains at the heart of Songkran. It is in these quiet moments that the festival's truest beauty shines.

The Gentle Power of Nam Jai

At the center of every smile shared and splash exchanged during Songkran is the Thai virtue of nam jai, or "water of the heart." Nam jai is more than simple generosity—it is an instinctive kindness, a spontaneous act of giving, a genuine concern for the wellbeing of others.

During Songkran, nam jai flows freely — neighbours open their homes, strangers share cold drinks, and communities unite to protect the elderly and the young from the heat and chaos. It is a time when Thailand's collective heart beats strongest, and the cool touch of water becomes a blessing of spirit.

Keeping the Spirit Alive: Traditions to Treasure

In today's fast-moving world, Songkran offers a precious opportunity to reconnect with what matters most. In 2023, in recognition of its unique cultural status, UNESCO included Songkran festival in the Intangible Cultural List. To keep its spirit alive and thriving, a few thoughtful practices can make all the difference.

Celebrate and cherish the following:

Sacred water rituals: Embrace the gentle, respectful traditions of blessing elders and sacred images. Merry-making moments: Take time to visit temples, offer food, and engage in acts of generosity that nurture the soul.

Family and community time: Use Songkran as a chance to heal, forgive, and strengthen the bonds of family and friendship.

Living with Nam Jai: Let kindness and generosity flow into every interaction, large or small.

Caring for nature: Celebrate mindfully by appreciating and conserving water, a sacred gift.

By choosing mindfulness over mayhem and kindness over carelessness, we ensure that Songkran remains a celebration of heart, heritage, and hope. Protecting Songkran's spirit is a collective act of love—toward our ancestors, our communities, and ourselves.

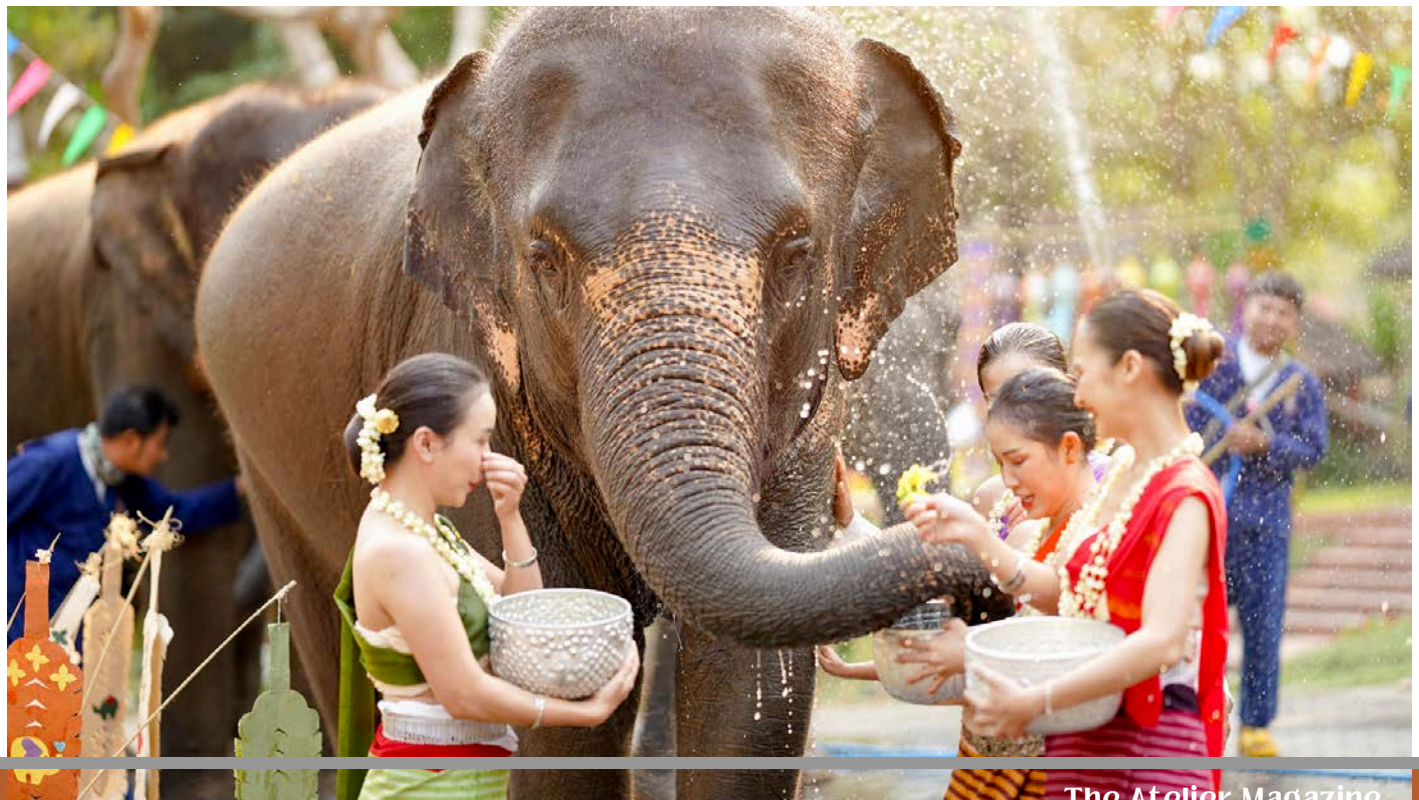














The Silent Strength: Women at the Heart of Songkran

Look closely at any Songkran celebration, and you will see women weaving the very fabric of the festival. They are the ones preparing offerings, organising family gatherings, leading temple visits, and ensuring that the essence of Songkran—its soul of gratitude and kindness—is passed on.

This strength is not new. In Thai mythology, the seven celestial daughters of the god Kabil Maha Phrom take turns each year carrying the symbolic head of the god Brahma, heralding the arrival of the New Year with grace and power. They symbolise wisdom, beauty, and guardianship—the same qualities that Thai women continue to embody in everyday life.

Today, Thai women are leaders not only in their homes but across all facets of society—business, education, culture, and activism. Their role in Songkran is a reminder that true renewal, like true strength, often flows from quiet determination and unwavering kindness.✦



Pic Courtesy- Freepik

About the author

Dr. Sirikul 'Nui' Laukaikul, Founder of the Thai firm The BrandBeing Consultancy, is a brand strategist and sustainability adviser. She is also Country Director of SB (Sustainable Brands), Thailand.

Chaimaa Mellouki

MOROCCAN CUBISM: A REBIRTH OF IDENTITY THROUGH ART

One of the most promising figures in Morocco's contemporary art scene, Chaimaa Mellouki was born in Nanterre, France in 1983 to Moroccan parents. A self-taught artist with a singular trajectory, Chaimaa's bold, emotive work is deeply rooted in the cultural identity of North Africa and the sacred symbolism of Amazigh heritage (known as Berbers to the outside world, Amazigh are indigenous people of North Africa). At the same time, she has created a fresh artistic language that defies Western conventions and gives voice to a proudly African visual narrative: Moroccan Cubism. Cubism is an art form that originated in Paris, characterised by the use of simple geometric shapes, interwoven planes and later, collage. Established by Chaimaa, Moroccan Cubism brings together French intellectual rigour and openness; and the warmth and deep-rooted traditions of Morocco, empowering her to paint with a unique palette—both literal and metaphorical.

Between Two Worlds: A Unique Artistic Identity

Chaimaa's art is born from a powerful confluence—growing up in France, she absorbed modern art, postwar abstraction, and psychoanalysis—later translating that knowledge into a raw and intuitive practice.

Her artistic statement is clear: to offer a liberated vision of African identity through bold geometry, ancestral codes, and emotional vibrancy. With each stroke, Chaimaa navigates the fractured identity of the postcolonial subject—healing it with shapes, colours, and rituals.

The Birth of Moroccan Cubism: A New Artistic Movement

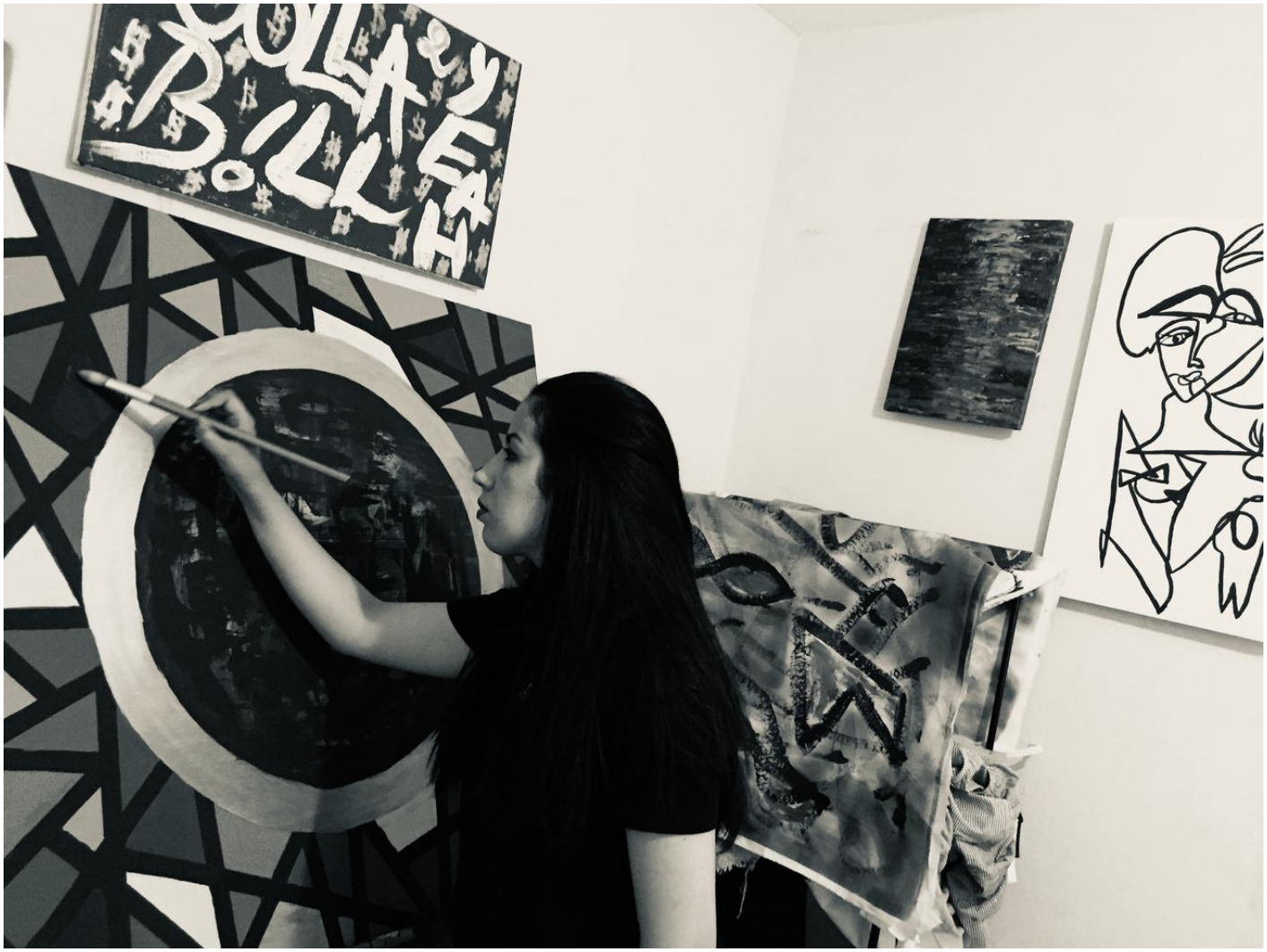
Moroccan Cubism is not merely an echo of early 20th-century European Cubism; it is 'a powerful reappropriation', liberating form and narrative from colonial frameworks and centers Africa—its shapes, languages, and cosmologies—within contemporary art.

An Intellectual and Artistic Journey

Holder of a law degree and a master's in behavioral criminology, Chaimaa brings a psychological depth to her work. Her understanding of the human psyche, of trauma and social constructs, fuels her creative process. She has also followed a range of artistic training programs that allowed her to explore abstraction, healing, and the radical power of visual storytelling.



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A New Chapter: Moroccan Cubism on the World Stage

At the 'Blue Mirage', her latest solo exhibition at the Fondation Maison du Maroc, Paris, in May 2025, Chaimaa's work encouraged visitors to look differently; to unlearn and relearn; to feel.

In Chaimaa's words, "Art is an overflow of the self," and her art becomes a direct channel through which she expresses the depth of her Moroccan roots. Born of the rich traditions, symbolism, and sacred geometry of Morocco, Chaimaa's work brings forth a reimagined vision of Moroccan culture, blending heritage with contemporary expressions. Through this overflow, her art embodies not only her personal journey but also the collective spirit of Morocco. Each piece stands as a celebration of the country's vibrant history, its symbols, and its undeniable place in the global artistic conversation.



This dual path—intellectual and intuitive—shapes a deeply original artistic voice. A voice that speaks of collective memory and personal rebirth; a voice that shatters silence.

Africa at the Center: A Cultural Reclamation

For too long, African forms and philosophies have been extracted and showcased without context, their creators erased from history. Chaimaa's Moroccan Cubism artform offers the reverse: an intentional centering of Africa, reclaiming space with grace and boldness.

Her work argues that the future of contemporary art lies in the South: in stories still untold, symbols yet to be decoded, textures that resist commodification. Africa is not an influence; it is the source. Through Moroccan Cubism, Chaimaa invites others to imagine new movements: hybrid, intuitive, powerful and rooted in pride, not imitation.

For the Youth: A Pathway, a Mirror, a Dream

A committed visionary, Chaimaa's dream extends far beyond galleries. She hopes Moroccan Cubism will become a beacon for young Moroccan and African artists, a school of thought and practice where they feel free to create without apology.

"I want the youth to see that art is ours. That abstraction can carry our names, our symbols, our truths." Says Chaimaa.

Her mission is to nourish a new generation that is as rooted as it is daring. She is the founder of Contemporary Art of Africa, a platform that is dedicated to showcasing and promoting emerging African artists.

As a contemporary artist, Chaimaa creates compositions that break from the linear history of art. They are neither mimicry nor homage. They are rebellion.

Berber symbols, sacred geometry, the repetition of motifs found in carpets and traditional tattoos merge into powerful compositions that reclaim the narrative. For Chaimaa, art is a plaidoyer—a plea—for cultural transmission. Each canvas tells a story that lives between past and future, fragmentation and healing.

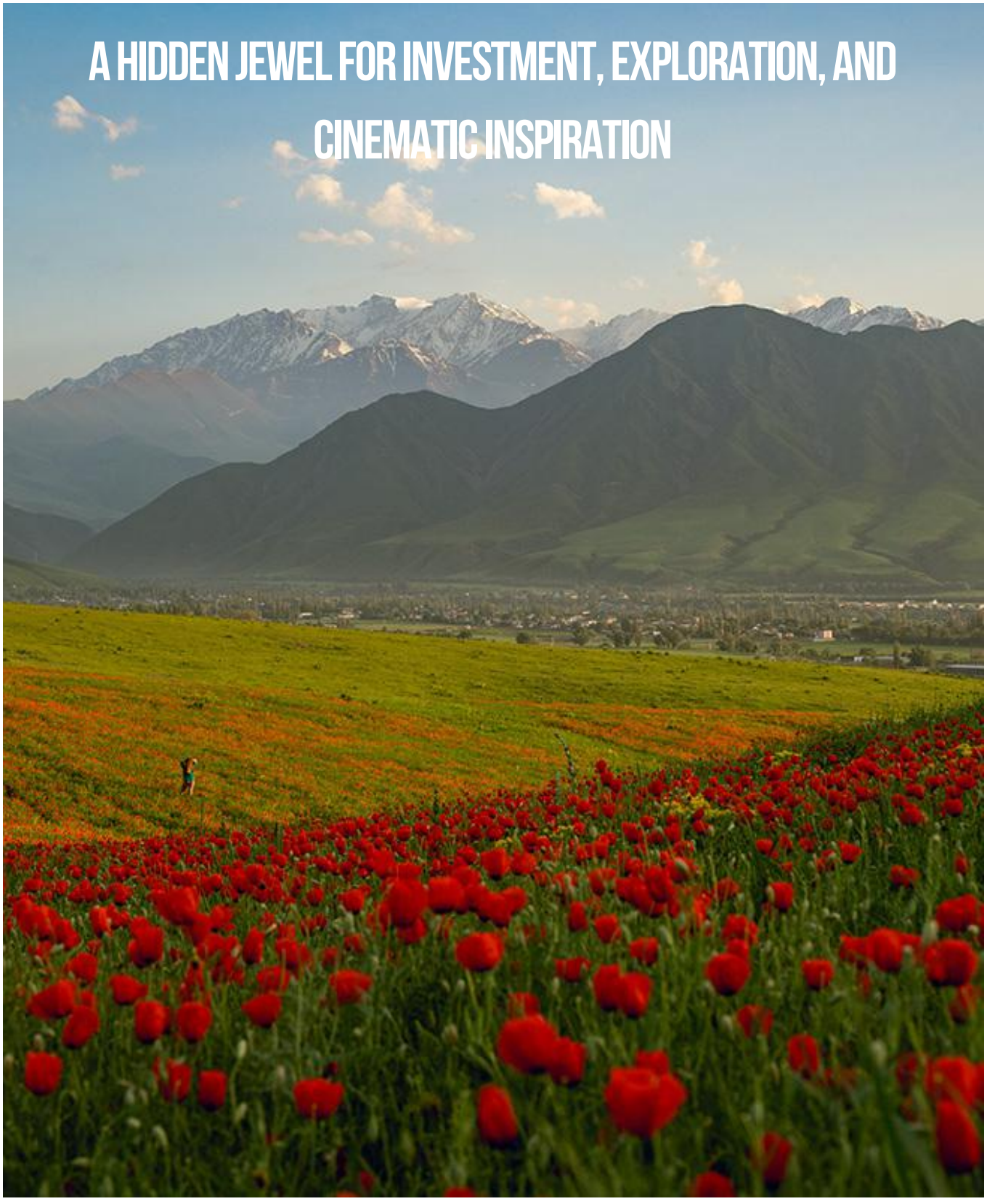
"Moroccan Cubism is not mine," says Chaimaa, "it belongs to this time, this land, this people. I'm just a witness." Her goal is to make it an emblematic movement of the 21st century—an open language for African and diasporic creators. ✦







KYRGYZSTAN


A HIDDEN JEWEL FOR INVESTMENT, EXPLORATION, AND
CINEMATIC INSPIRATION







Nestled in the heart of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan offers a unique blend of untouched nature, economic opportunities, and cultural richness. With snow-capped peaks, crystal-clear alpine lakes, and a warm, welcoming population, the country is emerging not only as a captivating tourist destination but also as a promising partner for international investors and film producers. For Indian tourists and filmmakers in particular, Kyrgyzstan presents a compelling landscape of adventure, discovery, and collaboration.

A Rising Star for Investors

Kyrgyzstan has rapidly become a destination of interest for global investors, thanks to its liberal economic policies; strategic location bordering China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan; and simplified investment procedures. The Kyrgyz government actively supports foreign direct investment (FDI), offering favourable tax incentives, minimal bureaucratic hurdles, and access to untapped sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, agriculture, and IT services.



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With an open-door investment policy and membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), investors benefit from duty-free access to a market of over 180 million people.

The Kyrgyz currency Som is relatively stable; labour is affordable; and the population is highly literate, providing a ready foundation for business operations. In recent years, the tourism sector—particularly eco-tourism and film tourism—has shown double-digit growth, offering tremendous potential for Indian stakeholders.

Virgin Nature and Pristine Air

Kyrgyzstan is home to some of the most breathtaking natural landscapes in the world. With over 90% of its territory covered by mountains, the country is often referred to as the "Switzerland of Central Asia." Nature here is truly virgin—untouched, unpolluted, and deeply revered by locals. Imagine waking up to the fresh mountain air of the Tien Shan range, trekking through wildflower-covered meadows, or riding horses along highland pastures with views that stretch beyond the horizon.

The air is clean and invigorating—ideal for those seeking wellness retreats or an escape from the hustle and pollution of modern city life.

For tourists who seek scenic and spiritual experiences, places like Lake Issyk-Kul (the second-largest alpine lake in the world), Ala-Archa National Park, and the Jeti-Ögüz red rock formations provide perfect getaways. Additionally, the country's abundance of hot springs, yurts, and nomadic experiences offers something both exotic and deeply relaxing.





Cultural Hospitality and Historic Sites

Despite being relatively undiscovered by mass tourism, Kyrgyzstan boasts a rich cultural and historical tapestry. Travellers will find an engaging mix of Silk Road heritage, ancient petroglyphs, Sufi shrines, and Soviet-era architecture, ideal for both exploration and photography.

Kyrgyz hospitality is legendary. The people are open-hearted and proud of their tradition, eager to share their music, cuisine, and customs. Visitors often describe their stay in Kyrgyzstan as deeply personal and authentic—an experience that modern tourists are increasingly seeking.

For the picky foodie, vegetarian options are also widely available, particularly in urban areas like Bishkek and Osh. Air connectivity from the capital city Bishkek to major Indian cities has improved in recent years, making travel easy and convenient.

A New Frontier for Cinema

Kyrgyzstan is steadily becoming a hotspot for film tourism, particularly for Indian directors, producers, and location scouts. With its unexplored natural backdrops, affordable production costs, and supportive local government, the country is increasingly seen as an ideal destination for shooting everything from romantic dramas to high-octane action films.









Several Indian productions have already been filmed in Kyrgyzstan, taking advantage of its diverse terrain, from snowy mountain passes to lush valleys and ancient fortresses. What sets Kyrgyzstan apart is the range of cinematic locations within a short distance, reducing transportation costs and logistical complexities. Whether you seek alpine serenity, desert-like plateaus, rustic villages, or urban backdrops, you will find it all within a few hours' drive.

The Kyrgyz film industry is growing, with a skilled workforce, local equipment rental companies, and government-supported film commissions that facilitate permits, customs clearance, and location scouting. There is also growing interest in co-productions and joint ventures between Kyrgyz and Indian studios, opening doors for deeper creative collaboration.

Organising Cinematic Tours: Shoot and Relax

Cinematic tours in Kyrgyzstan offer a unique opportunity to combine business and leisure. Film professionals from countries like India can participate in organised packages that include both scouting and shooting days as well as relaxing cultural experiences. These film-friendly tours can include:Site visits to potential filming locations (mountains, lakes, traditional villages)

Meetings with local production coordinators and film commission officials

Equipment rental showcases

Accommodation in yurts or boutique mountain resorts.Wellness retreats in hot springs or lakeside lodges.Horseback riding, falconry, or traditional cooking classes.These tours offer a win-win situation: producers can assess location feasibility and costs, while also experiencing the rich hospitality and stunning nature that Kyrgyzstan has to offer.



Kyrgyzstan for Indian Tourists and Filmmakers

Kyrgyzstan offers several benefits for Indian citizens and the Indian film industry. Indian citizens enjoy the privilege of a visa-free or visa-on-arrival entry.

For Indian filmmakers, Kyrgyzstan is an ideal setting for the following reasons:

- Affordable travel and production costs compared to Europe or North America
- Diverse, untouched locations that are rarely seen on screen
- Skilled, bilingual crew and growing infrastructure
- A cinematic tradition that respects both modern and traditional storytelling
- Government and private sector support for international film collaborations

More Than Just a Beautiful Country

Kyrgyzstan is not just a beautiful country; it is a promising partner for investors, a sanctuary for travellers, and an inspiring canvas for filmmakers. Its mix of virgin nature, clean air, low-cost production environments, and film-friendly policies makes it an ideal destination for film producers and tourists alike.

Whether you are scouting your next film location or simply looking for a place where mountains touch the sky and stories come alive, Kyrgyzstan is ready to welcome you. ✦

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AN INITIATIVE AT THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

Rosalía Arteaga Serrano*

Quito, the capital of the Republic of Ecuador in South America, is a beautiful and historic city. Declared a World Cultural Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1978, it holds the distinction of being the first city ever recognised with this title. Quito's streets and squares, with their unique topography and charm, are difficult to describe. Its colonial-era churches and balcony-lined houses, many adorned with blooming geraniums, are especially noteworthy.

The city also enjoys a privileged geography, surrounded by hills and mountains, nestled within the majestic Andes Mountain range, which spans a significant portion of South America. While its steep alleyways may present a challenge for walking, this only adds to the allure of this colonial city with deep indigenous roots.

The name of the country, Ecuador, derives from its position near the Equator, the famous equinoctial line. Its presence and measurements were certified by the French Geodesic Mission, a scientific expedition from France in the 18th century whose goal was to measure the arc of a meridian at the equator, work that contributed significantly to determining the shape of the Earth. The mission was of great importance to the scientific world at the time. It is said that the packages and crates sent back to France bore the label "from the Equator", which played a key role in naming the country after its independence.



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This is why we speak of the Republic of Ecuador as being located in the middle of the world. Within its borders are several points where crucial scientific measurements were taken that helped validate global theories.

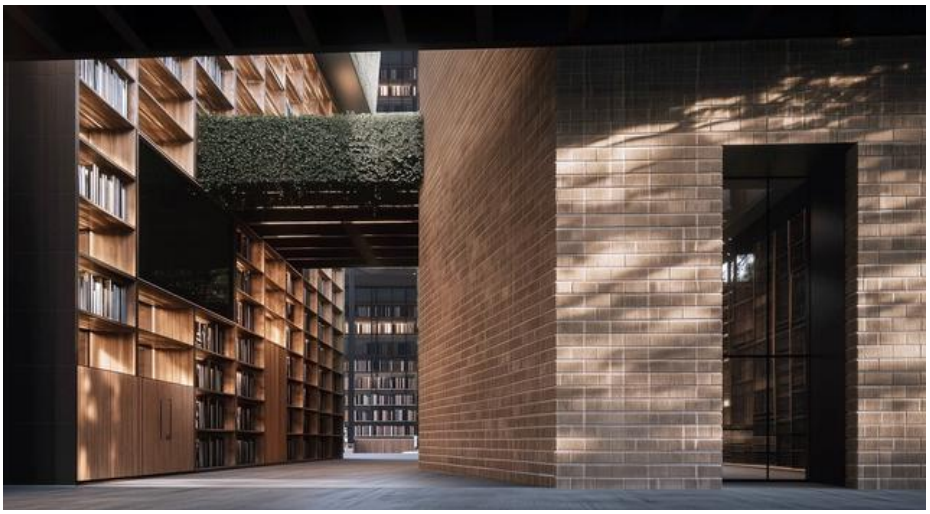
Just a few kilometers from the centre of Quito lies the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo or 'Middle of the World City,' a small tourist town where visitors can explore historical sites, museums, artisan markets, and learn about both the scientific and cultural significance of this region, as well as the artisanal, artistic, and culinary richness of what is now the Republic of Ecuador.

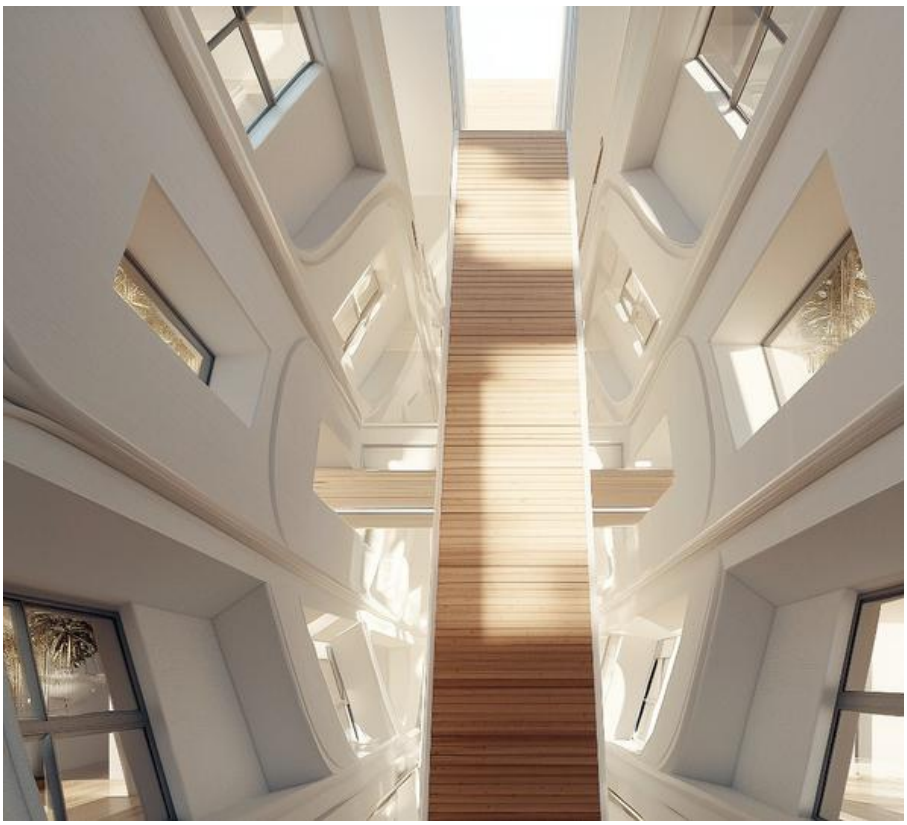
In this South American capital, a remarkable initiative is currently underway, one in which I am involved. In the heart of Quito's historic district, we are building the country's first Eco-Museum-Library (EML), a visionary project led by the Foundation for the Integration and Development of Latin America (FIDAL). FIDAL is a civil society organisation with nearly 30 years of experience working in areas such as education, culture, environment, and migration.

This initiative is made possible with private sector support and is envisioned as a space that blends multiple dimensions: heritage preservation, education, and environmental sustainability. It involves restoring and repurposing a century-old republican-era mansion, part of the city's cultural heritage, using strict preservation standards dictated by the National Heritage Institute, while ensuring the new construction is environmentally responsible.

Importantly, this new institution aims to provide access to cultural and educational spaces for low-income populations, especially children and adolescents.







The Eco-Museum-Library is already generating great interest. This heritage structure, around a hundred years old and located in Quito's historic center, will include modern technological features to create interactive and educational experiences for the thousands of expected visitors. While respecting its republican-era architectural identity, the EML will offer cutting-edge experiences that appeal especially to young people, blending tradition with innovation in a uniquely engaging way.

Alongside its archaeological collections, artworks, shells, and books, the EML will offer interactive spaces such as a virtual aquarium, virtual football rooms, music zones, ancestral mathematics workshops, and anti-racism education halls, all equipped with diverse technological elements that will serve as a major draw for both national and international visitors.

We also hope to include a 'Cabinet of Wonders', inspired by Renaissance-era rooms filled with rare and curious artifacts. In our case, it will showcase shells and scientific objects designed to spark curiosity and wonder, particularly in young minds.

The Eco-Museum-Library is a first-of-its-kind project in Ecuador. Its interactive design will attract thousands of visitors, especially young people, who will enjoy immersive experiences with virtual reality, robotics, and STEM, STEAM, and E-STEM education—science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics—with a strong ethical foundation.









E-STEM is a concept developed by Fundación FIDAL that adds ethical reflection to the STEM and STEAM approaches. We believe that science without ethics can be dangerous, even destructive, as history has shown in the development of weapons and other harmful technologies.

We believe this initiative will revitalise Quito's historic center, breathing new life into areas that might otherwise be neglected or fall into disrepair.

The Eco-Museum-Library was born as a dream, and is steadily becoming a reality, thanks to the support of many, including artists from Ecuador and around the world who have donated paintings to decorate the museum walls or offered their work for auction to raise funds.

It is heartening to witness how this civil society-led initiative, housed in a public building owned by the Quito Municipality, is attracting broad interest, even from private citizens who have donated books and archaeological collections to enrich the museum's offerings.



In a world often marked by selfishness and indifference to the public good, this cultural project by Fundación FIDAL rekindles our love for the city and reminds us of the power of service, community, and shared responsibility in building better citizens and better spaces for artistic, educational, and communal growth.

We hope that the Eco-Museum-Library will open its doors by late 2025 or early 2026, becoming a welcoming home that inspires new initiatives and helps restore not only the historic center of Quito but also the self-esteem of the city and its people. ✦

About the author
Rosalía Arteaga Serrano is Former President and Vice President of the Republic of Ecuador, Former Secretary General of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organiza.tion



SEEDS OF CHANGE

HOW GEORGIA AND THE GLOBE ARE

RETHINKING AGRICULTURE THROUGH INNOVATION

Nino Zambakhidze



Growing up in Georgia, my childhood understanding of farming was devoid of creativity. Like many, I viewed agriculture as a domain characterised by strenuous labour, rigid routines, and constant adjustments to the elements. However, my years of experience in the agricultural sector—both in Georgia and with international partners—have completely transformed my perspective.

I have come to realise that effective farming is fundamentally an exercise in creativity. It involves rethinking possibilities when conventional methods fail. It embodies resilience, curiosity, and decision-making that resonates beyond the fields—impacting ecosystems, economies, and communities. In our rapidly evolving world, adopting this mindset has become essential and not just optional.

Rethinking Agriculture's Role

In Georgia, agriculture transcends mere economic activity; it embodies identity, heritage, and community values. Yet, like elsewhere globally, farmers are grappling with escalating challenges. Climate change, restricted water access, economic uncertainty, and dwindling interest from younger generations are altering the agricultural landscape.

Amid these challenges, a transformation is under way. A new mindset is emerging across Georgia and beyond, with farmers experimenting with innovative strategies, challenging outdated practices, and exploring novel tools and methods. This change is propelled not just by technology but by the courage to think outside the box.

Revering the Past, Welcoming the Future

Genuine innovation does not necessarily entail discarding traditional practices. Often, it involves re-examining and adapting time-honoured methods to meet contemporary needs. Georgia's rich agricultural heritage, similar to that of many regions worldwide, holds valuable insights that can be revitalised rather than discarded. Striking a balance between tradition and innovation lies at the core of sustainable agriculture. This balance demonstrates that progress is not solely about transformation; it also encompasses thoughtful continuity.



Creativity as Leadership

In both Georgia and internationally, agricultural communities are experiencing a subtle yet profound revolution: leadership through innovation. Individuals previously marginalised in agricultural decision-making—especially women and youth—are emerging as visionaries, educators, and solution-finders.
They are not merely adopting new practices; they are redefining the conception and execution of agriculture. From product innovation to sustainable land management, and from climate resilience to community involvement, they illustrate that farming serves as fertile ground for creative thought.

Agriculture as Culture

Traditionally, agriculture has been perceived primarily as a technical or economic concern. However, it is inherently cultural and even artistic—the cycles of planting and harvesting, the aesthetics of landscapes, and the presentation of food —all carry emotional and aesthetic significance.
In Georgia and various regions worldwide, this cultural aspect is being revitalised. Farms are increasingly seen not just as production entities but as living spaces where nature, heritage, and creativity converge.

A Future Fuelled by Imagination

The upcoming generation will inherit a world that demands smarter, fairer, and more sustainable food systems. This future will not emerge through mere replication; it will be shaped by imagination. Engaging young people in agriculture involves demonstrating that it is a realm where ideas can thrive, innovation is encouraged, and they can take on leadership roles.
From international conferences to local classrooms, fresh energy is surfacing. Young individuals are developing tools, establishing platforms, and offering innovative perspectives on longstanding issues. Their involvement serves as a reminder that agriculture is not a remnant of the past—it is integral to the future.

Collaboration Fosters Change

No one can overhaul a system in isolation. Sustainable agriculture flourishes when diverse minds collaborate: farmers, scientists, designers, policymakers, and educators. Whether in Georgia or elsewhere, collaboration enables ideas to evolve and expand—from local initiatives to global movements. When agriculture is bolstered by a broad community of thinkers and practitioners, it becomes more adaptable, inclusive, and impactful.

Cultivating More Than Crops

At its essence, agriculture is about growth—not just of food, but also of ideas, relationships, and a shared vision. By nurturing land with intention and foresight, we also cultivate something profound: pride, connection, and hope.
Creativity is akin to a seed. In a supportive environment, it can develop into systems that are not only efficient and productive but also beautiful and meaningful. By allowing space for imagination in agriculture, we can construct food systems that nurture both people and the planet, across the globe.✦

About the author
Nino Zambakhidze is an entrepreneur, changemaker, and Chairwoman of the Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA), representing over 6,000 farmers across Georgia. With a background in business and policy, she has worked extensively to promote innovation, sustainability, and female leadership in agriculture. A graduate of Grenoble School of Business and alumna of programs at Stanford, Oxford, and Cambridge, Nino is a recipient of multiple international awards, including the Young Global Leader title by the World Economic Forum, Forbes Woman 2016, and Woman Entrepreneur of the Year honour as part of the national business prize "Merkury 2011". Nino is passionate about transforming rural livelihoods through creative thinking and collaboration.



KHATI

WEAVING HERITAGE, EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SPORT

MAPULANE PHOHLELI

What may appear as a simple act of skipping rope is, in the highlands of Lesotho, a profound expression of heritage, resilience, and the enduring power of women. Known as 'Khati', this traditional skipping game has been revitalised through a global movement that unites generations, celebrates cultural identity, and transforms movement into meaning.

A Rope That Tells a Story

In Lesotho, Khati is more than a game—it is a cultural artifact. The ropes, traditionally crafted from teele, molula or moseea, a strong and flexible grass, are biodegradable and deeply symbolic. These ropes are not just tools for play; they are woven with stories, memories, and the wisdom of generations. In rural communities, where synthetic materials are scarce, children learn from their mothers to braid these ropes from a young age, continuing a legacy of craftsmanship and sustainability. As they braid the ropes, they compose songs which are historical and educational. The songs are incorporated with every jump depending on whether the beat is fast of slow, whilst the lyrics sink deeper in their hearts for knowledge.



The process of making Khati ropes is meticulous and meditative. Grass is carefully selected, soaked to soften the fibres, and braided by hand into durable strands. This practice, rooted in necessity, reflects a deep ecological consciousness and a reverence for tradition. It is a quiet yet powerful form of resistance and resilience.

I have found Khati to be always more than a game. It was how we connected. The rope is not just for skipping—it is for storytelling—in every strand is a lesson, a memory, a heartbeat of this land. We wanted the world to see that our traditions still live; and that they can empower us forward.



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From Tradition to Global Movement

Between March 21 and April 21, 2025, G100 sports empowerment and championships organised an online campaign challenge of Skipathon dubbed the #G100JumpForChange which transformed Khati into a global symbol of empowerment. Over 300 changemakers from 16 countries participated in this skipping initiative, each jump a declaration of visibility, strength, and solidarity for women and girls around the world.

In Lesotho, the challenge sparked a cultural revival. Elderly women in Maseru began crafting traditional ropes once again, using ancestral techniques passed down through generations. These handcrafted ropes became the literal and symbolic ties of a global sisterhood, connecting women from Lesotho to Slovenia,

Brazil to Kenya.

The cultural and environmental significance of this revival is huge. Skipping ropes, often thought of as tools for fitness, have long been integral to the culture of Lesotho. These ropes are not just objects of play but works of art, crafted with care and tradition by local women, and represent the power of intergenerational knowledge passed down through the ages.



Skipping for Change

This movement was not just about fitness—it was about reclaiming space, voice, and visibility. Women and girls skipped in city squares, village grounds, and schoolyards, each jump echoing a call for equality and recognition. Even Her Majesty the Queen of Lesotho joined in, skipping alongside grassroots leaders in a powerful image of unity and solidarity.

The campaign aligned with several UN Sustainable Development Goals, promoting health, gender equality, education, and climate action. But perhaps its most profound impact was the intergenerational dialogue it inspired. Young girls learned to craft Khati ropes from their elders, inheriting not just a skill, but a legacy of strength and sustainability.

The tradition of making Khati ropes celebrates both the past and the future, weaving the wisdom of elders with the creativity of today's youth.

A Legacy in Motion

Khati is now more than a village pastime—it is a global movement. It is heritage in motion, art through action, and solidarity in every skip. The handcrafted ropes remind us that meaningful change often begins with the simplest acts—woven by women, powered by purpose.

Let us keep skipping—not just for fitness, but for freedom. Not just for sport, but for stories. Every jump is a rhythm of resilience, a leap into legacy. Khati lives on, not only in the hills of Lesotho, but in the hearts of women worldwide who dare to reclaim tradition and redefine strength. ✦

About the author

Lesotho based businesswoman and social entrepreneur Mapulane Phohleli is known for her work in women's empowerment through sports across Africa; and in social development. She is president of Mot'seeo FC, a non-profit making organisation using football to empower women and children; which she founded in Lesotho. She is G100 Global Chair for Sports Empowerment and Championships wing.








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