

THE ATTELIER

MAGAZINE

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INSIDE THE ISSUE

Art is an invitation to dive into the inner struggles that define us
By Elise Grange alias Mehiwm

An interview with contemporary glass artist
Phillip "Swede" Hickok

Acting: A Weird Form of Art?
By septival

Human Resonance Project: on the Inner Field of Being
By Katarina Dodić

Kolams: Ephemeral Works of Art Unfolding at the Thresholds of Homes
By Aishwarya Raghunathan

Poetry
Ana Paula Giudice Anastacio

CONTENTS

04 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S NOTE

05 EXECUTIVE EDITOR'S NOTE

06 PRISMATICA

A curated space where visual arts meet the cutting edge.



22

26 ECOSYSTEM OF ART DIPLOMACY, LAW, AND ECONOMY

A space where art meets economy—exploring Diplomacy, copyrights, sustainability, marketing, and creative growth.



30

34 PERFORMING ARTS

Film and arts are the soul's mirror, where emotion, memory, and meaning converge in every frame and stroke.



35

40 FILM MAGIC

Where every click carves memory into arttimeless, raw, and real.



46

53 PHOTOGRAPHY

Where every click carves memory into art-timeless, raw, and real.



54

65 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.



66

72 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.



78

83 INNER MUSE

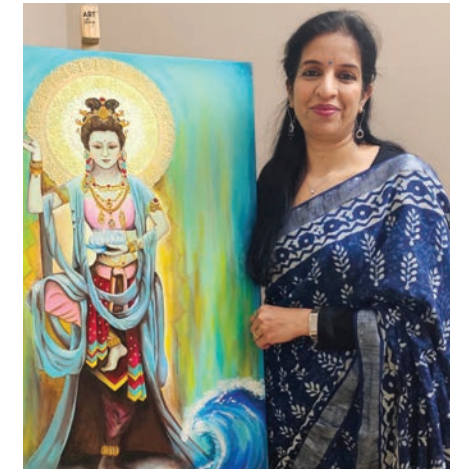
A journey through art and spirit—unfolding how creativity connects us to our higher self and a more meaningful life.



91

105 MAGNET MINDS

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



111

118 ROOTS & RYTHYM

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



125



COVER STORY

131

EDITORIAL



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FOUNDER'S NOTE

For me, creation is not a choice, it is a calling. This edition of The Atelier is born from one such space. We successfully completed the first year with four issues and we are moving to the next year.

Over the years, I have come to understand that art is never just about expression—it is about listening. Listening to what moves within us, what unsettles us, what seeks form, and what refuses to remain unseen. This magazine is an extension of that listening; a space where voices, visions, and journeys find resonance.

Art exists beyond a world that seeks clarity, outcomes, and definitions. It allows us to sit with ambiguity, to explore without conclusion, and to experience without the need to explain. In many ways, it becomes a mirror not of what is visible, but of what is felt. One of our visions is to create a platform where art is not separated from life, where creativity is not limited to the artist, and where every individual can see a part of their own journey within these pages.

I have always believed that creation is a shared space, it is truly individual because behind every work, there are silent forces—people, moments—that shape it. This magazine carries those unseen layers as much as it carries what is visible.

As we move forward, The Atelier will continue to evolve; not just as a magazine, but as a space of connection, where art meets thought, where tradition meets contemporary voices, and where the inner and outer worlds find balance. Thank you for being here, for seeing, for feeling, and for allowing art to be a part of your journey.

With gratitude!



Dr. Beena Unnikrishnan

FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EXECUTIVE EDITOR'S NOTE

The first issue of The Atelier magazine in 2026 carries widely varied but philosophically bound stories that underline the limitless capacity of art for spiritual and mental healing. British-Hungarian artist Agnes Gomori says that 'she is the living proof that creative expression can be healing', while Amsterdam-based Artist Katarina Dodić explores the 'invisible inner field from which human experience emerges.' From the French Alps we have 23 year old Mehiwm aka Elise Grange who says that to her, 'over time, art has become a reason to live.' Multifaceted artist Ana Paula Giudice Anastacio dissects the many dimensions of fear in her thought-provoking poem, *I know my fears like the marks on my skin and I wear them like rings.*

We also have actor septival from Geneva who gives us a glimpse of what it means to be a theatre actor; and a very reassuring article on why the human brain doodles, by psychology expert Abirami Vivek. South African documentary filmmaker and cultural researcher Mbali Khumalo talks about the importance of documentaries as cultural archives.

Varied, but stressing on the immeasurable value of art in its various forms, for both the creator and the viewer, by bringing out meanings and making possible personal interpretations.

We at The Atelier hope that the artworks by the incredible artists featured in the magazine will continue to amaze and delight our readers.

Thank you for your continued interest in our magazine.



Sandhya Rajasekhar

Executive Editor

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.

'ART IS AN INVITATION TO DIVE INTO THE INNER STRUGGLES THAT DEFINE US'

By Elise Grange alias Mehiwm

MANDALA AS A WAY OF BEING

By Fabienne Tosi

TRANSFORMING PEOPLE INTO ART THROUGH BODY AND LIFE CASTING

Ivone Gaipi

INTERVIEW

'WHEN I'M BLOWING GLASS, ALL MY PROBLEMS MELT AWAY WITH THE HEAT'

An interview with contemporary glass artist Phillip "Swede" Hickok

'ART IS AN INVITATION TO DIVE INTO THE INNER STRUGGLES THAT DEFINE US'

By Elise Grange alias Mehiwm

A young self-taught and autistic artist aged 23, I found through art a path to resilience. Forced to leave school around the age of 14 due to harassment, and following a particularly difficult life journey marked by numerous hospitalisations, art saved me from a chaotic daily life. Fascinated by ornithology, the arts, nature, chemistry, and gemology from a very young age, it seemed obvious to me to continue along this creative path.

Today, I have turned it into a strength and aim to help as many people as possible by showing them that hope, beauty, and gentleness can be found in solitude. Over time, art has become a reason to live. My main goal is to help victims of harassment, to show them that there is an "after" that is far brighter, anywhere in the world. I also strive to change mindsets regarding mental illness through several series of artworks and interventions in certain psychiatric hospitals, in order to give a voice back to patients who are often stigmatised.

Having grown up in the heart of the French Alps, I quickly developed a sensitivity to the invisible, learning to perceive the atmospheres and subtle emotions that surround me in these mountains. Nature, both wonderful and cruel, taught me that there is a perpetual balance between the



Elise Grange



positive and the negative. To reflect this duality in my art, I create my own mineral pigments from A to Z in order to preserve the very essence of nature in each of my works.

Over time, I noticed that many contemporary artworks used chemical materials. This led me to take an interest in the artisanal know-how of past centuries. This is how I discovered the craft of the

pigment maker, an art forgotten and lost since the 17th century. I therefore explored ecological alternatives by collecting stone offcuts from sculptors in order to extract mineral pigments from them by grinding them with a mortar. I conducted numerous tests on the molecular and anatomical structure of stones, as well as on the chemical reactions that pigments could have with the

various binders that I also make myself using natural products (such as honey, gum arabic, etc.) for my handmade watercolours and inks. After several years, I succeeded in finding the right chemical formulas, thus making it possible to unite art, chemistry, and spirituality. In this way, all the benefits of lithotherapy, as well as a deep grounding in nature, can be found in each of my works.

Generally, I use vivid colours to convey a positive and inspiring message, as well as bold black lines that tend to illustrate a “lost paradise” within us, which we rediscover when we are at our lowest: hope, inner strength, and each person’s determination in the face of life’s challenges. An almost perfect balance between darkness and light. A strong contrast for a powerful message. There are hidden symbols in each of my creations; it is all a matter of perspective, which everyone is free to interpret as they see fit.

“Batacendres” is the name I gave to my most intimate universe, which many galleries have described as “fascinating” and “deeply introspective.” At the heart of this universe stands a lost young girl, the only one able to feel love in a world where this feeling seems to have disappeared. Her journey leads her to encounter various creatures, eager to help her, yet often unable to understand the depth of her emotions. Through this quest, the work explores powerful themes such as solitude, autism, rejection, bullying, visible and invisible disabilities, and

grief, offering a moving reflection on these essential realities of life. “Batacendres” thus reveals itself as a rich exploration of inner challenges and the subtleties of the human experience.

For me, it is an invitation to dive into the inner struggles that define us, a meditation on the human condition. Each work bears witness to the beauty and complexity of emotions, while celebrating resilience in the face of adversity. My creations range from contemporary figurative art to hyperrealism, passing through surrealism and onirism. I adapt my technique according to the message I wish to convey to the audience. This is why each work contains one or several hidden meanings. Nothing is left to chance. Every stroke, no matter how small, has its importance.

I also paint birds. In my view, they represent freedom, this very freedom that I lost following an assault in the street that left me disabled. Since this particularly difficult life experience, I have devoted my entire life to art. Painting birds is a way to escape and think about something else, a way to keep in mind that sometimes all it takes is to look out the window and observe nature to rediscover a deep message of hope.



MANDALA AS A WAY OF BEING

by Fabienne Tosi

My artistic journey is rooted in movement, translation, and the quiet search for unity. Born in France and later settling in Switzerland as a teenager, I trained as a translator at the University of Geneva, a profession that I still practice today. Long before discovering mandalas, I was already drawn to the act of bridging worlds, of listening carefully and shaping meaning with precision and sensitivity.

As an adolescent, I instinctively gravitated toward abstract and geometric drawing. At the time, these forms appeared without explanation. In retrospect, they feel like early signs, seeds of a visual language that would later unfold through sacred geometry, symmetry, and repetition. In 2014, mandalas entered my life at a pivotal moment. Seeking a secular meditation practice, I encountered the work of Fabrice Midal, a French philosopher and meditation teacher. One of his books, *Mandalas – Rediscovering the Unity of the World*, immediately resonated with me. This intuitive attraction marked the beginning of a profound artistic and inner transformation.

My first encounter with mandalas came through a colouring book, then widely popular in Europe. The initial experience



Fabienne Tosi



was unremarkable, until something shifted. Rather than filling existing shapes with colour, I felt a clear inner call: I wanted to create mandalas myself. This realisation, simple yet decisive, opened the door to a practice that would soon become central to my life. For months, I immersed myself in creation. Evenings dissolved into nights as I drew, guided by rhythm, symmetry, and silence. Time lost its usual structure. The mandala became a space of presence, a place where thought softened and attention deepened. Creation was no longer about producing an image, but about inhabiting a state of being.

This experience naturally led me towards sharing. I trained as a mandala workshop facilitator, deepening my understanding of their symbolism and history across cultures. Through this exploration, the mandala revealed itself not as a decorative object, but as a universal structure, an ancient tool for centring, self-awareness, and connection with the greater whole. As Fabrice Midal expresses it, the

mandala is “a living invitation to the conversion of the heart.”

Across civilisations, the mandala appears in multiple forms. In Tibetan Buddhism, monks create intricate sand mandalas according to precise spiritual rules, only to erase them upon completion, embodying



impermanence and offering the work to the healing of the world. Among Native American traditions, the medicine wheel functions as a ritual space for restoring balance and harmony. In Europe, mandalas manifest through cathedral rose windows and labyrinths, guiding the gaze, and the psyche, toward an inner journey. In modern psychology, Carl Gustav Jung reintroduced the mandala as a means of accessing the unconscious and revealing inner dynamics.

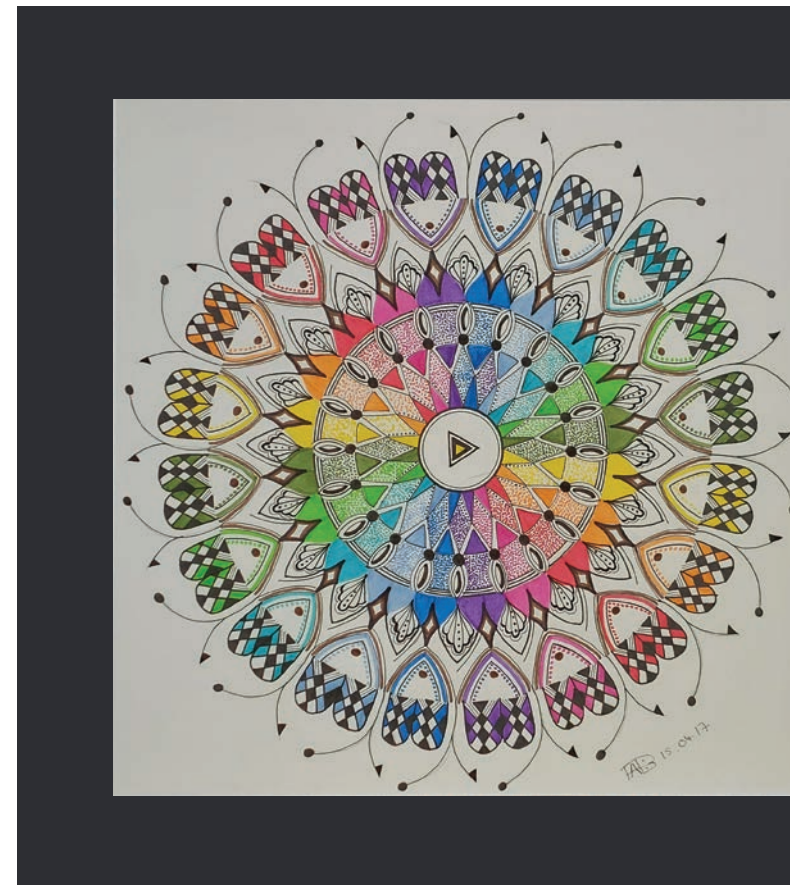
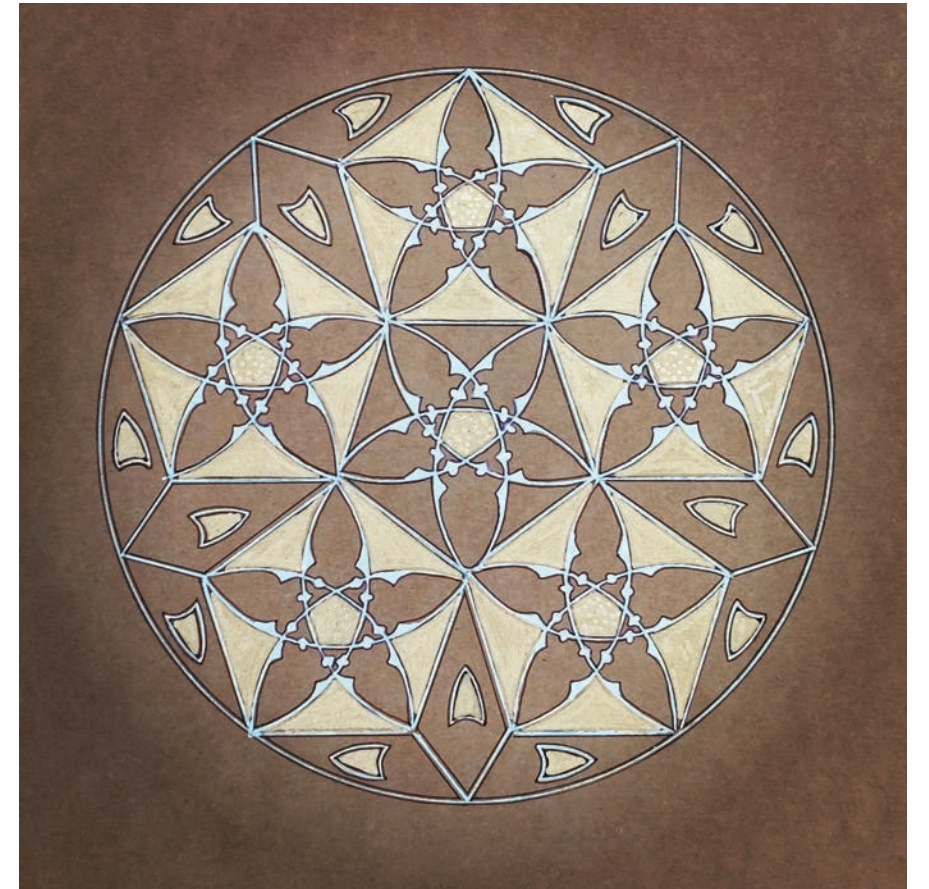
For me, creating a mandala is never about aesthetics alone. It is a process, a path. The essence lies not in the finished form, but in the act of creating itself. Each repeated motif becomes a gesture of recentring, a quiet dialogue between inner and outer worlds. My practice embraces a wide variety of media and formats. I create mandalas on paper and canvas, on wooden discs, pebbles, and sometimes directly on natural elements. Paint, felt-tip pens, and coloured pencils are among my

preferred tools for giving shape to mandalas. I also create plant mandalas using flowers, leaves, branches, and occasionally even food, composing ephemeral and organic works. These creations may appear on tables, floors, in forests, or on a simple plate, bringing a living, fluid dimension to each piece.

Inspired by ancient traditions, I also work with chalk or coloured pigments, echoing the gestures of Indian women who draw kolams

in front of their homes each morning. After several years of practice, I felt a call to expand my visual language. I turned towards cathedral rose windows, sacred geometry, and Islamic patterns, studying continuously to refine my techniques. I approach this exploration with humility, seeing myself still at the beginning of a lifelong dialogue with form. I draw constant inspiration from nature itself; where everything, in my eyes, is already a mandala.

Over time, I have observed the mandala's ability to reach diverse audiences. It offers a non-verbal mode of expression for individuals on the autism spectrum, a meaningful creative space for elderly people or those living with dementia, and a grounding



structure for individuals navigating reintegration after incarceration. Collective mandalas, in particular, foster cohesion, shared presence, and a sense of belonging. A deeply personal experience further anchored my conviction. In 2015, my mother passed away. Living far apart, our relationship had grown distant. When I discovered mandalas in 2014, I instinctively felt they would resonate with my mother, an exceptionally skilled and creative woman. A shared passion emerged, restoring intimacy during that final year. Toward the end of my mother's life, when words faded, I called her every evening. My mother's final words to me were simply:

“My darling, mandala, mandala.”
A moment forever held in silence
and love.

My first exhibition in my
village in November 2024 was
met with great enthusiasm,
followed by participation in the

Contemporary Art Salon at the
Carrousel du Louvre in Paris in
October 2025. I hope to repeat
this experience in 2026 with
Guilmette Bagdadi, a very talented
artist also based in Geneva, whom
I met in February 2025. This

encounter marked the beginning
of a meaningful artistic dialogue,
and several joint exhibitions are
planned for 2026, opening new
perspectives for collaboration
and shared exploration. Today, I
create personalised mandalas on
commission and lead workshops
that introduce participants to
the world of mandalas, or guide
explorations around specific
themes.

My work invites contemplation
rather than interpretation;
presence rather than explanation.
For me, the mandala is not
only an artistic practice, it is a
companion, a guide, and a way of
being in the world. This journey,
which grows richer every day,
continues to fascinate and amaze
me, making mandalas a true
personal, spiritual and artistic
quest.



TRANSFORMING PEOPLE INTO ART THROUGH BODY AND LIFE CASTING

Ivone Gaipi

It was while studying painting in Portugal, after seeing a sculpture whose skin details were so intricate, that I fell in love with the technique of Body and Life Casting. It felt magical, exceptional: it reproduced every characteristic of the body. That curiosity led me to Scotland, where I learned the art of body casting at *The Edinburgh Casting Studio*.

From Ancient Egypt to the Greeks and Romans, and later through the 20th-century film industry, Body and Life Casting existed in the shadows as a secondary technique. In recent decades, it has emerged as an individual artistic expression, distinguished by its versatility in material creation and its plasticity as a vehicle of message.

This desire to learn also guided me to the English sculptor Ken Clarke, who has dedicated his life to this technique. Having the privilege of being his pupil helped me begin the Gaipi Body Casting Atelier project in Portugal in 2017. Later, studying with the Portuguese master and painter Rui Aço along this path helped me clarify my artistic identity throughout this journey.



Ivone Gaipi

Transforming people into art



This was the motto that inspired me to create the Gaipi Body Casting project, where I combine Body and Life Casting techniques to create sculptures based on body molds. The possibility of using

the body as raw material, as an extension of the observable ego, which is later deconstructed to reveal perceptions of the self, is fascinating.



We are body and mind. How do we uncover the many layers of this union? It is within this mystery that I find joy in using the body to construct (or deconstruct), creating new unified perceptions of message and intention. This is the principle from which I approach my projects.

When someone entrusts me with their body as raw material, what will the final result be? How will this interpretation of who they truly are merge with my own perception of them? In truth, the resulting sculptures reflect two visions: the vision of the body's owner, their self-perception and

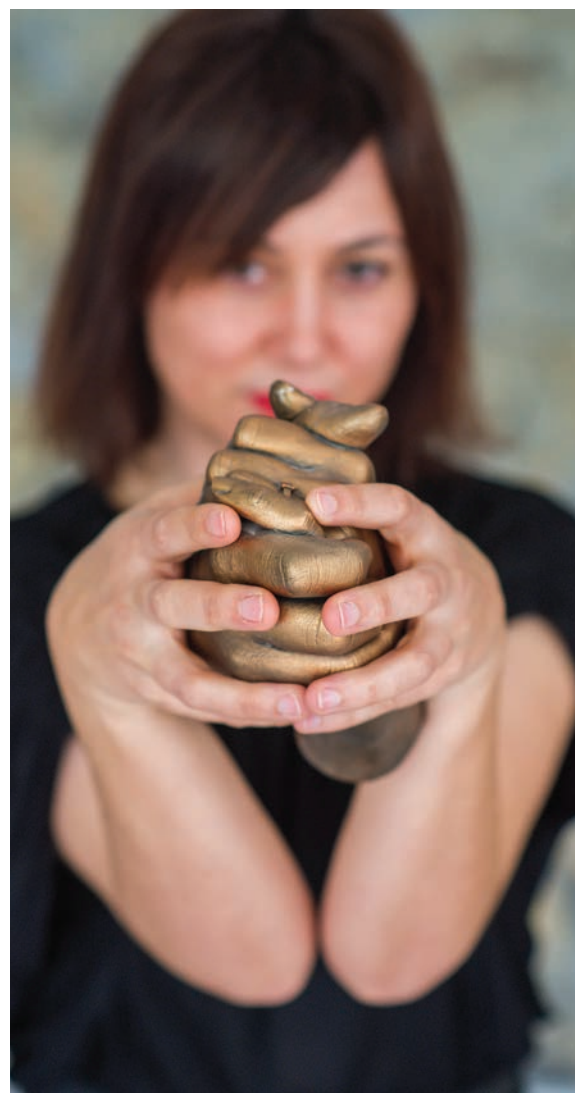
expectations when creating a sculpture of themselves; and my vision as an artist observing this dynamic.

Is the result a materialisation of that person's reality, or a distorted or omitted manifestation reflecting what someone wishes to be, an illusion of identity? These layers of thought fascinate me whenever I use someone's mold to transform them into a sculpture with identity. That is why this process is so compelling to me: it allows me to reflect layers of identity using art as the point of departure.



on the client's own identity, while expanding my perception of them as well.

When we create individual and personalised sculptures, the result is always a fusion: a sculpture that reproduces my client's reality, but also mine. It brings me deep satisfaction to leave pieces of myself within the works I deliver.



The atelier experience

Those who come to the atelier live the experience of transforming their body into art. Being based in Lisbon allows me to receive people from many parts of the world to create exclusive and personalised sculptures.

Because I enjoy travelling and expanding knowledge, meeting clients in their home countries to create the mold that is later used for the artistic creation, also allows me to observe their reality within their environment. This contributes to sculptures that reflect a perception more centered

Creating art to anchor meaning

I enjoy creating exclusive artistic solutions—to a company that wishes to integrate art into the transmission of its values; to a couple getting married who want to create a symbolic and artistic amulet; to a family seeking to create a material legacy that remains beyond the body's existence; to an individual who wishes to eternalise themselves

through art—using it for their own transcendence, becoming part of it.

To create is to anchor meaning. This is the greatest purpose of my artistic expression. It is the fortune of recognising our body, or the body of someone we love, within a sculpture. What is art without the attribution of value to an object? And this value, beyond financial worth, is a symbolic value that organisations and individuals seek when they come to me to manifest a symbolic sculpture through art.



About the author

Sculptor Ivone Gaipi is founder of the Gaipi Body Casting Atelier in Lisbon, where sculptures are created from body molds, sculpture techniques are taught, live performances take place, and remarkable sculptural works are produced. Gaipi participates as a sculptor in both collective and solo exhibitions, bringing to the world artistic expressions of the ancient technique of Body and Life Casting.

‘WHEN I’M BLOWING GLASS, ALL MY PROBLEMS MELT AWAY WITH THE HEAT’

An interview with contemporary glass artist Phillip “Swede” Hickok

“In a time when AI and automation is becoming common, I think it’s increasingly important to appreciate the hand made. I love making art that has something to say, and I often try to express messages through my work, but for me it is equally important that it’s made skillfully, and by my own hands.”

Phillip “Swede” Hickok is an international glass artist who is currently an artist in residence at *Glass Sutra* in New Delhi, India. In 2011, he obtained his Certificate of Journeyman in Glass from the National School of Glass, in Orrefors, Sweden. In 2023, he completed his Bachelor of Craft in Glass Design, at the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Swede has exhibited internationally and has been a resident artist at several residencies around the world. In his work, he strives for a personal balance between concept and craft, by pushing the boundaries of the material.



Phillip Hickok

Excerpts from an interview with Falak Neaz, Editorial Coordinator, The Atelier:

Q1. You were born in Sweden and grew up in Colorado. How did these two different cultures shape you as an artist and as a person?

I am a homogeneous mix of the two cultures, and I believe my work reflects this. I may incorporate more of the American colour palate, with the Scandinavian forms, or I may sculpt and assemble glass in American torch styles, but then my colours and textures tend to lean more minimalistic.

Q2. What first drew you to glass as a material? Was there a specific moment when you knew this was your path?

When I first saw glassblowing, I was in Oregon and happened to walk by a mobile glass studio. I’ll always remember that moment. It was as if lightning struck me; like falling in love. I couldn’t take my eyes off it. I knew then and there that this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

Q3. You trained at the National School of Glass in Sweden and later at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. How did your education change the way you think about art?

My time in Sweden was entirely focussed on the craft of glass. They taught Scandinavian

fundamentals of how to move with the material and to manipulate it. It allowed me to view the glass in a disciplined and structured manner. By the time I studied in Denmark, I had already been blowing glass for close to eight years, so I understood my material and how to shape it. The Danish Royal Academy helped me find a way to express myself outside of the traditional “rules” of how to work with glass. It wasn’t focussed on techniques at all; it was focussed on how I express and articulate my ideas through the material, as well as the process to which I get there. It was during this time that I really started to explore creating textures and started incorporating metal into my work.

Q4. You specialise in Graal and Swedish overlay techniques. What excites you most about working with these traditional methods in a contemporary world?

Both these techniques were invented at the Orrefors factory. So, for me it’s a part of my history and my Swedish heritage that I carry with me. I use the Swedish Overlay in a lot of my work, but I tend to incorporate it in my own way. I use it to be able to add other mineral rich colours to the exposed base colour to generate chemical reactions between the precious metals. Recently here in India I’ve started revisiting the Graal technique, but with an intention of using it in a more contemporary way.





Q5. Your work balances concept and craft. How do you personally define that balance?

In a time when AI and automation is becoming common, I think it's increasingly important to appreciate the hand made. I love making art that has something to say, and I often try to express messages through my work, but for me it is equally important that it's made skillfully, and by my own hands. Blowing glass takes many years of practice to even grasp any sort of proficiency, so for me it's important to recognise the dedication and knowledge of the techniques as much as it is to understand the meaning.



Q6. You have worked in many countries and artist residencies around the world. How does moving between different studios and cultures influence your creative process?

Wherever I travel, I feel like I learn a concept or technique from that region. I think travel shapes us as individuals and helps us expand our way of thinking, and this is also mirrored into the way that I work with my material.



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Q7. What is the most challenging part of working with glass, and what keeps you coming back to it despite those challenges?

I'd say one of the most immediate is the heat. We work in front of a 1000 plus degree oven all day long. Blowing glass is also a physical activity; It's kind of like working out in a sauna for six to eight hours. Despite the challenges, being able to move with my body, and create forms from actual lava— it is magic. When I'm blowing glass, all my problems melt away with the heat. It's meditative and exhilarating; I couldn't imagine doing anything else with my life.

Q8. When viewers look at your work, what do you hope they feel or understand?

Making art is a very personal process, and I at least understand why I'm making it. Some of my glass is more technique focussed, and simply hopes to achieve beauty; while other work tries to express sadness, chaos, rebirth or joy. At the end of the day, I'm showing the viewers a peek into my own being and the best I can hope for is a willingness to look.

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Q9. As someone who has worked both as a production gaffer and as an independent artist, how do technical skill and creative vision support each other in your practice?

When I have an idea, the skills and knowledge of my material allow me to achieve my artistic expression. I think the two support each other organically, as I'm often open to play and experimentation. Certain techniques may inspire an idea or concept, then as the concept develops, I may further shift the techniques used to refine that idea.

Q10. How has India influenced your work so far, and what are you exploring at this stage of your journey?

While here, I've gotten the chance to incorporate some traditional Indian cane patterns into my work. I've been working with canes for most of my career, but it's been truly a treat to be able to play around with patterns that hold such a rich history in them. Using these patterns, I developed a body of work I call the *Seeds of Shiva*. For me, it's exciting to learn about the history and culture of the glassmaking process here and to allow that to inspire new contemporary expressions.

ECOSYSTEM OF ART DIPLOMACY, LAW AND ECONOMY

A space where art meets economy—exploring Diplomacy, copyrights, sustainability, marketing, and creative growth.

**FRICION AND FLOURISH: NOTES FROM
JANUARY AT THE KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE**

By Shahzada Khurram

**THE AYN GALLERY: CREATING RIGOROUS
CONDITIONS FOR INTERPRETATION**

Yasmine Azzi-Kohlhepp

FRICION AND FLOURISH: NOTES FROM JANUARY AT THE KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE

By Shahzada Khurram

*Curator, Cultural Programmer,
Public Art Facilitator*

The sixth edition of the well-known Kochi-Muziris Biennale opened on December 12, 2025 and concluded on March 31, 2026. The contemporary art exhibition featured 66 artists and collectives, whose work was spread across 22 venues in the islands of Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, and Willingdon in Kerala, India.

The Biennale, *For the Time Being*, curated by Nikhil Chopra with HH Art Spaces, posits that a biennale can be less an exhibition than a convocation of time, labour, and presence. But this edition does more than decentralise venues, it exposes fault lines in how biennials stage politics, embodiment, and resistance.



Shahzada Khurram



“If Kochi’s strength is its openness, its failure is not knowing when to close the door.”

From the outset, *For the Time Being* attempts the impossible, a city-wide choreographic logic that moves between more than twenty venues without a clear center, seeking to turn dispersal into a conceptual frame. The gamble, decentralising dramaturgy while holding an overarching thesis, often collapses into entropy rather than ecology.

At its best, the biennale demonstrates that process can generate poetic force. Dineo Seshee Bopape’s *Mme Mmu, Bhumi Bhumi* at Island Warehouse converges soil, sound, and memory into an immersive ground, asking viewers to sit within earthen mounds that articulate histories of displacement and regeneration. The work’s raw biophysical presence counters the biennale’s otherwise diffuse spatial logic.

Similarly, Faiza Hasan’s portrait works offer a quiet rupture, a sequence of self-representations unfolding over time, each shifting gaze suggesting spectral temporality and subtle interiority. Here, fragility becomes a method, undoing the biennale’s propensity toward sheer spatial excess.



But these resonant instances remain islands in a broader sea of inconsistency. Unlike editions where a decisive thesis modulates every corner, here the statement feels stronger than its systemic follow-through. The relocation

of so many works into heritage buildings and warehouses, from Aspinwall House to venues across Mattancherry, luxuriates in atmosphere but often abandons structural narration.

“The ambition is admirable; the architecture is absent.”

At times, this curatorial risk slips into indifference. Large-scale works by Adrián Villar Rojas and others are visually impressive yet narratively untethered, floating without tectonic underpinning. The biennale’s openness has also exposed it to civic debate. Works shown within collateral

programmes have sparked discussions around religious representation and artistic freedom, reminding viewers that the biennale operates within a complex social ecology rather than an insulated art world.

Locally grounded commissions are among the edition’s greatest strengths, yet here too the institutional frame falters. Works that address labour, ecology, and lived histories, for example Birender Kumar Yadav’s *Only the Earth Knows Their Labour*, are powerful precisely because they foreground material realities. Nevertheless, the exhibition architecture rarely supports their urgency with equal clarity.

More problematically, the biennale’s discursive programs, talks, workshops, screenings, while abundant, read as parallel

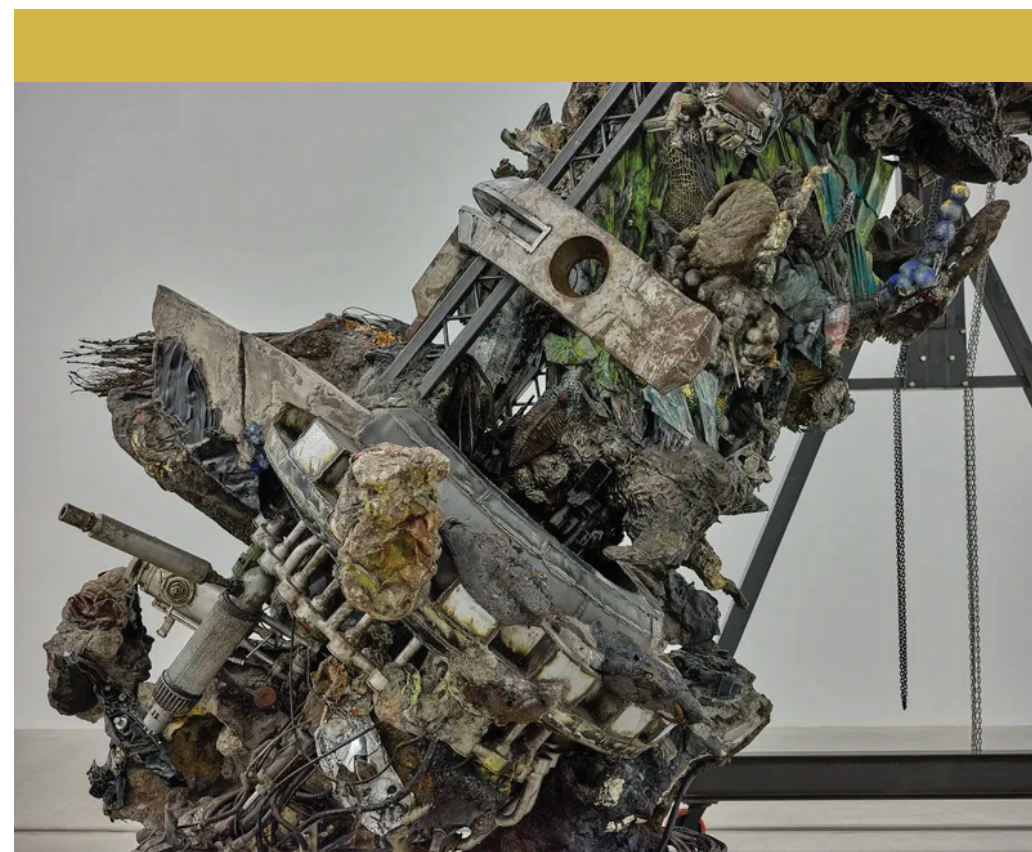
tracks rather than integral to the exhibition’s central cosmos. If the curator invites us to experience the event as a living system, that system needs a spine. Too often, talks feel like appendices rather than connective tissue.

And yet, the biennale’s very oscillation between endurance and ephemerality is perhaps its most honest gesture. If performance, dialogue, and affective encounter are its commitments, then the exhibition, fragmentary and unfinished, refuses the logics of spectacle that so easily flatten biennale narratives. This refusal is politically coherent; it aligns with a biennale that does not simply display the world but dwells with it.

This edition’s greatest contradiction lies in its insistence on openness without sufficient formal rigour. Uneven execution reveals a vital truth; a decentered biennale cannot be its own argument. Movement without anchor slips toward diffusion, process without clear framing risks opacity.

So, the sixth Kochi-Muziris Biennale does not render verdicts. It probes, and in doing so exposes the limits of biennale logic itself. If contemporary biennials seek models beyond spectacle and institutional hierarchy, then Kochi’s most lasting gesture may be this, showing that the difficulty of a new model is not a flaw but part of its epistemology.

This, at least, is a biennale that resists closure, even when it demands one.



THE AYN GALLERY: CREATING RIGOROUS CONDITIONS FOR INTERPRETATION

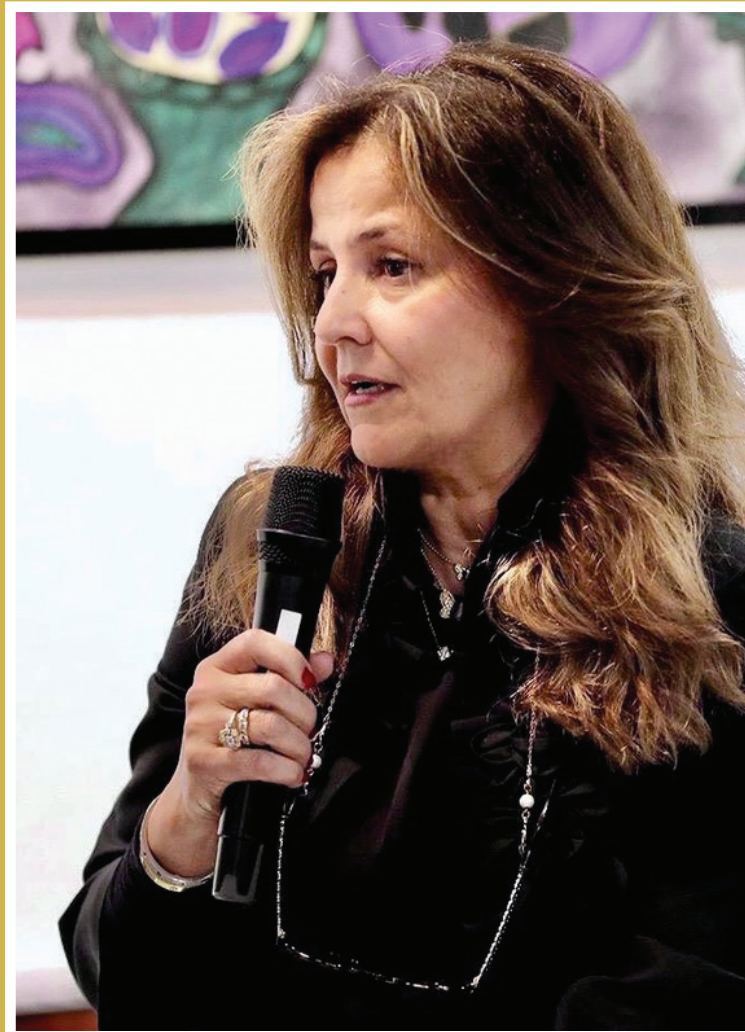
“The risk today is not a lack of visibility, but simplification.”

Yasmine Azzi-Kohlhepp, *Founder*

Paris occupies a singular place in the global artistic imagination. The capital is readily associated with the great avant-garde movements of the 20th century. Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism: it was the scene of major aesthetic breakthroughs. For over a century, it has attracted artists from all over the world, including activists, dissidents and figures fleeing war or authoritarian regimes. Paris has established itself as a place where artists can invent, challenge and rebuild.

But to be an artistic centre also means shaping narratives. Major cultural capitals shape the stories we remember. They elevate certain movements and secure their place in collections and museums. Other scenes circulate more discreetly, not because of a lack of quality, but because their institutional networks have been less structured on an international scale.

The contemporary Algerian scene offers a revealing example of this. Often approached through its political and historical context—an essential dimension—it is still frequently interpreted through this prism alone.



Yasmine Azzi-Kohlhepp



However, in exhibition spaces, these works reveal a formal and conceptual complexity that goes beyond the usual interpretative frameworks. They engage directly with contemporary aesthetic debates.

Curating this scene from Paris implies a particular responsibility. The city remains a powerful space of legitimisation, shaped by a complex history with Algeria. This history influences the way in which the works are perceived, contextualised and sometimes reduced.

It is precisely within this space that AYN Gallery situates its work. Based between Paris and Oran, the gallery asserts a clearly articulated trans-Mediterranean position. It is not a question of representing a national identity, but of creating rigorous conditions for interpretation. “The risk today is not a lack of visibility, but simplification,” emphasises its founder, Yasmine Azzi-Kohlhepp. “A work can be highly visible and yet poorly understood.”

The artists represented by the gallery do not form a homogeneous group. Some live in Algeria, others belong to the diaspora. What connects them is not their origins, but their focus on invisible structures: memory, territory, body, language, power.

This plurality is clearly evident in the works on display. Salim Le Kouaghet’s abstractions pursue a rigorous exploration of form and sign, far removed from any folkloric interpretation. Halida Boughriet’s installations and performances interrogate surveillance mechanisms and invisible boundaries that permeate contemporary societies. Each practice shifts the gaze through the strength of its formal language.

The gallery operates with a broad international outlook. It is not a question of affixing a geographical label, but of building bridges between trajectories and practices from different contexts. This dynamic has given rise to cross-disciplinary collaborations, such as that between Lebanese photographer Roger Moukarzel and the late German artist Marion Boehm. As its founder points out: “I am less interested in the origin of artists than in the way their practices create tension and produce meaning.”

AYN Gallery is not limited to its spaces in Paris and Oran. With exhibitions outside its walls, participation in international fairs, and expanded curatorial dialogues, this strategy affirms an



active presence in multiple networks. “Art centres are no longer fixed,” observes Yasmine Azzi Kohlhepp. “They are reconfigured through the circulation they activate.” Paris nevertheless imposes its own codes. The rigour of the white cube, the attention to light and rhythm shape the viewer’s gaze. Exhibiting here means engaging with this tradition without neutralising the political or poetic density of the works.

Scenography becomes a tool of precision. It is not a question of dramatising or erasing, but of orchestrating balances. Too much contextualisation can be confining. Too much neutralisation can be weakening. The exhibition space becomes a place of subtle mediation.

Publication also plays a central role. An exhibition is temporary; a book is permanent. Producing

monographs contributes to the writing of a lasting historiography. In partnership with Les Éditions du Crieur Public, AYN Gallery is committed to long-term projects. In a trans-Mediterranean context, publishing becomes an instrument of circulation: it extends the exhibition and anchors the work in a structured memory.

This approach is in line with market developments. A new generation of collectors, mobile and international, is looking for works with conceptual depth. Interest is shifting towards the coherence of an artist’s career and the depth of their research. “Defending an artist means preserving the high standards of their work while making it accessible in very different contexts,” explains the founder. “This balance is fragile.”

The central issue is not only one of media visibility, but also of structuring. How can these artists be permanently included in collections, institutions and archives? How can we prevent their reception from being conditioned by an exclusively geopolitical interpretation? This is one of the most complex challenges facing galleries engaged in transnational work today.

Curating between France, Algeria and international projects means working in a space of circulation rather than in a fixed territory. This requires recognising that the Mediterranean is not a periphery, but an active space of production and reinvention.

Founder Yasmine Azzi-Kohlhepp’s work focuses on contemporary artists from North Africa, the Mediterranean and the diaspora, exploring questions of memory, transmission and cultural dialogue. Through exhibitions, publications and collaborations, she develops projects that connect regional artistic practices with international contemporary art networks.

For the Gallery, rethinking the contemporary Algerian scene from Paris is not a diplomatic stance. It is an intellectual position: activating circulation, slowing down the gaze and affirming that these practices are fully part of the international conversations shaping contemporary art.



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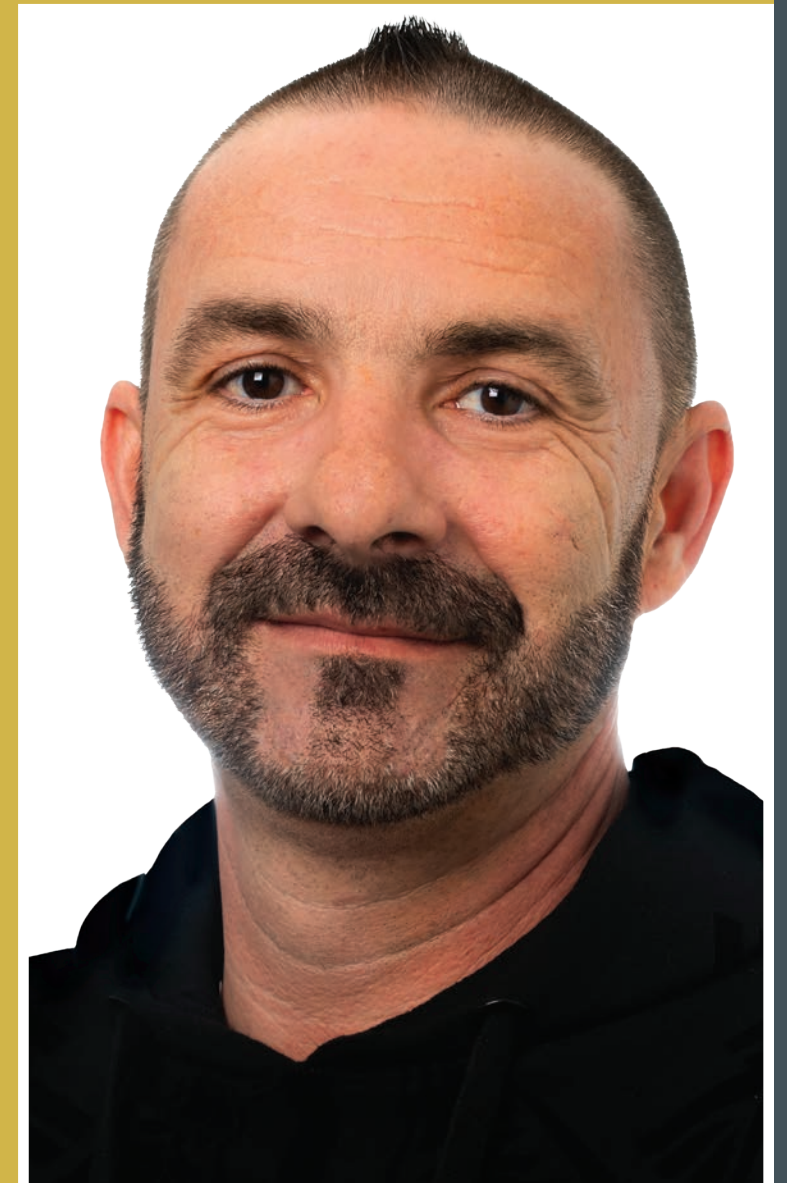
ACTING: A WEIRD FORM OF ART?

By septival

ACTING: A WEIRD FORM OF ART? Ruminations of a theatre actor

By septival

“Really? Oh, I could never do that!” is one of the most common replies you get when you tell someone you are an actor. And behind these words, you can generally descry a mixture of admiration, suspiciousness and fright. Having grown up in a family of musicians and appeared regularly on a stage since I was nine, I had considered acting a perfectly “normal” activity until I found out, through such reactions, that comedians were often seen as freaky night owls, if not self-centred, arrogant slackers. One of the most surprising comments I ever received was from a guy who said he found it awkward to sit in an auditorium watching people who were pretending to be other people when he knew they were not! That is when I began to wonder: what is it that makes acting so peculiar? Are we actors all kinds of weirdoes who enjoy faking and fooling others? Let us see how much of that is true.



septival

Memorisation

This point, often mentioned outside the community as the discipline's major difficulty, is normally expressed through a terrified "I could never learn all my lines!" A totally underrated statement. First, if you learn *your* lines only, you will never know when their turn comes; you also need cues, which are other characters' lines or actions. And there is actually much more: the exact timings of entrances, exits and movements as decided by the director that are as essential as your text, together with all instructions on characterisation including gestures, gait, tone, tempo, face expressions, let alone the

tunes, harmonies and choreographies in musical theatre. An amazing lot of information to process, indeed! However trained one is, this can only be achieved with the highest degree of alertness. So much so that this state of hypervigilance generally persists for hours after the show, which often ends late at night. Hence if actors are no early risers, it is definitely not out of weirdness or laziness, they have spent the night reliving the past performance and blaming themselves for anything they could have done better.



Stage fright

Many people claim they could not handle their apprehension. Now that is because they figure themselves walking onto stage without prior preparation. This is precisely what rehearsing is about: repeating the same scene over and over again until it feels like visiting a forgetful grandmother with whom you keep having the exact same conversation. By the opening night, we will have done too many run-throughs to be caught off guard. Still, most, if not all actors do feel some stage fright, generally right before their first appearance, or after a glitch, but the hyperattention mentioned before overcomes it within seconds when they are on stage. Is it crooked to have such self-control? I do not think so.



Impersonation

Yes, acting means forgetting yourself and putting on someone else's shoes; literally and figuratively. And with a full auditorium scrutinising your body from head to toe and listening to the slightest tremolo in your voice, you had better not break the spell. This is where the magic of acting lies: if you are backstage the very moment actors are about





Illusion

Sure enough, acting is the art of faking, of make-believe. It means showing emotions that one does not really feel, either through imitation or by digging into one's personal, sometimes painful history. When you are assigned a part, you try to figure out the character's background, hopes, frustrations and, more generally, his train of thought in order to "impersonate" him in the best possible way. Now however hard you try, when you see yourself on video, you cannot give in to the illusion, because you know how you created it. But the viewers do. And here we may have found the bias that is undermining theatre people's reputation: do spectators have something at the back of their minds when they congratulate you on your acting skills? Could they possibly consider that if you are so convincing on stage, you might be able to fool them just as well in real life? In other words, is a comedian's talent, quite ironically,

responsible for his bad image? No, that would be a bit far-fetched. Which brings us to the conclusion that there is really nothing wrong with acting. Nothing but prejudice.

Well, when I come to think of it... I must confess having had a strange impression myself when the actor who had stood out as the boot-licker in our show began to praise my performance with the exact same tone as his character...



About the artist

septival is a multidisciplinary, largely self-taught artist based in Geneva, Switzerland. His work encompasses drawing, writing, music, theatre, and design, and is unified by a long-term conceptual project initiated in his early adolescence: the creation of an imaginary country named *Sverdia*. In parallel to his visual practice, septival is an accomplished singer-songwriter whose compositions address rarely explored subjects with realism and restraint. His musical productions are entirely self-authored and self-produced, with the artist assuming the roles of lyricist, composer, arranger, instrumentalist, vocalist, and, when extending into audiovisual formats, screenwriter, cameraman, editor, and communications manager. septival received early training in drama and has since participated in numerous theatrical productions, including musical works, in both French and English. Influenced by the traditions of vaudeville, he has written several plays, two of which have been staged by a Swiss theatre company. He now operates as a freelance creative, and is currently working on completing his first musical.

to walk onto stage, you will see them transform into their characters, face and posture change in a flash, and the comedians are gone. The effect is so powerful that it can overshadow the most terrible headache or flu that has kept them in bed all day... and that will doubtless return as soon as the curtain falls. A kind of miracle rather than wickedness.

Still, each role involves specific challenges, whether inherent to the plot, the character, or linked to the actor's idiosyncrasies. For the latter, similarities may be as difficult to manage as great gaps, and when a situation echoes one's own past or present life, or highlights one's weaknesses, rehearsals can turn into a really exhausting experience, both physically and emotionally. Here again, by dint of practice, you learn to let go. And since you walk this difficult path hand in hand with your peers, you end up with friendships that are neither strange nor shallow.



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.

FRAMING THE CANVAS: AN ANALYSIS OF COLOUR PAlettes AND SET DESIGNS IN FILMS INFLUENCED BY FINE ARTS

By Archie Mohlaba *aka* Dopamine Dave

AGAINST ERASURE: DOCUMENTARY, A LIVING ARCHIVE

By Mbali Khumalo

FRAMING THE CANVAS: AN ANALYSIS OF COLOUR PAlettes AND SET DESIGNS IN FILMS INFLUENCED BY FINE ARTS

By Archie Mohlaba *aka* Dopamine Dave

Cinema and the fine arts share a profound visual relationship. Throughout film history, directors, production designers, and cinematographers have drawn inspiration from painting, sculpture, and other fine art traditions to construct evocative colour palettes and immersive set designs that deepen meaning, evoke emotion, and guide audience interpretation. This cross-disciplinary exchange situates cinema within a broader aesthetic and cultural framework, reinforcing film as both a narrative medium and visual art form.

This article explores how visual strategies inherited from the fine arts manifest in cinema: why they matter, how they are executed, and the impact they have on audience perception. Through selected case studies, it examines the deliberate use of colour theory, composition, and material design in shaping cinematic storytelling.



Archie Mohlaba

The visual grammar of fine arts and its translation to film

Fine art disciplines, particularly painting, rely on a visual grammar composed of colour theory, spatial composition, light contrast, texture, and symbolic representation. In painting, a palette is never arbitrary; it functions as a psychological and narrative device. Similarly, set design in film employs these principles to construct environments that extend character psychology and thematic intention.

In cinema, colour and design operate beyond decorative function. They communicate mood, tension, social hierarchy, and emotional transformation. Bold primary hues may evoke clarity, stylisation, or ideological intensity, while muted tones can suggest realism, nostalgia, or historical context. These visual strategies form a language that audiences interpret instinctively, often before consciously analysing narrative structure.

Painterly influence in contemporary cinema

The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014)

Directed by Wes Anderson, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* exemplifies the integration of fine art aesthetics into cinematic design. The film's pastel palette, dominated by soft pinks, powder blues, and rich burgundy, evokes Rococo delicacy and Expressionist stylisation. The symmetrical framing and curated interiors transform each frame into a carefully composed tableau.

The visual cohesion of the film demonstrates how palette selection can construct emotional tone. Rather than relying solely on dialogue to shape atmosphere, Anderson employs colour relationships to create nostalgia, whimsy, and controlled melancholy. Each scene resembles a curated painting, reinforcing the film's thematic interplay between memory and myth.



Barry Lyndon (1975)

Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* remains a benchmark in painterly cinema. Drawing heavily from 18th century European portraiture, Kubrick and cinematographer John Alcott used natural light and candlelight to replicate the tonal qualities and chiaroscuro techniques of classical painters such as Thomas Gainsborough and William Hogarth.



The subdued earth tones and balanced compositions reinforce historical authenticity while aligning the film's visual texture with the artistic tradition of its era. Here, colour palette and lighting are not stylistic flourishes but structural elements that anchor narrative realism. The film's painterly aesthetic situates viewers within a visual language historically consistent with its setting.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017)

In Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, fine art influence emerges through modernist abstraction and expressionist colour dynamics. Stark contrasts between neon highlights and desaturated industrial spaces create a psychological landscape reflective of alienation and artificiality.

The film's visual strategy positions colour as narrative architecture. Warm amber tones frequently signal memory, intimacy, or fragile humanity, while cold blues and greys reinforce detachment. Geometric set constructions echo modernist sculpture and abstract composition, transforming physical space into a metaphorical extension of character consciousness.

Beyond colour: Composition and materiality

The influence of fine arts extends into compositional framing and material selection. In painting, composition directs viewer attention and emotional response. In film, production designers and cinematographers employ spatial arrangement to structure audience perception.

Constrained framing, layered depth, and textured surfaces contribute to emotional storytelling. The selection of materials, velvet, glass, concrete, wood, affects how light interacts with surfaces, shaping tonal contrast and atmospheric





Conclusion

The relationship between cinema and fine art underscores film's dual identity as narrative and visual medium. By adopting principles of colour theory, composition, and material texture, filmmakers construct layered experiences that transcend dialogue. Colour palettes and set designs become interpretive frameworks, shaping emotional engagement and thematic depth.

Films such as *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Barry Lyndon*, and *Blade Runner 2049* demonstrate how painterly influence enriches cinematic language. In these works, visual design does not merely support narrative, it is narrative. Through this ongoing dialogue between canvas and camera, cinema continues to evolve as a dynamic extension of the fine arts tradition.

About the author

Archie Mohlaba is a visual culture writer and film analyst specialising in cinematic design, colour theory, and interdisciplinary aesthetics. With a background in film studies and fine arts, their work explores how visual language shapes narrative and audience perception. They have contributed to discussions on production design, art direction, and visual storytelling across academic and creative platforms.



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density. Just as brushstroke and canvas texture alter a painting's impact, set materiality modifies cinematic presence. This integration of tactile realism and visual theory elevates the environment from backdrop to narrative participant.

The significance of artistic influence

The borrowing of fine art principles enhances cinema in several critical ways:

Psychological immersion: Colour triggers emotional responses prior to intellectual interpretation.

Cultural resonance: Art historical references situate films within broader aesthetic traditions.

Narrative reinforcement: Visual motifs can mirror thematic and character development.

However, this approach demands balance. Over-stylisation may overshadow narrative clarity, while excessive aesthetic emphasis risks prioritising spectacle over substance. Effective integration requires disciplined cohesion between visual design and storytelling intent.

AGAINST ERASURE: DOCUMENTARY, A LIVING ARCHIVE

By Mbali Khumalo

Across continents, traditional art and craft is disappearing quietly. Not always through fire or war, though that happens too, but through slow displacement. Industrial replication replaces hand technique. Museums separate objects from ceremonial use. Global markets reward speed over inheritance.

In this fragile landscape, documentary cinema has become more than record. It has become a vessel. A vessel for continuity, for return, and for memory. Yet not all preservation takes the same form. Some films safeguard through dedication. Others through restitution. Some through scientific methods. And some through the firm belief that communities should represent themselves.



Mbali Khumalo

The discipline of mastery



Takumi: A 60,000 Hour Story on the Survival of Human Craft (2018). Directed by Clay Jeter. Toyota Motor Corporation. Image courtesy of official press kit.

In *Takumi: A 60,000 Hour Story on the Survival of Human Craft*, mastery is measured in decades. Japanese artisans dedicate their lives to repetition. Knife sharpening, carpentry, and textile precision.

Until their technique becomes their philosophy. In return, the camera mirrors this discipline. It is restrained, deliberate, and patient.



Craft in America (2007–present). Created by Carol Sauvion. PBS. Image courtesy of PBS Press Room.

Similarly, *Craft in America* frames handmade practice as a living American inheritance—as the real American Dream. In this series, workshops are filmed as sanctuaries. Clay, wood, fibre, all treated with reverence. As finite resources, deserving a good steward.

These films dignify human labour and protect the craft through elevation. But they also raise an important question: What happens when devotion alone cannot withstand economic pressure? This survival of technique requires more than admiration. It requires structural support.

Craft under global pressure



The Vanishing Strings of the Andes (2023). Directed by Sam Watkins. Independent Production. Image courtesy of official press materials.

The answer to that question emerges in *The Vanishing Strings of the Andes*, as Ecuadorian guitar luthiers confront a harsher reality. Factory imports threaten to render generational knowledge obsolete.

And because preservation here is precarious, the camera cannot afford to just linger on beauty; it must transcend into the uncertainty faced by the craft.



The Last Stitch (2019). Directed by Alfred H.L. Sung. Repulse Bay Tailors Limited. Image courtesy of distributor press kit.

This tension echoes in *The Last Stitch*, which traces the fading art of the cheongsam across Shanghai, Hong Kong, and diasporic Toronto. As the film progresses, the garment becomes an archive of femininity, migration, and political transition. Every stitch absorbs the pressure of global capitalism.

In both films, globalisation is not abstract. It is intimate. We see it alter livelihoods, textures, and tempo. As cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai argues in *Modernity at Large* (1996), global flows reshape local cultural production unevenly. Documentary, in these cases, becomes a way of slowing those flows long enough to see what is being lost in the sea of memory.

Art as sovereignty



Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole (2003). Directed by Gil Cardinal. National Film Board of Canada. Image courtesy of NFB.

While some documentaries prioritise the preservation of technique, others fight for the return of the artefact. *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole* documents the Haisla Nation's

efforts to reclaim a totem pole taken during colonial extraction. The pole is not merely carved wood; it is lineage embodied. Here, the camera becomes witness to repatriation.



Restitution? Africa's Fight for its Art (2022). Directed by Nora Philippe. PBS SoCal. Image courtesy of PBS.



African Artistry: Crafting from the Heart of the Wild (2024). Directed by Tom Harrad. Independent Production. Image courtesy of Clearstory 2019.

Similarly, *Restitution? Africa's Fight for its Art* enters the charged debates around African artefacts held in European institutions. This film hones in on the political nature of preservation. It exposes conservation without return as incomplete, reflecting a restitution debate by art historian Bénédicte Savoy, in her work on restitution debates (2018). Savoy reminds us that objects displaced from their contexts lose relational meaning. These documentaries extend that argument visually and affect the audience emotionally. They ask: Who has the right to preserve? And for whom?

African continuity, not exotic display

Where many early ethnographic films treated African craft as spectacle, recent works shift the gaze. *African Artistry: Crafting from the Heart of the Wild* situates artisans in Ethiopia, Senegal, and Kenya within their personal living ecosystems that allow them to produce meaning. These craftsmen change our perspective. We unsee weaving as a tourist commodity and open our eyes to an inherited



The Art of Preserving Art (2009). Prime Video Documentary Series. Image courtesy of Prime Video.

cosmology. We begin to see beadwork as coded language, which automates different responses in each region. The rhythm of the edit reflects daily life. The camera does not intrude; it accompanies the craftsmen as they let us into their world.

In *Hands of History*, Indigenous women artists articulate how art anchors identity amid historical disappearance. As preservation fails to emerge from institutions, we see a matrilineal continuity rescue itself from the tentacles of forgetfulness. This approach aligns with what scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes as a "decolonised mind." A mind that reclaims its narrative authority through language, image, and cultural practice. In these documentaries, authorship is restored in a world that has long questioned indigenous legitimacy.

The limitations of repair

Preservation is not only culture condensed into practice, but it is a history that is formed through

collective habits. As a result, not all preservation is community-led. Some of it is laboratory-based.

The Art of Preserving Art reveals conservators using microscopes and climate control to extend the life of fragile works. Pigment is stabilised. Canvas is reinforced. Time is slowed chemically. This work is vital. But it also raises tension. This is because preserving an object does not necessarily preserve its context. Restoration without relational return can feel incomplete, echoing the need for sovereignty and continuity in a world where the art of preserving art is prioritised over the art itself.

Documentation as counter to forgetting

Across all these films, one truth emerges: preservation is not neutral. It is shaped by power, access, and ideology. Some documentaries focus on mastery. Some prioritise community.



Thread Carefully (TBC) Directed by Mbali Khumalo. NFVF x NEWF Environment and Belonging. Image courtesy of Soudanger Concepts and Nextway Productions.

Some emphasise restitution. Some concentrate on science.

Yet the most transformative works, particularly those emerging from indigenous and African contexts, understand preservation as relational. Art survives because it is practiced, not because it is stored.

Documentary, at its most ethical, does not freeze culture in nostalgia. It documents living adaptation.

It reminds us that craft is not fragile because it is old. It is fragile because systems have made it so. And film, when wielded with care, becomes an act of resistance against that erasure.

A contemporary inheritance: Thread Carefully

Cue in *Thread Carefully*, a film born from remembering anew. It demonstrates the destabilisation of South African textile traditions by revealing how the youth of today preserve the remnants of fast fashion, rather than the textures of inherited craft.

By slowing down the world of fast fashion, this film follows young South African entrepreneurs as they steward the surplus of garments dumped on “third world” shores. What initially appears heroic gradually reveals itself as something more complex: the inheritance of speed itself.

Unlike the films foregrounded earlier, which defend indigenous heritage against disappearance,

Thread Carefully confronts a different liberation struggle. Not only the liberation of people from imposed systems, but the liberation of the planet from extractive systems that have normalised excess.

Every craft, method, and system created by indigenous people is the wisdom of millennia, a wisdom that could only be found and practiced by the people of that land, a wisdom rooted in stewardship. As these documentaries urge us to remember, this article intends to do the same. Indigenous knowledge should vacate the periphery and make its way into our homes, finding practice in our hands to prevent erasure and cultural extinction.

A moving archive

If art is memory embodied, documentary becomes its moving archive. Not perfect. Not sufficient alone. But extremely powerful if observed carefully.

Through patient observation, political confrontation, and community-centred storytelling, these films create space for cultural forms to breathe a little longer, and perhaps to regenerate and be remembered. In a time of accelerated forgetting, that is no small intervention. It is a collective pursuit that requires every person alive to remember. Remember those who have passed. Remember what they did and how they did it, but most importantly, remember that you can do it again and do it better.

About the author

Mbali Khumalo is a South African documentary filmmaker and cultural researcher based in KwaZulu-Natal. Her work explores the intersection of memory, craft, and environmental responsibility, with a particular focus on how African communities preserve cultural knowledge in contemporary contexts. She is interested in documentary as a tool for cultural continuity, restitution, and a facilitator of stewardship. Her recent projects examine textile waste and the politics of preservation. Khumalo’s practice centres ethical storytelling and community-led narratives that resist erasure and foreground relational knowledge systems.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Where every click carves memory into art-timeless, raw, and real.

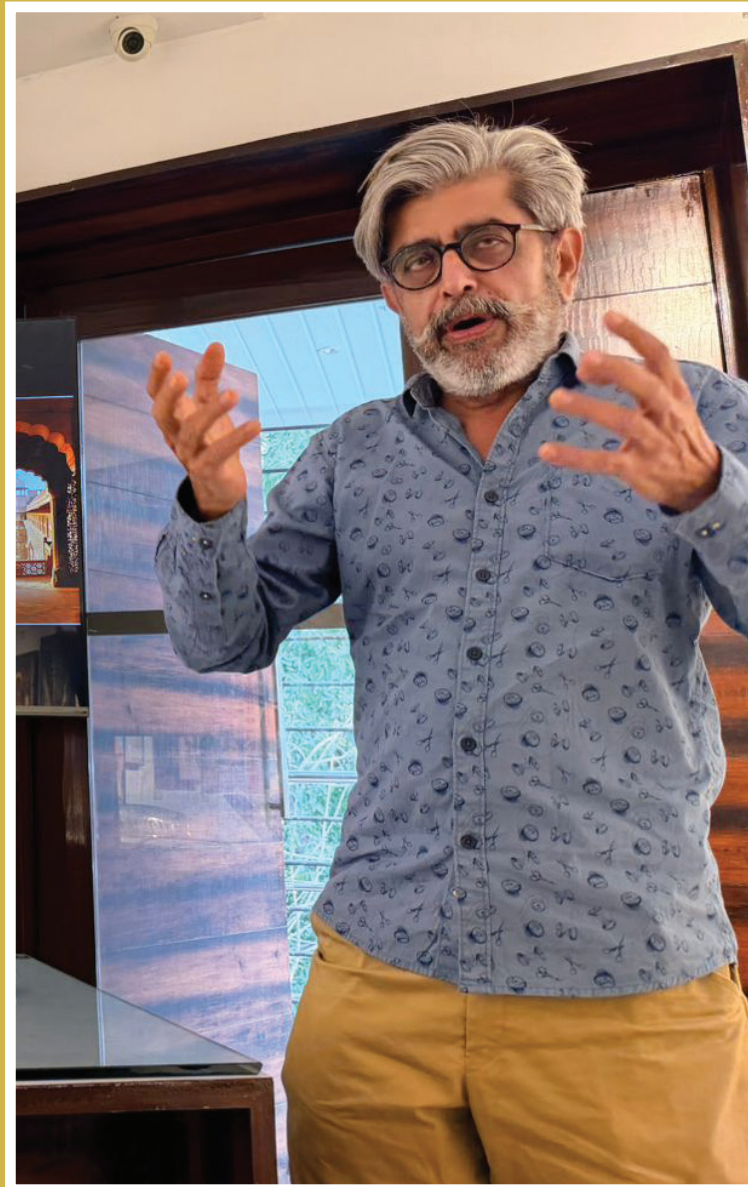


A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPEDITION TO KERALA WITH AMIT PASRICHA, THE PANORAMIST

A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPEDITION TO KERALA WITH AMIT PASRICHA, THE PANORAMIST

A photographic trip to Kerala is always exciting. When my dear friend Balan Madhavan, the photo director of the expedition to create photographic images for a travelling group show for an initiative by Kerala Tourism invited me onboard, I jumped to it. Yet, to receive a brief from him to produce images in just five days, that I would personally like, and were strong enough to be exhibited in 10 cities across the country, was quite a challenge. Since I wander and wonder, I took this on to satisfy these urges.

Now, while I find pleasing others with your art to be relatively easy, satisfying yourself is a much more formidable ask. I have often wondered when fellow photographers excitedly talk around their own work: is this really how they feel or are they excellent marketers? I sometimes suspect it is the latter. I, for one, tend to get tired of my work quite quickly and my single-minded pursuit is to try and reinvent myself continually.



Amit Pasricha



I had chosen to photograph around Allepey, Kottayam and Kochi and my first task, when I arrived, was to try and stop myself from drawing comparisons between the town in front of my eyes and that in my memory from earlier visits, decades ago. Our habitat, especially our urban landscape, has transformed

dramatically over time and not always for the better and a travel photographer is best served looking with a fresh pair of eyes. That is easier said than done since nostalgia is busy trying to paint a rosy picture in your head.

On every visit, I feel like an explorer. In Kerala, I had to

unravel its mystery and plunder some visual gold in five days. While the world is as it exists around us, it is the right questions to the right people that get us to where we want to be. I don't necessarily know where I want to be, but this dialogue is what gives me clues.





One of the first things to hit you, coming from Delhi, is that people are so warm and nice, away from urban centers. This trip was a case in point and every encounter with a Malayali left me happy, satisfied and generally satiated. They indulged me, and were happy to answer my barrage of questions. Some even welcomed me to their homes.

I was content in other ways too, and I got up to fishy things on this visit, consuming every seafood I could find, clams, squids, mackerel, sardines, anchovies, pomfret and more. I was living a good living, staying at an interesting resort, heading out before the crack of dawn and imbibing life as it happened around me through my lens and feasting on wholesome seafood. This was another reason that made me feel that the trip could have been longer.

I was lucky to have both a wonderful guide as also a sensible driver on the trip. Well-educated and courteous, they were curious too, willing to explore things I sought even if they had no idea about them. It is very refreshing to have people like that with you when you travel and far removed from the staple which tends to start and end with 'why you cannot have what you seek'!





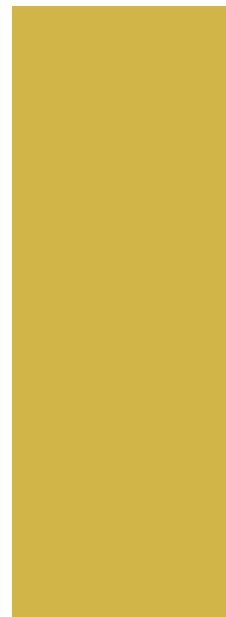
A photographer's journey is always marked by surprises, as were in store for us when we passed by the Vaikom Temple to discover a three-day long festival there and yet another temple to find young classical dancers, performing, not on stage for a

seated audience, but actually to the gods! It is then that you begin to get a sense of the vibrancy of the place, a living breathing culture. Having spent the first couple of days exploring the backwaters and the tiniest of canals, this surge of human energy



was a refreshing change and I was beginning to feel like I was onto something powerful.

The backwaters though, were different from how I remembered them; the houses were now smarter, less quaint, the canals brick-lined and sadly more polluted. Electric poles strung with wires celebrated widespread electrification but called for a new visual interpretation, one where the picturesque included them.



I was here to celebrate and picture Kerala's glory and to interpret it with my panoramic tools, in all of its synergistic as well as its discordant juxtapositions. I ended the trip in Fort Kochi and caught the beginning of the Biennale and there it

was, in five days I had travelled from the idyllic and the ancient to the modern, all banana wrapped in Kerala's fish-scented charm. All that remained was to head home and stitch up my images and live the experience that the haste did not allow for.



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.

INTERVIEW

'Culturally, the Patan double ikat Patola carries a weight that few textiles in the world can match': Sunil Salvi, owner of Komal Handicraft, on the revered handwoven, luxurious Patan Patola silk saree.

‘CULTURALLY, THE PATAN DOUBLE IKAT PATOLA CARRIES A WEIGHT THAT FEW TEXTILES IN THE WORLD CAN MATCH’: SUNIL SALVI, OWNER OF KOMAL HANDICRAFT, ON THE REVERED HANDWOVEN, LUXURIOUS PATAN PATOLA SILK SAREE.

Komal Handicraft in Patan, Gujarat, continues the centuries-old tradition of the Patan Patola—not merely as a business, but as a responsibility. Home to the legendary Sheetal Patola by the Sunil Salvi brand, the workshop, located near the Railway Station, Patan Marketyard, welcomes visitors who wish to witness the art of double ikat weaving firsthand.

In a conversation with the Atelier Magazine, Sunil Salvi, owner and craftsman, speaks with quiet pride and deep conviction about the art that his ancestors carried across nine centuries.



Sunil Salvi

Excerpts from the interview:

Q1. Of the many traditional, highly valued textiles in India, Patola sarees stand out as unique. Where does the inspiration for the designs come from? What are the different standard designs that distinguish a Patola?

You know, when people ask me this question, I always say, our designs are not something we “came up with.” They came with us. When our ancestors were brought from Jalna in Maharashtra to Patan by King Kumarpal in the 12th century, the designs traveled with them, generation to generation, woven into memory as much as into silk.

The inspiration comes from life itself, from the natural world, from our faith, from the communities who wore these sarees. The most iconic motifs include the Nari Kunjar which has dancing figures and elephants woven together, the Phul Veli which is a flowering vine pattern, the Chowkda design with its geometric grid, and the Ratan Chowk. Parrots, elephants, human figures, flowers; these are not just decorations. Each motif has a meaning. The elephant represents strength and auspiciousness. The parrot, love and fertility.

For our Bohra Muslim patrons, traditionally the design is purely geometric without figurative elements, out of religious observance. So even the same craft tells different stories depending on who wears it. That, to me, is the beauty of Patola. It listens.

Q2. A Patola saree takes months to complete. How many skilled weavers do you employ? How are the artisans trained?

A single double ikat Patola saree takes anywhere from four to six months to complete, sometimes even longer for more complex designs. And that is with a team of at least two to four weavers working together on the same loom simultaneously, because the loom itself requires two people to operate at all times. You cannot do this alone. One person handles the warp threads; another passes the weft, and both must move with the precision of a clockmaker.

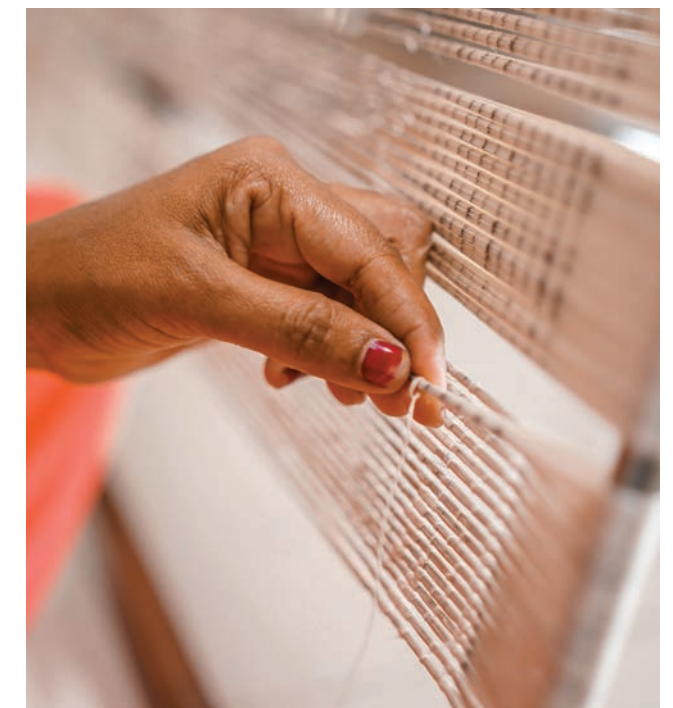
Before a single thread is touched on the loom, the design is mapped out entirely on graph paper, every intersection of warp and weft plotted and calculated. Then comes the tying and dyeing, the most labour-intensive part. The silk threads are tied in specific bundles, dyed, re-tied, and dyed again for each colour. Only then is weaving possible.

At Komal Handicraft, we keep a small, dedicated team. We work with weavers who have grown up with this craft; it is not something you can train in months. The real training happens over years, through daily immersion. Our artisans learn by doing, by watching, by making mistakes on simpler pieces before they are trusted with a full saree. It is almost like an apprenticeship that never truly ends.

Q3. What are single ikat Patolas? Are they as valuable culturally as the double ikat ones?

This is a question I get often, and I want to answer it honestly without dismissing anybody's work.

In a single ikat, only one set of threads—either the warp or the weft—is tie-dyed and patterned before weaving. The other set is plain. This makes the process significantly simpler and faster. Single ikat Patolas are largely produced in Rajkot and



Surendranagar, and they are beautiful in their own right. They carry their own local tradition and craftsmanship.

But double ikat—what we do in Patan—is something else entirely. Both the warp and the weft are individually tied and dyed, and then they must align perfectly on the loom to create the pattern. If even a single thread slips out of position, the whole design is disturbed. There is no room for error. And when it is done right, the finished fabric looks identical on both sides, no front, no back. That is not a feature. That is a miracle of human skill.

Culturally, the Patan double ikat Patola carries a weight that few textiles in the world can match. It has been worn by royalty, gifted as stridhan—a woman's sacred inheritance—and traded across Southeast Asia for centuries. So, while single ikat has its own dignity, the double ikat Patan Patola is in a different category altogether. It is not just cloth. It is proof of what human hands can do.

Q4. This is a GI tagged product. How does it help in say, marketing and distribution?

The GI tag for Patan Patola came to us officially in 2013, and I will tell you; it was not easy. There was a long dispute with weavers from Rajkot who also wanted the tag under the same name. We had to fight for it, and rightly so. Because what we make in Patan, the true double ikat, is not made anywhere else in India. The GI tag formally recognises that.

In terms of marketing, the tag gives us legitimacy that no advertisement can buy. When I tell a customer that this is a GI-certified Patan Patola, they know they are looking at something that is geographically and technically authenticated. It builds confidence, especially for buyers who are making a significant investment, which a genuine Patola always is.

For distribution, it helps us distinguish our work in an increasingly noisy market. We participate in exhibitions and craft fairs under the GI umbrella, and it opens doors with premium retailers and cultural institutions who take craft documentation seriously.

But I will be honest with you; the GI tag is a certificate, not a shield. Imitations still exist. What the tag cannot do is reach every buyer on every online platform and explain to them what they are really buying. That education still has to come from us.

Q5. As you said, the GI tag is not a shield. Machine-made and cheaper Patola imitations abound the market, especially online. Is there anything that a novice in Patola saree purchase should know to identify an original Patola?

Ah, this pains me deeply. I have seen sarees sold online for a few hundred rupees being labeled as “Patola” and it breaks my heart; not just for us, but for the buyer who thinks they are owning a piece of heritage when they are buying a printed copy.

Here is what I tell everyone who asks: the first and most reliable test is to look at both sides of the fabric. A genuine double ikat Patan Patola has no front and no back. Turn it over, and the design, the colour, the intensity—everything is identical. A machine-made or single ikat imitation will always have a slightly blurred or muted reverse side.



Second, look at the edges of the pattern. In a true Patola, because the threads are dyed before weaving, the edges of the design have a slightly feathered, soft quality—not the sharp, hard-edged print you see in digital or screen-printed imitations.

Third, weight and touch. Authentic Patola is woven in pure silk with natural dyes. It has a particular weight and lustre that synthetic alternatives cannot replicate. The colours are deep but never harsh.

And finally, the price itself is an indicator. A genuine Patan Patola starts at one lakh rupees and can go much higher depending on the complexity of the design. If something is priced at five thousand rupees and labelled Patan Patola—please walk away. Nothing is available at that price point that is genuine.

When in doubt, come to the source. Come to Patan.

Q6. Considering that this is an expensive product, do you have specific target markets? Are foreign tourists a market that you target?

Our traditional buyers have always been families who understand what a Patola is—connoisseur families from Gujarat and Maharashtra, Jain and Bohra communities—for whom a Patola

saree is not just a purchase but a rite of passage. These are people who have grown up seeing this fabric at weddings, at pooja ceremonies, passed from mother to daughter. They don't need to be convinced of the value.

But yes, over the years, we have seen a beautiful growth in our collector audience from across India and abroad. Serious textile collectors, museum curators, fashion designers looking to study or collaborate find their way to Patan, and we welcome them warmly.

Foreign tourists, particularly those with a genuine interest in craft and heritage, have become a very meaningful part of our world. We get visitors from Europe, Japan, Australia, the United States, people who have travelled specifically to see a Patola being woven. They are often the most attentive, most respectful visitors we have. And many of them become buyers, not just of sarees, but of smaller pieces—fabric panels, stoles, cushion covers—which we have developed to make this tradition accessible at different price points without compromising on authenticity.

Indonesia has historically been one of our biggest overseas markets. Patola textiles held deep ceremonial significance there for centuries, and that connection still exists today.



Q7. What technological, design, and textile adaptations have been made over the centuries?

This is a question I love, because it forces us to be honest about the balance between tradition and survival.

The fundamental technique has not changed. The double ikat process—the tying, the dyeing, the weaving on a two-person loom—is done today essentially the same way it was eight hundred years ago. We will never change that. That is the soul of the Patola.

But adaptation has happened, carefully and necessarily. In terms of dyes, for example, our ancestors used entirely natural dyes: indigo, turmeric, pomegranate rind, madder root. We continue to use natural dyes, and actually there has been a deliberate return to them in recent decades as the world has grown more conscious about sustainability. The deep reds and blues and greens you see in our sarees come from these natural sources, and they are why Patola colours do not fade even after a hundred years.

In design, we have gradually developed smaller pieces—dupattas, stoles, fabric meters—to meet the demand of a changing wardrobe. Lehengas using Patola silk, contemporary drape formats, even home textiles. These are not compromises. They are invitations for a new generation to carry the tradition with them.

The raw silk itself; we source the finest quality, primarily from Bangalore wholesale markets, sometimes from abroad. That has changed with globalisation. But the craft that transforms it remains rooted in Patan.

Q8. How do you pass on the knowledge of making this unique handicraft and ensure that the legacy continues?

I will share something personal here. My biggest worry is not machines or imitations. It is succession.

This is a craft that cannot be learned from a book or a YouTube video. It lives in the hands, in the years of practice, in the quiet discipline of sitting

at the loom every single day. In our family, the knowledge has always passed from parent to child, from elder to younger, not just the technical steps, but the values. The patience. The reverence for the material.

Traditionally, we have taught our daughters and daughters-in-law as much as our sons, because a Patola family functions as a unit. There is a photograph in our workshop, an old black-and-white one, of the women of the family weaving alongside the men. That is not unusual for us. That is our normal.

For the future, we are actively working to involve the next generation—not by forcing them—but by showing them what this craft means. We create demonstrations, we welcome visitors into our workspace, and we tell the stories. When a young person sees a tourist from Germany or Japan come specifically to witness this weaving, something shifts in how they see their own inheritance.

We also work with institutions and craft organisations to document the process, because even if the physical craft faces challenges, the knowledge must never be lost.

Q9. Most families into this weaving tradition are Salvi artisans. Do you consider opening it up to others interested in this art by providing them with training etc.?

This is a genuinely difficult question, and I want to give you an honest answer rather than a comfortable one.

For centuries, the Patola has been a guarded family tradition. The techniques, the designs, the dye combinations—these were not written down. They were whispered between generations, demonstrated, practiced in privacy. There was a reason for this. In a world where imitation was easy, the secrecy was a form of protection for the craft and for the livelihood of the families who depended on it.

Today, that calculus is shifting. The number of families actively weaving is very small. The GI tag protects the name and the geography, but it cannot



Founder Sunil Salvi with family

create new weavers. And if the craft is to survive, it needs more hands; skilled, committed, respectful hands.

We are open to training people who show a serious commitment to this tradition. Not casual enthusiasts, but those who are willing to invest the years and the effort. Some weavers from other communities have already entered this space, and when they approach it with genuine devotion, the craft is richer for it.

What I will never compromise on is the technique itself. The double ikat, the natural dyes, the handloom—these are not optional features. Anyone we train must understand that they are not learning a skill. They are becoming custodians of a living heritage.

Q10. The Indian market is large enough for expensive sarees and other garments, especially during weddings and festivals. Do you consider expanding into other articles of clothing like lehengas, salwar kameez, shawls and menswear, using the Patola tradition of weaving?

We are already moving in this direction, and it feels like a natural evolution rather than a departure.

The saree will always be our core; it is the form in which the Patola was born and through which it carries its deepest meaning. But we live in a time when the saree is not the only celebration garment. Young women want lehengas for their weddings, their sisters want sharara sets, the groom's family wants something in Patola silk for the sherwani. This is not a diminishment of the tradition. It is a widening of its embrace.

We have started offering Patola fabric by the metre, which gives designers and customers the freedom to work with tailors for custom garments. Dupattas and stoles in Patola have been very well received: they give someone who may not be ready for a full Patola saree a way to own and wear a piece of this heritage at a more accessible price point.

Menswear is an area with genuine potential. We have always woven fabric for angavastrams and scarves for men. With the growing interest in heritage textiles among men who care about craft—and there are more of them now than ever before—we see an opportunity to develop this further.

The principle remains the same regardless of the form: if it carries the name Patola, it must be woven with the same integrity, the same natural dyes, the same double ikat technique that has defined this craft for nine centuries. That will never change.

POETRY AND 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.

I KNOW MY FEARS LIKE THE MARKS ON MY SKIN AND I WEAR THEM LIKE RINGS

Ana Paula Giudice Anastacio

THE PRIVILEGE OF TELLING LOVE STORIES

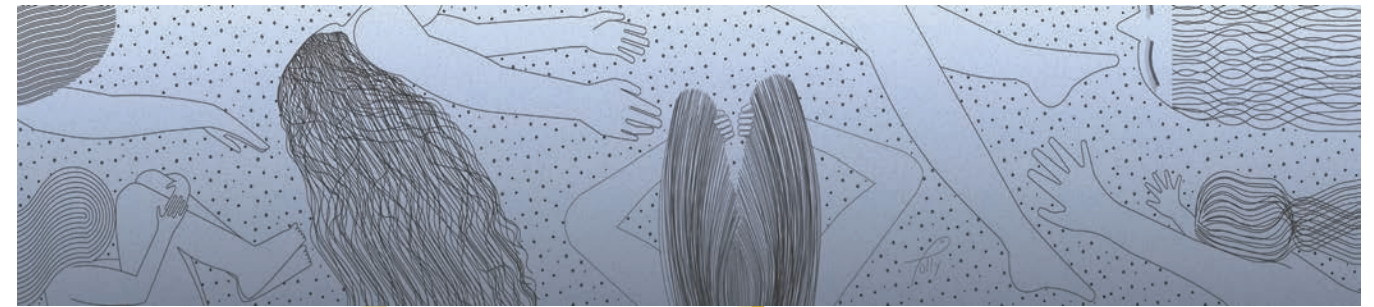
By Sahana Ahmed

I KNOW MY FEARS LIKE THE MARKS ON MY SKIN AND I WEAR THEM LIKE RINGS

Ana Paula Giudice Anastacio



Ana Paula Giudice Anastacio



I first met fear in my mother's eyes when money was tight,
and then saw it in my grandma's forehead when she realized
she pretty much depended on others.
Later, I recognized it in my brother.
His tears dropping like the rain on that saturday afternoon
when my father left after a fight, too angry, too soon.
Not long ago I saw it again,
this time in my father's hands
and on his crude denial, as I despaired beyond denying
over the impossible truth that my dear mother was dying.

I, too, feel these fears. The fear of loving, but not being able to provide.
The fear of loving and losing my love or, even worse, losing my mind.
The fear of loving and realizing I have no control.
I am afraid of loving, I am afraid of letting go.
With each moment of loving boldly, I fear I'll find myself forgetting
that though love can be eternal, our bodies won't be everlasting.
I am afraid to open my heart and find myself clumping its pieces.
I am afraid to lock my heart and then get lost in its dry creases.
I am afraid to love so greatly that it borders on insanity.
I hold each of these fears like keepsakes in my vanity.

I am afraid that the world will not notice,
that it won't stop to smell its roses.
Maria, Sophia, Virginia, Rosalía, Djamila,

Nina, Paulina, Erundina, Elis Regina, Jovelina.

I am afraid we'll do wrong by our girls
and keep on forgetting our pearls.

Sholeh, Renee, Alline, Auriel, Kara, Aleena,
Jéssica, Georgia, Zahra, Taynara, Catarina.

Each woman, a scented dream written in precious stone.
I fear that so many of us will keep dying afraid and alone.

I am afraid of my two lungs, which unfortunately are asthmatic.
I don't care for any disease, but fear most of all the psychosomatic.
I am afraid of microplastics. I am afraid of all the fanatics.
I am afraid of those who are stoic or overly diplomatic.
I am very, very afraid of those who claim, full voice, to be fearless
and fear them even more when they end up being our leaders.
I fear those who say they have nothing to lose.
I fear that someday we'll lose track of the truth.
I fear that we, the lovers, will always be taken for fools.
I cherish all these fears as my jewels.



I am afraid that our fear of others will lead us to even more violence
and our fear of the unknown will keep us away from science.
I am afraid that our fear of suffering will stray us away from love
and that our fear of loving will lead us to being alone.
I am afraid of the monsters of the world.
I am afraid of the monsters in my soul.
I try to keep them apart. I fear that I think I'm clever,
because I am really terrified of them ever banding together.
I keep these fears close by for I have come to treasure them.
I keep these fears close by for I fear I might forget them.

I fear time. I am afraid of acknowledging it beyond discussion.
I am afraid of wasting time and I fear its timeless repercussion.
I am afraid of you, dear reader, of your naked eyes laying upon this page.
I am afraid of how you'll read my words. Or me. I fear what you will say.
Can you see me? Can you see everything I try to hide?
I am afraid that you can see me, really, on the inside.
But I want my heart to escape my chest and spread its wings.
I want to reach you, shorten the space that lives between you and me.
I am afraid you'll see me, but I am also afraid that you never will.
I am afraid of all these feelings, but I am much more afraid not to feel.

I am afraid that fear will be shelved like a book of old spells,
that it will rot like a corpse that was thrown into a well.
I am afraid that fear will be ignored as our ancestors' whisper
that it'll be forgotten as an old confiscated liquor.
Like a dusty antique or a rough gem,
our fears mean more than we credit them.
But I am afraid that fear will be buried in a gloomy sequestered terrain
under all this honorable courage we were taught to proudly proclaim.
We are used to looking away from what we fear.
We don't want to face it, we don't want to hear.

Fear has a very bad reputation, just like a lover,
but it's not about themselves, it is about what they uncover.
They remind us of everything we want to have, but don't,
of what we left behind, of what we did and what we won't.
That shortness of breath, the lump in our throat,
the lock on our jaw, the rock in our boat.
The fear. Not pleasant, but, if it appears, when it appears,
it is for a reason. We have to look at it. Look deep, eyes clear.
That's why I know my fears like the marks on my skin and wear them like rings
so I can always remember them and they can always remind me.

ABOUT THE POET

Ana Paula Giudice Anastacio, or simply “Polly,” was born in São Paulo, Brazil, but after many other harbours, she finally dropped anchor in Seixal, Portugal, a place she carefully chose and which, in a way, also chose her. Throughout her life, she has been enchanted by words, using them as a refuge and keeping them at the forefront of her work, sometimes as a teacher, sometimes as a lawyer, but it was in poetry that they found their happiest home.

She has worked in many fields, but art is what sustains her, and she expresses it in various ways: written and visual poetry, paper collages, hand drawings, illustrations, and mixed-media works, as well as performance art. In 2024, she independently published her first book, “Mergulho - poesias de uma alma submersa” (Dive - poetry from a submerged soul), which she also illustrated. In the first half of 2026, she will release her second book, “The Dance,” her first in English.

Her other versions, subversions, and diversions can be found on Instagram at @polly.wants.it.all



THE PRIVILEGE OF TELLING LOVE STORIES

By Sahana Ahmed

Novelist, poet, founder and CEO of Bare Bones Publishing



Sahana Ahmed

“Your style of writing is too classy for the content you wrote. It was too smart for a romcom.” This is what a friend—formerly the director of a big-ticket literature festival—wrote to me after reading *Combat Skirts*, my debut novel.

years of evolution. Love is complex, love is personal, love is different for everyone. Readers expect the moon. You need to come up with something fresh, something stellar, every single time. There are no shortcuts.

also make their readers care. And make them care till the last word on the last page. The material needs to come from a deep emotional place even when the story is light-hearted. It is exhausting.



I get her point. For that is the general impression. What's there to a love story, after all? Boy meets girl, spark/drama/conflict/tension. Love suffers, love triumphs. The end. Easy.

And yet, romance is one of the hardest genres to pull off. Because love is such an accessible emotion; who doesn't know love? It is the epitome of feel-good, the ultimate positive experience. Negative emotions are easier, they are straightforward; they are programmed into our subconscious by thousands of

And let us not forget the business part of it. As per Romance Writers of America, the romance fiction industry is worth more than one billion dollars a year. It is much bigger than inspirational books, and about the size of the mystery plus sci-fi/fantasy genres combined. An overwhelming number of people are consuming love stories. There is no reason they should be taken lightly.

That brings us to the writing. Romance writers must not only create authentic inner and outer worlds for their characters but

So, the first prerequisite of a romance writer is emotional stamina. Love stories are all about the heart. Every moment needs to be unfolded delicately for it to mean something. Ideally, it should marinate inside your head for a decent amount of time before it reaches your pen. And when it does, it needs to be written and rewritten for precision and clarity. The prose needs to be fluid. If it is not, you will just stumble from one plot point to another dragging the reader along. Not a happy relationship.



Be caring. Towards your characters, most of all. Make them real people with real motivations. Respect them, even the ones who appear for just one scene. It will make your job easier, I promise. One more thing. One day, suddenly, you will discover that your characters have grown minds of their own. That is good. That is very good. Don't fight that. It means you have done well. Now, let your people dictate things for a while; do not force your will on them.

Not that you give up control. It is your story, after all, and only you know points A to Z. But have empathy. Have an unselfish, altruistic view of the world. Let yourself be inspired. Inspiration can come from many

sources. For me, it is the movies. A meet cute, some clever lines, a big misunderstanding. Grand gestures, grander declarations, the work. But as a writer, I have no Ryan Gosling, no Emma Stone to help me. No soundtrack by A.R. Rahman either. I must rely solely on my words to create desire and longing and heartbreak. It is just me between the blank page and a soaring sense of happily-ever-after. Or the crushing defeat of unrequited love. How does one navigate that?

By writing it unlike a romance. Do not put limits on your imagination and see what can happen. Use techniques that belong to mysteries and thrillers, even horror. Shake it up a bit, bend some rules. Write your story

like it's your first and your last. And stop worrying what your mother will say when she reads it. Have fun, keep it interesting. If something does not excite you, chuck it out. Do not fill your pages with tired inanities. It takes time, it takes practice, but make every sentence do something for you. Your readers will sense it and join the party.

In the words of author Liana Brooks, "Done well, romance is the most complex literary form. Done poorly, it's just bad writing." I believe that. All my publishing breakthroughs, in various forms and genres, can be traced back to a love story. And my friend sees that too. This is how she sums up my writing journey: "You built your own privilege."



INNER MUSE

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

THE HEALING POWER OF SPIRITUAL ART: A JOURNEY BEYOND THE VISIBLE

By Agnes Gomori

HUMAN RESONANCE PROJECT: ON THE INNER FIELD OF BEING

By Katarina Dodić

'I AM A TRAVELLER OF ETHEREAL PLACES AND INFINITE SPACES'

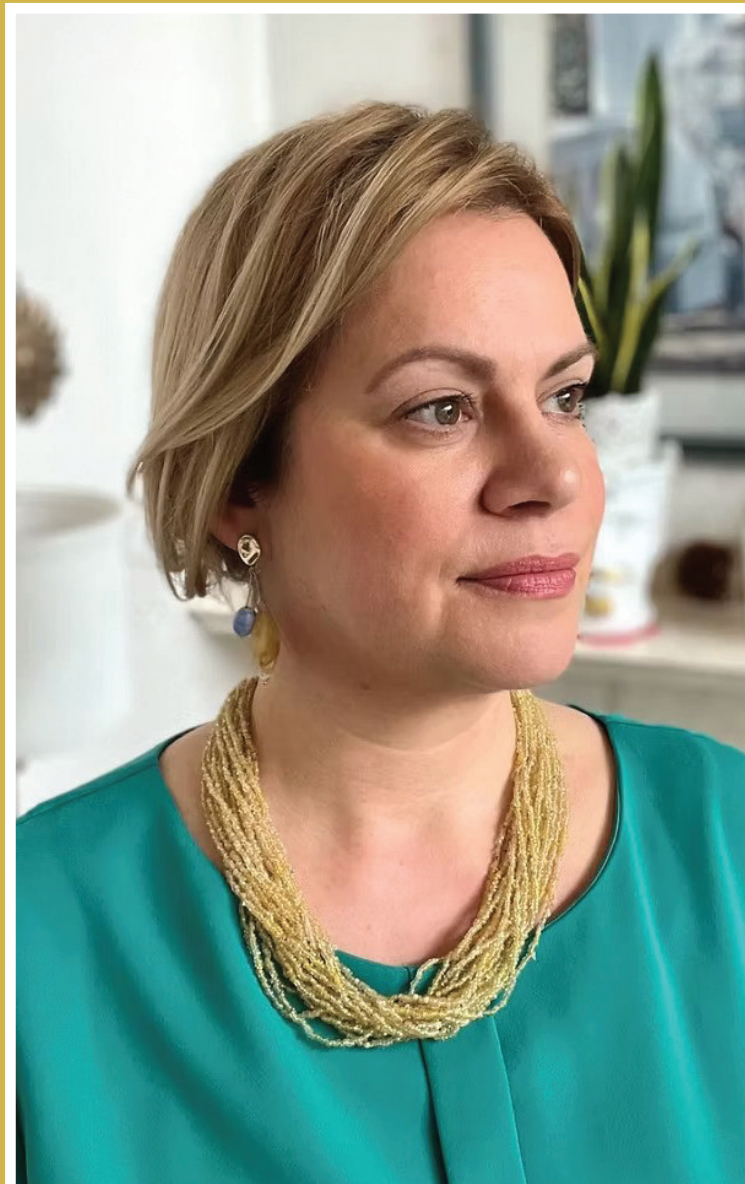
By Yazmine Acevedo

THE HEALING POWER OF SPIRITUAL ART: A JOURNEY BEYOND THE VISIBLE

By Agnes Gomori

Art and spirituality were always at the centre of my world, yet my creative practice began later in my life as an inner calling. The journey was completely intuitive; I craved to return to the centre of my being, away from the noise and overstimulation of the world. I had an innate desire to translate emotions, memories, and spiritual presence into visual art pieces. But like many artists, I too was busy having a traditional career, focussing on material rewards, rather than on doing soul-purpose work. I was only doing art in my free time while I was successfully building other people's businesses. It felt that slowly but surely, I was drifting away from my soul's desire.

The real change took place after I suffered a serious burnout. It was a brutal wake-up call, which made me realise that it was time to live according to my life purpose. I am living proof that creative self-expression can be healing. Together with the intense inner work and self-care, it has completely transformed me, and I knew I had to share this knowledge and help others feel the same. As part of my healing, I returned to the habit of doing something creative every day. I also revived my studies of energy healing, which I did back in my twenties, and learnt new modalities. I was always intuitive, but it was



Agnes Gomori



the first time that I let my intuition guide me completely. I no longer put my logical, fear-based mind in the driving seat.

Soon after, I successfully completed a life coach training, which prompted me to create my unique offerings and build my business. For instance, as part of my intuitive art sessions, I offer soul guide coaching which may involve Akashic reading, chakra alignment, intuitive guidance, or past-life work. I then create a bespoke art piece based on the session, which is deeply personal and meaningful to the client. The artwork becomes a visual map of the client's transformation. My art is more than decoration because I am using the language of energy, intuition, and inner truth. It is always important for me to create a bridge between the seen and the unseen, the individual and the divine.





I draw inspiration from my intuition, dreams, meditative visions, and ancestral guidance. I did not decide to be the “translator of the invisible”; rather, it was a path chosen for me by the Universe. We often hear that healing has to involve a rapid, dramatic transformation. But I feel sometimes it is simply about creating a space to breathe, and allow enough time to feel, to reconnect. Art can do that for

us. The artworks I create are infused with intention and healing energy. This is not metaphorical for me—it is energetic work. I invite heavenly guidance from the Creator, ancestors, spirit guides, and angels, and allow the artwork to hold the divine frequency. My creative process begins with silence and prayer, sometimes for healing, sometimes for clarity, sometimes for whatever the world needs

that day. I allow the visual story to emerge intuitively rather than forcing an idea. When the piece is complete, the prayer continues to live within it. Viewers can feel the intention behind the work, and the artwork becomes a guide, a source of light.

One of the profound aspects of spiritual art is its ability to reflect on the viewer’s inner world. I have people messaging me saying that my work brought up strong emotions for them, sometimes even tears. This response is the result of the dialogue between the viewer and the energy embedded in the art. Such an example is the artwork titled “We want peace”, or another example is the piece titled “Miscarriage”. The latter was also displayed as part of a joint exhibition at the Royal Free Hospital in London. It was an incredibly humbling experience. I am grateful for the recognition I have received for my art, especially for the pieces that are more personal. When my artwork titled “Remembering Daisy, hiding our grief” was selected as the cover art of a magazine, I got very teary. Because I knew that the message of the artwork had not only been delivered, but profoundly understood.

It is in these moments that I am reminded that art has the ability to express so much more than words. I was brought up in an era when being strong and emotionally resilient was the accepted way to live our lives. Being vulnerable would have been considered a weakness. I am happy to live at an age when I can witness a positive



transformation in this regard. Being vulnerable and talking about our feelings openly is finally being normalised in more and more parts of the world. Despite that, sometimes I still hesitate, wondering if the art that I share with the public might be too personal. Feeling too exposed fills me with dread. But I learnt that people respond so much better to authenticity as opposed to overly curated posts!

I look at spiritual art as a form of soul medicine. It has the ability to nurture the parts of us we often neglect: the intuitive, emotional, and mystical aspects of life. I hope that viewers find my art to be a healing presence; a quiet companion, a mirror, a teacher, or sometimes simply a moment of peace. As an artist, I feel that I have always lived between worlds: the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and the practical, the emotional and the humorous. My art is a bridge between them, an invitation to slow down, to feel more deeply, and to reconnect with our truest selves.



About the artist



Agnes Gomori is a British-Hungarian multidisciplinary artist based in London. In her work, Agnes' aim is to capture the ethereal world that is invisible to most, and translate it into visual stories for others to experience. Agnes works across multiple media such as acrylic, watercolour, photography, and hand-drawn digital art. She also writes music and poetry, and sings.

HUMAN RESONANCE PROJECT: ON THE INNER FIELD OF BEING

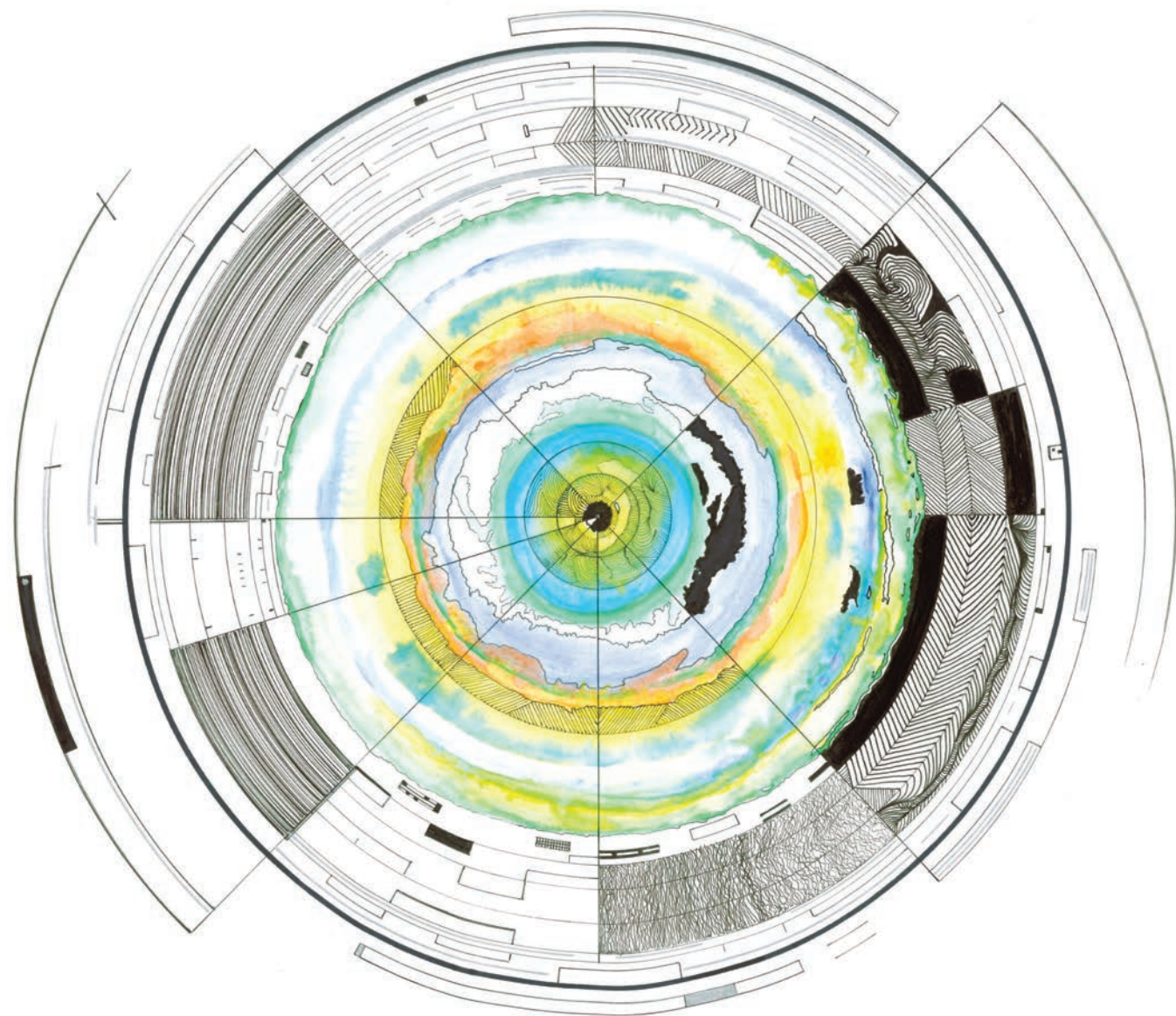
By Katarina Dodić

At the foundation of my artistic practice lies a persistent inquiry: What is the fundamental structure that connects human beings beyond form, identity, and narrative? What exists prior to language, culture, and biography, and yet silently shapes them all?

This inquiry led to the development of The Human Resonance Project; an ongoing body of work that explores the invisible inner field from which human experience emerges. The project unfolds as a visual investigation of resonance: how an inner core vibrates outward into perception, emotion, embodiment, and relationship. At the conceptual heart of this practice lies what I refer to as God's Particle.



Katarina Dodić



God's Particle: The conceptual core

The term "God's Particle" is inspired by the Higgs boson in particle physics, a particle associated with the Higgs field, an invisible structure that gives mass to elementary particles. Without this field, matter would not stabilise, and physical reality as we know it would not exist. Though the field itself cannot be observed directly, its effects are fundamental and universal.

In my work, God's Particle is not presented as a scientific explanation nor as a religious symbol, but as a conceptual and poetic analogy. It represents

an inner origin point, a universal microcosmos present within every human being. This core is not visible or measurable, yet it is essential. It is the silent source from which consciousness, sensation, emotion, and meaning arise.

God's Particle functions as the centre of the entire Human Resonance Project. It is the constant nucleus from which all visual explorations emerge.

Synchro: Resonance as manifestation

Each work within the Human Resonance Project is called a Synchro. A Synchro is an individual

manifestation of resonance originating from the same inner core. At the centre of every Synchro lies God's Particle - visually marked as a focal point from which the composition unfolds.

While the core remains constant, its expressions vary endlessly. Each Synchro articulates a distinct configuration of vibration, density, rhythm, and spatial relationship. These variations do not represent fragmentation, but multiplicity: parallel resonances arising from one underlying field. The works do not develop linearly, but radially - anchored by a shared centre, yet free in their outward expression.

In this way, the Human Resonance Project reflects a fundamental aspect of human existence: while we share a common inner structure, each individual embodies it differently.



Resonance, attention, and the observer

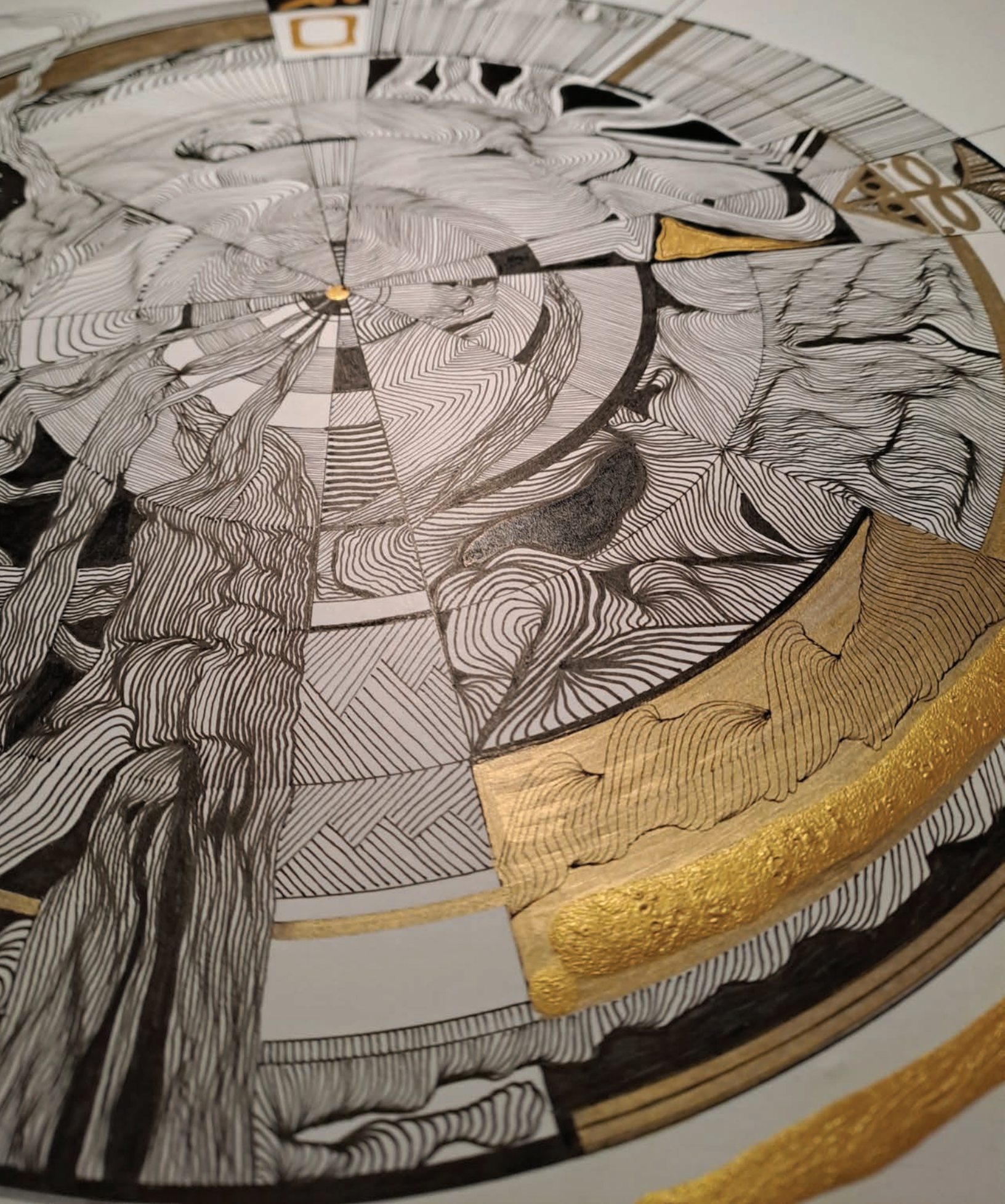
The project is conceptually informed by ideas drawn from quantum physics, particularly the role of the observer. In quantum systems, observation is not passive; it influences outcome. This principle offers a meaningful parallel to inner experience. Attention shapes perception. Awareness alters internal states. When we direct consciousness inward, the inner field responds. In this sense, resonance is not only something we emit, but something we cultivate.

The Synchros function as reflective spaces rather than explanatory images. They invite the viewer into a contemplative encounter, not to decode meaning, but to sense it. The artwork becomes a site of attunement, where inner recognition takes precedence over interpretation.

Material language and layering

The use of mixed media is integral to the conceptual structure of the work. Layers, textures, interruptions, and contrasts mirror the stratified nature of consciousness itself. Clarity and ambiguity coexist. Structure emerges, dissolves, and re-forms.

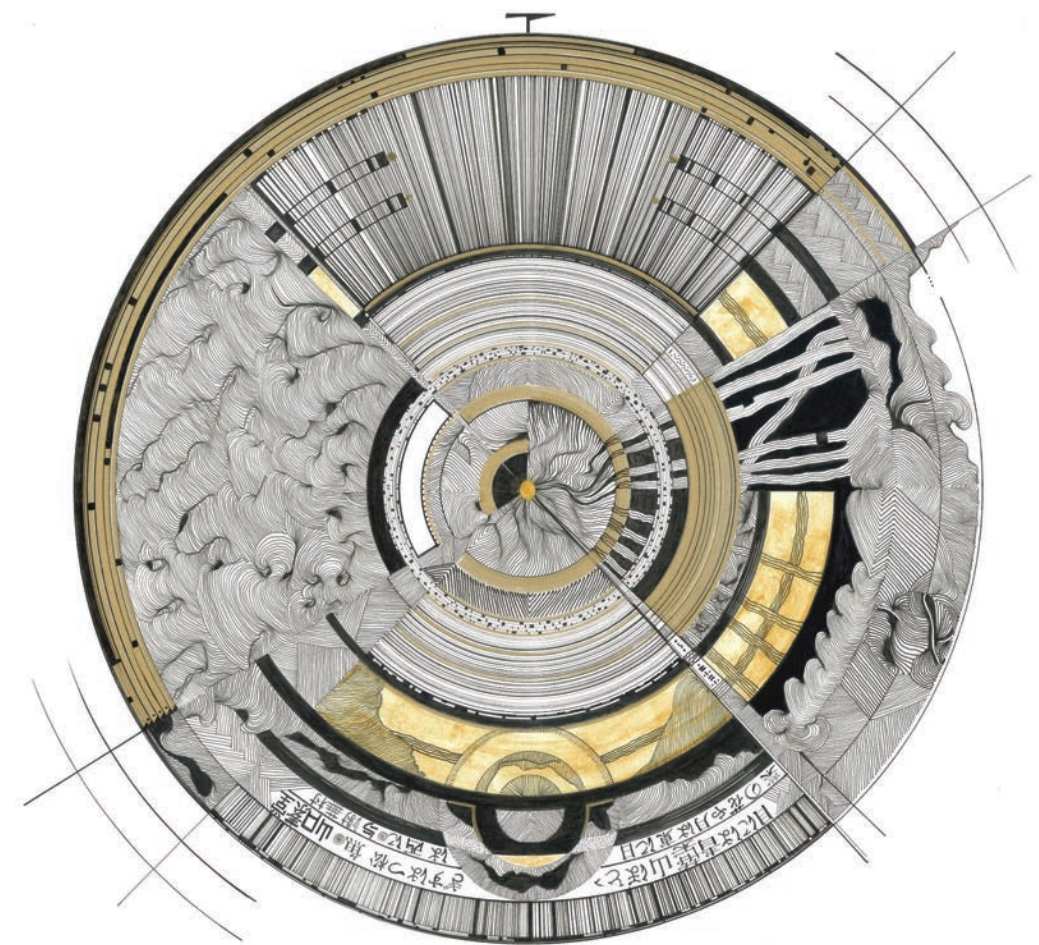
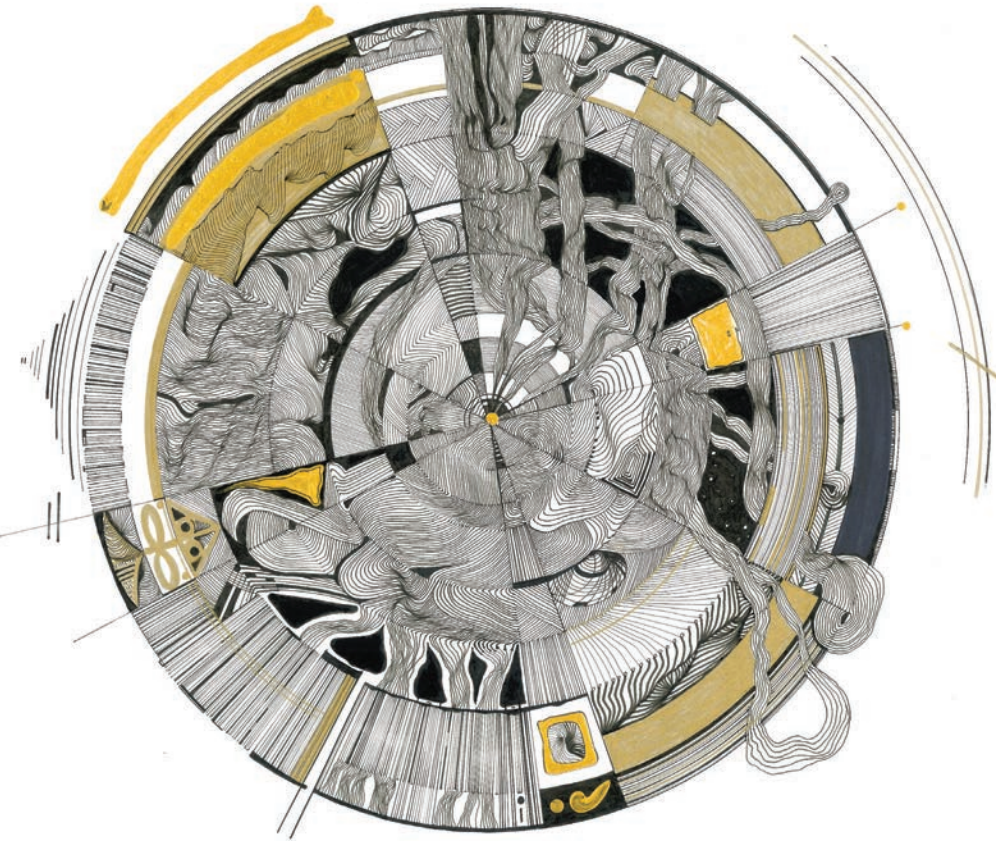
Negative space plays a crucial role within each Synchro. It is not absence, but potential; the unmarked field from which form arises. The dialogue between mark and void echoes the relationship between the visible body and the invisible forces that animate it. Material choices are not illustrative; they are experiential. They embody the tension between stability and flux, presence and emergence.



Art as a field of inquiry

Situated at the intersection of art, science, and philosophy, the Human Resonance Project treats art as a form of inquiry rather than representation. Scientific concepts are approached as metaphors, as conceptual bridges that allow inner experience to be articulated without reduction.

I do not seek to resolve the perceived divide between science and spirituality. Instead, I inhabit the space between them. Art offers a unique capacity to hold ambiguity, contradiction, and depth simultaneously. Where language reaches its limits, visual form remains open.

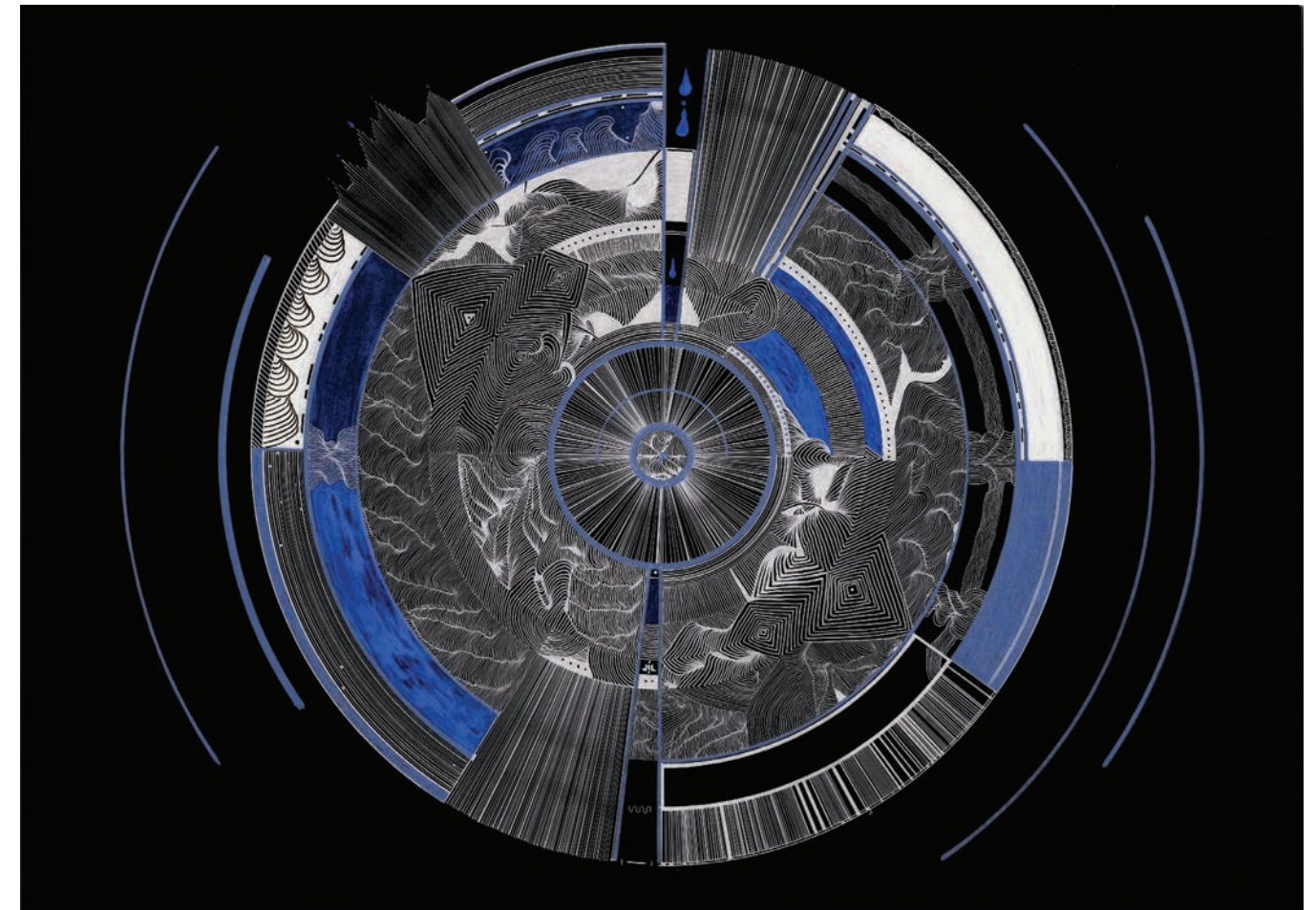




A shared inner architecture

Ultimately, the Human Resonance Project is an invitation, not to understand, but to recognise. Beneath individual differences lies a shared inner architecture: a common field of resonance that connects us. By visualising the invisible, the work does not attempt to define this field, but to make it perceptible.

If God's Particle names the silent core within us all, then each Synchro is its echo: a visual articulation of how inner vibration becomes experience, connection, and meaning.



About the author

Creator of The Human Resonance Project, Katarina Dodić is guided by curiosity; a quiet, persistent force that shapes her exploration of life, consciousness, and the invisible fields that connect us. She works in the vibrant city of Amsterdam, yet most of her time unfolds in the nearby countryside where she lives with her family and their

dog. Her creative path bridges multiple disciplines: classically trained in music, experienced in acting and scenography, and a practicing conceptual-visual artist, alongside two decades as a medical health professional.

‘I AM A TRAVELLER OF ETHEREAL PLACES AND INFINITE SPACES’

By Yazmine Acevedo

As an artist, this is the journey that calls to me, like an indefatigable voice from the abyss, an abyss that holds secrets of a universe that can never be truly known, only revered in its ineffable beauty: A beauty of inextinguishable light at its very core. With my painting, I seek to be closer to this light, to embody it, and ultimately share through a materiality that I hope will replicate a parallel experience for the viewer.

I interface with such magic when I paint, from the fluidity of the medium to the surprising possibilities of colour that abound; colours that range from the most delicate transparencies graduating toward the deepest shades. I layer wash over wash, alternating watercolours with acrylics, ultimately defining forms to distinguish shadow from radiance, thus articulating a composition that grounds the more ephemeral gestures. Experimenting with a variety of papers and integrating them within the image has also become an essential part in shaping my vocabulary, perhaps an homage to my background in printmaking, or simply a dialogue with my passion for paper. I do find that handling paper is akin to working with fabric, which I equally see as a drawing tool, complementing paint and paper in the



Yazmine Acevedo



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building of concrete surfaces or infinite spaces. I give honour to my maternal grandmother for exposing me since childhood to the discipline of craft and design in textiles: from indigenous to imported clothes, the in-house bespoke and commercial collections were often embellished with beadwork or embroidery, guided by patterns of botanicals or abstractions that were transferred directly onto the fabric using original stencils, hand-drawn on vellum — like a type of printmaking, of painting. Admiring these objects and processes honed my astuteness in identifying the relevance of similar materials and technical approaches to my endlessly evolving visual language, evident in the majority of my portfolios in progress.

One of my ongoing portfolios, *Dimension of Angels*, is an exploration of the orb as a central character in an ever-changing landscape of emotions; a mirror of emotions reflected in the sky, the ocean, the earth, the air. Or is it the chromatic atmosphere that can show us our potential of being, being love, being joy, being grace? Who is mirroring whom? If we create a mirror of beauty, of integrity, of compassion, and gaze into this image, can we recognise ourselves? Or rather, can this mirror transform us into becoming our highest selves? In other words, can our frequency be altered—for the better—in the presence of this particular work of art?

Emerging and *Renewal* are both from the Soul Retrieval series of twelve images, which altogether depict a soul's journey from darkness to light. Small in scale, the centered orb shimmers and shifts, as if by reflection, just as soul travels within and beyond itself—at times visible, at times elusive.

First Light I and *First Light II* are celestial odes, hearkening a moment when the sky reveals itself bright and unabashed, and wherein the source of illumination could be anywhere. An irrefutable affirmation to the connectedness of all.

A more recent series, *Monolithic Elements*, is directly inspired by my love for crystals — my obsession, in fact. Crystals can do what I wish a work of art would do, and so they have become a thematic and textural motivation for my work. If I can capture their spirit in the act of painting, as opposed to illustrating external form, will the finished piece emit





the same? Golden Elestial Sky holds the vibration of the stone Elestial Quartz; a powerful stone attuned to the higher realms and ancient wisdom; a stone that restores the fundamental chakras from the root to the soul star. When rutilated with gold, there is an electrical charge that can revitalise the physical body, while keeping it stabilised in the three-dimensional realm.

Transformation, ascension, or just a recognition of our divine humanness remove the polarising lens of judgment: this is the timeless field of unity consciousness that I enter when painting. And the more I paint, the more I see the way, the why, and the how. The purpose carves the path, just as artistic intent informs the development of personalised techniques.

As far back as 2003, when I transitioned from painting with oils and forayed seriously into solely working with water-based paints, the raw images that emerged from my untutored studies helped me discover, understand, and therefore verbalise, one of my earliest manifestos as an artist—which still holds true today:



My painting is Of Light

communicating through color

To mirror the infinite

— a perfect orb —

a way to find truth

by obscuring reality

We rediscover essence

— True Beauty —

creating the oneness of all things

feeling all of life within us

giving to all of life around us

being a state of grace

We can heal the world.

(This is the language of angels...)



About the author

Yazmine Acevedo is a painter and printmaker, who began her formal education in the arts as a Painting Major at the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts. Eventually, she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Printmaking from Cornell University College of Architecture, Art, and Planning in Ithaca, New York. During

a summer interim, she was selected to apprentice at the Sam Francis Litho Shop in Santa Monica, California. To broaden her creative scope, she also spent a semester in London, England, focussing on Theater Design, both scenic and costume. Her work has been included in group exhibitions in New York, Manila, and the United Nations General Headquarters.

MAGNET MINDS

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

**THE SKETCHBOOK MIND:
WHY THE HUMAN BRAIN DOODLES**
By Dr. Abirami Vivek

ART IS A QUIET FRIEND TO THE MIND
By Anjali Sharma

THE SKETCHBOOK MIND: WHY THE HUMAN BRAIN DOODLES

By Dr. Abirami Vivek

*Counseling and Child Psychologist
Mental health coach*

There are moments when we find ourselves tracing invisible lines on a table; absentmindedly scribbling on a notepad during a meeting; or simply sketching clouds with our gaze. These are not meaningless acts. They are the brain's natural way of thinking—sketching even in silence.

As someone who has spent years observing children in classrooms, I have often noticed that when a child doodles, it could be a swirl, a line, or a repetitive pattern; their attention is not lost, it is actually anchored. That moment of art-like movement is their brain's way of processing, recalling, or emotionally balancing information.



Dr. Abirami Vivek

The neuro side of doodling: When the brain draws to think

From a neurological standpoint, doodling is a form of active rest. The right and left hemispheres of the brain synchronise through rhythmic, repetitive actions like drawing or sketching. It helps the brain organise thoughts and store information through association and imagery.

In early childhood, this happens quite naturally. A child's first attempt at drawing—a circle with two dots—is not just art; it is cognitive mapping. It is the visual representation of their growing understanding of “self and other.” In adults, doodling does the same thing at a more abstract level, connecting stray thoughts, emotions, and memories into forms that make sense only to us.

Learning, at its core, has always depended on reference and representation. Long before words are formed, the brain captures images. From a neurological point of view that all of us can relate to, our eyes function much like a camera, constantly clicking pictures while the brain quietly stores them like a hard drive or memory card.



This is how meaning is built. We attach words to images, images to experiences, and experiences to memory. That is why even in adult learning we rely heavily on bar diagrams, graphs, flowcharts, and visual models; they simplify complexity and make information easier to retain. For children, this process begins far more organically. We show them objects, name them repeatedly, ask them to colour, sort, assemble puzzles, or match forms. These are not mere activities; they are creative expressions of learning. Through these visual and tactile experiences, vocabulary grows, comprehension deepens, and memory strengthens, because the brain learns best when it sees, touches, and associates.

The sketchbook classroom: Observations from early learning



When I was running my early education programs, I often observed that children who were encouraged to draw while listening retained information better. For instance, one little boy in my class used to fill the margins of his notebook with waves and small fishes whenever I read out a story. When asked what he was doing, he said, “I’m keeping the story safe in the water.” That sentence struck me — his mind was translating auditory information into imagery; a perfect example of how the art impulse works as a cognitive scaffold.

In the same way, another kid who had trouble with letters started writing excellently when she began making letters out of clay and drawing them with chalk.

Why we doodle in thought: The mental canvas



Even as adults, when we are deep in thought, our brain doodles in abstraction. Some of us visualise scenarios, others see shapes or colours when recalling an emotion or memory. That is the inner sketchbook, a mental artboard where our imagination drafts meaning.

Doodling, even mentally, is how the brain untangles. It allows emotions and information to flow rather than stagnate. In children, this process happens visibly, through scribbles, lines, and colour bursts; in adults, it happens invisibly, through imagination and thought visualisation.

Art as a pathway to easy learning



Art activates the sensory cortex, motor coordination, and emotional centers simultaneously. When children draw what they learn, they convert abstract information into concrete memory.

Neuroscientists call this multi-modal encoding. In simpler terms, the brain stores data more efficiently when it is linked with visual, emotional, and motor experiences.

That is why teaching alphabets through forms, stories, and colour, rather than by rote, leads to higher retention and comprehension.

Personal reflection: A sketchbook that never closed

Even now, I find myself sketching during long calls or while planning projects. It is not a distraction; it is organisation. My imagination creates sketches for sorting. When I look back at my notebook, those shapes and lines serve as breadcrumbs for my thoughts, a subtle record of how an idea came to be.

Perhaps it is what children do every day: they record their invisible ideas in visible lines.

The inner child with a pencil

Art, memory, and learning are not separate streams; they are intertwined. Every child has an inner sketchbook, where ideas, memories, and emotions coexist.

When we allow them to doodle, draw, and imagine freely, we are not just nurturing creativity; we are helping their brain learn in the language they were born with—the language of art.



ART IS A QUIET FRIEND TO THE MIND

By Anjali Sharma

Art is a quiet friend to the mind. It doesn't interrupt, demand, or judge. It simply waits, patient like a blank canvas, ready to take in whatever we hold inside us. In a world that pushes us to move faster, speak louder, and achieve more, art provides a gentle pause. It creates a space where the mind can relax, where emotions can breathe, and where silence feels comforting instead of empty.

For me, painting is a personal form of therapy. The healing starts the moment I prepare my palette. As I squeeze out colours and mix them, something within me changes. My racing thoughts slow down. The brush moving through acrylic becomes rhythmic, almost meditative. Mixing colors requires focus. A little more crimson can change coral from dull to bright. A touch of white can lighten blue into something soft and gentle. In these small adjustments, my mind learns to centre on one moment at a time.



Anjali Sharma



COMPASSION

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RANG, SAPNO KE

mind learns to centre on one moment at a time.

Warm corals ease my anxiety with their gentle glow. Soft blues calm my breath like an open sky. Earthy tones ground me when I feel scattered. Every colour carries emotion, and understanding them feels like learning the language of my inner

world. When I paint, I choose colours not just for harmony but for emotional connection. The canvas reflects feelings I may not have words for yet.

A blank canvas can feel intimidating, but I see it as a safe space. It doesn't rush me or criticize my hesitation. It simply invites me to start. In that



SHIVATVA

openness, I find permission to release stress with bold strokes, to soften grief with layered washes, and to express frustration without needing to explain. On tougher days, texture becomes my voice. A palette knife cutting through paint reflects the depth emotions carve into the heart. Thick layers hold intensity; gentle glazes reveal vulnerability. Through texture, I

express sadness without fear and celebrate joy without restraint.

Each brushstroke reminds me to breathe. A painting grows layer by layer, often slowly and imperfectly. Some strokes must dry before adding more. Some colours need correcting. Some areas have to be completely redone. In this process, I realise that small progress is still

progress. Healing, like painting, is rarely a straight line. It is patient, layered, and always changing.

There is something grounding about the physical nature of art. The feel of texture beneath my fingers connects me to the present moment. In a world filled with speed and screens, paint is real and immediate. When



RANG, SAPNO KE



AKSHYAVAT

I press into the canvas, I feel resistance and response. It becomes a dialogue between me and the surface. The canvas listens, and I listen back. This exchange teaches me to be naturally present, the kind that comes when you are fully absorbed in creating.

The subjects I paint often carry quiet lessons. When I paint something sacred, I am reminded to let go and trust. When I paint birds in flight, I think of freedom and companionship. Even a simple flower represents resilience and growth. Though the subjects differ, the lessons remain the same: patience, acceptance, and openness to change.

Imperfection has become one of art's greatest teachers. I once sought perfect finishes, smooth edges, and predictable results. But



WINGS OF FREEDOM



A DETAIL FROM THE PAINTING "ORENDA"

art challenged that mindset. Some of the most beautiful moments in a painting come from unexpected textures and accidental blends. Imperfect edges bring vibrancy and authenticity. I learned that flaws are not failures; they add character. They tell the story of the process. By accepting imperfection on the canvas, I gradually started accepting it within myself.

Art also creates connections beyond the self. Nothing brings me more joy than watching someone pause in front of my work. When they look closely and feel something—even if they cannot name it—that pause becomes powerful. In that moment, art becomes a bridge between inner worlds. The colours that once held my private emotions now resonate with someone else's

experience. They may find hope where I found healing, or comfort where I once found courage. The meaning becomes theirs, and that shared emotional space feels deeply fulfilling.

The beauty of art lies in its openness. It does not require explanation. A sunset may represent closure for one viewer and new beginnings for another. Two birds flying together might symbolize love, friendship, or freedom. The artwork lives multiple lives, shaped by the eyes that see it. Knowing that my creations can offer someone stillness or reflection gives my process deeper meaning.



GOLDEN BLISS

Beyond emotional healing, painting teaches discipline and trust. Some days, inspiration flows easily; other days, the canvas feels unyielding. Showing up anyway is part of the practice. Trusting that creativity will return is part of the faith. Art reminds me that consistency is more important than perfection. Even a small act of creation keeps the connection alive.

Most importantly, art offers freedom, the freedom to express without judgment or limits. On canvas, I can be bold or delicate, structured or abstract, vibrant or muted. I can explore contrasts and harmonies just like I explore them within myself. The calm that arises during the process stays with me long after the painting is finished. It becomes a quiet strength I carry into daily life.

Art is not just something I do; it is something that sustains me. It accompanies restless nights and peaceful mornings. It holds my chaos gently and transforms it into colour and form. It teaches me to slow down, to notice subtle shifts, and to honour emotion without becoming overwhelmed by it. Expression becomes release, and creation becomes hope.



ALORA

In the end, calmness and freedom are the greatest gifts art gives me. Through colours and textures, through layers and light, I rediscover balance. I learn to trust the process, on canvas and in life. In that trust, I find healing.



About the author

Born in Jaipur, India, Anjali Sharma enjoys exploring contemporary and abstract styles, especially seascapes. Anjali believes art should tell personal stories. She loves creating customised pieces that bring her clients' visions to life. She hopes to help others experience the power of art as therapy.

ROOTS AND RHYTHM

From ancient roots to modern rhythm—
a journey through living culture

CLAY STORIES: THE JOURNEY FROM SCHOLAR TO PUBLIC STORYTELLER

By Dr. Sangeeta Jawla

KOLAMS: EPHEMERAL WORKS OF ART UNFOLDING AT THE THRESHOLDS OF HOMES

By Aishwarya Raghunathan

COVER STORY A BOY ON THE GHATS

Beena Unnikrishnan

CLAY STORIES: THE JOURNEY FROM SCHOLAR TO PUBLIC STORYTELLER

By Dr. Sangeeta Jawla

Coming from a potters' household, where my only childhood wish was to have a piggy bank—a *gullak*—this story reflects my journey into a storytelling practice that grew from uncovering the hidden tales of potters and sharing them with a wider public. This work, and the stories within it, are not confined to the pages of a PhD thesis; they flow beyond the written text and beyond language itself. The pages have transformed into clay surfaces, and the stories now appear engraved in clay. They are also spoken through my body; a body that, in the philosophy and wisdom of potters, is understood as being made of clay. Thus, the body becomes a vessel that tells the tale: the story of a clay pot and its journey from creation to use. This is how the performance found its name—*Who is the Pot?*

This clay pot is shaped through deep material knowledge, the movements of the human body, and the guidance of the five elements of nature. In potters' folklore, the pot speaks; asking questions, conversing with humans, inquiring about its own making, and questioning human behaviour. It carries within it not only the knowledge of its formation but also an understanding of the creation of the cosmos. The pot knows



Dr. Sangeeta Jawla



and from there, with my camera, to Assam and Tripura, Himachal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Goa, Bangalore, and Tamil Nadu. Each potter narrated the tales in their own way, even though the stories themselves were strikingly similar. Regional and linguistic variations shaped their telling, but one thread ran consistently through all of them: the caste of potters.

The folk stories, songs, and quips explore many ideas, yet they all return to the potters' humble households; spaces marked by splashes of clay and scattered fragments of thekrā, the broken pieces they reuse in their daily work. Recycling is not a concept for them; it is an everyday practice woven into their craft. The potter's clothes, the potter's wheel, and every tool he uses are coated with the clay that society often labels as "dirty." The vessels they create serve practical needs and,

how humans came to be, how the caste of potters was assigned, and why its making is traditionally restricted to the hands of men, creating a taboo around women touching it. It is also the loyal companion of the potter and his donkey when others look down upon them. The pot holds cosmology, philosophy, literature, and inherited knowledge; it contains it all. Yet the true identity of the pot remains unknown; hence the question: *Who is the Pot?*

Over the last eight years, I have taken part in this work as a researcher, a folk singer, a potter, and a storyteller. The stories I gathered came from different regions of India, beginning in my own village in Haryana, then moving through Rajasthan,



at times, become essential in ceremonial rituals. Yet the potters themselves seldom receive recognition for crafting these ceremonial objects; instead, they too are considered "impure."

The storytelling performance that emerged from both the practice and the repertoire of stories within potters' households offers a different way of seeing this tradition. For the potters, these stories and gestures belong to everyday life; for a scholar who eventually became a performer, they reveal deep wisdom, material knowledge, caste-shaped practices, and an entire philosophy of living. The performance begins with my own introduction as a little girl who loved touching clay pots but was forbidden to do so after reaching puberty. I was drawn to the question behind this taboo. Why may some people touch the pot while others may not? Who is the wheel, does it carry a gender? Who is the clay, is it imagined as



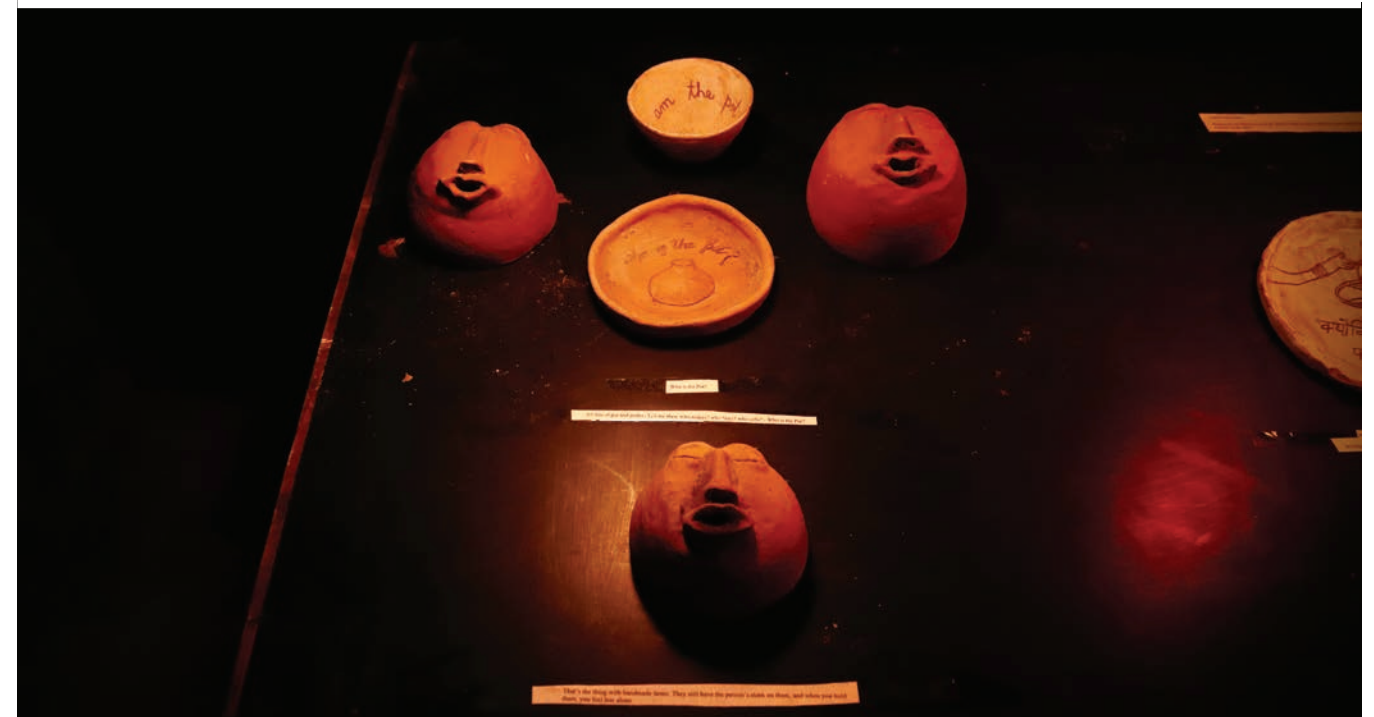


masculine or feminine? If a man shapes the pot, then who is the pot? Is it a male entity produced by male hands? And is this why the first form thrown on the wheel resembles a Shiv Linga, a phallic shape?

The girl wonders: *What if I were clay?* I could be shaped into anything. Interestingly, the same girl—now a woman—who never managed to make a pot on the wheel in her childhood, is now doing so on stage, breaking the very taboo she grew up with. One day at Triveni Kala Sangam, during the Terra Fest, I met a group of potters. A woman approached me and asked, “Are you the one who stood on the



wheel and questioned the making process? How dare you?” In that moment, I knew the performance and the ideas behind it, had struck where it needed to. The community still holds fast to the belief that touching the pottery wheel is a male prerogative, a taboo that remains firmly in place.



A storytelling mimics the very act of making pots in potters' households, and my director Ashish and I bring a theatrical element into it while still calling it a storytelling performance. The audience sits on the floor, and I interact with them, walking up to them or inviting them onto the stage. I share my clay with them; they touch it; they touch the wet clay pot that I shape on stage in that moment. They move with the rhythm of the clay and the wheel. People of different genders and different social positions come together to touch a potter's wheel and clay, something that almost never happens in actual pottery households when buyers visit. They knock on the pot and try to understand its value. They haggle over the price: eighty rupees or a hundred for a pot, twenty or fifty for a piggy bank. Yet these same people go to the potters' homes to worship the pottery wheel.



I, Chameli, the researcher, the character, and the storyteller in *Who is the Pot?* become a bard of the modern times. From autoethnography to performance autoethnography, from storyteller to potter-in-the-making, I share these stories with different audiences, inviting them to listen and reconnect with clay which is not only mine but theirs too, as we all walk upon it every day.

About the author

Sangeeta Jawla is a research scholar, a practicing potter, and a theatrical storyteller. She has been collecting the folklore of the potter community across India from last eight years. Her Ph.D. is titled *Potters' Narratives: Identity, Social Relations, and Material Culture*. She has completed M.A. in English Literature and Folklore and Cultural Studies. She holds certificates in Programming Arts- Hindustani Music, Sanskrit language, Art Therapy, and is trained for three years in classical vocal music. She attended a Short Course on Fundamentals of Arts Management. She has been a resource person at several events and has performed as storyteller across multiple platforms. She has also displayed her work at India Art Fair as a collaborative project with Indian Ceramic Triennale (2024). She has extensive experience as a researcher. She is also a potter artisan authorised by the Ministry of Textiles, India.



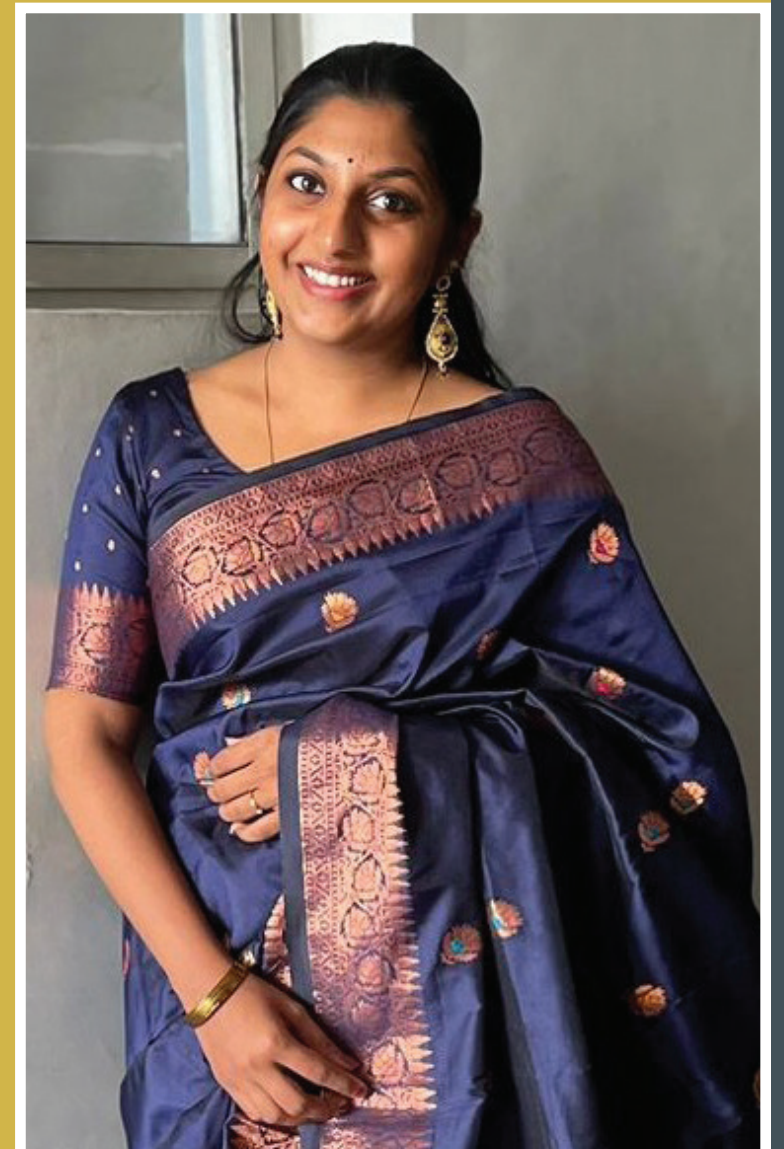
KOLAMS: EPHEMERAL WORKS OF ART UNFOLDING AT THE THRESHOLDS OF HOMES

By Aishwarya Raghunathan

In the quiet hours before dawn breaks, many South Indian streets come alive with delicate white patterns unfolding at the thresholds of homes. These are *kolams*—ephemeral works of art drawn daily by women using rice flour. The word *kolam* means form and beauty, and its presence in Tamil culture traces back to the age of Sangam literature. Devotional works such as Nachiar *Tirumozhi* describe ritualistic spaces adorned with *kolams*, while later texts like *Kalingattuparani* mention them as symbols of celebration and auspiciousness.

Across India, similar traditions flourish under different names: rangoli, muggu, mandana, *alpana*, and *pookalam*. Though the materials may vary from rice flour and coloured powders to flower petals, the intention remains the same: to transform the earth at one's doorstep into a canvas of beauty and divinity.

At its core, a *kolam* is built from two simple elements: dots and lines. Together, they form patterns shaped by symmetry and geometric balance. This focus on structure and mathematical precision sets traditional South Indian *kolams* apart from many other rangoli styles across India, which often emphasise colour and pictorial designs.



Aishwarya Raghunathan



AI enhanced

Patterns in Kolam

Kolam designs can be broadly categorised based on their structural patterns and methods of creation. While numerous regional and stylistic variations exist, several prominent forms are widely recognised within the tradition.

Pulli (dot) Kolam

Pulli Kolam is constructed using a grid of equidistant dots (*pulli*), which serve as the design's foundational framework. Patterns are created by connecting or encircling these dots using straight or curved lines. Because of its systematic structure and relatively simple technique, *Pulli Kolam* is often considered the most basic form of *kolam* and is commonly practised by beginners.

Freehand Kolams

Freehand kolams are created without the use of dots or predefined grids,



Photo credit M.J. Mahesh



Photo credit M.J. Mahesh



Photo credit Pradhicka C.

allowing greater freedom for artistic expression. In this style, the artist draws patterns directly from imagination, often incorporating figurative or decorative motifs. The colourful *rangoli* traditions are often considered examples of this freehand approach.

Padi Kolam/Manai Kolam

Padi Kolam, also referred to as *Manai Kolam*, is characterised by parallel lines arranged in repetitive and symmetrical patterns. These designs typically begin with a square base, from which geometric shapes and decorative elements are developed. The patterns often resemble a sequence of steps or tiers, giving rise to the term *padi*, which means 'steps'. *Padi Kolams* are frequently associated with auspicious occasions, rituals, and ceremonial spaces.

Sikku/Chikku Kolam, Neli Kolam, and Kambi Kolam

These styles represent some of the most intricate and complex forms of *kolam* design. The patterns consist of continuous, curvilinear lines that weave

around a grid of dots to create elaborate interlaced structures. The term *sikku* or *chikku* translates to 'knot' in Tamil, reflecting the knot-like appearance of the patterns. *Neli* refers to the graceful, flowing movement of the lines, while *kambi*, meaning 'metal wire', evokes the thin, thread-like continuity of the design. These *kolams* follow strict principles of symmetry and continuity, where each dot must be encircled, and lines typically intersect only once.

A unique art form

The *Kolam* is far more than decoration. It serves as a daily act of hospitality, inviting guests and divine blessings into the home. For many women, the early morning ritual of drawing *kolam* is also a moment of devotion and mindfulness.

The practice carries deep cultural resonance. Designs are passed down through generations, reflecting regional styles and family traditions. During festivals and celebrations, neighbours and relatives often gather to create larger *kolams* together, turning the activity into a shared celebration.

The *Kolam* also plays a subtle educational role. Children who watch and learn the craft become familiar with patterns, symmetry, and spatial awareness. At the same time, the rhythmic act of drawing encourages patience and focus, making the process almost meditative.

Kolams may appear as delicate decorative patterns, but beneath their graceful forms lies a fascinating foundation of mathematics and science. Constructed from carefully arranged grids of dots, these designs often reflect mathematical ideas such as the Fibonacci sequence, as well as geometric principles of symmetry, rhythm, periodicity, and recursion. What seems like spontaneous creativity is, in fact, guided by an intuitive understanding of pattern and structure.

Margazhi and Kolams

The Tamil month of *Margazhi* begins around December 17 and ends around January 14. This period falls during winter. Traditional belief holds that the atmosphere during *Margazhi* contains

particularly oxygen-rich morning air. Our ancestors were keen observers of nature, and many cultural practices grew from these observations. Rituals were often designed with both symbolic and practical intentions.

One such tradition is the drawing of large and elaborate *kolams* during *Margazhi*. By encouraging people to wake up early and step outside, the practice ensured that individuals spent time in the fresh morning air—something believed to benefit health and well-being.

The act of drawing *kolam* also involves bending, stretching, and balancing movements. These gentle physical actions help maintain flexibility in the spine and pelvis and were thought to support overall physical health. In traditional understanding, these movements were especially beneficial for women, including those who were pregnant.

Mylapore Festival

Although *kolam* is usually a domestic art form, it occasionally expands into public spaces through community celebrations. During *Margazhi*, the



Photo credit Pradhicka C.



Photo credit M.J.Mahesh

neighbourhood of Mylapore in Chennai becomes a vibrant cultural hub. Music concerts, devotional singing, and temple rituals fill the streets around the historic Kapaleeshwarar Temple.

One of the most visually striking events during this time is the *kolam* contest held along the streets. Here, the streets themselves become vast communal canvases as participants gather to create elaborate patterns. What is usually a household ritual transforms into a shared public celebration of creativity and tradition.

The event began modestly in the late 1990s as a small *kolam* competition. Over the years, it has grown into a prominent feature of the annual festival. In 2026, the Mylapore Festival celebrated its 22nd edition, with more than a hundred participants contributing their designs to the *kolam* contest.

About the author

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COVER STORY

A BOY ON THE GHATS

Beena Unnikrishnan



One evening, after a quiet boat ride on the Ganges, I stepped onto the Assi ghats and sat down for a moment of rest. The river was still speaking its own language, and I was quietly absorbing it.

That is when I saw him.

A little boy, sitting on the steps of the ghat, with a few small paintings spread out in front of him. No noise, no calling out to people. Just present... as if he belonged to that space as naturally as the river itself.

I picked up one of his paintings.

Before I could even ask, he said softly, “₹50.”

There was no hesitation in his voice. No doubt. Just clarity.

He had covered his face with a mask. I asked him gently if he would show me his face. He refused. Not out of fear, but with a quiet firmness. As if his identity did not matter—only his work did.

In that moment, I felt something shift within me.

There was pain.

The pain of knowing that he was not going to school. That life had already taken away something that should have been his right.

And yet... there was also strength.

A child who could sit there, create, price his work, and sell it with dignity. A child who already saw himself as an artist.

It was not charity. It was not helplessness. It was ownership.

I bought that painting.

And when I looked at it closely, I realized: it was Ardhanareeswarar.

The union of the feminine and the masculine within one self.

A balance I have always believed in. A truth I have lived, explored, and expressed through my own journey.

In that moment, everything came together.

A child denied one form of education... yet deeply connected to another form of knowing.

A life holding both struggle and strength at the same time.

A reality where absence and abundance coexist.

The Ardhanareeswarar painting was not just an image.

It was a reflection.

Of contrasts. Of uncomfortable truths. Of a balance that exists even in the most unexpected spaces.

For me, this was not just a painting.

It was a reminder that life itself is Ardhanareeswarar:

holding both the broken and the beautiful, the loss and the becoming, the silence and the expression... all at once.

Today, that small ₹50 painting becomes the cover.

Not because of its perfection, but because of its truth.

Because sometimes, the most powerful art is not created in studios...

It is born on the steps of a ghat, in silence, in struggle, and in an unshaken belief—

“I am an artist.”

64 YOGINI TEMPLE

HIRAPUR (ORISSA, INDIA)



Photo credit Pradeep Badhar