DESIGN INDIA

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CHANGE MAKERS



Rohit Chawla *pg 10*

Pratheek Thomas and Tina Thomas **02** Richa Bahl **24** Mohit Suneja **32** Shitanshu G. Maurya **40**
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indi

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ALONE



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Editor in Chief | **sudhir@indidesign.in**



Have learned the value of quality online time with family, friends, and colleagues during C19



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DESIGN INDIA

Designindia was founded in 2002. It was started as a platform for interaction for the design community in India and abroad. Over the years it has grown into a forum spread over many social and professional networking domains, linking design professionals into an active, interactive and thought leading community.

http://in.groups.yahoo.com/group/designindia

This too shall pass

I am writing generally and positively about what we can do to help ourselves at such times. I acknowledge however that people may be going through major problems, trauma, grief, loss, uncertainty distress, and may be in volatile situations, work- or family-wise. Please take help from whoever may be available, talk to family and friends, and don't suffer in silence.

Time will demand more from you. Routine, time management, and some structure around you and the things you need are great thoughts but not easy to sustain during these times. Lives have changed; don't expect anything to run as it did before C19. We have to deconstruct life and rebuild it, and each of us has to do this in our own way.

We will remain in survival mode for some time to come. The social fabric around us, our tribal instinct, belonging to groups, people contact, chatter with colleagues and acquaintances, and daily banter made us happy and thrive. Much of it has been replaced by a virtual connection. Our societal carpet has been pulled out from beneath our feet....a few things are bound to break. We are not free anymore, we can't come and go as we want...against our better judgment, we have to follow what we are told. We have lost our bearings.

So how do you cope in these times?

By embracing the new normal. By not resisting the new normal for the time being. C19 will not last forever. It may take time for us to adapt, learn, treat, and stop it, but realize that everyone believes we will get over it. Nobody doubts that. The vaccine will come, and antivirals will be available. Moreover, our bodies will adapt to throw the virus out. C19 will play itself out.

'Nothing lasts forever.' 'This too shall pass.' We need to understand the impermanent nature of things and life.

Keep yourself busy. Make plans and follow them.
Follow instructions. For now, just follow.
Video chat with people you like.
Be careful about consuming news.
Engage in self care.
Keep doing small activities to help others.
Absorb what's happening around, but restrict your reaction.

It will not be easy, but we will get through this.

Sudhir

ValueLabs

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UVEP cover



VISUAL IMPACT

*A common love for storytelling led **Pratheek Thomas and Tina Thomas** to the sometimes uncertain but always fulfilling comic business*



UVEP inside page

What drew you to designing comics?

PT: We've always loved to write and create stories and that love continues to this day. We're both engineering graduates - Tina worked as an Electronics Engineer in an IT company in Bangalore for five years before we co-founded Kokaachi. After studying engineering, I pursued Product Design from National Institute of Design.

What led to Kokaachi?

PT: In 2010, my college friend Dileep Cherian and I co-founded Manta Ray comics; Prabha Mallya was our Art Director and Tina moonlighted as a writer with us. Manta Ray was launched with the release of *Hush,* a graphic novella written by me. The first two volumes of *Mixtape* comics were also launched at Manta Ray. We also had the privilege of creating *The Small Picture,* a weekly, full page comic in the *Mint* newspaper, which ran for three consecutive years.

Dileep was based in Dubai and I was in Bangalore, and over time, the long distance communication (or lack of) took a toll on the running of the company, so Manta Ray closed operations in December 2013. However, Tina and I wanted to continue our storytelling journey, and launched Kokaachi and Studio Kokaachi in Kochi in February 2014. Kokaachi is where we make and publish our comics and other graphic narratives in collaboration with artists and illustrators.



Above & below: Matchbox Comix Volume 1



Studio Kokaachi is where we take up our commissioned work – animation, illustration, comics and other visual storytelling projects.

Introduce us to the Kokaachi philosophy.

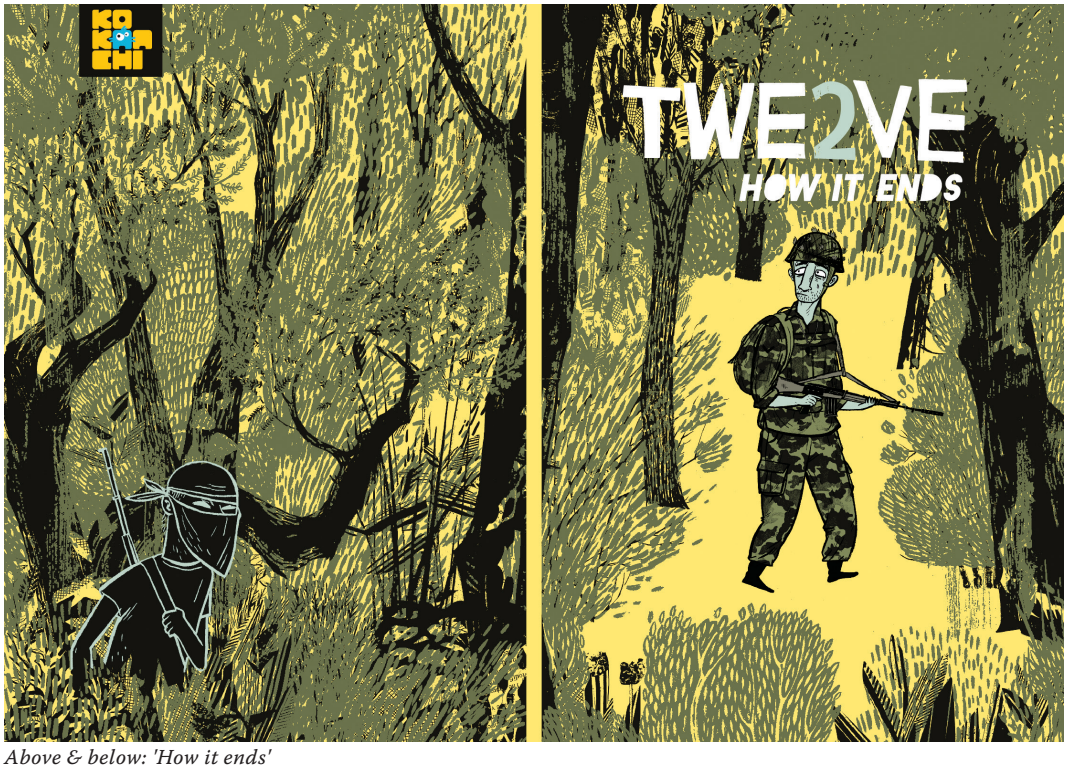
PT: We've always wanted to tell original stories set in India, of the world we live in. We love to tell stories of real people and their real (and sometimes, fantastic) lives. The one thing we consciously stay away from is rehashing mythology and superhero stories.

The joy of telling visual stories is in the collaboration. We love working with our illustrators and artists, to see the words on the page take on a new life the moment they start to visualize it. One of the greatest joys of being a publisher is the number of creators we've met and worked with over these past six years, and how, through this process of open collaboration, many of them have become our good friends.

TT: In a world where everyone loves to say that 'Print is dead', we believe that print is very much alive and that it can thrive too. Our books are our love letters to print. We love the scent of a new book and put a lot of thought into each one we make. The stories and the art are carefully chosen of course, but we also pay attention to the paper we print on, the binding, how the book feels in a reader's hands.



Matchbox Comix Volume 2



Above & below: 'How it ends'



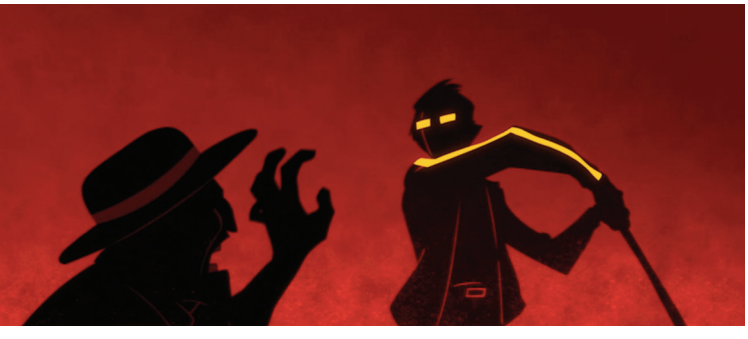
Describe the creation process.

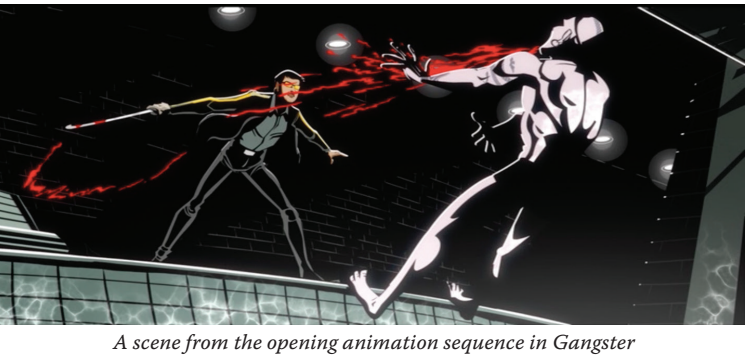
TT: At Kokaachi, we publish stories that we like to read. So, when one of us gets a story idea, we narrate it to the other person and if the other person also thinks that it can make an interesting story, we go ahead and develop the story further. We then share this story with our brain trust - a small group of friends whose sensibilities we trust. Based on their feedback, we refine these stories, and then find an artist whose style matches the story, and one we would like to work with. And finally, the story goes out into the world.

Which have been your most exciting projects so far?

PT: Over the years, we have been fortunate to work on some really exciting commissioned projects: We were taken by complete surprise when Aashiq Abu asked us to create an animation sequence for his Malayalam film *Gangster* (2014) - that was our first animation project and he put his complete trust in us. We ended up creating more than 13 minutes of animation, including the climax action







A scene from the opening animation sequence in Gangster

sequence - that was our big break into the realm of animation, and it still remains one of our favorite projects.

We've looked up to Mani Ratnam since our school days and never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that we'd be sitting across a table with him, working on his film *OK Kanmani,* designing characters, worlds and storylines with him.

Designing the titles for *Lust Stories,* Netflix's first original film in India, was another high point. The project got us a lot of encouraging responses from viewers and that led us to the title design for *Gully Boy,* and then most recently, *Ghost Stories.*

TT: On the publishing front, we are really excited about some of the in-house books we are working on now. *Idivettu*, written by Pratheek, will be the first ever-serialized Malayalam comic.

Pratheek, tell us about the graphic novella *Hush*.

PT: I wrote *Hush* in 2009 - I had lost my job during the recession and was thinking of self-publishing it then. It is based on my brother Vivek's idea for a short film. *Hush* was published by Manta Ray in 2011,

when the comic scene in India was very nascent, maybe even non-existent. It was an experiment for the Indian market as the story is told without any words, the art is in black and white, and it talks about child sexual abuse. *Hush* is illustrated by Rajiv Eipe. I think readers found the illustration style and layout of the book quite refreshing; it got a lot of good reviews and coverage from the mainstream press.





Comics have evolved by leaps and bounds. How experimental should one be to keep up with market trends today?

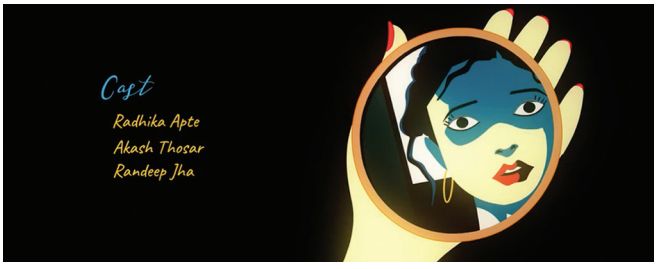
PT: We're inspired by the stuff we read and this is reflected in the kind of books we make too. But we're not really clued into market trends - we just tell the stories that we love to read ourselves. We believe that everything you do should be in service of the story you are telling - you don't have to be experimental for the sake of being experimental.

TT: One of our upcoming re-releases is a book called *How it Ends,* written by Pratheek and illustrated by Aindri Chakraborty. The comic charts the internal conflicts of a young, inexperienced Indian soldier trapped in the jungles of Central India after an ambush by naxals. To re-create the experience of the forests, Aindri has used cellular-scans of various leaves and plants, and camouflaged them amongst her drawings. So, we try and do such experiments in our books to enhance the visual experience of the story for the reader.



Our *Matchbox Comix* is a huge draw amongst people who don't read comics otherwise. This is a set of six tiny comics and each story comes inside a themed matchbox. People love this product; they find it cute and adorable.

Title sequence of Ghost Stories







Above & below: Frames from the opening titles of Lust Stories

How do you overcome a creative block?

TT: Like all creators, we have our share of creative blocks; we do get stuck on the stories we are working on. When we hit roadblocks, we spend hours (sometimes, even days or weeks) wondering where to take characters from there. Creative blocks are tough periods to get through. Pratheek usually steps out for a walk - long walks help him clear his brain and make space for new ideas to come in. I take a break and play with our four doggie darlings. Sometimes I go into the kitchen and try out some new recipe as the story simmers on the back burner of my brain. I like to distance myself from the story for some time and not get pressurized to find an immediate solution.

What challenges have you faced so far?

PT: The main challenge has always been financial. Making a comic book is much more cost prohibitive than creating a prose book. In a comic book, in addition to the writer's fees, you also need to pay the illustrator, letterer and designer. The production costs of our books are much higher because of the kind of paper we use and the production quality we want.

The sales cycles of our books are much longer as the readership and market for comics is still niche and small. So, it takes quite a bit of time before we start to see significant returns on the investment we've put into a book. However, we cannot slow down or bring down the number of titles we bring out each year – our readership and market will grow only if we bring out more content, consistently.

The other challenge we face is distribution – there are no pan India distributors for comics. We are present in about 40 stores across India, but we distribute to these stores ourselves.

How commercially viable is the comics business in India today?

PT: The comics industry in India hasn't grown to a stage where independent creators or publishers like us can make a living just from the sale of books. I think we have a long way to go to reach there. The two of us mainly depend on the revenue from the commissioned projects we take up – both for our own living expenses and to publish and produce our books.





1

We think the only way to make the industry sustainable is by making more comics and thus growing the interest in the medium. Nowadays there are a lot of comics-loving design and art students who are making their own comics and zines. And with robust platforms like Indie Comix Fest for new creators to showcase their work, we hope to see growth in the readership and business in the coming years.

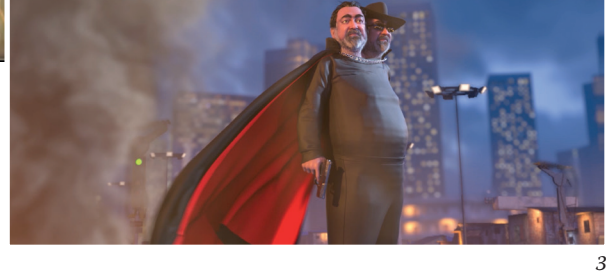
What's next?

TT: We want to take our books to the international market. A comic publisher-distributor is interested in taking our books to the UK market, so we're excited about that. We are also looking forward to releasing the new books we are working on, including a couple of illustrated poetry books and visual books that are outside the traditional book formats.

kokaachi@kokaachi.com

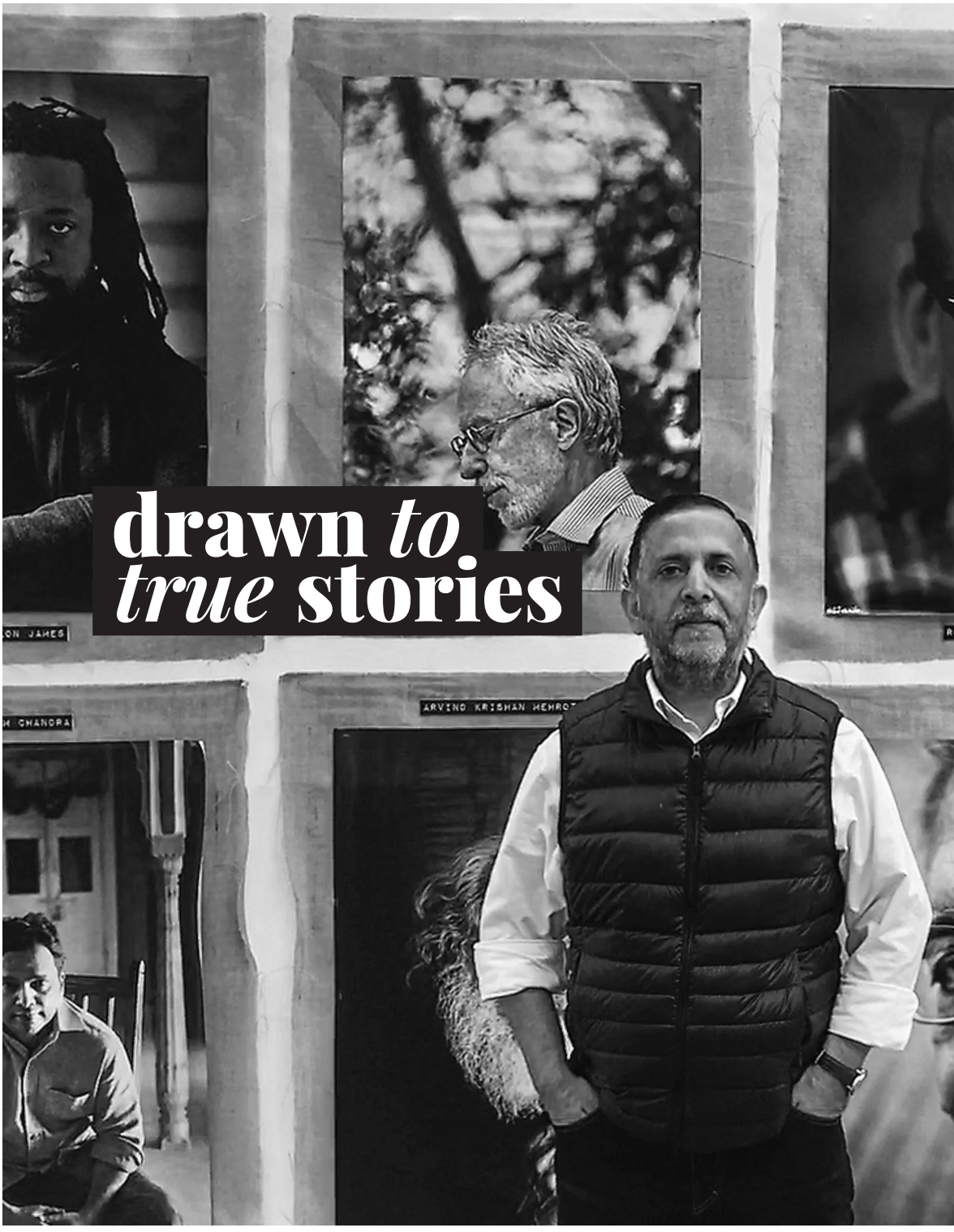


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3

1. The typefaces that make up the final logo in the opening titles of Gully Boy
2. A scene from the game sequence in OK Kanmani
3. The double-headed villain from the game trailer in OK Jaanu



drawn *to* *true* stories



Rohit Chawla's subjects have ranged from fashion to food but it is in journalistic photography that he has found his niche

Against his author portrait exhibition at Jaipur Literature Festival

How were you drawn to photography?

RC: Photography for me began as a means to an end - not some great creative calling of sorts but a happy coincidence that helped earn some extra monies during my somewhat impoverished college days. I came from a middle class bureaucratic family where the luxury of having a girlfriend in the 1980s necessitated a creative solution. A close friend's father ran one of India's first color photographic labs, so I learnt some basics by association. Eventually, I bought my first camera, a Canon AE - 1, on loan, for a lordly sum of Rs. 2,800, from photographer S. Paul (also the elder brother of Raghu Rai). I started freelancing and working for various magazines during my college days. One day, by a sheer quirk of fate, I landed up at India's largest and then most respected advertising agency, HTA. I worked there for 20 eventful years before moving out in 2006 to start my own film and design company. I embraced editorial photography seriously and in earnest when I joined India Today as Group Creative Director in 2013, and finally discovered my true calling in a journalistic idiom.



First fashion assignment (1982)

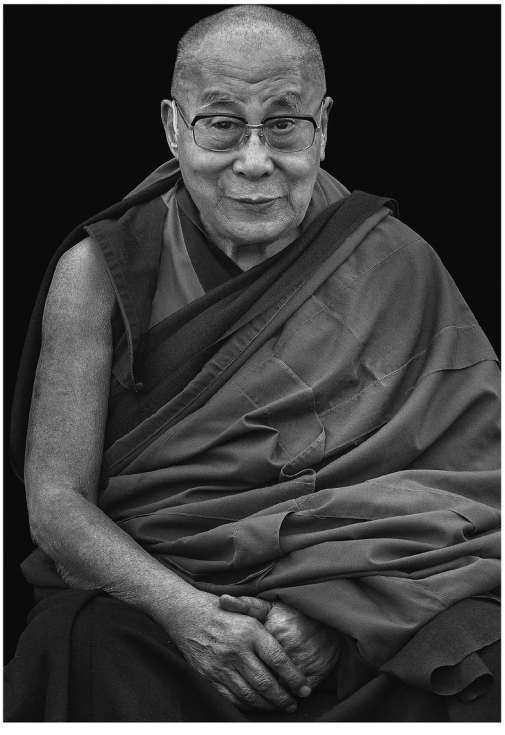


When, in your opinion, does photography become art? What defines great photography?

RC: For photography to transcend the banality of simply documenting and recording in a digital age and for it to actually be accorded the primacy of art in its current avatar, the image needs to echo a certain poetry of form that is individualistic and distinctive. Fine art photography is increasingly about the staged image where the photographer, very much like an artist of yore, creates from the heart and is in complete control of the final product. The sheer randomness, perfect technical parameters, the obligatory B&W overdose, and surfeit of Photoshop filters on phones has spawned a whole generation of soulless purveyors masquerading it as fast food art. I am a believer in the dictum that one shouldn't necessarily take the photograph that's there but create the image that you want.

Your photography is multidimensional with a dash of illusion. What is your idea of the perfect shot?

RC: There is no such thing as a perfect shot, particularly in my photographic practice, which is increasingly about the quiet portrait. Portraits are collaborative and though there can be some happy accidents and coincidences, time being the limited commodity in a celebrity portrait, the ability to improvise at short notice when the physical environment becomes the creative enemy calls for a certain Spartan approach. I hate over art directed, over styled imagery; the gloss

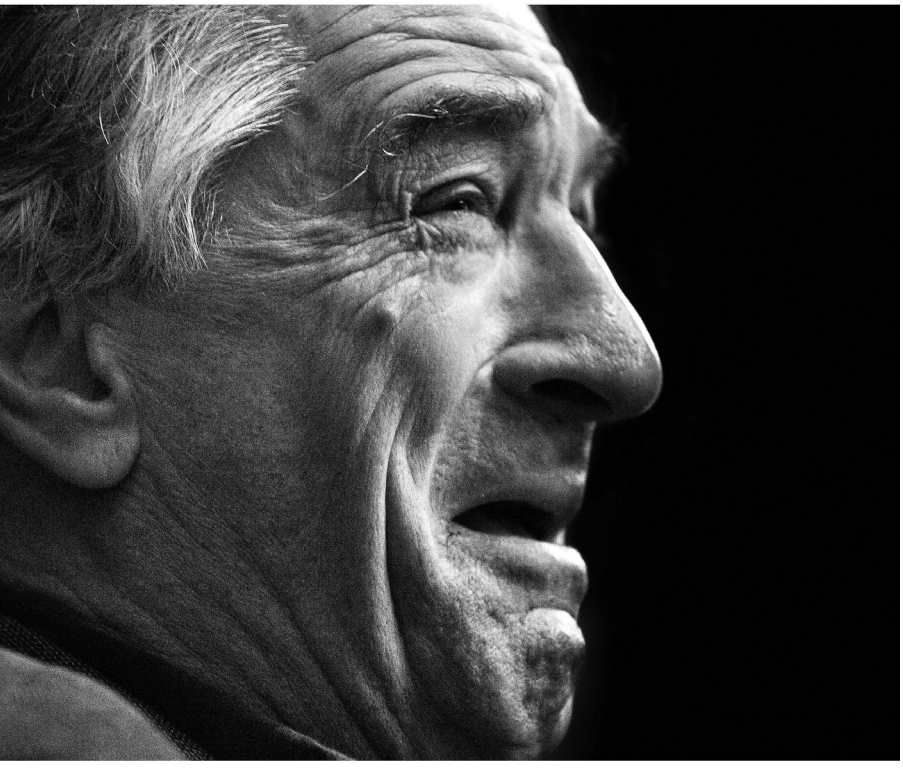


Left: Dalai Lama (2020); Below: Robert De Niro (2014)

and technique feels synthetic and nylon, particularly in a post-Covid world. The intimacy of a portrait stems from simplicity. And most good design and photography is about subtraction.

What inspires you?

RC: I draw my inspiration from nature and architecture. If I wasn't a photographer I would have been an architect. The interplay of space and form in a graphic idiom is the leitmotif of my craft. Architects like Charles Correa and Frank Gehry, and the poetry of straight lines is all the inspiration I need. Getting to travel is singularly the biggest joy of my profession and something that I unfortunately might have to postpone in the near future. I was supposed to be in Bolivia on assignment in June but am happy sustaining myself by the sea in Goa for now.



How do you prepare for a photo-shoot?

RC: I am a lazy person at heart and particularly loathe artificial lights unless a particular assignment mandates it. I do however like to recce or see the intended location / place if time permits just to understand the lighting constraints. I hate photographing at night and in dark dingy places. Give me that one elusive window light and then the rest I improvise. Props and furniture are always

an artistic tool to play with so I am constantly changing and rearranging while imagining the photographic frame.

How do you deal with a creative block?

RC: A creative block is a luxury few photographers in journalism really have. But, if that means feeling sub optimum on a particular day or not feeling particularly enthused by a particular subject or place then it certainly feels like an impediment that is best dealt with by simply not giving up but trying harder. There are significant periods in my photographic journey where I have simply stopped photographing for myself and that perhaps could be called a creative block in short. Travel for me creates the definitive creative surge when it becomes difficult to find magic in the seemingly mundane - best to see the unseen to learn to see again. Photographers do need to see more.



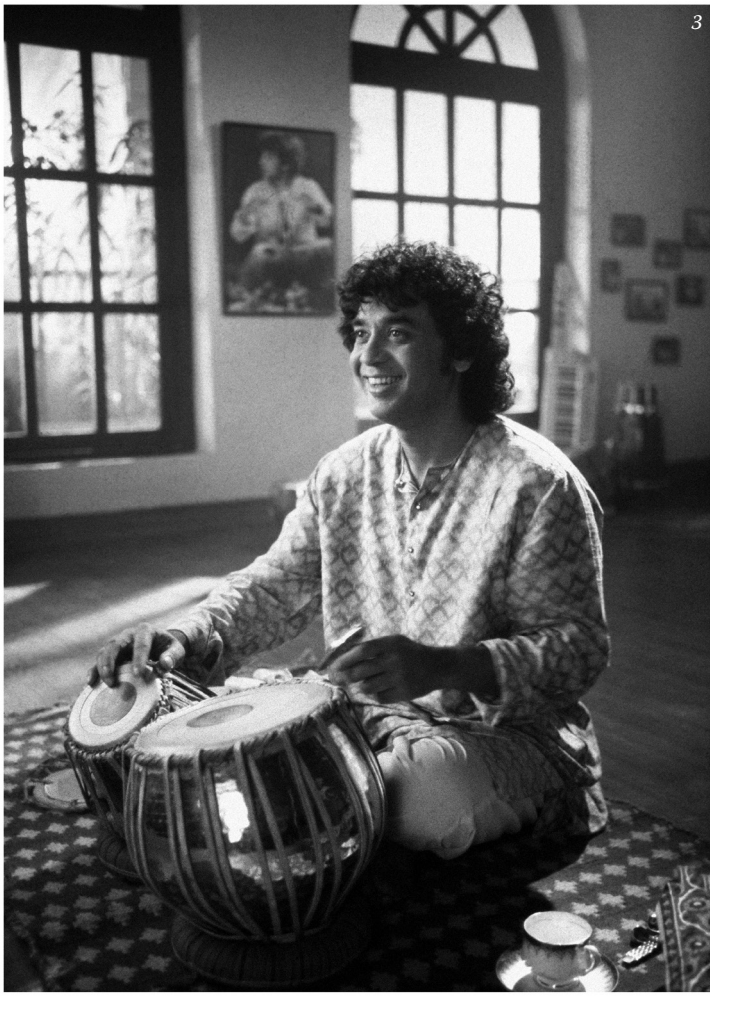
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1. Ai Weiwei's performance, Lesvos, Greece (2016)
2. Jeff Bezos, Chandani Chowk, New Delhi
3. Zakir Hussain (1994)





3



'Frida on White Bench' (Lisa Haydon, 2012)

You have paid tribute to celebrated artists like Raja Ravi Verma, Frida Kahlo and Gustav Klimt. How do you recreate masterpieces through photography?

RC: My decision to swap paint with pixels for the work of some of my favorite artists started essentially as a paid commission for a sponsored calendar. In choosing to recreate them somewhat loosely I got a chance to study their work and style intimately, and that was the essential impetus. The collaborative nature of the exercise and working with designers like Tarun Tahiliani, and Sabyasachi, in addition to set designers and model makers bought its own insights.



Right: Tarun Tahiliani miniature (2015)
Below: Havana (2008)

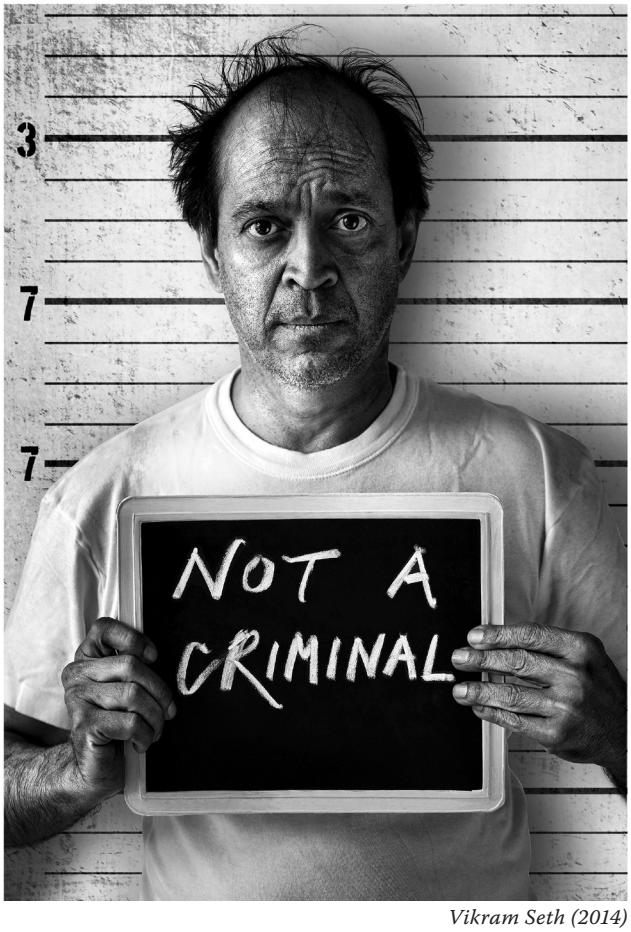
Most of that body of work, particularly the tribute to Raja Ravi Verma, was essentially done in pre-Photoshop days in 2007 on real sets. Sabya bought his own unique Indo-Mexican sensibility to Frida, which was refreshing. Klimt, an artist of a certain excessive ordainment, was an antithesis to the minimalism I practice in my own photographic style. To embrace all these various influences







Naseeruddin Shah (2013)





Vikram Seth (2014)

for a little while was creatively joyful. But what was particularly galling and funny in equal measure was to have some johnny-come-lately plagiarize the whole Raja Ravi Verma concept in 2020. I guess being ahead of the curve in the non-digital world in 2007 can also be somewhat of a curse.

Which have been some of your most memorable projects?

RC: Certain images do seem special - the conceptual cover with Vikram Seth, Ai Weiwei at Lesbos, artist in studio photo sculptures, and out of the box series with authors. My favorite recent assignment was the 2019 cricket World Cup since I am a cricket fanatic – there's nothing like the joy of capturing a special moment from the playing grounds. Since people and portraits are my drugs of choice, the back stories behind the pictures are my best kept secrets. Because every portrait hides a story too.

Does the viewer of a photograph look for esthetics or meaning?

RC: Beauty has become a bit of a dirty word in contemporary art, which is a travesty. I personally worship at the altar of beauty and refuse to get swayed by the obtuse permutations of some curators who are perpetually trying to create a sort of herd mentality of obfuscation among their incestuous ranks in the fond hope that they and their chosen artists can protect their insider turfs. If an image can't stand on its own two feet without the support of a curatorial note, it has no meaning for me.

How do you balance your personal work with professional projects?

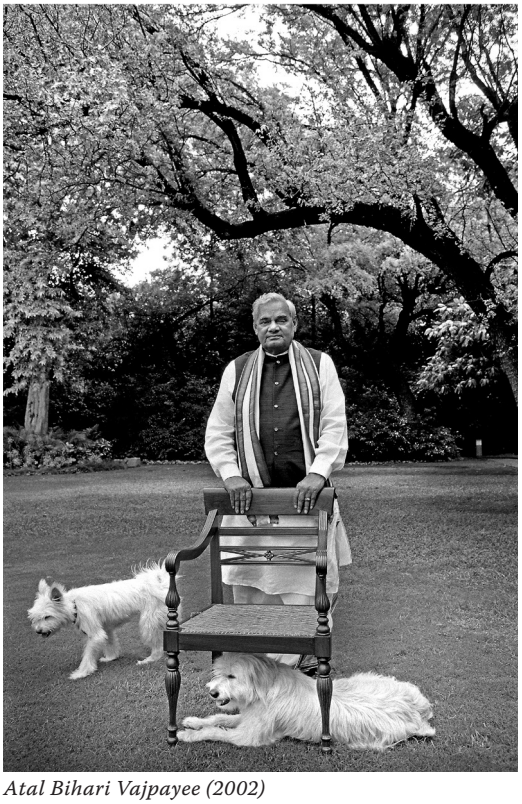
RC: At this stage of my life I can afford to be choosy and only take on projects and assignments that appeal to me at a visceral level. Vanilla fashion bores me unless it comes with dollops of exciting travel

Left: Nafisa Ali, Tribute to Rohit Khosla series (1994)

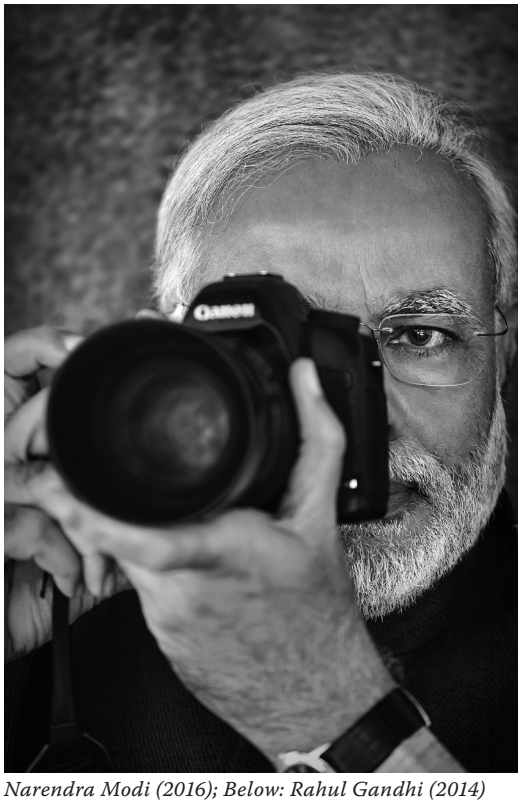




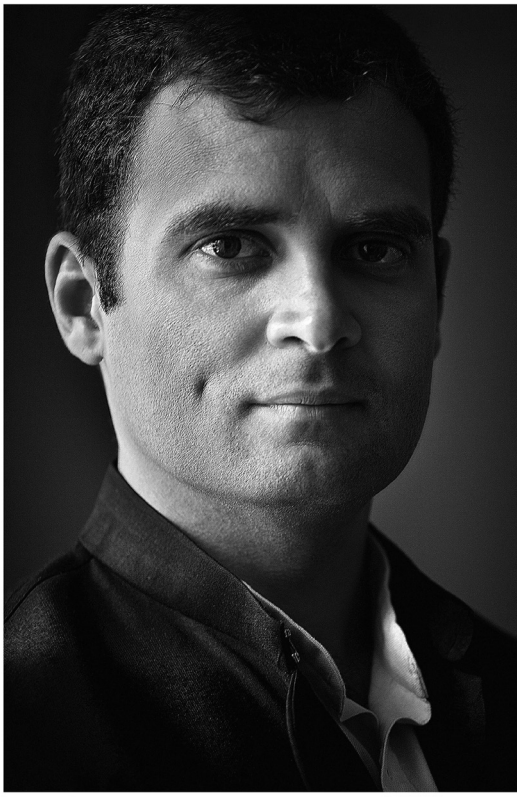
Astad Deboo, 'Out of the box' series (2010)



Atal Bihari Vajpayee (2002)



Narendra Modi (2016); Below: Rahul Gandhi (2014)



locations. Chefs interest me and so food photography with the obligatory Michelin meals thrown in are fun. Books are a deep abiding interest and I'm working currently on authors and artists from across the world. I detest the idea of specializing in a particular subject - this essentially stems from a personal belief that there are only two kinds of photographs, good or bad.

What makes photography commercially viable?

RC: With digital and the democratization of photography it has become a global language we all communicate in. The exalted status of the professional photographer is no longer a holy cow. One has to be constantly prepared to compete with young, hungry legs and an ever expanding ocean of imagery. Creating distinctive imagery is completely about ideation and flawless technique and those

who can combine both might just survive in the real world - it's no longer enough to romanticize that solitary lamppost at night sort of imagery. At the end of the day the photographer now is only going to be judged by the last photograph he took yesterday.

Does analog photography have a place in today's world?

RC: Analog photography is an oxymoron now. It's like insisting you like speaking on the historic black landline phone because you like the romance of glitches and cross connections. Gallerists and a few incestuous curators are constantly trying to create additional value and cinematic lore for some old time photographers in a bid to create value for their collectors. But, like the HD quality we have willingly embraced in our viewing patterns, analog is simply a romantic illusion - more so for those who can't compete in a digital ecosystem.

What's your take on the photo-festivals mushrooming across the country?

RC: They're creating awareness and putting a sort of artistic spotlight on the craft, which is welcome. But some of these festivals, in their great desire to be edgy, also propagate banality and a derivative esthetic that is particularly alien to our cultural landscape. Raghu Rai and I were recently bemoaning the mindless abstraction and randomness, bereft of any poetic form or artistic quotient, that's considered cool by the visually challenged curators and wannabe galleries. It's perhaps symptomatic of the fact that most photo-festivals are increasingly run by failed photographers turned curators who find it easy and expedient to showcase rank outliers and obscure works because their insecurities come in the way of showcasing their more formidable peers.



Ibiza (2019)

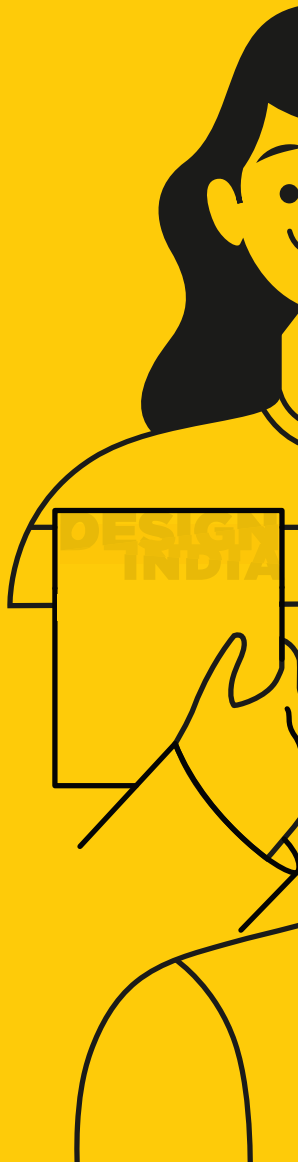
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Richa Bahl's multicultural influences as a child led to her giving up a career in advertising for the joy of creating unforgettable spaces

A niche for herself

Stellar Rooms master wardrobe



Stellar Rooms console

Photography: Arya Arora



Stellar Rooms living room



How were you drawn to design?

RB: Growing up as an army officer's daughter, I was exposed to many Indian cities and cultures; our homes were always multicultural, with local handicraft items from different states. The Officers Mess was always a colonial style building with grand sofa sets, big chandeliers and lots of plants. During the summer holidays I went to my grandparent's home, which was a beautiful white house in the middle of a farm. All these early experiences helped develop my inclination for design and culture. I believe it's an instinct one has – for me, it's just sheer fun. I delight in color, have an awareness of balance, a feeling for lighting, a sense of style, a zest for life, and an amused enjoyment of the smart accessories of the moment.

How did your stint in advertising influence your interior design career?

RB: After my post-graduation in mass communication, I worked in advertising for some years before I opted to become an interior designer. My advertising experience



Universal Studio: Managing Director's room

Photography: Fabien Charuau

helped me to understand who I was designing for; I love to create spaces which have my touch but are tailor made for the client as per their life and functionality. My work involves a lot of planning and budgeting and my advertising experience helps there too. I feel that the older you are the more life experience you have and the better designer you will be.

How did you get into interior design?

RB: Many years back, I decided to design my first home and oversee the execution as well. The entire process was a great teacher and it was thrilling to see it all fall into place. The experience made me realize my passion and that's how my interior design journey began. When I finished my home, a friend who had recently bought a house asked me to design it. Soon, the word spread and I did another friend's home and it snowballed into a practice for me.





Universal Studio: Meeting room

How has your cultural background impacted your design philosophy?

RB: Being exposed to various states while I was growing up gave me a design ethos for myself. I love creating homes that look well-traveled - that's very important to me as I feel the world is getting smaller. I like to create spaces that bring about nostalgia; every time I see a niche I remember my grandparents' home. For me design has to bring about a connection; so, if you are a writer, your home needs to have a happy clutter of books and lots of coffee cups and comfortable seating with cushions.

Describe your style. How do you amalgamate the old world with modern elements?

RB: I love creating a fusion of old and new. The world is getting smaller and smaller and people are exposed to various styles and need a contemporary feel.

As an interior designer I break the monotony and add intrigue to a room by mixing old and new elements into the space. This personalizes it and makes it yours! Over the years I've learnt that people are attracted to designers who are passionate about their particular niche and will be prepared to take risks with them. I don't want the space to look too modern or traditional - I want to make it look interesting.

What is your approach to balancing different elements in a space?

RB: Balance for me is in the way you decorate your home. It makes your home feel complete and organized. It gives an overall visual appeal to a room. Of course the first step is to figure out the optimal layout. There are lots of elements one has to deal with and decide before achieving the right balance. I like the space to have a soul so it's not just placement of pieces of furniture and artifacts...it should tell a story. Inside a room, I want to be moved - I want to feel the drama.

What does it take to create spaces that speak about a person?

RB: I like the space to become a lifestyle statement and a reflection of the inhabitants' personalities. The first is to really understand who you are designing for. For me, the most challenging yet fun part of the job is figuring out the essence of the design, which is always about the people and how they live and use their space. I love to see the surprise and awe in my client's eyes after it's all done, and my attempt is to always achieve the moment for them.

Share your experience of working with celebrities.

RB: Celebrities want their design to be passionate, original, a personal statement, and above all exclusive. When designing homes for celebrities you have to understand that their home is their sanctuary, an escape from the world and all that being a celebrity brings with it. Home becomes a place to really expose who they are, where only their family and closest friends will get to meet the real them in real surroundings. Sometimes the most glamorous stars tend to be the simplest in real life, and the interiors are humble, comfortable, and very personal.

I have had great experiences working with each one of them, including film stars like Alia Bhatt, Kangana Ranaut, Freida Pinto, Dia Mirza, Kriti Sanon, Parineeti Chopra, and Aditi Rao Hydari. They gave me the freedom and trusted me to give them a beautiful home and we enjoyed working together. They are such achievers in their field and I am thrilled to have them as my clients and give them spaces they love.





Left & Right: Lodha Towers, Photography: Fabien Charuau

Are your clients very demanding?

RB: There are clients who really dislike something, and they have demands like no spotlighting, no black, no people pictures or portraits in the house. A client wanted the perfect shade of pastel pink and we looked and looked and we looked, and found a few options but nothing was quite right. Another client wanted the entire house to have different flooring in each area. He was not fond of uniformity. We need to work around these demands.

What are the colors and materials trending in interior design today?

RB: I am not a trend follower as such and my designs are based on who I am designing for. For me a few things will always be trendy, such as adding a lot of greens, using eco-friendly materials, and supporting local artists. I largely stick to innovation and styling around these trends. It also depends on what appeals to your eyes at what point.

What's next?

RB: This is or was going to be an exciting year for me as I'm working on a project very close to my heart. I'm renovating two 100-year old heritage properties in the village area of Bandra in Mumbai.

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LEARNING to LEAVE a MARK

*Award-winning illustrator **Mohit Suneja** has tried his hand at working on a wide range of projects and genres of art*





How did your tryst with illustration begin?

MS: I always had a knack for drawing. Even before completing my first year at College of Art, New Delhi, my drawings were being recognized and published in books. Initially, I started making illustrations for story books and drawing book covers. I also created storyboards for many ad commercials and short films. I would attend college in the day and work on freelance assignments late into the night. I would take up these assignments to learn something new and for extra pocket money. When not working on such projects, I would practice a lot for myself, read books, hone my skills and think of new ideas. Throughout this period, my focus was on building my portfolio and working on my projects, some of which continue till this very day. For me, the thirst for knowledge can never be quenched. From designing a stamp to creating a wall mural 20 times my size, I've done it all.

What is the importance of a formal design education?

MS: My formal design education has played a key role in shaping my personality and thoughts. The experience at

art school has enabled me to think freely and push my limits as far as possible, without following the traditional forms of art. This understanding reflects in my work, thus allowing it to resonate with like-minded people. I learned a lot while working on different kinds of projects and got to work with a wide range of experienced people from different genres of art, who facilitated my necessary exposure to the industry. Classroom knowledge is important, but I feel that for me, working on these projects broadened my horizons, giving me the necessary confidence to follow my own path.

What made you opt for the freelance path?

MS: I love to be as free as I can be. I can't confine myself to something that doesn't excite me. I like my energies to be flowing like a river that passes through the mountains and valleys - always moving and seeking new things. Keeping this approach in mind, I constantly experiment with new ways and different mediums while creating art.

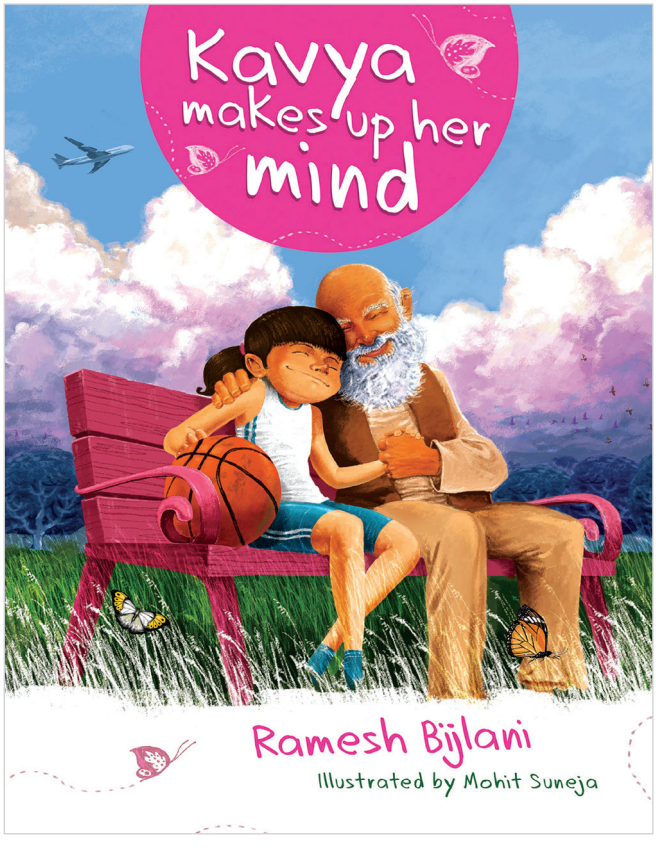
Working as a freelancer can be interesting and challenging at the same time. The best part is that you get to work on a wide range of projects and meet new people. This constantly challenges you to level up your skill-set and approach new clients accordingly. I've had a lot of fun along the way, and it has been a great learning experience too!

The biggest advantage of being a freelancer is that you get to have a life of your own. Instead of a manager sitting on your head and commanding you to meet client deadlines, you can work more freely with more time on your hands. You even get to create your own workspace in your home, or, if you're established enough, your own office! You can decide which days to work and which days to relax. You get to be your own boss. Can anything be better than that?

Which have been some of your more memorable projects?

MS: In 2010, while pursuing my Master's degree at College of Art, New Delhi, I developed a short graphic novel on life events of Bhagat Singh as part of an illustration assignment. This project is very close to my heart as I have been influenced by Bhagat Singh's thoughts to a great extent. My rebellious soul resonates with the way he led his life.

In 2012, I got the opportunity to redesign and illustrate the curriculum books for





Bhagat Singh

Presidium Schools. I got the chance to observe the behavior of children very closely. I would make rough sketches of their actions, which I later incorporated in the illustrations.

In 2014, I illustrated 'Kavya makes up her mind,' a very sweet story of a young girl, authored by Ramesh Bijlani for National Book Trust, India. I spent a lot of time with the author, wherein he shared a lot of memories of his granddaughter, who was the inspiration behind the book. On its release, the book received a huge response from the young audience and got reprinted in several languages.

What does it take to handle clients? Please share some tips.

MS: You have to be a good listener. If you don't listen and understand the client's brief properly, the foundation of the project won't be strong, and you'll inadvertently make errors, consequently spending more time correcting those errors. You also need to be able to analyze the brief and visualize the final product before you begin working on it.

Always know that there will be disagreements between you and the client. At times, they may reject your work completely and ask you to redo the whole thing. This can damage your self-esteem, but you have to learn how to take criticism in your stride and use it to improve your work. Constantly evaluate your growth as you move from one project to the next one. If there's no visible change in your work over the years, then you definitely need to reinvent yourself.

Keep in mind that while it's great to work for an already established brand, you should also support new and unknown brands with your art. You will then play a key role in developing the identity of those new brands. If you are successful in leaving a mark while working on small and big projects alike, you'll definitely evolve as as artist and earn admiration for your work from all quarters.

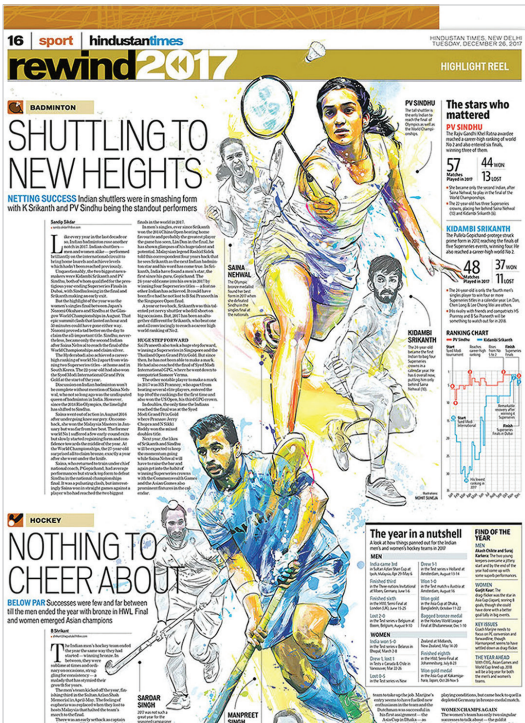
What is your role as Assistant Art Director with *Hindustan Times*?

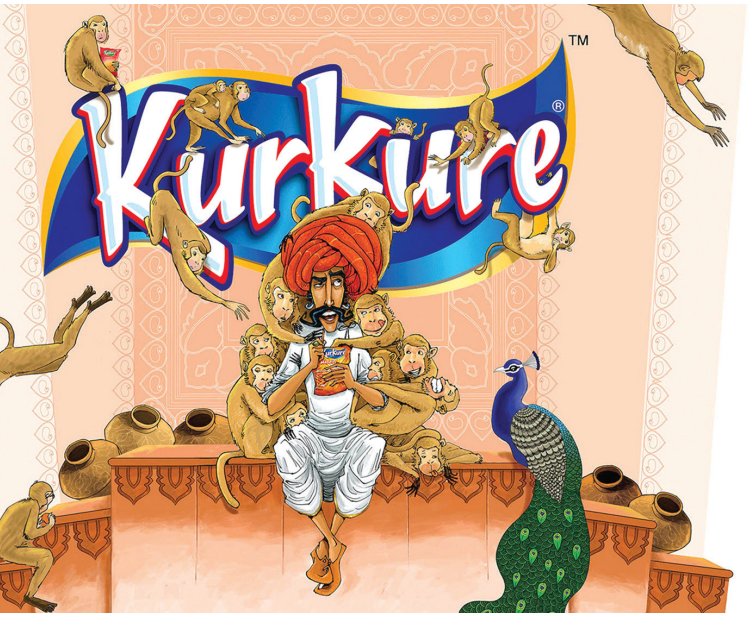
MS: I freelanced with *Hindustan Times* (HT) on a few of their projects - they saw my potential, loved my work and offered me a full-time job. Working with HT has been a good learning experience. It's really a challenge to work on new projects almost every day. There has been a remarkable growth in terms of my ability to ideate and execute ideas. It's a different feeling altogether to see your work published in a reputed newspaper like HT and reach the masses all over the country. The way people respond to my work and get in touch with me to share the varied emotions that my artworks cause them to experience is wonderful!



The most challenging part of working in a newsroom is to deliver the work on time without losing out on the quality of work. I fight the clock every day. Sometimes, it gets really difficult, but I believe that these extreme challenges push your mind in unimaginable ways, forcing you to muster all your strength to deliver the work. That's how you progress and learn.

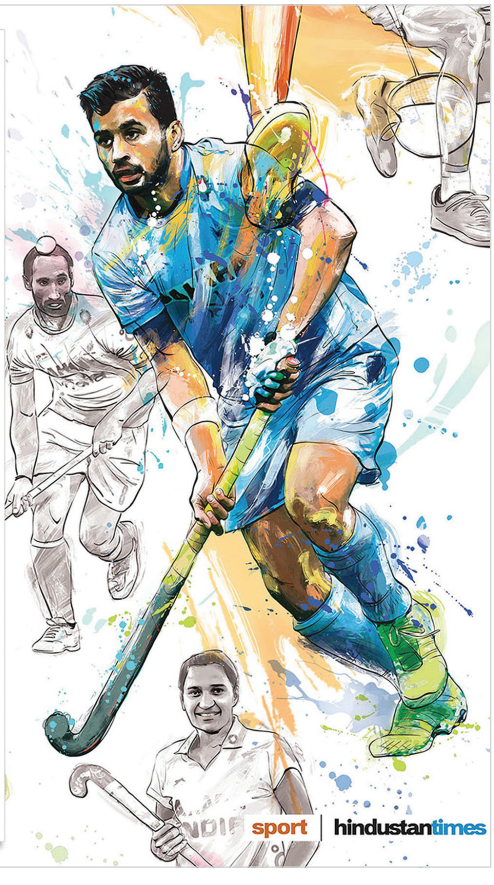






How do you approach illustration assignments?

MS: Before I begin drawing, I spend a lot of time on research, understanding the true tone of the text by diving in a bit. Depending on the given subject, it might take me days or weeks to create the illustrations. Most of the time, publishers have a broader business point of view and rarely indulge in the creative aspects of the given book on a micro level. They see it merely as a business module and are mostly concerned about generating revenue. A good design might fall flat if the sales graphs are pointing downwards. Thus, while working on a book for a publisher, it's important to know their priorities and then proceed accordingly.



On the other hand, authors are focused only on one book, unlike publishers. Therefore, the artist gets the opportunity to delve deep into the subject, get to its deepest core and then get the best out of it. If the wavelength of the author matches the artist's, things might work out in unexpected and unimaginable ways.

How did you become passionate about drawing cartoons and caricatures?

MS: I've been drawing cartoons and caricatures since school. I am an observer - I quietly observe a lot around me: animals, birds, the way people talk, their body language, gestures, attitude, dressing style, etc. Since my college days, I carry a small-sized sketchbook with a pen for scribbling sketchy notes while commuting in the metro or hanging around in malls, or at the office. Later, these notes serve as my original observational ideas and are helpful in the process of developing the original artwork. Rather than being dependent on Google for everything, I prefer looking around, taking a long walk and then creating my own references and notes in order to make my work more authentic.

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Hindustan Times Leadership Summit 2018, Delhi

One moment from my career that I will always cherish is when I presented Will Smith, one of my favorite Hollywood actors, with his caricature at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit in 2018. He really loved it and gave me a huge autograph. It was like a dream come true. I had never thought that I could reach that far.

What inspires you?

MS: I believe that inspiration can strike from anywhere if one is open, aware and receptive. I admire a lot of illustrators and artists and truly respect the effort and energy they put in an artwork. Whenever I see young minds soaked in their work, truly oblivious to the passage of time, it inspires me; pushing me to create with the same energy. Great movies inspire me too!

What has your teaching experience taught you?

MS: Since I pursued BFA and MFA from College of Art, New Delhi, it was an honor to teach in the same college. Standing on the other side of the classroom and dealing with one hundred different minds was a task in itself. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching, and relish that experience till date. Whenever I see my students pursuing their dreams and reaching new heights in their career, I feel rewarded as a teacher. It's a matter of pride and self-confidence when your students go farther than you in their careers. A hundred years from now, it won't matter what kind of car I drove, the house I lived in or how much money I had in my bank account. But the world may be a slightly better place because I made a positive difference in the life of a student. I believe that I've learned more from my students than they have from me.

Please share your aspirations.

MS: I wish to go on vacations abroad, date like-minded illustrators and create graphic novels. I am looking for people with whom I can collaborate and make things happen. I really wish to create some visually good graphic novels with original content and art and take India to international platforms and awards. Eventually, I wish to have my own studio dedicated completely to illustrations.

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FIRING *the* IMAGINATION

Drawn early to the wonders of clay, ***Shitanshu G. Maurya*** *has discovered that the creative journey is more important than the destination*



'Fossil V'
(Stoneware & stone,
36x10x20 in, 2018)



'Welcome on board' (Earthenware & Aviation scrap, variable size, 2015)



How did your tryst with ceramics begin?

SM: I still remember spending whole afternoons under the scorching sun, playing with mud in the backyard of my grandmother's house during the summer vacations; we tried making some shapes and fired them as well. As a child I lived near a community of potters and I saw them working from close quarters. That left an indelible mark on my psyche and was probably what led me to the technicalities and pleasures of ceramics.

Education gives an insight into the technicalities of the subject and opens up the dark chambers to a new world. I pursued a BFA (Painting) degree from College of Arts & Craft (Lucknow University). Ceramics was an optional subject that I opted for in my second year as I began to be drawn by clay. The ceramics classes took up about 10% of the curriculum and I found that too little for my growing interest; so, I invested my spare time in the ceramics studio and slowly I found myself submerged in the clay. I was in love with clay and chose Ceramics as my major for my post graduation despite a lot of opposition from seniors, teachers and family. I spent the two years of postgraduate studies either in the studio or meeting other artists and attending workshops.

Tell us about your association with the Lalit Kala Akademi.

SM: Since 2018 I have been working full time with the Lalit Kala Akademi as ceramic studio supervisor at the regional center in Kolkata. Prior to this, I was associated with the Lalit Kala Akademi as a working artist and worked at the studio in Lucknow for almost 14 years. Now I have an administrative and managerial role - my job is to facilitate working artists at the studio and provide them the best facilities and environment. I curate workshops, art camps, and other programs and help provide other artists an opportunity to work within the community to enhance their creative instincts. In 2019, I got the opportunity to visit the UK on a research scholarship under the Charles Wallace India Trust Award. I worked in the UK for six months as a research associate at the School of Fine Arts at Newcastle University and at Sandy Brown studio. This was a great opportunity for me to explore a new place, history, architecture, culture, and the technicalities of the medium – the experience left an indelible mark on my memory. In my spare time, I try to continue my practice. I am enjoying this shift in life and career, as it is always good to change place and come up with many more new things to learn and do. It is a golden opportunity and I am open to every bit of it.

Describe your style.



SM: Sometimes my forms are clear and realistic and sometimes they are vaguely a form of something in complete abstraction. My style is not far from abstract expressionism where visuals speak of time, valor, purity, weight, and outcome of travel from the past to the present.

What inspires you?

SM: My inspiration comes from my inner world, which is fed from my observations, and I feed my observations through books, movies, walking, traveling, and feeling the essence of my presence in any surroundings.



1



2



3

1. 'Fossil VI' (Stoneware, 12x12x36 in, 2018)
2. 'From handmade to readymade I, II & III' (Ceramic & wood, 50x13x13 in, 2020)
3 'Wake up!' (Stoneware & ms steel, 48x18x24 in, 2009)



Give us a glimpse of your creative process.

SM: Basically, I try to immerse myself into the pool of ideas in my mind; this isolates me from the outer world and helps me to come up with drawings and other possibilities of works. Sometimes an object, thought, place, person or a situation acts as a catalyst. It sounds quite simple after the first step but crossing it is quite challenging and intriguing. For a show it all starts with a framework and a curatorial note; then my whole process starts on paper with technical and esthetic possibilities. After some research I get on to filtered drawings and things go into the implementation process. Sometimes, however, I start with nothing in mind, nothing on paper, no considerations, just clay in hand and it moves me further to some forms and processes. It is quite magical and delightful to work this way – it is a pure way of connecting with yourself and your creative process.

How different are shows in India from those abroad?

SM: Preparing for a show is sometimes like arranging a big fat wedding, where one needs to plan for each and every thing. Every show is bigger than the last one, so our expectations get bigger and we try to fill all the voids. There is a big difference in shows in India and abroad due to the different work cultures and ways of presenting exhibitions. I have exhibited in Korea, Abu Dhabi, and England and I had to personally prepare for everything. Each experience is different from the earlier one, but what remains the same everywhere is the enthusiasm and zeal to present the best.



'From Past to Present II' (Stoneware, porcelain & PC sheet, 55x30x60 inch, 2013)

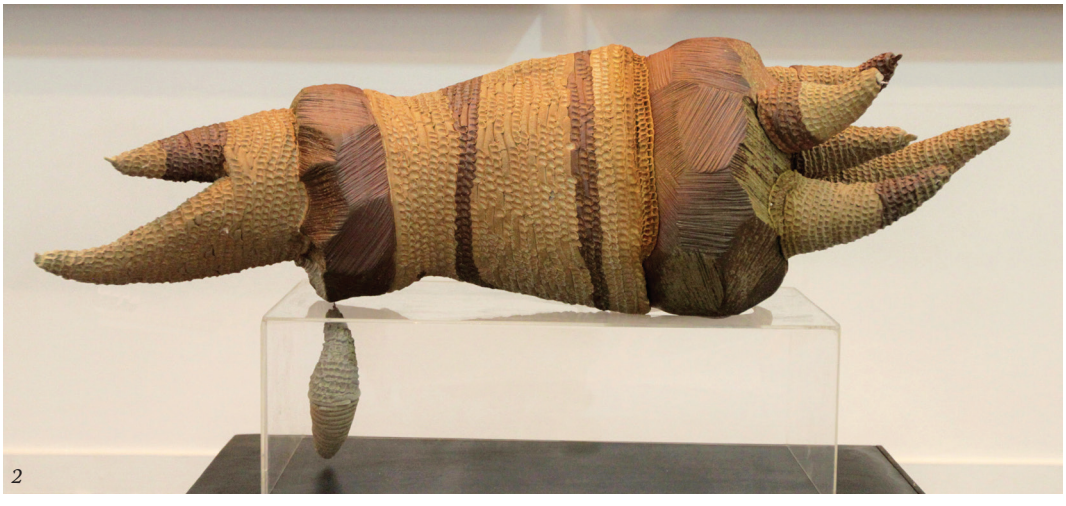
Which have been some of your memorable projects?

SM: 'Green Age' was a commissioned project and this was probably the most challenging work for me at that point of my career. My ideas started growing on a larger scale and I started giving them shape on a scale for which I had zero resources. As time passed the project started reacting on its own and suddenly it started driving me towards completion with lots of accidents, challenges, tough deadlines, and other issues; after every challenge it directed me to new ideas, and this was the nectar from the whole process. I was paranoid until the day the project was successfully installed. I was glad to have such wonderful results and an experience that still resonates in my mind.

How do you balance creativity with the commercial side of it?

SM: Balancing creativity and commerce is difficult. One needs money to cater to creativity and creativity to cater to commerce - both are complementary but need different gears to run. I never ran towards the commercial market because I didn't want to compromise my creative process. I chose to live with the minimal requirements of life. It is difficult to live this way but it keeps me hungry for the next new thing to do!







1. 'Fossil IV' (Stoneware & stone, variable size, 2018)
2. 'Fossil I' (Stoneware & PC sheet, 36x12x18 in, 2017)
3. 'Green Age'

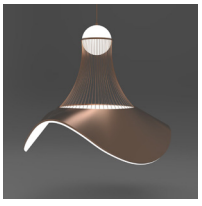
You're no stranger to receiving awards. What difference do they make to an artist?

SM: Awards boost morale and prove one is on the right track - they play quite an important role in one's journey. I feel they are very important and vital in the process of strengthening the creative process. On the other hand, awards may result in complacency and overconfidence. It is very important to handle the intoxication of the award. I feel one need not work for an award - it needs to find its way to you.

How will the current coronavirus pandemic impact ceramic designers in India?

SM: The pandemic has affected every nook of society and the world - no one is unimpaired by its drastic effects and transitive powers.

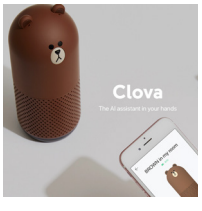
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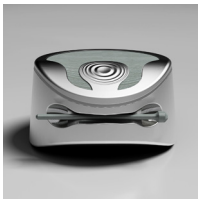
















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'Supper' (Stoneware, wood & sound clip, 14x09 in each, nine platters, 2009)

I think it's time to think more openly and widely, where we are part of this universal challenge and not particularly tortured by it. I am more worried about craft workers who rely on small markets and festivals and rituals; it is a very hard time for them to sustain and keep their hopes alive. As an artist, I feel this dormant time is very helpful to recharge my energy and get more clarity on the creative process. It's time for all ceramic designers and artists to look for more environment-friendly and sustainable ways to check our carbon footprint; it's time to rethink and move to a greener model.

Please share your aspirations.

SM: My aspirations are limited to the creative journey, not a destination. There is no particular milestone to cross – I'm just aspiring to carry on this journey to a new terrain and find new possibilities of life and creativity.

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'Check seal on delivery' (Ceramic, found chair, video clip & sound clip, 10x10x05 feet, 2014)

MAKING a Different IMPACT

As much an activist as a designer, ***Kriti Tula*** *is determined to change the way fashion is created and consumed*









How, in your opinion, has the definition of fashion changed from elaborate to minimal and conscious?

KT: As the idea of long term trends faded away, fashion evolved to be more individualistic around the globe. With the rise of the internet, influencers and social media, the attention span of consumers reduced. Inspiration became available everywhere, and more people grew conscious enough of personal style and body type to not blindly follow trends but pick styles to enhance their personality and suit their bodies. I wouldn't say that fashion has moved from elaborate to minimal. Both elaborate and minimal designers are doing phenomenally well serving their own niches. However, conscious is not a trend - it is the DNA of a brand. You can choose to make elaborate or minimal designs while producing consciously made design, evaluating the impact of each piece made.

What is the story behind Doodlage?

KT: It is estimated that if factory waste from India, China and Bangladesh was used to make fresh garments you could make 60 billion garments worth 200 million dollars every year, saving all the resources that go into making fresh fabrics and saving tons of this refuse from its fate of down-cycling.

As a designer I was always inclined to find solutions and Doodlage started exactly with that agenda. Our aim was to start a conversation around ways to bring circularity in fashion and raise awareness around the impact of a linear fashion model. Everything at Doodlage is upcycled from factory waste, recycled from factory waste, made to be zero waste. Our packaging is plastic free. We produce all our products with ethical production units.

How do you ensure sustainability in your design process?

KT: We source post production waste from large scale fabric and garment manufacturing units. This ranges from weave, print and color defects to post cutting waste. We work around these problems with patch work and embroideries along with several other techniques. Our waste and post cutting waste from factories is paneled to create running patchwork fabric which is used for producing all patched garments. What is left after this process is used to create textured fabrics, which is then used to make accessories. What is left after this step is further shredded to make paper, which is used to make our stationery and packaging. We are now working to connect post-consumer waste from Indian consumers to recycling units to make recycled yarns. We buy these yarns to make fabrics for our garments. What can be resold or upcycled is first separated to be sold as raw material for the same. We also promote repair, repeat and rewear through several campaigns throughout the year to the best of our current capacity.

Your philosophies challenge the typical notions of fast fashion. What are the challenges of running a sustainable brand?

KT: It's important for us to continuously invest in better finishes, avoiding overproduction, working with fair wage units, finding ways to invest in reselling or swapping. Every business comes with its own set of challenges. When we registered the brand in 2012 we only had a vision for what we wanted to create; it took us a while to figure out supply chain, vendors, sellers and steps to scale and raise awareness around the need for sustainable fashion. We started operations in Delhi in 2014. As a bootstrapped firm, we worked with one problem at a time with very limited funds and carefully curating our supply chain. As a founder, I continued to work till 2018 to



gain more experience in the industry before I joined the brand full-time. Even after being profitable post the first year of operations, every year came with a new set of challenges, which is a part of every entrepreneur's life and every new business.

What does it take to work with artisans? How do you approach quality control?

KT: Patience and respect for everyone in your team is what it takes to work with artisans. Fashion stands at a cross point of our cultural differences and between various economical segments of our society; that is what made fashion intriguing for me. We work with third party fair wage and ethical production units to maintain the quality of the products, and an in-house QC team helps to maintain the quality of our product.







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How do levels of acceptance of sustainability in India and abroad differ?

KT: It's difficult to be 100% sustainable in this age and time and the level of awareness, product accessibility and affordability all play important roles in changing consumer behavior. Internationally this movement and its acceptance started earlier and India is catching up. All consumers need to reduce their waste. Be more open to swapping and buying second-hand clothing.



How do you balance the commercial and creative aspects of your work?

KT: The right mix of these aspects is the recipe to create a successful brand with a loyal consumer base. We can hope to maintain the right balance as we prepare to scale up.

How do you market and distribute your products in India, and globally?

KT: We are mainly connected to a global audience by our recently launched website. Our secondary channels are third party multi designer stores in several cities around the country like Ogaan, Aza, Elahe, Anahita, and Folio; third party websites like tatacliq, mensXP, Jaypore, Nete, and pernia's pop up shop. We also work with several boutique stores around the world. And lastly, we help other businesses go green with corporate orders for packaging, merchandising and uniform solutions.

What's next?

KT: We are raising funds to scale; introducing new product categories; increasing product depth; and working to reach more people in India and globally through our website.

team@doodlage.in

Painting OUT LOUD

*Art has given **Aditya Verma** a voice in a way that nothing else has, allowing him to put before the world what he truly sees in his creative mind*



BTS from the shoot/ Memoirs of Past Love Bites

How were you drawn to art?

AV: I have painted since before I could walk; it has always offered me the freedom to think out loud the way I think inside my head. My work too is a reflection of the immaterial thoughts we all have, infinitesimal, impossible to quantify, but bearing

immense weight on our psyche and actions throughout our life. Formal education in an arts college offered me perspective as to what I shouldn't do in the pursuit of finding my true expression, while offering me the practice and academic structure essential to escape the inner trappings that we acquire while growing; it allowed me to see things from my own unique perspective.



'Sense of Self, Inside my Mind 2' (ink drawing)

Describe your style.

AV: Something that doesn't rest in any one style, my art is polymorphic, combining the tenets of individualism with collectivism. Fluidity in personal life and in my art is what feels right to me, and an innate ability to adapt to and accept multiple perspectives and thought processes is what drives my style.

Do you think combining individualism with collectivism can work in India?

AV: We are products of the failure that our world has endured. While the West understood the individual, normalizing personal ambition and focus, the East understood the collective, laying foundations for a one mind-one result approach. Both could not survive without each other, and both ignored each other. Where there is an absence of balance, there is chaos. I have focused my energy on finding this balance, saying what I want to say in a way that is understandable for everyone, irrespective of language, modes of communication and circumstance.

Where does inspiration come from?

AV: From my daily life, and from a very sharp Emotional Quotient! Minute things about people and their behavior, actions, words, conditioning and situations are like goliath statues screaming to be painted. My inspiration is also the void of human consciousness, a space where humanity

exists but also does not exist, where all thoughts are dumped and forgotten about, where we all co-exist as one.

Why is it so important for an artist to tap into the 'sense of nothingness'?

AV: A majority of our lives is actually spent inside our own heads, no matter how much we communicate with others and try to leave our mark behind in this world. Sex, art, science, technology, ambition, emotion, life and death are all inevitable in a person's life, yet no matter how big your contribution to the world, all is eventually forgotten. I spent many years furiously filling canvas after canvas, pouring my heart out into the world, and a visual of a silver kid at the bottom of a river came to my head. No matter how much this child ate, drinking river after river, sitting at the bottom of the ocean, no matter how much this child grew, its existence was nothing to the universe. This sense of nothingness exists in all of us, and tapping into it is the only way we can come close to surrendering ourselves to nothingness and creating what we truly see inside our minds and wish to create.

Why did your focus shift from painting women to painting the daily life of queers?

AV: Acceptance of the self plays a major part in this, as well as an ability to step away from group thinking to form my own perspective. My idea of beauty expanded as I climbed over the walls of phobias and misinformation carefully built around me since birth, and found myself at home, able to breathe, able to touch, feel, kiss and hold people who I could understand clear as day and absorb as easily as moonlight.

As I realized my queerness, going from one label to the next as my sexuality and ideas of gender expanded, I found more and more discrepancies with what the world said was real and what actually existed. For a long



'Tongue Twister/Realisation of Pain' (ink drawing)

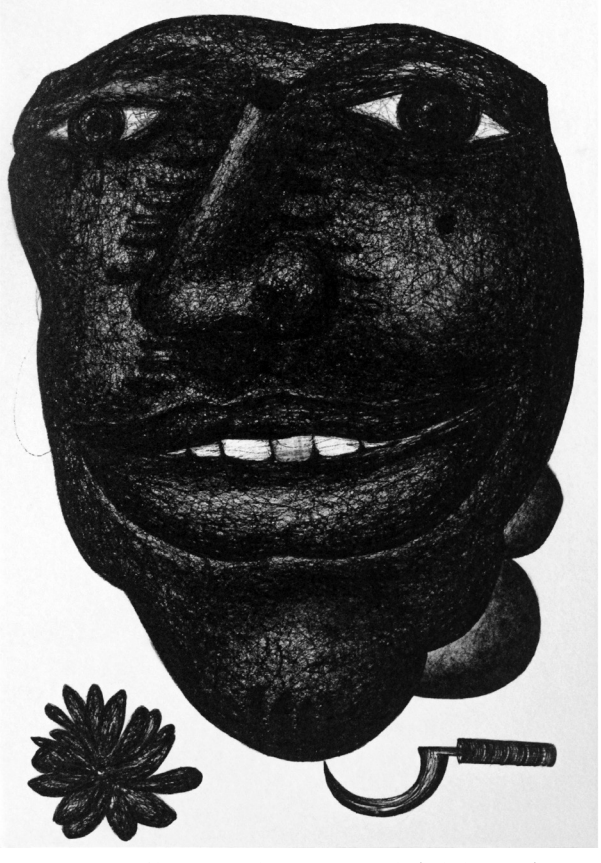


'Transcendence, Flowering/ Realisation of Self' Part 2 (ink drawing)

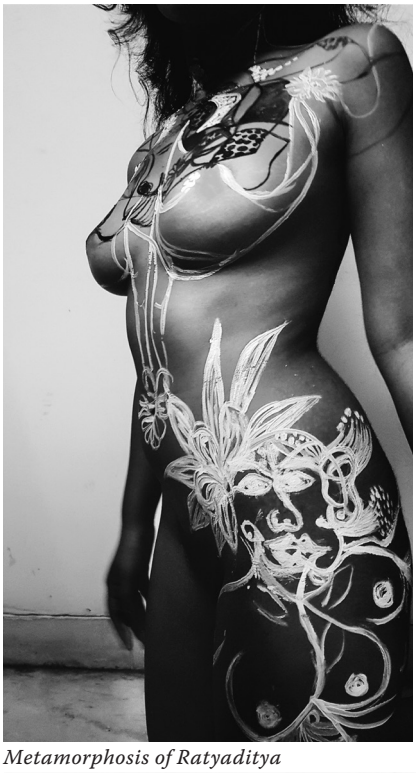
time I felt I was trapped under a sheet of ice, where it was dark and no one acknowledged the presence of a gender spectrum, my words falling on deaf ears; and then one day I realized I was standing in shallow water, restricted as long as my mind chose to believe in restrictions. That day I started limping, then walking, running and finally sprinting, and there was no looking back for me.

Which media do you most enjoy working with?

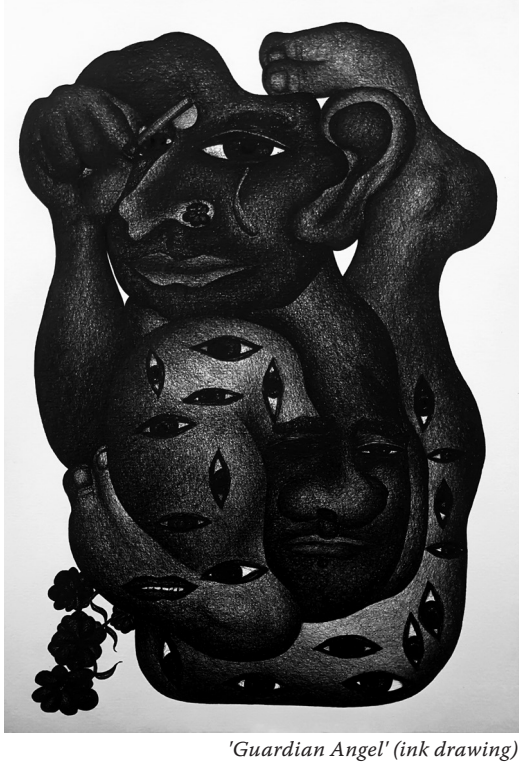
AV: Ink! While traditionally training under veteran artist Shobha Broota, I discovered and focused years of practice in many mediums. Towards the start of my conscious journey in art I focused a lot on ink, finding an almost supernatural connection between ink and my hands. I could use ink in a multitude of ways from the start, and continue to push my boundaries and understanding of ink to date. I have always worked out of moving spaces, the Delhi metro being a classic example, and have always experienced a certain elevation in my art when it is made around other people. Ink is one of the rare mediums that comes with very little limitation, offering mobility and portability, and from the beginning of my journey in art I have preferred to carry a mini studio with me, as the need or urge to paint is like drinking water or talking, and can strike at any moment. A major chunk of my oeuvre is in ink, and I feel ink also helps me break from the limitations of a bigger canvas that artists often unwittingly fall into. One can observe class structures and hegemonies of the art world being challenged and broken through the active dismissal of big canvas formats.



'St. Humour/Self Portrait of a Happy Monk' (ink drawing)



Metamorphosis of Ratyaditya



'Guardian Angel' (ink drawing)

What drew you to body painting?

AV: The body for me always represented freedom. My own body was a cage, no matter the physical work I put into it. My vocal chords were jailers, stopping me from saying what I wanted to say, my arms dead weight, and my face frigid. Growing up, I poured myself into books, gobbling up knowledge for the sake of acquiring it, aimlessly wandering through libraries, ignoring people, watching from afar, talking as if two characters in a book would talk, imagining the world in my head, unable to animate it. Art offered me a voice. When I began painting I found people understood in seconds what I couldn't convey to them for years. Body painting helped me bridge that gap. One day it dawned on me that painting on someone would be a great way of talking to them; I would be able to bring them into my world, show them what I was thinking, and see what they were thinking.

'Untitled Goddesses' was the second body painting project I did, unwittingly, as part of someone else's project, which me and my fellow photographer found quite pointless as a whole. I had talked to the people participating in the project about their lives, and they had poured out their stories to me, as I painted on them. As an afterthought we decided to shoot our own series; the models wore their own clothes, and their own stories on their skin, and the write ups for the outtakes were born of their own tongues. After this there was no looking back. One day I casually photographed a muse of mine as we lay reclining after a very long life drawing session and shared the photo with the world, asking whether anyone else wanted to get photographed or painted on, and there was no looking back.

How did your tryst with music begin?

AV: Music is also something we are born with. Some can let it in better than others, letting their own music communicate with the music of the universe, and some can briefly generate the sound that the universe is generating. I saw music as a pillar of my existence from a very early age, as I always believed art is multi-dimensional and the

truest of artists used every art form in the world to express absolutely all sides of their self expression. From learning classical guitar from a great artist as a child, to being introduced to the concept of the artist being able to express using any art form as a tool during my teenage years under the guidance of Shobha Broota, I found omnipotence. My drive to endlessly create led me to a few incomplete tracks of Pandit Ravi Shankar's work on my phone one day, and as I closed my eyes and absorbed the rarity of the sitar, I was hooked. I found my guru, and armed with my sister's unused sitar and a thirst to learn, I started my second journey into the world of music. Little did I know that I was going to come full circle at the feet of Pandit Ravi Shankar's grand disciple, and my training under Pandit Madan Shankar Misra, the last of his generation, began.

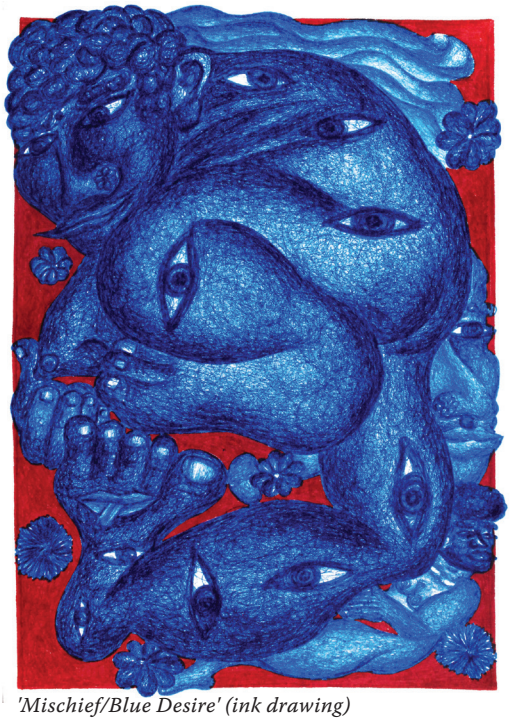
How do you strike a balance between creativity and the commercial side of it?

AV: I don't. I hold a job in advertising (Senior Creative Designer at WatConsult in New Delhi) and can generate any amount of money I need. I paint what I want, when I want. The outcome does not matter, neither does the cost. Frugality is one of my core beliefs. I do not need paint anymore to be an artist - I can paint with anything that is available. All of this offers an explosive freedom and the word 'no' stays on the tip of my tongue, something which is rare in the art world. I am not part of any institution or fraternity; I live in my own world and on my own time.

What's next?

AV: I am looking forward to my first solo exhibition, Light and Dark, showcasing my current thought process, and effort towards becoming autonomous, freeing up more time to create art and music. The effort is in the moment, so the future is effervescent and of no concern to me.

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'Mischief/Blue Desire' (ink drawing)



'Finality'/Photograph of unexplored desire



keeping ART ALIVE *in a lockdown*



Kiran Nadar with Ghanaian-British architect Sir David Adjaye

Collections and images courtesy: KNMA

*The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) is home to some of the finest modern contemporary art. With a core collection comprising post-independence 20th century painters, KNMA also holds exhibits of emerging artists. On its 10th anniversary, founder **Kiran Nadar** leads us on a heritage walk down memory lane, spanning the evolution of Indian art over the last 100 years.*

How has the current coronavirus crisis changed things at KNMA?

KN: We have been working on actualizing a new museum, which I had conceptualized two years ago. I feel India is ready for an architectural masterpiece in the form of a museum, for which we had just finalized the architect and selected land in Delhi. It was in the final stages when the nationwide lockdown was announced to halt the spread of the coronavirus. Ghanaian-British architect, Sir David Adjaye, who lives between Ghana and USA, had finished the drawings and the plans. He was to come and stay in India in June and July to start construction, but now the work is on hold indefinitely. I foresee a delay of months, not more, due to these novel circumstances. These are unprecedented times. Of course, we will move forward in the future, as and when the lockdown is lifted and life goes back to normal, and we can. As I consider

the model and plan that the architect has designed and given us for this new museum, I have something powerful to usher in another milestone for Indian art on the world stage.

What is the KNMA team up to? Has your programming been affected?

KN: We are all well organized to work remotely from our residences. We have swiftly shifted focus from physical events to the online arena. We are offering virtual tours of a lot of our past shows and permanent collection, working on doing social media outreach and designing courses and online workshops for all ages. As a dynamic organization, KNMA aims to bring the gallery as a cultural platform into people's homes. Starting with the jewels from our archive, we connected the audience to our existing display in the form of virtual exhibitions of our permanent collection. It has been proved time and again how beneficial arts and culture are to mental health so we are also running programs across all platforms to keep the arts alive in people's homes; we want to inspire and encourage all ages to take part, at home, and develop their own creative practice.

You have a deep understanding of art and artists in flow. How do you feel the art world would respond to stress in times like this crisis?

KN: I'm sure artists are spending a lot of time doing a lot of work, because they are also bound to their residences. I don't know what will emerge from this potentially moving, en masse collective creative response to the current crisis. The art world is flexible and herein is our strength during these trying times.

Shall we go back to the beginning and visit your first tryst with art? How did your journey begin?

KN: The first pieces in my collection were from the holy trifecta of Indian talent at the time – M F Husain, Rameshwar Broota, and Manjit Bawa. Being engaged with many so artists and makers of the time, I ended up collecting more work than could be hung at home or the (HCL) office. So, as an effect, rather than a cause unto itself, the museum was conceived, in a dash of serendipity or kismet. That's how the journey started. I never imagined that a collection based on my personal interest and tastes would evolve into a public museum. It all happened organically.

How has this journey with art changed you?

KN: It has definitely had an impact. I wouldn't say art has changed me, but I've definitely evolved from it. It has sharpened and widened my horizons and I've become more perceptive. I don't really have an arts background, so it's been a huge learning experience. I further worked on sharing my experiences with the public to use what I have learnt via art. So there was an after-effect as well. Ten years is quite a long time. One doesn't notice it all at once, as the pace of time is languid. I have a very good team.



Self Portrait with Easel by Amrita Sher - Gil (1930)

It's a small team but most members have been with me right from the start and looking back we have certainly come a long way, and that's been good for the museum. It has been an amazing journey so far.

What according to you was the most formative period for Indian art?

KN: Indian art goes back many centuries. The landscape of Indian art is as old as time itself – relief, sculpture and miniature painting evolved and existed alongside the very first development of human societies in the subcontinent. Art is as primordial as the human condition, so to be clear, we are really talking about contemporary Indian art here. This encompasses different movements that have been key milestones from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, so just over a hundred years.

Let's start with Ravi Varma who, perhaps unintentionally, essayed the cultural diversity of India by his depictions of the common man as well as portraits of royalty. He took inspiration from the renaissance painters and developed a realistic style. He did a lot of mythological art in the form of paintings of gods and goddesses and miniatures, along with his portraiture of subjects from diverse classes – a telling documentation of the stratified society at the time, made clear by the ornaments and attires of his subjects. Then there was the Bengal School, and from there, we go to the writers and masters of the Tagore school. They didn't have large canvasses. Their works were small in size and they worked with a completely different depth of perception from when you look at the works made by the Bombay school, which started around the time of Independence in 1947. The Progressive Artists' Group (PAG) was a group of modern artists, formed by six founder members, F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza, M. F. Husain, K. H. Ara, H. A. Gade, and S. K. Bakre, who was the only sculptor in the group.

The most important period for Indian art is the Progressive Art Movement. Post-Independence was a pivotal moment. It was a key movement that then grew to encompass many major artists like Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta and Krishen Khanna. All these artists were not really part of the Progressive Artists Group but got linked with them because they followed the same kind of interest in art. A lot of these people moved abroad, but someone like Husain did not. He stayed in India and so that's the most important period as far as I think.

Then there are post-modern artists like Broota. Of course, there are many women artists, like Amrita Sher-Gil. So, art has evolved over a century in different ways. Now there are the contemporary artists, the prominent ones being Anju Dodiya, Atul Dodiya, Neelima Sheikh and Nalini Malani.

Who are your maestros? Any artist who deserves a special mention?

KN: There is one particular artist that comes to mind, and that is Hungarian-Indian painter Amrita Sher-Gil, who passed away at the young age of 28. She would have been 108 today. She was a class of her own - an individual artist who was a phenomenon and wasn't part of any group as such. She really was one of the most progressive individuals of her time, in terms of her world-view and practice. A pioneer of blending eastern and western influences, specially as a young woman at that time, in the context of challenging people's perspectives via her work and art.

You have seen the art world evolve quite a bit. Could you share some observations about the changing landscape?

KN: There was no digital art 10 years ago, while today audiences are opening up to the possibility of new mediums like location independent participatory exhibitions and virtual biennales that render geographies and

boundaries obsolete. There are now artists who work exclusively in new media. These relatively new and unknown forms of art are different from anything that existed before. One can't say how popular they will be and how soon; we don't know what these will evolve into, and which ones will prevail. One cannot be certain of how this will impact the cultural landscape, but it will definitely lead to a newer terrain!



Untitled by Manjit Bawa

Art is always evolving, much like the rest of the world. Perhaps the art world is best positioned to be agile, and color outside the lines. Could be that this is the industry that can most easily embrace the unknown, overcoming all constraints and outlines. Our conventional understanding of art is being expanded and turned on its head. The process of display, ownership and sharing of art are unlike what we are used to dealing with, in traditional paintings and sculpture. The new formats are mainly acquired by public spaces like museums, events and commercial complexes to hold scale. Not just the newer digital art, but a lot of conventional large-scale works too cannot fit into private spaces. The constraints of the new mediums are spatial and practical or perhaps just a matter of sentiment. Openness, change in the behavior of buyers and collectors will certainly follow. How soon the newer mediums and forms of art are going to be accepted in India is yet to be seen.

To authentically experience the artist's concept and imagination, one may need a certain amount of space and technical infrastructure. So far my observation is that only those spaces that are capable of showing the work in a way that transfers the vision of the artist, do justice to the newer mediums. For example, take the case of Bhupin Talika. His works are beautiful but so massive that it is impossible to fit them into private spaces designed for personal use. Personally for me it is quite interesting to watch video art, if the space is large enough to show what the artist is trying to say. The experience can be quite moving and epoch-making if the scale has been maintained and the artist's vision has translated well.

As told to Sonalee Tomar for the Asian Curator

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(Sonalee Tomar studied at NID and worked as the Editorial Director of Pool Magazine before founding 'The Asian Curator', a platform to support creative outliers with liberating resources)

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