DESIGN INDIA

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CHANGE MAKERS



Dr. Naushad Forbes *pg 12*

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WHY ENTER?

The **iF DESIGN AWARD** has a reputation as an internationally recognized sign of design excellence since its founding in 1953. For a designer, winning an iF award can launch a career or take it to the next level. For a company, it can be the key to breaking into a new market – or getting valuable media attention and respect.

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SCHEDULE

28 Jun 2019	Early bird registration
27 Sep 2019	Regular registration
18 Oct 2019	Last chance registration
21-23 Jan 2020	Jury session
May 2020	iF design award night

THE DISCIPLINES

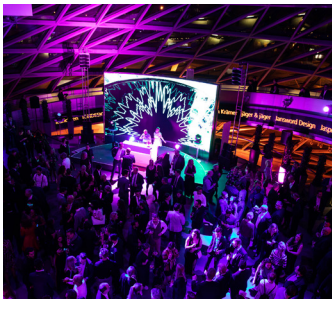
Discipline 1.0	Product
Discipline 2.0	Packaging
Discipline 3.0	Communication
Discipline 4.0	Interior Architecture
Discipline 5.0	Professional Concept
Discipline 6.0	Service Design
Discipline 7.0	Architecture

FEES

Discipline	Registration by 28 June 2019	Registration by 27 Sep 2019	Registration by 18 Oct 2019	Fee for Award Winners
Product	EUR 340 per entry	EUR 450 per entry	EUR 490 per entry	EUR 2700 per entry
Packaging	EUR 250 per entry	EUR 375 per entry	EUR 425 per entry	EUR 2700 per entry
Other Disciplines	EUR 250 per entry	EUR 375 per entry	EUR 425 per entry	EUR 1600 per entry







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With Praveen Nahar, Director of the National Institute of Design Ahmedabad, at the iF Design Award Jury session in Hamburg



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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

Designers in 2020

Designers are becoming more critical than ever. Today you will find designers working across industries, from technology, product design, UX, industrial design to materials, surfaces, ergonomics, policy, branding, and healthcare. Designers are making their presence felt in fashion, architecture interiors, furniture, automobiles, media, broadcast, hospitality, banking, education...it seems like there isn't an area they haven't explored. What is surprising is what they bring to the table, even in areas traditionally considered out of bounds.

If designers in 2020 are being more recognized and valued, it's because they are:

Outsiders: Designers are forever outsiders in their own industries. They might spend a lifetime in one domain or industry, but their diverse interests and curiosity to discover how things work makes them fans of other sectors, processes, and systems. They have a natural quest for knowledge that's not limited to their own industry. This is invaluable for their own organizations as well.

Disrupters: Because they are outsiders, it's always elementary for them to ask why something should happen the way it does. Causing disruption because of cross knowledge is another sought after trait.

Activists: You will not find designers sitting around when they see something new or better - they will be leading the change, talking, and lobbying for it inside and outside their organization. This can bring significant value to older institutions.

Ethicists: Designers will be the first ones to flag the ethics issues. Whether it is to do with data privacy or use of unsustainable materials, it's hard to keep designers quiet. This trait may make them activists on the other side as well.

Authenticists: Designers would instead find their own way than copy someone else. They would never fake anything or allow their industry to do things less than original. Which brand today can afford to ignore what this value means to IP and innovation?

We have our excellent design education to thank for this. The pioneering design teachers in India – Dashrath Patel, Kumar Vyas, Nadkarni, Vikas Satwalekar, Mahendra Bhai, Balaram, and so many more – didn't just teach us design, they established values that other education systems have long forgotten. I am sure design teachers of today will keep this flag flying higher.

Sudhir

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the perfect balance

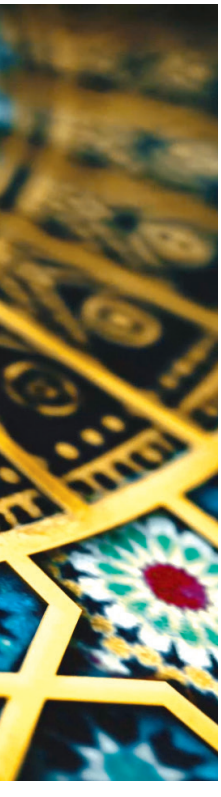
***Aniruddh Mehta** is as much graphic designer as visual artist, and he tries to do justice to both through his work at Studio Bigfat*



Netflix's 'Sacred Games' title sequence design

What does it take to create work that bridges the disciplines of art and design?

AM: Though art and design may have similarities and the two disciplines often coexist, they are rooted in different schools of thought. I've always loved making things; and to me art is birthed from (and exercised as) an unconstrained freedom of expression, whereas design is catered towards a set objective that is often very focused and specific. One could perhaps argue that art is subjective and design is objective, or that romanticizing design could possibly result in art - I think there's a possibility that that's where the magic happens.





'Perfect'. Photo by: Linesh Desai



India Art Fair Mural

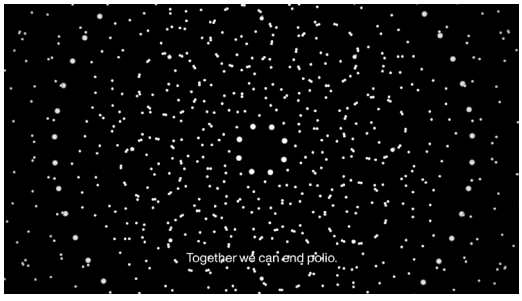
What role has a formal design education played in your career?

AM: I pursued a graduate degree in design at London College of Communications. In my first year I fell in love with the reading material that I was assigned to – from Jon Maeda to John Berger. I learnt about the concepts of lateral thinking, simplicity and problem solving – how to find efficient ways of approaching a task at hand. My esthetic then developed based on a set of design principles that I adapted to my work. Formal education definitely works as a great backbone. You may learn things on the job but certain design concepts that you pick up during college/university go a long way.

How did Studio Bigfat come about?

AM: After working in the industry for a few years I made a full-time shift to working independently as a freelancer, soon after which I started my own studio practice in Mumbai. Each project under the studio is significantly different from the other, from wall murals to brand identity to animation/moving image. I work with other peers who freelance in their respective specializations and commission them on project basis whenever there's a requirement. I think it's great, it keeps things fresh and reduces the chances of feeling burnt out.





'End Polio' Campaign for Gates Foundation

Which projects have had the greatest impact on you?

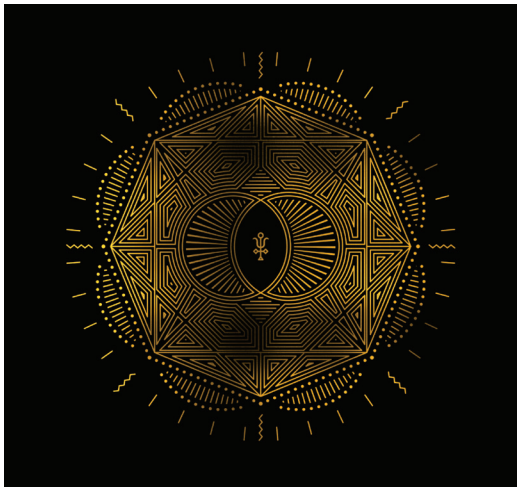
AM: My first solo exhibition at Method Art Space in Kala Ghoda was definitely a personal milestone. I got a chance to showcase a different side of my work - something more analog, and something that I had not shared or showcased in the past. Of course, being a part of the team that designed Netflix's *Sacred Games* title sequence was pretty huge, mainly because of the show's popularity and its spillover into mainstream pop-culture. A few other projects that stand out are the India Art Fair facade design, immersive space design for HP, identity system and motion design for Anomaly Brands, collaborations with Animal Factory Amps and with Tejas Nair for Puma, and a motion design piece for Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

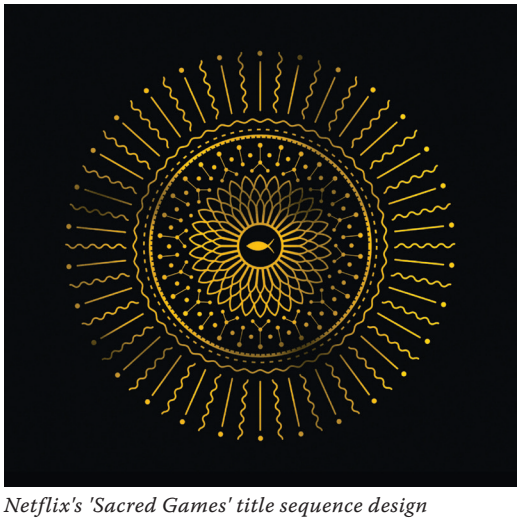


Immersive space design for HP

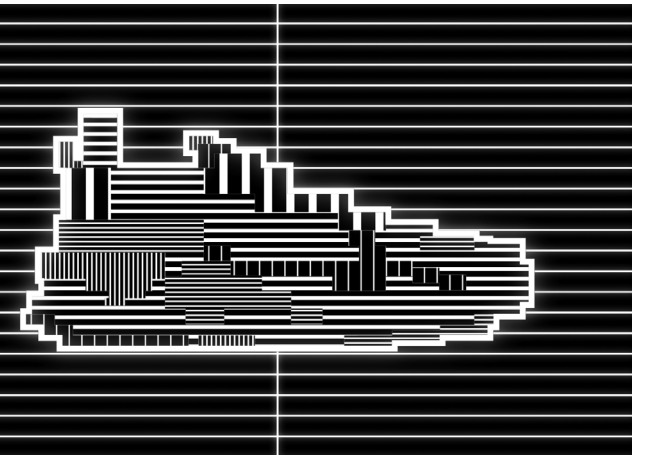
Share your experience of working on the *Sacred Games* project.

AM: During our first meeting, director Vikramaditya Motwane ran us through what he thought was a good title sequence and several concepts that were tied to the undertones of the show. The screenplay itself had a wish list concept for the title sequence. There was a lot of R&D involved between the Plexus team (Yashodha Parthasarthy and Vijesh Rajan) and I before we actually started the design process. We first narrowed down



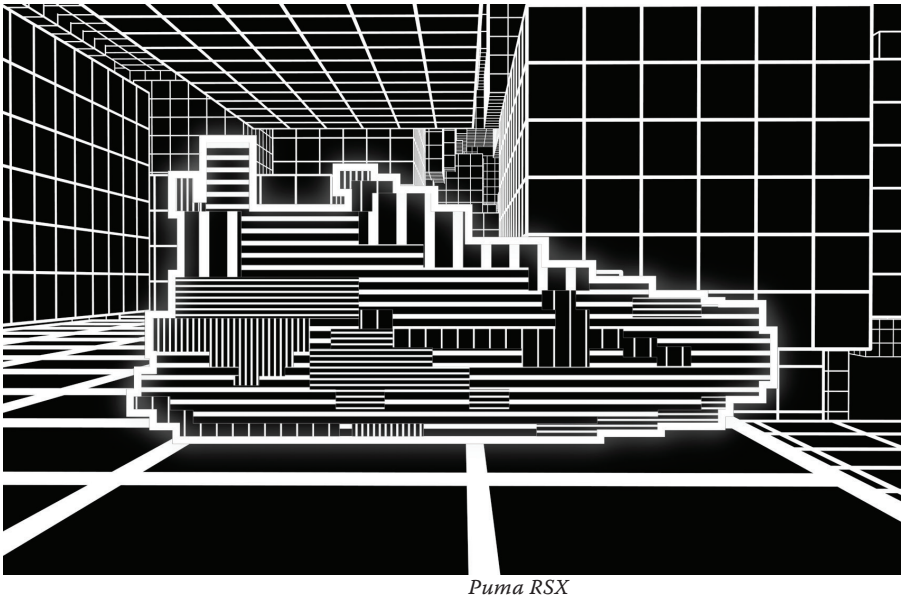


Netflix's 'Sacred Games' title sequence design



What does it take to work with brands? Share your tips.

AM: Do honest work, be consistent and genuine. Don't ever feel entitled. Know your worth, but also know that nobody owes you anything; I guess the brands or the kind of work you are looking for will eventually find you. A good idea is to build mock projects for your portfolio with a brief set by you - this way you create a body of work similar to the kind of work you would like to be commissioned. Brands need to have faith that you can put out the kind of work they would like to be associated with, so invest your time in building value because it will later convert to commissioned work.



Puma RSX

the right symbols that would accurately represent each episode title, which was based on tales from Indian mythology. Each symbol was the foundation and the center piece for each *mandala*. It was important to maintain the same level of detailing for each but also keep them distinct enough to be able to tell their own story. The key was to create a design that would raise the right amount of intrigue and not give away too much information. For Season Two, the process was smoother since we had already cracked the blueprint – so there was less trial and error this time and it was more focused on research and design.

Tell us about your first solo exhibition, 'Perfect'.

AM: The main inspiration when I started working on this series two and a half years ago was simply to break routine and screen-time – I wanted to explore art that was more tactile and freeing. There was no agenda or goal that I was working towards – it was merely a way of self-expression and enjoying the process of making. The concept for the

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indi
EXPERIENCE



Animal Factory Collab

exhibition and the paintings was birthed out of conversations and questions examining the idea of what we consider to be 'perfect'. It is also a deviation from my regular studio work, which is based on perfecting the geometry and balance within a piece/ composition. This series, however, is about accepting the inherent imperfections present in the process of creation. In a nutshell, the exhibition focused around rewiring the idea of perfection on a personal level and opening up the same dialogue to viewers.

How does the process of learning and unlearning come into play in art?

AM: Art will always be subjective. When I started making abstract acrylic paintings it was a process of complete unlearning for me. I loved it. I was vulnerable and open to making mistakes in hope that they would lead to interesting discoveries, which often did.

What inspires you?

AM: I think my answer would change depending on the day I'm asked this question, but as a constant, I'm always inspired by the relationship of space, balance and form in visual arts. Underground music culture and its relationship with art and design is also something that I'm very fond of. Record labels and broadcast radio stations, for example, explore some of the most cutting edge no-holds-barred design esthetics.

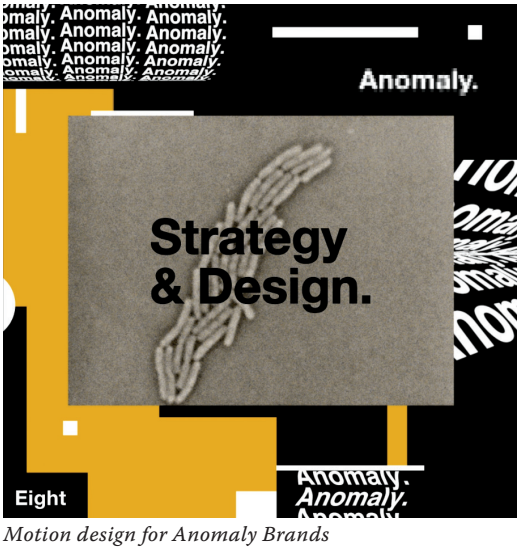
What are the challenges in your line of work?

AM: However liberating and productive it is for me to work alone on most days, it can get tiresome and sometimes you can get pigeonholed with certain directions on a project. It's always important to share work with your peers and get feedback. For more constructive feedback, ask someone what isn't working instead of what is!

What's next?

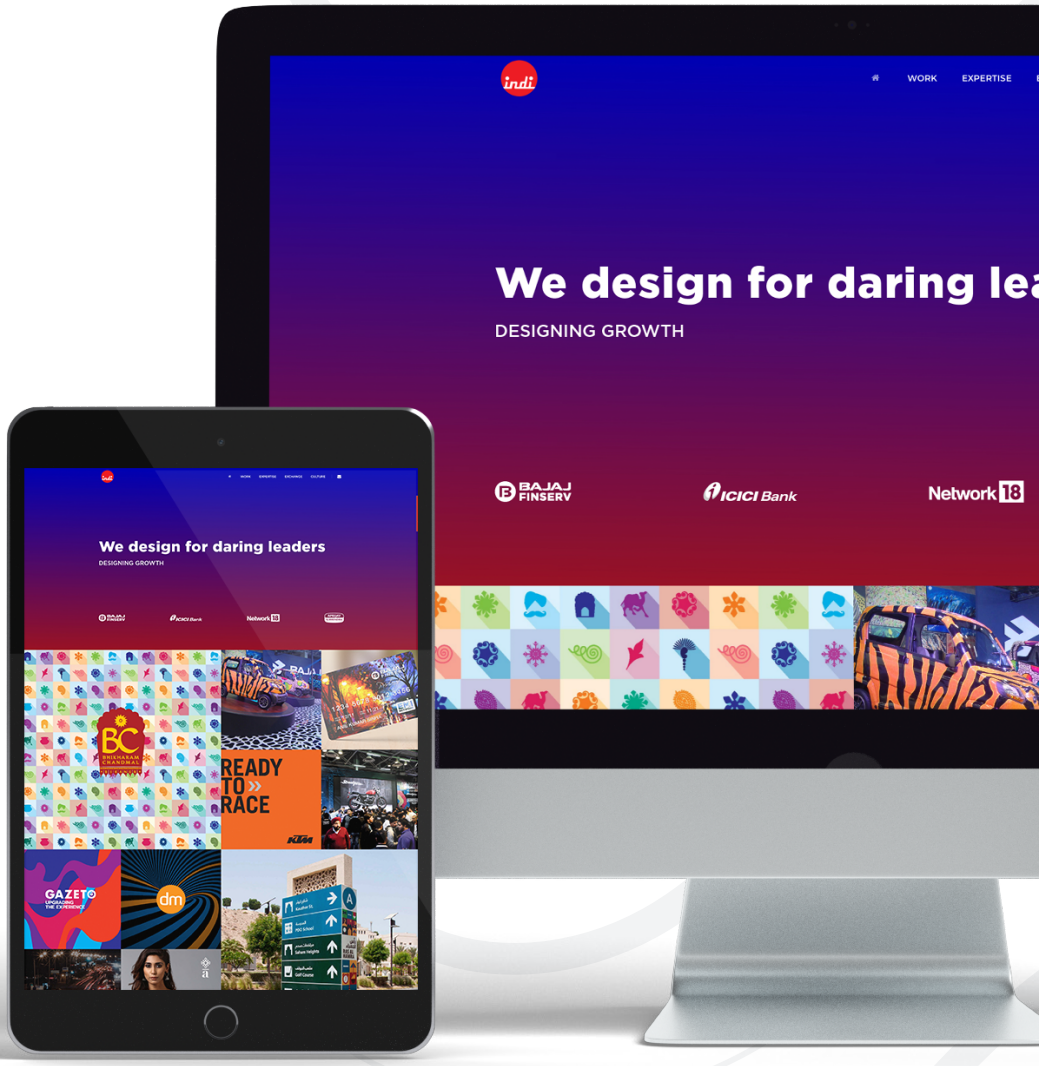
AM: In my spare time between projects I've been working on my own brand (product-based) which should take flight in 2020. I'm excited about that.

aniruddh.mehta1@gmail.com

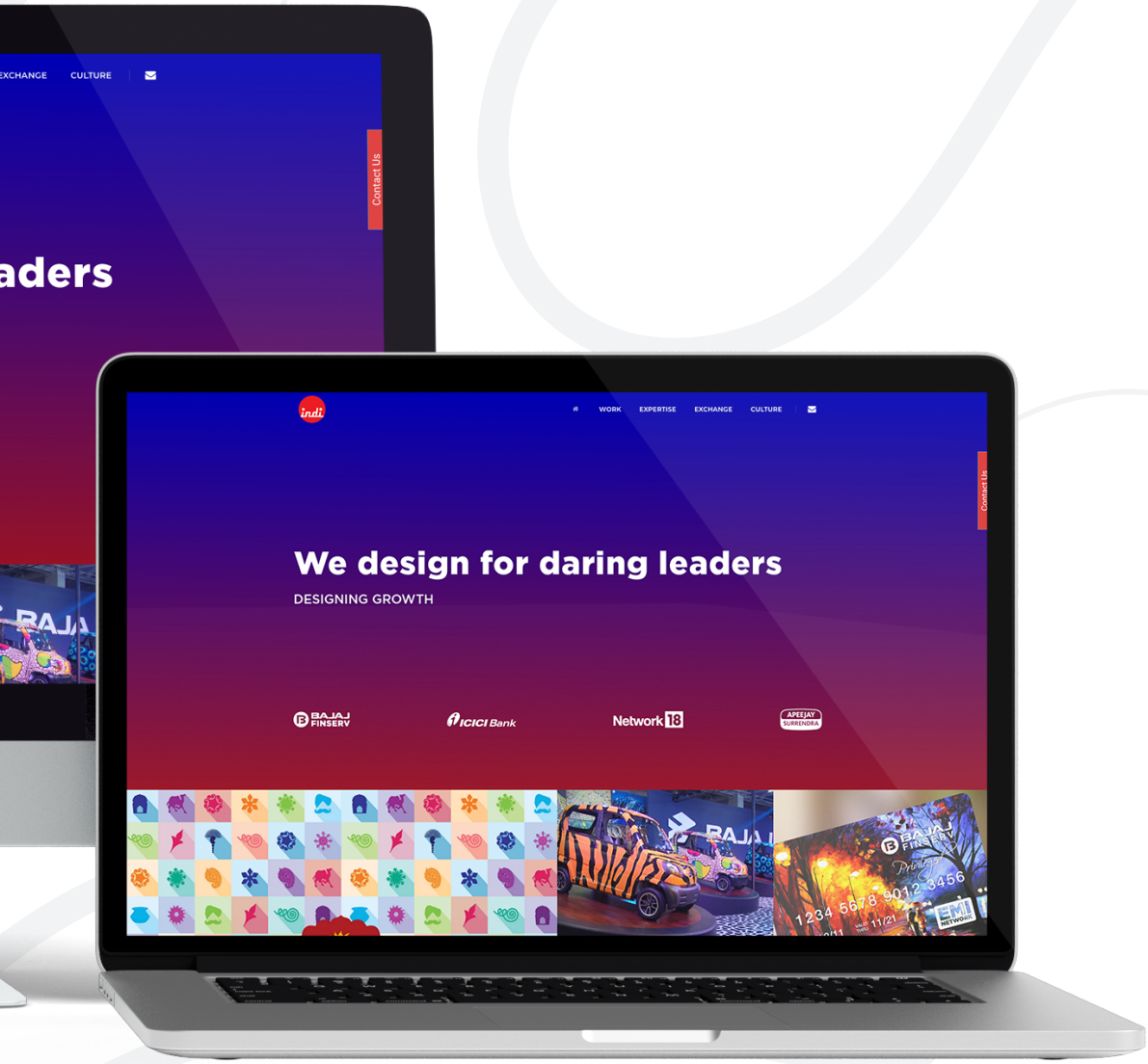


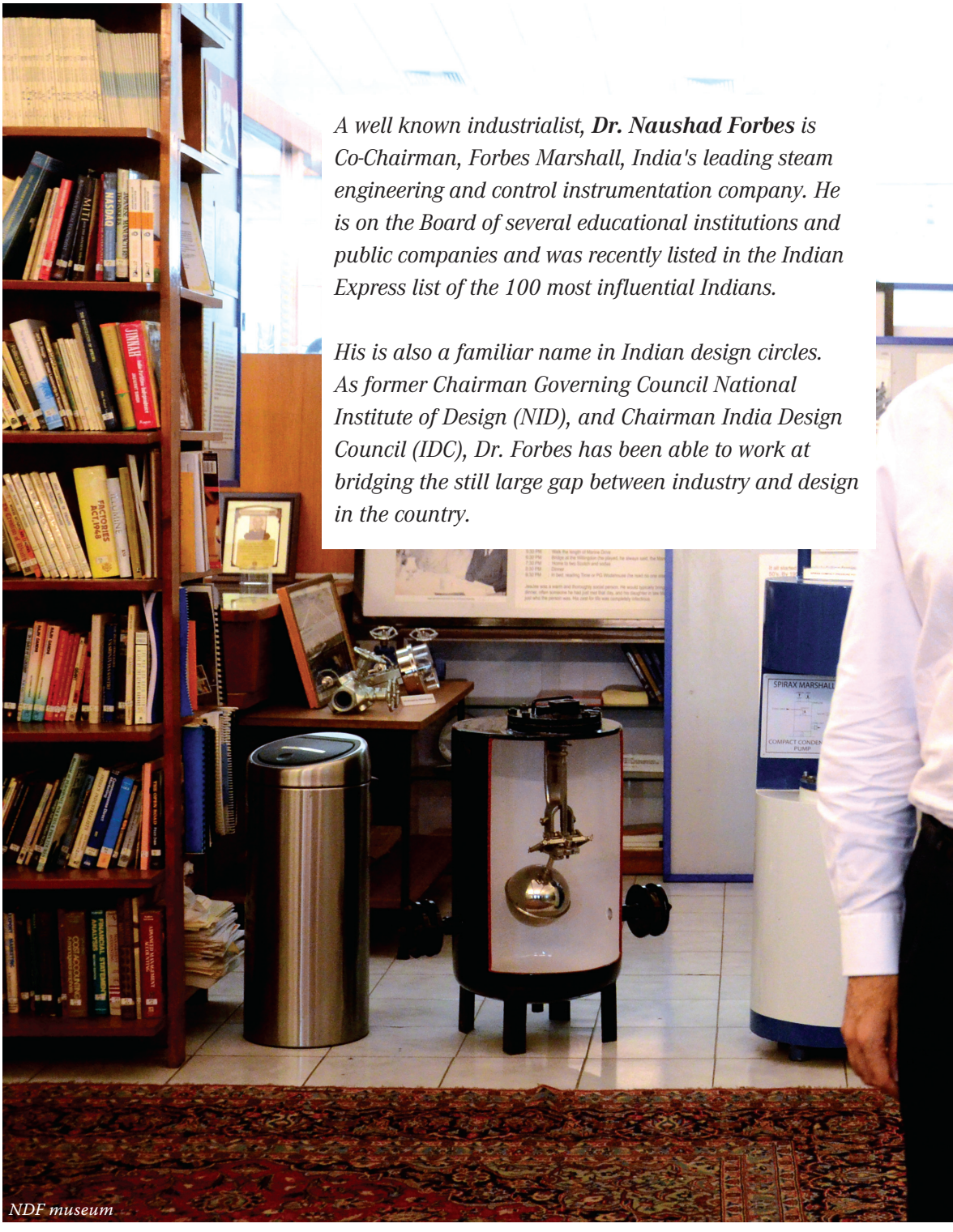
Motion design for Anomaly Brands

our new website is live!



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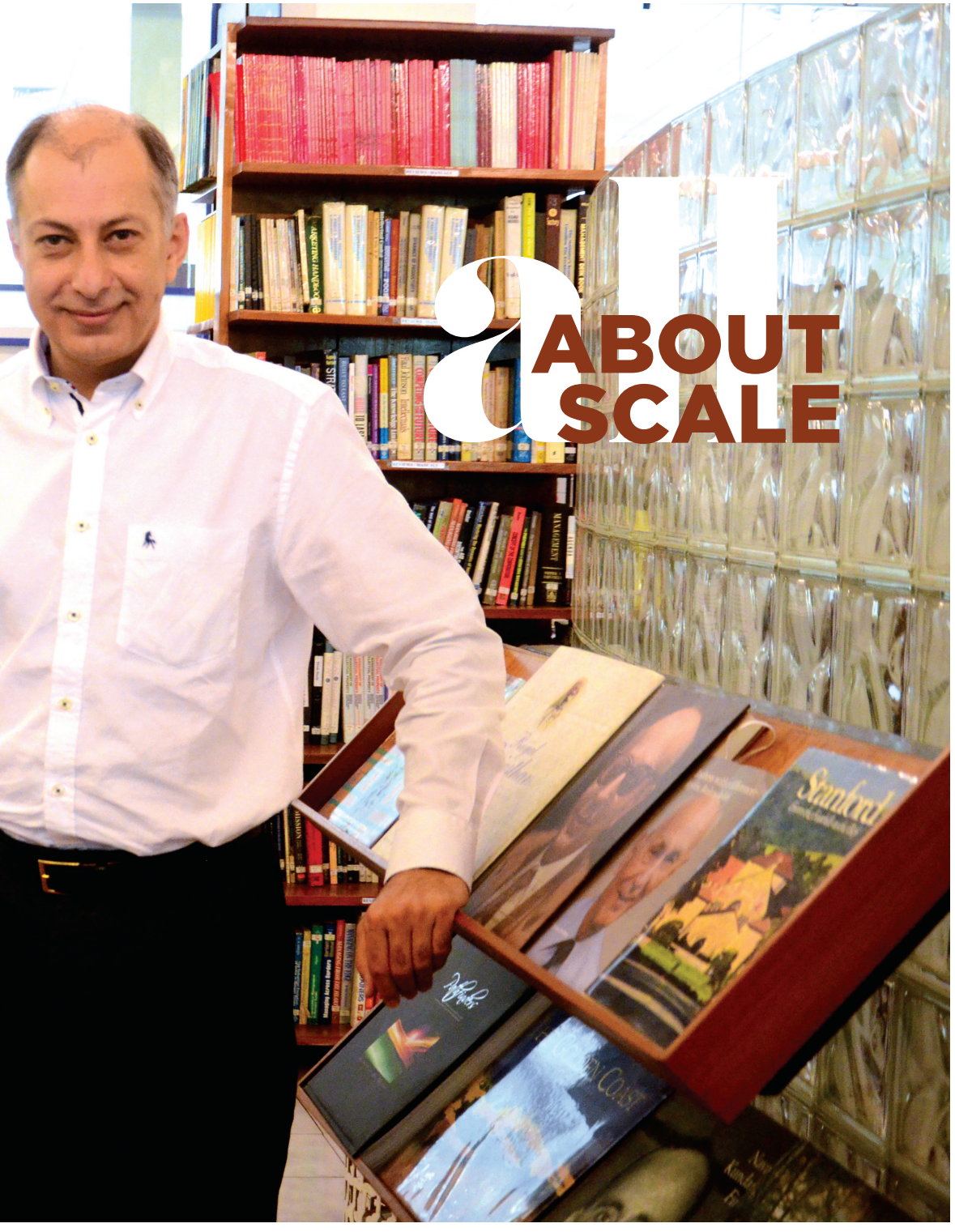




NDF museum

*A well known industrialist, **Dr. Naushad Forbes** is Co-Chairman, Forbes Marshall, India's leading steam engineering and control instrumentation company. He is on the Board of several educational institutions and public companies and was recently listed in the Indian Express list of the 100 most influential Indians.*

His is also a familiar name in Indian design circles. As former Chairman Governing Council National Institute of Design (NID), and Chairman India Design Council (IDC), Dr. Forbes has been able to work at bridging the still large gap between industry and design in the country.


ABOUT
SCALE



Naushad receiving the Degree of Doctor honoris causa from Principal and Vice Chancellor Edinburgh University, Professor Peter Mathieson

How did your years as a student at Stanford University impact your career?

NF: I received my Bachelor's, Master's and PhD Degrees from Stanford University. I hugely enjoyed my student years. I found myself taking courses all over the university - in history, economics, literature and art - in addition to my course work in engineering. Indeed, if I were to go back to university again, I wouldn't study engineering but would instead do economic history.

Three life-long impacts from my student years:

- When one considers any issue, going back to first principles always helps. What does the underlying theory say? Rigor in thinking that makes one keep asking why something is so, ensuring that whatever one observes must fit into a broader pattern of understanding, this to me is critical.
- Some of my greatest professors were also the quietest. In a discussion one rarely heard them express a view, or they argued the opposite to whatever the majority view was. The best learning happened that way.
- Learning was good for its own sake, for the simple joy of knowing or understanding something new; it didn't need to be useful.

What did teaching at Stanford teach you?

NF: I was an occasional Lecturer and Consulting Professor at Stanford University from 1987 to 2004. I had complete autonomy to teach what I liked in the way I liked. I was fresh out of college, but never once did anyone look at what I was doing, so the responsibility for doing well or badly as a teacher was completely mine. I loved the students and was passionate about the subject. If you do something you love, you'll do it well, so it all worked out well. I developed courses on Technology in Newly Industrializing Countries. I also came away completely convinced that any attempt by a government to determine a curriculum, or try to enforce teaching standards, was a rather foolish thing to do, certainly for any highly competitive institution.

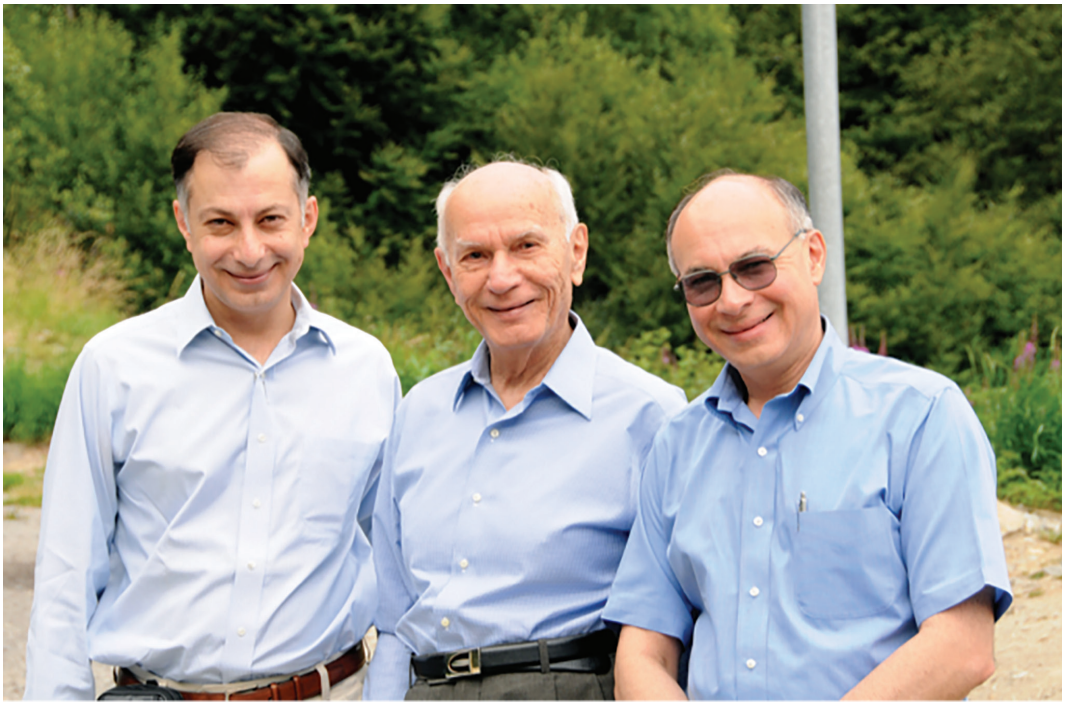
What, in your opinion, defines market leadership in India today? How do you envision it changing in the future?

NF: Market leadership is quite distinctive from market share - market share is an outcome of doing the right things for market leadership. It seems to me that three things matter for market leadership:

- One has to do something different from everyone else in a manner which matters to the customer - they must appreciate it enough to pay for it. Competing on price is in my book a terrible thing - it's a race to the bottom, and ultimately customers lose in terms of both quality and innovation. So, compete on service, product innovation and being good people to do business with - leave competing on price to people who copy your product.



NID Convocation 2018



From left to right: Naushad Forbes; Darius Forbes (his father); Farhad Forbes (his brother)

- In India there are many distinctive conditions - unserved populations, unmet needs - that one can valuably design products for.
- Whatever we do has to be world class - we should not be giving the Indian customer anything less than the best available in the world. And we should welcome international competition with zero tariffs as the best way of ensuring we are doing only the best for the Indian customer.

What is the most challenging part of your role as Co-Chairman at Forbes Marshall?

NF: How does one create space for all around one to lead and perform, while being a hands-on and active manager oneself? I constantly struggle with that.

What role has design played at your company?

NF: We hired our first professional product designer almost 30 years ago, and design has been core to our success in developing great new products since then. We would be a much less successful firm without design. Our designers are sought by all our development teams, and contribute both to product esthetics and performance.

Why should industry value design?

NF: For the same reason we do. Many great Indian companies value design and invest in it. But we are still not the norm. Only when thousands

of Indian companies see design as core to their success can we claim to have arrived industrially.

How has a close association with NID and IDC changed your view of the role of design?

NF: NID Ahmedabad is a wonderful institute with great faculty and world-class students. IDC has been playing a useful role in bringing in new design initiatives in the country. Through both I've met some great designers, people with huge talent committed to the cause of design, and especially design in India. But I've also been humbled by how large our task is. Design is still a tiny enterprise in India. Too few companies prize it, too few of our products, services and public spaces reflect good design practices, and too few people in the country experience good design. We need to scale the impact design must have on the country by a factor of ten or even a hundred for the average Indian's life to be better thanks to design. I've come away from my NID and IDC association both struck by the potential of design and challenged by how much more there is to do.

How can Indian design be made to have the requisite impact on industry?

NF: I think our key priority is scale, scale, scale. We need to produce 10 times as many designers each year, for which we need 100 times the number of qualified design faculty that we have, and we need



Naushad's speech at the CII-NID India Design Summit 2017



At the launch of 'Chartered Designers of India' during an India Design Council meeting in Delhi

1,000 Indian companies that invest in and place design at the center of their technology strategy.

How do Indian designers compare with their counterparts abroad?

NF: Our designers do perfectly well abroad too so there is nothing inherently inferior or superior about Indian designers. As I see it, we suffer from not having enough going on in design in the country for the scale to deliver quality. Designers are so thin on the ground in our country that there isn't enough of a good alternative around to deliver really first-rate quality of work.

How do you think the recently launched Chartered Designers of India (CDI) will help establish and uphold the professional standards of design practice in the country?

NF: The CDI has just been launched by the India Design Council. The first step is to provide a minimum of standardization across recognizing design qualifications and experience, and to provide this to all users. As this gets established, the CDI can then move on to actually helping designers improve their own capabilities through peer learning.





NID Convocation 2018

What is your message to young designers?

NF: I would ask them to focus entirely on the quality of their own output as the first step. If the designer is working on, for example, a new boiler, can they confidently say that the boiler they've designed is the best anywhere in the world? We're close, but are we THE best? When we do better than any other in every profession, we will then truly be a developed country.

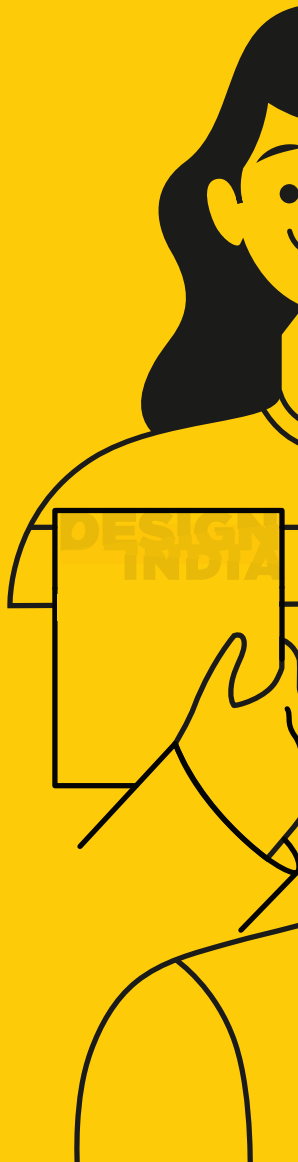
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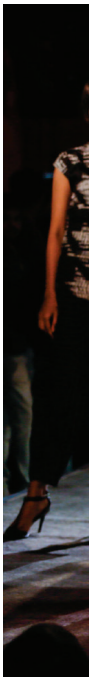



DESIGN
INDIA

The RICHNESS of HANDMADE

Amit Vijaya and Richard Pandav *are committed to bringing together many hands and hearts through their clothing label 'amrich'*





How were you drawn to textiles/apparel?

AV: Both of us come from diverse fields of education – I was from a Science background leading to Graphic Design and Richard is from an IT background. We suppose it was a calling to our real passions and giving in to our creative sides. Destiny has its own ways of leading one to the paths they are supposed to be on.

While working as a freelance graphic designer in Kolkata I was servicing a number of clients in the textile and fashion industry and started dabbling in textile design for further creative satisfaction. I applied for a post graduate program in Textile Design at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad and was pleasantly surprised to be selected for the course.

Richard was struggling to fit into the algorithms of binary codes when he finally gave in and applied for the post graduate program in Apparel Design at NID - he was elated to have been given a seat to pursue his calling.



Above: 'Broken' at CDS; Left: Opened out shibori pattern

RP : NID was the foundation for our friendship and the meeting of our creative visions. Being a multidisciplinary institute, it gave us an understanding of design as a whole, rather than in a particular field. Getting a hands-on education with artisans as well as understanding the limitations and possibilities of the craft sectors allowed us to explore working towards our own label. It also helped instill the values of handmade, which we have carried forward into our label as well as design intervention opportunities.



'Broken' FW'17



How did the 'amrich' label come about?

AV: As students at NID, understanding and respecting each other's strengths and limitations, we decided on starting a clothing label some day in the future. However, as luck would have it, we were chosen to represent ourselves as well as NID at the Gen-next Show at Lakme Fashion Week.

RP: We worked on a line paying homage to the ancient craft of natural indigo dyeing and added the element of hand-crafted *Itajime shibori* to offer newness to the Indian fashion scenario. This was way back in 2006; the craft of *Itajime shibori* had not yet invaded the country and so we packed our bags and went and worked with a Bandhani craftsman in Kutch. We taught him the basics

of the technique so as to fulfill production orders, if any, and the rest is history!

AV: The first collection – Itajime Blue – was a test to see if we would be able to work together and put out our vision for people to see on an international platform. To our extreme happiness, the collection received rave reviews from buyers as well as critics. Post this experience, we went back to finishing our course at the institute and realized that it would be pertinent to work in different strata to gain more experience of business before we ventured into the big bad world of fashion with our own label. We enjoyed working as consultants for a number of organizations ranging from the grassroots like Khadi Gram Udyog to uber luxurious fashion brands like Ravissant in Delhi.


'Broken' at CDS

How does your label amalgamate the luxury of handmade and the richness of Indian crafts?

AV: Indian textiles and crafts are renowned for their richness and diversity and we try and do our bit to showcase the repository in new and exciting ways. We are just a means to get the beauty of Indian handloom and textile techniques out on a national and international platform. We make use of age-old craft techniques but with design intervention at various stages in the process, and work closely with craftspeople to create new avatars of their techniques.

RP: Our brand philosophy is something that we absolutely believe in: elegance of simplicity; beauty of handmade; and indulgence of comfort.

AV: The real luxury is the fact that there are a lot of hands and hearts involved in the creation of each and every piece - from the hand woven textiles to the special surface techniques applied on them, the research and development of new silhouettes and the finishing of each and every garment or accessory.

Describe the 'amrich' woman.

AV: In this world of fast fashion and mass produced labels, the 'amrich' woman is someone who cherishes the creation of responsible fashion. She understands the need to be well dressed as well as conscious

of her choices. She is someone who plays various roles in her life but still takes time to look great for herself rather than the world. Following trends blindly is not for her. The 'amrich' woman is always comfortable and elegant.

How do you come up with a collection?

AV: There are no set rules to the starting of a collection - it could be an image, song, craft or anything that catches our imagination. This leads to research and development to try and translate our vision through the textiles and ultimately the looks we want to portray for the time. For example, for the ChiaroScuro collection, we were inspired by the effects of light and shadow on various surfaces and started by designing textiles that would portray a similar effect. From the woven textiles to the surfaces created on them via the use of resist dyeing techniques, the single thought of light and shadow pervaded the entire exercise.





RP: Even the layering of the final garments for the looks was worked through with a similar thought in mind. One thing constant in all the collections is our love of innovating with hand woven textiles and resist dye techniques.

Is it difficult to work with artisans?

AV: An understanding of the techniques is an absolute must when planning a collection with artisanal crafts. The knowledge of the limitations as well as the possibilities of breaking away from tradition is something that excites us and helps put across the talent of the craftspeople. Making the craftspeople try and develop novel techniques within their scope to bring newness is always a challenge.



Left: 'ChiaroScuro' backstage at Jakarta Fashion Week. Above: Fabric hand stitched for dyeing - Shibori.

RP: The beauty of it all is when the artisans agree to experiment and create; and when they themselves appreciate the final outcome that has taken a lot of toil and trouble. We make sure that our label absorbs any byproducts that are created, and the craftsperson does not have to incur any losses at any given point. Working in this manner for more than a decade has ensured trust between us and our family of artisans, who now demand new ideas at different points of time.

AV: We have however burnt our fingers quite a few times, when certain craftspeople give in to their greed and sell out our concepts and designs. The other big challenge is to keep the craftspeople aware of being time-bound in terms of developments and deliveries.

How do you market and distribute your products?

AV: We do not have a formal game plan for marketing, and the growth of the brand has been primarily organic. We believe in a slow word-of-mouth kind of marketing and have been lucky to have made a space for ourselves in an over-crowded PR-bought arena. We do recognize the importance of being in the limelight but have a greater faith in the power of good and honest work. We work closely with select multi-designer stores in India and internationally to reach a discerning clientele.



'Ties & Bind' SS'18

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'Ties & Bind'

Do awards matter to you?

RP: It's always good to receive awards but the real reward is a collection doing well since that results in good business for the label as well as for the craft families.

Have you faced many entrepreneurial challenges so far?

AV: One of the biggest challenges is the scare of being over-shadowed by brands that have been built solely on the power of PR and Marketing. Being a label that has grown organically through our own efforts, a major chunk of the earnings every season is put back into the research and development and in the sustenance of the crafts and artisans. Handmade has its own challenges in terms of quality and time. It is extremely important to educate our retail partners as well as the end consumers to the characteristics of hand-crafted, small batch products and to defend their prices in comparison to mass produced clothing.

How do you plan to expand your brand?

RP: Having made a name and niche for the label in India, the next step is to garner a wider customer base abroad. For customers in India we will soon offer a more focused Indian line in limited editions, which will be retailed through very select stores.

AV: There are also a lot of exciting developments for the label in the lifestyle arena.

RP: We are also making a conscious effort to work closely with NGOs and companies to offer design intervention. This is our way of sharing our learning and experiences with a wider audience.

amrichdesigns@gmail.com

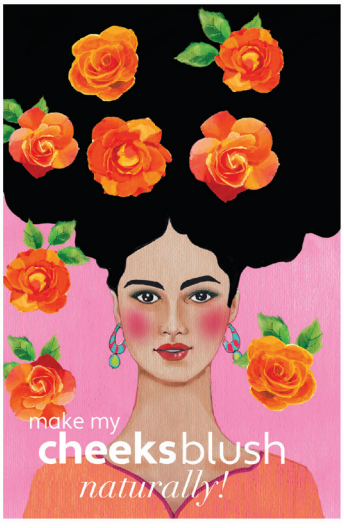

'Ties & Bind' at Lakme Fashion Week

The Creative curve

*As partners at GCD Studios, graphic designers **Shahana Jain and Devshree Sahai** contribute enthusiastically to the 'creation of ideas without boundaries'*



BIOTIQUE Cosmetics packaging









What does it take to create persuasive advertising campaigns?

SJ: The key to making a campaign effective is keeping it real and relatable. Our experience has taught us that great ad campaigns are often founded on deep insights - complete understanding of the brand, the gaps that it seeks to fill, the target audience, competition, etc. Drawing from real stories and experiences lends authenticity to the messaging. It is instantly perceived as logical and therefore becomes memorable.

It is very important for the brand to find values that become uniquely associated with the user. A campaign can be effective and memorable but converting it into an actual reaction requires deeper understanding. If it manages to strike a chord with the target audience and brings positive results for the brand it has served its purpose.

Transparency and honesty also play an important role in making a campaign stick. There has to be truth in the message so it has the power to convince the viewer/consumer to engage with it and buy into the product/service. A campaign becomes the face of the brand and creates an image in the minds of the consumer. That image must be credible for it to have the desired impact.

Good design is imperative for a campaign to be noticed. A judicious combination of copy and visuals with appropriate emphasis on both, impactful messaging, uncluttered and clean visuals that convey a clear message, and simple layouts all go a long way in presenting the campaign esthetically, therefore adding to its saleability.

Devshree, what role has formal art education played in your career?

DS: I'm a strong believer that creativity comes from within and cannot be taught but if you are even a little inclined towards it, formal education guides you in the right direction. I didn't even want to pursue Arts. My mother saw the creativity in me at a very early stage and was sure a formal art education would help me further. I pursued a BFA (Applied Arts) at the College of Art, New Delhi at a time when graphic design was still an unknown profession in India. My time in college was an eye opener. It gave me a base

to start with. Our college laid a lot of stress on hand work and concepts. We weren't allowed to show anything on the computer - everything had to be done by hand, from the first cut of the layout to the last finished design. They taught us the basics, which now I realize is very important. Young people these days jump straight to the computer when they get a brief; they don't understand that Google doesn't have the answers every time, and definitely not original ones. Very rarely do you see designers thinking with pen and paper. I just believe thinking without Google or Pinterest to aid you enables a better understanding of the problem at hand, leading to stronger and original solutions.

Shahana, tell us about your journey from psychology to graphic design.

SJ: I wasn't very sure of the path I wanted to take. Multiple factors, including the uncertainty of a stable career in a field of design that many people didn't even know about, led me to enroll for Psychology in Delhi University. While I became immersed in my honors course in psychology, my heart was never completely in it. I couldn't see myself pursuing a full time profession based on the subject. Design and creative pursuits kept me busy in my spare time, so I enrolled in a software learning course alongside. I didn't know what fruit it would bear; it was purely to create a foundation for myself to build on later. All I knew was that I had made a beginning towards something that looked more promising than anything else. Immediately after graduating I took up a design trainee's job in a reputed design studio in New Delhi. I wanted to further assess my intention of pursuing design and then move on to formal education in the subject. The day I walked into the studio I knew it was my kind of space - unconventional, friendly, and bustling with creative energy, ideas and color.

I eventually did not get down to studying design, learning continuously on the job



Beetle Smartotels

instead. Not having a design education drove me to make an extra effort to be cognizant of every input and insight the workspace had to offer. I was always in a state of readiness - to assist, to try something new, to do anything that was assigned to me. In creative professions like graphic design, along with the basic skill set it is also extremely necessary to understand the environment, the people, the key requirement, the process of ideation and execution. Being faced with real situations at work helped me grasp these fundamentals more effectively and at a 360 degree level.

How has your journey at GCD Studio been so far?

DS: I joined GCD Studio in New Delhi in 2012. Coming from an agency background I found GCD to be a breath of fresh air. I was



surrounded by people who were passionate about every creative they made, and it was refreshing. I have learnt a lot from Gopika Chowfla, who is the Founder and Creative Director. Just seeing her work, her process and her passion has taught me a lot. Every designer is a storyteller. Whether you are designing a logo or a landing page, the drive has been the same. In 2018, I became a partner and Senior Creative Manager.

SJ: I have been with GCD for 13 years and enjoyed every moment of it. I joined in 2007 as a designer, and was part of a workforce of six people. The environment and philosophy was refreshing. The two-room studio actually enabled creative osmosis, essential for great results as well as personal growth. I saw myself growing and becoming a better designer and visualizer.

From assisting senior designers with their jobs to handling important clients and projects in their entirety, it has been a huge learning, growth and achievement for me. As partner and Associate Creative Director of GCD, I essay multiple roles, the primary one being to see that work goes on seamlessly and in a productive and positive manner. Looking out for new business and tapping potential clients is an important part of my work profile. Apart from the creative role, I have a very critical managerial role to play in the organization and I love it completely.

Which projects have left their mark on you?

DS: With every project we have had a different journey and each one is memorable in its own way. But some recent noteworthy ones are:

Veeba Foods – brand identity and packaging design: The project commenced in 2014 and from day one we worked in collaboration with the client who gave us complete freedom to envision the brand the way we felt fit. Our task was to create



a distinct identity and place for Veeba in an already cluttered market. We reviewed the brand identity, created a positioning, and designed categorized packaging for an entire range of sauces and dressings, including advertising and marketing solutions. We continue to handle the entire packaging and communication for Veeba. The brand has been hugely liked and recognized in the Indian market.

Beetle Smartotels - brand identity and hotel collateral: This innovative hospitality product is the only chain of hotels in India fashioned out of shipping containers. Being a unique concept, it was fun exploring different ways to depict the USPs of the hotel. The more the limitations, the more exciting was the challenge. It had to be projected as a budget hotel without looking cheap. We created a friendly and playful visual vocabulary at every touch point of the brand, thus making it cool and aspirational.

Museo Camera: We designed the brand identity for India's first centre for photographic arts, including the visual language, communication material, and the signage and way finding system for the museum. We were involved from the very inception of the idea, and therefore started on a blank slate. The directors of the museum allowed us creative freedom to find innovative ways to add graphic design to the space.

BiotiqueColour cosmetics: More recently we have created packaging design for a range of color cosmetics introduced by Biotique. An unconventional illustrative design approach was adopted that would stand out from the already saturated cosmetic market. The process was exciting and we were happy with the result.

Farmveda: A CSR project of developing packaging design for a range of ready to cook/eat food mixes, grown by a farmers collective in Andhra Pradesh. To be associated with an initiative like this was an enriching experience in itself. We created packaging that showcased the farmer on the pack, therefore attributing to them the importance they deserve.







Jaipur Literature Festival: Working on festival graphics and communication is always stimulating, since they bring with them a different energy and vibrancy. We created a complete range of merchandise for the festival using alphabets and letterforms to create faces and puppets from Rajasthan.

What are your secrets for smooth collaboration with top brands?

SJ: The key to good and longlasting relationships with clients is to understand them and their requirements in detail as well as work with them in a collaborative way to achieve the best solutions for the brand. We believe that the client is the master of his brand/product and therefore should remain involved in the design process on an ongoing basis. Isolation from the client can lead to disconnect, which may adversely affect the search for solutions. On our part we like to work from within, as partners with our clients, so they are instantly made to feel comfortable, which is imperative for effective communication throughout the project. To go the extra mile and grasp the unsaid and intangibles is the key to being unique and appreciated by the client. The involvement and sense of ownership towards every brand makes us connect with the people involved on the other side in a more holistic and deeper manner. To be open to feedback and tolerant of criticism is essential for all designers. We consciously try to take the point of view of the client without being judgmental or impatient. It only helps us arrive at a suitable solution that everyone is happy with.

Do women entrepreneurs face more challenges than usual?

SJ: When women choose to become entrepreneurs, they mean business! They often have given up some stereotypical role or broken a norm to do this, so often have to prove themselves. That is what gives them the drive to succeed and even do things differently. Fortunately in our profession it has never happened that we feel threatened by men or feel unequal and therefore have to prove a point to anyone. The challenges of women entrepreneurship are more directed towards realizing our own personal goals, rather than driven by external factors like gender equality.

Personally, every woman has her own way of structuring her life around what she wants to achieve. It is a function of her personal choices. If she wants she can find a way to balance work, home, family and children, therefore creating an environment conducive to success for herself and those around her. For instance, GCD Studio is an all women's team, led by a woman who believes there is no work life separation. From bringing

her children to work, to taking a vacation to spend quality time with them, she has always encouraged the co-existence of work and life.

I feel women understand their responsibilities well and can effortlessly juggle both work and home without neglecting either. Because women are accustomed to multi-tasking they manage to get a lot done simultaneously. Sometimes we do have to prioritize and take decisions as we go along. For example, when women choose to become mothers they do it with the knowledge that work will take a back seat for a while, or find ways to manage both. Fortunately our profession allows work from home, so we don't take anything as a burden or setback. Being women we understand each other's personal commitments and needs and therefore create a sensitive and supportive environment in the studio. What might be perceived as a 'challenge' to many actually empowers us to move forward no matter what.

Where do you see branding and marketing in India heading in the next five years?

SJ: These are some of the trends I foresee:

The digital trend: With YouTube, social media and online portals becoming the media vehicles of this generation, the digital platform is hugely determining the trends in communication design. The future will increasingly witness the influence of technology and the digital medium on the way design is presented, the limitations of the mobile phone in particular. If it doesn't look good on the mobile phone interface, it doesn't work. The use of animation, Gifs and videos, will become a standard feature in design. They draw attention in cluttered environments and tell stories more effectively than static visuals.

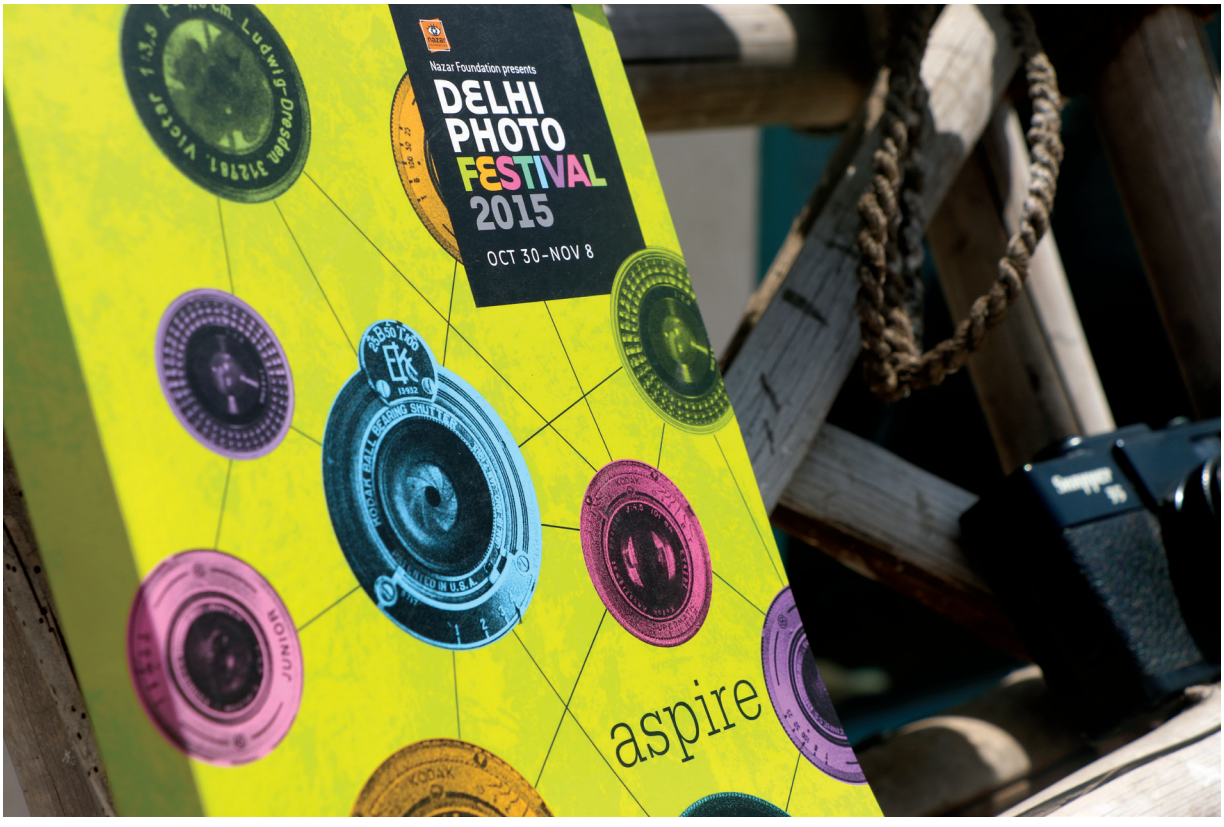
The minimalistic trend: Brand identity design is getting simpler at one level. Designers are

MUSEO CAMERA
Centre for the Photographic Arts

using more of sans serif fonts for logotypes, lower case type. Large and small brands are commissioning designers to simplify and refresh their identities to look more contemporary and digital friendly. As more and more companies inhabit primarily the digital space, we see more use of vignettes, gradation, 3D forms and bright colors that are now possible without incurring additional costs, and stand out on electronic screens. Dynamic forms, the ability to be animated are again features that logos and brand identities are moving towards.

The cultural trend: Another important trend Indian marketing and branding is experiencing is the growing importance of cultural and emotional influences. People are becoming more aware by the day. They have started liking brands which are culturally rooted and speak from the heart. Ads that have soul in them and are extremely relatable with the common man resonate much more with a wider audience.

The strong visual trend: As attention spans are shrinking and with the brief life of most communication, brevity is the order of the day. The plan is to get the message across as fast and impactfully as you can, before they 'skip'. In a borderless world where a plethora of languages are spoken, visuals speak a universal language. So expect more and more communication to rely on strong pictorial content and short simple text. As advertising moves towards the internet platform, design



and communication gets more targeted and personalized – in the very near future get ready for ads to be tailor-made for specific viewers.

What's next?

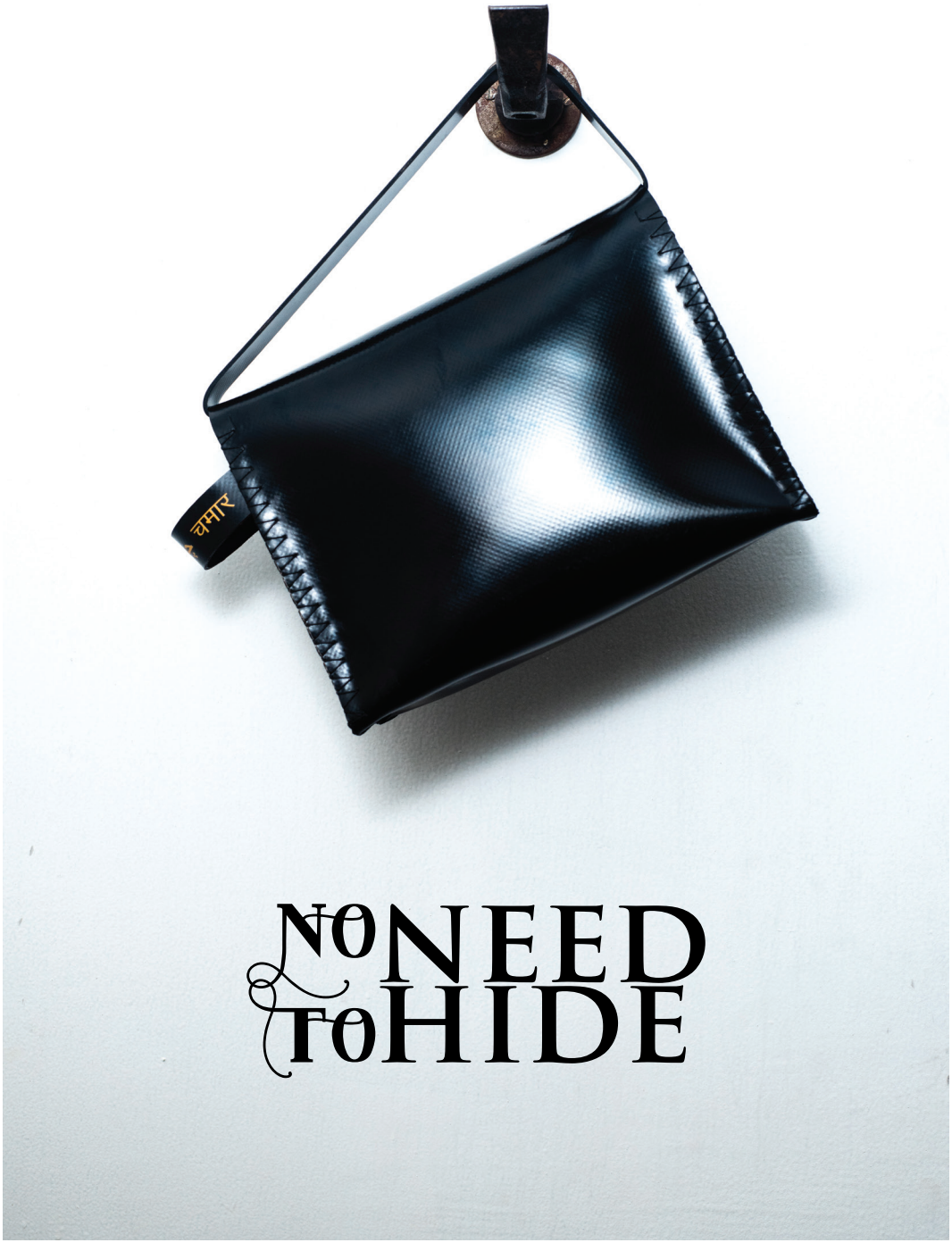
Our most immediate aspiration is to equip GCD with the requisite skills to take on the demands of being in a digital space and therefore being relevant to the times. We are working on building our social media marketing skills, and understand Facebook, Instagram and Twitter marketing because that is what every brand eventually aspires to be showcased on.

We are looking at partnering with innovative startups to give them turnkey solutions on brand development and being a part of their journey. This enables us to remain in touch with the current generation of young ambitious people who exude a different energy towards their goals, and to be aware of current business trends and what's working what's not.

GCD studio has worked extensively in the hospitality, real estate and FMCG space. Although we have connected with almost every industry possible, we would like to broaden our base further and do more work in the education, tourism, cultural and craft sectors.

To conclude we want to continue doing work that is memorable and relevant and maintain the high design standards that GCD is known for. With the strong work ethic and philosophy that we follow we hope to take GCD to greater heights in the future.

shahana@gopikachowfladesign.com


NO NEED TO HIDE

By encouraging traditional leather artisans to explore recycled rubber and other material, ***Sudheer Rajbhar*** *is giving them the opportunity to keep their skills alive*



How did your journey in design begin?

SR: I trained as a painter – pursuing a BFA degree at the College of Visual Arts in Mumbai – so it's easy for me to play with colors, shapes and texture.

What led to the formation of the Chamar Studio?

SR: In Sanskrit, *chamar* refers to one engaged in the act of removing skin, specifically hide. Part of the Dalit communities of India and ostracized as 'untouchables' by the Indian caste system, *chamars* are traditionally hereditary artisans who work in leather. This long tradition was disrupted by the latest beef ban, making it difficult for *chamars* to obtain and use the leather material they are so connected to, and on which their livelihood depends. I set up the Chamar Studio in Mumbai in 2017. The Chamar brand employs leather workers from the *chamar* community to produce handmade bags and other accessories in different materials, from



canvas to recycled rubber and more. The idea is to reutilize the skills and the experience these craftsmen have gained over the course of their life.

What is your brand philosophy?

SR: The word chamar is seen as a discriminatory slur. I started the Foundation *Chamar* as a space for Dalit artists and artisans to support art and craft; it re-appropriates *chamar* as an act of pride in resistance, forming a network of communities of artisans across Mumbai. The Chamar Studio brings together hands that democratize design, typography and high fashion in the form of rubber bags crafted by *chamars*. The circulation of these products among different kinds of people brings with it a statement about the condition of 'untouchables' in India. Through the Chamar brand we are supporting the community economically and giving them visibility. It is the first step to opening a conversation about a too often silenced situation in India and abroad.



The Chamar Studio has conceived a project by which urban and industrial detritus is recycled using the experimental innovation of artisans. We want to re-install conceptual thinking back within what we often describe as folk-art, industrial art or handicrafts. The project perceives artisans as artists and not under the condescending nomenclature of 'folk or industrial art'. The boundaries are limitless and the artisan is allowed complete conceptual and formal freedom in experimentation and production. Formal discourse is an essential part of the project to reveal an esthetic that is devoid of the burden of formal art education or influences of globally popular elitist product design. The workshop and project unleash a counter-current of creativity that is drawn from the act of making, hand-work and traditional wisdom passed down from generations, thus assuring and altering the context within which we see the crafts. The project challenges the disservice handicraft promotion boards have done by replicating formats, streamlining and forcing traditions of production and visual thought arbitrarily across India.



What is your design process?

SR: I directly approach artisans and explain my ideas to them. My designs are really simple and minimal, and the artisans can comfortably recreate them.

Tell us about the Blue Collar project.

SR: Blue Collar is a project of interviews with cobblers who form part of a union of workers who polish and repair footwear at the various stations of Mumbai's suburban railway. The documentaries are accompanied by a special range of Chamar Studio bags in a shade of blue, which are to be launched on 1st May, celebrated world over as ' International Workers Day ' and in Mumbai as the day the state of Maharashtra was founded. Blue is the colour of social justice and the self determination movement founded by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, whose crusade for Dalit liberation from the oppressive caste system defines India today. World over blue is derived from the indigo pigment; it is a color and product immediately associated with India and the exploitation of labor during colonial times. It is the color of hope, peace and continuous change in Buddhism.

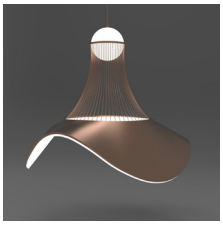


Manual labor, synonymous with the term 'blue collar' work, is in a precarious state in an era of hyper-consumerism and human exploitation. Design often aids in the inequality of labor. Chamar Studio rectifies this reality through a workable utopia.

How do you market your products?

SR: I use Instagram to promote my brand – it's a good platform to reach the younger generation.

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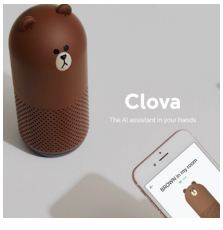













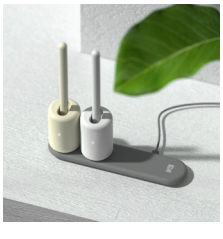











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What's next?

SR: My next collection is called Black Fortune – based on the story of the first six Africans who escaped slavery and became millionaires. The collection is dedicated to found objects from Mumbai's Dharavi slums, which are turned into luxury fashion accessories.

chamarstudio.com





the Nature of Light



Eagle, Shamanic Soul Collection

***Prateek Jain and Gautam Seth** of Klove Studio combine the delicacy of hand blown glass with the sturdiness of metals to create a breathtaking range of lighting options*



What made you swap your respective professional pursuits for lighting design?

It was a completely intuitive decision, based on our mutual love for quality product design. This reflects in the name we chose - Klove. We simply liked the sound of it; we felt it manifested love, exuberance and a zest for life, which we like to translate into our larger-than-life installations and our smaller, more profound pieces equally. In 2005, we launched Klove Studio with our first décor line, 'Transparent, Translucent to Opaque,' a study in how different materials such as glass, mesh, stone and metal responded to light and space. It was through this exploration that we found ourselves drawn to the intriguing interplay between glass and light. The 'duality of raw beauty' in the structural cleanliness of glass - fragility on one hand and the endless potential for versatile product design on the other - has since become Klove's USP.

In our early years, our designs were marked by very simple forms, to which we are curiously returning. We didn't bring any formal design education to the table,



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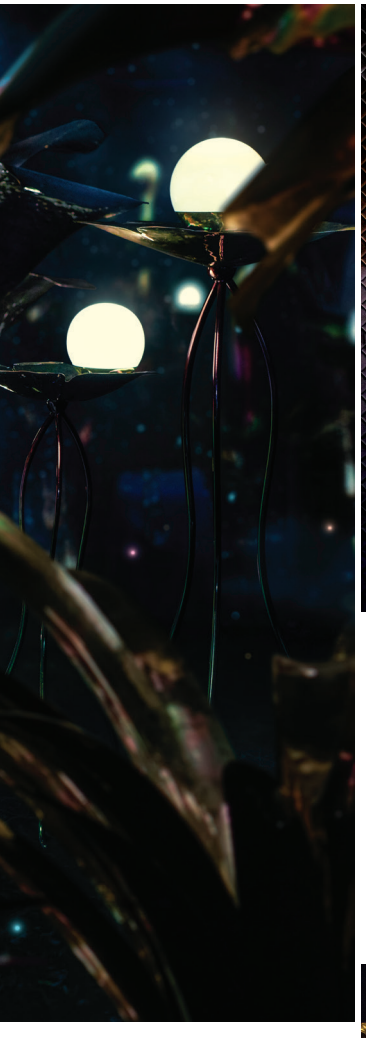
which has made the journey even more special, because we have learned that natural materials, especially fragile ones like glass, have a life of their own. We've grown so much as individuals and as designers in so many years of working with these materials.

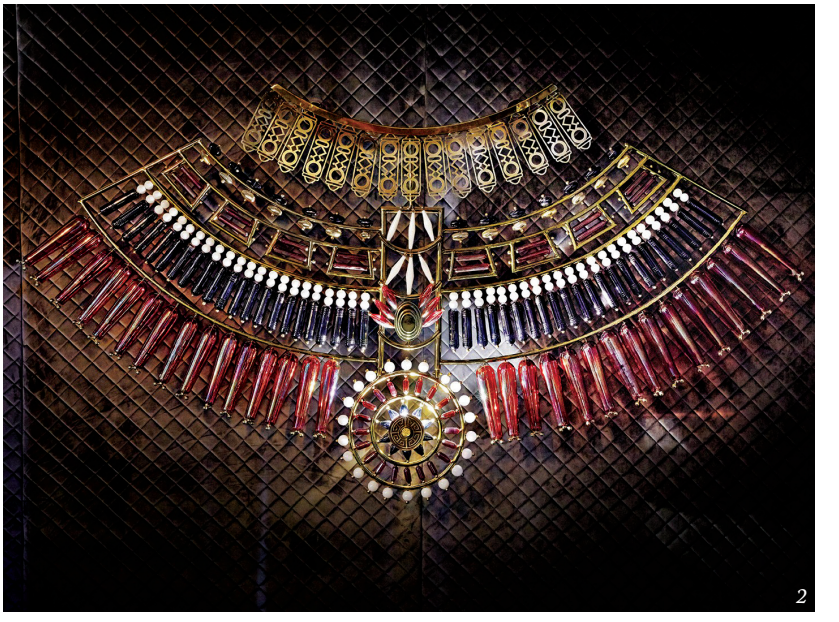
Describe your style.

We follow guidance hiding in plain sight - intuition, simplicity, raw and honest (sometimes larger-than-life) beauty. The uniqueness comes from the fact that we've taught ourselves to be designers 'on the job.' We travel extensively, documenting different perspectives around the world and apply that to what our experience with blown glass design has taught us so far. The result is two-fold: on one hand, we enrich and improve our existing style. On the other, fantasy and functionality blend to produce something new and exciting.

How do you come up with a collection?

We seriously venerate a very particular thought process. Elemental, intuitive and exploratory, it taps into the synchronicities of life, illuminating what is simple in the complex, or extraordinary in the seemingly





ordinary. Through this process, we hope we present a very comfortable and familiar idea of creativity - the kind that awakens forgotten secrets in the collective consciousness, which fuels human 'creative epiphanies' more than we know.

Which are your most memorable projects?

The inspiration for every project can be traced back to some special life-memory or the other, which makes each one memorable in its own right.



1. Klove x Arttdinox. Photo credit: Tarun Khiwal; 2. Necklace 'Totems Over Time' 3. Organic

Our very first collection, 'Transparent, Translucent to Opaque' will always be memorable because it illuminated the path forward, quite literally! The Klove Mandapam was truly grand and beautiful, featuring Swarovski crystals with our signature blown glass; going up to almost 18 ft in height. It can be transformed into six mini installations. Similarly, Nathdwara will always have a special place in our heart for the sense of sacred beauty it exudes.

From our more recent creations, it gave us joy to see 'Totems Over Time' come to life. It would have been impossible without forging a personal mental connection with the historical and cultural intrigue surrounding totems and their spiritual power.

We'd also like to mention that over the course of our career, we've been fortunate to be - and are humbled to say that we still are - working with some iconic, visionary individuals and institutions across fashion, F&B and hospitality and art and culture.

Tell us about your latest collections.

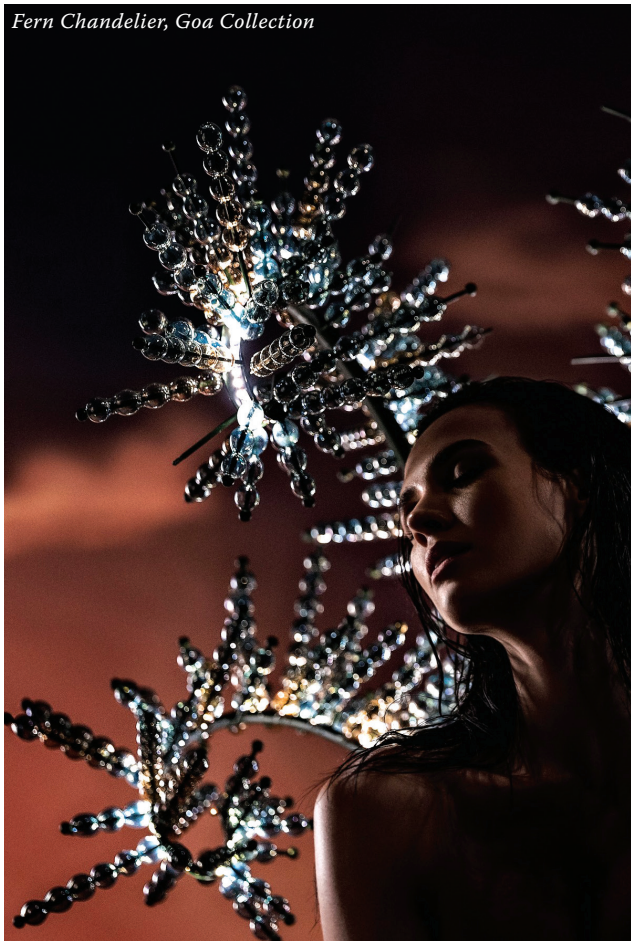
'Totems Over Times' features four installations, enthralling and 'God-like' in stature, an ode to the Laws of Divine Geometry. They prompt us to be introspective, inviting us to examine them as closely as possible, so we can find a symbolic representation of our own Selves within them. Totems Over Time also features six 'necklaces;' for the People of the Old Ways often wore their Totem as a symbol of their Heritage, of their Tribe. These bold pieces of 'jewelry' represent the noble, yet 'salt-of-the-earth' spirit of the Shaman Way.

The Goa Collection draws inspiration from the tropical paradises of the world and the iconic era of the 1970s in Goa. It brings you back to your favorite moments; like indulging in exotic fruits, or savoring the gentle, salt' sea breeze under the shade of palm trees, or taking a private moment while absorbing a spectacular sunset. The Goa Collection will engulf you in a sense of euphoria and nostalgia.

What is your experience of working with artisans? How do you approach quality control?

It's humbling and insightful. We learn so much from their discipline, passion and effortlessness. For many of the skilled craftsmen and laborers, this work is all they know. Their identity revolves around this work. It's something to think about. It prompts you to bring your own heart and soul to the process in the same way.

We have an in-house Quality Check Team that inspects each and every element meticulously, before we ship the product to the client. Quality control standards are



Fern Chandelier, Goa Collection

established from the get-go. We have to make sure we follow through and keep a check on the work in progress at every crucial stage. Fortunately for us, the artisans we work with understand the detrimental inconvenience of wastage - in terms of materials, time and energy - that stems from negligence or miscommunication or even procrastination for that matter.

How is designer lighting placed in the market today? How do you envision it changing?

We feel it's asserting itself in a high-octane, yet organized and extremely creative way; both, as a part of interior design and as a full-fledged industry in its own right. Designer lighting is very inclusive and responsive, even if the special design nuances make it a fairly niche area; because it's these very nuances that absorb consumers' demands





Goa House Chandelier

for upscale esthetics and effortless functionality. In order to get that balance right, we see an interesting amalgamation of classic and contemporary approaches all the time. Moving forwards, we see a greater focus on sustainable manufacture, production and design; eye-opening reinterpretations of organic materials and interesting layering of textures that can potentially alter the very character of designer lighting. We will see a lot of technological applications that'll make the products more sculptural and desirable.

What difference do awards make in the scheme of things?

We are always, always grateful for the recognition and appreciation. We feel loved. This isn't just a job for us, it's our purpose;

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and if people embrace Klove with so much love and warmth, it makes us feel like we're doing something right. Awards are a good acknowledgement of our work and receiving them keeps us motivated. In terms of day-to-day work and business, it reminds us that we have a responsibility, of elevating people's perception of designer lighting as a lifestyle choice.

What are the challenges you face?

We face the same kind of challenges that any entrepreneur and growing business does. Each challenge has its own context and we feel it's important to be mindful of those who work with you and for you when you're trying to work your way through the challenges. Specifically from a creative perspective, there's the constant challenge of plagiarism and copies. But we use this motivation to grow with every new collection; by being more innovative, detailed and intricate in our approach. Execution can be copied, but essence, not so much!

What are your plans for the brand?

Creative and commercial satisfaction call for diversification. It's a continuing work in progress, but we would certainly love for Klove to make its presence felt overseas with greater frequency and strength. We plan to do more bespoke work. We are hoping to expand in international markets such as the Middle East, UK, and Singapore.

marketing@klovestudio.com

A moving experience



'Melt' (Installation)



***Amrish Patel and Darshan Soni** came together to share a common vision that has since come alive through striking explorations of kinetic art*

What role has a formal design education played in your career?

AP: I pursued a Master's in Marketing Management, but had an inclination towards design from a very young age. Our family business is in real estate and I often used to visit construction sites during my school holidays. I would learn about design, be a part of the conversation, and get involved in the process of planning. Over the years I would see things start to take shape. When I finished my education I designed my home and felt that I could do much more if I had my own design studio - that's how things fell in place. Not having a formal education in design makes me curious about things and makes me explore things in my own way.

DS: I pursued a Bachelor of Architecture degree at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad. The School of Architecture provided me the environment to grow as a person, architect, artist, and individual. It provided me the perception to experience the beauty of the world. It taught me to develop the tools for learning and keep learning. The great institute had great faculty, seniors and juniors, and exposed me to so many aspects of design and art - I could keep becoming better by questioning and understanding the design world.



'My Dubai' (large scale city sign installation)



'Betula' (parametric chair)

How did Apical Reform come about?

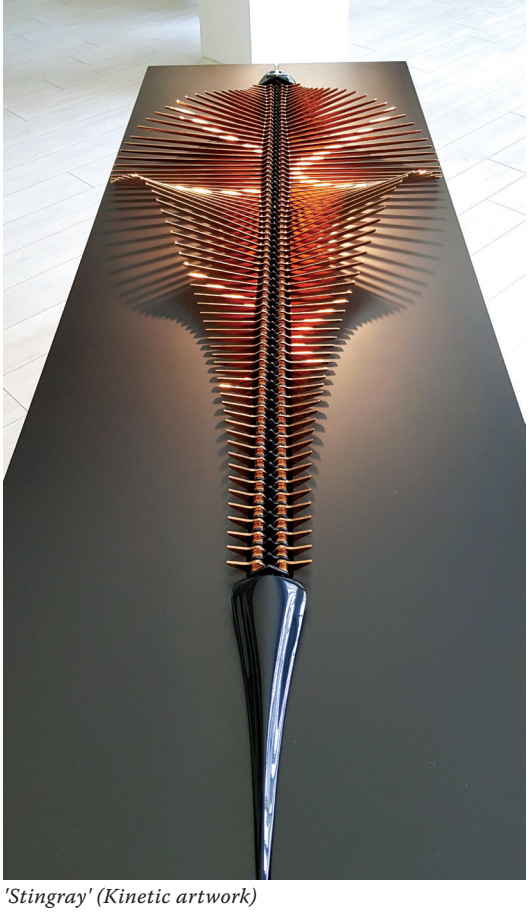
DS: Amrish and I met through a common friend in 2010. We did a couple of pilot projects and realized we complemented each other's strengths - the results were very exciting. We realized that we made a great team and eventually decided to form a company together where we both could share our ideas and vision and create work which had impact in various ways. Apical Reform, started in Ahmedabad in 2011, is a collaborative design studio dedicated to creating immersive experiences led by art and innovation in production technology. The core identity of our work methods and interests are 'the introspection and constant effort of reforming to become better'. This is a perpetual process for us, and hence the name - Apical Reform. It is a constant process of reforming and moving towards the apex as a never ending process.

What makes your partnership work?

DS: Amrish is Creative Director – he has a very good understanding of the design world, materials and esthetics. His formal training in business gives him a very vital role in the company. That is a great relief for me and as Design Director I can put my heart and soul into the process of design. He leads the business front and I handle the design. This brings in a great balance.

What drew you to kinetic art?

AP: The core of our design practice has always been parametric designs. We also focus on innovation in various aspects of design, such as materials, details and programs. We were always fascinated by kinetic art - it requires a great understanding of mechanics, mathematics, materials and details. The parametric understanding along with deep roots of our childhood experiences

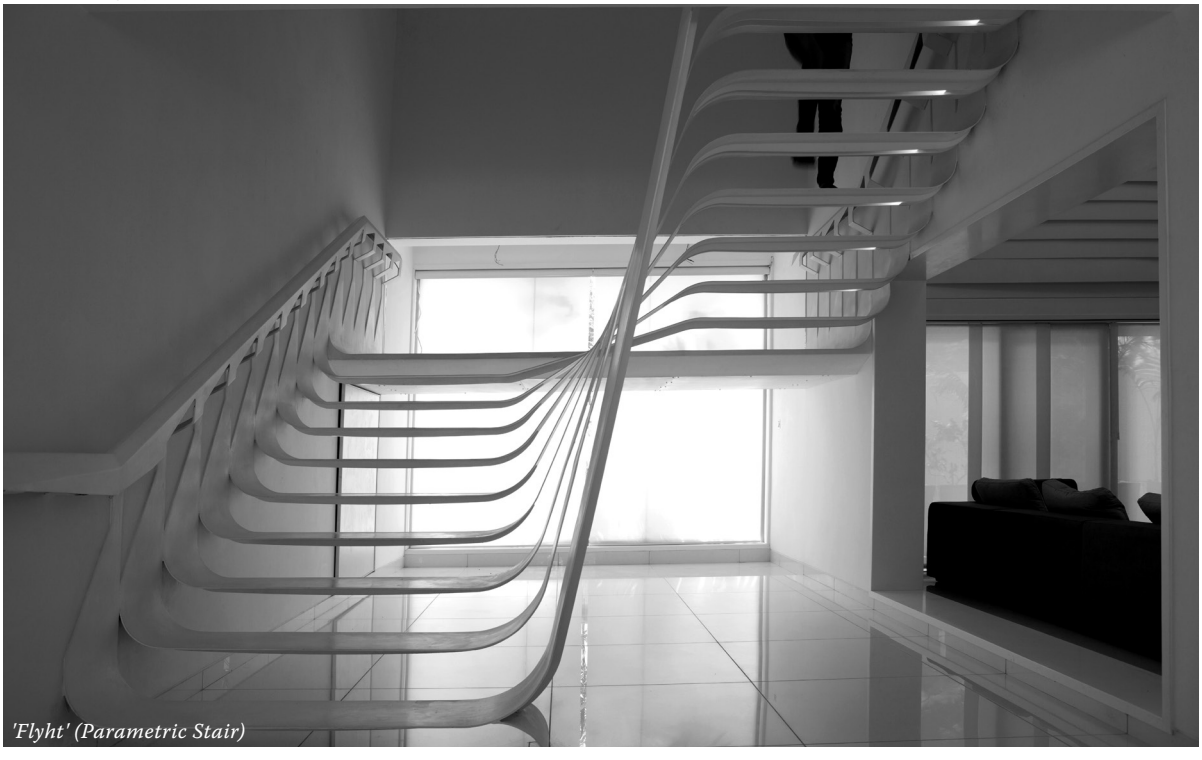


'Stingray' (Kinetic artwork)

and explorations have always kept this genre of art in a special corner in our hearts. We always wanted to express ourselves through kinetic art. In the beginning of our practice we did not have enough resources. As the years passed we developed the missing links and started our kinetic art wing with the wings of the 'Stingray' and the twist of the 'Tornado'.

What inspires you?

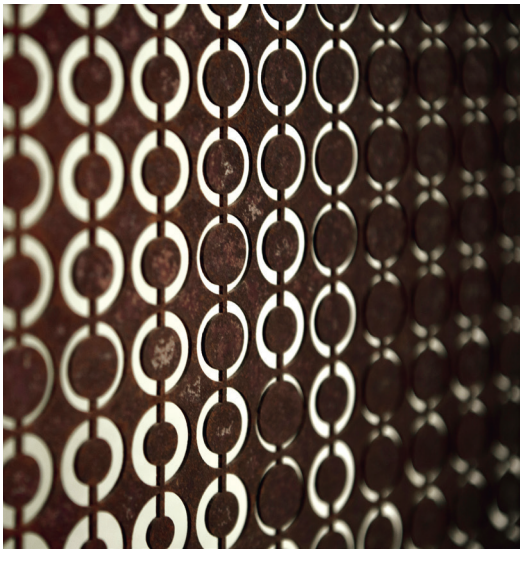
DS: For us, nature is big source of inspiration. Nature has everything. One has to keep observing to get inspired – whether it is the sudden down flight of an eagle approaching its prey, a smoothly swimming stingray or fields of grass dancing in the breeze. Does this make you smile, cause wonder or curiosity? How we perceive our world is the answer to finding the joy of life. We start to celebrate it through our work and it transforms into something which is cherished by people.



'Flyht' (Parametric Stair)







'The Poet' (Metal perforated screen)

Which have been your most memorable projects?

DS: 'Stingray' was the most memorable project for me. It was conceived in and proposed in a very short time. This was our collaboration with one of the most unique and fantastic international brands - 'mb&f: maximilian busser and friends'. It was our first kinetic art work and it had to provide a mesmerizing experience apart from the highest finish. We had sleepless nights and were resolving and designing even in our dreams. It was a great team effort and we could complete the work on time - it had an overwhelming response at the launch in Dubai.

How do you balance your art and architectural practices?

AP: We only take on a couple of architectural projects per year, which allows us to create more art and we can experiment with more concepts per year. The architectural projects demand a big slice of our time. More projects would



'Synchronicity' (wall hung artwork)

not leave us any time or energy for more explorations and in depth studies for the artworks. Doing fewer architectural projects allows us to do more art works and to go deeper into the architectural projects that we choose to realize.



What does it take to create timeless design?

DS: We think the most important aspects of timeless design are the experience, sensibility towards the material, and understanding of the program. Being innovative and responding to the functional requirements are two critical sides of the process. Sometimes the trends misguide the designer and they fall into the trap of unknown directions. Timeless designs can be achieved if the program is understood in great depth, the materials speak to the design senses, and the experience guides the process of design.

Have there been many entrepreneurial challenges so far?

AP: There are a lot of them! We have carved our niche in the design field through years of introspection. The most difficult challenge we have faced is to have the right kind of team members. Ours is not a typical design studio practice where fresh graduates from design schools can fit. We would love to have people who are passionate about hands on work. We find that the current educational environment is not focusing much on working with the hands. We believe that 'making is learning'. One learns a lot about materials, sequences and processes when the body and mind are involved in creating some things with the hand. Hence, after almost nine years we only have a small team of seven passionate people. We focus on quality rather than quantity.

Another challenge is the acceptance of our work in the

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realm of art in this country. India needs to absorb what happens around the world and provide platforms to upcoming artists who have new ways of creating art. Expression of art changes with time. We still find it difficult for our work to be accepted as art amongst the art fraternity in India but it will happen when the time is right. Meanwhile we are exploring markets outside India where our work is very easily accepted as art. We also find more opportunities to create public art installations.

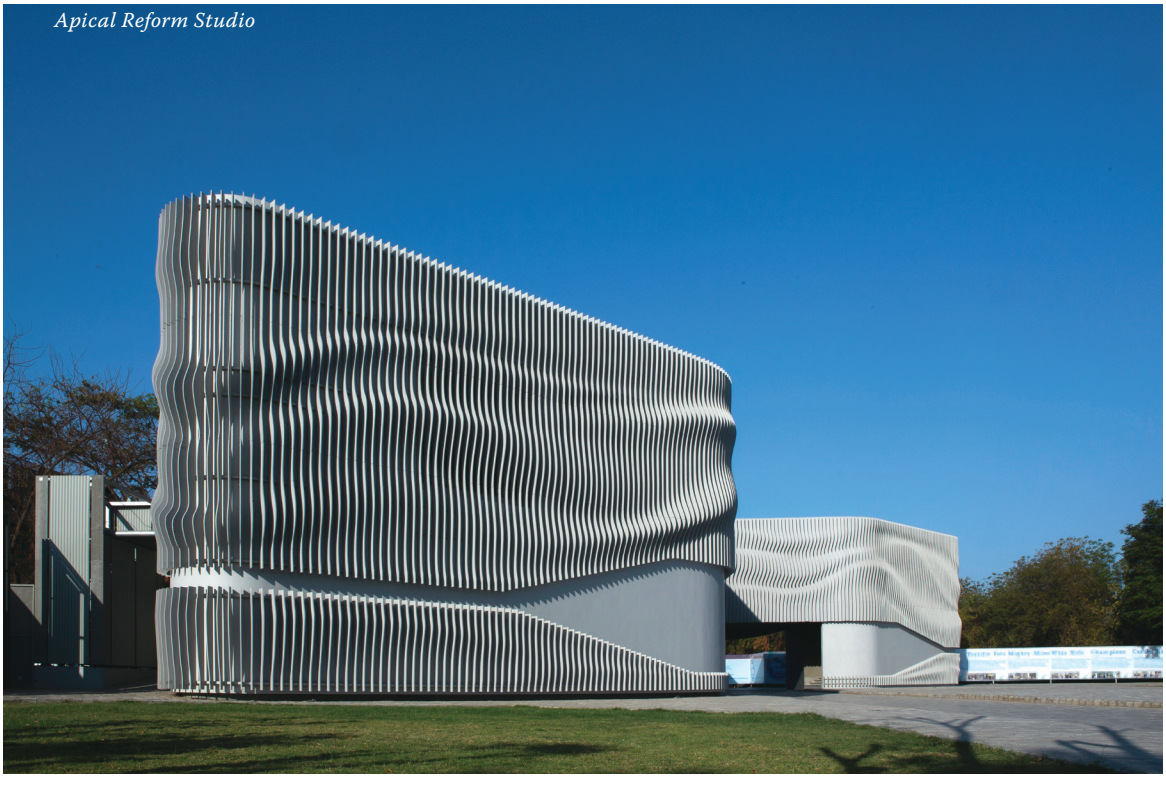
How can the amalgamation of technology and innovation bring about disruptive changes in Indian design?

AP: Technology is a very important part of design. All designs need some kind of technology. We have seen a huge change in technology in the last two decades. There are numerous innovations taking place every day. Innovation always brings out new ways to do things and makes life easier and more comfortable. Unfortunately, in the current design scenario, the aspect of overdesign and misuse of technology overpowers the designs. In such a situation, design does not serve its true purpose and remains misguided.

What's next?

DS: We would love to take our journey to the stage where we can create larger than life art installations for people - work that evokes emotions and spreads smiles. We would also love to collaborate with kids and young designers to learn from them and share our experiences. We aspire to celebrate kinetic art throughout our career and achieve heights in this field. We are awaiting the opportunity to create something so beautiful that it makes India proud.

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Apical Reform Studio





A NATURAL INSTINCT

Nibha Sikander's *3D figures of birds and insects are intended to draw attention to the wonders of nature. She tells Sonalee Tomar of 'The Indian Curator' how she was drawn to the art of paper-cutting.*



Left & Above: House Sparrow

Take us to the beginning of your story.

NS: I started cutting paper over 15 years ago and when I first started, it literally involved taking a single piece of paper and cutting it into abstract forms. This developed into more stencil-like forms using colored paper. Almost six or seven years ago, I developed this technique of laying paper from the top and adding thicker paper in-between, to add more body and make it more relief sculpture like.

Tell us about the evolution of your practice over the years.

NS: I find that my work itself speaks to my commitment to paper. Each work takes me several days to complete and is a complete immersion in the paper, and the paper-cutting process, which has allowed me to reach this level of technical ability. I feel that paper has the ability to be flexible as well as stiff when required, which really does help me in the process of creating my various natural forms.

What were your biggest learnings and hiccups along the way? Which is the most memorable moment?

NS: I guess I would have to highlight the technical side of my work. I do learn and discover new things as I work. As I work, in this case with birds, moths and insects, I make mistakes. When each work progresses, I am able to correct my mistakes, and sometimes I can add or subtract the paper as I go along. It is this process that I enjoy the most when I'm working.

The hiccup came when I opted to pursue Visual Arts (Painting) at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara, and felt like I had to conform to the structure of painting with watercolor or acrylic or oil. I struggled to find a way to incorporate my paper-cutting technique into such a rigidly structured undergraduate degree. Though I did experiment with paper a bit in the fourth year of my Bachelor's and my Master's as well, upon graduating I gave up other mediums to focus on paper.

What inspires you? Take us through your process and continuous frameworks of reference.

NS: I come from a family of nature lovers and have been surrounded by books on birds and trees, as well as conversations about various species my entire life. Talking about my current body of work, one of my most memorable moments is connected to my trip to Kaziranga with my family. We visited Nameri, a bird sanctuary, and I saw the Great Indian Hornbillfor the first time, and it completely mesmerized me. I had never seen a bird that size, and also when it flew above us the wings were so massive that it felt like

the wind was displaced. After that I started to observe and buy books and research more about birds and other species extensively. My family has had property on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra for many years, so I have been visiting these places since I was a child; I am most comfortable in nature. About a year ago I moved to our home in Murud-Janjira, where I currently reside. Right behind our place is the Phansad wildlife sanctuary, where a variety of moth and bird species live - they inspire my work.

What is the primary role of an artist?

NS: My role is to highlight nature and the species that inspire me. My work enables people to challenge their perceptions of overlooked creatures in nature.

How do you balance art and life?

NS: I would say that my life and art are very much intertwined. I live in Murud-Janjira and my studio is in my house



itself. Being surrounded by nature I am dealing with these insects and moths on a daily basis, so I find no real need to separate the two.

How do you deal with the conceptual difficulty and uncertainty of creating work?

NS: For my most recent show, the concept was clear very early on. Once I started with the birds, the moths and insects simply followed. Since I encountered these creatures every day it was much easier for me to observe, photograph and recreate them. Hence, I had the conceptual aspects mapped out for these particular series.

How does your audience interact and react to the work you put out into the world?

NS: People react differently to the materiality and the three-dimensionality of the works. The images online make the works appear to be flat, however upon seeing them right before your eyes, you are able to uncover the layers and appreciate the life-like appearance.

Who or what has shaped your own creative process? Who are your maestros?

NS: I would definitely say my mother, who is an artist herself, has been a huge influence in my journey with art. More importantly, crafts



Moth Series



have had a major impact on me, like the Andhra leather puppets, *Sanjhi* rangoli stencils, Mexican, Chinese and Polish paper cuts. My maestros are varied, from Goya and Paul Cezanne to Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, especially towards the end when he started experimenting with paper cut outs like the *Blue Nudes* series. Benode Behari Mukerjee and his paper cut out that he started when he was losing his sight have been a great influence. As have Bhupen Khakkar, Andy Warhol, and M.C. Ecsher among many others.

Crimson Spotted Emerald



How do you feel about commissions?

NS: Often for me, commissions become a vibrant space and opportunity to experiment with the medium. For example, when I worked with the Arvind Indigo Museum I was made to work with paper of a particular thickness that was dyed different shades of Indigo. Interestingly here, I was working with shades of one particular color palette as opposed to the multiple colors I am used to. I do feel that commissions tend to challenge my notions and usual ways of working.

What are you working on now?

NS: I want to pick up from one work named 'The Abstract Kingfisher', where I have played around with using different cutout forms, creating a completely new abstract form of the kingfisher. I am definitely not done working with the full form of birds, moths and insects but I want to try and push my work more into the abstract so let's see what happens.

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

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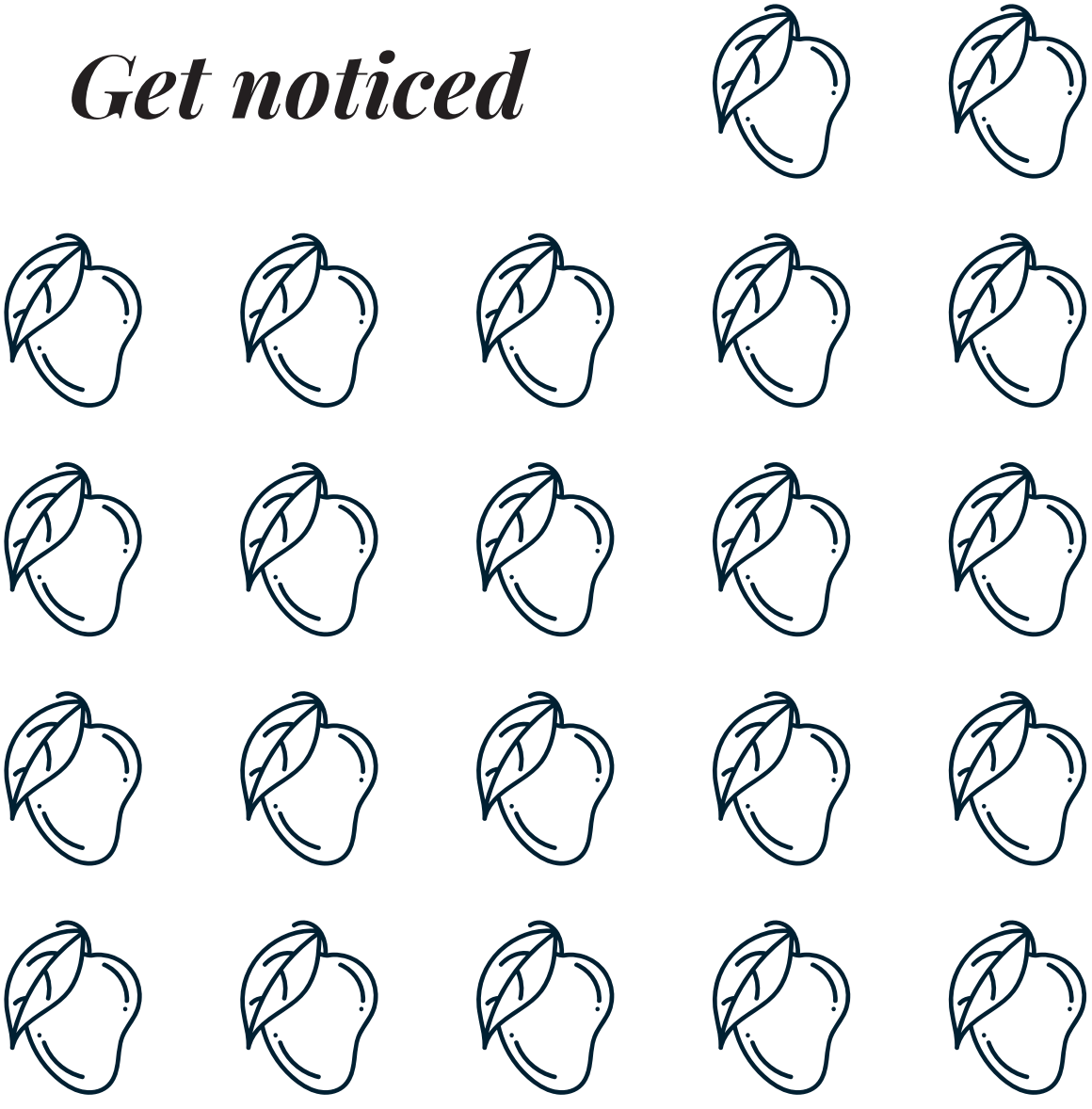
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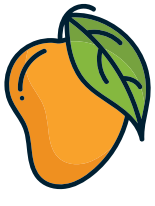
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