DESIGN INDIA

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CHANGE MAKERS



Ajay Shah *pg 10*

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With Marianna, Tarun and Deepak on desert safari in Dubai



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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

Transferable Value of Design

We all know that as designers we work beyond ourselves, we work for others, we work for projects and solutions that make sense and create value for others. This value is often not just a number and very often it is much more than we can imagine. Most of the time the impact is irreversible and triggers cumulative impact. We know till someone else benefits from our value creation, as designers we are not satisfied. Whether it is a logo for a machine or an app, or just a rearrangement of furniture, we feel fulfilled by the way it changes the world around us.

Most of our work is such that we can communicate it to others, make them comfortable using it, and transfer to other stakeholders to manage it further. A designer or a studio also build value for themselves when they are doing such projects. Each project adds to its portfolio, brings in more work and attracts people who want to work on such projects. Many studios, as well as designers, become aware of the value they are creating at this stage and start introspecting. At this stage, much of this value is the designer's talent itself. Very few studios in the past have been able to create processes and systems that account for talent. With these in place, the value of the studio becomes transferable and scalable.

Design as an industry becomes valid only when the designers and studios start building value that is transferable and scalable. A freelance designer could be very talented and may do fantastic work, but that kind of work will not continue in his/her absence.

I think it is time for us to include creation of the Business Value of Design as a topic in design schools. While we have started teaching Design Management to designers, they also now need to start planning on creating a transferable and scalable value for the work they do.

Sudhir

ValueLabs

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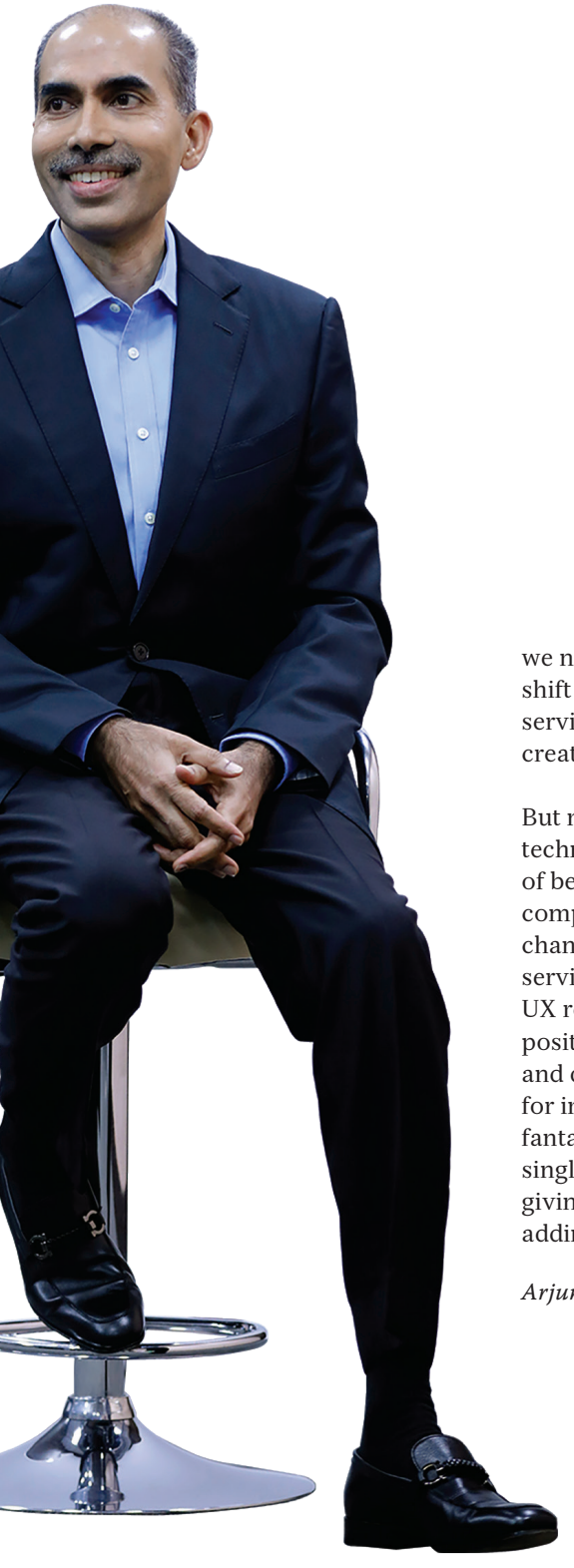
between **VISION** *and* **STRATEGY,** *there is* **DESIGN!**



The intersection of design, business, and technology is where great things happen. If value creation ever had a recipe, design would be the secret sauce that makes or breaks it. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that almost all the successful businesses got the 'Design' right – accidentally or by design! Once a brand is positioned correctly and the product/service is well designed, the customers come to you.

The proof lies in looking at one of the greatest design companies ever - Apple. The Apple marketing philosophy is centered on understanding the needs of their customers better than any other company. This foundational sentiment, along with the phenomenal branding that Apple has showcased, has created the tech giant we see today. Even unboxing a new iPhone is a joyful experience for the customer, one that they are willing to pay for.

In the previous decade we saw all organizations shifting to become digital companies. This shift came about through the incredible, almost blinding, influx of data



we now see available to each company today. With this shift came the utilization of data to create products and services. We analyzed what worked and what didn't and created products/services based on this history.

But now we see companies marrying design and technology to create beautiful products/services. Instead of being limited just by data of what worked in the past, companies have found that proper design carves out the channel for great technology creation. Now, product/service creation succeeds when design is informed by UX research, understanding the end user's needs, and positioning the product/service correctly. Technology and design come together to create new benchmarks for innovation and creativity, allowing for the birth of fantastic products. Design has evolved from being a single stitch, to a solid thread in the business tapestry, giving customers a truly wonderful experience, and adding immense value to businesses.

Arjun Rao, Founder & CEO ValueLabs

ValueLabs, a global technology services provider, has acquired Indi Design. With this acquisition, ValueLabs' offering in the tech solutions segment expands to include Brand and Business Consulting.


CHECK YOUR
INDIAN
ORIGIN

Founder and creative director of London-based product design studio, Tiipoi, ***Spandana Gopal*** *reinterprets the gems of daily life in India through modern design*

How did Tiipoi come about?

SG: I always felt something was amiss in the perception of Indian design and the concept of 'Indian-ness'. I wanted to share internationally a truer contemporary design typology inspired by simplistic and utilitarian forms of daily life in the Indian household that are rooted in generations-old craft techniques and materiality. Tiipoi was born in 2014 out of my musings about wanting these objects in my life. I wanted to use them, and for them to occupy a place in my daily life. The root of these objects was in India, in Bangalore, at my grandmother's home, my mother's home, my aunt's home, or the local coffee shop or meals place. There was a certain action around eating and drinking that I loved and missed so much.

What does it take to challenge the stereotyped label of 'Indian design' through modern, functional design?

SG: I think you've got to be a bit naive, and a bit inexperienced and a little bit stupid too, which means that you are also fearless because you don't know what you are up against. I think I'm trying to say that I didn't know what I was getting into when I just wanted to tell this story. To me it seemed quite straightforward. I think I realized it was a challenge only when I was fully immersed in it. Then it was like a domino effect of solving many problems at once that were automatically attached to this brief I had given myself for modern and functional design from India.



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1. Modern Kantha single teal
2. Jamakhan cushion line
3. Water tower
4, 5, 6, 7: The Ayasa Line



Ayasa brass storage jar for tea and coffee with wooden lid

What shapes the concept of 'Indian-ness' today?

SG: I don't know if Indian-ness is a thing that can be identified or seen or drawn or designed. I think it's an attitude or a thought or a feeling. It's like being able to respond to a joke or enjoy a poem or a song. I feel the more we try to distill it the more it escapes us. For me, if someone who is not of Indian origin uses a Tiipoi product in a way that is quite close to how it was intended - I'd say that was quite Indian, and the Indian-ness has had its effect in that moment.

Give us a glimpse into your design process.

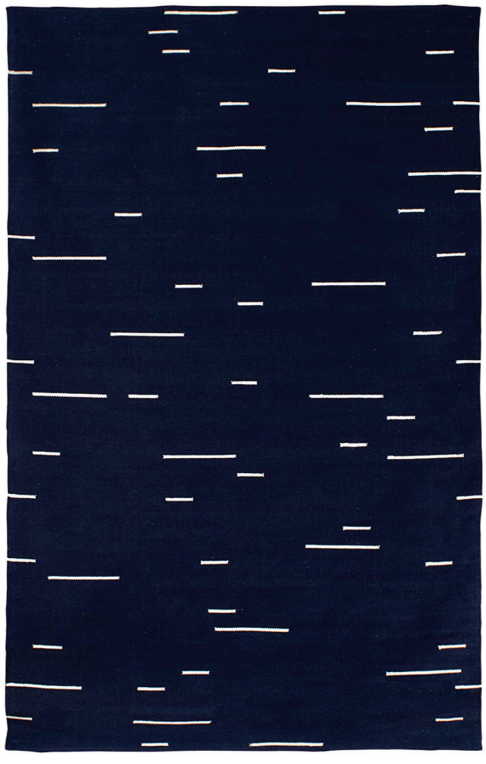
SG: We have a very strict design testing system called the Tiipoi test; every design needs to go through this filter for it to become a Tiipoi object, a Tiipoi thing. Unfortunately I can't reveal those five secret clauses that make up the test!

How do you market and distribute your products?

SG: That's something that we really need help with and something that we are looking to address in this year. I feel like we're only using one side of our Tiipoi brain and that side is really great, but we definitely need help with the other side. We need the right people to help us grow. We're currently on a growth plan and raising investment just for these reasons.

What inspires you?

SG: I get excited about bringing people together, creating community, creating events. I love old buildings, abandoned houses, and antique shops in India. I love the way markets display their vegetables and wares and I love the signage. I like the sound of sewing machines and big industrial presses, and I love factory spaces and all the machines inside them. I rarely get inspired by pictures in books or by art shows. I think real life is my biggest inspiration.



Jamakhan Rug Line

How do you tackle the entrepreneurial challenges along the way?

SG: I think it's very easy to believe that if I'm doing something I love then it's really hard for it to become a viable business! It's easy to get intimidated by people who only think about numbers and returns. I have to remind myself that I have to run a business that makes money, but I'm not running this business to make money. I tackle



Diya Brass Candle Holders



my fears by just exposing myself to situations that I'm afraid of. Or people I'm intimidated by. I think at the end of the day, we're all humans. And it's okay to make mistakes and look a bit silly, but I think you need to go to all those places to find out the answer for yourself.

It's challenging to run a business between London and Bangalore. You have to be able to code switch between different modes of operation - everything from translation of a drawing, email etiquette, 'yes' meaning 'not really' or even 'no' (but being well intentioned, not wanting to disappoint), to festivals and puja holidays in India, to just basic semantics of language and cultural nuances being so different. But, I think this space in the middle where all these negotiations appear is really beautiful.

What role has formal art education played in your career?

SG: I think fine art education is a very challenging and complex thing. It's either soul shattering or enlightening and I think for me it was the former. It prepares you for life in a way that no other profession can. Somehow it gave me the ability to adapt to other ways of thinking; it allowed me to unlearn and be really open minded in my approach and break down boundaries that separated creative practice. Art college is a very inclusive space if you choose to give yourself to it, and I think I bring that into my work at Tiipoi. I had to unlearn everything again when I started to work with industrial designers and profession wise this is like an anti-thesis to fine art!

What made you swap art for design?

SG: Even in my art practice I always explored my relationship with India - this coming and going, and the object in one context and then the other. I was always interested in displacement and meaning. I think in a way that's what I'm doing with my brand too. I'm trying to create a new meaning and translating a context. I see these practices as increasingly fluid these days - and there has been a shift in craft objects entering the art space. I think that one can become the other in front of the appropriate audience.



'Tii-pot' - brushed stainless steel teapot

What major shift do you envision happening in contemporary Indian design in the next five years?

SG: I think on one hand there seems to be a bigger movement of social and political awareness among young designers who are trying to articulate themselves outside the confines of the industry, which has been driven by luxury markets. There are lots of parallel conversations happening via



Modern Kantha Quilted Cushion

smaller fringe events, and for me this is really exciting. I do feel like there is a tendency to adopt a Western language, and I think that we all do it - in a way that is looking for approval from an industry that is based in the West. I think if there is enough of a community willing to support each other and share audiences then that could shift.

What's next?

SG: I'm currently reviewing my business strategy and model. I'm on my way to do a road show to raise funds for the next part of Tiipoi's growth. The idea is to create a larger platform for other designers like me.

info@tiipoi.com



Ayasa multipurpose pourer

giving in to impulses





From designing furniture to creating stationery and working on brand identities alongside, ***Ajay Shah*** *has had a diverse design journey that shows no sign of taking the beaten path!*

W Hotel Totem



Left to right: Mi-vida

How were you drawn to furniture design?

AS: Post my studies in Mumbai, I was drawn to NID as my brother was studying there. I used to visit him during my holidays and gradually found myself attracted to the teaching methods, workshops and conversations around design. Post the foundation year, I had to choose a discipline that I wanted to specialize in. I can't remember exactly what led me to choose furniture design, but once I had taken this call it grew on me very fast. I graduated from NID in mid 1987 and went on to work with a design studio in Mumbai and then a company where I was involved in designing and overseeing production of furniture.

How did Circus Design Company come about? Why did you later rechristen it ASDS?

AS: Circus Design Company (CAD) was formed in 1987/88. I was involved in furniture design and production with my brother, besides working on projects for his studio. Circus Design Company came about through a strong urge to be an independent design studio practicing furniture design. The early projects were varied and I had the opportunity to design furniture for a fashion store. This project grew organically and I eventually designed the complete shop. It was a manifestation of everything I wanted to do in design. This one store led to more retail projects and recording studio amongst other work. I had also started to design for a perfume and a cosmetic company around this time and this relationship grew to become something I would do for over 10 years.

Ajay Shah Design Studio (ASDS) came around the year 2002 - to design products, spaces and brand identities for big and small businesses. We were approached to design a food court in Bangalore but our approach led us to planning the food court, designing the space, furniture, the graphic identity and the overall graphic language. This project came together and we realized the possibility of a single concept translating across all aspects of a project. We understood the importance of `identity'. Around this time, I felt it was necessary to rechristen ourselves to a more serious name (as Circus Design Company was sometimes misunderstood).

MI VIDA

MY HOME, MY LIFE

Which projects really stand out in your mind?

AS: There are quite a few to look back upon. Some of the older projects hold a special place, because of the exuberance you have as a designer starting out. These include many experimental retail formats and concepts for malls and commercial properties. We even



designed a railway station using modular components that could easily be assembled on site. In recent years, there've been a series of firsts. We did a comprehensive brand strategy and standardization exercise for Shapoorji Pallonji Real Estate, which deepened our understanding of the science of branding. The success of that project has seen the roll-out of similar engagements. Some of the smaller but stimulating projects that come to mind include the branding and packaging work we did for Moonshine Meadery and Pizzo, a frozen pizza company; and the identity we created for Glide, our first client in the insurance space. Last year, we created a whole new brand of affordable housing in Africa called Mi-Vida, which was good exposure for us. But having completed close to 500 projects over the last 30 years, the list can go on and each project has had its own share of memories and experiences.

Share your experience of working with PVR Cinemas.

AS: We had the opportunity of designing lobby environments for PVR Cinemas in their early years. I'm quite the movie buff







Above: Glide
Below: Pizzo









by distancing images to create depth and dramatic compositions. In some cases we used sound to further accentuate the cinema experience within artworks. PVR Cinema is not just a commercial venture. It's a labor of love by the owners and this, in my understanding, is the largest differentiator. They were involved clients and had keen interest in everything related to design.



Svara





and hence this was something I was looking forward to. We were able to combine all our skills of graphic design, from building a concept, to composing imagery and designing a container unit to hold the imagery. In cinematic terms, the foregrounds and backgrounds were realized











What was the most challenging part of designing for BCCI?

AS: I think the most challenging aspect of designing brand architecture for BCCI was the scale of the project and the volume of creatives that had to be churned out. After refining the primary BCCI logo and identity, we started to work closely with them on branding each of their formats between 2015 - 2017. This started off with the Champions League and was followed by tournaments like ODI, Freedom Series, T20 and Test Cricket, which is still in effect. Each project had huge design requirements. It was one of the busiest times for the studio and we even had to partner with a smaller agency for additional support.

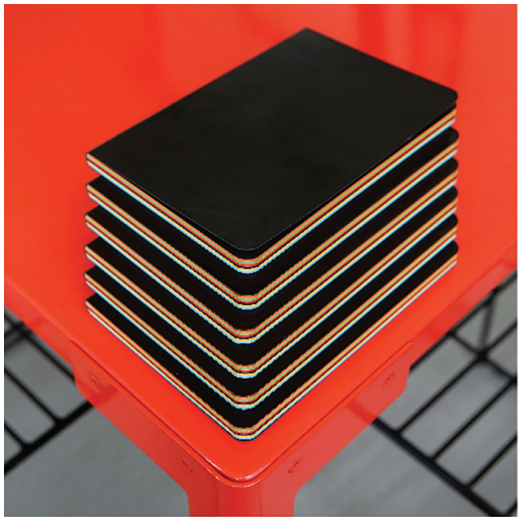
What has been the evolution of the design studio and where do you see yourself at this stage?

AS: The studio's evolution has been mostly unplanned and highly instinctive. We started off by designing furniture and then moved into retail and commercial space design during the formative years. Over the last decade, we've seen a greater influx of branding projects that has scaled from creating identities, positioning and brand strategy, packaging, publication, communication and even campaign design. We've also worked in a broader range of sectors, ranging from large, legacy brands to new-age start-ups that show a lot of potential. As a studio that's

been comfortable with more traditional mediums, we're now strengthening our digital capabilities and are actively collaborating with experts in various tech domains.

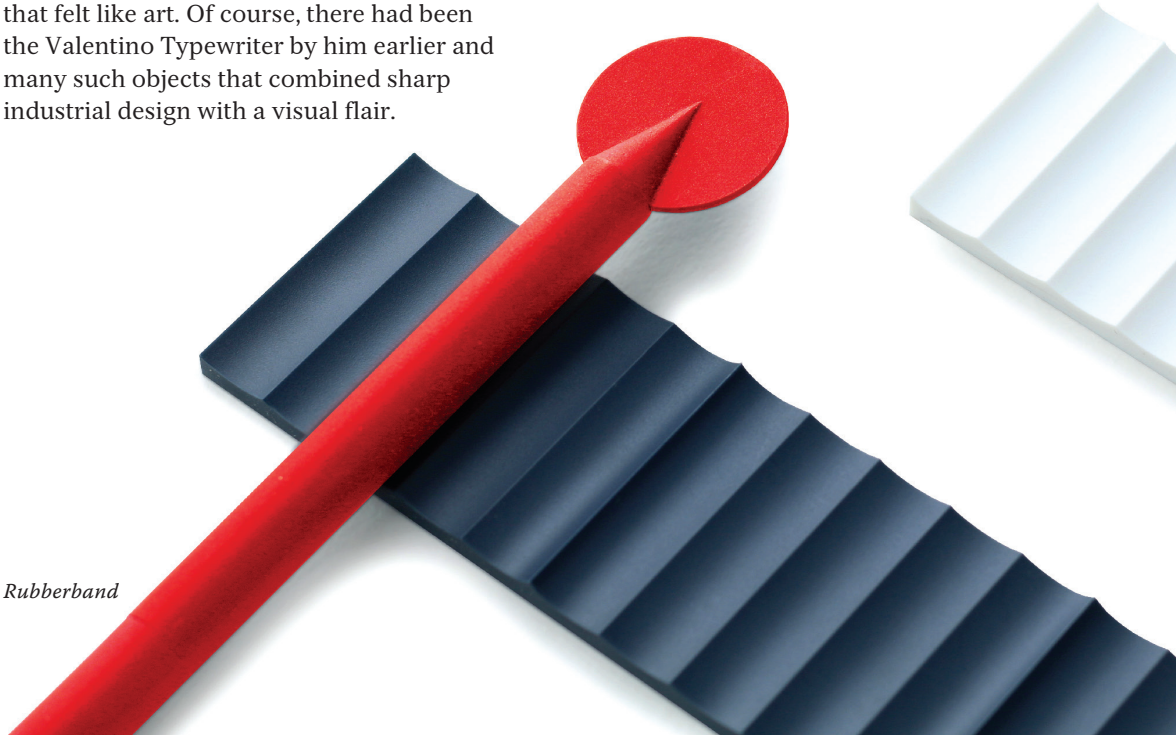
At this stage, I believe we've created our own distinctive style that stems from a solid esthetic belief. We're proudly rigid about this and it's worked well for us so far as it invites clientele who share the same vision. It also makes the design process extremely gratifying and fun for the studio.





How did your foray into designing products begin?

AS: I started designing products very early on. I was fascinated with the idea of seeking products that would delight! My exposure to product design was more playful, rebel design rather than traditional and craft based objects. The thrill was in seeking objects and products that expressed freely and were always produced with attention to detail and in production houses rather than in a handmade set up. My first strong influence was the Enorme chord phone designed by Ettore Sotsass. It was a modern instrument that felt like art. Of course, there had been the Valentino Typewriter by him earlier and many such objects that combined sharp industrial design with a visual flair.



Rubberband

I started by designing several objects such as jelly coasters, translucent glasses and picture frames. All of these were produced by making injection molded dies. I started to sell them under the brand name Circus2Circus.

What is the story behind Rubberband?

AS: In the year 2008, I started to work on a line of paper products. I was looking for a simple name and Rubberband stuck! It exemplified the possibilities as I could stretch the brand to its maximum, give it any shape and always bring it back to its original form. The brand grew organically and by taking charge of the design, the production and the distribution, we were able to control the brand experience. Through the last 10 years, there has been a constant exploration of design ideas translating into different products with an equal emphasis on seeking channels to show and retail the collection. We have played an active role as designers, producers and retailers and in the process gained experience on what it takes to make a brand.

The brand Rubberband continues to grow, modify and continues to design and develop new products. In 2018/2019 we collaborated with five international design studios to create new products. These products include objects, bags and stationery, each having a unique concept and story. The products are now retailed at our webshop and in select shops worldwide. We have also designed and developed new furniture for office





spaces and are closely collaborating with architects and designers to provide furniture for their projects.

What is the importance of establishing your own brands versus providing design services?

AS: The answer is simple: there is a greater design independence when you have your own brand/s. However, providing services and establishing other brands reaps its own rewards. There's greater variety but it also needs a greater amount of patience, as it comes with its own set of challenges. It needs discipline and drive to keep going at it against many odds.

info@asdswow.com | info@rubberbandproducts.com



WASABI

by



SEA LOUNGE



Above: Treehouse
Left & Right: TAJ



Visual and performing artist, ***Neha Kudchadkar*** *is happy to juggle her various roles as long as they contribute to personal growth*

The making of an artist



Something polis

What drew you to ceramics?

NK: I used to practice Ikebana in school, and so I was always surrounded by beautiful ceramic pots. From the beginning the flower arrangements I made were not just about flowers, but about how the flowers, the vessel they were arranged in, and the room around it were related to each other and to me. Enrolling into a ceramics degree program was a deliberate, thought out decision. I wanted to make my own pots. In the end I never made any! I became interested in other possibilities of the medium. I consider myself a ceramicist. I understand the material. It suits my temperament. I am interested in its physicality, its fragility, it's immediacy. I am also interested in the social, political, technical, and geological history of the material. Even though I work in various media, I think through clay.

How has a formal art education impacted your career?

NK: My formal education in ceramics has been critical to the way I make and to the way I teach today. Both, the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, and the Royal College of Art, London were major catalysts for growth at different points of time in my career. The RCA, where I majored in ceramics and glass, helped broaden my understanding and vision of what a clay-based practice could be. My time there completely revolutionized my practice. But, it was the invaluable, rigorous, course at Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry that set the discipline it takes to build a life as a ceramicist. It also became the root of my friendships and allyships within the Indian ceramics community.

Describe your style.

NK: I do not have a fixed style. My approach varies from project to project; it is determined by the questions I have posed to myself at that time. In making the work, I am making a move towards a resolution, and the result is entirely the product of my inquiry. To me the process of making is as critical, if not more critical, than the final product. The process and the research I undertake drives the 'style' and also determines the medium.



Above & below: Handjob (2018)



For instance, *home/land* is a series of three photographs made in Israel and the West Bank, that document the performance of rooting myself in a 'foreign' land. The sites at which these images were made are of tremendous importance to the work, loaded with meaning. They were made quickly, and without permission in a private garden with the backdrop of sabra fencing in Jerusalem, in Kiryat Arba, a Jewish settlement in the West Bank, and at the separation wall in Hizma, a suburb of Jerusalem broken by the wall.

In *Handjob,* which is a tool-kit for loving, each 'digital' tool was modelled as a prosthetic directly on my finger, in response to a particular incident from that day. A mold was then made from it, and it was slip-cast to make the five editions of the tool-kit. The tools serve various real and fictitious functions. They can be used to caress, nurture, groom, and love, and come with a complete instruction manual. Because it is made on my body, it does not quite fit anyone else. But this misfit is interesting to me.

What inspires you?

NK: I am extremely aware of my social, emotional, political, environmental surroundings, and my work stems from that awareness - from my position as actor, observer or acted upon, and the questions



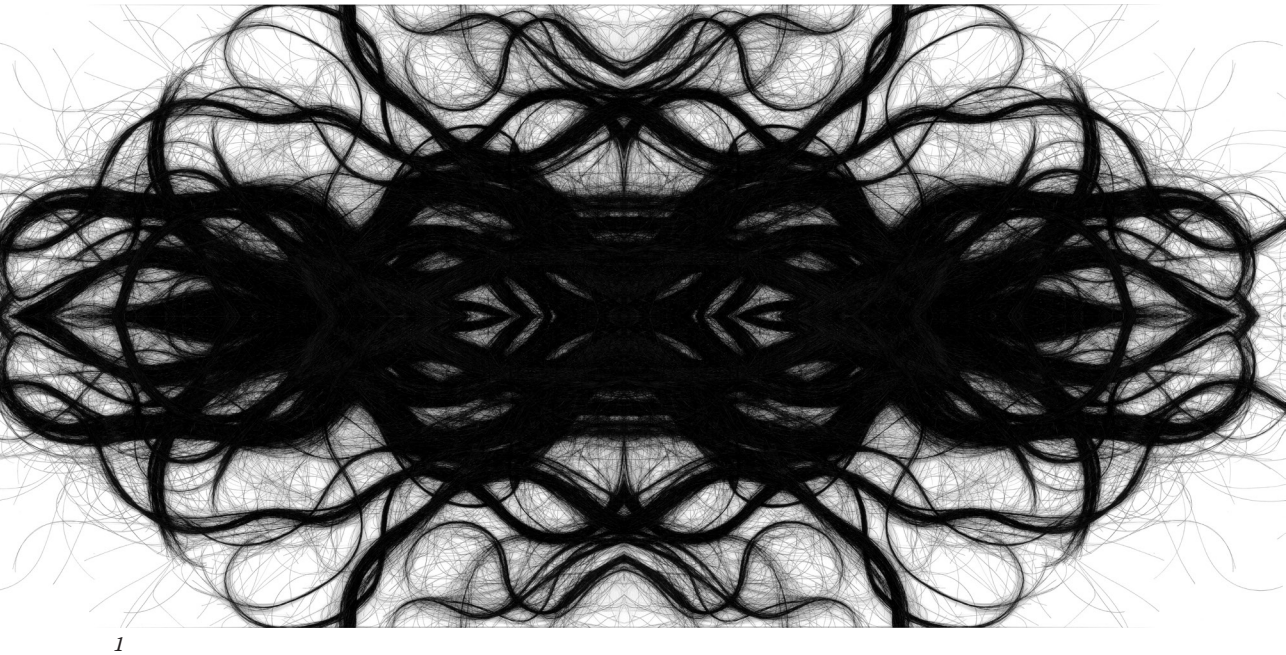
home/land

that I constantly ask of myself and of my immediate environment. It is important for me that the process of making is a process of learning and personal growth. I draw inspiration from words, images, body language and gesture.

What goes into a solo show?

NK: My last two solo exhibitions were curated by Marie Du'Pasquier, with whom I have been collaborating for close to two years now. *For Pinch Your thumb and Three Fingers (2018),* I had a skeletal structure for *Handjob* when Marie proposed the collaboration for the Mumbai Art Room. There was a short, intense period of making and resolving the final working time for the show. In preparation for *All That is in This Thing (2019)* I had the rare luxury of spending time in residence at the CAN, Centre de'art Centre d'art Neuchâtel, conceptualizing what I wanted to make for the show later in the year. I spent a month reading, researching matter, and the nature of information one holds in the body, and began extracting information from my body in various media. Once I was back in my studio in Mumbai I played with and manipulated this information to make the series of work titled *Molt*, which was shown at Display in Berlin. *Molt* is an exoskeleton of sorts - removed from my body but not without it.

Marie and I have also been thinking of the exhibition space as a 'contact zone' and have been looking at engaging with other artists and practitioners within the context of the show. And so, for both of these shows, we invited other voices and presences to come into the gallery space and activate it with performances, workshops, conversations and artist talks.



1

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

NK: Not very successfully! Most of the shows that I have participated in over the last few years have been non-commercial. This has afforded me the space to experiment and develop my work without the pressure of having to make a sale, which is extremely liberating. On the other hand, it is not the most sustainable way to work. I have been supporting my art-making with occasional teaching jobs. I have also won a few awards over the years that sustained my work and helped me travel and learn. It will be good and ideal to reach a point where my work becomes collectable, but I am prepared to grit my teeth and ride it out for a few more years before I have to change course.

How do you juggle your various roles - ceramicist, dancer, teacher, and collaborator?

NK: All the various roles I am committed to inform each other and give greater depth to my practice. Being interdisciplinary is vital to my way of thinking and making work. Over the years, and with some difficulty, I have found a way for these roles to flow into each other. I am learning to be content if, in everything that have done I have given my best and most honest contribution in the particular circumstances. One thing that I am extremely grateful for is a super strong support system. At both *beej* and the Indian Ceramics Triennale, I work with people who are supportive of my multi tasking. It can get extremely messy, stressful and overwhelming at times, but I am too greedy. I still need to and want to do all this, this way!



2



3

1, 2, 3. Molt (2019)
4. Thought Casts, Group of 7

Tell us something about *beej*.

NK: A performing arts collective in Mumbai, *beej* was founded by my friends and colleagues, Sanjukta Wagh and Pranali Kakade, and myself. We are trained Kathak dancers and interested in how we can explore the form as a medium of expression, grounded within the context of today; a language to tell stories relevant to us. We work in the spirit of mutual growth and collaboration. As a collective, *beej* addresses the three strands of process, performance and pedagogy. The *beej* garage works towards initiating conversation and critical discourse around the dance making process and dance culture. Our productions involve dance and theater work that is not bound by the traditional repertoire, and informed by contemporary context. The *beej* school of Kathak explores various interdisciplinary tools and methodologies to generate a holistic approach to classical dance education.

What has teaching others taught you?

NK: Teaching can be an extremely rewarding experience. I do not teach full-time, but I do enjoy the short projects I undertake with students from different disciplines. My greatest learning has been to understand and accept where each person is in their personal journey and try to move forward from there. Teaching has also taught me to question and critique constructively, a skill that I often use on myself when I step back and reflect on projects.

What's next?

NK: I hope that this is the year in which I finish building my studio, which is a couple of hours outside Mumbai. It will be good to have a generous, quiet space to make work and think.

nehakudchadkar@gmail.com



4



a changing platform

*Part photographer, part designer, **Sharad Shrivastav** is redefining the concept of luxury through his range of affordable leather accessories*

What took you from biotechnology to design?

SS: When I enrolled for my graduate degree in Biotechnology from Pune University I wanted to get into the field of research. I feel awful about my thinking process then, but the intention was to do something that could land me in a secure position. I was completely clueless about how photography and design were kind of taking over my life. I completely enjoyed the first year - meeting new people, making great friends. By the time I reached my second-year the attentiveness was



somehow lost and at one point I wanted to quit! But I wasn't ready to live with something unfinished. I had invested a lot of time, effort and money into this, so had to complete it, but I was struggling.

I think I've always had a fascination for art, images, colors and computers. In Pune I shared an apartment with an artist, Parth Sarathi, who later became one of my closest friends. I used to get thrilled looking at his work in different mediums and forms. Soon every inch of our apartment was covered by his extraordinary work. It was from him I got my first introduction to design, and the whole trajectory of my life changed. Sketching became a hobby, something that kept me satisfied and calm. Finally, I decided to enroll in a design course along with my graduation to balance my motivation. There was no looking back and somehow design took over from biotechnology.

How did your tryst with photography begin?

SS: Using the camera was what took me to photography. The sound of the click, the installation of film and how it rolled was next level excitement for me. I was 14 when my dad purchased a Kodak film camera. And soon I was

'Coalesce' Collection



the one taking all the family portraits. I would open up the camera, assemble, deconstruct and do all sorts of crazy stuff...I was hooked! In 2015 I bought my first professional camera with the necessary pieces of equipment to sharpen my skills and techniques.

I guess photography helps me reconnect a lot of separate pieces in life. As a kid, I used to love visiting a small railway station near my house with my dad's camera. It was an absolute joy to take pictures there as you could find so many subjects and emotions. I somehow found peace even though it was a crowded, noisy place. Growing up in Bihar, I wasn't allowed to spend too much time with the camera - I was allowed to treat it as a hobby but not as something I could pursue as a career. It went on as a hobby for the longest time, till 2015 whenI started experimenting with professional setups.





Which were your most memorable shoots?

SS: One of the most memorable projects was shooting a portrait of Gurmeet Sanga Rai, photographer Raghu Rai's wife. The location was to be her workspace in Delhi. We kept looking for the perfect location, angle and background for almost an hour when suddenly I found a window outside with a damp wall. The mild sunlight created a glaze on the yellow wall, and the moment she stood there it was breathtaking - the expression on her face, the way she looked. She looked like a sun kissed lady. It is difficult to express in words. That has been one of my most liked pictures so far.

Left & Above: Slinch collabration with Three

Tell us about your time as Art Director at *Platform* magazine.

SS: It was fun and inspiring! My responsibilities were to look after the visual style, images, layout and design of the art magazine under the guidance of editor, Shruti Kapoor Malhotra. Gradually I got interested in print production and started taking an interest in post-production as well. I loved working under strict deadlines with full creative freedom. I also got a chance to take some amazing portraits for the magazine. Sometimes I accompanied the editor for the interview sessions and was awestruck hearing the amazing stories of creative personalities. Interaction with the talented young artists featured in the magazine gave me a different perspective towards art and design. I was doing everything I loved - design, create and sell. I had an opportunity to design a few artworks for *Platform* for various exhibitions. I also designed products for them, which are selling on their online portal.

Slinch collabration with Three at Amazon India Fashion Week









Slinch collabration with California-based designer Jessica Bistro

How did Slinch come about?

SS: While I was studying design, I happened to get an internship with a leather export house in Noida. And it was love at first sight. Internship for 12 months gave me an insight into what and how can you use leather for various products, but I wasn't super inclined towards their design esthetics. I needed more exposure in retail and design in India. I joined a retail cum event design and management firm called Second Floor Studio. Working with designer Punit Jasuja for almost four years gave me a great insight into design, and what was new and upcoming. More importantly, I learned how to sell one's designs. I worked with *Platform* for almost five years, where my interaction with customers, art collectors, publishers and designers gave me a lot of strength to start something of which I had full control. Finally, after 10 years I went back to my first love - leather!

I started Slinch (the word is a unit of measurement) in a small unit in New Delhi in 2018 with the vision to create something spectacular. Slinch represents a small group of people trying to make a change. Our goal is to use local artisans to create handcrafted functional products in affordable ranges for all the sectors. The focus is to create something for a lifetime. We aim to make a name for ourselves with quality, not quantity. Every product is handcrafted in our workshop in Delhi.

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

SS: In the beginning it was slightly challenging. They had a very rigid way of working and were used to creating products for masses with little care about quality. Slinch had a very different style, esthetic and way of working. Our focus was quality. It took me time to understand them and vice-versa. But they were smart and learnt quickly. Now we have a lot of fun working together, we learn new techniques together. It's become a big happy family. I try and encourage them to become better humans and spread rapport around.

What inspires you?

SS: Travel inspires me. I get inspiration by discovering different cultures and less traveled roads. As a designer and photographer, travel is my constant companion. My 'Coalesce' collection is based on Ladakh's tribes and communities.

What is your design process?

SS: The key factors to consider are the target audience's current lifestyle, our design esthetics, and the practicality of the product. A lot of thought and brainstorming sessions are involved in coming up with a collection. The process starts with creating a design through an illustration or a sketch. Once the design is ready we move on to make a pattern on paper, which is more of a drafting program. Pattern making keeps evolving as I refine and improve each design. A pattern is considered final when it's ready to translate into leather. Next, we create a prototype for each design, and then it undergoes various practicality and functional tests. Once that's done we check on durability and quality. Then it goes into style and product shoot. We have various quality checks before a product goes out for sale. And finally it goes on our online portals for selling and marketing purposes.





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How do you see 'modern luxury' in India today?

SS: Modern luxury, in my opinion, is bending and widening for a world where we can create our own symbols of status rather than having them defined for us. Initially luxury meant something expensive and out of range for a large section of people or something that was not available everywhere. Now we have been able to create products that are as comfortable as luxury products but affordable for a large section. Our parameters have changed to something sustainable, more experiential and safe.

How do you plan to expand your brand?

SS: The plan is to collaborate with curated stores worldwide before we launch our first retail space in Delhi.

wecare@slinch.com

How do you market and distribute your products?

SS: For the first six months it was only through pop-ups and exhibitions, so people could touch and feel the products. Soon we gained the trust of our clients and through word of mouth we started getting in touch with lots of other people. In early 2019 we started on social media and began sending emailers. Later in the year we launched our website. Currently, we have a collection displayed at Second Floor Studio in Shahpur Jat, Delhi.





DOODLES ON DEMAND

*Known simply as **Suchi,** this independent, Dubai-based digital designer and illustrator enjoys giving a quirky touch to drawings about 'people and their stories'*



Above: Illustrated Self Care poster for Katherine (Insta @endocrinepod)

Where did your design journey begin?

SM: I have a PG degree in Interactive Multimedia from Xavier Institute of Communication (XIC), Mumbai. CD presentations and multimedia animation was trending then. My first lesson in digital art was when we were introduced to Adobe Illustrator & Photoshop. I fell in love with those apps! There were endless possibilities on what you could create, you just had to know the correct keys to press.

I started my first part-time job along with my day classes at XIC. Gradually I got into designing for clients and working to a brief. There would be edits, revisions, heartbreaks and that was the real deal! Art for a commercial purpose cannot be looked at in isolation - it's an entire process that involves deep diving into the client's mind, understanding their product, how the end consumer may perceive it and finally what sells.

I started my career in 2000 as an e-greeting card designer with MubarakHo.com in Mumbai; that was followed by UI/UX design at Tata Internet Services and TCS Mumbai. I then moved to Cyber Gear in Dubai, where I was heading the team for UI design and web marketing collaterals for corporate and business establishments in the UAE.

How were you drawn to illustration?

SM: I'm a late bloomer, discovering the joys of digital illustrations only two years ago. I have no formal training in art - I draw with my Wacom pen-tablet. I was itching to start something on my own when I spotted a balloon in the sky. That was it – I doodled a series of balloon-people who do things that make 'em happy! With a lot of self-doubt I put it out on social media, opened an ETSY store. People loved it, maybe because the idea was simple and they connected to it. My first client was Livingston+McKay, EMMY award-winning producers and master story tellers based in Texas who bought my first doodle!

I started experimenting with drawing people, fun stories about them, things they like to do, their pets, families and so on. My art has no fixed structure. The style is fluid. I color outside the lines and the strokes are whimsy. I love symbolism – I add it to all my drawings, it's like a little secret I share with every client I draw for.



Illustrated posters depicting Emirati achievers

Where do you look for stories?

SM: People! Everybody I interact with online and offline has such amazing stories to tell. The people I draw for reach out to me from all over the world and it is delightful to note how they freely share their tales – things they like to do, their families and friends, pets, places they've been to, memories they want me to doodle and so on. The whole drill of exchanging ideas and edits is what excites and inspires me at the same time.

Another big source is Instagram – I am drawn to that app because of the awesome community of



Illustrations for Melting Panda's RedBubble & Etsy stores

creators out there who have so much to share and teach. Things were different when I started out – now the online community openly shares and exchanges ideas, resources. Creators no longer 'hold in', they collaborate and continue to grow and inspire.

When did you branch out on your own?

SM: I quit my full-time job in 2010 to be a stay-at-home mum. That's when I took to freelancing for digital illustrations. So, there I was, doodling and designing between changing diapers and washing bottles! There are days of chaos and madness but that's my happy space that I keep going back to. I wouldn't have this any other way. And here I must mention my friend cum husband who nods and supports every crazy idea I have!

I am keenly involved in drawing for Women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). Most of my illustrations have been converted for print, transferred onto various merchandise, and even onto cakes and embroidery! I also take on web projects that include UI design, social media design, logo+ infographics and more.

Why were you drawn to illustrate women in STEM?

SM: In 2018 I came across a calendar by Life of Science, a science media platform, featuring Indian women scientists. Obviously, it had amazing stories to tell and I wanted my eight-year-old to read them too. However, the real photos and text did not hold his interest for long and I wondered if I could doodle them in a way that spoke to the little guy. I emailed their founders to find out if I could draw these women and their stories for young readers. Voila, they commissioned the 2019-2020 calendar where I illustrated 13 brilliant Indian women in STEM. The calendar was launched with big fanfare at the Hindu College in New Delhi and was received very well in the STEM community and by the women scientists I drew. I could also see a connection between a young reader and the simple yet meaningful doodles. That was it!

Smore - a kid's science magazine based in USA commissioned 'Women in STEM' illustrations for their publication. These were my first commissioned illustrations for an international publication – I made doodles of Marie Curie and Mae Jemison among others. The doodles were also converted to posters, bookmarks, tee shirts and more for *Smore's* online store.



Smore magazine

Which have been your other memorable projects?

SM: Incredible Emiratis is a set of 22 illustrations commissioned by GEMS Modern Academy, Dubai. It features accomplished men and women Emiratis who have excelled in their field of work. The artworks are on display in one of the school galleries.

The Greenecostore was one of the first woman-run eco businesses that introduced earth-friendly products in the UAE. I headed the design team for its website design, print collaterals including mailers, brochures, and packaging. I also illustrated for their eco-friendly merchandise.

I created a doodle for the Red Hand Challenge led by Youmna Oraybi Ghaziri in Dubai to raise awareness for her daughter Lynn who suffers from a rare disease known as Erythromelalgia. The doodle was highly appreciated and used extensively in the awareness campaign throughout UAE. It was later printed onto a cake and embroidered by an artist in Lebanon!

How do you deal with clients?

SM: 'When a client asks you to jump, you must ask how high!' I learnt that lesson early and follow it even now. I listen to every brief very carefully, and do my background checks before throwing in ideas. I have a direct connect with every client and there is a lot of brainstorming before I pick up the stylus, because of the personal nature of my drawings. So, I think the key here is to listen. However, there are times when your best ideas go flying out of the window. In that case just take a deep breath, take a nap, and get back to your drawing board fresh. The only way to stay on top of the game is to stay informed about your industry and current trends. Do your homework before a meeting but don't only talk work. Believe in your skills, be firm on your best idea and yet be ready to edit when required!

What are the pros and cons of freelancing?

SM: The pros first – you get to be your own boss and work in pajamas! More seriously, you are free to pick the clients/industry of your choice. Sites like Upwork & Freelancer enlist projects of all types and you choose what interests you – you pick your industry type, timelines, the client budget and payout that suit you. The big advantage is you're not limited by time or space; you can be sitting in Dubai like me and working for a client in Australia. Freelancing also lends you that extra time to pursue your other hobbies.

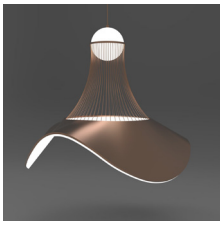
The cons – when you begin as a freelancer, you need to establish your credibility and commitment to working and handling a project all on your own. This happens over time and as you widen your portfolio with 5-star testimonials. If you decide to take on large scale projects and pitch to the biggies, you need to have a diversified team under one umbrella. That's when your coordination and communication skills must kick in.

When working remotely (across the globe) like I do, it sometimes gets challenging to better explain your idea via mails only versus an in-person meet. Skype calls can only do so much! Initially and sometimes for long periods, it's difficult to pay off bills with a freelancer fee – some clients do take the 'free' in freelancer quite literally! My advice – if you want to grow your circle, treat it as you would your full-time job. It's fine to experiment with what works for you. It's often a privilege to be able to guide your own working routine and that also helps you in finding out what's really important to you.

How does the design scene in Dubai compare to the one in India?

SM: Dubai has a vibrant and growing community of creators who have converged from all over the world. The design scene is expanding rapidly with designated design districts that host exhibitions, installation art,

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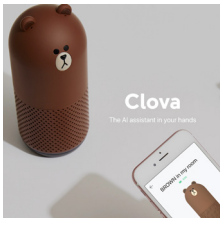













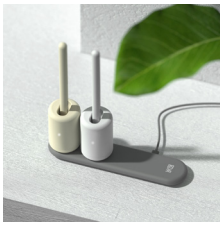











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A story drawing for a client

graffiti and street art, which is all so incredible. Due to the city's diverse population there are cultural boundaries to be mindful of, but the community appreciates new ideas and is willing to experiment and go big.

Back home in India, art and design has always been fantastic! I've been following several Indian designers, illustrators and doodlers on their social media especially the current crop who are experimenting and going all out with their art and humor. Rohan Chakravarthy's illustrated *Bird Business* is brilliant! It's amazing how he rolled up science, art and humor in one! On the web design front, I am hoping to see further improvements on responsive layouts for mobiles and devices. Design must not only look good – it should be intuitive and lead the user to the desired information quickly and effectively.

What's next?

SM: I am hustling hard to grow my small-biz for illustrations, both local and worldwide. I am a big fan of bold graphic design and bright colors. I am aspiring to be brave enough and get neon colors into my illustrations, expand my color palette, and experiment more! I just signed up for some skill share classes for flat illustration styles and working with a limited palette – that's an interesting 2020 trend to watch out for.

It's a dream to publish an illustrated book one day. I just finished illustrating a children's book and it's almost ready to be published, so fingers crossed for that too! I want to keep drawing women in STEM especially for young readers. In the web design arena I want to further grow my skills with focus on responsive mobile design. I also want to work on an online store for quirky illustrated merch maybe, along with a zillion self-created projects that are floating in my head right now.

What would you advise new entrants in your field?

SM: Go all out in exploring the daily patterns and inevitable stumbles in your creative life. Never stop at the imperfections in the process – I think there's a lot of joy in discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary.

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JEWELRY

Crafting heirlooms

Aashna Singh & Sneha Saksena *started OLIO as a clothing brand but realized what truly inspired them was creating jewelry that would be handed down through generations*









Give us a little background. How did you meet?

AS: We met at our previous job at Bhane, an online store based in Delhi. I was handling brand + PR and Sneha was the jewelry and accessory designer. Bhane would do 'real people' shoots all over the country and we worked on those together. It was crazy - some days we shot over 30 people in a day! But through this we found we worked really well together; we had complementary skill sets and both loved to work really hard. The best part of our relationship is we're coworkers first, and then we became friends. It's easier than when friends try to work together.

What led to OLIO?

AS: We both quit Bhane on the same day in August 2015. We worked on OLIO for three months and launched it in November 2015. The name was decided in a coffee shop - we both decided to write names we liked and OLIO was the last name on Sneha's list. We loved it instantly, it just stuck. We were young kids back then and we hired a tailor and jumped into creating our own brand without giving it too much thought. Since then we've been taking it one day at a time. Through ups and downs, our partnership has remained rock solid.





The jewelry industry has witnessed a major leap from heavily embellished to sophisticated and minimal. How has your brand evolved through this journey?

AS: I think there's a market for all of it. Jewelry is so personal and occasion specific. We try to make pieces that go from day to day dressing to your best friend's wedding - something for everyone.

What made you swap fashion design for jewelry design?

AS: With the advent of fast fashion and its influence, we weren't very inspired by clothing anymore. It's quite a saturated industry and we had nothing more to add. We wanted to work in a more sustainable way - create objects that had long life spans. We wanted to make heirlooms that would be passed down generations. We'd always been very interested in jewelry and had launched a few capsule collections along the way. We now make modern heirlooms inspired by India. We pivoted from clothing to jewelry last July. It's been a short but very rewarding six months.

What does it take to create conceptual jewelry pieces in a minimal design language?

AS: Our design language has always been very minimal and clean; it's something that comes very naturally to us. We're inspired by history and all its intricate details, so the mix is what we call modern heirlooms.

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

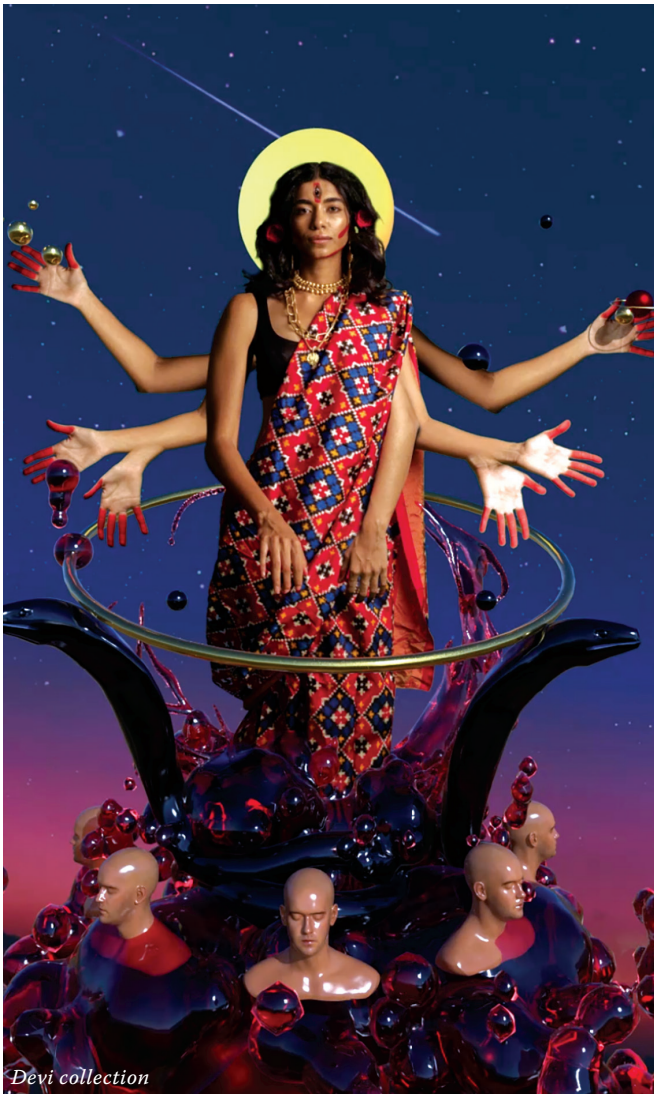
AS: It's so exciting to strike that balance with jewels, because they're all little pieces of art that people love to invest in.

What has been your experience of working with celebrities?

AS: Stylists source from us directly, and these sourcing requests have all come organically. We just sent out the pieces to them and one day you see a big celebrity wearing your pieces. In the past six months since we launched our jewelry line, some of the biggest celebrities have worn us, including Sonam Kapoor, Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone, Kalki, Kriti Sanon, and Radhika Apte. We joke that only Kareena and Alia are left to wear us. It's so exciting and makes you believe that no dream is too big.

What entrepreneurial challenges have you faced so far?

AS: Multiple - all day every day. Handling the creative aspect comes easily to us, but running a business is not something we've ever been taught. But we ask questions, we Google everything and we're lucky to have a supportive circle of family and friends who are always willing to help out.



Devi collection





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What does it take to stay consistent in such a competitive industry?

AS: Brand principles and storytelling audiences are very mature. They want to connect with brands and they buy from brands that share the same values. Products are secondary; audiences are more interested in your story.

What do you see trending in Indian jewelry design in the next five years?

AS: It seems to us that young Indians are reclaiming their heritage and culture. There's a plethora of inspiration and we think more people will be wearing 'traditional' pieces on a more regular basis: *naths*, toe rings, anklets, *bazubands*, etc.

Share your aspirations. How do you plan to expand your brand?

AS: We're launching new stories soon that we're very excited about. We specifically want to reach out to NRIs as our pieces are very nostalgic of a past India yet contemporary enough to wear day to day, and it's something an Indian far away from home will definitely value.

aashna@theoliostories.com

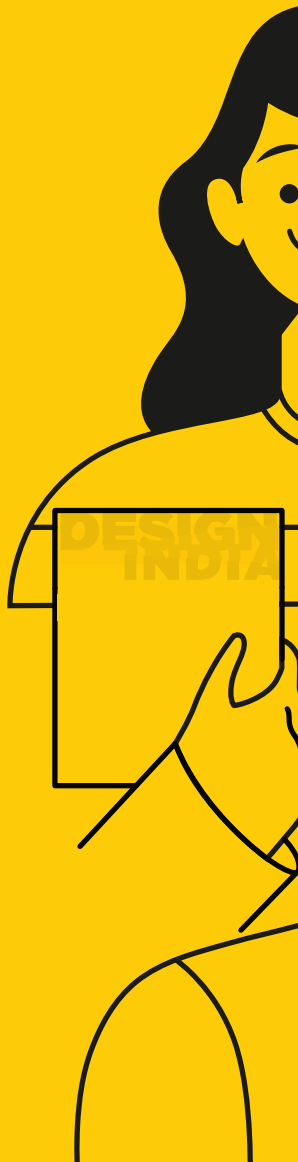
This story was coordinated and designed by Anshika Seth, student at NIFT Patna, interning at Designindia Magazine.

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Free as a BIRD

Pooja Rajput's *Chidiyaa brand is intended to evoke nostalgia in the wearer, bringing to the fore memories of beautiful times past*





What is the story behind Chidiyaa?

PR: I am no fashion expert. I had no experience or formal training in fashion and didn't know anyone from the industry. I just needed a medium for self-expression and I believed the story could be well said through fashion. I would travel to a lot of artisanal villages and various craft fairs in Delhi and nearby. I loved picking up stuff for myself and admired the process of making these beautiful products, and I believed there were a lot of women like me, who wanted something unique, well designed, and ethically created.

What took you from computers to fashion?

PR: I have always been creative, and immensely enjoy that part of me. As a child I was always inclined towards art but coming from a middle class family our priority was always to get a stable job with steady income. That's how Computer Engineering happened; but my heart wasn't into coding. So, while the IT industry was at a boom and all my friends got placed in big corporations, I went on to pursue my Master's in Business Administration just so that I could do something more.









I got a job as a project manager with a leading insurance company. Project management is all about people, coordination and managing chaos, and I loved it. Even while I was doing a corporate job I always managed to keep myself creatively involved with all the people and HR engagement activities. Life was good, but I knew this wasn't my calling. I needed a more fulfilling medium of expression and so Chidiyaa happened.

The design ethos of Chidiyaa is a blend of traditional and contemporary styles. How do you strike a balance between the two?

PR: Traditional is beautiful, but you need to create something that is yours. So, you pick up some of what is already out there in nature and some of what you have created. Place them well, and unclutter the design, so that it shows and is not lost in the busy pattern. I have realized putting too much is not required; quite often just one or two elements are enough to create a beautiful design. Simple is beautiful.

I believe clothing is one of the many forms of self-expression. A person chooses what to wear according to her personality, her mood. I create designs I would like to wear myself - designs that are not over the top but still unique. Something free spirited, but still functional.

What does the Chidiyaa brand stand for?

PR: Chidiyaa is not a product, it's an emotion. It is the nostalgic feeling that makes you happy; that takes you to your childhood or the good old days. It does not make you sad that they're over, but brings back the fond memories. Chidiyaa is a community of women who think alike, who have a mind of their own but are still emotionally vulnerable. Chidiyaa is about the honest artisan who is making his living by doing what he does best.

How do you design a collection?

PR: Ideas mostly come from personal experiences, from travel. For example, I have always been fascinated by the moon and its many shapes, and that made me work on the crescent line. The challenge was to design the crescent motif and place it such that the end print is still wearable and minimal.

Our many motifs like the dragonflies, moon, and birds come from everyday life. A flock of birds flying together is something we see every day, but how wonderful would it be to see these on a dress or even a sari!

These ideas are converted into wooden blocks by artisans. Dyes are prepared using traditional techniques. It is a multistep process of hand printing, cleaning and washing before the fabric is ready for fabrication.

What did it take to establish your network of artisans across India?

PR: In the entire design process the artisan is the hero. If not for him I couldn't create what I imagined. To understand and value this is very important. Artisans who have been working with us over the years are now our family and understand our design philosophy very well. But this wasn't easy.

The first year of starting Chidiyaa was all about product development. I had to travel extensively to remote villages to understand different printing and weaving techniques and what craft would best suit my style. It needed a lot of experiments to finally come up with something that was close to the concept design.

Today Chidiyaa works with artisans using different printing techniques. We mostly do Ajrakh but are also now exploring something exclusive in Dabu and Bagru. We also work with the weavers in West Bengal from where we source our handwoven linen. Our recent collection in Modal and Mashru silk with hand block prints has done very well.

What makes your brand stand out in such a competitive fashion industry?

PR: I design what I like to wear and I believe there are a lot of women who have the same need to wear clothes that are sustainable, high on craftsmanship, design and quality but still don't necessarily dig a hole in your pocket.

What is your positioning strategy?

PR: Chidiyaa is high on design and quality, yet it is not high-end luxury. It is for those who are looking for an exclusive product at a price they can afford. We are currently selling through our own web portal and an offline store in Gurugram. Marketing is mostly though word of mouth and social media. The plan is to explore more mediums of marketing and add more channels so that we can reach a larger audience.



We will open our first store in Delhi in January. I have tried to design the store to speak the story of Chidiyaa - simple, clean minimal and very unlike any other store you would find in a mall. We have live wooden wedges and rope fixtures, a spindle unit on the roof with blue linen threads, which has specially been designed by my artisan in West Bengal. You will find wooden blocks and cotton buds that are actually used in the making of our products.

How challenging is it to be an entrepreneur?

PR: If you are emotionally connected and value your artisan, your team and your customer, you build a seamless ecosystem where everybody is working to the common goal. The key is to prioritize and not invest in something that is not as important to you; focus on what's important, be it home or work. I am blessed to have a very supportive family that has been my pillar of support as I built Chidiyaa brick by brick.

How do fashion trends affect the wardrobe choices of women in India?

PR: Women in India are increasingly open to experimenting with new designs and fabrics. They carry Indian wear with as much ease as western attire. There are an increasing number of people who value handcrafted and are aware of the design and creation process of these garments. These are the people who invest in classics and are not defined by trends or brands.They know what looks good and what they wear becomes the trend. While we have large international fashion brands growing in India there is a good market for homegrown brands like Chidiyaa.

Social media has changed the dynamics of the fashion industry. How has it impacted your label?

PR: Social media can be a great enabler for anybody starting up as one can build a brand even if one doesn't have deep



pockets. However, there is no substitute to providing value and the right shopping experience for your consumer. Fashion perhaps is the fastest growing category in ecommerce. Chidiyaa started as an 'online' brand and we opened our first offline store only a few months ago. Social media is a primary medium for us to connect with our consumers.





What can we expect from Chidiyaa next?

PR: Chidiyaa is a young brand. We are blessed that our designs have resonated well with our consumers. We are grateful for their love. We would like to create newer experiences for them by bringing in contemporary designs on different fabrics. We are exploring relevant tie ups to reach out to more consumers who would be interested in our products. Food and fashion are close to my heart. It is my dream to open a Chidiyaa Café someday!

hello@chidiyaa.com

This story was coordinated and designed by Anshika Seth, student at NIFT Patna, interning at Designindia Magazine.

Epic Effort

A young and inspired team comes together to create an illustrated version of the Mahabharata for today's children



Left to right: Kavita, Charu, Rachita

One of the oldest and greatest epics in the world, the *Mahabharata* has been retold innumerable times over the ages. The latest version is *'The Mahabharata: Illustrated Classics for Children'*, a brightly illustrated series of ten books that unravel the epic with simplicity, bringing to a young reader a glimpse of the famous epic without losing any of its essence, magic and power. The simplified and engaging narrative has been retold by Charu Agarwal Dhandia, keeping in mind the sensibilities of a child. Kavita Singh Kale has created beautiful and attractive illustrations for a one of its kind visual experience for children and adults. Designer Rachita Rakyan has seamlessly brought the writing and illustrations together.



The two-year long journey has been exciting for all involved in creating the series. The process involved constant collaboration between the writer, the illustrator and the graphic designer, who sat through hours of brainstorming and discussions to bring it all together. Here's how they did it:

Retelling style

This is Charu Agarwal Dhandia's first foray into writing for children, and expectedly, there were multiple challenges. The first of these was to comprehend a battle story written by a sage 3,000 years ago, and adapt it for today's young audience. "Children are very imaginative and impressionable, and it was important to choose the right stories from the vast epic and narrate them in a way that would positively influence their imagination and breed the right emotions," says Charu.



Ganga



Mahabharata is known to be a most thrilling story with complex emotions – of love, hate, adventure, brotherhood, jealousy, wisdom, karma, duty, betrayal – all of which needed to be wrapped up into interesting and engaging stories for young readers. Charu decided to narrate the story in bite sizes that are easily digestible for young readers, and so she broke the entire narrative into 10 short books.

Illustration art style

"Since the story is about the great battle of Kurukshetra that was fought amongst brothers for the throne of Hastinapura, the story-line has many dark



narratives that are extremely challenging to illustrate visually in a picture book format for children," admits Kavita Singh Kale. As part of visual research, Kavita referred to Indian miniature paintings for inspiration. For her, the project became an esthetic inquiry into Pahari paintings, a style of miniature painting that was developed in the Himalayan kingdoms during the 17th to 19th century.

Kavita created all the hand painted artworks with gouache and pencil colors on paper; these were eventually scanned and composed digitally. Keeping in mind the 7+ target age group, she used bright colors, decorative patterns, and enjoyable character expressions and poses. The series has a visual experience that is semi realistic with stylized forms and elements.

Book design

Graphic designer Rachita Rakyan has given the title font unique character strokes that make it distinctive and classic. She has carefully selected fonts and color codes to complement the illustration style; the serif font helps guide the flow of letters, words and sentences and glides the reader's eye from one letter to the next easily, making a great reading experience for children.

Rachita gave each front and back cover a distinctive color symbolic to the tone and content of each book's central story. The cover, along with the title and illustration, gives a slight indication of each book's story without revealing too much. "The blurbs have been written and designed like a thought bubble, which poses a question from a child's perspective, provokes the child to think and generates interest to read the book to find answers," she says.

For children in this digital age, the series of books will definitely provide answers in a unique and interesting way!

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***Hena Kapadia** set up TARQ primarily to encourage young artists to push the boundaries. She tells Sonalee Tomar of 'The Indian Curator' how the gallery also acts as a bridge between these artists and collectors.*





What led you to TARQ?

HK: After majoring in Art History and Economics from Tufts University in Boston, I pursued my Master's degree in Modern and Contemporary Art World Practice at Christie's Education at the University of Glasgow, in London. Over time, my involvement in the domain of art in various capacities in India and abroad led to TARQ in Mumbai.

TARQ was built with the intention of creating a meaningful conversation around art and its myriad connotations and contexts. It was envisioned as something of an incubator for young contemporary artists working towards pushing the boundaries of how contemporary art in India is exhibited



Conversations with artists

and perceived. TARQ's youthful and experimental ethos encourages collectors, novice and seasoned alike, to approach art collecting through a perspective that marries thoughtfulness with an inquisitive eye for esthetics and artistic processes. Our robust programming encompasses workshops, engaging walkthroughs with the artist, film screenings and art talks tied to the exhibition and the gallery's overall raison d'être. This allows for multiple types of audiences to engage with art in new and impactful ways.

What does your role as Director of TARQ involve?

HK: As the Gallery Director, my role is multi-layered and adaptive. I simultaneously work with the artists we represent, envision the year ahead, build relationships, think of new innovative approaches to engage clients and work on audience outreach. Every day is a new opportunity to engage collectors in the young innovative artists we represent at TARQ.

Tell us about your curatorial philosophy.

HK: The curatorial voice for any exhibition involves working with a plurality of voices, including artists, curators, creative minds and art historians. Most importantly, the philosophy at TARQ is to best represent the vision of our artists, whether it is as simple as creating space for their work to be seen, or more complex interactions in group shows with the works of other artists.



How do you deal with the conceptual difficulty and uncertainty of creating something completely new with each show?

HK: By working closely with each artist and the team at TARQ, we make sure to talk through our ideas with an open mind. Each person brings forth new ideas in terms of programming, installation, sales and other key decisions. As a gallery, we want to make sure that the artist's voice is brought forward, from the initial wall text at the entrance to the placement of each artwork to the range of events during the five weeks. Each exhibition presents its own challenges since each one deals with an entire new series of works. It is only with teamwork and communication that we are able to make the best of every new body of work.

What are you looking for when you review the work of artists for a show?

HK: While researching and looking for young contemporary artists, I am instantly drawn to their process as much as their final artwork that you would see in the gallery. I am keen on knowing the artwork in detail, the artist behind the artwork, their ideas, their research and their potential to evolve and grow as an artist.

What have been the gallery's notable achievements so far?

HK: The gallery program has been running since 2014. 'TARQ' is the Sanskrit word for 'discussion, abstract reasoning, logic and cause'. The gallery came about as a means to build conversation around emerging contemporary artists and be a bridge between the artist and the collectors. With this in mind, the gallery has

hosted nearly 50 exhibitions and participated in art fairs in India and around the globe. Since its inception, it has been a forerunner in providing impetus to young, serious artists in India to thrive. It has participated in India Art Fair and Art Basel Hong Kong multiple times.

What are you working on now? What should we look forward to?

HK: We are currently in the middle of our exhibition 'Folly Measures' by Vishwa Shroff. In this exhibition, she continues to journey through the everyday, focusing on the idea of transience and impermanence. The show is both meditative and thought-provoking in the manner in which Vishwa's drawings of architectural form uncover man's relationship with space over a period of time. We will be



participating in the India Art Fair 2020 where we will show the work of ten of our artists across a multitude of mediums, including photography, sculpture, paper-cut, painting and site-specific material to best convey their preoccupations.

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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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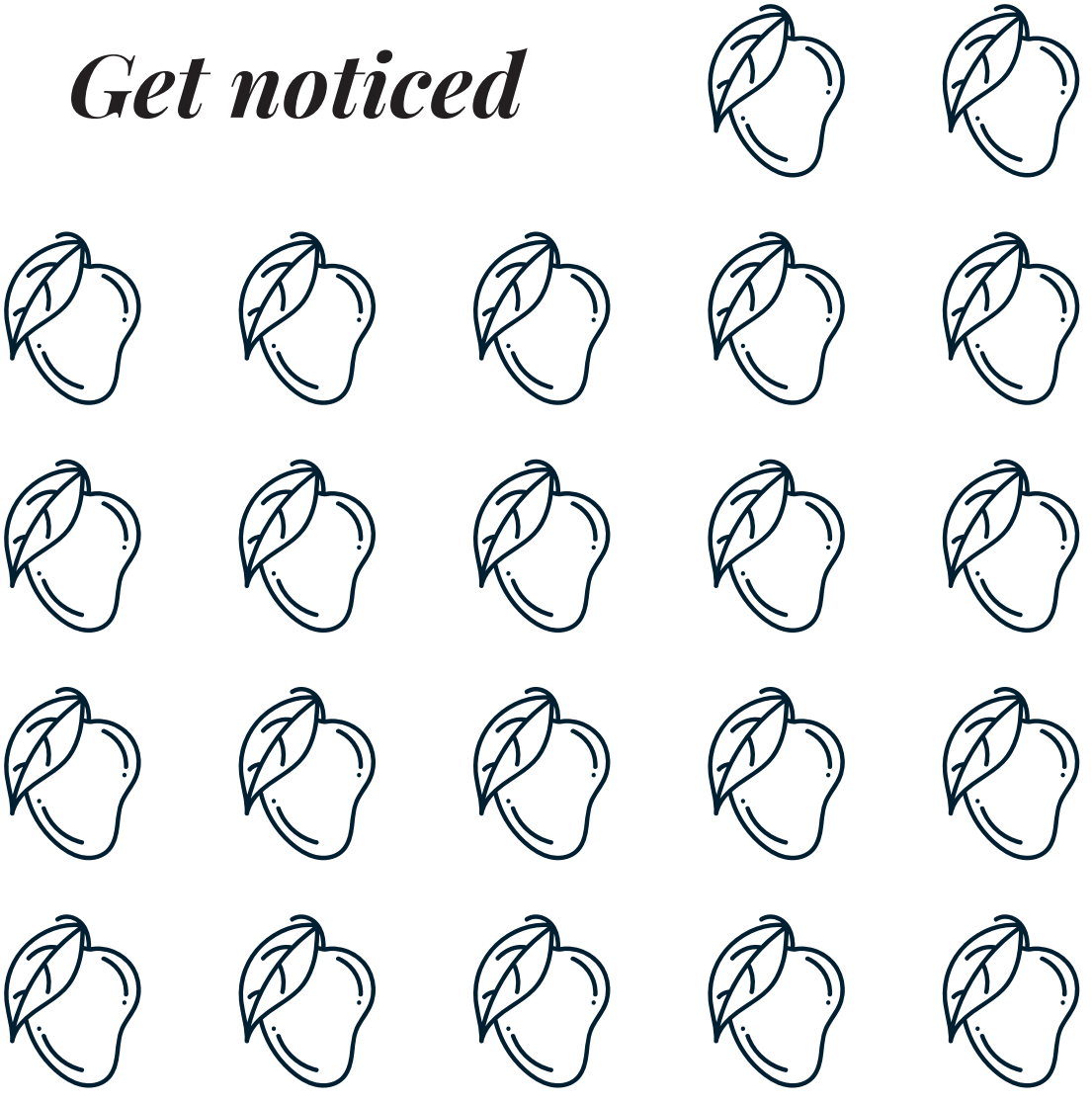
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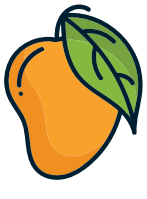
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