

Why is it important to document the process of making art? A diverse group of artists in this exhibit weigh in

By Anannya Sarkar

02 September, 2022



From textiles to embroidery, sculpture to canvas, *Riyāz* at Iram Art Gallery shows how artists remain united in their meditative process of making art despite their diverse practices

While Bapi Das often makes art drawing from his past experiences of driving an auto-rickshaw in Kolkata to make ends meet, the renowned Jayasri Burman dives into her childhood memories revolving around mythology and the deity of the goddess that has now become one of her much-loved signature motifs. However, what unites Das and Burman are their meditative acts of making art and an exhibition in New Delhi that has brought together a diverse group of artists such as these in the form of *Riyāz* at Iram Art Gallery, which is on till 4 September.

DIVERSITY OF MEDIUM

Curated by Ina Puri, the exhibition featuring 24 artists has been brought together under one roof to show their differences in their approach towards art as well as their similarities in terms of the behind-the-scenes discipline they follow, which is akin to the word ‘riyaz,’ loosely translating to mean ‘practice.’ “Each artist’s practice comes to the fore, for which I have put together little statements by every artist right next to their work. We tend to speak for others too much,” says Puri. Her experience of having worked on the book *Faces of Indian Art: Through the Lens* of Nemaï Ghosh that gives a rare behind-the-scenes access to illustrious artists as they created magic through their practices is something that has also inspired Puri in this curation.



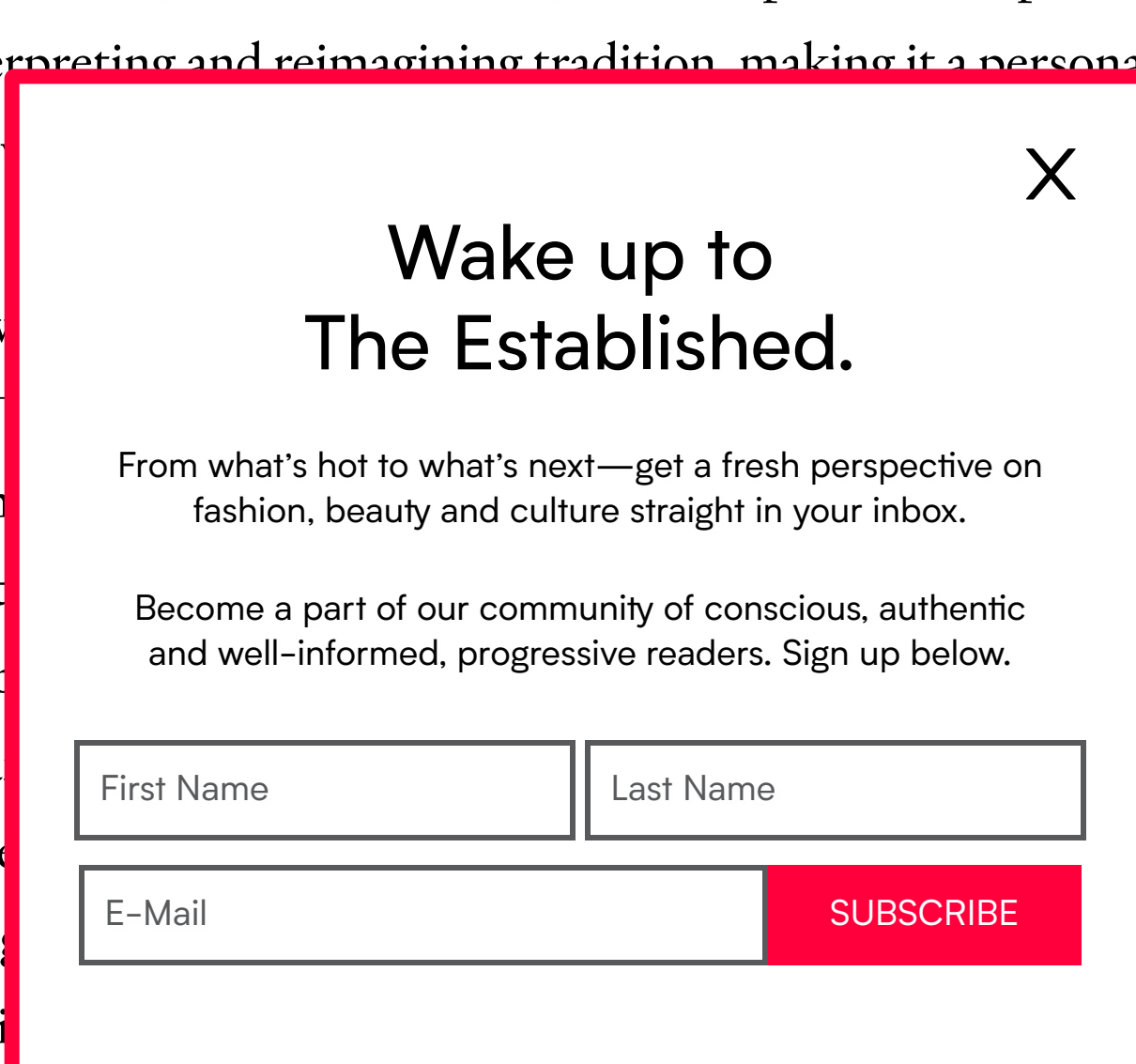
Fireflight Extension, Faces by Narayan Sinha.



The Abhyasa Mandala by Ankon Mitra.

The diversity reflects in names such as KG Subramanyan, considered to be one of the “gurus” of Indian art, and Narayan Sinha who comes from Santiniketan and works on installations with an industrial feel. Meanwhile, Naveen Kishore of Seagull Books fame is presenting a work on gender that tells the story of Chapal Bhaduri’s transformation to his famous characters, known for his female roles within Bengal’s *jatra* culture, like “a play within a play”.

Sinha, through his installation comprising 90 faces, shows the myriad emotions that we might harbour within us. “Through this installation, I wanted to depict all the different ways we can experience ourselves. Thousands of emotions may often fit chaotically through our mind; sometimes we feel hollow and empty, sometimes we feel complete, sometimes we move through life mechanically and sometimes with softness,” explains Sinha about his work. Burman, on the other hand, dives deeper into her practice of “reinterpreting and reimagining tradition, making it a personal narrative.”



Rajesh Soni and R. Vijay.

“WITH THE PASSING OF ARTISTS SUCH AS ANJUM SINGH AND MANJIT BAWA, IT HAS REINFORCED THE FACT THAT PEOPLE DON’T LIVE FOREVER. THERE IS NO DOCUMENTATION OF HOW (RABINDRANATH) TAGORE PRACTISED ART IN THE STUDIO. THESE STORIES AND THE ARTISTS’ STORIES NEED TO BE TOLD.”

Ina Puri

Ankon Mitra uses a technique-specific on-site installation comprising origami (folds only) and Kirigami (cuts and folds), incorporating mediums such as brass, aluminium, hand-woven textiles, French Cordenon cardstock, nylon wires, proximity sensors and LED lights. “We become adept at what we do as a daily ritual. My daily ritual is a meditation on folding. Just as prayer beads are turned through the fingers while chanting, my fingers fold the sheet material, pleating a prayer into every tuck. The *abhyasa* or practice allows me to progress from folding soft material like paper to folding a hard and challenging one such as brass. This is the quiet movement of *riyaz*, of honing, of daily ritual, of prayer,” explains Mitra. Das reflects on the meditative quality of his process when I had first met him on the sidelines of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2018 as he recollected how he would make his embroidery art in between ferrying passengers or as he waited at the traffic light. “The signal light has a number underneath, counting down until the colour changes. It happens often that when I’m on my way somewhere, I see an obstacle in the distance, but by the time I reach it’s cleared,” adds Das.

ASSOCIATING MEMORY WITH PRACTICE

While the art that we view mounted on a wall draws audiences in from the perspectives of aesthetics and subjective sensibilities, the oft-ignored process of making art is a ritual by itself that tells its own stories. In our troubled times, art often acts as the catalyst for rebellion as well as unification and therefore, as Puri says, “It is very important to document the processes of the artists of our times,” to understand the “why” and “how” behind what they create.



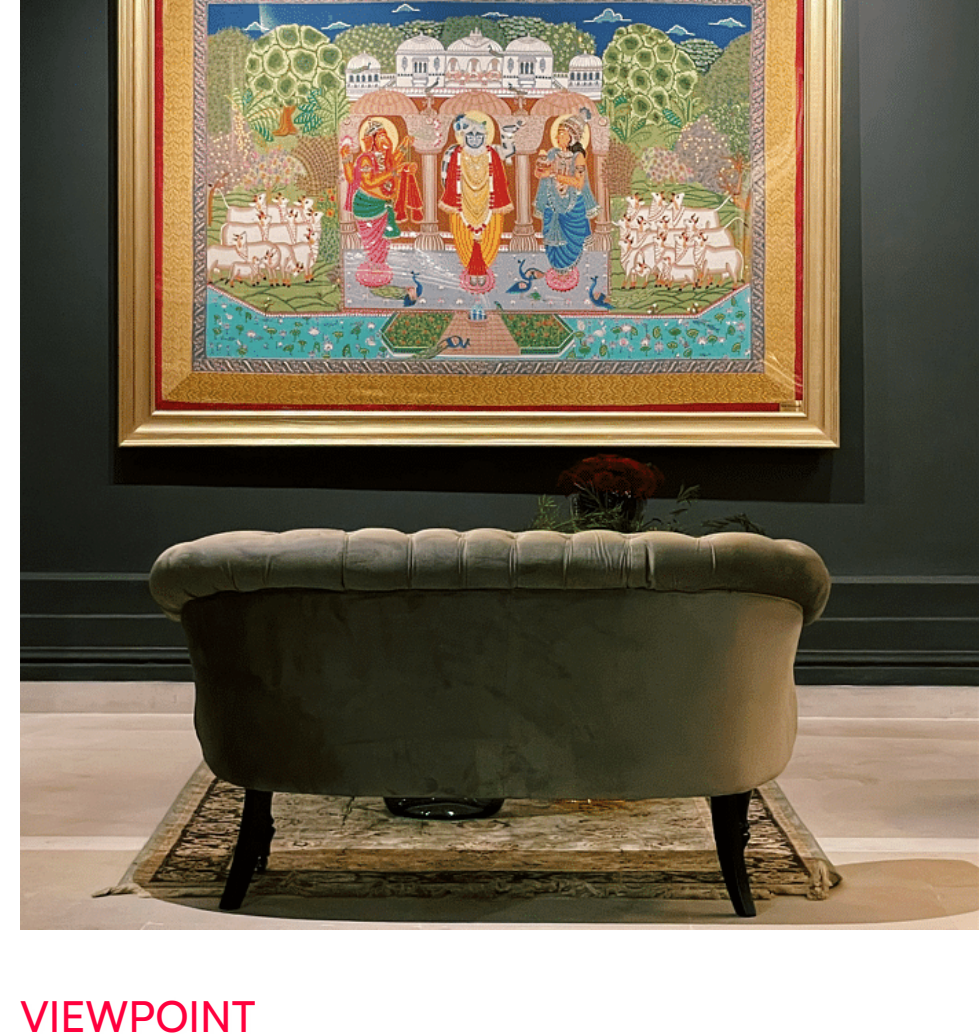
In Search of the Absconding Dream by Waswo X Waswo.



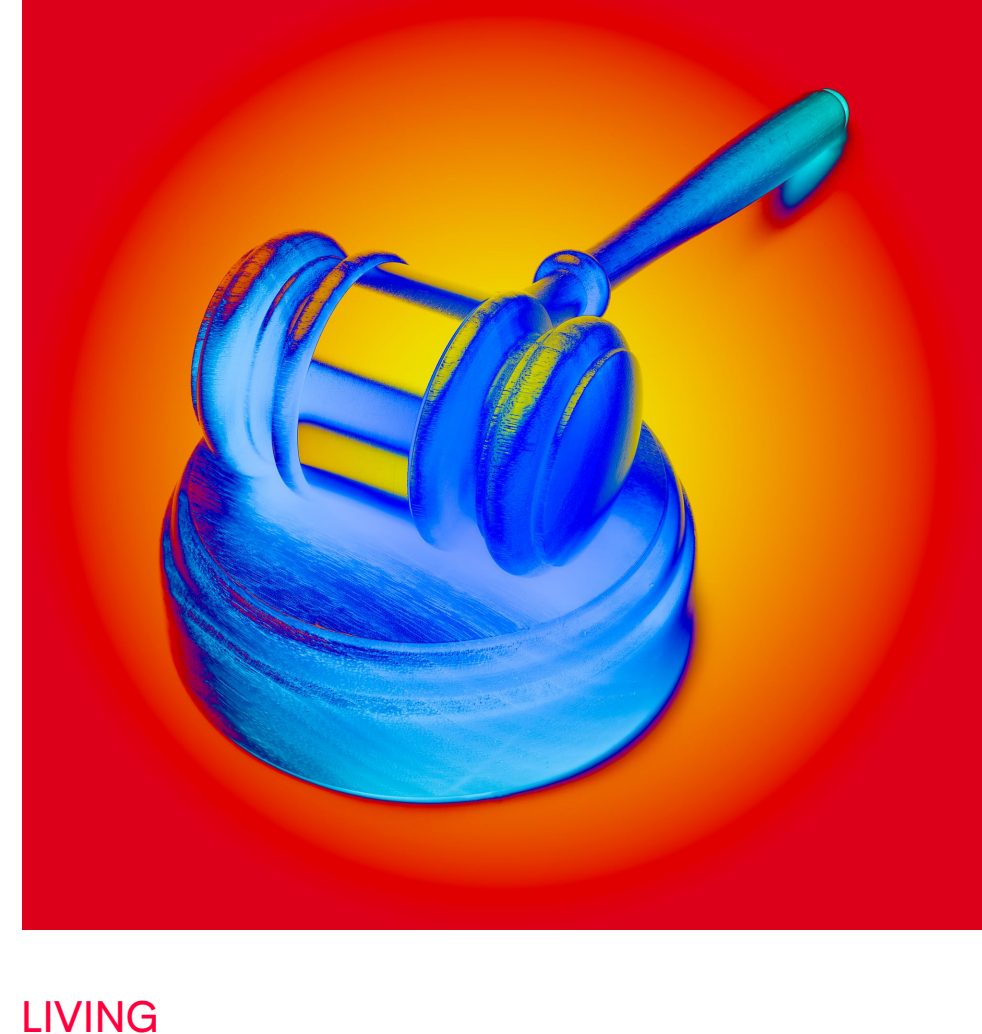
Artwork by Madhvi Parekh.

Puri associates this documentation with the act of conservation of memory. “I want to make *Riyāz* an annual affair because I increasingly feel that the practice has to be documented and the diversity of artists in this exhibition also goes to underscore the importance of inclusivity. With the passing of artists such as Anjum Singh and Manjit Bawa, it has reinforced the fact that people don’t live forever. There is no documentation of how (Rabindranath) Tagore practised art in the studio. These stories and the artists’ stories need to be told,” she signs off.

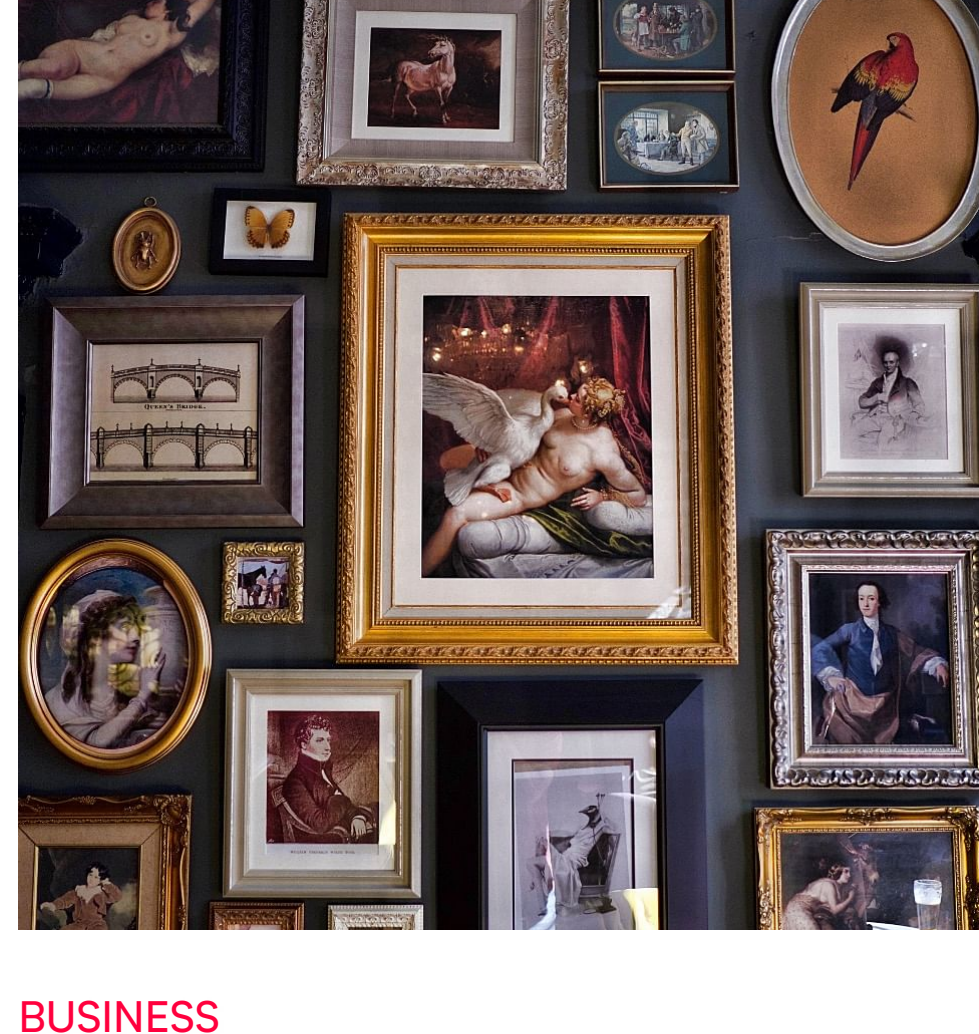
READ MORE



VIEWPOINT
Reimagining the art form of the pichwai, will save it
By Khushi Shah



LIVING
The inner workings of the business of art in India
By Kriti Saraswat-Satpathy



BUSINESS
How buying global markets impacted art-buying patterns in India?
By Akshita Sekhri