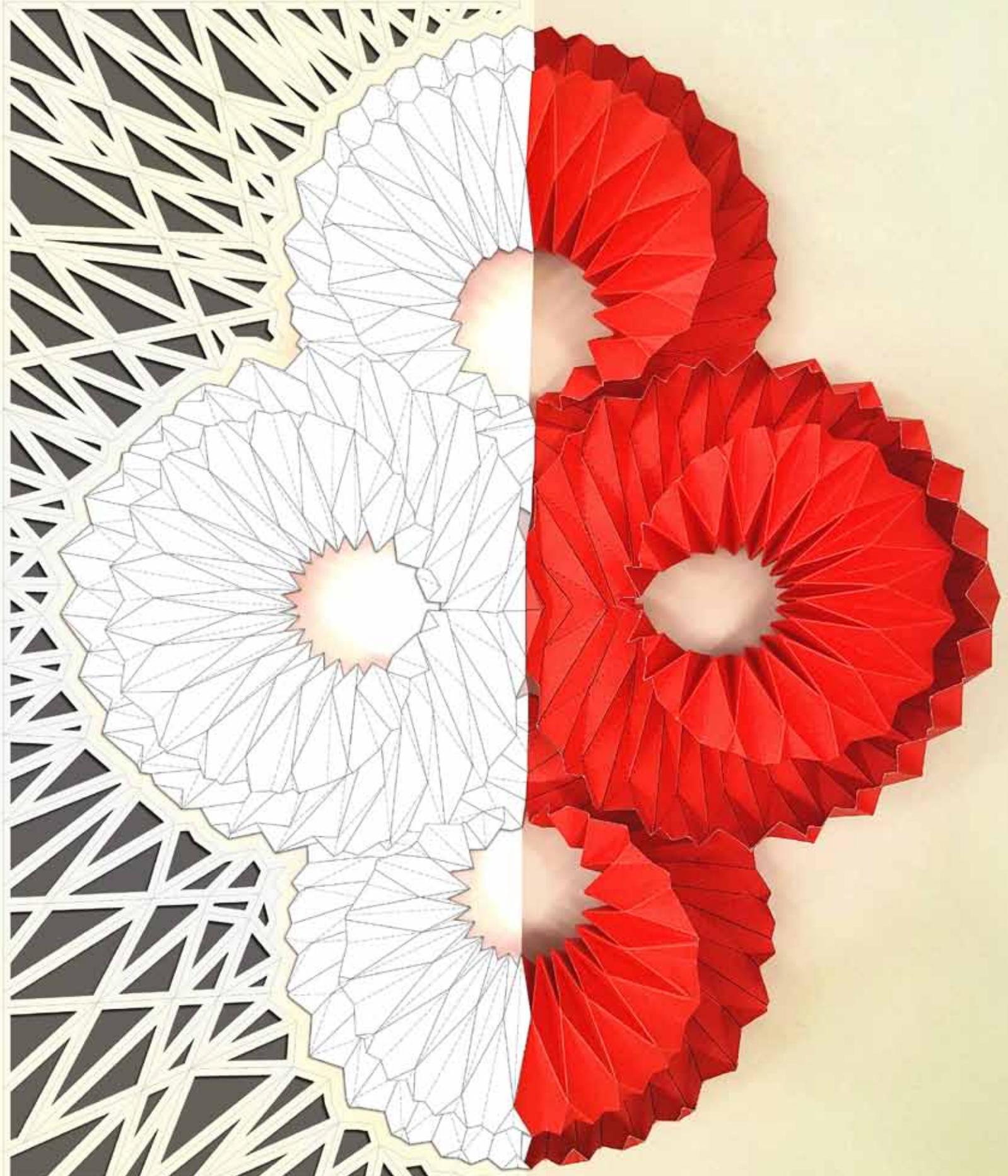




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Publisher's note

The words 'design' and 'art' are like siblings. They might share the same blood, but their personalities are entirely different. They can exist as two separate entities, and for most part they do; but there are those quietly explosive moments when they become mutually inclusive. This issue of Arts Illustrated we look at that space of intersection.

We explore how the fundamental elements of design and art interact with each other, and specifically look at artists who allow these two worlds to merge by giving us structurally exciting experiences, so that even in a seemingly fluid space we are always centred. It isn't so much of design becoming art or art becoming design as it is about the two celebrating their common last name – which is, in this sprawling world of contemporary art, delightfully open to interpretation.

Vincent Adaikalraj



Editor's note

In middle school, most of us with access to education have dabbled with the intricacies of that thing called a science project. And, most of us, invariably, have succumbed to its sheer mind-boggling impossibility and outsourced it to our parents or older siblings or, sometimes, even neighbours. Mine was a recreation of the moon's surface to understand gravity, and my artistically inclined sister used cardboard, tin foil, match box and sticks and created the moon's uneven surface with craters, an astronaut half up in the air, and even a little rocket ship. At 12, I thought it was the best science project in the world. Actually, I still think it is. The fact that the school (irresponsibly) thought otherwise is beside the point. The point is that, even without our realising it, art and design have always been a part of our lives, and they have always co-existed – where art is the free spirit, design is the boundary and to think of one without the other is like thinking of a science project without mother-father-sister-brother-neighbour. We may have consciously put it aside for the cause of higher academics (inevitably, if you lived in Chennai), but it never leaves us – be it in the clothes we wear, the colours we use in our homes, the kind of furniture we like or the art we put up on our walls, the two have walked hand in hand like Hansel and Gretel.

As it is with the said fairy tale and with most words and definitions, the meaning of what art is and what design is segued into crumbs of disparity, the patterns becoming harder and harder to navigate. So this issue, on art and design, we decided that instead of trying to peel away the layers, we would instead climb to the top and look for spaces where they intersect. The stories we met were surprising, and resonated with Netflix's original documentary series, *The Art of Design's* trailer (I haven't watched it yet, so it isn't a recommendation, although on a side note, how our online spaces are designed are just as important or the fact that Facebook's notification icon changed from blue to the more eye-catching red, the colour of danger, just as telling of how much design and art play a role in our lives) that says: 'You're looking for a moment when you feel you are as close to the soul as possible. That's what good design is.'

This is also the month when, quite coincidentally and importantly, two events based on art and design take place in Delhi – the India Art Fair, now in its 10th edition with a brand new team, and the India Design Forum, now in its 4th edition co-founded by the mother-daughter duo, Rajshree Pathy and Aishwarya Pathy (we feature them in our Q&A section this issue). And if you are at the IAF, then do look for our specially curated booklet on this event. If you are not, that's fine – you know where to go for your art and design stories, right? (And this is a definite recommendation, for AI, of course).



Praveena Shivram
praveena@artsillustrated.in

Cover Artist



I am an architect by training and an artist by temperament, with a keen interest in the geometry and mathematics of trees, flowers, hills and coastlines. I am deeply interested in exploring the folds in nature. I studied the science and maths of flow and energy-travel through space and all energy waves (sound, light, heat) travel by folding through space. The empty space itself is crumpled, and therefore folded, due to the gravitational force. All life forms too start with the folds of DNA interlocking within strands of healthy cells. I realised that we are made of folding, work through folding and are surrounded by folding. This, coupled with the art of origami, became the basis for my art practice. It allowed me to make sense of the underlying geometry and structure of the chaos that surrounds us, at a physical and metaphorical level.

The work for the cover of this issue is titled *The Four Noble Truths*. I attempt to meditate on the philosophy that Gautama Buddha enunciates: Fact that suffering is the truth, reasoning the cause of suffering, possibility of the end of suffering, and the path that leads to the end of suffering. The work has four connected parts that resembles a large sea-shell. Metaphorically, the void within these contains the positive and negative energies, yin and yang. And the truth sits within each empty space where realisation delves, outwardly disconnected and also separated from the other three 'truths' by the very construct of the form. While the right-hand side of the image shows the emotion and 'reality' of the experience, soaked in rich red colour, the left-hand side lays bare the clinical, technical and physical construction of the work, where the cutwork-pattern reveals the context or framework from within which the work emerges.



Ankon Mitra

Cover design curated by Rahul Kumar



Redefining the Everyday

There is a parallel sub-culture brewing in fashion studios with ethically conscious clothing brands placing the aesthetics of design firmly into the everyday, linking sustainability in sourcing and selling with accessible fashion

SUPRIYA SEHGAL

Looking back at our message trail, compared to Supriya Suryanarayanan, I am a Whatsapp nun. A menagerie of yellow emojis occupies the left part of the screen. My side is a dispassionate green. But by the end of our first chat, it feels like we've been friends for decades. As a first time – and grossly late – online shopper, I am thrilled with the easy interaction with the co-founder of Ukti.

This homegrown clothing brand creates Western wear for women with Indian fabrics, and is distinctly more affordable than others in the fray. The online communication mirrors the energy of the dress that is delivered to me in the following week. Simple, with only a pop of colour, it feels like it was designed especially for me. It even has very

deep pockets, a feature that mysteriously evades numerous women's wear clothing. Attached to the package, is a handwritten 'thank you' note on recycled paper. Ever since, I am hooked to this personalised style of shopping. Warm interpersonal credentials apart, it is the ethos of the brand that strikes one as mindful.

Fashion in India has been blitzkrieged by economically sourced, high on trend, fast turnaround clothing wear in the past decade. Understandably, this is possibly the only way for international brands to forge into Indian markets and get a slice of the country's high youth-inclined statistics and the promise of future purchasing muscle that they proclaim. Naturally, the loyalty for the brands is firmly wedged in high margins.

But there is a parallel sub-culture brewing in the fashion studios. A breed of ethically conscious clothing brands is slowly beginning to dominate the mindspace of the shopper. They address both ethical and ecological aspects of sourcing, designing and selling. For example, Ukti co-founders, Supriya SV and Seethal Sharma, make a trip to Udupi every other month to source fabrics from weavers, and are a call away from others at Ilkal and Gajendragarh. The idea is to reinvent the use of traditional woven saris from Karnataka. Although their clothes are not entirely hinged on handloom, they've turned their gaze to lesser-feted weaving hubs. These small villages are chosen over Chanderi, Pochampally and other destinations that are already popular in the domain.

Not only is the ethical inclination sourcing-faced, but manufacturing and selling are given a fair amount of thought as well. Small tailoring units are given regular orders for sustained business. Up-skilling the tailors with new trends and employing more women is a conscious effort. The consumer, too, is directly impacted by this. Clothes rooted in handloom are usually priced steeper than others. Ukti urges people to cross the affordability bridge by pricing the clothes reasonably, taking a hit on margins at this stage. Being a business, they have their eyes on profitability, but first there is a clear goal to achieve – to make more people wear Indian handlooms. And while they make affordable clothes, each design is unique and has limited pieces only. Oftentimes, brands that take the affordability route back it up with large quantities to keep the cost of tailoring and fabrics low. But Ukti believes that affordability and uniqueness are not mutually exclusive, so they never repeat fabrics, unless they are unique to a particular weaving style. 'Not being from a design background has made us purists in a way. The designing process is rooted in wearability rather than aesthetics. You won't find too many frills and flounces to embellish the garments,' explains Supriya when talking of the brand philosophy of everyday fashion. Their hashtag '#uktieveryday' has been born from this viewpoint. 'Minimising wastage by creating accessories with left over fabric is another way to be more aware of and fair to our environment.'



Udupi Handloom Crop Top.



Two Sided Dress in Pink & Grey Ikat.



Scarf with Mosaic Rose pink print.

Wardrobe space for ethical brands is sure to get larger as more of them come under the radar for shoppers. Priorities are likely to shift, and eventually multinational brands may heed the call for sustainability in selling and sourcing. Till that happens, my Internet search for more ethically keen Indian brands remains.

On my freshly embarked digital meandering, I bump into Krishnaa Shyam Sundar's 'Full Circle' scarves. The surface-pattern designer may be living in Bath in the south west of England, but her blog takes one into the dusty village trails of Chettinad, where her inspiration is alive in the traditional basket weaving, decorative mosaic tiles and fiery spices. It manifests into nine crepe silk limited edition scarves, digitally printed on silk and cashmere modal, and packed in handmade palmyra boxes. Many scrolls down her blog, I'm in the world of eggplant purples and bright reds of the tiles and baskets. Her black and white sketches steer the trajectory of the project from inspiration to product, with final photographs of neatly packaged scarves being opened and the box headlined by a caricatured logo of a sari-clad woman. Each one is made by a woman artisan in Chettinad and is even signed by her.

Krishnaa's artistic bent was fuelled early on while living in Chennai. Watching her grandmother paint all the time injected an interest to pick up the paintbrush. 'Our home was also filled with wonderful mosaics, which became a big source of inspiration. After learning some traditional techniques such as Thanjavur painting and



Krishnaa Shyam Sundar wearing her scarf with Bougainvillea Chilli Red print. Photograph by Dr.Sukumar Natarajan.

Kalamkari, I veered away from this and began sketching. Folk art in the temples and the *kolams* drawn by my grandmother on a daily basis were additional inspirations.' Equipping herself with a host of degrees in History of Art, Illustration and Brand Development from reputable colleges around the world, Krishnaa finally settled in Bath, where she now lives and works. 'The Full Circle Project is my homage to the Indian folk art that has always inspired me. It was not simply to raise awareness or give back as an act of charity. It was to inextricably link local livelihoods to the inspired product, making a meaningful and sustainable relationship.'

A Kickstarter campaign has been created to infuse a lease of life in the project and is explained by Krishnaa on the crowd funding website, as she looks for funding

to fine-tune the production process. 'I've been designing scarves – amongst other products such as tote bags, keepsake boxes and stationery for over three years now. I perfected the material palette through rigorous prototyping and arrived at crepe silk and a specially woven cashmere modal as the fabrics that best carry my intricate line work whilst providing excellent warmth and comfort,' she says, while describing the journey of Full Circle.

I 'save' the project to contribute and have my eyes set on a Spice Garden Green scarf. I am happy to wait until mid 2018 when it will be delivered. And I am sure it will go well with my black and white dotted Ukti dress with the red pompoms at the back placket.

