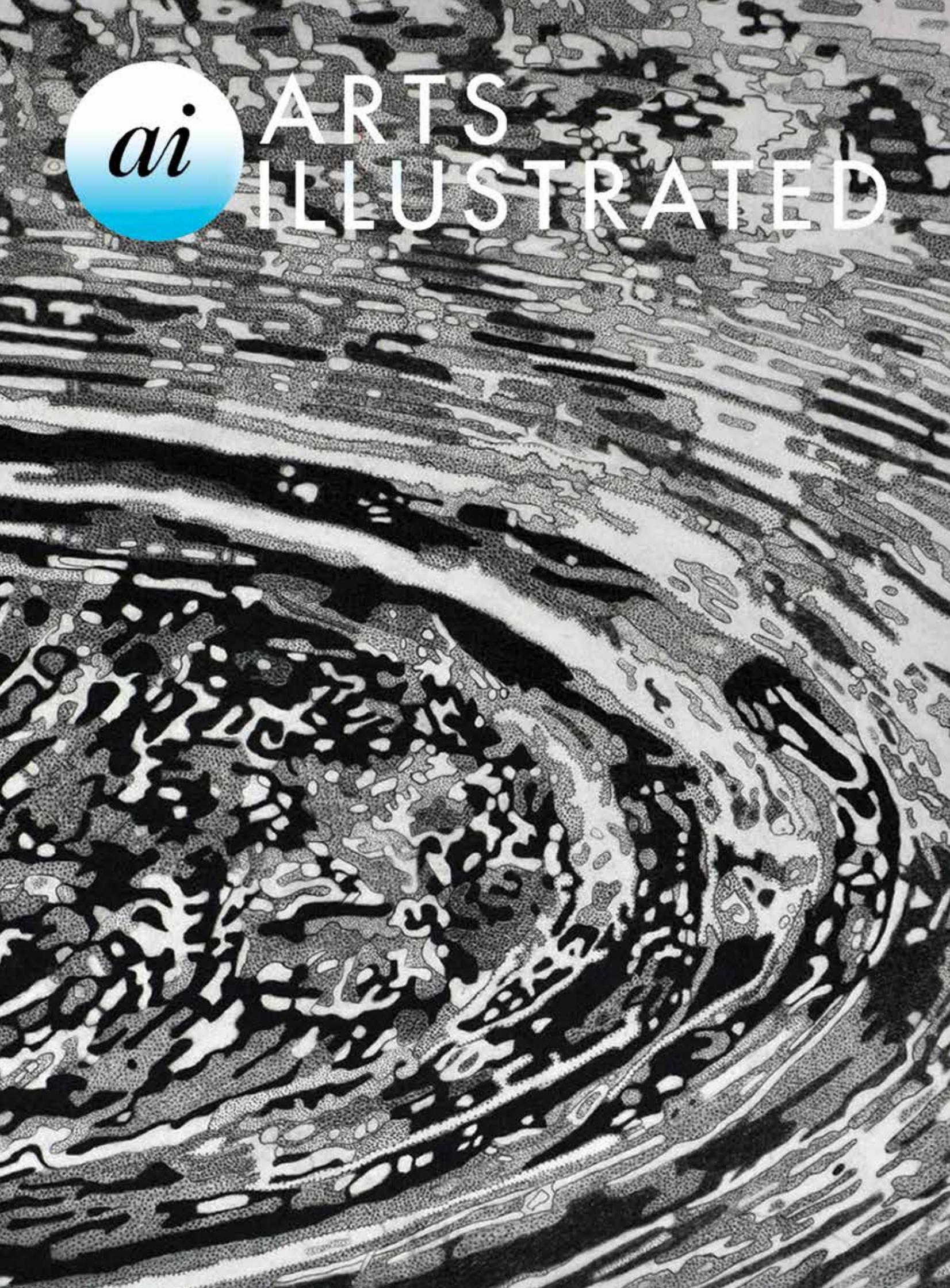




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

At the time of working on this issue and discussing the cover with Parvathi Nayar – on the solo power of water and its environmental implications in a development-hungry country – relentless waters with another kind of hunger devastated the entire state of Kerala. It made Parvathi's cover for this issue frighteningly relevant and our theme that wanted to look at the beauty of solitude, the aesthetic of isolation, and the beginning of things, where one is followed by two, where many drops begin with that first one, always. The Kerala floods reminded us that perhaps destruction too was tied into the idea of solo, a precursor of what is to come, a full stop for the next sentence to begin.

This issue we found that solo resided in each one of us, in its many-hued splendour. It reiterated the fact that just by virtue of something being 'single' or 'alone', it did not do away its complex layers, its narratives and stories and its constant need to dialogue with the world, so something new could then walk its path. Even a literal interpretation – a movie named 'Solo' or a solo road trip – brought with it a surprising charm of its own, unpredictable in where it takes us.

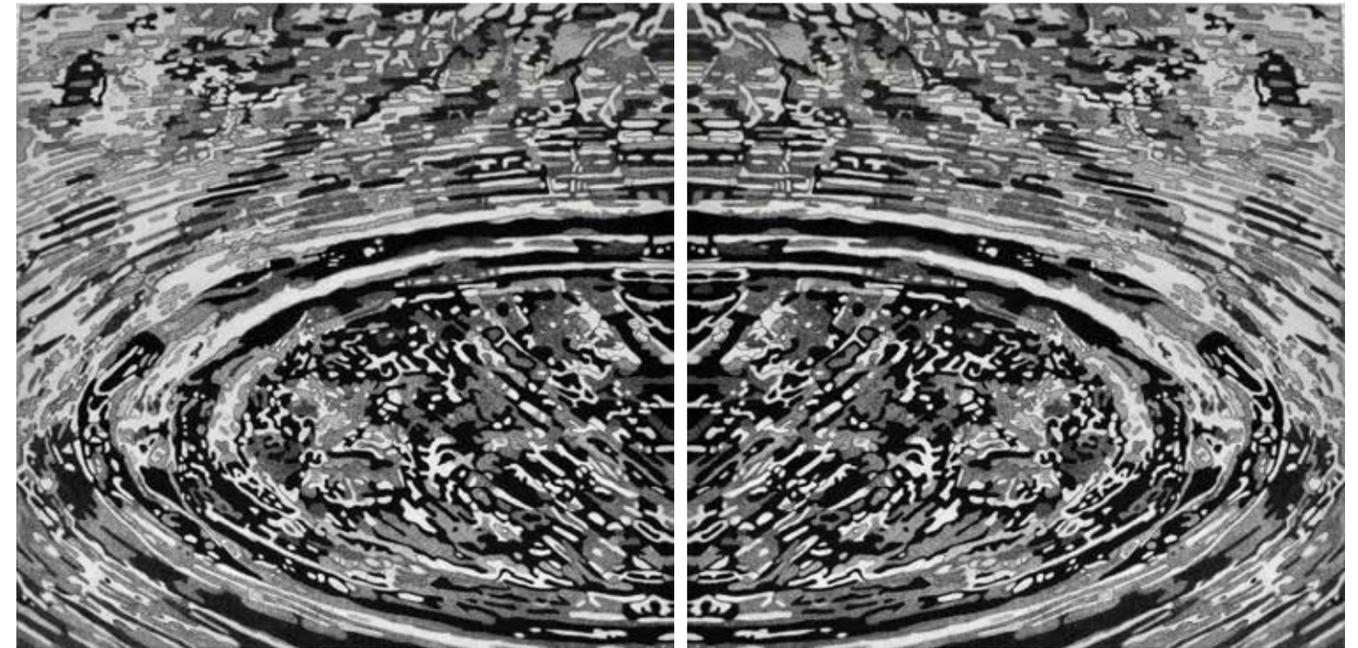
But, perhaps, the one thing that really stood out while we put this issue together and one that truly resonated with the theme for me was the Supreme Court verdict on September 6 that finally scrapped Section 377, an archaic, pre-colonial law that criminalised same-sex relationships, allowing the colours of the rainbow to reclaim its rightful place in the sky.

Our pages, too, this issue, bring a piece of that rainbow – resplendent in its alone-ness, multi-layered in its manifestation, and full of shining light for the future. And a reminder that every journey begins with someone, somewhere, over the rainbow.



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The solitary event. A singularity from where life itself emerged. But equally, one pebble in the pond. Perhaps, then, another. And another. The butterfly effect. One event collides with a neighbouring one, influences that episode. And moves to nudge the next. A cascading series of causes and outcomes.

It's what I dream each drawing will do – be an idea moving outwards, whose form is both fluid and frozen, meaning one particular thing but also many different things. A ripple that will find new shape in the minds of its viewers.



Parvathi Nayar

For the Love of Hues

An exclusive interview with Susan Mathen and George Abraham, founders of Hue & Why, on their journey of placing colour at the helm of their creative work

SUPRIYA SEHGAL

It is ironic that colour as a single creative medium is most celebrated when we talk of it in profusion. Colour offers language the ammunition to describe anything from moods, cities and settings. It is the core of description in art and forms the backbone of viewing the world – nature, urban development, daily objects and even political inclinations. Colour even has the muscle to stir a number of emotions. We often see the world through carefully curated pixels of RGB and CMYK.

The world might be an amalgam of colours, but the medium can often be the lone anchor for a complex thought. Individual colours can store in them a vast ocean of meaning despite being the singular medium of creativity. Even as a 'solo' attribute, it can evoke a million meanings and emotions.

The example of Frida Kahlo's lucid deliberation on single colours is a reminder. An excerpt from *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait*, offers a peek into an evocative moment when she tried out colour pencils, 'sharpened to the point of infinity...'



She wrote:

Green – good warm light

Magenta – Aztec. old TLAPALI blood of prickly pear, the brightest and oldest

Brown – color of mole, of leaves becoming earth

Yellow – madness sickness fear part of the sun and of happiness

Blue – electricity and purity love

Black – nothing is black — really nothing

Olive – leaves, sadness, science, the whole of Germany is this color

Yellow – more madness and mystery all the ghosts wear clothes of this color, or at least their underclothes

Dark blue – color of bad advertisements and of good business

Blue – distance. Tenderness can also be this blue blood?

And so, when I met with Susan Mathen and George Abraham of 'Hue & Why', understandably, colours – the collective and the individual – were on my mind. Susan, an independent, certified colour strategist, and George, a graphic designer, are firm believers in the power of design and aesthetics to make the world a better place to live in. 'I moved from researching colour in ancient cultures, to applying for a PhD in Colour (which I never went for), to discussing colour in art, doing a colour certification course and very slowly distilling it all to what I am doing now,' says Susan. And George adds, 'As an applied arts student, I find colours very therapeutic, especially when you paint. Once, I was a part of a psychology test using colour – and I was amazed at how a few colours could say so much about me. I was sold on the power of colours and what it can convey. And it so happened that I got married to

Susan and we decided to follow this colour journey together, which is one of learning, and sharing the knowledge.'

During the course of the conversation, they further demystified and extricated colour from everything else to give old thought processes a new prism, one I am sure Kahlo would have approved of.

Excerpts from the conversation

Can you tell us about the genesis of your interest in colour?

Susan: We approach colour from two different directions - 'logos' and 'mythos', as they say in Greek philosophy. The logical/objective way of thinking and the intuitive/emotional way of thinking. Once we had a long debate on what is a better approach to

life. It defines who we are as professionals and as personalities. It is in finding the right balance between the logical and the emotional that we find harmony.

I am a strategist, I do research and my approach is to simplify and reach the essence of a problem; to find facts and derive meanings. I would be the 'logos' part of this. And George is a creative soul. He loves taking the leap and creating something intangible, something that captures feelings and emotions. He is the 'mythos' part.

George: It started with a project Susan did at a heritage museum in Chennai - on a creative exploration on colour symbolisms in ancient India. And we moved to colour semiotics - understanding colour meanings in cultures, and creating design

applications with the same. *What is the meaning behind the name Hue & Why and what is it that you aim to do?*

Susan: We spent a lot of time in the naming process. There were a few close friends and family who helped. Hue & Why is, in fact, a name that my brother came up with, based on what we wanted to convey.

George: Hue & Why is precisely what it says - the why behind colours. It is a play on the term 'How & Why of Things'. It also beautifully captures the logos and mythos concept we believe in - where 'Hue' connotes the intuitive world and 'Why' connotes the logical world. We aim to be a repository of colour knowledge in Asia, a one-stop shop for all things colour. We aim to give a balanced view - with both the Eastern as well as the Western colour concepts. At the moment, the world is skewed towards the Western colour influences.

How intertwined is the world of branding and design with colours. Are they inextricable? Give us some examples of how you have used colour to tap into human emotions or a layered thought for a brand.

George: Branding projects are close to our hearts, and what we have done for the most part of our professional lives. We think colours and visuals are critical to branding. Colours are like words, and each colour signifies a certain value or meaning. When you know these meanings, you can use

different colours together to form meaningful sentences or powerful stories. Most people do not dwell on what these colour meanings are, and therefore the entire colour palette does not seem strong. We work on a story or a theme first. And then arrive at a colour palette that stays true to this story. And ensure this is carried on to every element - be it branding, interiors, packaging or even website. For instance, we have worked on a cafe branding project where we classified the cafe moods into vintage, hipster, cutesy, and so on; and from these the client selected the one they resonated with. We married this moodboard with the values of the brand we were working with. This is how we created colour palettes and then the design language, typography, brand identity, and so on.

Can you tell us a little about the process of making your clients look through a colour filter for their design needs?

Susan: We have our own design process - right from client brief to final output. We try to co-create this along with the clients, and ensure there are a few rounds of interactive sessions. In these sessions, they are able to express all that they may have in their minds. It takes many rounds of discussions and interactions to ensure we have the right starting point. Based on the interactive sessions we present the brand story, and after that a few mood boards. It is only after all this that we translate them into

a corresponding colour palette and design language.

How do you plan to make your journey into colour more robust after this?

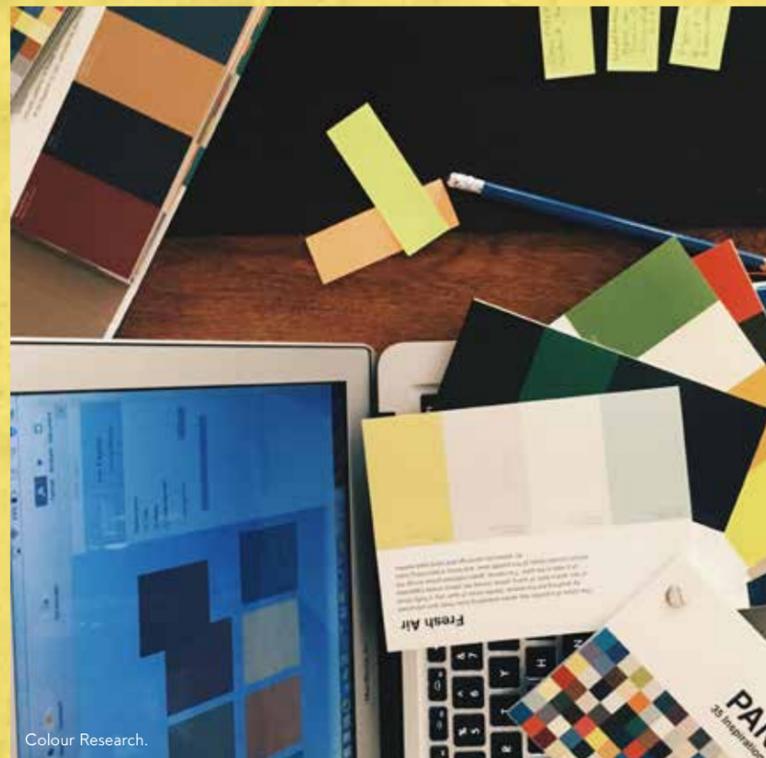
Susan: We plunged into this a year ago and are very happy with the last one year. 'Hue & Why' colour workshops have been conducted across four cities already and we have some more planned for this year in the major metros. We have collaborated with travel and tourism ventures and history and culture ventures in the past year offering colour-based heritage walks and colour-based painting exhibitions; a few more such collaborations are in the pipeline. Also, our colour trend stories for 2019 will be out soon. This will be the third edition where we prepare colour trends as the result of a year-long research.



Susan Mathen and George Abraham.



Colour Walk.



Colour Research.



Colour Workshop.



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