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TAKE

TAKE

ON ART

SUSTAINABILITY

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Editor & Publisher
Bhavna Kakar

Managing Editor
Dilpreet Bhullar

Assistant Editorial and Programme Coordinator
Manan Shah

Editorial Consultant
Tanya Dutt

Design & Layout
Vivek Premachandran

Subscription & Accounts
Surender Kumar

Warehouse Assistant
Rafeek Khan

Cover Image:

Mūj Māthi // from the roots
Studio 5 installation view (detail)
Image Credit: Anil Rane
Courtesy: Asia Society India Centre

Artwork in the image:

Madhvi Parekh, Karishma Swali and the Chanakya Craft Collective
Story Teller, 2021

Multi mixed media hand embroidered panels crafted in organic jute linen and silk threads using contemporary variations of the back stitch with a fine needle. This versatile traditional technique has been worked from right to left and stitched backwards to the previous stitch in this installation.

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Email
takeonartmag@gmail.com

Instagram
@takeonart

Website
takeonartmagazine.com

Facebook
@takeonartmagazine

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Contributors



Alka Pande is an art historian, author and curator with two postgraduate degrees one in history and the second in history of art. Followed by a PhD in Art History and a Postdoc in Critical Art Theory, University of London. She is a recipient of the Charles Wallace Award, the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government, the Australian-India Council Special Award, the L'Oréal Paris Femina Women Award and the Amrita Sher-Gil Samman. She built the collection of Indian Artists for the Essl Museum, Vienna, (2010), The Divine Gesture Gallery at the City Palace Museum, Udaipur, and the Outdoor Sculpture Park for Fateh Prakash, a Taj Property at Udaipur (2020). Dr Pande has also authored a number of books on Indian Art and Culture including: *Ardhanarishvara: The Androgyne Probing the Gender Within, Body Sutra: Tracing the Human Form through Art and Imagination, Shringara: The Many Faces of Indian Beauty, Pha(bu) llus: A Cultural History*. She was the Artistic Director of Photosphere, an initiative of the India Habitat Centre in 2016 and 2019, and the Project Director of the first-ever Bihar Museum Biennale, 2021. Currently, Dr Pande is a consultant art advisor and curator of the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

Ankita Ghosh is a writer-researcher based in Mumbai. With a background in media and cultural studies, she approaches art via its intersections with popular culture, political actualities and dynamics of power. She has previously written for ASAP | art, Paper Planes, India Art Fair, Sahapedia and Serendipity Arts Foundation. Her work experience in the arts also includes assisting several organisations with design, documentation, communications, curation and research. She is presently employed with Asia Society India Centre, where she supports arts and culture programming focused on India and South Asia.

Annalisa Mansukhani is a writer, researcher and curator studying histories of photography and notions of the image in contemporary art and curatorial practices. Annalisa is a contributing writer for ASAP | art where she dissects possibilities of the photographic in contemporary inter-media practices. As the Programmes Manager for the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) in Delhi, she establishes frameworks and activates resources around art and research, spaces of exhibition, critical writing, editorial and public programming. She is currently fascinated by narrative forms, vocabularies of memory and trauma, and the poetic as a sensibility across mediums in art. She lives and works in New Delhi, India.

Aparna Andhare is an art historian and a curator. She works independently on research, writing, and archiving projects. From 2017 to 2021, she was a curator at the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, City Palace, Jaipur. Specialising in art and architecture of early modern India, she has two master's degrees: Art in the Global Middle Ages (MSc, University of Edinburgh, Sep 2017), and Arts and Aesthetics (MA, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, May 2012). Aparna now divides her time between Bombay and Poona.

Chloe Ho is a doctoral candidate in Art History at the University of Melbourne and Digital Archive Researcher with Art and Australia. Her PhD project looks at performance and installation art and other artistic, social and political events in, from, or about Singapore from the late 1980s to the present in relation to the writing of global art history. Her broader research interests include performance art forms in the Asian context and artistic migration, particularly in relation to performance art and artists. She has published in places such as Southeast of Now and Live Art Development Agency.

Writer and researcher **Dilpreet Bhullar** shuttles between New Delhi and Mumbai, India. With an MPhil from the University of Delhi in Comparative Literature, she has been the recipient of the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability Fellowship at Columbia University, New York, and the International Center For Advocates Against Discrimination Fellowship, New York. Her essays on identity politics, memory studies, representation of refugees and visual sociology are frequently published in leading books, journals and magazines. In her long-standing role as the associate editor at the India Habitat Centre, she edited a theme-based journal on the visual arts as well as co-edited the books *Third Eye: Photography and Ways of Seeing* (India Habitat Centre and Speaking Tiger, 2019) and *Voices and Images* (India Habitat Centre and Penguin Random House, 2015). She is currently Managing Editor of the magazine TAKE on Art, dedicated to South Asian contemporary arts.

Epsita Halder is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, India. Her first monograph *Reclaiming Karbala: Nation, Islam and Literature of the Bengali Muslims* (Routledge, 2023) is on Bengali Muslim cultural nationalism and literature in Bengal. She researches and publishes on sonic-visual piety of Muharram and Shi'a identity formation in Bengal. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Max Weber Kolleg, University of Erfurt and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She has edited and co-

translated *The Open-Winged Scorpion and Other Stories*, an anthology of short stories of Abul Bashir, from Bangla into English (Seagull, 2021).

Georgina Maddox is an independent critic-curator with two decades of experience in the field of Indian Art and Culture. She was Assistant Editor at *Mail Today* and senior feature writer for the *Indian Express* and the *Times of India*. She is currently working as an independent critic for various publications—like *The Hindu*, *Open Magazine*, *Architectural Digest*, *Vogue* and *Elle Magazine*. She also writes for online publications like *Studio International*, *STIR world* and *MASH Mag* and *Art Dose*. She has critical essays in books like, *The Phobic and Erotic* edited by Brinda Bose and *Articulating Resistance* edited by Shivaji Pannikar and Deeptha Achar.

Henry Noltie is an Honorary Research Associate of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew and Edinburgh, and of the Natural History Museum, London. His work has involved taxonomy, curation and, for the last 25 years, the study of botanical drawings made by Indian artists for surgeons of the East India Company.

Jesal Thacker, an artist by training, has independently curated several exhibitions. Moving Images (2014) an exhibition of artworks by Madhao Imartey accompanied with screenings of films by and about John Cage and a series of video art by Bill Viola, making a crucial amalgamation of varied genres a part of her curatorial approach. Another exhibition of note that she co-curated was Dissonance — Transgressed Boundaries between Desire and Fear (2015), a multi-disciplinary show with artists Nezaket Ekici, Prajakta Palav and Nita Tandon. Along with Prabhakar Barwe's retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art (Mumbai and New Delhi, 2019). Rhizome, Tracing Ecolcultural Identities was another unique curatorial proposition by Thacker, in collaboration with the CSMVS Museum (2023) which included fourteen site specific projects spread through the museum premise.

Krishnapriya C P is an artist and curator based in Chennai. She was one of the curators of the two editions of the Students' Biennale, Kochi (2016-17 and 2018-19). She was a resident artist at University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 2017 and the summer of 2019, supported by the South Asia Centre, Upenn. She co-conceptualized the 'Dictionary of Nonsense' an artistic, socio-political engagement exploring the notion of public engagement. The Dictionary of Nonsense was realized within the framework of Five Million Incidents 2019-2020, conceived by Goethe Insitut/ Max Mueller Bhavan In collaboration with Raqs Media Collective.

Kunal Ray teaches literary and cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune. His writings on art and culture in India appear in a variety of publications such as *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* and *The Hindustan Times* amongst others. He co-edited *Shabd aur Sangeet – Unravelling Song- Text in India* (Three Essays Collective, 2019). He is also the co-founder and co-editor of *On Eating - A Multilingual Online Journal of Food and Eating*.

Lina Vincent is an independent art historian and curator with two decades experience in arts management. She has worked on projects that highlight plural approaches, with a focus on inclusivity and collaboration in public arts engagement. Her ongoing engagements include the development of 'Sandooka – The Living Museum of Kodava Culture,' a virtual project commissioned by India Foundation for the Arts (IFA); 'Goa Familia', archival photography project with Serendipity Arts Foundation; 'Sunaparanta Art Initiator Lab', Goa (S.A.I.L) mentoring programme, and an exhibition on Biblical engravings for the Museum of Christian Art (MoCA). She concluded an Archival Museum Fellowship through IFA, Goa Chitra Museum (2018-19) and headed the Piramal Residency Artist Incubator Programme 2019-20. She has curated numerous exhibitions with galleries across India and contributes to publications on art history and contemporary cultural practices.

Manan Shah is a museologist, writer and aspiring art curator and art critic. Born and brought up in Kasheer (Kashmir), he holds a degree in Archaeology - Ancient History and Museology from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India. He has published widely in magazines and journals including *Inverse Journal*, *History is Now Magazine*, *World History Encyclopedia*, *Free Press Kashmir*, among others. His writings and curatorial practices are attentive to the knowledge systems of antiquity that have informed the current-day cultural and political identity of Kashmir. Shah is also a recipient of the Kochi Students Biennale Curatorial Fellowship and has been part of India Art Fair's Young Collectors Programme as an assistant curator. He is a member

of ICOM. Currently, based in New Delhi, Shah is working as an assistant editorial coordinator at TAKE on Art - a magazine dedicated to contemporary South Asia arts. He is also part of the curatorial team at the contemporary art gallery LATITUDE 28, New Delhi, India.

Manisha Gera Baswani is a visual artist creating cultural landscapes of connections across Asian traditions, weaving painting, photography, sculpture and poetic writing. Baswani is also the creator of the ongoing photographic project 'Artist through the Lens', which intimately documents studios of artists and the arts community across the Indian subcontinent over two decades. 'Postcards from Home', an aligned sister series, is a historic documentation of 47 artists from India and Pakistan, with a shared history of the 1947 Partition of India. The series was showcased at the Lahore and Kochi Biennales, and recently at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford for an entire year. Baswani has also curated her teacher and artist A Ramchandran's solo exhibition for Vadehra Art Gallery in 2018. Manisha has shared the genesis and evolution of her unique art practice across platforms such as TEDx (2019).

Meera Menezes is an art writer and independent curator. She has written extensively on modern and contemporary Indian art over the past three decades and is the author of *V.S. Gaitonde: Sonata of Solitude*. She anchors the arts magazine, *Art India*, in Delhi, is a regular contributor to *Artforum* and has written for *Art Asia Pacific*, *The Hindu*, *Mint*, *Take on Art*, *The Indian Quarterly*, *The Wire*, *Firstpost* and *Critical Collective* among others. She has done her Masters in German Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and has worked as a TV journalist and producer at the South Asia Bureau of ARD, Germany's largest public service broadcaster.

Mustafa Zaman is an artist, writer and curator working in Dhaka since the early 1990s. Born in 1966, he has been active as an artist and writer since his graduation from the Institute of Fine Art in 1989. An exponent of the 1990s generation who began experimenting with various mediums and forms, Mustafa became known for his concept-driven art that sought to critique social and artistic norms. He started contributing exhibition reviews to both English and Bengali dailies and their weekly supplements. Mustafa edited *Depart* between 2010 and 2017, which played an important role in bringing Bangladeshi art into regional and global focus. He began curating in 2010 and wrote numerous catalogues for the emerging artists of Bangladesh.

Oindrilla Maity is an independent curator and art historian based in Kolkata. She has a PhD in Culture Studies and has graduated from the Gwangju Biennale Foundation International Curators' Course, Gwangju, South Korea.

Pooja Savansukha is a Mumbai-based writer. She has worked at the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum and Project 88, and has contributed to *The Hindu* and *ART India Magazine*. Currently she is Managing Director at the MAP Academy. She studies Persian and her research interests include modern and contemporary art, Islamic art and textiles. She received her MA in History of Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Media & Performance from Trinity College, Connecticut.

Rahul Kumar is an art and culture writer. He was the founding-Editor (Arts) with *STIR* and Consulting Editor with *Arts Illustrated*. He writes for MINT-Lounge and contributes to various art journals. Rahul is a Fulbright Scholar with a Masters in Arts from the USA, a Charles Wallace and Pro Helvetia fellow. A recipient of scholarships from the India Foundation for the Arts and the Ministry of Culture (Government of India), his artworks have been auctioned at Sotheby's London and are part of significant collections, including the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.

Rashmi Viswanathan is the Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Hartford (USA) and a fellow with the Smithsonian and the American Institute of Indian Studies. Her research looks at transnational formations of discourses of modern art, and has been published in journals such as *Art Journal*, *Third Text*, and *Trans-Asia Photography*.

Rituparna Roy is Initiator of the Kolkata Partition Museum Project that aims to establish a Partition Museum in Kolkata, focusing on the Bengal experience. An alumna of Presidency College and Calcutta University, she did her doctoral research in India and her postdoctoral research at Leiden. She has taught at several institutions in Kolkata, Leiden, and The Hague. She is the author of *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh* (2010), co-editor of the ICAS Volume, *Writing India Anew: Indian English Fiction 2000-2010* (2013), and a collection of shorts, *Gariahat Junction* (2020). She can be reached at royrituparna.com.

Saloni is a writer and photographer. She completed her B.A. in English Literature from Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi and her M.A. in Arts and Aesthetics from School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has interned with National Museum and Sahapedia in the past. Currently she works with LATITUDE 28 and TAKE on Art magazine.

Seema Kohli is an experimental multi-disciplinary artist, straddling the worlds of the visual and performing arts and poetry. Kohli has had over 32 solo shows and over 300 group shows worldwide. She explores the themes of beauty, sensuality and spirituality in her works. Her work celebrates the female form and energy as the source of the twin forces of creation and destruction. There is a focused engagement with the concept of *Hiranayagarbha* or The Golden Womb; She attempts to create new artistic identities by reshaping belongings, bringing the past and the present into a dialogue through decay, hybridization and transformation. Her works are in collection with the Rubin's Museum, British Museum, Kiran Nadar Museum, Milind and Bill Gates Foundation to name a few.

Shruti Ramlingaiah is a curator and art writer based in Mumbai. With a background in art history and museum studies, she has worked with a range of museums and galleries in the past. She has written on art majorly in the form of exhibition reviews and curatorial essays. She received a Curatorial Intensive grant from Independent Curators International (ICI), New York and Njabala Foundation in Kampala, Uganda 2022, EYES Project Fellowship awarded by the Japan Foundation Asia Center, Tokyo in 2019 and the Getty Foundation travel grant in 2018.

Stephanie Satara is a New York native of Indo-Guyanese descent. She is an avid art, design and architecture lover who has previous art experience at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Curatorial Department of African, American and Oceanic art and several galleries within New York City. She is also a member of the Women's Art Association in Guyana. She's currently working as an art manager with a focus on minority, diaspora and women artists.

Tamara Sears is Associate Professor of South Asian Art History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick, where she also co-directs the Global Asias Initiative. Her first book, *Worldly Gurus and Spiritual Kings: Architecture and Asceticism in Medieval India* (Yale University Press, 2014), which received the Association of American Publishers Award for Professional and Scholarly Excellence in the category of Architecture and Urban Planning. Her most recent publication is *Paper Trails: Modern Indian Works on Paper from the Gaur Collection* (Mapin, 2022).

TAKE ON
WRITING SERIES

CONCEIVED BY
BHAVNA KAKAR

HORIZON AND
PERSPECTIVE:
CURATORIAL GAZE TO
GAUGE PROMISE OF ART

SYMPOSIUM CONCEPTUALISED BY

BHAVNA KAKAR AND
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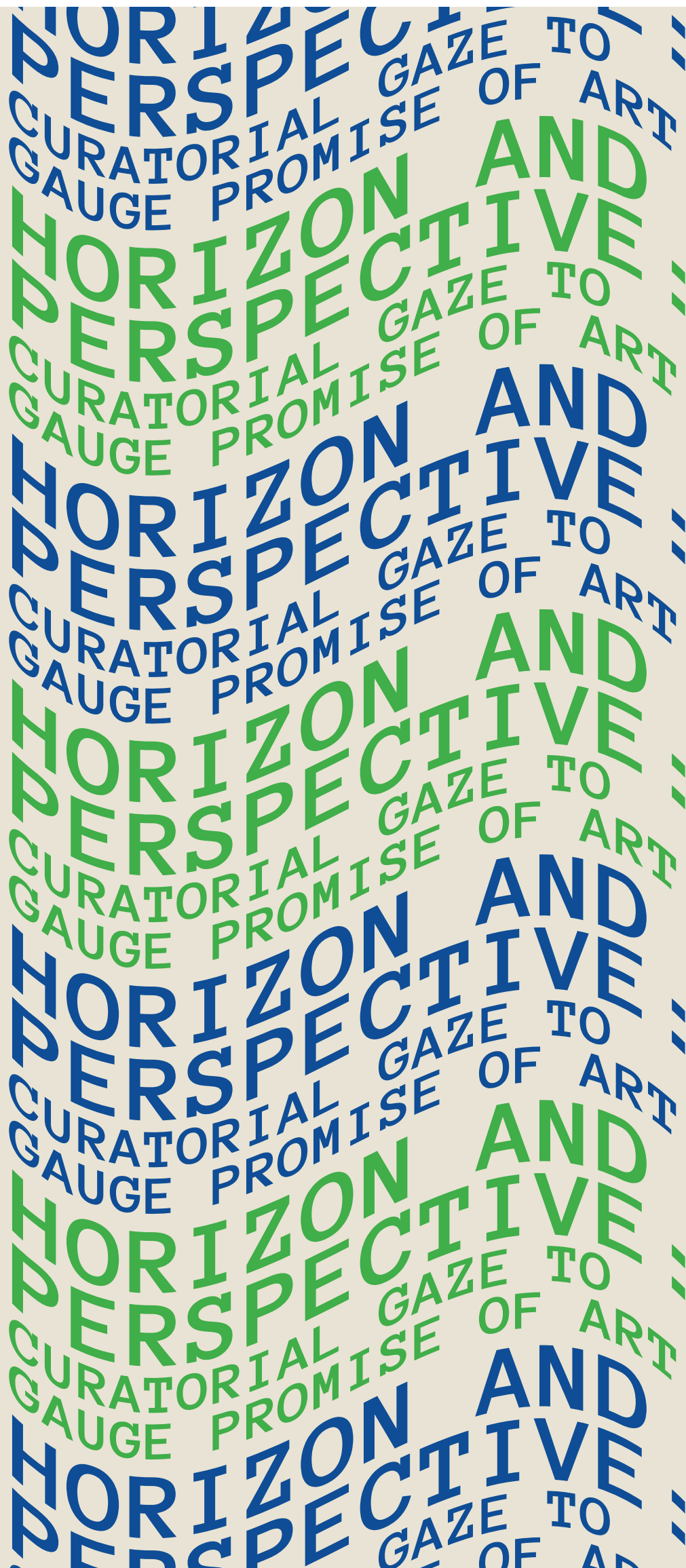
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Bhavna Kakar



Image Courtesy: Vicky Roy

Bhavna Kakar is an arts entrepreneur and publisher. Her independent research and curatorial practice focus on innovative forms of art making and writing in the region of South Asia. She consolidated these interests to establish Gallery Latitude 28 and TAKE on Art magazine. Kakar's commitment to fostering art writing practices is one of the driving forces behind TAKE's continued efforts to build accessible and global discourses on arts. Under the TAKE on Writing Series, she has organised workshops, symposiums, and initiated the AWA with the support of Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia. TAKE is the only art magazine from the subcontinent to have regularly partnered with global art events including Art Basel, Basel; Art Basel Hong Kong; OCA, Norway; Goethe-Institut; Art Dubai; and Dhaka Art Summit amongst others. Kakar was awarded FICCI's Arts Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

The environment and the economy are really both two sides of the same coin. If we cannot sustain the environment, we cannot sustain ourselves.

- Wangari Maathai¹

In an era marked by swift industrialisation, urbanisation, and the exploitation of resources, the wisdom of Wangari Maathai, a notable Kenyan advocate for social, environmental, and political causes, resounds as a pertinent reflection on the complex interplay between the environment and the economy. The idea of sustainability surpasses mere ecological considerations; it encompasses a comprehensive balance between environmental soundness, economic advancement, and societal welfare. Maathai's affirmation underscores the essential concept that the well-being of the environment and economic prosperity are interconnected facets, each reliant on the other for continual survival. The significance of transitioning from a linear economic model of "take-make-waste" to a circular economy represents a deliberate embrace of principles that seek to curtail and recycle resource consumption, while also mitigating the ecological repercussions.

A fortuitous meeting with Uthra Rajgopal, a vanguard of South Asian contemporary arts dedicated to textiles, sparked a discussion on textiles and the possibility of an issue that would explore its various layers, especially around the representation of the body. After discussions spread over almost a year, the theme took a turn, laying

the groundwork for the advent of the 29th edition of TAKE *Sustainability*. As the scope expanded, the need to broaden the discourse and our horizon became evident and this prompted the invitation to Bandana Tewari, a Sustainability Activist and one of the most respected voices in Fashion, to curate the introductory segment of the issue.

Cultural sustainability, specifically, emerges as a pivotal element in upholding the essence of societies and securing the enduring legacy of human heritage for posterity. Its significance extends beyond the preservation of artefacts confined within museums or historical sites; it involves a dynamic process that empowers communities to protect their cultural heritage while adapting to the evolving dynamics of the modern world. This process necessitates the acknowledgement of the innate value of diverse cultures and the protection of the rights of indigenous populations to uphold their distinctive ways of life. This endeavour orbits around the preservation of traditions, languages, customs, arts, and intangible rituals that define the identity of a community.

Co-edited by Bandana Tewari and Uthra Rajgopal, this issue spotlights responsible consumption and collaborative endeavours that guide societies toward harmonious coexistence, benefiting both the environment and humanity. Tewari's co-editorial note emphasizes nurturing a deep comprehension of reconnection and resilience to counteract degenerative development's effects and secure a viable future for generations.

Cultural preservation, as a standard-bearer for safeguarding identity, human culture's mosaic, innovative creativity, and economic implications, demands an understanding that transcends freezing

¹ Ariana Agrios (ed), *Fossil Fuel Industries and the Green Economy*. New York, Greenhaven Publishing LLC, 2022, p.14.

cultures in the past. Instead, it focuses on ensuring their vibrancy, relevance, and significance in the present and future. Tewari's section fosters a world that embraces diversity, weaving humanity's rich heritage stories into the fabric of progress.

Tewari consistently underscores the worth of age-old techniques like intricate hand embroidery, weaving, and dyeing methods. By illuminating upon artisan narratives and their crafts, she highlights the need to support artisans' livelihoods while preserving cultural heritage. The essays stress the vital role of ethical fashion practices. Tewari vocally addresses the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion, encouraging conscious consumer choices that honour and contribute to cultural preservation. Articles by authors such as Anita Lal, Diana Campbell, Karishma Swali, and Huma Adnan elucidate the significance of sustaining traditional practices in a thriving fashion ecosystem.

In the intricate landscape of sustainability initiatives, the textile industry emerges as a pivotal player, confronting challenges and offering solutions while striving to balance creativity, socioeconomic growth, and environmental well-being. The British Textile Biennale exemplifies this commitment by showcasing artistic and technological strides that aim to reshape textiles' future while fostering conscientious practices. Curating the *Fragments of Our Time* exhibition within the Biennale, the UK-based Rajgopal, delves into sustainability—a concept gaining heightened attention as the world grapples with rapid changes. Rajgopal propels ethical practices and collaborative efforts, reimagining every facet of the supply chain, from sourcing raw materials to consumption. These insights, filtered through contemporary arts, inspire the textile industry to address sustainability comprehensively. The Biennale illustrates the intersection of cultural and textile sustainability, bolstering each other's impact. Essays enhance our understanding of textiles beyond utility, underlining the potential for lasting legacies that coexist with nature. Central to this is the blend of tradition and heritage with modern technology, a reminder that sustainability is rooted in generations-old practices. The British Textile Biennale exemplifies the same assurance by showcasing artistic and technological strides that aim to reshape textiles' future while fostering conscientious practices and we are delighted to be launching this issue on this occasion.

Similarly, the global textile industry stands at a crossroads, its choices today shaping the planet's future. This section's essays and interviews underscore how textile sustainability has evolved from a trend to a necessity. By interweaving traditions, arts, and sustainability, this section serves

as a compelling example of the textile industry's capacity to champion the planet while enthraling us with its craftsmanship.

TAKE Sustainability is centred around well-researched articles and in-depth features that aim to dispel myths, rectify misconceptions, and advocate for collective action. Through actionable steps, the issue empowers individuals to adopt mindful choices that shrink their ecological footprint and positively impact the environment. Additionally, it acts as a platform to showcase success stories and innovative initiatives that offer inspiration, emphasizing the potential for change, even through small actions. It challenges the status quo and encourages critical thinking, fostering a reader base that becomes more aware and engaged. This impact extends beyond the issue, promising a brighter future for generations ahead.

Collaboration takes centre stage, gaining new life as its multifaceted implications are explored in daily life. This theme thrives globally in art exhibitions, exemplified by reviews from Chloe Ho, Henry Noltie, Shruti Ramlingaiah, Stephanie Satara, and Tamara Sears. Their reviews embody the essence of an alliance, reflecting the ever-evolving tapestry of human culture.

This year has brought its share of grief for the world of art, the passing of veteran artist and activist Vivan Sundaram after a long illness and the untimely demise of Dr. Kavita Singh created an irreplaceable void in our lives. Vivan's legacy resonates through generations of artists and Gulam Mohammed Sheikh's poignant tribute keeps his artistic spirit vibrant in the hearts of those who knew him. Kavita's publications have intricately unveiled the richness of the Indian cultural tapestry. While we grieve her loss, her contributions shall enrich the pages of art history.

As part of the *TAKE on Writing* series, "Horizon Perspective: Curatorial Gaze to Gauge the Promise of Art" this symposium stands as a dynamic platform, uniting diverse voices from the art and curation domains. It embodies collaboration, sparking enriching discussions and deepening comprehension of the ever-evolving art landscape. Beyond its significance to the art community, the event plays a vital role in expanding outreach efforts for the sixth edition of the Delhi Contemporary Art Week also showcasing *TAKE's* commitment to facilitating meaningful dialogues and exploring the profound potential that art holds for our collective future.

Bhavna Kakar
Editor-in-Chief

CO-EDITOR'S NOTE

Bandana Tewari

COMPASSION- THE LINEAGE OF CREATIVITY



Bandana Tewari is a Sustainability Activist, and Fashion Journalist. As a TED speaker and writer, she has given keynote speeches all across the world about compassionate consumption, sustainability and spirituality, with a special focus on Gandhi and Fashion and the need for sartorial integrity. As Vogue India's Editor-at-Large for 13 years, Tewari was responsible for planning, visualising and ideating fashion features for the ultimate style bible. Her ringside view of the rapidly evolving industry coupled with her signature ability to take the long view in every commentary has made her a globally recognised voice in fashion lifestyle and sustainability. She is a Special Advisor to Copenhagen Fashion Summit and sits on several advisory boards-NEST (NYC), Redress (Hong Kong), Global Fashion Agenda (Stockholm), and Fashioninnovation (New York) amongst others.

When my 13 year journey as a journalist in high fashion and culture started pivoting towards advocacy for sustainable lifestyle and conscious consumption, serendipitously, I chanced upon the wise teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh.

This renowned Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, poet, and peace activist was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by none other than my other hero – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I remember reading a lucid essay by this Zen master who wrote about his quest to find an exact English word to describe humanity's deep interconnectedness with everything else. The idea of interconnectedness to him, was in reality, the cosmic aggregation of all things that support life, of which humans are, simply, one of the many players. Thich Nhat Hanh understood that in realising the sacredness of this universal interconnectedness, one could internalise the true essence of harmonious coexistence between not only man and nature, but more poignantly, between everything - animate or inanimate.

He wrote: "I finally came up with the word "interbeing." The verb "to be" can be misleading, because we cannot be by ourselves, alone. "To be" is always to "inter-be". To "inter-be" and the action of interbeing reflects reality more accurately. We inter-are with one another and with all life."

This disarmingly simple truism forged my conviction to commit to a journey of being extraordinary in the ordinariness of my life – by being an everyday activist. Inspired by

the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, I must confess, I started believing that each one of us who dream and create must be an everyday activist, whose sense of purpose honours the larger canvas of life. After all, it is individual values that embolden our collective concern for environmental challenges, and seek solutions to heal the earth. For that we all have to be interbeings.

Lately, it has been easier to understand sustainability from the horrors we see on TV of environmental degradation of land and water; or the glaring economic inequalities between factory makers and elite owners in the fast fashion industry that proliferates our social media feeds. We are more likely to understand sustainability when it is a product that we can see, touch and feel – solar panels or a pair of vegan leather boots made from food waste. But even though Cultural Sustainability was declared to be the missing link in the map of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals-the existing triptych being economic, environmental and social)–it remains a bit obtuse.

The truth is the quintessence of cultural sustainability lies in the opposition to individualism. When Nigerian author and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichí described 'the danger of a single story' in her TED Talk, she was in fact highlighting the fallacy of one-sided stories and the power of narratives based on the diversity of individuals and cultures. You can well imagine what this means to deeply indigenous communities across the world or to culturally rich countries of South America,

the Indian subcontinent and Asia. Cultural sustainability suddenly opens the floodgates of creativity rooted in the ethics of ancient wisdom, co-creation and *advaita*, the non-duality of life. Culture shows us the interconnectedness of our bio-diverse world, where development must be sought keeping the idiosyncrasies of people's culture, our ancestors, the plurality of the lived experience and the universality of our common humanity.

Quite simplistically, for each one of us, culture is by far one of the most authentic foundations upon which we define our understanding of home, family, community, region, and within that, our creative and economic activities. Therefore, culture must sit at the centre of our dialogue on sustainability, in our everyday lived experience. I sincerely hope that the following essays will help de-alienate the topic to an extent, and guide us through practices that allow us to assess our own world of creativity and consumption. The brilliant line-up of writers-creators, the 'culture custodians' amalgamate modern-day knowledge and ancient wisdom through their work, informing our past experiences and future existences. They lead us to a deeper understanding and urgency for sustainable development. When we understand this, the pillar of cultural sustainability aligns itself perfectly with the other three megaliths - economic, environmental and social.

In the essays we will read about the practices and ideologies that are steeped in our everyday experience of cultural sustainability. They are indeed written by interbeings - men and women across architecture, art, wellness, design, craft amongst others - who elucidate wonderfully how personal culture is, and how intrinsic it is to our recognition that culture is continuation; and that continuation comes with sustainability. Whilst they uphold our inner world of dreams, ideas and values - they also hold a mirror to the vicissitudes of our times. Each has unique ways of approaching their understanding of cultural sustainability, but without question what is common to all, is their unwavering acknowledgement of the entire spectrum that involves product, people, process and purpose. They show us how to recognise the diversity of the codes of conduct, the global and local dimensions that can help tackle cultural exclusion, and honour intergenerational community development. Our minds are capable of finding great solutions to any given problem, but it is our compassion that chooses sustainable ones.

We, who live in the Indian subcontinent believe deeply that human action follows a karmic interrelationship of cause and effect. Our actions, whether benevolent or malignant, have consequences. Therefore to be Thich Nhat Hanh's benevolent interbeings, the responsibility is upon us to tread mindfully on earth, and show our environment the same care we bestow on our own children.

It is no wonder his words continue to sit poignantly in my heart. He said: "Every time I offer incense or prostrate before the altar in my hermitage, I do not do this as an individual self but as a whole lineage. Whenever I walk, sit, eat, or practice calligraphy, I do so with the awareness that all my ancestors are within me at that moment. I am their continuation. Whatever I am doing, the energy of mindfulness enables me to do it as "us," through interbeing, not as "me."

CO-EDITOR'S NOTE

Uthra Rajgopal

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND



Uthra Rajgopal is an award winning Independent Curator with a specialist interest in South Asian textiles based in the UK. Her most recent exhibitions include *Rehang* at Bikaner House, Delhi and *Cotton: labour, land and the body* for the Crafts Council UK. Uthra is frequently consulted as a writer, lecturer, and mentor and has been appointed as the Associate Curator to curate "Fragments of Our Time", a group exhibition, for the British Textile Biennial 2023. She remains a keen advocate of championing and expanding the field of textile arts and building networks across and between South Asia and the wider communities.

It is my great pleasure to have been invited by Bhavna Kakar to co-guest edit this special edition on *Sustainability* for TAKE on Art. The idea was hatched in 2022 when I had been approached by the British Textile Biennial to curate an exhibition on the theme of sustainability. In doing so, I felt the theme of sustainability was much larger than the exhibition and so given my area of specialism in South Asian textiles and contemporary textile art, it developed into a natural expansion, worthy of a special edition.

Textiles and sustainability go hand in hand. This does not mean it is always achieved but it seems that the essential elements are and should be understood by everyone. The etymology of the word stems from the Latin 'to hold up' or 'support' (*sus and tenere*). This word alone actually tells us everything we need to know. How do we as a society support one another, our land, our ways of living and economies to ensure we have textiles? After all, textiles form a fundamental part of all our lives, beyond our experiences and memories. Of course, garments are the first things that everyone thinks about when we say the word textiles but let us take a moment to think beyond clothing, fashion, and bed linens. Consider the automobile, aviation, and aerospace industries, they all depend on high performance textiles. The manufacture of nylon depends on the extraction of crude oil. Hospitals and the medical industry depend on cotton swabs, gowns, bandages, suture threads and so on. Bank notes in many countries are still made from a woven composition of cotton and linen. How different would the world have been

if soldiers during the World Wars did not have enough parachute silk? My point here is that textiles are fundamental to how we live, not just in terms of how we clothe ourselves but frankly our survival depends on them. Just imagine if we woke up one day and there is no more cotton, no more wool, nylon, silk, leather, hemp, linen, or rubber? In the face of a climate emergency, if we know we are depleting our natural resources how can we alter the consequences of our actions today? The actions of governments, activists and scientists alone will never be enough. We all need to understand more deeply and make space to see the unseen and hear the unheard. Out of sight but not out of mind.

It is my belief that we are all fundamentally connected to each other, across the entire planet. Our actions have an impact on people and places hidden from view, from root systems growing beneath our feet, to the oceans swirling around the globe which not only provide a home to vast species of marine flora and fauna but also provide a protective layer over the seabed, rich in minerals, to the particles in the sky above us. Everything we do has an impact. All our actions have consequences. Whether we will live to see the result of our actions and consequences on the next generation is uncertain but what is clear is that our planet cannot support our present rate of consumption of raw materials on which our lives depend.

Sandra Sawatzky a Canadian artist from Alberta writes about her phenomenal 67m long 'film on cloth' titled *The Black Gold Tapestry*. Yes, that is correct, 67m long. An epic undertaking for any

artist. With a previous career in the film industry as a writer, producer, and director, Sawatzky set about researching the history of the world. After nine years of immersing herself in research, design, and laborious and meticulous hand embroidery, she produced the epic saga, of our social, economic, and environmental histories and as she states, “a social history of fossil fuels that is a deep reflection on climate change and transition”. Her textile artwork stands as a visual stitched record of the impact of industries and consumption on the natural world. In itself worthy of touring the galleries of the world.

We will also read in this section about the livelihoods of communities impacted by textile production and consumption. Natural fibres such as cotton, wool, jute, linen, and silk are nurtured through careful cultivation, harvesting and farming. How we care for the soil, the water, vegetation, and our animals are skills that have been carried by generations of nomadic pastoralists. These communities live in harmony with the land and their herds. I was privileged to witness this for myself during my curatorial residency in 2023 in Kutch, Gujarat. At the Shrujan Living and Learning Design Centre in Bhuj, I was able to go out into the field where I sat with the Jat community, learnt about their instinctive care of their camel herds and how every action was in profound consideration of everything around them, using only what they needed, making what they could, using their hands and minds for crafting with complete care and in harmonious balance with the environment. Niyati Hirani writes about her holistic experience of visiting Shrujan LLDC in Bhuj. Established by the late Chanda Shroff in 1969, Shrujan and now the Living and Learning Design Centre has been helping to sustain the indigenous communities of Kutch with a dignified way of life through their unique textile arts and crafts. Despite its remote location, Kutch is a land where its people take great pride and care of their land and heritage. We gain a sense of this pride and warmth, through Hirani’s article, taking us on an experiential journey through her time there. Indeed, the energy and pride are visible and palpable as soon as one enters the courtyard and from the CEO down to the cook and manager of the open-air restaurant and café serving the most delicious home-cooked organic vegetarian food, one trip to Shrujan LLDC is never enough.

Staying with the theme of rural and remote communities, Monisha Ahmed provides a unique insight into a nomadic pastoralist community in Changthan, North-eastern Ladakh. They are known for their herds of *pashmina* goats. Today

we know that *pashmina* wool from this region supplies the luxury fashion industry and yields a high economic value, rising steeply, along the supply chain. However, the nomadic communities who care for these animals have a different understanding of value as they are embedded within their spiritual and ritual practices.

In the interview with the Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama, he mentions the spiritual practices undertaken when textiles leave the possession of the family. Our lives are intertwined with the fibres of cloth. We also learn about how value is perceived and altered in the repurposing of used jute sacks. With the raw materials coming from South Asia to make these sacks, they are filled with coco and stamped accordingly and then exported around the world. After these jute sacks are used, their value alters. With the help of local collaborators, Mahama deconstructs these redundant empty sacks – many of which carry the scent and marks of the organic products once packaged inside them – and transforms them into monumental textile artworks. Often seen in public spaces, towering above us, these textile panels are used to shroud, wrap, and drape buildings which confront and disrupt the historical, economic, and ecological circulation of materials, manufacturers, and power structures. Perhaps the next time we eat some chocolates we might want to reflect on its journey from land to mouth via the many hands that harvested, packaged, produced and sold them to us?

The hidden hands of labour that go into embellishing, finishing, and maintaining our garments across India is highlighted in the captivating essay by Ritu Sethi. Each bead, each tassel, starched pleat, pressed or darned garment clearly demonstrates a craft which has been passed down generations of families. These are forms of haptic knowledge – skills that can only be learned through touch. And it is these skills that consumers depend on to make their garments look pristine, finished, and acceptable in the social circles we move in. In essence, we need to reflect on the sustainability of clothes not only in terms of its manufacture and production but also how we care for them during its lifetime in our wardrobes.

In the essay by Ruxmini Reckvana Q Choudhury we turn to sustainable weaving practices in Bangladesh. Highlighting the rich history of this country in terms of its *muslin* and *jamdani* production the essay actually opens with a moment of reflection about how second-hand fabrics are never thrown out but repurposed, reused and given a new lease of life, often evoking

a sort of 'second generation' of memories within the home. We also learn about the importance of garments, clothing, and fabric in contemporary artworks seen in the 2023 Dhaka Art Summit. Artists have positioned cloth and used garments in powerful contemporary artworks to highlight sustainable practices, heritage as well as crises of consumption, circulation, and production.

Indeed, in the field of contemporary art there has been an increasing visible expansion of artists using materials and techniques connected with textile production to highlight issues relating to sustainability. Cleo Roberts-Komireddi and I have written about the British Textile Biennial (BTB23) focusing on the artworks and curatorial narrative of *Fragments of Our Time* to be shown at The Whitaker Art Gallery and Museum in Rossendale, Lancashire. The third edition of the Biennial traces routes of fibres and fabrics across continents and centuries to and from the north of England in a series of commissions and exhibitions in the spaces left behind by the Lancashire textile industry. Situated in a former textile mill owner's 19th century mansion and set over two floors, *Fragments of Our Time* at The Whitaker brings together 17 artists from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh and the diaspora from the UK and USA who interpret sustainability through the lenses of the environment, economy and/or society. As South Asia has a rich tradition in textiles which has been gently nurtured from their land and animals for thousands of years, the idea of what is and is not sustainable seems to be inherent in the subcontinent's DNA but it is up to us, in this time we are living in, to ensure that we do not create further structural damage to our finely balanced way of life.