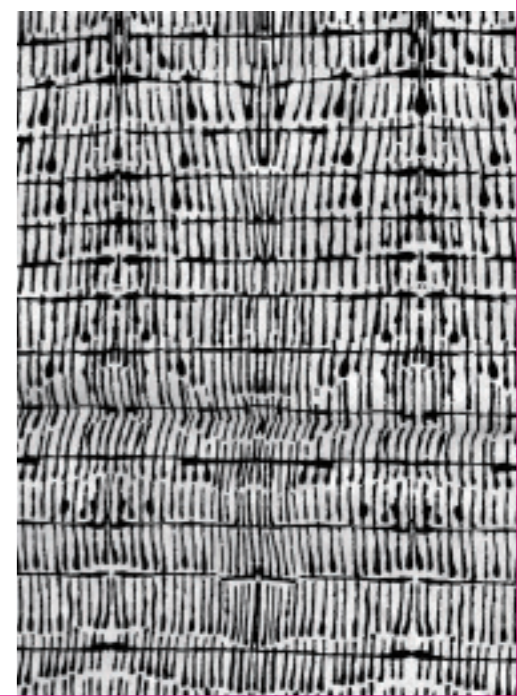


RITEN MOZUMDAR

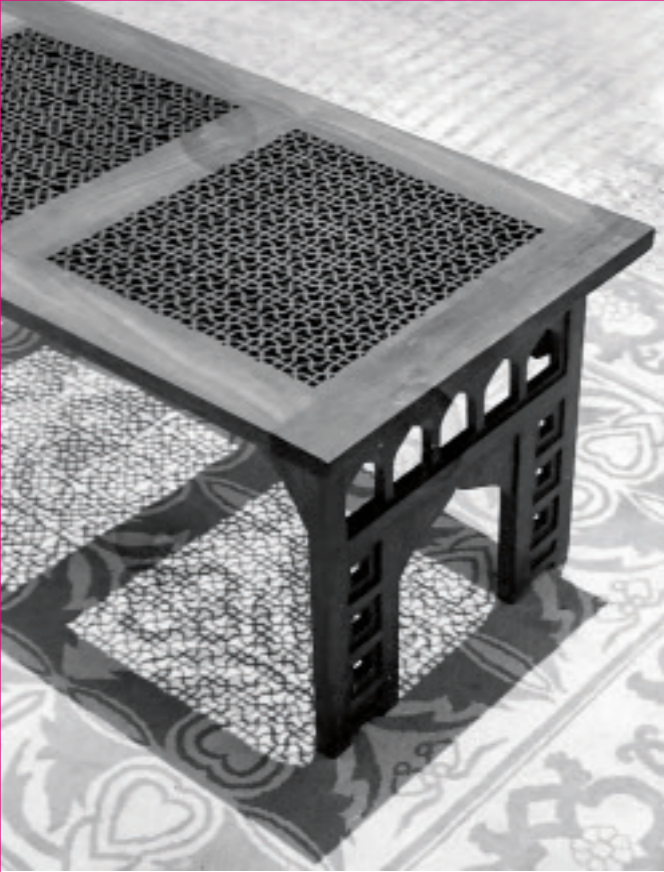
From the early 1950s, as independent India began asserting itself on the international stage, Riten Mozumdar emerged with a spectacular late-modernist aesthetic across mediums: painting, sculpture, furniture, textiles, fashion and more. Today, 14 years after his death, a retrospective revisits the prolific pioneer's enormous contribution to art and design



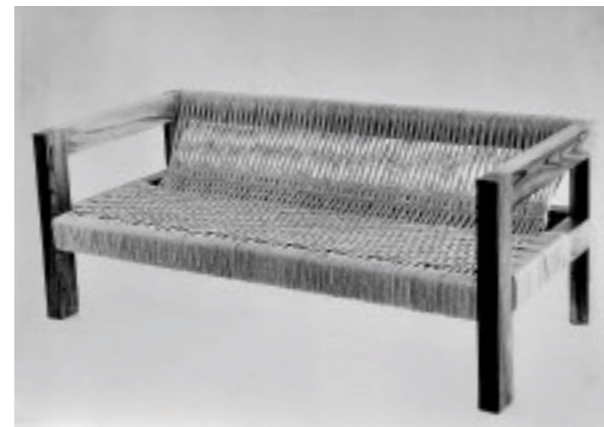
PHOTOS COURTESY OF TIM PRENTICE ARCHIVES (PORTRAIT); HEIRS OF RITEN MOZUMDAR.



Above: Circa 1970 portrait of Riten Mozumdar. Right: Fish (top), Mach Ranga (centre), and Benu Bono (bottom)—all three are silk screens on cotton, designed for Marimekko, Finland, by Riten Mozumdar, 1956-57.



Left: Jali furniture, 1966-67, made for All India Handicrafts Board, Riten Mozumdar. Below: Contemporary furniture designs by Riten Mozumdar. Facing page, left: Fabindia poster for an exhibition of handwoven textiles in Bombay 1978. Facing page, right: Fabindia Annual Report cover, 1969.

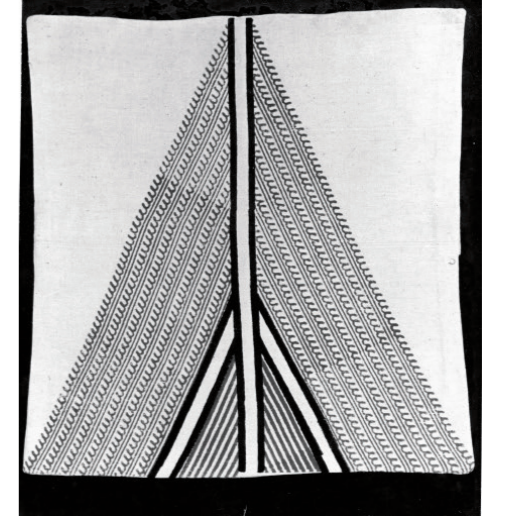
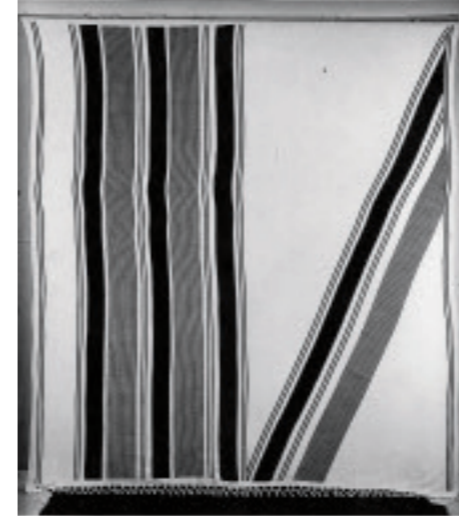
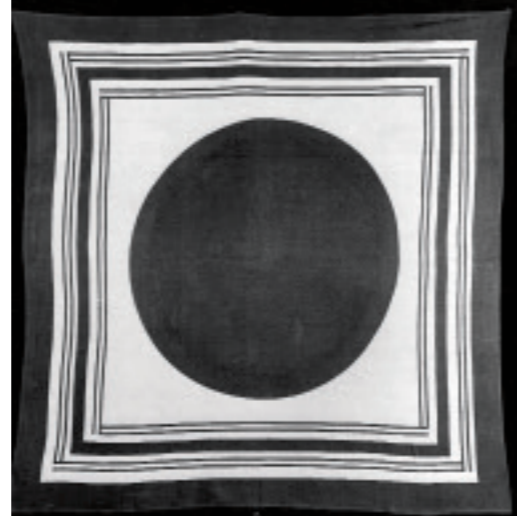
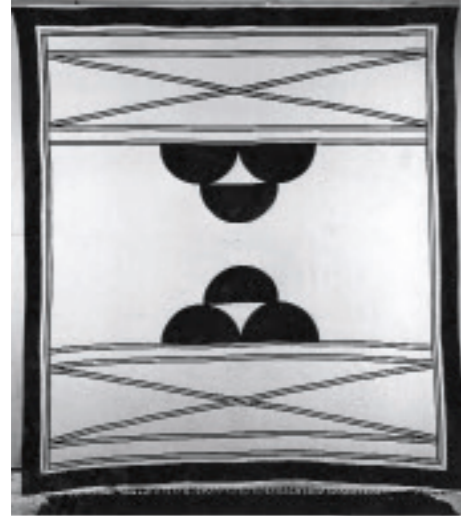


PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEIRS OF RITEN MOZUMDAR.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FABINDIA ARCHIVES.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEIRS OF RITEN MOZUMDAR.

Facing page and this page, from left: Teenpahar, Bindu, Rasta and Kauna, 1966-2000, bedsheet designs for Fabindia, by Riten Mozumdar.

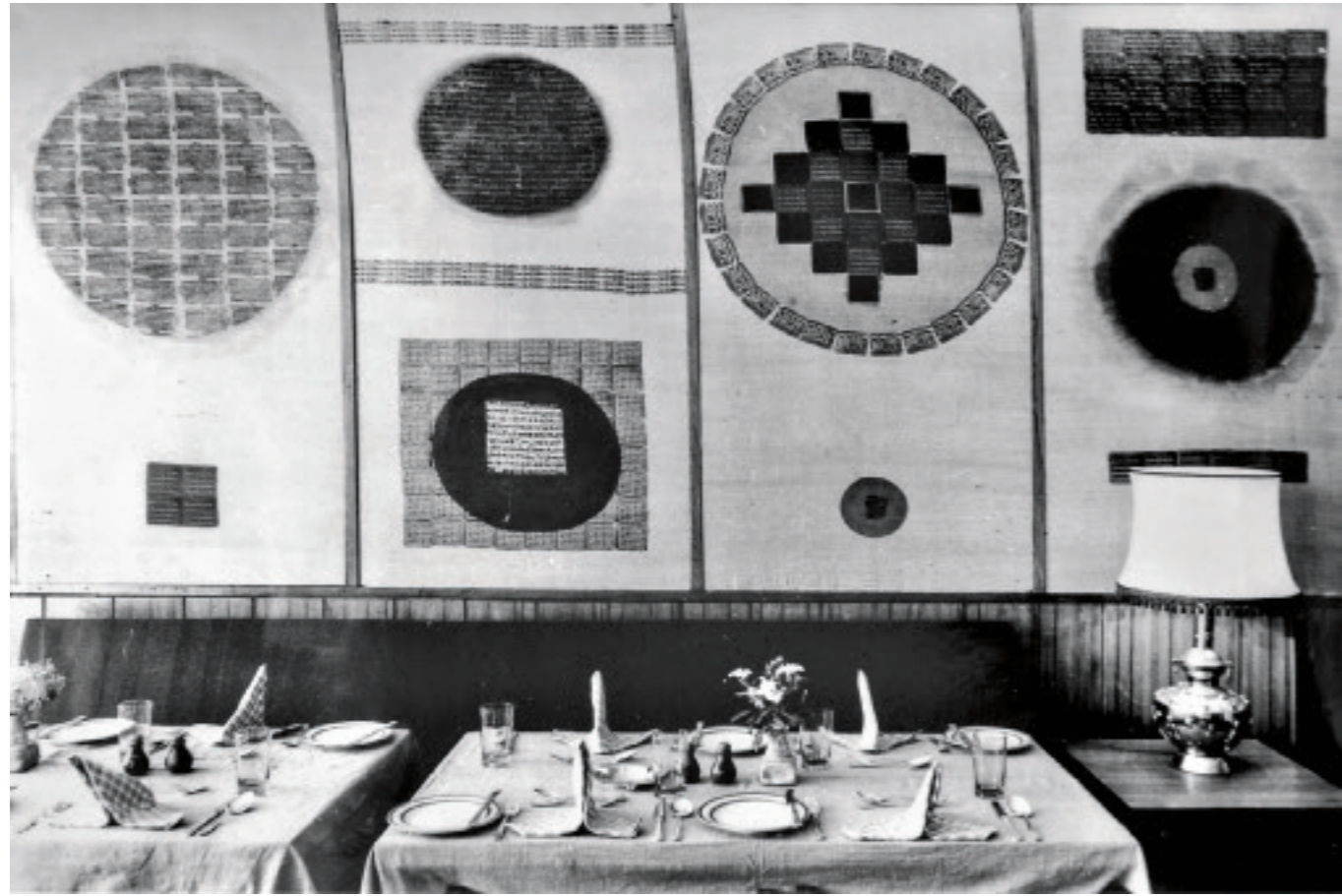
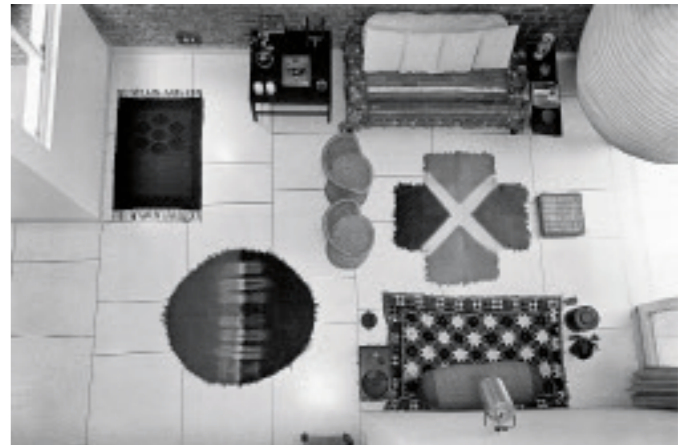


PHOTO COURTESY OF HEIRS OF RITEN MOZUMDAR.

Silk murals in Ashoka restaurant, Bengaluru, 1972, designed by Riten Mozumdar. Facing page, top right: Riten Mozumdar at his desk in his residence, designed in 1974 by Charles Correa and a top view of the same home. Facing page, bottom left: Riten Mozumdar 'Untitled', circa 1998, acid dye on silk.



TOP RIGHT PHOTOS COURTESY OF MADAN MAHATTA/PHOTOINK. ARTWORK COURTESY OF CHATTERJEE & LAL

Below left: Monika Correa in a block print on cotton sari named 'Rome by Night', designed by Riten Mozumdar circa 1970s. Bottom left: Dresses designed by Riten Mozumdar for Pallavi, a clothing label that exported to the Middle East and Australia, late 1970s. Facing page: Riten Mozumdar in New Delhi, posing with a selection of his Namdah carpets, circa 1970.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MONIKA CORREA (PORTRAIT); HEIRS OF RITEN MOZUMDAR (REST).



Riten Mozumdar, the youngest of nine siblings, was born in Kosur, Punjab, in 1927. His father, Surendranath, was a doctor by profession. Whilst still very young, his father passed away and his mother, Prembala, took over the responsibility of her children, bringing them up through the upheaval of the Independence struggle. Mozumdar trained in Santiniketan, West Bengal during the late 1940s. Made famous through the vision of Rabindranath Tagore, this was a time of great creativity at the institution. Young Mozumdar studied under brilliant faculty such as Benode Behari Mukherjee, who went on to play a mentor's role in Mozumdar's early professional years; indeed, it was on his recommendation that the graduate stayed for some months in Nepal, undertaking training in craft techniques. It was this early experience, working across mediums, that unleashed the polymath in Mozumdar.

The mid-to-late 1950s would see Mozumdar travel, work and exhibit extensively in Europe and North America. It was during this time that he worked with Marimekko in Helsinki, producing designs that would lay the ground for his distinctive visual vocabulary. Once he returned to India, the 1960s and 1970s proved to be an incredibly productive period for Mozumdar, and his creative promiscuity was evident throughout. This was a moment in which both state and private industry were actively engaged in the formation of design solutions appropriate to a young nation. Mozumdar set to work on a dizzying array of activities, both on his own and as part of collaborative efforts: examples include furniture design and product design (Taaru, a Delhi-based furniture company inspired by Scandinavian design, and the All India Handicrafts Board); textile design (M Print, Mozumdar's own label, and Fabindia); fashion (Pallavi, a clothes line popular in the Middle-East and Australia); and exhibition design (in particular, for Sachdev Eggleston Associates, who were responsible for major expos of the period). In India, nearly everyone involved in the art and crafts sector would have encountered Mozumdar-designed objects and products in some form or other. In particular, his work with Fabindia achieved iconic status and, over the years, has become synonymous with the brand's identity. The startling coloured geometric shapes, especially circular forms, printed on all manner of fabrics for use around the house, were seemingly ubiquitous in urban Indian homes in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mozumdar counted many cultural titans of the period as his personal friends. Charles Correa became particularly close after the two met aboard a ship sailing to India from the UK in the 1950s; it was Correa who would eventually design Mozumdar's Delhi home. KG Subramanyan, the great late modernist artist, was also a friend for many decades and it was he who urged Mozumdar to move back to Santiniketan in the 1980s. The spirit of the age was cross-disciplinary and encouraged artistic producers to seek out those of a similar mindset.

Described by friends as shy and soft-spoken, Mozumdar was not one for continuous self-promotion. He was, however, very sure of his likes and dislikes, as his private notes and public statements make clear. In a recent interview, Monika Correa, artist and wife of the late Charles Correa, recalls Mozumdar's heightened aesthetic taste. "Charles wanted to make some saris for me, so he and Riten went out to buy plain mull cotton for six saris and Riten pinned them on to his table. Charles made these strokes and borders and Riten steamed them. But when I wore the saris, they did not look as good as they had on the table.... Riten told Charles that they looked beautiful as a flat canvas, but when worn on the body, the sari takes on different curves. You have to place the block where it shows up. You have to understand the way the body moves."

Mozumdar's later years saw him return to painting; 40 years after completing his art studies. Employing the technique of acid dyeing on silk, he consciously collapsed the boundaries between design and art. The artworks produced during this period combine elements of abstraction and calligraphy. Often referencing the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, the letters play hide and seek with the viewer as they merge with swirling lines and blocks of colour. These exquisite paintings are the summation of a life engaged in creative pursuits.

Taking stock of Riten Mozumdar's career, it becomes clear that he stood out amongst his peers for the sheer breadth of his technical know-how. Those early years moving through Santiniketan, Nepal and then Europe and America, formed in Mozumdar a world view that set him apart. The key to his success was his ability to marry a love of local arts and crafts practices with a deep understanding of international design history. In bringing together the different strands of his practice, it is hoped there might be a renewed appreciation of this true pioneer.

Chatterjee & Lal gallery in Mumbai is hosting a major retrospective on Riten Mozumdar from 9 January to 29 February 2020. Riten Mozumdar: IMPRINT is researched and co-curated by Ushmita Sabu.

– By Mortimer Chatterjee, Tara Lal and Ushmita Sahu