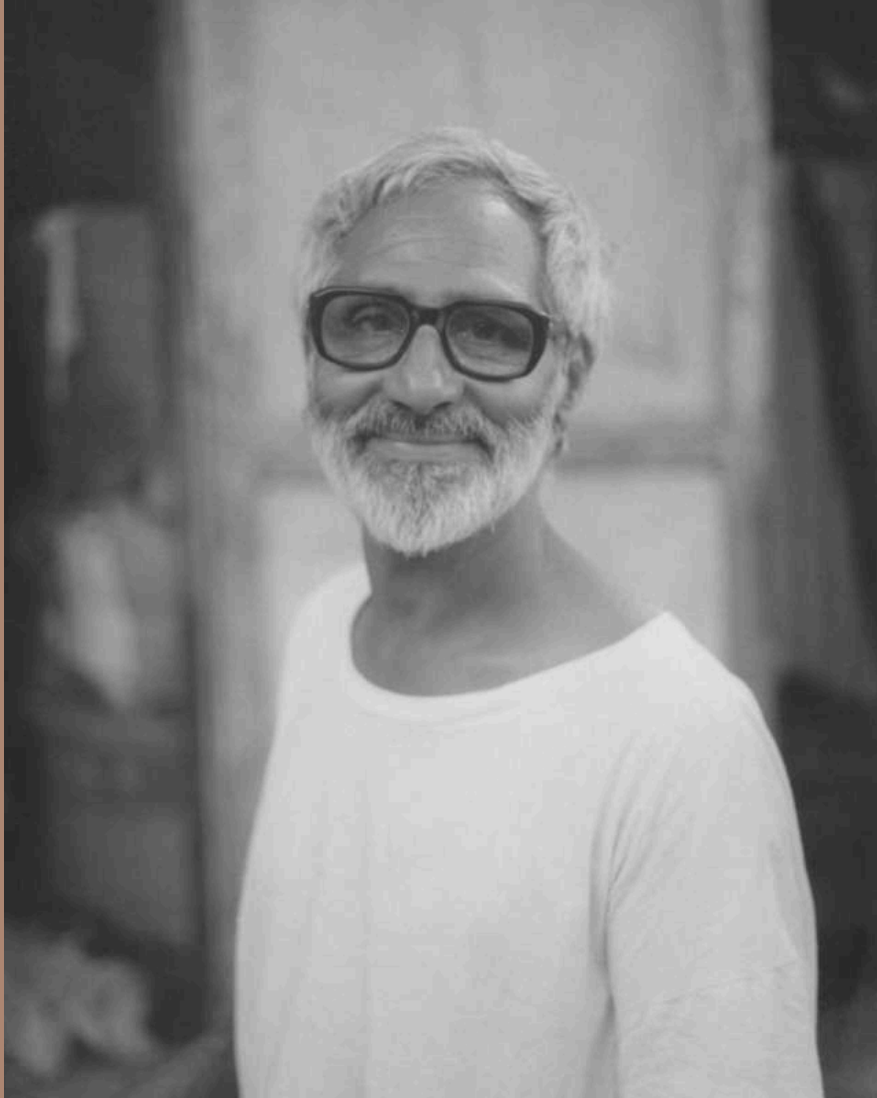


RAJEN (1931 - 2021)
A Weaver of Magic



12 September - 24 October 2024

chatterjee & lal

“Art is a journey of which you don’t know the end.” ~ Rajen

Rajendrasing Chaudhari, simply known as Rajen to most, left behind a rich tapestry of imprints from his long and prolific career spanning over 60 years. Rajen studied painting at the prestigious Sir J. J. School of Arts in the mid 1950s. Later, a job with the government’s ‘Hill Wool’ Scheme, followed by a teaching position at NID and a travelling fellowship to design institutes across Europe, led him to a unique medium of painting. Artist Rajen wove. He transformed the humble weaver’s loom into his vibrant canvas, weaving into it the multitudes of cultures that criss-crossed his horizon.

This exhibition is as much about Rajen Chaudhari, the artist-weaver, as it is about the fabric that we call life. A fabric where the quotidian and the sublime magically intertwine in tapestries pulsating with the spirit of the time.

~ Jaai Kakani



Untitled, Circa 1980s

Tapestry

34 1/4 x 23 1/2 in
87 x 59.7 cm

(with tassels)
44 1/2 x 23 1/2 in
113 x 59.7 cm

Untitled, 1990

Tapestry

87 x 61 1/2 in
221 x 156.2 cm

(with tassels)
103 3/4 x 61 1/2 in
263.5 x 156.2 cm





Untitled, mid-1990s

Tapestry

52 3/4 x 29 1/2 in
134 x 74.9 cm

(with tassels)
67 1/2 x 29 1/2 in
171.4 x 74.9 cm

Untitled, mid-1990s

Tapestry

64 1/2 x 24 1/2 in
163.8 x 62.2 cm

(with tassels)
71 1/2 x 24 1/2 in
181.6 x 62.2 cm





Untitled, late-1990s

Tapestry
Signed lower left

52 3/4 x 29 1/2 in
134 x 74.9 cm

(with tassels)
60 x 29 1/2 in
152.4 x 74.9 cm

Untitled, late-1990s

Tapestry
Signed upper left

68 x 31 1/2 in
172.7 x 80 cm

(with tassels)
82 x 31 1/2 in
208.3 x 80 cm





Untitled, 2000

Tapestry
Signed lower left

66 1/2 x 30 3/4 in
168.9 x 78.1 cm

(with tassels)
76 1/2 x 30 3/4 in
194.3 x 78.1 cm

Untitled, 2005

Tapestry
Signed lower left

90 x 22 1/2 in
228.6 x 57.1 cm

(with tassels)
96 x 22 1/2 in
243.8 x 57.1 cm





Untitled, 2005

Tapestry

66 1/2 x 35 1/4 in
168.9 x 89.5 cm

(with tassels)
82 x 35 1/4 in
208.3 x 89.5 cm

Untitled, 2010

Tapestry
Signed lower left

77 x 35 1/2 in
195.6 x 90.2 cm

(with tassels)
86 1/2 x 35 1/2 in
219.7 x 90.2 cm





Untitled, 2010

Tapestry
Signed upper left

88 1/2 x 45 in
224.8 x 114.3 cm

(with tassels)
104 x 45 in
264.2 x 114.3 cm

Untitled, 2012

Tapestry
Signed upper left

84 x 37 in
213.4 x 94 cm

(with tassels)
93 x 37 in
236.2 x 94 cm





Untitled, 2014

Tapestry
Signed lower left

79 x 50 in
200.7 x 127 cm

(with tassels)
96 1/2 x 50 in
245.1 x 127 cm

Untitled, 2015
Tapestry
Signed upper left

71 x 21 1/2 in
180.3 x 54.6 cm

(with tassels)
85 x 21 1/2 in
215.9 x 54.6 cm





Untitled, 2015

Tapestry
Signed lower left

61 x 24 in
154.9 x 61 cm

(with tassels)
77 x 24 in
195.6 x 61 cm

Untitled, 2015-2016

Tapestry
Signed lower left

53 1/4 x 28 1/2 in
135.3 x 72.4 cm

(with tassels)
63 1/2 x 28 1/2 in
161.3 x 72.4 cm





Untitled, 2015-2016

Tapestry
Signed lower left

64 x 31 1/2 in
162.6 x 80 cm

(with tassels)
77 x 35 1/2 in
195.6 x 90.2 cm

Untitled, 2019
Tapestry
Signed lower right

83 x 29 1/2 in
210.8 x 74.9 cm

(with tassels)
99 x 29 1/2 in
251.5 x 74.9 cm



Rajen Chaudhari Artist, Weaver.

A colourful journey

Rajendrasing Chaudhari, simply known as Rajen to most, and Baba to those who were close to him, passed away on March 16, 2021, at the age of 90, leaving behind a rich tapestry of imprints from his long and prolific career, spanning over 60 years. Rajen was an artist. The medium he chose to paint in though, was unique. Artist Rajen wove. He used a humble weaver's loom as his paint brush, weaving his magic into the loom, capturing and captivating a generation's imagination with a sweep of his brush and the throw of his shuttle.

Pastoral Beginnings

Rajen was born into a well-to-do farming family in Sahranpur, North India. Hard working, rooted to the soil, Rajen's family had no involvement with the arts except for some folk music sung on special occasions. Yet, from early on, art and music flowed from Rajen's heart.

At age nine, Rajen was sent to a Gurukul for schooling. For Rajen, those were some of his most enriching years. As he would narrate, "All students spun on a *charkha* every day for at least 40 minutes, and it became a ritual that we enjoyed very much. We also used to learn music; it was a beautiful time in life." Nostalgically he would continue "I used to win the spinning competition; it used to be called the *Charkha Dangal*." Spinning the *charkha*, conversing in Sanskrit, learning music, wrestling, swimming in the Ganges — this all-encompassing way of living and learning were pivotal in shaping Rajen.

Rajen completed his class 10 studies at Gurukul Kangri and then graduated with a B.A. from Agra University. But Rajen's heart was in the fine arts. On the suggestion of a close family friend he joined the Sir J. J. School of Arts in Bombay to study painting. These were the mid 1950s and India was just emerging as a nation independent from colonial rule. The burgeoning art scene in Bombay was abuzz with intellectual and critical fervour; with the contemporary and the modern brushing imaginations with the traditional, folk and cultural- reflecting the everyday pluralism of life that is India. It is against this backdrop that Rajen began his artistic training.

As Rajen would later narrate to his daughter "We artists would read novels of old masters and try to imbibe their lifestyle- going to the railway station, staying up all night there and sketching, sketching, sketching". Human anatomy and gestures were considered one of the most important to master and there would be studio sessions with nude models at the art school. But as Rajen would laughingly lament, "oh, they were often old!" Yet, it is this vigorous engagement in art school days that gave Rajen his unmistakable skill and command.

A gazetted officer at Almora

Soon after he completed art school, Rajen found a job as an artist-designer with the Uttar Pradesh State government's 'Hill Wool' Scheme. Here, Rajen decided to learn the fundamentals of weaving. He joined the Weavers' Service Centre in Banaras, and under the guidance of Mr. A.K. Das mastered the grammar of weaving. Thus began a journey that changed the way Rajen engaged with art.

The joy of teaching

At Almora, Rajen heard about a new design institute starting in Ahmedabad, the now world-renowned National Institute of Design (NID). Rajen applied for a teaching position at NID and was accepted. Later at NID, Rajen received a one year Ford foundation scholarship to study textile design at the Royal College of Arts, U.K., the Arts School of Helsinki, Finland, and the Konstfack Skolam, Stockholm, Sweden. These exchanges foundationally transformed Rajen's understanding of textile craft, changing the way he looked at the art and design of woven textiles.

Just before leaving for Europe, Rajen had met Darshini Shah, a young classical dancer at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad. Darshini's quiet grace captivated Rajen and a special bond blossomed between the two. On Rajen's return from Europe, the two got married with the blessings of their parents. Soon after marriage, with the support of his father-in-law, Rajen started his own studio, calling it the 'WeaveLab'. He quit NID as full time faculty, so as to be able to pursue his own artistic callings.

Art at heart

The 'WeaveLab' is where Rajen explored his passion for painting, weaving his magic into the conversations between warp and weft. Experimenting with the multitudes of weaves in his repertoire, Rajen's WeaveLab grew to be a treasure trove of textiles. From tapestries to pile rugs, lino screens, double-cloth weaves, Gobelin wall-hangings, triple layered dhurries, warp-based fabrics, weft-based furnishings... Rajen's technical prowess was extensive, as was the thrill of the designs that came off his loom. Rajen's fine structural understanding of the various weaving techniques from across the world allowed him to experiment freely, sometimes mixing weaves from east and west, sometimes inserting found materials like feathers, cassette tapes or even chips of clay tiles into his weaves. "My loom broke twice, but I finished it," he had once shared in an interview. Undaunted by challenges of size, scale or material, Rajen created some monumentally large tapestry curtains (60 ft x 30 ft), specially designed for auditoriums in Ahmedabad.

Distinct but without a need to adhere to a monadic stylistic language, Rajen unabashedly wove into his art the multitudes of cultures and times that marked his horizon. His subjects could vary from nudes to the divine, Kalamkari motifs to abstract compositions, or calligraphy with profound meaning to innocent frolicking animals. Whether it was a spontaneous splash of a moments brush with time, or a play with lores past that found their way into his present- Rajen's art carried the joy of the moment.

Well known among the creative circles and one among the prominent architects, interior designers, and musicians of the time, Rajen was a force to reckon with in the field of textile and tapestry art. Rajen's work has been exhibited across major cities in India and abroad, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Vadodara, Kolkata, as also overseas, in Brussels, Belgium, Denmark, Japan, U.K and U.S.A. His patrons too are spread across the globe, spanning an impressive spectrum of public institutions, professionals, and private collectors. His tapestries today adorn numerous walls across the globe. Compellingly, they speak of a thread that connects all humanity.

The fabric of life

With an infectious smile and a zest for life, Rajen continued to weave till the very last. In his last few years, Rajen suffered from Alzheimer's, but while his memory failed, he continued to weave. As his daughter Fakira tells us "He was more right-brained than left-brained, so, the artistic side of him was fine." Rajen's intense and vigorous practice left a deep imprint on all who witnessed it. His surprising sensibility of colours and innate spontaneity lent a rare richness, originality and verve to his art. He would often say that he could paint 20 paintings in a day, which in spirit he could... while spinning, weaving, dyeing, singing... one joyously flowing into the other.

Today, Rajen's legacy is being carried forward by his daughter Fakira with the help of the women at WeaveLab.

~ Jaai Kakani

Rajen (1931 - 2021)

1970 - Started WeavLab in Ahmedabad

Education

- Diploma in Painting and Mural Decoration, Sir J.J. School of Art, Bombay
- Intensive training at Indian Institute of Handloom Technology and Weavers Service Centre, Varanasi
- Royal College of Art, London
- Bachelor in Arts, Agra University

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2024 RAJEN (1931 - 2021): A Weaver of Magic, Chatterjee & Lal

1996 Painter Weaver RAJEN, ABC Art Gallery, Varanasi

1992 All India Exhibition of Art, Jaipur

- Tree of Life Exhibition, Brussels
- International Expo, Japan
- Textile Garden, Denmark
- Under Craft Art Gallery, USA
- Bird-In-The Hand, USA
- Gallery G, USA

Grants

1992 - Lalit Kala Academy, Jaipur

1990 - Lalit Kala Academy, Gujarat

Chatterjee & Lal was formed in 2003 by husband and wife team Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal. Today based in Mumbai's Colaba art district, the gallery is an important node in the city's maturing art scene. Whilst the gallery has always focused on the work of emerging and mid-career artists, more recently programming has included historical material that adds to the corpus of knowledge on twentieth century histories of art and design.

Gallery artists exhibit globally and the gallery participates in select art fairs. The directors are published authors, regularly sharing their insights on art in national and international publications.

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Gallery Timings

12 PM - 5 PM
Tuesday - Saturday
And by appointment
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