

IMPACT
design thinking and the visual arts in young india



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This is the first in a series of Chatterjee & Lal exhibitions charting design thinking in India during the 20th Century.

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This exhibition celebrates the creative promiscuity of the era. It looks at disciplines as diverse as book design, animation, advertising, industrial design, photography, textile design and painting. At the same time, a sense of collegiality functions as the bedrock from which sprang many of the collaborations evident in *IMPACT*. It may not be surprising, then, that some of the practitioners featured are seen multiple times through the trajectory of the exhibition; this is the case with K.G. Subramanyan and Haku Shah. These two luminaries take their place alongside a host of other figures working between the fields of art and design in modern India: Netly Sethna, Riten Mazumdar, Prabhakar Barwe, Mitter Bedi, and Sunil Janah. We also include the work of younger practitioners Sooni Taraporevala and Nina Sabnani.

We would like to thank all our lenders and those who helped in the research phase of the exhibition.



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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DESIGN

In the decade after independence, Nehru and his circle of advisors worked to realise a common interface between government, industry and consumer. An institute dedicated to design thinking seemed an essential component of this strategy. On the advice of Pupul Jayakar, American designers Charles and Ray Eames were invited to visit India. In 1958, having spent time travelling through the country, the couple submitted *The India Report*, a document urging the synthesis of tradition and modernity so that India could compete in world markets. Based on the suggestions made in the Eames report, and with the help of the Ford Foundation and the Sarabhai family, the government of India set up the National Institute of Industrial Design (later the National Institute of Design - NID) in Ahmedabad in 1961.

Educators, artists and design thinkers, both from inside the country and internationally, formed the founding team of NID. Dashrath Patel, Nelly Sethna, and Kumar Vyas comprised some of the nucleus of early faculty. These early years also saw leading design thinkers - such as Louis Khan,

George Nakashima and Adrian Frutiger - holding lectures and workshops.

NID was active in the crafts sector from the outset. At the same time, as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, various government projects were assigned to the institute. In subsequent decades, various collaborative projects were undertaken wherein NID became the link between academia and action groups.

In 2015, NID's Photography Design discipline began the herculean task of archiving the institute's massive wealth of material collected during its fifty-seven year history. This project involves digitising, metadata tagging, data organisation and physical reorganisation. Peripheral research has required the study of all available sources, including the extensive use of oral histories. *IMPACT* showcases four such archiving projects, undertaken by former students of NID Photography Design.

~ Chatterjee & Lal is thankful to Rishi Singhal from Photography Design at NID for his help with this text.

Unknown photographer

Graphics seminar, (L to R) Unidentified, Helena Perheentupa, H. Kumar Vyas, Mahendra C Patel 1969

From Head, Hand & Heart - H.Kumar Vyas

Image courtesy: NID Archives



Unknown photographer

Dr. Frei Otto, Pupul Jayakar and Jamshed Bhabha,
Circa 1965

From Revisiting NID's History - Visiting Consultants
Image courtesy: NID Archives



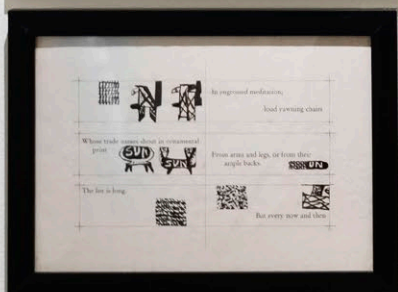
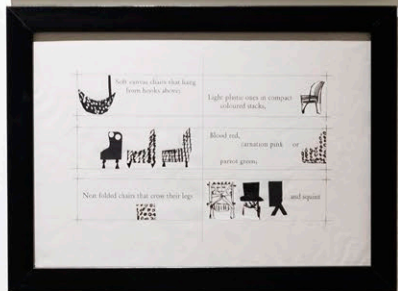
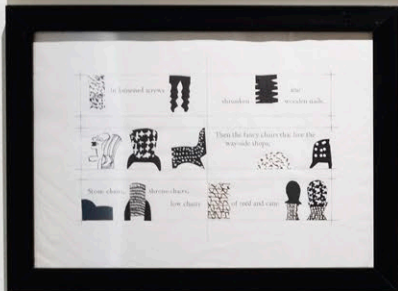
Unknown photographer

Visit of Charles Eames, (L-R) Charles Eames, Helena
Perheentupa, Manu Gajjar, H. Kumar Vyas, M.L. Bhandari
1978

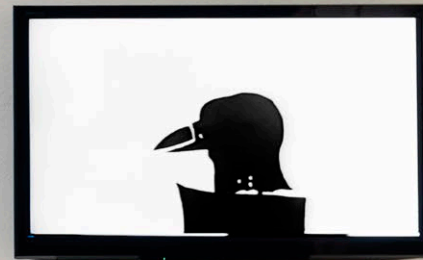
From Head, Hand & Heart - Helena Perheentupa
Image courtesy: NID Archives



Parmanand Dalwadi (b.1940)
Portrait of M.P. Ranjan
Circa 1970
From *Head, Hand & Heart - M.P. Ranjan*
Image courtesy NID Archivess



Nina Sabnani (b. 1956)
A Summer Story
1987
Single channel SD video with sound
4 mins 47 secs (looped)



K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
A Summer Story
1972

K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
Some Chairs
2003



K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
Chairs
Circa 2003
Mixed media and collage
(8 works)



Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal



K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016) for Weavers' Service Centre
Untitled
 1959 - 1961/2
 Ink on paper



Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal

WEAVERS' SERVICE CENTRE

Nehru recognised the value of the handicraft sector not only as an income generator but also as a cultural asset of young India. Among various efforts to develop the handloom sector, the government of India instituted bodies like the Indian Institute of Handloom Technology and the Handloom and Handicraft Export Promotion Corporation. Other initiatives included the Calico Museum of Textiles, set up by the Sarabhai family in Ahmedabad in 1949.

Pupul Jayakar made monumental contributions to the government's policies on Indian crafts as chairman of the All India Handloom Board. She identified the need for an all India body that would catalyse and transform the traditional design aesthetic of the weaver within a

more contemporary framework; this paved way for the establishment of the Weavers' Service Centre in 1955. Initially operating out of four centres across the country, from the outset the Weavers' Service Centre recruited artists from the fine arts, many of who had no formal textile experience. Rather than putting in place a plan for large-scale production, the idea was to allow artists to create design samples in the spirit of experimentation. Artists were hired on their ability to interact and collaborate with craftsmen and weavers, while remodelling personal design vocabularies to strengthen handloom designs. More centres came into being as the objectives began to include training of weavers, revival of languishing crafts and extending documentation support. Textile expert

Martand Singh curated a series of seven exhibitions from 1982 - 92, called Vishwakarma; these, in turn, were inspiration for the Jayakar Volumes, documenting Indian textiles, which were studied and used to commissioned within the Weavers' Service Centre.

There have been an astonishing number of artists associated with Weavers' Service Centre since its inception: Haku Shah, K.G. Subramanyan, Prabhakar Barwe, Manu Parekh, Jeram Patel, Jogen Chowdhury, Himmat Shah, Gautam Vaghela, Shona Ray, Toofan Rafai, Bhaskar Kulkarni, Amrut Patel, and Arpita Singh to name a few.



Left to right:
K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
Untitled
Circa late 1960s
Mixed media and collage on paper

K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
Untitled (Markers series)
1967/68
Marker pen on paper
(15 works)

K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
Untitled
Circa late 1960s
Mixed media and collage on paper
(2 works)



K.G. Subramanyan (1924 - 2016)
Untitled
Circa late 1960s
Mixed media and collage on paper
(2 works)

K.G. SUBRAMANYAN

K.G. Subramanyan was one of India's iconic artists and educators. He belonged to that generation looking for a collective national identity through art and indigenous design.

Born in Kerala in 1924, he was part of the Indian Independence movement during his youth. In 1944, he joined Kala Bhavan, Shantiniketan, to pursue art. He subsequently moved to Baroda to teach and he made the city home.

Subramanyan's relationship with the Weavers Service Centre began with making textile designs in 1959. As a design thinker, he was an integral part of the efforts being made to revive Indian textile design. At the New York World Fair in 1965, Subramanyan used hemp fibres and discarded

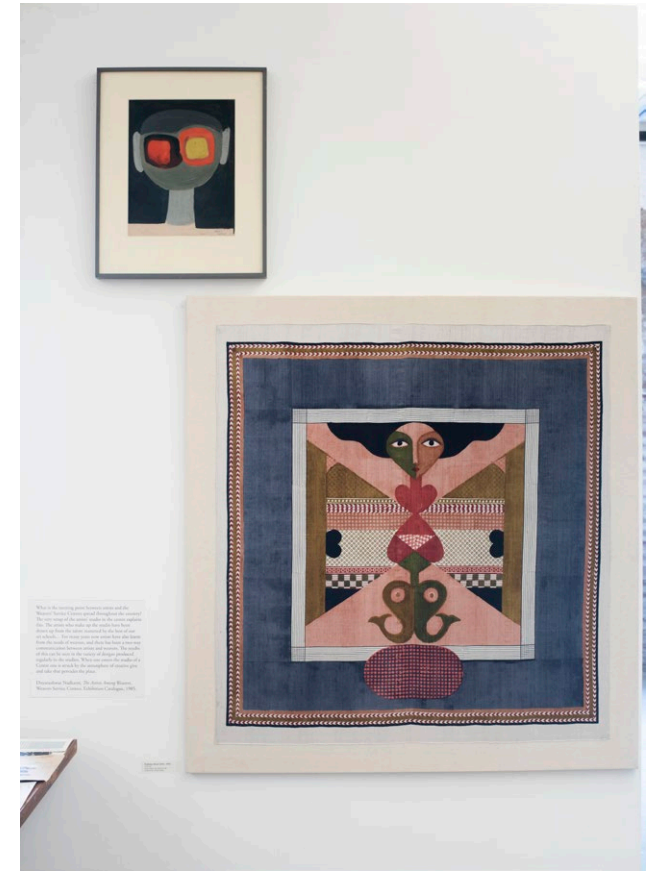
pieces of cloth to create a massive textile relief, stressing on the interdependence of art and craft in the Indian design vocabulary.

In 1966, the artist was given a Rockefeller Grant to travel to New York. This was a very productive time for Subramanyan. In addition to canvas works, he undertook a series of works on paper that have come to be retrospectively titled, *Markers*, alluding to the marker pens he used in their making. *IMPACT* includes examples of this period as well as elements from his extensive relationship with book design.

A recipient of all three Padma awards, KG Subramanyan was a true pioneer.



Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal



THE SOUVENIR SHOP

The Souvenir Shop is a curatorial object, functioning as a broken or an un-ready tool to project questions and propose porosity in exhibition making and thinking. It is presented as a volatile aggregation and mediation of indigested materials and thoughts produced by three art centres/ experiments in institution-making from 1950s to 1970s, wherein artists reflected on craft, design, indigenous motifs and techniques, creativity and utilitarian objects, and the place of modern artist within it.

The first is Group 1890's proposal for an Art Centre that exists only as a written document, the second being the Cholamandal Artists' Village in Madras and lastly the Weavers' Service Centres set up by the Handloom Board of Govt. of India. It also takes into its fold examples of interstitial spaces like the Fine Arts Fair in MS University Baroda which started in 1962, the Astitva Collective formed in 1974 that included several artists working at WSC, and the Folk and Tribal section of Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal. In

doing so, the Souvenir Shop highlights the work of artists Prabhakar Barwe, Arnawaz Vasudev and Haku Shah. Its larger iteration was part of the exhibition Hangar for the Passerby at KNMA in 2017.

Akansha Rastogi , 2018

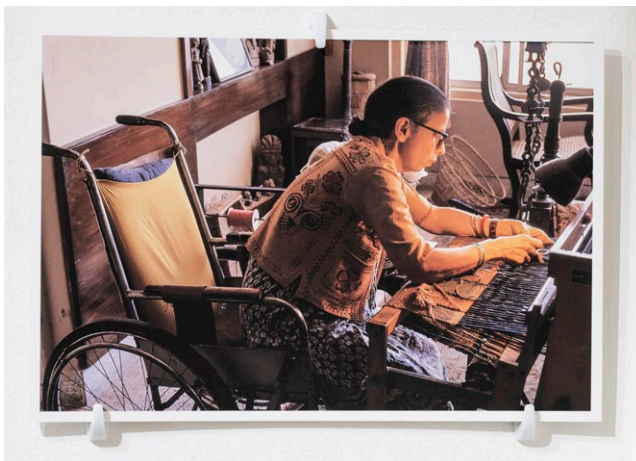


Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal



Left to right:
Nelly Sethna (d. 1992/1993)
Untitled
Tapestry
Wool and cotton mixed

Nelly Sethna (d. 1992/1993)
Untitled
Wool



Sooni Taraporevala (b. 1957)
Portrait of Nelly Sethna
1999
Digital print



Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal

RITEN MAZUMDAR

Having graduated, in 1950, with a diploma in art from Santiniketan, Mazumdar pursued a career in design. In 1957, he was taken on as a textile designer at Printex-Marimekko, in Helsinki, Finland. Having moved back to India, he was appointed as a consultant and designer for Fabindia in 1959. He was to work with Fabindia's Textiles and Floor Coverings Departments until 2000. During this long span of time, he was also a consultant to many businesses and organisations, including the famous Delhi-based furniture company, TAARU.

In an illuminating essay on Mazumdar (published in Art and Deal Magazine in May 2016), Ushmita Sahu provides a sense for his polymath creative instincts:

“Mazumdar’s practice was varied and his oeuvre ranged from paintings, sculptures, toys, small objects to textiles, murals and furniture to complete design solutions for interiors and large complexes.”

The series of paintings exhibited in IMPACT were created after Mazumdar had returned to Santiniketan in the early 1980s. K. G. Subramanyan reflected on the series in his eulogy to Mazumdar in 2006:

“Round about 1980 both of us gravitated, in our different ways, towards Santiniketan.As soon as he [Mazumdar] moved in, he set up studio and did a series of paintings in dyes on stretched silk. They were all impeccably designed clusters of colour washes and calligraphic motifs. A lot of the calligraphy was based on the initial lines of Rabindranath [Tagore]’s touching poem - Dinanta Belai.” (Quoted from a letter published as part of the Subramanyan Archives compiled by Asia Art Archive)

Sahu describes Tagore’s poem as dealing with “the angst of separation from a universal consciousness.”



Haku Shah (b. 1934) for Weavers' Service Centre
Saree
1959/60
Cotton

Haku Shah (b. 1934)
Gossip
Circa 1985
Oil on canvas



Haku Shah (b. 1934)
Votive terracottas of Gujarat
Undated
Digital photographic print

HAKU SHAH

Haku Shah (b. 1934) is a noted artist, designer and cultural anthropologist. After completing his education at MSU, Baroda, he worked at the Gandhi Ashram at Vedchhi in South Gujarat and worked as a designer for the Weavers' Service centre (1959 - 1962). Later, he joined NID in 1961 when NID was getting set up in Ahmedabad, Shah embarked on a mission of documenting the rituals, culture and way of life of non-urban communities (he

would also receive a Nehru Fellowship for this research in 70's). In 1968, he curated an exhibition called Unknown India, organised by Dr. Stella Kramrisch, at the Philadelphia museum of art. He was awarded a Rockefeller Grant. He has been the curator of the Museum for Tribal Cultures at the Gujarat Vidhyapith (University) and has also conceived and designed an art and crafts complex at Udaipur called Shilpgram.



DESIGNS FOR AIR-INDIA

The Commercial Director of the Air-India publicity department was Mr. Bobby Kooka (1912 - 1996). The Art Director was Jal Cowasji. Between them, they were responsible for the look and feel of design at the airline. The Air-India Maharaja was debuted in 1946; it

was drawn by Umesh Rao, an artist with the advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson. Over the next half century, a plethora of material was generated by the publicity department. Side by side, the airline was aggressively acquiring a first class Indian art collection, incorporating examples from across art historical periods. It was only natural, therefore, that artists were often asked to collaborate on design projects. B. Prabha and M. F. Husain are two prominent examples.



Mitter Bedi (1926 - 1985)

Workman at Godrej typewriter manufacturing plant, Vikhroli (Mumbai)

Circa 1970

Image courtesy: Mitter Bedi Collection, Godrej Archives



Mitter Bedi (1926 - 1985)

Godrej AB typewriters

Circa 1970

Image courtesy: Mitter Bedi Collection, Godrej Archives



Mitter Bedi (1926 - 1985)

Workman at manufacturing plant, Godrej locks, Vikhroli (Mumbai)

Circa 1970

Image courtesy: Mitter Bedi Collection, Godrej Archives

MITTER BEDI

The course of Bedi's legendary career as a photographer was an archetypal Bombay success story: beginning with modest commissions to photograph weddings and birthday parties in the early 1950s, he graduated swiftly to prestigious assignments from corporations like Air-India International, Lever's, and the Standard Vacuum Oil Company (later nationalised as Hindustan Petroleum). He found a sense of focussed purpose in 1959, when he met the noted American industrial photographer Arthur Darzian,

while working on an assignment for Standard Vacuum.

By the time of his death in 1985, Bedi had photographed more than 2,000 installations spanning a wide range of industries, from steel, fertilisers and textiles to paper, sugar and pharmaceuticals. His interests extended to the service and hospitality sector, and he documented many establishments of the Indian Hotels Group, Welcomgroup and the Indian Tourism Development Corporation. More fortunate than most pioneers, Bedi enjoyed renown during his lifetime, receiving two Kodak International Awards, nine

Advertising Club Awards, six Commercial Artists Guild (CAG) Awards, and the CAG's "Photographer of the Year" title for 1984. No reclusive genius, he popularised photography by writing extensively on the medium and encouraging many young enthusiasts who went on to become accomplished visual-arts professionals themselves.

~ Excerpted from a review, published in The Hindu, by Ranjit Hoskote of Mitter Bedi's exhibition at Piramal Centre for Photography as an Art Form, Mumbai, 2000"



Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal

SUNIL JANAH (1918 - 2012)

In the 1950s and 1960s, Janah documented a large number of newly built factories, especially coal mines and steel plants in east India. In his words, "In the 1950's, Jawaharlal Nehru's 'New Temples' of concrete and gleaming steel began to tower over the rice fields, transforming the countryside and the life of the people." (Quoted from the artist's statement)

M.F. HUSAIN (1915 - 2011) FURNITURE AND TOYS IN THE 1940S AND 1950S

The artist worked as a commercial artist with Fantasy, a Bombay-based furniture company, between 1941 - 1949. During this time, he developed a range of designs and publicity material for the company. Whilst at first the aesthetic was premised on Disney and other Western-oriented themes, by the mid-1940s the artist had developed a visual language marinated in the imagery of village India. This period was to have a great impact on his later work, in particular in the toys that he had manufactured from the 1950s onwards.



Install shot | Chatterjee & Lal

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