

LEARN WITH THE MASTERS: WORKSHOPS WITH ARTISAN DESIGNERS OF KUTCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Somaiya Kala Vidya, an institution of education for traditional artisans, offers workshops to the world with its graduates in textile crafts including weaving, block printing, batik, bandhani, embroidery, appliqué and patchwork. Expert traditional artisans of the desert region Kutch, India, educated in design and business, are well prepared to teach concepts as well as skills. Close interaction with these young masters provides a richly rewarding experience in understanding traditions and an unparalleled opportunity to broaden the comprehension of art, craft and design.



Claire Pratt, 2014: *"I was skeptical, but the Somaiya Kala Vidya workshops were the best part of the trip. They gave me a whole new appreciation of craft."*

BACKGROUND

One of the unique aspects of India is the persistence of a broad spectrum of distinct cohesive rural cultures. These cultures can be quickly marked by material culture: dress and traditional arts and crafts. The unique aspect, however, more than the dress and crafts themselves is the fact that such expressions emanate from a shared understanding of the world, a shared identity, and an environment in which art is integrated into daily life. Further, the arts are the product of traditional learning systems, which differ from those of formal learning with which we are familiar. Accelerated urbanization and globalization have endangered such rural lifestyles. Yet, we can gain from them while they are still intact.

Kutch is one of the richest regions for textiles in India. World renowned extra weft wool weaving, intricate natural dyed hand block printed ajrakh, the finest bandhani (shibori), distinctive batik, and a dazzling range of mirrored embroideries and appliqué are all practiced in this small, historic desert land, circumscribed by the great salt marsh Rann of Kutch and the Arabian Sea. In addition to textiles, Kutch is also home to wood, leather, pottery, and metal crafts. The pristine seacoast is home to legendary hand building of wooden dhows that sail to Africa and the Middle East. Migratory birds of many species winter in the region. And one of the most important Indus Valley sites, Dholavira, is located in Kutch, making this an ideal land for additional sightseeing.

THE INSTITUTE

Somaiya Kala Vidya, a division of K.J. Somaiya Gujarat Trust based in Adipur, is an institution of education for traditional artisans of Kutch. Its mission is to preserve and protect traditional arts, and its strengths are a deep understanding of culture and arts, and a focus on the artisan. Somaiya Kala Vidya offers design and business education for artisans of Kutch using an approach based on existing traditions, and teaches a spectrum of others about rural traditions. Founder Director Judy Frater has worked with many artisans of the region since 1993.

Somaiya Kala Vidya's Advisory Board comprises master artisans of Kutch, and the faculty includes both local and international teachers. The effectiveness of the institution is in the relevance of the education provided. Approaching education through a vital subject, the institute enables direct access to higher education and ultimately raises the capacity of artisans and the value of traditional arts. Somaiya Kala Vidya students have increased their market reach and incomes through good design. They have been honoured with awards for excellence and invitations to participate in international programs.



The impact of design education on artisans has been recognized internationally as well as locally. In 2009, the Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Service to Design Education was awarded to Founder Director Judy Frater. The medal, likened to the Nobel Prize for Design Education, is awarded through an association of UK bodies, including the Royal College of Art. In 2011, Ms. Frater also received the Crafts Council of India Sanman Award.

Somaiya Kala Vidya does not levy fees from women artisan participants, and takes a token fee from the male artisan students. Fees from the workshops contribute to the operation of the institute.

THE WORKSHOPS

Somaiya Kala Vidya, a social enterprise working with textile arts in the desert region of Kutch, India, offers workshops focusing on concept, design and techniques of textile arts of Kutch for design and textile enthusiasts. The workshops are taught by master traditional artisans who have graduated from a design program, and coordinated by Founder Director Judy Frater.



Facilities

Somaiya Kala Vidya is situated on an expansive campus outside Adipur, near the commercial center Gandhidham, in Kutch. Studios for weaving, block printing and dyeing are constructed in traditional style with stone and lime mortar, and antique wood and stone elements. These structures have revived languishing eco-friendly techniques while contributing to the beautiful, inviting atmosphere of the rural campus. Workshops may be conducted in artisans' villages. Simple, healthy Gujarati vegetarian meals are included in the workshops.

Objectives of the Workshops

Workshops include extra weft weaving on a pit loom, hand block printing, batik block printing, bandhani (shibori), and dyeing with synthetic and natural dyes. Embroidery in Rabari and Suf traditions, patchwork and appliqué can also be taught.

Participants learn age-old traditional techniques, traditional concepts of color, form and patterns, and creative evocation of artisans' experiences through their arts. This is an excellent opportunity to experience the vibrant culture of Kutch artisans. Participants will appreciate concept as well as learn exciting skills, through working with traditional artisans. By the end of the workshop they will have produced a genuine textile in the art form chosen, and have had the enriching experiencing of working directly with these fascinating artisans.





The expected outcomes are that participants will

- *learn a traditional aesthetic style
- *learn one of the traditional techniques
- *experience a traditional system of learning and expressing
- *understand traditional art as an integrated part of life that expresses a world view
- *understand traditional art as a combination of aesthetics and skills
- *gain a perspective of their own culture and subculture

Activities

Workshops can be for the duration of 1 day, 2 days, or 5 days.

Included in all are brief introductory lectures, on traditional textile arts and their cultural context, by Judy Frater. Illustrated lectures can be included. A list is available



Instructors

In all workshops, participants work with traditional artisans who have graduated from a design program-- weavers, printers and dyers, the inimitable nomadic Rabaris and other embroiderers. Profiles of instructors will be available when the dates of the workshops are set.



ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL ARTS



Weaving

Kutch weaving is practiced on a 4 treadle, fly shuttle pit loom. The specialty of the tradition is hand insertion of ornamental extra wefts, almost like embroidering. Traditional dhabla/ blankets which used interlocking or tapestry wefts were made with a hand thrown shuttle.

Block Printing

Kutch block printing is largely done with resist, so that the pattern is light on dark. Substances including gum Arabic and lime, or mud and millet flour are printed on the fabric with wooden blocks. When the fabric is immersed in the dye bath, the colour cannot penetrate the printed areas. Typical patterns are complex, using two or three blocks to create the motifs. The most traditional fabric, Ajrakh, is printed separately on the back and front. Thus, registration is a critical skill.

Batik

Batik in Kutch is a particular form of resist printing. The wax is applied with wooden blocks. Again, the patterns are light on dark. But the technique of printing is specifically swift because the wax must be applied while it is hot.

Bandhani

Bandhani, or shibori, is a tie dyed resist. The fabric is folded for double thickness, printed with a basic pattern, and tied with fine cotton string in knots along the patterns. When the fabric is immersed in dye, the dye cannot penetrate the knots and a dotted pattern results. The technique requires manual dexterity.

Natural Dyeing

Traditional Kutch textiles were dyed with natural substances, including indigo, iron acetate, madder and pomegranate rinds. Natural dyes on cotton fabrics require mordants. So the process is multi stepped and based on an understanding of chemistry.

Embroidery

Many styles of embroidery are practiced in Kutch. All employ intricate stitching techniques, and setting mirrors. Rabari work is renowned for its prolific use of mirrors of a variety of shapes, and its wide repertoire of stitches. Suf is worked from the reverse of the fabric in surface satin stitch counted on the warp and weft. Garasia Jat embroidery is a cross stitch variation also counted on the warp and weft, and using minute mirrors. Pako uses nearly the same techniques as Rabari work, but is denser with predominantly floral motifs.

Patchwork and Appliqué

Patchwork creates a fabric by stitching together squares and triangles of cloth. Appliqué creates patterns by stitching pieces of cloth upon the fabric. Both techniques are relatively easy to learn and can be used to make larger, utilitarian products.

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE AND FEES

1. Day long workshop

Examination of traditional pieces, with explanations by artisans of pattern, technique and conceptualisation.

Learn the basic techniques of the chosen craft

Design and execute a small piece.

Exhibition, sharing and wrap-up with the group

2. Two day workshop

Day 1

Examination of traditional and narrative pieces, with explanations by artisans of pattern, technique and conceptualisation.

Learn the basic techniques of the chosen craft

Experiment and innovation

Day 2

Learn basic forms and color patterns.

Design and execute a small piece.

Exhibition, sharing and wrap-up with the group

3. Five Day workshop

Day 1-

Discussion: Introduction to the crafts, history and lifestyle. With focus on when and why these crafts are practiced

Activity: Examine traditional textiles and learn basic techniques

Day 2-

Discussion: Illustrated lecture on concept and techniques.

Activity: Learning traditional and contemporary patterns and continue with techniques

Day 3-

Discussion: Film: **The Masters' Voices**- artisans discuss design in traditional textiles

Examination of examples, with focus on discovering the relevance of patterns to lifestyle.

Activity: Learn basic form and color patterns. Advanced techniques. Design the final products

Day 4-

Discussion: Illustrated lecture on motifs in cultural context

Activity: Begin to execute project.

Day 5-

Discussion: Illustrated lecture on colour and pattern in Kutch

Participants discuss what they have learned about life and art in rural Kutch.

Activity: Participants finish projects

Post workshop

Exhibition and sharing. Celebrate with artisan instructors- an afternoon of song, and craft sales.

FEES

Minimum 3 people required. Fees per person include lunch and tea as well as materials and instruction and pick up-drop off at Bhuj.

1 Day - \$ 100 per person | ₹7,500

2 Days - \$ 190 per person | ₹14,000

5 Days - \$ 450 per person | ₹33,000

Options for workshops with room and board are available on request.

Special discounts for group bookings are also available.

SOMAIYA KALA VIDYA STAFF AND ADVISORS **MANAGEMENT RESUMES**

Nishit Sangomla, Director, Somaiya Kala Vidya

- Education: B.Tech, Chemical Engineering, NIT Trichy, PGP Entrepreneurial Leadership – Ladakh
- Work experience of over three years, in the craft sector.
- formerly Program Manager for social enterprise Hatheli Sansthan, a society under the NGO Barefoot College (SWRC Tiloniya)
- Consultant for Himalayan Blooms, an NGO based out of Khetikhan, a village in the Champawat region of Uttarakhand.
- He is also a part of Team Lugu and was working with members of the Changpa tribe in Ladakh, over the last year.
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Lakha Rabari, Somaiya Kala Vidya Office Manager

- 2014-present Somaiya Kala Vidya Office Manager
- 2006-2013 Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya Office Manager
- 1991-2006-Karani Papers Mumbai-Office Manager/ Accountant
- 1988-1991-Shah Mulji Lakamsi Mumbai-Sales and Godown incharge
- 2008 Certificate in Basic Computer Operation



SOMAIYA KALA VIDYA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Ismail Mohammed Khatri - block printer, Ajrakhpur

Shamji Vishramji Vankar- weaver, Bhujodi

Gulam Hussain Umar - tie dye, Bhuj

Ali Mohammed Isha - tie dye, Bhuj

Umar Faruk - tie dye, Bhadli