

SHELLY JYOTI

INDIGO: THE BLUE GOLD

Plantation | Trade | Forced labor | Migration | Colonization



THE SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE, CHICAGO, IL

PRESENTS

SHELLY JYOTI INDIGO: THE BLUE GOLD

Plantation | Trade | Forced labor | Migration | Colonization

Curated by Laura Kina

Shelly Jyoti – Indigo: The Blue Gold

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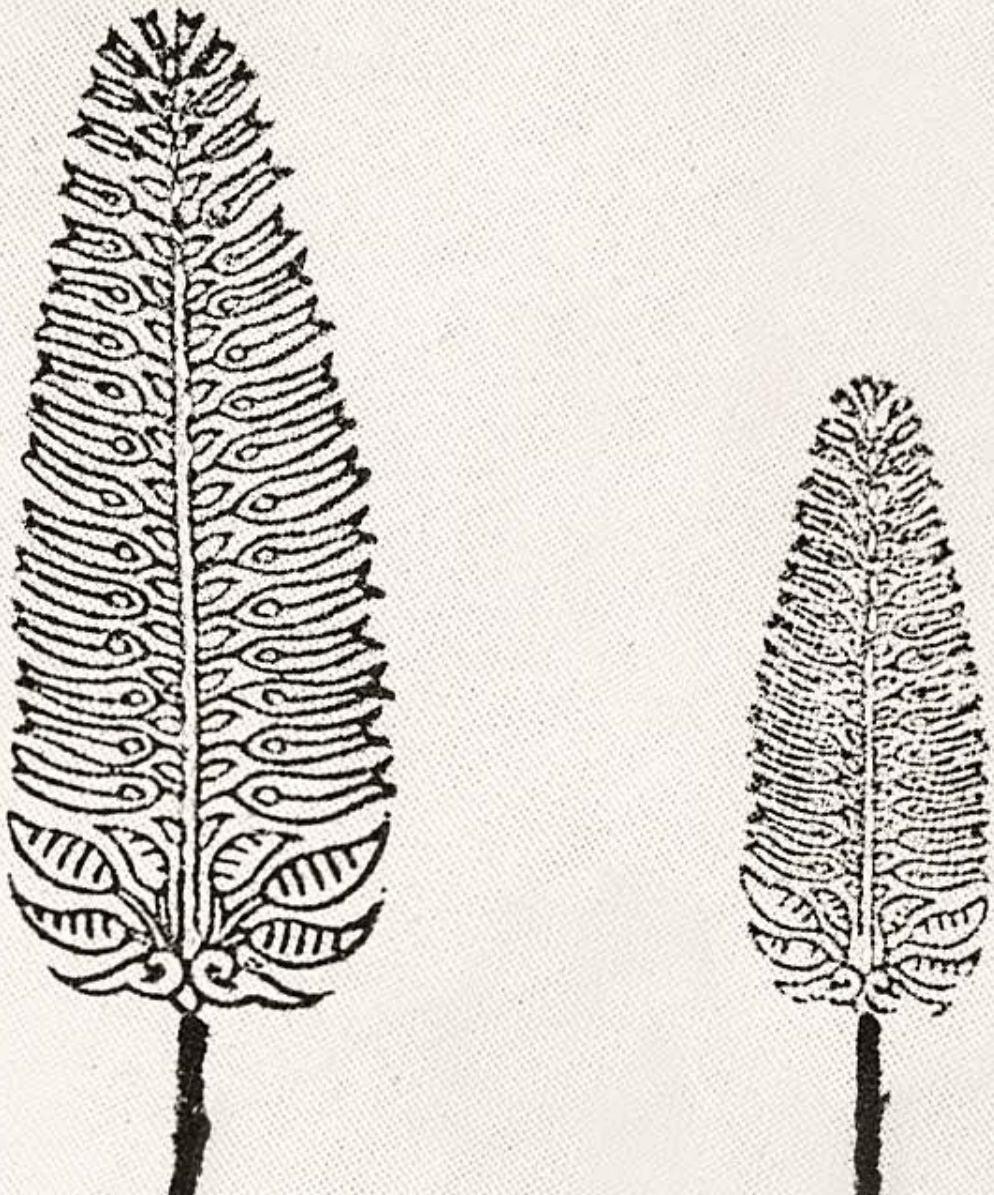
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Front Cover Image: Shelly Jyoti, *Indigo Across the Globe*, 2023

Back Cover Image: Shelly Jyoti, *The 18c Merchant Ship*, 2023



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The 18c Merchant Ships, (detail) 2023.
Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and zardozi embroidery
on khadi fabric, 187 x 16 inches.



Founder's Foreword

As the founders of South Asia Institute, we are proud to be sharing the works of Shelly Jyoti with American audiences in a mid-career retrospective titled *Indigo: The Blue Gold*. Jyoti's singular manipulation of the traditional designs of ajrakh is truly exceptional.

The South Asia Institute is a unique art and culture space in the United States that is dedicated solely to promoting the arts of the region. The mission of the South Asia Institute is to amplify South Asian American voices and explore their complexities, while staying connected with the larger human family. Our overarching goal is the establishment of a more inclusive and just world where cultural differences are celebrated, not ignored and traditions are appreciated and not misunderstood.

We aim to achieve these goals through curated exhibitions of art works by emerging and established artists, innovative programs and educational initiatives. The exhibition of Jyoti's work has greatly contributed to establishing the reputation of South Asia Institute as a unique leader for the promotion of South Asian heritage.

We congratulate the curator, Laura Kina, for her role in assembling this insightful exhibition of Jyoti's works with unusual perceptiveness and passion. Her close relationship with the artist added a distinctive dimension to the exhibition.

We thank Shelly Jyoti for trusting South Asia Institute to exhibit her complex and intricate works. It is our privilege and a welcome responsibility to share her work with the citizens of Chicago and beyond.

Afzal Ahmad, President & Founder
Shireen Ahmad, Director & Founder

East Indiaman Trading Vessel, 18th century, 2023
Resist painting and indigo dyeing on hand spun-woven khadi
fabric, 24 x 36 inches.



Curator's Introduction

Indigo Blues: Shelly Jyoti’s Transnational Collaborations

By Laura Kina,
Curator and Vincent de Paul Professor, The Art School, DePaul University

The South Asia Institute is honored to present New Delhi-based Indian contemporary artist and textile designer Shelly Jyoti’s first solo museum exhibition in the United States. **Shelly Jyoti—Indigo: The Blue Gold** is a mid-career retrospective of Jyoti’s investigation into the 18–19th century colonial trade of natural indigo dye. Known as the “King of Dyes,” “Devil’s Dye,” and “Blue Gold,” indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to 2nd millennium BCE.¹

As Barbara Hanson Forsyth’s essay explains, “*Indigofera*” originated in Africa more than 150 million years ago and then spread to India

where it was first cultivated for use as a dye.” Different varieties of true indigo (not to be confused with European woad) are grown around the world with the earliest known uses of indigo dye dating back 6,000 years ago in Peru.² Jyoti’s exhibition focuses specifically on indigo’s long history from several perspectives, including global trade, forced labor, slavery, and indentured labor, migration, and colonization in terms of India’s colonial history.

The exhibition features over forty new artworks along with a selection of Jyoti’s installations, poetry, drawing, fashion, and textiles from the past decade including her signature “Indigo

Narratives” series, which traveled extensively across the US and India from 2009–2018. Jyoti’s art uses recurring iconographic symbols including Gandhi’s spinning wheel, fish, and ships to tell the story of indigo. Since 2009, Jyoti, has been creating contemporary hand spun woven khadi textile works utilizing traditional indigo dye and ajrakh (Arabic: blue) reverse block printing techniques that trace back to ancient Indus Valley Civilization (3,300–1,300 BCE). Jyoti’s original textile art is produced in the studios of master craftsmen Juned Ismail Mohamed Khatri, son of the legendary Dr. Ismail Mohamed Khatri, in Ajrakhpur, Bhuj, Gujarat.

Shelly Jyoti is a visual artist, fashion designer, poet, and an independent curator whose work references the cultural context of Indian history. She is trained as a fashion designer from National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi, and she earned her MA in English with American Literature from Punjab University, Chandigarh.

My work focuses on Gandhi’s ideology of nation building for creating moral and peaceful societies, relevant for the 21st century, connecting the past with the present.

Shelly Jyoti and I first met in 2008, when her solo show *Beyond Mithila: Exploring the Decorative* was at Woman Made Gallery in Chicago. We went on to collaborate on a two-woman textile exhibition **Indigo** that traveled across India and the US from 2009–2013, including

Chicago’s Cultural Center in 2013. In 2022, we created a reunion work about the pandemic for **Reimagining the Global Village** curated by Nirmal Raja at Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design that featured transnational art collaborations. Curating **Indigo–The Blue Gold** is an extension of this collaborative spirit in which we invited five scholars to be in conversation with thematically distinct bodies of work in Jyoti’s retrospective. Curator JohnyML critically reviews Jyoti’s oeuvre making connections between British colonial history of extractive labor practices, US slavery, and today’s data driven global capitalism. A historical overview of indigo dye across the ages is provided by curator Barbara Hanson Forsyth as she addresses the exhibition theme of “Trade and Migration.” Professor Michelle Yee extends this exploration in her close material examination of Jyoti’s textiles around the theme of “Transnational Colonial Commodity.” Professor Lisa Trivedi asks us to consider the human cost behind indigo production in “The Mosaic Wall of Indigo” as well as the “possibility of interconnection” in “Indigo Farmers in Colonial Bengal and Gandhi’s Intervention.” Curator Sarah Fee examines Jyoti’s kaftan and embroidered jackets in “Contemporary Printed Fashion.” Finally, Jyoti herself shares the ancient history behind the process of working with ajrakh and indigo in “Indigo Plant, Color, and Dye.”

Indigo–The Blue Gold opens with Jyoti’s “Oxygenated Blue” (2018) abstract installation of water composed of tiered strips of indigo dyed khadi fabric across a range of saturations.

In the indigo dying process, fabric is dipped into a fermented vat of green colored indigo plant biomass steeped in water. When the fabric is lifted from the dye and exposed to air, the green color instantly turns blue. This process is called “Oxidation” – aeration “dimerizes the indoxyl molecules” resulting in the insoluble lightfast blue indigo dye.³ The raw materials of this installation are politically loaded with indigo symbolizing the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent and hand-spun khadi’s close association with Gandhi’s Swadeshi movement of self-reliance and the Indian freedom struggle.

Jyoti’s “An Illusion to Ajrakh: An Indigo Plant” (2009) and installation “Homage to the Farmers of Champaran 1917-18” (2008-2017) directly reference the Champaran Satyagraha rebellion of farmers who protested being forced to grow indigo cash crops for the British Raj. This was Gandhi’s first satyagraha on Indian soil following his return from South Africa. These two art works were part of Jyoti’s debut “Indigo Narratives” series and were created with ajrakh block print resist and natural indigo dye on khadi fabric. Jyoti’s use of traditional master artisans to produce her contemporary art works and her focus on histories such as the farmers



Oxygenated Blue, 2018
Strips of indigo dyed khadi fabric,
72 x 96 inches.

of Champaran are part of her commitment to “celebrating the subaltern.” These materials, techniques, concepts, and entangled South Asian histories have all come to be central to Jyoti’s practice. Jyoti accompanies this work with a spoken word poetry video “An Ode to Nil Darpan” (2023), which draws inspiration from Dinabandhu Mitra’s 1858–1859 Bengali play “Nil Darpan: The Indigo Planting Mirror” about the Indigo Revolt.

Building on “Indigo Narratives,” Jyoti’s solo shows include three distinct bodies of artwork *Salt: The Great March* (2013), *The Khadi March: Just Five Meters* (2016), and *Bound by Duty: An Idea of Swaraj and Collectiveness* (2018-19). In 2018, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts presented a retrospective of these works in *Revisiting Gandhi: The Art of Shelly Jyoti 2009-2018* in which looked at her thematic use of swaraj, khadi, salt, and indigo as symbols of Indian national identity.

The South Asia Institute exhibition includes her installation of white khadi sails in “Sea Voyage” (*Salt*) and a large-scale textile of fish swimming together in a school in “Migrated Communities” (*Bound by Duty*) both of which continue her longstanding interest in Gandhi’s teachings of the power of collective action and self-reliance. Her 2022 “Chakra” series features the recurring motif of Gandhi’s spinning wheel, and the motif of the indigo plant is explored in new works in the “Indigo Plant, Color, and Dye” section of this exhibition.

Jyoti has created nine new large-scale textiles around the theme of “Transnational Global

Commodity” that bring together images of British sailing vessels embroidered with gold thread, with abstracted trade routes, circles symbolic of Earth’s seven continents, and ajrakh block resist pattern printing on indigo dyed khadi to look at the history of 18-19th century indigo trade and colonization of India. These works were created using 300-400-year-old carved wooden pattern blocks from Gujarat—one, which is similar to a 500-year-old Kutch-made block fragment excavated Egypt in Fustat, the former capital and Cairo’s first Islamic settlement.⁴

In Jyoti’s “Mosaic Wall of Indigo” works, this link is made overt through her subtitle “Red, White, and Black Make Blue” quoting Andrea Feeser’s book about indigo’s history of slave labor in colonial South Carolina⁵ The mosaic works play with the forms of ship mast flags, geometric abstraction and floral prints that riff off of the ajrakh tradition and modernist abstraction, along with a color palette that recalls the Union Jack and US flags. Her use of the centralized circle motif in these works invoke time, circulation, and labor as they are simultaneously a moon, sun, globe, spinning wheel, compass, vortexes of energy, and even a coronavirus.

Jyoti is a prolific multimedia textile artist whose singular focus takes on wildly divergent forms. To highlight her origins as a fashion designer, we selected samples of her 2016 structured indigo dyed jackets that are hand embroidered with shisha mirror-work characteristic of the Gujarat region that Jyoti called home for fourteen years. They are shown alongside her new kaftan series

that in turn relate to her new large-scale textile wall works blurring the lines between traditional and contemporary art, fashion, and craft.

This exhibition highlights the Indian subcontinent’s rich textile tradition of ajarkh, indigo, and embroidered needlework and asks us to think about the global history of the indigo trade that involved forced cultivation, exploitative trading terms, colonial oppression, indentured labor migration, and slavery. In an interview

with the South Asia Institute to prepare for this exhibition, Jyoti shared that indigo continues to have “a deep resonance with modern India’s post-colonial identity because of its ties to India’s colonial domination and her emergence from that experience as a growing global economic power. A large part of the story I want to tell is about traditional textile arts and the ways that they continue to serve as a means of cultural expression, resistance, and reconstitution.”⁶

Exhibition Essays

JohnnyML & Barbara Hanson Forsyth

¹ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans* (London: British Museum Press, 1998, 2006, 2011), 18.

² Jeffrey C. Splitstoser et al., “Early pre-Hispanic use of indigo blue in Peru.” *Science Advances*, 2 e1501623 (2016) DOI:10.1126/sciadv.1501623.

³ Lopa Pattanaik, Satya Narayan Naik, P. Hariprasad, Susant Kumar Padhi, “Influence of Various Oxidation Parameter(s) for Natural Indigo Dye Formation from *Indigofera Tinctoria* L. Biomass,” *Environmental*

Challenges, 4, no. 100157 (August 2021): 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envc.2021.100157>.

⁴ Mattiebelle Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World: Technique and Trade in Early Indian Dyed Cotton Textiles*. Washington D.C.: Textile Museum, 1982), 56.

⁵ Andrea Feeser, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

⁶ Email to the South Asia Institute, May 10, 2023.



Centering the Margins: Textile Art of Shelly Jyoti

by JohnnyML, Indian art historian, curator and writer

In summer, Gurugram, one of the richest suburbs in India’s capital city, Delhi, looks like a film set erected for the Star Wars franchise. The real estate boom remains unabated like the tropical summer heat. The curvaceous glassy exteriors of the buildings glimmer as they were the sweating backs of enslaved pirates pulling the oars of a ship. Suddenly from nowhere history falls into the vision with a thud. Slaves! In the 18thC–19thC, they were the engines of globalization; they have been always there in the vicinity of development, invisible like phantoms. The word indigo recalls the history of US slavery, a different version of it from the East India Indigo Revolt, which had the seeds of a rebellion that changed the world.

Gurugram is the place where artist Shelly Jyoti lives. In the comfort of her spacious art studio, she shows the ajrakh works that she has been creating for the last few years which would be exhibited in the *Indigo: The Blue Gold* in Chicago. She takes out the works one by one that are neatly folded and kept, and her

very act of displaying the works for critical perusal is performative; a performance which is mundane and accentuated alike. One cannot handle textile, even if it is done, shown, and purchased for everyday use, without some kind of performance involved in it. The stacks of the works, the ajrakh printed clothes with semiotically loaded images and symbols, become annals of a history book, which Jyoti has been trying to write and interpret all these years.

Between textile art, something that Jyoti keeps contesting in her self-positioning as an artist, and the history of the land, Jyoti needed a connection to be established so that aesthetics of its making wouldn’t fall into the gap. Ajrakh printing technique, which has been around since the Indus Valley Civilization , is reclaimed by Jyoti from its marginal state, a cottage based practice limited to a niche audience that faces gradual dwindling of patronage therefore visibility in the national discourse of aesthetical as well as functional

art. Redeeming a marginalized art form from its complex causations and attributing it with an added historical and aesthetic value is a politico-economic intervention and Jyoti does it with diligence and elan.

Gandhi, the historical figure who emblemized world peace and India’s struggle for political independence had his political initiation in India after his prolonged stay in South Africa, through the strike of the indigo farmers in Champaran, the Northwestern part of Bihar, a north Indian state. Champaran became a point of departure for Jyoti in her early project titled *Indigo Narratives (2009)*. History of slavery and the embedded aspirations for liberation through the figure of Gandhi and the number of faceless, nameless, and formless farmers found form and voice in Jyoti’s narratives. In the projects that followed Jyoti used ajrakh and indigo as mediums and methods, history and aesthetics objectified and made it a part of the conceptual discourse.

As her involvement with the histories of ajrakh, indigo, and Gandhian philosophy became deeper and more intense, Jyoti’s aesthetic dialogues started taking different trajectories where the performative act of making art got supplemented by poetry performances. A graduate in English literature before transforming herself into a full time artist who uses textiles as her major medium of expression, Jyoti supplements images and installations with words that function as extensions of the critical utterances. It is in the transitory spaces of visual expression and verbal utterance that Jyoti finds the need for “installing

the ideas” that in terms of visual art could be called “installations” but for the artist they are ideas pushed into the space where the viewers could be surrounded by visuals, tactile forms, and verbal utterances. This is a sort of embracement of the object experience with the nuances of history through various forms of expressions.

Jyoti found her true resonance in Gandhian principles such as “Swaraj” and “Swadharma,” which could be roughly translated as “Self Rule” and “Sticking to Ethical Practice” and sought ways to express the same using ajrakh and indigo as her mediums. Collaborating with the traditional practitioners of ajrakh dyeing, she developed an ensemble of images and emblems that kept weaving not only the said Gandhian principles but also the nuances of colonial history and the kinds of suffering that the subjects had to undergo. Jyoti as an artist does not forward an accusatory critique against the colonial past, instead she sticks to the idea of flagging out the issues that could be panned out to any juncture of history where the core ideas of colonial system could function without inflicting direct pain to the subjects.

Neo-colonialism is a vaporous one, spreading out everywhere causing exciting auditory and olfactory sensations, and leading the subjects to an enchanted trail to the cliff of destruction. The pied piper act of leading the innocent to unfathomable and inescapable chasms is what the neo-colonial forces do to human beings all over the world. Jyoti’s works open this fact from various angles and entry points but only

those who have a sense of history could unspool such a complicated historical fact from equally enticing and intricate images that have historical validation of over four thousand years, unassumingly passed through times with elegance and dignity.

Images of ships play a pivotal role in the works of Jyoti because it reminds one of the early forays of human beings in establishing a global platform of commercial exchange. One

cannot say for sure whether it was wanderlust that goaded men to set out for expeditions or their innate need to conquer other parts of the world. Whatever the case may be, they were all prodded by curiosity aroused by hunger and territorial aggression. Expeditions, first on foot, then on rafts and later in wind driven ships resulted to the idea of conquering and subjection, which eventually gave birth to the abominable practice called slavery and slave trade. A thing of curiosity enhanced by scientific



Indigo Across the Continents, 2023 (detail)

Diptych, ajrakh printing, dyeing, and zardozi embroidery on khadi fabric, 105 x 30 inches.

and technological advancement slowly turned into human subjection, a historical irony. This irony is ironically emphasized by Jyoti through the image of a ship woven by golden threads. History must be written in golden threads!

The title of the show “the Blue Gold” has a ring of mythology. Gold, a metal that had once been discarded as a useless material for its lack of hardness and strength found its way into the commercial imagination of the states and people through its elevation as a mythological element that contained value of all the values. The metaphorical and symbolic values attributed to gold is such that it became the primordial divine egg from which the world emerged, Hiranyagarbha. Once drawn into the commercial parlance of value transactions, it became the fundamental bond and surety, and its natural sheen became more glistening and enticing. All the wars were fought not only for the territories but also for the reserve gold of the states. Gold became the stand in word for greed, avarice, and ruthlessness because it contained all the transactional values of the world.

There is no wonder why indigo was called “blue gold.” In a way it is connected to the first sin in the Biblical sense. When the forbidden fruit was tasted by the woman and man, they became

aware of their nakedness. The story of clothing starts from that very incident of tasting a fruit. When the world economy was based on factory produced clothing, indigo became a gold as it was the primary dyeing agent of the clothes. All the human beings on the face of the earth need clothes on their bodies. Clothing has remained the data of the world all the time because DATA is the new gold. With the arrival of new technologies and new dyeing agents, indigo might have lost its hold over the clothing industry. But like gold, indigo has gained a symbolic value, a value of struggle, forbearance, and independence. Can the introduction of ajrakh and indigo into the dominant practice of contemporary art redeem it from its marginal position? Can indigo as an idea bring back the historical nuances of human struggle and fight against slavery?

Shelly Jyoti is not a sloganeer, but she has a vision and like a true champion of a cause that finds few supporters in the field, she is hopeful that one day ajrakh and indigo could exemplify history of art and politics. Blue Gold reaching the museum itself is not a small step.

~ JohnnyML

Summer, New Delhi, 2023

From Fascination to Exploitation:
A Brief History of Humanity’s Indigo Obsession

by Barbara Hanson Forsyth, independent curator, appraiser, and co-author of forthcoming publication (2024), *Blue Gold: The Art and Science of Indigo* for Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA.

No one is entirely sure who first discovered indigo and how. In fact, it appears that many civilizations discovered it independently; a staggering variety of plants produce it worldwide and it grows on all of earth’s continents except Antarctica. Preeminent scholar Jenny Balfour-Paul speculates that some damaged indigo leaves got soaked with stale urine or ash left over from a wood fire and colored something blue.⁷ It’s possible that humans used indigo before there was anything close to civilization, but the date of its first use will probably remain a mystery. What is known is that the origins of indigo feature in numerous ancient mythologies, a testament to its magical nature. While it’s hard to imagine in our 21st century technicolor world, blue is rare in the natural world beyond the sky and ocean, and therefore had a unique value and power for humankind for millennia.

Indigo has a dark colonial past of extraction and exploitation, such as sugar, tobacco, coffee, and chocolate, but evidence of indigo trading goes back much earlier than these other global commodities. Classical authors,

such as the Roman architect Vitruvius, mention indigo pigment imported from India that was considered a luxury item. In the first century CE, Pliny the Elder references it as a plant material from “Indian reeds.” From the 7th century CE onwards, indigo and textiles dyed with it were being traded on a large scale across the Silk Routes by camel caravans and by sea, and largely exchanged at the many markets and ports of the Near and Middle East, thereby connecting indigo and dyed textiles from India and the Far East to buyers from the Near East and Mediterranean.⁸ Ajrakh cloth has been produced and traded since at least the early medieval period.⁹ While best known as a colorant, indigo has many alternative uses such as bodily adornment including tattoos, hair dye, a skin protectant, and many other cosmetic and medicinal uses worldwide.

Since indigo is colorfast, surviving ancient textiles sometimes retain their blue color after other colors have faded, but the record of surviving textiles is uneven at best. The oldest examples of indigo come from regions where



Sea Voyage, 2013
50 pieces of constructed sails from khadi fabric, cotton threads.

various conditions ranging from a dry climate to more elaborate burial traditions enabled their survival, whereas textiles from more tropical areas are much less likely to endure. For example, there is archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley site of Mohenjo Daro that suggests Indian textile technologies were advanced by the second millennium BCE, so it is likely that indigo production was happening

there at that time, too. However, the humid climate of the region is not conducive to textile preservation, therefore evidence of indigo’s use before the medieval period in India is based on written sources.¹⁰ Similarly, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia have been working with indigo for millennia, perhaps as early as the Zhou Dynasty (1050–221 BCE) according to early texts, but there is also extant textile evidence

from Han Dynasty (206 BCE–CE 220) tombs.¹¹ Furthermore, there is evidence that *Indigofera* originated in Africa more than 150 million years ago and then spread to India where it was first cultivated for use as a dye. Neolithic African cave paintings show clear use of textiles for clothing and accessories, but whether early African textiles incorporated indigo dye remains unknown, again due to the tropical conditions of much of the continent. The earliest examples of West African indigo-dyed textiles date to the late 8th century and were excavated from a burial site in the Republic of Niger. Later examples from Mali and Benin City, from the 11th and 13th centuries respectively, reveal highly skilled textile knowledge.¹² In 2016, archaeological research identified traces of a blue pigment on 6,000-year-old cotton at the ancient Peruvian site of Huaca Prieta. The pigment was analyzed and confirmed as an indigoid dye, making the earliest known use of indigo about 1,500 years earlier than previously thought. This discovery also re-centered indigo’s historical narrative to include the scientific and technological accomplishments of the ancient people in the Americas.¹³

Textiles in general and indigo in particular were prized possessions that were often mended, reused, and passed down from generation to generation. The immense labor required to cultivate and produce it made it an expensive prestige item, associated with royalty and power, while its durability and colorfastness made it a practical dye for working peoples’ clothing and later, military uniforms. Hence,

by the early modern era, indigo was in great demand and competition for it was fierce.

The trade of indigo and other commodities expanded greatly after 1492, when European explorers opened up new routes and ushered in an era of aggressive colonization. The Dutch and English East India companies imported massive amounts of indigo to Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Shelly Jyoti’s “Sea Voyage”, a large installation comprising 50 pieces of constructed sails made of khadi fabric, reimagines the large vessels that carried indigo from India to Europe. Journeys by sea were inherently perilous, with ships highly susceptible to loss through wrecks or pirating.

The Dutch and English soon faced competition from the Spanish and French, who went on to colonize the Americas and the Caribbean and cultivated both native American *Indigofera* species as well as introduced some Asian indigo varieties. By the 18th century, Europe was hooked on indigo, with the largest cargoes coming from the Caribbean as well as English colonies in North America.¹⁴ The expansion of indigo production in these areas resulted in large plantations. Producing indigo on a grand scale required massive amounts of labor—for every five acres of indigo, four laborers were required—providing a major impetus for the African slave trade.¹⁵ Indigo dyestuff and indigo-dyed textiles were directly traded for slaves, and indigo plantations were often “starter” plantations used to quickly raise capital for more land to grow other valuable commodities such as

cotton or sugar, and more enslaved labor. Indigo production in Britain’s southern American colonies, such as South Carolina, was relatively short lived. It was essentially an opportunity for Britain to meet increased demand at lower cost, to fill war-fueled shortages, to compete with the French and Spanish. South Carolina indigo had an uneven reputation for quality compared to other that coming from French and Spanish colonies, partly because the terrain was not ideal for its growth, though its very inferiority was also an asset because it was cheaper and perfect for dyeing things for the mass market.¹⁶ By the time of the American Revolution, production there had dropped off dramatically and Britain returned to India to meet its insatiable demand for the dye.

Between 1779 and 1802, the East India company set out to control indigo production in India and

compete with indigo from the Caribbean. Jyoti’s “East Indiaman Trading Vessel, 18th Century” speaks to the imperial power and exploitation that these ships represent. By the 19th century, Bengal and Bihar became the main source of indigo supplying the textile industries of the Industrial Revolution, such as military uniforms. While peasant laborers were not enslaved, they were effectively treated as they were, as they were often abused and forced to grow indigo rather than rice and pulses they needed for food. Fortunes were made and lost on Indian indigo plantations over the course of the 18th century, depending on demand for the product, yields (usually a result of weather), and political tensions, yet India’s plantations remained dominant until a German chemist named Adolf von Baeyer changed everything by working out the basic chemical structure for indigo.¹⁷

⁷ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans* (London: British Museum Press, 1998, 2006, 2011), 4.

⁸Ibid., 23, 27

⁹Ibid., 157.

¹⁰Ibid., 18.

¹¹Dominique Cardon, *Natural Dyes: Sources, Tradition, Technology and Science* (London: Archetype Publications, Ltd., 2007), 385.

¹²Lori and Kay Triplett. *Indigo Quilts* (Concord, CA: C&T Publishing, 2015), 7-8, 10.

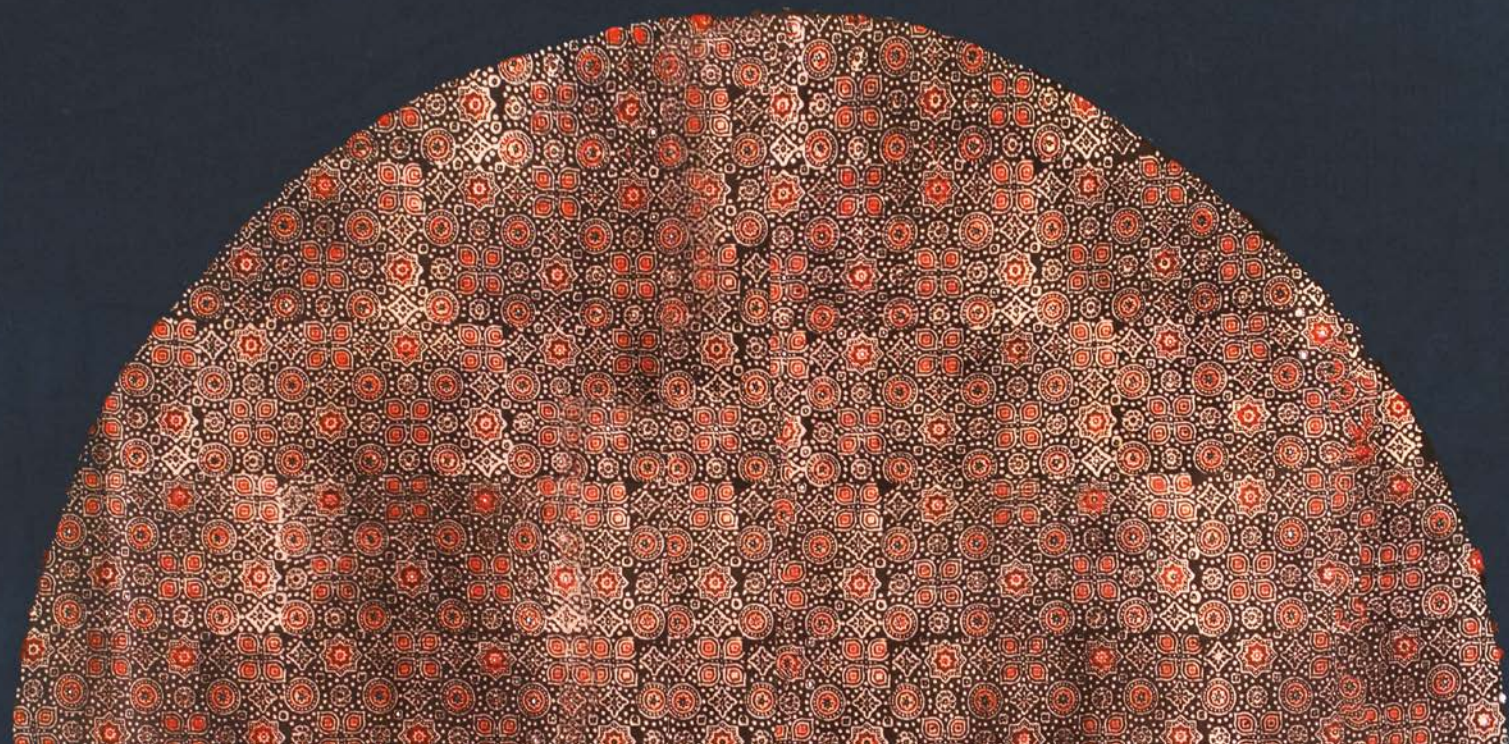
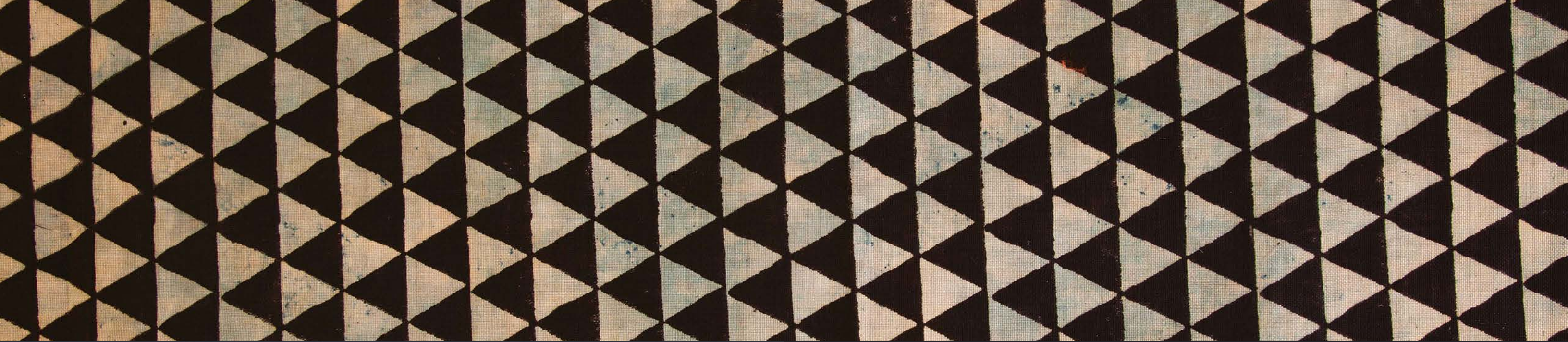
¹³Aaron Sidder, “Earliest Evidence of Indigo Dye Found at Ancient Peruvian Burial Site,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 15, 2016.

¹⁴Cardon, 365-66.

¹⁵Balfour-Paul, 60.

¹⁶Feeser, 21.

¹⁷Balfour-Paul, 70-73, 82.



2023
Indigo as a Transnational Colonial Commodity

Transnational Colonial Commodity

by Michelle Yee, Assistant Professor of Global Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Throughout Shelly Jyoti's mid-career retrospective, the materiality of her objects —the fabric, its dyes, and their complex yet familiar patterns —beckon to centuries of knowledge and many hands that are involved in their production. Further, the main themes printed on her work highlight iconographic metaphors: schools of fish, merchant ships, and spinning wheels, each highlighting the artist's negotiation of, ultimately, the role of indigo - and by extension, India - in larger transnational narratives. Indigo, the plant and the dye that it produces, was highly sought after—a desire that led to the large-scale export (and taking) of not only the plant and the dye, but the human bodies that held the knowledge to cultivate, produce, and utilize the dye in textiles and fabrics across the world. Unsurprisingly, Jyoti's work, as Sarah Fee explains in her essay in this catalog, reminds us that indigo was mainly consumed through dress and fashion

In this thematic section, however, Jyoti has expanded her new 2023 textiles beyond the human scale. Here, indigo is used on a magnificent scale, a bleeding darkness in stark contrast to the billowing merchant ships, stitched in gold thread floating along waves in, for example, Jyoti's "Indigo Trade Across the Continents," or sitting at the center of a continent, framed by an abstract landmass in "Indigo Across the Globe." Indeed, such iconography gestures to the role of the 18th century merchant ship - a symbol in its own right in illustrating the torrid voyages of Europeans seeking spices, dyes, and other resources around the globe. Similarly, in Jyoti's panels, it gestures to the journeys indigo itself took. Yet, Jyoti's decision to emblazon such ships in shining gold on massive fabric panels beyond the scale of the human body,



Indigo Across the Globe, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing and pure gold
zardozi embroidery on khadi fabric,
67 x 66.5 inches.

reveals a more complex approach to the histories of transnationalism.

Jyoti named this section of her exhibition, “*Transnational Colonial Commodity*,” and certainly, the ships, the voyages upon the oceans, and the encounters with Jyoti’s abstracted continents gesture to the undeniable and inevitable transnational collisions that this highly-desired commodity caused. Yet, Jyoti’s treatment of the merchant ships is nuanced. The golden glorification of the ships reflect a complex relationship between India and the colonial past, one that is not easily dismissed in postcolonial critique. They remind of India’s pivotal and central role in the complex histories of transnational encounters. In so doing, they function as a reclamation of the narratives of movements and circuits. Her works return the ships and the transnational collisions of colonial projects back to India — a modern nation-state that continues to grapple with this complex history.

In these works, the cosmopolitan significance of indigo point to India as the originator not only of the indigo dye itself, but also of the Indian ports from which those ships departed, the production of the crop, the knowledge, the traditions, and the creativity – creative traditions and cultural knowledge that have been carried

on for generations all the way to the present day as exemplified by Jyoti’s works on the wall in this exhibition made by the hands of skilled Indian craftsmen who continue to be the best in the world. Indeed, it was while doing research in the port city of Kochi that Jyoti noticed the prevalence of merchant ship vessel images decorating her hotel room harkening back to an 18th century that witnessed the movement – oftentimes forced – of Indian people to serve in Indigo production around the world.

Similarly, in Jyoti’s large-scale tapestries, these ships are glorified. They are rendered visually in the shining gold thread, manifesting the gold of the “blue gold” that indigo was called. Here, the ships shimmer in all their glory on tapestries of sublime scale. The tapestries themselves utilize culturally-significant ajrakh printing and zardozi embroidery. Both techniques hearken from different cultures across multiple continents – once again conceding that the transnational is also local depending on context. Like medieval tapestries, these larger-than-life panels tell stories. They reveal that materials, techniques, and craftsmanship are always inherently transnational. And yet, in Jyoti’s work, they also seek to re-center India and to glorify her histories, traditions, skillsets, materials, and commodities within transnational colonial narratives.



Indigo Across the Continents, 2023
Diptych, ajrakh printing, dyeing, and
zardozi embroidery on khadi fabric,
84 x 33.5 inches. 105 x 30 inches.



The 18c Merchant Ship, 2023
Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needle
work on khadi fabric, 90 x 102 inches.



The 18c Merchant Ship, 2023
Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needle
work on khadi fabric, 90 x 102 inches.



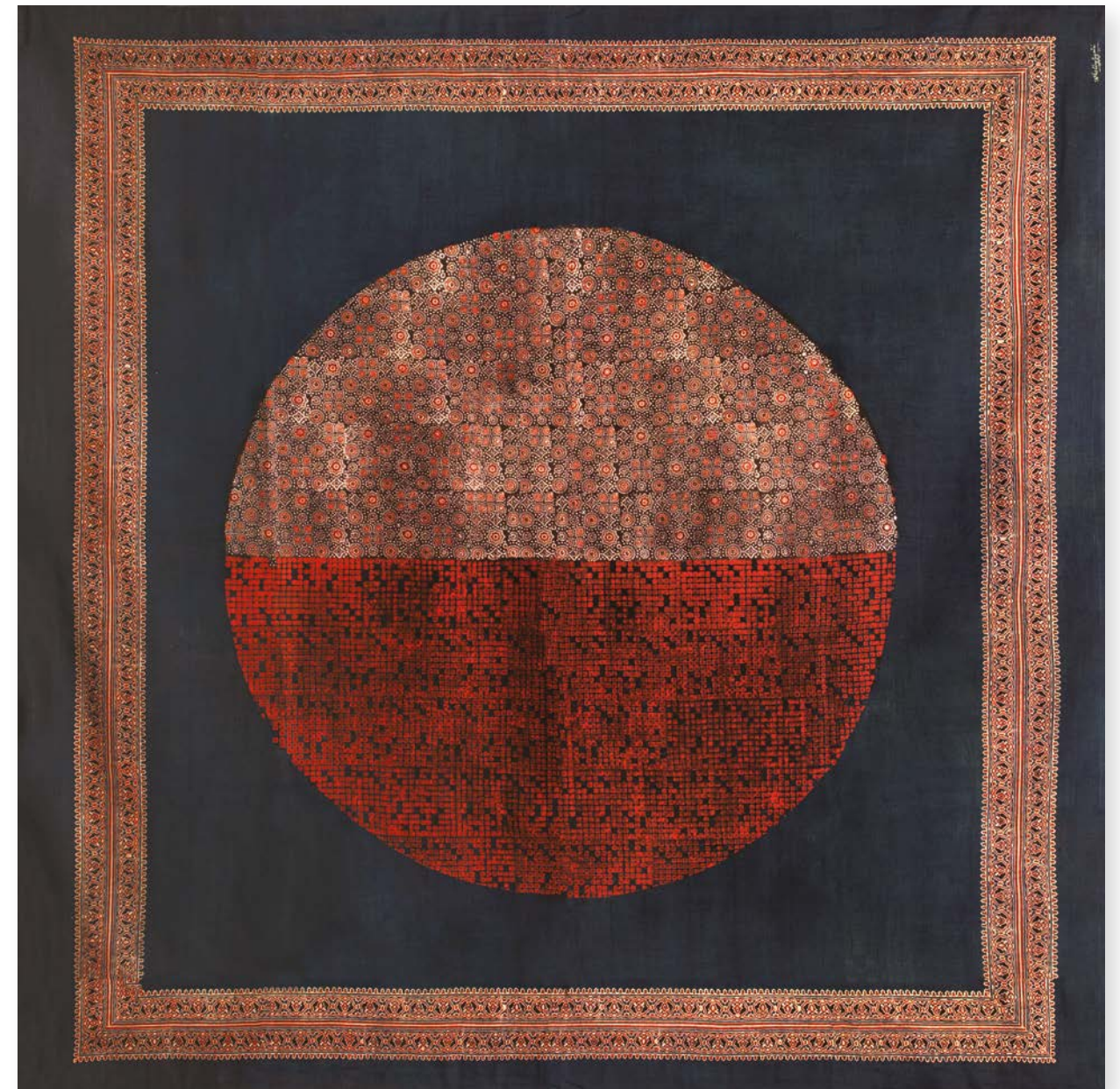


Indigo Trade Routes, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric, 67 x 67 inches.

Indigo Territorial Domination, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric, 68 x 58 inches.



Indigo Trade Influences, 2023
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needle
 work on khadi fabric, 66 x 64.5 inches.



Urbanization of Indigo Dye, 2023
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and mirror-work
 on khadi fabric, 64 x 67.5 inches.



World Trade: Cartography of Trade Route
(diptych), 2023 (detail)
53.5 x 57.5 inches.

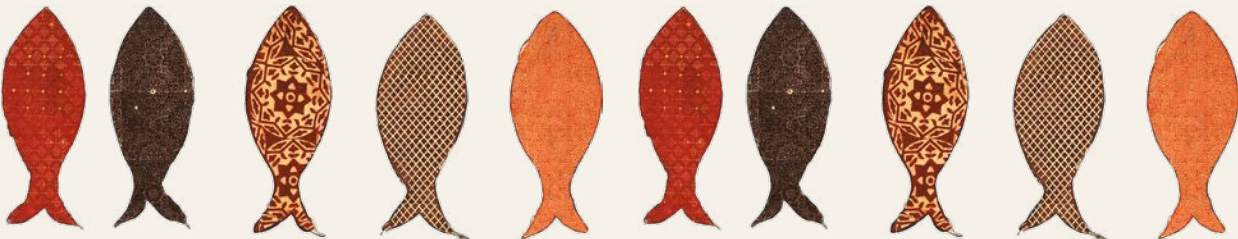
2013–2023
Trade and Migration

Indigo and Sustainability

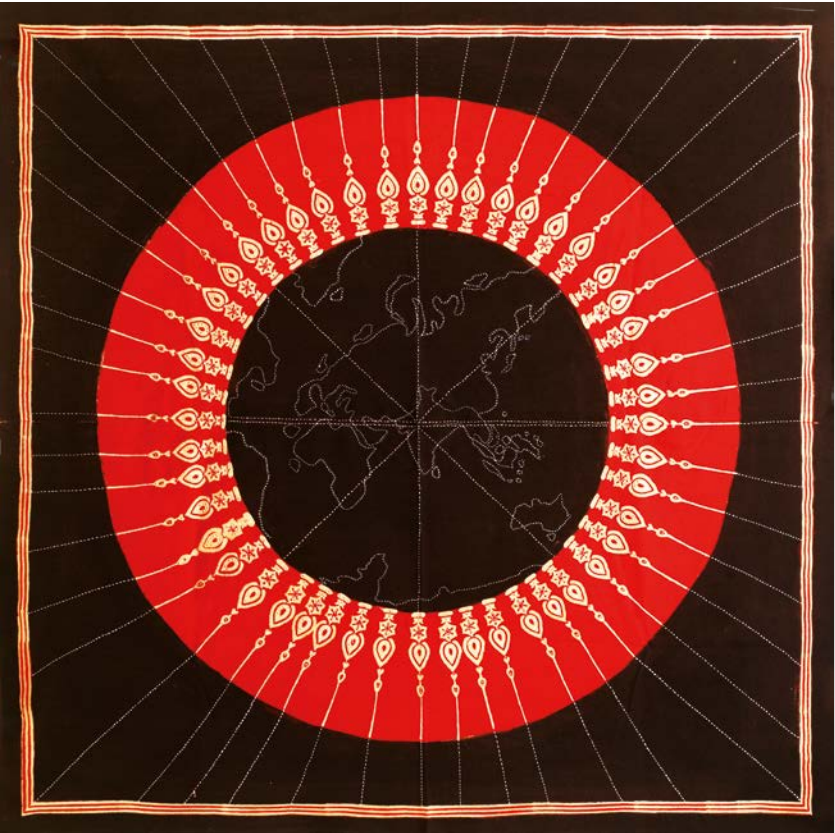
by Barbara Hanson Forsyth, independent curator, appraiser, and co-author of forthcoming publication (2024), *Blue Gold: The Art and Science of Indigo* for Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA.

The discovery and commercialization of synthetic indigo, which entered the market in 1897, changed indigo production dramatically. Specifically, indigo plantations disappeared quickly once the same deep color could be achieved through a chemical process rather than days of exacting labor. Synthetic indigo is molecularly identical to that from plant sources and virtually indistinguishable from the natural variety, although many indigo practitioners and connoisseurs would beg to differ. While synthetic indigo eliminated the crushing human labor traditionally required to process the dye, it has been an environmental catastrophe. Denim, for instance, is one of the world’s most polluting industries.

Today, given the continued appetite for indigo and its endless possibilities for design and human creativity, the challenge is how to make it sustainable. The resurgence in the natural dye is one path. Refining the processing of synthetic indigo to use less water is another. Finding a path forward that is both equitable and less toxic for the environment will require humanity to work together and find solutions. Shelly Jyoti’s, "Migrated Communities", can serve as inspiration. According to the artist, her idea came from “a micro-organism school of fish where trillions collaborate together undersea, displacing water to create ocean currents and waves.” In this work, she “examine[s] the idea of ‘collective impact’ or ‘collectiveness’ in societies that are evolved ethically and spiritually, to bring social changes for better alternate societies.”



Caribbean Islands: Cartography of Trade Route (diptych), 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric, 53.5 x 57.5 inches.



World Trade: Cartography of Trade Route (diptych), 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric, 53.5 x 57.5 inches.



Migrated Communities, 2019
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi
 fabric, 72 x 220 inches.



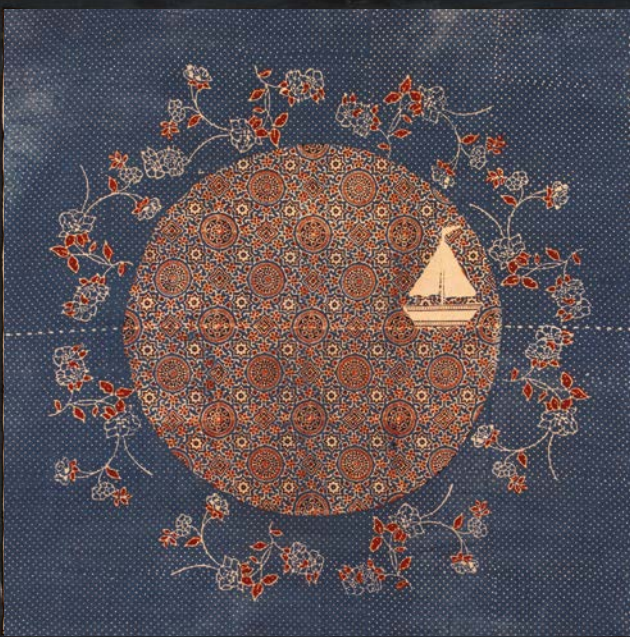
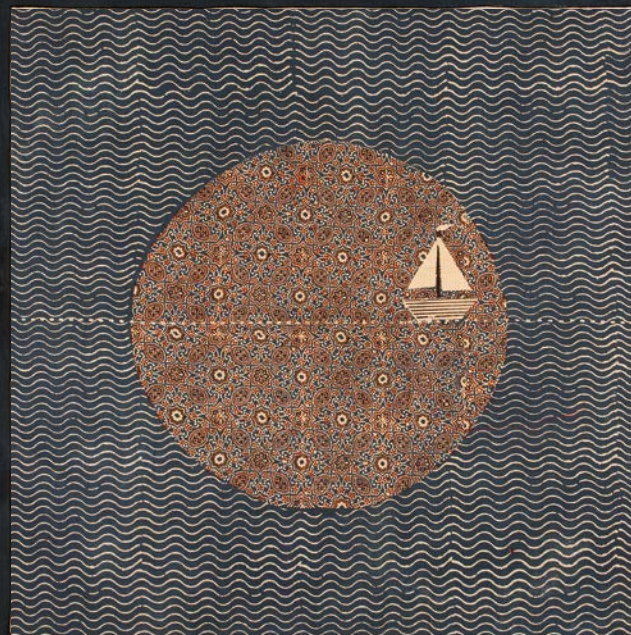
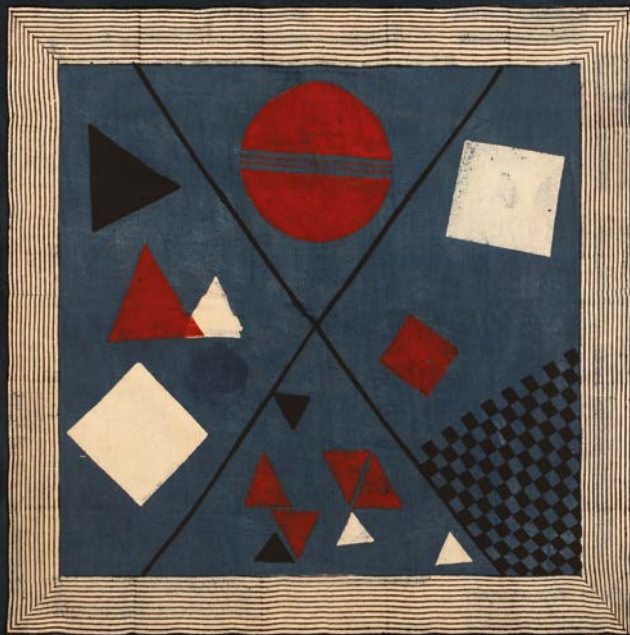
Migrated Communities, 2019
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi
 fabric, 72 x 180 inches.



Migrated Communities, 2019
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 72 x 180 inches.



Migrated Communities, 2019
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi
 fabric, 72 x 220 inches.



2023
Mosaic Wall of Indigo
Red, White, and Black Make Blue

Red, White, and Black Make Blue

by Lisa Trivedi,
Christian A. Johnson Professor of Teaching Excellence and History, Hamilton College

In conversation with Andrea Feeser’s 2013 book on indigo cultivation in South Carolina, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue*, Jyoti uses natural dyes, including indigo, to create an ajrakh on khadi installation that bears witness to the farmers whose lives we cannot otherwise recover from the historical record.¹⁸

Jyoti designs each ajrakh block around a sphere to sensitize the viewer to the global nature of the indigo trade and its effects. Traditional ajrakh geometric patterns are redeployed to emphasize the standardization of production and the monotony of plantation-scale agriculture. Eight white and black pieces are juxtaposed here to signal the injustice and inhumanity that characterized the forced cultivation of indigo. This was a process paid for dearly by brown and black laborers who endured unspeakable working conditions in order to produce a commodity that

brought extraordinary profit for traders across the globe. Red and white reference maritime flags that appeared regularly on the open seas accompanying Indigo, the most precious cargo of its era. Five red blocks reference nautical signals and motifs, including a compass’ cardinal directions and triangles that plot the course of ships used for transporting indigo and laborers around the Cape of Good Hope to ports on the West Coast of Africa and Europe, as well as to the islands of the Caribbean and the American South. Seven red, white, black, and blue squares are drawn from a larger collection of 30 squares to emphasize the ubiquitous use of indigo in national flags around the world, including the British Union Jack and the US Stars and Stripes. The beauty of indigo should not be appreciated without awareness of the human cost of its production. According to Catherine McKinley’s 2011 *Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the*

World, Indigo was a more powerful commodity in the eighteenth century than the gun, sugar, or cotton.¹⁹ As the profitability of indigo grew, cultivation expanded from South Asia to the United States and eventually the Caribbean where Indian indentured laborers eventually migrated and African slaves were traded, leaving behind families and homelands never to return. Whether indentured or enslaved by Portuguese, British, Dutch, French, or Americans, Indians and Africans carried knowledge of indigo cultivation and textile production with them, continuing to use the dye in their rituals and clothing. In order to satisfy the

global demand and Western appetite for indigo in the late 18th and 19th centuries, Indian tenant farmers in South Asia and enslaved Africans in the United States and Caribbean were forced to produce the crop under unspeakable conditions. Productivity was maximized regardless of the toll it took on farmers. Expanded production also led to farmers being over-exposed to the plant during its harvest and processing, literally turning their bodies blue. The history of indigo trade thus links communities across the “Global South” to those of the West in important, if unsettling, ways.

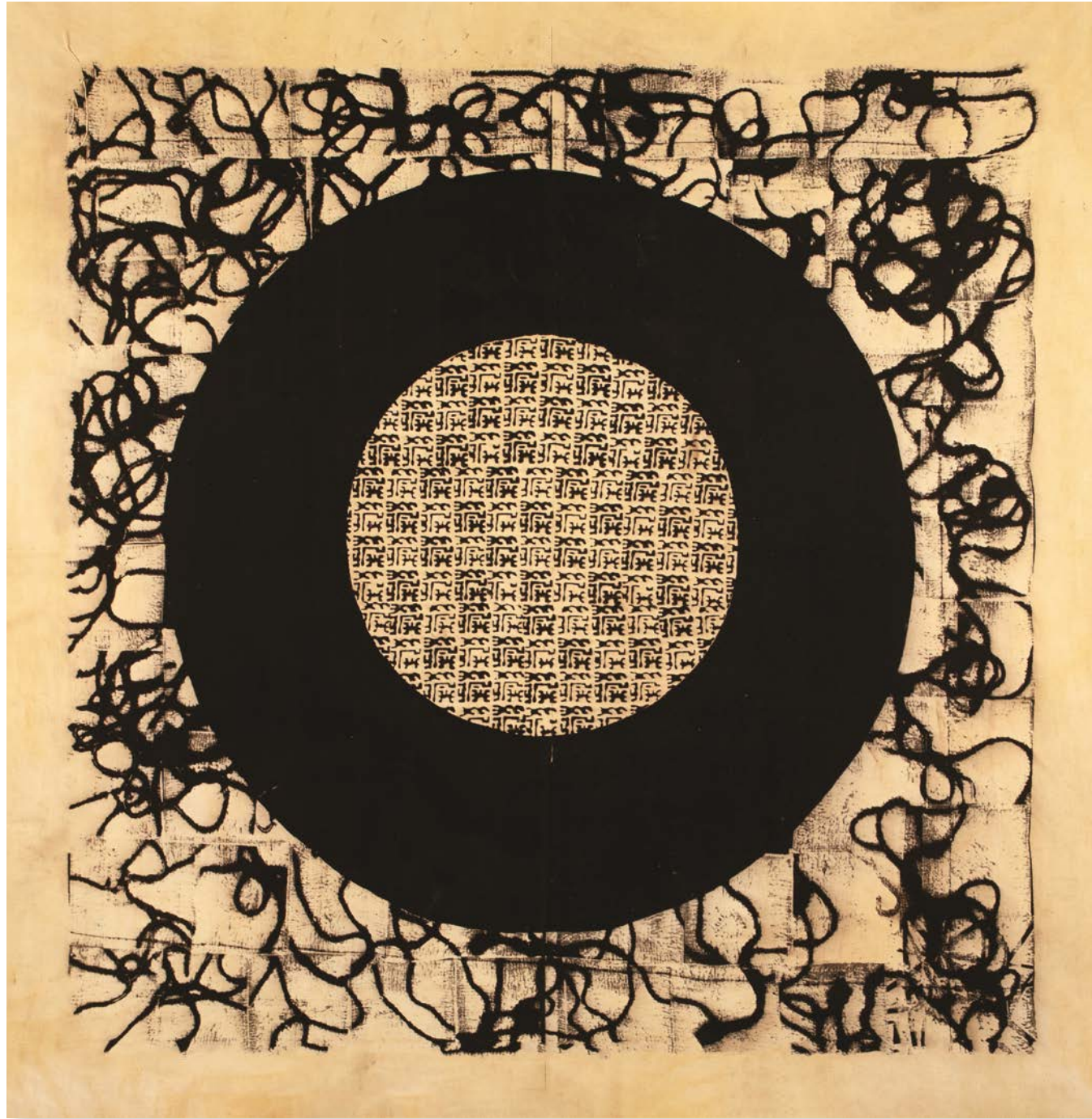


The Flags: Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric, 42 x 42 inches.

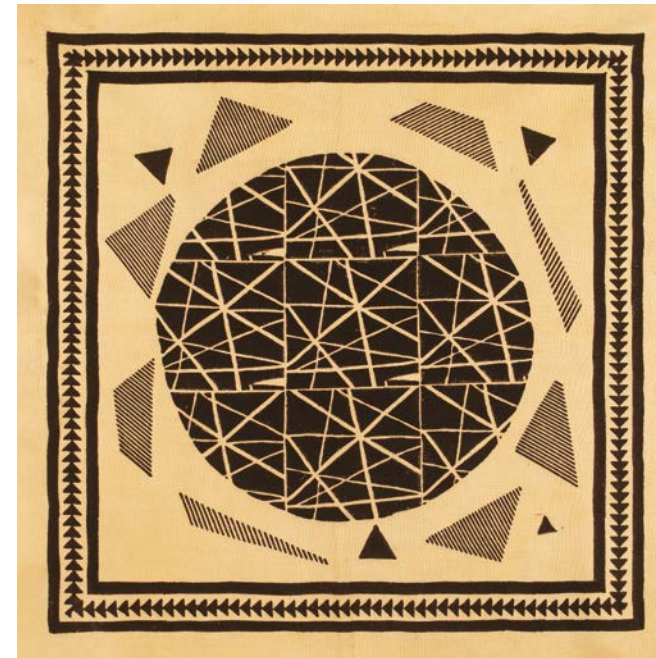
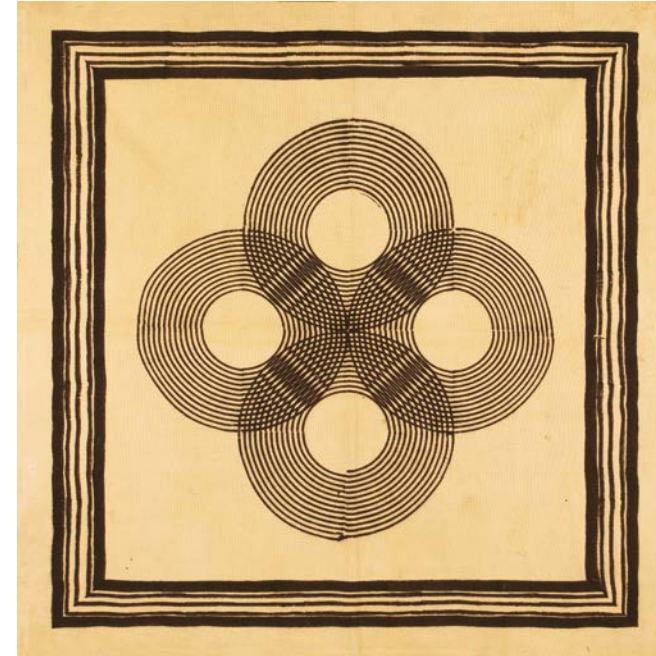
¹⁸ Ibid., Feeser.
¹⁹ Catherine McKinley, *Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the World* (NewYork: Bloomsbury, 2011).



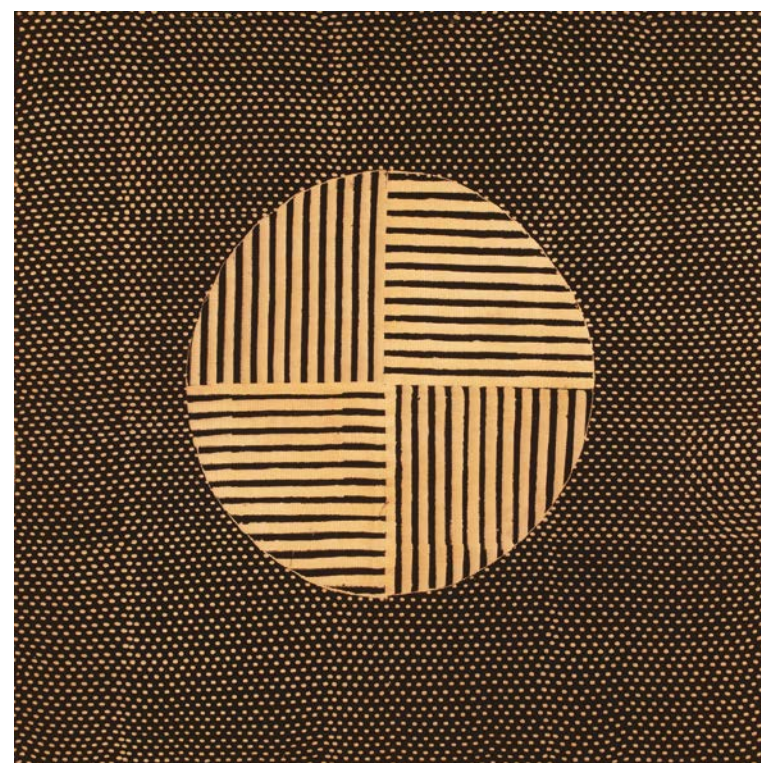
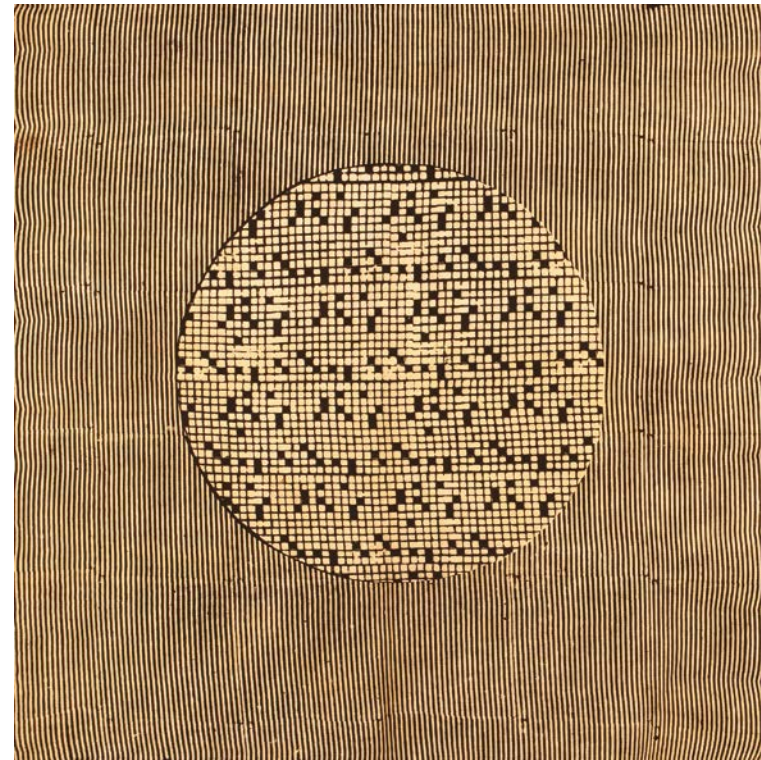
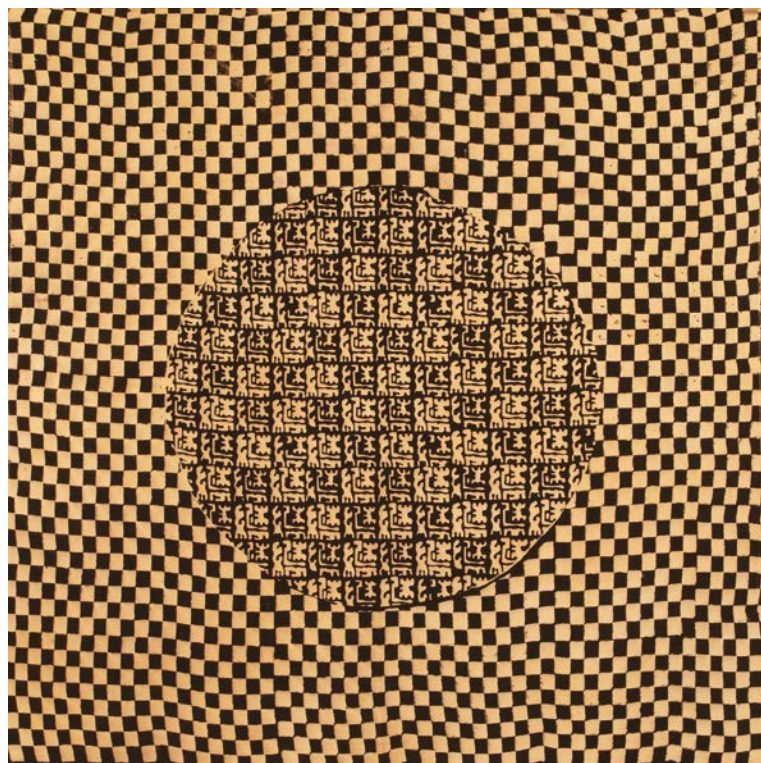
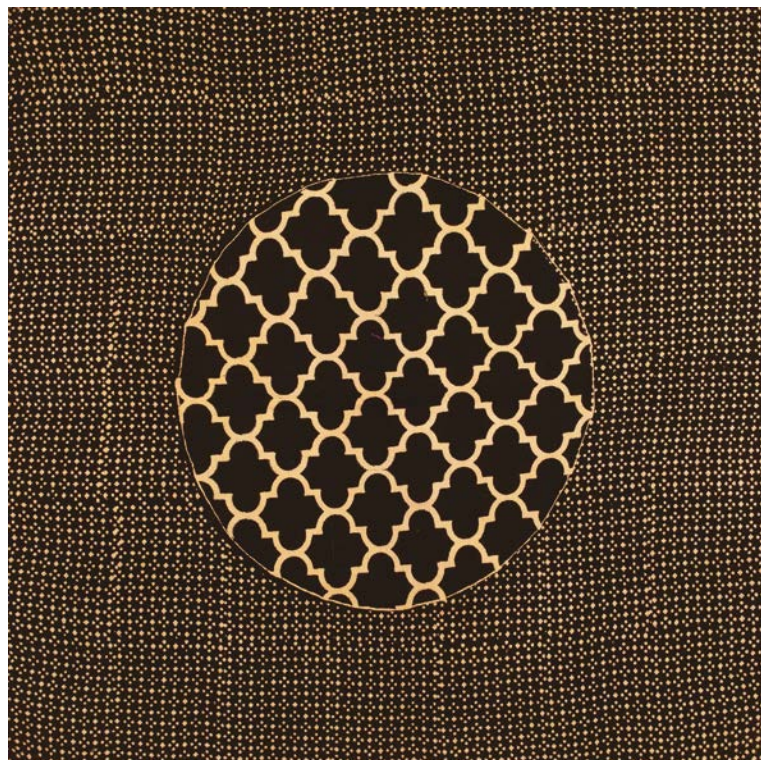
Fragmented: Red White and Black
Make Blue, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi
fabric, (4 small)
33 x 30 inches.



Explorer: Black and White series, 2023
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 47 x 49.5 inches.



Dislodged: Black and White series, 2023
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 (4 small) 33 x 30 inches each.



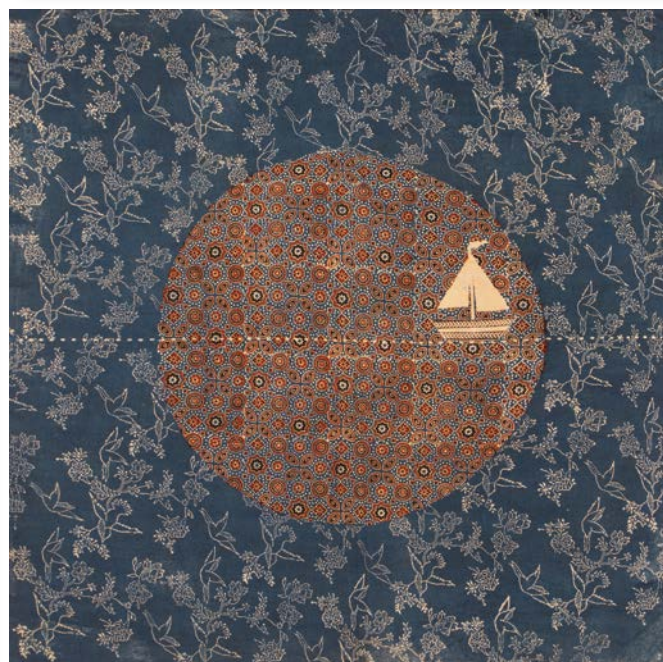
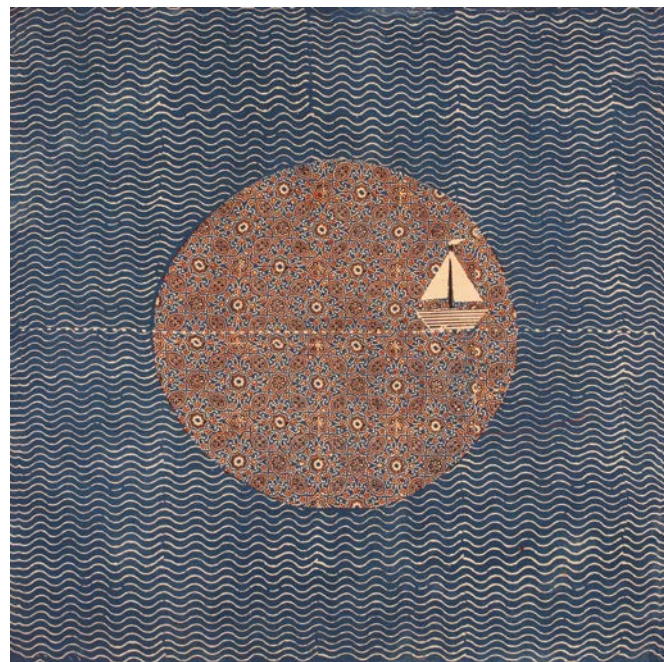
Around the Globe: Black and White series, 2023
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric, (4 small) 33 x 30 inches each.



The Trade Routes: Red and White series, 2023
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 48 x 52 inches.



Dominion: Red and White series, 2023
 Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 (4 small) 33 x 30 inches each.



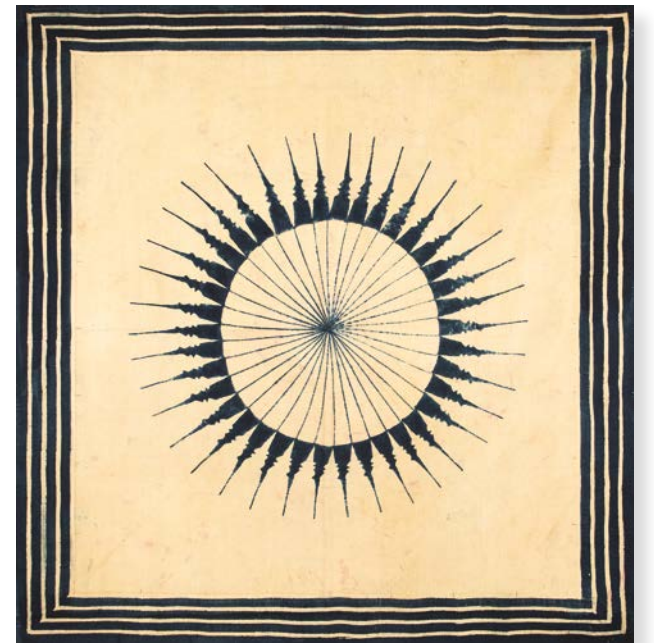
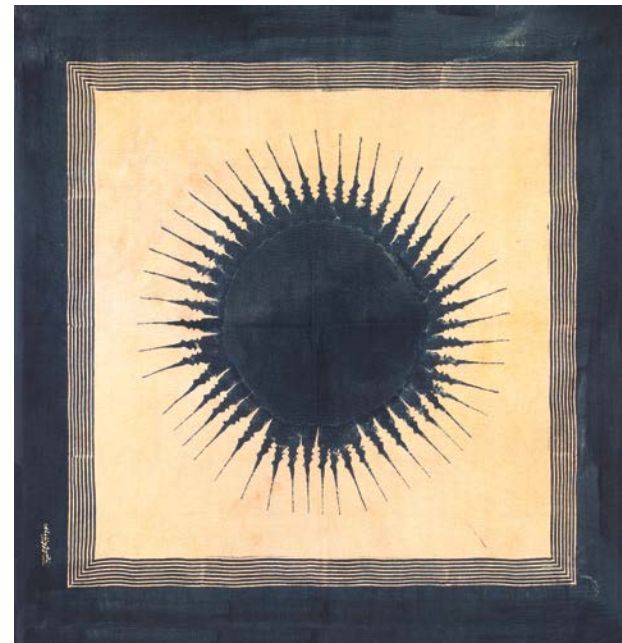
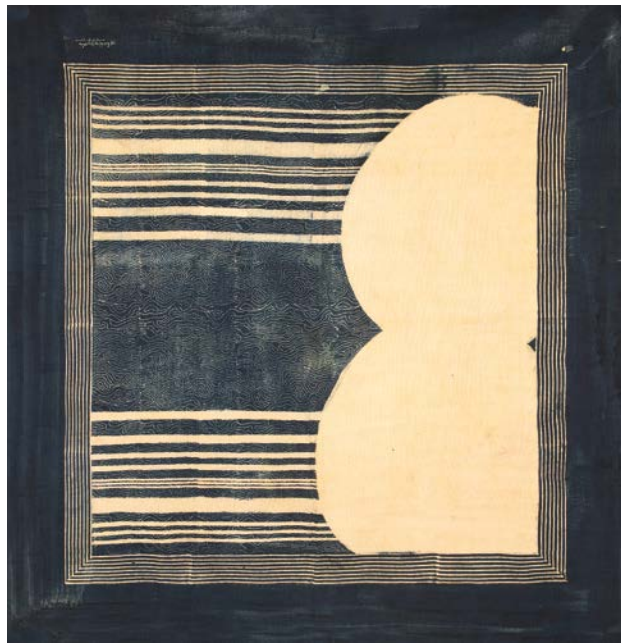
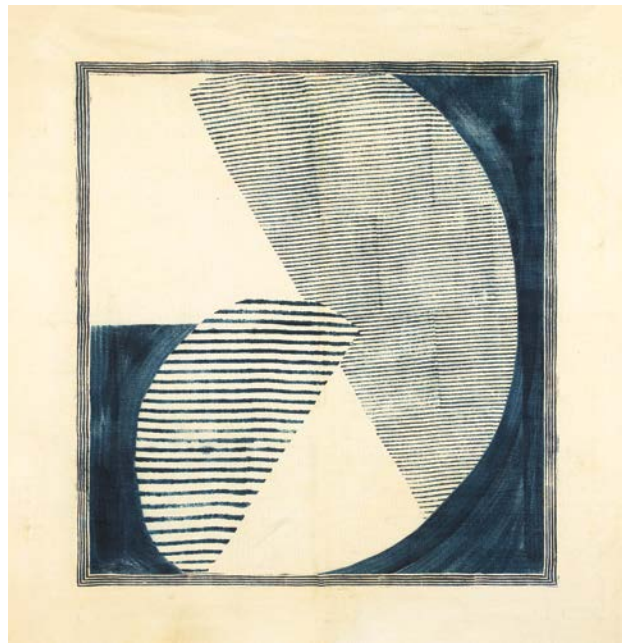
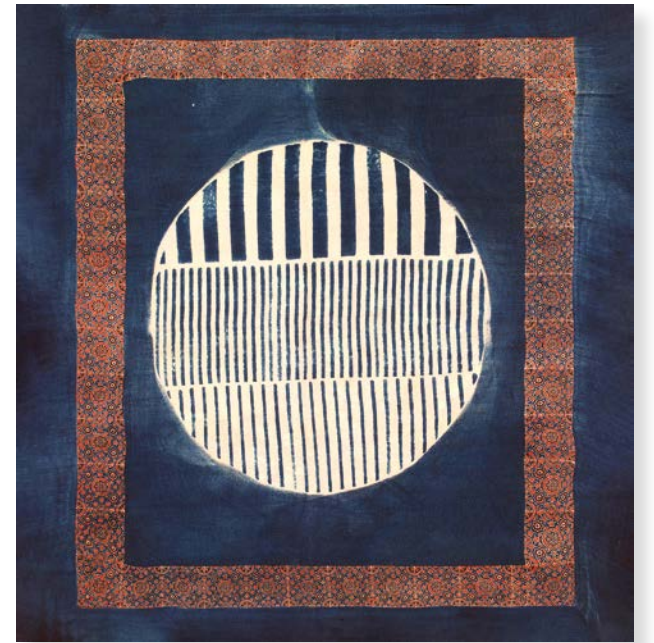
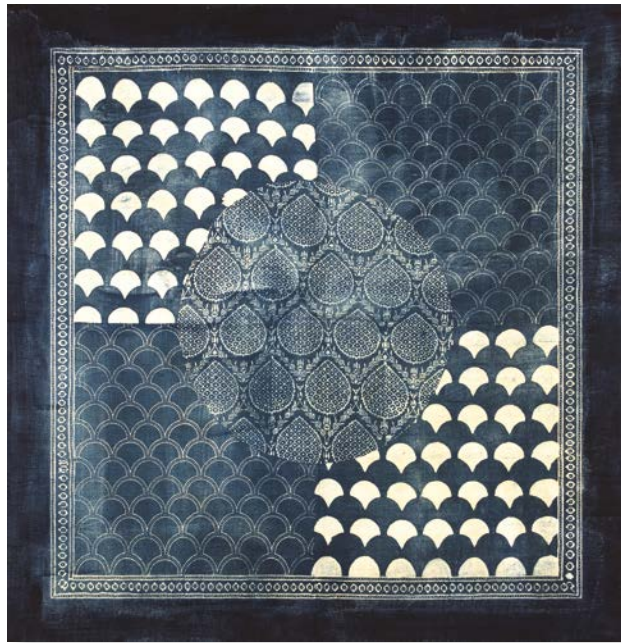
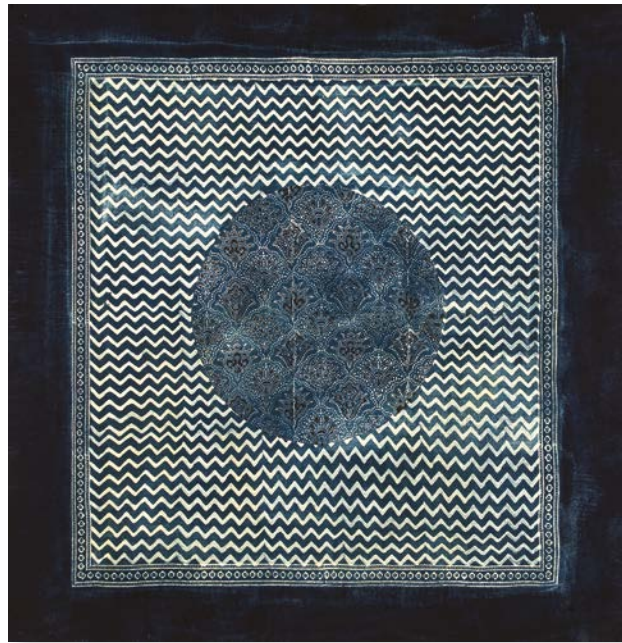
Indigo Across the Globe, 2023

Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
(4 small) 33 x 30 inches each.



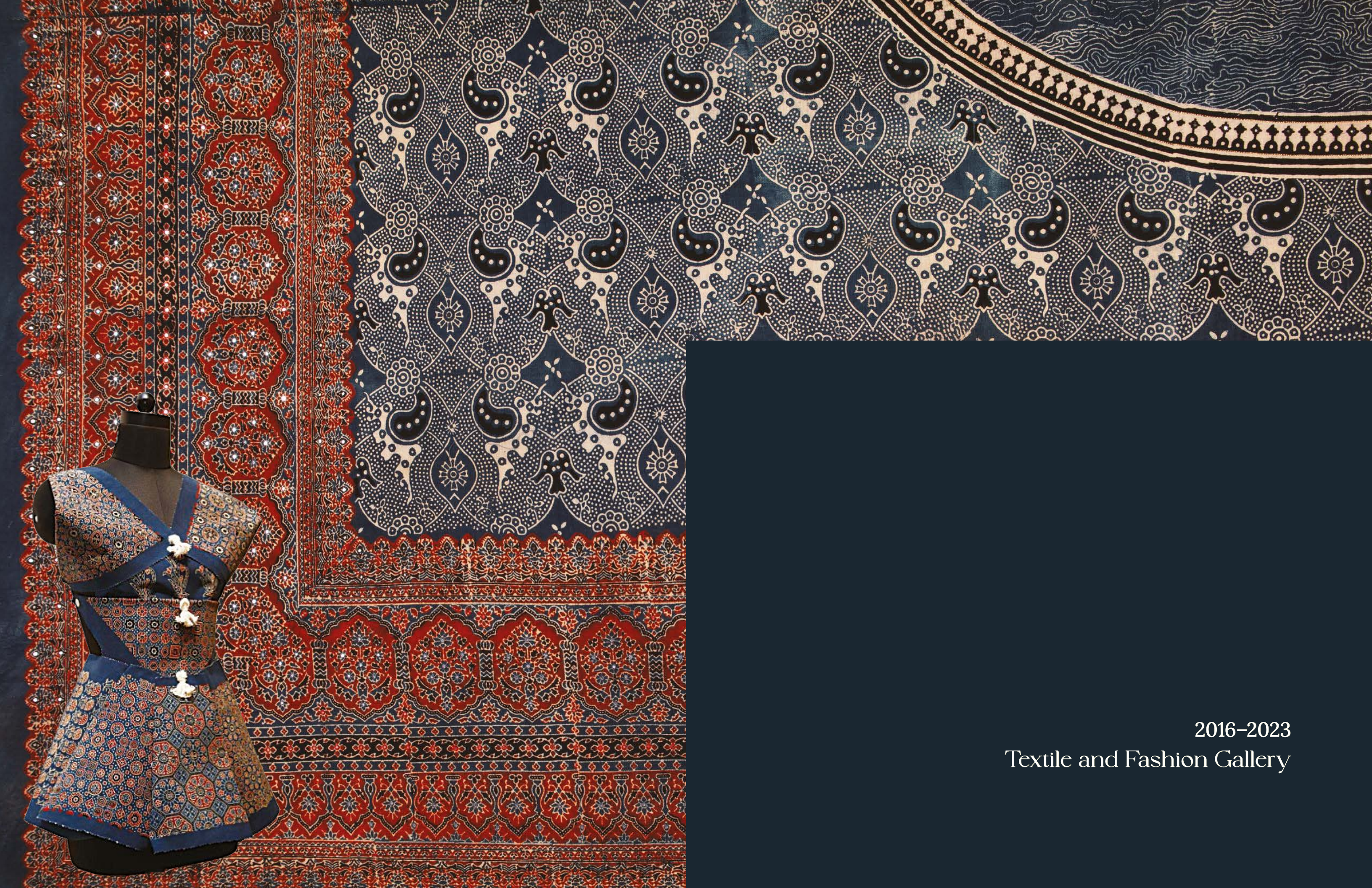
Dominion Across the Globe, 2023

Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
42 x 42 inches.



Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
33 x 30 inches each.

Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
Ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
33 x 30 inches each.



2016–2023
Textile and Fashion Gallery

Contemporary Printed Fashions

Sarah Fee, Senior Curator, Global Fashion & Textiles (Asia and Africa),
Royal Ontario Museum

It may be forgotten today, but long before blue jeans, much of the world dressed in indigo-dyed cloth.

There is beauty not only in the making of indigo dyes, but also in dressing the body in deep blue. Dyes derived from indigo-bearing plants have been applied directly on the body, from permanent tattooing to ephemeral black “henna” for the hands, to dyeing the hair.²⁰ In Yemen, men might lather the body with a mixture of indigo and sesame oil, until, in the words of an observer, “they shone like blue metal.”²¹ The aim could be aesthetic, or to absorb the perceived medicinal and protectives properties of the plant. Across millennia in many parts of Asia and Africa, including ancient Nubia and Egypt, blue was the dress of elites.²² In the 19th century, a vast swath of ordinary people wore blue cottons of an astonishing variety: from the white-and-blue kimono of rural Japan, to the skirts and tunics of hill tribes of mainland southeast Asia, to the deep blue robes of Palestinian brides, to the work dress

of Slovak peasant women and French workmen, to Mayan women’s skirts, to East and West Africa where much of the population dressed in striped or solid blue, among them the Tuareg “blue men” of the Sahara in their 60 foot-veils. And while much of this global blue fashion was made locally, a large part of it was imported from India.

Arguably the most vibrant colors, the most skilled dyers, and the most exuberant patterns originate in the Indian Subcontinent. The most potent of the indigo-bearing plants, *Indigofera tinctoria*, is indigenous to South Asia, with several other *Indigofera* spp. varieties available besides.²³ Ancient texts and medieval archaeological finds attest to deep shades and nuanced patterns – including 6th-century fragments of indigo-dyed Indian textiles found in the Nile valley, and a 12th-century trousseau list of an Indian bride resident in Cairo mentioning 6 different shades of blue.²⁴

Jyoti’s contemporary wearable art works remind us that the global desires for India’s cotton

cloth and potent dyes, the millions of yards of printed cottons that shipped to other parts of Asia, to Africa, Europe, and the Americas, were mainly consumed as dress. Indian printers and dyers customized color and design to serve an amazing variety of clothing forms, including majestic wrappers in the courts of Java and Sumatra, and a variety of stitched silhouettes for Iran, Europe, the Americas, and beyond.

Her new kaftan series carries forward the themes of the show, encoding in palette and pattern the brutalities and tragedies that lie behind the beautiful fabrics and fashions: European ships, spheres to represent the globe and wheels of time, the color red speaking to imperial flags and to the bloody consequences for the Black and Brown bodies that birthed the cotton and the dyes for western capitalist commerce. Her choice of the kaftan cut intentionally speaks to further east-west fashion entanglements, namely the spread of the kaftan out of West

Asia to become a global fashion worn around the world.

At the same time, the kaftans and her earlier 2016 structured indigo jackets -- made of the khadi cloth intrinsic to liberation, inflected with the embroidery and mirror-work of her beloved Gujarat -- also speak to resilience, hope and futurisms. Despite the historic traumas and disruptions, and thanks to the craft activism of Mohandas Gandhi and many others, India’s textile skills, knowledge and artistry endured. With her modern bold geometries and inventive re-combinations of heritage ajrakh motifs, and boxy, roomy silhouettes, Jyoti and her artisan collaborators such as Juned Khatri prove in a blaze of color how heritage textile arts and motifs can be made fashionable for contemporary life and capture the imaginations of the growing numbers of people around the world seeking low-waste cuts and sustainable colors and fibres.

²⁰Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World*, (New York: Routledge), 110.

²¹Ibid., 134.

²² Ibid., 29, 140, 199, 215. For other good surveys of indigo dress across time and space see Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, 1998; Catherine Legrand, *Indigo: The Colour that Changed the World* (London: Thames and Hudson,

2013). ²³ Lotika Varadarajan, “Indigo: The Indian tradition,” in *Culture of Indigo in Asia*, Kapila Vatsyayan ed., (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2014), 78–88; Ibid., Cardon, 354–366.

²⁴Ibid., Balfour-Paul 1999, 123.



Indigo Trade, 2023
 Structured kaftan: Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and
 mirror-work on khadi fabric,
 50 x 35 inches.



Indigo Territorial Domination, 2023
 Structured kaftan: ajrakh printing, dyeing and
 mirror-work on khadi fabric,
 50 x 36 inches.



Indigo in Starry Nights, 2023
 Structured kaftan: ajrakh printing, dyeing, and
 mirror-work on khadi fabric, 50 x 36 inches.



Indigo Across the Globe, 2023
 Structured kaftan: ajrakh printing, dyeing, and
 mirror-work on khadi fabric, 50 x 36 inches.



Indigo Trade, 2023
*Ajrakh printing dyeing, and needle work on khadi fabric,
 50 x 35 inches.*



Indigo Territorial Domination, 2023
*Structured kaftan ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 50 x 36 inches.*



Indigo Saplings, 2023
 Structured kaftan ajrakh printing and dyeing on khadi fabric,
 50 x 36 Inches.

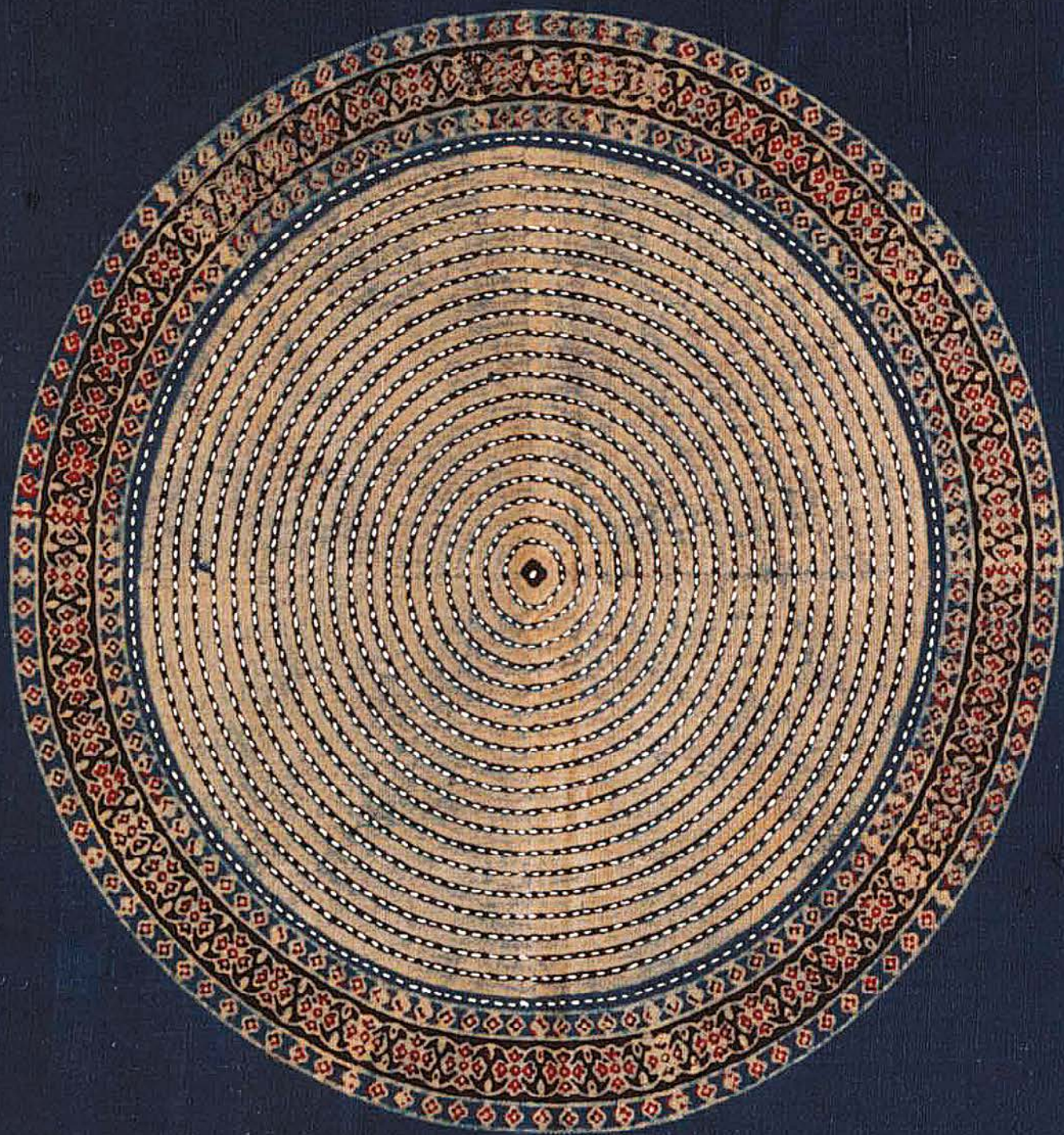


Clothing Gandhi's Nation, 2016
 Structured Jackets, Autumn-Winter Collection 2016,
 hand embroidered, mirror-work, indigo dyed, ajrakh
 printed khadi fabric, Jackets size medium,
 34 x 55 inches each.

Clothing Gandhi's Nation, 2016

*Structured Jackets, Autumn-Winter Collection 2016,
hand embroidered, mirror-work, indigo dyed, ajrakh
printed khadi fabric, Jackets size medium,
34 x 55 inches each.*





2009-2023
Indigo Farmers of Colonial Bengal
and Gandhi's Intervention



An Ode to Nil Darpan (triptych), mix media on canvas, 30 x 23 inches each, 2009

by Lisa Trivedi,
Christian A. Johnson Professor of Teaching Excellence and History, Hamilton College, New York

Today, the deep blue color associated with indigo is synthetically largely created in a lab rather than grown on India's vast agricultural lands. In the West, indigo is most commonly associated with blue jeans made popular by Levi Strauss & Co during the California Gold Rush, rather than with the human exploitation upon which its global trade depended. In "Homage to the Farmers of Champaran 1917-18," Shelly Jyoti has assembled 300 indigo textile discs printed on khadi, to represent the hundreds of thousands of farmers whose labor produced indigo, sometimes at their expense and that of their families. Each individual disk is connected to a series of others, signaling that farming was undertaken by the entire family-, caste-, and, sometimes, village-communities. Notice how each disk moves independently and in sync with others in the installation. Cultivating indigo was a common thread upon which these communities were enriched, but, more commonly, impoverished. Jyoti's installation emphasizes again the interdependence of communities across the globe from South Asia and Africa, to Europe, North America and the Caribbean. It also reminds us of the possibilities of interconnectedness enabled through the creation of ajrakh-printed cloth,

dyed with indigo on the fabric of Gandhi's Indian nation, homespun home-woven cloth, known as khadi.

"Not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained with human blood," wrote the English Judge, Edward De Latour. The exploitation Indian farmers who grew indigo for global profit was captured evocatively in *Nil Darpan* (in Bengali: নীল দর্প) or *The Indigo Mirror*, a play written by Dinabandhu Mitra in 1860. Eventually, indigo became closely associated with India's freedom struggle when Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) initiated his first Indian satyagraha, or nonviolent protest, on behalf of tenant farmers exploited by indigo cultivation in Champaran, Bihar, in 1917-18. When German synthetically-produced blue dye became unavailable during the First World War, British officials turned to Indian farmers, requiring indigo cultivation on each parcel of land leased or payment of a substantial tax. Gandhi was alarmed to learn that Bihari peasants had been coerced into growing indigo rather than rice and pulses during a period of famine.

In November 1917, Gandhi initiated the Champaran satyagraha which was designed as a means to put

an end to their suffering.²⁵ Gandhi's investigation, as well as articles and speeches that drew upon it, were met with government sanction. He was arrested by British colonial authorities in April 1918 and ordered to pay a Rs. 100 security. Because Gandhi viewed the government's revenue policies unjust, he refused to pay. Thousands of supporters of the indigo farmers and Gandhi rallied outside the courthouse, forcing local authorities to release Gandhi and vacate the charges made against him.

Gandhi immediately turned his attention away from the colonial government and their unjust policies to Indian landlords. In what would become a signature of his mass political movement for Indian independence, or swaraj, Gandhi focused attention on the role that Indians themselves played in colonial domination.²⁶ Gandhi eventually called off the Champaran satyagraha after he reached an agreement with Indian landlords that granted greater autonomy to poor farmers over what they grew, and canceled revenue hikes and collection until the end of the famine. Gandhi's success in Champaran led India's Nobel poet laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, to anoint him *Mahatma*, or "Great Soul."

India celebrated Gandhi's Champaran Satyagraha in 2017-2018, thereby raising awareness about the plight of Indigo farmers a century earlier. Given its history, indigo continues to have deep resonances with modern India's post-colonial identity as can be seen in filmmaker Swati Dandekar's 2019 film, *Neeli Raag*, or *Blue Cloth*, which focuses on India's dying indigo trade and lives today that have been upended by the synthetic indigo.



Chicago Cultural Center, IL USA, 2014

²⁵ On the Champaran Satyagraha see, Shankar Dayal Singh, Gandhi's *First Step: Champaran Movement* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1994) and Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915-1922* (New Delhi: Cambridge, 1972).

²⁶ Mohandas Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, or Indian Self-Rule* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1938).

Indigo Farmers: An Ode to Nil Darpan

2009-2023



An Ode to Nil Darpan (triptych), mix media on canvas, 30 x 23 inches, 2009

The blues of indigo
Or the moods of indigo!

The turbulent blue waters
Stormy skies and stormy weather
Under the sky and over the sea

The Union whip
And the farmers blue
Resistance spread wide
Toiling and sweating
Spading and farming
Plowing and cultivating
On meadows green

The parched terra firma, the soil
(the soil that gets infertile after each cultivated crop)

Tilling the devils turf
Swinging sapphires in paddocks blue
The natives of region delta
Flaming colonial regime
Torrid, and stifling
The eastern India in the century nineteen

Die of hunger, No food to eat
But grow indigo!
Why! Says a farmer's child!
Innocently. Why! I am hungry!
The woe of a mother
Child and the farmer
Oppressed in drudgery

Hundreds of years of subjugation
Voices of screaming women
Dragging down the fields
Uncluttered tresses
Torn breasts and feet
What the sordid story
Of exploitation and authority !
The chase continued

for the golden blue devil
The hawk and the worm
The 'tinkathias' enforced...
The greed intensifies
The hell break loose,
Like worms they die...

So they do! Even today!

Mahatma steps in...
He walks miles and miles
Preaching 'right to live'
'freedom to live'
Kindling awareness
He wrote letters unending
To colonizers ruling

Fighting for the farmers
The hawks threatened him
In his body frame
Unshaken he was
Went on and on...
NO VIOLENCE he said
STOP growing indigo... we will fight!

We need wheat and rice
to survive!
The blood that trickled
In the fields of blue
Is the blood that embossed
The chest of indigoes
To reach England

Do we need another Mahatma
to fight for 21st century farmers..!!

The blues of indigo
or the moods of indigo!

~Shelly Jyoti, 2009

THE MODEST INDIGOFERA
A Colonial Commodity

An attractive plant
From the family of beans
Purple clusters, and flowered peas
Around the world In tropical regimes.

This plant, colour and the dye
An antiquity of ancient times
A hue so rich, bold and revered

A colorant, so labour intensive
Crushed and Clustered green leaves,
Softened into vats to the mushy waters
For months and days, in undated
Fermented, in crystalline white
Of sodium hydrosulphite
Processed and grounded
solidified blue cakes
Triturated fermented, macerated
Decantated and oxygenated
The magical blue
Such a legacy of this modest plant
The ships that voyaged
Marin tined around the world
Stopped at Indian shores

Carted the boxes of dye from India
East to west and beyond
Making it the most desirable dye
Magnificent blue they said !

A colonial commodity
Traded across the globe
In the realm of clothing and weaves.

The story of voyages does not end
This magnificent blue gold
Had a flipping side too it
The Mood board was violence
Slavery forced and indentured it was!
Migration and colonization and beyond
Touching the horrendous human trafficking
Narratives unheard, and unsung, they were!
The saga of slavery and capitalism persisted for
decades and centuries unending
The bleeding hues of Red, white and black
made devils blue
The so called
The gold of millennia

What a legacy of this modest plant!
Indigo, the blue gold of old
A hue so rich, so bold
Authoritative and empowered

Yet fracturing
the magical blue with
exploitation, oppression and grind

~ Shelly Jyoti, 2023



An Ode to Nil Darpan, 7 x 9 inches, works on paper, 2009 (detail)



The politics of indigo in India's freedom struggle: Gandhi introduced a new politics of swadeshi, founded upon the production and consumption of homespun cloth. The spinning wheel or charkha thus emerged metonymically as an emblem of self sufficiency and nationalist independence. Its appearance in Ajrakh provides a corrective to the exploitation of Indian peasant cultivators who suffered for the European appetite for indigo. Lisa Trivedi

The Chakra Series:
The Three Wheels of Self-reliance 2022
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 103 x 29.5 inches.

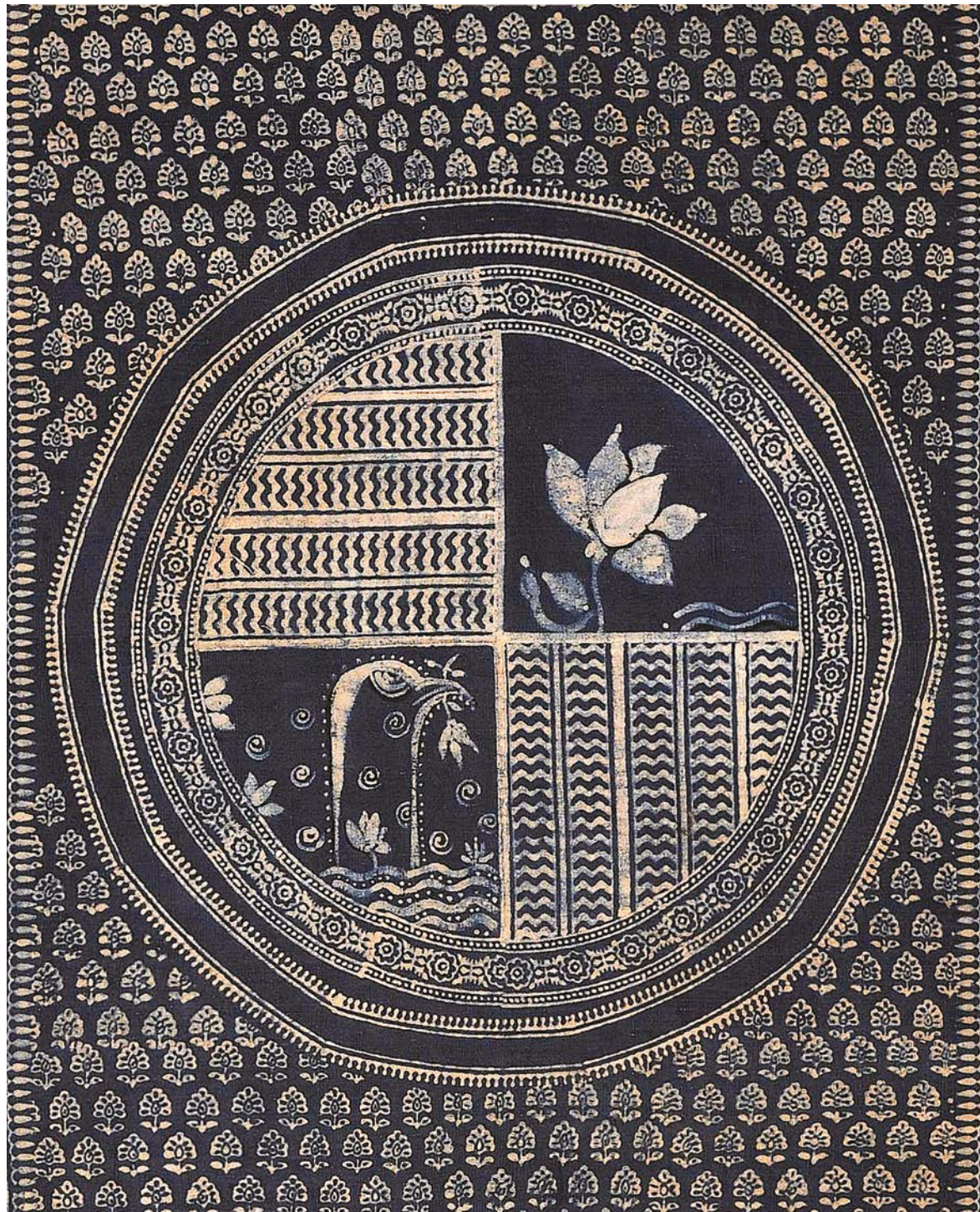


The Chakra Series:
The Spinning Wheel, 2022
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 54.5 x 49 inches.

The Chakra Series: Self-Reliance (blue), 2022
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 49 x 54 inches.



The Chakra Series: Self-Reliance (red), 2022
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 48 x 54.5 inches.



Ode to Nil Darpan, 2009 (detail)
Ajrakh printing, dyeing on khadi fabric,
60 x 42 inches.



The Charkha Series, 2023
Ajrakh printing, dyeing on khadi fabric,
48 x 65 inches.



*Empowering the World, 2023,
36 x 46 inches*

2009–2021
Indigo Plant Color and Dye

Celebrating the Subaltern with a Nearly 5,000-Year-Old Textile Tradition

by Shelly Jyoti

The survival of Indian block printed textiles is closely tied to a spirit of self-sufficiency that has survived the modern developments of machines and industrial mills and is still practiced in India's Rajasthan and Gujarat, especially in Bhuj's Ajrakhpur and Dhamadka, and in Pakistan's Sindh province. Although temporarily side-lined in the last century by quicker means of printing cloth, ajrakh has endured because of artisans and customers who remain loyal to the craft.

Ajrakh is a unique reverse, block-printing technique that utilizes natural dyes in designated areas of the pattern, which are pre-treated to resist penetration by the dye. The word ajrakh is derived from the phrase, "aaj ke din rakh" or "keep it for today," alluding to the traditional process of preparing fabric for printing. Ajrakh involves 20 odd steps, which include pre-soaking the cloth in a mix of camel dung, soda ash, and castor oil; mixing the dye-resistant pastes from gum and millet flour; and blending secondary dyes from an array of natural sources: yellow from turmeric, brown from rhubarb, orange from pomegranate skin, red from madder root, and black from a boiled syrup of scrap iron, chickpea flour, and sugarcane molasses. At each stage of the lengthy process, fabric must be set aside to dry for a period of 3–4 days.

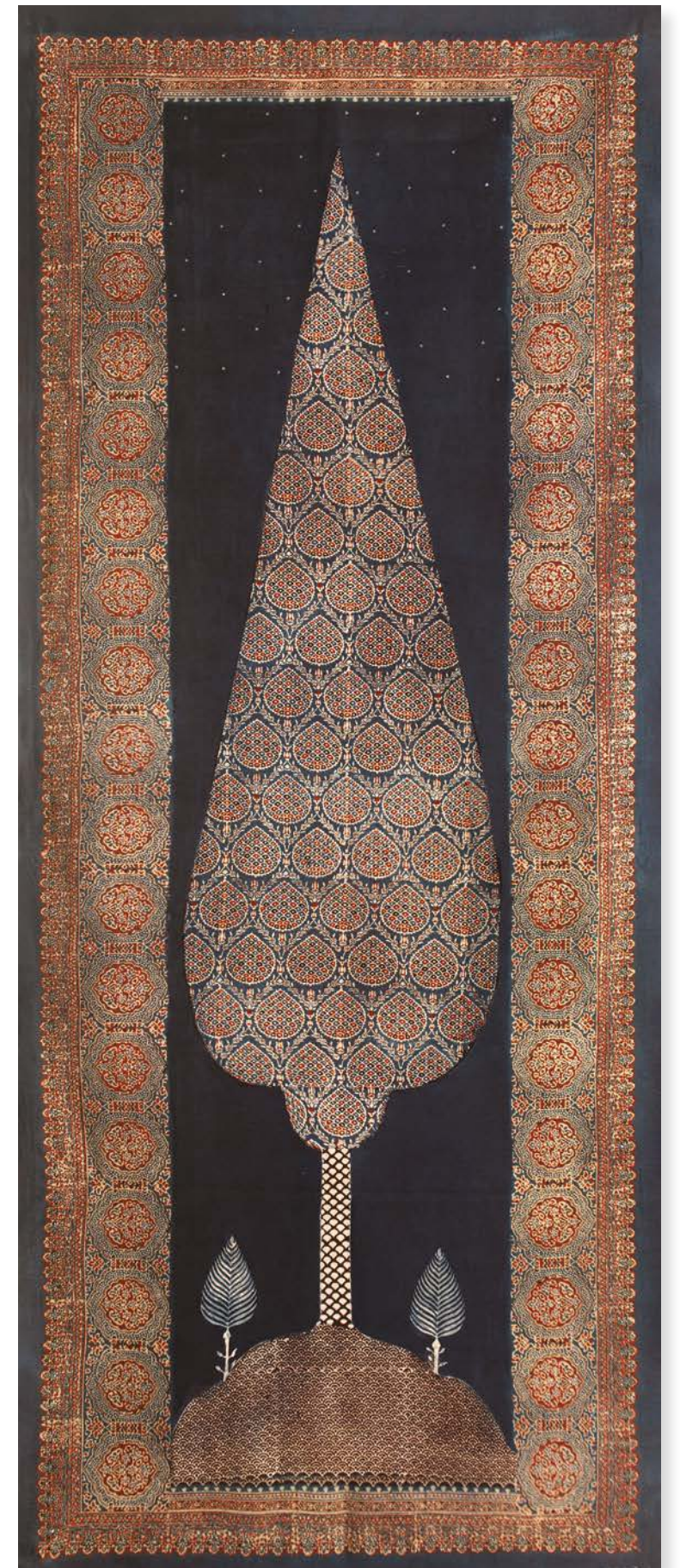
Nature plays an important role in ajrakh. Craftsmen work in harmony with the natural environment; the sun, rivers, animals, trees, and mud of their location are all part of the creative process. Water is vital to the production of ajrakh cloth as it is prepared, mordanted, and dyed, influencing the tones of the colors that will emerge to the success or failure of the entire process. After the 2002 earthquake in Kutch, the water table shifted and has been affected with impurities, a development which today directly impacts the printing of textiles in the region.

Ajrakh prints are predominantly geometric, using blue, red, white, and black. In order to achieve its particular effect, ajrakh requires the use of multiple hand-carved wooden blocks, each of which needs to synchronize with others in order to produce a coherent pattern when combined. Block makers, known as *poregars*, use simple tools to carve each block in pairs to register an exact inverted image. Today few artisans retain the skill to produce ajrakh blocks. Because of the persistence of master craftsmen and an increasing awareness among the urban consumers about the richness and value of this environmentally-friendly craft, ajrakh production is slowly regaining momentum.

Today, the village of Ajrakhpur, renamed to honour the traditional block printing craft, is abuzz with activity, tourists, and pride. The age-old textile craft was revived here by Khatri Mohammadbhai Siddiqbhai, the late patriarch of the village's most famous family of artisans. Today, a third generation of the family are masters of the art, and the entire clan has achieved national and international renown for their skills and talent.

My experience creating ajrakh artworks began in 2008 when I was researching visual art, printing, dyeing, and needlework on hand spun khadi (handspun, hand-woven cotton). Created from blocks that belong to Ismail Mohammed Khatri's archive of approximately 400 designs, my work continues to be carried out in collaboration with his son, Juned Mohamed Katri, in the family studio in Ajrakhpur, Bhuj, Gujarat. Inspired by political movements in India's freedom struggle and employing Gandhi's philosophies of *swadharma*, *sarvodaya*, *swadeshi* and *swaraj*, most recently I created a triptych work, "Svalambhan," that was installed in India's new parliament building in May 2023.

The Tall Blue Devil in Starry Nights, 2022
Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric, 84 x 34 inches.

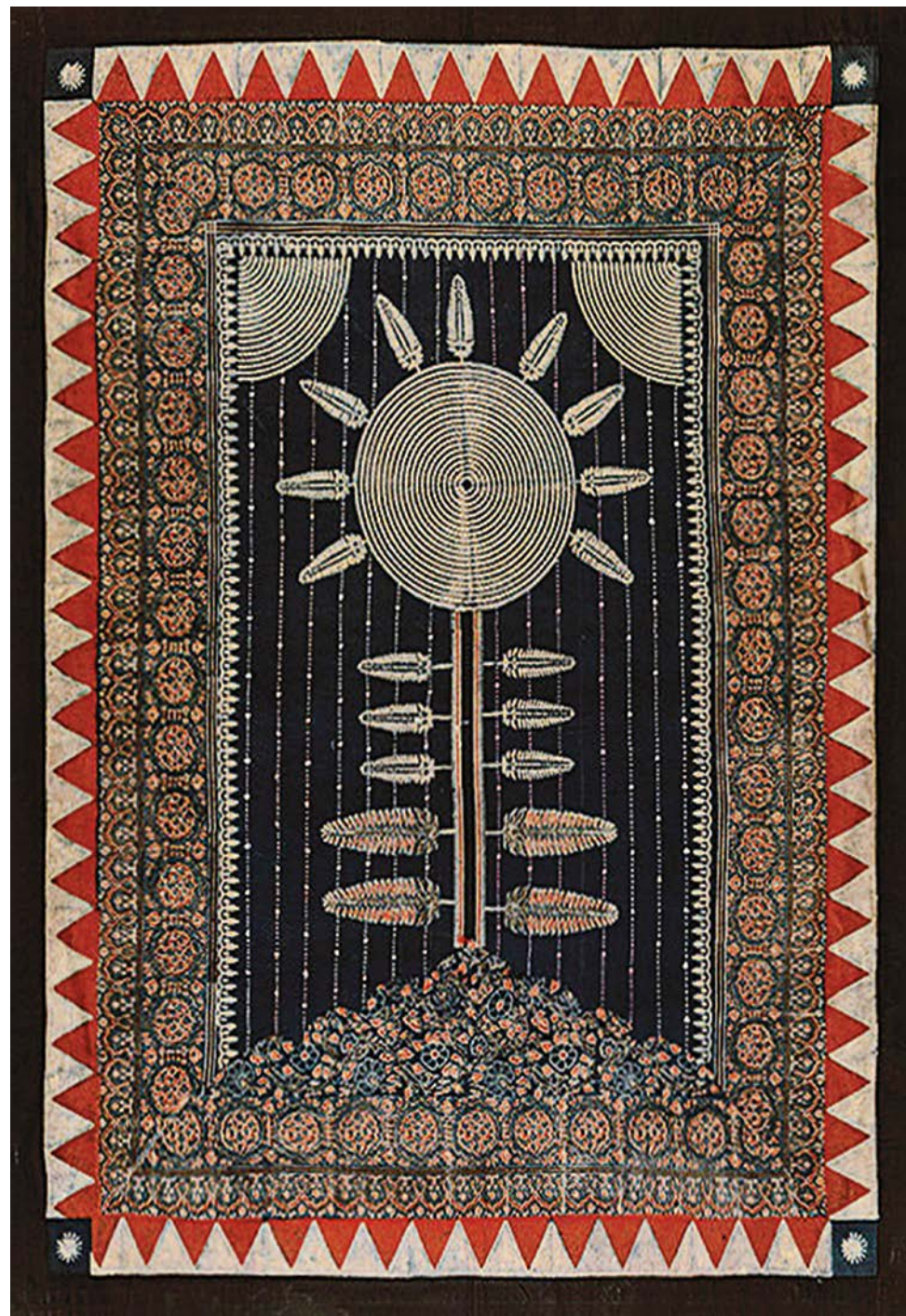




The Blue Devil in Starry Nights, 2016
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 54 x 36 inches.



Blooming Indigo, 2016
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 54 x 36 inches.



An Illusion to Ajrakh: An Indigo Plant, 2009
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 60 x 46 inches.



Blooming Saplings, 2022
 Ajrakh printing, dyeing, and needlework on khadi fabric,
 46 x 35 inches.



Artist Statement

My work embraces historical iconographic elements and textile production techniques to bridge India's rich and varied artistic traditions. In my art practice, I explore and construct a hermeneutics of period histories that are both socio-economically and politically sensitive.

I am honored to be invited by South Asia Institute of Chicago to reopen my 2009 work on *Indigo* series. In Indigo narratives 2009 series, I explored the role of indigo in India's freedom struggle and Gandhi's first non-violent protest on Indian soil in 1917-18 after he returned from South Africa, and the account of tyranny of British colonial indigo planters on native farmers through Bengali literary text, Nil Darpan, written by Dinabandhu Mitra between 1858-1859.

In my current exhibition, *Indigo: The Blue Gold*, I re-conceptualize my earlier work, exploring the significance of indigo dye as a transnational and exploitative commodity that connected the globe through profitable trade, migration streams, slavery and indenture,

and colonization. This exhibition addresses historical, botanical, and commercial aspects of the cherished and innocuous indigo dye which is such an ordinary feature of modern life.

The exhibition comprises six interrelated sections. Each section of the exhibit tells the compelling story of how indigo connected the globe. The opening section of the exhibition focuses on the history of the indigo farmers of colonial Bengal with an installation titled *Homage to the farmers of Champaran*. This section also features spoken word poetry performance of Ode to Nil Darpan. The mass cultivation of indigo on plantations in India's Bihar and Bengal required forced labor and the exploitation of generations of farmers for decades, until Gandhi political intervention, the Champaran satyagraha.

Indigo: the Blue Gold features 44 new pieces all printed on hand-spun, handwoven khadi cloth. These pieces were created through the application of textile tradition nearly five thousand years old. Printed and dyed ajrakh is

augmented with needle work, known as zardosi, and a splash of sheesha work (mirror-work). My ajrakh pieces utilize the iconography of 18th century ships, nautical routes, maps and maps to tell a story about global interconnection.

The Mosaic Wall of Indigo: Red, White and Black Make Blue is an installation comprising 28 works using red, white, and black natural dyes. It speaks not only of the drudgery of indigo cultivation, but also the violence that was required to satiate global demand for the commodity. Red, white, and black make blue attend to the variety of human experiences connected with indigo dye, its cultivation, trade, and application.

To provide perspective on contemporary indigo dye, I also created an installation of fashion and clothing including trendy kaftans and unisex indigo jackets. Using traditional wood block motifs that are three to four hundred years old and indigo dye, I have created a fresh, contemporary style for today's consumers. I strive to present the viewer with an experience rich and meaningful through heritage arts

recontextualized and redeployed, emphasizing the need for conservation of India's diverse textile arts traditions.

The ajrakh printing and dyeing techniques used throughout the exhibition are traditionally associated with khatri communities, who began migrating from the region of Balochistan (Pakistan) to Sindh (Pakistan) and Gujarat (India) in the 17th century. I work with tenth-generation ajrakh craftsmen who today live in Ajrakhpur, Bhuj, Gujarat. With their artisanal skill and heritage woodblocks, I create pieces consistent with my conceptual framework, excavating ideas, feelings, and forms from history that celebrate the subaltern for a contemporary, international audience. Working with indigo dye on khadi fabric and these ancient resist printing techniques, I am able to create truly contemporary designs that draw attention to the complicated and intertwined human history of indigo.

Shelly Jyoti

Visual/textile artist, fashion designer, poet, independent curator

Born: 1957, Rohtak, Haryana

Lives/Works: Gurgaon/ New Delhi, India

www.shellyjyoti.com

EDUCATION

- » 1995 Fashion Design and Clothing Technology, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi, India
- » 1980 MA English Literature, Punjab University, Chandigarh, India
- » 1978 BA English Literature with Fine Arts, Punjab University, Chandigarh, India

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Indigo: The Blue Gold

- » 2023 South Asia Institute, Chicago, IL

Epoch 2020: An Iconology of Time

- » 2021 Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (virtual exhibition/webinar)

Bound by duty: An idea of Swaraj and Collectiveness

- » 2019 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- » 2019 India International Center, New Delhi
- » 2018 Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi
- » 2018 Revisiting Gandhi: The Art of Shelly Jyoti 2009–2018
- » 2018 Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi

The Khadi March: Just Five Meters

- » 2017 National Gallery for Modern Art, Bengaluru
- » 2017 Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
- » 2016 Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Salt: The Great March

- » 2015 Azad Bhavan Gallery, Indian Council of Cultural Relations ICCR, Delhi 2014 The Museum Dakshin Chitra, Chennai
- » 2014 IIC India International Centre, New Delhi
- » 2013 IGNCA Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi

Indigo: Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina

- » 2017 Indigo Narratives: An Ode to Neel Darpan, The Museum for National Archives of India, New Delhi
- » 2014 Indigo: Exhibition of Textiles by Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, Gandhi Memorial Centre, Bethesda, MD
- » 2013 Indigo: Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago, IL
- » 2011 Indigo: Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, Diana Lowenstein Gallery, Miami, FL
- » 2011 Indigo: Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, ArtXchange Gallery, Seattle, WA
- » 2010 Indigo: New works by Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, Nehru Centre, Worli, Mumbai
- » 2009 Indigo: New works by Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, Palm Court Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
- » 2009 Indigo: New works by Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina, ABS Red Earth Art Gallery, Baroda, Gujarat

Beyond Mithila: Exploring the Decorative

- » 2010 Taj Palace, New Delhi
- » 2009 Palm Court Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi 2009 Jamaat Art Gallery, Mumbai
- » 2008 Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL

Lyrical Abstraction: A Space for Abstraction & Muses

- » 2007 Experimental Art Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi 2008 Sristhi Art Gallery Welcome Hotel, Baroda

Pastels, Inks, Drawings – Works on Paper

- » 2004 ICC, Milpitas, California 2004 Welcome Art Gallery, Baroda

Woman of the New Millennium

- » 1999 Shristi Art Gallery, Baroda

SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- » 2023 Charkha: Wheels of Svav lambhan Triptych, Svav lambhan,New Parliament House of India
- » 2023 Shakti Ministry of textiles Govt Of India, International Women’s day, New Delhi
- » 2022 Generations, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL
- » 2021 Re-imagining the Global Village, Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, Milwaukee, WI, curated by Nirmal Raja
- » 2021 Yatra Nariyastra, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, curated by Uma Nair 2019 Small Works Member Show, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago
- » 2018 New Traditions: Influences & Inspirations in Indian Textiles, 1947-2017 Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur
- » 2017 Reunion 2, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL
- » 2016 Traversing Traditions/India, Charter Oak Cultural Center Hartford, CT
- » 2013 CARE Package India International Centre, 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi
- » 2012 CARE Package, Twelve Gate, Philadelphia, PA, and Curator: Ombretta Agro
- » 2012 Ajrakh Blazing Sun, United Art Fair, New Delhi
- » 2010 13th International Open, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago IL. Curator: Laura Kina
- » 2010 Logged, Emami Chisel Art Calcutta, India. Curator: Amit Mukhopadhyay 2010 Art Fusion, Nehru Centre, Mumbai. Curator: Nina Rege
- » 2009 Natures Fury (Curatorial Digital Project), Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- » 2009 Women Imaging Women: A Study of Female Portraiture, Robert Morris University, Chicago, Curator: Amy Galpin
- » 2007 The Spirit of India, Singapore. Curator: Anu Aggarwal
- » 2007 Line and Form, The Mahua Art Gallery, Bangalore
- » 2007 Cynosure Lanxes, ABS Art Gallery, Baroda, Gujarat
- » 2006 Creative Fantasy, The Mahua Art Gallery, Bangalore
- » 2006 Elle Decor Art & Design Show, New Delhi. Curator: Dr. Alka Pande
- » 2006 Here Comes the Bride, Woman Made Gallery, and Chicago, Illinois. Curator: Beate Minkovski
- » 2004 Summer of 2004, Print Making, Chaap, Baroda
- » 2003 Women, Trauma and Visual Expression, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL
- » 2002 Nature’s Fury, (curatorial project) Digital artwork, Srishti Art Gallery
- » 2002 Voices against Violence, Fine Arts Faculty, Baroda
- » 2001 Earthquake Relief Art Benefit, Fine Arts Faculty, Baroda

SELECT CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- » 2012 Vastram: Splendid World of Indian Textiles for ASEAN countries Indian council of cultural relations (ICCR project)
- » 2018 Astan, Kazakhstan
- » 2015 Muscat, Oman
- » 2013-15 MGC Asian Traditional Textiles Museum, Siem Reap City, Cambodia

HONORS/AWARDS /GRANTS

- » 2018 Sahitya Kala Parishad award, Government of India “Women artist ”
- » 2018 Exhibition grant, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi
- » 2017 Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi and South Region
- » 2013 Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts IGNCA, New Delhi
- » 2012 Indian Council of Cultural Relation-’Indigo Narrative’ Project International, ICCR, New Delhi
- » 2011 Sahitya Kala Parishad award, Government of India “Women artist ”
- » 2010 Grant for curatorial project Nature’s Fury by Gujarat Sports & Culture Ministry, Gujarat
- » 2009 Grant for Indigo Narrative project by Gujarat Lalit Kala Akademi, Gujarat
- » 2004 Artist of Eminence by Baroda Management Association, Baroda, Gujarat
- » 1994 Best Traditional Craft Design Collection Award, NIFT, New Delhi

ARTIST LECTURES /CONFERENCES /WORKSHOPS

- » 2022 “Digital Reality During Pandemic Times: Epoch 2020”, Palash art lectures, IGNCA, New Delhi
- » 2021 “Mapping Ajrakh Textile Traditions Through Contemporary Art and Craft,” Birla Institute of Art & Design, Calcutta
- » 2021 “Khadi & Ajrakh Embodies Swadeshi Movement: Relevance of Gandhi in Present Tense,” Embassy of India San Francisco, CA
- » 2021 “Integrating Art, Craft and Design: Through Textile Art and Installation in Contemporary Visual Space,” National institute of Fashion technology, Bengaluru
- » 2021 “Revisiting Gandhi in Pandemic Times: An Artistic Journey Through Ajrakh” Production,” Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya CSMVS, Mumbai

- » 2020 “Gandhi’s Thought Leadership in Relevance: Through Textile Art and Installation,” Indian Embassy of Sao Paulo, Brazil
- » 2020 “Imagined Communities: Swaraj and Collectiveness,” Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi
- » 2019 “Gandhi’s Thought Leadership in Relevance to the 21stC: Textile Production in Contemporary Art and Craft,” National Museum of India, New Delhi
- » 2019 “Gandhi’s Thought Leadership in Relevance to the 21stC: Through Textile Art and Installations,” Lady Irwin College, New Delhi
- » 2019 “Gandhi’s Thought Leadership in Relevance to the 21stC: Through Textile Art and Installations,” India Foundation International Conference on Soft power, Taj Hotel, New Delhi
- » 2018 “Mapping Ajrakh Traditions In Contemporary Art and Craft,” George Washington University, Textile Museum, Washington D.C.
- » 2018 “Khadi and sustainability,” Panel discussion-YES Bank Culture, New Delhi
- » 2018 Ajrakh workshop and Talk with craftsman Juned khatri, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi
- » 2017 Film Screening and Poetry Reading, National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore
- » 2016 “Installation Art: Objects, Things and Symbolism,” XIX International Conference, The Forum on Contemporary Theory, Baroda, Gujarat
- » 2016 “The Poetics of Khadi: Cutting Across Time and Space,” Panelists: Ritu Beri-Fashion designer; Meenakshi Lekhi-MP; Shelly Jyoti artist, Geeta Goradia- Chairperson Jewel Industries, Varsha Das- A Gandhian thinker, art critic and litterateur; Poonam Goel-Delhi based art writer
- » 2016 “The Making of The Khadi March: Just Five Meters,” Textile Design dept, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi
- » 2015 “Gandhi’s Political Enlightenment Traversing Human Lives and Humanity,” XVIII International Conference “The Wider Significance of Nature,” Ravenshaw University, Cuttack Odisha, India
- » 2015A “Indigo: Narratives: An Ode to Neel Darpan,” Shiv Nadar School, Noida.
- » 2014 “Salt-A colonial Metaphor: Relevance today-Verbal, Visual and New Media,” *Art by Shelly Jyoti*, 17th International Conference, Forum for Contemporary Theory, Goa
- » 2014 “Invoking history and celebrating the subaltern,” Apparao Art Gallery, Magnolias, DLF phase 5, Gurgaon, Haryana

- » 2014 “Invoking History and Celebrating the Subaltern,” Apparao Art Gallery, Chennai
- » 2014 “Salt- A Colonial Metaphor: Relevance today,” National Lalit Kala Academy, Chennai
- » 2014 “Textile Installations in Contemporary Visual Space,” NIFT, New Delhi
- » 2013 “Lincoln, Gandhi and Obama: A creative visual dialogue in Miniature painting style,” Academic paper, 31st Annual international ATWS conference, IIT Chennai
- » 2013 “Rebuilding: A Sense of Nationalism” Indira Gandhi National Centre of the Arts, New Delhi
- » 2013 “Quilting, Art history and Metaphor,” DePaul University students With Professor Jean Bryan Chicago Rooms, Chicago Cultural Center
- » 2013 Public Lecture- “Indigo: Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina,” Shelly Jyoti, Laura Kina and Pushpika Frietas, Chicago Rooms, Chicago Cultural Center
- » 2013 Artist Talk- “Indigo: Shelly Jyoti & Laura Kina,” Art Institute of Chicago, students with Professor Nora Taylor-Asian Art Now, Chicago Cultural Center
- » 2013 Artist Talk: Art Institute of Chicago, Textile Society, Chicago Cultural Center
- » 2012 “The Splendid Textiles of India: Trade| Cotton| Cloth,” Forum on Contemporary Theory, XV International Conference Theme: “Media and Utopia: Imagination, History, Technology” Allahabad, India
- » 2011 “Beyond Mithila Past & Present,” DePaul University, Chicago, IL
- » 2011 “Transnational Artistic Collaboration: Shelly Jyoti and Laura Kina,” Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL
- » 2009 “The Politics of Indigo: Revisiting India’s Torrid Colonial Past,” Centre for Contemporary Theory and General Semantics, Baroda
- » 2008 “Beyond Mithila Past & Present,” University of Illinois, Chicago, IL
- » 2005 “Designing: Methods & Trends” Dept. of Home Science, M.S. University, Baroda
- » 2004 “Woman Artist and a Designer,” Seminar on Women Force and Source, Baroda Management Association
- » 2002 “Technology and Computation Accelerating the Speed and Growth in the Garment Industry,” Forum for Contemporary Theory, Baroda
- » 1996 “Designing Kids Wear from Concept to Consumer,” Course leader and coordinator six week programme design, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi

PUBLICATIONS

Exhibition Catalogs

- » Shelly Jyoti – Indigo: The Blue Gold. Edited by curator Laura Kina. Chicago/New Delhi: South Asia Institute/ GoodEarth.in, 2023.
- » Revisiting Gandhi: The Art of Shelly Jyoti 2009–2018. Edited by Kathryn Myers. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 2018.
- » Shelly Jyoti – The Khadi March: Just Five Meters. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 2017.
- » Shelly Jyoti – Salt: The Great March. New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations ICCR, 2014.
- » Shelly Jyoti – Salt: The Great March. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 2013. Shelly Jyoti. “Vastram” – Splendid Textiles of India. New Delhi: Indian Council of Cultural Relations, 2012.

Additional Selected Publications

- » Jyoti, Shelly. “Ajraakh: Celebrating Textile traditions by Shelly Jyoti.” Namaste (ITC magazine), Jodhpur issue, 2015.
- » Gill, Brinda. “Indigo Narratives Series.” The Quilters, Spring 2012.
- » Jyoti, Shelly. “Me, my mother and my daughter” (inside cover art). Sahitya Akademi: Indian Literature, edited by Ankur betagiri, LVI, no. 2 (No. 268 March/April 2012).
- » Jyoti, Shelly. “Me, my mother and my daughter” 2011, 20x32 inches, dry pastels on handmade paper. Shringara: The Many of Faces of Indian Beauty, by Alka Pande, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2011.
- » Jyoti, Shelly. Untitled, 2011, 20x32 inches, dry pastels on handmade paper, (cover artwork). Socleen Journal, “Genetically modified crops,” 2012.
- » Jyoti, Shelly.“Art & Couture: The Collaborations.” ArtETCMagazine, 2010.
- » “Indigo Narratives: New Work by Shelly Jyoti and Laura Kina.” Visual Arts Publications IHC, vol. 9, (2010)
- » Jyoti, Shelly. The green house, 2010 , 9x12 inches, mixed media (cover artwork). Socleen Journal, “Green Houses,” 2010.
- » Jyoti, Shelly. (cover artwork). Socleen Annual Journal, “Global Warming,” 2009.
- » Jyoti, Shelly. “The Alchemist,” 2008, 8x11 inches, dry pastels on paper (cover artwork). Institute of General Semantics, 2008.
- » Jyoti, Shelly. Meditative, 2007, 8x11 inches, dry pastels on paper (cover artwork). St. Xavier University Magazine, Spring, 2007.

- » Jyoti, Shelly. Artwork and poetries (cover page). Sahitya Akademi: Indian Literature, edited by AJ Thomas. (IL238, 2007)
- » Jyoti, Shelly. “Raja Ravi Verma: Fusion of Art and Design.” Times of India, 2002.

JUROR & RELATED PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

- » 2019 Bound by Duty: An Idea of Swaraj and Collectiveness, juried NIFT student Project Room exhibition, India International Centre, New Delhi
- » 2018 Revisiting Gandhi: The Art of Shelly Jyoti, juried NIFT student Project Room exhibition, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi
- » 2017 Juried Graduate Textile design exhibition, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi
- » 2015 Juried Junk Juxtaposed, The Times of India initiative, National event, NIFT, New Delhi 2015 Juried fashion show organized by Deccan Herald, New Delhi
- » 2014 Juried and lectured at National Institute for Fashion Technology NIFT, New Delhi 2001-2005 Juried fashion shows – National Institutes of Fashion Design, Baroda
- » 1994-2003 Designed, manufactured garments under my own label “SHELLY JYOTI” domestic market Freelance designer for export houses for American and European markets. Coordinated fashion related courses in Fashion Institutes in India.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- » Forum for Contemporary Theory Baroda, Gujarat DAAN-The Diasporic Asian Art Network, New York Woman Made Gallery, Chicago IL
- » Association. Global South studies, Shreveport, LA Kasturba Gandhi Trust of India, New Delhi
- » Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, New Delhi

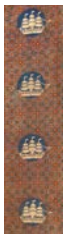
SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- » New Parliament of India, New Delhi Triptych artwork
- » TAPI collection (Textiles & Art of the People of India), Surat, India IGNCA (Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts), New Delhi
- » International Lincoln Centre Louisiana State University, Shreveport, USA Works in many private and corporate collections in India and USA


SOCIAL INITIATIVES

- » Supporting Ajraakh textile artisans
- » Art for Adult Autism


Index of works 2009-2013




The 18c Merchant Ships,
2023, 187 x 16 inches.




East Indiaman Trading Vessel, 18th Century, 2023,
36 x 24 inches




Indigo Across the Globe,
2023, 67 x 66.5 inches




Indigo Across the Continents, 2023
84 x 33.5 inches




Indigo Trade Across the Continents, 2023,
105 x 30 inches




The 18c Merchant Ship,
2023, 90 x 102 inches




The 18c Merchant Ship,
2023, 90 x 102 inches




Indigo Trade Routes,
2023, 67 x 67 inches




Indigo Territorial Domination, 2023, 68 x 58 inches




Indigo Trade Influences,
2023, 66 x 64.5 inches




I Urbanization of Indigo Dye,
2023, 64 x 67.5 inches




Caribbean Islands: Cartography of Trade Route (diptych),
2023, 53.5 x 57.5 inches




World Trade: Cartography of Trade Route (diptych),
2023, 53.5 x 57.5 inches




Migrated Communities, 2019
72 x 220 inches




Migrated Communities, 2019
72 x 180 inches




Migrated Communities, 2019
72 x 180 inches




Migrated Communities, 2019
72 x 180 inches




Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023, 42 x 42 inches




Fragmented: Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Fragmented: Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Fragmented: Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Fragmented: Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023, 33 x 30 inches




Explorer: Black and White series, 2023, 47 x 49.5 inches




Dislodged: Black and White series, 2023, 33 x 30 inches




Dislodged: Black and White series, 2023, 33 x 30 inches




Dislodged: Black and White series, 2023, 33 x 30 inches




Dislodged: Black and White series, 2023, 33 x 30 inches




Around the Globe: Black and White series, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Around the Globe: Black and White series, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Around the Globe: Black and White series, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Around the Globe: Black and White series, 2023,
33 x 30 inches




Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
33 x 30 inches




The Trade Route: The Red and White, 2023
48 x 52 inches




Dominion: The Red and White, 2023
33 x 30 inches




Dominion: The Red and White, 2023
33 x 30 inches




Dominion: The Red and White, 2023
33 x 30 inches



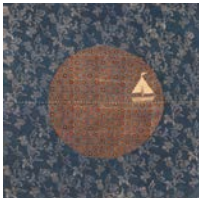
Dominion: The Red and White, 2023
33 x 30 inches




Dominion Across the Globe, 2023, 42 x 42 inches




Indigo Across the Globe, 2023, 33 x 30 inches



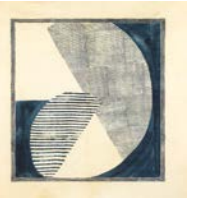
Indigo Across the Globe, 2023, 33 x 30 inches




Indigo Across the Globe, 2023, 33 x 30 inches



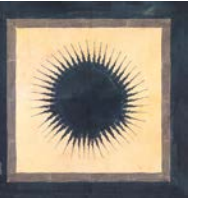
Indigo Across the Globe, 2023, 33 x 30 inches



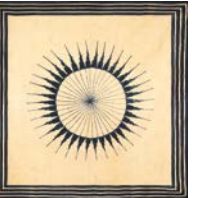
Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
33 x 30 inches




Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
33 x 30 inches



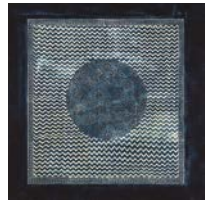
Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
33 x 30 inches



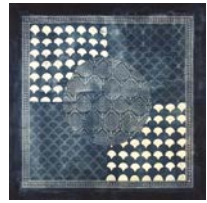
Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
33 x 30 inches



Indigo: Deeper than Blue series, 2023
33 x 30 inches



Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023, 33 x 30 inches



Red White and Black Make Blue, 2023, 33 x 30 inches



Indigo Trade, 2023
Kaftan: 50 x 35 inches



Indigo Territorial Domination, 2023
Kaftan: 50 x 36 inches



Indigo in Starry Nights, 2023
Kaftan: 50 x 36 inches



Indigo Across the Globe, 2023, Kaftan: 50 x 35 inches



Indigo Trade, 2023, Kaftan: 50 x 36 inches



Indigo Territorial Domination, 2023, Kaftan: 50 x 36 inches



Indigo Saplings, 2023, Kaftan: 50 x 36 inches



Clothing Gandhi's Nation, 2016, Size - medium
34 x 55 inches



Clothing Gandhi's Nation, 2016, Size - medium
34 x 55 inches



An Ode to Nil Darpan (triptych), mix media on canvas, 30 x 23 inches, 2009



An Ode to Nil Darpan, works on paper, 7 x 9 inches each, 2009



The Chakra Series, 2023
48 x 65 inches



The Chakra Series: The Three Wheels of Self-reliance 2022, 103 x 29.5 inches



The Chakra Series: The Spinning Wheel, 2022
54.5 x 49 inches



The Chakra Series: Self-Reliance (red), 2022
48 x 54.5 inches



The Chakra Series: Self-Reliance (blue), 2022
49 x 54 inches



An Ode to Nil Darpan, 2009, 60 x 40 inches



Empowering the World, 2023, 36 x 46 inches



The Tall Blue Devil in Starry Nights, 2022
84 x 34 inches



The Blue Devil in Starry Nights, 2016
54 x 36 inches



Blooming Indigo, 2016
54 x 36 inches



An Illusion to Ajrakh: An Indigo Plant, 2009
60 x 46 inches



Blooming Saplings, 2022
46 x 35 inches

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Contributors' Biography

Dr Sarah Fee is Senior Curator of Global Fashion & Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, and is Affiliated Faculty in the Art History Department of the University of Toronto. She holds graduate degrees from the University of Oxford and the School of Oriental Studies, Paris. Her research focuses on the weaving and dress arts of the western Indian Ocean world. Sarah's most recent exhibit and publication project is *Cloth that Changed the World: The Art & Fashion of Indian Chintz* (ROM/Yale University Press, 2020).

Laura Kina is a Chicago-based artist and Vincent de Paul Professor in The Art School at DePaul University. She co-edited *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (University of Washington Press, 2013) and *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art* (University of Washington Press, 2017). Kina is a curator for the Virtual Asian American Art Museum, series editor for the University of Washington Press "Critical Ethnic Studies and Visual Culture," and visual arts editor for Bridge Journal.

JohnnyML is a writer, translator, art historian, art critic, art curator, editor of art magazines, poet and a prolific blogger. He has three postgraduate degrees in Creative Curating, Art History and Criticism, and English Language and Literature. He is one of the pioneering curators in India who worked towards bringing respect to curatorial practice. He contributes to *Art India Magazine*, *Creative Minds*, *Art Journal* and many other exclusive art magazines. His blog, www.johnnyml.blogspot.com is a platform for his continuous response to various issues he addresses within the art world, literature and a variety of other realms.

Lisa Trivedi is the Christian A. Johnson Professor of Teaching Excellence and History at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. She is the author of *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Indiana, 2007) and *Refocusing the Lens: Pranal K. Patel's photographs of women at work in Ahmedabad* (Wellin Museum of Art, 2014). Trivedi's current research addresses women industrial textile workers in Bombay and Manchester between 1900-1950.

Michelle Yee is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University. She studies critical race visual culture and focuses on Asian diasporic and Asian American visual cultures. She holds a Ph.D. in Visual Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her writing can be found in *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas*, *Third Text*, *Panorama*, and *Art, Etc.*

Barbara Hanson Forsyth has worked in the arts for over 25 years, curating exhibitions and managing collections, as well as working in appraisals and sales, education, marketing, and development. Her career spans fine art, decorative art, folk art, design, and craft. Barbara earned a degree in Art History from Stanford University and a MA in the History of Decorative Arts, Design and Culture from the Bard Graduate Center.

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Thank you to **Dr. Shireen and Dr. Afzal Ahmad**, founders of the South Asia Institute, based in Chicago, IL. Shireen and Afzal invited me to the South Asia Institute in 2022, to showcase the space and then extended a formal invitation to reopen my *Indigo Narratives* show from 2009. I was excited by the idea of resurfacing my old show since Indigo still had a lot of scope and opportunity for more research and as a result, more creations, and storytelling. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my works on your platform and being partners in this journey! Thank you to **Andrea Moratinos**, the exhibition manager at SAI, who played an important role in assisting with the layout of the exhibition and putting our graphics and show together digitally.

Laura Kina and I collaborated as transnational artists for *Indigo: New Works* by *Laura Kina and Shelly Jyoti* in 2009, which then traveled to seven different venues across the US and India. Our artistic collaboration and partnership has only continued ever since with Laura curating *Indigo: The Blue Gold*. Laura brings in thought provoking ideas, her meticulous curation is impactful and will bring relevance to the audience and era of the show. Thank you for the immense effort in bringing *Indigo: The Blue Gold* to life.

Lisa Trivedi, sincere gratitude for your contribution to this show as an advisor, consultant, and author for the essays! Lisa's book *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* was an important pillar of research and inspiration for my show *The Khadi March: Just Five Meters*. Our common interest in Gandhi's philosophies and its relevance to today's times brought us together for the catalog essays she authored in 2016 and 2018. She brings perspectives to my creative visualization through her words. I appreciate her insightful perspectives and expertise.

Thank you to **Barbara Hanson Forsyth**, independent curator, appraiser, and co-author of forthcoming publication (2024) *Blue Gold: The Art and Science of Indigo* for Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA, for investing in time to draw connection between my installations “Sea Voyage” and “Fish-series” with *Indigo: The Blue Gold* with her research on through her essay titled “From Fascination to Exploitation: A Brief History of Humanity’s Indigo Obsession.”

JohnyML: A prolific Indian art historian, curator, and writer. Since 2007 to 2023, Johny has written for my solo exhibition catalog essays for Lyrical Abstraction 2007, *Indigo: New Works* by Shelly Jyoti and Laura Kina 2009, *The Salt March* 2013, *Revisiting Gandhi: The Art of Shelly Jyoti 2009-18 (Retrospective in India)*, and *Indigo: The Blue Gold*. Thank you for being an important link in my artistic journey and I value your contribution.

Sarah Fee, Senior Curator, Global Fashion & Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum, I extend my thanks for your essays providing a historical perspective on ajrakh textiles and indigo dye. Your contribution

to my show has enriched the contemporary fashion and textile collection. I appreciate your expertise and support through your essay “Printed Contemporary Fashions.”

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Below mentioned are names of my craftsmen, artisan and skilled workers who I have been working with for many years and their contribution is immense in making *Indigo: The Blue Gold* 2023. I am grateful for their presence in my artistic journey.

Juned Ismail Khatri, ajrakh master craftsmen, Ajrakhpur, Bhuj
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Sumant Devi, hand needle work (Siwan, Bihar)
Zameer Ansari, Nazrul, Saukat, zardozi embroidery: (Krishna Market, Old Gurgaon, Haryana)

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Ridham D Chhatrala Bhuj, Gujarat: Photography & Videography
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Indigo Across the Globe (Dptych), 2023
 Ajrakh printing, and dyeing, on khadi fabric,
 12 x 16 inches.



