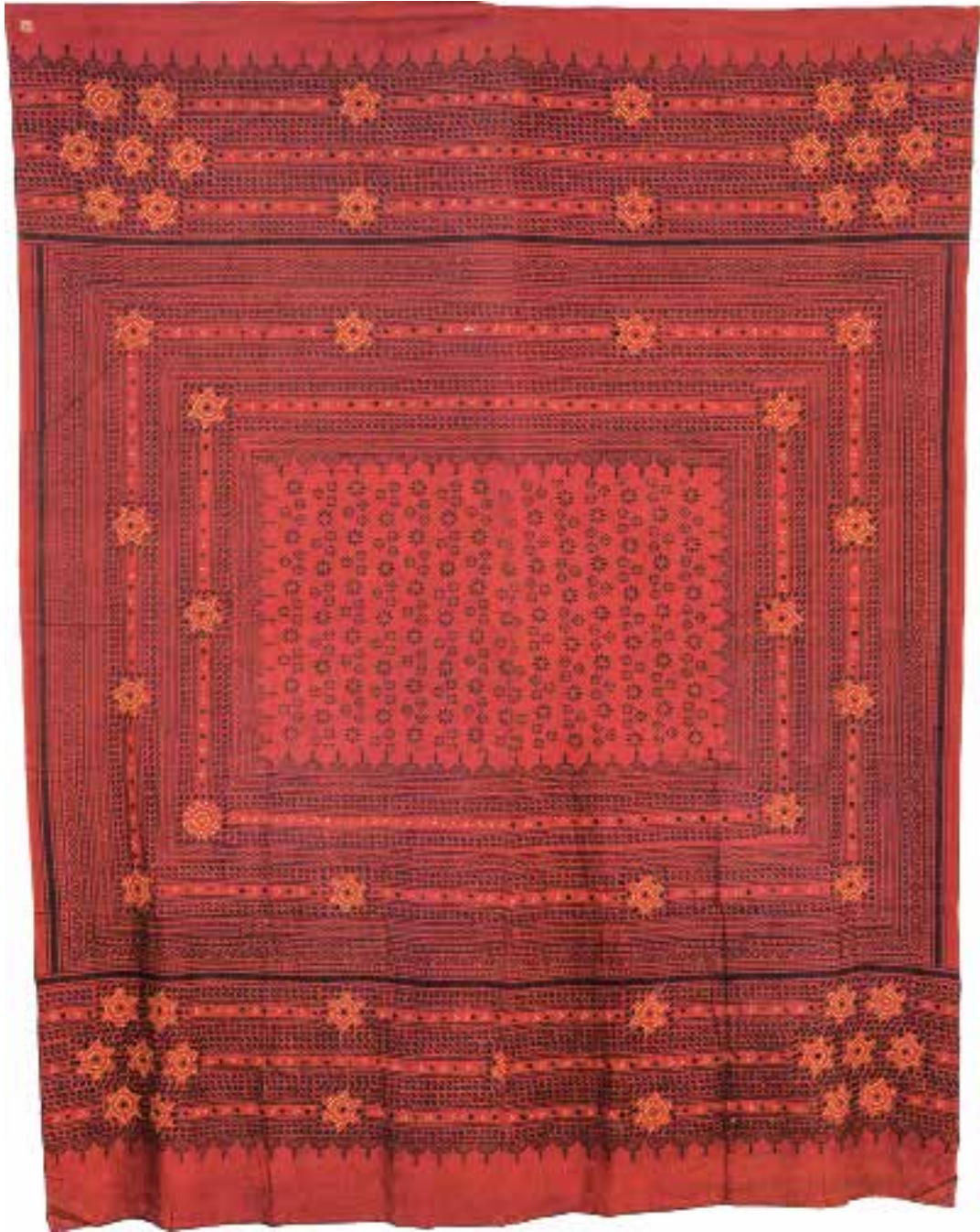


Textiles Asia

JOURNAL



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Stars and Corners Reinventing a Textile Connoisseurship

Judy Frater

A few years ago, while interviewing prospective students for the design course at Somaiya Kala Vidya, an institute in Kutch, India, for the education of artisans, I asked Jabbarbhai, a traditional *ajrakh* printer from Kutch, why he wanted to take the course. Jabbarbhai responded saying “I have printed yardage for 25 years, how long can you work for someone else? I have never made a corner.” His answer was an arrow in my heart. But I found that most people hearing his words could not sense the depth of his angst. What Jabbarbhai meant was that he wanted to create in the full sense of his tradition, rather than repeat one task in a production line. He wanted to use all of the aesthetics and skills of *ajrakh* to compose as well as execute print repeats. Jabbarbhai wanted to be an artist, not a worker.

Ajrakh is the most known and beloved of a range of hand block printed natural dyed textiles of Sindh, Pakistan and Kutch, Gujarat, India. It is a specific textile with an identity independent of how it is used, clearly defined by its attributes: a fixed set of multiple borders on long and short sides, and a field with one of fifteen or so block pattern variations. Each artisan had his own blocks from which his client could choose.¹ Each pattern is created with impressions of three blocks, an outline called *rekh* and two filling patterns called *datlo*—one for each color; all patterns must register. *Ajrakh* is indigo with classic Islamic patterns of red, black and white. The colors are created with a complex process of resist and mordant printing and dyeing with indigo, madder and iron acetate. In the most traditional version, the fabric is painstakingly printed on both sides of the fabric with perfect registration, twice. This creates deeper shades of indigo and madder, extends the life of the cloth and enables use as turban or shoulder cloth in which no reverse side shows.²

In Kutch today, the word *ajrakh* has come to mean any printed fabric, and printed fabric is produced in factory-like workshops. The many steps of printing are done by manual workers who may or may not be descendants of traditional Khatri artisans. By 2019, the 150 Khatri

families of Ajrakhpur, one of two main printing centers in Kutch, were producing an estimated 70,000 meters of printed fabric a month. To meet market demands of faster and cheaper production, some families have begun to screen print on tables up to 40 meters long rather than hand print on human scale tables. Many of today’s urban consumers cannot discern the difference between hand print and screen print, nor do they value it.

The shift in conception and valuation of hand craft in India evolved over the last seven decades. As India began nation building in the 1950s, the government



Ibrahimbhai Jat models an *ajrakh* shoulder cloth. An *ajrakh* can be worn as a turban, a sarong or a shoulder cloth. Jats are among the groups of Muslim Maldhari pastoralists who traditionally wore *ajrakh*. Photo credit: Mark Tuschman 2012.



A workshop for screen printing *ajrakh*, Dhamadka, Kutch. Originally, Khatri hand printed squatting at small tables low to the ground, then standing at higher 6 meter tables. The demands for cheap printed fabric in quantity have led to industrial innovations such as screen instead of hand printing, on tables as long as 40 meters. Photo credit: Judy Frater 2019.

focused on rapid industrialization. Abigail McGowan discusses at length how craft was swept into this movement as a complementary means of production that could promise “to help toward the common goal of building India’s path to the future.”³ With the influx of industrially produced goods, traditional clients began to prefer newly available mass-produced textiles over hand craft, and artisans were forced to look to more distant, unknown markets in urban metro centers. With industrialization, the concept of design as an entity was also introduced. Newly minted designers were actively encouraged to intervene in commercializing craft, both as an inspiration to developing an Indian style distinct from western aesthetics and to help artisans adapt to new markets. As McGowan elaborates, while early 20th century reformers saw crafts as important, national and declining, “almost everyone agreed that crafts were a distinct sector of the economy characterized by traditional styles, technologies, labor and organization. It was precisely this definition by tradition that provided outsiders the excuse to intervene. For all agreed that, while change was inevitable, artisans as a group were too tradition bound to handle it on their own.”⁴

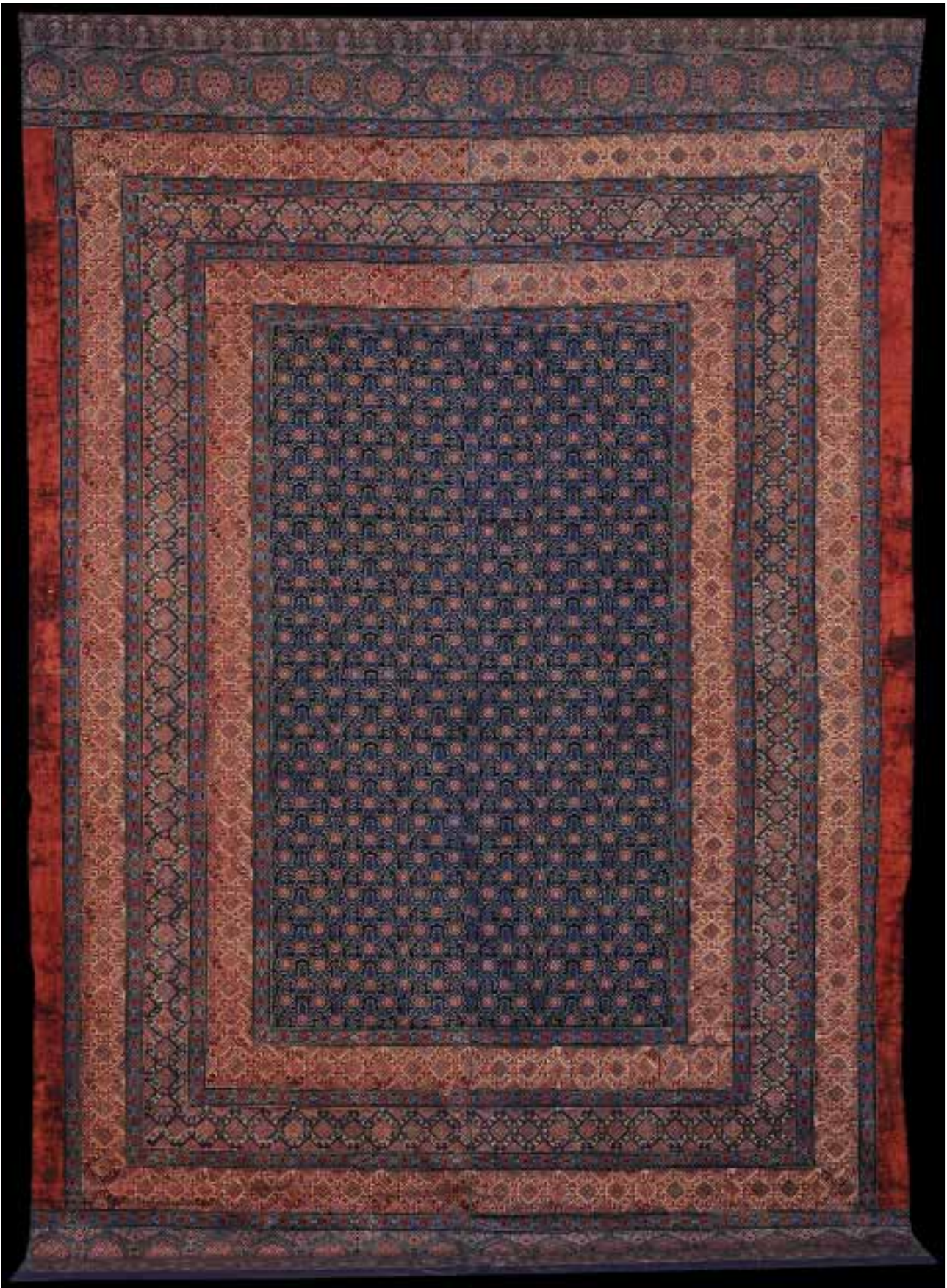
In the spirit of industrialization, commercialization of craft used an industrial model in which the assumed goals are to manufacture faster, cheaper and in a more standard manner. Craft became a commodity, and

artisans came to be considered skilled technicians who could realize the concepts of professional designers.

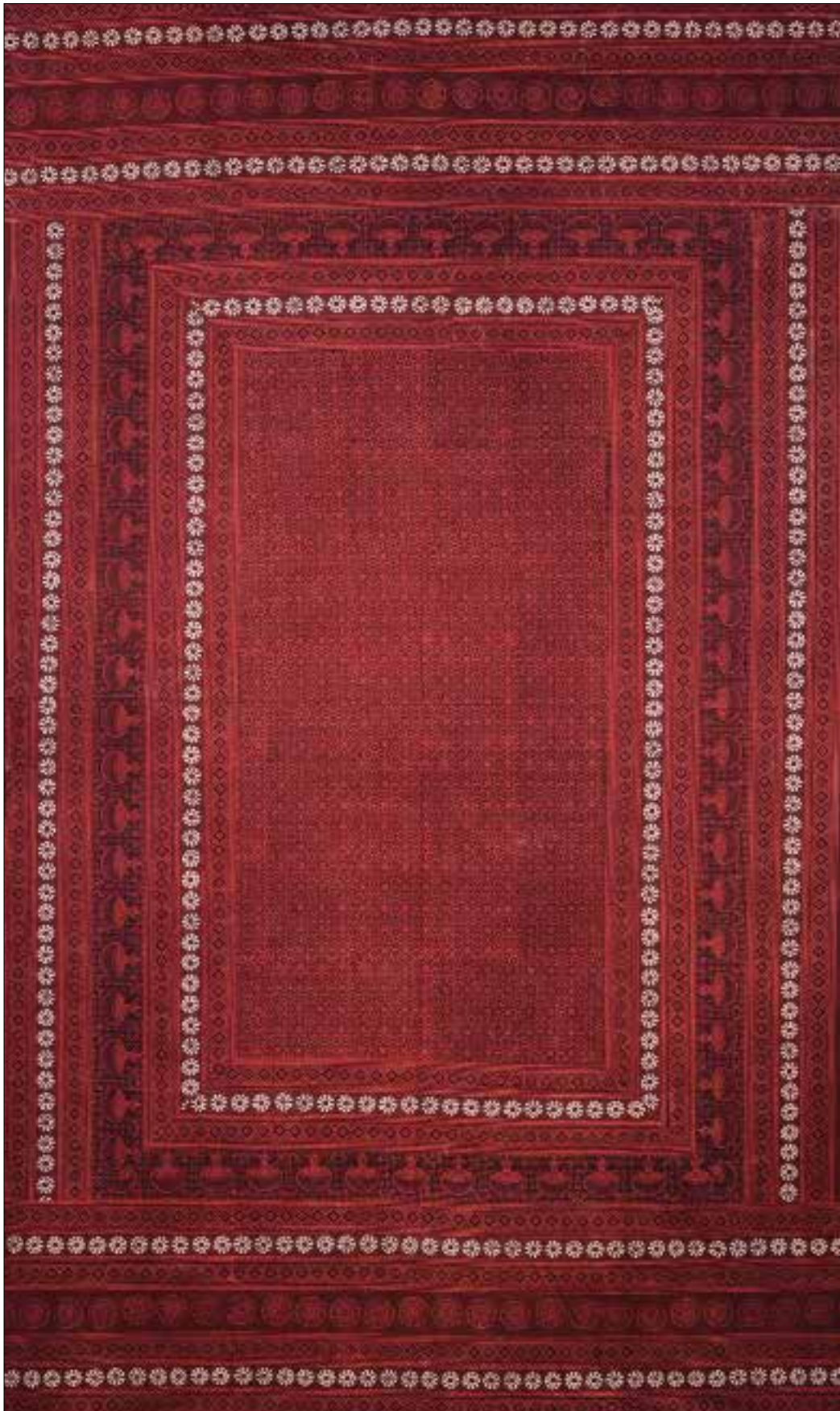
Traditions of hand block printing, as well as hand weaving, *bandhani* (tied resist dyeing), hand embroidery, patchwork and applique have been practiced in Kutch for at least ten generations. Pre-industrial *ajrakh* was created in a very different cultural eco-system. Men of the Khatri dyer community (of which Jabbarbhai is a member) printed and dyed a range of fabrics and interfaced directly with their traditional clients: pastoralists and agriculturists who lived in their immediate regions and wore the printed textiles.

These traditional textiles were created to express the identities of their users. Indian societies comprise many strictly delineated endogamous castes/ethnic communities, and historically identification of community membership determined many facets of interaction. The fibers, colours and patterns of textiles used for dress and home were specific markers of community identity and status within that community; textiles were a critical expression of cultural heritage.

Khatri dyers bartered their fabrics directly to their end users for milk, animals and grains. They knew their clients intimately, usually through hereditary relationships. They knew not only when births, marriages or deaths in their clients’ communities required textiles to mark those occasions but also the tastes of individu-



Traditional *ajrakh* with *kakar* motif in body, by Dr. Ismailbhai M. Khatri. The colors and border patterns of *ajrakh* are traditionally fixed. A client can express himself by choosing from about 15 body patterns. *Kakar*, which means clouds, is one of the oldest patterns. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.



Malir with *koyaro* (spider web) body pattern, by Dr. Ismailbhai M. Khatri. *Malir*, like *ajrakh* is a cloth used by Muslim pastoralist men as a *poth* (sarong). The name *malir* is derived from an old region east of Karachi in Sindh. *Malir* borders are also fixed and field patterns selected. Typically, a *malir* is deep maroon with black and white patterning. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.

als and the allowable variations in styles as that slowly changed over time. *Ajrakh* artisans created for specific clients, with the desire to please them in addition to simply earning. The strong element of personal recognition was mutual. The clients recognized and appreciated the subtle personal signatures of artisans with whom they associated and were what we might call connoisseurs. For generations, while men's craft making was transactional, artisans did not work simply to earn, but to exchange.

Because traditional fabrics were identity markers, allowable variations of designs were limited. Thus, the mutually agreed value for hand printed textiles was centered in skill. Excellence was defined as replicating the traditional designs as skillfully as possible. The artisan's focus was on creating the best, longest-lasting textile for a known and respected user.

In a 2008 interview, Dr. Ismailbhai Mohmed Khatri, an *ajrakh* master artisan, discussed how artisans and their clients evaluated hand printing.

“The art of *ajrakh* is from attention to all aspects. In the old days, the designs and motifs were all in our heads. So if someone asked us to make a *malir* we knew what a *malir* would be, and all the details of making it. There was no need to do any other planning.

Kutch printing is first-class. The patterns should be fine enough to be discernable from afar. From the details we can distinguish the work of an individual artisan. Traditional patterns were common to everyone, but artisans made or used them in different ways. The main distinctions in design are with the block maker. Fifty years later we can recognize each artisan's distinction in block, printing and color. No two are the same.

In printing, the registration must be correct and the impressions clear—not murky. The shapes and patterns should be distinct, and the end patterns should be perfectly symmetrical. If the joints between block impressions do not show then that is good. But it is hard work so in the whole piece somewhere or other you will see the blocks meeting. We do not call that bad. Screen print is too even—no sign of a hand block print is evident.

The combination of patterns on the textile should be balanced. Traditional borders did not vary. Clients could choose the field patterns. But the proportion of border to field was traditional. Any change in that would not look good. With colors,



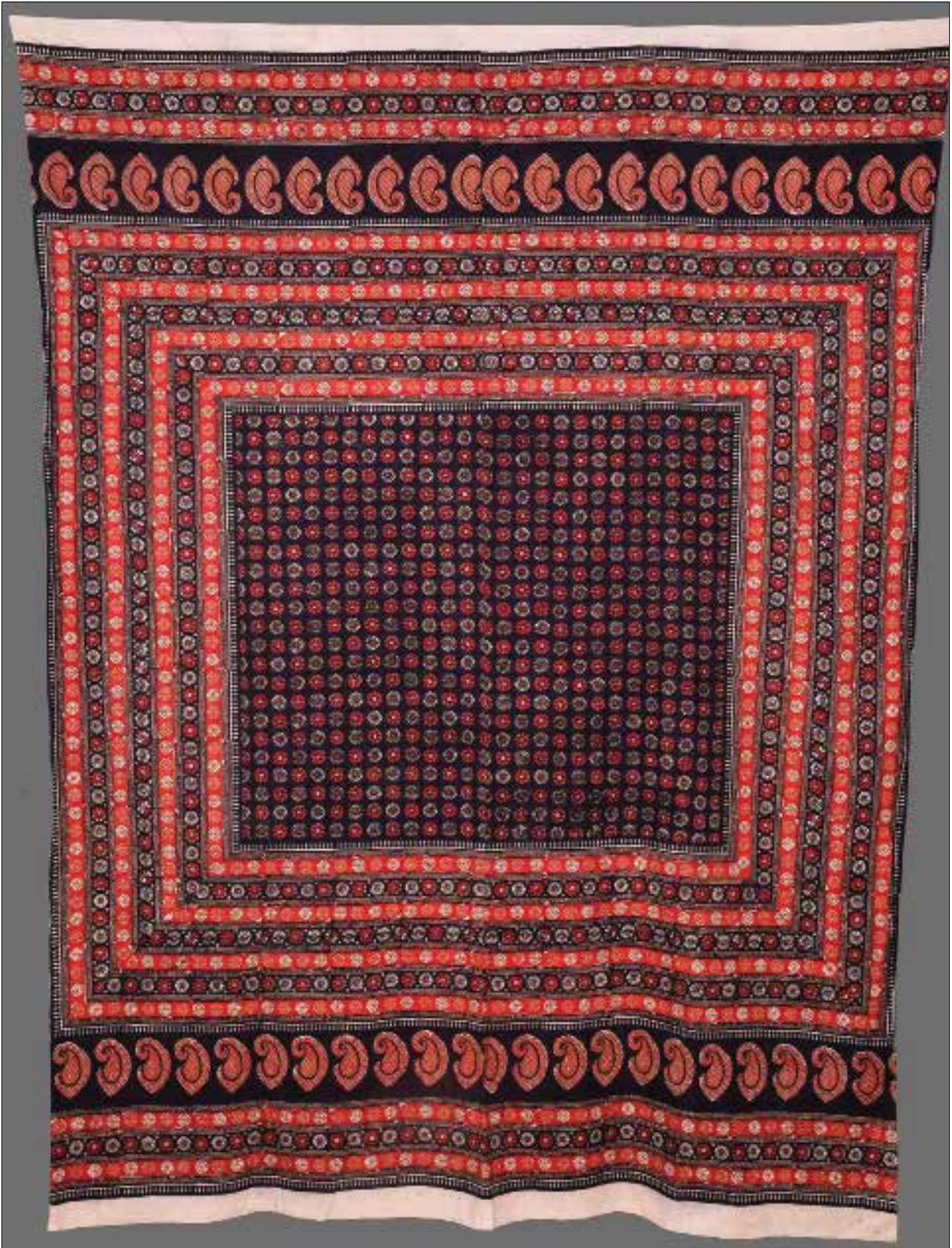
Screen printed fabric in *ajrakh* style, by Irfan Anwar Khatri. The cotton fabric is fine, the pattern, inspired by textiles printed in the *ajrakh* style for trade to Southeast Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries, is crisp. It is natural dyed. “It’s a screen print,” Irfanbhai warns me. The huge screens are cleverly designed with a line emulating a joint between smaller wood blocks. But the print is too fine and regular, mechanical. I buy it anyway, at a rate that can’t be matched with hand print. Photo credit: Judy Frater 2024.



Dr. Ismailbhai M. Khatri and fellow master artisan advisors teach the Somaiya Kala Vidya class of 2019 to examine their respective traditions. Each year, in the first module of the design course, advisors spend a day or two with students studying examples of traditional textiles. Photo credit: Judy Frater 2019.

too, when the indigo, black, red and white colors are balanced within capacity it looks beautiful. If any color is more or less then the textile does not look good. For example, white stars should be sharp and should sparkle.

The use of multicolors is the specialty of Kutch and shows the artisan's skill. Traditional Maldhari clients liked very dark colors, and deep colors also last longer. They are made by *minakari* technique, which uses at least four extra processes: resist and alum are printed a second time, the fabric is dyed again in indigo, washed, and re-dyed with alizarin to achieve double depth in indigo, black and red. *Minakari* is an old skill and we are preserving it, even though many people do not want or cannot grasp the value.



Nasbi malir by Dr. Ismailbhai M. Khatri. One particular variation of *malir* is the *nasbi malir*. The border patterns are specific to this cloth, and its unique, technically challenging characteristic is that it is entirely printed rather than being resisted and immersed in dye. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.



Maatheran by Dr. Ismailbhai M. Khatri. *Maatheran* is a block printed *odhani* (veil) derived from a *bandhani motichur*. As this was cheaper, it replaced that veil for everyday use by Muslim Maladhari women. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.



Jabbarbhai Habib Khatri presents his work to the final professional jury at Somaiya Kala Vidya. A long-time *ajrakh* laborer, he created this piece for Ashoke Chatterjee, who he met in Ahmedabad. The complex composition of many different patterns printed into geometric shapes required planning, masking areas and registration of blocks—as far from production printing as he could imagine. He added freehand brush texture for good measure. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.



Jabbarbhai presents a shawl from his graduating collection, along with his planning layout, to the final professional jury at Somaiya Kala Vidya. When questioned about production friendliness of his complex designs he said, “I made it to last.” Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.

Our traditional customers knew quality and would not take a textile in which the pattern did not show, or if there were spots or bad proportions. They wanted quality. Designs really developed through clients. When clients complained, if artisans paid attention, then quality improved.

We made small changes within the traditions. For example, a *motichur* is traditionally made in *bandhani*, an expensive technique, and the clients were poor. We made a block using iron pins to emulate the dots of *bandhani* and printed the same composition. The look was accepted. I was sure it would be. The difference in technology made the printed version, which is called *maatheran*, more affordable.”⁵

But traditionally, textiles were not evaluated primarily in terms of the cost of materials and labor. When I asked Irfanbhai Anwar Khatri how the community had ensured that the exchange of goats, milk or grain was equal to that of *ajrakh* textiles, he answered simply, “We didn’t.” The exchange was in terms of needs and capabilities.

Industrialization transformed the concept of creation to production. With focus on efficiency and cost, hand-crafted textiles became commodities, unspecialized products produced in quantity and sold on the basis of price rather than quality or style with little or no regard to who made them.

The inability to differentiate between hand print and screen print exemplifies the loss of value for *ajrakh* and related hand printed textiles. Contemporary clients, physically and culturally distant from artisans, no longer have knowledge of the textiles they consume nor the ability to recognize the personal signatures of artisans which are intrinsic to hand work.

Knowledge is the basis of value. Connoisseurship, “the ability to tell almost instinctively who painted a picture,”⁶ is a concept developed in the 18th century, out of a desire to cultivate and promote knowledge about the arts. However, membership in this club—the Society of Dilettanti—was open to only a select group.⁷

Although the word and the elitist connotation of connoisseurship may have gone out of fashion, the concept of cultivating value is alive and well. Consumers in the United States have been guided in how to value selected food and drink products. The “3rd wave” of coffee connoisseurship emphasizes the artisanal—creating value for small, personal production, where beans are sourced from farms instead of countries, roasting is about bringing out rather than incinerating the unique characteristics of each bean, and the flavor is clean and hard and pure.⁸ Another example is mezcal: Ronda Brulotte chronicles the transformation of mezcal from a local drink in Oaxaca to a prestige beverage north of the border and demonstrates how taste making practices borrowed from other food and beverages created new frameworks of connoisseurship for those who were not traditionally or historically mezcal’s intended consumers.⁹

Yet, a central question remains: Who determines the criteria used to create value? In the realms of art and food, historically intermediaries, critics and appointed connoisseurs rather than producers or traditional consumers guided clients.

In the world of hand craft in India today, critics or arbitrators are largely absent, and artisans use one set of criteria to evaluate their work while consumers who have

“learned” that craft is a commodity use another. I have observed more than once a visitor selecting what would be deemed by an artisan a shoddy example of a textile tradition over an excellent one because the colors went better with her home décor.

In 2005, I launched the year-long design course for artisans, which today operates as Somaiya Kala Vidya (SKV) in Adipur, Kutch. The objective was to teach traditional artisans design and connect them to contemporary clients.¹⁰ During the course students learn to apply elements and principles of design, analyze urban markets, express concepts and present their work. Heritage is a foundation of the course. In the first module, master artisan advisors, including Dr. Ismailbhai, teach students to examine and appreciate the traditions which they share to ensure that they retain their identity while creating innovations. Final collections are juried first by family members and then by design and craft professionals. Finally students test their designs in a pop-up exhibition in Ahmedabad.

Artisans such as Jabbarbhai take the course because they strive to be known as individuals, as their forebears were. And they strive to find success in new markets. Jabbarbhai gained the courage to test his ideas. He took the essential *ajrakh* star motif as his theme, enlarged it to grand proportion, and created textiles with numerous corners, demonstrating his skills

in composition and registration. The final professional jury gave him the award for Best Collection.

Tausifbhai, an *ajrakh* printer classmate of Jabbarbhai, created his own take on their shared tradition, a collection inspired by the date palms surrounding his village workshop. “When people see a date palm they look first at the dates and don’t notice the tree,” he said. “My workshop is in a date palm grove, so I see the palms every day. I thought about how the palms look dried from far but are alive and strong, and give delicious, sweet fruits. But before the picker gets to the fruits he has to go through thorns. I closely observed all aspects of the trees: roots, trunk, leaves and dates, I designed a large motif inspired by the leaves of the date palm and chose existing patterns that complement and recall date palms.”

Tausifbhai used traditional blocks in bold new ways to evoke the texture of the thatch of the palm trunk and create diamond shapes to represent the dates. In most of his work he printed traditional borders to represent his identity. He demonstrated his skills through identifying and meeting technical challenges, hand placing blocks and creating a black background in the body and indigo in the border. Tausifbhai’s collection was panned by the family jury, elders whose knowledge and experience centered on traditional work with limits on innovations.

Somaiya Kala Vidya’s design course teaches artisan



Tausifbhai presents a sari from his graduating collection to the family jury at Somaiya Kala Vidya. The stripes in the body evoke the texture of the thatch of the trunk, and the plain black diamonds are the dates, in an asymmetrical composition that is a major departure from a traditional *ajrakh*. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.

students to understand contemporary market tastes. Tausifbhai and Jabbarbhai innovated for clients they did not know. Both students made collections with the goal of creating something new and beautiful to show their identity and capability and to be recognized as artisan designers. The criteria they used for themselves combined traditional standards imbibed through their heritage and Dr. Ismailbhai's instruction as well as contemporary design concepts learned at Somaiya Kala Vidya.

As their target audience is distant, innovations must be more obvious than subtle changes in style or scale of a traditional pattern in a block. Jabbarbhai's stars and



Ajwa, the King of Dates, by Tausifbhai M. Yusuf Khatri. Tausifbhai designed the block he printed in this piece to represent Ajwa, and he created the dramatic, deceptively simple scarf to demonstrate his skill in printing. The blocks have to be carefully hand placed, which is more difficult than simple repeats. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.

Tausifbhai's date palms both sold well in the show in Ahmedabad that culminated the course. However, both of these graduates, new to contemporary markets, now work to find appreciative clients.

In the traditional craft ecosystem of Kutch, criteria for evaluating craft evolved from knowledge and understanding of a craft shared by maker and user. Artisan designers are learning contemporary aesthetics. Can today's clients gain value for craft traditions through learning about craft from an artisan perspective?

We need opportunities for consumers and makers to connect. I have observed the power of learning in shaping valuation. When a woman with hand print experience took a three-week course in *ajrakh* tradition, she began wanting to print simple white resist with an indigo background. She diligently learned to create complex traditional *ajrakh* and the even more complex green background innovation which requires additional resist printing and a final yellow dye over the indigo background. When the course concluded, I asked her which was her favorite work. The green *ajrakh*, she quickly replied. She had learned appreciation through connection with artisans and skills.

A client can also hone criteria for valuation in the traditional way, by extended close exchanges with artisans. In the "Connecting for India" project: *Rehnuma*, the designer Saloni Lodha (of the eponymous brand SALONI), asked a group of *ajrakh* artisans to create a collection on a theme. Brainstorming, they focused on the omnipresent *ajrakh* star, and then team member Aslambhai christened the collection *Rehnuma, the Guiding North Star*. The brief was broad: traditional natural colors, sizes corresponding to bedspreads and tablecloths. When everyone's work was shipped to Saloni's office, the quality control team, which works primarily with industrially produced fabric, was daunted by many imperfections.

Perfection is an industrial goal, while the artisan goal is excellence, as Ismailbhai explained in his differentiation between screen and hand print. This initiated a long deliberation among artisans and design team over valuation. The artisans had created special one-off work. Each gave a statement highlighting their concepts and their innovations. Aslambhai said he was answering a brief. He addressed the theme, *Rehnuma*, thinking of stars zoomed in and out, from different angles and perspectives, and the force of guidance, and made a collection, intending all of his work to be shown together.

Saloni's team was thinking in terms of sampling home textiles. But in an epiphanic change in perspec-



Ajwa, the King of Dates, by Tausifbhai M. Yusuf Khatri. Tausifbhai designed the large motif inspired by the leaves of the date palm and combined it with complementary traditional border patterns, illustrating innovation in his living tradition. Photo credit: Ketan Pomal, Studio L.M. 2019.

tive, Saloni decided to exhibit the collection not as products for sale but as art in a gallery in New York. The criteria for critiquing art, and its valuation, are very different from those used for products. Most striking was the impact of the dramatic change in perspective on Aslambhai's textiles. Initially, when viewed through the lens of bedspreads, they were not selected; displayed as art they became a focus of the show.

Saloni and her team learned to understand *ajrakh* from an artisan's view. The more we know, the more we value. In the traditional craft ecosystem, an artist's statement wasn't necessary. As Dr. Ismailbhai noted, nothing needed to be written down. "*Malir*" said it all and an artisan made the best *malir* he could.

We now need to guide the vision of the consumer. Although there is ambivalence about the exclusive-

ness of “connoisseurship,” knowledge is important. As is time. When Dr. Ismailbhai speaks of proportion of patterns and balance of colors, he is not precise but subjective. He is speaking with judgement honed from viewing thousands of printed textiles. In developing connoisseurship, there is no substitute for experience. Connoisseurship takes time. Incorporating indigenous understanding of technology and aesthetics with contemporary taste could develop an inclusive connoisseurship that reinvents the traditional artisan-client relationship. Further, shared understanding and valuation will

ensure that artisans and clients enjoy mutual respect and satisfaction: a sustainable system. “We want feedback from an informed client” Aslambhai said. “It has to be a collaboration.”

With his sons now managing the bread and butter production, Dr. Ismailbhai has begun to create limited editions of exquisite traditional textiles. I ask him what we need to do to get this quality? He smiles. “Make it with love,” he says. Even love for someone unknown. Many people don't want or can't grasp the value of minakari, he said. He is creating for those who can.



Rehnuma by Akibbhai Ibrahim Khatri, 2022. Akibbhai specializes in complex Islamic geometric compositions. These require planning, sketching, concentration and registration skills. If he makes a mistake, the entire piece is ruined. Akibbhai created this piece inspired by *Rehnuma*, the Guiding Star, for the designer Saloni's project, "Connecting for India." Photo credit: Raul Tovar.



Rehnuma, by Aslambhai Abdul Karim Khatri, 2022. Aslambhai created this piece inspired by *Rehnuma*, the Guiding Star, for the designer Saloni's project, "Connecting for India." Aslambhai explained "In the old days, people relied on stars to navigate. In the center I created different shapes to show how the bright North star can guide us through the darkness." Plain blocks of color are technically challenging, as natural dyes tend to be splotchy. Photo credit:

Endnotes

- 1 Patterns documented in the workshop of Dr. Ismailbhai Mohmed Khatri included *miphudi kerī* (mango in drizzling rain), *miphudi naani* (small version of drizzling rain), *kori* (Kutchi coins), *champaaphali* (frangi-pani flower), *khaarek kanaavaari* (dates and spots) *khaarek moti phuladi* (dates with big flowers) *gini* (gold coin) *riyaal* (Saudi coin), *riyaal bodi* (Saudi coin without star), *riyal chokdi* (Saudi coins in corners) *pencho* (five designs), *chaar phuladi* (four flowers) *chaar pa ek* (four parts one), Mohammed *saahi* (made by Mohammed Siddique), *kakar* (clouds), *koyaro* (spider web) *suraj mukhi* (sunflower). These are illustrated in Frater, Judy, Ismail Khatri and Latha Tummuru, 2021. *The Art of the Dyer in Kutch: Traditional Block Printed Textiles/ Culture and Technique*. Kindle Direct Publishing.
- 2 Frater, Judy, Ismail Khatri and Latha Tummuru, 2021. *The Art of the Dyer in Kutch: Traditional Block Printed Textiles/ Culture and Technique*. Kindle Direct Publishing.
- 3 McGowan, Abigail, 2009. *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.199.
- 4 Ibid, p. 203.
- 5 Khatri, Ismail Mohmed, 2008. Personal interview.

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8 Jonathan Gold (March 12, 2008). "*La Mill: The Latest Buzz*". *LA Weekly*.

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10 Frater, J., 2020. "From Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya to Somaiya Kala Vidya: Education as a Sustainable Future for Artisans of Kutch and Beyond," in "Education for Artisans," *Global Journal of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Issue 6.



Color block stars by Akibbhai Ibrahim Khatri, 2022. In this deceptively simple textile, Akibbhai displays his expertise. Plain areas are more difficult than printed ones. Photo credit: Raul Tovar.

Fulbright and Ford Foundation fellowship alumnus and Ashoka Fellow, **Judy Frater** lived in Kutch, India, for 30 years, where she researched traditional textiles and founded Kala Raksha Trust, the Kala Raksha Museum, and Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya, the first design school for artisans. She later reinvented the school as Somaiya Kala Vidya. During almost 15 years as director of the program, she was honored with the Sir Misha Black Medal for Design Education, the Crafts Council of India Kamla award, and the Designers of India Design Guru Award. She was recognized by Conde Nast Traveller India as one of 50 champions of sustainable travel and by Architectural Digest India as one of nine "Grande Dames of Craft." Frater has master's degrees in South Asian Languages from the University of Minnesota and in Museum Studies from the University of Washington. Previously Associate Curator at The Textile Museum in Washington DC, she is author of *Artisans by Design: An Odyssey of Education for Textile Artisan in India* (2024), *The Art of the Dyer in Kutch* (2021), and the award-winning *Threads of Identity: Embroidery and Adornment of the Nomadic Rabaris* (1995). She currently resides in Santa Fe and teaches the values of hand craft through lecturing and writing. In 2022, she was Artist in Residence at the UW, Madison, and she has led annual artisan tours in Kutch since 2022. blog: <http://threadsofidentity.wordpress.com>
www.textileslive.com

Recently Published

Tibetan Rugs: The Rudi Molacek Collection

By Rudi Molacek, Thomas Wild, Thomas Cole and Felix Elwert

Artist and photographer Rudi Molacek has assembled, with an artist's eye, an idiosyncratic collection of more than 300 Tibetan carpets, rugs, mats, seat-, bench- and saddle-covers. Between the 15th and the 20th centuries they were woven for both sacred and secular purposes by Tibetan nomads and villagers, and in the shadow of monastic centers across the Tibetan Plateau. The first volume presents Tibetan rugs intended for sitting, sleeping, meditation and horse riding, as well as those made to furnish the region's prestigious temples and monasteries—an expression of the relative wealth and status of their owners. The second volume focuses on a group of so-called "Wangden" rural rugs, characterized by a unique weaving technique, some of which have been the subject of an illuminating exercise in radiocarbon dating to establish the antiquity of the tradition. (source: www.amazon.com)

HALI Publications, Ltd. (April, 2024)

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Beyond the Loom: The People Who Crafted Rugs in Kathmandu, Monsoon 2023

By Narendra Shrestha with Ryan Higgins

"You need to show people how their rugs are made."

This is the belief of Ryan Higgins of Tamarian, a US-based company that designs and imports fine hand-made rugs knotted in the Tibetan tradition. This book documents the lives of the weavers making Tamarian's rugs in Kathmandu over eight days in July 2023. Award-winning photographer Narendra Shrestha's brief was to document all the processes of rug making, focusing on the human element. In his photos, we see the joy found in the everyday, the exquisite and labour-intensive art that is weaving, and the ancient blending seamlessly with the modern. *Beyond the Loom* is a love letter to Nepal, its people and the inherent beauty of the hand-made. (source: <https://shop.hali.com>)

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