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Designers turn entrepreneurial amid pandemic

Pranav Shriram

BENGALURU: Graphic designing has become an exciting opportunity for a large number of youngsters across the country. Having chosen to work on their passion, some have enabled the path to an increasing number of followers as freelancers, while others aim to flourish as established brands. The pandemic in many ways has brought such opportunities for them but has also influenced many aspects of setting-up of the businesses and garner a larger support base & greater reach. In a report published last year, based out of a survey conducted on 11,362 freelance creators across 147 countries, online graphic design service 99 Designs talks about the developments in the realm of graphic designing and their functioning during the pandemic.



Products by Purity

satisfied," he added.

Imkong's path to the creation and set up of this business strikes a good resemblance to the findings of the 99 Designs survey. According to the report, 72% of the respondents

Im Kong

created for the general mass while some designs were created for a certain section of people. So, though created from scratch, inspiration for our designs varies from design to design," he said. Additionally, he has taken to studying and learning the process of promoting using Facebook Ads, Google Ads and Reels. However, he also attributed the increasing sales of the brand's products to the experiences shared through word-of-mouth.

The founder and creator had a fairly neutral stance on whether the situation created by the pandemic was a boon or bane for his business. "The pandemic has given the opportunity for me to sell a lot of products online but it has also prevented the idea of a brick & mortar structure becoming real," he said.

Having understood an entrepreneurial designer's journey into maintaining a new business during a pandemic, it is but natural for many to wonder why such a venture should claim any conversational space. Sweta Agarwal, creator of The Artsy Company page, elaborated her opinions on this. According to her, the "aspect of creativity and the ability to execute your imagination" is what makes graphic designing a profession one can consider taking up during these testing times. "In

the era of social media, art is an on-growing brand and has a lot of potential for growth, given ones talent and artistic creations," she added.

Primarily focused on gifting products, @theartsy.co (the official instagram handle of the page), they create graphic designs for hampers which can be customized for many occasions, including weddings, birthdays, etc. For Sweta, the primary factor while creating the page and setting the business, was attracting all the demographics. "To create a brand with new designs and something not seen often in the market available, and to stand out from the market requirements," were part and parcel of the objectives set out for the business.

Along with many other such objectives, Sweta also lauded the tools that social media platforms

of people around the world got a platform and time to showcase their work and art." However, a sense of relief was expressed as she noted, "we were thankful enough to get a bunch of orders and the ability to grow our business during this rough time.

Judith Chettri considered the option of starting an online business which focused on the sale of stickers and photo cards designed by her. This plan was executed through her Instagram page, 'murasakinokloud'. According to her, the right equipment would go a long way on the right platform as a designer starts presenting her or his work. With this comes the step of recognizing the right target audience.

Graphic designing during the pandemic has indeed produced a interesting range of motivating



Judith's first designs

According to their infographic, a "positive thread in the story of 2020, was found in designers' personal & professional growth during the pandemic. Online learning led the charge as the most common way for designers to upskill."

A clothing/apparel brand from Nagaland has been slowly proving to be a strong presence with its designs and products. Purity Founder and Creator, Imkongtsukdak Tzuwar shared his experiences on how he maintained the brand's functioning during the pandemic. "My brand as of now is online based, so I don't think the pandemic has affected it in terms of its brand image because everyone is at home and mostly on their phones, but in terms of sales, I think it could have done better like any other business would have, without the pandemic around," he said. "My goal was to achieve popularity and become a household name rather than make a huge profit from sales but nonetheless I am still

Ig/@murasakinokloud

learnt newer skills from YouTube & 36% chose online courses. He also attributed his success to the high level of importance he attached to research. "Nobody in my family has any background in graphic designing or in the apparel industry, so I took it to YouTube and Udemy and started learning how to design using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator and designed my own logos, created apparel designs in collaboration with other artists, spent years on sampling products from all over the country so that my brand is known for the quality we deliver, how to provide impactful customer service, and everything I should know and the research is still ongoing so that everything within my brand improves," he said.

Talking about the designs and its inspirations, Imkong explained that he wanted to stay original and create an impact in the society by presenting his brand as a premium example. "Some designs were



Representative Image

provide and the assistance they provide while setting up new businesses. "Instagram is the best social media platform available for all small businesses, targeting the right audience, and with the right marketing skills, it helped to expand the brand on social media," she said. She further said, "A lot

Creative Commons

range of stories for creative individuals who looked forward to explore their creative potential and turn them income-generators. According to Imkong, "Filtration of information and knowledge is the important stage in bringing an idea into existence." Sweta subscribed to the motto which demands her fellow designers to "work hard on the quality & production." Judith, additionally suggested that one "should be very patient" with oneself. According to her, this should also extend to the customers. For her, taking a break also provides the ability to achieve the necessary goals set out. "Just because you own a small business, doesn't mean you need to constantly work yourself to death, just to come up with something."

With the pandemic as a backdrop, faced with hurdles, and with a knack for skills, these budding entrepreneurs turned distress into an opportunity.



Sweta's designs from 2019

Ig/@theartsy.company

What it took to keep the art of wood carving alive

Suhas S Kashyap

BENGALURU: India is a country known for its diverse art and culture. Wood carving is one such art that has flourished in the country. This art form can be found from palaces and furniture to handicrafts. Wood carving today is a rare feat while artists are trying to revive the market for the art.

A family near Bengaluru is still practicing the art as a profession. They are the fifth generation artists in the family practicing the art. Belonging to Soraba Sri Maroor Ganapathappa family, this art is passed on to them by their ancestors. The group of artists are known as Gudigars, have worked upon to create historical places that stand strong even today.

Gudigars are a micro minority community that mainly depend upon fine art of wood carving for a living while spreading its glory across the world today. In the present day only a few Gudigars still continue to practice the artform. They are based out of Shivmogga and Sagara districts, and are now spread across the world. They have a part in creating wood carving fine art from present day Mysore Palace to Vidhan Soudha and more.

M S Malatesh, a mechanical engineer and M S Ravindranath, a civil engineer by education, continue to practice and sustain the art even today. "The art was initially created upon Ivory, later was done on Sandalwood especially in Karnataka. In the present day it is practiced on teakwood. The scarcity of the sandalwood was a major reason for the art's transformation to teakwood usage apart from other reasons such as cost and government restrictions. All the recent art created is using teakwood" told M S Ravindranath explaining about transformation

of the art with time. He displayed one of the preserved art works done by his great Grandfather on ivory. "The initial art done on Ivory was minute and highly detailed. It took immense effort and concentration to create. It was different from working on large spaces" he added.

"Our ancestors are one of the six families who wood-works on the present-day Mysore Maharaja Palace. They created wood worked on the doors, ceiling and decorations for the newly built palace," said M S Ravindranath. He also added that his grandfather Ganapathappa, a renowned artist has created the throne for the Ramachandrapur Mutt, Hosanagar.

"Initially the work was demanded only by temples and palaces, and was rewarded through barter system. Our ancestors survived by creating art for wherever the demand came from. They moved around creating art. The art spread through temples and such structures," said M S Ravindranath speaking about the growth of art during their ancestral period.

During the Portuguese Empire in India, the artists fled from Goa for survival. They settled in the parts of Old Mysore region: Soraba, Shivamogga. "Once we settled in Old Mysore region, we started using various medium such as teakwood for the survival of art," M S Ravindranath explained.

Talking about the present-day market for the art M S Malatesh said "The art presently is carried out on teakwood. The major market today are the temples and handicrafts. The art is making a comeback in the foreign markets as well, but the number of artists that practice the art is very few," he said. "The demand for chariots and other hand carved items are increasing as this art is exclusive."



M S Ravindranath explaining chariot making process.

Suhas S Kashyap

"Being a mechanical engineer I am working on this art since 1989; I learned this from my grandfather. We have manufactured over 160 chariots, various palanquin, doors and rathasuptho for various states in India as well as for foreign countries. We use specialized technique to manufacture chariots. We mainly manufacture Pushparatha, one of the types of various chariots," he explained speaking about the demand for the art in the present day.

M S Ravindranath said "recently the usage of fibre-wood in order to create various pieces has begun. A cast is prepared from which similar

pieces can be mass produced. This kind of pieces created using fibre-wood will not have the exclusivity. The original art cannot be mass produced. There are possibilities of usage of CNC and various technologies. Most of the modern-day door carvings are done using automated machines, but an artist's work can never be recreated using machines."

"To save the art form and continue it further we have hired interested people and trained them to carve on wood. We hope that we will be able to train more interested people to preserve the art and carry it forward. We want the art to

survive forever and receive huge recognition," he added.

Ivory art, an art form practiced by Gudigars, has come a long way. It has transformed from Ivory art to Sandalwood and further to Teakwood. The art is presently known as wood carving and is carried out on teakwood. The art is lately receiving recognition. Both, handicrafts and large format art such as Chariots. are receiving demand from within the country and from foreign countries as well. With only few artists remaining, it is high time that we recognize these art forms and help them carry it for the generations ahead.

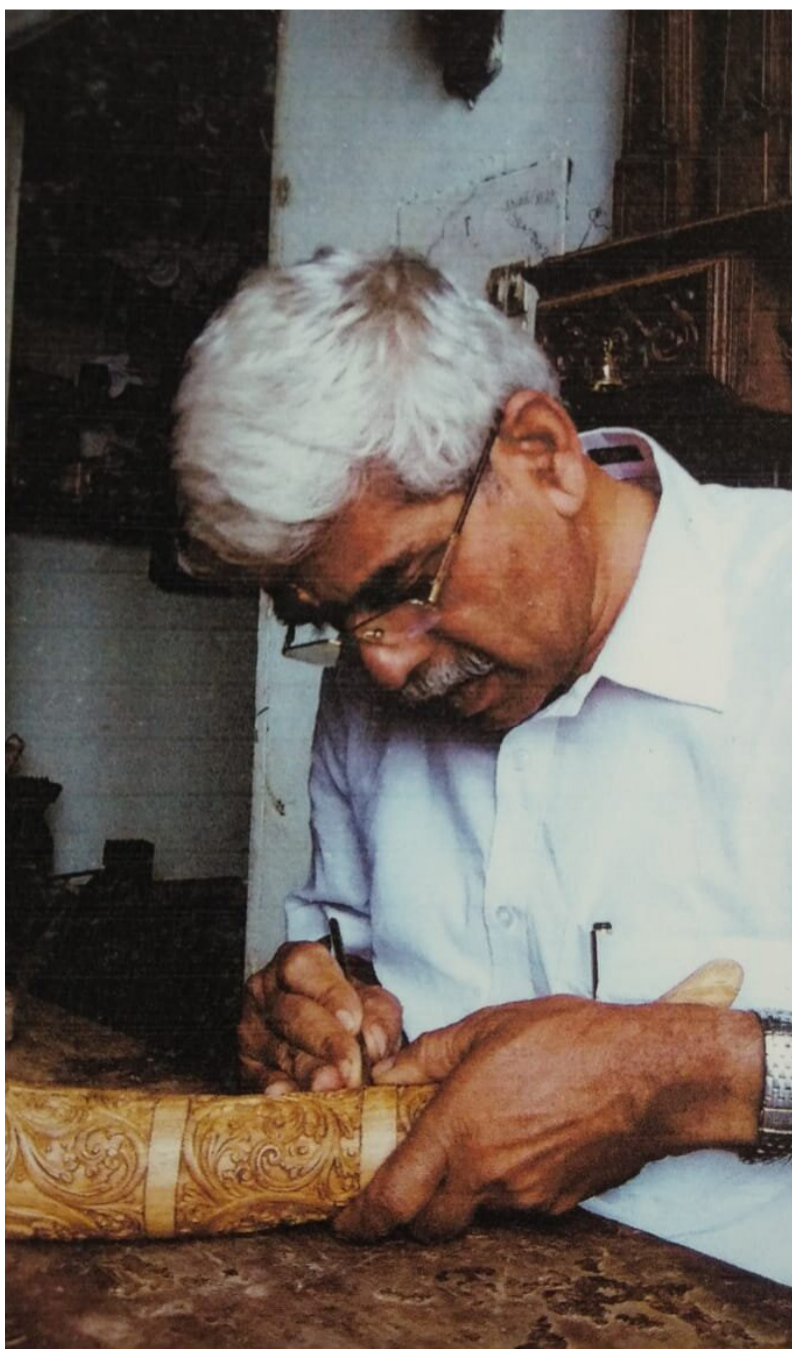


Carving art done by M S Malatesh Suhas S Kashyap



M S Malatesh displaying a chariot

Suhas S Kashyap



M S Malatesh carving wood

Suhas S Kashyap

“Indian wood carving art is an exclusive art and has immense history to it. It has survived over years through timely transformations. It is very important that we save this art.

– M S Malatesh,
Wood Carving Artist

Kochi-based calligraphy artist pens culture



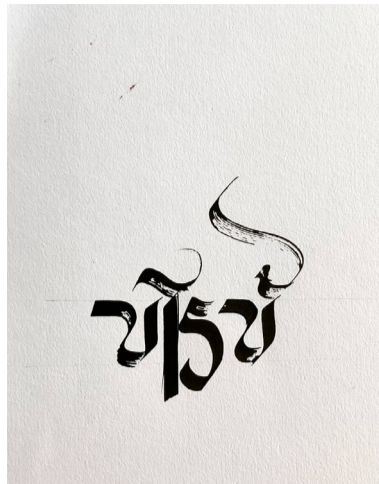
Bangla/Bengali Composition

Arakkal Shada Amina

Kochi-based calligraphy artist Prajwal Xavier didn't consider himself one who would conduct an online workshop to teach calligraphy. In an in-person session, he was able to assist each person individually and guide them to perfect their artwork—be it the angle they hold the materials or the pressure they apply. Prajwal, however, like everyone else on the planet, did not anticipate a pandemic that would halt one of the things he loves doing the most—sharing his expertise in the craft with like-minded artists. He ultimately decided to take the plunge and began conducting online sessions and unexpectedly it turned out to be an enriching and rewarding experience.

Prajwal's interest in calligraphy began much before he had any inkling of what calligraphy is. "When I was in lower (primary) school, I always paid special attention to lettering when we had to draw something. Be it the names on buses, the brand names of cars, or the small typographical elements on lorries—I attempted to bring in a written element at all times," said Prajwal. It was a while before he realized what he was interested in was called calligraphy, a discovery whose inspiration he credits to the unknown artists behind everyday signboards and street signs he was privy to from a young age.

"In the beginning, I didn't realize that calligraphy is a specific art style. It was only when I was in college that I came to know of the distinction of calligraphy as



Malayalam 'Vidavu', Gap/Absence



Malayalam alphabets 'Ka Kha'

an art style and that it is part of a bigger canvas," he said. Prajwal is a self-taught artist. The 29-year-old obtained a BTech degree from Toc H Institute of Science and Technology, Kochi before throwing himself into the craft. During the initial phases of his artistic endeavour, Prajwal referred to multiple artworks and engaged in conversation with various veteran artists about calligraphy and related topics. This process ultimately paved the way for his specialization in calligraphy—Prajwal is now a seasoned calligraphy artist with a national and international presence.

While his specialization lies in the Malayalam script, Indian signboards and other Indian scripts such as Odiya, Gurmukhi, Bangla, and Tamil, he is also interested in ancient scripts such as Hebrew. Prajwal's calligraphy mostly follows the Gothic or Uncial styles, and is always a sight to behold.

While he continued to expand his artistry, Prajwal conducted various calligraphy workshops to acclimate other people to this craft and share his experience. The workshops were sometimes conducted in coordination with universities and sometimes independently. To date, he has conducted over 400 workshops in different cities of the country.

When the pandemic hit, Prajwal like most artists took to online platforms to sustain his craftsmanship. Talking about the shift, he said: "I never thought I'd be the kind of artist to conduct an online workshop. I liked offline sessions more because when it's in-person, I am able to understand whether they grasped the concept I'm teaching and help them with



Odiya/Oriya Composition 'a ā ī ī' Background strokes denote 'Ca'



Malayalam alphabets 'Pa Pha Ba Bha'

other nitty-gritty things such as the angle they hold their pens in. I couldn't do those things online. When I realized the pandemic wouldn't end anytime soon, I started conducting online sessions, an experience that came with a silver lining."

The silver lining that accompanied online workshops was accessibility. "I received inquiries from various people interested in participating in a workshop, but they were located in areas I couldn't conduct offline sessions in. When inquiries about online sessions started flowing in and I realized I have the audience for it, I began conducting workshops online. This opened up the demographics of my audience. Applications came in from within the country as well as outside of it," he said. Prajwal conducted a workshop online once every two months with limited seat availability. His workshops are inclusive of high-quality materials that he carefully curates, packs and sends to the participants.

Workshops aren't the only things Prajwal misses because of the pandemic. Calligraphy, like all forms of art, is incomplete without festivals and exhibitions that celebrate it. He said: "Because of the pandemic, a lot of events

that I was looking forward to were cancelled. I was especially excited for the Typography Day event conducted by IDC School of Design (IDC), Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay) with support from India Design Association (InDeAs) and Aksharaya, but that too will be held online." Prior to the pandemic, Prajwal was invited and his artwork was exhibited in the Asian Calligraphers Event held in Singapore in 2019. His calligraphy has also been exhibited at the Indian Calligraphy Festival.

He has big plans for when the pandemic ends. The first one is to conduct a sign walk. He said: "I've only conducted one sign walk so far. Sign walks are popular outside of Kerala, but it's more or less unheard of here. Like a photowalk, my group and I went to the Ernakulam Market to observe the street signs and other sign boards. On these walks, we pay attention to the style, the typography, the font, the material, the category it falls into and more."

He has a few personal projects to tend to as well. "I want to release more products under my brand, and hopefully devise a new font," said Prajwal, thrilled for the things to come.



Gujarati Composition, Peacock 'Tha'



Prajwal Xavier in his element

Clay art takes center stage on social media

Riya Joseph, Nandita Narayanan

With a plethora of small businesses of booming on social media platforms, we've been witnessing a fairly new phenomenon of clay-based products making an entrance in the market as well. Interestingly, polymer clay jewellery and pottery have been creating quite a stir among the digital natives. Once considered among the clan of traditional jewellery and handicrafts, Gen Z has managed to give these creations and designs a contemporary twist. Let's delve a little into the origin and history behind clay art and how this art form thrives today.

Terracotta Jewellery: translating to "baked earth" the use of terracotta

clay traces back to the Mohenjo-daro period, where terracotta clay was utilized to create artefacts, sculptures, pottery and jewellery. Over the years, terracotta craftsmanship was popularly used by tribal communities in states like West Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat and even in some regions of East Uttar Pradesh. Clay was used to make a variety of products, ranging from Hindu deities to decorative pots before it got streamlined to jewellery and pottery in recent times.

India's history with pottery is deeply entrenched in its rich and varied culture. From Chunar in Uttar Pradesh, known for its distinctive fine black clay pottery to Rajasthan's, Pokhran pottery

which has geometrical etchings reminiscent of its traditional style, each state in India follows a distinct technique when it comes to the products they create.

Today the art form has carved out an online presence for itself, with many self-taught artists taking to social networking sites to sell their wares. With the younger generation taking an interest in clay art, either, as a part time hobby or full-time business, an increasing number of Instagram stores have cropped up over the social networking site catering to the netizens.

Communique got in touch with these artists to hear about their journey and see what it means to run an online business during a pandemic.



Flower earrings

Instagram/its.kanila



Handpainted teapots

Instagram/melodramagicpottery

"I found creating pottery almost therapeutic and soothing. I liked the fact that you can mould something and the idea of building something that I can see.(sic)"

-Prachi Dutta, The Lune Space



Clay cups

Instagram/thelunespace_

Prachi Dutta, The Lune Space

Prachi Dutta, an architect by profession, found her calling for pottery through videos on Youtube and Instagram. She currently runs a pottery shop on Instagram under the banner of The Lune Space. "I found creating pottery almost therapeutic and soothing. I liked the fact that you can mould something and the idea of building something that I can see." The Bengaluru based artist specialises in wheel-thrown products like mugs, bowls, coffee pour-overs and plates. Speaking on conducting business on social media she says "You can essentially set up shop on Instagram with Instagram business. It also helps promote your business and gives insights on how many people visited your profile, so you get an idea of how your profile is doing by large."



Necklace

Instagram/classicclaycreations_

Dhruvi Manek, Classic Clay Creations

"As a kid, I've always been creative and active", said Dhruvi Manek, Mumbai based small business owner. "Sitting idle is my worst nightmare. I was pretty bored during the lockdown and I saw clay jewellery being a trend in India. Clay has always been my cup of tea."

Dhruvi explains how this venture was best suited for her. She explains how it's fun however it is a long process

"Designing earrings and playing with clay is my favourite thing then, baking, securing, arranging, varnishing, etc. But all the wait is worth it because the product comes out so good. I've had my bad days too but I've got my hands on it now." she describes. Dhruvi sells an array of accessories ranging from earrings to necklaces.



Clay wares Instagram/melodramagicpottery

Shershtha Rakshit, Melodramagic Pottery

"When I moved to Bangalore to pursue a career in science, I attended several ceramic workshops out of curiosity at a pottery studio. After that I learnt through watching videos on the internet, and practising at home," says Shershtha Rakshit, a corporate employee based in Bengaluru. Rakshit who runs Melodramagic Pottery on Instagram has a home studio where she makes her wares. Talking about her work she says, "Selling handmade pottery is a challenge in itself as it competes with price of mass produced tableware/decor. Finding the right audience and expanding that audience is tricky for Indian potters usually. My work will fall in the category of functional art work. They range from tableware, home decor to quirky collectibles."



Earrings

Instagram/its.kanila

Shivani Sahay, It's Kanila

"When I started I had a lot of trouble finding the materials. Clay was expensive. But, the other materials I needed were also expensive." said Shivani Sahay. "I couldn't find most of the products on Amazon or Flipkart. So I started with limited production materials. However, with time I got to know about other small businesses which are into selling such production materials and things got easier."

She explains how the process is time-consuming if one look into the practical aspect, however, she adds it's not time-consuming if one looks into the emotional aspect. "I love what I do. So, I don't mind sitting for hours, visualising and creating designs, actually making the designs, baking them, sanding them."

“Weddings are never out of trend” - bridal artists

Mohamed Shahul Hameed H

BENGALURU: Marriage is a milestone and is something to be cherished; everyone wants to look their best on their wedding day and that's where the bridal artist come in. A regular Indian wedding will have engagement, sangeet, mehndi, reception and wedding day as per one's customs. It requires a lot of planning behind the look of the bride for the big day. The bridal artists always suggest lighter makeups on the pre-wedding events and heavier makeup on the wedding day. A bridal artist's job doesn't end at facial make over, it also includes henna tattooing, hair dressing, saree draping and so on. "I want to have Anushka Sharma's bridal look on my wedding day," says Aditi Agarwalla, an MBA student, when asked about her preferred bridal look. The bridal makeup has seen its fair share of evolution, but it hasn't lost its shape. Aditi further added that Anushka's wedding look sets a new standard. She also added that everyone's preferred look has a western influence and she believes that the traditional Indian look is saved by the events like wedding and festivals. Weddings aren't just an occasion where two people promise a commitment, it is also an opportunity for businesses revolving around it. The Bridal industry also utilised the opportunity for its fair share. But the story wasn't the same for the last two years. The wedding

business almost had a knockout punch through the COVID 19 pandemic. After the announcement of the pandemic, all the planned weddings were either called off or postponed and then came the succor when the government relaxed the restrictions on weddings. This relaxation turned out favorable to the parents as it prevented them from spending their entire wealth on their children's wedding. The only business which got away from crisis was the bridal industry.

"I started my business in August, 2020 and it has been a never-ending story," says Shobika Shanmugasundaram, an ex IT employee who quit her job to follow her passion in the bridal industry in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu. Shobika hits the right note to create an impression on her customer base as she says, "Instagram marketing is the main tool for my business." During the pandemic, all IT employees were asked to work from home and Shobika felt it was time to follow her passion. She completed multiple makeup courses and built a bridal team consisting of a mehndi artist, a saree draper while she handled hair dressing and makeup. She currently has around 3.5K followers on her official Instagram page and revealed her trick of the trade to get followers. The moment she realized that she embraced her passion seriously she managed to arrange a photoshoot alongside an Instagram influencer with her bridal makeup on her and posted the pictures on their



Magic of bridal art caught on camera

respective pages which instantly struck the right chord.

"I always had a thing for styling people later it turned into passion for makeup" says Sindhuja Srinivasan, a bridal makeup artist and founder of Kannama Designs from Pollachi. She began her journey in 2018 after completing

her fashion technology course. "Weddings are never out of trend," triumphantly declared Sindhuja when asked about the future of the bridal industry. Sindhuja is one of the leading makeup artists in Pollachi with a whopping followers count of 12.3k in Instagram. She adds that Instagram plays a major role in expanding her business. She believes networking with wedding vendors, writing blogs, and advertising will yield her more customers. Instagram ads and promotion feature helps with the visibility of her profile to gather more audience. She added that her income depends entirely on the

Instagram/sindhuja_srinivasan

wedding season and she makes it up during the off season by working on parties, bridals for muslim and Christian weddings, cocktail makeup sessions apart from writing editorials.

'Weddings are all about the blessings from the guests.' We all would have heard these words from our parents but wedding have never really been the same since the pandemic and restrictions imposed on weddings. After the beginning of the nation wide vaccination drives, the situation seems to have been under control. Nevertheless everyone is advised to mask up and maintain social distance.



Concept Photography

Instagram/sindhuja_srinivasan

“Instagram plays a major role in expanding my business as I could reach more audience and connect with them too. Instagram ads (Promotion) helps to reach out to the visibility of my profile to exact identified target audience which makes my work even more easier.”

– Sindhuja Srineevasan, Bridal artist, Blogger, Stylist and founder of Kannama Designs

“Business is not a constant setup. There will be ups and downs. If I get clients, I will be super happy to work for the brides, and if I don't get I'll happily wait until next client.”

– Shobika Shanmugasundaram, Bridal makeup artist, founder of Shobika's Artistry

Mural artistry hits road block during the pandemic



Shiva mural painting

Lekha Vyllopilly

Vandana Nampoothiri

BENGALURU: The quintessential mural art of Kerala dates back to the 8th century. Mural paintings garnered much attention in Kerala during the 10th to 12th century time period. Unlike other murals, Kerala's mural paintings are known for their vibrant colours.

Mural paintings have adorned the walls of temples and churches, since ancient times. They mostly depicted Indian mythologies like Ramayana and Mahabharatha and biblical stories. Murals were mostly painted in the outer sanctum of temples. The outlines were drawn using black colour and its bright colours are some of the characteristic features of mural paintings. The paintings in temples are known for

their bright and vibrant colors like red ochre, yellow ochre and green, while mural paintings in churches have a blue colour palette. The figures are coloured based on their qualities or virtues as described in the mythologies.

The Bhakti Movement during medieval times (15th century) boosted the mural art scene in Kerala. Paintings were commissioned by rulers and landlords back then, as a way of expressing their devotion. In 1970, a fire broke out at Guruvayoor Temple destroying all the murals in the temple. Subsequently, artists from across the state came together to reconstruct the paintings and art schools like the Institute of Mural Paintings were established to revive and preserve the art form.

Mural paintings took a backseat during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the unavailability of materials and lack of access to public places. Kochi - based mural artist Lekha Vyllopilly, the grandniece of the Malayalam poet Vylpilly Shreedharan Menon, said that works getting delayed was the greatest drawback she faced during the pandemic.

"Work orders had declined during the pandemic, due to the COVID scare. People were hesitant to place orders due to unemployment and other financial situations they faced. On top of that already committed works got delayed indefinitely due to lockdown," Vyllopilly said.

Unavailability of materials and lack of access to public places were some of the issues the artist faced during the pandemic.

"I was able to manage during the pandemic because I had some colours which I had brought before the lockdown" she said. "Despite that I could only do paintings that could be done within my home."

According to Vyllopilly, clients and artists nowadays prefer paintings done using acrylic paints on canvas. Artists use synthetic pencils and acrylic paints as traditional pencils ('Kittalekhini') and natural colours are hand made and are time consuming.

Mural paintings were initially painted on walls and ceilings using traditional colours. Five colours, i.e yellow ochre, green, red ochre, white and black also known as Panchavarna are traditionally used for mural paintings. The preparation of walls are done in three stages. For stone or brick walls, the walls will first be carved in the desired shape after which

"Viewing a painting in real time and viewing it online is very different"

- Lekha Vyllopilly, Mural Artist

it will be plastered using lime and sand mixture, which will be prepared a week prior to painting. For cement walls, it'll be white washed before painting.

Art exhibitions and workshops conducted by the artists and other art galleries were halted or done online during the pandemic. "Art exhibitions getting cancelled or going online has affected artists including myself to a large extent. I personally am not comfortable with online exhibitions," Vyllopilly said.

"The communication between the art work, artist and people are restricted during online shows. Viewing a painting in real time and viewing it online is very different. As far as an artist is concerned, interacting with people and getting feedbacks from them directly is an important thing."

Vyllopilly who has an art institute, Ruplekha Institute of Fine Arts and Mural Painting in Thripunithara, Kerala says that teaching students mural painting online was difficult. "Initially I was sceptical about conducting online classes, but it is going pretty well. As a teacher I prefer teaching students offline as it is easier for me to rectify the mistakes and guide the students more," she said.

"People who were not able to learn mural paintings earlier were now able to learn the art form due to online classes. People across

the world can now learn the traditional art, which I feel was one of the greatest advantage of online classes."

Vyllopilly is best known for her 44 feet long mural done at SRV school, Ernakulam, a project undertaken by her while working as a teacher at the school. The mural painting was an illustration of her grand uncle's famous poem 'Mambazham'. She studied BFA (bachelor of fine arts) in mural painting from Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady. She did her post-graduation in visual arts from Bangalore University. She has also conducted a number of workshops on mural painting.



Mural paintings on pots

Lekha Vyllopilly



Mural paintings by Lekha Vyllopilly



Lekha Vyllopilly

Stealing hearts with fiber art using Macramé

Jesly Pulikotil

BENGALURU: Popularly known to have originated in the 13th Century, macramé is an art of knotting yarn into different patterns to form beautiful tapestries. Macramé comes from an Arabic word Migramah meaning fringe. However, some say that macramé comes from the Turkish word

‘Makrama’, meaning a towel. Macramé was a popular hobby all through the Victorian era, even Queen Mary in the 17th Century held classes to teach the art form to other women. Victorian homes were adorned with macramé curtains or table-cloths, bedspreads or plant holders. Although the era of macramé faded eventually, it made a return in the

1970s. A huge credit for keeping this fibre art alive can be attributed to sailors. They used various types of knotting techniques for requirements on the ships as well as to make belts, hats, tapestries etc as an activity to pass time while travelling. They would sell these handmade goods to people once they reached the port. Macramé goods became

synonymous with the bohemian culture and style. Today macramé is back in trend for not just home decor items like wall hangings, table cloths or plant holders, but also for clothing, jewellery and other fashion accessories. The reach of social media today has helped contemporary macramé artists to not only reinvent traditional

macramé designs and patterns, but also to transcend geographical boundaries and bring their works of art to our homes. Communicate spoke to Deepthi Gopal and Gayatri Rao, who curate their own macramé stores on Instagram, to know more about the process of making macramé products and what are their journeys as macramé artists today.



Deepthi Gopal's macramé keychain of Lord Ganesh

Deepthi Gopal is a macramé artist based in Bengaluru who curates dee_knots on Instagram. Gopal is a full time corporate employee in the finance industry. “I wanted to keep my plants where my baby couldn’t reach so I started making small macramé plant hangers and then that’s how I fell in love with those knots,” she said and added that she eventually went on to starting an Instagram store in August 2020.

When asked about the time required to finish a macramé product Gopal said that it depends on the size of the order. “Small orders take an hour and bigger ones take days together. As I am a full time working mother I hardly get time to invest in macramé. However, because of my love for this art I will make sure I dedicate a few hours every night before I hit the bed.”

Gopal says that her customers are comparatively less due to her personal time constraints, but her product quality has always been appreciated. “People like the handbag designs I come up with,” she added. As a designer, her personal favourite has been a bird nest plant hanger design and macramé shelf design. “It’s the same product that I saw in my dreams and I recreated it. Also, my best memory is when I collaborated with my favourite brand Itsy Bitsy to promote their macramé range.”

What Gopal worried about as she started the store was finding raw materials. However, today the market provides a lot of options, so comparing and buying the right

raw materials has become easier. This allows her to work through new ideas and designs, while trying to manage time. “I want to release new ideas and expand the store, but time constraints are my biggest enemy. I am trying my best to make things happen. And I soon would be launching my new ideas,” Gopal concluded.



Other macramé products by Deepthi Gopal

Macramé comes from an Arabic word ‘Migramah’ which means fringe.

Gayatri Rao, a graphic and web designing enthusiast, along with her mother Nirmala Rao, creates and curates their macramé store knotsandcords.co based in Mumbai, on Instagram. “My mom knew how to make them and for the past few years, she had been asking me to help her start something where she could sell them,” Gayatri Rao said about her introduction to the fiber art. Having had experience operating an online store on Instagram in 2018-19 with her best friend, Rao realised it was the right place to set up a Macramé shop in the lockdown. “Lockdown brought out the best in us. And we knew we could make it work via Instagram.” Like Gopal, Rao also agrees that smaller, less complicated designs do not take long to complete as opposed to intricate patterns and designs. “Products like tops, large wall hangings etc, takes anywhere from 2 days to a week to make,” she added.

Rao is overwhelmed by the responses from her customers especially since there is an influx of interest in handmade goods. “We didn’t know if people would be interested in buying these items but there are so many who do (buy them). And with the focus shifting towards handmade, slow produce, more and more people are looking at small businesses to fulfil their requirements. And it’s great!” She added, “A few months back, a lady approached us and ordered a bunch of coasters from us as she wanted to add them in her wedding basket. It felt so good to be a small part of someone’s wedding!” Rao faced some problems at times but that led them to work harder. “There were a few times when our tops didn’t fit the buyer the way it was supposed to. Or they weren’t completely in love with what we made. Since it isn’t a one-size-fits-all scenario, it is a little difficult to get it exactly right. But all these experiences have just made us work harder and get it right.”

Often macramé artists and other small scale businesses have been criticised for their product prices. Rao said that attributing prices to her products has been tough at times, “Since there is no right



Layered Lunar hanging by Gayatri Rao and Nirmala Rao



Belt bag and wall hanging by Gayatri Rao and Nirmala Rao

price, you can always undersell or oversell your product. Reaching the perfect price for a product is always a process. But thankfully, these prices are not set in stone and can be updated anytime, so that’s helpful,” she said.

Rao and her mother have loved experimenting with various possibilities in the art, and it is almost not possible to say no to their customers’ ideas. “Whatever they want, we find a way to make it happen. We love trying out new things ourselves so when we’re asked to customise something, I believe we’re happier than the customers themselves. And we have something for everyone,

whatever the budget maybe, we can probably find something for them that they would like,” she shared. Rao and her mother have been looking to expand their macramé store further so that more people get to see what makes them stand out in this art. They are also welcoming collaborations with others. “We’re focusing on growing as of now. Maybe there will be a proper website in the future. I would love to collaborate with people who genuinely love our products and can add value to them. Always excited about where we can take this small Instagram store and reach as many people as we can,” she concluded.

Internet keeps the traditional art forms alive

Abhimanyu Sharma

BENGALURU: The beautiful and elegant art of pottery has been a part of Indian culture and traditions for centuries. Pots of clay moulded into a specimen of artistic brilliance have served Indian households for centuries while performing the most basic to the most auspicious of tasks. However, it is a sad and grim reality that in present times the artisans that create these pieces of art are struggling to find their spot in the over-competitive era of e-commerce. “Times are tough. People are not interested in buying the pots anymore and the occasional sale is usually around a festival,” says Rajesh Kumar, a 2nd generation potter in Kota, Rajasthan, who has given his entire life to the art.

Rajesh says, “My father was from Bundi (a small town near Kota). We came to Kota with the hope of earning better.” Explaining about his dismal condition at the moment he says, “Pottery is the only thing my father left me with and that’s all I have to provide for, for my family.” This according to him is also one of the reasons why the traditional artists struggle to make ends meet, especially when the demand for their product is so low. “The business wasn’t doing so well anyway and this situation of lockdown and curfew has only made it worse,” he says. Rajesh has a family of six, including 4 children. The entire family depends on this business which puts an extra toll and financial pressure



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on them in the current scenario. Rajesh further adds, “I want all of my children to complete their schooling. I don’t want them to continue living this way. I want to give them something more than just a struggling business,” revealing his dream that every father has for his children. Meanwhile, Rajesh’s words are just an indicator of how important the family perceives the role of education to be. For Ananya (Rajesh’s eldest

daughter) however, the ray of hope hasn’t seemed to be lost on their family business. She believes that even though the times are tough they just need to look in the right direction. “Everyone loves small decorative pieces of sculptures. The internet is booming with demand for the kind of pieces we make,” says Ananya who has been trying to get her father to shift their business online to provide a boost into the family income. Indeed in digital

“People are not interested in buying the pots anymore. The occasional sale is usually around a festival.”

- Rajesh Kumar, a 2nd generation potter in Kota.

times when the world is coming closer and closer each day, we have seen a rise in interest in traditional artworks, the opportunity is there and that’s what Ananya wants to capitalise on. “I have actually made some connections where we provide retailers with small affordable decorative objectives. It’s not much for now but it does help,” she adds, indicating that she isn’t ready to give up on their family business just yet. For her, she feels that she owes it to the art, because that’s what helped provide for her education, her food and for the most part, everything else as well.

her father’s desires and goals. “My ultimate goal is to give a new life to our business on the internet. I know what papa thinks of it but I will not give in to the time. Not giving up is what makes it possible for small businesses to survive. Traditional arts have always seemed to be in conflict with modern technology but merchants have realised that e-commerce if anything, is an opportunity for them to expand their business horizons. It is a gateway for them to open themselves to a whole different segment of the market that they never knew existed and all it takes is that one



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“I can’t just abandon it. Pottery has been a close part of my life ever since I was a kid. I have watched Papa moulding and sculpting hundreds or thousands of pieces. It has been a part of our family line and it’d be wrong if it ended with us,” she adds, being fully aware of

step towards it. It is equivalent to a bird expanding its wings for the first time and making that leap off its nest. There is a factor of uncertainty, but if everything goes right, the possibilities are endless and the whole world becomes their playfield.

“Ever since I was a kid I have watched Papa moulding and sculpting hundreds or thousands of pieces. It has been a part of our family line and it would be wrong if it ended with us” - Ananya

“This situation of lockdown and curfew has only made it worse”
- Rajesh Kumar



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