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Indian Hand-made



In 2015, ASEF culture360 invites you to get an insight on issues that are highly discussed in the cultural sector across Asia and Europe.

*Through a number of in-depth articles and interviews, **Magali An Berthon** will initiate a reflexion about a creative generation which connects **arts, design, crafts and social responsibility**. She will introduce **European and Asian personalities and initiatives**, which offer **original and inspiring answers to a globalized world**.*

*In this first article, Magali An invites you to discover **ARTISANS'**, a cultural center based in Mumbai, India. This platform highlights the work of artisans and designers, offering their unique take on Indian traditional and contemporary crafts. **Radhi Pharekh**, founder of the project, shares the story of this one-of-a-kind space where “art, craft, and design converge.”*



What is the story of ARTISANS' ?

Radhi Parekh: A graduate in Visual Communications from the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, I returned to India in 2009 from a 22-year career in the United States and the UK. I went from illustrating children's books in London, to designing multimedia games in San Francisco, and to creating online solutions in the Silicon Valley ! While working in the virtual medium by day, I followed the urge to **engage with real materials**, and began to make jewelry, connecting with the thriving crafts community in the Bay area.

I felt the need to celebrate the hand-made in India, particularly in the face of rapid globalization in Mumbai. That was the genesis of ARTISANS' and I returned eager to save and restore an old commercial property located in **Mumbai's heritage precinct, at the heart of the Kala Ghoda art district**. I launched ARTISANS' in September 2011. For me it represents a place "where art, craft and design converge." Each exhibition is an experience which brings alive **the people and processes behind the products**, in a warm and engaging space, to connect with our audiences as fully as possible.

Why is this gallery so unique ?

R.P: ARTISANS' is the **first gallery in India promoting indigenous arts and crafts**. We present the new work of a selection of **artists, designers and makers**, and travel widely searching for emerging voices within traditional communities in the country. We are interested as much in **initiatives reviving ancient craftsmanships as pioneering contemporaries**.

We are known to take risks and support experimental projects, seeking to represent the most innovative of Indian design, in a multitude of techniques and materials through our programmes.

We attract **locally an audience of collectors and crafts enthusiasts** who have an eye for authentic design. Expats in Mumbai are also keen supporters of sustainable local initiatives. With each product comes a unique story. During our cultural season between September and March, Indian and foreigner visitors as well as the Indian diaspora drop in to find gifts representing the country. They are delighted to discover that there is a whole world beyond "cheap and cheerful" souvenirs.



How do you foster collaborative works between artisans, designers and visitors?

R.P: ARTISANS' is not only a gallery with a strong social commitment. It is also a **creative hub**. It has an active programme of workshops, lectures and book launches that allow people to interact with thought leaders, and meet artists, artisans, and designers.

We look for collaborative work that has emerged from creative crossovers, for instance – collaborations between two weaving groups from different parts of India; a co-creation between an urban fashion designer and rural artisans; an interaction between a tribal artist and an animator... We are interested in **trans-disciplinary dialogues**.



Can reviving artisanal work also provide a promising solution for the future of India ?

R.P: Arts and crafts in India are not just decorative. They embody an essential meaning for the maker and the user. Beyond a utilitarian role, they represent a deep connection to the earth, to myths and beliefs, to community and identity.

At a time when the global focus is on sustainable futures, locally hand-made products resonate with a conscious lifestyle that global citizens aspire to. Within increasingly homogenized economies, their uniquely Indian identity is a valuable differentiation. In our post-industrial world, artisanal work contributes to creativity and innovation in a way that cannot be underestimated.

I see a shift in perception, and **a renewed appreciation for indigenous arts and crafts today**. Whilst the past few decades saw the rise of the aspirational Indian consumer enamoured by unprecedented access to global brands in westernized malls, the young generation is once again looking local. There is however a lack of localization and visibility in the media, where advertisements are financed by western brands and still regarded as symbols of progress.



India is often considered as being the world's largest manufacturer, because of the fast fashion garment production. How do you manage to show another side of Indian crafts and design?

R.P: Artisans think of their work as labour rather than skilled craftsmanship, much less, art. Generations of artisans were robbed of their self-esteem and creative freedom and they do not want their children to follow them. They were pushed in the process of making identical work for markets they have no direct understanding of, at a pace dictated by trends. At ARTISANS' we aim to give credit back to the creators.

We recognize the uniqueness of designs initiated by the artisans themselves. They have a direct understanding of the market. And we provide a fair platform where they can grow as artisan-designer-entrepreneurs.

As the numbers of skilled artisans diminish, the finest work has become a luxury. We hope that markets such as ours encourage new generations to pursue in these precious creative industries.



What are your upcoming projects at ARTISANS'?

R.P: The priority is on extending our unique brand and gain more awareness. This summer we are developing a website to increase our reach. Young designers and writers are currently collaborating with us to connect with new audiences.

At ARTISANS' we are all about celebrating our inimitable Indian identity. But we are also open to the world. We are looking to connect with artisans and designers across our borders, to **facilitate co-creation and fruitful collaborations.**



Learn more about Artisans':

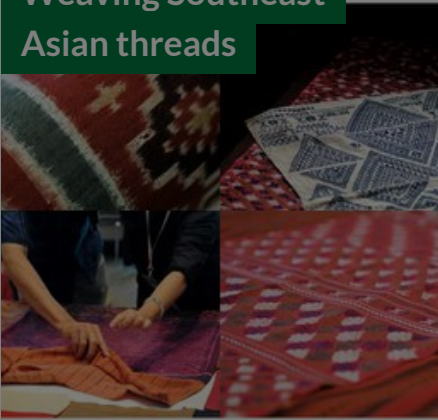
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Magali An Berthon is a French Vietnamese textile designer and editor based in Paris. Graduate of the National School of Decorative Arts in Paris, she has gathered a valuable experience as a textile designer for fashion and home collections. She finds inspiration in her many travels especially in South-East Asia and has developed a deep interest for ethnic arts & crafts, natural fabrics and dyes. In parallel, she works as a writer and documentarist specialized particularly on textile know-how from all over the world.

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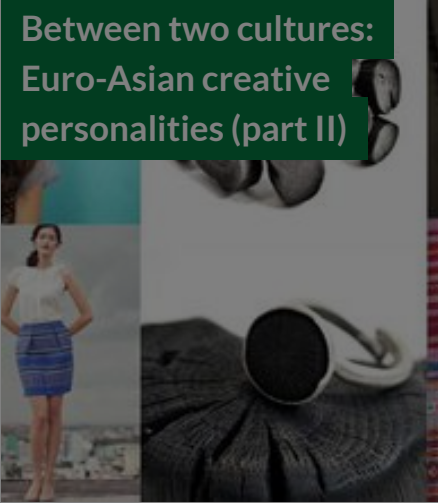
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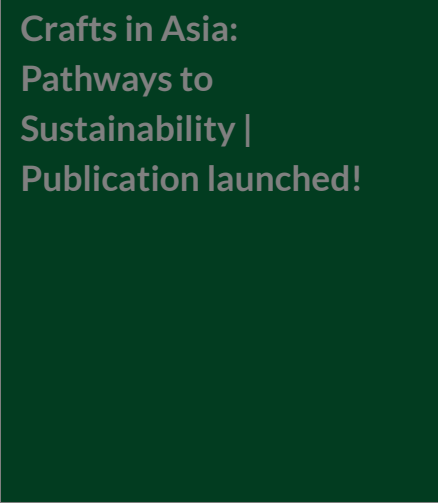
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