

INTO OUR WHIMS
Narratives of Art, Culture, Ecology

P R A B H A K A R



B H A G W A T

EST. 1973



LEAF, the research arm of M/s Prabhakar B. Bhagwat is engaged in research and publication in the areas of Landscape Design, Environmental Planning, City Development and Management and Developing Public Spaces, Public Parks, and Art.

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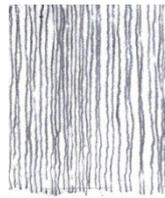
Email: pbb-ahm@landscapeindia.net or info@leaf-india.org

This journey began in the middle of 2021. It was a day like any other when we decided to visit the space that we are currently in. We were welcomed by a bare space - with the afternoon light pouring in from the windows, our voices echoing as we discussed the many possibilities of what may be done here.

It was not a decision to be made in haste; it required patience.

So, after much deliberation, and consultation we were able to arrive at a consensus - to convert it into a space that became a representation of our ethos. It needed to become a space that is rich in art and craft; thus becoming a space with the ability to inform, and raise our quality of thinking as a collective.

And this, then, is the story of the journey that we have taken to do just that.



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Produced by Anek Taanka

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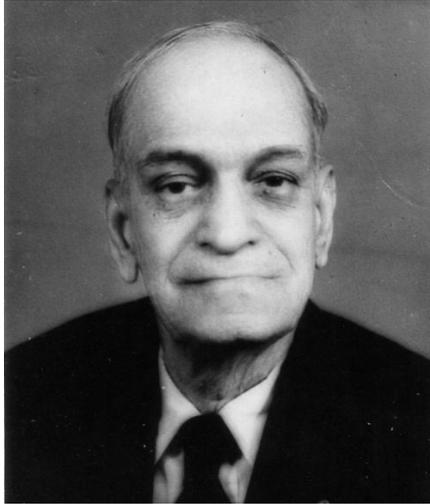
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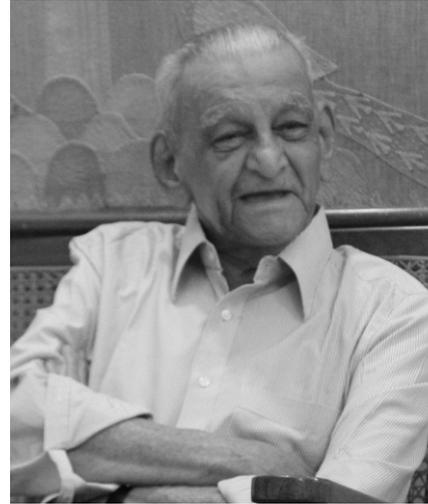
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BEGINNING AND ONWARDS



Bhalchandra V. Bhagwat
Circa 1900's



Prabhakar B. Bhagwat
Circa 2015

This firm has been built on a legacy - one whose foundation was laid by Bhalchandra V. Bhagwat - who was introduced to gardens and plant material through his position as the Superintendent of the Empress Botanical Gardens in Pune.

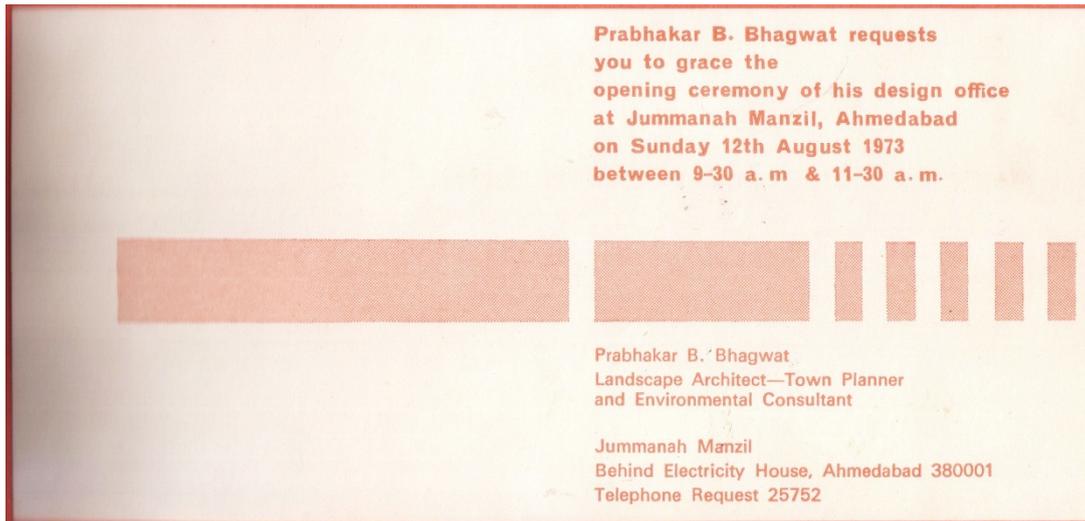
This affinity towards nature was passed on to his son - Prof. Prabhakar Bhagwat who spent many of his formative years in the garden.

Having, then, studied under the tutelage of C.Th Sorenson, and Brian Hackett, Prof. P.B Bhagwat went on to become India's first qualified Landscape Architect.

Throughout his career, he continued to bring together his passions for practice, academia, and research by becoming instrumental in establishing some of the most well-renowned design programs in the country.

He founded the Studio in 1973, soon after returning from Delhi.

THE JOURNEY



Invitation for the opening of the office in 1973.

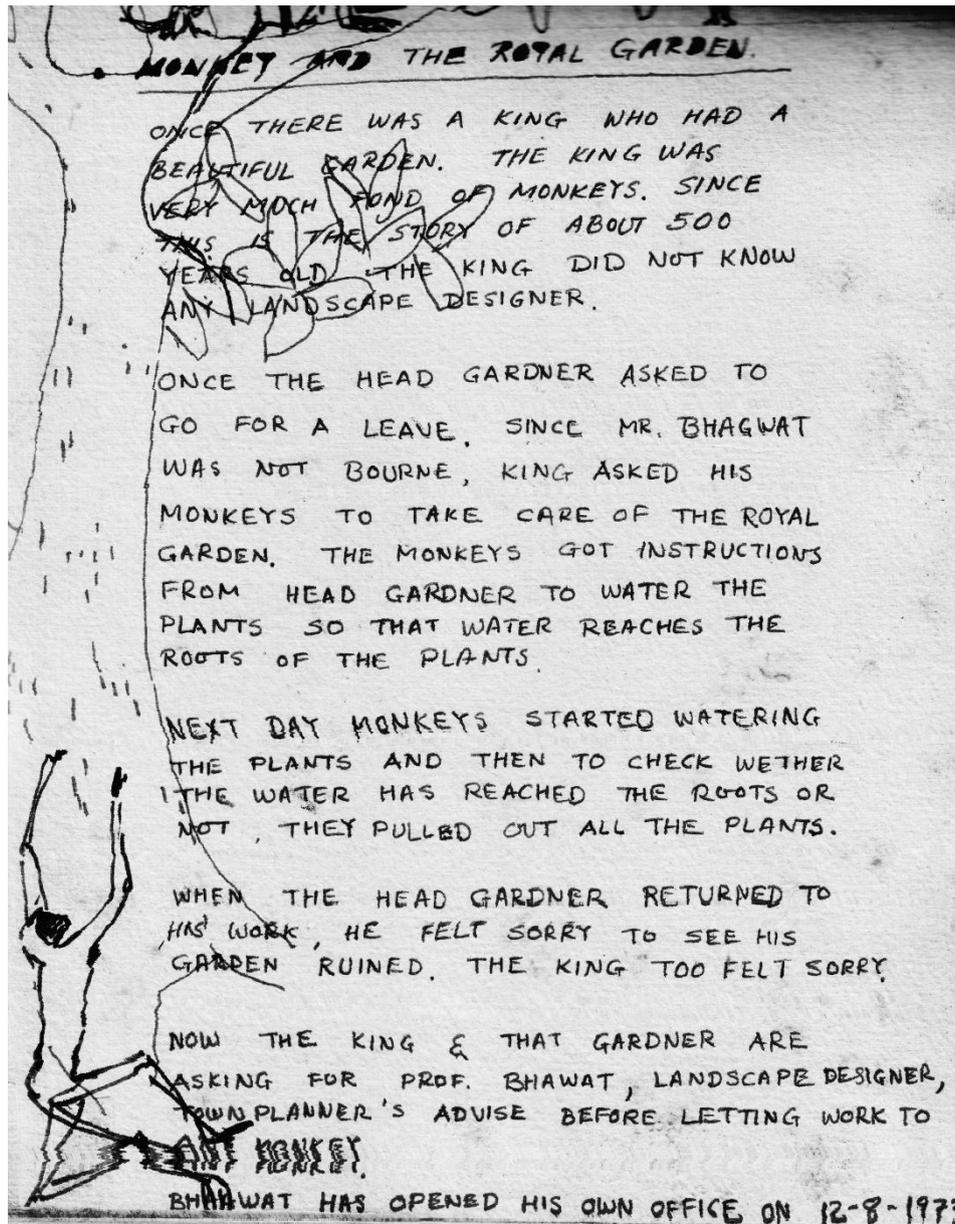
It's been a rather eventful one. Almost fifty years soon.

In 1973 my father, having returned from an unhappy stint at SPA Delhi, was at a loss as to what to do.

Two well-wishers/ friends Sh. H. M. Joshi and Sh. Navneetbhai Choksi gave him courage and urged him to open his own firm. One offered him a small space in a building called Jummanah Manzil near the old Advance Cinema and the other promised to make up for whatever was the financial monthly shortage he was likely to face, that he would need to run the household.

Being a landscape architect in those days was not really the pinnacle of professional possibilities (actually it's not even today!!) and hence the assumption was that he would not make ends meet.

He luckily managed.



A note from the visitor's book on the opening of the office by Nilendu Shah.

PROJECT NO. :	74/21A-4 :
DRAW NO :	74/21A-4 :
DATE :	30TH MAY '75 :
SCALE :	1 INCH = 8 FEET :
PRABHAKAR B. BHAGWAT	
Landscape Architect-Town Planner and Environmental Consultant,	
Jummanab Manzil, Behind Electricity House, Ahmedabad-380001.	

MR. JAYENDRABHAI SHAH	
SCALE	1" : 16' 0" FINAL PLAN
No. 4186	Prabhakar B. Bhagwat
DATE. 1	Landscape Architect Town Planner and Environmental Consultant
AUGUST '86.	28, Jain Society Nr. Pritamnagar Akhada Ellisbridge Ahmedabad-380006.

Stamps from the office in 1975, and 1986.

Many years later he had to vacate this space and another friend stood forward. Sh. Tarunbhai Kothari offered him a spare office he had, at a terribly nominal rent at Embassy Market on Ashram Road. Finally, that too, had to be given up.

On the terrace of an old bungalow in Jain Society near Paldi he managed to rent two "stair cabins". One became his office, the other was the studio. I'll wager that all told it was no more than 240 sq. feet. The landlord was, I remember, a bit of a pain and we had to leave that soon enough.

Sh. Nareshbhai Patel, my father's landscape contractor, and the person who even today calls me every few weeks to see if we are doing fine, got fed up with this shifting.

Showed his restless Patel genes he did! And one day dragged him to meet Sh. Purshottam Goyal, whose son Sandip today runs the very fine realty company Goyal and Co. He was gracious and, without making a big song and dance about payment terms, sold us a small flat in Satellite Apartments.



Photographs of the Studio from 2019.

The studio was growing a bit and so in 2001 we shifted to where we are today, Panchtirth Apartments.

And a few years later, we bought another flat on the same floor and expanded further.

Come post Diwali we will start working from the 142 Offices which is on Bopal Road.

It's a place of craft.

Of art.

Of music.

And we are rather looking forward to this next move.

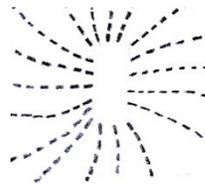
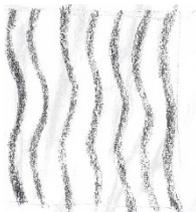
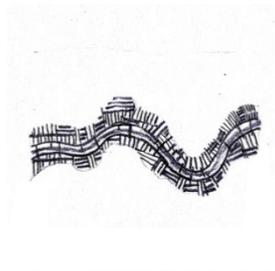
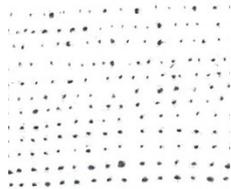
So if any one is in our geography, do swing by.

For coffee.

Or the many meal options that the building seems to offer.

Aniket Bhagwat

NARRATIVES OF ART, CRAFTS, CULTURE, ECOLOGY, AND OF THE MANY ELEMENTS

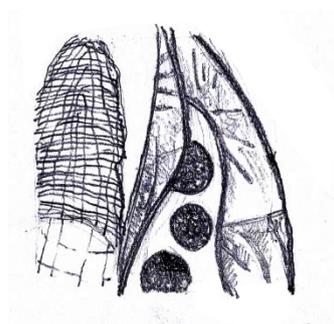


Here it is that we will dream, here it is that we will converse and think.

Here it is that ideas will come together, much like music coming together in perfect harmony.

Here it is that we will strive - much like an artist - stepping back, and examining the disarray, and from within that, creating meaning, creating value.

Here it is, that we will continue to tell the stories that need telling.



TAKING ROOT

Conceptualised by Dhara Mittal

Technical detailing by Dhara Mittal, Nishant Mittal, Vaishal Patel

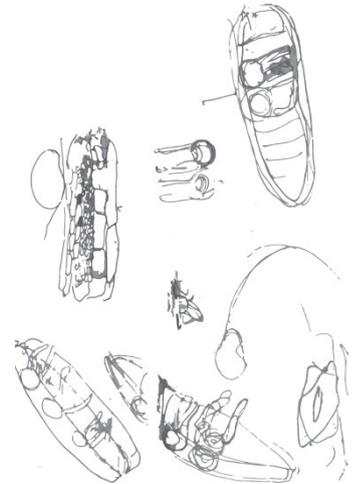
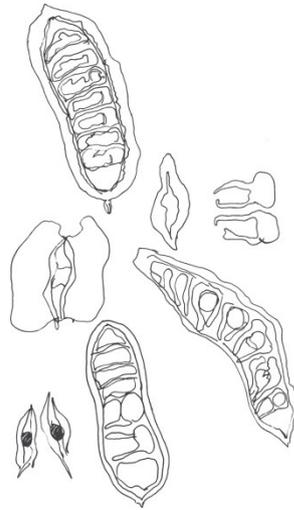
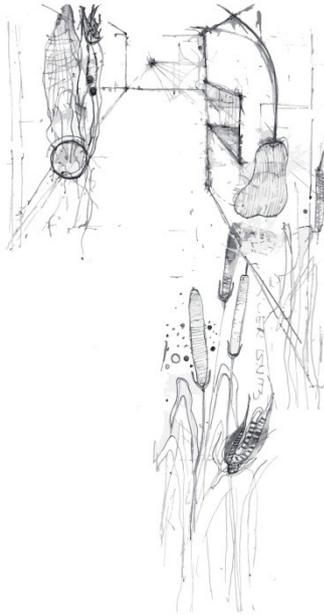
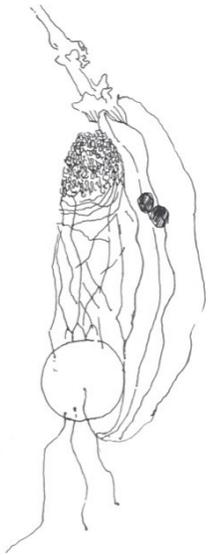
Execution and Fabrication by Premkumar Vaishya (David),

Gajanan Paratkar

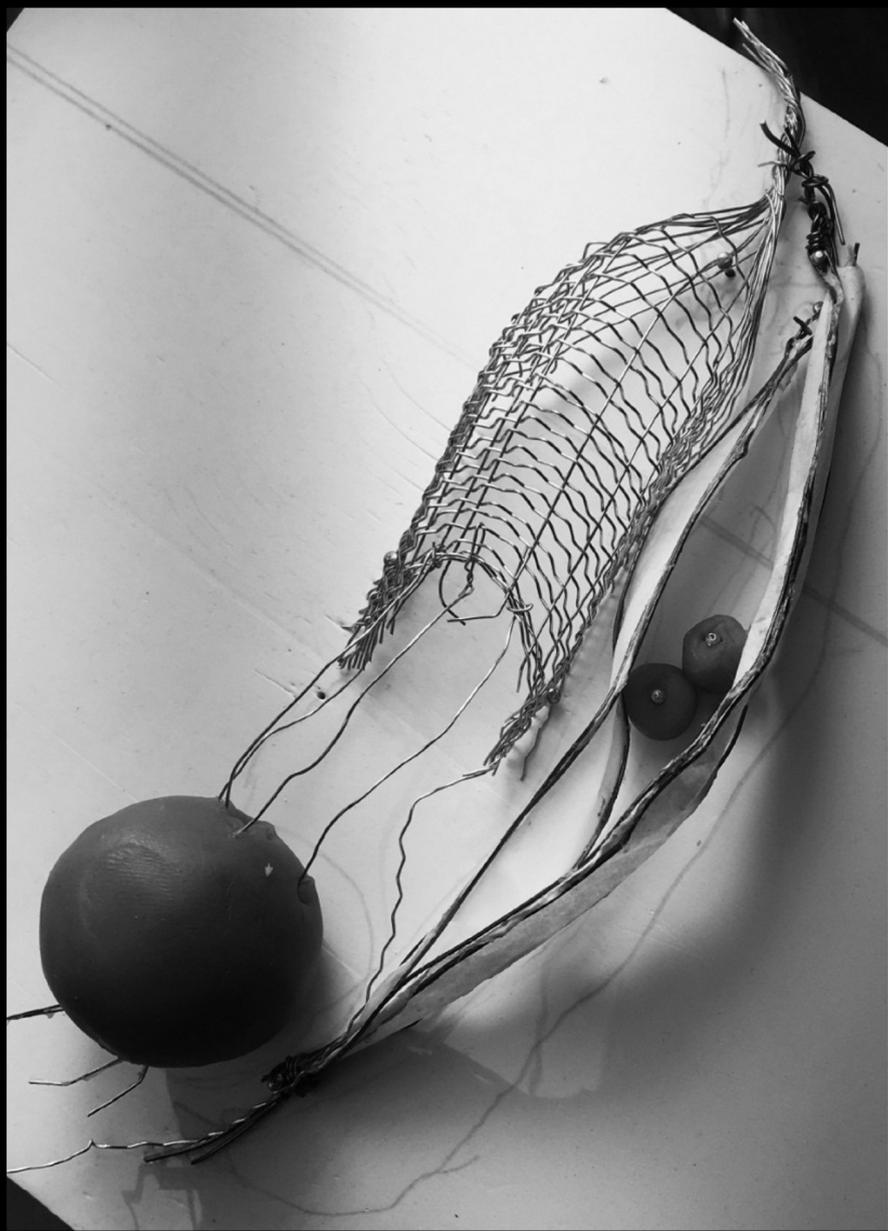
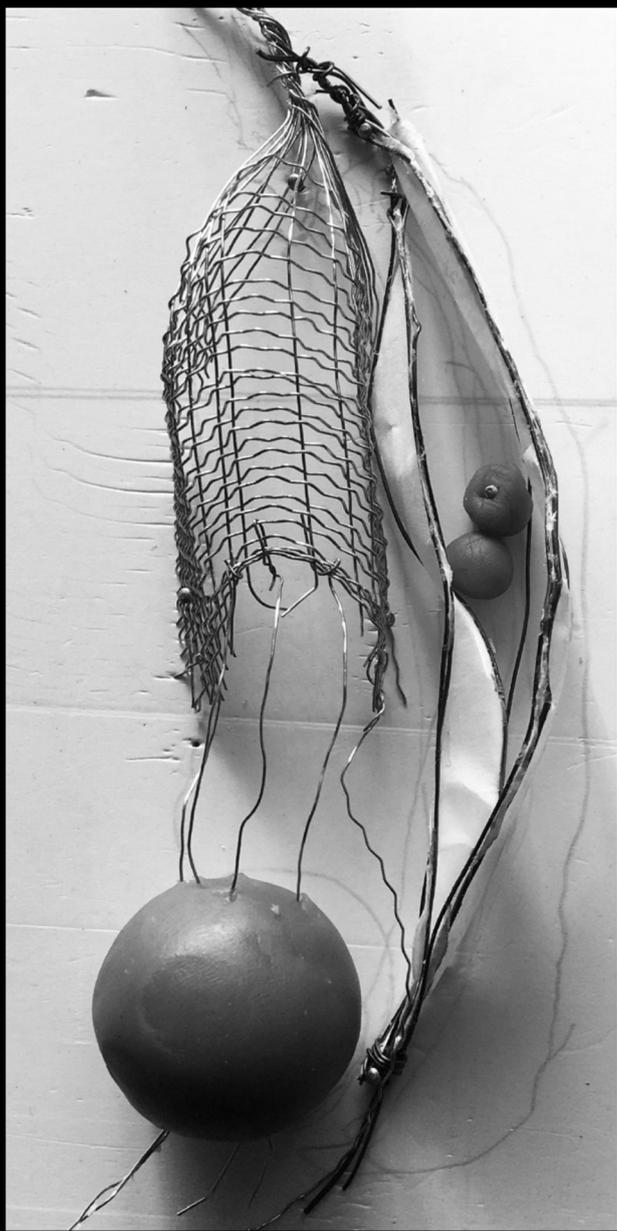
Site Assembly by Prakash Panchal

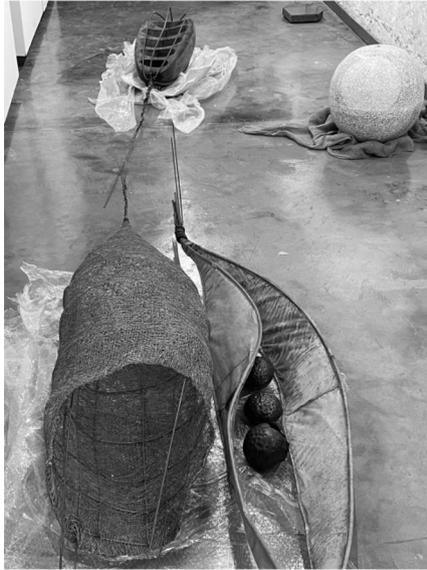
Imagining, and then nurturing; thus an idea takes form. It continues to grow, a manifestation of everything that one envisages; a response to external forces, at times bending to their will, at others standing firm, announcing itself without a shadow of uncertainty!

An installation, envisioned in parts, that is a composite of wood, copper treated with coffee, leather, and a concrete ball; its form inspired by the seeds of plants oft used within the studio's planting palette. Set against a wooden backdrop it, thus, becomes the first element that composes the entrance.

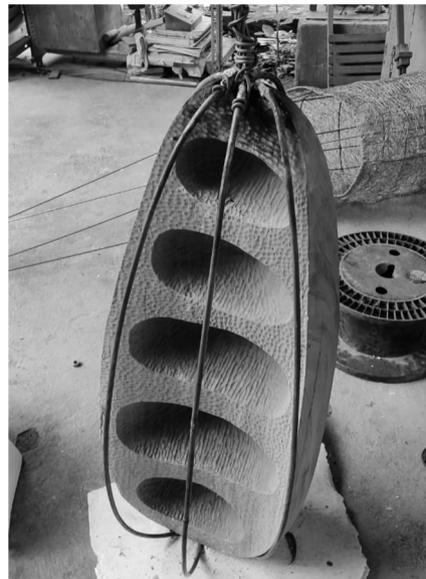


Above: Study Sketches for 'Taking Root' by Dhara Mittal
Right: Initial Thinking - Maquette





Above: *The making of one of the seed pods*
Right: *Carving and assembly of the second pod*



*Do not make a note of me
Please don't confine me to words
Come see me for what you want to see
Even if it sounds absurd*

*I can come across
As mighty serious and profound
Reflecting ideas of regeneration and loss
And spreading life around*

*I can also be super basic
if you need me to
Reminding you of flowers and twigs
And seeds that flew*

*At times I can help conjure
Different landscapes you trod
Give you imaginations to infer
Trust me, I can be a sensory pod*

*I can also be an idea
That has been thoughtfully bred
A magical panacea
On the verge of being spread*

*And on days when you feel blah,
Have a heavy mind and tired feet
I can simply be an oversized loofah
Making you long for the bath you need*

*However put
It's easy to find
That, I'm a seed taking root
In the garden of your mind*

- Dhara Mittal



Above: *Photographs of the Entrance Space*







THE MYTHICAL LANDSCAPES

Conceptualised by Aarohi Bakeri and Vaidehi Bhagwat

Produced by Anek Taanka

Against the Northern light, we find stories that are nebulous - made absolute by their connotations! They are windows that allow us to imagine a better - at times an idealistic - world; telling the stories of mythical landscapes across cultures.

Within the studio space - continuing the idea of story-telling - is a set of 10 textile screens inscribed with mythical narratives, each measuring 240 cm. by 90 cm. They are a result of a combination of stitching techniques - including appliqué, and embroidery.

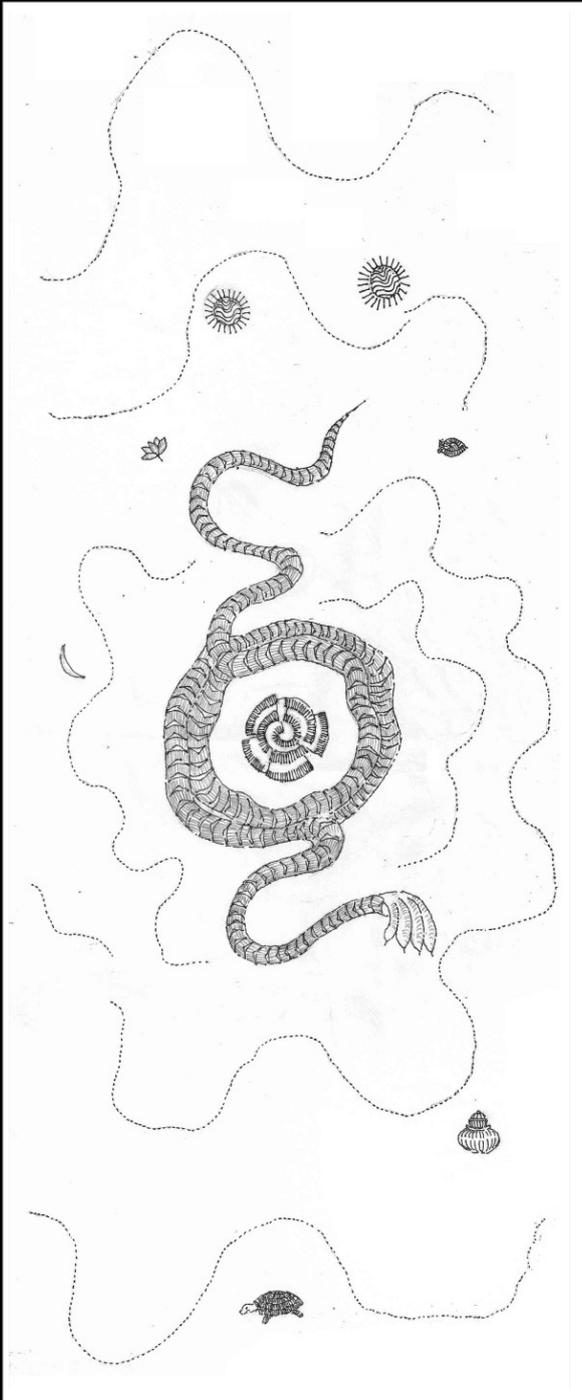
With the smaller details that have been incorporated, they demand undivided attention and focus.

SAMUDRAMANTHAN

Hindu Mythology

This is a story of a fight for everything that matters; for immortality. Rishi Durvasa cursed the *devas* for insulting him - condemning them to lose their powers and strength. And so, they decided to churn the Ocean of Milk for the Elixir of Life using Mount Mandara as the rod, and Vasuki - the snake king - as the churning rope.

While it is easy to look at this story only for what it demonstrates, when read in a different light, it is one of exploration, and of hidden depths.



Unknown



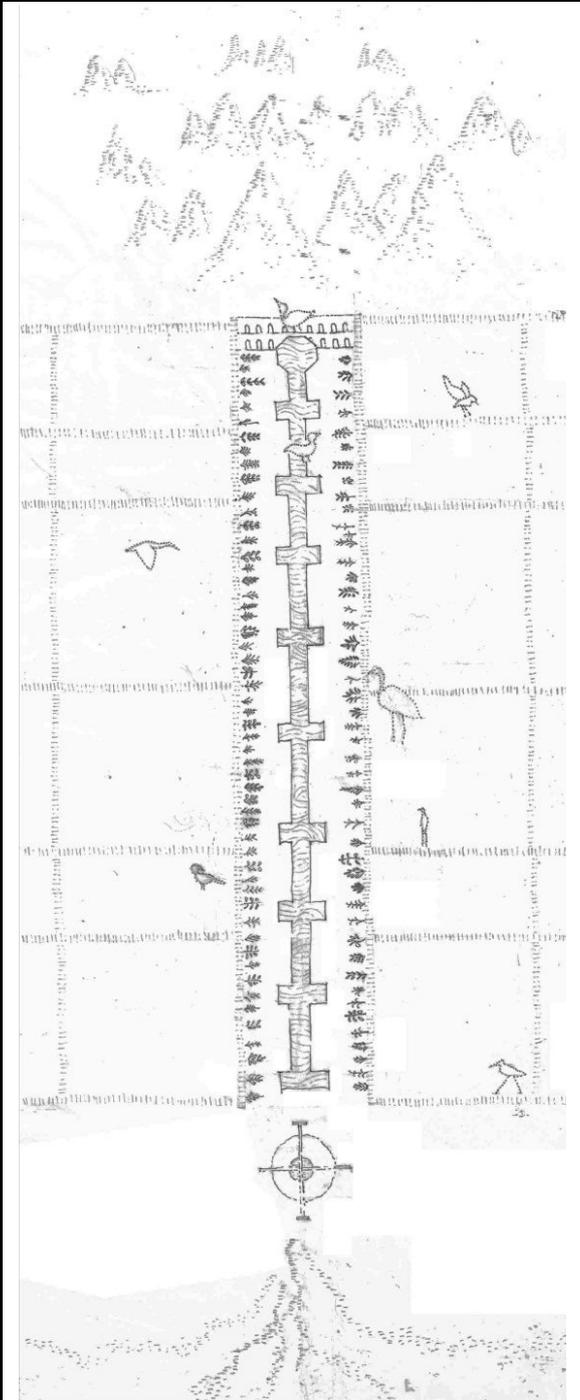
From Dispersed Razmnama,
1598

CHARBAGH

Islamic Paradise Garden

This form is a legacy from a culture for whom the idea of the Garden is equivalent to paradise.

The philosophy of the Gardens is believed to be rooted within the four sacred elements - water, wind, fire, and soil - illustrating a union between the mortal, and the divine.



The Mood at Kota Palace
17th Century



Bagh-e Babur by F. Zahra Hassan
2007

ACQUIRING THE SANJEEVANI BOOTI

Hindu Mythology

In the midst of chaos, spaces of nature transform into spaces of recuperation and healing. As has been told in the Ramayana, Raavana's son Indrajit hurled a powerful weapon at Laxmana, who fell unconscious - almost near death.

Hanumana took it upon himself to procure the necessary cure, making the journey to Mount Drona, and then, not knowing which herb to bring back – brings with him the entire mountain.



Tataka Illustrations from Persian translations of Ramayana, 1605



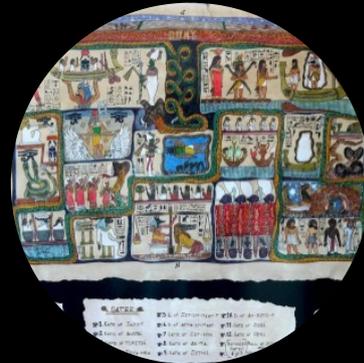
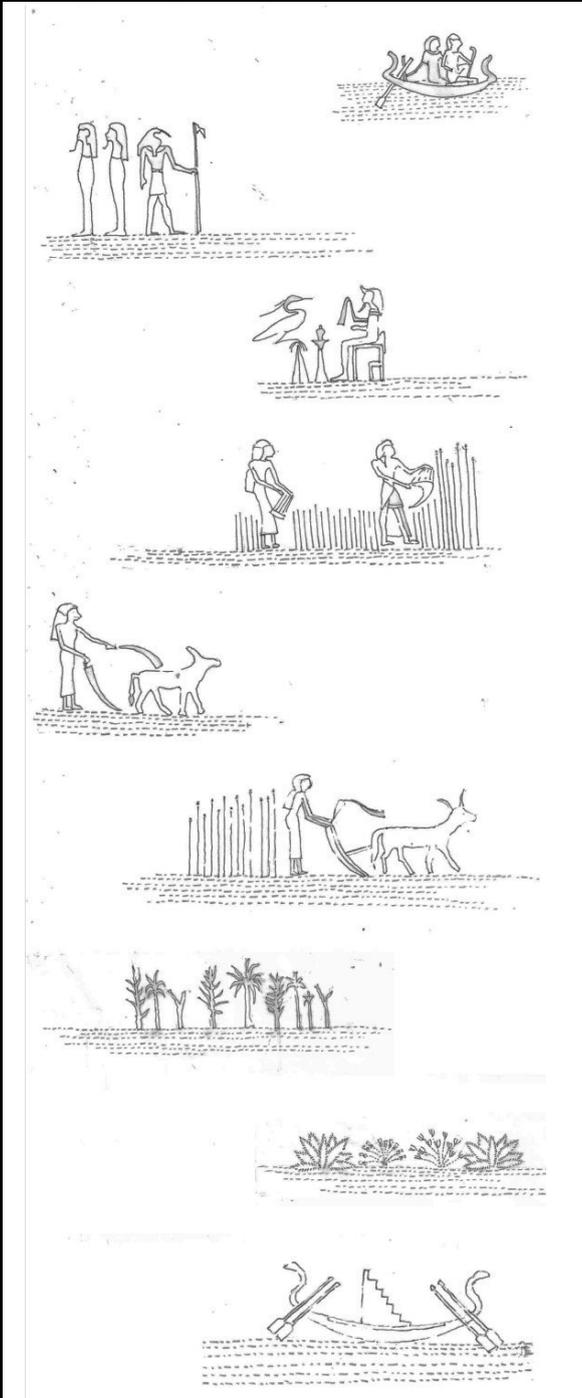
Hanuman bearing the Mountain Top with Medicinal Herbs, 1800

AARU, FIELD OF REEDS

Egyptian Mythology

Viewing afterlife as an extension of one's life on earth, this idea of heaven is composed of lush green vegetation, and demonstrates a set of different islands - an oasis in the middle of flowing rivers.

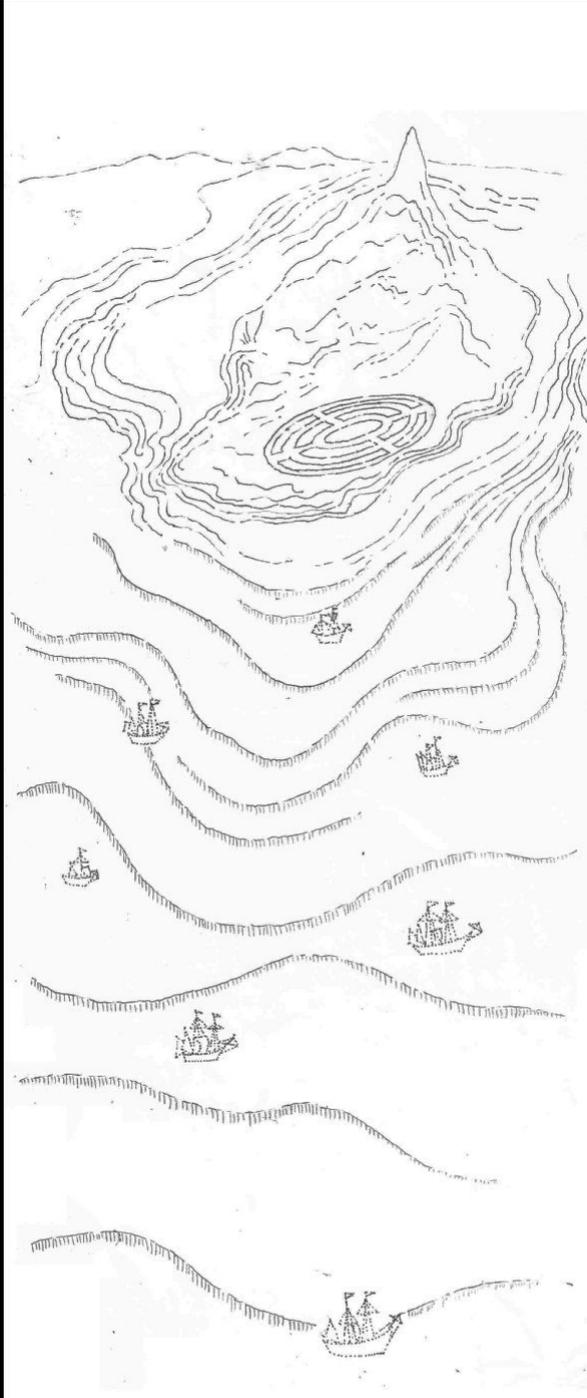
It focuses on productivity, as much as it does on the creation of comfort - with Gods, and humans co-existing.



Duat, A map of the Egyptian Underworld



Tomb of Sen-Nezem
19th Dynasty



ATLANTIS

Greek Mythology

Idealised as an advanced, utopian civilisation holding wisdom that could bring world peace, the story of Atlantis appeared in two of Plato's dialogues - Timaeus and Critias in 360 BCE.

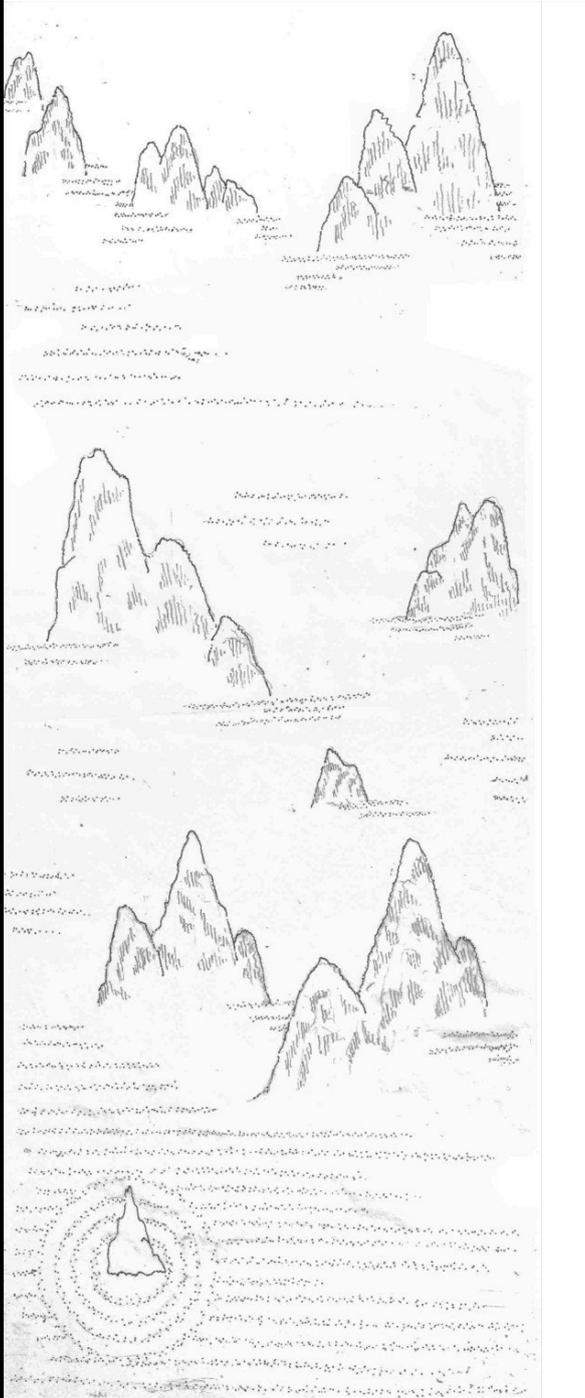
It is about the evolution of a civilisation, providing insight into what one may have considered to be the ideal society.



Mundus Subterraneus by Athanasius Kircher, 1665



Plato's Caribbean Atlantis by Rocio Espin Pinar, 2015



MOUNT PENGLAI

Chinese and Japanese Mythology

The space is a representation of one of three (or five) islands where the mythical immortals reside. Legend says no one has succeeded in locating the mythological space.

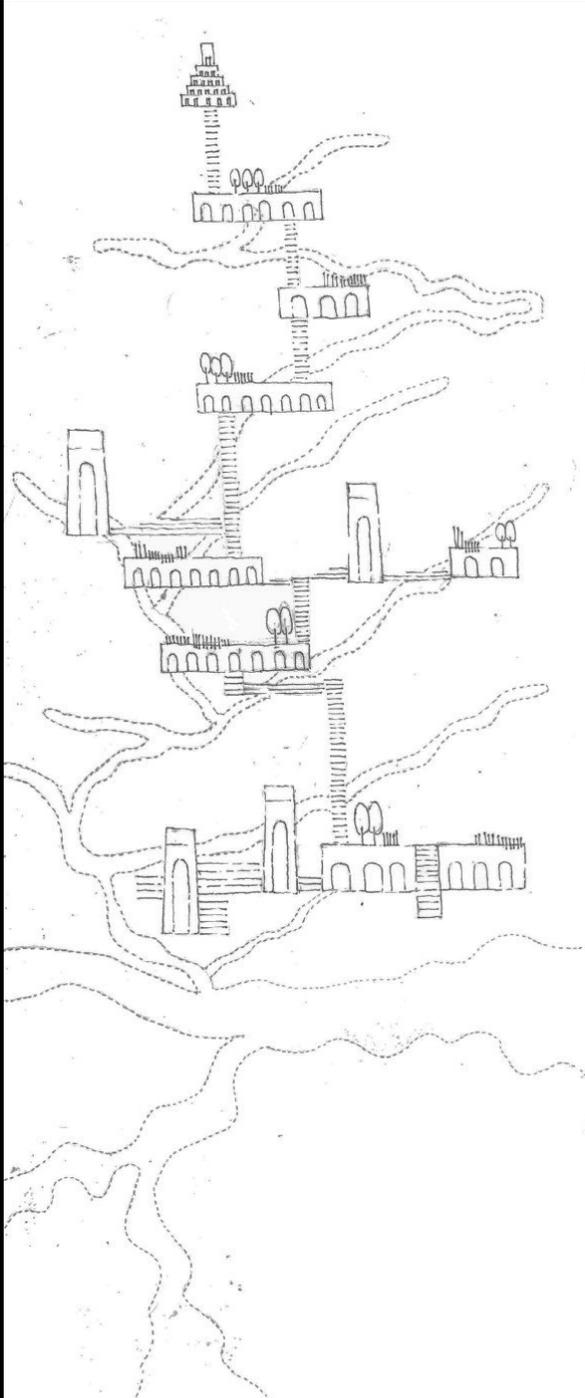
It is a place where there is no pain, no hunger, and no disease; with people living in perfect harmony, and fruits that grant eternal youth.



View of Mount Hōrai
19th century



Penglai Mythical Island
18th Century



THE HANGING GARDENS OF BABYLON

Mythological Garden in Iran

This space was built by King Nebuchadnezzar II, for his Median wife Queen Amytis because she missed the green hills, and valleys of her homeland.

It has perhaps laid the foundation for stepped or terraced gardens.



Hanging Gardens, 19th Century



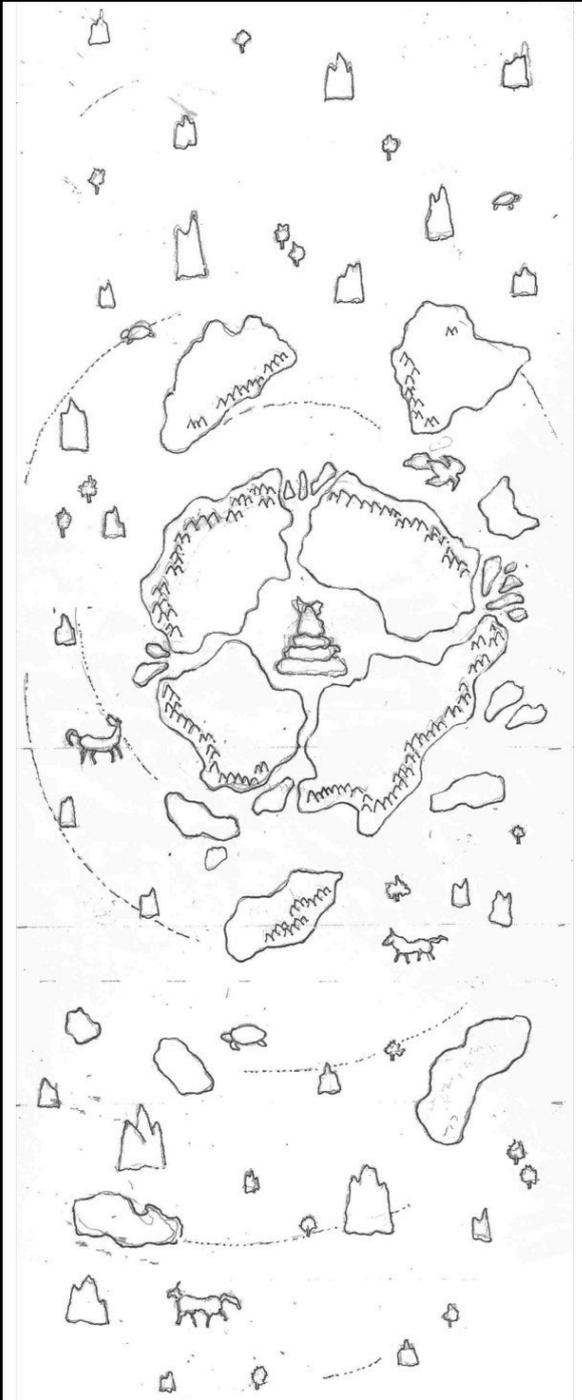
The Hanging Gardens of Babylon by Harry Green, 1978.

MOUNT MERU

Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Mythology

The Abode of Gods, at the foothills of the Himalayas, this mountain is the axis of the Earth.

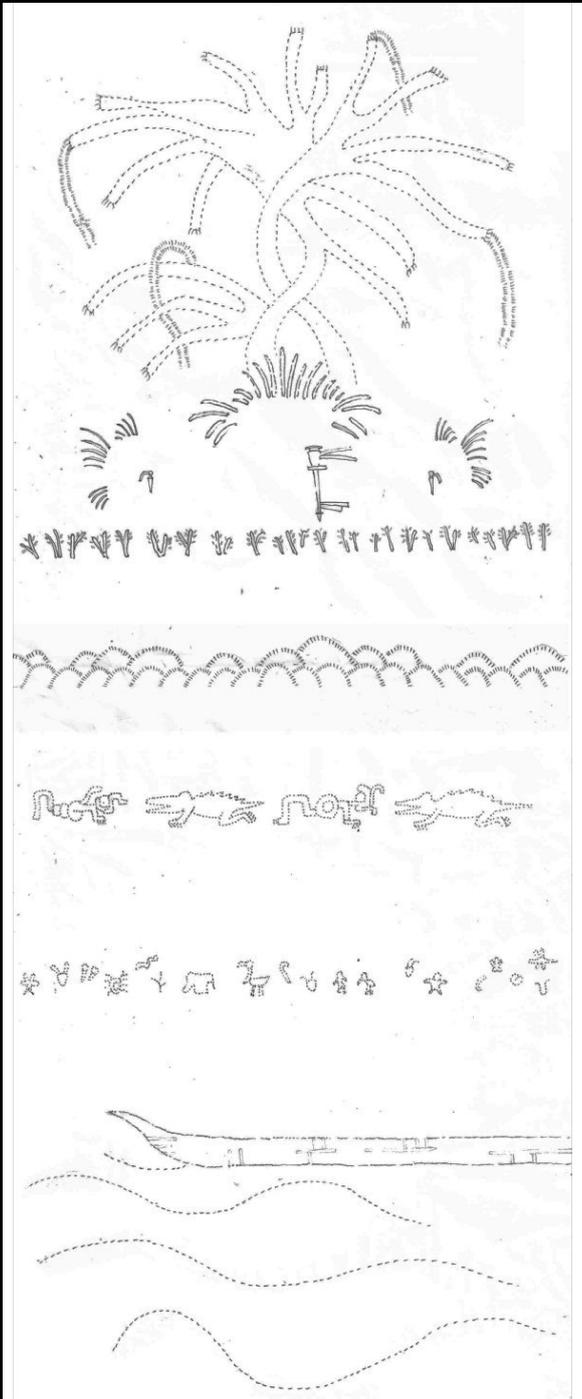
Located at the centre of the world, it is composed of 4 faces, each one made of a different material; the Northern facade made of Gold, the Eastern facade of Crystal, the Southern facade of Lapis, and the Western facade composed of Ruby.



Atlas of Gerardus Mercator
1595



Cosmic Mount Meru
18th Century



TLALOKAN

Aztec Mythology

A paradise on Earth, this is a story from Aztec Mythology; a place for the plentiful - allowing entrance to only those who drowned, or caught fire.

This was, perhaps, an allusion to one's association with natural elements. It consists of caves and water - the 4th layer of the upper realm.



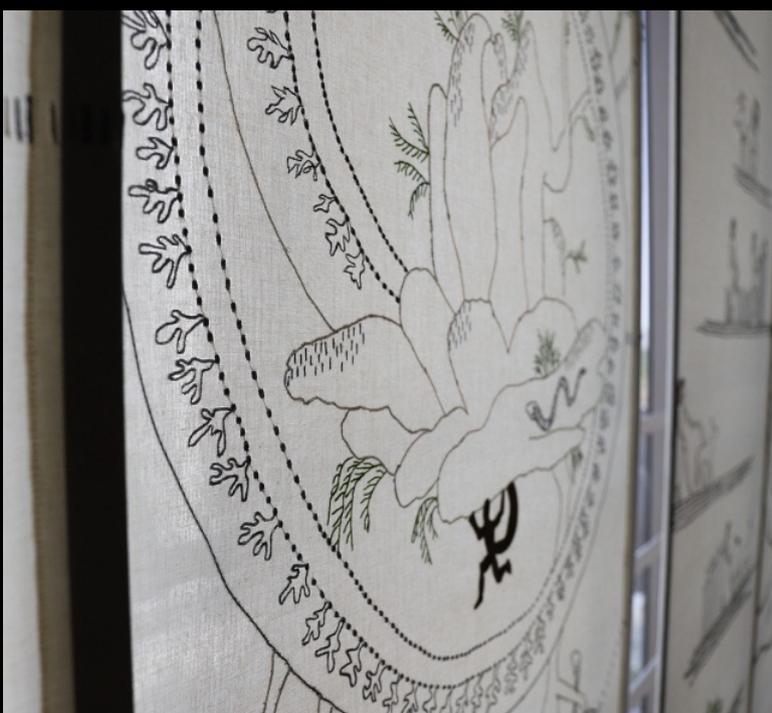
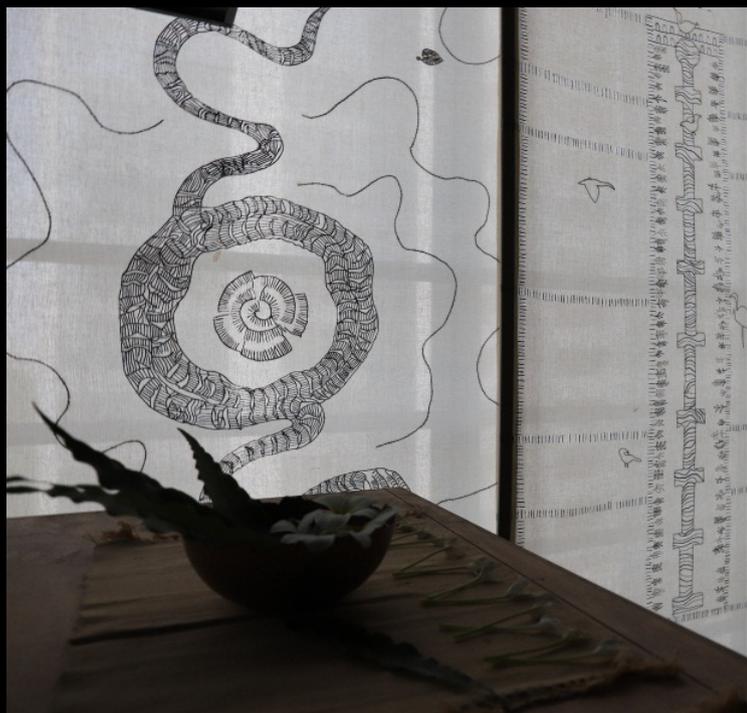
Mountain of Abundance
450-600 AD



Tlalokan, Paradise of the Rain God



Above: *The making of one of the Screens*
Right: *Details of the stitches*

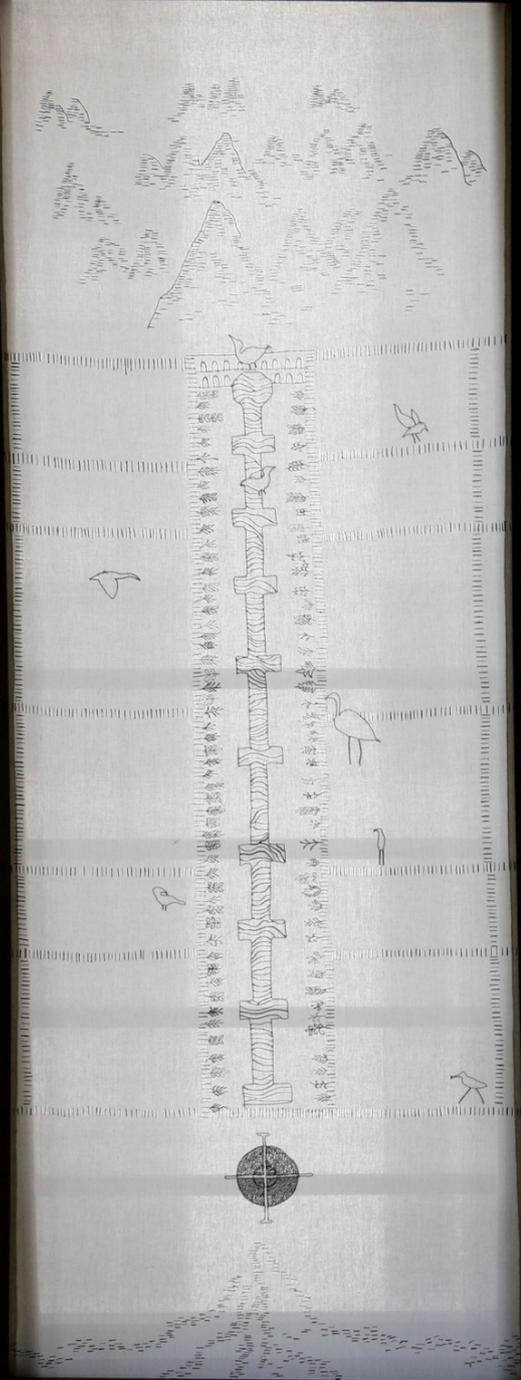


*Subtle.
Some, slightly unknown.
Wondrous landscapes, mythical paradises
Waiting to unravel,*

*Slowly revealing itself
A gaze -
Of inquisitive inquiry
Slowly revealing itself more*

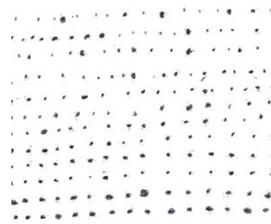
*Framing Cultures
Of stories across the world,
Against the light of the sun
Igniting curiosity; Quenching curiosity*

- Aarohi Bakeri









FRAMING THE ECOSYSTEMS

Conceptualised by Aarohi Bakeri

Produced by Anek Taanka

Still, calm, chaotic, disordered. We are composed of that by which we surround ourselves. Perhaps there never is a time that we are not made of dualities, of infinities.

Six more textile screens bracket the 'Mythical Landscapes' screens - with depictions of water ecosystems - the Delta, Currents, and Waves - on one side; and then land ecosystems on the other - Desert, Grasslands, and Forests.

They are not within immediate view, but remain integral to the composition, and completion of the space.



DELTA

The Water

Strong, vast, diverse! Assuredly paving its way forth! It refuses to be confined, to be contained!



Sundarbans Mangroves



Aerial View of the Sundarbans Delta



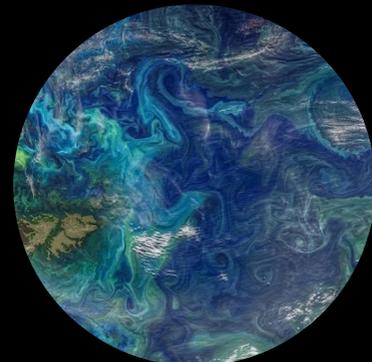
CURRENTS

The Water

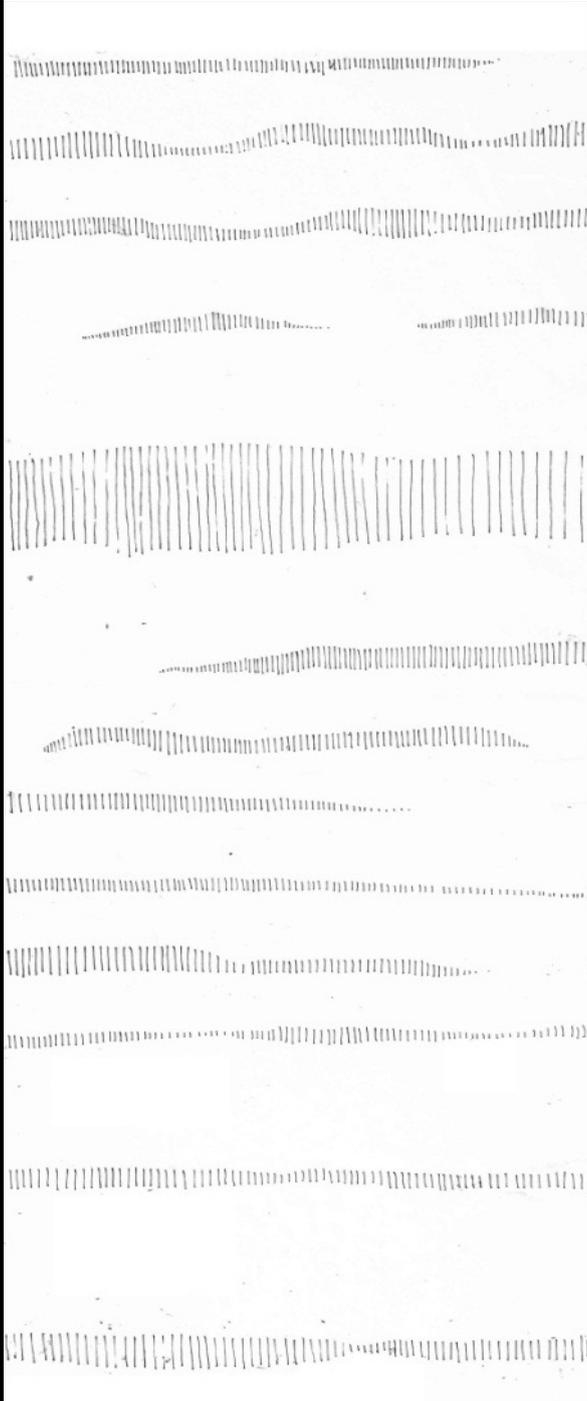
Unified, cohesive, and ever-playful! As they continue to work together, they announce to the on-looker their own identity; their own uniqueness!



Blue Water Ripples
Stanley Zimmy



Eddy, South Atlantic Ocean
NASA



WAVES

The Water

Forceful! Charged! Energetic!

They are dynamic in every expression; adapting themselves, always! Growing, and then, with a sense of calmness, continuing forth!

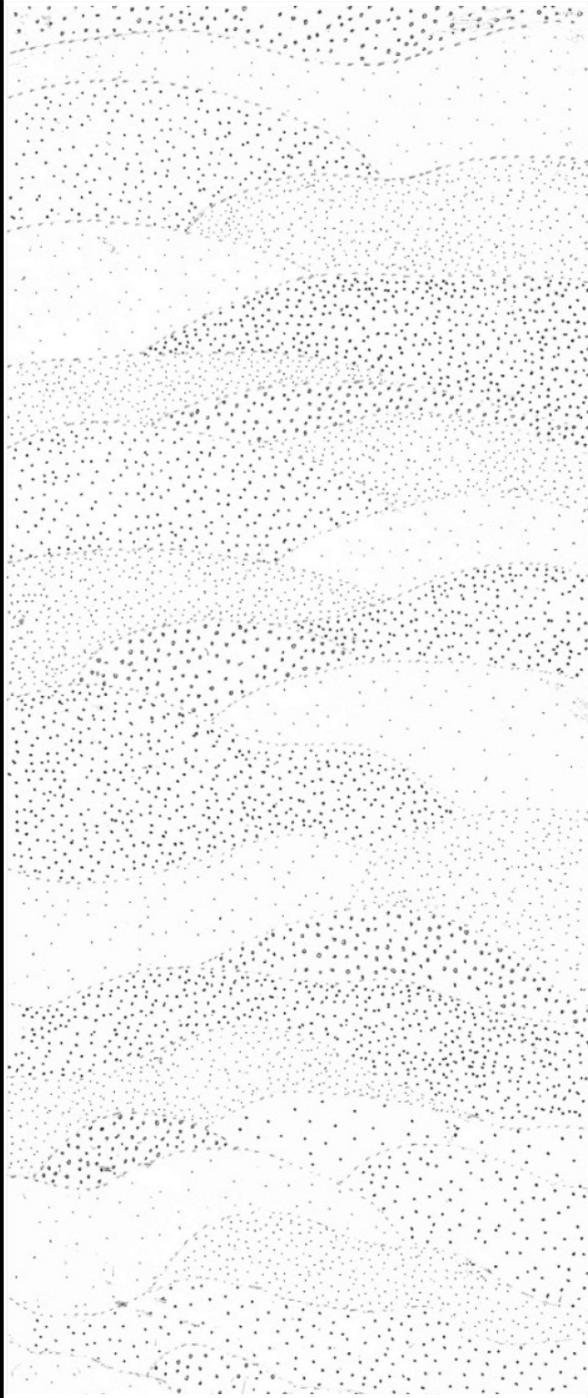


Horizon, Pingleshwar, Kutch



Seaside Serenity
Christine Bell





DESERT

The Land

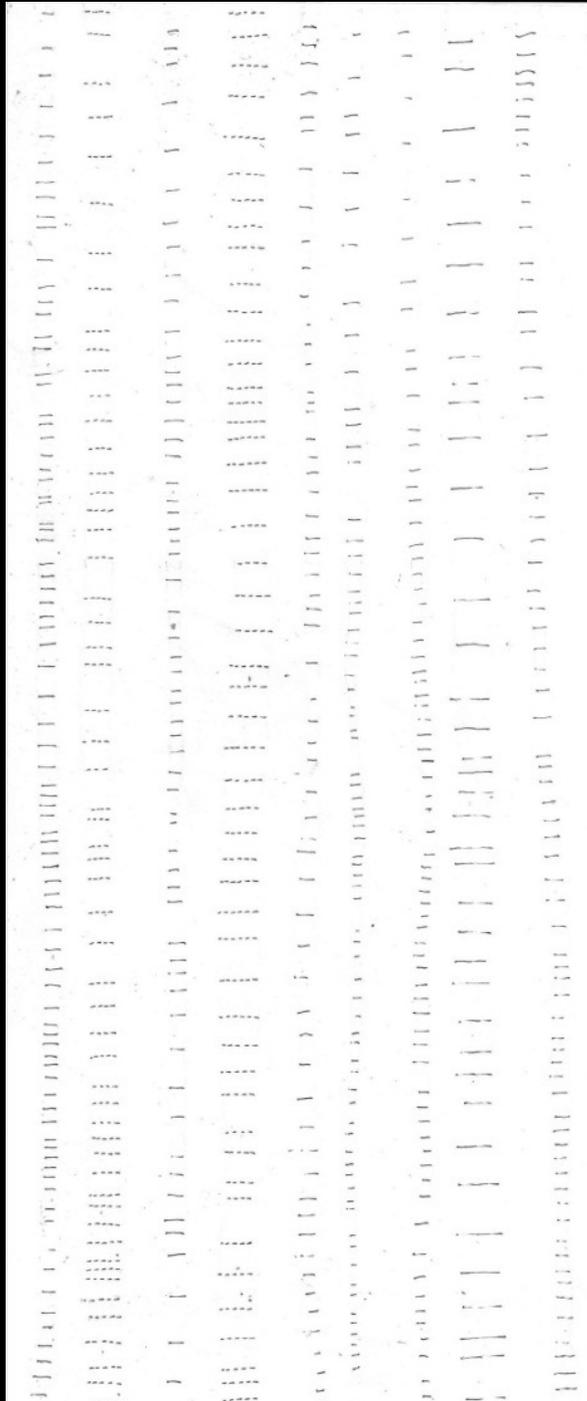
You must know it to traverse it; know its depths; know its expanses! A space that requires that you navigate it with purpose, and deliberation!



Thar Desert



Undulations, Thar Desert



FOREST

The Land

It gives; and through this giving it continues to grow!
Providing one with peace, calm, and almost a suspension
from reality!



Deodar Cedar Forest, Manali
Bjorn Svensson



Sub-alpine Forest
Lassen National park



GRASSLANDS

The Land

Through its dominance, it nurtures – becoming a space for unison and interaction; a space for refuge for all who seek it!



Grasslands,
Kaziranga National Park



Savannah Grasslands.
Serengeti National Park





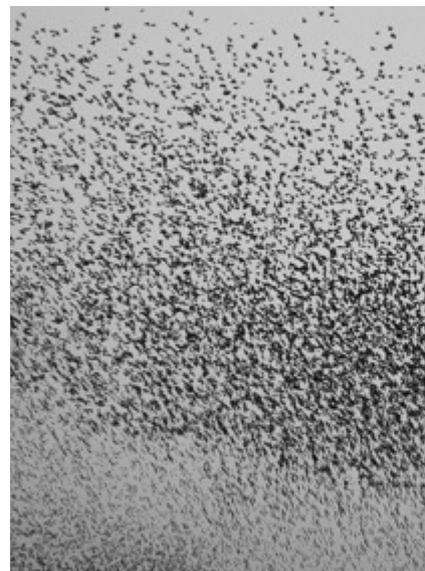
SWARMS

*Conceptualised by Smruti Bhagwat, Aarohi Bakeri
Produced by Anek Taanka*

They swarm, they rise; moving as a collective - free flowing; moving of their own volition.

These lamps are almost a continuation to the screens, and measure 1.5 m in width. The initial idea was to inscribe these lamps with geometric patterns that would allow for the screens to hold the space, and tell their narratives.

The final form of the lamps now have free-form patterns that almost resemble swarms of bees moving through the space; completing the space without drawing attention away from the Mythical Landscapes.

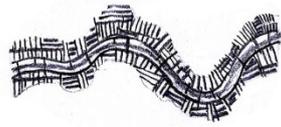


Above: *Photographs by Jan Vaj Ijken*
Right: *Making of the lamps by Anek Taanka*









AVATARAN

Installation by Mrugen Rathod

It flowed, it gushed, it paved its way; forceful, self-assured! But then, when asked, it mellowed, and changed form, as water is wont to do; containing within it everything that has changed over the years; diminishing, but never disappearing.

Composed of cotton fibre, stainless steel, and an LED backlight, this installation - while telling the story of the alteration of the Sabarmati River as it flows through Ahmedabad - serves almost as a connection between the Studio space, and the Lounge - revealing itself slowly at times, and at others - all too completely, and all too suddenly - forging ahead in a compact space.

Avataraan – The Descent of Sabarmati is the reflection of the Sabarmati River and the recent change. A seasonal river, dry almost throughout the year, gets quenched barely through a monsoon and very rarely floods. The “udbhavasthana” (starting point) is one of the most ancient mountain ranges of Aravalli in Rajasthan, which is usually dry, yet has a good amount of rain during monsoon.

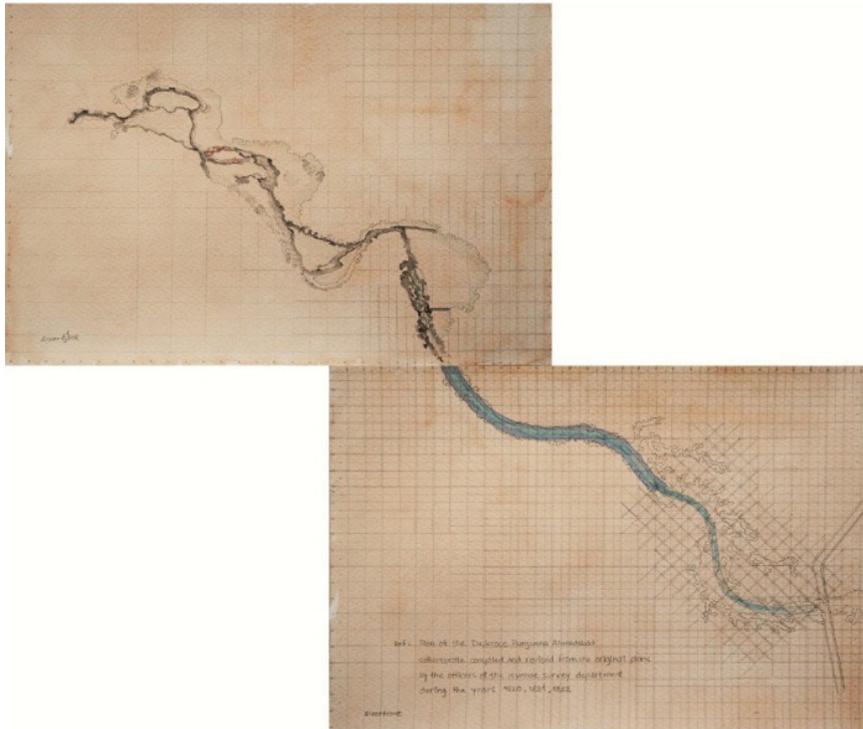
Up until recently, the river was scantily a stream of open sewage efflux, branched out through Ahmedabad, stanching. This gave rise to the idea of a River Front solution. The controversial project took form only after an elaborate battle between environmentalists and city developers, to soon give birth to one of the great wonders of the country. But was this a real solution?

The structural victory was exalted, for the concrete design and also for the dream it gave many such rivers of the country of the anticipated new grey costume.

Of the 27 kms of the river bank in Ahmedabad, 11.5 kms is constructed upon. The commercial aspirations around the riverfront dam the Narmada canal water throughout the year. The development sure is fruitful to many, but at a much larger cost of the river.

At the end, the river still is the same sewage stream.

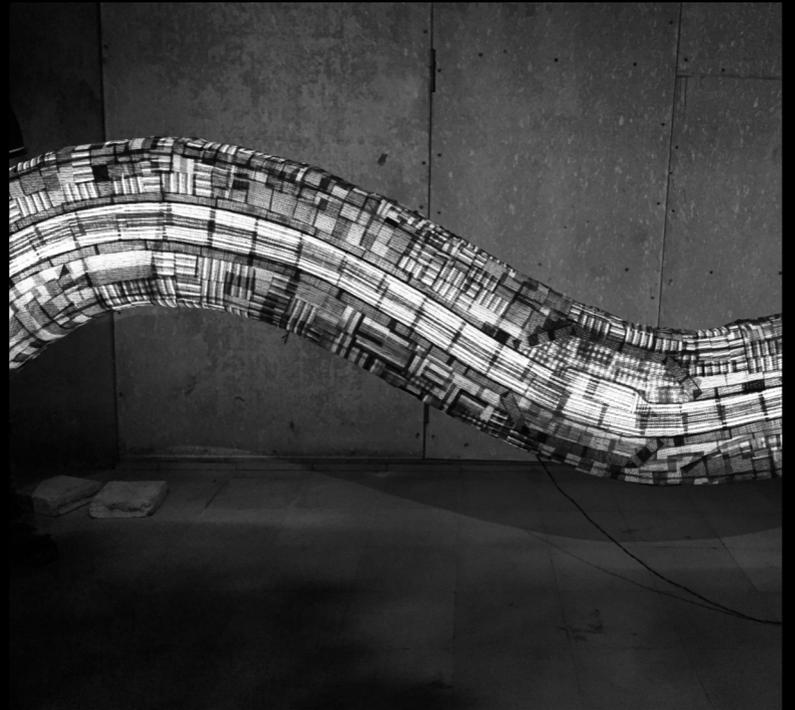
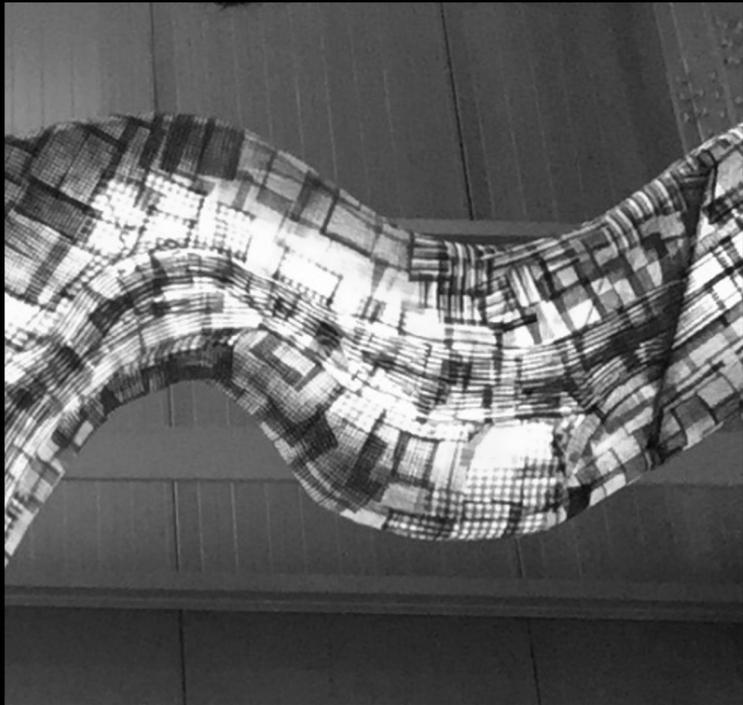
- Mrugen Rathod



Above: Sabarmati Studies

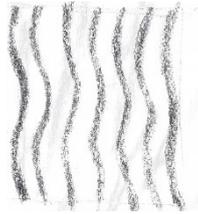


Above: *Making of the Installation*
Right: *Details of Avataran*









THE GOND STORY

Conceptualised by Smruti Bhagwat
Painted by Kaushal Prasad Tekam

These tigers; they move, they prowl - constantly vigilant, looking down upon us. At the top of the chain, they devise their own environs.

Always vigilant, always self-assured!

Gond is a form of story-telling, that finds its origins in the Gond community of Madhya Pradesh; an art form whose identity is inseparable from the community to which it belongs. Originally, it's motifs were derived from stories that were relevant to the community; sometimes of the community itself - their narratives - at others of the environment.

A holding element within the lounge space is a lamp – almost 6 feet by 6 feet – painted upon which are tigers, that are seemingly moving towards the river. It is then accompanied by 3 other Gond lamps placed in close quarters.



Above: Making the larger light
Right: Making of the smaller lamps









THE BELL METAL EXPLORATIONS

Conceptualised by Smruti Bhagwat

Crafted by Junus Ismail Luhar

It is perhaps the smaller gestures, the gestures that are expressed in subtle manners that define the sense of identity; that allow for spaces to be distinguished one from another.

Bell Metal - a hard alloy. In India, the industry has established itself in Rajasthan, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Haryana, and Gujarat. The knowledge on developing bell metal has been passed down from generation to generation.

Within the office space, Bell Metal has been used in three spaces, a crafted bench and a reflective dome in the entrance space, and in arches that define the spaces in the central studio.



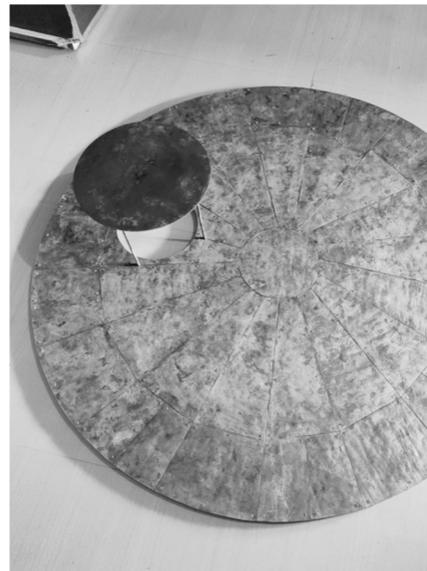
Above: Making of the Bell Metal arches
Right: The partitions





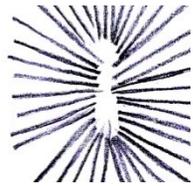
Above: *Making of the Bell Metal Bench*
Right: *The Bench*





Above: *Making of the Bell Metal Light*
Right: *The dome in the entrance*





MEMORIES AND NOSTALGIA

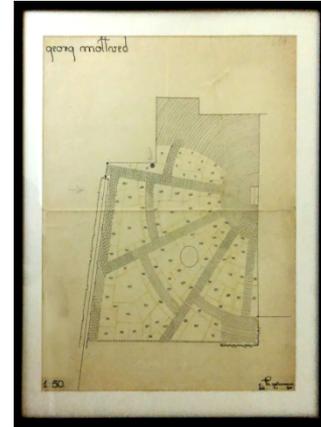
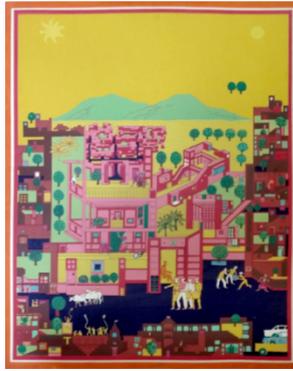
We moved offices after 20 years; and so, needless to say it has been home to countless memories.

It was a journey that began slowly. And then, over time, it became apparent that in a world that is governed by ideas of polarity and duality - art continues to be a unifier; and at times, even an equaliser - holding nothing back, baring all to the viewer, and entrusting them with the responsibility to cull from that which they see.

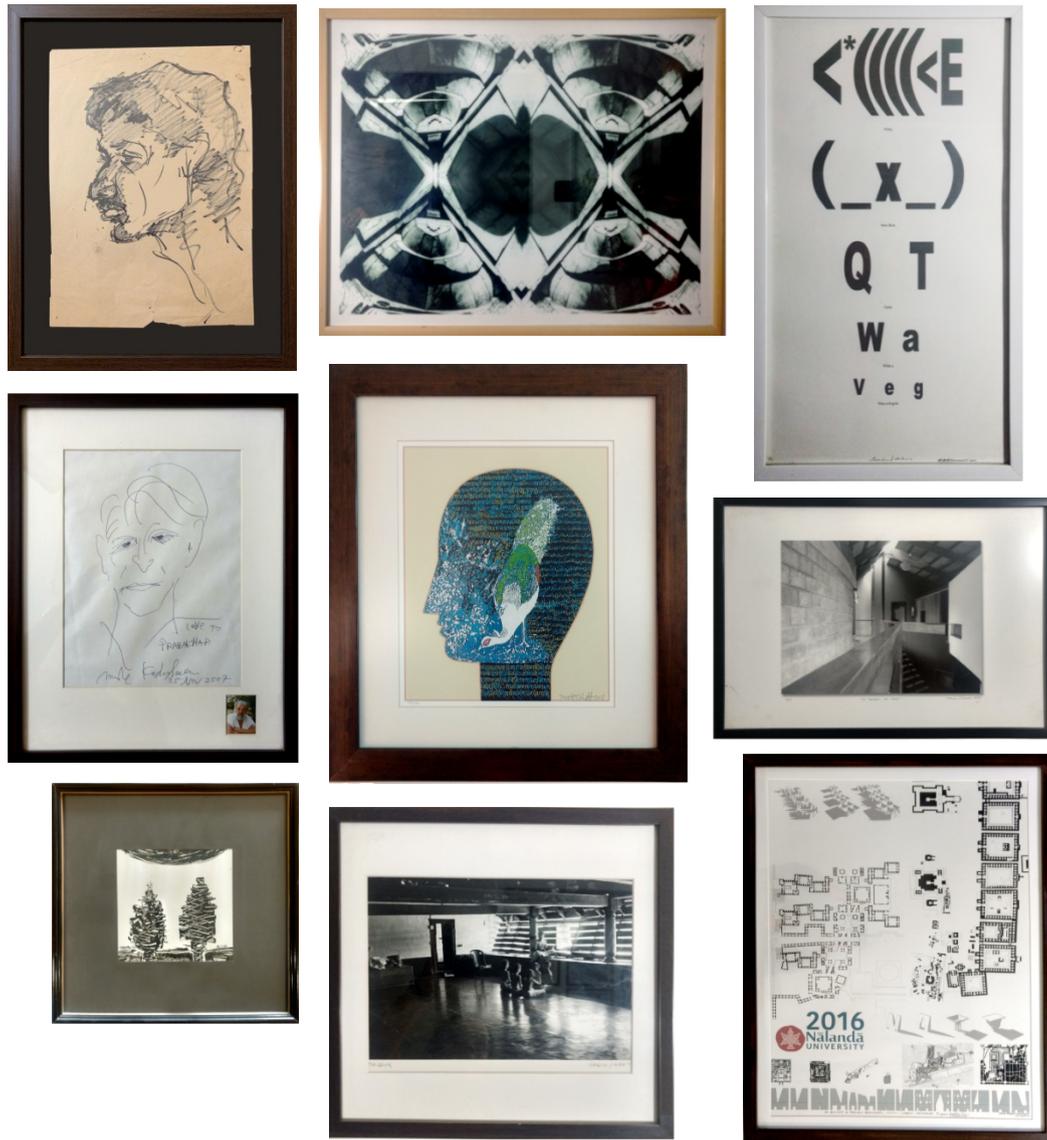
As we continued to further our understanding - not just of art, but even the idea of patronage - we were drawn to works that spoke to us - at times, at a personal level, and at others - of ideas that were reflected at a greater scale.

And then, almost all at once, and all too suddenly, we found ourselves being gently led into an unfamiliar terrain of this world! Some of the collection that you will see is a result of the guidance we have been provided, a result of conversations we have had with our near and dear ones.

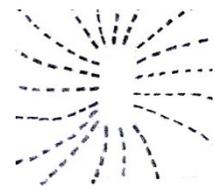
And then, there is a part of this collection that is just reflective of moments in time, of friendship, of kindness, and joy!



Clockwise: Jyoti Bhatt, B. V. Doshi, Santana Gohain, C. Th. Sorenson, Series by John James Audubon



Clockwise: Piraji Sagara, Miki Desai, Karl Antao, Samira Rathod, Rajeev Kathpalia, Sanjiv Shah, Kireet Patel, Dani Karavan's friend, Jyoti Bhatt



VIGNETTES OF THE OFFICE

This space has opened up new possibilities; provided a new environment and inspiration for growth for a Studio that is composed of a passionate community; one that is constantly aiming to further the discourse on design, and has demonstrated, time and again, that outside of the creation of spaces, design is about the conversations that it stems from; from what it takes inspiration.

In this space, we will continue to grow, to create spaces for interaction, and conversation.

This space provides the ability for the imagination of design, beyond design.

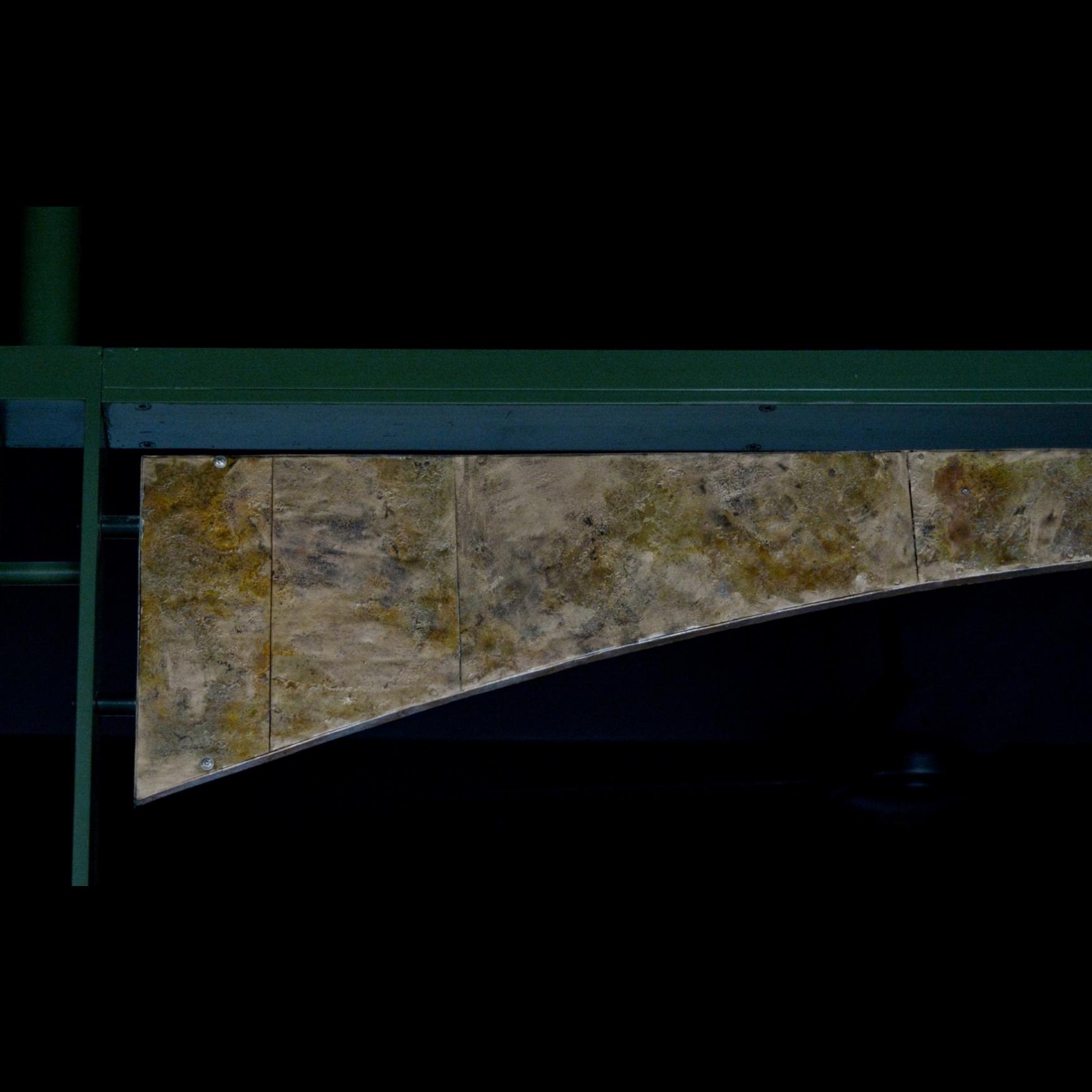
The images are by Shilpa Gavane, Vinay Kushwah, Jaimin Bhavsar; as the space was being formed. Once inhabited, we will record it over time and also record other spaces of the studio.

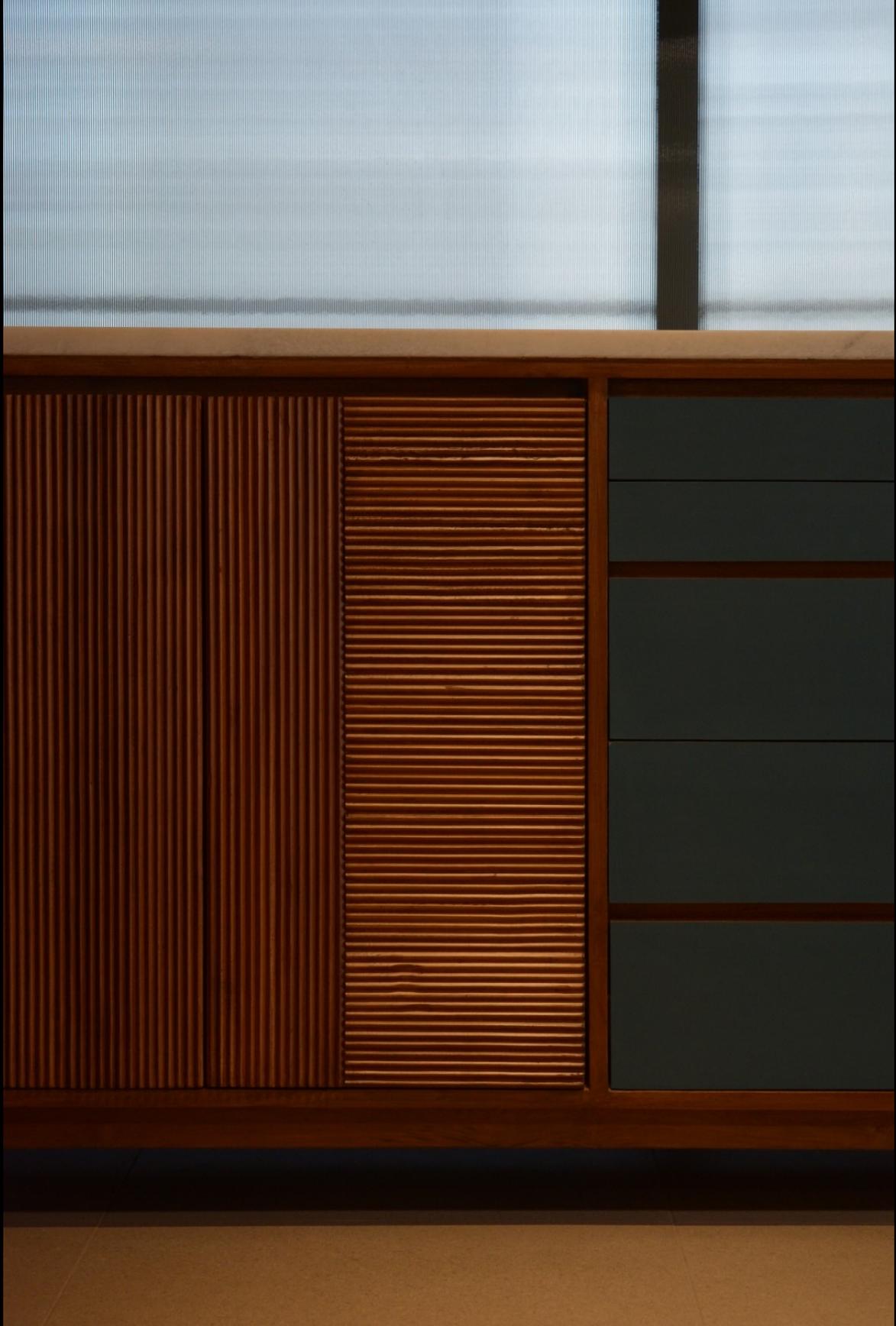






















November 2021