

PROJECTS / PROCESSES

**CATALYSING
INTERVENTIONS:
REDEFINING CERAMIC
AND GLASS CRAFT
COMMUNITIES
WITH DESIGN**

KRISTINE MICHAEL

PROJECTS / PROCESSES VOLUME III

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**Catalysing Interventions: Redefining Ceramic
and Glass Craft Communities with Design**

Kristine Michael





Detail of Swagata Naidu and Rajesh Sharma's installation "Utopian World: Sentient Beings" (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



**Kindling Change:
Fired Material Design
Intervention in
Ceramics and Glass for
Sustainable Living**

Venue Old Public Works
Department Complex

Curated by Kristine Michael

Curatorial Note

Curated by *Kristine Michael*

Curatorial Advisor *Chandrika Grover Ralleigh*

Artists *Kavita Pandya and Titas Ganguly (Ochre Ceramics); Lipi Biswas (Studio Boner Pukur Danga); Vanmala Jain (Kuprakabi Ceramic Design Studio); Srila Mukherjee & Firozabad Blown Glass Craftsmen; Swagata Naidu & NID Ustaad Project at Firozabad with Lampwork Glass Craftsmen; Vineeta Oswal & Manoj Pilli (Studio Glassic)*

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The emergence of the modern craftsman and the definition of craft in post-Independence India throws up a series of provocations. First, the link between craft and national identity as seen from the historical precedence in which khadi was taken as a symbol of “nationhood”. The reclaiming of the right to work creatively by hand was a way in which the colonial destruction of time-honoured social modes and relations of production in a pastoral idyll won an essential place at the heart of a new nation. Craft was at the core of the ideal of swadeshi and both Tagore and Gandhi located craft practices in their ideologies at Sevagram and Santiniketan.

Second, the importance of materiality to the creative practice of early Indian artists who always looked to the craft of the potter, the patua painter, the toy-maker, the miniature painter, among others,

for their unselfconscious ease of understanding the medium and its possibilities, their technical skill and visual interpretation of their community's identity. It changed the nature of how we view art and craft, however, when later definitions of high art in modern/post-modern discourse excluded the craftsman-artist and material-based practices in their categorisation. The craft legacy became subsumed and relegated to governmental policy for handicrafts and artisans - no longer a vital force and intellectual stimulus.

Third, crafts' essential link to the needs and creativity of the community as a living form changed with industrialisation and urbanisation. There are efforts by many organisations and initiatives to open up new markets for hand-made products using traditional skills and local materials and resources. This helped to develop Indian artisanship but the conflicting, fractured nature of this development led to a dilemma whereby crafts tried to retain tradition, be commercially viable, and the craftsmen continued to find new creative stimuli independently.

The development of artist-designers working in craft interventions over a sustained period of time has developed practitioners whose skills may or may not be from a gharana/caste-based tradition but yet there is individual creative expression which supports livelihoods from working creatively with local resources and material. It is in the subtle harnessing of the localised traditional knowledge and practice of the crafts of pottery and glass and the embracing of viable technology that works in both rural and urban contexts that has seen a successful trajectory in the six examples showcased in this exhibition.

One of Kasimir Malevich's proposition's states that all objects have four dimensions—that is to say, three dimensions we can observe and one that is spiritual and self-sustaining. It seems apt for the tracing in this exhibition of the voices of six people's collaborative journeys, carefully negotiating material, skills and design; community, livelihood, and sustainability towards a new means for conceiving a viable future for ceramics and glass communities.

Catalysing Interventions: Redefining Ceramic and Glass Craft Communities with Design

KRISTINE MICHAEL

The exhibition *Kindling Change* at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019 discussed the role of artistic modernism in Indian contemporary ceramics and glass practices as a reimagining of past traditions. This was made possible through sustained creative and symbiotic collaborations between individual artists and designers working within particular craft clusters or geographic concentrations of craft practices. These individuals have created new craft communities through the interventions of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focused on sustainability, enhancing creativity, and ensuring economic independence for practitioners.

Both ceramics and glass use fire as the defining material process. “Kindling” implies tending a fire and the flame of change, as it were—it works as a metaphor for both the material as well as the social development that the exhibition tries to document.

Craft revivalists and social reformers such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, and M K Gandhi pointed towards modernity as a renewal mechanism for Indian sustainable innovation and creativity. Gandhi’s vision for a post-independence India was closely linked to its resurgent village industries, which set the bedrock of revitalised crafts by shaping individual journeys—some pan-Indian and some local. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who was inspired by Gandhi’s philosophy of rural self-sufficiency and was invested in the close ties between craft and the nationalist movement,

was aware of the tensions introduced by industrialization and colonial economics and highlighted the severing of the link between craftsmen and the community due to the introduction of mediators such as new markets, technology, and materials. Her contribution to the growth of small-scale and cottage industries and cooperatives in a rural economy had both a preservationist and modernising thrust through government initiatives and private institutions aimed at progressive modernisation that would preserve the best elements of traditional practice with the needs of post-independent India. She created a support system of Regional Design Centres and cooperatives across India. These came to be located at the intersection of the local and global, the traditional and modern, the colonial and indigenous, the international and national. It marked the beginning of a transition into what India should or could become, not only as an invaluable cultural asset but as an economic force. This was a reflection on the model of “alternative modernities” that challenged European and American-centred concepts of progress within modern societies.

Community handwork as an aspect of handicraft which uses semi-industrial technology, is the only means of access to a mode of production compatible with the traditional gender roles in a domestic setting. It reflects the lives and environment of the predominantly female makers within community practices. An example of this can be seen in Vanmala Jain’s Mumbai group “Kuprakabi”, and in Lipi Biswas’s work with rural women in Santi Niketan. It exemplifies a democratisation of style, design, and materials that illustrates the ways that traditional craft can evolve and assume its place in a globalised art-craft consumer market. Craft as a socially engaged and collective practice within urban communities challenges notions of commercial small-scale, semi-industrial production, and raises issues of women’s craftwork being excluded from the contemporary art discourse.

In the field of ceramics and glass, the notion of the collaborative process—involving craft communities working with the designer/artist—gives us a specific historical moment where, the utilitarian



General view of the first gallery 'Kindling Change' at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.
Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



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artefact or the object of art demonstrates an aesthetic wealth. It embodies vernacular materials, knowledge, design, and handwork skills. It reflects but is not bound by tradition and it is not static—thus permitting new materials and techniques, interpretations of experiences, and creative expressions for both a rural and urban market. The propositions related to design and craft that this exhibition aims to examine through the case studies of successful interfacing seen here all question whether there is a different way for design to engage with craft. The first is that craftspeople are co creators and share in the design process in an equitable manner and with their point of view and not just as a passive recipient. Secondly, whether new technologies are always more efficient, and empowering enough to preserve and not destroy a people's history, originality and innovation. Thirdly, can craft activities co exist within the modern economic and social structures and retain their flexible way of life as a strength not a weakness?

The contemporary and vernacular artists who collaborate in the exhibition are from different cities of the country and their narrative focuses on a powerful and closer look at the impact created by working together for sustainable development. The exhibition sheds light on the story behind the collaboration and the exciting development of new possibilities in the mediums of glass and ceramics through installations, text, and film. Through this extended artistic discourse and praxis, the exhibition creates new means for conceiving the future.

KINDLING CHANGE: THE EXHIBITION

Kindling Change focuses and highlights the work of several ceramic and glass designers trained at the National Institute of Design (NID) who have worked with communities and craft development over a sustained period of time. This vision was supported by a framework that explored the significance of ceramic design beyond the material's

techniques, processes and aesthetic. There are six installations in the exhibition at the PWD building in Goa—three in ceramic and three in glass. Each installation has an accompanying short film made by the talented filmmakers Jayant Parasher, Saurabh Vyas, and Sudeshana Sharma. Kavita Pandya's installation titled "*A Timeless Conference of Birds*" includes a soundscape titled "*Birds of Goa*" created by sound artist Farah Mulla.

The accessibility aspect of the exhibition included a space for object handling made by the artists of the exhibition to facilitate an experience of the work by those who are unable to visually access the installations in the same way as the able-bodied audience. These were objects as unique and fragile as those in the exhibition. Each installation further involved evoking touch and tactility access to the surface design through sensory plaques created by access consultant Siddhant Shah.

The workshops were conceptualised as a means of communicating through the material; hence all four of them, which had overwhelming participation, were led by the artists sharing their artistic journeys with short presentations. This led to an introduction of the material through a demonstration of technique and a hands-on experience for the participants. Besides these, two curated walks and workshops were held for speech impaired students of Sanjay Special School with Siddhant Shah and a sign language interpreter. In the words of one of the students, Shivraj M: "*With the accessibility facilities, we could learn so much. My favorite was the glass solar system. I enjoyed this a lot as there was a sign language interpreter who could explain to us what the artist was saying... otherwise we see things and go away. No one tells us anything as we are not able to communicate. I wish to learn more about glass*".



Demonstration and glass workshop conducted by Rajesh Sharma and Swagata Naidu with school children, as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.





Demonstration and clay workshop conducted by Lipi Biswas and Lakshmi Kisku, as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by The Lumiere Project.



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BUILDING BRIDGES: INTEGRATION OF DESIGN AND CRAFT

The ethos of sustainability and renegotiating relevance within craft disciplines has been at the center of the mission of NID, Ahmedabad. Generations of designers have been taught to appreciate that the power of design lies in the creative solutions that improve lives and seeks to empower those who do not have access to resources.² It was a more human-centred design approach that integrated designers with communities. This encouraged a collaborative process and a holistic approach that acknowledges the importance and relevance of the study of human societies. Negotiating between this craft mission and the new consumer culture which used design to build Brand India as an international global presence remains one of the challenges facing interventions in craft communities. In searching for a fuller understanding of the role of responsible design in each craft intervention, states Amartya Sen, taking cognisance of its direct relevance to the wellbeing and freedom of the crafts person, its indirect role through influencing social change, and influencing economic production is as important.³

Ceramic and Glass Design was one of the initial industrial design disciplines at NID. This vision was supported by a framework that explored beyond the material's techniques, processes, and aesthetic.⁴ It was between 1966 and 1968 that its founder Dashrath Patel, who was an important modern artist of the time and a polymath with a diverse practice spanning painting, ceramic art, photography, sculpture and exhibition design, set the base for the ceramics design department. He was a versatile collaborator of the modernist project in post-independence India, bursting with idealism and faith in the capacity of the artist/designer to transform society. To him, kneading and forming clay was as symbolic as fashioning a nation. Responding to the "crafts" sector held a special charm and challenge as it provided the possibility to work directly with the country's rural artisans.⁵



Detail of figure of politician and clowns from the installation “Mumbai Nukkad” (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



General View of Vanmala Jain and Kuprakabi's installation "Mumbai Nukkad" (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



THE WOMEN BEHIND MUMBAI NUKKAD

A new generation of craft activists from the mid-twentieth century worked to create sustainable economic models and social development agendas. Craft as a socially engaged artistic collective practice within urban communities is counter to the art object and gallery discourse. One example of such a design activist is Vanmala Jain, the founder of the Kuprkabi Ceramics Foundation in Mumbai, who has worked to bridge the gap between the vernacular and contemporary, thus paving a path for new social and aesthetic modes of life and work. Influenced by her social activist father, Padma Chand Singhi, who inculcated in her the social and moral imperative of the role of crafts in the regeneration of livelihood, and the inspirational role it should play in the building of new communities while breaking with hereditary caste occupations. In her hometown of Jaipur, Jain had developed a close rapport with miniature painter and ceramic artist Kripal Singh Shekhawat, who was one of the leading forces for the Rajasthan modernist art movement. As a graduate of the NID's Ceramic and Glass Design discipline, it was clear to her that as part of a vision for design relevance in India, ceramics was seen as a medium to achieve sustained development objectives. Through her work, Jain inspires practitioners to maximise the power of clay and design thinking by means of combining traditional handicrafts, modern design, and innovative and sustainable systems and technology.

Kuprkabi challenges the notion that there is only one mode of production for design and raises issues of women's craftwork being excluded from the discourse on arts. The community handwork from their homes is the only means of access to a mode of production compatible with traditional female roles within the domestic setting. Kuprkabi's techniques of making promote and display an ideal synthesis of art, craft, and the application of grassroots technology. All the products are handmade in terracotta clay by various people and brought together at the studio. This ensures that optimal number of persons in the local community stay gainfully employed.

The Mumbai Nukkad installation in ceramic and textile reflects the lives and environment of the predominantly female makers in their community practice. This is developed through a democratisation of style, design, and materials that illustrate that traditional craft can evolve and assume its place in a globalised art-craft consumer market.

One sees and identifies with familiar figures of the Mumbai streets, the Konkani fish seller, the corner shop *paanwallahi*, the office *dabbawallahs*, the Parsi intellectuals, and so on in a never-ending jamboree of plurality of community and life. The psychological impact of being pawns in a chess game between divergent forces brings new meaning to the permeable barrier between art and craft and the fluidity of aesthetic values assigned to ceramics. In this blend, we see the Bauhaus economy of manufacture and purpose combined with the ethereal happenchance of allowing the qualities of the materials to combine and breathe through the process, thus creating new meanings of form.

A QUIET RENAISSANCE IN BENGAL

Located close to Shantiniketan, and Sriniketan in Birbhum district of West Bengal, inspired by the strong Tagorean legacy and ethos of Kala Bhawan at Visva-Bharati University,⁶ Lipi Biswas and Bidyut Roy of Studio Boner Pukur Danga have interpreted the pottery cycle as a microcosm of man, nature, and culture.

The story of Studio Boner Pukur Danga begins in 1997 when Lipi Biswas, a young painting graduate of The Faculty of Fine Arts at M S University Baroda met painter and alternative architect Bidyut Roy in Santiniketan. Although both were painters by training but early on, Lipi decided to leave painting and turn to the most common material found in the village—clay.

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Biswas and Roy were awarded the Arts Collaboration Grant from India Foundation for the Arts in 1998-1999 to work in the interstices of urban visual artists and tribal/folk artisans, and to conduct a series of workshops in the villages of Bihar and Bengal. The project was an attempt to reduce knowledge and technological gaps between the practices of tribal, folk, and urban potters. Both of them learnt their instinctive ways of arriving at the form, shape, and volume of pots, the making of indigenous glazes from locally available material, and the technique of making huge cylinders from the tribal and folk potters. In return, they shared scientific methods of preparing clay, chemical glazes, and how to fire pots at high temperatures.

Lipi Biswas works with the local Santhal community of women and strives to make them financially independent as well as skilled in the making of ceramics as well as reviving techniques, introducing and innovating with new designs and opening fresh markets. Barring a few materials that come from other states, the studio believes in natural living and gathers or creates as much as possible from their surroundings. The studio makes a range of functional products of ash-glazed earthenware and stoneware. Most of the ware is made through hand pinching or wheel throwing and modelling. This process makes each ware different from the other, just as each human is different from another. Biswas doesn't imagine herself as a social entrepreneur but her vision is to help an entire village sustain themselves on pottery and local markets.

The Button project started in 2004. The plight of the local tribal women affected her deeply and it was the beginning of a movement to earn a livelihood through self-respect. The skill set needed was simple and it was an object they could all relate to. For Lipi, this project became the language to articulate the metaphor for the women's lives which is a struggle to make a livelihood just like the buttons that hold two ends of clothing together. The varied shapes of the buttons symbolise the different women of all ages who are the catalysts for the project.



Detail of large button in the sand, jute rope, and smaller buttons in the background taken from “Once A Button” (2019), an installation by Lipi Biswas and Lakshmi Kisku at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



General View of Lipi Biswas and Lakshmi Kisku's installation "Once A Button" (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



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Lakshmi Kisku is a Santhal woman from Boner Pukur Danga and has worked with Lipi Biswas for sixteen years as a button-maker. A middle-aged widow, she lost her husband a couple of years ago to a snake-bite and has struggled to retain a life of dignity and independence in the village within a strongly patriarchal system. She discovered herself through clay and it sustains her while shaping her individual voice.

The installation concept “Once A Button” describes Biswas’ efforts in a metaphorical “button narrative” about lives touching each other, just as buttons touch us, take care of us, leaving their silent mark on our lives, and get carried away by the river of life. *Prakriti* is described as a button which is a necessity without which a shirt—described as *Purush*—is useless. The button carries thousands of experiences, from early childhood through adolescence, walking on the ramp of youth, starting a new chapter, being at war, and finding oneself under the heavy wheels of life until eternity.

The narrative brings all these myriad buttons together and strings them with different natural fibres such as cotton, silk, wool, hemp, jute, linen, and roots of creepers. These tensile rivers carry a parallel story of the people—the button-makers—so that they flow freely, with bounty and generosity onto a beach of many scattered buttons.

The placement of the installation is specific to the role that women play in rural households—occupying a dark place, a corner of the room, with always a threshold to be crossed.

BIRDS OF ANAND

Inspired by Gandhi’s Sevagram and Wardha initiatives, craft revival and regeneration work was taken up by S K Mirmira in Gramodaya Sangh, Bhadrawati in the early twentieth century.⁷ Mirmira’s path-breaking vision aimed to assist the artisan in making the transition

to small-scale mechanised industry as the most economically viable space for the future of pottery along with the development of new products to suit local rural needs. He saw the future in the development of glazed terracotta for traditional potters as a way of reviving the local market which was flooded with competitive new materials for vessels and household objects. His vision was ahead of its time; one which encompassed the training, production, and marketing of glazed terracotta and low temperature whiteware by artisans with the support of rural and urban markets. His life's mission made a deep impact on the local village economy of Bhadrawati and was an exemplar in new modes of artisanship and entrepreneurship. The Gramdan Sangh legacy continues even today under his students, Kavita Pandya and Titas Ganguly.

Kavita Pandya is a ceramic designer and artist, trained in ceramic sculpture from MS University, Baroda, and in ceramic design from the NID. She and Titas Ganguly worked closely with Mirmira and later started Ochre Ceramics in Anand, Gujarat with the study and practice of the Japanese *Nerikomi*⁸ or coloured clay technique, to create and innovate with the local community.

They realised the potential of harnessing the creativity and passion for animal figurines in the local communities in 2004. At this stage, they started encouraging village youth to create natural forms perceived from their surroundings. Anand is known for its rich collection of flora and fauna. This study of the behaviour of animals in their environment, their forms, characteristics, and interaction with nature is what makes their products appeal to fun-loving people of all ages and occupations, and are not limited by geographical boundaries. The universal nature of the products makes it possible for people from any corner of the world to identify with them. The journey of transformation from inspiration to end-product involved a lot of explorations and experimentation in form and material. Inspiration was also drawn from the rich tradition of clay figurines and toys from every corner of India.



Detail of the installation "A Timeless Conference of Birds" (2019) by Kavita Pandya and Vijay Kumar Chandrasingh Parmar, as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

Initial discussions for the concept of the installation “A Timeless Conference of Birds” involved the elements of air, water, and sound, which in many ways epitomise the links between Panjim, Goa and Anand, Gujarat. The installation uses images of the birds of Goa made in *nerikomi* technique inlaid onto flat clay discs which hang from the ceiling gently swaying with the wind.⁹ This was accompanied by a soundscape of individual birdsong made by Farah Mulla, in order to generate excitement and awe, as well as encourage a diverse range of sensory participation.

Vijay Kumar Chandrasingh Parmar joined Ochre at the age of eighteen in 2004. Though he doesn't come from a family of hereditary potters, he chose to take up pottery as a profession when he was inspired to learn *nerikomi* skills from Ochre. Over the years he has matured into a highly skilled craftsman in clay, whose creativity shows in his deep observation of nature and animals around him. He was able to translate minute details into the medium of clay transforming a formless clay lump into a restless, mischievous monkey or a thoughtful donkey with impeccable precision.

While working on *Kindling Change* he discovered skills in sketching from photographs and transferring these onto the intricate designs required for *nerikomi* clay. This has helped him in creating the marvelously expressive series with Pandya that was inspired by a twelfth-century persian poem titled *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid ud-Din or Attar of Nishapur. The poem speaks of a journey by a group of thirty birds led by a hoopoe as an allegory of a Sufi sheikh or master leading his pupils to enlightenment. They set off on a quest for the mythical bird Simurgh and this takes them through seven valleys, each teaching a different moral.

THE WORLD OF GLASS

The NID craft documentation course aided the development of design aesthetics inspired by and suited to the Indian context and simultaneously sensitised designers towards the socio-economic reality of the region and the practicing indigenous communities.¹⁰ This process of immersion helped to foster empathy towards the needs of social development and the use of design thinking as a tool. Over the years, the department developed a close network with various traditional terracotta clusters across the country and has deepened its understanding of the wider socioeconomic concerns and sustainability-oriented issues of crafts, as well as that of material and form.

Despite the existence of a traditional glass-working sector and industrial requirements in the field of glass, there was no formal education in glass design available in the country till it was included in the curriculum at NID. The ground work to identify clusters and industries for glass objects and its relevance in the country's economy was carried out by a team led by Neelima Hasija before developing a curriculum to include glass course. They were guided by Srila Mookherjee, NID alumnus and the first studio glassblower in the country. They established collaboration with Center for Development of Glass Industries (CDGI), Firozabad to support the glass curriculum at NID as well as for supporting industrial exposure to production methods and techniques in glass blowing and lampwork.¹¹

Neelima Hasija studied the Indian glass sector as a researcher and a designer to gain deeper insights into the sector's reality—its opportunities and challenges. From 2006 to 2016, she worked closely with the Handicraft sector located in and around Firozabad and Purdilnagar in the capacity of Principal Investigator under the aegis of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India. Hasija carried out extensive field research and strategised design interventions at various levels for the development of the industry as well as the glass practicing communities. Projects spread over



Detail of Srila Mookherji and Pappu Sarfuddin's installation "The Glass Galaxy" (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

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eight years helped the discipline firmly establish a strong network with industrial and craft clusters and afforded immense exposure to the city's challenges and opportunities working with glass across Firozabad district and Purdilnagar town of Uttar Pradesh . Students who worked on these projects developed appropriate networks and a deeper understanding of the work culture and socio-economic realities of the craftspeople who were highly dependent on exports.

The NID's craft intervention initiative as knowledge partner with the Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development Scheme (USTTAD) under the aegis of Ministry of Minority Affairs,¹² was the impetus for a series of design development activities in five minority craft clusters across India, one of which was the glass flame-work of Firozabad. Started in 2016, the project aimed to preserve the heritage of arts and crafts of minorities and build the capacity of traditional crafts persons by updating the traditional skills and products through various activities like documenting the craft, product development, and design workshops.

The Flame-work Craft Documentation was an outcome of USTTAD, and involved the faculty and students of the Ceramic and Glass Discipline led by Swagata Naidu. The numerous visits and intense study among each cluster of craftspeople in order to document how they practice their craft and understand their limitations and potential resulted in several design intervention workshops, brand building, and development of packaging, thereby opening up new markets for the craftsmen.

Swagata Naidu trained in architecture from SCET Surat and is currently head of Ceramic and Glass Design at NID. Her focus, besides the science of material courses related to glass and developmental possibilities with technology, is the enormous reach of craft and its wide variety of practices seen through formal responses to different community needs.

Naidu has worked closely with two craftsmen from Firozabad—Rajesh Sharma and Zafar Ahmed. Both of them are primarily lampwork glass craftsmen working with the material for the last thirty years. Lampwork craft has evolved from furnace bead-making. A graduate in commerce, Rajesh Sharma was exposed to glass object making and was drawn to the glass craft since childhood. He learnt glass blowing and worked in the glass industry but found his passion and expertise in the lampwork technique of working with hollow and solid glass rods. He enjoys collaboration, taking on challenges, and developing new designs with the help of NID. Zafar Ahmed is a traditional glass craftsman who has developed his skills by working with his elder brother and father, and now has his own workshop. He has been working with glass on his own and on collaborative projects for the last twenty years and is highly regarded for his craftsmanship. Both have collaborated with Naidu on the details of the many creatures that make up the installation “Utopian World: Sentient Beings”.

The installation is an attempt to bring to the fore the brilliance and luminosity of the material, transformed and orchestrated into forms by the heat of fire and expert hands. It depicts the familiar co-tenants of planet Earth through its diverse landscapes with its flora and fauna. The concept recalls a metaphor of an oasis in this divided world where human beings are like a mean neighbour usurping the resources meant for all, as well as undermining everyone’s value. The installation invites the viewer to recall and celebrate every living being’s existence in a divided world. Using the technique of lampwork, which brings out the property of reflection, and transparency, complex fluid forms inspired by flora and fauna represent varied climactic terrains.



General View of Swagata Naidu and Rajesh Sharma's installation "Utopian World: Sentient Beings" (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



CRYSTAL CREATURES

Glass beads have also become integral to life in many tribal communities throughout the country. Purdil Nagar is the heart of the Indian bead industry and is heir to the ancient North Indian bead-making tradition. The craftsmen communities are called *manihars*, who migrated from the Sindh region of Pakistan about two hundred years ago and made and sold bangles using flame-work techniques known as “*Bhatti ka kaam*”. The majority of glass artisans of Purdil Nagar work in home-based workshop spaces.¹³

Studio Classic is a creative space that works at the intersection of art and design. Co-founded by Manoj Pilli and Vineeta Oswal, both graduates of Ceramics and Glass Design from the NID, Ahmedabad, they are passionate about working in glass and initiating creative ideas and design development with craftsmen. Both have been an integral part of the USTAAD Project and this has been the springboard for their vision of developing creativity and innovation with the traditional bead-making craftsmen of Purdil Nagar.

They have worked with handcrafted combinations of material of glass-metal-wood-clay in the realms of space installations, murals, home décor, and lifestyle accessory products.

Studio Classic engages with design development projects for craft communities in India. They have worked with handcrafted combinations of materials such as glass-metal-wood-clay in the areas of space installations, murals, home décor, and lifestyle accessory products to build a unique design language. These are handcrafted by both designers and various artisan groups.

Ishtayak Ali, is a glass bead and bangle-making craftsman at Purdil Nagar, Uttar Pradesh. He has been practicing the glass craft since his childhood and was exposed to the design field in recent years through workshops organised by the NID through the USTTAD Craft documentation. He is invited to various exhibitions and craft related gatherings for demonstrations.



Detail View of "Antic" (2019), an installation by Vineeta Oswal, Manoj Pilli and Ishtayak Ali, as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

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The installation is a response to the joy of being a part of the overwhelming innocence and wilderness of the elements of earth. Insects are the tiniest wonders of the world, the beauty of which can be appreciated with the naked eye. Inspired by the moving queue of ants from the dropped bread crumb, ants are always in a collective which is disciplined and hardworking.

While the installation clearly represents ants on the move, it is open to diverse interpretations. One such connect could be that of human behaviour: Is there order or chaos? Clarity or ignorance?

THE GLASS GALAXY

Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh was a part of the Mughal Empire and named after Firoz Shah Mansab Dar during Akbar's reign. It became the centre for numerous generations of Persian glass-makers who brought their craftsmanship in ceramics and glass to the area.¹⁴ Pappu Sarfuddin was introduced to glass and was apprenticed within the industry at a young age. He was identified by the Centre for the Development of the Glass Industry (CDGI) as a skilled artisan, but it was his open mind and his tenacity that helped him develop his skills and work with foreign and visiting glass makers. He first interacted with Mookherjee and the students of the NID at CDGI as a trainer. Srila has worked with the development of glass techniques and contemporary designs in Firozabad for over two decades.

Following her graduation in Ceramics at NID, Srila Mookherjee spent several months working in a ceramic design studio with Eila Romakkaniemi, Rovaniemi in Finland. She learnt the art of glass blowing under the tutelage of Anthony Stern in London and also worked at the Glasshouse, Covent Garden. On her return to India in 1989, she set up her studio "Aakriti" in Kolkata, sourcing all her material and equipment indigenously. As the founding Member of Indo-Swedish Glass Sambandh programme and AFSA Fired Art, she has held many solo exhibitions in Indian cities. She has been

instrumental in setting the Glass Discipline at NID where she is currently visiting faculty.

She continues to practice her craft and creates pieces from molten glass, always striving to explore and challenge the possibilities of this exciting medium by enjoying the feeling of immediacy it imparts. Every piece she creates is a unique combination of colour, form, and artistic expression.

Mookherjee's work is inspired by her passion for both functional arts as well as the vessel form. It is a creative combination of form with function, craft with art, which she feels ultimately brings beauty into our everyday lives. The vessel form is one that she has been engrossed with in a variety of different media, from terracotta to glass to porcelain. For her, the vessel form is the epitome of beauty. It exists to hold or contain—both literally and metaphorically. It is all-encompassing in its generosity, it receives, it holds, it gives. It is a vehicle for her ideas and feelings as an artist.

“The Glass Galaxy” installation is a tribute to the many dreamers, thinkers, scientists, and artists who have brought us closer to the universe we live in. With its systems of planets, moons, stars, and other debris orbiting around this massive ball of hot gas known as the Sun, the “earth’s cosmic neighbourhood” is a rich source of inspiration for a glassmaker. In fact, the solar system lends itself to the art form of blown glass in a way that little else does. The shapes, textures, and colours of celestial bodies are a glassblower’s dream and the perfect expression of the spectacle that is our cosmic universe. Furthermore, the ethereal and mysterious quality of planets and stars are mirrored in the medium of glass.



General View of Srila Mookherjee and Pappu Sarfuddin's installation "The Glass Galaxy" (2019), as part of Kindling Change at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



PROJECTS/PROCESSES

EVERYTHING

I still recollect my mother
Holding my hands
Teaching me, guiding me
Making the mundane extraordinary
My craft is my life, my reality, my love.

GIFT IN THE POT

Unassuming, plain, simple
Nothing fancy to it
Created from the yielding clay
Touching lives, connecting generations
The ageless inheritance from our ancestress
Moulding the essence of our being
We are the artisans
Guardians of the gift bestowed

CREATION

I was thus created
The future is in my hands..

REQUIEM

I was just seventeen when I was married off
This is the last of the twelve pots my mother made
To take with me to my new home
I cant help but smile when I touch this
For I feel my mother's love
And I am 91!
But this pot is just like me
The end .

Excerpts from *Gift In The Pot - Earth Poetry* by Jungmayangia Longkumer, Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Extension SASRD, Nagaland University Medziphema Campus.

PROJECTS / PROCESSES

NOTES

¹ The historical experience of Asian societies has been particularly studied by scholars such as Charles Taylor and Arif Dirlik. See: Sasheej Hegde “Reassembling Modernity: Thinking At The Limit”, *Social Scientist* 37, No 9/10, September–October (2009): 66–88.

² See: Ashoke Chatterjee, “Design in India, The Experience of Transition”, *Design* Issue 21, No 4 (2005): 4–10.

³ See: Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴ Neelima Hasija, “A Desi Bauhaus: The Development of a Modernist Idiom of Ceramics at The National Institute of Design”, *Marg*, December–March (2017–2018).

⁵ HK Vyas, *Design the International Movement with Indian Parallel* (Ahmedabad: SID Research Cell, CEPT).

⁶ Santi Niketan, Silpa Sadan and Sriniketan were started by Tagore in the early twentieth century and were brought together as the Visva Bharati University. See: Kristine Michael, “‘The World in One Nest’- Tagore and Coomaraswamy’s Utopian Craft Community Visions of Transformative Social Action”, *Marg: A Mediated Magic* 71, No 1, September (2019): 154–165.

⁷ See: Kristine Michael, “Idealism, Revival and Reform - Indian Pottery at the Crux of Craft, Art and Modern Industry”, *Marg*, December–March (2017–2018).

⁸ *Nerikomi*, sometimes referred to as “neriage”, is a decorative process originating from Japan that involves stacking colored clay and then slicing through the cross section to reveal a pattern, which can then be used as an applied decoration.

⁹ Images of the common birds of Goa were translated onto clay, and their calls were composed for the sound track from the book: Rina Jain and Nitin Jain, *A Photographic Guide to Birds of Goa* (The Write Place, 2015).

¹⁰ Madhyam Exhibition, *Connecting The Dots: Past, Present and Future*, National Institute of Design, 2019.

¹¹ Glass blowing refers to a technique that involves inflating molten glass into a bubble with the aid of a blowpipe. Lampworking also known as flameworking, is a type of glasswork in which a torch or lamp is used to melt the glass rod which is then shaped with tools and moulds. See: Alok Kumar Kanungo, “Glass Beads in Ancient India and Furnace Wound beads at Purdalpur: An Ethno-Archaeological Approach”, *Asian Perspectives* 43, No 1, Spring (2004).

¹² Ministry of Minority Affairs and National Institute of Design, “*Flamework of Firozabad*” USTTAD Craft documentation (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development).

¹³ See: Peter Francis, “The Glass Beads of India”, in *The World of Beads Monograph* series 7, (Lapis Route Books, 1982).

¹⁴ See: Mukul Somany, *Evolution of Glass Industry in India: Challenges and Future Scenario* (Hindustan National Glass & Industries Limited, 2013).

¹⁵ Jungmayangia Longkumer, *Pottery: Earth Stories* (Dimapur: North East Zone Cultural Centre, 2010).

Biography

Kristine Michael is a ceramic artist, researcher, curator and arts educator based in New Delhi. She has held over 26 solo shows and participated in international and national group shows. She is the recipient of Junior Fellowship from the Ministry of Culture, The Charles Wallace Trust Award, Sanskriti Award, among others. She was a research scholar under the Nehru Trust at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) for the study of nineteenth century Indian ceramics in its collections and has curated the Ceramics Gallery at the renovated Albert Hall Museum (Jaipur). She recently curated an exhibition “The Art of Kripal Singh Shekhawat” for Delhi Art Gallery, which was showcased at the Indian Ceramics Triennale 2018 (Jaipur) and Museum of Legacies (Jaipur).

Projects / Processes 2019

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