



MITHILA PAINTING: A SECOND LOOK, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Presented by Dr. Punam Madhok
East Carolina University, USA

Twenty-second International Conference
on New Directions in the Humanities
Thursday, June 27, 2024.

Sapienza University of Rome, Department of European,
American and Intercultural Studies, Rome, Italy





Dharamsheela Devi a Mithila artist who lives in Jitwarpur.



Vinita Jha (born 1964), a Mithila artist who lives in Ramnagar.





Me with Vanita Jha and two of her daughters,
Nisha Jha and Roopam Kumari at Ramnagar, Bihar.



Medals won by Vanita Jha
and her three talented daughters,
Nisha Jha, Rupa Jha, and Puja Jha.



Tokio Hasegawa, founder and director of the Mithila Museum in Tokamachi, Niigata Prefecture, Japan, established in 1982.



On the outskirts of the small mountain town of Tokamachi in Niigata, Japan, stands the only museum in the world primarily dedicated to Mithila paintings.

Me with Chankrakanth Kumar Bari



Me with Naresh Paswan



Me with Pratik Prabhakar





Kohbar, Darbhanga Museum.



Aripan



Looking at a kohbar.

Aripan



Kohbar



'Marriage of Rama and Sita,' wall painting at the Railway Station in Madhubani.



According to folklore, when the town of Janakpur was gearing up to celebrate the marriage of Rama and Sita, King Janak, the bride's father, told its residents to decorate their dwellings with paintings.

Covering houses with images to mark special events then became a Mithila tradition.

Dr. Rani Jha, *Rama and Sita spellbound upon seeing each other for the first time* (detail of a painting, adorning a wall at the Mithila Art Institute.)



Young girls in Mithila grow up watching and assisting their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts drawing *aripan mandalas* or rice-powder drawings of flora-n-fauna on the ground.





By drawing *aripans*, they transform their homes into temples.

Maithil women take pride in never repeating a design.

They claim that this art is their own form of Yoga - a chance for meditative self-expression removed from other responsibilities.

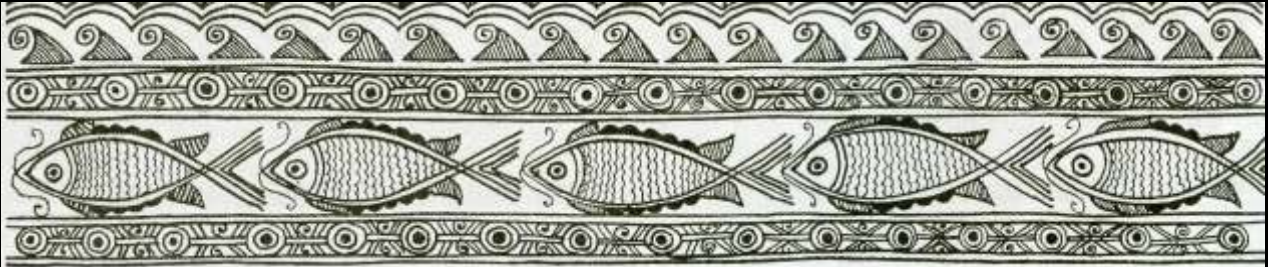
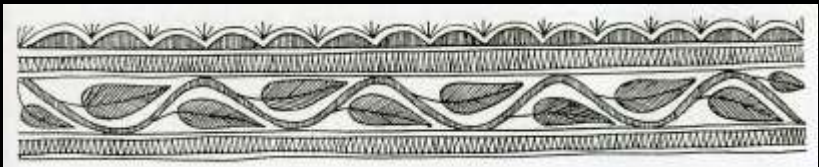
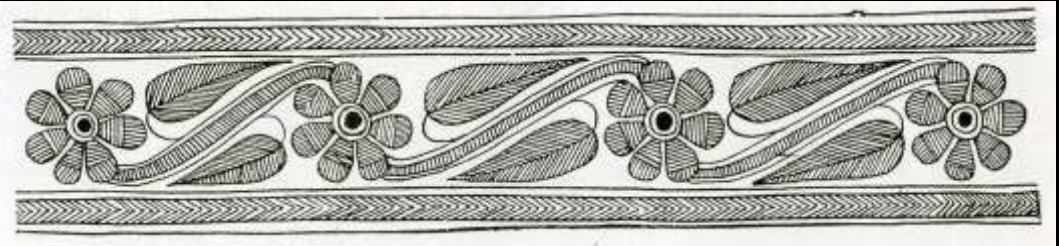


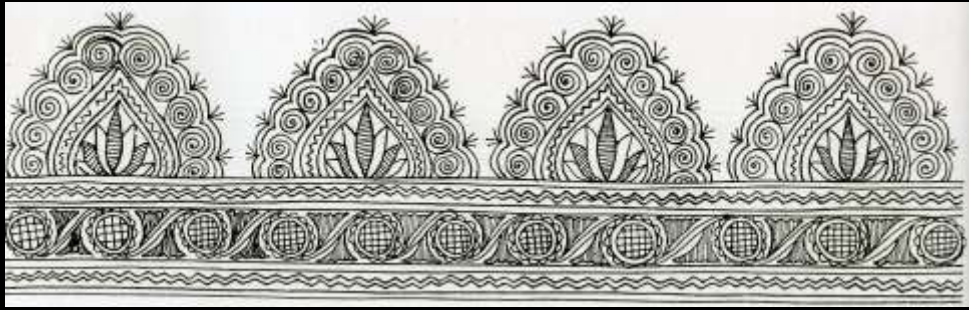


As these works of art last only minutes before they are blown away or walked upon, it is the moment of making that is considered important.

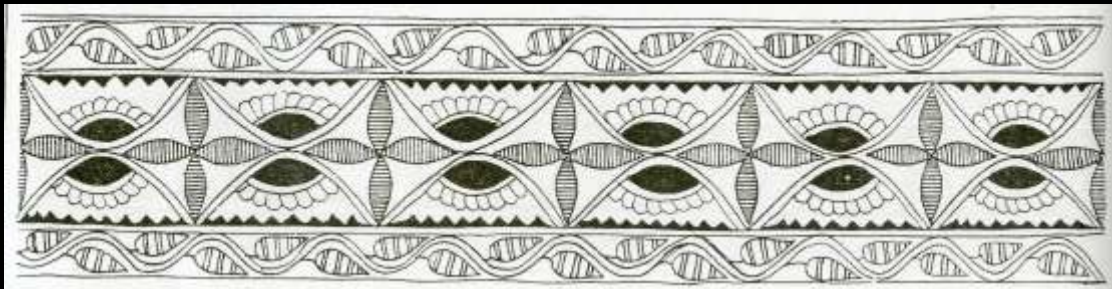
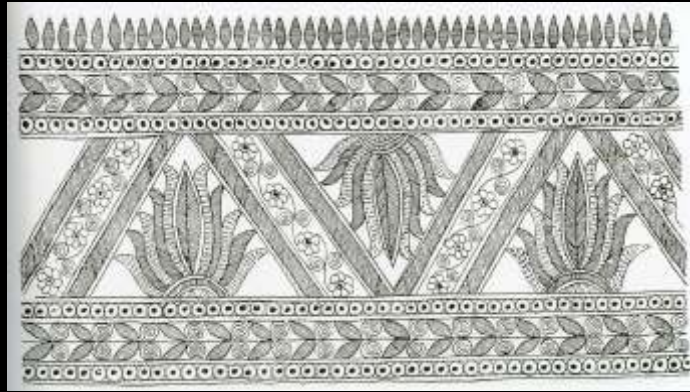
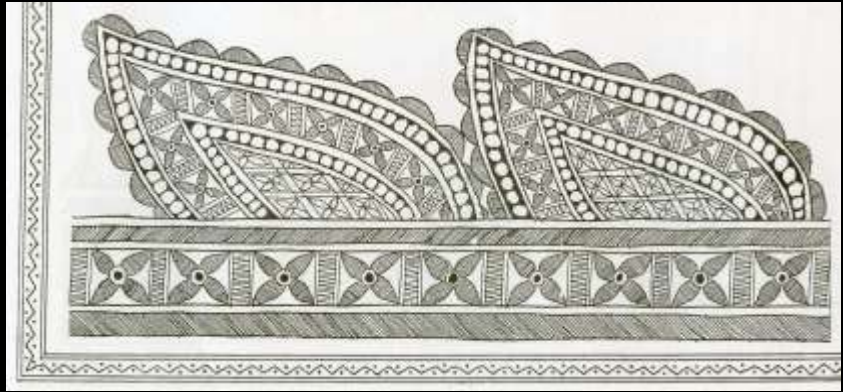


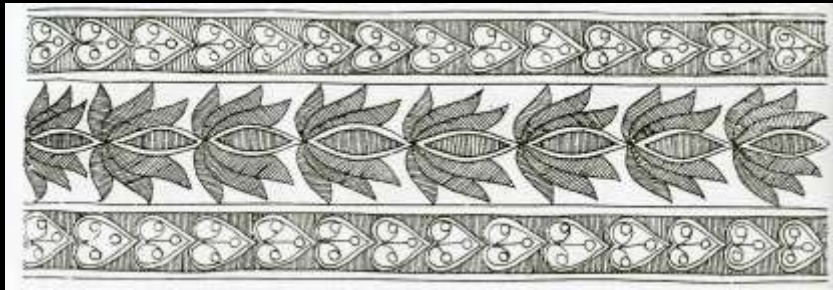
By the time a young *Maithil* girl is ready to marry and leave her parents' house, these patterns are imprinted in her mind.



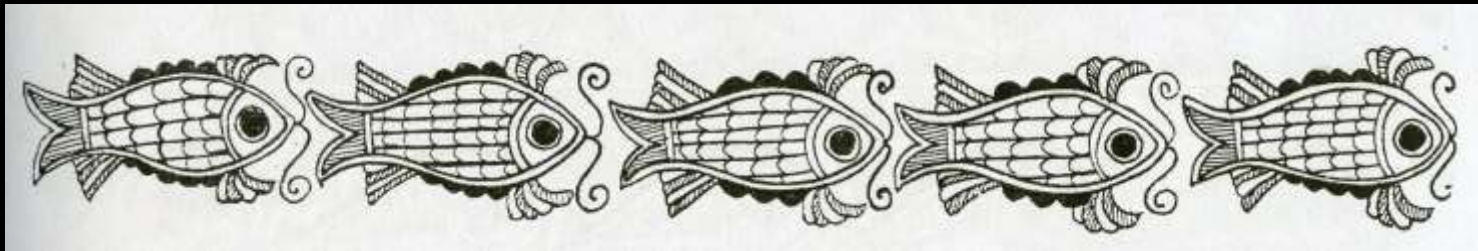
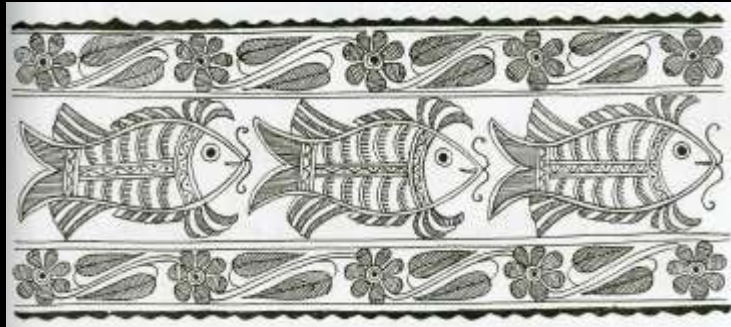
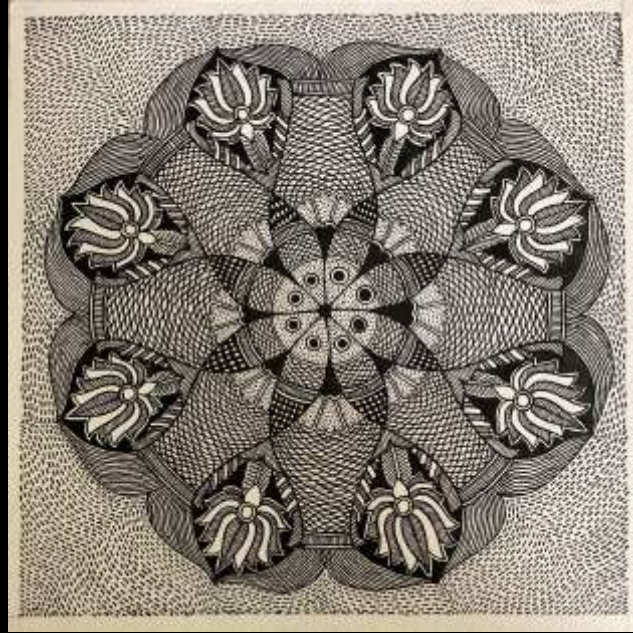


Nevertheless, a collection of the best family motifs and patterns drawn in miniature on paper with pen, ink, and watercolor are included in her dowry to serve as memory-aids.





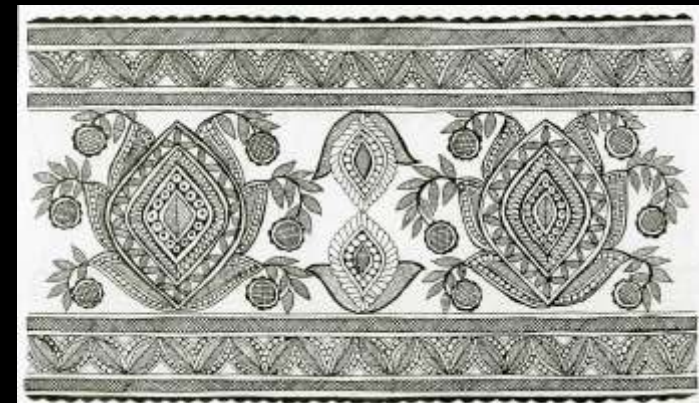
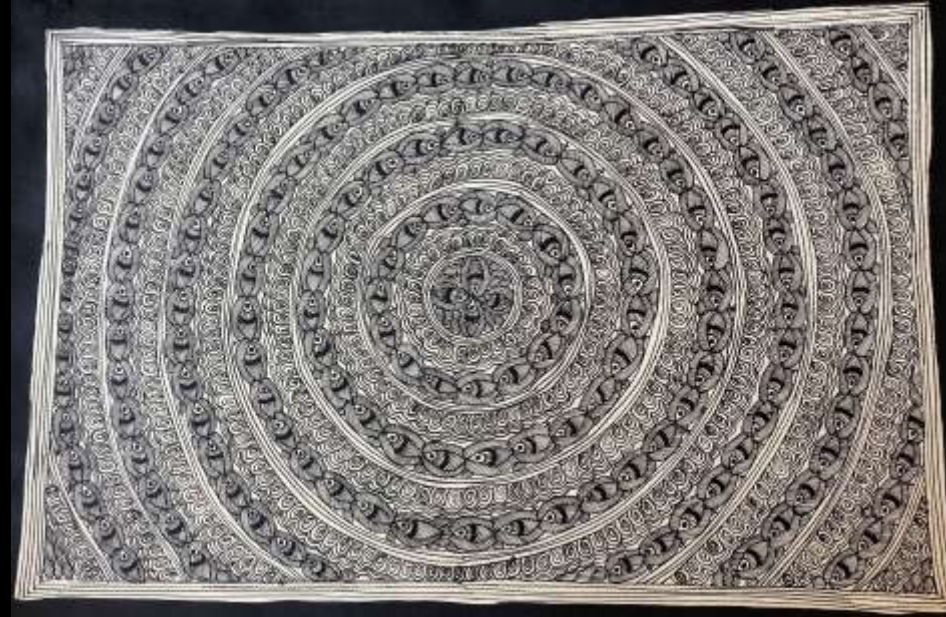
At the house of her husband's family, she learns new patterns and adds to them from her old stock of motifs.





In this way, the age-old rite of *aripans* is preserved and enriched year after year.

The general procedure, however, is for women to paint from memory rather than from paper models.





A bride draws an *aripan* in the courtyard, door-front, and other parts of the house early in the morning to ensure good fortune. Decorating her home with floor patterns becomes a matter of course for her.

She then recites prayers, offers flowers, and burns a stick of incense on the *aripan*, which serves as an altar.

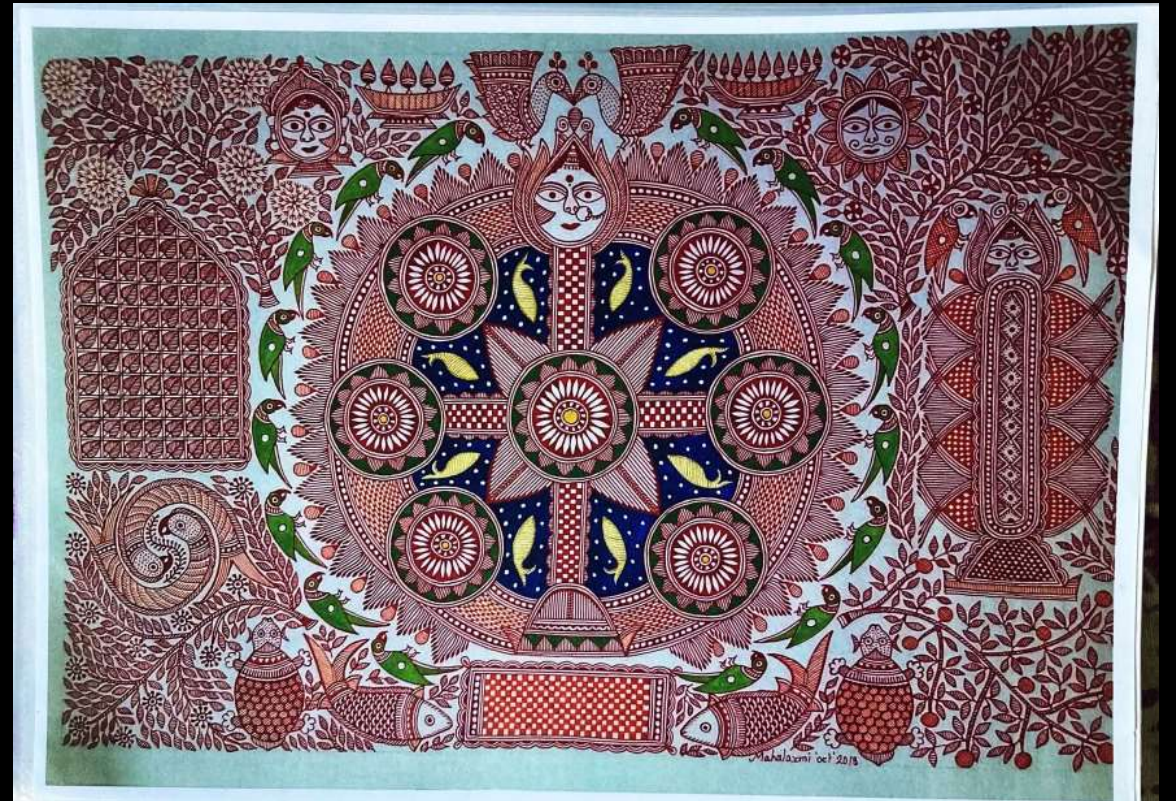


Scholars like Jayakar and Thakur refer to these magical diagrams as writing rather than as drawing and believe that they possibly had archaic hieroglyphic origin.





Aripan



Kohbar

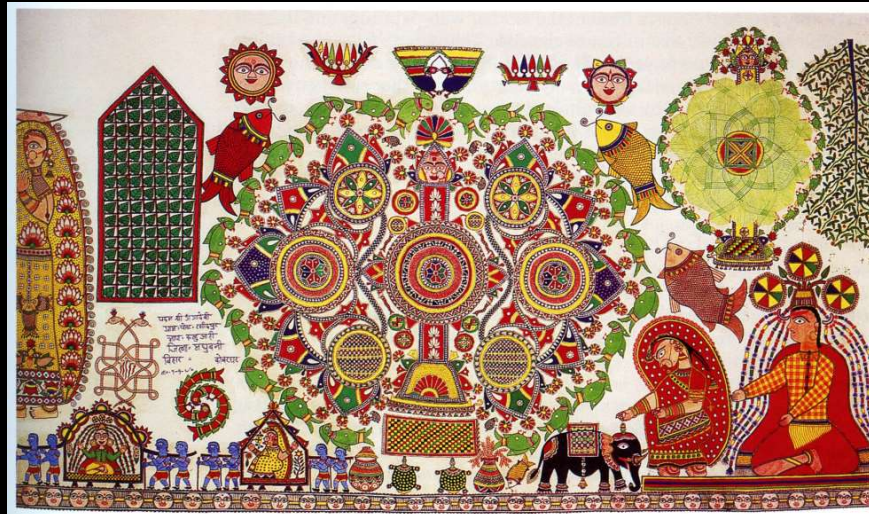


Kohbar by Bibha Das





Kohbar by Bibha Das



Kohbar by the late Ganga Devi



Kohbar by Pratik Prabhakar

Bibha Das with *Kohbar* painted by her on sheets of paper.



Abha Das holding a *Kohbar* painted by her on cloth against the wall.





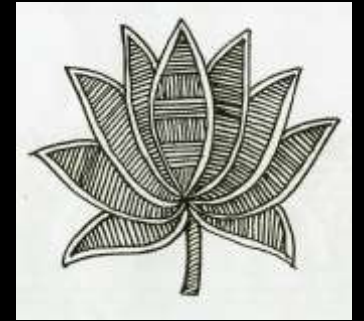
Kohbar painted by Ganga Devi (1928-91) at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi in 1989. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 1984 by the government of India.



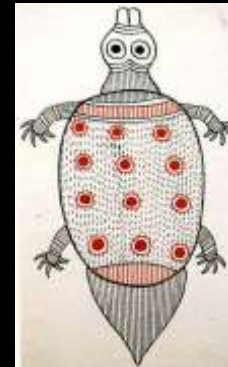
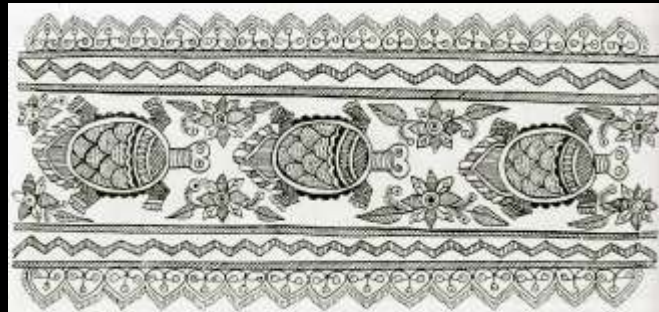
Ganga Devi (1928-91) painting a Kohbar.



Kohbar (detail) by Ganga Devi (1928-91) at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi, 1989.



Kohbar by Mahalaxmi





Kohbar by Mahalaxmi

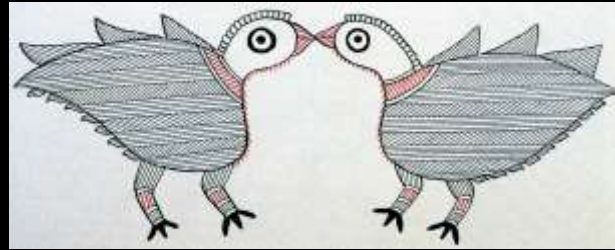


Kohbar by Pratik Prabhakar

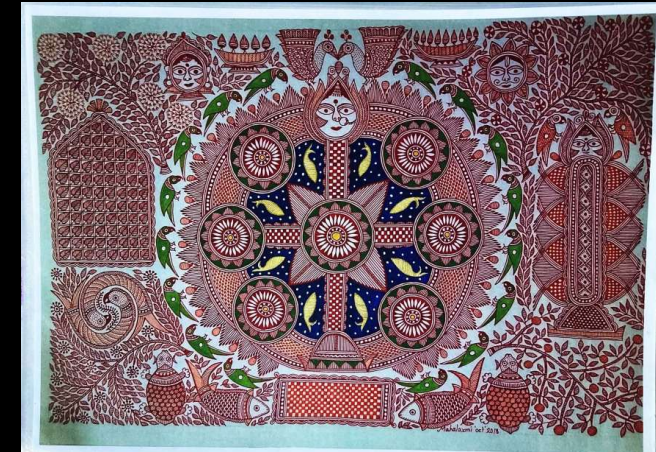




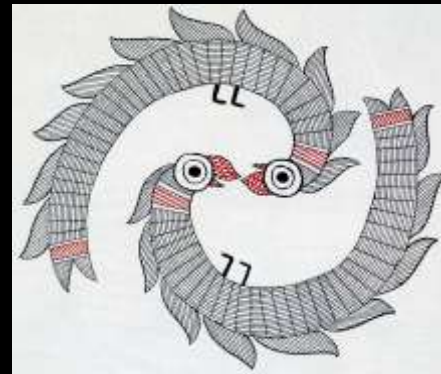
bidh-bidhata



Kohbar by Pratik Prabhakar



Kohbar by Mahalaxmi



latpatia suga





Woman painting a *Naina-jogin*
at the Crafts Museum,
New Delhi, July 2022.



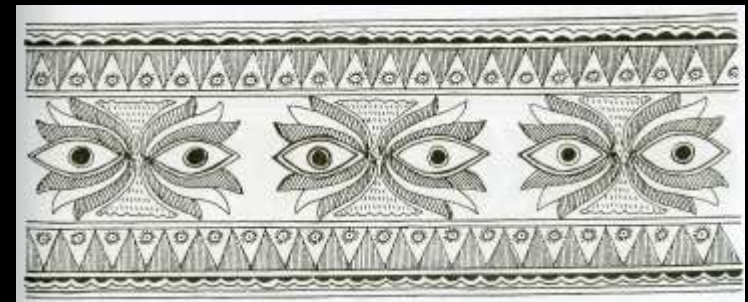
Naina-jogin
(‘Eye Goddess of Mithila’)
by Ganga Devi,
1988-89



Kohbar by Ganga Devi



Eyes are the source of *shakti* or power



Radha and Krishna by Vinita Jha





Swati Jha,
'Krishna, the cowherd god,'
July 2022



Manoj Kumar Jha (relative of Sita Devi),
'Radha and Krishna,' June 2001

Leela Devi, *9/11*,
2001



Shaline Kumari,
Global Terrorism,
2005.

Baua Devi, *Naga* painted
before 9/11, 2001



Baua Devi, *Naga* painted
after 9/11, 2001



RADFORD
UNIVERSITY
Art Museum





Mithila Musings:
*Contemporary Arts from an
Ancient Culture in North India*

International Webinar Oct 13, 2022




Exhibition curator John Bowles



RAJA SALHESH'S GARDEN
Painted on the wall of the Rajmahal, Jaipur, Rajasthan
 17th-18th century

MARTINE LE COZ
Contemporary Mithila artist, Jaipur, Rajasthan
 1980s-2000s



MITHILA MEDLEY
Contemporary Mithila artist, Jaipur, Rajasthan
 1980s-2000s

NARESH PASWAN
Contemporary Mithila artist, Jaipur, Rajasthan
 1980s-2000s

MITHILA MUSINGS
Contemporary Mithila artist, Jaipur, Rajasthan
 1980s-2000s

Martin's Portrait of Mahasundari Devi



Martin Le Coz with Dulari Devi

WORKS BY MARTIN LE COZ (born 1955)



Martin Le Coz sketching Dulari Devi



Martin's Portrait of Dulari Devi



Martin Le Coz, *Aripan*



Martin Le Coz, After Baua Devi



Martin Le Coz, After Ganga Devi





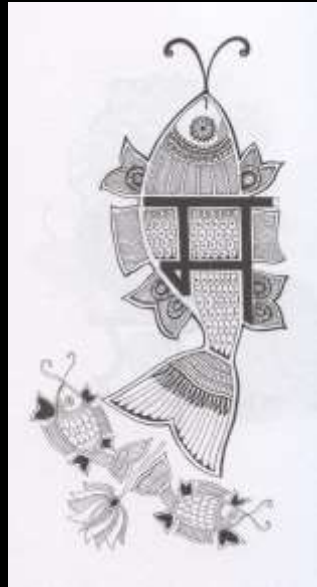
अ
अहिंसा (ahinsā) – non-violence



त
तितली (tīlī) – butterfly



प
पक्षी (pakshī) – bird



म
मछली (machhālī) – fish



फ
फूल (phūl) – flower

Martin Le Coz, *Mithila Reverie,*
Meditations on the
Devanagari Script

Me meeting with Roopam Kumari



Me meeting with Urmila Devi



Me meeting with Lalita Das



Me meeting with Godavari Dutt



Me meeting with Shakuntala Devi



Bride and Groom by Vinita Jha



Bride by Chandrakanth Kumar Bari



Burning the Bride,
by Mahalaxmi Karn and Shantanu Das,
ink and acrylic on paper



Dark Kohbar by Mahalaxmi,
ink on paper



Nisha Jha (born 1990),
The Hungry Man of Dowry



Dr. Rani Jha, *Confinement*



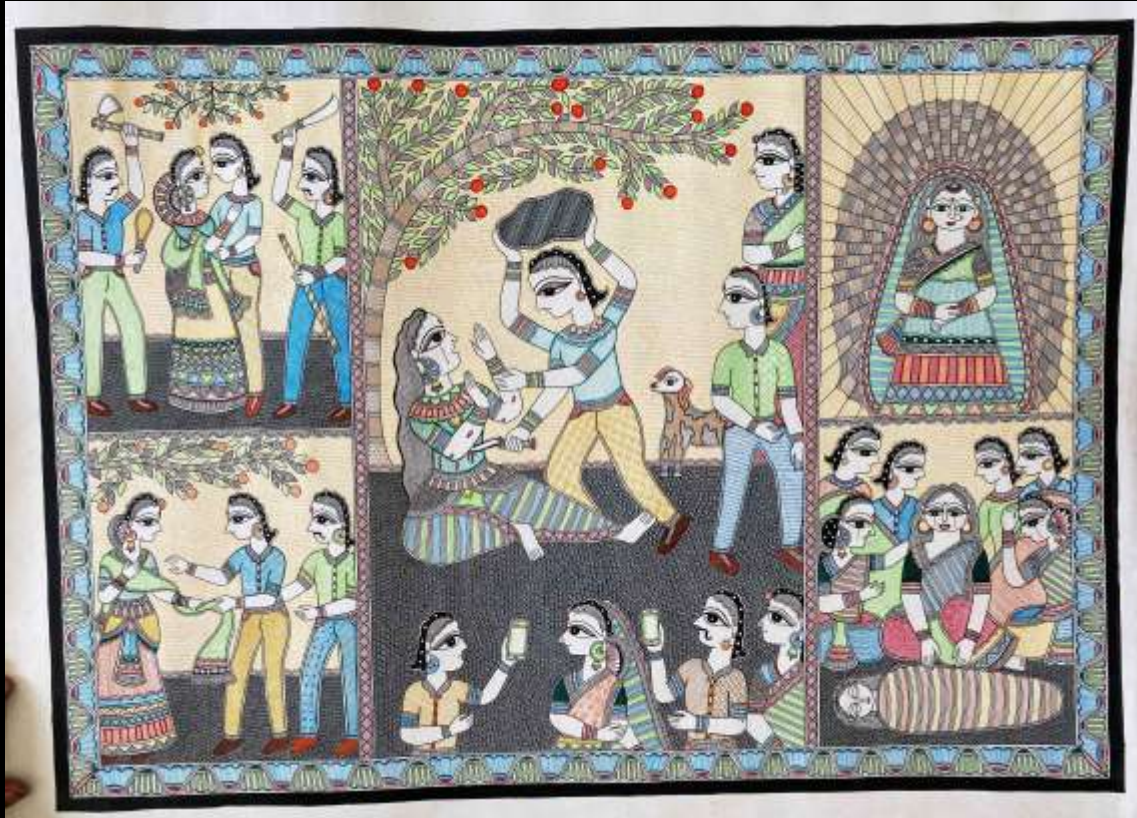
Vinita Jha, *A Calf is Better Than a Girl*



Dr. Rani Jha, *Abortion Clinic*



Priya Kumari, *Eve Teasing*



Pintu Sharma, *Ill-treatment of a Woman in Public*



Abhishek Kumar Roy, *Ill-treatment of Women*



Dr. Rani Jha, *Plight of a Housewife*

Dr. Rani Jha, *Changing Women*



Dr. Rani Jha, *Modern Girl shocks Traditional Women*



Dr. Rani Jha, *Sky is My Canvas*



Dr. Rani Jha, *Breaking Free from Traditional Rituals like painting the kohbar*

Dr. Rani Jha, *Emancipation of Women*





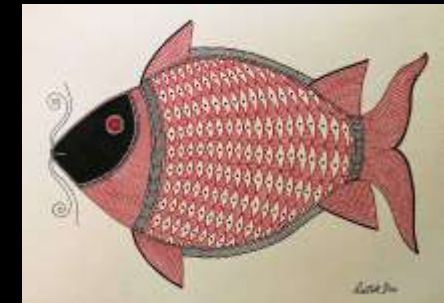
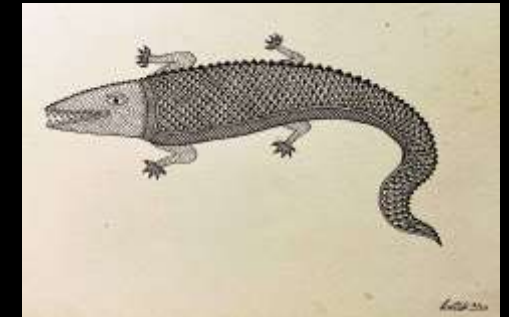
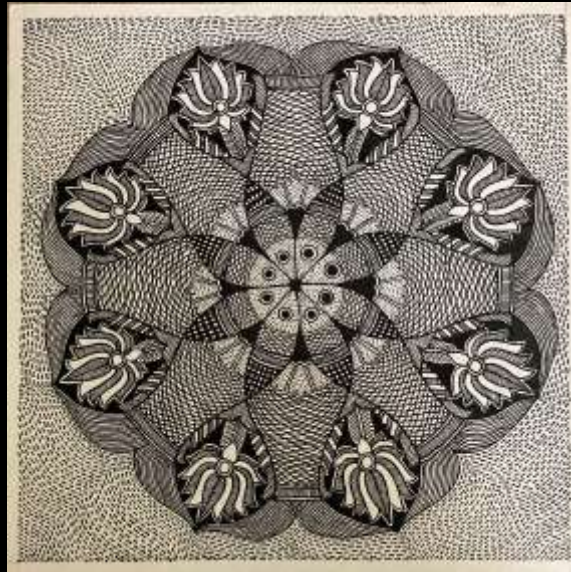
Pratik Prabhakar demonstrating how to draw motifs of Mithila painting to students at Sandip University, Madhubani, Bihar. (June 2023)



Works by Pratik Prabhakar (born 1983)



Pratik Prabhakar standing before his paintings of an *aripan* and a *kohbar*.





Marine Life by
Rambharos Jha

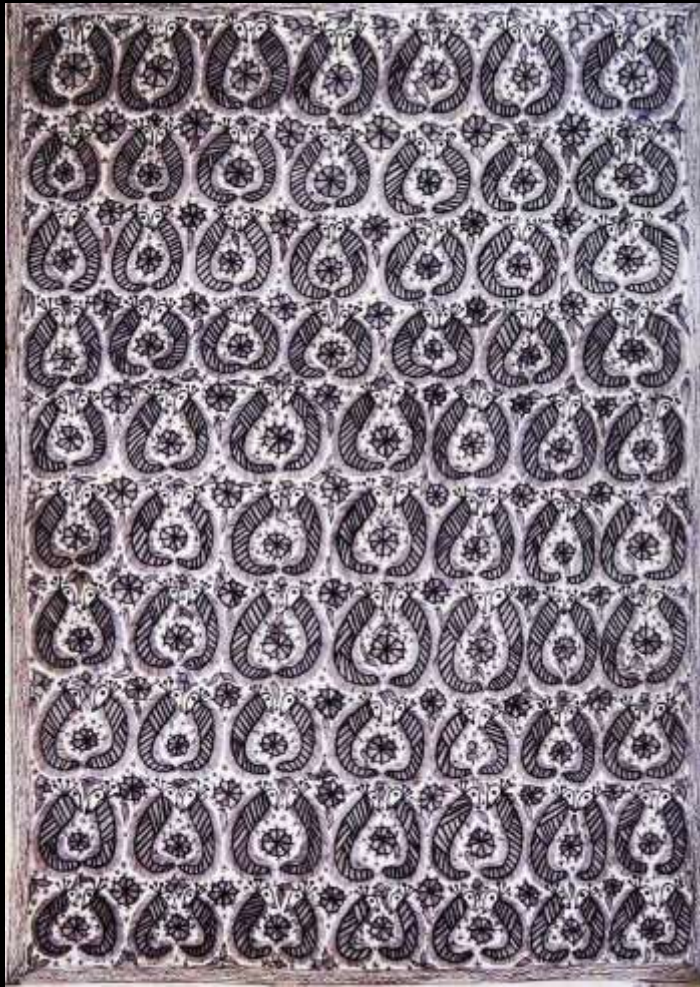


Rambharos Jha
(born 1978)



Works by Pintu Sharma





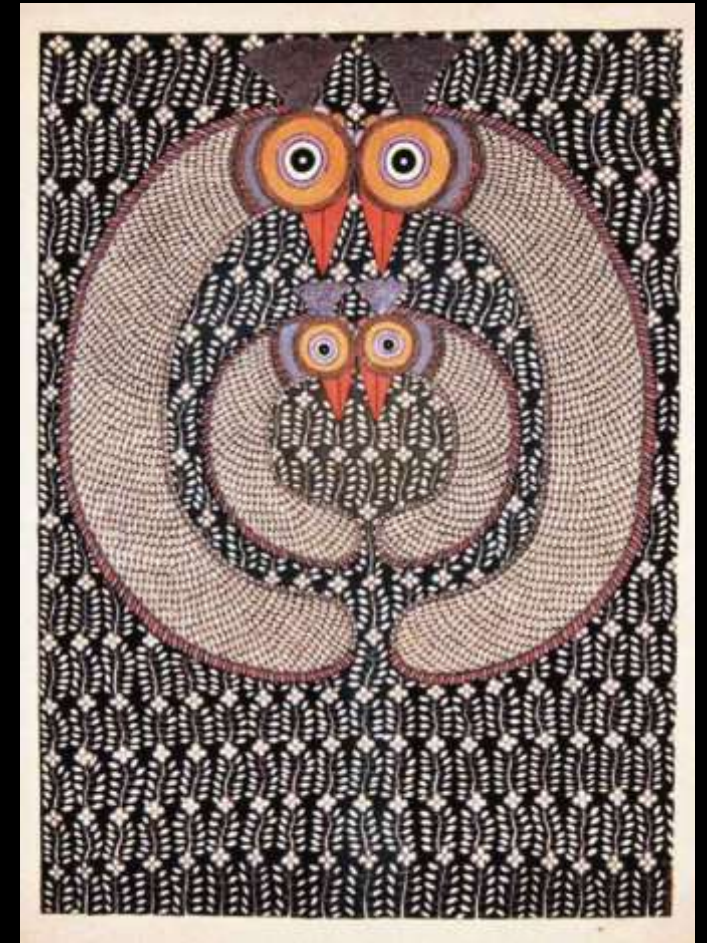
By Urmila Devi (Born 1957), 2014,
acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 in.

[She received a Bihar State Award
for this painting.]



By Urmila Devi (Born 1957), 2017,
acrylic on paper, 22 ¾ x 15 ½ in.

Depictions of *Ajaba Chiriya* (Wonderous Bird)



By Amrita Jha (born 1989), c. 2013



Naresh Paswan (born 1983), *Peacocks*



Kachbacchias in a Tree, 2018,
by Raj Kumar Paswan (born 1962),
acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 in.



Kachbacchia
birds are called
“jungle babbler”



Birds in the Garden of Raja Salhesh, c. 2004-5,
By Sarup Lal Paswan (1933-2009),
Lampblack ink applied with
matchsticks on paper,
9 x 6 in.



BHAMATI by Mahalaxmi and Shantanu Das, 2018,
acrylic on canvas.



Story of *BHAMATI* , Wall-painting at the Madhubani Railway Station

Bhamati's husband, Vachaspati Mishra (c. 900-980 CE),
was born in the Mithila region.

The story of Bhamati was written by the renowned
Padmashri awardee, Dr. Usha Kiran Khan, 1945-2024.

Thank you!

madhokp@ecu.edu