About Ganjifa

I have always desired to curate an international print show of small prints – almost miniature in nature, which could have contemporary culture specific interpretations but at the same time a strong historicity.

Ganjifa is a card game that originated in Persia (modern Iran) and became popular in India under the Mogul emperors in 16th century.

The word Ganjifa comes from Persian word ganjife, meaning playing cards. The first known reference is in the Diary of Emperor Babur in 1527. The game first became popular at court, in the form of lavish sets of precious stone-inlaid ivory or tortoise shell. It later spread to the general public, whereupon cheaper sets would be made from materials such as wood, palm leaf, or pasteboard.

Ganjifa cards were circular and traditionally hand-made by local artisans. The suits were composed in twelve subjects on colored backgrounds, with cards running from 1 to 10, and two court cards, of a minister or counselor, and a king. The precise style and arrangement of the decoration on any set was dependent on its artist.

Ganjifa – the playing cards, has a strong cultural specificity of origin and has the malleability of regional adoptions. Historically Ganjifa has had an obvious handmade origin and it is feasible to create small miniature prints like playing cards.

Thus, Game of cards – Ganjifa, became my theme for the international print show. I shared this concept with my friends and art community and the response was overwhelming.

Ganjifa has 54 printmakers from across the globe – each one has created one card in edition of 60. Participants are from Japan to US, and Europe to South Africa. Each artist has chosen a specific card and put their cultural and artistic impression on them.

There are total 60 Ganjifa portfolios created, of which 54 are being shared among the participants. Rest would be owned and exhibited by Chhaap – Baroda Print Making Workshop. Sales proceed of these portfolios would go towards the promotion of print media via various activities under Chhaap.

Many participants are proposing the show of this portfolio in their home countries and I am sure this will help in promoting print making as a still valuable art form.

Thank you, to all the participating artists for your efforts and belief in printmaking.

Kavita Shah
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