

surrey
art gallery

TEACHERS GUIDE

WITH BIG IDEAS & CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Swapnaa Tamhane: No Surface is Neutral

PATTERN | CULTURE | IDENTITY



Swapnaa Tamhane, *Mobile Palace (detail)*, 2019-2021, natural dyes and applique on cotton.
Photo by Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

Dear Teachers,

This guide is a classroom resource designed to support teachers and students attending the exhibition *Swapnaa Tamhane: No Surface is Neutral* on display at Surrey Art Gallery from September 23–November 26, 2023.

The Teachers Guide contains an activity that will help prepare your students for their Gallery visit and engage them in classroom discussion. Additional exhibition information, artist biography, terms & concepts, a resource section, and connections to the BC Education K-12 Curriculum are also provided in this guide.

The *Art Encounter* workshop offered at the Gallery this season is based in the process of block printing and examines cultural identity, the relationship of art and craft, and the narrative capacity of pattern to tell the diverse and complex stories of communities.

We hope this resource provides support to your work in the classroom, and that you enjoy making meaningful connections to contemporary art and ideas with your students through the exhibition tours and workshops at the Gallery.

Sincerely,

Jinsil Haveliwalla, School and Family Programmer

This Teachers Guide was created with contributions from Surrey Art Gallery staff including: School and Family Programmer Jinsil Haveliwalla, Artist-Educator Claire Cilliers, Visual Arts Programmer Lindsay McArthur, Curator of Education Chris Dawson-Murphy, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections Jordan Strom, and Director Alison Rajah.

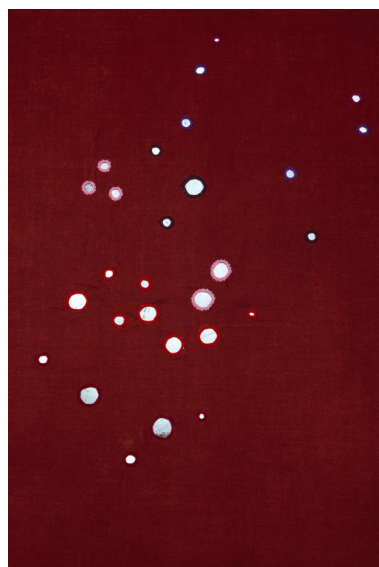
ABOUT SURREY ART GALLERY

Surrey Art Gallery is the second largest public art gallery in the Metro Vancouver region. Internationally recognized, the Gallery showcases diverse contemporary art practices including digital and sound art and exhibits renowned local, national, and international artists. Surrey Art Gallery's mission is to engage the public in an ongoing dialogue about issues and ideas that affect our numerous communities as expressed through contemporary art, and to provide opportunities for the public to interact with artists and the artistic process.

To receive announcements about exhibitions and related events at the Gallery, sign up for our e-newsletters at surrey.ca/arts-signup. The City of Surrey also has an e-newsletter specifically for teachers: surrey.ca/12392.aspx.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The Gallery's school programs develop an appreciation, understanding, and excitement about contemporary art. Visit the Gallery's website to learn more about our school programs and teacher resources: surrey.ca/galleryeducation.



Swapnaa Tamhane, *Bird's-Eye 2 (detail)*, 2020, natural dye, embroidery, mirrors on cotton. Photo by Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

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Swapnaa Tamhane, *Mobile Palace (detail of installation)*, 2019-2021, natural dyes and applique on cotton. Photo Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

Swapnaa Tamhane: No Surface is Neutral

September 23–November 26, 2023

When India became independent, it had about 10 million hand looms and hand-weavers and another million craftsmen of other denominations.... No wonder, therefore, that the country had to think in terms of a mixed economy, with one sector pulling towards mechanization and heavy industries and the other towards manual production and cottage industries. In other words, the jet plane and the bullock-cart plying side by side.... We have always put the lower and higher skills in the same enclosure... so if we have to keep the scene going, we cannot do so by hitching them... onto prevailing commercial trends; we shall have to make a more planned effort. And only then will hands have a chance."

K. G. Subramanyan, "Do Hands Have a Chance?", 1986

Textiles from India carry the weight of history in their fibres. Cotton has shaped India's ancient trade, provided the impetus for India's colonization, and was a powerful nationalist political symbol leading to liberation from colonial rule. In this exhibition, artist Swapnaa Tamhane explores the material and conceptual resonances of cotton through the manipulation and treatment of surfaces. She asks us to question European modernism's limited ideas about ornamentation as frivolous and to think about design anew. Through this process, she pushes back on the colonial basis of such ideas and their contemporary impact.

Artist, teacher, and philosopher K.G. Subramanyan had immense influence on ideas around art and design in newly-independent India. He rejected the separation and hierarchy of art, craft, and design as a Western invention imposed through colonial rule and advocated for the hand skills of Indigenous artists as an essential part of the modern world alongside industrial production. In a larger sense, he was asking us to reconceive our notions of modernity.



Untitled (Phulkari), water-soluble graphite on handmade khadi paper mounted on cotton, 2017. By Swapnaa Tamhane. Photo: Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

Swapnaa Tamhane: No Surface is Neutral (cont.)

Swapnaa Tamhane continues Subramanyan's legacy and updates it for our times. Her work channels the anti-colonial moves made by Subramanyan to amplify Indigenous ways of knowing as a part of rather than separate from contemporary artistic practice. Translated to today, the work attempts to make a decolonial gesture by foregrounding the hands of makers, including her own. These include the hands of weavers, woodblock carvers, textile printers, and embroiderers whose work often continues to go uncredited by artists or fashion houses in the East and West. But it also includes the hands of our mothers and grandmothers within diasporic communities who stitch and embroider but whose stories remain invisible and untold.

The exhibition features two bodies of work displayed side by side. The first are textile works made in collaboration with artists in Western India from the region of Kutch. They are arranged in sweeping architectural forms that reference the Mughal and Ottoman shamiana (imperial tent), industrial textile production, and the shimmering .5 mud homes, layered with motifs from a mid-century modern building by Le Corbusier in Ahmedabad, India. The second body of work is drawings on paper handmade by Tamhane from khadi (hand-spun cotton cloth) that has been deconstructed down to its base fibers and reconstituted.

In these works, drawing can take any form of mark making—from pencil or ink on paper and thread on fabric to folding, crumpling, and mixing paper pulps. Textile work is like drawing for Tamhane, a layering of gestures that can connect through time and space to many hands: a community, an intervention, a form of resistance.

In the settler colonial space we call Canada, Subramanyan's question seems as relevant as ever: do hands have a chance?

Dr. Deepali Dewan

Guest Curator



Alana Bartol and Bryce Krynski, *all roses sleep (inviolata light)*, 2022 (video still). Image appears courtesy of the artists.



Taslim Samji, *Kampala to Canada*, 2022, acrylic on canvas. Image appears courtesy of the artist.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITIONS

Alana Bartol and Bryce Krynski: all roses sleep (inviolata light)

August 19—December 4, 2023

Following the perspective of a solitary bee on a journey through the prairies in search of a wild rose, this immersive video by Alana Bartol and Bryce Krynski blends how bees and humans experience the land around us.

The accompanying scratch and sniff card expands on the pleasant and pungent experience of pumpjacks, grazing cattle, prairie grasses, and wildflowers. Through multiple senses, the viewer steps into the world of a bee. With this new perspective, *all roses sleep (inviolata light)* invites us to dream about our shared future with the living beings around us.

Curators: Jordan Strom, Zoe Yang
Origin of Exhibition: Art Gallery of Alberta

Kampala to Canada

August 26, 2023—January 28, 2024

This exhibition is a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Ugandan-Asian Canadians' forced exile from Uganda considered through visual art.

Curated by Taslim Samji, this exhibition acknowledges both the hardships and achievements of Ugandan-Asian Canadians, highlighting the stories of their struggles, successes, and new lives through biographic texts as well as curated artworks in a range of media including painting and photography.

Curator: Taslim Samji
Origin of Exhibition: Community-curated

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: CREATING PATTERNS

THEME: CONNECTING TO CULTURE AND IDENTITY THROUGH ART

OBJECTIVES

Through this activity, students will:

- Consider the work of contemporary artist Swapnaa Tamhane.
- Learn about the cultural and historical significance of cotton and textiles in India.
- Think critically about the difference between art and craft, and how these are valued.
- Create a block print inspired by Swapnaa Tamhane's artwork.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Pencil
- Pencil crayon
- Coloured markers
- Erasers
- Black permanent markers
- Cardstock (1 per student)

BIG IDEAS FROM BC CURRICULUM

- People connect to others and share ideas through the arts (Art Education, Grade 1)
- Exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives (Arts Education 4)
- Through artmaking, one's sense of identity and community continually evolves (Arts Education 7)

ACTIVITY

Students will design their own pattern block and consider how this connects to their sense of community, culture, and identity through artistic expression. This activity leads students to consider the significance of pattern: as a carrier of story and cultural tradition, and as a visual element.

DISCUSSION & INTRODUCTION

Begin by introducing artist Swapnaa Tamhane's exhibition, *No Surface is Neutral* by sharing the images provided in this guide. Tell students that Swapnaa designed these patterns, and collaborated with Ajrakh printers from India who carved a design into a wooden block. This block is then covered in ink, and then pushed onto the fabric, repeated many times to create these amazing patterns!

- Talk with students about today's artmaking— that they're going to be designing their own pattern, working with geometric shapes inspired by the artwork of Swapnaa Tamhane.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: CREATING PATTERNS

THEME: CONNECTING TO CULTURE AND IDENTITY THROUGH ART

INTRODUCTION

- Show your students examples of patterns from a variety of cultures and histories (see Image Gallery). Discuss the idea that patterns can convey stories, tradition, heritage, and meaning through colour, line, and form. Ask students to think of the patterns they see on textiles in their homes or on their clothes.
- Ask students if they see a difference between modern and traditional patterns? Are there some they really like? What patterns or designs are important to them? Why? How do they connect to these patterns? Where do these patterns come from? A place, community, or culture?
- Who makes these patterns and textiles? We often call people who create art artists, and people who create craft artisans. Why do we call some objects craft and some art? And what is the difference? What do your students think? How do we value these things?
- Where are these artists from? The people that created these block printed textiles are from the Kutch region in India, highly skilled artists printed these works on cotton fabric, grown, spun, and woven in India.
- Cotton has been grown in India for 5000 years! Cotton was prized for its light weight and was considered a valuable luxury item. British colonizers of India sought to control the production and trade of cotton textiles. They made industrial machines to mill cotton in mass quantities and subdue the production of cotton in India, moving its industrial production to Britain to gain wealth and power and build their empire.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Provide each student with a sheet of paper and a pencil.
- Ask them to experiment by designing four patterns, drawing inspiration from their own sense of identity and what they connect with in their culture, and community.



Swapnaa Tamhane, *Mobile Palace (detail)*, 2019-2021, natural dyes and appliqué on cotton. Photo Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: CREATING PATTERNS

THEME: CONNECTING TO CULTURE AND IDENTITY THROUGH ART

INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)

- Provide each student with a blank sheet of card stock, pencils, coloured pencils, markers, or crayons to create their final pattern.
- Encourage their creativity, remind students that there are no right or wrong ways to create a pattern, that it's their personal expression. What story do they want to tell?
- Ask students to draw out their design, to think about the colours they choose will work together, and to complete their design by adding colour.

REFLECTION

Gather the students together to share and discuss their pattern designs. Ask students to share their work, ask them:

- What inspired their work?
- Does their pattern hold meaning for them or symbolize something?
- Does their pattern tell a story or connect with a tradition? What are the roots of that tradition? Where does it come from? Does it connect to a place, culture, or community—or something they've seen?
- Ask them to reflect on what they've learned: Do patterns mean something different to them? Do they think differently about the fabrics, textiles, and clothing that they use and wear? And the artists and artisans that create them?

EXTENSION

Connect the pattern making activity to the upcoming visit to the exhibition, *Swapnaa Tamhane: No Surface is Neutral* by discussing the use of pattern and textiles in her work. After the exhibition visit, have students create a reflective art journal entry where they compare their cultural pattern designs with what they observed in Tamhane's artwork. Consider displaying your students work and create a collaborative cultural pattern display in the classroom, showcasing their designs and the diversity represented.

This pre-visit art activity encourages students to connect with their own heritage, fostering a deeper appreciation for textile art and the cultural aspects in Swapnaa Tamhane's art, encouraging them to see how visual pattern holds cultural significance.



Swapnaa Tamhane with Mukesh, Pragnesh, Avdhesh Prajapati, and Bhavesh Rajnikant, printing blocks for *Mobile Palace*, 2019. teak wood. Photo: Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS FOR SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Participating in a guided tour, studio workshop, or self-guided tour in conjunction with the exhibitions supports Big Ideas and Learning Standards in the British Columbia Arts Education Curriculum for grades K-12. The exhibitions can be used as a touchstone for discussion relating to themes and concepts addressed in a variety of curricular areas.

K-12 ARTS EDUCATION CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

Students will be able to use creative processes to create and respond to the arts:

KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 2

- Explore elements, processes, materials, movements, technologies, and techniques of the arts
- Explore artistic expressions of themselves and community through creative processes
- Reflect on creative processes and make connections to other experiences
- Interpret how symbols are used through the arts
- Express feelings, ideas, stories, observations, and experiences through the arts
- Experience, document, and share creative works in a variety of ways
- Describe and respond to works of art

GRADES 3-4

- Connect knowledge and skills from other areas of learning in planning, creating, interpreting, and analyzing works for art
- Reflect on creative processes and make connections to personal experiences
- Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences
- Explore relationships among cultures, societies, and the arts

GRADES 5-7

- Works of art influence and are influenced by the world around us
- Engaging in creative expression and experiences expands people's sense of identity and belonging
- Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences

GRADES 8-9

- Interpret and communicate ideas using symbols and elements to express meaning through the arts
- The arts provide opportunities to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of people from a variety of times, places, and cultures

GRADE S 10-12

- Create artistic works that demonstrate personal, cultural, and historical contexts
- Purposeful artistic choices enhance the depth and impact of an artistic work
- Express meaning, intent, and emotion through visual art
- Intentionally select and combine materials, processes, and technologies to convey ideas and justify choices

TERMS & CONCEPTS

Aesthetics: The formal study of the principles of art and beauty.

Ajrakh: A form of block-printing on cotton cloth using intricate geometric patterns. Found mostly in the Ajrakhpur, Kutch district of India, Sindh, and Pakistan.

Art: The act of creative expression of ideas or feelings through making objects, sounds, movement, scents, drawings, performances, written language, touch, or through any medium that engages the senses.

Block Printing: A printmaking method that uses a wooden block, carved by an artist, to create a design. The surface of the block is coated in ink and pressed onto paper or fabric to create an image.

Colonialism: The practice of one government occupying an area or community, often forcing it's rule of law, culture, and language on the colonies people.

Cotton: A fibre which grows around the seeds of cotton plants. It is spun into yarn and woven into sheets of fabric.

Craft: The act of making an object, often something that is functional, that you can use in daily life, such as: furniture, ceramics, and textiles.

Culture: The arts, beliefs, religion, language, institutions, and other products of human work and thought of a particular period, class, community, or population.

Drawing: The art of creating a two dimensional image through mark making: lines, dots, shaded areas, and washes on a surface.

Design: Organized and creative arrangement of the elements of artwork, including line, shape, textures, and space.

Dwelling: A building, house, apartment, or structure where people live.

Geometric: The use of angles, lines, and regular shapes such as squares.

Installation: A three-dimensional artwork—sometimes consisting of various elements—that alters the way a space is experienced.

Kutch (Kachchh): A district of Gujarat state in western India. It's known for its textile art which includes the use geometric patterns.

Medium: The physical material used to create an object or artwork.

Nomad: a person who has no permanent home or location, who travels from place to place.

Pattern: Any regularly repeated visual element, especially a design made from repeated lines, shapes, or colours on a surface or object.

Printmaking: The process of creating an image by transferring it from one surface to another.

Symbol: A sign, shape, image, or object that is used to express or represent a particular idea or quality.

Textile/Fibre Art: Art that is made using natural or synthetic fibre, such as cotton, wool, silk, etc. Fibres can be spun, woven, knitted, braided, knotted, sewn, and can be decorative or functional.

Three-Dimensional: Having three measurable features (height, width, and depth), like any object in the real world. Examples of three-dimensional art include: sculpture, installation, and performance art.

Two-Dimensional: A planar composition that has length and width but does not possess depth. Examples of two-dimensional art includes paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

ABOUT SWAPNAA TAMHANE

Swapnaa Tamhane's art practice is dedicated to drawing, making handmade paper, and working with the material histories of cotton and jute, while her curatorial interests explore contemporary art histories from India and the wider South-Asian diaspora in North America. She has an MFA in Fibres & Material Practices, Concordia University, Montreal, where she is currently an Artist-in-Residence. Residencies have been held at KHOJ @ 1 Shanthi Road, Bangalore and Museum der Moderne Salzburg, and she was a participant at March Meeting, Sharjah, in 2010. She has been supported by SSHRC, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (2009), and she was an International Museum Fellow with the Kulturstiftung des Bundes in 2013. In 2019, she was a juror for the Sobey Art Award, and is currently on the board of SAVAC. She has exhibited her work at Nature Morte, Delhi; articule, Montreal; Sculpture Park Jaipur; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; and Victoria & Albert Museum, Dundee, Scotland. Her research extends to material culture, and with designer Rashmi Varma, she wrote *SĀR: The Essence of Indian Design*, Phaidon Press (2016).



Artist Swapnaa Tamhane. Photo by Brandon Brookbank

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Swapnaa Tamhane Website

<https://www.tamhane.net/>

Surrey Art Gallery Presents Booklet

<https://www.surrey.ca/sites/default/files/media/documents/Surrey-Art-Gallery-Presents-Swapnaa-Tamhane-No-Surface-is-Neutral-Web-Booklet.pdf>

Inside the Mobile Palace – discussion with Curator Deepali Dewan and artist Swapnaa Tamahane

<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/rom-at-home/conversations/inside-mobile-palace>

Ajrakh blockprinting – a discussion with collaborating artist Salemamad Khatri

<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/rom-at-home/conversations/for-the-past-present-and-future-of-ajrakh-blockprinting>

Discussion - Colonial hierarchical separation of art, craft, and design with ROM Curator Deepali Dewan, MET curator Shanay Jhaveri, and Critical Craft Forum co-founder Namita Gupta Wiggers.

<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/rom-at-home/conversations/reframing-artcraftdesign>

About Ajrakh Printmaking

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/ajrakh-printing/ajrakh-process/stages-dyeing-and-printing>

<https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/7695/the-ageless-art-of-ajrakh-printing>

<https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/7695/the-ageless-art-of-ajrakh-printing>

MEDIA RELEASES & REVIEWS

Create a Stir

<https://www.createastir.ca/articles/surrey-art-gallery-swapnaa-tamhane-exhibition-sc>

Galleries West

<https://www.gallerieswest.ca/events/swapnaa-tamhane-no-surface-is-neutral/>

Cloverdale Reporter

<https://www.cloverdalereporter.com/entertainment/surrey-art-gallery-show-explores-indian-cotton-processes-3091376>

Art Forum

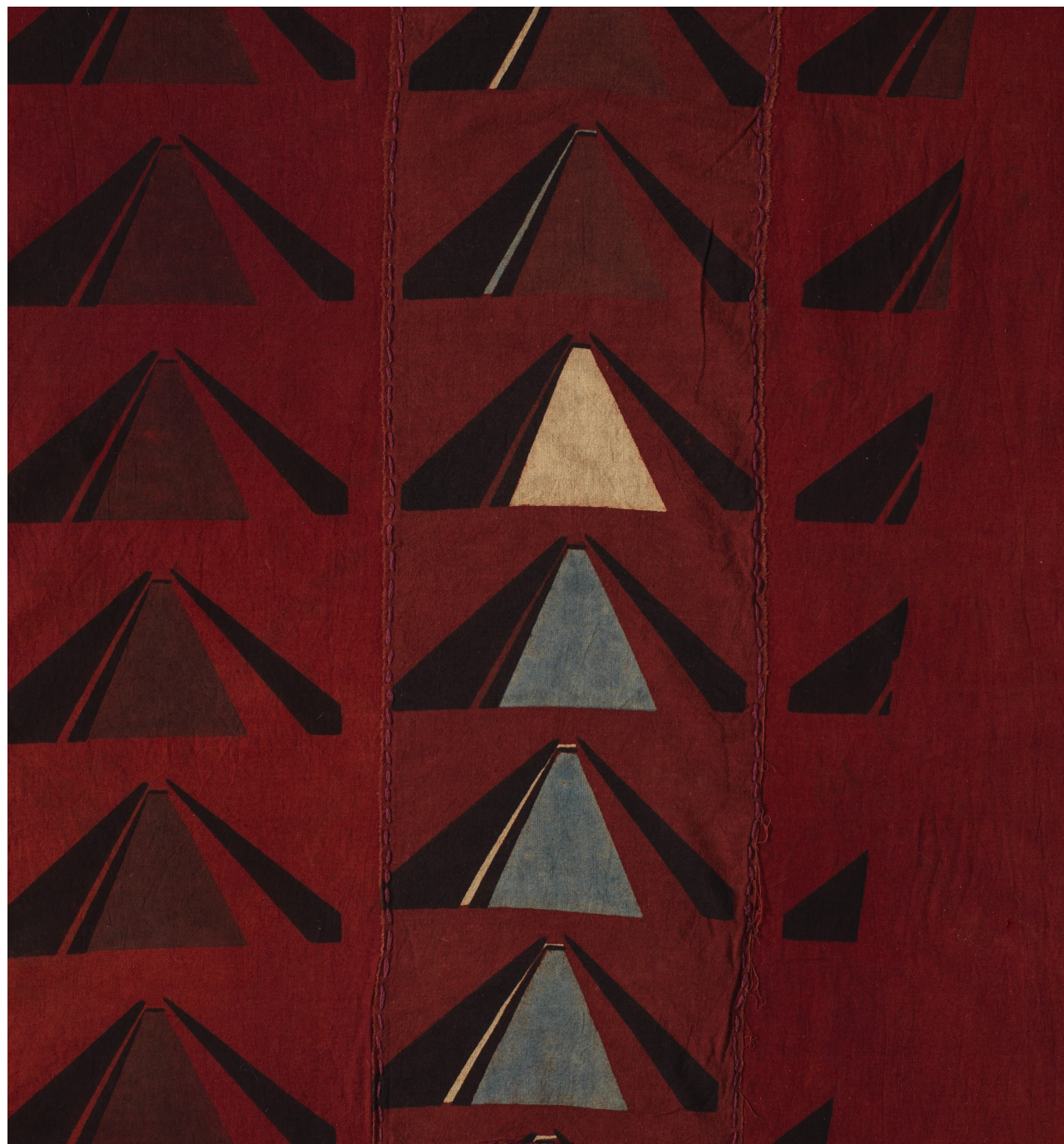
<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/202208/swapnaa-tamhane-89325>

IMAGE GALLERY



Swapnaa Tamhane, *Mobile Palace* (installation detail), 2019-2021, natural dyes and applique on cotton. Photo Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

IMAGE GALLERY



Mobile Palace (detail), natural dyes and appliqué on cotton, 2019-2021. By Swapnaa Tamhane with Salemamad Khatri and Mukesh, Pragnesh, and Avdhesh Prajapati and Bhavesh Rajnikant, with assistance from Sine Kundargi-Girard. Photo: Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

IMAGE GALLERY



Mobile Palace (detail), natural dyes and appliqué on cotton, 2019-2021. By Swapnaa Tamhane with Salemamad Khatri and Mukesh, Pragnesh, and Avdhesh Prajapati and Bhavesh Rajnikant, with assistance from Sine Kundargi-Girard. Photo: Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

IMAGE GALLERY



Study 1, woodblock print on khadi rag paper, 2018. By Swapnaa Tamhane and printed at Glasgow Print Studio.
Photo: Paul Eekhoff, ROM.

IMAGE GALLERY



Ahub1988, *Ajrakh Block-printed textile*. May 31, 2010. C.C. by CSA 3.0.

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ajrak.jpg>

IMAGE GALLERY



Shaire Productions, *African Textile with strip-woven fabric strips sewn together*. Nov 7, 2006. C.C. by SA 2.0.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:African_Textile_Design_Pattern.jpg#filelinks

IMAGE GALLERY



Madreilling, 18th Century Chinese Silk Textile from Cleveland Museum of Art, C.C. by CCO 1 Universal Public Domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:China,_18th_century_-_Fragment_from_Book_of_Textiles_-_1920.1950.7_-_Cleveland_Museum_of_Art.jpg

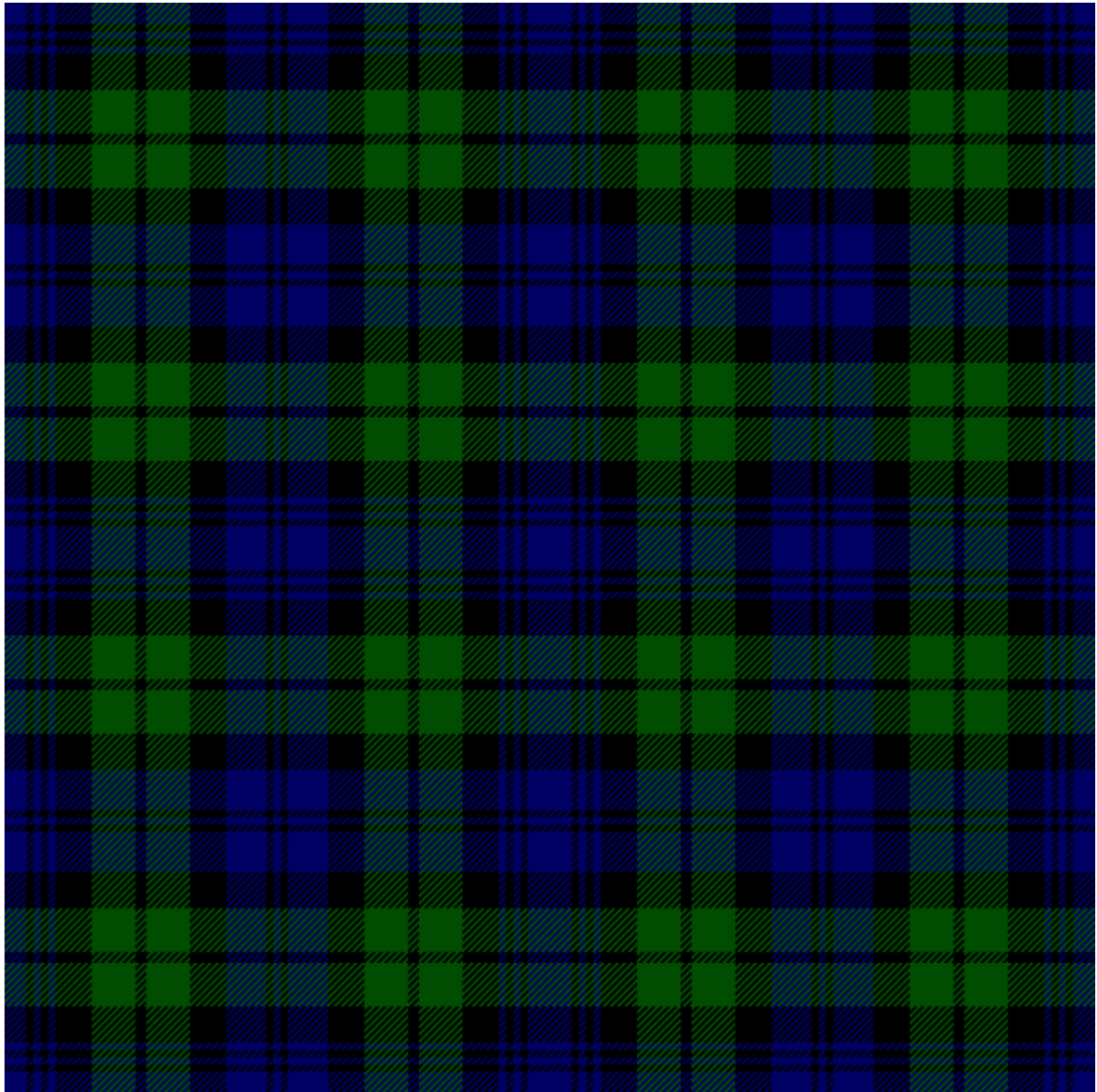
IMAGE GALLERY



Japanese traditional pattern (sei-gai-ha) with plovers. Sept 1, 2022, Universal Public Domain.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E9%9D%92%E6%B5%B7%E6%B3%A2%E3%81%AB%E5%8D%83%E9%B3%A5.jpg>

IMAGE GALLERY



Celtus, Black Watch or Campbell Tartan, July 18, 2007, C.C. by CCA 2.5 Generic.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black_Watch_or_Campbell_tartan.png

IMAGE GALLERY



Simon Burchell, Maya textile, used to make the traditional corte worn by Maya women as a skirt, Dec 31, 2015, C.C. by CCA 4.0.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maya_textile_04.JPG

INFORMATION / MAP



**SURREY ART GALLERY /
SURREY ARTS CENTRE**
13750 88 AVE IN BEAR CREEK PARK

SKYTRAIN STATIONS

- 1 SURREY CENTRAL (FOR CITY HALL,
LIBRARY, & 96 B-LINE OR 321 BUS TO SURREY
ARTS CENTRE)
- 2 KING GEORGE (TO CATCH 96 B-LINE OR
321 BUS TO SURREY ARTS CENTRE)

- 40 minute drive from downtown Vancouver
- 2 km walk from King George Station
- Catch Bus #321 or R1 at Surrey Central Station and get off on King George Hwy at 88 Avenue.

SURREY ART GALLERY

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Surrey, BC V3W 3L1

604-501-5566
artgallery@surrey.ca
surrey.ca/artgallery

GALLERY HOURS

Tue, Wed, Thu: 9am–9pm
Fri: 9am–5pm
Sat: 10am–5pm
Sun: Noon–5pm

Closed on Mondays & holidays

Admission by donation

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