

The politics of creative justice:

Conversations on
creative processes

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*Cover Art: Coucal and dancing frog at Chingara waterfall,
Coorg by Srivi Kalyan*

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Designed by Srivi Kalyan

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Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram

Abstract

This exposition explores the question of creative justice in creative processes and pedagogy. Through an evolving conversation on a chat app, a mentor shares her creative process of a painting that she is emerging with her students at the Masters level. And interwoven through these, they evolve a pedagogy of artistic research, decolonization, reflective inquiry into self, aesthetic encounters with their own cultures, Indian aesthetics and philosophies, meandering and pondering together. The exposition is constructed in four parts.

Part 1: Utopia and the politics of creative justice.

Part 2: The Conversations through chats.

Part 3 - Student responses and reflections.

Part 4: Teaching as philosophy of a way of being.

The mentor journeys through over twenty five years of her practice, inviting her students to participate, question, reflect and ponder with her, offering a creative pedagogy for artistic research that is also bound in the politics of creative justice.

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Thanks to all my students from whom I have learnt much, and shared a great part of my life with.

Part 1

Utopia and the
politics of
creative justice

Note and Acknowledgement

The conversation on the painting “Coucal and Dancing frog at Chingara Waterfalls” was specific to my current second year Masters students who are doing their capstone project. However I also shared parts of the conversations with other friends, colleagues and five other batches of masters’ students, some of them merely highlights. All of them have contributed immensely in participating, being inspired and painting with me, sharing their memories of time in nature and just encouraging me to share and not feel shy or that I might be disturbing them, celebrating both my creative spirit and my relationship with nature and art along with me.

While the ten students who are an active part of this discussion are acknowledged here, others, I thank deeply for their time, space and affection. Additionally I would like to thank two young people I mentored, Sreelekha between 2009 and 14, Ramnath between 2012 and 2016, both of them now, accomplished creative practitioners in their own right. I have taken these conversations back to them as well, as our early explorations and forays into birding, environmental issues, creative practice, teaching and learning happened together. It has been wonderful tracing back our memories, while building new conversations together. I appreciate their time and engaged discussions with me.

Introduction

The politics of creative justice lies at the heart of our conversations –my graduate students and me. And layered under this term “Creative Justice” are social design, thought and action, relationships with the natural world, the culture(s) of our classrooms, be they in real or virtual spaces, in open gardens or wilderness, and our relationships with each other and our own inner selves.

Most of my students come from engineering, technology and other backgrounds except two of them who have background in applied arts and design. They have taken on an immense challenge of shifting careers and struggle with gaps in their skills and abilities for art and design. And to me as a mentor, it is a critical question, I have been pondering about for the last seven years of my teaching in this institution. In our meeting together in person last month as a collective in an actual classroom, they despaired and questioned on how they would ever arrive at being an artist/ designer and how they could find their own process and creative potential as they are getting ready to finish their final capstone project and will soon graduate in a few months.

And my response to them was, it isn't about what you have to learn but the bigger question is:

What to let go? – And it is from this memory that my pedagogy re-emerged in a different light in these two months. I decided to research the politics of the creative block through unfolding a creative process with them and cultivating a culture of conversations, metacognition and perception of their own creativity in response to mine.

At Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, (now Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology), where I have worked since 2014, I have set up programs in Information Arts and Information Design Practices, Earth Education and Communication and Reimagining Transitions. My work lies at the intersection of art, design, education, social interventions, politics of living, self-reflection and environment. **The most fundamental question I ask both as a curriculum designer and as a mentor is - What does it take to be human? This very question in today's world seems a utopian starting point.** We have stunted our own growth and evolution as humans it seems like. We rush through life, we run after a rat race that we don't comprehend, we are led by forces of greed and power that we are not even aware of and we destroy people

and nature, our own beings and those of other species mindlessly and sometimes with willful blindness.

At the college I teach in, where reimagining education lies at the heart of our everyday pursuits, I have been inquiring and pondering with my students for the last seven years, both undergrad and postgrad as also with my colleagues. In particular from the graduating batch of 2017 to my current students in their first and second years of Masters, our questions to each other have been pertinent, as we seek to challenge ourselves, all our preconceptions and biases and fashion ourselves anew each year. This is a hard job, because it destroys us in many ways, as we carefully nurture each other as well. It is scary, wonderful and exhilarating; it is also exhausting, tiring and devastating sometimes.

Why Creative Justice?

In India, we deal with cultural diversity and immense plurality of languages, economic backgrounds, belief systems, religious notions in the same classroom. We also deal with the loss of cultural memories, intuitions, languages, personal voice and knowledge systems as an impact of colonization. With rapid development and globalization, we also struggle with an immense loss of the environment at an unsustainable pace.

And the most delicate and fragile loss is the loss of our creativity; Creativity, as a way of life, as a natural instinct, as a way of being that was such an important part of this culture in its ancient and pre-colonial, early modern times.

This is the heart of our classroom – a remarkable rich, fertile group of young people with incredible plurality and a devastating loss of their own creative intuitions due to years of programmed mass education, impact of colonization, and a belief that one must become part of the rat race to survive, repeated by families generation after generation and their own private traumas and anxieties. And in this classroom, our politics lies in having all these conversations out - cathartic sometimes,

in rage sometimes, in lack of confidence and courage oftentimes, with a feeble and undeveloped vocabulary to speak of these many injustices that have shaped our lives, so that we can let go and create.

Artistic research in this context is really centered around asking – What do we need to let go to be able to create? And we begin in this mess. We must each year build trust among our small groups and be able to relax in each other's presence to be able to speak of these things, find our lost languages and embark on our creative journeys.

It has taken me seven years with different students in this institution, and another ten years of working with students from across the country and elsewhere in the world to map some of these issues, to understand what stops them, blocks them from: creating, engaging with communities, walking in wilderness, embracing life in all its fullness. This is my utopia; I want them to live full rich creative lives that are compassionate, joyous and cognizant and loving of all life around them as they make art, design for themselves or for the wellbeing of the society at large.

Over time, they too have come to buy into this dream, as we laugh and joke about it together. We know it is utopian as we give ourselves a healthy dose of everyday reality, job scenarios, market requirements, work related issues, health crisis that emerges from living this fast mindless life and financial needs.

Every year, as a mentor, I despair over the blockages that stop my students from seeing their own creative spirit and splendor. I want to show them that creativity is generative, like the spider who weaves from within herself, the baya weaver who builds his nests, rivers that flow shaping rocky mountains and crafting valleys. Creativity is simple, natural and the very essence of life. It is also meditative, contemplative and reflective. It is silent and still, not loud, noise or egoistic.

I want them to connect back to the heart of their own creativity, redefining and reimagining their own identities, personhood and agency.

The Context

While this conversation has been going on for a long time with many different students, my current second year masters students – nine of them from Information Arts and Information Design Practices and one from Visual Communication, have been gathering together in online meetings, over whatsapp chats, phone calls, email letters, building a culture of conversation together, inquiring into our fears, worries, frustrations, and creative processes. We have encountered friends and families getting COVID, one of the students also losing a parent to COVID. This time together has been tough, fraught with impossible situations, and yet somehow, we have found meaning in being together, leaning on each other as artists, designers, and people.

This exposition explores one of these many exchanges as I unfold my creative process to them. It started with our discussions on emerging form and what form means to an artist and designer, sometime in November 2020. They are all in the middle of working on their graduating projects, each of it has a social or environmental relevance. They have taken up wicked problems, nuanced narratives and complex issues that takes all their energy and intention to unravel. They are impeded by their own fears of their capabilities as much by the COVID 19 scenario, which has initiated

lockdown on working with communities and travelling to places. Amidst all this chaos, we find time to ask the most essential question of ourselves, and we ask it together –

What does it take to be human?

In part 2, I document extracts from our chat conversation on whatsapp –

I shared a step-by-step process of the evolution of a new painting I was making. **This is a two way process of trust, restfulness and need on both our sides – mentor and students.** I am coming out of hibernation of the last year where I was writing up my doctoral thesis alongside my full-time work responsibilities. And they are embarking on a new journey. We both share trepidations and inertias, that have different meanings and starting points, but the emotions are somehow the same. I need their trust, conversations and confidence in me to unfold my work to them, and they draw inspiration from my modeling and my openness to sharing my creative life with them.

My doctoral work inquired into 'porosity' as a principle of consciousness that allows for a fluid interchange of relationships between the human and natural world. Out of my countless encounters in the natural world, I am drawn by many memories to create a series of paintings. Using water colour and pen and ink, I begin to unravel the memories of my porous moments with the natural world. The first of this new series is Coucal and Dancing frog at Chingara Waterfalls, Coorg, Karnataka.

In the heart of the Western Ghats, this waterfall is located inside the rain forests, with an abundance of wildlife, both flora and fauna. Four of us- colleagues, friends, ecologists and biologists and myself an artist, walked through sometimes dense, and sometimes lighter forested areas, the raucous call of the hornbills, giant red snails crawling on the side, snakes slipping away, frogs croaking, scarlet minivets lighting up the dense green covers to reach the waterfall. This painting captures my intense experiences at the waterfall.

In opening this memory and the creative process that followed it, I let my students see my own fears, wonder, mysticism, artistry, mistakes, and vulnerability.

Cherished and embraced by them in an online space, I was encouraged to continue the conversations from the

9th of February to the 19h of February when I set aside this painting and started others. Our conversation is still ongoing as I write this exposition and I continue to share in a more limited manner, my creative process for newer works I am creating as part of the series.

What are our everyday utopias?

Setting up a culture for our classroom

Where we can evoke friendship in and through artistic research.

We are held together by the poetics of our vulnerability. We gather in the safety of our invisible embraces and laughter.

We ponder together about life, earth and being human. We rediscover our lost languages, we trace them to the past, we articulate them in the now, and we draw them to the future.

Amidst all that strains us, pulls us apart, everyday issues, administrative needs, educational expectations, examinations, need to start hunting for jobs, taking care of our personal lives, our utopia is creating space and time for the culture of the classroom that we are constantly evolving.

Artistic research immersed within questions of education, politics of design and action, the mundaneness of everyday practice, the music I

cherish and my playlists that inspire my moods and the relationships that unfold between mentor and students, the journeys of teaching and learning, where our roles are constantly shifting – in this discussion are located around twelve circles of thought, one flowing into the other.

Fear
Trauma
Lack of Confidence

Culture
Intuition
Disconnect

Lack of Vocabulary
Unspoken voices
Hidden thoughts
Subtle Self

Rational, irrational,
nonsense
Mystical
Playfulness
Laziness

Wonder
Poetry
Reimagining Self
Music

Building Conversation
(Monologues, dialogues,
conversations with inner
self)
Togetherness
Trust

Real
Virtual
Time-space

Community
Politics
Meaning-Making

Pondering
Imagination
Creativity
Body

Being, wellbeing
Freedom & Responsibility
Witness

Relationship with the natural
world
Being present in the now
Meditations on living

Memories
Language
Self

Starting out with - What does form mean to the artist/ designer?

We take a plunge into exercises, activities, workshops, conversations, some of it going back to April 2020, others starting out in July 2019 when they started the program. As they work on their projects, I work on mine. In this extended sharing, fluidly and seamless I bring out and integrate the issues and politics of creativity as I have perceived and studied them across the last seventeen odd years of my practice as an educator.

In my own vulnerability, quest for identity, language, voice, expression and making - I draw out theirs. This is our story, a shared journey, a walking together of sorts from the different places that we are in. Our minds, beings and consciousness are connected in the subtle ways of the human spirit. We are working on this, these are forgotten ancient practices, but it is possible still, when trust, love and embrace happens, and unconditionally we are connected without our knowledge. And as one of them spoke for the others - I seem to know how to complete their sentences, and my tribute to them is that, they know to complete mine.

My creative practice is rooted in Indian philosophical and aesthetic traditions. By virtue of this, my practice is reflective, meditative, in Indian words, it is a yoga (A spiritual discipline) and a yajna (Transformative Ritual). It is also an act of crafting consciousness and inner self, of crafting one's own being. It is in this light that my conversations unfold with my students, creating new language for a contemporary world, where these ancient cultural intuitions, ways of creative practice and the art of mentoring continue to inform and guide me.

Artistic research in the online format

Short dialogues, chat formats, extended conversations, long sustaining yet short dialogues opened out in space and time. Group conversations and individual one on one conversations flow into each other. Covid-19 imposed restrictions on us in terms of meeting each other, and talking in real spaces. But the virtual world opened up new ways of connecting and strangely offered a way to play hide and seek. We could hide behind videos, we could choose not to share our vulnerable bodies, and only our voices. We can talk in ways that seem intangible across time and space. We can hold long conversations together without the disturbances of classroom structures. **We miss being in physical spaces, but the virtual has afforded other possibilities, ways of meaning-making and building presence.** It has been hard work, building this strange language for a virtual world of conversations... but I feel connected to my students as they do to me and we have had fun along the way. Also smileys, gifs and all the convenient symbols from the world of chats make our conversations lighter, gentler and more fun.

I see the unfolding of the chats through four lenses.

1. Artistic openness as performance

I interact with them in real time as the painting evolves. In a sense, I am performing the art in front of them. What I hope for is transfer of feelings, emotions, and creative spirit as I am experiencing it at the moment when I am painting. This has long been considered a way of learning in tradition.

The porous transfer of knowledge and learning from the teacher to the receptive student, the process is intentional, a gift and receiving of it, a mutual process, akin to breathing.

2. Body as archive

Trained as a bharatanatyam (Classical Indian Dance form) for over 15 years, my body is a site of my felt, intuited and cultural memories.

IAIDP as a program is conceptualized in the idea of embodied practice, where the experience of the body and its intelligence is integral to the stories we tell. I re-enact a past performance through my will. I allow my memories to flow, along with it the moments of porosity I have experienced at the waterfall. **Each day, I seek to liberate my body from its colonization, and re-learn to experience the natural world.** Tuning into the wistful and quirky presence of the coucal or the agile one of the dancing frog, the very presence of the waterfall in its seamless weaving of time, are also the poetic ways of the culture I grew up in. Beautifully documented in Sangam poetry from the Tamil, southern Indian region, this embodied landscape language is flowing through my veins. But I have to work hard to re-open the channels in my body. As I draw and paint, I open up this body as archive as a way of decolonizing pedagogy, inviting my students to rediscover their own bodies through embodied practices.

3. Relational Eco-Creativity

Relationship with the natural world through aesthetic perception is key to my own work in ecosophy. Drawing upon the intrinsic and interwoven relationships human beings share with the natural world, forgotten in our urban cultures, but very much alive in smaller pockets across the country as I travel, and in the long history and philosophy of Indian thought tradition, ritual and artistic practices, I want to enchant my students with how much there is to feel and experience and connect back with the natural world. As I speak of the intimate experiences I share with waterfall, coucal and dancing frog, I invite them to my world, to an aesthetic perception and a way of relating with the natural world, through one's own creativity.

I also invite them to share their experiences in the natural world, find words for all that they have never articulated. I hope this will eventually allow the creative primordial spirit to entwine with them, through the intricate veins and roots of the natural world, that if one were to breathe or step on the earth, we would be instantly embraced in. Creativity becomes effortless in some ways when this connection happens. This eco-creativity lies at the heart of my pedagogy.

I want to take them away from tools and techniques into the heart of being alive to everything around them, to find themselves in bird wing and tree root, monkey tail and flowing river.

4. Redefining Creativity, questioning measurement

In my art, the modern Indian artist's questions on what is Indian in contemporary Indian art continues to be a quest. I have been drawn by the line of the traditional Indian artist, used by indigenous tribal, folk as well as artists considered to be drawing in the classical style. The line is the essence of life capturing the subtle being of all that is drawn. Traditional Indian philosophy and aesthetics define the spirit of my work. And in this approach, creativity is not measured just by the quality of work, but the quality of consciousness that the artist has traversed. It is about the stillness of the mind, and self-reflective quietude that the artist arrives at through contemplation.

While we are bound by certain criteria for formal academic measurement, which has also been consistently questioned at our college, as a collective, I ask them to question what we will measure, what we will perceive in our own arts and ourselves. This is essential for the utopia of our classroom. If we cannot free ourselves from the Western standards of measuring creativity, we cannot unblock our own intuitions.

The huge fear of judgement that comes from these standards of measurement needs to be dealt with before we can break open the doors to our cultural intuitions and creative processes. And our work in building community comes from this shared looking at our own fears and pondering about them together. As I paint with them, it is this notion of creativity juxtaposing it with my fears that I make visible. My intention is to be inclusive, to draw them in to the necessities and boundaries of technique and form, while letting themselves go in the evocative power of art to release fear and build community together, where are no judgements of class, caste, creed, experience or skill. Only when we define creativity on our own terms, will we find the language of the art and the versatility and openness to the forms that seek us and those that we seek.

Our inquiry into our past, into our intuitions and cultures does not mean we deny Western models or ideas, creative impressions or inspirations for we have been groomed in them. But it means we seek to be thoughtful and alert to what makes us who we are and what we don't know or remember about ourselves. Perhaps as time passes by we will blend all the cultures that we are exposed to in a multitude of ways that are meaningful, but for now, the intention is to seek ourselves in all the darkness of our individual and collective pasts, while holding on to the remarkable light of unhindered creativity.

Language

Language is at the heart of my work in pedagogy. The language of the subtle self, our interiorities and the landscapes we unfold within ourselves. All of these conversations with my students are a pondering with them to see how they can articulate their own interiority. One can debate whether written and oral language are important as forms of expression and why we cannot just express ourselves in tacit, visual, gestures or a hundred other silent languages. However there is a distance to be bridged between our inner and outer selves, our public and private world, and the most ancient of our thoughts with our most contemporary ones. And if we cannot craft our language, to be able to articulate ourselves, we are lost without the bridges that we need.

This cohort of students has been warm and gentle, I wonder if I can be so open with others too and how long these trust building and culture building exercises will take. I don't have answers yet, and herein lies the vulnerability and ephemerality of this journey.

In Part 2, our documentation of the chats, which records the evolution of the painting are made visible.

In Part 3, student reflections on this particular process, as well as their thoughts about practice, pondering about their own creativity are recorded in their own words.

In Part 4, which, summarizes and concludes this exposition, teaching/ pedagogy is framed within the philosophy of being.

Part 2

The
conversations
through
chats - An
Introduction

A whatsapp conversation and Engagement with Masters students from the graduating batch of 2021. (Minor edits have been made to the original messages for readability.)

Snippets from the chat are presented on the page with an option to download the full chat conversation that emerged over twenty days in a book format (pdf) for deeper engagement.

The excitement of this form of pedagogy that is shaped by the use of technology has been working in real time with students as the painting evolves. The students have shown an immense and continued interest in the entire evolution of the work, even as we discussed several other things in between. This time and this mode have been new, strange and precious.

The pedagogy created here was experimental, unexpected, unplanned and emerged out of an organic flow of interaction and participation. Some of the significant observations that have emerged are in the following areas.

Technology:

We explored whatsapp as technology in education- The innovative use of whatsapp to share the creative process of emerging a painting led to real-time interactions over the first 5 crucial days of the painting followed by another 15 days of reminiscing, musing, accepting the work, pondering through and about it. What is incredible is the way it has brought us together as a community. What I have been unable to find a way in the regular model of classroom engagement within the constraints of institutional time in the last one and half years, I was able to find a way to reach my students seeking to understand intuition, creative process, reflect on their own processes and get into the exhilaration and reflection of making.

There were so many modes of engagement through technology that this process opened up. Sometimes students responded back to messages, they pondered with me or encouraged me, appreciated something, and were intrigued about a moment in my creative process. They reflected in longer emails or chat messages sent privately. They spoke to me over phone or MStears as we discussed their capstone projects and seamlessly reflections from these whatsapp engagements emerged in the space.

Safe Space and Sharing:

I wonder why technology has enabled such comfortable sharing on my side as well as the side of my students. Perhaps screen provides a private safe space where it is possible to share life experiences, metacognition which in-person learning may not allow.

We each also had our own time to articulate a thought, a feeling and find a way to share it that we were comfortable with in our own time and space. Even though the time of this process has been a dense and intense twenty days, we each found a time-space that worked privately for us. Since silence was accepted, and there was no testing, questioning, or expectation for people to participate, students chose to also read in their own pace, moments of interest to engage and reflected back on select part of chats as and when they wanted. The continued access to the real-time conversation also enabled slow processing of thought, learning and reflection. It also allowed some students who chose to do so, to build their practice alongside mine, while painting and making in their space, as I was working in mine.

Attention:

One of the things that amazes me is this quality of attention that we have been able to generate. Different kinds of attention have emerged in the process in students at different points of time, evident in their reflections and responses available in part 3. I would say that the qualities and kinds of attention that have emerged are

- Rapt and wondrous,
- Reflective, curious and interrogative
- Thoughtful, engaged and creative
- Self-aware and metacognitive, and self-healing
- Contemplative and meditative

If one were to measure learning success through using chat in an art/design class- the way it holds student attention over extended period of time and promotes student creative expression in a deeply meaningful way seems to be one thing to take away as a critical feature.

Equity in education:

Online interaction has allowed for a different kind of equity to emerge from the way we think about equity in the classroom. This here is equity of imagination and intuition and how these creative processes unfold in time. Each of the students have their own reasons, beliefs, traumas, conditioning that have blocked both their intuition and imagination and also the access to free flowing creativity. To me, creativity is a fundamental right, albeit, bound by ethical values and responsibility. This has been the premise with which I open the curriculum, the program and creative work from the first semester that they enter. The first course/ unit that I teach is “Cultivating Being: Sadhana as Praxis”. It is in our very first class that we began our deliberations on being and building a culture of equity, intuition, creativity and excellence for our classroom. In this unintended unit emerging with the painting of coucal and dancing frog on a waterfall, it seems that we have refined and distilled our notions of equity, and the pact has become firmer between us. This is evident in the confidence of their voices as they ponder, the way they have encouraged each other’s voices and creative works, found a solidarity that is emerging from who we are to each other as creative people, irrespective of our backgrounds and ages.

Reaching out:

At this time of COVID-19, one of the biggest challenges has been managing anxiety and stress and finding a way to embrace virtually each other's poignant stories of fear, loss, family illness and grief. We need time out of time, to make sense of this lock-down and forced isolation. We need time to find the meaning of solitude when it is imposed, or needs to be emerged from isolation and loneliness. And at such a time, this pedagogy has created a humane space for reaching out. To find ourselves, and be gentle with ourselves, be creative at a time of crisis, resting assured in the knowledge that there is warmth at the other end of the screen. Intangible, tacit and invisible warmth that can flow between all of us because we care, and we are reaching out to each other through the vitality of art practice and artistic research, through the utopian hopes we have for ourselves and the new relationships that have emerged out of this process. In reaching out, being vulnerable to each other, offering encouragement and support, the practice of art and artistic research, done together as a community have become our pedagogy of hope.

Extending Practice:

Each of my students has been able to extend their practice through this engaged and resonant process of interaction that they developed with my own creative process as I shared it. Further to our reflections and participatory conversations, I have also offered a space of making together in our individual one-on-one meetings on teams, where we create something each for the same idea, and then share our processes and outcomes together. We deliberate on practice and imagination, the ways of intuition, what blocks our perception, what new possibilities could be emerged... In this way, our pedagogy has become recursive. We now build on the basic pattern that we created by asking – what does form mean to the artist?

Refining pedagogy in online mode

I fashion our chats in the form of a book, trying to retain the flavor and format of a cell phone/ whatsapp on laptop format, and also capture the voices that are hidden in these real-time conversations. This opens numerous insights for me on the medium and technology and how these short bursts of texts, and the nature of posting as one would to a friend or family, without thinking too much, sharing the momentary thought has built a certain camaraderie among all of us as a collective. It seems how we think about time is critical to how we can refine pedagogy for both online and offline modes of teaching artistic practice, and research.

Privacy, trust, and culture of the classroom

I think humorously of the children's book "Ms. Malarkey doesn't live in Room 10", by Judy Finchler (Author), Kevin O'Malley (Illustrator), where kindergarteners curious about their class teacher are shocked to discover that Ms. Malarkey in fact does not live in the classroom. I smile as I find my students discovering that I too am vulnerable, scared, confused and overwhelmed when I make art, much like them. I find their rejoicing in my foolishness and silliness, and how human it suddenly makes me to them, endearing. I find their curiosity to peer through my head to understand how it works strangely welcoming of my creative being. I don't feel they are being intrusive. They too take care to be gentle in their probing and reflection and are respectful of my privacy, both creative and personal.

But this is a safe-space, a trust bound collective that we have taken time to build for one and half years. This did not happen in a day. We have invited one student outside this close knit group to engage with us and allowed him to find his own space and place of trust. I see him watching us

when we meet, partly perplexed, and partly enamored by the joyous and boisterous welcoming we give each other and the delight we feel in meeting each other in person after the sudden lock-down of universities over nine months. It is only one day, one afternoon that we met for, before we went back to the online mode. But it enriched us, confirmed our faith in each other and renewed our sense of hope in ourselves, our work together, and the possibilities of each one of our individual practices. To me, it is a “we”, them and me. We are not on two sides of the educational space and as redefined in Srishti Institute of art, design and technology last year, as one of the core beliefs of our educational approach, we are community of practitioners and aspiring practitioners.

In part 2 and part 3, what I have unpacked here qualitatively are evident in the conversations, reflections and responses of students, and also the vast opening of hearts and minds, and the way we have found a malleable and porous quality to both space and time in our engagements. **At this point I wonder, is utopia really that far-flung? It seems that between our sleep and waking state, we reach out to each other, and we find that we can allow ourselves to free fall, for it seems one or the other of us, is waiting, alert and will hold anyone who chooses to fall with care and cherishing.**

And in that both artistic research and pedagogy, move for me from the individual private spaces of artifact and practice to community, social engagement, action, friendship and ethical responsibility for each other.

A glimpse into our conversations



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[1:05 am, 10/02/2021] Hia: *I feel you expressed what goes on in my mind. But I cannot articulate it.*

[1:05 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: *It has taken many years of practice between then and now to adapt, embrace, play with, be confident about and find a certain situatedness to these lines that emerged through oils, acrylics, watercolors, inks, pencils, crayons and pen...*

[1:06 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: *Practice based phd for 6 years*

[1:09 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: *Also 7 years of trying to understand how to teach students in Srishti and what to make visible to them. But have to thank your group where I feel I have found a heartwarming and warm group of ppl whom I can trust and share with and also think through many of my thoughts with.so thanks and kudos to all of you for also creating this space of trust with me.*

[1:12 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: *Now I will pay heed to my body and close for the day. The vision for the painting came sometime mid afternoon and I let it sink in for almost 4 to 5 hours before I knew I could not resist painting it. So finally restarting painting after almost a year. And 4 hours of being at it for today. Hopefully will continue tomm... and have a meeting at 10 o'clock in the morning....*

[1:15 am, 10/02/2021] Hia: *Good night srivi. <3*

[1:19 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: *<3
The music moved on to Gundecha brothers singing dhrupad, then Kumar Gandharv's jhini chadariya. Now Shafi Faqir, a Manghaniar singer from Sindh is singing a beautiful Kabir bhajan- na jane tere. And the next song is perfect to end the day as Vidya Rao sings Yeh tan that Tambure in thumri, a quiet meditative and gentle rendition.*

[6:26 pm, 11/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I spent a few hours at Chingara, waded right into the waterfall, steeped myself in its laughter, gaiety and glory, walked between tadpoles, and root systems, rocks and fallen leaves looking for frogs. There is no one photographic moment of the waterfall in my memory. There are many many moments and each section of the waterfall, rocky, ledge, slip and fall of water that I spent few minutes on, in deep intensity. These many moments fuse into a new harmonious, undivided singular aesthetic time in the painting. The moment when I saw the reflections of foliage in the water, the moments when sunlight sparkled through water droplets and spray, the moment when light seared a naked piece of glistening rock, the moment when two falling lines of water danced, waving in and out of each other making new patterns with the wind, the moment when a cloud covered the sunlight and the entire mood of the waterfall shifted, the moment when mist covered us briefly creating a haze and intensifying the sound, the moments as each sense experience opened and flowered one after another like a navaragamalika, an ecstatic yet mellifluous symphony... it is this nuanced and interior aesthetic space-time that I seek to paint and find form in my art.

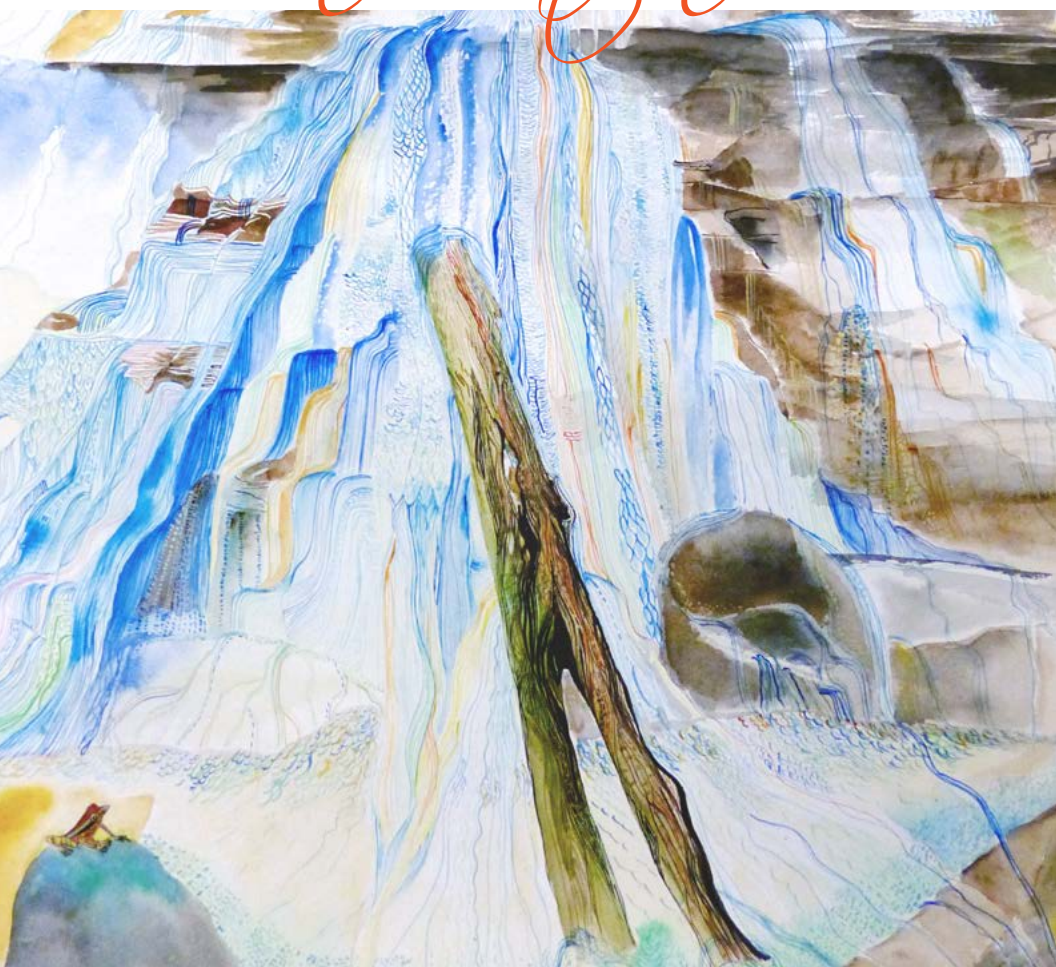




[0:55 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: This was the first painting I made in 2003 trying to get this particular style together in the masters workshop I had mentioned earlier. Drawing upon miniatures, patachitra and other folk art forms, blending it with my bold strokes and free painting style. My inquiry was - How to keep miniature painting lines but have painterly effect of conceptual and symbolic world?

Part 2

The Conversations



Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram (Srivi Kalyan)

Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology

*Cover Art: Coucal and dancing frog at Chingara waterfall,
Coorg by Srivi Kalyan*

February 2021

Designed by Srivi Kalyan

The politics of creative justice: Conversations on creative processes

Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram

Abstract

This exposition explores the question of creative justice in creative processes and pedagogy. Through an evolving conversation on a chat app, a mentor shares her creative process of a painting that she is emerging with her students at the Masters level. And interwoven through these, they evolve a pedagogy of artistic research, decolonization, reflective inquiry into self, aesthetic encounters with their own cultures, Indian aesthetics and philosophies, meandering and pondering together. The exposition is constructed in four parts.

Part 1: Utopia and the politics of creative justice.

Part 2: The Conversations through chats.

Part 3: Student responses and reflections.

Part 4: Teaching as philosophy of a way of being.

The mentor journeys through over twenty five years of her practice, inviting her students to participate, question, reflect and ponder with her, offering a creative pedagogy for artistic research that is also bound in the politics of creative justice.

Many thanks to my students - Ashwin Suresh, Hia Banerjee, Kaushik Kannan, Monica M Chandak, Mridul Verma, Nupur Agrawal, Pranav Sharma, Samridhi Pandey, Sonal Choudhury, Surabhi Singhai, for this participatory conversation and the contributions of their reflections in part 3.

Part 2

The
conversations
through chats

Coucal and Dancing Frog at Chingara, Coorg

Conversations on evolution and reflections on painting

Srivi Kalyan

(Srisrividhiya Kalyanasundaram)

9-26th Feb 2021

I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Priti Gururaja and Dr. K.V. Gururaja who invited me to be part of their research trip at Coorg and for Madhushri Mudke who was also part of the team where this beautiful encounter with coucal, waterfall and dancing frog happened.

A whatsapp conversation and engagement with Masters students from the graduating batch of 2021. (Minor edits have been made to the original messages for readability.)

(Unfortunately most of the smileys and images we used during the chat could not be copied to this document. The vibrant world of whatsapp smileys are missed here)

[4:11 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan

All of you tend to doubt yourself. That's ok. Instead, trust art that has been gifted to you and that you have chosen. You don't have to trust yourself. That art has a 70,000 year old human impulse to it, and a cultural history that goes back thousands of years. Allow art to happen to you and trust it.



[9:17 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Coucal and Dancing frog at Chingara waterfall, Coorg





[9:17 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Starting a watercolor work after a long time. 18 x 24 inches, around A2 size



[9:18 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: At Chingara Waterfall, Coorg, 2017



[9:18 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Going to give form to this doodle that I shared earlier in December with all of you.



[9:31 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: A memory from 2017... suddenly flashed in my mind. Greater Coucals are most fascinating to watch. They belong to the crow family. They are full of smart strutting and fun and mischief. This one strutted down the ledge of the waterfall before running back into hiding quickly. The misty drops from the waterfall were rising up and the grayness and freshness of monsoon inside the rainforest made it mysterious. And way down the stream from the waterfall, we spotted this little dancing frog.

[9:40 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: When I start the painting, this is all I have, the flash of a vivid memory, a vague yet rich feeling. I have no idea whether I can do justice to either of these. Am I a little nervous as I start my work? Definitely, Yes!

I think about my composition. I draw and erase the coucal a few times; I don't want it to be too big or too small. I want the sheer magnificence of the waterfall, but at the same time it is difficult to let go of the marvelous form of the coucal. This creates a tension in my composition and then there is the dancing frog, the real life size of which is about the size of a nail. I want these contrasts to play out. These are my thoughts as I set out on the painting. I know I might mess it up. It is a risk. I even worry about the cost of the paper that I have preserved for three years waiting for the right moment and the right painting. But I feel driven to paint today... and so I decide to take the risk and have some fun...

[9:47 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Watercolor is a difficult medium to handle and it scares me every time. There are no second chances with watercolor. You can mask a few mistakes perhaps with clever tricks, but not much. How much should be wet on wet, how long should a section dry before painting on it, what should the base layer coloring be? You cannot do more than 3 to 4 layers with water color as it is very easy to get the colors into a dirty dull shade. I am worried about all this every time I start a watercolor painting. But I know I have to be patient and let the painting happen to me. The coucal and the frog have vested interest in coming to life in the painting. So I befriend them as I do with the waterfall, the rocks and the fallen branch. I entice them with our shared memories and take the plunge.

[9:55 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I wonder at the fear though, in some sense it is more like a healthy respect for both the medium and the natural world, a surrender to all these forms, inviting them to enter my body and mind.



[10:01 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: My tools.

[10:02 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Am going to try and make my creative process visible as I develop the work over the next few days. Hope it opens a window to all the challenges, fears and planning that goes into my work also.

[10:03 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Even after 35+ years of being at it!

[10:07 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Kumar Gandharv singing Raag Malkauns (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HXSIDYYw28>) in the background.

[10:11 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Now that I am making my process and work visible to all of you, there is also an addition fear and embarrassment as I wonder- what if this painting turns out to be a disaster?

[10:17 pm, 09/02/2021] Pranav Sharma: This is way too inspiring! Takes great amount of courage to share the process and acknowledge the vulnerability. We are lucky to witness the process :))

[10:20 pm, 09/02/2021] Hia: Would be waiting for the final painting.

[10:41 pm, 09/02/2021] Samridhi: Thanks for sharing your process Srivi



[11:09 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: As I started working on the branch, my style of flowing inner lines begins to surface. I am trying to capture a hidden yet pervasive and pulsating life force that is there in all things as I try to bring them to life through art

[11:15 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I have used a 6 or, 2 pt and a 000/miniature painting brush along with chinese ink

[11:30 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I am waiting and pondering now as to what should I detail out next for the last 20 min. The coucal, frogs, rocks or waterfall. Here I consider, colors, tones, foreground, background tension and also what I should paint first, so I will be able to take the painting forward. Till this internal.conflict subsides, I will wait. Paddy is visiting me and we are chatting away even as my hindustani playlist keeps me in my own zone for the painting

[11:31 pm, 09/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Playlist for the day: Hirna by Kumar Gandharv, raag shuddh shyam by him, raag Tilak kamod by Bhimsen Joshi, 10 beat and 12 beat cycles

[0:01 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: What will happen if I paint the coucal first. Will he become too overpowering? But if I do the waterfall first, will the waterfall compete with the coucal? Do I want a misty mood in the painting or a lively starkness and freshness? I have decided to paint the frog last. But I cannot yet take a decision between the coucal and the waterfall.

[0:02 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: The coucal has rust, blue, black in its body and a sharp red in the eye. What colors would complete the waterfall then. Do I want it to complement with pastel colored tones or show a vividly playful narrative reflective of my mood.

[0:06 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I am still conflicted and pondering my decisions. My playlist moves to Raag Jogiya and then to Raag Durga both sung by Bhimsen Joshi. I am delighted when Raag Durga starts. This song has always provided intense and focused creative energy for me. I breathe in the Raaga into my body hoping for another day of magic from it. Even otherwise I don't feel restless in my pondering anymore. I feel embraced and connected to something greater than me when I hear this song. I didn't plan for it. It just happened to come along on my playlist and there is an instant recognition like meeting an old friend. The paper and the painting become part of this flow and a slow rhythm that flows through all life.



[0:44 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Decided on the coucal first.

[0:58 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: The coucal is in a diagonal and dynamic relationship to the fallen tree . This is great for me to set a rhythm and movement in the painting. The coucal is in a horizontal movement while the fallen tree is in a vertical position over which water and light slide and dance. The waterfall will cut through the geometric nature of these lines with its organic playful flow. I hear the lines like music in my head. There is also the monsoon rains and the clouds invisible in the painting, but right above this space, and a downpour is going to happen anytime. The rich dark grey, means every little shade of green, orange, yellow and blue will sparkle and give off an almost luminiscent light and call out their presence. This is the thrill and delight of monsoon for me. This is how my interpretation of colors happen. They are part symbolic, part impressionist, and part intuitive feeling and sound.



[1:05 am, 10/02/2021] Hia: I feel you expressed what goes on in my mind. But I cannot articulate it.

[1:05 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: It has taken many years of practice between then and now to adapt, embrace, play with, be confident about and find a certain situatedness to these lines that emerged through oils, acrylics, watercolors, inks, pencils, crayons and pen...

[1:06 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Practice based phd for 6 years

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[1:15 am, 10/02/2021] Hia: Good night srivi. <3

[1:19 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: <3

The music moved on to Gundecha brothers singing dhrupad, then Kumar Gandharv's jhini chadariya. Now Shafi Faqir, a Manghaniar singer from Sindh is singing a beautiful Kabir bhajan- na jane tere. And the next song is perfect to end the day as Vidya Rao sings Yeh tan that Tambure in thumri, a quiet meditative and gentle rendition.

[7:34 am, 10/02/2021] Sonal:

Dear Srivi,

I woke up to this highly inspiring process that you have shared. It felt like I was entering the different windows in your mind, and with you opening up the ones that were closed.

The description is so vivid that what separates us perhaps from the experience is only not physically doing it, otherwise it is like we are a part of the coucal and the waterfall, Misty or not...

I always thought, thoughts can't be made visible, and I remember all the times artists said " a lot of thought has gone into the painting" but I resonant with it more now when you have made it visible. Thank you for sharing the truth and vulnerability of approaching a blank paper, of ruining material, and of the painting differing in reality from imagination. Thank you for echoing our sentiment each time we begin to paint or sketch.

I am going to hold onto this for a long time, and now I also have access to such beautiful music. Thank you for always giving so heartily.

*Best,
Sonal <3*



[10:48 am, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma: Coming out beautifulllllly

[10:49 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Had forgotten to send this pic yesterday

[10:51 am, 10/02/2021] Sonal: So so so lovely!

[11:02 am, 10/02/2021] Surabhi: This is so beautiful... Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts, process, art and music.. Loving this!!

[11:32 am, 10/02/2021] Nupur: It's so difficult to believe you also have these thoughts like us. But everything has come out so beautifully Srivi

[11:35 am, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I keep telling you all and you don't believe me...

[0:00 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Hia, Thanks for hanging around and messaging me yesterday night. Felt a lovely sense of conversation.

[0:03 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I will be slightly scared till I finish and everything really comes together.

[0:56 pm, 10/02/2021] Nupur: So it seems we never get over this.

[0:56 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Precisely!

[0:58 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: When I make those silly creatures, I am not too worried because they are anyway silly and accommodating of my foolish self

[0:59 pm, 10/02/2021] Nupur: But what is silly for you has turned out to be too precious for us

[1:02 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: It is precious to me also. But they make my world lighter, funnier and let the child in me live happily

[1:03 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: All of you please consider this sharing an invitation to dialogue and ponder with me

[1:03 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: You are also welcome to share your journeys and work if you feel like

[1:07 pm, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma: Definitely. Will do soon

[1:50 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I used to enjoy painting on walls and large canvases when we had a workshop in my masters where we were asked to work with the miniature style. It was a sudden insight that happened during the workshop, that the energy of the large vibrant strokes I liked to create could be created and contained in miniature lines. It opened and deepened my observation of miniature paintings while also opening a whole new style and possibility in my paintings.

[1:50 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: It has taken many years of practice between then and now to adapt, embrace, play with, be confident about and find a certain situatedness to these lines that emerged through oils, acrylics, watercolors, inks, pencils, crayons and pen...

[1:52 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And sorry about flooding this chatbox. Please let me know if it is disturbing to any of you. I am also happy to shift to mail, if so.

[1:55 pm, 10/02/2021] Sonal: Glad you are sharing and pouring your heart Srivi... it feels good to have this conversation linger and fill us with so many insights...

[2:24 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: <http://nawangkhechog.com/universallovecd.php> _ today's playlist. Haven't started painting yet. Was busy with admin work till now.

[2:26 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I love Nawang Khechog's work. Universal Dance of Kindness, one of the pieces from this playlist has held me in tight embrace and beauty on many days, tough ones, gentle ones, and on days when my inner quieter worlds have to collide with the messy loudness of everyday life and work.

The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel in the Himalayas · Nawang Khechog <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4XBbFVCTo0> - listening to this one right now.

[2:29 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: This sound, is the sound of water I want reflected in my painting. I will listen till the sounds become colors and lines and are ready to float through my body back into my work. I might even sleep and let it happen in a subconscious state. I didn't sleep much yesterday night. So I don't have enough energy to start painting yet. So I am letting the quiet solitude and yet welcoming warmth of this music leave its impressions in me, and gently embrace me with its many sweet and simple secrets.

*[2:38 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1Kn6m0ox8I>
Universal Dance of Kindness*



[8:31 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Beginning the waterfall. Framing the basic flow and force of water









[8:38 pm, 10/02/2021] Sonal: Very very beautiful Srivi... just love the details and how it is slowly becoming... can't wait to see it finish...



[8:56 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I deepen the blue in the coucal's neck. I chose a rather brilliant and vivid shade that is typical of what you see when light falls on wet feathers.

[8:57 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: As the blue on the neck deepens, the edge of the waterfall beckons me back and I know how to intensify the connection that the coucal, the ridge and the waterfall share. I begin by matching the blues and the oranges of the coucal to the flow and colors of the waterfall





[8:59 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And that's how an internal conversation begins to happen in the painting between the beings that inhabit it. It transforms into a sacred live space for now they are all stirring to life and one must be gentle and quiet in entering this space now



[9:08 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Water slides, slips, pounds, slithers over, shimmers, separates, meets, merges, defines rock, unifies it, shapes it, embraces it, withdraws into it, breaks forth from it, splinters against it... watching water is to be in observation of leela (cosmic play)... the sound is so subtle, yet visually thunderous in each of these sections. How does one even sense, comprehend, experience and partake in a waterfall... and as I shape each section of rocky ledge, water flow, fleeing feather and leaf, swimming tadpole...my insights, memories, visions deepen, yet simplify, become layered yet focused.

[9:09 pm, 10/02/2021] Sonal: I hope you will document this process for yourself... you are so present with what you are doing... it's so inspiring

[9:09 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Yeah will do. Might make it into a paper when I finish.

[9:31 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Is it time for the frog to wake up too. I am too sleepy, as much as he is starting to pester me, he must wait till tomorrow. He is excited now and wants to pick his colors. I can see him leaping on to my watercolor box sitting on the edge and pointing out the shades he wants to be painted in. Too much excitement leaping all over the place! Shooooo I say sleepily and he is frustrated. I promise to paint him brilliantly tomorrow as I fade into the night

[9:32 pm, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma VC: :))

[9:37 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: The very lovely Nalu the moon rider, by Riley lee and Andy Rigby plays on :)

[9:43 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo28M_KK9hQ Spring from Nalu the moon rider

[9:44 pm, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma VC: How did you find this Srivi?? ..just curious

[9:46 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: My sister was introduced to this music by visiting profs in her college years around 97 I think. It became my favourite and she gifted me the cd 10 years ago.

[9:48 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I have to check with her.

[9:49 pm, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma VC: okayy.

[9:55 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And in those days before the internet craze began, we also went around hunting in cassette shops looking at covers and names that were unique and inspiring and found unexpected pieces of music like that... don't quite remember how she found out about Riley Lee. She even wrote to a Japanese professor in those days to get his research recordings of the sound of sand in the desert and another professor for the song of the humpback whales... we were crazy like that in our quest for sound and life.

[9:56 pm, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma VC: Amazingggg...

[11:42 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Apparently she found the instrument shakuhachi mentioned in Zen Buddhism then searched for recordings of it

[11:52 pm, 10/02/2021] Pranav Sharma VC: Shakuhachi! okay..

[11:56 pm, 10/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: It is a Japanese flute. Riley lee however is an Australian? who learnt it, I think. Please check.







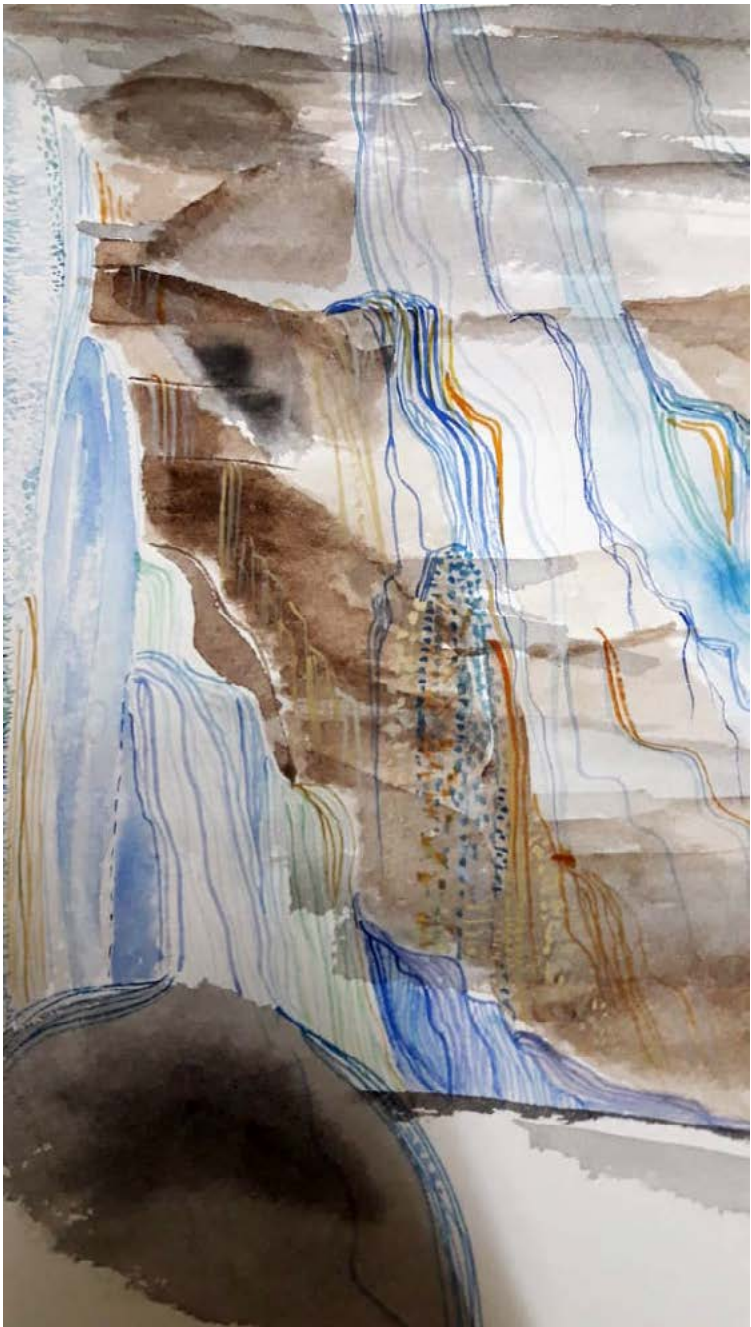






[6:26 pm, 11/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I spent a few hours at Chingara, waded right into the waterfall, steeped myself in its laughter, gaiety and glory, walked between tadpoles, and root systems, rocks and fallen leaves looking for frogs. There is no one photographic moment of the waterfall in my memory. There are many many moments and each section of the waterfall, rocky, ledge, slip and fall of water that I spent few minutes on, in deep intensity. These many moments fuse into a new harmonious, undivided singular aesthetic time in the painting. The moment when I saw the reflections of foliage in the water, the moments when sunlight sparkled through water droplets and spray, the moment when light seared a naked piece of glistening rock, the moment when two falling lines of water danced, waving in and out of each other making new patterns with the wind, the moment when a cloud covered the sunlight and the entire mood of the waterfall shifted, the moment when mist covered us briefly creating a haze and intensifying the sound, the moments as each sense experience opened and flowered one after another like a navaragamalika, an ecstatic yet mellifluous symphony... it is this nuanced and interior aesthetic space-time that I seek to paint and find form in my art.













[11:52 pm, 11/02/2021] Sonal: It's beautiful to flow with your conscious as you paint and write... Thank you Srivi

[0:50 am, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Water cascades, step by step light-footed like a pixie, playful like a little girl playing hopscotch, graceful like the moon gliding across the sky, sometimes mysterious like a spy, at other times like a gorgeous woman making her way down staircases... one can watch for hours all the rhythms and beats of water flowing down against each crevice, each bend in the rock, chiseling mountain and rock over centuries...shaping land and channeling winds.

Reflective exercise to understand the evolution of style in Coucal and Dancing Frog at Chingara Waterfalls.

Srivi Kalyan

Fri, Feb 12, 2021

From a continuing conversation with
Mdes IAIDP 2021 batch

[11:44 am, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home> - free bird encyclopedia

[11:44 am, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Nothing like watching birds to ponder about form.

[11:46 am, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I am waiting for my paper on Bird and Line to be published soon. In that I ponder through bird watching, Indian aesthetics and artistic practice on how one can develop an ecosophy (Ecological philosophy) through this process.

[11:50 am, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: on another note, I was looking at the evolution of my work in this particular style and technique of the current work over the last 18 or so years.

[0:11 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Should I flood your chat boxes with 10 or more paintings and reflections? Please let me know before I post.

[0:12 pm, 12/02/2021] Pranav Sharma: Please do! By all means :D

[0:14 pm, 12/02/2021] Surabhi: Yes yes.. eager to see and read

[0:30 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Ok. I will take that as a yes for now. And at any point, anyone feels it is too much, please message me.

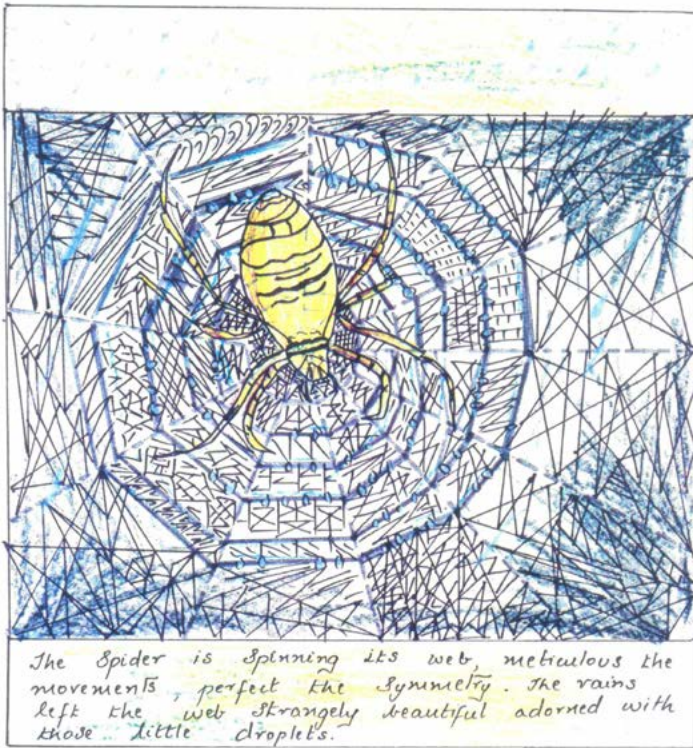
[0:30 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I tried to look back and see when this particular style started in my work in a distinctive manner and tried to trace back to older works. From 8th or 9th grade doodles when I used to do geometric patterns, my pursuit of many elements of what now forms a unique style seem to have evolved. And how they have been evolved through both writing and visual pursuits. It is fun to look back and also note how long a journey it is for the artist. People often miss these long inquiries into form and technique that an artist goes through in the evolution of their style(s). Also, the pieces discussed here are the finished works that I have documentation of. Between creating pieces and initial experiments, there are tons of sketches, simple repetitive exercises of trying out different lines, color play trying to get shades and tones and hues that I like, exploring multiple forms, sketching from different inspirations.



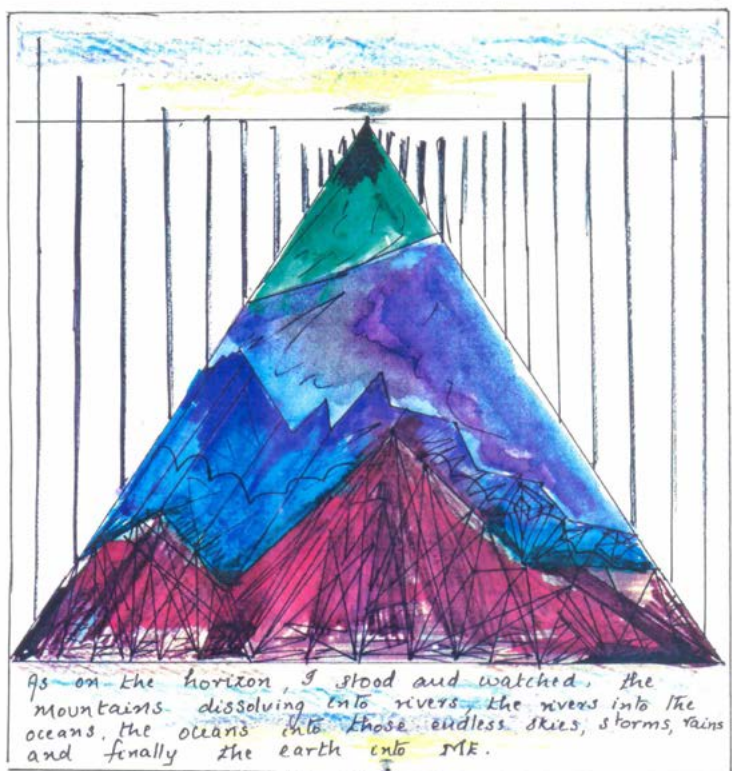


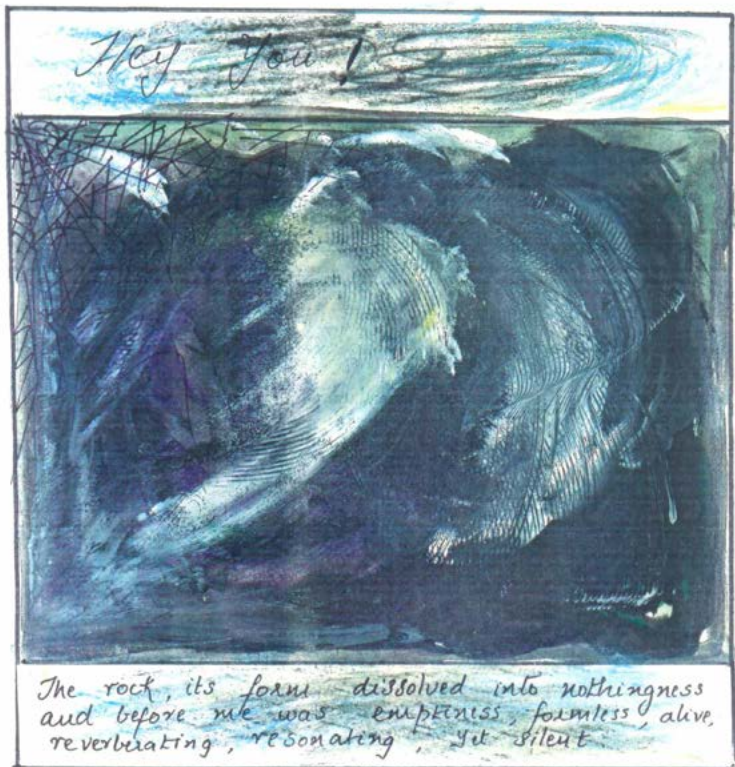


[0:35 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I will use this essay “Why not be different” as my starting point. Written in my 11th grade, must have been 17 years old, I suppose. http://www.sriviliveshere.com/uploads/1/9/6/2/19626401/why_not_be_different.pdf - this is when through a blending of writing and image, I looked closely into and asked questions on dissolution of form, being and non-being, form and formless. This is where my philosophical and artistic quests emerge in their first integrated form and both in my writing and my art, my inquiries into the abstract and symbolic forms begin to meet.



The Spider is spinning its web, meticulous the movements, perfect the symmetry. The rains left the web strangely beautiful adorned with those little droplets.





[0:36 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I remember that these thoughts were clearly articulated in my mind very much as I am writing it now when I was 17 years old. This illustrated essay is my first rudimentary attempt to bring poetry, essay, art, philosophy, reflection and conversational writing together. It was a submission to a common wealth essay competition.

[0:39 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: From my earlier doodles starting in 8th grade perhaps, which were purely geometric forms often, the illustrations here move into an inquiry of expanding those geometric forms into narratives, integrated with organic forms and the sharp and heavy sense of form, I seek to dissolve into a fluid and formless space of abstraction through the series.

[0:42 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: A very distinct artistic inquiry as a writer, poet and artist emerged very clearly for me while writing and illustrating this essay. Some of the poems here were written independent of the essay and I integrated them into it while crafting the essay. IN some sense, when I look back, this seems like a precursor to the kind of practice based research and writing I have now done in my doctoral work.

[0:47 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I remember being so excited and kicked about it and tormenting my family on the great value of this essay, while my parents particularly as well as my teachers found it extremely abstract.

[0:47 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: :)

[0:49 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I will place this as the beginning of a conscious journey into this particular artistic inquiry that has evolved to the current work, which I have been sharing with you.





[0:50 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Two pieces from a collection created in 1998 as part of my first exhibition that I had at Gangarams Gallery in Bangalore.

[0:53 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: 1998 - Technical and style Inquiry was about how to blend the geometric and organic. How to create and expand the geometric forms in a way that somehow could be fluid enough to be organic? The answers, which I found in these paintings were part of conscious and unconscious inquiries that started with doodles and a collection of geometric pattern art from 8th or 9th grade or perhaps even earlier.

These paintings have emerged after 4 - 5 years of evolution and almost everyday practice.



[0:55 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: This was the first painting I made in 2003 trying to get this particular style together in the masters workshop I had mentioned earlier. Drawing upon miniatures, patachitra and other folk art forms, blending it with my bold strokes and free painting style. My inquiry was - How to keep miniature painting lines but have painterly effect of conceptual and symbolic world?



[0:57 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Inquiry - Can I capture my sense of musicality of form through miniature lines? Mira - A continuation of paintings during and post the day-long workshop we had.



[0:58 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Inquiry- How to work with miniature lines in a contained form that still have the essence of my large painterly strokes. Mayil (peacock)?

[1:00 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Kirata and Arjuna (Kirata is Lord Shiva, a scene from the epic Mahabharata). Also part of the same workshop collection. Inquiry - How do I blend the kind of energetic strokes I had in my acrylics and oils with the gentler lines of miniature/ folk art forms? How do I bring it together in form? The bodies of both Arjuna and Kirata have those bold strokes, while the faces are inspired by patachitra. I also was looking at abstracting color into the composition as part of my style, using color to capture subtle motivations and moods of the characters/ subjects that I painted.







[1:04 pm, 12/02/2021]
Srivi Kalyan: This is from 2008. Made as a gift for a friend who was my muse for this work. Inquiry - How to paint the inner world of a person completely entwined in nature? I was trying to blend Tammylan (a character from Cherry tree farm by Enid Blyton, described as a wild man) fused with the God Krishna, the flute player who plays his flute and charms all wild creatures and my own intuitions about my friend as a nature lover. How to show this inner world of a person in love with nature, deeply entwined with it? How does color shift mood and form? Can a tree with blue leaves somehow reflect the inner sky of the character?

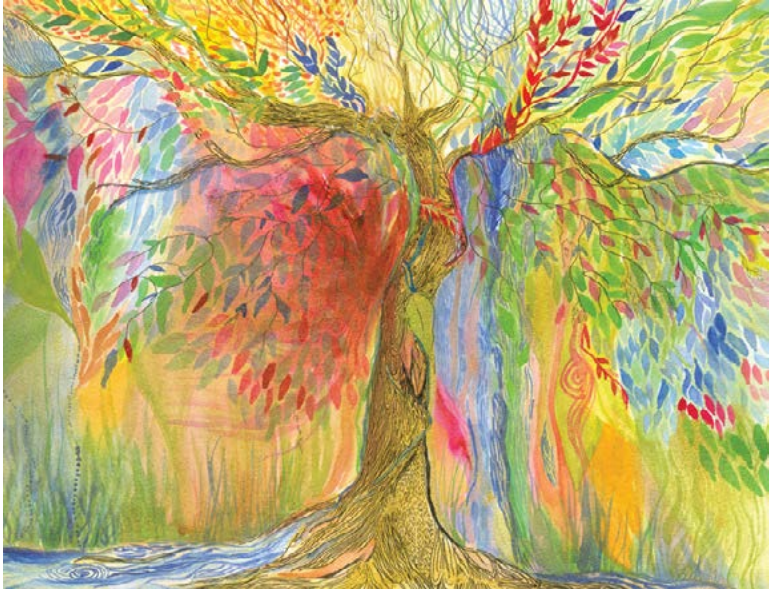


[1:07 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Painted in 2012. Ganga. Also as gift for a friend who I saw as an incredible woman and who had supported me with much compassion during a very difficult project that finally fell apart. Inquiry - How to capture tranquility while showing the raging, flowing, bountiful ganges and also reinterpreting and illustrating the legend that she drowned seven of her children before the last child, Bhishma in the epic Mahabharata?



[1:13 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Painted in Bali in 2010

[1:14 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Painted in response to music - Gamelan Bali and Western music fusion/ improvisation workshop. Inquiry - How to capture the sounds of two different worlds, while focusing on the harmony?



[1:21 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan: Painted in 2013 as a gesture of thanks to wildlife film maker Shekar Dattatri who sent me 6 of his film CD's for a series of nature based writing and art workshops that I was conducting, some of these films are now available on his YouTube channel. This painting had two inquiries - How do I capture an entire forest and its subtle flows in a single painting? How does color, form, symbolism and line come together? 2nd was that- It was an inspiration from two of Shekar's films - "Nagarhole - Tales from and Indian Jungle" and to some extent - "Save our Sholas" . This painting also marks the beginning of a quest for ecological art in a more conscious manner in my work. My work underwent a tremendous shift from 2013, as I began a strong inclination towards conservation, species watching, understanding environmental issues and actively finding interventions through art, design and education... Much of which is now fine-tuned and articulated in my thesis, as well as the curricula I have designed, several workshops I have conducted outside Srishti and some of my illustrations and exhibition work as well.*

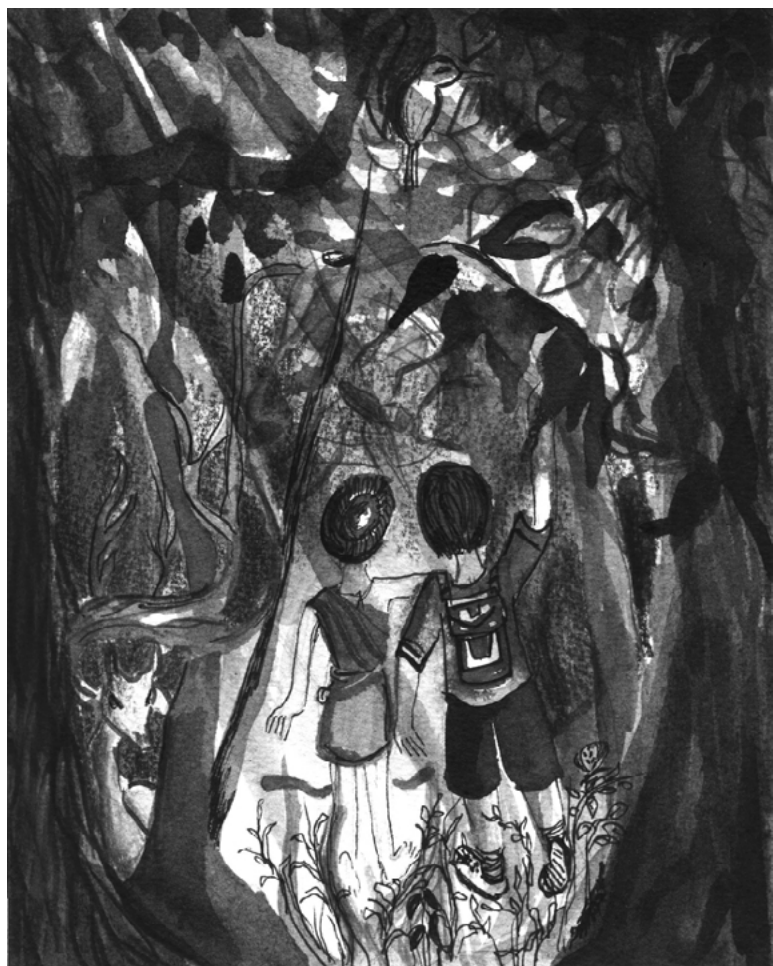


[1:24 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: 2014 - Illustrations from Jungu the Baiga Princess.

[1:26 pm, 12/02/2021] Samridhi: Love this

[1:27 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: In this set, a children's book, Forests of Madhya Pradesh (Central India), naturalistic observations were all blended with the delicate style. The cover is in color, the rest of the images in black and white. Published by Zubaan.





[1:29 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: <https://www.amazon.in/Run-Ranga-KathaBooks-ebook/dp/B087N89RNF>, Also from 2014/ 15 I think.

[1:30 pm, 12/02/2021] *Samridhi*: I love how ink can create such mysterious mood and still look so delicate

[1:30 pm, 12/02/2021] *Samridhi*: Thanks for sharing Srivi

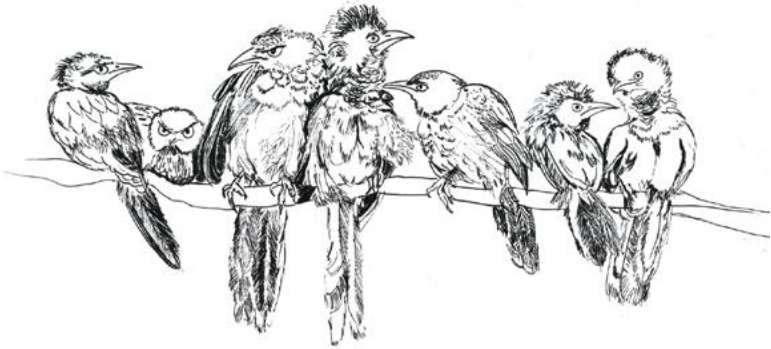
[1:30 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: yeah, and such a pleasure to explore. That set was with indian ink

[1:32 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: With the rhinos, I was looking for both a realistic and yet at the same time a free interpretation of the form of rhino. These were few years where I was sketching nature drawings, and trying to find my own form and style for wildlife art.









[1:34 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: A series of explorations of birds in 2014, created for a grant with Auroville friends that didn't eventually come through.







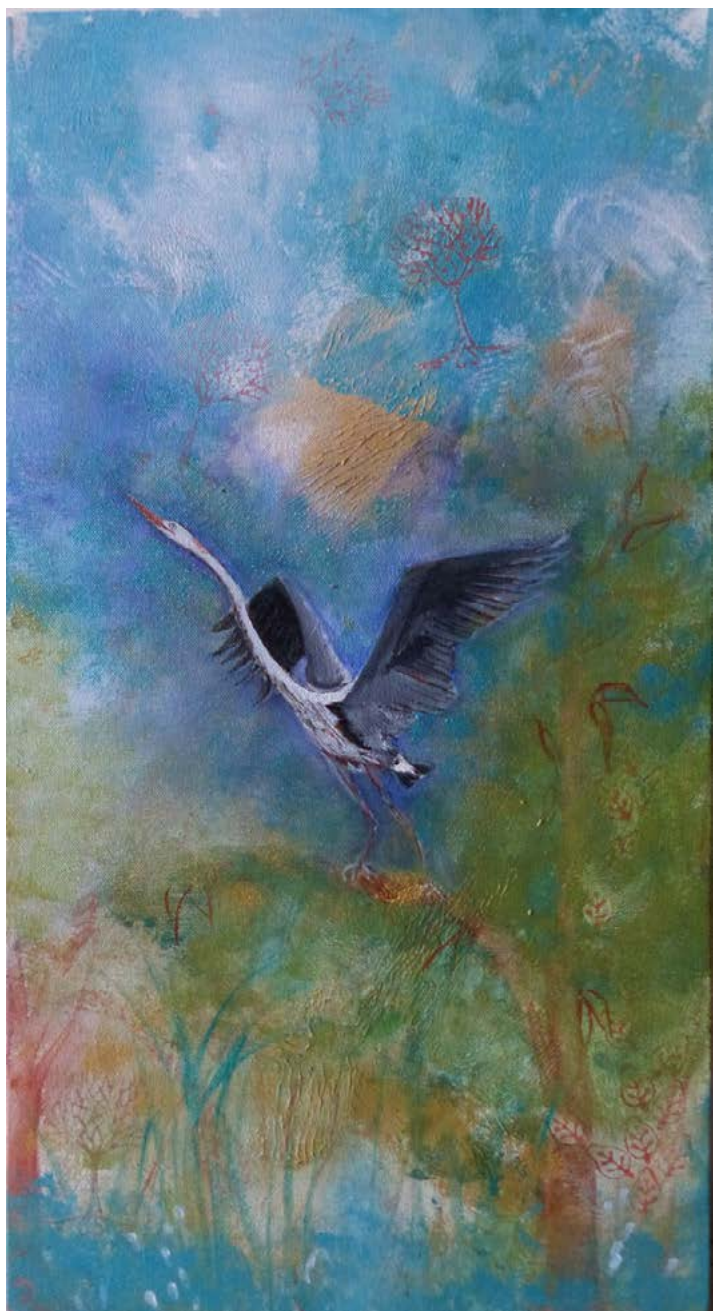


[1:35 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Inquiring into how my naturalistic and folk styles could meet.

[1:41 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Acrylic Painting explorations between 2015 -17

[1:42 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Continuous inquiries in how to blend the naturalistic, abstract, symbolic and my inquiries into the porous self. All of these are inquiries into form and style

[1:44 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: These evolved through my bird watching/ species watching, photography, nature journaling and sketching













Hoplobatrachus tigerinus
Indian Bull Frog

Presence - how does one find the line that pinizes the complex presence of a bull frog or the common Indian road? There is an apparent hesitance to the form that seems to absorb out at presence, but looking closely, it is again a light line. Then how do they project this presence. The posture, size, the sound they seem to project out of their body is loud, not just their call.

This is when one begins to see the sound that guides form and hence form rather than just see it.

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[1:45 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Watercolors from frog watching

[1:45 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Part of a collection from 2017 trips and phd work

Curiosity and uncertainty and a seeming confusion that contains this sense of freedom. I find all these contradictions (or wanting to observe in fog: The Malabar tree trunk looking over a leaf and the Kumbhar's night frog pucking mud on his eggs above such uncertainty in their bodies that it would be impossible to miss the high level of focus they are capable of. Elsewhere when I watch the Malabar gliding frogs or many others sliding over one another, carefully slipping over anything in their path, they appear mindless as if they don't care for anything around them. Then you see precision that is extraordinary in the way they sit, march, lunge out, call, and it thumps you in a deep way as if you somehow they make choices about when they will be precise and when they will let go of such. Are these conscious frog decisions, or human perceptions? Anyway, I continue to pursue the artist's desire to inquire through lines and am thrilled to see where my lines will flow and when they will stop. While others may wonder about this obsession, to me, this translates into my inner world. These lines that know how to slide, glide, stop in obliqueness with *dehaka syndrome* - these are also now lines of the mind and how of consciousness.

Pedotus tuberculatus
Mabbar Lisa Toad



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Nyctanolis lambaris
Kambon Night Frog

Frog sleep is indeed the greatest of meditations to encounter. Lizardis was my favorite teacher in the few days I spent at Eido. It was amazing to watch him croak in unlikely corners, more comfortable, natural, and seemingly lost in a world of his own. One has spent many years in the study of the form of Isha Baddha and Dohitiamurti as ideal forms of meditation as created by artists of a earlier generation. But I would not now, if he were seeking the lines for their forms, honor the corner of his time from sleeping frogs. For I encounter the same quality of sleep-time in their stillness as I do perceive in them the meditator's distance to a zone of time and space. In this meditation, they somehow locate their temporal and spatial qualities in that complex assessment of being, and one is rendered into the time-asleep and as in and through them.

Rhacophorus lateralis
Small Tree Frog



Completion

*The frog here
complete me
and few remaining
in the other.*

Meditations

*same to guide to
rest
I wonder at how
and an answer whether to be
afraid for him or delight in him.
Then I meet the lateralis sleeping
in the deep pond
and hear a golden backed frog
singing
hidden in mud walls along forest
floor
and my thoughts
and I am baffled at the*

*relatability
of life.*

*The books are moral
and I think about meditations
and all these things we read every
and still without thinking
I cannot make sense.*

*I fall in love with time
and think I resemble a
Siddhaganga
Does it matter?
That complete this
and this complete that
and neither is complete
and everything is complete*



*[1:54 pm, 12/02/2021]
Sri Kalyan: This is pen work with ink created in 2016, for another friend for opening the world of Bandipur to me and her generous gifts of her love for nature, working in conservation, books and staying at her home in Bandipur and much more.*

Hermit, that yogi is my guru
who can untie this song.
A tree stands without root,
without flowers bears fruit;
no leaf, no branch, and eight
sky mouths thundering.
Dance done without feet,
tune played without hands,
praises sung without tongue,
singer without shape or form -
the true teacher reveals.
Seek the bird's, the fish's path.
Kabir says, both are hard.
I offer myself to an image:
The being beyond boundaries
and beyond beyond.

24, Page 49, The Bijak of Kabir



[1:56 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan: This work evolved from my Kabir series done between 2010 and 12. <http://www.sriviliveshere.com/mapping-ulat-bansi.html>. The inquiry here became particular to landscape, habitat, wildlife, and eco-art*

[1:57 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan: This is the first complex integrated piece of my naturalistic and folk styles along with my nature observations and experiences*



*[1:57 pm, 12/02/2021] Pranav Sharma
VC: I love this..*

*[1:57 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan:
Thanks :)*

[1:58 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: While ofcourse there are many more works I could discuss, I think these are reflective of the critical pieces that have shaped the new work and the long journey of inquiries into form, style, line, technique, color and composition

[2:02 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: So many individual inquiries through which I painted and figured out over 25 odd years, and now I can handle certain aspects of the style in a new work much better, because I know I figured out some resolution for how to use material, or technique in some other painting. So when I build a new work, there is both body memory and technical skill that have evolved. And the style continues to evolve while asking new questions of form, line, color and composition.

[2:04 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I am also able to pause and reflect and work more quietly compared to the frenzy before 2010 and even in some recent works. There is a sense of having completed a few of the jigsaw puzzles of my life. So now am able to pause and gently puzzle over new problems through my practice. So with this, I will stop with the reflective exercise behind the evolution of the style.

[2:12 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Thanks for listening :)

[2:15 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: Request: Please don't share this randomly/ forward the works to your friends.

[2:16 pm, 12/02/2021] *Hia*: Ofcourse not.

[2:18 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: Don't feel overwhelmed. Instead engage with me, ask questions, share thoughts.



[2:20 pm, 12/02/2021] *Pranav Sharma VC*: yess

[2:37 pm, 12/02/2021] *Nupur*: These are so nice srivi.. I absolutely love them. I've recently found out I don't like drawing animals but this just wants me to give maybe another try?

[2:38 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: You should also start watching them in the wild.

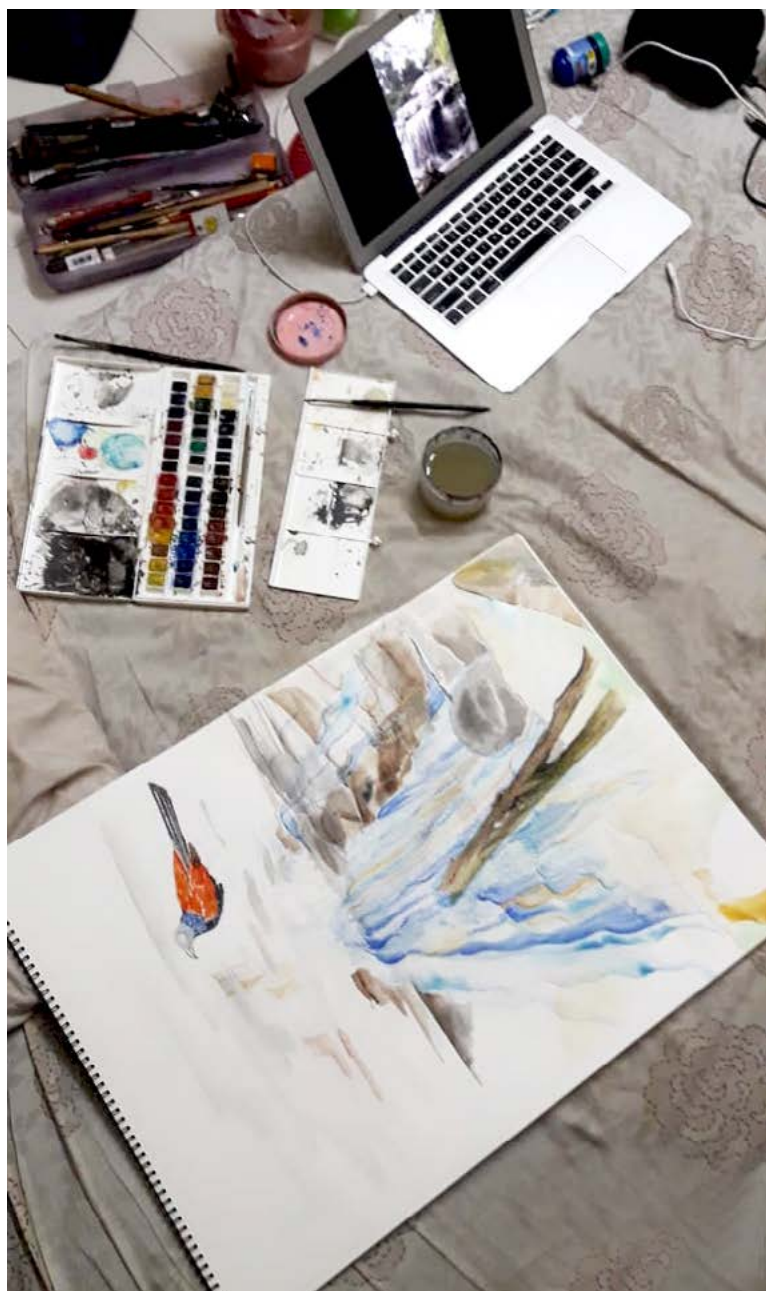
[2:39 pm, 12/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan*: These sketches of babblers happened after I watched babblers apart from referring to the work of other photographers. But by then I knew babblers were cute and talkative and chatter away all the time. So it made it possible for me to find the expressiveness in their form.

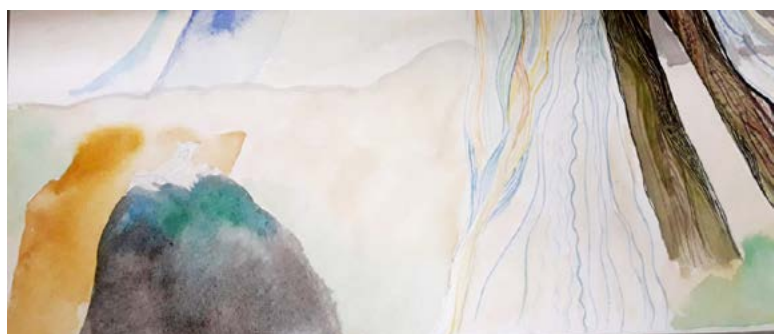
[2:40 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: It was also the beginning of my bird watching days. I still didn't know much. The first bird I spotted was a coucal, nice and huge :) All my life birds were = crows for me. I just watched crows endlessly. So I was so excited to have spotted a different bird only to find out it belonged to the crow family!

[2:41 pm, 12/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: That's why both the painting and this pen work of the coucal show it in a startling bold manner.

Vulnerability is the key word :) Dialogue and conversation makes me also feel better and not so lonely in sharing an otherwise private world that is made of internal conversations and solitude and music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OT5JDuCwfmA> Riley Lee and Andy Rigby - El sueno the Dream playing









[6:15 am, 13/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan:* Turquoise rock and emerald lake for the dancing frog to compete with the khembootha (coucal)

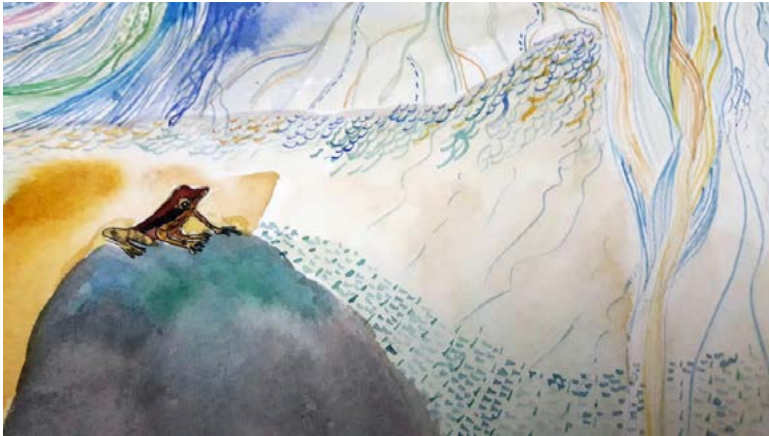
[6:16 am, 13/02/2021] *Hia:* Really like the harmony of colors

[6:31 am, 13/02/2021] *Srivi Kalyan:* :)









[7:47 am, 14/02/2021] Sonal:

Dear Srivi,

Good morning... Thank you for sharing that beautiful waterfall emerging one stroke at a time... In my moments of pause and wonder I read what you have written all over again and find meaning and unbound joy in it... Thank you for being so hearty in your giving...

I have reached home, and adjusting to the weather, with cold and a blocked nose... I have also been consumed by my nephew's incessant questions and demands and hence not been as active on the group...

Just wanted to say, you have someone silently listening to you always, even if I am not talking back as much...

Hope your parents are okay, and you are hanging in there... sending you my best always...

*Love,
Sonal*



[8:09 pm, 14/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Almost done. Will give it a rest for a few days to see what to highlight or deepen. And also let everything in the landscape settle in. They will each find their own comfort space and acceptance as well as relationship with each other. It takes a while for this internal magic to happen and one must let the work lie fallow for a while. Then they will call out one by one, asking me for a stroke here, a tinge of color there, the deepening of a hue... now it is a time of waiting and pausing. Nature and the painting will take their own time now. And when it is time, I will wade and swim and get invited to partake in the sapphire waterfall, emerald lake, turquoise rock, pearl black ledges, fallen tree, amber coucal and golden frog conversations. Until then... Nawang Khechog travels with his flute breathing life into our worlds...

[8:18 pm, 14/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: The porous self, tender, nuanced, subtle and vulnerable rocks gently as the last frontier between human and all things wild... melting, flowing, yielding and dissolving
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4XBbFVCTo0> - The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel in the Himalayas_Nawang Khechog



[8:41 pm, 15/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I had a lovely few hours thinking through other paintings I would like to make in this collection. One challenging composition that I am playing around in my mind is of about 6 to 8 hornbills landing and congregating on a fig tree at the base of Morni hills, near Chandigarh. I don't have a photograph of what I saw, and this was brief moment that I had a chance to encounter this phenomenal moment before the birds flew away. The sounds of their flapping wings in the silent forests of the Garhwal region were like mad elephants thundering down. Overwhelming beautiful, my first sighting of the oriental pied Indian hornbills in all their magnificence, I am playing around the possible compositions in my mind and how to compose 8 of them in a single painting. It is exciting and complex and scary at the same time.

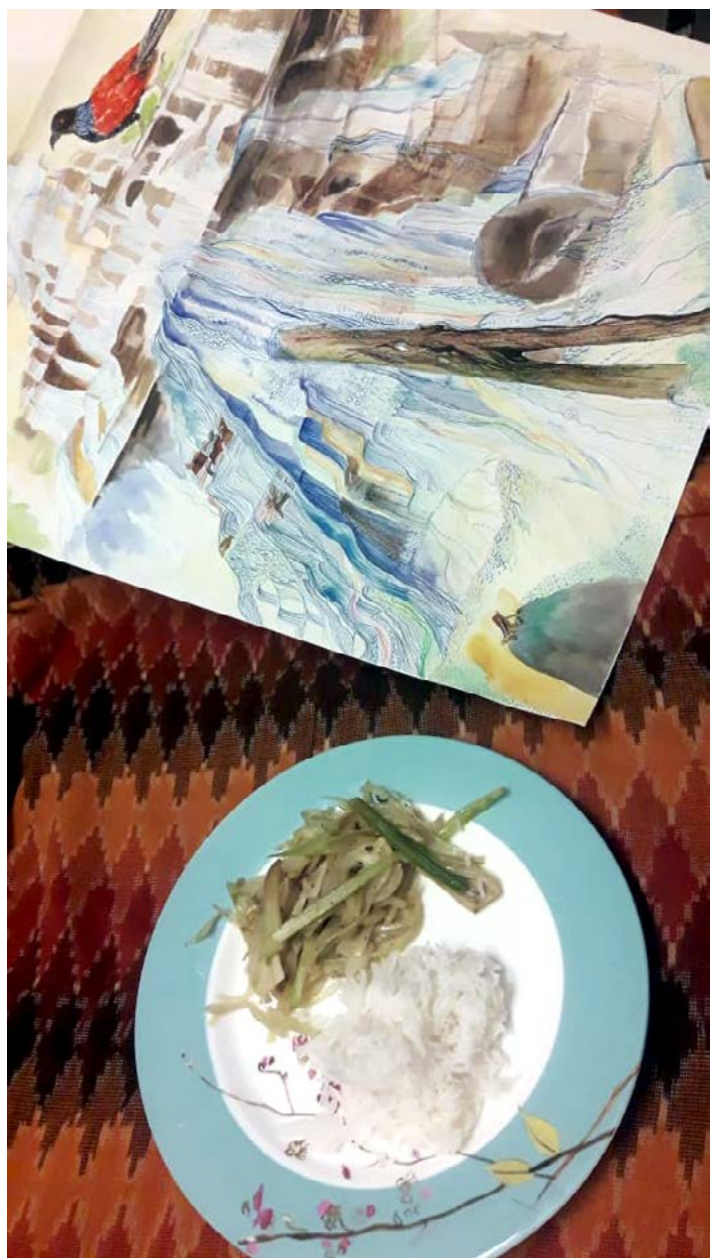


[2:53 pm, 18/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Fennel bulbs sliced and roasted with potato, garlic and onion and mildly flavoured with salt, pepper and ginger

[2:54 pm, 18/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: As the painting finally starts growing on me and I dont feel it looks too terrible. The food is simple and yummy.

[3:14 pm, 18/02/2021] Hia laidp Mdes: The painting is slowly forming.

[3:15 pm, 18/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: ... In it's own world and It's own world

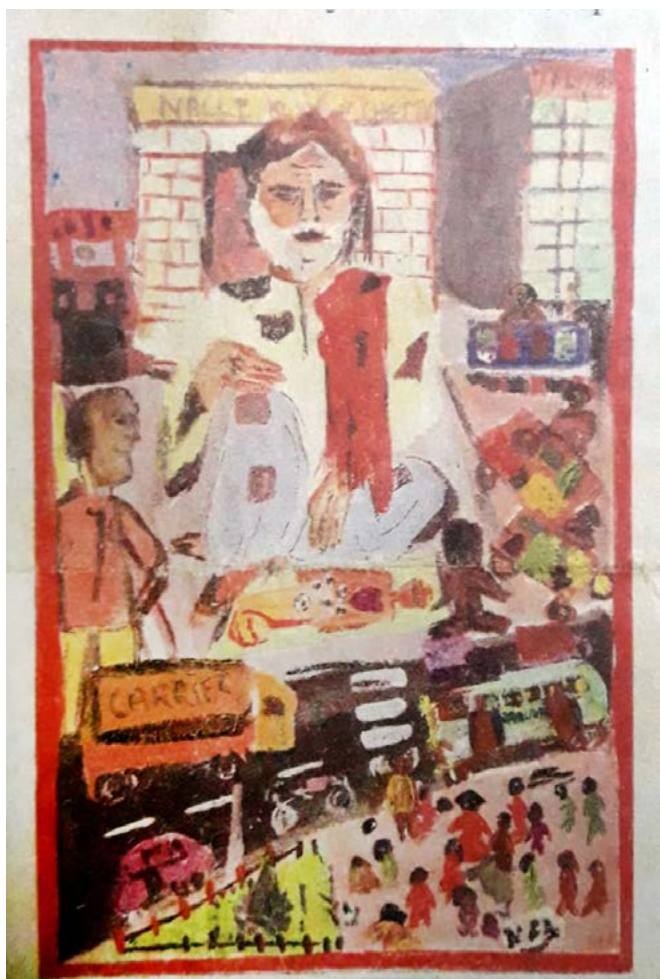


[0:56 am, 19/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: The water has begun to flow in the waterfall today....

[8:45 pm, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: That said, when I was talking to Surabhi I realised, I might have missed sharing this with you. After I painted the coucal, I left it against a wall and kept walking past it hour by hour trying to figure out whether I liked it or not. I could see all the mistakes I had made. The places where les had become thick and heavy, patterns had smudged, colors were wrong according to me. Then I panicked that the coucal was too big and then I got confused thinking- but I do want the coucal to be big.

As I was telling Hia, it reminded me of a painting I had done in my 10th grade for the Hindu young world painting competition. It was for one of the given titles "Beggar on the street" I drew a huge beggar dominating one of the busiest market areas in Chennai. By fortune or misfortune, the painting won the editor's special prize and got published in young world.

After that started the disaster. Everyone I knew told me it was a terrible painting and they couldn't imagine what had possessed the judges to give me a prize. I was upset and sad and my art teacher, who is the nicest person in the world also said, well...It is not very good in a very polite way. Then I wrote to my sister who was in Coimbatore and she being the kind and wonderful sister said that it was a wonderful painting, why else would I have been given a prize. Then I went to the award function in Vishakapatnam with my father and ran after every judge and asked them why they gave me a prize as everyone around me thought it was a terrible painting. That's how I first learnt the words to define and defend my work and also value my work for what it was, in all its messy silly glory.



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of the building to capture the scene below. There was no Central Station. Another prizewinning painting had the station building reconstructed with a most modern facade.

Every one of the entries for the topic, "Temple car festival", had the crowd of devotees, but more fascinating to look at were the highly decorated chariots carrying the 'utsavars' and the people pulling the 'cars' with devotion. A few paintings carried the deities on palanquins, and not chariots.

The very few entries for the fifth topic 'Beggar in the street' perhaps had a hint that Madras streets nowadays seldom see wandering beggars, though one can come across several of them near places of worship. Anyway, whoever had attempted this subject were sure of what they should picturise. The evidence of this confidence must have prompted the judges to pick up an entry from this lot for the special prize. It had the quality of a poster in graphic style. Strangely, there were more male beggars than women.

The few that were seen were mostly in front of street houses asking for and accepting alms. Some of the men sitting on the footpaths had spread a piece of cloth in front of them to collect the coins dropped by the passers-by. In one painting, the beggar was seen going about with his hat upturned. Rather realistic, though one wonders where he got the hat from.

This year's competition had attracted some handicapped children, and it was a sight to see them dexterously handling brushes and pencils with their toes. The challenge to compete with their normal counterparts was not too much for them and some of them did feature among the



[8:46 pm, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Coming back to the coucal, it made me laugh thinking my beggar on the street and coucal on the waterfall haven't changed much and I accepted the overly large coucal affectionately remember the events from all those years ago in 1995.

[8:47 pm, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And then eventually after a few days I decided that the painting was not too bad. I still don't consider it finished and hopefully in a few months, will be ready to sign it and complete it.

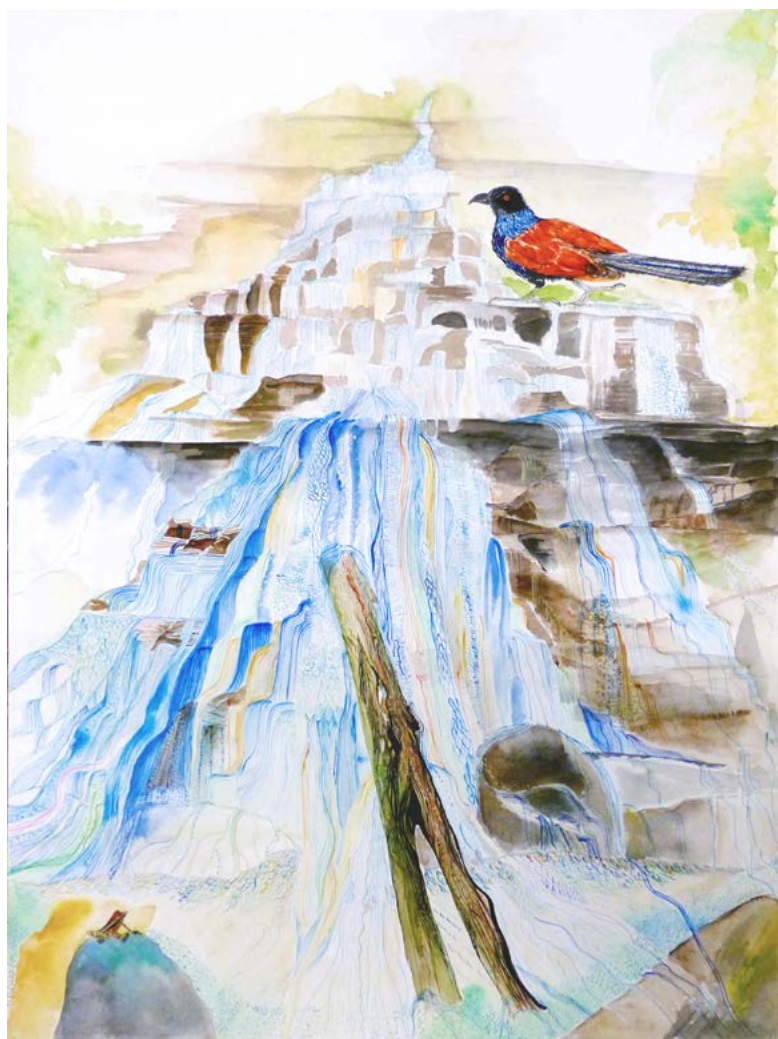




[3:59 pm, 21/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: The fun and madness of painting a series, evolving a project, magical, suspenseful, frustrating, sweet...

[4:03 pm, 21/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And this kind of craziness and fun of making is what I want for all of you to enjoy and take pleasure in for your own projects. This is independent of assessment, reviews, audiences, design methods etc. It is simply you having fun with your project!







Student Reflections

- an introduction

Many thanks to my students - Ashwin Suresh, Hia Banerjee, Kaushik Kannan, Monica M Chandak, Mridul Verma, Nupur Agrawal, Pranav Sharma, Samridhi Pandey, Sonal Choudhury, Surabhi Singhai, for this participatory conversation and the contributions of their reflections in part 3.

Thanks to Ramnath Chandrashekar and Sreelekha Sureshkumar for being there, their reflections and for reminiscing with me.

Thanks to Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram and Padmini Nagaraja for listening.

Thanks to all my students from whom I have learnt much, and shared a great part of my life with.

Part 3

Student responses & reflections

- Introduction

Introduction

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I shared the exposition as it was evolving with all my students and invited them to work with me in a mindful manner understanding the underlying thoughts and my own pedagogical work with them. I decided to approach this process as a metacognitive conversation, where each of us would be able to bring our perceptiveness, our approaches to the whole process, our emotions and thoughts and allow for a transparent and reflective engagement learning from each other. This I felt would also keep an active and participatory conversation alive in order to find our individual as well as our group languages.

As a time right after the final submission of my doctoral thesis, as I wait for the final defense to be set up, I am in an in-between space that is overwhelming. The journeys of the last six years have come to fruition, and yet I am mentally and emotionally exhausted by my work for the thesis and my work at the college and all the other personal struggles in between. However, my students embrace my struggles, coming along on this slow gentle walk of a painting with me, allowing me to calm down, gather myself and find new beginnings.

I am deeply grateful for this time that we have shared together and the welcoming space and the kind of culture we created together. These reflections are strangely promises we have made to each other and ourselves. In reading these, the utopia that we set for ourselves does not seem far-flung or impossible. It seems natural and right in our grasp.

Select quotes from each of their reflections has been placed on this page. However, to engage with their internal journeys, art explorations, and range of thoughts, a pdf copy of the book of Student reflections and responses is also available for deeper and closer engagement.



The journey of reflective and meditative understanding allowed me to live creatively during moments of everyday madness and cherish the wonder of natural and cultural world that is around us, and in us.

Ramnath Chandrashekar



Asking questions on form, understanding aesthetics, learning about our own cultural art forms are some of the practices that I've developed after having conversations with you. These practices have the capacity to inform me and mould me to be a better artist. This is a constant learning-unlearning process, asking the right questions and pondering for the answers lets us move ahead, learn more.

Ashwin Suresh



After reflecting on expressive exercises and open discussions of form workshop, time felt more elastic to me. spurts of imagery I see in my mind at some point in time, come back rearranged, upside down, more nuanced and concrete. And this waiting space needs to be filled with a relaxing energy of creating and pondering.

Samridhi Pandey



When you shared your journey with us in the group it was so raw, it felt as though we were a part of something real.

It was quite different from my imagination of you.

Monica. M. Chandak



It is just a matter of bringing purity and clarity in our minds, and once we start clearing out the unnecessary conditioning, we begin to harness the potential of intuition. It is like a muscle, needs to be exercised, but as we gain proficiency, reading animals, people and situations alike, become an interesting game.

Mridul Verma

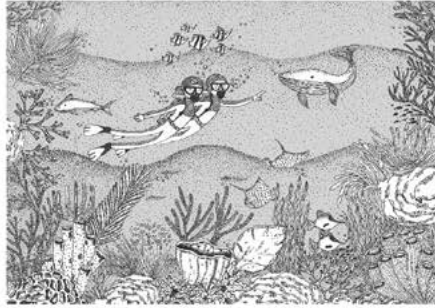


When an artist is painting, the mind is constantly in a dialogue with the inner self... this dialogue is usually unheard and unspoken of... by sharing the process through days together, Srivi made me realise that these thoughts can be articulated and also be shared for others to acknowledge the struggles and conversations of an artist with themselves...

Sonal Choudhury



Let's do it!
Sreelekha Sureshkumar



During the design sprint workshop, I was surprised to observe how music embraced, dissolved and included me in the process of making, creating a harmony of space and strokes, details and sometimes sheer simplicity conveying my message.

Surabhi Singhai



As you had said, the institutionalization starts from a very young age. Colonization of minds, from the way my art teacher had hijacked my mind by injecting within the conventional standards of what art should look like, how lines should flow, how colors should be used next to each other, has definitely impacted on my mind. I was left to think that my art was limited to certain forms. It slowly became under confident. The way a kid is nonchalant, confident about their thoughts to put on a blank sheet of paper, why is it that, by the time we grow up, we find ourselves scared, and extremely self-scrutinized.

Hia Banerjee



...and I sketched like you asked us to Srivi...I sketched everyday two three pages...and I realised what you meant by you couldn't really teach us...it was all practice.

Nupur Agrawal



I do struggle with letting go, which is why I need to have a vision of what I want to create. In the process of breaking this, I often feel like a stranded person lost on a lonely island. I constantly find myself dismissing the need to question the philosophical aspect behind 'creating' because the answer seems too far-fetched in my head. But when you shared your reflective process behind the paintings it made complete sense despite my apprehension about using heavy metaphors and words to describe visual pieces of work.

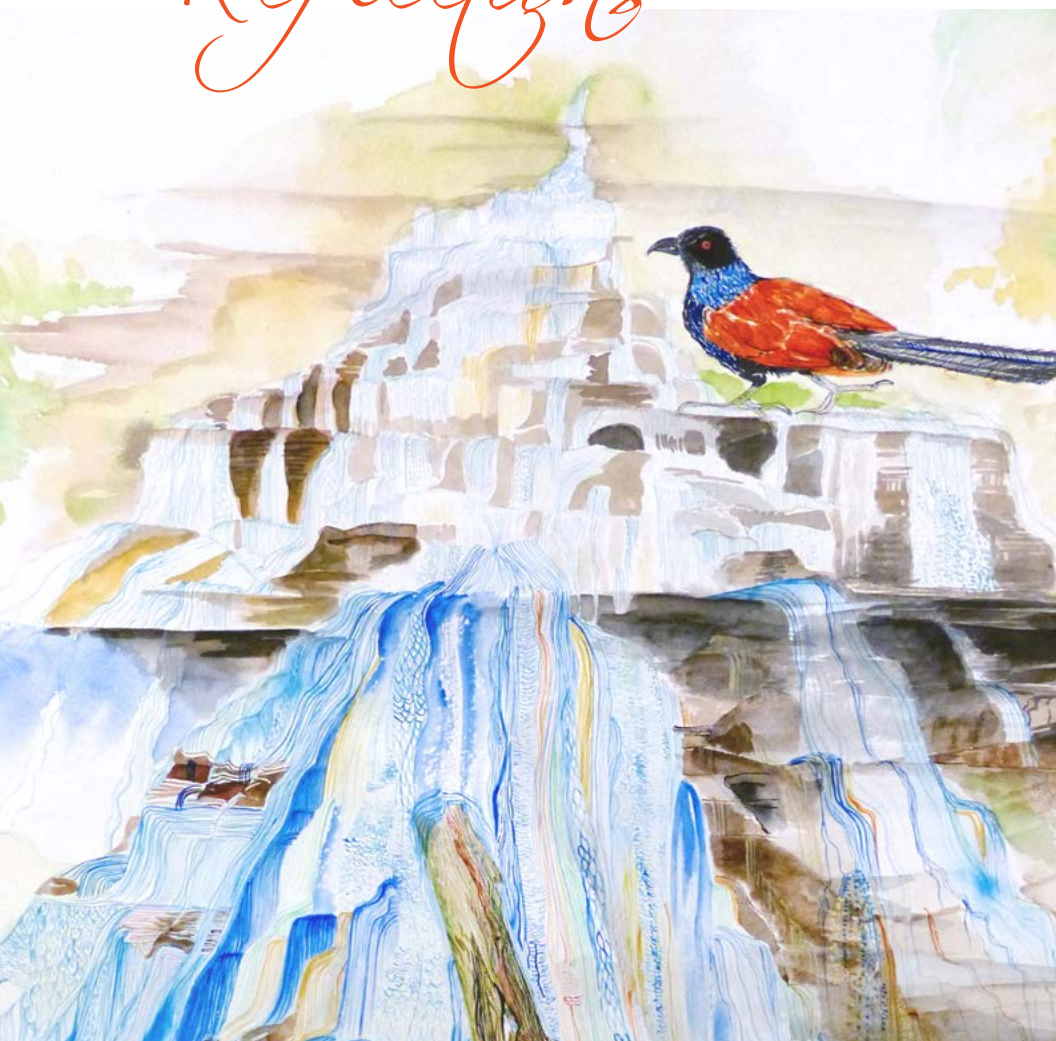
Kaushik Kannan



I feel the flow of the painting as it takes form. The connection between the Coucal and the waterfall as it might have been in the moment when it was witnessed re-lives again through me. Even though only slightest, as it was midnight and I was immersed in my work too much, I remember thinking about the frog while listening to the harp by Andy Rigby. The way music hinged me to the visuals of this painting...an inspiration in my darkest of hours. Like a spell of charm lighting up the dim lit lamps of self-doubt.

Pranav Sharma

Student & Reflections



Many thanks to my students - Ashwin Suresh, Hia Banerjee, Kaushik Kannan, Monica M Chandak, Mridul Verma, Nupur Agrawal, Pranav Sharma, Samridhi Pandey, Sonal Choudhury, Surabhi Singhai, for this participatory conversation and the contributions of their reflections in part 3.

Thanks to Ramnath Chandrashekar and Sreelekha Sureshkumar for being there, their reflections and for reminiscing with me.

Part 3

Student
responses
& reflections

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process, our emotions and thoughts and allow for a transparent and reflective engagement learning from each other. This I felt would also keep an active and participatory conversation alive in order to find our individual as well as our group languages.

As a time right after the final submission of my doctoral thesis, as I wait for the final defense to be set up, I am in an in-between space that is overwhelming. The journeys of the last six years have come to fruition, and yet I am mentally and emotionally exhausted by my work for the thesis and my work at the college and all the other personal struggles in between. However, my students embrace my struggles, coming along on this slow gentle walk of a painting with me, allowing me to calm down, gather myself and find new beginnings. I am deeply grateful for this time that we have shared together and the welcoming space and the kind of culture we created together. These reflections are strangely promises we have made to each other and ourselves. In reading these, the idealistic dreams that we set for ourselves does not seem far-flung or impossible. It seems natural and right in our grasp.

Ramnath
Chandrashekar

Ramnath, a student from eight years ago, when we first met is a conservation educator, photographer and filmmaker changing lives in so many wonderful ways. It has been a special few weeks as we catch up between our busy schedules after a couple of years. There is so much to reminisce and cherish, for in mentoring him, we chose informal education. We travelled across South India, we did workshops for children, met principals and educators, met other conservationists, travelled sometimes with his girlfriend, now his wife, grew gardens, painted, wrote in natural landscapes, did birding together, and he came to my college to teach my students photography. We designed for his programs and each of these actions were engaged processes of mentoring and learning, as we got into critical dialogues and conversations on what the essence of education, aesthetics, environmental education were even as we despaired together at the critical loss of the environment. Our classroom was the great outdoors. There is warmth in our memories of each other and hope for the future.

Reflections

“I stopped by at a roadside three days ago. It was to see a school of white cattle egrets in a farmland. The fields filled with water after generous rains; the evening light shining on the egrets; clouds in the background; tender paddy saplings (naathu) ready to be planted with hope; a lone tree on the farm land – growing smartly at a tiny real estate at the intersection of three bunds.

I felt a sense of calmness deep within me as I watched them gently. Suddenly, the egrets, all of them, took a short flight when a farmer moved, and they came back again in a few seconds, settled in the farmland. As their wings flapped during take off and landing, I felt liberated.

If I had observed the same scene in 2012, my words would be, “Cattle egrets on a farm land.”



Photo Credits: Ramnath Chandrashekar

I would have felt calm and liberated, which I am very sure of – with equal surety of not realizing the feelings. It was at such a time of hidden thoughts, lack of vocabulary, subtle self, and fear of being judged for expression, I was blessed with Srivi's mentoring. Though my sensibilities were shaped far away from mass education, with my creative intuition, alive, I was at the same time going through devastating loss of voice, self and words.

The culture of the classroom that Srivi created shaped my purpose and redefined my identify for myself – so much so, when I watched a Hawaiian Monk seal glance at a group of people and arch back to rest within seconds, I realized the importance of self-care. When I listened to a tailorbird in my backyard chirp vibrantly, my day became lively and vibrant.

The journey of reflective and meditative understanding allowed me to live creatively during moments of everyday madness and cherish the wonder of natural and cultural world that is around us, and in us."

<https://www.ramnathshekar.com/>

Sreelakha
Sureshkumar

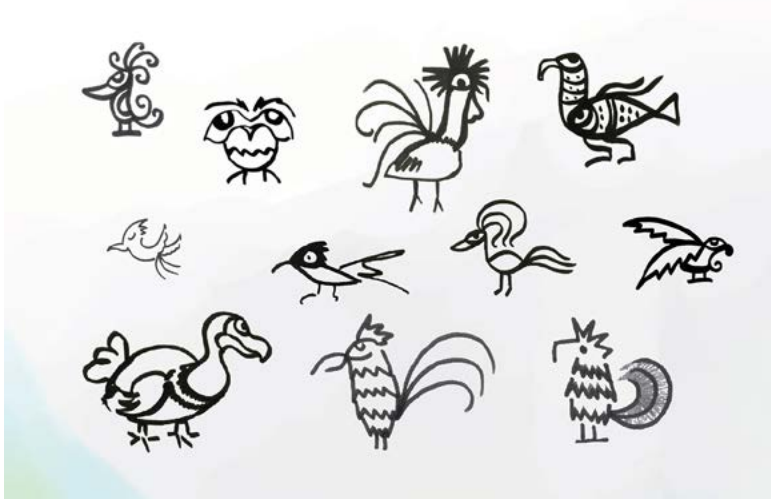
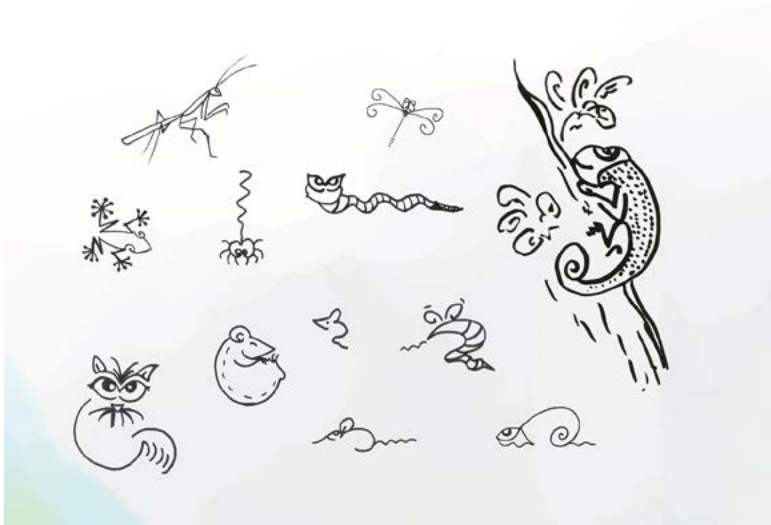
Sreelekha, was a 18 year old art student, when I first taught her illustration techniques at Stella Maris College, Chennai, my alma mater. Extremely talented in graphic arts and illustration, as well as a deep thinker with a quiet humorous way about her, she came to work with me in the company I founded after she graduated from her program. We have spent hours designing and exploring together, meeting clients, working with young children, documenting my work as well as our respective portfolios and the portfolio of the company. She has been with me while I shifted my office building, packing, unpacking, sorting, reflecting, pondering and sometimes even quietly yelling at me when I am preposterous. Wise and gentle, she would cradle my fears and join in my wonderment at life and beauty, sorrow and grief.

She pushed me to precision and perfection in my work, by refusing to budge until her own high expectations were met. She designed Fooniferse.com with me, as we pondered about space and meaning in an online interface.

She engaged deeply with my quest as I began to explore and expand my work in environment and conservation. She documented and worked with me on creating a film of my environmental creative writing program at a school in Chennai. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk9XlbKBea>

She moved on to do her masters after about two years of working with me and I moved on to teach at Srishti Institute in Bengaluru. She collaborated with me on another book design project in 2016.

I have fond memories of my work with her. We have discussed and debated and pondered about every little aspect of design. We have gone to client meetings together and had hilarious moments discussing the most impossible of them. We have redefined each other's understanding of design with affectionate criticism. Much like my work with Ramnath, my pedagogical work with Sreelekha too was in informal spaces.



*Illustration credits: Sreelekha Sureshkumar,
Quirky illustrations for the Fooniferse website.*

I call Sreelekha, my student from about twelve years ago, when we first met, to wish her for her marriage. She is an hour away from when the first of the rituals will begin, and yet, she ponders with me and shares her own experiences of porosity and mysticism with the natural world and life around her. I laugh at her as I ask her to get ready for her wedding and she smiles back in her gentle way and tells me to complete the conversation that she is enjoying. While her words are not here, her musings and joy have been delightful to gather in my heart.

She tells me of her own porous experiences with nature and a frame of being where there are many mystical encounters, a certain aliveness to the present. She tells me how much she resonates with my doctoral work and how meaningful she finds this time in her life. She is still the quiet, contemplative and wise young woman I first met in 2009. Her eyes light up as she speaks even as her body is relaxed and in quiet resonance with everything around her.

<https://www.behance.net/sreelekhasureshkumar>

Surabhi Singhani

Surabhi is inquiring into our fragmented attention and its challenges in a technological world.

[26/02, 6:56 pm]: I always wondered if I could sit beside you during your process of making art, while quietly observing you, getting to know your philosophies and conversations with your self. I am glad you shared your creative process which paved way to this possibility. It was a comforting experience to witness how endearingly you hold each character and element you draw, giving each stroke a place where it should beautifully belong in your canvas. I truly love the child in you, curious and excited to explore the world through embodied experiences, material explorations, artistic curiosities, music and poetry. I always felt that my younger self was braver to try different things fearlessly and with time I have been marred by 'what ifs', distractions and overthinking of how people interpret me.

But you gave me the hope that one's best memories can be re-lived and experiences can come alive through art. Also, one cannot and never should stop learning.

'Trust art that has been gifted to you and that you have chosen. You don't have to trust yourself,' these words of yours stayed with me, making me wonder what was stopping me to embrace art that wanted to stay with me since childhood. I sometimes loved it but other times I'd let it wander due to my other engagements or procrastination. When you started the painting, the vivid memories you shared gripped me to the story and I was curious to know what unfolds next. The coucal, the waterfall, the frog along with their magnificence, playfulness, forms and their personified conversations made me engross into the narrative of their making. It is amazing to see your music, gliding smoothly into your process, lending the much needed calm required to relive those memories.

You told me yesterday, 'Convert a statement you are not quite sure of into a question or an inquiry and start seeking answers to it' and you showed it so well in your creative process. Your geometric doodles of class 8th or 9th consciously or subconsciously helped you in finding how geometric forms can be expanded to depict fluid, organic nature in art . This shows how an artistic inquiry stays with you for years.

During the design sprint workshop, I was surprised to observe how music embraced, dissolved and included me in the process of making, creating a harmony of space and strokes, details and sometimes sheer simplicity conveying my message.

That activity stayed with me and music became my closer companion, sometimes taking me back to my brief training of classical music in my childhood and how I enjoyed it then. You have the perfect playlist as well as understanding of the music guiding you to the inner solace and joy, which those memories want to reiterate. The inner dialogue in my head while doing any art felt close to yours and the best part is the humorous quality of those conversations. It was hilarious to see these characters' interest in coming to life and how they lure you into making them at any point of the day or night.

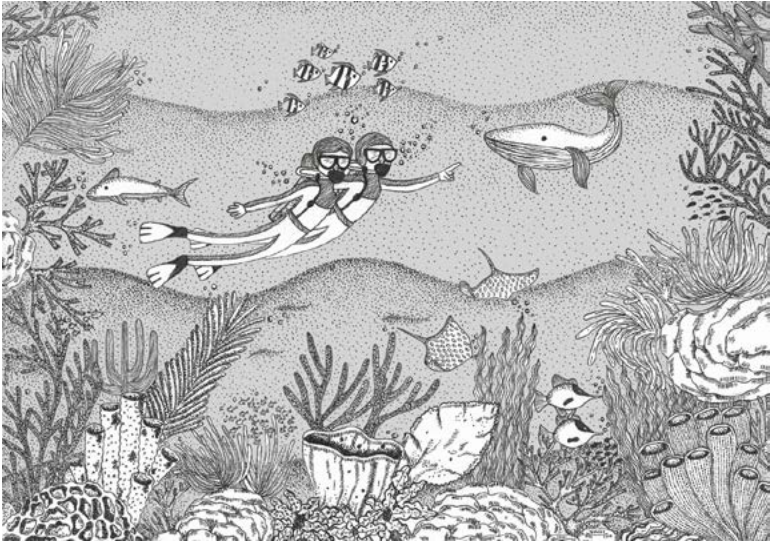


Illustration Credits: Surabhi Singhai, Scuba diving

I have been 'deep reading' your process and wanted it to stay with me. I started with documenting your works and process. But this time, I also wanted to take a plunge into it by participating as well. I took the opportunity of working along with following your thoughts. I am elated that my phone screen and chats used my 'attention' meaningfully (otherwise mostly distracting me) in the form of your reflective process and we used this opportunity to share our thoughts, feelings and journey through these screens despite staying far.

Here is my attempt of learning through your journey. This is from my memories of scuba diving I did some years back. I recollected the marine life I witnessed.

It was relieving to see how you too have this hidden fear of how an art will finally look; will it be different than expected and what if some characters or elements overpower others. The unison of memories, music, friends cheering us up and trust in art, makes this a truly rewarding journey. Thank you for inspiring us, trusting and loving us enough to share this valuable process of yours. I am blessed to be your mentee.

Hia Baverjee

Hia is inquiring into the nuances of women led craft in their homes in Bengal for her capstone project.

Dear Srivi,

Thank you for sharing your piece of writing. It has brought an avalanche of thoughts and reminiscence to me. Thank you for trusting us so much, and sharing your mind with us.

I am so in agreement with you when you had said that

“Creativity is generative, like the spider who weaves from within herself, the baya weaver who builds his nests, rivers that flow shaping rocky mountains and crafting valleys. Creativity is simple, natural and the very essence of life.”

When we get a group of peers, that one can share, receive, draw inspiration from as well as the liberty to scrutinize, one truly flourishes. I want to be like the baya weaver. Confident and unhindered. I have unfortunately gotten a bit too excited and written something. I am sharing it with you. Thank you again for giving the space to speak unapologetically.

Resonating with you

While reading your piece, so many thoughts have emerged within that resonates amicably along with your writing. Indeed, it has been a struggle to get out of my fears, and make space for my creativity.

As you had said, the institutionalization starts from a very young age.

Colonization of minds, from the way my art teacher had hijacked my mind by injecting within the conventional standards of what art should look like, how lines should flow, how colors should be used next to each other, has definitely impacted on my mind. I was left to think that my art was limited to certain forms. It slowly became under confident. The way a kid is nonchalant, confident about their thoughts to put on a blank sheet of paper, why is it that, by the time we grow up, we find ourselves scared, and extremely self-scrutinized.

Till the end of my four years of bachelors I had not been able to finish one sketchbook. It was always, either the book was too new to taint with my lines, or the thoughts of what is worthy of putting down. The hesitance from my own mind to my hands was so strict, I felt like there have been an army camp of soldiers, rejecting any kind of percolation that didn't seem to be fit. Any thought that might have been given the permission to pass through to see the day light, used to become a priced possession. Much like a parent who have been trying to conceive for a long time. The insecurities become evident in the lines, always a fear that it is going to below par. Keeping each step with utter consciousness. It used to be exhausting, tedious.

Until one day, I decided to throw myself into the pool of anxiety. I decided to put myself through the pain every day. Sit and go through the exhaustion. Making anything and everything. My mind constantly telling me, it's worth nothing. Still I take another sheet of paper, and make again. Again, and again.



Illustration Credits: Hia Banerjee, Three generations in the simple act of combing and plaiting each other's hair.

Whom do I tell this? Is this something to be told! I have chosen to be in the field of visual art, and here I am after completing my bachelors, struggling with pencil and paper. If people hear this story, what would they perceive of me ? It is my profession, yet I was unable to call myself an 'artist'. I felt I am not there yet.

I had shown some of these works to my friend. I wanted him to scan these, and make virtual copies of them. He returned all, except two. He had told me, he liked them too much, and he wants to keep it. It was so bizarre to me. How can these drawing be worth anything to someone, that they would like to own a piece of my work? On my birthday he gifted me those two artworks. He had framed them, like the ones that I used to see in galleries. It was one of my most overwhelming moments.

Owning that framed piece of my own work make me feel like an artist for the first time. They were probably more than any trophy that I could have won in any of the art competitions. Though there were no audiences, but I had become something in my own eyes for the first time. And that feeling is priceless.

Nybur
Agrowal

Nupur is inquiring into how critical thinking can be fostered in teens and young adults through literary epics.

[9:41 pm, 23/02/2021] Nupur: I relate to this entire thread. When I came to Srishti, I had it in mind we would have these basic art and design workshops and we would be taught techniques. And I was so lost Srivi...I used to see the work of others and feel like I just was so far behind. And then I did two or three group projects and probably felt more intimidated... but then for Aparna's class I did the Gond art illustration project, a fairly simple project but everything I did from scratch and didn't care much about the output.. I just did it for fun and Let myself flow...this really helped me gain some confidence and I slowly started working and finding things that inspired me...and I started creating. And then in the lockdown with no such peer competition I just started sketching and became a bit more confident of my work...



Illustration Credits: Nupur Agrawal, Not Ready to Let Go of You

and I sketched like you asked us to Srivi...I sketched everyday two three pages...and I realised what you meant by you couldn't really teach us...it was all practice.

[9:43 pm, 23/02/2021] Nupur: And even though I have a long way to go...lots of practice to do. Somewhere I can finally understand what you had been trying to tell us in the first semester.

[9:44 pm, 23/02/2021] Nupur: And I feel grateful that even though I did realise it pretty late, someone did atleast tell me and I can follow it now.

Pranav
Sharma

Pranav is inquiring into how new aesthetes can be emerged for traditional Hindustani music using visual arts, animation and other new media.

“Looking at the Coucal and the waterfall painting. As an aesthete, ready to lure myself into this canvas,

I feel the flow of the painting as it takes form. The connection between the Coucal and the waterfall as it might have been in the moment when it was witnessed re-lives again through me. Even though only slightest, as it was midnight and I was immersed in my work too much, I remember thinking about the frog while listening to the harp by Andy Rigby. The way music hinged me to the visuals of this painting...an inspiration in my darkest of hours. Like a spell of charm lighting up the dim lit lamps of self-doubt.

And it's not only about the act of painting I feel inspired towards, it's the way of life. We see many things, watch few and feel fewer. Probably I am still there under the dews of Chingara. Being transported to a place by a piece of work! By the process of it...might I, too be able to reproduce such experience through art, only if I wasn't in an unknown hurry.

As I look at the abstract geometrical expression from her 11th grade writings, not always so it happens that the others or we ourselves can reason out our art objects. Quoting Srivi's words from one of our conversation, "Intuition needs space to exist in the physical space, or else it will make you go mad".

Looking at the different artworks and the way they have been emoted, I don't see a particular style, no boundaries, no bounding framework. What I see is an ocean of experiences, of feelings, of thoughts... sometimes taking form of a playfully dangerous tide if under the full moon or sitting quiet listening to the surface ripples.

Being her mentee and looking at these artworks I believe painting is not tiring, it's something that makes you want to get tired in. A million ways to express, none to be gauged in the scale of awesomeness, if in true expression! Meeting of folk and naturalistic style



Illustration Credits: Pranav Sharma, A Kathakali artiste applying makeup before a performance. From a book on Theatricality.

would be my personal favorite, no doubts there. Not sure, but I remember the ladyfinger stamp prints on one of the kingfisher paintings. “Continuous inquiries in how to blend the naturalistic, abstract, symbolic and my inquiries into the porous self. All of these are inquiries into form and style”, to be able to articulate like this along with sharing the supporting work is pure awesomeness, yes.

To be able to witness the processes of works done over such a long and intense journey is a joy ride one wants to take on and on. It takes great courage and selflessness to be able to share such personal things in so much detail.

Sonal
Choudhury

Sonal is inquiring into how young children can be encouraged to process loss and death through art and design.

Dear Srivi,

Good morning... Thank you for sharing that beautiful waterfall emerging one stroke at a time... In my moments of pause and wonder I read what you have written all over again and find meaning and unbound joy in it... Thank you for being so hearty in your giving...

...

Thank you for sharing snippets of your life Srivi... Thank you so much for sharing these images and also your beautiful paintings... for your process... and your friendship... and for your heart...

...

When I have looked into a painting for a long time be it Van Gogh's sunflowers or Monet's water lilies, I have wondered what they must be thinking. I have wondered if each stroke was planned or were there a few misses... I have wondered if the Colors spilled and smudged in some places or each stroke achieved the impossible quest for perfection... And now I wonder that if art is about imitating life, then isn't it foolish to expect it to be perfect?

A lot of my questions got answered when my mentor began to share the process of her painting with me... Her process was lyrical, rhythmic and so sensory, that at times I felt as if I was a part of the landscape... I felt the ripples in the water, the gurgling sound, and the play of light and shadow on the water... I was further drawn into the scape as Srivi narrated stories and drew me further into the moment...



Illustration Credits: Sonal Choudhury, Making Friends.

When an artist is painting, the mind is constantly in a dialogue with the inner self... this dialogue is usually unheard and unspoken of... by sharing the process through days together, Srivi made me realise that these thoughts can be articulated and also be shared for others to acknowledge the struggles and conversations of an artist with themselves...

I have been deeply grateful and overwhelmed to be part of this sharing... It has inspired me to not curb my desire to express about what I create... Thank you Srivi for being the waterfall of wisdom and learning in my life... I wish to remain perched at its fringes just like the coucal all my life...

Kaushik
Kannan

Kaushik is inquiring into how storytelling and native and tribal relationships with the natural world can inspire stronger bonds with nature in urban contexts.

[7:55 pm, 25/02/2021] Kaushik: Every painting and artistic piece of work that you have shared made me feel inspired to create more pieces of my own. But the fact that there is so much philosophy that drives it made me realize how constricted my flow of work is.

I do struggle with letting go, which is why I need to have a vision of what I want to create. In the process of breaking this, I often feel like a stranded person lost on a lonely island. I constantly find myself dismissing the need to question the philosophical aspect behind 'creating' because the answer seems too far-fetched in my head. But when you shared your reflective process behind the paintings it made complete sense despite my apprehension about using heavy metaphors and words to describe visual pieces of work.



Illustration Credits: Kaushik Kannan, At Chilika lake

Coming to the paintings I often find myself comparing the quality of your work to mine (because they revolve around the natural world) even though there is no need to do so. Although, this did reaffirm my thoughts on how free the 'form' in your paintings look compared to mine. I believe this free flowing aspect gives the surreal feeling to your paintings that I struggle to achieve. Being so articulate about your own work and being so mindful of what you are feeling when you create also goes a long way in achieving this, I am sure. I sometimes, find myself feeling reflective when I make illustrations but the mindfulness aspect is very inconsistent. I know I have a lot to learn along these lines. But reading all your messages and even writing this small note confirmed one thought for certain. I love creating art! :)

[7:56 pm, 25/02/2021] Kaushik Iaidp Mdes: And I know all of us have said this enough but thank you for teaching and being there for us when we feel lost. :)

Mridul
Verma

Mridul is inquiring into shared economy and building a platform to bring communities together to build sustainable societies.

[1:17 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: In relevance to this painting and your memory, what do you mean by 'visions deepen, yet simplify' and 'become layered yet focused?'

"Srivi Kalyan: @ Mridul - As I begin to paint, in this particular section of the waterfall, I suddenly realise that the waterfall is not a still moment, a photographic moment, that it is layered with many moments of my perception and interaction with the waterfall. As I paint, my memories begin to unfold slowly and I realise the depth of my porosity, my experience, as sometimes an intuition strikes me, or a feeling floods through me. At the same time, as I paint, I now just have to focus on my lines, the image right before this text, I am just painting water sliding over the rock. Now I know, that I need to capture each little path of water in different parts of the waterfall. I have arrived at a process and a method. Now I can paint with clear focus. I decide to work with patterns, dots, short lines and flowing lines to capture the different moods, moments and experiences of water I encountered. That's what I mean by simply yet focused. Since my waterfall is not one moment but many moments of a long period of time, it is layered with light, feeling, mood, emotion, opening of my senses, silences, exhilaration, discovery, wonder... and that's how it comes alive for me through lines."

“Srivi Kalyan: This sound, is the sound of water I want reflected in my painting. I will listen...”

[1:18 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: After the writing sprint you conducted in mid-December, I realised how my subconscious influences my work. And how vital it is for me to get in the correct mindset/stance/setting.

External motivations in the form of peers and music helped me push myself. Most of it is subconscious, I believe, and the atmosphere greatly helps in reaching that revered mindset while approaching a task.

But also often I find myself exhausting over fixing the atmosphere, cleaning my room, my workstation, waiting for the motivation, mood etc. If not anything else, I realise I excuse myself from action citing these reasons.

“Srivi Kalyan: And that’s how an internal conversation begins to happen in the painting between the beings that inhabit it”

[1:19 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I pick up the phrase ”gentle and quiet” from here. I relate it with the times when I get immersed in my work. When I get disconnected with the physical world, my surroundings, the time by the clock, often even my own body, and am purely focused on the task itself. I recall the times when I used to spend hours and hours working with metal or wood in my mechanical engineering labs. Even after forgetting about food, I still used to find energy in myself to continue working for hours.

[1:19 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Even my addiction to substances of abuse couldn’t command/distract my attention when I would work immersively.

“Srivi Kalyan: Water cascades step by step light-footed like a pixie...”

[1:20 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Naganandini, my pod manager for the 1 week we attended the college this month, shared a small book on metaphors. Until I read that book, I was always apprehensive of using metaphors and stories while communicating, partly because of my ineptness and partly because I felt that metaphors are unnecessary. But since that reading, I'm coming to realise that most of our communications are full of them. For example, the sentence we often speak, "I am out of motivation" is also metaphorical :P

Nevertheless, here how you use metaphors to describe the flow of water helps me imagine and create my own vision of the water. Although you've just used words, I could imagine a lot of visuals and experience it in my own head. Now I wonder, is it always true that 'a picture is worth a thousand words', or if words are used smartly, could it also be otherwise? :P

[1:20 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I'm awed when you and also Sonal for that matter, bring out appropriate metaphors and make the communication more meaningful instantly :)

*“Chill kar”
Relax/ be cool*

*“Kya scene?”
~ What’s up?*



*“Ek number”
~ best / number
one quality*

*“Thanks yaar”
~ Thanks
buddy*

Illustration/ Typography Credits: Mridul Verma

I wanted to create Whatsapp stickers for the multilingual-2-word-phrases which I commonly used while texting.

Inquiries into how typography can address linguistic plurality

“ Srivi Kalyan: I will use this essay ‘Why not be different?’...”

[1:21 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: It was a pleasure to read this Srivi. Deference in abundance for you, knowing that your 17 year old self could pose such philosophical questions which I haven't been able to ask myself or the others around me yet.

Definitely Krishnamurthy came to my mind as I read though your essay, one of his book itself is titled “Freedom from the known”

Also, I don't know why but after reading your essay I feel compelled to tell about the two bedside books I'm reading currently.

The first one is “The story of my experiments with truth”, Gandhiji's autobiography. His straightforward language is very appealing. He does not mince words and keeps his narrative very honest and pure. I feel he also, thought subtly, poses very similar questions to what you've asked on 5th page....

“Srivi Kalyan: Painted in 2013 as a gesture of thanks to... My work underwent a tremendous shift, I began a strong inclination towards...”

[1:22 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Haha, this is what I think is what we all yearn for, discovering our calling, a style, a passion.

“ Srivi Kalyan: I am also able to pause and reflect and work more quietly...”

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: And then like for you, I hope we also get to sort out our pieces of the puzzles :P

“Srivi Kalyan: Trust in yourself and your work”

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: !!

“Srivi Kalyan: And move forward”

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: !!

[1:23 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I think we should pin these two messages on the top. Your littlest push helps us go a long way Srivi.

“Srivi Kalyan: In most Asian traditions, you find this concept that all things have sentience...”



[1:24 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Along with animating paintings and sculptures, I also feel that having a respect for the materials, tools and skills goes a long way in building consciousness and technical skills. It gives us a moment to be mindful of what we have. It's value, it's properties. The Hindu mythology of god Vishwakarma captures this.

“Srivi Kalyan: These moments between us where I try to entice him (Calotes Versicolor) with my quietness and gentleness, and he assesses my presence according to his own criteria are a precious time of sorts. Our hearts are beating a bit too wildly, just in case we cannot trust each and must flee at the slightest external noise... but this time in Auroville at the Sharanga guest house, we managed to get to friendly banter and acknowledgement of each other. There is a twinkle in our eyes, and we carry our secret meeting with a bit of a thrill and part ways.”

[1:24 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Reading though your conversations with nature and other beings invigorate my belief in the power of intuition. I'm slowly forming a belief that we all beings are bound by consciousness.

“Srivi Kalyan: And even the loudness of our minds and interior voices are enough to make them scurry away.”

- And this message further strengthens my belief in tacit communication, intuition.



[1:25 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: **It is just a matter of bringing purity and clarity in our minds, and once we start clearing out the unnecessary conditioning, we begin to harness the potential of intuition. It is like a muscle, needs to be exercised, but as we gain proficiency, reading animals, people and situations alike, become an interesting game.**

[1:25 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: A paragraph from another book I was reading, Intuition on Demand by Lisa K.

[1:25 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: It is not just about this selfish motive to get the best out for yourself, but I feel,

it is one power which we all have and can use for a greater good. Be it understanding the predicament of another being or communicating efficiently, listening to our own bodies etc.

“Srivi Kalyan: And this kind of craziness and fun of making is what I want for all of you to enjoy and take pleasure in for your own projects. This is independent of assessment, reviews, audiences, design methods etc. It is simply you having fun with your project!”

[1:26 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Moral of the story, keep doing whatever you want to do and don't worry about grades!:P

“ Jeong Kwan quote: “You must not be your own obstacle. You must not be owned by the environment you are in. You must own the environment, the phenomenal world around you. You must be able to move freely in and out of your mind. This is being free. There is no way you can't open up your creativity. There is no ego to speak of. That is my belief”

[1:26 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Haha although spoken so easily, this is one huge challenge I believe. Not giving into distractions. I remember, you also once said, “chop off the head of the distraction whenever it comes up,” again, so easy and true, but when it comes to putting it in practice, I often find myself weak.

“Srivi Kalyan: I don’t have techniques to teach, learning from me is to learn the philosophy of my work and art, the philosophy of a way of life. Yes I teach techniques and tools along the way, but what I hope you can take away with you is the philosophy and then go on to craft your own ways of being and philosophies.”



[1:28 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: Thank you Srivi for these messages. We take huge pride in being your mentees.

“Sonal: Thank you for taking the time to write and share all of this Srivi... Thank you for showing us the bigger picture always :)

[1:28 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: *

“Hia: I feel you expressed what goes on in my mind. But I cannot articulate it.”

[1:30 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: *

[1:32 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: I do have my thoughts for the messages you shared a few hours ago, but I'll put them up in the morning! :)

[1:34 am, 25/02/2021] Mridul: In a first, I hope we could also be of some help to you! :P



Monica M
Chandak

Monica is inquiring into trauma in early childhood education and working with caregivers on listening to children.

[4:27 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: It has been quite a journey seeing your process. I have been figuring stuff out for myself. And painting comes as a part of healing and expressing. I remember as a child drawing mountains and apples and how much I enjoyed doing. I don't practice it anymore.. but i am trying different methods of expressing. One such tool that I recently learnt about is role play and writing.

[4:41 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Did anything of the process I shared support or give you new directions for writing/ roleplay?

[4:41 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: can you unpack 'quite a journey' a little more descriptively?

[10:38 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: So, Srivi I have always looked at you as an ideal person. Someone I want to be for my children in the future, to give them direction, the way you show light to us/me in my dark time (when I feel under-confident, since PGDP mentorship).

When you shared your journey with us in the group it was soo raw, it felt as though we were a part of something real. It was quite different from my imagination of you.

Like you were an idol that I worshiped who knew it all. Coming from that space when you shared your process it was natural, intuitive, and most of all reflective. You are still that someone I want to be, but more you. And I know you keep pushing us to do things, but this time you were doing things with us. It kind of motivated me to think deeper, look deeper within and around myself.



Art credits: Monica M. Chandak

[10:41 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: About how it helped me in my writing and role-play is, I am not a writer, we have established that. **But, watching your art grow and expand in free flow without judgment and the pressure of being judged has shown me that I am just being too harsh on myself and my process of writing.**

[10:43 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: I have been meaning to tell you that your work is so dear to you and I know it was not the best when you really started off your journey, it has reached this level with practice. I intend to do the same. Now, more than ever, I have started writing small stuff here and there talking about feelings or just anything in any form from poems to short stories (not intending to share it, not just yet), trying to build more faith and less judgment from my end for my own art.

[10:50 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: Role-play is healing, I just did one small session with Sahil and the effect of it brought in so much clarity in terms of my internal self and my project. I have been projecting my feeling of a structured environment and unstructured play. I feel drawn to homeschooling and have developed a certain amount of dislike for a structured/institutional

environment. I didn't realise this, but I did leave myself the hints about these feelings here and there. connecting the method of healing to your art, I know you have shared the tiring experience of work that you have been feeling lately and you still won't stop motivating or pushing us to do what we like, take time for your students and be with them when they need you. The care you have shown by sharing your process ...

[10:52 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: I am NOT praising you to get on your good side, these are my unfiltered feelings about you and can't thank you enough for sharing your experience with you. Please understand the emotion and not the language. I am sorry if I have offended you in any way or form.

[10:53 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Not at all. It is heartfelt, honest and beautiful as you always are.

[10:54 pm, 26/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Thanks so much for writing all this out. I am glad I asked you. I am also honest when I say I am revived and healed when each of you respond. I need this as much as the many things I may share and give of my time to all of you. So you must value your words very highly because they mean so much to me.

[10:56 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: It feels like I want to virtually hug you. You have been such a GOOOOOOOOD mentor to me; I have grown so much much under your wing.

[10:56 pm, 26/02/2021] Monica: honestly my trip to Srishti land has been a success because of you.

Samridhi
Pandey

Samridhi is inquiring into the challenges women face in careers in technology and the need to revisit how we think STEM education for girls in India.

Your sharing of playing stories, characters and experiments was simply precious to me. It roused me from periods of deepening anxiety and crisis of faith. It made me want to run away and play with these characters. It brought joy and nostalgia of childhood imagination, enough to make me doodle with a smile. Having you narrate your experiencing the developing forms in your painting, was like having you paint next to me. And it gave me an opportunity to sit and ponder mindlessly next to you creating.. a soothing feeling that amidst all the chaos, one can and should nurture one's creativity. It was fascinating to read about you articulating each detail of your vision(that sometimes overwhelmed me)... Descriptions of emerging lines of waterfall, relationship between coucal and ridges. I was faintly able to grasp the deep conversation a creator needs to have with form.

The back and forth, the negotiation between inspiration, vision, one's abilities and shortcomings. Sometimes this conversation felt too personal for me to read (opposite to your intention of sharing I believe). But that I think is the essence of an inner artistic dialog.

The feelings that expectations of a vision or visual evoke need to be broken down into words and translated into questions, however vulnerable it may make one seem. I noticed myself noticing sections of your developing work... Some fluid lines meeting each other and going their own way, the changing white space, blues and reds. These gave rise to moments of contemplation of form, line and feeling behind it. These spontaneous moments of organic discovery were a contrast to my striving need to unravel the chaos of complex themes & questions while trying to obsessively categorise everything.

After reflecting on expressive exercises and open discussions of form workshop, time felt more elastic to me. spurts of imagery I see in my mind at some point in time, comeback rearranged, upside down, more nuanced and concrete. And this waiting space needs to be filled with a relaxing energy of creating and pondering.



Illustration credits: Samridhi Pandey

Ps: I found some previous artworks that I could connect to the last few lines. These artworks happened more effortlessly, without any objective in mind. Last two are from my asemic writing class.

I realised the difference in my own process of creating either by forcing habits of practice or pure inspiration. The forced practice discourages me pretty soon when faced obstacles of creative blocks, criticism, etc. While creation during moments of pure inspiration happens without me being conscious about it. I can't trace the thread of motivation for these creations that make me pick up a pen or brush...To recreate or reimagine the objects of curiosity and bursts of thoughts and feelings. A balanced creative process that combines these two is going to my new goal. By trying to consistently find these inspired moments, being curious and asking questions through form, without waiting.

Note: These words don't feel enough to express what I have experienced and how much I appreciate you and your sharing your thoughts and process with us. I hope some of this is usable/helpful to you.

Ashwin
Suresh

Ashwin is inquiring into designing an online -offline education model for middle and high school children with a focus on sustainability and engineering.

Inspiration comes from little things, a scene from a movie, a sight that catches your attention, a piece of art, a picture, a word, a story, a piece of music. For me, creating starts from inspiration, either internal or external. Translating those ideas into a process and making a tangible product at the end is something that I have always enjoyed doing. This was a very linear process for me till a point, usually starting with developing an idea and slowly progressing towards the desired output. I have always felt that it lacked depth, though I enjoyed the process the output didn't seem to convey what I had originally intended. This is a practice that I have developed after joining Srishti, to understand myself as an art practitioner, question my thoughts and look back at my past experiences while also enjoying the process of doing it.

Your words have always inspired me Srivi, your ability to articulate thoughts is a gift that I admire.

The sudden transition from a technical field to art field was difficult for me in the beginning but with your tips in mind I was able to kind of merge both my fields of interest to create something stronger that suited me. This has been a major learning outcome for me, to connect dots, it is sort of like a tool that I can use whenever I get stuck at a point. From your first class on mind-maps to nature walk to helping us through our capstone, I learned a lot as a artist-designer. To observe, find, understand, think, develop, your sessions changed my worldview as a designer. Now I'm in my constant quest for finding errors/gaps, questioning my own thoughts, pushing myself to make connections and articulate my thoughts.



Illustration Credits: Ashwin Suresh

This is a painting i made, inspired from one of my favourite memories. I love how a piece of art can create such strong feelings of emotions within me, though it was created by me. The silence of the city, the sound of the guitar, a hot cup of chai and endless conversations. Everytime I take a look at this, i actually feel myself being inside the painting.

Sharing your process was very helpful for me, it allowed me to understand to a certain extent, why you did what you did. As you said, creativity is natural and intuitive, but we have to make the space for it to happen, this was something I was having trouble dealing with before. Waiting for the right moment to get inspired and then being very conscious about the output did not help in improving my skills as an artist, rather just go with the flow, trust my skills and make more, and slowly I will get there.

Asking questions on form, understanding aesthetics, learning about our own cultural art forms are some of the practices that I've developed after having conversations with you. These practices have the capacity to inform me and mould me to be a better artist. This is a constant learning-unlearning process, asking the right questions and pondering for the answers lets us move ahead, learn more.

Finding all answers might be impossible but I'm happy that I've started my quest, and I think the journey is more important than the destination. Thank you for all the support Srivi.

Thank you

[1:39 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And I have to say that this process of sharing with you, starting sometime in November perhaps, while going through a hugely difficult process of work and thesis writing and then the time of breakdowns after that, I have felt much cherished and comfortable in sharing with all of you.

[1:39 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And I would say that all of you have been there for me, in one of the most difficult times of my life and helped me cross a bridge, that would have otherwise crashed and burned without the support.

[1:41 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And for the first time, having shared the painting process, I have articulated my pedagogy as well.

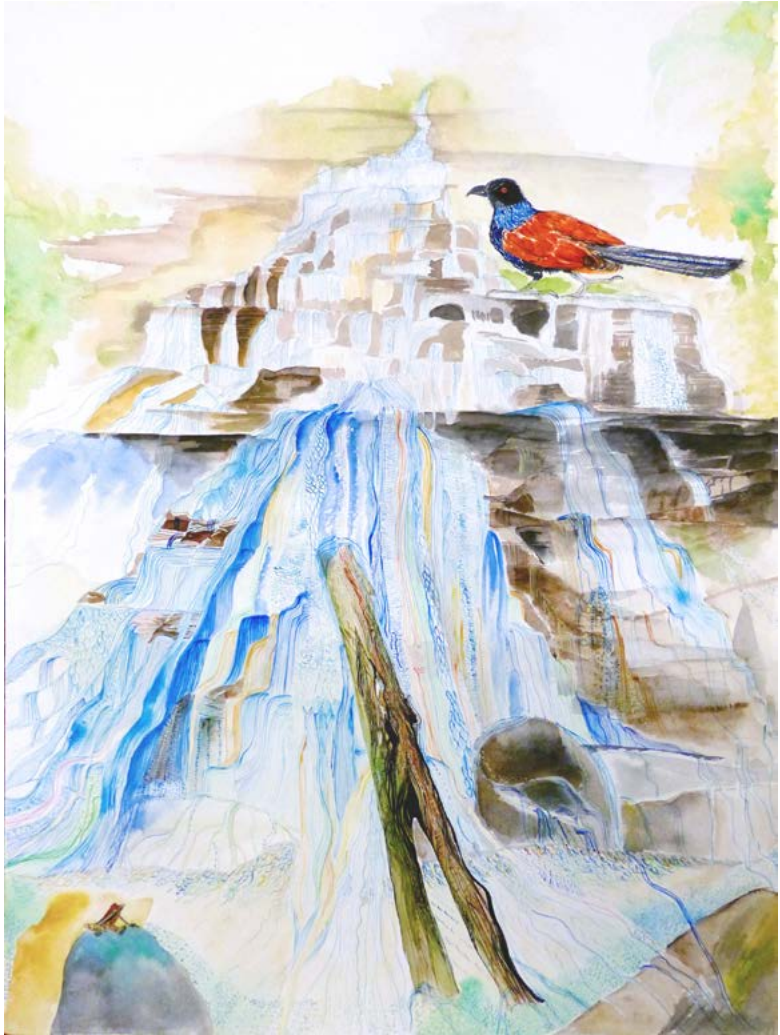
[1:44 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: So thanks immensely to all of you for making this participatory.

Each time one of you articulates, I become a little more confident and sure of what I am doing also. I also get lost, confused and frustrated and emotional, both with my creative work and my teaching.

And it is always humbling when I work with each of you, even as I sometimes feel like tearing my hair - I enjoy the wandering that we do, but I worry what it may mean for the immediate needs.

[1:48 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And then someone from an older cohort comes and tells me they are doing well, they have good jobs, they are earning well, and they are passionate about their work, about social issues, they share their stories and I feel a sigh of relief. It is scary sometimes, this sense of responsibility and lonely, if students don't lend their voices. So you have definitely been of immense help to me by putting your thoughts into words.

[1:54 am, 25/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Thank you



**Be still my heart. These
great trees are prayers.**

Rabindranath Tagore

Teaching as
philosophy of
a way of
being



Many thanks to my students - Ashwin Suresh, Hia Banerjee, Kaushik Kannan, Monica M Chandak, Mridul Verma, Nupur Agrawal, Pranav Sharma, Samridhi Pandey, Sonal Choudhury, Surabhi Singhai, for this participatory conversation and the contributions of their reflections in part 3.

Thanks to Ramnath Chandrashekar and Sreelekha Sureshkumar for being there, their reflections and for reminiscing with me.

Thanks to Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram and Padmini Nagaraja for listening.

Thanks to all my students from whom I have learnt much, and shared a great part of my life with.

Part 4

Teaching as
philosophy
of a way
of being

Conclusion

Creativity emerges from a state of being free of one's own ego. It is a seamless process when we are in tune with ourselves and the world we live in and we are able to transcend them to resonate with the essence of all life. It comes from a space of inner stillness of quietude, a fondness for life and living. I share with my students the following quote from a cooking show I am watching that resonates with all that we have spoken so far and these are my final few chat messages to summarize the conversation we began in particular on the 9th of February with the coucal and the dancing frog. A few other messages as memories unfolded and thank you's were shared till the 27th of February have been included in Part 2 or 3.

[8:39 pm, 23/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: “Creativity and ego cannot go together. If you free yourself from the comparing and jealous mind, your creativity opens up endlessly. Just as water springs from a mountain, creativity springs from every moment. You must not be your own obstacle. You must not be owned by the environment you are in. You must own the environment, the phenomenal world around you. You must be able to move freely in and out of your mind. This is being free. There is no way you can’t open up your creativity. There is no ego to speak of. That is my belief” - Chef’s table - Jeong Kwan, Vol 3, Netflix

[8:45 pm, 23/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: Jeong Kwan is a Buddhist nun in Korea, and is featured in one of the cooking shows for her sublime cooking. This is her narration in the show. This is also what I believe in, as well as my own practice of creativity. In many ways, this is the cultural gift of our ancestors, what should be our natural intuition and way of being. Infact, if you look back at tradition, creativity was a way of life, not something you studied or got a degree in. It is how you lived your everyday life.

[9:08 pm, 23/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And this nature of creativity, and egoless, yet confident state of being cannot happen without connecting with the natural world, without allowing landscapes, and other beings

to shape you, without being moved and sculpted by the beauty of wind, water and all the elements.

[9:09 pm, 23/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And strangely enough, in some ways it is hard work, but in other ways, it is a very simple and natural way of being. It is like a tree or a river, a scarlet minivet flitting around or a garden lizard. It is straightforward, honest simplicity.

[9:26 pm, 23/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: And I understand the things that feel overwhelming when I share my work or just my conversations, even as you seek me out, that you are sometimes awed or confused or conflicted by what I have to say.

[9:28 pm, 23/02/2021] Srivi Kalyan: I don't have techniques to teach, learning from me is to learn the philosophy of my work and art, the philosophy of a way of life. Yes I teach techniques and tools along the way, but what I hope you can take away with you is the philosophy and then go on to craft your own ways of being and philosophies.

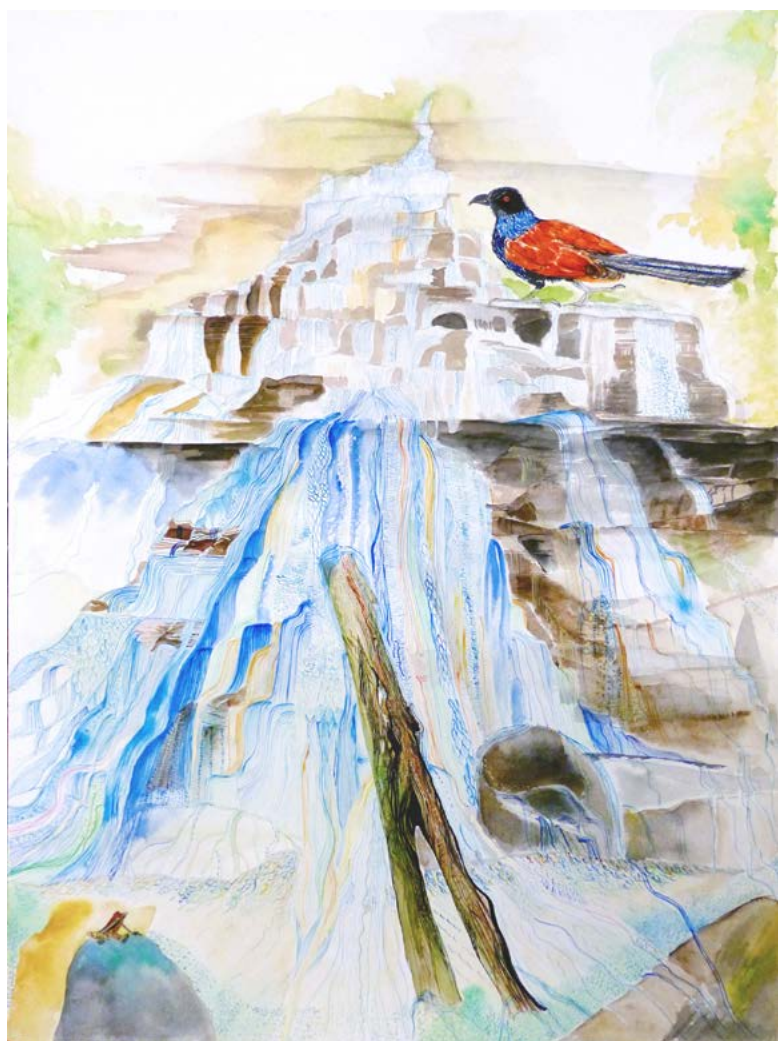
So when you come for your meetings with me, let's ponder together. That way, both of us will go back richer than we came to the conversation.

This pondering together is perhaps the principle of my pedagogy. It is utopian and idealistic, it comes from the felt being and the heart, it comes from traditional ways of perception, creativity, artistic process, aesthetic perception and the ideas of relationships between teacher and student, learning and teaching, mentoring and choosing who and how one will learn from another. And from a very young age, I have believed that there is no hierarchy in this process of teaching and learning. It is akin to breathing.

I write this here, because my students have encouraged me and I take confidence in the fact that they have trusted me with their worlds, their vulnerabilities and fears, their joys and the ways in which they are reshaping their world and the world at large. I thank them immensely for this participatory process, both their silent and active listening and their wonderful projects that I look forward to see evolving.

In the case of my older students Ramnath and Sreelekha, with whom I am discussing after eight to ten years after first meeting them, it is a pleasure and sense of friendship, camaraderie of sorts of shared memories and languages that we have co-evolved. Their trust in me, and the many times that they have helped me in being and becoming a mentor, a teacher, a guide and a friend is much appreciated.

Ours is a idealistic world, my students and I, for we wander in landscapes interior and exterior, virtual and real, where subtle selves meet and talk, in spaces of trust and healing, hope and action. We come together to inspire each other and find ourselves in the reflections of the other as our own selves. This kind of pedagogy is sheer poetry, frustrating, fantastic and fun. And in our quietest moments, it leaves us with a sense of gratitude for life and for each other.



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I have reflectively provided a selective list of references as this exposition has been a synthesis of a wide range of reading and practice in art, design, education, ecosophy, eco-aesthetics and arts in education.

The references are in five areas

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- Indian thought, philosophy, aesthetics, Colonial impact on arts education, Creativity in Eastern thought
- Curriculum, pedagogy, Ideas on arts education, arts in education in India and elsewhere
- Artistic research
- Ecological Consciousness, Ecosophy, eco-ethics, eco- aesthetics, eco-art

A lot of this work draws upon my doctoral work. Five papers published during my doctoral work have a lot of resonance with key ideas in this exposition. Another book I co-authored with South Indian artist A.V. Ilango and a paper published with concepts emerging from the book both look closely into art education through an

Indian aesthetic and philosophical lens and offer close inquiries into artistic research through the practices of both Ilango and me as artists. My masters thesis in consciousness in Indian art and my film from teaching environmental education at a school in India also have been evolving practices that has helped me synthesize my creative practices as well as pedagogy.

Doctoral work and my research in arts education through the lens of Indian thought and aesthetic practices

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Thank you