'*Hear! Hear!*': Unintentional silences in the *Bengal Patachitra* project

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What is Patachitra?

Patachitra (*pata*: cloth; *chitra*: painting) is a traditional performative art form found in Odisha, West Bengal and parts of Bangladesh made by the 'Chitrakars'. The cloth-based scroll paintings are made with organic colours and are usually accompanied by songs sung by the same artist. The subjects feature the contemporary, read in light of mythologies, riddles and metaphors. They travel like bards and perform when they find patrons, unscrolling and unravelling the narratives with them.

What is already there?

The *Bengal Patachitra* project is a brilliant and the most significant attempt at showcasing the unique tradition. It also tries to build a marketplace to promote better business practices to empower these artists to participate in better and more transparent transactions. It serves as a window into the lives of these artisans. However, certain design choices unintentionally seem to silence some aspects of this performative tradition.

Problem Statement

While the name might literally mean painting on a piece of cloth, the experience of patachitras is much more than that.

- They are not just painters but also performers who write and perform the songs that accompany their paintings. While the visual is easier to display, the experience is only complete when you hear the songs. The performative finds its place only via youtube videos which can be made more apparent as, without it, the experience of the folktales is incomplete.
- The code of conduct for audiences and buyers, an important ethical document, features as a pop-up pdf relegated to a corner. It should be highlighted prominently as a separate webpage as it is an important consideration regarding the ethics of the artists.

Objectives

- A more holistic promotion of their art.
- Respecting better the individual ethos of the artisans.

Proposed Solutions

Responsible (minimal computing) 2D design changes in the *Bengal Patachitra* website. The aim is towards making the website more optimised while taking a step towards immersion.

- Website can integrate background music featuring the songs of the respective artisan whose page one opens. IIT J students have done the same for IGNUS, which can be seen here. The user can choose to use it or not or simply have the subtitles.
- The UI needs a bit of a change. The download section should not be relegated to the right margin. It needs to be more intuitive for the user to click on that section which has essential information about the tradition and culture of Patua. The entire section should be in the form of a web page rather than a pop-up.
- The art code of Patachitra, which includes the code of conduct for the buyers, needs to have a separate page. Currently, a pdf opens whenever we click on the art code.
- The history of Patua's in the download section should be presented in an interactive manner rather than just having a flyer with small fonts.

A VR 3D experience of Patachitra (a possible next step on achieving cross-platform optimisation across devices like computers and mobile phones.)

- The mechanics of promoting an artist can be made much more engaging for the user by integrating Virtual Reality into the website. This will make the entire experience much more intuitive for the user and make it easier to access an artisan's products and know more about them.

Please refer here for a basic outline of our proposed interfaces.

Expected Impact

- The changes mentioned in the website will result in improved user experience and, at the same time, promote the performative element more.
- The VR integration will result in better recognition of the art of Chitrakar. They will be much more likely to be called for a performance at an event and also increase the sales of their artwork.