Thangka Art

History, Culture and Preservation

Thangka art is a traditional form of Tibetan painting that has been practiced for over a thousand years. But, the art has been losing it's value over the last few decades. To learn more about the contributing factors and causes, a study was conducted at the Norbulingka Institute, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.

Purpose of visit

1. To experience the essence of art and culture of Tibet.
2. To know about the Tibetan artisans and immigrants.
3. To know more about their lifestyle and source of income

Overview

- Thangkas are highly detailed and often feature intricate patterns and bright, vibrant colors and are considered sacred objects and are often used in religious ceremonies and meditation practices.
- But it takes a lot of time and effort to make these artforms which can be done only by experienced artisans.
- Nowadays, not much people know about these artforms and forms, hence, they dont get recognition on large scale.

Problem Identification

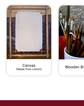
- The lack of acknowledgement of this art form and long hours put into it has led to its slow decline.
- Duplicate and cheap printouts have overshadowed the original masterpieces.
- Other problems which lead to create more problems in terms of exposure of the Thangka artists support from the government and Tibetan royal families.
- Workers and artisans face a lot of health problems because of long working hours such as back pain, breathing issue etc.

An artist in Norbulingka Institute working on her masterpiece

Origin & Importance

- Kangra art is a style of Indian painting that originated in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh in northern India during the 18th century.
- Its delicate lines, intricate details, and vibrant colors, which are often inspired by the natural beauty of the Himalayan region.
- To portray further feelings through colours and shapes, Kangra paintings turned out to be the main medium.

Elements



Canvas (made from cotton)

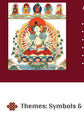
Wooden Brushes

Pencil Or Charcoal

Natural colors (made from natural pigments)

Role of colors

- Colour is of great significance in Tibetan Buddhism, being one of the elements for identifying the different deities and their attributes.
- The colours used in thangkas were made by the artists from naturally occurring vegetable and mineral pigments.
- Sometimes different coloured canvases are used to paint the thangkas.



Association of Deity with Canvas Colour

- White: normal colored paintings
- Brown: Amitabra Buddha
- Blue: Medicine Buddha
- Red: Guru Padmasambhava
- Green: Green Tara
- Reddish Brown: Manjushree

Themes: Symbols & Dieties

Together, the eight lucky symbols stand for the spiritual path that leads to an end to suffering and the enduring inner serenity of enlightened people.

The Treasure Vase
Longevity and wealth

The Wheel
Represents the Buddha's teachings and the Noble Path

The Parasol
A symbol of secular wealth

The Glorious knot
Longevity, continuity, love, and harmony

The Pair of Golden Fishes
Happiness and equanimity

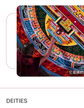
The Victory Banner
Buddhist victory over the four maras

The Lotus
purity and renunciation

The Right-turning Conch Shell
The sovereignty of the Buddhist teachings

BUDDHA

Thangka art often depicts images of the Buddha, including the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, as well as other Buddha figures such as Amitabha, Medicine Buddha, and Tara.



MANDALAS

Mandalas are intricate geometric patterns that are used in meditation and spiritual practice. Thangka art often depicts mandalas in intricate detail, with the complexity of the design holding a symbolic meaning.

DEITIES

These art often depicts various deities, both peaceful and wrathful, that are central to Tibetan Buddhist practice. These deities are often depicted with multiple arms and faces, each with its own symbolic meaning.

LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Thangka art also depicts scenes from the life of the Buddha, including his birth, enlightenment, and final nirvana. These paintings often convey the teachings of the Buddha and are used in meditation and prayer.

TIBETAN CULTIRE

Thangka art also depicts various aspects of Tibetan culture, including landscapes, animals, and people in traditional clothing. These paintings often depict the beauty and richness of Tibetan culture and serve as a reminder of its importance in the world.

Techniques

Fine Brushwork | Wash technique | Natural colors

Layering | Gold and silver detailing | Borders

Primary Insights

1. They are happy learning new techniques.
2. They are satisfied with the teaching of their superior.
3. They get monthly allowance and health insurance from the institute.
4. Festivals also provide meditation classes so that they can focus well while working on a painting.
5. They like to work in peace but are interrupted by visitors sometimes.
6. Sometimes they get distracted by the surrounding.
7. People often buy cheap duplicate paintings from the market.
8. Most of the people have serious health problem while making thangka paintings.
9. Many of the artisans are immigrants from Tibet.
10. People prefer cheap machine made paintings over traditional handmade painting.
11. Has to live away from his family and Can't save enough money for his other expenses.
12. One painting takes 3 to 6 months to complete and still they are not getting enough pay checks, recognition.
13. Doesn't get enough time for their family and themself.

User Personas

Based on the data gathered from interviews from various artisans and visitors of Norbulinka Institute. The sole purpose of this is to understand our users even better.

Persona 1

Tenzin Nyi Ma

Age : 35
Occupation : Thangka Artist
Education : Thangka Artist
Hometown : Tibetan Refugee Camp

Bio

Tenzin is an immigrant from Tibet who came to Dhar Kangra of Himachal Pradesh in 2005. He joined Norbulinka in Dharmshala institute to learn the national art style. He is currently working as a thangka artist. He is married and has two children. He lives in a small house with his family. He earns his living through his paintings which he sells at the working institute's middle of the city.

Touch points

Needs

- To receive more of the other art forms.
- To be able to live a better life.
- To be able to be the breadwinner for his family.

Goals

- To make recognizable through his art form.
- To be able to live a better life.
- To have a comfortable life as a artist.

Pain points

- Due to the long days from his family.
- Health issues due to the long working hours.
- Doesn't receive the pay according to work.

Persona 2

Jane Austin

Age : 25
Occupation : Visitor
Education : Graduate
Hometown : Texas

Bio

Jane works as a tech-savvy agent in Canada. He like to travel and explore new things. He likes to spend his time with his family and friends. He recently is trying out for the small and always appeals his free time among their religious interests. He prefers to buy souvenir from place he visits.

Touch points

Needs

- Knowledge of thangka art forms and other facilities.
- Interaction with artisans and learning sight-seeing.
- Should be fitness and travelling friendly.
- Wants to interact freely.

Goals

- To be recognized through his art form.
- To be able to live a better life.
- To be able to be the breadwinner for his family.

Pain points

- Communication difficulties due to language barrier.
- Finding the best souvenir for other people.
- Finding the best and currency house while travelling.

Problem Solving

1. Among every artist, there was a common concern of recognition and low wages.

The majority of the young pupils were content with the knowledge and commitment of their fellow painters, but they want more from their artistic pursuits.

2. Tourists and visitors, on the other hand, were pleased to observe the art being created but were slightly dissatisfied when they were unable to practice the art form for themselves.

1 To overcome the concern of the young painters, we came up with an idea for a self-employed merchandise.

About the Merchandise

- The designs will be a fusion of modern art styles with the essence of thangka art itself.
- It will consist of figures and symbols from the Thangka, keeping in mind the religious sentiments of the people.
- The fabric will be purchased from the local suppliers.
- Inhouse production will be the key factor as the artists will be making/ printing the merchandise themselves, to promote their individual art forms.

2

A two-hour/days course that teaches visitors the fundamentals of the art form and allows them to personalise their painting so they can take it home would be ideal for improving their overall experience.

Thanks for watching!