

Prototype for Data Visualization of Prof. Jyoti Bhatt's Photographs from 'Living Tradition'

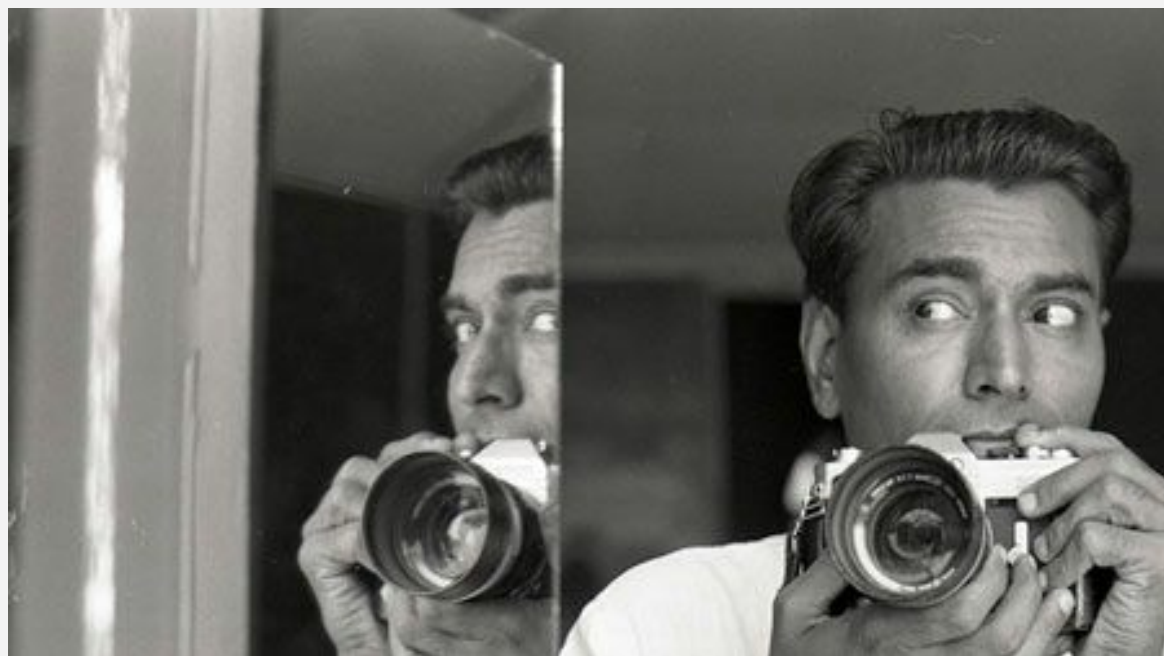
Fellowship Mid Term Report

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About AAA's The Baroda Archives Project

In late 2011, Asia Art Archive started a digitisation project to broadly map the various practices that shape the field of contemporary art and the forms of knowledge around it through the lens of art pedagogy. Art schools in South Asia played a central role during the 19th and 20th centuries to advance new attitudes and sensibilities toward the making and showing of art following its colonial history. They served as catalysts not only for education, but also as sites of exhibitions and as publishers of books and magazines—collectively paving a way for artistic exchange and collaboration, and reshaping the field with continuous experimentation.



Jyoti Bhatt

The faculty of Fine Arts in Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, stands out as one such art school. Founded in 1950, subsequent to India becoming an independent republic, the art college emerged with an aspiration to think of

art anew in post-colonial India. While a number of artists were involved in building the institution, AAA focused on the personal archives of four influential art practitioners who taught at the school since its establishment. Professors K.G. Subramanyan, Jyoti Bhatt, Ratan Parimoo, and Gulammohammed Sheikh made significant contributions in the world of art through artworks, literature, art writing, curation, new methods and ideas for pedagogy, and institution building. Integral to the establishment and development of the college, their careers and personalised visions show their thoughts on what art could be, and how art education could contribute to the field.

‘The Baroda Archives’ project thereby began an in-depth excavation of documents that sheds light on the artists’ art practices, written articulations of their ideas, contributions to art education and crafting of curricula, and their wider influence in the field of art. 40,000+ documents were digitised in this project that focus on, but are not limited to, the decades from 1950s to 1990s. While the digital archive includes artwork images, exhibition folders, letters and correspondence, art magazines, research initiatives, artist protests, exhibition catalogues, diaries and sketchbooks, manuscripts and essays, poems and short stories, a substantial portion of the collection is of photo-documentation of the ‘Living Traditions of India’ by artist Jyoti Bhatt. It is of this last set of documents around the ‘Living Traditions of India’ photographs that my IFA project proposal has been written.



Physical archive of Jyoti Bhatt's photo-negatives. Photograph taken in August 2014.

About the 'Living Traditions of India' documents in the AAA collection:

A number of government institutions and museums dedicated to rural arts and crafts emerged in India soon after independence. Artists also invested considerable attention to the contexts, techniques, and forms of traditional art practices. This engagement brought new questions on how to define tradition in the 20th century; how to reconcile the relationship between modern and traditional art; how to support a sustainable environment for traditional arts; and how these disappearing art forms might be preserved. Artists in Baroda were particularly interested in these questions, which translated into various institutional initiatives, Fine Art Fairs, research projects, and artist exchanges and workshops with artisans from rural contexts. This AAA collection has a number of interesting documents digitized around this, from photo-documentation and diary records by Jyoti Bhatt, to essay manuscripts and letters and proposals concerning the Handloom Board of India by K.G. Subramanyan, and a proposal to teach a Masters' level course on Living Traditions of India that Gulammohammed Sheikh prepared for the UGC. These documents in the AAA collection range over 30,000 in number and presents an exciting challenge of how to curate them on a web-interface.

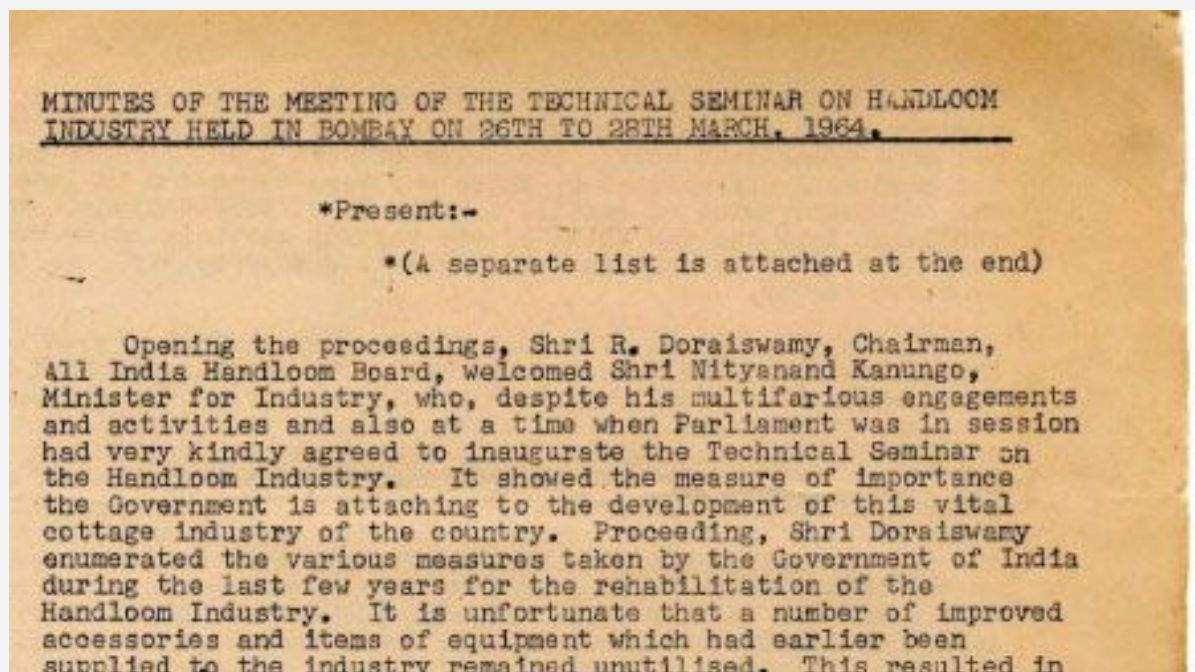


Figure 2: Minutes of the Meeting on the Technical Seminar on Handloom Industry held in Bombay on 26 - 28 March 1964. Courtesy: K.G. Subramanyan

IFA & AAA Project Update

The project started by questioning the gap that is often assumed to exist between the developer and the designer. This distinction (and hierarchy)

often places the designer as the source of ‘aesthetics’ whereas the developer is often relegated to contributing his ‘skill’. This is best exemplified in the way that most design firms operate today. Especially in processes concerning digital design, more often than not, the developer enters the picture to ‘execute’ the design. Of course, such distinctions between ‘aesthetic’ and ‘skill’ based practices are not new. They can be found in other related fields as well, such as the distinction between the architect and engineer, the designer and fabricator, or the artist and craftsman. And while this project does not aim to find ‘solutions’ to this gap/distinction in any direct way, it does begin with the premise that these two processes or positions (and discourses) around the designer and developer must be seen as twinned or intersecting. There are however many challenges in making them intersect, and these are varied. For instance, digital information requires access technologies that are changing at an ever-increasing pace. And this in turn, recalibrates the work that interface designers have to do. Let me provide an example from my own experience of working for this project. One of the libraries¹ I started learning and using for the project at the inception of the project has changed drastically over the course of this fellowship. Because of the speed of technological advances, it is an exciting challenge to hold on to any set of particular software tools throughout the project. Similarly, we must note that technologies change and develop not in isolation but in response to very specific demands – these could be demands of the economy or the market, of its function, and so on. For example, it is well-known that the technologies that gave us wireless and cellular phone services, the internet, or even cameras, were initially developed as part of the military industrial complex. In other words, we cannot see design and development as two parts of a linear process – of one following the other.

¹ I refer here to digital libraries which contain codes for developers. These libraries are most often open source.



From Living Tradition Series.

In the case of the Jyoti Bhatt archives, and the Living Tradition series of photographs, the convergence of design and development becomes all the more obvious when one considers the very multi-layered subject of the project – of Jyoti Bhatt’s photography; of its subject matter and aesthetics; of Prof. Bhatt’s changing processes of developing photographs in the dark room; of processes of scanning undertaken by AAA that have digitised the already-developed photographs; and of scanning processes that have themselves ‘developed’ photographs that until now never saw light of day. In other words, one major facet of the Jyoti Bhatt Living Tradition series for me to consider while conceptualizing its visualisation was the centrality of the technologies of photography itself, and the aesthetics of this technology. What this digital archive of Prof. Bhatt’s photographs conveys first and foremost, is of the inability to separate aesthetics from technics. Or to put it differently, design from development.

Other Updates

The insights after conversations with Prof. Jyoti Bhatt, confirmed my interest in using photographer’s contact sheet as the prime design motif of the navigation system for this project. At this stage, I am better focused on the materials I need to lead the process for this project. I have looked into the key binding features of the project, such as the principles of design that are particularly addressed by this project and the economy of using the technology.

In my visit to Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong in July 2015, my meetings with the Research team, the Digital team and the Library team centered around the [API](#), the changing methodologies of digital archiving, and the forthcoming version of the Asia Art Archive website. It was agreed to have an open source frontier to promote and share projects like mine in the future. Various meetings and discussions at the AAA office at Hong Kong helped me device a strategy on the following lines:

- To be semantic with all coding part of the project which will extend the developing process without obstacles.
- Stay with more active libraries.

In November 2015, the IFA Grantee Orientation meeting in Bengaluru was an encouraging platform for sharing ideas and to know the procedures of the organization for fulfilling these missions.

Web libraries accessed for the project

There are many online libraries for open source codes that I have been accessing for this project, and I expect to join more in the process. The javascript libraries online are popular for community support and its new uses. Below is a list of some of the main libraries that are proving helpful to materialize this project.

- [Foundation.css](#)
- [D3.js](#)
- [Chart.js](#)
- [Leaflet.js](#)
- [Angular.js](#)

Web resources and communities you have been accessing

Github is the main platform for sharing and discussing the process I am working on in this project. The few forum that I frequently visit include:

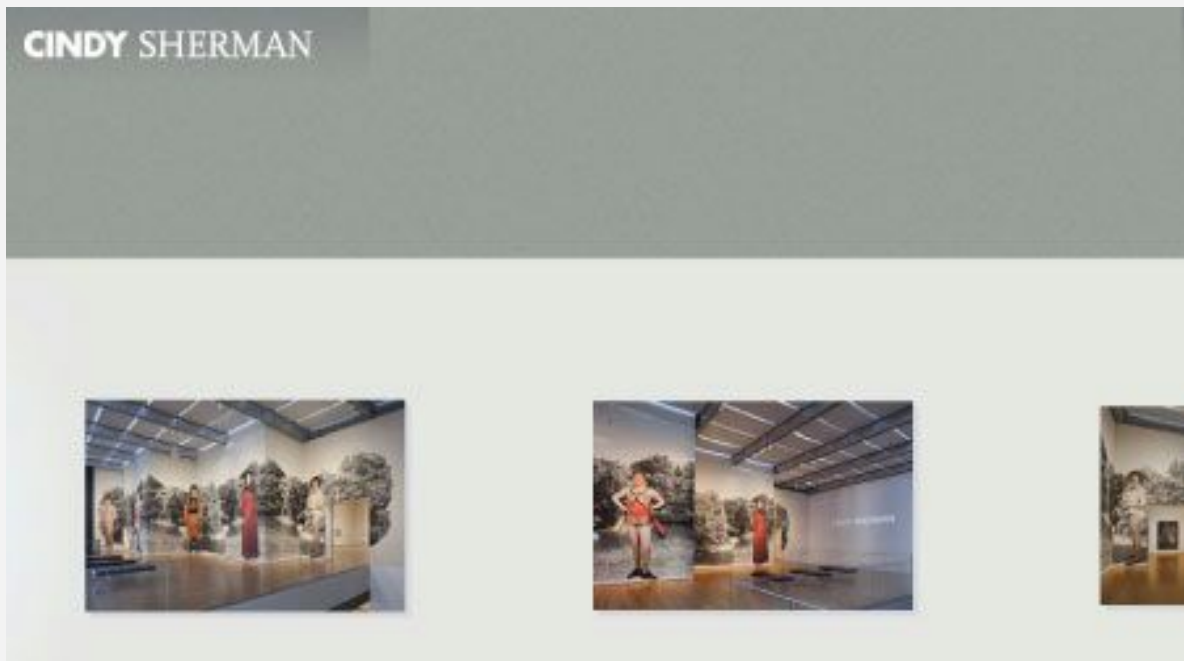
- [Github](#)
- [Foundation Forum](#)
- [Codepen](#)

Readings

An important aspect of this project, especially with my being an artist, is to be up to date with readings in the field of data-visualisations. Two reference that have been key to my thinking around this project are:

1. Fry, Ben. *Visualizing data: exploring and explaining data with the Processing environment*. O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2007.
2. Bertin, Jacques. *Semiology of Graphics: Diagrams, Networks, Maps*. ESRI Press, 2011.

Sample images of data-visualization I am interested in exploring



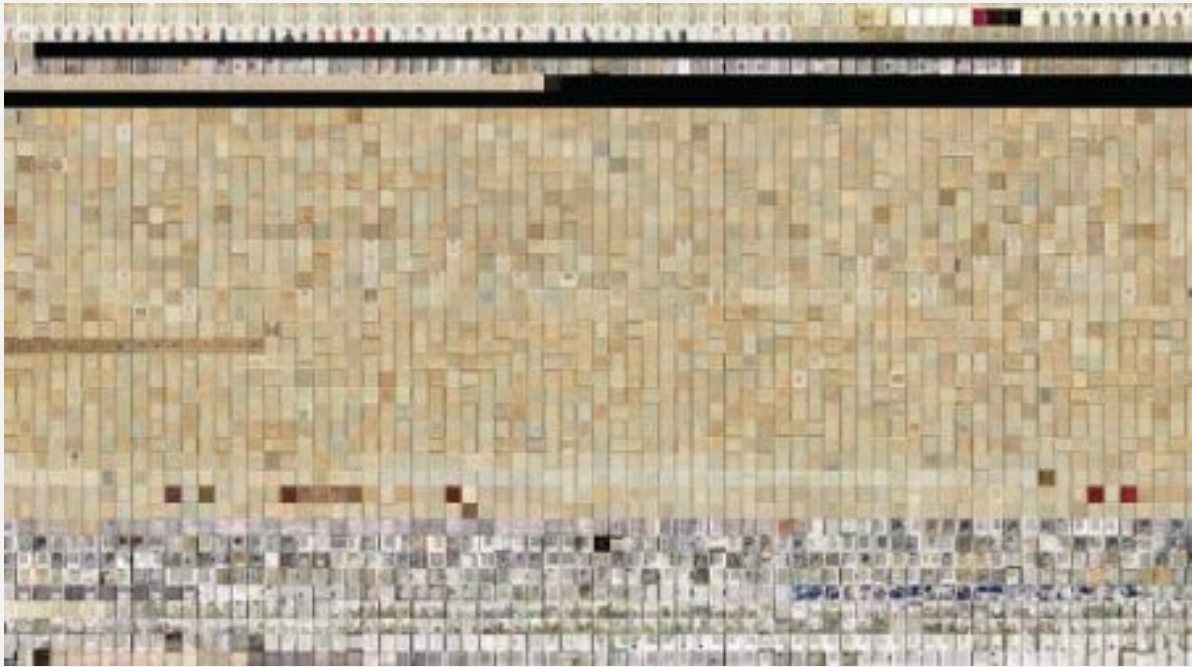
[Cindy Sherman](#)



[Storylines](#)



[Magritte](#)



[New York Public Library Collection](#)

Proposed Timeline for 2016:

January-February

1. Produce basic visual models.
2. Develop navigation elements.
3. Improve basic visual representation to make it clear and visually engaging for users.
4. Prepare detailed graphic layouts of interface with wireframe
5. Consolidate notes on each elements that may perform well with mentioned corresponding web technologies (behaviour, interactivity, sound, video and animation).
6. Consolidate a list of javascript libraries that can help materializing the web presentation.

March

1. 7 March 2016 - Make a presentation of project progress at an internal roundtable in AAA India Projects space in New Delhi.
2. End-March - Submit the final draft of the project.