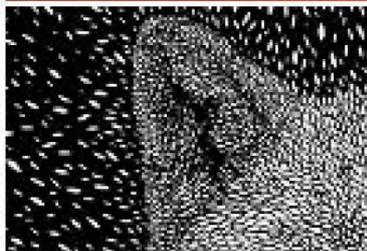
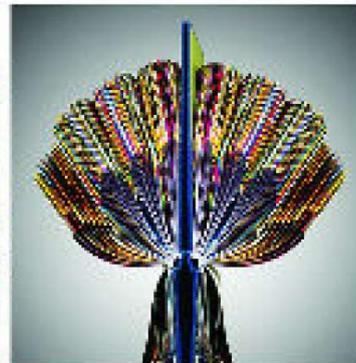
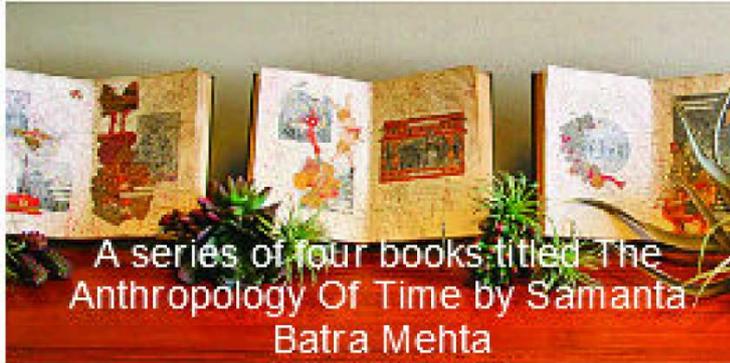


# Seeing art in pages



WRITTEN BY



**Simi Kuriakose**

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While the argument on the death of books may seem conclusive, we say there's reason to be optimistic about the medium. Reading Room: an exhibition displaying work by 15 artists, who have explored books as a tool of art, confirms our belief. We headed to Tarq Art Gallery at Colaba only to discover a world of books seamlessly colliding as art. The exhibition got us thinking that there's more than the traditional way to look at things.

"Book art is the quintessential 20th century art form," summed up art historian and critic Johanna Drucker. 25-year-old Peddar road resident and gallery owner Hena Kapadia says, "Book art has always existed; traditionally as manuscripts and illustrations. It has only progressed over time. Now, publications by Shantiniketan are seen as book art and in the West, several artists use books as an art form." Reading Room aesthetically stabs the conventional theory of neatly racked, well-maintained books, replacing it with some folded, torn and even burnt books and pages that advertise an emotion or a story like no

other. This commercial collection ranges from Rs. 1,600 to 4 lakhs and features artists from Sri Lanka, India and USA.

The first of the lot (also "the most expensive one") is *Chronicles*, a work by Sathyanand Mohan. This is a collection of 25 framed photographs from a journal written between 1922 and 1944 by his grandfather. The pages circle around the life of his grandfather, also mentioning the continuing struggle for India's independence. The series of work displayed also consists of a number of artists responding to the Sri Lankan civil war. A recognisable artwork is that of Radhika Hettiarachchi titled *Herstories: Mothers' Voices Of Resilience And Hope*; she went around Sri Lanka to interview women who lost their father, brother or husband during the war. *Displaced* by Kingsley Gunatilake, as the artist suggests, "are books like the cartridges where ammunition is kept." The pages have bullet marks embedded in them, highlighting the after effects of war.

The artwork titled *Sessions in Paradise* by Smriti Choudhary is a contrasting black and white pigment pen work on paper. The images depict nature at its best: ink drawings of a wolf with the backdrop of stars, a bear in the forest and the sorts. Kapadia tells us, "The artist was born in a small town in Rajasthan and was familiar with nature. Now, living in an urban area, she wanted to introduce her child to nature and seasons through her work." There's *Three Butterflies* by Banoo Batliboi, an unconventional art done by folding pages of a book on the basis of a set formula; it uniquely looks like butterflies. Another interesting and fun work is by Anne Covell. Called *Natural Order: A Game Of Pairs*, it is a researched pairing game, for both kids and adults, with an ecological explanation for each set. Some other artists' whose works are featured at this exhibition are Samit Das, Meera Devidayal, Liz Fernando, Layla Gonadua, Samanta Batra Mehta, Tanmoy Samanta, Deng Yifu and Zach Stensen. The experimentations adopted by the artists is impressive. It also indicates that books are priceless possessions that don't just belong in a reader's collection but are works of art in themselves. By the end of it, we had a conversation with and about books; just like the gallery name suggests, Tarq (Sanskrit for conversations).

Curated by Amit Kumar Jain, this exhibition featuring artists' books and altered book art, is on till September 13.