



FASHION • 12 DEC 2025 • 5 MIN

In Hampi, indigo dyes jamdani-inspired kimonos. (Just don't call it jamdani)

In 'Blue Futures: Reimagining Indigo', 13 artists reimagine the storied dye across mediums

BY VINITA MAKHIJA



Handwoven kimonos by Sappadittya Biswas

Indigo has long carried a tangled reputation. Once known as Blue Gold, it was a prized dye built on forced cultivation. A colour that financed empires, emptied villages, and left stains that still show. The exhibition *Blue Futures* at Hampi Art Labs (running till January 2026) acknowledges that history but dares to look ahead too.

The show features the works of 13 artists from India, Japan, Mali, and Europe. Their works range from heavy stone and ceramic to fragile woven cloth. Indigo is the shared sky, although each artist uses it to paint their own cloud of imagination.





Banners in 100 shades of indigo by Japanese collective Busaisou

One set of works is by Kolkata-based textile wizard Bappaditya Biswas, an institution in himself. The 52-year-old UNESCO award winner is the co-founder of Bai Lou—a label he runs with his wife Rumi—as well as Byloom, the iconic Kolkata store that's a first stop for visitors to the city seeking out everything from playfully printed home linen to finely woven saris. But over the last few years, ever since the Covid-19 pandemic, Biswas has been focussing his attention on reviving ancient hand-painting and dyeing textile techniques, reframing textiles as art and activism rather than fashion.

Biswas's works occupy the central gallery at Hampi Art Labs. When you walk into the facility spanning 9 acres housing exhibition spaces, studios, apartments for residencies, gardens, and a café, you'll encounter four unstitched kimono-like forms hanging from the ceiling. The four are part of a larger set of 20 first shown at the Serendipity Arts Festival in 2019. At first glance, the kimonos appear sheer. Step closer, and each cloth reveals its trick: irregularities that are created on the loom itself, not added later. One kimono holds tiny air pockets woven into its surface. Another integrates small felt discs and sequins during weaving, no tailor required. Another is woven with motifs of Goddess-like gold feet. This ingenious precision on the loom is a signature of Biswas, supported by a long collaboration with weavers who understand how far the handloom can stretch.



Handwoven kimonos by Bappaditya Biswas

Biswas rejects the idea that textiles exist as charming craft disconnected from the present. His work repeatedly returns to how identities are shaped and erased through material culture. Take the use of the term 'jamdani'. In 2016, Bangladesh acquired the GI tag for the technique, which meant that jamdani created in India cannot be labelled by the same name. For weavers who had crossed the border after Partition, it was a loss. "They asked me, 'Who are we if we can't even refer to ourselves as jamdani weavers, our entire identity?'" he says. To lose one's home once is brutal. To lose your professional name adds a second exile. Over 25 years of working together, Biswas and his weavers have doubled down on innovation, using extra weft weaving to build a new textile language that they can co-own, with skills they already possessed. That work continues with these kimonos. "I wanted people to be shocked at what weavers from Phulia [West Bengal] were capable of."

Biswas only uses the indigo that he cultivates. The kimono format becomes a deliberate choice. The weavers were used to weaving saris—an unstitched garment. The relatively simple pattern of a kimono echoed that and offered a chance for India's weaving vocabulary to meet Japan's garment logic. This choice recognises that indigo is a global traveller. It adapted. It caused damage in more than one geography. It also built beauty in more than one. Sangita Jindal, founder of Hampi Art Labs, puts it plainly: "The sacredness of the material should always be kept in mind."



A tapestry by Japanese artist Takuma/Slow Fabric

Besides Biswas, artists whose works are a part of the exhibition include Kavin

ADVERTISEMENT



MORE LIKE THIS


A RARE MAHESHWARI WEAVE IS ON THE VERGE OF DYING OUT. THIS 95-YEAR-OLD ARTISAN HAS THE KEY TO ITS SURVIVAL


'HONOUR THE ARTISAN' WAS THE UNSPOKEN DRESS CODE FOR SWADESH'S FESTIVE DO


THESE NEW STORES HOUSE DOLLS, ANGELS —AND CLOTHES

Besides Mehta, artists whose works are a part of the exhibition include Ruth Mehta, artist and creative director of Indigo Art Museum in Ahmedabad, who created a model-sized sculpture of a sandstone stepwell and a life-size container 'vase' in ceramic. Young artist Ashok Siju from Kutch collaborated with artist Savia Mahajan to dye porcelain, glass, and paper to create a series of sculptures that hang from the ceiling. Upendra Ram's 'Roop Katha', translated across three stoneware pots, might be the most striking piece of all, a record of indigo's history, embossed and coloured with the very blue that wrote those chapters.



Tapestries by Japanese artist Takuma/Slow Fabric that feature different kinds of shibori

Still, cloth always contains human presence. It is the first architecture we inhabit. It absorbs labour in ways other materials cannot hide. To that end, Buaisou, an indigo farm and artists' collective from Japan, presents 100 shades of indigo in 100 ramie panels, a calm gradient of labour. Japanese artist Takuma Shimada of Slow Fabric introduces mokume shibori in a tapestry that rewards repeat study. A Patan patola sari by Gaurang Shah, entirely in indigo, makes a rare appearance.

Blue Futures holds industrial dyeing, colonial trade, global fashion, village skills, and urban consumers in a single vat. Swirl them around and you get questions like: Can something that once caused so much damage become a tool for repair? "By focusing on the experiences of artisans, farmers, and craft communities, we consciously make sure that the story honours the people who have worked with indigo for generations," says Jindal. Curator Meera Curam offers a provocation: "If we took textiles and clothes off the indigo conversation, what would remain?"

The show argues that the future of indigo must be built on shared knowledge, not extraction. It must value makers, not only markets. Perhaps the most hopeful message is structural. Slow weaving in a fast world is a stance. Collaboration across borders is a stance. Recognising craft as something that will save our tired souls is a confirmation. Indigo will not escape its past, nor should it. But here it is offered a different horizon, one where the next chapter is written by the people who want you to experience every shade of blue.

Blue Futures: Reimagining Indigo is on at Hampi Art Labs, *Toranagallu, Vidyanagar, Karnataka, till January 28, 2026, from 11 am to 5 pm, Monday to Thursday*

the nod
Current . Crisp . Clever

HOME
ABOUT US
CONTACT US
NEWSLETTERS
PRIVACY POLICY
TERMS OF USE

STYLE
BEAUTY & WELL-BEING
CULTURE
TRAVEL & LIVING
COMMUNITY
VERY QUICKLY

A thrice-weekly newsletter, delivered directly to your inbox.
Enter your email address
SUBSCRIBE

2026, The Nod.

Disclaimer: All rights reserved. Use of this Website hereby constitutes express and unequivocal acceptance of our Terms of Use and Privacy Policy Statement. The materials listed, mentioned, relied upon etc on this Website shall not be duplicated, doctored, stored, transmitted or transferred or otherwise used for non-consensual activities, except with the prior written consent of Reliance Retail Limited only via official channels of communication.

wardrobes

BY PRIYANKA PARKASH & NAHEED DRIVER

Princess of Wales's Earthshot Prize look in threeweeks

BY KHUSHI VORA

problem, and the little world she's building for her growing family

BY AKANKSHA KAMATH

ensemble with a cowl of layered jewels dripping down her back

BY CHLOE CHOU

A thrice-weekly newsletter, delivered directly to your inbox.

Enter your email address

SUBSCRIBE

2026, The Nod.

Disclaimer: All rights reserved. Use of this Website hereby constitutes express and unequivocal acceptance of our Terms of Use and Privacy Policy Statement. The materials listed, mentioned, relied upon etc on this Website shall not be duplicated, doctored, stored, transmitted or transferred or otherwise used for non-consensual activities, except with the prior written consent of Reliance Retail Limited only via official channels of communication.