

Care For Some Colour And Pattern, Adulting World? – My Interview



I met Haripriya K Rao for the first time when she came to interview me while interning at the New Indian Express in April 2016 – my first interview ever (you can read it [here](#)). I cherish her visit all the more because she was the first visitor at 9 a.m, well before the gallery officially opened – on the first day of my debut solo exhibition at Venkatappa Art Gallery, Bangalore. Needless to say, I was thrilled when she contacted me again last month.

Haripriya is currently majoring in Communication Studies at Mount Carmel College and requested for my inputs on Mandala Art for a journalistic assignment she was working on related to advanced writing for print. Considering how much I love Mandalas – How could I say no!

Scroll down to read my views and that of other visual artists on Mandalas in her recently published academic paper titled 'Care for some Colour and Pattern, Adulting World?'

Coloring books for adults are flying off the shelves right now – are any of you into it? Do you think coloring is strictly for girls? Do you have any favorite books or patterns that you love to colour? I wanna hear.

[Click here](#) to view my 2016 Mandala series titled 'Microcosm'.

Care for some Colour and Pattern, Adulting World?

By Haripriya K Rao

Preetha (name changed), 17, comes home from school and before she starts her assignments, she opens her small pocket-sized, black and white book, and starts colouring in one of its pages. She tells me that she colours in this book, everyday, with utmost concentration. I watch her colouring an elaborate circular intricate design, for about an hour. Unmindful of my presence looming over her book, she searches for that perfect shade of blue to colour a petal, after colouring that design with shades of pink, blue and green. After she is done, she quietly closes the book and starts her homework. Her mother brings me tea and biscuits as I'm a guest and sits down next to me.

"Preetha started colouring Mandalas when she was in 7th Standard. It helped her calm down. Her Ajji used to do it on the ground, her granddaughter does it on paper," her mother remarks with a smile. When her mother left to bring me water, I ask Preetha, "Why do you colour them?" She says without batting an eyelid, "It helps me with my depression."

I take time to recover from that statement and after drinking the water, her mother brought me, I ask Preetha about her depression. She unabashedly says, "My therapist told me about colouring. I stumbled upon Mandalas when my friends were drawing them to kill time. Something about the whole design made me feel good and gave me hope. I haven't stopped since," she says.

Preetha was diagnosed with depression when she was 14. "It was due to school stress and peer-pressure. We had put her in a posh school and Preetha had a hard time adjusting there," her mother said when I inquired her about Preetha's depression. She started art therapy with Mandalas with her psychologists and has shown significant improvement in her personality, grades and in her over all being.

“Her late grandmother insisted on letting Preetha draw, but we never saw the benefits of it until Preetha started colouring these Mandalas. We thought colouring would be a huge waste of time,” says her mother embarrassed.

Recently a breast cancer survivor got ‘Mandala tattooed’ on her Mastectomied breasts. Sue Cook decided that cancer would not make her look disfigured instead tattoos would make her look empowered. “Cancer can leave survivors feeling as if their bodies are no longer their own. So I decided that a tattoo would transform my scars into art. Now, every morning I can wake up to see a beautiful piece of body art,” says Cook, the 62-year-old art teacher.

Mandalas in Sanskrit represent wholeness. Its literal meaning is a circle. The Mandala has its roots in Hinduism and Buddhism. According to an online website, Mandalas appears in the ‘Circles of Life’ encompassing family, friends and social circles. They are also believed to be never ending as they have circular designs.

According to Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, “A Mandala is the psychological expression of the totality of the self.” He discovered the significance of Mandalas through his own inner work. Jung saw Mandalas as symbolic of the inner process by which individuals grow toward fulfilling their potential for wholeness. In the Mandalas created by his patients, Jung saw a natural process of generating and resolving inner conflicts that brings about greater complexity, harmony, and stability in the personality.

Nancy Curry and Tim Kasser, research psychologists, Knox College (USA) claim “When individuals colour complex geometric forms, they are provided an opportunity to suspend their ‘inner dialogue’ and to deeply engage in an activity that removes them from the flow of negative thoughts and emotions that can sometimes dominate their lives.”

Of late, adult colouring books have hit the markets and there are many buyers ranging from kids to old people. When I was in a book store the other day, I saw a kid who looked about seven years old and his mother, both buying books. While he bought a Tinkle comic, his mother bought one those adult colouring books.

When I asked her about her choice, she said, “After a long day of work, when I

need to calm down and have some 'me' time, I sit and colour these Mandalas. I'd rather do this than sit and binge watch TV serials," she said.

She also shared that this was her 4th book.

Like her most people are taking up colouring and they are called colourists. Sarita Murthy, 53, a homemaker, says that she prefers colouring Mandalas after a long day at work. She takes about an hour to complete each Mandala and she does one, everyday. "My husband used to complain about me being irritable after coming from work, so I started colouring Mandalas to relieve my stress. Now he finds me to be more pleasing," she says with a twinkle in her eyes.

The trend is rumoured to have started in 2014, with Johanna Basford bringing out the first book, Secret Garden, a collection of line drawings inspired by her grandpa's love for gardening, and all living things in it. The trend is only catching up, in India, with most publishing houses coming out with titles of their own. There is Devdutt Pattanaik's rendition of Ramayana and Mahabharatha stories, The Sita Colouring Book and the Jaya Colouring Book are all published by Penguin. Hachette India has published Dream Cities and Secret Japan.

There are many free apps available on the Playstore, iStore and on the App Store as well, for the those who prefer to draw and colour on their mobile phones. Apps like Mandala Coloring Pages, Mandala Coloring Book, Mandala Adults Colouring Pages, etc. all have about 10 million users worldwide.

Sapna Dube, a visual artist who recently had her debut paint exhibition says that her mother used to draw Mandalas. "I think my first brush with Mandalas was as a child watching my grandmother and mother drawing elaborate white-patterned Rangolis outside the house every morning and trying to imitate them. Throughout my childhood, I watched and learned from my late artistic mother as she filled one blank canvas after another with melancholic, monochrome Mandalas," she shares. Her recent exhibition too was dedicated to her late mother who inspired her to become an artist.

She adds, "The child in me often questioned her (her mother) as to why she wouldn't add colour to them and being an artist, she'd simply say that that wasn't

her style. One day, I stealthily took one of her Mandalas and colored them with sketch pens – she nearly blew a fuse when she found out. That incident seems to have made a lasting impression on my young rebellious, impressionable mind because the Mandalas I draw today although heavily influenced by my mother’s style, they all have a riot of colours.”

When asked about how long she had been drawing them, “I’ve always drawn. I can’t remember a time that I didn’t draw and sketch and had always been able to sit in my own quiet space and play with colours endlessly,” she says. After her mother’s passing in 2011, she started looking at her mother’s work more closely – mainly consisting of Mandalas. This she hoped would compensate for her calming presence but instead she came to know her most intimately after she had ceased to be. “It was as if my mother’s spirit was gently nudging me towards the ‘light’ with her paintbrushes. I grabbed that ‘brush’ she was handing to me with both hands and so began my journey into the world of Mandalas,” Dube shares.

I have always wondered how people felt when they drew or coloured Mandalas. Dube has the answer, “Since it involves symmetry/ repetition it requires a lot of concentration and patience. Also, I never know what it will look like beforehand. It’s like putting pen to paper and letting it all flow. It’s definitely meditative and very calming both during and after. My husband says I can’t even hear him talk while I’m drawing – It gets me to a trance like, sub conscious state.”

“The whole process of drawing a Mandala to me is like sitting with a shrink and baring my soul – it’s very therapeutic. I always come up with themes for an upcoming series while drawing Mandalas as it also helps me discover passions I didn’t even know I had,” Dube eloquently shares her experience.

Ayesha Siddiqua an amateur artist shares that she draws Mandalas often as it helps her to concentrate. “I started doodling and drawing Mandalas when I was in school. They just sort of came to me, I didn’t even look at how it was done and I never bothered to structure them. I used to feel exhilarated, satisfied and even inspired when I drew and coloured them. I draw them when I’m lost or bored or exhausted or all three. I even draw them when I’m angry to let it all out. I draw them to feel more confident too,” she says. She has a page on Facebook named the “The Unfinished

Canvas” and has sold a few of her canvas artworks.

“It was a raging trend and I wanted to give it a try myself. I found it to be extremely therapeutic and it has helped me to eliminate stress. It is also satisfying as well,” says Trishal Reddy, an artist who recently has her work published by Classmate Notebooks. “It was thrilling to find my Doodle artwork on so many books, that too all across the country. As an artist she says that Mandalas has helped her with the experimentation and help her to come up with new patterns and combinations. She too is an active member on Social media and has a page, ‘Design Freak’ and does commissioned artwork.

“Are Mandalas meant for “Girls Only”?” I wondered out loud. To this Ravi Deshpande, a retired banker says, “Of course not! Mandalas were never gendered. You see priests drawing elaborate Mandalas in front of temples and Gods. Women used to do it in their houses and their Pooja Rooms. It was never gendered. It is an art form and it is free to everybody. In fact, I draw them myself whenever I find time. My grandson loves to see me draw them,” he shares.

Dube agrees, “The most elaborate and beautiful Mandalas are created by Tibetan lamas. In India, most intricate, ritualistic Mandalas with deep, powerful meanings originally created by ancient sages like the Sudarshana Homa Mandala at temples are drawn by male priests and almost every woman in India decorates her home with a free-hand Rangoli every day, so it’s not only unfair but grossly inaccurate to label it as a gender-specific art form.”

Reddy also is of the same opinion, “Art is never gendered and it should never be. Individuals by themselves, just being who they are, are amazing works of art. I’ve seen guys colouring Mandalas too. Art is for all, with no boundaries,” she shares.

A recent debate about these Mandalas is about its opposition to Christianity. I stumbled upon a picture which was mostly put up for humour (I think) that the most searched result on Google regarding Mandalas was that ‘Is drawing Mandalas against Christianity?’ Mandalas as mentioned earlier, has its roots in Hinduism and Buddhism. A website called ‘The Last Hiker’ claimed that Mandalas was against Christianity and people who drew or coloured Mandalas were not Christian either. The site went on to argue that devout Christians would never focus on a ‘Human’s

creativity' or on a materialistic creation. It is demonic to concentrate on Mandalas and is not Christian, the site opined. It also claimed that Carl Jung, the father of analytical psychology, was deeply into the occult, alchemy, astrology, studies in mysticism offered by the Orient. 'The Last Hiker' also raised questions like, "Is it about spiritual hosts of wickedness sneaking Mandalas into our homes and into our subconscious minds? Is it really about recreation or is it New Age evangelism?"

IT professional, Aditya N has another view point altogether. He opines that he would be much more interested in 'Indian Art' if it wasn't so attached to religion and superstition. "I can't seem to believe that by drawing a Rangoli and keeping some jug of water on top of it and decorating it with some flowers and vermilion will bring down the Gods. I just cannot wrap my head on it," he opines.

Whether this craze will go on or eventually die out like others, is a difficult question to answer. But I cannot help but think of this statement whenever I think of Mandalas or colours or patterns or all of them; "A world without art is just Meh," and Preetha who is en-route to finishing her 8th book of 200 pages of intricate circular patterns filled with colours also seems to agree with me.