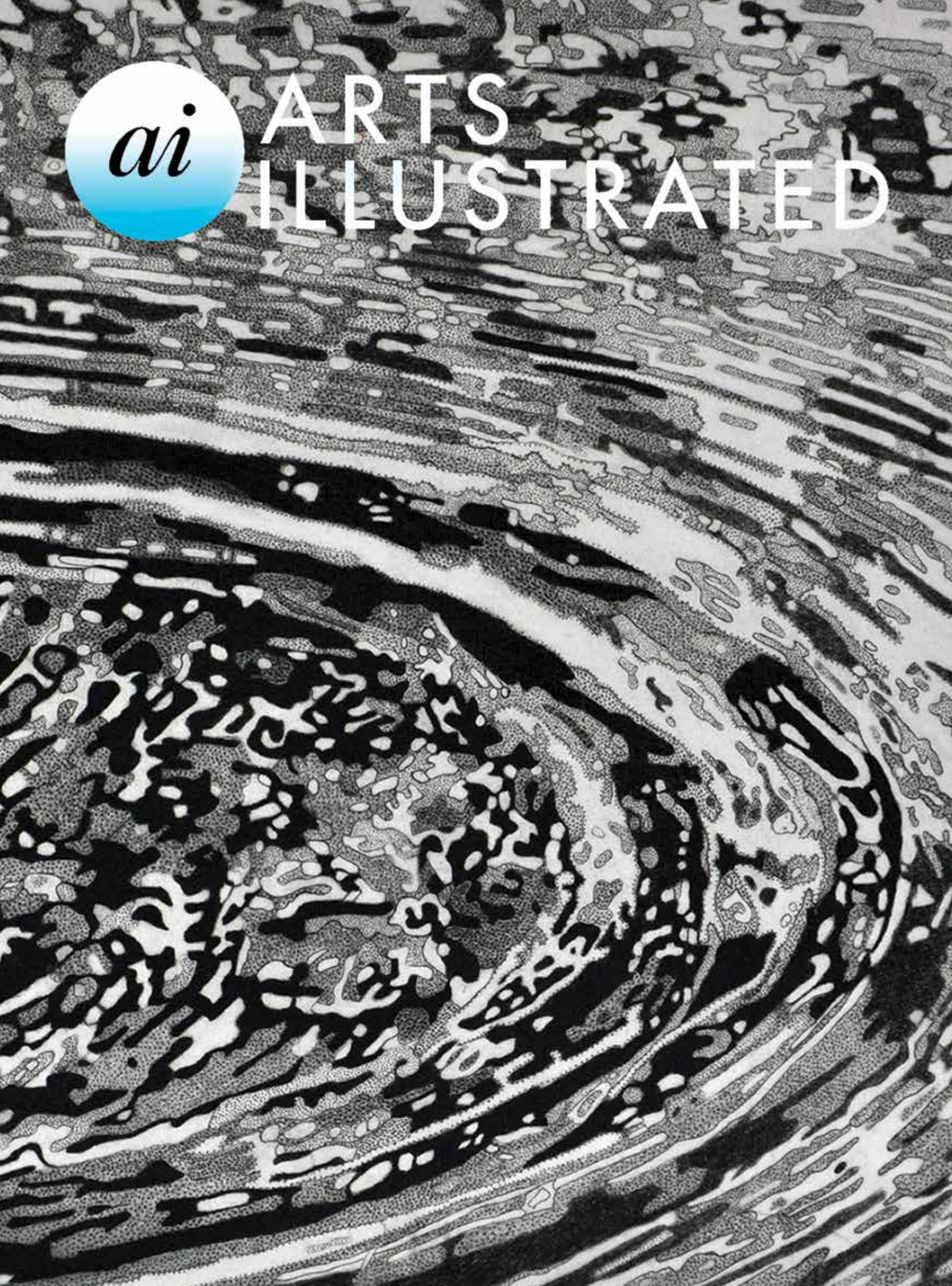




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

At the time of working on this issue and discussing the cover with Parvathi Nayar – on the solo power of water and its environmental implications in a development-hungry country – relentless waters with another kind of hunger devastated the entire state of Kerala. It made Parvathi's cover for this issue frighteningly relevant and our theme that wanted to look at the beauty of solitude, the aesthetic of isolation, and the beginning of things, where one is followed by two, where many drops begin with that first one, always. The Kerala floods reminded us that perhaps destruction too was tied into the idea of solo, a precursor of what is to come, a full stop for the next sentence to begin.

This issue we found that solo resided in each one of us, in its many-hued splendour. It reiterated the fact that just by virtue of something being 'single' or 'alone', it did not do away its complex layers, its narratives and stories and its constant need to dialogue with the world, so something new could then walk its path. Even a literal interpretation – a movie named 'Solo' or a solo road trip – brought with it a surprising charm of its own, unpredictable in where it takes us.

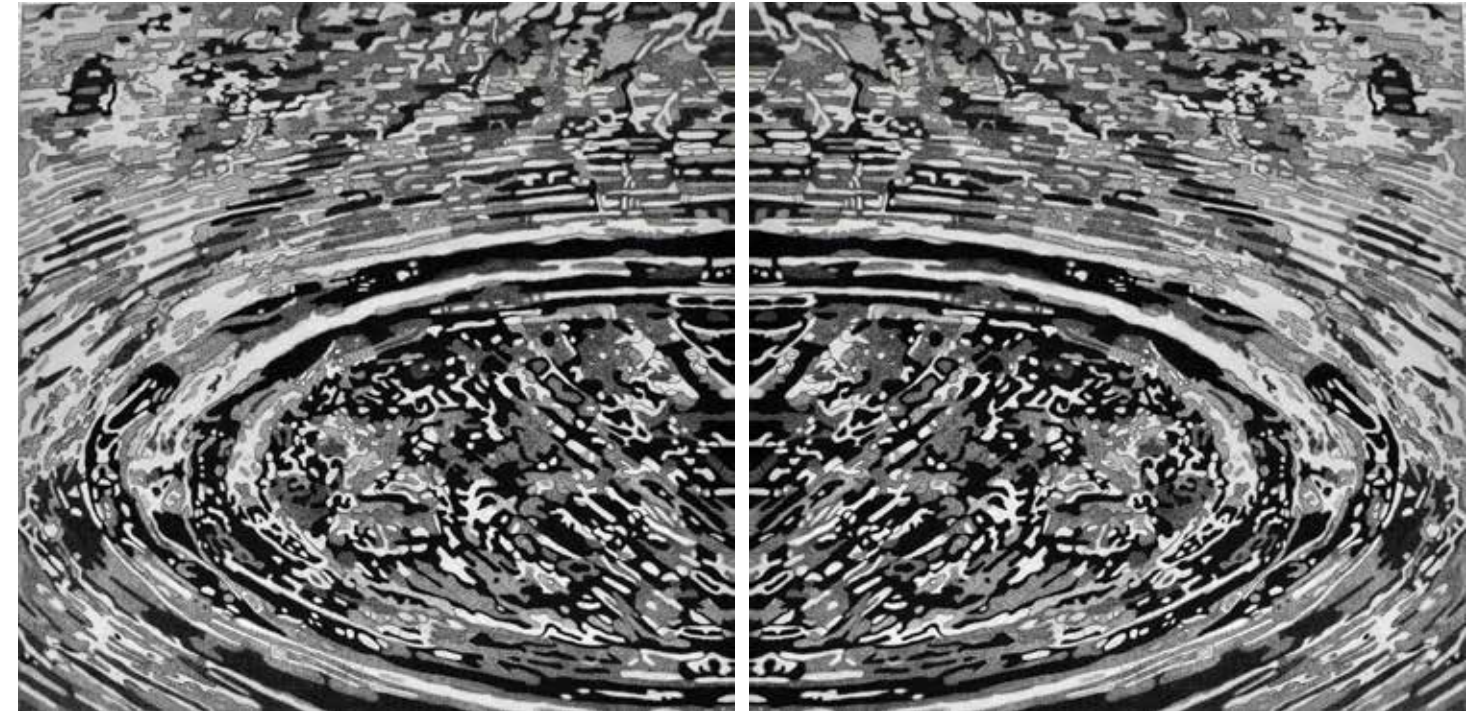
But, perhaps, the one thing that really stood out while we put this issue together and one that truly resonated with the theme for me was the Supreme Court verdict on September 6 that finally scrapped Section 377, an archaic, pre-colonial law that criminalised same-sex relationships, allowing the colours of the rainbow to reclaim its rightful place in the sky.

Our pages, too, this issue, bring a piece of that rainbow – resplendent in its alone-ness, multi-layered in its manifestation, and full of shining light for the future. And a reminder that every journey begins with someone, somewhere, over the rainbow.



Praveena Shivram
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Cover Artist



The solitary event. A singularity from where life itself emerged. But equally, one pebble in the pond. Perhaps, then, another. And another. The butterfly effect. One event collides with a neighbouring one, influences that episode. And moves to nudge the next. A cascading series of causes and outcomes.

It's what I dream each drawing will do – be an idea moving outwards, whose form is both fluid and frozen, meaning one particular thing but also many different things. A ripple that will find new shape in the minds of its viewers.



Parvathi Nayar



Collective Commons

A Life Less Ordinary

Product designer, fashion icon, art and craft connoisseur and an entrepreneur Sunil Sethi's office in south Delhi is situated in a semi-industrial and institutional area. A large room is stacked with neatly packed works of art, which is part of his collection, and yet another room has a stock of the last few tapestries of master painters. But it is in his personal office on the top floor of the building where his favourite works are. 'My room is curated with black and white works and each is very special to me. In ways more than one they tell you the story of my life,' he says. And so, here's the story.

RAHUL KUMAR

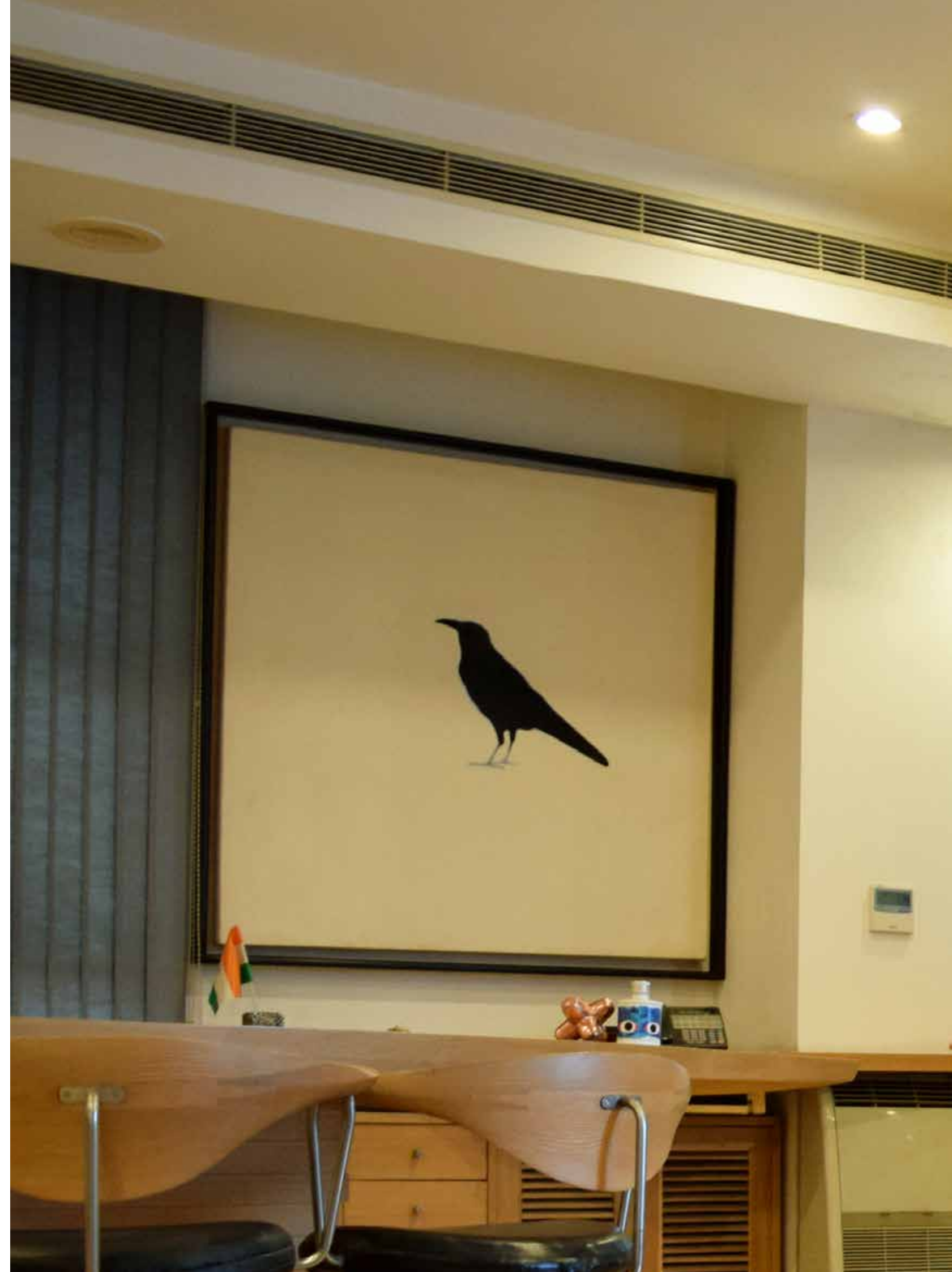
Photographs by Shantanu Prakash

Mine is an old Delhi family, settled here for close to a century.

I was born in Delhi and grew up in the University area. I have many fond memories of the old Delhi area, where my grandfather set up his business by the name of American Radio and Automobile in 1926. He was the sole importer of the needle used in gramophone players and spare parts for Benz vehicles. My father, also a graduate from Shri Ram College of Commerce, took over the business and gradually I joined hands.

Sports, public speaking and theatre were more of a passion in my younger days.

I represented my school in both cricket and badminton teams, and not many know that I have taken an opening ball from Mohinder Amarnath at the DDCA Delhi League in the mid-1970s. Arun Jaitley was my partner at an inter-college debate





event and Gulshan Grover directed a play in which I played the lead. I have had a wide range of experiences but nothing that was even remotely close to visual arts or design.

Setting up a buying-house as part of the family business brought me closer to creative field.

While the traditional business of my family was to import, I set up an export company. It represented major international apparel brands to export garments out of India. As part of the promotional campaigns, we held roadshows and exhibits that were centred around Indian culture. As an extension to garments, designers like Paola Navone and Tom Dickson used me as the sourcing agent in India. This stint allowed me to



appreciate the heritage of India in the true sense. I began to notice things that modern-day India was leaving behind and discarding.

A show in London that we organised marked the beginning of my association with visual arts.

The CEO of Selfridges asked me to organise a promotional show based on the changing cultural landscape of the country, from royalty to the youthful India. The two-month event in 2001 in London included Amitabh Bachchan launching the show. Along with disciplines like food, fashion and performances, contemporary art was an integral part of this. I curated a show of kitsch-art, which was a hit. Formal art could not be





part of this event, but it initiated my journey with the arts. From the fashion standpoint also, this event was a milestone. My organisation pioneered in selling Indian fashion internationally and, as a result, I was nominated to lead the Fashion Design Council of India. I became its President in 2008 and remain so till date.

Floor-coverings with the work of master artists on it is one project that I am proud of.

This was a unique project that was initiated after a successful implementation of the production of carpets for the Carpet Promotion Council. I realised India has a deep strength in design and also craftsmanship. Maneka Gandhi's 'People for Animals' got in touch with me to help produce carpets with artworks that I named *Floored by Art*.

We reproduced a tapestry in limited edition with works of modern masters like MF Husain, SH Raza and Ram Kumar, and contemporary artists like Manu Parekh, Bose Krishnamachari and Paresh Maity. Up until now, I was only in awe of these creative people and here I was interacting with them. I still have a few in my collection and commercially they did well beyond my belief.

Raza saab appreciating his own work in tapestry was a precious moment.

As part of the contract, I had to give one of the reproduced works back to the artist. I decided to personally present the work to Raza saab. He was spellbound when he saw it. He could not believe that the weave can depict each stroke of his brush, the subtle change of shades of colour and even his

signature. He stood in front of the framed carpet with folded hands. That was a moving site, and he placed the work in his living room.

Abstract genre remains my all-time favourite.

Abstraction and minimalistic works have remained my core interest. I ended up acquiring some of the best works of artists like Zarina Hashmi in my early days. I now get requests to loan them for important shows. I do sway into figurative and representational works occasionally, especially to support upcoming artists. I am part of a foundation that gives grants to young artists to study abroad. As a result, I end up seeing a lot of exquisite talent and cannot resist including these works in my collection. Here is a secret...very few

people know that I am myself an installation artist. One of my significant works is still placed at the Nehru Park metro station in Delhi.

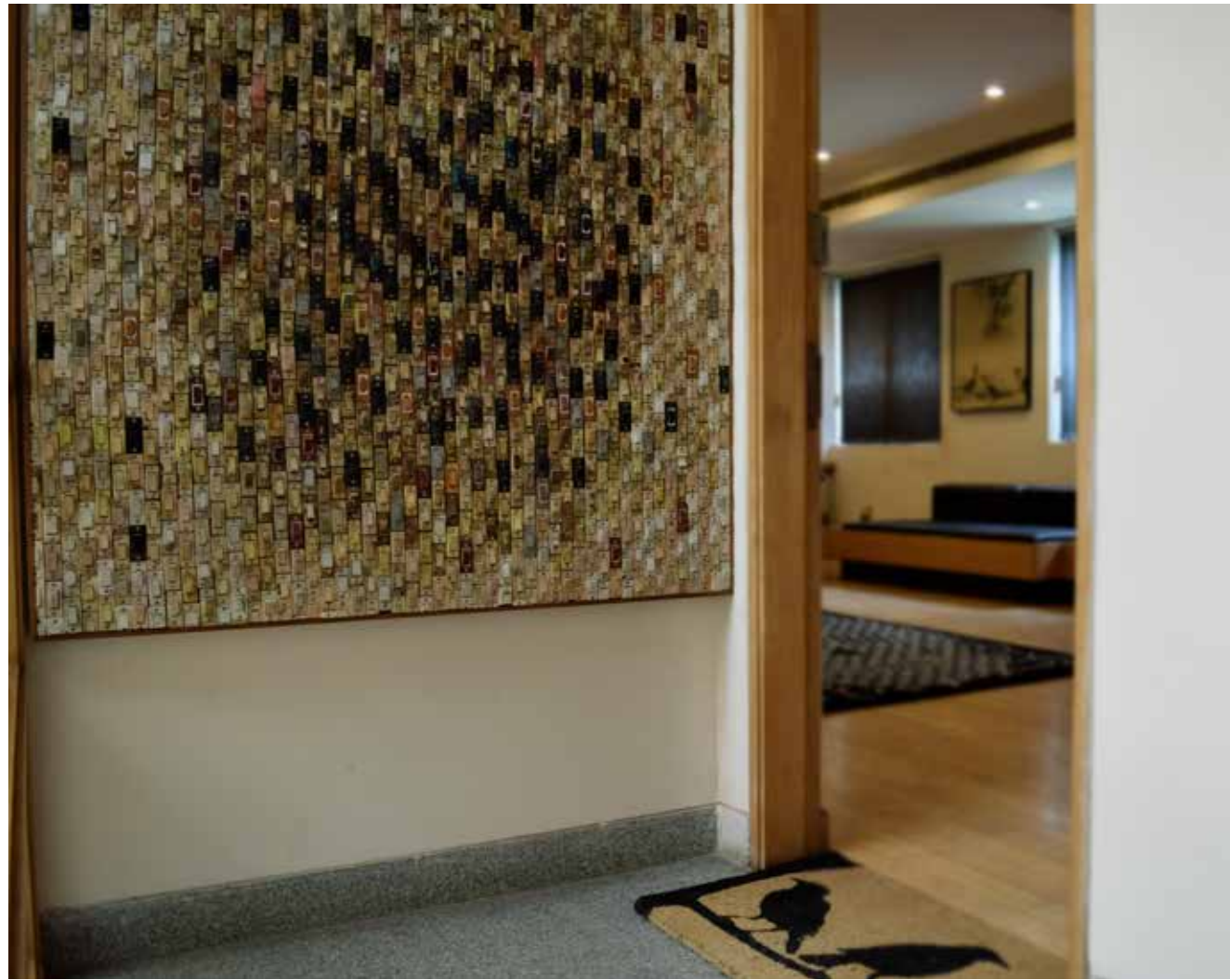
I was keen for my daughter to inherit the passion for art from me.

More than anything else, I wanted my daughter Tarina to take on the passion for arts from me. I coaxed her into taking a short course in print-making. It was something I could not do, but I was so fascinated with the medium that I was satisfied with her learning the process. We now acquire work as a family. She formally studied textile design, but I am happy that she enjoys art as much as I do.

I can draw parallels with my own life in some works, and those are the most precious to me.

The works in my personal office are in monochromatic tones, with black as the primary colour in them. I commissioned a young artist to make a painting inspired by the cityscape of old Delhi. He painted the very shops that I used to frequent as a child, to buy my favourite sweet and have my clothes stitched. Then the *Crows* by Pradeep Mishra have a place of pride. *Crows*, in the Indian context, are considered bad omen. They are ridiculed and shooed away. When I started my career, it felt to me as though I was ridiculed the same way. These works connect emotionally with me.





The sketch of Gopi Gajwani tells the story of my life.

Gajwani gave another title to this work, but I call it *Waiting for a Morsel*. In the sketch, there is a figure of a man, but his face is not visible. And three crows are sitting around his legs, as though they are waiting for a morsel of food to drop while the man eats. In my days of struggle, I waited like that for the smallest opportunity. And like in this sketch, the people who gave me those opportunities are not identified.



Sunil Sethi



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