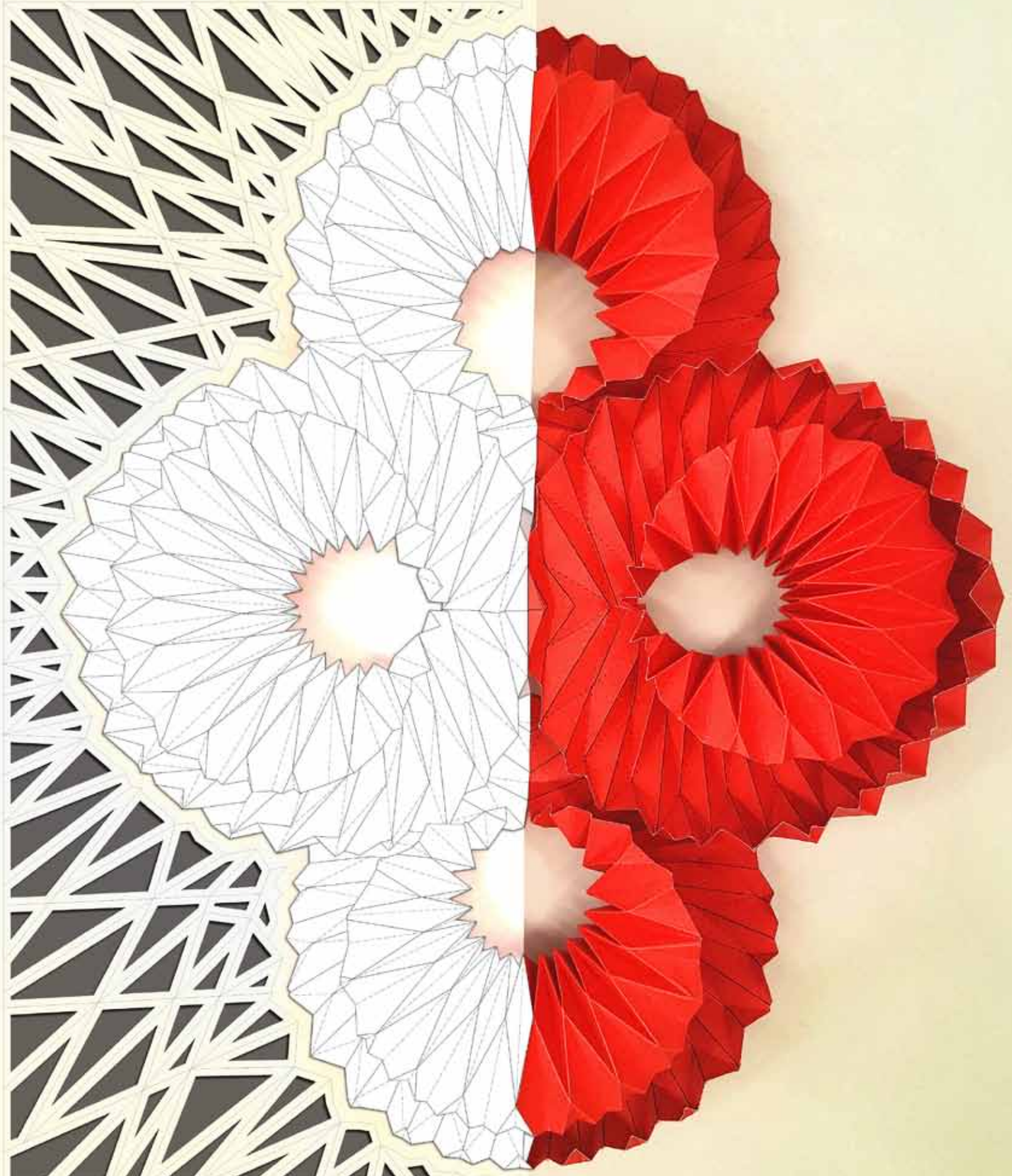




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

In middle school, most of us with access to education have dabbled with the intricacies of that thing called a science project. And, most of us, invariably, have succumbed to its sheer mind-boggling impossibility and outsourced it to our parents or older siblings or, sometimes, even neighbours. Mine was a recreation of the moon's surface to understand gravity, and my artistically inclined sister used cardboard, tin foil, match box and sticks and created the moon's uneven surface with craters, an astronaut half up in the air, and even a little rocket ship. At 12, I thought it was the best science project in the world. Actually, I still think it is. The fact that the school (irresponsibly) thought otherwise is beside the point. The point is that, even without our realising it, art and design have always been a part of our lives, and they have always co-existed – where art is the free spirit, design is the boundary and to think of one without the other is like thinking of a science project without mother-father-sister-brother-neighbour. We may have consciously put it aside for the cause of higher academics (inevitably, if you lived in Chennai), but it never leaves us – be it in the clothes we wear, the colours we use in our homes, the kind of furniture we like or the art we put up on our walls, the two have walked hand in hand like Hansel and Gretel.

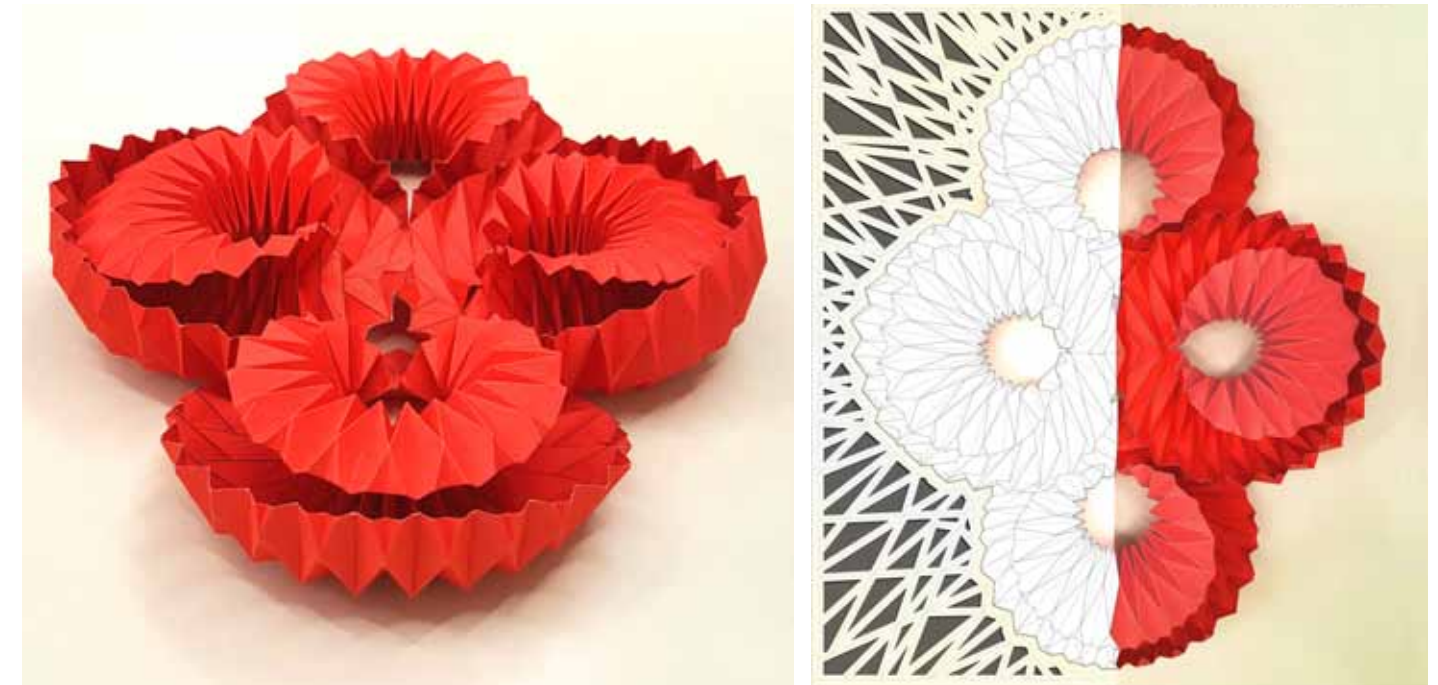
As it is with the said fairy tale and with most words and definitions, the meaning of what art is and what design is segued into crumbs of disparity, the patterns becoming harder and harder to navigate. So this issue, on art and design, we decided that instead of trying to peel away the layers, we would instead climb to the top and look for spaces where they intersect. The stories we met were surprising, and resonated with Netflix's original documentary series, *The Art of Design's* trailer (I haven't watched it yet, so it isn't a recommendation, although on a side note, how our online spaces are designed are just as important or the fact that Facebook's notification icon changed from blue to the more eye-catching red, the colour of danger, just as telling of how much design and art play a role in our lives) that says: 'You're looking for a moment when you feel you are as close to the soul as possible. That's what good design is.'

This is also the month when, quite coincidentally and importantly, two events based on art and design take place in Delhi – the India Art Fair, now in its 10th edition with a brand new team, and the India Design Forum, now in its 4th edition co-founded by the mother-daughter duo, Rajshree Pathy and Aishwarya Pathy (we feature them in our Q&A section this issue). And if you are at the IAF, then do look for our specially curated booklet on this event. If you are not, that's fine – you know where to go for your art and design stories, right? (And this is a definite recommendation, for AI, of course).



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Cover Artist



I am an architect by training and an artist by temperament, with a keen interest in the geometry and mathematics of trees, flowers, hills and coastlines. I am deeply interested in exploring the folds in nature. I studied the science and maths of flow and energy-travel through space and all energy waves (sound, light, heat) travel by folding through space. The empty space itself is crumbled, and therefore folded, due to the gravitational force. All life forms too start with the folds of DNA interlocking within strands of healthy cells. I realised that we are made of folding, work through folding and are surrounded by folding. This, coupled with the art of origami, became the basis for my art practice. It allowed me to make sense of the underlying geometry and structure of the chaos that surrounds us, at a physical and metaphorical level.

The work for the cover of this issue is titled *The Four Noble Truths*. I attempt to meditate on the philosophy that Gautama Buddha enunciates: Fact that suffering is the truth, reasoning the cause of suffering, possibility of the end of suffering, and the path that leads to the end of suffering. The work has four connected parts that resembles a large sea-shell. Metaphorically, the void within these contains the positive and negative energies, yin and yang. And the truth sits within each empty space where realisation delves, outwardly disconnected and also separated from the other three 'truths' by the very construct of the form. While the right-hand side of the image shows the emotion and 'reality' of the experience, soaked in rich red colour, the left-hand side lays bare the clinical, technical and physical construction of the work, where the cutwork-pattern reveals the context or framework from within which the work emerges.



Ankon Mitra

Cover design curated by Rahul Kumar



Up, Close & Personal

What would you do if all the wall space in your house was already full of art, but you still have more that you would like to display? In collectors' Brinda and Alfaz Miller's case, they just literally looked up.

'Ours is a typical Mumbai building, small and tall. Wall space is limited, so we had to find creative ways to get the most of what we have. We thought, why not the ceiling – that's a lot of unused space,' says Brinda, an artist, Executive Committee member and Honorary Festival Director of Mumbai's Kala Ghoda Festival since its inception, and member of the Advisory Committee, NGMA-Mumbai. She has her studio on the fourth floor of the tower off Shivaji Park where Alfaz runs his architecture firm, which was established in 1982. The Millers have a fascinating collection that continues to grow.

RAHUL KUMAR

Photographs by Shantanu Prakash

Bringing art into retail space was first conceived by Alfaz three decades ago
He was a practising architect and loved to collect art. For a project for Grindlays Bank, he planned a 100 sq. ft. space at a Mumbai branch especially to display art. Banks were where people would come, unlike now when most of our transactions happen online. A common friend referred me and I was excited to meet someone who had the vision to get art out of the traditional white-cube gallery space back then. Several years later I met him again when Alfaz

came to buy a work for a client from my show. Art was really the reason how we both met and got to know each other.

We would jointly see shows and pick works

As we interacted more, we realised that we had a lot in common. Art can be very individualistic – not just for the artist but also for collectors. But Alfaz and I had similar aesthetic sensibilities. We would go to see shows together, and buy works for ourselves and also for his clients.

People now are a lot more aware of art and know what they want. But in those days they depended on architects and designers for guidance on the kind of art they should have and even to tap into the artist network. Galleries were few and access to knowledge on art for the viewers was non-existent. Only as recently as 2005, after the art boom, did art become the thing-to-do and follow. Access to material online has also helped create awareness and educate people.

Being an artist helped in approaching other artists whose works we collected over time

We interacted with artists all the time. And this became a good way to start collecting. We had easy access to them. It is always nice to know about one's practice and concerns rather than just reacting to works visually. Therefore, my artistic connect helped in getting access to that information. Of course, we artists love to exchange works. Artists usually like to give works to those who would not sell it, making a mere investment business of their work. On the other hand, being creative souls, they want to surround themselves with aesthetics and beauty. As a result, a considerable part of our collection is through barter or bought at huge concessions directly from the artists' studios.

Ours is a diverse collection, albeit a few practices with a deep representation

We like a diverse array of works. Therefore, for the most part we have a single or just a couple of works from one artist. Within our creative sensibility, our collection represents a large diversity. But

there are exceptions. For instance, a practice like that of Prabhakar Kolte cannot be captured in a single work. We have eight of his black-and-whites alone! Abstract works remain at the core of our interest. One does not get bored easily from a well-made abstract work. Even the few figurative works that we have are strong expressionist work and tend to border on abstraction.



We disagree, but ultimately it's a combined decision...umm...mostly!

In very rare instances will either of us acquire a work without an 'in-principle' acceptance from the other. Otherwise, we make consultative decisions. We give each other veto rights; after all we both have to live with the works. The one point we disagree on is that Alfaz does not ever want to sell anything, while I feel we have





accumulated works that we do not like any more. It is important for us to circulate those...but that discussion always ends up in a debate, and the works go back to the store room.

We have a diptych that was not even planned by the artist

We have two works of Sunil Padwal. They were made at different times and displayed in completely different shows. When we saw the second of the two works, it immediately felt like it was meant to go with the one we already had. It is interesting that such serendipitous things happen. We placed the works together, meeting at a corner. At another time, Vasundhara Tiwari promised a work which did not come for a very long time. But when it finally arrived, I saw she had put me in the painting. Her passion and depth were so evident. It is a work I personally cherish.

Art is an emotional asset, and yes, one that is consumed

We have never seen art as a commercial asset. It is an emotional asset that we consume over time. We look at the works every once in a while, as do the visitors at our home and office. I discovered an interesting feminist angle in a work of Manu Parekh after it hung on our walls for many years. Such things happen



as the works reveal themselves, gradually. We do occasionally have to conserve and restore works. Mumbai is hot and humid and it does impact art on paper and canvas.

A small Abir Karmakar work is special
If forced to pick one work from our entire collection, it will have to be the Abir Karmakar painting. If I had not seen him make the work in front of me, I would have never ever imagined it not to be a photograph! Then, a work of Mehlii Gobhai is close to me for the fight I had to put up to have it. We decided on it at the same time a French collector wanted to have it. I won, and we love that work.

Brinda and Alfaz Miller.

