Design Resource

Making of Kalighat Pattachitra - Kolkata
Scroll Painting
by
Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B
NID, Bengaluru

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/making-kalighat-pattachitra-kolkata

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Introduction

Pattachitra is a general term for traditional, cloth-based scroll painting. In Sanskrit, Patta stands for "cloth" and "Chitra" for "picture". While in the context of Bengal tradition, Patachitra means "the paintings made by Patuas using natural colours." According to legends, the art was originated among a group of artisans called 'Patuas' from Kalighat in the 19th century. They used to paint long narrative stories on scrolls of handmade paper often stretched to over 20 feet in length. These scroll painters then traveled to other parts of rural Bengal, thus spreading the art to many. The migration and innovation brought in new changes in the art, introducing watercolours and mill papers being the new entrants for its execution. Now, two types of Kalighat Pattachitra survive in the time, Oriental and Occidental. The Oriental style of paintings largely depicts gods, goddesses, mythological characters, and scenes from religious texts. Occidental style features secular and civil themes like women and men involved in daily activities, their role in the society, depictions of freedom struggle, and other themes that common people could relate with them.

According to the shape, size, and technique associated, they are divided into two types, namely Square Pata or Chouko Pata and Rolling Pata or Jarhano Pata. Square Pata or Chouko Pata is a card-shaped Pata, made based on a single impression without rolling efforts. At the same time, Rolling Pata or Jarhano Pata incorporates a block that is rolled for impressions. The colours used for this art are mainly derived from natural ingredients like leaves, seeds, roots, pulses, fruits, etc. For example, yellow colour from turmeric root, blue from Aparajita flower petals, black from the soot obtained after burning an oil lamp under a pot, etc.

Along with the colours, the gum of Bael fruit is mixed so as to hold the paint on the base material. One of the famous modern artists involved in Kalighat Pattachitra is Jamini Roy, who experimented immensely with the painting during his early days of the occupation. Equally, a well-known artist is Mr. Anwar Chitrakar, a West Bengal-based person settled in the Naya village of West Medinipur district. He is a National award-winning artist who has contributed to the field greatly for long decades. His entire family is into the making of Kalighat Pattachitra easily passing the craft from generation to generation, thus conserving its heritage.

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Artisan Mr. Anwar's house in Kolkata.

Flat two-dimensional perspective and pointed facial features are a common style in Kalighat patachitra.

Mr. Anwar's National Award on display which he won for the contribution to Kalighat Patachira art.

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Patachitra painter displaying a traditional painting.

Hand fan with beautiful puppet design.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials that are used for making Kalighat Pattachitra are as follows:

• **Paint Brush:** It is used to make paintings.

• **Organic Dyes:** These are made out of organic materials like leaves and plant roots.

• **Art Paper:** It is the main medium on which the painting is created.

• **Waste Cloth:** It is used to wipe washed brushes and absorb excess water.

• **Particleboard:** It holds the drawing paper tight during the painting process.

• **Pencil:** It is used to make sketches over paper.

• **Eraser:** It is used to remove unwanted pencil marks.

• **Natural wood apple/Bael Gum:** It is used as a binder, hence mixed with the paint colours to stick to the medium.

• **Coconut Shell:** It is used to store the organic dyes prepared.

• **Leaves, Roots, and Stone:** These are used for preparing natural dyes for the painting.

• **Pestle Stone:** It is used to crush the leaves and roots to extract colours.

Watercolors, extracted derived from natural stuffs.

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Different sizes of Painting brushes are used for coloring and detailing purposes.

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Card sheet used to draw the kalighat patachitra.

Wood apple gum used during the patachitra painting.

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Pencils and eraser are used to compose drawing on card sheet.

Making Process

Painting Process

The painting process starts with sketching. The theme for painting depends on the artist; here, the artist sketches Buddha sitting in a meditative posture.

Initially, an outline of the sketch is done, and later details are added to the sketch. Once the sketching is completed, the artist prepares the dyes for painting. The natural gum obtained from the Bael tree is used as a binder along with the paint. The gum is added to the coconut shell containing the dye, allowing the colour to observe some of it. Excess gum is removed from the coconut shell, and the remaining gum is blended finely with the paint using one finger. Now the dyes are ready for applying. The paints are made from natural organic material like leaves, roots, fruits, etc.

The artist starts by filling the contours and space in the sketch with colours using a big-sized brush and allows it to dry. Once the initial coat of paint is dry, the artist starts to paint the details on it using a small-sized brush. Using a very small-size brush, the artist paints fine details like facial features into the painting. Finally, the artist gives a final touch to the artwork by drawing outlines in black colour, and thus a Kalighat Patachitra is prepared.

Flow Chart
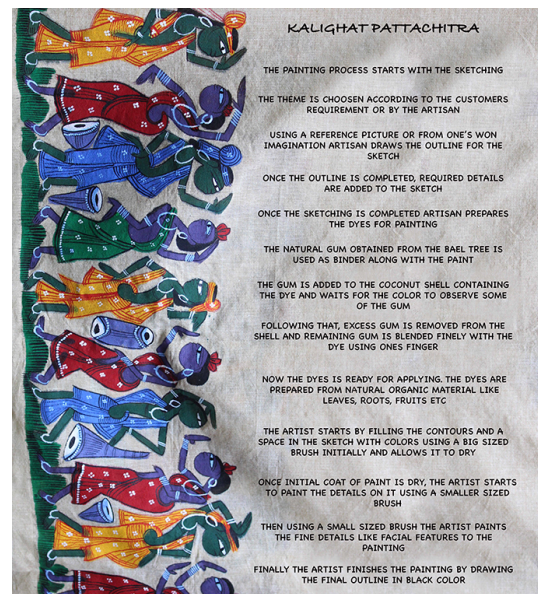
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Preparation of Dyes:

Various types of leaves, roots, and fruits are used to obtain different shades required for the painting. Depending on the ingredient, the method of extracting colour also varies. If the colour is being extracted from leaves or seeds, then they are crushed using a hand or pestle, and the colour is collected in an empty coconut shell and dried in the sun. The extracted colours are stored in the coconut shells because the shape of the container acts as well, which enriches the colours. Different shades of the same colour can be obtained by exposing the colours to sunlight. For a darker shade, the extracts are directly exposed to sunlight, but if a bright colour is needed, the mixture of colour and gum must be kept out in the sunlight. The more the colours are exposed to the sun, the darker the shade of colour. The basic colours, which are prepared for the making of the painting, are black, red, blue, white, green, yellow, and brown. Other colours are prepared by mixing two colours together. The colour Black is made from the burnt rice, charcoal, or soot of the oil lamp. The soot is collected into a coconut shell and powdered well, then a required amount of gum is added and blended well. The colour Ochre Red is made from the seeds of the Saffron. The seeds grow into spiky pods, which grow in clusters at the top of the tree. The seeds are removed from the dried fruit pods and crushed to extract the colour, and stored in the coconut shell.

The colour Red is obtained from the leaves of the Segun/teak tree. The leaves are crushed, and the colour is squeezed out in a coconut shell. The colour Blue is obtained from the petals of the Aparajit flowers, which grows like a creeper. The petals are crushed, and the colour is collected into a coconut shell. The colour white is made from a special type of clay known as Kusum Mitti, which is available on the earth in the form of stones. These stones are available at a depth of 10-12 feet under the ground. The stones are scrubbed against a rock, and the white paste obtained is collected in a pot and left to dry. The colour Green is obtained from the leaves of the Kundri or Barbati (runner beans). It is also extracted from Seem, Bheranda, and Kesut leaves. The colour Yellow is obtained from the turmeric root. Roots are crushed in the pestle stone, and juices are collected in the coconut shell. The colour Brown is obtained from the matured leaves of Segun/teak.

The Wood Apple Gum, which is used as a binder along with the natural dyes, is prepared using the pulp of the wood apple fruit. The seeds are removed, and the pulp is mixed with the water to make the binder.

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https://dsource.in/resource/making-kalighat-pattachitra-kolkata/making-process

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

Flow Chart

1. Natural ingredient like leaves, roots, clay, etc., are collected for making dyes.

2. The leaves or roots are crushed using pestle stone, and the colour is collected in the coconut shell.

3. The shape of the coconut shell acts like well, which enriches the natural colour.

4. Different shades of the same colour are obtained by exposing the colour to sunlight for different time intervals.

5. For a darker shade, the colour is exposed for more time to sunlight.

6. The natural colours are allowed to dry in the shell itself. A small quantity of apple gum is added to the shell whenever required.

7. The colour absorbs the required gum, and excess gum is removed. The colour is blended with the gum. The dye is now ready for painting.
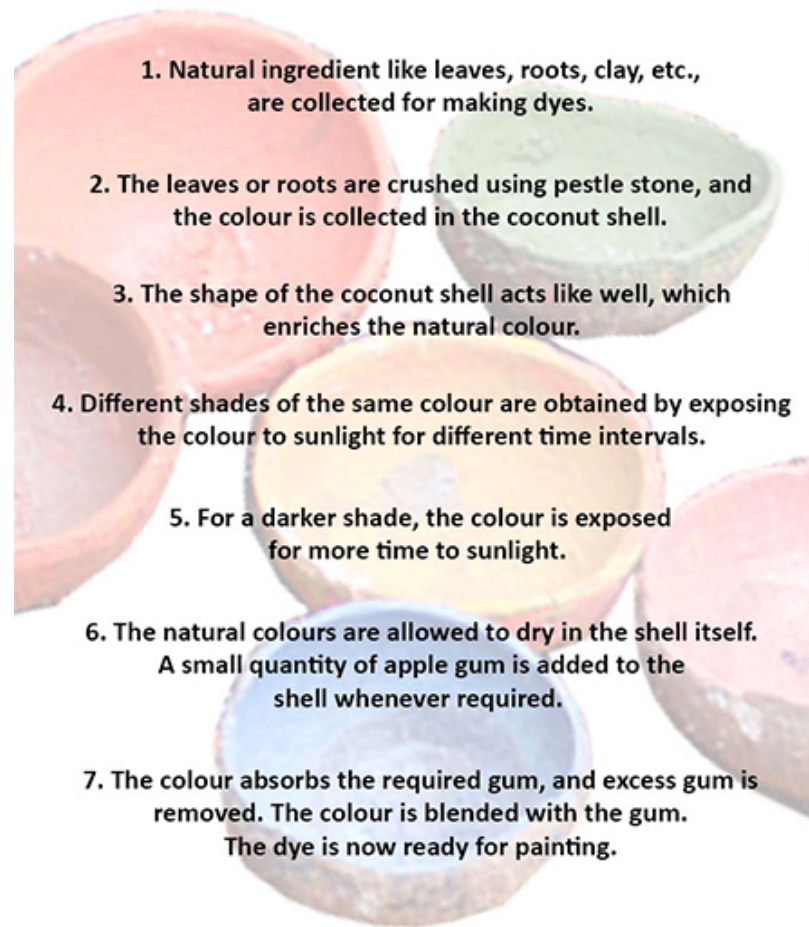
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Artisan naturally prepares dyes using leaves, seeds, roots, and are mixed with wood gum.

The outlines of Buddha figure is drawn first with a pencil.

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Source:

Artisan painting the body part of the Buddha.

All colors are mixed in dried coconut shells.

Artisan painting the Buddha canvas by following the traditional style.

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Details are given with differently sized brushes.

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Once the painting is completed, the outlines to the figures are given using black color.

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The black shade is given to the tree.

A glimpse of a painting before framing.

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Products

The figures inspired by folklore were illustrated previously in Kalighat Pattachitra, while nowadays, contemporary themes are used widely for mass reach. At Mr. Anwar Chitrakar's workshop, Kalighat paintings are finished in a medium-length cloth with a single painting bearing one or two figures, adopted for quick delivery ease. Though previously, they worked on long scrolls of cloth or paper stretched over 20 feet. The size of the painting ranges between 12 inches x 18 inches and 113 feet x 8 feet, varying as per the theme selected. The product price starts at INR 2500 and goes up to INR 50000, sometimes even above that.

A pot painted with enamel and acrylic paint.

Double pots are used as a showpiece.

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A hand-fan made of bamboo sticks bearing colourful figures.

A carefully painted handbag.

A kurta painted with fabric paint.

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2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

Video

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B at NID, Bengaluru.

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