

PUNE Stories

Anne Lawless



AS AN ARTIST AND ART teacher I was really looking forward to my first trip to India as I am a real visual magpie! On first arrival I was mesmerized by the sheer scale of the sights, sounds, and array of colours and textures in the cities of India. My time in Pune proved not only to be a journey into the depth of Iyengar yoga, but also a visual and sensory experience of the very best kind.

DURING JANUARY 2024, BETWEEN THE FANTASTIC RIMYI YOGA classes, class observations and self-practice sessions, I recorded my visual experiences in the mini-sketchbooks I created especially for the visit. Within their pages I used a wide range of techniques including drawing, painting, crochet, photography, mixed media and collage to record my feelings and impressions during my month's stay in Pune.



This page: A few of the many studies from Anne's sketch books





Above: Anne with Mrs Smita Rane a Pune art teacher

Left: Vidya Bhavan School

NOTHING IN INDIA IS WASTED AND I FOUND some great examples of reusing, recycling and upcycling during the month. Sunita Shroff-Naik is a skilled tailor whose studio, a short rickshaw ride from RIMYI, is a textiles heaven. She creates made-to-measure garments from the wide range of fabric she stocks in her shop: print, weave, embroidery, embellishment, patchwork and silk and other fabrics.



Above: Sunita Shroff's shop



DURING THE VISIT I CREATED A LINK WITH A fellow art teacher and was incredibly fortunate to be able to spend some time in the local school, meeting some of the staff and seeing a range of artwork created by children of all ages. I felt very privileged to see how their skills developed, using their creative voices, and responding visually to their surroundings, and to hear how much art education is valued in India.

Left and below: Some of the children's artwork

The staff there use free machine embroidery over print to create the most beautiful, embroidered fabric. She also sells a range of handmade quilts made by "Waste to Taste" – a group of women based in the surrounding villages in the countryside outside Pune.

Right: Applying machine embroidery over printed fabrics



ALSO VISITED THE HANDMADE paper factory, where I was allowed to tour the building and see step-by-step how they make the paper. Workers sort the recycled textile scraps into colours and sizes and then they use a paper-making process to create the most beautiful handmade paper and gifts in a range of colours and finishes.

Right: workers sort the recycled textile scraps



Left: some of the many samples of handmade paper.



Below: handprints are clearly seen in the paper mache wall



Above and left: an array of goods on sale in the factory shop



Recording my experience of a completely different culture heightened my awareness and broadened my own art practice, enriching the experience of my students in the UK. As a long-serving teacher of art and textiles in a South London Secondary school I was able to share my recordings and experiences

with my creative students – who were fascinated. I added some new projects to my teaching using new resist dye techniques, embroidery stitches, Rangoli art and my students created patchwork techniques using the silk scraps I bought from a tailor in Pune.

Anne Lawless is a Level 2 teacher living and working in South London

You can see the process, meet the staff, and then buy a selection of beautiful products that they have created. These are sold in the attached shop, itself made from papier maché, which is only really evident by the handprints in the wall and the muffled acoustics in the building!

