



**Celebrating Arts Day 2024**

# **Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions.**

*Compiled by The Acropolitan Editorial Team*

New Acropolis, a school of practical philosophy present in over 50 countries, celebrated Arts Day 2024, in recognition of the value of art and culture in all their myriad expressions, to individuals and to societies. India North, comprising the main centre Mumbai and the Pune branch, hosted an event at each location on June 9th, entitled Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions.

In keeping with the New Acropolis theme of the year **Towards Unity Through Diversity**, these events presented rich and diverse expressions of art and culture, with one unifying principle, the search for Beauty in all its multifaceted forms.

Culture is the thread that allows for the continuation and transmission of human values and wisdom across generations, and the arts are an expression of that timeless knowledge that must be preserved as part of our human cultural legacy. Therefore culture is one of the pillars of New Acropolis as its purpose is to enable us to interact, create, express and share noble sentiments, in an effort to build better individuals and societies, that recognise themselves as unique, but also take pride in being an integral part of an interdependent, unified whole.

Towards this end Pune held a symposium over the whole day, comprising interactive workshops and presentations that unfolded across a spectrum of artistic expressions that included Dance, Drama, Poetry, Origami, Carpentry, Music and Architecture. Mumbai hosted a 2 hour event that hosted a distinguished architect, an award winning film director, an erudite practicing philosopher, a talented violinist, a skilful Kathak dancer, and a mellifluous Carnatic Singer. In this issue we bring you a synopsis of the essence that was expressed by all the artists in both events.

## Part 1 : The Pursuit of Beauty

New Acropolis, Mumbai hosted an event entitled **Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions**, which brought together artists from divergent genres: Architecture, Film, Philosophy, Music and Dance. Held in the environs of IF.BE, a cultural centre for Architecture, Design and the Arts, housed in an imaginatively re-designed 140 year old ice factory, the audience immersed themselves in the stimulating and creative display. Excerpted below are brief vignettes of the events that unfolded across the evening.



### Finding Beauty through Purpose

***“Architecture is about living --- not just living, but living together, how communities and societies can grow and become one.” - Architect B.V. Doshi***

Architect Sameep Padora and his team have won awards and distinctions that are too numerous to mention, across diverse projects, creating spaces that span homes, hostels, apartment buildings, townships, restaurants, offices, shops, colleges, and temples. Though Architecture is both a science and an art, Sameep finds solutions by asking philosophical questions that read like Zen koans: *In using resources, how lightly can you touch the ground? How do you do more with less? Can technology bring more value to a craftsman’s imagination? Can an international knowledge system that connects the whole world help us enrich what is local?*



The answers to all these questions were displayed in a slide presentation of his projects that illustrated the principles of simplicity, frugality, community building, environmental awareness, historical context & multi functionality.

One project employed construction techniques from 16th century Spain, using state of the art software from Switzerland and building with local material in Maharashtra. Another involved designing modern tools for traditional craftsmen, not to implement their craft, but to allow them to extend their creativity. A Balaji temple designed to go beyond a place of worship, used ecologically treated waste water from a nearby plant as a moat for the temple, as well as serving as a receptacle for harvesting & recharging ground water.

Said Padora, "For me the idea of a project doesn't come from my vision, but finding what the project needs. Kota in Rajasthan is a city that has an incredible number of people migrating every year to study for the IIT exams. So, hostels are prevalent throughout the city. Rajasthan has an incredible history of medieval architecture, And yet when you look at Kota today, it it suffers from this lack of identity and lack of historical continuity. So we wanted to learn from the traditional architecture of Rajasthan, the idea of the haveli, and the courtyard and create a hostel building that did not have the standard central corridor with student rooms on both sides. Kota, because of the number of students studying there, also has one of the highest suicide rates in the country, partially because of this absolutely intimidating architecture of banality, but also because of the complete disconnection with each other. So, the final project responds to the idea of Rajasthani architecture but looks at it through the lens of the time that we are in. Conceived with subterranean water recycling, and multiple terraces that open up into the central courtyard, there are bridges across the courtyard that allow for students to communicate across various floors creating a sense of shared space, belonging and community."

***By searching for the truth in all his projects, by finding solutions that satisfies the myriad questions he poses, Sameep Padora showcased for us how his pursuit of beauty fulfils a need, and how his search for a purposeful solution can be beautiful.***





## Finding Beauty Through Principles

***"Movies may not solve our problems, but they definitely have the ability to raise the right questions."* - Meghna Gulzar**

Bollywood film director Meghna Gulzar has many critically acclaimed films to her credit, including *Razi*, *Chhapaak* and most recently *Sam Bahadur*. What these films have in common is that the lead character brings beauty and meaning to their own lives, and to those around them, through the bold and steadfast pursuit of Justice, Goodness and Truth.

Meghna's personal choices demonstrate the principles that motivate her life. Her success has been hard won. The daughter of acclaimed Urdu poet, lyricist, film director and Padma Bhushan awardee Gulzar, and Padma Shri Raakhee, one of Bollywood's most successful, and feted actors, Meghna said "I would not let my parents pick up the phone and call anybody. And my biggest learning in the process has been that we have this little core of strength which is more than what we imagine it is. It's not just me, all of us have it. It will surprise you and reveal itself to you in relation to the circumstance you are in. The tougher the circumstance, that core of strength will grow accordingly. And to realize that and believe that, for me has been my biggest blessing in the trajectory of my life."



Speaking about her experience in making Sam Bahadur Meghna said “I don't have anything against entertainment but I think there's nothing more tragic than a film that doesn't impact you, touch you, stir you, make you question or make you wonder. Because it takes so much money, effort, manpower, time, and talent, that for it to be something that you forget the minute your popcorn tub is over, nothing could be more wasteful than that.

When I was approached to make a film on Sam Manekshaw, I didn't want to represent him or his life. I needed to bring forth effectively the spirit of the man, who he was and why he was the way he was. Because that is where the inspiration is.

To be the commander-in-chief of one of the largest armies in the world can go to your head if you're not on the right side of the moral compass. But here was a man who had the humaneness, and empathy to treat 93,000 prisoners of war with respect and dignity. He and his soldiers gave up their quarters, and headquarters, for the prisoners at war, at the end of the Bangladesh war in 1971. So yes, he was just, righteous, and principled, and his engagement, whether with his jawans or his prime minister was very honest and true.

I also know that for all of us who worked on this film, there was an internal shift. The value for truth, righteousness and discipline was subconsciously imbibed in our journey. For me the biggest draw to make a film on this man, was that in today's times, it's very important that we have role models, heroes, and ideals. Something that can make us aspirational, and, hopeful, to better yourself, to better your surroundings, to inspire you. So, if we have managed to give that to our audience and then it was worthwhile. “

***Principles are the most valuable building blocks of life, and Meghna's films have the power to connect, inspire and awaken something in our hearts, by showcasing the beauty of a principled life.***





## Living Philosophically, Living Beautifully.



***“Living philosophically, living beautifully, we become an example of what it means to be a human being” - Sivan Barzilay***

Sivan Barzilay has been a practicing philosopher for 25 years. She is a teacher and head of the Mumbai Centre of New Acropolis, and continues to instruct and inspire her students on how to bring meaning and purpose to their lives.

Said Sivan, “Living philosophically is a philosophy of the heart. It is to develop an attitude that will escort us through all the different aspects of our life, at any moment, in any situation, from the moment that I wake up in the morning to the moment that I go to sleep at night. It is when I'm young and full of dreams, but also when I'm older, approaching the end of what we call life, and preparing myself for the voyage that starts after life. It is to craft our lives with Beauty.

What is Beauty? It is part of life. It is accessible to all of us. And what is interesting is that when human beings stand in front of immense beauty, we start to incline toward it. We start to want to imitate it. One of the most outstanding qualities of humans is the pursuit of beauty: This is something that we can see from the beginning of time in cave paintings, tattoos, decorations on tools, weapons and jewellery, and across all cultures, and socioeconomic strata. Why are we so attracted to Beauty?

Maybe we should start with nature. The universe, it is said, even though it is not obliged to be beautiful, yet it is beautiful. But it also demonstrates a few important principles that can help shed some light on our questions.



It is said that when the universe manifests itself, it expresses itself through a duality, which we call spirit and matter. Life creates forms, because the forms are needed. Through the forms we can experience, and through the experience we can realize. In other words, we can say that life is a spiritual journey based on material vehicles. When the spirit actually expresses itself and leads the matter based on the laws of the spirit, then the creation is a beautiful creation. This beauty is not of the form, it is what the form carries. It is a quality of the spirit, it is within all of us and it is the reason we resonate with beauty.

Just as we have the five senses that can be in touch with the external world, we also have an inner sense, the sense of beauty, with which we can sometimes sense the intangible. Perhaps what we call art is an attempt of artists to connect to this concept of beauty, to grasp it and give it a tangible form.

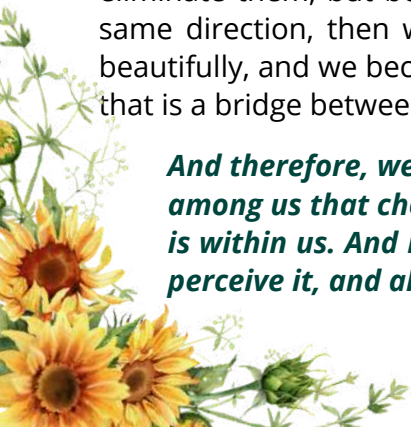
We need to surround ourselves with beauty, because if we don't do that, there is a risk that the sense will decrease and atrophy, resulting in the inability to communicate with beauty of any kind, in spite of all the beauty of life around us.

Nature is a complex unity that contains many different phenomena and elements, but they all work together, are interconnected and interdependent. No part works in isolation. Our bodies too display the same unity through diversity. Composed of millions of cells and different systems, yet all the different elements work together to fulfil the same purpose. If one cell began to work in isolation, it would create what we call disease, and the beauty of the whole organism would slowly erode.

If we extend this to the way we live our lives, we can observe how many different thoughts, emotions, desires, and motives we have, all pulling in so many directions, that it seems like all this multiplicity creates confusion. But in nature, the diversity doesn't create confusion, it creates unity.

How can we bring the principle of unity into our lives? Beauty is one of the answers. When we are able to harmonize all the different parts of our life, not because we eliminate them, but because we allow all of them to fulfil the same need, to go in the same direction, then we create our life as art. This is living philosophically and living beautifully, and we become an example of what it truly means to be a human being, one that is a bridge between the visible and invisible.

***And therefore, we should not leave beauty and the pursuit of beauty to only those among us that choose to practice the field of art. Because beauty is for all of us. It is within us. And I would even dare to say, it awaits us. It waits for us to see it, to perceive it, and also to create it within our lives."***







## Finding Beauty through Unity

*"The purpose of Art is to express Beauty" --- Plato*

The finale of the evening was entitled Ekatva (Unity), a specially curated performance by Carnatic singer Chandana Bala Kalyan, Kathak exponent Gauri Sharma Tripathi and violinist Nastya Saraswati which demonstrated the beauty of Unity in Diversity. Moving seamlessly from musical solos of classical Carnatic, Folk, Western classical and Kathak, to a duo between Nastya who played a western folk song interspersed with lyrics from Kabir by Chandana. Most inspiring of all was when all 3 artists together amalgamated their different arts and genres into one mesmerizing, unified presentation, illustrating tangibly how unity, beauty and harmony can be achieved through the diversity of uniquely distinct forms.





## Part 2 : The Value of the Arts and Culture

At the core of culture is the shared principles and ideals that animate and shape communities and societies: the sum total of customs, morals, values, rituals and belief – systems that are preserved and passed on through generations, engendering a sense of identity, belonging and continuity. They are crucial to a civilization, for deeply embedded in them are the tenets for discerning what is Good, Just, Beautiful and True.

Since time immemorial these core values and beliefs have been shared and expressed through rich and diverse artistic traditions. Ancient wisdom in the form of myths, legends, fables and stories are still communicated through Drama, Poetry, Music, Dance, Paintings, Sculptures and more, contributing to a magnificent and vibrant human cultural legacy. Interacting with this heritage from diverse cultures across the world allows for individuals and communities to better understand and respect each other, promoting acceptance, empathy, tolerance and harmony.

To investigate, interact and promote awareness of the arts and culture, New Acropolis, Pune, held an event entitled Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions. **A medley of workshops were held through the day, showcasing diverse cultural art forms including Shakespearean theatre, Japanese Origami and Haiku, Carpentry, Dance, Music and Architecture.**



## Shakespearean Theatre

Acknowledged as one of the greatest playwrights of our age, Shakespeare wrote plays that dealt with the entire gamut of human emotions and behaviour, always with a universal message of hope or warning for his audience. His theatre group, lacking resources, performed for audiences using very little in the way of production values, sets or costumes, relying instead on the power of his words to unleash the imagination of his audience.

Using extracts from Othello and Hamlet, this workshop highlighted how to make better choices, those that spring from our higher selves. The workshop also invited audience participation in exercises engaging the imagination, carried-out in total silence, using only the imagination to convey and communicate.

## Haiku

This Japanese form of Poetry traces its tradition back to the 13th century. It is a concise, succinct, yet profound art that offers deep insights and wisdom. Its brevity, sparseness and simplicity makes it a vehicle that touches the essence of an experience, stripping away the non-essential from the essential. It lends itself to interpretation, encouraging reflection and engaging the imagination. It has the ability to evoke the higher sentiments, universal principles and the great truths of life.

Examples from famous Japanese Masters fostered the appreciation of the form and its characteristics, and participants were encouraged to compose poems of their own, while reflecting on how to live lives of simplicity and clarity, aligned with the universal and eternal principles of life.







## Origami

The Japanese art of paper folding began as a ceremonial offering, making something beautiful by folding paper and then allowing it to be consumed in a ceremonial, sacred fire, highlighting the idea of the transience and impermanence of life. The concentration and attention required to make each precise fold is a lesson in patience, diligence and accuracy, while being fully present in the moment without letting thoughts and emotions de-stabilize your centeredness.

The audience participated in a simple Origami exercise of individually and quietly making the rays of the Sun, and using that as a lesson in self-awareness, so as to be able to bring that into their lives.



## Dance



Rutuja Marne, a Bharatnatyam artist, shared insights of her journey and transformation through dance. Initially what began as hard work and practice, eventually transcended into something beyond the craft, and through her performance, she offered the viewers a glimpse of this idea.

Through rigorous dedication, practice, or 'sadhana', the absolute focus on the craft allows one to perceive that there is something beyond the self. But it is not about finding who you are, rather, it is about becoming it, by chiseling a path that allows beauty to percolate. It is a journey that requires focus and practice to not allow the personality to overwhelm the essence. When you lose yourself to become the character, or the forms you choose to enact, there is a oneness that is achieved. But it is a delicate balance between achieving the oneness (between the actor and the character) and carrying the 'rasa', the taste, or the essence through the performance for the audience, and not crossing the line.

Bharatnatyam, is an ancient dance form with elegant postures and *mudras*, but more than what one sees, it is what one experiences. Akin to yoga or meditation, the essence is the same: To remain connected to the centre, and then, to share this with the audience. Said Rujuta, "Only when we are connected and do not lose ourselves, is when we can share the beauty which does not belong to us. We are just the vehicle."







## Silent Carpentry

Vivek Mahajan of VISDA, an Architecture and Design firm based in Chennai, presented a workshop on the concept of Silent Carpentry. Said Vivek, **“In silence you learn more about your object, and avoid friction, as you can then align your senses, your hands, the tools, and of course, the wood. This makes the process enjoyable and in the silence, there is a sense of calm.”**

He cited his own example, of how in filing wood in silence, he realised he was putting too much pressure on the filing, causing him to exert more energy. When he reduced the pressure, he realised he could work accurately, with more ease. Silence truly can be golden.

“Instead of using machinery and tools,” he explained, “the use of hands can give you the joy of working with wood. He spoke of *“thehrav”*, wherein your goal should be in the joy of creation and not on the object of creation. “Wood is a mirror”, shared Vivek, “and it’s possible that when you have decided to create something, the wood may not act the way you want. Thus, it is important that, you seek guidance from the wood. Each granule, flake structure and rings structure differ in each wood, thus impacting the final product.” To illustrate this he showed the audience various types of wood, including Sycamore, Teak and Rosewood. The interview ended with a lively question answer session on his passion for leathermaking and his love for carpentry.





## Music and Architecture

Sachin Das led this workshop which was a fascinating visual and aural journey through Music and Architecture. With a Degree in Architecture, and a passion for music, Sachin wears many hats. His organization Musée Musical, of which he is CEO, and that represents Trinity College, London since 1901, has 2 verticals --- Music Education and Music Technology. He is also National Director of Trinity College.

Said Sachin, "Arts are a way to express emotion, and though music and architecture seem to be such different art forms, yet they both create feelings and emotions, one from sound, and the other through space. Someone once said, **'Architecture is Music frozen', perhaps because they have the same elements of beauty like rhythm, harmony, form, colour and texture, that are expressed differently.**

Rhythm in music is a combination of repetitive beats punctuated by silences, and in architecture, repetitive forms, pillars, arches, can create rhythm. Harmony in architecture is to harmonize the building and its setting, so that the eye moves fluidly across the whole. In music diverse instruments collaborate, synchronize, and support each other, while playing in harmonious unison. Form and structure in architecture is evident, and in music, Indian classical and western classical have different but definite forms and structure. Colour and texture is easy to understand in architecture, but music too can be 'colourful' by using sound quality or Timbre . For example, the bansuri has a completely different timbre as compared to the sarod. So also the ornamentation of Carnatic music creates texture."





Using slides depicting works of renowned architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, I.M. Pei, and Antoni Gaudi, along with snatches of music from Beethoven, Bach, Ravel, and Zakir Hussain, this riveting presentation established the connection between these two arts, and perhaps a connection that all arts share. "This is why education in the arts is so important", Sachin ended, "It builds Emotional Intelligence, and perhaps the arts can show you how to bring rhythm, harmony, and structure into our lives."

All the arts require relentless physical and mental discipline, in constantly sharpening oneself, for only then can the artist grasp and transmit the inner essence of things. All art has the eloquence and meditative quality that invites reflection so that what begins as an outward journey for both creator and receiver, becomes an inward search for the highest sentiments and noblest ideals in oneself.

***Rabindranath Tagore said "Truth reveals itself in Beauty", and therefore the richness of the arts and culture are an invitation to encounter the invisible through the visible, a search for Truth and Wisdom through the ladder of Beauty. This is the reason they have the ability to resonate across cultures, promoting unity through their vibrancy and diversity.*** 