



# International Reception of Mithila Painting

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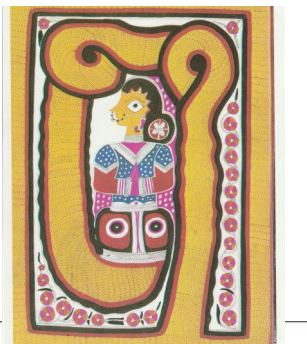
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# International Reception of Mithila Painting

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## Evolution of Mithila Art

**Mithila:** N. Bihar (IND) & Terai (NEP). Birth place of Sita & Janaki (*Rāmāyana*). **Mithila painting:** umbrella term for ritual & art forms. Since at least 14<sup>th</sup> c., women's domestic wall and floor (*aripana*) imagery: Hindu deities, icons of fertility (elaborately for weddings in bridal room, *kohbar ghar*). 14<sup>th</sup> c.: rigid matrimonial relations in upper castes (*Panji*), *pardah* (veil...), painting as outlet for women assertion. Impact of Vidyapati's Maithili songs. 3 styles: *geru* (mostly red), *bharni* (vivid colors), *kachni* (mostly lines in black and red).

**60s:** transferred on paper, paintings undergo changes: recognition of artistic individuality, new styles (tantric & *godana*/tattoos)... 1956: 1<sup>st</sup> commercialization (B. Kulkarni). **1966:** Indian govt (P. Jayakar, I. Gandhi) provides patronage by giving women paper & colors: **relief program further to drought & famine of Bihar**. Marketing policies (govt, develop. agencies) to attract national and worldwide audience: exhibitions, paintings on Jayanti-Janata Express, Madhubani station (L.N. Mishra), National Awards for Craftsmen...

**Mithila art on global village,** transnational spaces (airports, galleries...). **'New Mithila' artists,** art graduated, mix aesthetics, symbolic elem. of global & local cultures. Awareness of national & global position of a firstly local practice. Transnational flows renew syncretic painting.

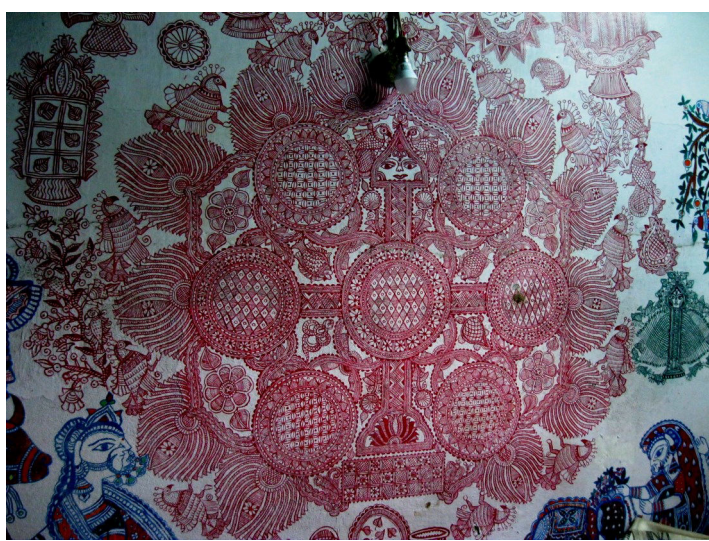
'Indianness', nation & art

1980: Crafts Museum Delhi

2003: Mithila Art Institute

1980: Ethnic Art Foundation, USA.

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Kohbar-ghar (lotus, bamboo grove) Godawari Dutt, April 2017, Ranti.



Bright fanning, Sabhapati Das household, Kayasth, vill. Darema, Photogr. W. Archer, 1940, Brit. Library



Lakhola Jha, *Krishna and Gopis*, c. 1970, s.l., Bharni style. Holi Pigm. Priv. Collect. N. N. S. Nirala. Photogr. 2017.

**1934:** Nepal-Bihar earthquake, W. Archer, local officer, 'discovered' paintings on walls. 47 photogr. (Brit. Library). Close to nationalist Bengali scholars, search for popular paintings. **1949:** his article *Maithil Painting* underpinned by universal aesthetics based on dominant movements in Post-War Anglophone World. Ritual & formal aspects set in unchanging tradition (styles per castes; feminine, anonymous & collective practice).

**70s:** Indian enchantment of counterculture; orientalist & romantic visions of S. Asian universe as spiritual, pantheist & sensorial. 'Flower power' quest: 'on the road' rather than 'on the job', free-love, spontaneous creation, anti-bourgeois. **Kairos of 60s indophily.** Internat. mediators: E. Moser-Schmitt (D), J. Elder, R. & N. Owens (USA), T. Hasegawa (J), Y. Véquaud (F). Véquaud's writings: timeless village utopia, *Sehnsucht* of lost Eden.

**Late 90s:** deconstruction of male Westerner interpretations through gender & cultural studies, like paintings as immemorial expression of Hindu women rituals... Appearance of men painters (10 %): gender categories redefined? But patriarchy not called into question.

**Mithila Paintings introduced to world,** redefined through outsiders' needs and Western paradigms. Devoted places to paintings and more than 130 exhibitions in 25 countries (cf. maps).

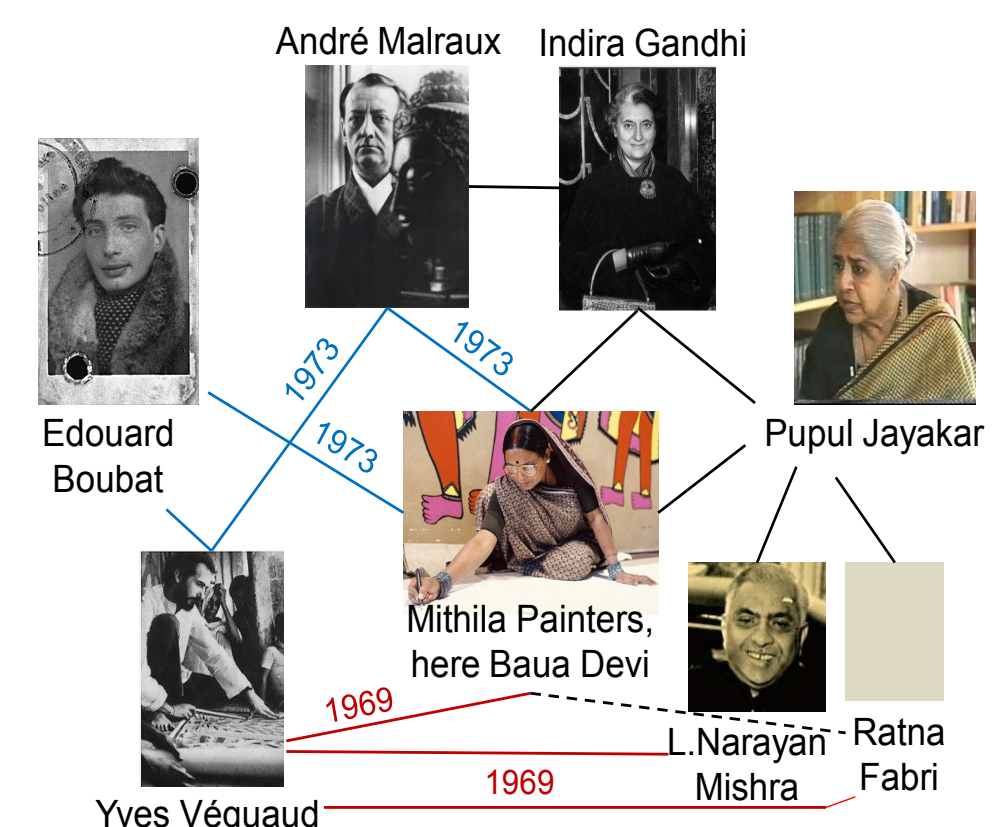
## 3 phases of reception with valued discourses of Zeitgeist:

- Late colonial and post-independence moment.** Archer's universal aesthetics stemming from colonialism, vanguards, psychoanalyze, surrealism, organic art vision.
- 1<sup>st</sup> phase of globalization, 'global 60s', 1960-1989** (climax 70s). Romantic world re-enchantment vs 'technocratic soc.' Véquaud: 'hippie' bohemia, neo-tantrism, prophetic painters, village communitarian utopia, return to pre-industrial & holistic community. Mithila art misunderstood as homogenous, stable and rural.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of globalization, 'postmodernity', 1995-today,** (climax 1<sup>st</sup> half 2010s). Techn. & styles shared, wider motives. Transversal dynamics of 'Neo' or 'New' Mithila artists. Women painters considered mostly through gender studies.

**Between religious, political and cultural fields.** Diplomacy crucial to paintings globalization (I. Gandhi; A. Malraux; M. Singh, Indian ambassador in Finland, 80s...) Interactions between stakeholders, vectors of cross-cultural transfers, led to construction of 'transnational' cultural field.



Y. Véquaud, B.S. Mandal, Baua Devi, her husband J.Jha making *Snakes*, acrylics. Behind: *King and Queen Story and a River Inside*, fresco. *Magiciens de la Terre*, Paris, 1989. Photo: Fr.-X. Bouchart © N. Beauthéac



Aspects of Franco-Indian cultural network around Mithila Paintings in 70s



## Globalization of Mithila Paintings: Worldwide Exhibitions

-1970 1970- 1975- 1980- 1985- 1990- 1995- 2000- 2005- 2010- 2015-

