

Design Resource

Thanka Painting - Sikkim

Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom

by

Abhey Singh

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/thanka-painting-sikkim>

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/thanka-painting-sikkim/introduction>

Introduction

The Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom was founded in 1957 by Sikkim government in an effort to preserve and promote traditional arts and crafts. With time it evolved as a centre for sustainable development of the region focussing on utilising the traditional knowledge and human resources. In modern perspective the centre serves as a important tool for providing employment and self-reliance across the strata of society covering diverse region, income rang and education. The centre has now expanded to 32 training centres with 650 trainees and 13 production units. The head office is located in Gangtok, the capital city of Sikkim. It provides training in carpet weaving, handloom, thanka painting, handmade paper, wood-carving, cane & bamboo craft, soft toys and multi-crafts. Training period ranges from 2-4 years depending on the craft. After that the artisans can either work in the centre's production units or work outside on their own. In order to promote the initiative the government also gives stipend to the students.

Thanka painting is a Buddhist style of painting depicting the life of Buddhist gods and goddesses. It involves elaborate compositions generally with a central deity surrounded by other identified figures in a symmetrical composition. The compositions are highly geometric painted on silk or cotton. Thankas have religious and spiritual significance and often you will find them hanging in the monasteries and homes.

The training at DHH for thanka painting is a four year long course. It starts with instructions in drawing keeping in mind the grids and layout of the Buddhist paintings. It is followed by instructions in painting and culminates in painting real thankas on silk or cotton. The painting usually involves stone colours and vegetable dyes with gold dust and gold threads used for tapestry.



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Place

Sikkim is 2nd smallest Indian state located in the north-east India. Sikkim chose to remain independent when India got independence in 1947. In 1975 it became the 22nd state of India after a treaty with the then Prime Minister of Sikkim. Sikkim has been very successful in protecting its cultural heritage along with embracing the modern ethos. The state has a very diverse flora and fauna and occupy a special place in India for it.



Directorate of handicrafts and handloom head office at Gangtok.



Hoarding explaining the mission of directorate of handicrafts and handloom.



Mannequins wearing traditional tribal costumes.



Bamboo exhibition at directorate of handicrafts and handloom.

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Plaque installed in corridor of directorate of handicrafts and handloom.



Sales emporium which sell all the items produced at DHH, Gangtok.

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Inside the sales emporium at DHH, Gangtok.



Sales emporium selling wood and bamboo products.

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People

Most of students in the thanka unit are young, between the age of 14-20. The students are mostly from remote parts of Sikkim, many of whom has not completed their high school education. The institute currently doesn't have a dedicated production unit for thanka painting.



The thanka painting classroom at DHH.



The thanka painting classroom at DHH.



The thanka painting classroom at DHH.



Thanka instructor checking the progress of the thanka painting.

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Trainees cleaning the classroom.



A trainee from the north district of Sikkim training in thanka painting at DHH.



Mr. Karma Thinlay Bhutia-the instructor for thanka painting unit.

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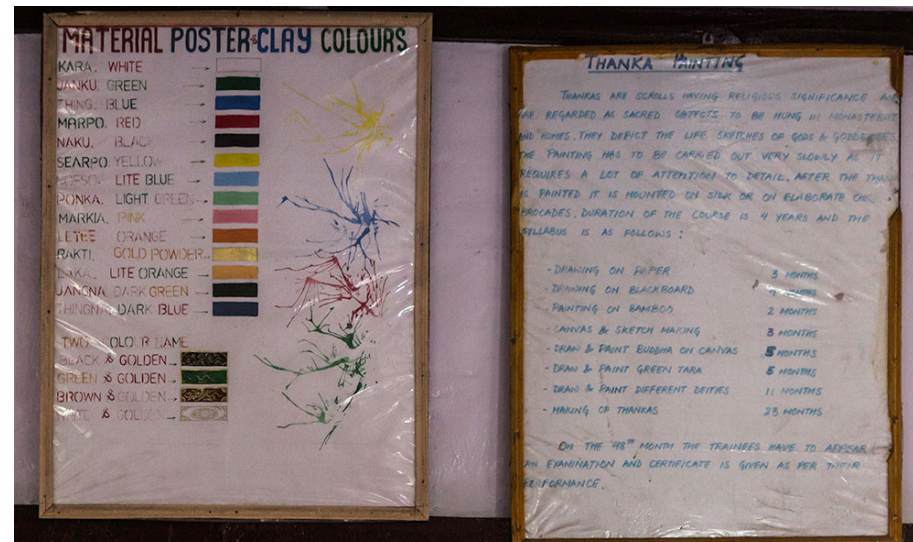
Process

The training for thanka painting at DHH starts with learning to draw. Every piece of painting in thanka has a very complicated grid layout. So trainees practice to draw already decided designs on paper. From drawing they move to painting. Earlier the colours used were mostly natural but now acrylic colours are used. The Process for making a thanka starts with canvas preparation.

First, the cloth is carefully sewn onto four lengths of bamboo which are tightly strung to a large wooden frame. The artist then spreads a coat of glue over the whole canvas and leaves it to dry. He stirs up a mixture of white clay, water and glue in a clean pot to the consistency of thick cream. Blessed medicines or other sacred substances are added if available. The mixture is then strained through fine gauze to remove any impurities and applied evenly to the dry canvas.

Next step is drawing the composition on the canvas. It is done by pencils and can take 10-30 days depending on complexity and experience. There is a definite, specific sequence to colour application. In general, the thanka is painted from top to bottom. Sky and all the blue parts are done first followed by greens and dark greens. After the base coat the details are again sketched and colored with proper shades. A considerable quantity of gold is used to highlight and give it its final glorious touches.

After finishing the painting it is mounted on silk cloth or a brocade to be hung in monasteries or houses.



The poster at the thanka painting unit explaining the process and the colours used.

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The basic motifs used for sketching.



Sketching practice for thanka painting.



Sketching practice for thanka painting.



Sketching practice for thanka painting.

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Painting on paper to practice for thanka.



The canvas painted with white clay and glue left to dry out on a sunny day.



A thanka painted on paper to practice.

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Sketching on canvas.



Base coat of paint on the composition.



Details in the painting.



A trainee painting after the sketching is completed.

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A trainee painting after the sketching is completed.

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An artist painting a thanka.



A 3rd year student painting a thanka at DHH.



A final year student painting a thanka at DHH.



Thanka painting on a wood.

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Products

Thankas are presented as scrolls mostly mounted on silk or brocades. With time changing and seeing the market-ability more and more deities from Hinduism are now painted in thankas.



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Contact Details

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You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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