PAINTERS

a project on the culture of Ahmedabad Street Painters

Paper Submitted for **Typography Day 2013**
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Project Title

Painters, A project on the culture of Gujarati Street Painters
http://streetpainters.wordpress.com/

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Abstract

The Project is based on the Painters in the streets of Ahmedabad.
The First area of study includes meeting with Painters and learning about their experiences, lifestyles, works & challenges and their Viewpoints on Painters today. I met and talked to 18 Painters from Ahmedabad and 2 Painters from Vadodara. Today Painters are having a tough time deciding whether to continue or change their profession. A large number of Painters had left painting and moved on to other professions but due to market qualification requirements most of them end up driving auto rickshaw or some other odd jobs. Some of them have collaborated their works with new printing processes and are doing good but not happy. A few of them still refuses to move on and and believes that one day the market will change and they will revive again.

The second area of study is focused on the visual treatments of gujarati handletterings on signboards, banners etc. From over 2000 photographs collected over three months, 952 photographs were selected, printed as a contact sheet, cut and classified them based on their structure and visual treatments. A comparative study in done based on the classification.

Keywords

Street Painters, Hand lettering, Gujarati Display Typeface

Introduction

2010, when we were in the first year of Graphic Design, we had our first course on typography with Tarun Deep Gridher and one of the exercises requires us to draw hand lettered types from our surroundings and develop typefaces based on those. This particular exercise reminded me of one of my uncle who is a self taught painter and I still am stunned by the kind of details and perfection of his works. He used to easily support his family from his daily wages but since the last 2-3 years he had a tough time getting customers due to cheaper and faster printing technologies. Last year when I went home he had shut his shop as he was unable to pay his rent. Most of the hand painted signboards are being replaced with vinyls and stickers. Then during Typography Day 2011 held in NID, Hanif Kureshi's "Handpainted Type" Project gave me a bigger picture of what is happening around and actually makes me looked at Painters at different locations and the situation was almost the same everywhere.

2012, February, as part of our academic requirements, we (UG Graphic Design) needed to complete three projects before we go for our Diploma project, This is my first project. Our project coordinator was Immanuel Suresh and on the first meeting he asked us to choose our own theme. After a week long discussion among ourselves we decided on "Subculture" as our Theme and on this theme we are to choose our own individual Topic. We meet again with Suresh and explained our topics, we have all chosen our topic but somewhere we were unable to define the theme and the topic together. So he gave us another week to clarify our understanding. By the time we meet again we thought that we knew exactly what we are suppose to be doing but in reality we weren't sure. Suresh knew this and he just asked a question "How do you go about the Project", well we didn't have the answer so he told us to write the project proposal and gave us one more week. By the time we meet again we were actually confused and nobody had written the proposal since none of us had ever written a project proposal before . Some of us have even change the topic, and we were kind of lost. At this time Suresh brought us two project proposals by Dr. Frei Otto, Architectural Consultant, National Institute of Design. One was "preliminary studies on the international airport at New Delhi, June 1966" another one was "a proposal for the Indian Pavilion at the Osaka World Fair, 1970" both hand written and well written. These two document gave us a clear picture of why a well planned proposal is needed before starting a project.The topic that I've chosen was IndianHandPainters it was later changed to Painters.

After the theme and topic were clear and the proposal was written we were to choose a guide for our project. I went to Tarun Deep Gridher to discuss the topic and ask him if he could be my guide, he immediately agreed saying that the project was very closed to his heart and that it was similar to what he had wanted to do for a long time. He even gave me a name 'the unsung heroes of Graphic Design' for the painters. Also Tarun asks every students under his guidance to have a blog, this helps us in updating, discussions and documenting the project easily as we move on with our projects and save time.

Aim & Objectives

This project is an attempt to document the dying art of hand painting/lettering in order to create an awareness of a rich visual culture which is now neglected. With this project I do not promise to bring a change about the Painter's way of life but if it does benefits them or anyone in any way than I have sucedded in creating a positive awareness.

This document can be used as reference for further research or for development of typefaces if it inspires anyone or it could be just a reference highlighting the changes and effects of new technology. I wish to take this project forward and add new perspectives in the time to come.

Methodology

There are two main areas of study in this project
1. Talk to the artists/painters and document their ways of working.
2. A comparative study on the visuals Collected and study the way of treatments.

1. Talk to the artists/painters and document their ways of working

This area of study comprises of meeting with Painters and document their way of life/work. The main purpose of this part was to figure out the history of Painters, their thoughts on new technology, their part of the story which had been hidden for a long time.

The first week I spent looking around the city for Painters and observing them. I did not spoke to them in the first two three days. I was trying to figure out how they responds to an outsider who needs some of their precious time. As I slowly began to talk to them some of them responded well but most of them ignored me as they felt I was wasting their time. It was then I decided to prepare a set of questions which I felt should make them feel comfortable and talk to an outsider and once they've felt comfortable talking then I can asked them some questions which they may or may not want to answer. So I began the questions with their Name, Age, Education which they can answer even if they are working then I went on to questions in which they will need time to respond to.

These are the set of questions that I've prepared
a. Name, Age, Address, Education?
b. How long have you been working as a Painter?
c. How did you became a Painter? Who inspired you to become a painter?
d. What kind of works you did and you do now?
e. Who and How do you decide the work (e.g. color)?
f. Do you call yourself a Painter or an Artist? How are Painters and Artist different?
g. What is your opinion on Flex machines, and new improved technologies?
h. Why still a Painter? Will you move on if you have the money to set up a flex machine?
i. What is the future of Painters?

I have talked to 18 Painters in Ahmedabad and 2 Painters in Vadodara during this project.
As I was talking to the Painters, I came across different group of Painters whom I have categorized and arranged them accordingly as:
1. Painters Who had changed their profession.
2. Painters who still paints just because it was too late to change their profession.
3. Painters who wants to set up their own Printing machines but doesn't have money.
4. Painters who had set up their own printing machines but are not happy.
5. Painters who had set up their own printing machines and are doing well.
6. Painters who are not bothered by the new printing technologies.
7. Painters who still paints and believes that people will get bored with the cheaper vinyl prints and will get back to Hand Painted signboards.
8. Painters who Simply Paints for the love of it.
9. Painters who had moved on to another creative work.

Each of the categories are explained through interviews of the Painters under each categories
1. Painters Who had changed their profession.

Pravin Bhai Raman Bhai Patani / 40yrs / Ahmedabad / 09904485003

Pravin bhai followed his father who was a Painter and learned from him. He worked as a Painter for almost 20 years and now he drives an Auto rickshaw in order to feed his family. He believes that Flex printing has taken away the work of most of the painters as it is cheaper and faster. Most of the Painters have left Painting and started taking up other jobs and Auto rickshaw driver is one which is common. He believes that there is no future for the Painters.

**Jigar Kumar Jivan Lal Parmar / 36yrs / Ahmedabad / 09924644568**

Photographed from a photo provided by Jigar Kumar.

11std passed, Jigar Bhai have been working with his father who was also a painter. He started working with Ramesh Bhai Parmar and 2 other together and worked intensively on Signboards, Banners and Wall Paintings for big companies like DMR, Dilbar ice cream etc. He is now a Clerk at Labour and Industry and he sometimes work on Paintings. He will never work as a flex printer as he does not like the quality and the durability.

He calls himself a Painter and not an Artist and he has worked intensively on oil paintings and also held 3 exhibitions at Baroda and Ahmedabad. The only difference he finds in a Painter and an Artist is that a Painter can't work like an Artist and an Artist can't work like a Painter, Artists creates chitra and Painters replicates, but some Painters are all rounder and some only works on type/numbering. He thinks that there is no future for the Painters and all the remaining Painters will also disappear one day.

2. Painters who still paints just because it was too late to change their profession.

Farooq Bhai Qureshi / 55yrs / Mirzapur, Ahmedabad / 09375197511
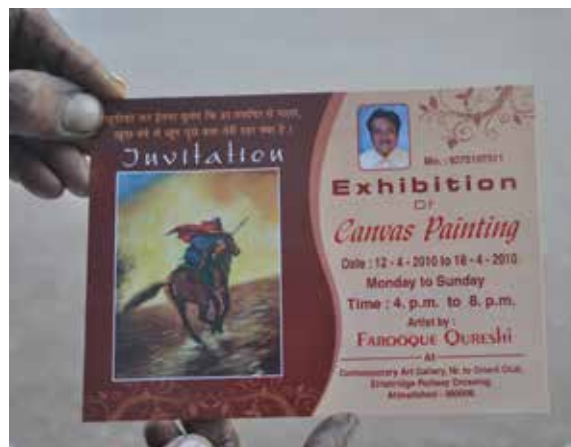
Farooq bhai after his 10th standard started taking interest in Arts and he studied Fine arts in CN Vidyalaya, and he has been working as a Painter for 35 years. While he was in college he took his time out and did works for clients. He had worked with different mediums and tried different styles on different mediums. He is also a Photographer and owns 3 SLRs.

Since the onset of Flex machines, works had greatly reduced for Painters. He calls himself an Artist "Realist Artist". He had worked hard for many years to put up his work on exhibition and he had his exhibition in 2009 at The Contemporary Art Gallery but unfortunately he did not sell any of his work. When he tried for his second exhibition Lalit Kala Academy after working for another 2 years, the officials of the Gallery not only rejected him but also asked him to stop wasting time saying his artworks are not worth exhibiting. He is frustrated and has stopped working on Canvas, oil and water colours. He had also spent a lot of time and money in photography and also held an exhibition and since it also doesn't give him any income in return he had also stopped photography thinking it's just a waste of time and money.

He feels that it doesn't matter whether an Artist or a Painter, if their work can't earn income than it is useless. He feels that Artists are all rounder and Painters mostly works on Lettering but it also depends because everyone has their own limitations. A Painter may bacome an Artist also. He now works mostly on Numberplate and Signboards. He feels that there is no future for Painters. He has given up Art and Photography and wants to sell his artworks.

Vinod Bhai Mopatlal Parmar / 40yrs / Ahmedabad / 08140838081

A 10th std passed student, Vinod bhai started working in a tea stall and supplied teas for the painters in Ashram Road Painter street 25 years ago. He then started taking interest in Painting and started learning from one Mukesh Bhai (he doesn't want to be interviewed) who worked there. Since then started he started following Mukesh Bhai and started Paintings on Walls, Banners, Number Plate, T-shirts, Signboards, Stencils etc. He mostly works on Signboards. He calls himself a Painter and not an Artist for Artists draws/creates new art from memory and Painters replicates. Nowadays the amount of work has greatly reduced due to the faster and cheaper printing process (Flex).He doesn't like the quality of work produced by Flex but he said that he would set up a flex machine if he had the money to buy one because it is what the market demands he needs to feed his family. He doesn't want his children to become Painter. He believes that there is no future for the Painters'.

Sudesh Rao Ram Rao Dhamdere / 40yrs / Ahmedabad / 09825462097

He worked as a cane weaver before he became a Painter. When he became a Painter it was a profitable and a respectable profession and now it is the opposite. He has been working as a Painter for 15years. He doesn't speak much. His son is working with him now as a Painter. He finds Painters future hopeless.

3. Painters who wants to set up their own Printing machines but doesn't have money.

Jeetu Sudeshrao Dhamdere / 30yrs / Ahmedabad / 09328092915

A Maharashtrian, born and brought up in Ahmedabad. Jeetu bhai did his schooling till 12th std then he started taking interest in Painting and started learning from his father who is also a painter in Ashram Road. He doesn't speak much. He has been working as a painter for 5 years and mostly works on Number Plates, Signboards & Banners. He calls himself a Painter and not a Artist for Artist creates and Painters replicates.

He doesn't favor artworks printed in Flex machines for the quality and the color fades really fast but he is ready to work as a printer as it is what the market demands now and he has to earn money for a living. He believes that there is no future for the Painters.

4. Painters who had set up their own printing machines but are not happy.

Gautam Patel / 45yrs / Ahmedabad / 9327072458

Gautam bhai studied B.Com, and has been painting since 30 years. He followed his painter friends and learned from them. He had worked mostly on Wall paintings & Signboards for different companies all across Gujarat, Rajashthan and Maharashtra. He now owns a computer and works alone in Flex, Banner, Radium cutting and Stickers. He enjoys painting and wants to work as a Painter rather than working on computer. Also the new rule on number plates by the Govt. has make the work more complicated than before.

5. Painters who had set up their own printing machines band are doing well.

Painter Navin Bros / 60yrs old business / Ahmedabad / 09428809436-37

Navin Shah was a gifted Painter and started painting when he was 18yrs of age. He is a self taught Painter and claims that almost 80 percent of the handpainted works in Ratanpur has been done by him. He now stopped Painting as he is paralyses after a stroke. He is now 70yrs of age. The business is now taken over by three of his sons and Manoj Shah is the one who is doing the artworks. He started working with his father at a very young age when he was in 7th std. He had worked on Wallpaintings, Posters, Numberplates, Signboards and Portraits. He is also a professional photographer. He bought a computer when the market started depending on them and had learned on his own. He calls himself a Painter, a Photographer and a Graphic Designer. He now works on Flex,Vinyl,Laminations and almost all digital artworks. He believes that Artist and Painters are very different as Artists works on small scale and Painters on Huge scale, Artists study light & works mostly for self and Painters works for more commercial line. He believes that it is the market and technology that has separated the Artists and Painters into different ways. He believes that Painters may extinct soon.

6. Painters who are not bothered by the new printing technologies.

Bobby Painter / 60yrs / Delhi Gate, Ahmedabad

Mulchand is his real name, he started working under the name Bobby (inspired from Bollywood film Bobby). He is well known for painting Bollywood stars and he has his unique

style. He calls himself an all rounder and ready to work with any medium. He has a good sense of colour and light. He doesn't like flex prints and he also doesn't care about it. He has a huge fans and a numerous clients after him. He is too busy to even give away his phone number. He thinks that Artists are all rounder and can work with any medium and Painters works mostly on Signboards, Lettering, Walls and Signboards and that's why Artists will remain and Painters will go away after some time. His son works with him cutting Radium stickers.

7. Painters who still paints and believes that people will get bored with the cheaper vinyl prints and will get back to Hand Painted signboards.

Ramesh Bhai Ishwar Bhai Parmar / 48yrs / Amaraiwadi, Ahmedabad / 09825559432

Ramesh bhai studied fine Arts and he has been painting since his childhood days. His father was a worker in a Textile mill in Mehsana. He looked at movie posters, paintings and photographs for inspiration. He has worked intensively with oil, poster color, water color, acrylic etc on various surfaces which includes canvas, walls etc. He has a good collections of his works and he has also given away a huge amount of his artworks to his friends. He believes that there is hardly any difference between an Artist and a Painter as they both work the same way and it is the people who looked at them differently. The only thing he could spot the difference between the two is that Artists mostly don't do realistic works and Painters mostly does realistic work.

He agrees that the Flex machine had hit the Painters really hard but believes that people will get tired of flex prints and come back to hand paintings because of the quality and durability. He (doesn't have the money but) will not move on to Flex even if he had the money to set up one and he is happy as a Painter though he earn very less as compared to some years back. He mostly works on signboards and number plates nowadays.

His son also does Painting and he wants his son to learn both Painting and digital printing. He sits opposite Sanyas Ashram, Ashram Road and works under the name Rajni Arts. He thinks that the future of Painter is good but it will take some time to regain its status. He gave me a good number of contacts for Painters in Ahmedabad.

8. Painters who Simply Paints for the love of it.

Arvind Bhai Dehgam Pandya / 62years / Gandhinagar / 09427065446

A very experience Painter Arvind Bhai wanted to know what I will do with the interview. He is a self taught Painter who has done numerous works in many mediums. He had worked as a Painter in ST, Ahmedabad and had done numerous works for the Government. He is now retired but goes around to help people with the skills he had gained over such a long years. He now does social works and doesn't charge any money for his work. *"kudrat ne hum ko diya hai, unko hum waapas kaar raha hun"* . As per him Artists goes to learn art in schools, and they create but Painters learns mostly self and they hardly create artwork instead they replicate. He doesn't like the quality of flex prints and favours Hand paintings. He believes that Flex had taken away the life of Painters, and whoever is still painting are frustrated and not focused with what they are doing. He has a firm belief that Flex will be taken over by Painter one day and Painters will revive their status once again.

9. Painters who had moved on to another creative work.

Salim Bhai / 50yrs / Roopali, Ahmedabad / 09624310905

Salim bhai has been Painting since a very young age. He had worked on Canvas, Film posters, Oil paintings but he did not have any records of his works. He has left handpainting and now works mostly Radium cuttings. He has a good amount of client as his works are unique and he delivers quality. He has attended Typography day 2011 held at NID. He believes that handpainting will return and people will get fed up of Flex prints one day.

Conclusion First Area of study

Due to technology and market demand Painters are struggling hard to survive, in order to meet the market demands they either collaborate their work with Printers or they completely change their profession. Driving Auto rickshaw is one easy way to earn their bread as they are mostly illiterate or haven't meet the education qualifications the market demands today. In a common scenario a Painter mostly is the only earning member of their family and in order to feed their family most of the Painters today had stopped Painting and shifted their profession. Still a very few Painters survive today who still paints with the hope that Painters will once again regain their status.

A vinyl print may cost around (8 to 15)₹ per sq. ft as compared to a Painter's work which might cost around (30 to 50)₹ per sq. ft and the delivery time is much quicker in a vinyl print but the quality & durability of a Painted work is so much more than that of a vinyl print. Most of the Painters believes that one day people will actually look for quality work and shift to paintings rather than going for a cheaper and faster low quality work.

In the First area of study I was trying to find out the history of how painting really began as a profession. Though there were traces of relationship between the painters in Vododara with famous Painter like Raja Ravi Verma and influences of Impressionist Painters in the South India with the Amazing Film Posters and Huge Hoarding Painters. I couldn't find a strong evedience to really relate them so I am still trying to figure this out.

There is an interesting trend that the Painters follow even now and also I couldn't find any female working in this profession till now.
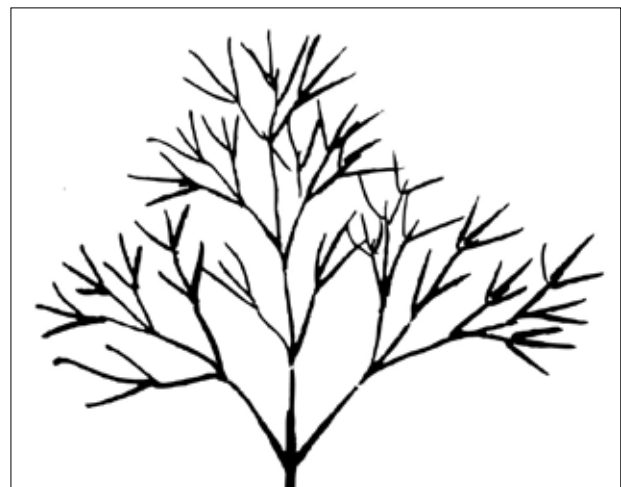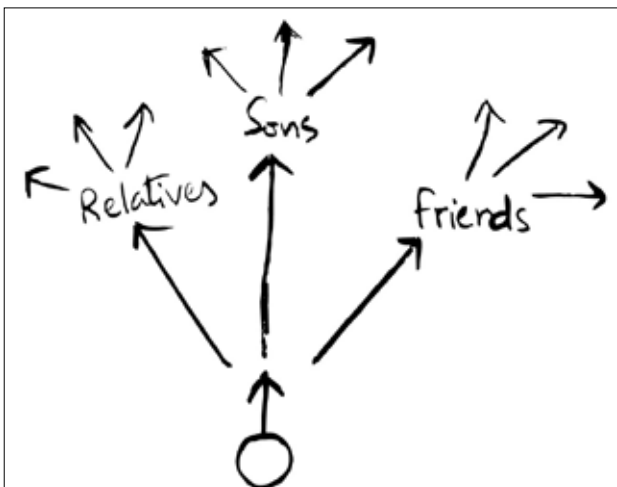
The Interesting trend that I have visualized. This is how the Painters spreads like a tree with a lot of branches. Most all of the Painters started their career following their father, a relative or friends. These field doesn't require a qualification requirement and this attracts a lot of people at a time when they needed to earn money to support their family.

Meeting With The Guide

While I was discussing with my guide about the final output of this project he asked me a very important question "what is it that I want for my final output". I was still not so sure about the final output for this project, though there were a few ideas such as

- Workshop / Exhibition by the Painters
- A movie documenting their Lifestyles & Works
- A publication on their Lifestyle & Works

These ideas were easily executable but the only question was how many audience could I reach out to and that's when my Guide asked me if I could write a Paper and present it on Typography Day 2013 so that it reaches a good number of people as well as an opportunity to work further resulting in various possible outcomes. He then asked me to bring all the visuals that I have collected and decide on what to do further.

We meet again in the evening and went through all the visuals that I have collected so far and then we came up with the idea of

- Identifying different styles of typefaces through various treatments in terms of strokes, weights, colors, graphic elements, uses of spaces etc.

He wanted me to collect some more visuals so that I have more variations to look at, and he also asked me to collect visuals from Akash Raj Halankar (a PG Graphic Design student working on Hand painted gujarati Typeface) and together we could study from a good variations of visuals.

2. A comparative study on the visuals Collected and study the way of treatments

From over 2000 images collected over 3 months, 952 images were selected named as per location and printed as contact sheets (28images in one A3 page). Sachin Bhai helped us in cutting the printed images in the Printing lab, NID. It took us 2 days to arrange and classify the images. I team up with Akash Halankar (PG Graphic Design) who is working on a gujarati typeface for his project. We have focussed on Gujarati typeface only and the classification is based on two main category namely **Form** and **Visual Representation**.

We have two sub categories under Form.

Monilinear – Lettering characters having the same stroke.

Modulated – Lettering characters having different stokes.

We have 9 subcategories under Visual Representation.
These categories are based on how the typefaces characters are being drawn by the painters. These categories will again fall under either Monolinear or Modulated.

Shadow – Lettering characters with shadows.

Distortion – Lettering characters which are distorted.

Outline – Lettering characters having having outline.

Geometric – Lettering characters which are geometrical.

Vignette – Lettering characters filled with mixed colors.

3D – Lettering characters having 3 dimensional treatment.

Decorative – Lettering characters having decorative elements.

Fill in – typeface characters having their negative spaces filled in with colors.

Exaggeration - Lettering characters which are being modified to give a visual appeal.

When all the arrangements are done we color coded the Visual Representation categories and looked for those images which falls under multiple categories. We were trying to get a fair idea of how many examples falls under each category and study further based on the categorization that we have done so far.2. A comparative study on the visuals Collected and study the way of treatments.

Categorization 01 | Initial Findings

GRAPH Monolinear > Modulated
Though we cannot conclude whether it is true considering all of Ahmedabad but based on the visuals collected through the areas covered, the image clearly shows Monolinear typeface is favored almost 1/3rd more than Modulated typeface.

The Gujarati Script

The Gujarati Script (in red color) was adapted from the Devanagari Script to write the Gujarati language. It is differentiated by the loss of the characteristic horizontal line running above the letters and by a small number of modifications in the remaining characters.

Treatments | The Gujarati Script

Though the Gujarati Script is differentiated by the loss of the horizontal line running above the letters here is some examples of Gujarati Scripts with upper horizontal line.

These examples clearly shows that the Painters who had painted these are highly influence by the Devanagari script. These may be some of the reasons behind these influence.
1. Since the Devanagari script is the most commonly script used and seen everywhere in India.
2. Most of the Painters often goes to Hindi speaking & Devanagari script influenced places in order to practice or learn Painting at some point of their Painting career.
3. Most of the Painters (not limited to) studied only till their 10th or 12th(rarely) classes or are illetrate and they mostly learned Painting/Handlettering copying Devanagari Script which is seen almost everywhere in India.
4. Whatever work the client had given them they sometimes (very rarely) do it their own way otherwise they replicate the work most of the time.

The Categorization | Some examples

Modulated
3D Stroke & Shadow

Monolinear
3D Stroke & Shadow

Modulated
Exaggerated Foot

Monolinear
Exaggerated Foot

Modulated
Exaggerated Terminal

Monolinear
Exaggerated Terminal

Gujarati Newspaper Analysis

These are some of the analysis done on the daily Gujarati newspapers, looking at their mastheads and trying to categorize them based on the categories in the previous chapter.

Modulated Exaggerated, Geometric
- Modified Terminals
- Reduced Curves
- Right Angled turns

Modulated Exaggerated
- Modified Terminals
- Extended Curves
- Calligraphic Strokes

Monolinear Exaggerated
- Upper line hint
- Extended curves
- Sharp cut terminals

&

Modulated Exaggerated
- Modified Curves
- Sudden uneven Strokes

Monolinear Exaggerated
- Extended Curves
- Uneven Curve Terminal

Modulated Exaggerated
- Extended Curves
- Uneven Curves Strokes and Vertical strokes

Analysis 1.0 | The character 'ra'

A closer study at one of the most repeatedly appearing and playful character, its characteristics and its reappearance on other characters such as the two 'sha' characters and 'aa'. It is a study on how the painters solve the problems differentiating letter characters with similar skeletons or characteristics, at the same time making them look visually appealing.

the character 'ra'

the character 'sha'

the character 'aa'

the character 'sha'

the conjunct of 'sha' & 'ta'

Analysis 1.01 | The character 'ra'

Some variations of the character 'ra'
These are only a few examples selected from the large numbers of the 'ra' characters
in Analysis 1.0

With a loop

Dominating upper
curve/bowl
small counters

Indent appearance

Enlarged strokes
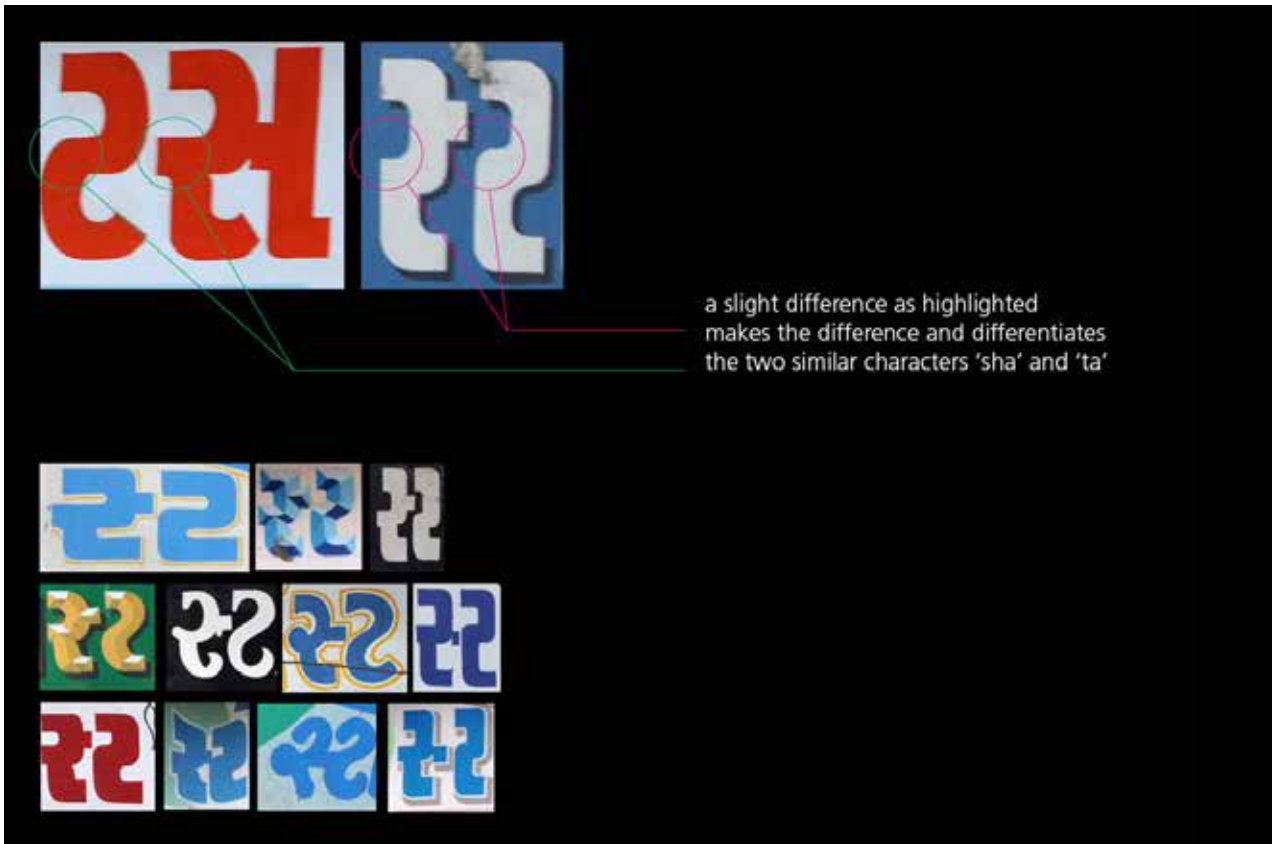

Linear terminal strokes

Dominating upper
curve/bowl
Geometrical

Analysis 1.02 | The character 'ra'

The character 'ra' reappearance
Few examples on how the letter 'ra' reappears on few other characters and what differentiates them from 'ra'

a slight difference as highlighted
makes the difference and differentiates
the two similar characters 'sha' and 'ta'

almost the same character,
the highlighted area differentiates
the character 'sha' from 'ra'
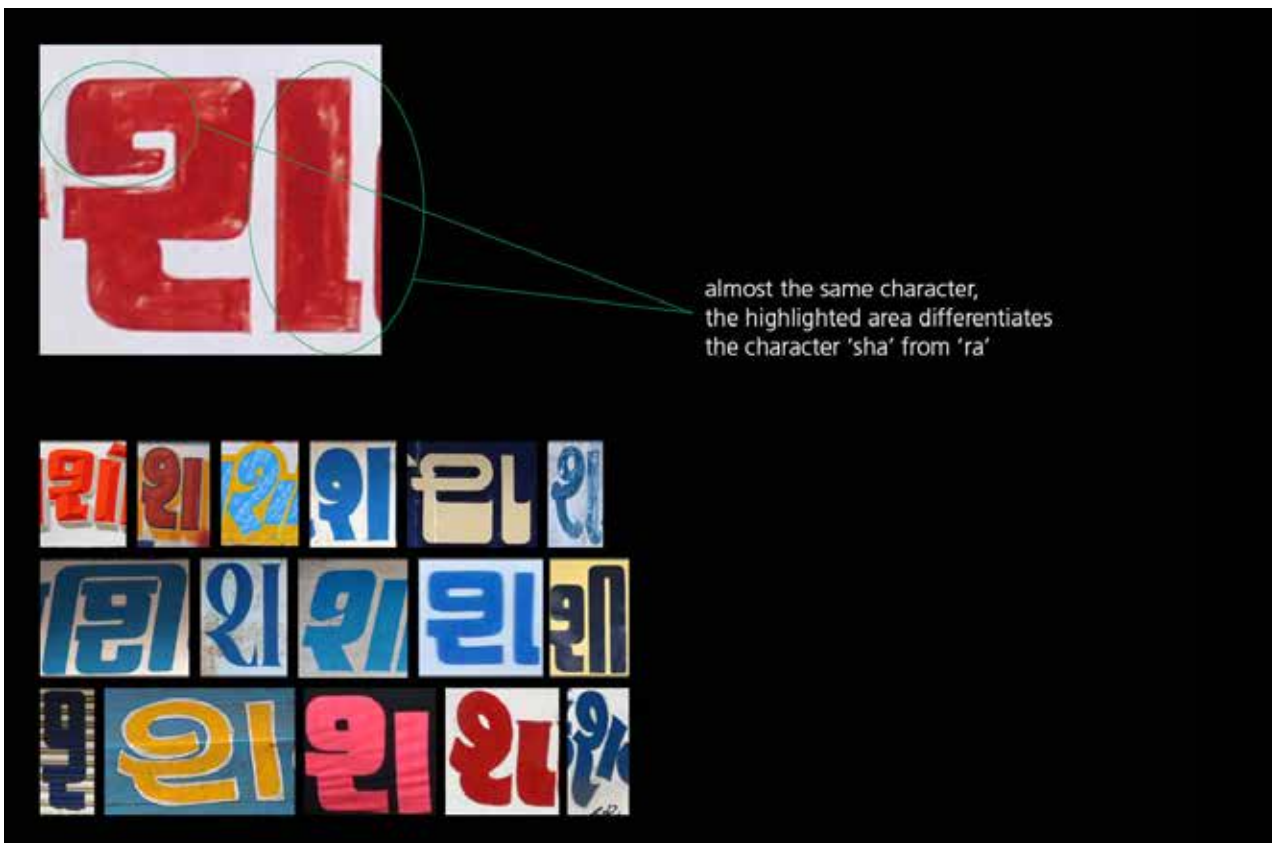
Analysis 2.0 | The foot

This ia an attempt to study the terminals / foot of the gujarati hand painted typefaces. These foot have some interesting variations and resemblance which gives a very unique feel and an identity itself to the letters. The foots are first selected from a large numbers of images, printed as a contact sheet then drawn which is then vectored for clarity.
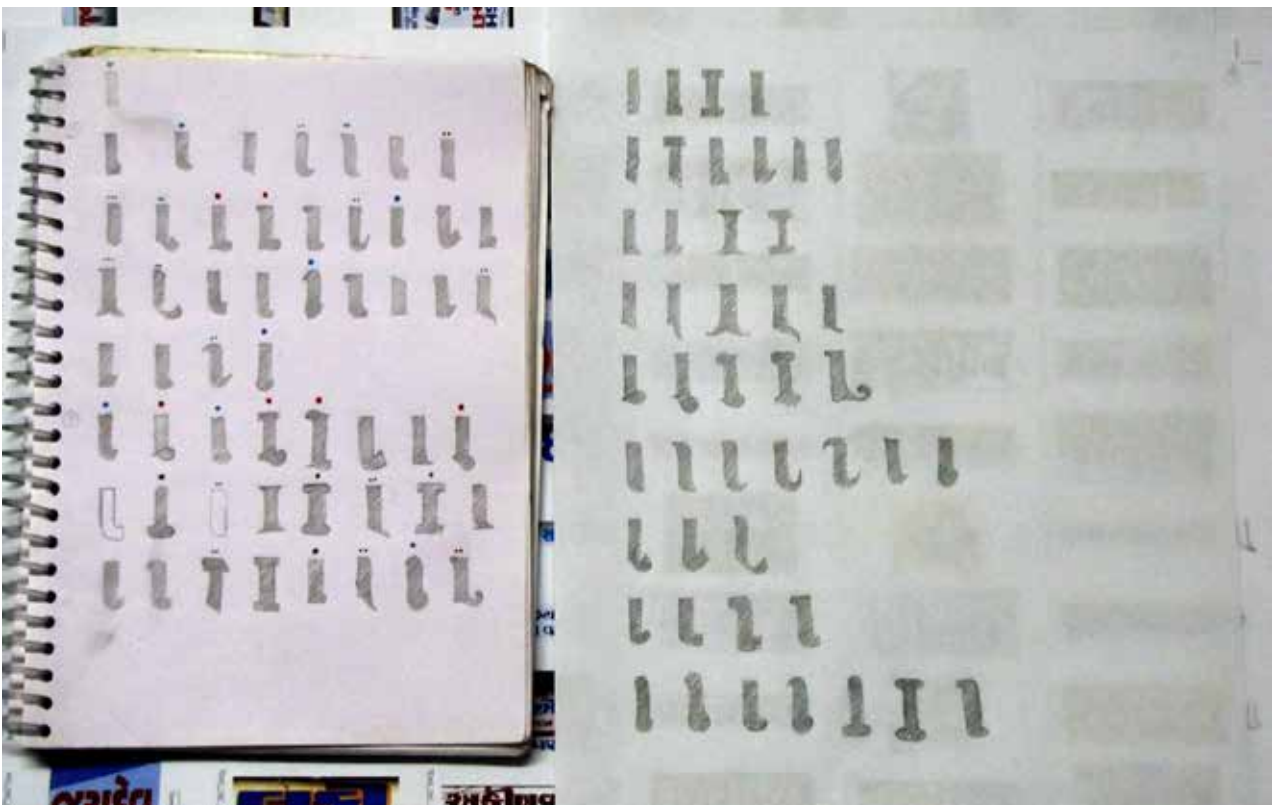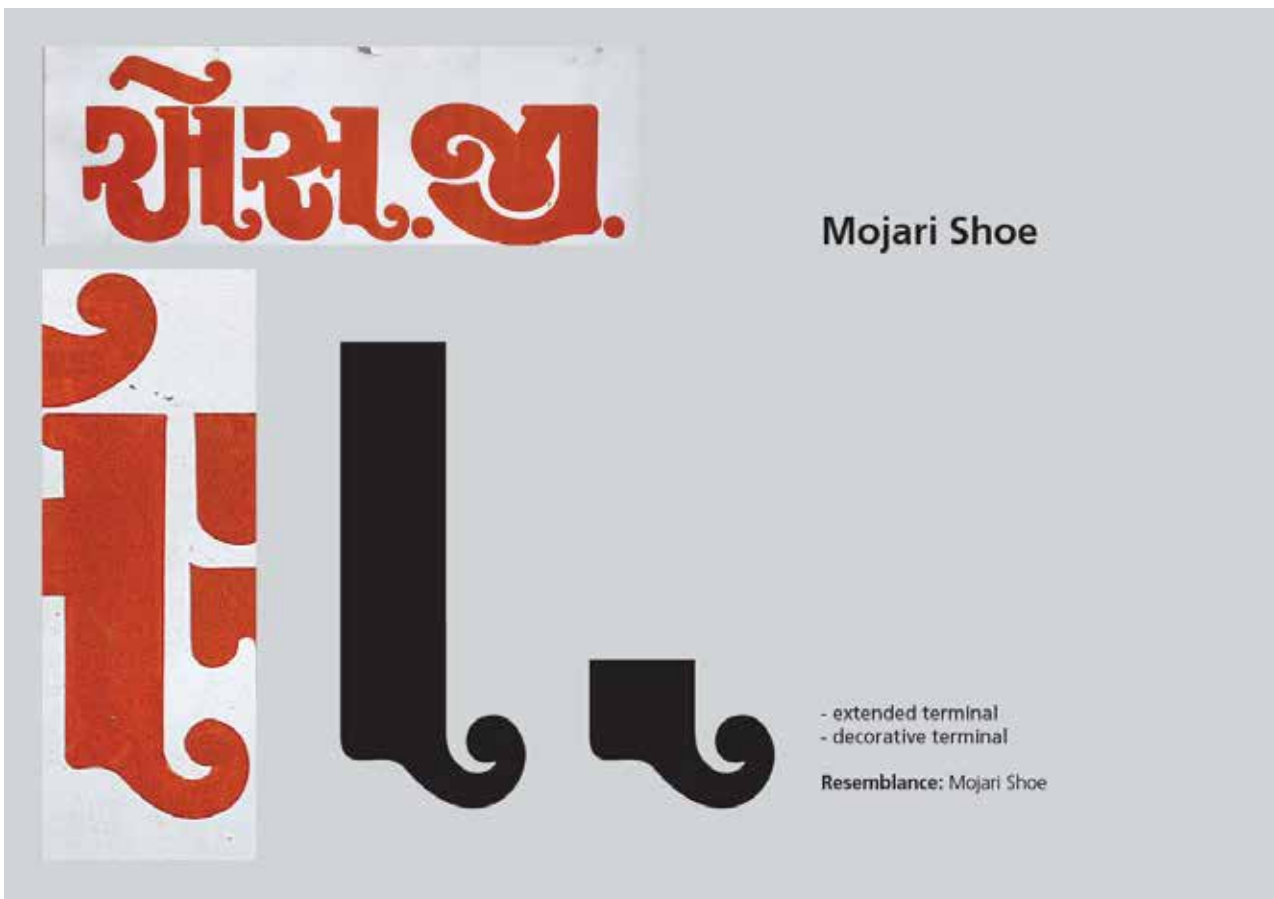
Analysis 2.01 | The foot vectored

The image below are the variatons of foot that I've drawn and vectored. The resemblance of the foots are given on the next page.
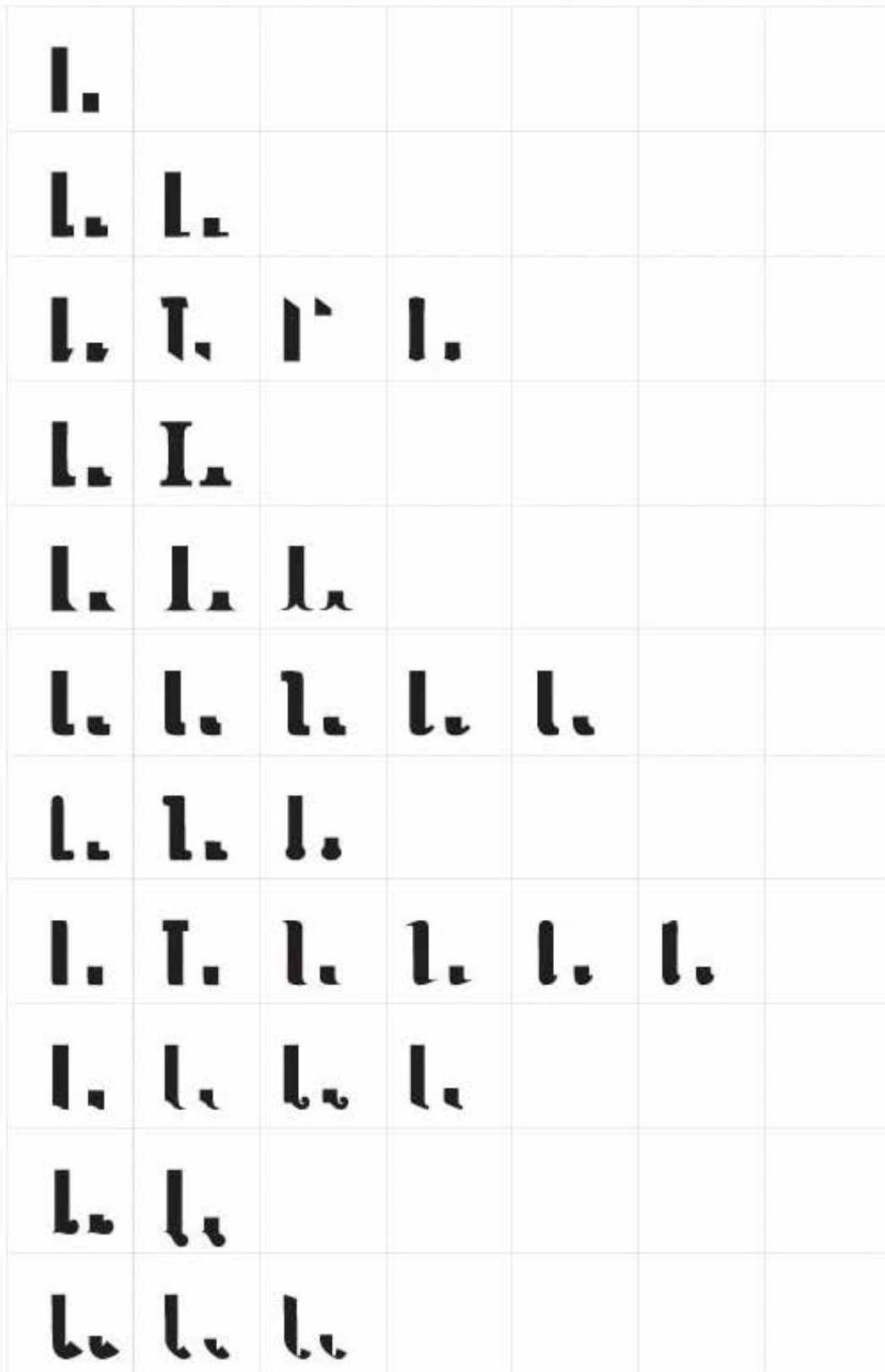
Analysis 2.02 | The foot resemblance

A few examples of the study of foot of the gujarati handlettered characters

Moustache

- decorative terminals

Resemblance: Moustache

Mojari Shoe

- extended terminal
- decorative terminal

Resemblance: Mojari Shoe

Conclusion

With the study of the foot, the project concludes as per the academic requirements but the project still needs a lot more research and findings which I am still working on. Infact I am planning to cover more areas and more places and cover more scripts other than the Gujarati script. This project has opened up a huge possibility of research and documenting the dying art of hand lattering/painting.

What the Painters belief about them regaining their status might actually come true as anything that comes back in history has always comes back with a lot of surprise. Even if this doesn't happens then documenting them is still very important as there is a very few research done in this area and when I had a tough time looking for such a documents for my research and I commit myself to this project so that anyone who wants to start a research or just to read or to look for inspiration related to this subject can use this document as a reference if it could be of any use and that would be my little contribution.

Acknowledgement

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