

Design Resource

Warli Painting - Nagpur

Tribal Paintings

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/warli-painting-nagpur>



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Introduction

India has a rich tradition of folk arts, the custodians of which are the many tribes settled in the interiors of our Indian states. Warli paintings are one such precious tribal art originating in the state of Maharashtra. According to historians, the practice of Warli tradition traces back to the Neolithic period of 2,500 BC to 3,000 BC. Then traveling across borders and territories, it has now emerged as a well-known art with great demand in the international market as well. The Warli tribe is believed to initially express the style over the walls of their houses, then slowly developing it to be executed on paper and cloths. Anciently, this means was used for transmitting folklore to a populace not acquainted with the written word. The most important aspect of the painting is that it does not depict mythological characters or deities but the social life of human beings and their connection with animals around them.

This painting resembling prehistoric cave paintings, shares similarities with the mural paintings from the Bhimbetka rock shelters of Madhya Pradesh, built in 500 and 10,000 BC. Along with scenes of human figures engaged in activities like hunting, sowing, and harvesting, festivals and celebrations also enjoy an important place in the art, showcasing the simple and humble life of the Warli tribe. Here people and animals are represented by two inverse triangles; the upper triangle forms the upper body while the lower triangle is for the pelvis. Gender difference is marked with a difference in their hairstyle and triangle sizes; the larger triangle at the top is for men and the broader lower triangle for women. These rhythmic patterns are often made on village hut walls that are made of natural elements like tree branches, mud, and cow dung, which becomes a red ochre background for the paintings. A distinctive feature is that Warli paintings are only done with a white pigment made from a mixture of rice paste, water, and natural gum added as a binder, unlike other folk paintings. Here the artist creates a paintbrush out of a bamboo stick by chewing its one end to gain an intended texture. Though traditional methods included contrast of white over earthy colours, contemporary formats have modified it to include rusty vibrant colours. The modern Warli art comprises abstract and representations of new objects such as bicycles, transistors, hand pipes, horses, etc., in corners of the paintings. The Warli tribes lead a simple and humble lifestyle that reflects strongly in their crafts. Though traditionally forest-dwellers, they have now emerged a pastoral community.

They now reside on the west coast of Northern Maharashtra, with a higher concentration in the Thane district, off Mumbai. Though they belong to an economically weaker populace, they still wholeheartedly hold close to their indigenous customs and traditions than leaving it to despair. The commercialization of Warli paintings is the next hope for the upliftment of the community. Fortunately, it's been proving positive for decades with the heightened popularity and demand in both the national and international markets. Therefore, they are increasingly becoming integrated with the mainstream.

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The Theme of Warli Art:

(A) Colours and shades - The Warli paintings are done on a stiff mud base using white colour, made out of finely grounded rice. Sometimes, the art also incorporates occasional dots in red and yellow colour. Historically, i.e., in its most authentic stage, ingredients like henna, indigo, ochre, charcoal, mud, brick, etc., were used to produce colours. Still, nowadays, artisans are found to use acrylic or fabric paints, easily available in the market.

(B) Content of the art - This extremely rudimentary art includes basic geometric shapes like circles, triangles, and squares. The circle mostly represents celestial bodies like the sun and the moon. The triangle forms a living being body, mountains, and certain trees, while the square is used to depict a sacred enclosure or a piece of land. Hence in every painting, all the elements are found to be within a square, and the representation of Palaghata, the goddess of fertility is a regular view.

(C) Value of Warli art - The sense of uniformity and the close social interactions with nature and the spirits are what make the essence of Warli paintings. In Tribal culture, death is not an end but is the dawn of a new beginning, thus considering life as an eternal circle. Hence, we find much representation of circles in tribal art. The origin of the art is closely related to the ancient beliefs of following an artistic ritual to invoke preeminent power, get rid of, or protect against diseases and natural calamities. The art of the Tribal people symbolizes man's harmony with each other and with nature.

Creative Craft Center from Nagpur is a place where training is given for artists to learn different kinds of art. Mrs. Vaishali H. Kawre is the owner cum trainer of this center. She runs this center for the last 22 years.



Artisan named Mrs. Vaishali H. Kawre runs Creative Craft Center, where Warli paintings are created for 22 years.

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The workspace of the artisan adorned with her handicrafts and paintings.



The artisan dotting that with years of practice and efficiency, the time taken to complete a painting work can be brought down drastically.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for Warli painting:

- **Handmade Paper:** It is used as the basic material for Warli painting.
- **Steel Plate:** Though mainly used as a paint pallet, it also holds pencils, paintbrushes, and eraser.
- **Pencil:** It is used to sketch characters and draw the border outline.
- **Paintbrush:** It is used to highlight the border and paint the Warli tribe on to a handmade paper.
- **Eraser:** It is used to erase the outline after the painting is completed.
- **Acrylic Color:** It is used for shading the Warli tribal art by using a brush.
- **Table:** It is used as a work area, where the artisan sets all the tools and raw materials required for the painting, for an easy reach and comfortable placing.
- **Plastic Scale:** It is used while drawing straight borders.



A steel plate holding pencils, brushes, eraser, and acrylic colours. A table used to support the artisan while painting.

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The handmade paper is used as a base for Warli painting.



Black acrylic colour used to paint the Warli painting.



The plastic scale used to draw borders for the painting over the handmade paper.

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Making Process

Firstly, the artisan chooses a handmade paper, and it is then placed over a table set to their comfort height. Then using a long plastic scale and pencil, a border for the Warli art is drawn. Once the border is drawn, with the help of a paintbrush black acrylic paint is applied over the border design to highlight it. Now the artisan proceeds to the interiors of the work, to start with the sketch of a scene from the Warli tribe life, using a pencil, which may include episodes like a normal day in their life, marriage, festival, or any other celebrations. These are done using white acrylic colour or a mixture of rice powder, water, and glue. It often holds a depiction of human lives, birds, animals, village houses, scenery, daily utility products, etc. Women with a pot on their head, drummers with the instrument, men holding flame torches, people carrying a baby on the hip or shoulder, drawing water from well, animals being hunted, a group dancing to music, etc., are some of the common themes used in the paintings.



Artisan drawing the border using scale and pencil on the handmade paper to start the Warli painting.

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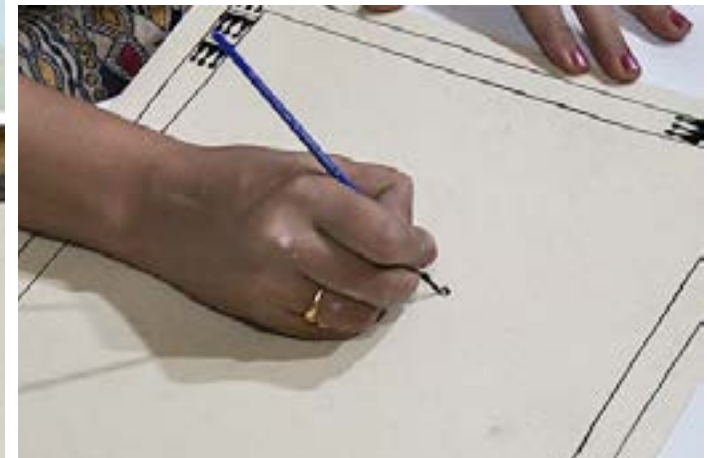
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Tribal design being painted on the border corners.



By using a paintbrush, the artisan highlighting the borders with black acrylic colour.



Artisan dipping the paintbrush into black acrylic colour and starts painting.

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A pencil is used by the artisan to outline the tribal horse.

A pencil is used by the artisan to outline the tribal horse.



A glimpse of the tribal horse, completely painted with black acrylic colour.

Artisan painting an equestrian controlling the horse, on which a King and Queen are seated.

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Artisan is painting a celebration scene where Warli people are rejoicing with their king and queen, playing musical instruments.

The painting shows a group of people dancing around the King and Queen.

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The King and Queen's arrival to the village.



Here an aesthetic piece of Warli painting is completed and framed.

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Products

An artist named Mrs. Vaishali Kawre from Creative Craft, Nagpur has been practicing Warli paintings since she was 18 years old. The art was taught to her by the tribal people themselves, residing in the Dahanu taluka in Palghar district of Maharashtra. Mr. Hareshwar Wanga, a master of Warli painting was her tutor back then. At this Nagpur based art center, the cost of Warli paintings ranges between 500 INR to 6000 INR, as the final rate is fixed as per the height, material used, and design given to the artwork. Here the minimum size provided is 1/1 feet while the maximum goes up to 5/5 feet. The product range includes greetings, envelopes, bookmarks, cloths, table mats, bedsheets, and sarees carrying Warli designs.



'Deva chowk' is the traditional way of the Warli tribe presenting their God through a painting.



A painting depicting a festival celebration by the Warli tribe, completed in different shades of colour.

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A peacock with long straight feathers is represented in the painting.



Types of duties undertaken by the Warli tribe in a day's routine are shown in the painting.



A unique kind of envelope cover decorated with tribal art.

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A painting showing tribal people dancing while working, reflecting their culture of having fun while working.

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Video



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This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B. at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

You can get in touch with him at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

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

Key Contacts:

Mrs. Vaishali H. Kawre

Creative Craft, Civil Lines

Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

Mobile: 09967963325 / 9967963325

Helpdesk Details:

Co-ordinator

Project e-kalpa

R & D Campus

National Institute of Design

#12 HMT Link Road, Off Tumkur Road

Bengaluru 560 022

India

Phone: +91 80 2357 9054

Fax: +91 80 23373086

Email: [dsource.in\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:dsource.in[at]gmail.com)

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