

The Chanakya Foundation and Karishma Swali announce a new exhibition in Venice titled 'Cosmic Garden'

The Chanakya Foundation and Karishma Swali announce a new exhibition in Venice, titled 'Cosmic Garden'

20 April – 24 November 2024
Preview: 18 April 2024

Salone Verde – Art & Social Club
Calle Regina, 2258, Venice, Italy
chanakya.in | chanakya.school
[Instagram](#)

The **Chanakya Foundation** and **Karishma Swali** present *Cosmic Garden*, an artistic collaboration between **Madhvi Parekh**, **Manu Parekh**, and **Karishma Swali**, creative director and co-founder of the Chanakya Foundation. Curated by **Maria Alicata** and **Paola Ugolini**, the exhibition will take place at **Salone Verde - Art & Social Club** in Venice, from 20 April to 24 November 2024.



Image: Karishma Swali, Madhvi Parekh and Manu Parekh with students, 2023 © Vismay Mirgal. Courtesy of Chanakya Foundation

The exhibition *Cosmic Garden* emerges from an ongoing fertile exchange between acclaimed Indian artists **Madhvi Parekh, Manu Parekh, and Karishma Swali**, creative director of the Mumbai-based **Chanakya School of Craft** — a non-profit institute committed to the **emancipation of women through craft**.

Marking its inaugural showcase in Venice, the presentation pays homage to the **pluralistic beauty of India's artisanal legacies and indigenous art traditions**.

This carefully curated series of works embraces a multidisciplinary approach, dismantling entrenched ideological hierarchies within the art world. It casts a spotlight on the **contemporary reinterpretation of traditional techniques**, transcending conventional boundaries to carve out a new artistic language rooted in collective cultural histories. The exhibition features an array of **paintings and sculptures by Madhvi Parekh and Manu Parekh**, as well as their metamorphosis into a third interdisciplinary medium — **hand-embroidery** — an art form refined over millennia.

Manu Parekh's art assimilates India's cultural tapestry while embracing elements of Western modernism and abstract expressionism. His vibrant compositions, characterised by broken lines, stripes, crosses, and floral motifs, embody the cosmic harmony of masculine and feminine energies.

On the other hand, **Madhvi Parekh's** works portray formidable female deities encircled by celestial beings and symbolic representations, inspired from Indian myths and emphasising the connection between humans and the divine.

Karishma Swali and 320 highly-skilled artisans from Chanakya conceptualised and interpreted the textile re-imaginings through meticulous needlework embroidery and handcrafting techniques, utilising organic materials like raw linen, jute, silk, and cotton. The result becomes a **true artistic statement**: a practice based on a dialogue that reinvents the role of the artist and the artisan, **blurring the boundaries between art and craft**.

Over the span of her 25-year career, Karishma Swali has been dedicated to elevating and **preserving India's cultural heritage through craft excellence**. In 2016, creative director at the Chanakya Foundation, she established the Chanakya School of Craft, a pivotal institution aimed at harnessing the power of craft to address the pressing challenges faced by women. The guiding mission of this school is twofold: to safeguard India's cultural heritage and to unlock the infinite potential of craft. The school has taught over 1000 women to-date, across all ages and socio-economic backgrounds forming a strong community of skilled women. Notably, in recent years, Karishma Swali has also fostered meaningful partnerships with luminaries like **Maria Grazia Chiuri, Dior's Women's Collection**, and collaborated with influential contemporary artists, such as **Judy Chicago, Olesia Trofymenko, Mickalene Thomas, and Marta Roberti**. Actively involving women from diverse backgrounds, these all-encompassing projects have significantly emphasised the importance of educational institutions dedicated to creating a new autonomy for women while championing craft excellence.

Held at **Salone Verde - Art & Social Club** in the historic Venetian district of Rialto, and curated by **Maria Alicata and Paola Ugolini**, *Cosmic Garden* shines light on the vital role of local communities in showcasing their material culture and preserving the rich, diverse essence of Indian traditions.



Image: Karishma Swali, Madhvi and Manu Parekh in conversation, 2023 © Sahiba Chawdhary. Post production: Daniele Zoico - Danto Production. Courtesy of Chanakya Foundation

Madhvi Parekh

b. 1942 in Gujarat, India; lives and works in New Delhi.

Madhvi's traditional representations revolve around her childhood memories, Indian mythology, women's craft, art and folk legends, all of which are aimed at narrating a story or a life experience. As a self-taught artist, apart from folk motifs and figures, she also uses imaginary, dream-like characters and spiritual abstractions that celebrate the male-female and real-surreal dichotomies.

More at www.dagworld.com/madhviparekh.html.

Manu Parekh

b. 1939 in Gujarat, India; lives and works in New Delhi.

Manu Parekh is among India's best-known contemporary artists. Fascinated by the modernism of Paul Klee and Rabindranath Tagore, through the teachings of S.B Palsikar at the J.J. School of Art, he began experimenting with a form of modernism that engaged with India's vernacular art forms such as embroidery, which were familiar to him from his childhood in Gujarat. During his work with the Weaver's Service Centre and the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India, under the guidance of Pupul Jayakar, he renewed his search for language and encountered many vernacular art forms travelling across western, northern, and eastern India. All his works are instinctive and powerful, illustrating his relationship with the tangible and sensual body, the earth and fertility.

More at manu-parekh.com.

Chanakya Foundation and Chanakya School of Craft

A compelling need to address social, economic, and environmental issues laid the foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility at Chanakya. The Chanakya Foundation's vision is focussed on fostering cultural sustainability and holistic advancement through education, skill development, and dedicated efforts to safeguard India's rich artisanal heritage and promote the arts. The foundation's mission is to empower women from underserved communities through exceptional education in hand craftsmanship, enabling them to unlock their full potential and elevate their quality of life. By instilling a visionary perspective, cultivating role models, and fostering a strong sense of community, the Foundation is dedicated to the transformation of societies.

Established in 2016 by the Chanakya Foundation, Chanakya School of Craft is a first of its kind. The non-profit school is dedicated to craft, culture and creating new autonomy for women. The goal for the school is to create a platform of multi-dimensional learning, focused on the arts and crafts while providing equal opportunity to an often ignored backbone of our communities: women. The curriculum teaches over 300 hand embroidery techniques through a holistic curriculum anchored through the voices and lives of

historical female figures. The school has taught over 1000 women to-date, across all ages and socio-economic backgrounds forming a strong community of skilled, autonomous women. While some choose to start their own business, many find employment within the Chanakya Ateliers and creatively collaborate with 13th master-artisans.

Karishma Swali

Since 1998, Karishma Swali has led Chanakya International, a global textile house with a four-decade history in the preservation, revival and conservation of India's intangible cultural heritage. Across her 25-year career, which includes stints at international luxury houses, Karishma Swali has worked towards bringing India's diverse craft traditions to the forefront. In 2016, Karishma established the Chanakya School of Craft, a non-profit foundation and school dedicated to craft, culture, and creating new autonomy for women. The school has taught over 1000 women to-date, across all ages and socio-economic backgrounds forming a strong community of skilled women. Since 2020, Karishma Swali has collaborated with noted contemporary artists such as Judy Chicago, Eva Jospin, Manu Parekh, Madhvi Parekh, Olesia Trofymenko, Mickalene Thomas, and Marta Roberti. These works have since been featured at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, at the De Young Museum in San Francisco (USA) and at the Museum of Impressionism in Giverny (France).



