



Art of India: Folk Art



UIMA K-12 School Programs Collections | Art of India: Folk Art

Humans have inhabited the subcontinent of India for thousands of years. Archeologists have located the earliest known artwork in caves of central India. These simple renderings of animals and humans date to around 5500 BCE. During the third and second millennia BCE, the Indus Valley civilization flourished. It was one of the world's largest urban cultures at that time. Since then, peoples have brought various cultural and material practices to the area. The Art of India: Folk Art Collection is composed of contemporary objects that show the variety of traditional Indian influences.

Many of the objects in the Art of India: Folk Art Collection are from the Banjara people. The name is fitting as they were historically known as traveling merchants who carried goods on cattle throughout India and even to South Africa, Afghanistan, Khaibar, Italy, China, Tibet, Arabsthan, and Brahmadesh. Some of the nomadic merchants' main goods were salt, grain, dates, coconuts, and dry fish. As small groups of Banjara became specialized in trading specific goods and developed their own trade routes, they took on the names related to the items they sold. The Islamic Mughal Kings, who ruled from 1526–1756, took notice of the Banjaras' honesty and work ethic and appointed the traders to supply food to their armies. The end of the Mughal Empire and the arrival of the railroad during the mid-nineteenth century led to a rapid Art of India decline of the Banjara livelihood. Today, nomadic traders live in various locations throughout India in communities called *tanda*, which are most often located in nature, away from villages. Most of the Banjara communities are nomadic and poor, but they are important centers of ancient folk art traditions.

The painting, *Rama & Sita Nuptials*, is a traditional Madhubani painting. The folk tradition of Madhubani paintings originated in the city of Mithila, in the state of Bihar, India. The colorful, ornate, and curvilinear style of Madhubani is expressive rather than representational. Women originated this art form with wall and floor paintings on homes to mark religious ceremonies. One of the most common themes was marriage. The old paints were made from crushed wet rice and natural pigments. Over time, artists began to paint on hand-made mulberry paper and silk fabric as a way to share their paintings and help support themselves.

Other items in the UIMA School Programs Art of India: Folk Art Collection include objects associated with the decorative arts. These objects include textiles, leather shoes, and wood printing blocks.

The following pages show examples of objects in the collection.





India, Bihar, Mithila; Hindu

Devendra Kumar Jha (Indian)

Rama & Sita Nuptials, 34 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

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India, Agra

Marble mandala

Marble, shell or stone, 6 x ¼ x 6 in.

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India

Women's *jooti* (handmade shoe)

Leather, rubber, thread, nails, cord, 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (one shoe)

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Partha Dey (Indian, b. 1965)

Durga and Kahli scenes

Ceramic, glaze

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