

India on Canvas: A Tapestry of Painting Styles

Indian Painting Styles -Folk Art to Temple Art

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India has a vast range of painting traditions, from ancient temple murals to vibrant folk and tribal art. Famous painting art forms include Madhubani, Warli , Pattachitra , Kalamkari , Gond and classical miniature styles like Mughal, Rajput, and Kangra. Each region reflects its culture, mythology, and daily life through these distinctive styles.

Paintings can be classified as

- Folk & Tribal Art: They are rooted in community rituals and daily life such as (Madhubani, Warli, Gond).
- Temple & Classical Art: They are deeply spiritual, linked to epics and deities (Pattachitra, & Tanjore paintings).
- Miniature Traditions: Patronized by royalty, showcasing refined detail (Mughal, Rajput, Kangra).

Folk & Tribal Art

Madhubani from the State of Bihar They are painted on walls and paper using natural colors. The themes include mythology, nature & festivals.



Pattachitra



Madhubani Painting



India Tanjore Painting

Madhubani paintings originated in the Mithila region of Bihar. Madhubani is a market town in North Bihar. They were traditionally

painted by women on walls and floors. These paintings are now also done on paper and cloth. They use bright natural colors and are known for their detailed patterns, bold outlines, and geometric designs. Common themes include Hindu gods and goddesses, nature, animals, and scenes from daily life.

Warli (State of Maharashtra) <https://www.shopkhoj.com/handicrafts/warli-painting/>

This is Tribal art, made by using white pigment on mud walls. It depicts daily life, farming, and rituals.

Warli paintings are one of the oldest forms of tribal art in India, originating from the Warli tribe of Maharashtra. This art form dates back to around 2500 BCE and is deeply rooted in the tribe's rituals, traditions, and daily life. Warli art is not just decorative; it is a visual storytelling tradition that records the tribe's way of life. It reflects harmony between humans and nature, embodying values of community living and sustainability. Today, Warli paintings have moved beyond village walls to canvases, fabrics, and modern design, gaining global recognition while preserving their rustic charm.

Gond (from the State of Madhya Pradesh)

This art form uses bright colors and intricate dots/lines.

. They are inspired by folklore and animals.

Gond Art is one of the most vibrant and intricate tribal art forms of India, practiced by the Gond community spread across Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Maharashtra. It is both a cultural expression and a storytelling tradition. Today, Gond art is showcased in galleries worldwide and adapted into textiles, home décor, and even digital media.

Classical & Temple Art

Pattachitra (Odisha & West Bengal)

They are cloth or palm-leaf paintings with mythological themes. The fact that it is strongly linked to Puri Jagannath temple rituals categorises it as Temple Art.

Pattachitra is a traditional painting style from Odisha and West Bengal. The word "patta" means cloth, and "chitra" means picture. These paintings are made on cloth prepared with natural materials. The painter is called Pattachitrakar. This art style is dedicated to Lord Jagannath of Puri. Pattachitra paintings are known for their fine detailing, decorative borders, and mythological stories, especially from the life of Lord Jagannath, Krishna, and the Dasavatara.

Kalamkari (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana)

Hand-painted or block-printed textiles. Themes: epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata.

Kalamkari is a form of hand-painted and block-printed textile art from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The word Kalamkari is derived from two Persian words: kalam meaning pen and kari meaning work, which together mean "pen work." The paintings are made on cotton or silk fabric using natural dyes. The designs are first drawn with a bamboo pen dipped in dye, and then filled with colors obtained from plants and minerals. The process involves many steps, including washing, bleaching, and dyeing, which require great skill and patience.

Tanjore Painting (Tamil Nadu) – Rich gold leaf work, religious themes. Tanjore Paintings Tanjore (or Thanjavur) paintings originated in Tamil Nadu during the Chola period. These paintings are famous for their rich colors, surface relief work, and the use of gold foil. The main subjects are Hindu gods and goddesses, shown with calm expressions and decorative ornaments. Tanjore paintings are considered sacred and are often used for worship. It needs careful layering of gold leaf on wood covered with chalk paste, lime & gum. Semi precious stones are also embedded in the painting.

Themes : Lord Krishna, Goddess Saraswati, Dasavatara(10 incarnations) of Lord Vishnu

Miniature Painting Traditions (<https://www.shopkhoj.com/handicrafts/miniature-paintings/>)

- Mughal Miniatures

They flourished under Mughal emperors. Typically depict detailed court scenes, battles, and portraits.

- Rajput & Rajasthani Miniatures

They use bold colors, themes of love and devotion. Styles include Kishangarh, Mewar & Marwar.

- Kangra & Pahari Miniatures (Himachal Pradesh)

They include romantic themes & delicate brushwork. They are inspired by Bhagavata Purana and Gita Govinda.

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