

DREAMSCAPES

The Art of Arpita Singh

MAP DISCOVER



Arpita Singh is an Indian artist. Born and brought up in West Bengal, she moved to Delhi to study art in the 1950s.

Since she was a child, Arpita was fascinated by the many magical stories and myths of India. She also loved looking and learning from miniature paintings.

Later, when she became a full-time artist, she included all the wonderful things she learnt in her works.



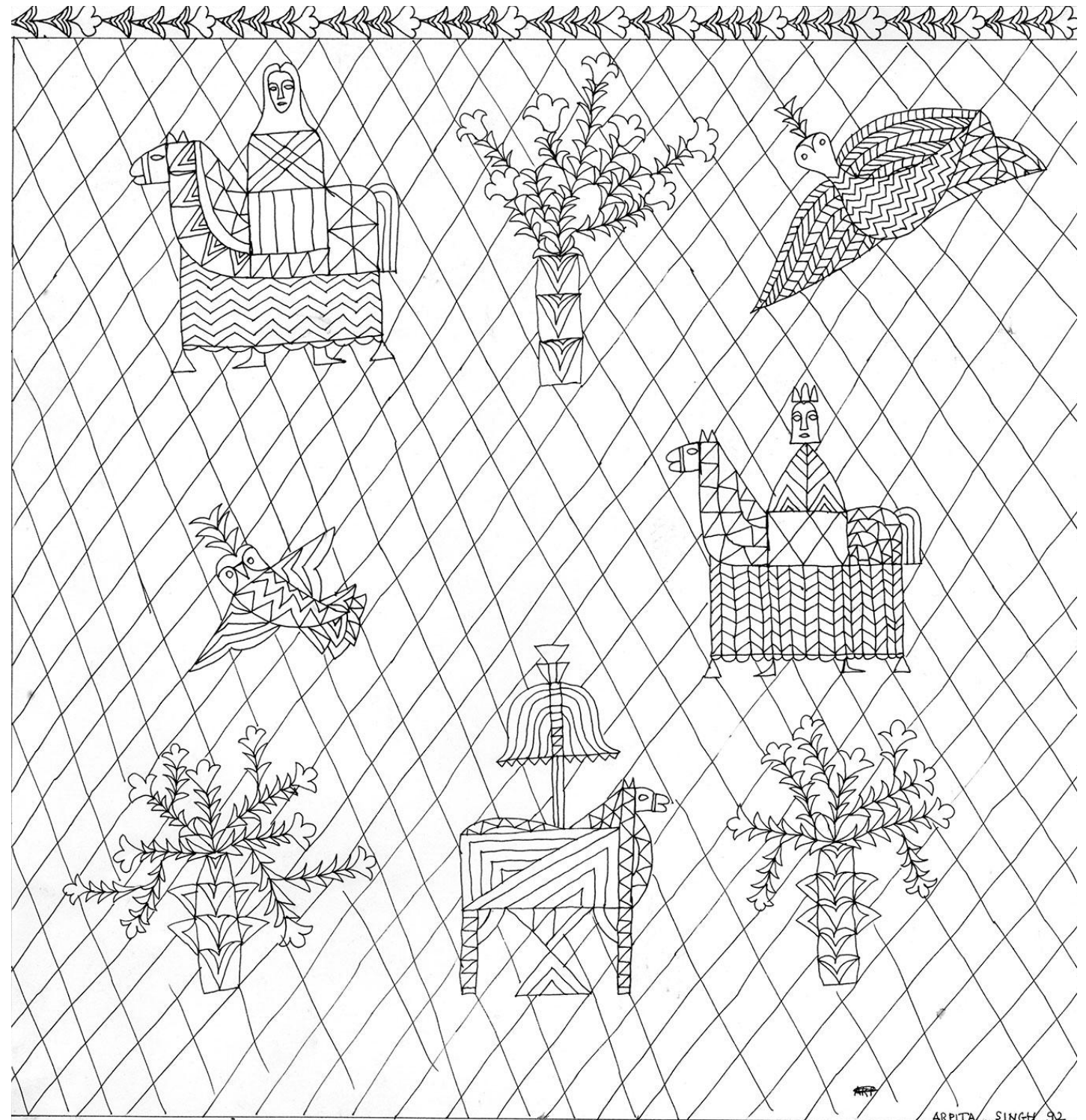
Image: Uploaded by Lalit Kala Academy on Wikimedia Commons, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

During her working years, she also learnt embroidery. In particular, she learnt a traditional embroidery technique called *kantha*. Here is a drawing by her that resembles that artform.

LEARN MORE.

Kantha is a popular embroidery style from the region of West Bengal in India. It is also common in Bangladesh. It was originally mainly practiced by women.

[Watch this video](#) to learn more about it!



REFLECT.

In earlier times, it was considered essential for women to be able to sew, embroider or knit. Why do you think women or girls, rather than men or boys, were encouraged to learn these techniques? Do you think it's different today?

Often, skills like embroidery are referred to as craft rather than art. Do you think there is a difference between the two terms? If so, what do you think that is?



When you look at Arpita's paintings, parts of it might look real while other parts look like an imaginary world.

Look at this painting, for instance. Which parts look realistic and which look fantastical to you?

Can you think of other artforms – a novel, movie or a video game – that take us into a world that can only exist in a dream?



LOOK CLOSELY.





**What do you think is going on this painting?
Which parts look real and which parts look unreal?**

THE DRAW-THE-DREAM GAME!

A fun game to play with your family and friends.

1: Think of an interesting dream you recently had.



2: Get yourself a partner and make sure they have a sheet of paper, a notebook, a pen and art supplies.



3: Now describe your dream to your partner, in as much detail as you can. While you narrate, your partner has to take notes. Once your partner is done, reverse roles.

4: Now make a drawing each portraying the other's dream. You have to think about how to convey the entire dream through a single image



5: Reveal your drawings! You can explain your composition choices to each other or ask questions.



6: Now it's time to rate each other's work! Each person scores the other and the person with the most points wins!

The Scoring Guide:

On a scale of 1 to 10 give your partner points for their drawing.

1 being nothing like your dream
10 being a great representation of your dream!

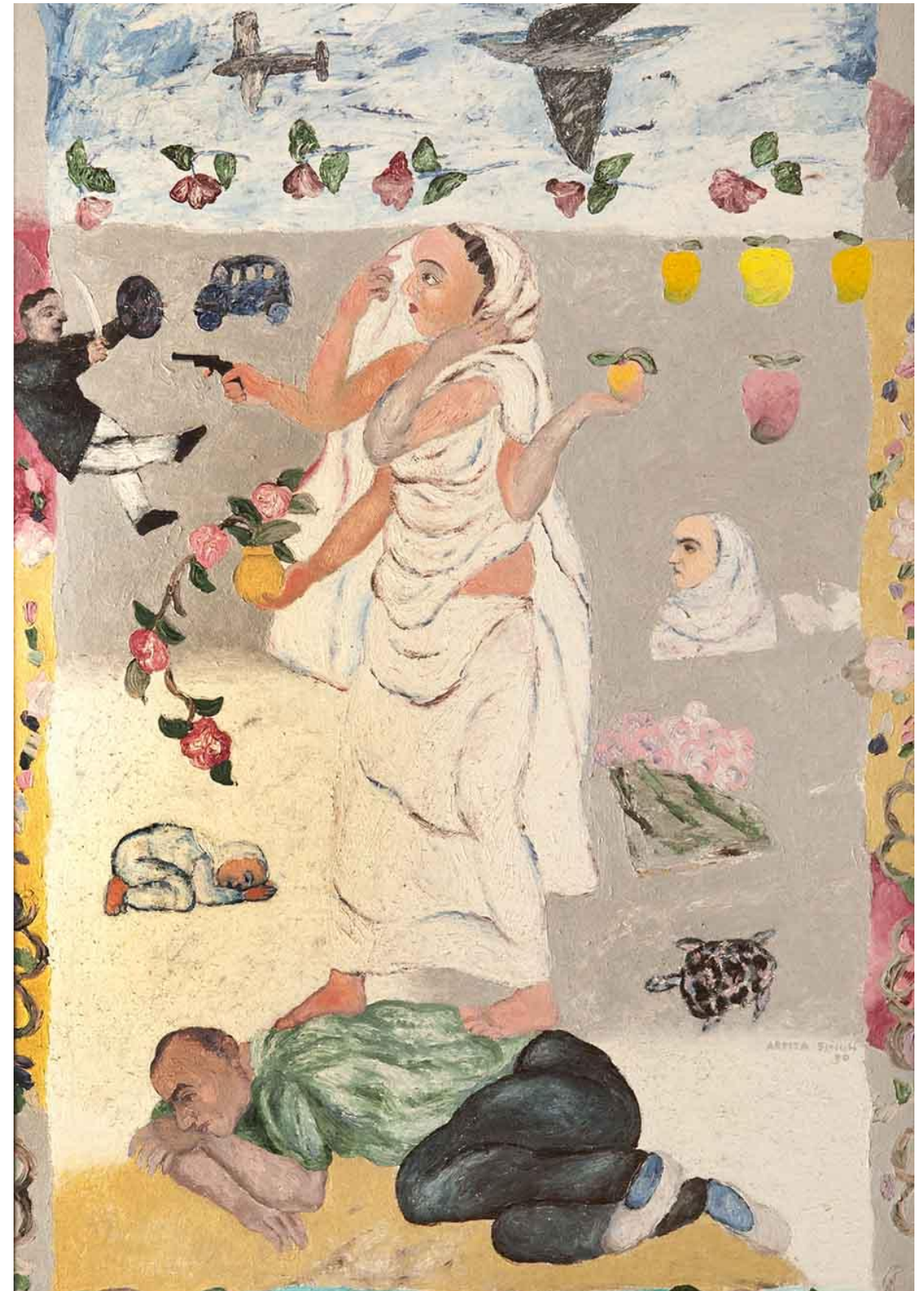
On a scale of 1 to 10 give your partner points for their description.

1 being super hard to follow or lacking in details
10 being super easy and clear

In her paintings, Arpita often includes human, animal and non-living characters. They all play a role to helping us understand the painting better.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- What are the parts that look real and the parts that look unreal?
- Do you see anything unique about the largest figure? What is this figure wearing and holding?
- Are all the other figures you see related to this central figure? If yes, how? If no, why do you think they're included?
- What are all the non-human things you can see? Why do you think Arpita included them?

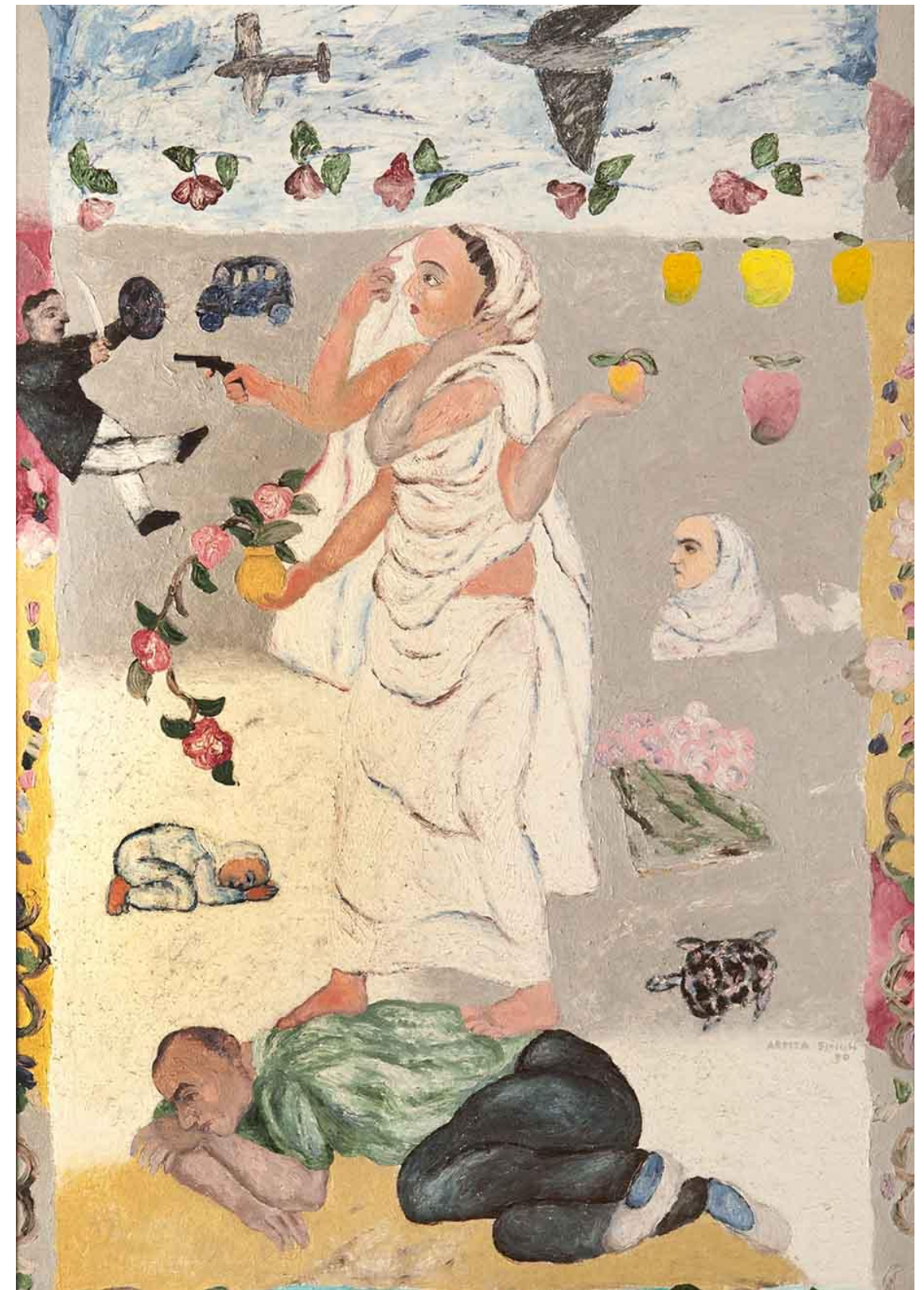


What you were doing in the last two questions of the previous slide was simply attaching meanings to what you saw in the painting. In fact, that is exactly what Arpita wants you to do!

She wants you to look at her paintings very closely, notice all the seemingly random things and create your own meanings about them.

THINK.

Was there a story that you could see unfolding in this painting? What helped you to arrive at this narrative? Were there any clues? If you learnt that this painting was titled *Devi Pistol Wali*, would that change how you see it?



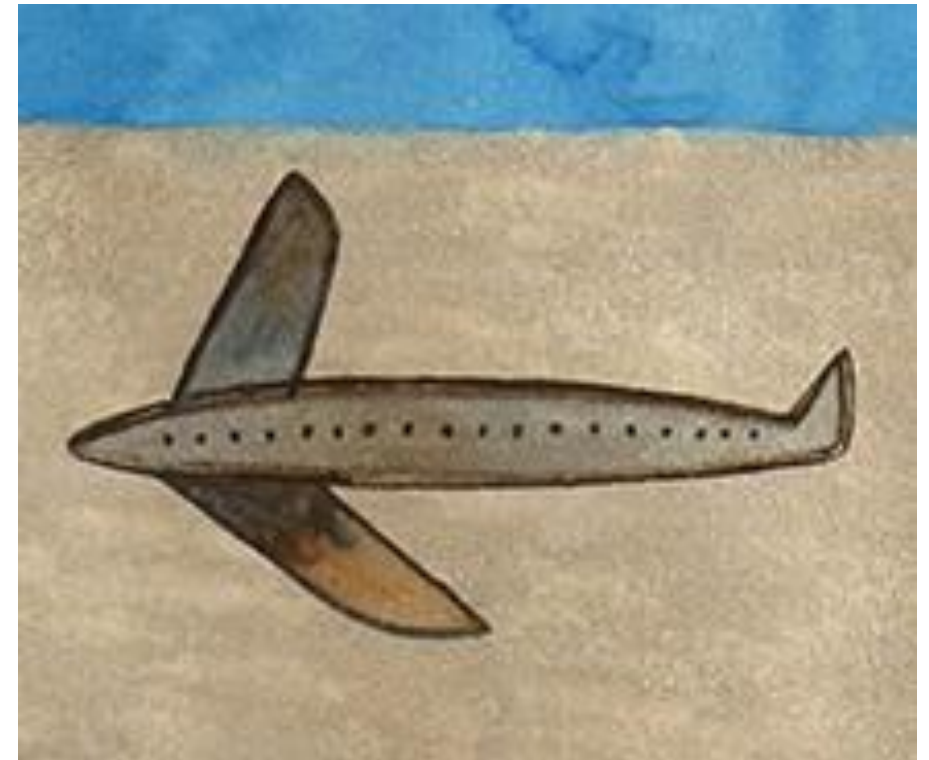
Arpita explores with a range of subjects in her art like migration, cartography and issues around women.

In most of them, she often draws the same things in many of her paintings, like in the examples here.

As you keep seeing them over and over again, you attach a meaning to them. In that process, they become symbols*.

Head to our **Activity Worksheet** to decode some of Arpita's paintings and create your own symbolic portrait!

*A symbol is something that is used to represent something else. Read about this online if you want to know more.





Many of Arpita's paintings include familiar items and figures that you might recognise. But she also created artworks where nothing looks recognisable or familiar.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- What does this look like to you?
- Imagine being inside this artwork: what kind of sounds do you think you would hear?
- What if you could reach in and touch these lines: how would their texture be?



LEARN MORE.

This artwork is made by a process known as etching.

Etching involves producing designs on metal or glass plates by using chemicals. Once the designs are drawn, ink is applied onto the plates. They are then pressed onto paper to create the final print!

[Watch this video](#) to see one type of etching process and a print being made!

Here is another painting by Arpita without any familiar figures. How do you think this one was made? Is it also an etching or something else?

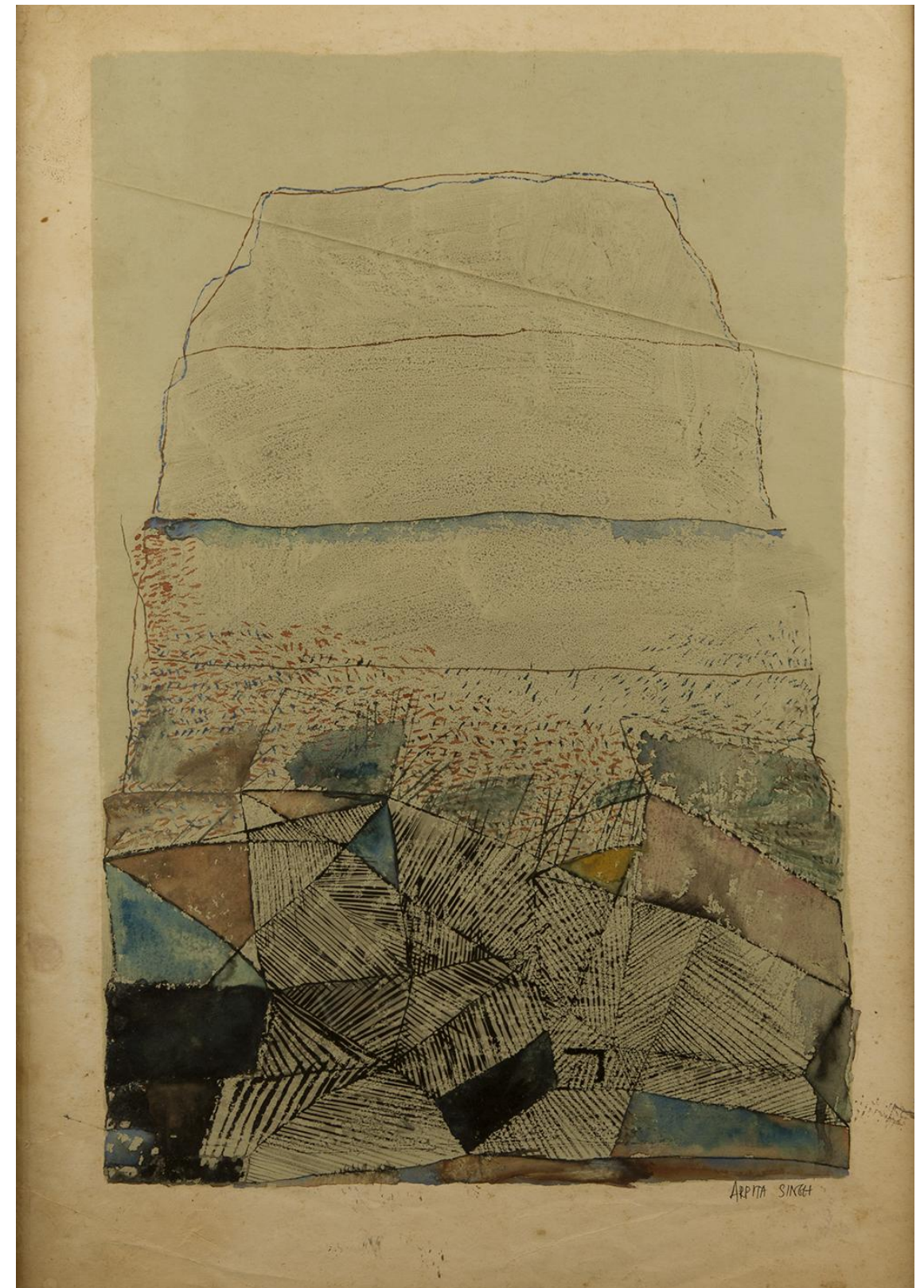
REFLECT.

What do you think it resembles the most? Why do you think so?

A pile of garbage.

Tin roofs on a cluster of houses.

An incomplete origami project.





Here is one more such painting.
What do you think this resembles?
Why did you pick that option?

A sea-shore.

A leaking wall.

A battle between termites and
ants for the big nest.

**For six years, Arpita only
made works like these
without figures. Now
she has a collection of
many hundreds of them!**

ART SPEAK!

These kind of paintings, without figures and mainly composed of lines and shapes, are also known as **abstract paintings**.

Abstract paintings do not attempt to create realistic looking images. Instead, they use the most fundamental and basic elements of art to unusual effect, including:

- lines
- textures
- shapes
- spaces
- colours
- tones*

REFLECT.

Do you think these elements are all different from one another? What connections can you make between them? Can they affect each other?



*In art, tones refers to the brightness or darkness of colour. You might have played around with tones, using the default filters on Instagram stories

Artists often play around with the basic elements to create not only abstract but all kinds of artworks. Let's look at how Arpita Singh uses one element to create another – like colour to create texture.

Here are some details (or zoomed-in close-ups) from some of her paintings. These are, in fact, flat surfaces. When you look at them closely though, you can almost imagine how they might feel to the touch. In art, texture is sometimes created optically (or just in the way things look) and at other times through actual materials like cardboard, metal, cloth, etc.

IMAGINE.

What do these details look like to you?

We have helped you out with some ideas. Can you think of other ideas of what they might look like?



A wall with peeled-off paint



Filtered sunlight



A wrinkled piece of cloth

It is not easy to create patterns and textures on a flat surface but if you have the right art supplies, it can be of great help! Arpita uses a range of materials in her art. Sometimes she uses watercolours and acrylic paints, sometimes just pen or ink, and sometimes she makes prints. (Remember the etching?)

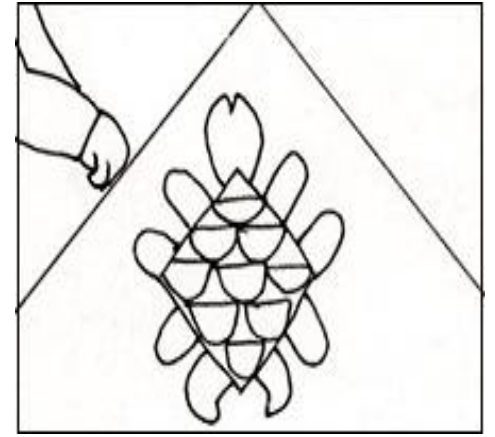
Here are some details of her paintings made with different materials.

Can you guess which is which and match the image to the medium*?

*In art, medium is used to refer to both a type of art (like sculpture, photography, textiles) and the materials that make up an artwork.



Oil paints



Pencil



Pen and ink



Watercolours

Answers (Left to right, top to bottom):
Watercolours, Pen and ink, Pencil and
Oil paints



LOOK CLOSELY.

What art materials do you think Arpita used to make this work? Do you think this is an abstract painting? Why / Why not?

If this was a 3D object and you could touch it – what do you think it would feel like? Why do you think so?

Does imagining touching it, make you feel a certain way or remind you of something?

Use our **DIY Guide** to examine the idea of textures a little more and make your own texture board!

Arpita's works often feature patterns, in the form of repeating lines, shapes and colours. Sometimes, even figures and things.

ART SPEAK!

A repeating image or idea is often called a **motif**. It's pronounced mow-tea-f! (*Mo* from motor, *tif* like leaf)

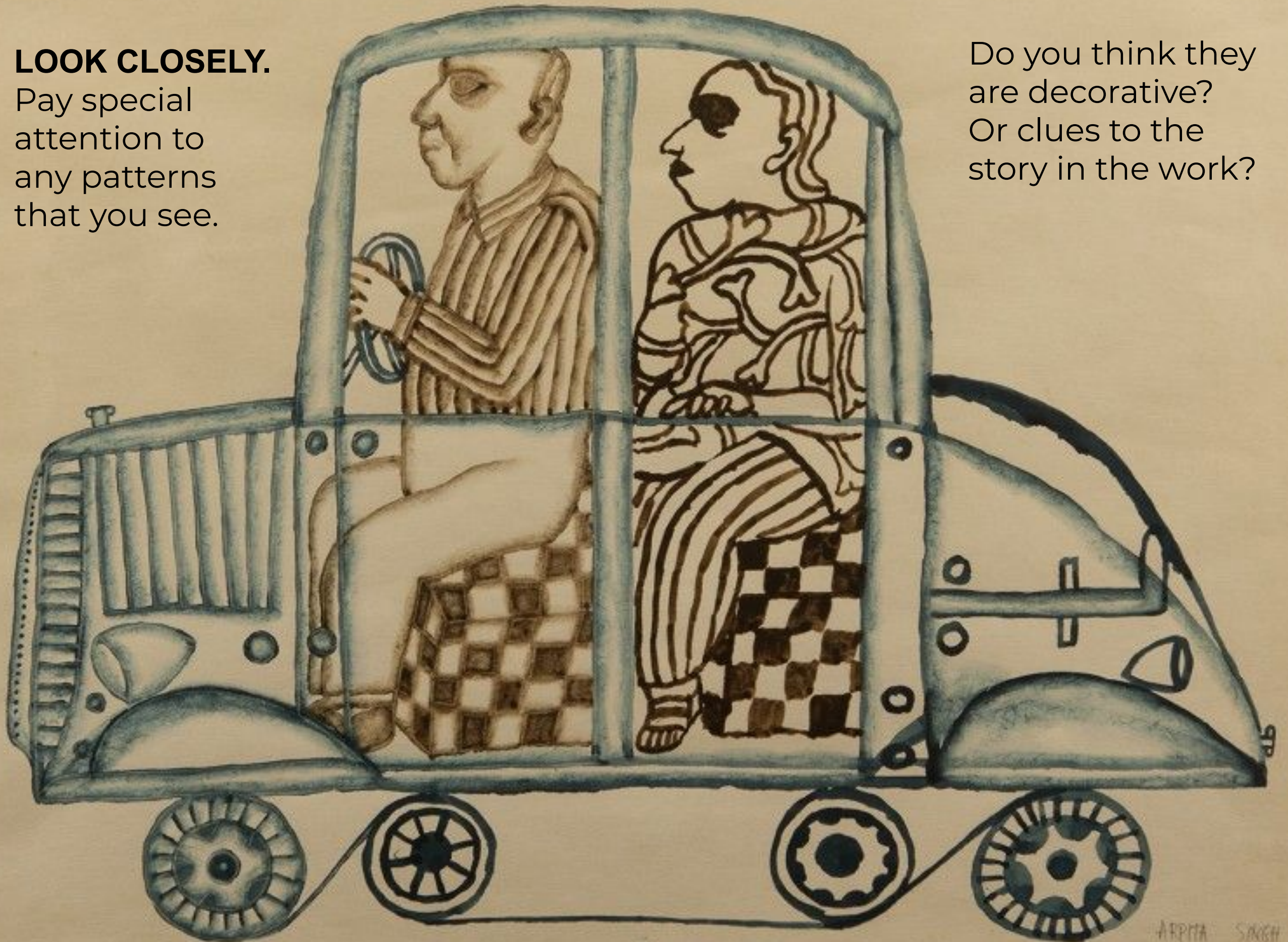
Look around where you are sitting right now. Can you spot objects that have patterns on them?



LOOK CLOSELY.

Pay special attention to any patterns that you see.

Do you think they are decorative?
Or clues to the story in the work?



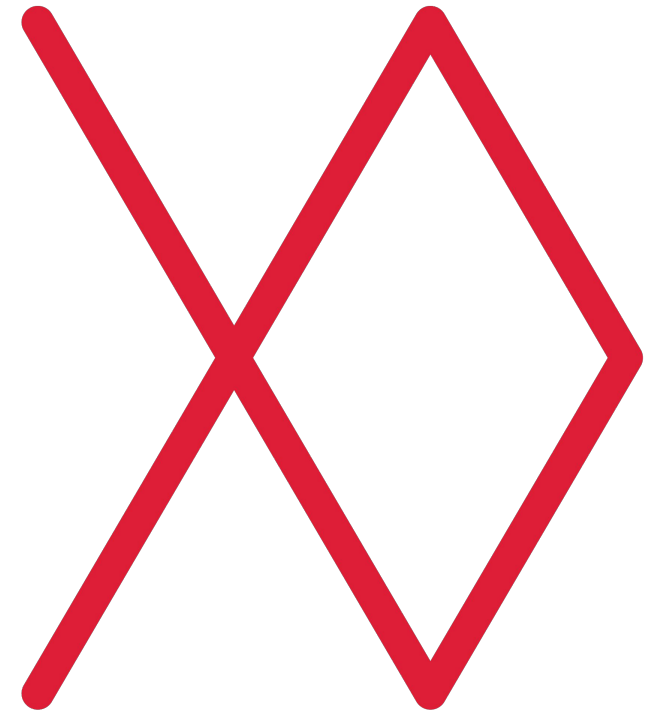
LOOK CLOSELY.



RECALL & RESPOND.

Try answering these questions about the painting you just saw without going back to it first!

Did you notice that Arpita used different tones of the same colour to make the painting?
Do you think she did that on purpose? If so, why?
What effect does using only one colour have here?



IMAGINE.

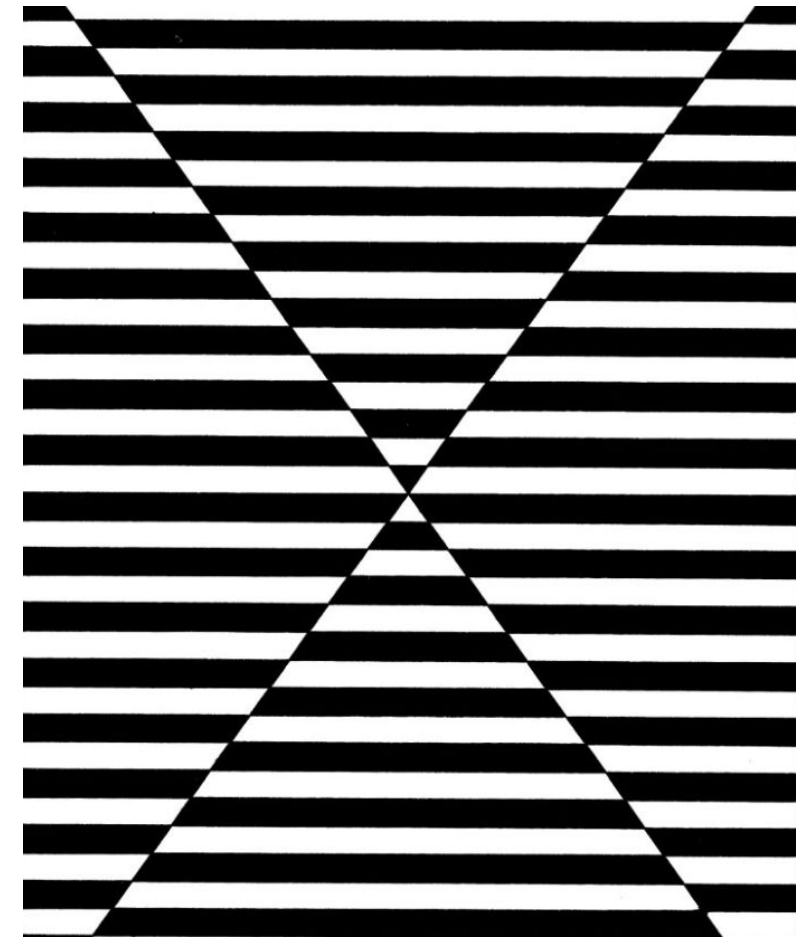
- If you touched the surface of the painting, what do you think it will feel like? What material do you think it is made of?
- If there were sounds to accompany this painting, what would it be? Also, what song would go well with it?
- If it were animated, what parts of it do you think will move? What kind of movement would it be?
- Now imagine all of this together – how it would feel, your chosen sounds and music, and the painting animated to life. Does it evoke any particular mood for you?

CREATE.

Let's experiment with an activity that uses colours, shapes and patterns to create 'moving' pictures. In fact, there was a whole movement around such artworks in the 1960s called **Op-Art**. Look it up online!

When you see artworks, they usually make you feel something. For instance, on seeing a landscape painting you might feel calm and wish to go to such a place, while seeing a war scene, you might feel sad or scared. Well, seeing these Op-Art pieces were supposed to make you confused and even dizzy!

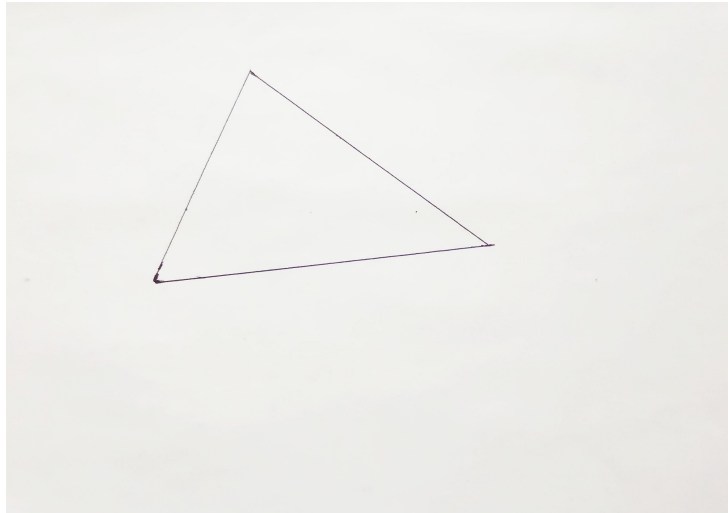
How about trying to make one yourself?
All you need is a **paper**, **ruler**, **pencil** and a **black marker pen**



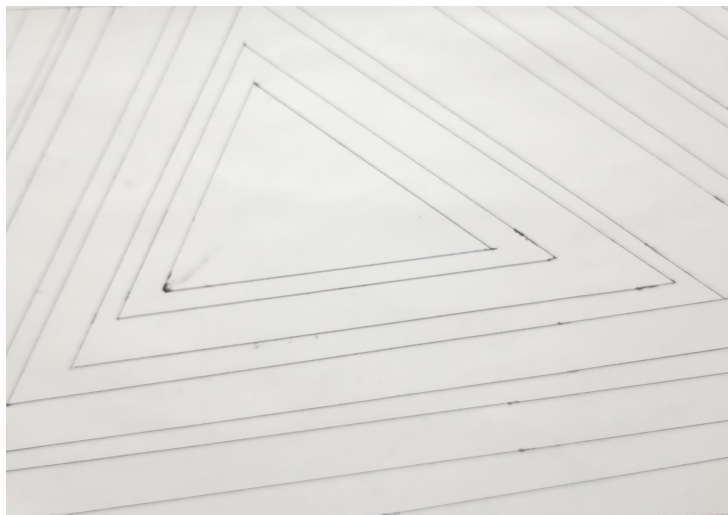
Source: Wikipedia.org

Don't forget to share images
of your works with us!

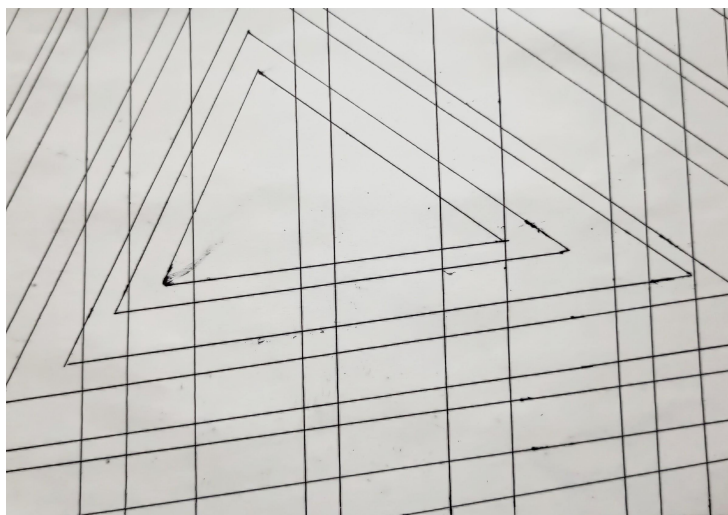
You can email us at
education@map-india.org
or DM us on Instagram!



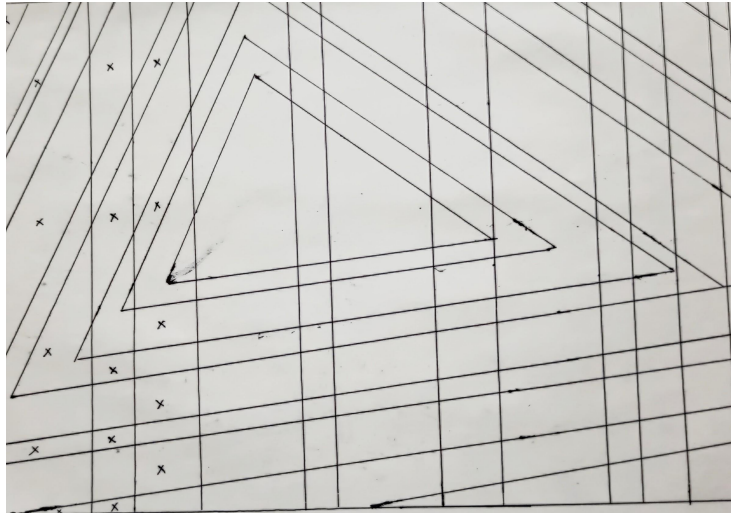
On your paper, draw any shape in the centre using your pencil.



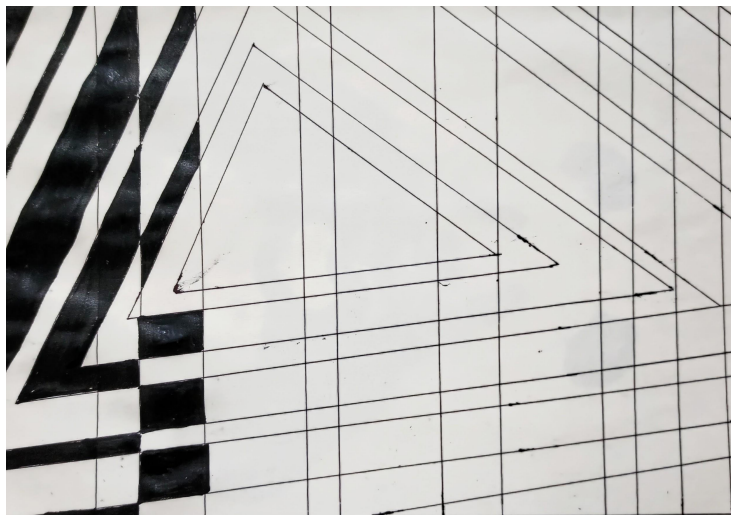
Keep repeating this around the central shape, going outwards until you reach the edge of the paper.



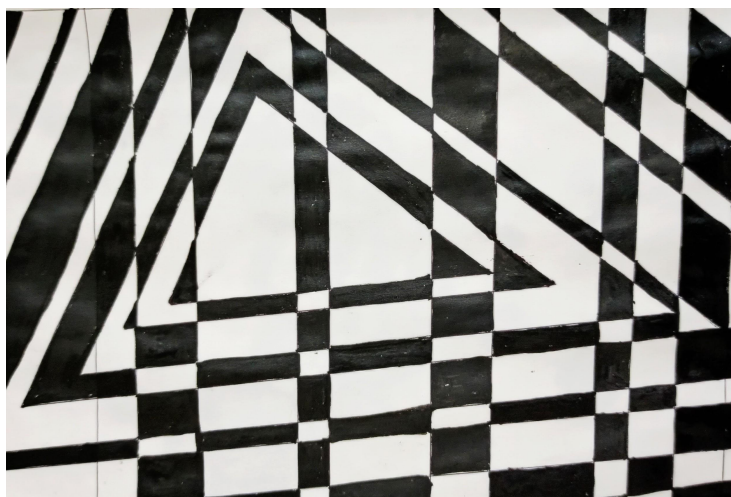
Now draw vertical lines over this design. Don't worry about making them equal, you can do varying gaps between the lines.



Now tackle one vertical section at a time - mark out alternate spaces created by the lines and put a small dot there.



Colour in the marked out spaces using your marker



And there you go - an optical illusion artwork made by you!

Wasn't that a fun activity? Now let's look at another one of Arpita's paintings.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- What do you think the figures in the painting are doing?
- What are the non-human things you see in the painting? What do you think they mean?
- Can you spot any letters and numbers? Do they take the form of words? How many of them don't make sense?
- Do you think the rest of the painting is related to the numbers and letters? If so, how? If not, why do you think they're here?





Collection: Vadehra Art Gallery

Check out this detail from another work by Arpita that uses letters and numbers.

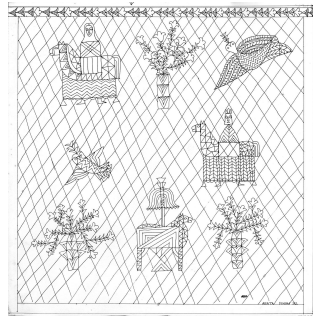
- What words can you make out?
- What seems nonsensical to you?
- Why do you think she uses text in this way?



Collection: Vadehra Art Gallery

EXPRESS.

Why not take inspiration from Arpita to create your own artwork merging text and visuals? Head to our **Stories With Art** extra to make some Arpita-inspired comics! Don't forget to send us photos!



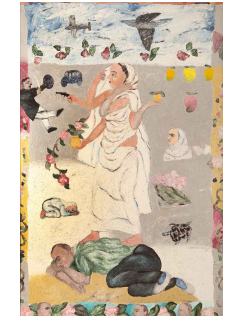
Untitled, 1992
Arpita Singh
Pen and ink on paper
H. 38 cm, W. 38 cm
MAC.01858



Manjit and Fil Talking, 1990
Arpita Singh
Acrylic on canvas
H. 122 cm, W. 122 cm
MAC.00506



Untitled, 1986
Arpita Singh
Oil on canvas
H. 90 cm, W. 121 cm
MAC.01050



Devi Pistol Wali, 1990
Arpita Singh
Oil on canvas
H. 122 cm, W. 76 cm
MAC.00617



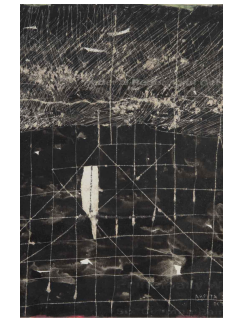
Untitled, c.1970
Arpita Singh
Etching
H. 35 cm, W. 24 cm
MAC.00741



Untitled, c.1970
Arpita Singh
Colour on litho paper
H. 45 cm, W. 30 cm
MAC.00743



Untitled, c.1970
Arpita Singh
Etching
H. 24 cm, W. 22 cm
MAC.00745



Untitled, 1975
Arpita Singh
Watercolour and ink on paper
H. 20 cm, W. 17 cm
MAC.01293



Face, 1983
Arpita Singh
Black ink on paper
H. 27 cm, W. 21 cm
MAC.01091



Couple, 1970 - 2000
Arpita Singh
Watercolour on paper
H. 35 cm, W. 45 cm
MAC.00729



Untitled, 1988
Arpita Singh
Pastels on paper
H. 15 cm, W. 23 cm
MAC.01201



Lotus Pond, 1995
Arpita Singh
Oil on acrylic sheet
H. 33 cm, W. 24 cm
MAC.01281



MAP

Museum of Art
& Photography

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