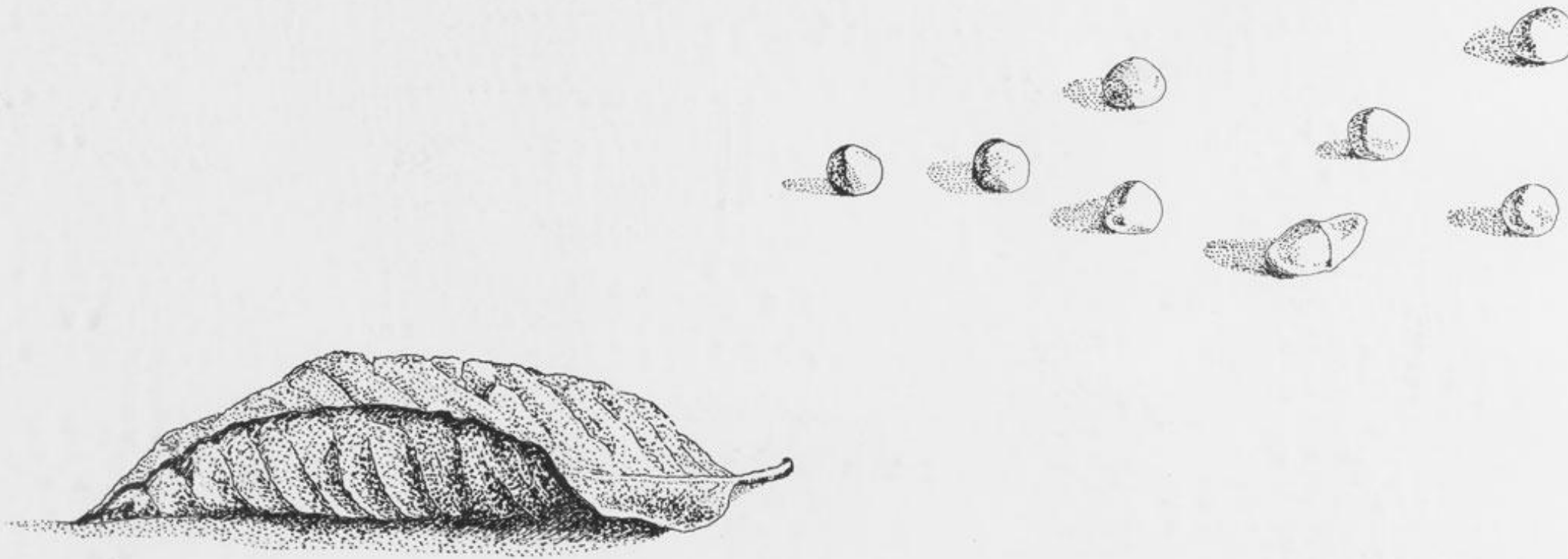


# Shifting Shapes, Shifting Spaces

The Art of Prabhakar Barwe



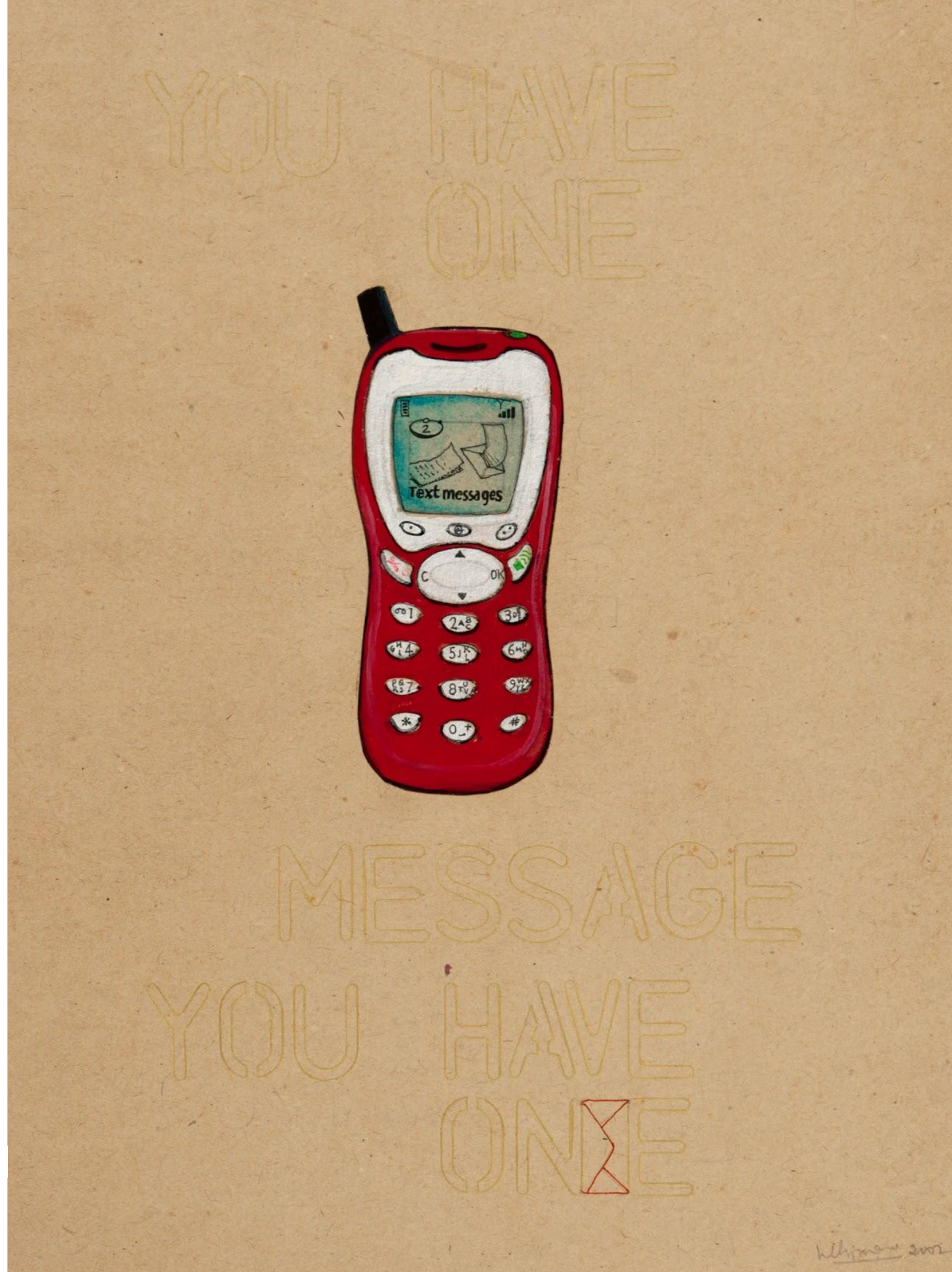
P. B. 98CE

## EXPLORE.

Grab an object close to you and observe it closely. It could be anything at all. Take note of its form, the way it occupies physical space and try making a quick sketch of it.

Is there something you noticed about this object that you had not noticed before?

**How would you describe the object in this artwork?**





We started with that activity, because the artist we are discussing here did exactly that (and more) all day, everyday, throughout his life!

His name was Prabhakar Barwe. He was born in Maharashtra and was one of India's leading abstract artists.

Image: Collection of Bodhana Arts Centre



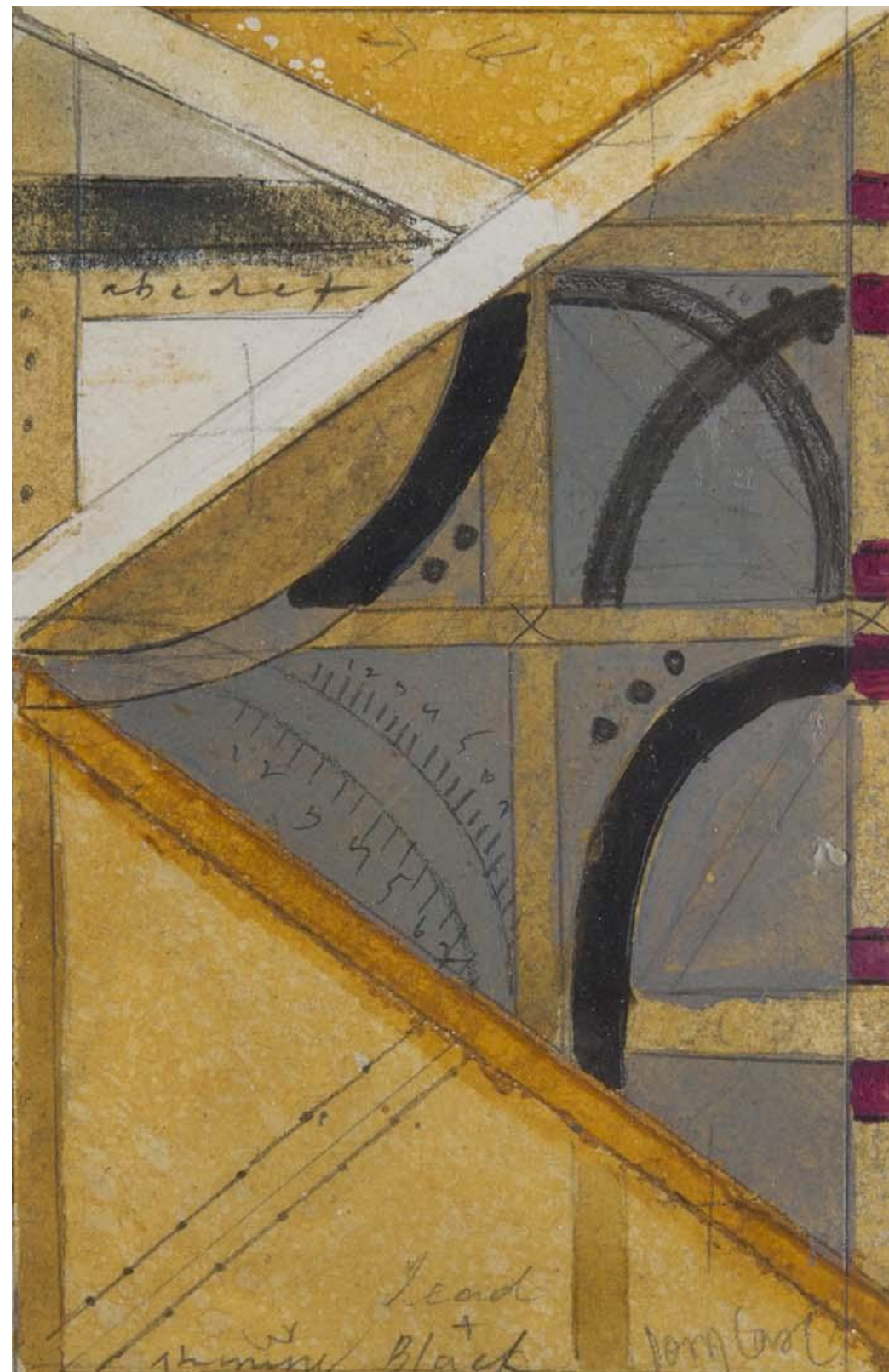
## VOCABULARY ALERT!

The word **abstract** means to separate or withdraw. It is commonly used to describe things removed from the physical world, such as ideas or concepts. For example, wisdom and truth are abstract qualities that we can't see or touch.

## ART SPEAK!

The term **abstract art** therefore, is used to refer to art that does not attempt to represent reality accurately. It uses **shapes, colours** and **forms** instead to achieve the desired effect or represent ideas.

**What do you think this artwork is about?**





Prabhakar Barwe, too, was not interested in the representation of reality.

He wanted to challenge our understanding of what is real and the meanings we associate with items that we encounter everyday.

After much thinking, he found a wonderful trick to make that happen!

Here is a work by him. Let's look at it in detail and see if you can figure out what his trick was.



**Can you guess the materials used to make this painting?**

LOOK CLOSELY.



प्रभाकर शर्मा १९८८

Abhishek '89.



CARROT AND OTHER IMAGES



If you could  
give this  
painting a  
title, what  
would you  
call it?



## THINK.

Make a list of all the items you recognise in this painting.  
Can you guess what is depicted? Is it a dinner table or a garden?  
The inside of a grocery bag or the view from your window?  
Is it bits of all these mixed and matched?  
Or is it none of these but an entirely new and unknown space?



**What is the story you think this painting tells?**

Like in the painting we just saw, Barrow's trick was to remove things from the physical world (where we are used to seeing them) and put them in abstract, 'non-real' worlds (where their placement feels a little confusing and sometimes nonsensical).

### **LOOK CLOSELY.**

Here is another one of his works. Can you take a guess at the space that's represented here?

What are the objects you can identify and what do you think the objects you can't identify might be?





**What do the green, blue and white shapes represent here?**

## **IMAGINE.**

If you could enter this painting, do you think you will hear any sounds? What kind of sounds?

Will there be any smells? Where are these smells coming from?

Take a guess at what the climate might be like. Will it be cold and rainy, sweaty and humid or something else?

Head over to the **DIY GUIDE** for a fun activity inspired by Barwe's art!

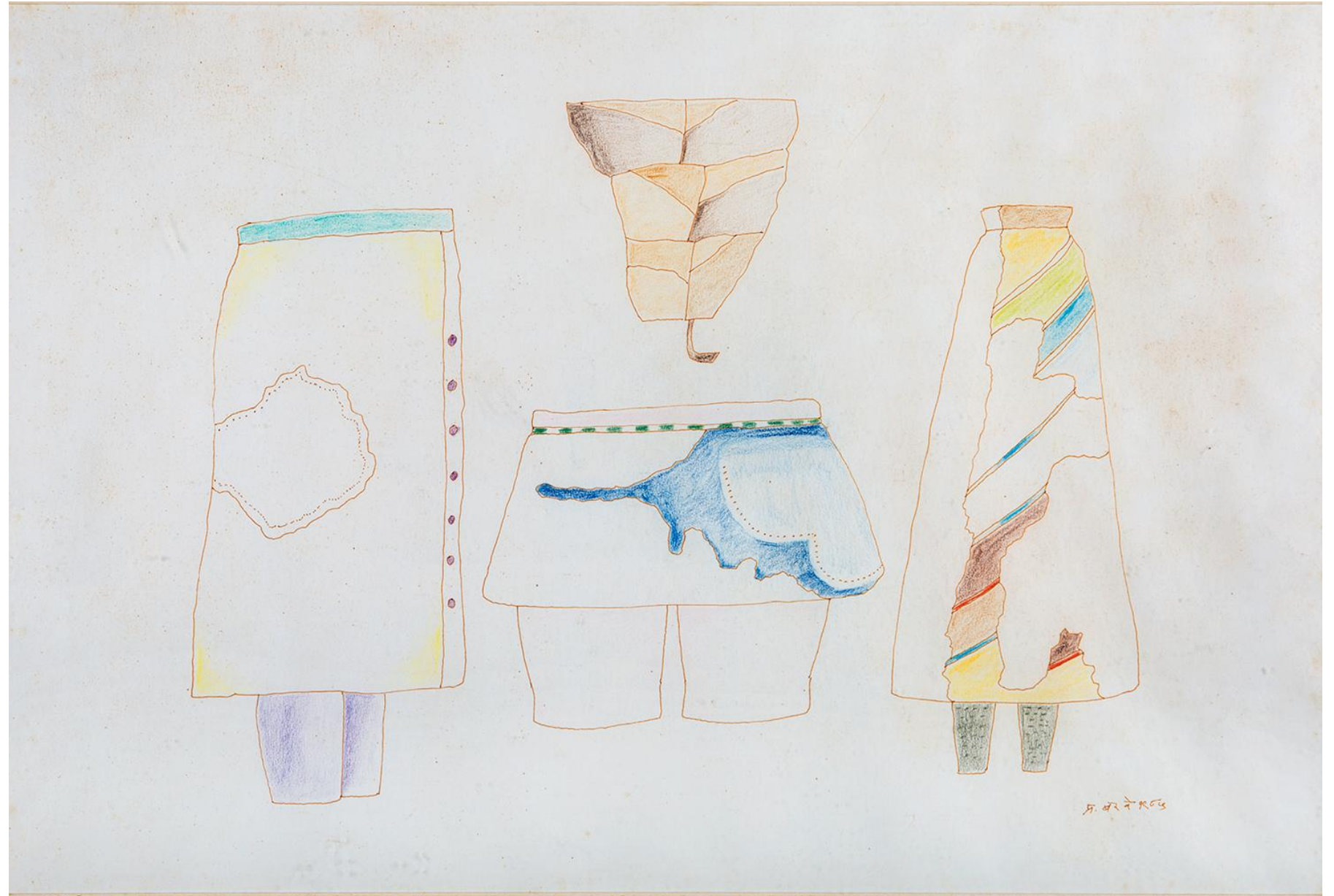


For a time,  
Barwe worked  
with weavers  
and artisans in  
Varanasi.

### **THINK.**

Can you spot  
anything in this  
painting that  
hints at how  
this experience  
might have  
influenced him?

What do you  
think the forms  
resemble?  
What do they  
remind you of?



**What do you think the irregular  
shapes on some of these items  
are meant to represent?**



## DID YOU KNOW?

Varanasi is a city in Uttar Pradesh. It's one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities of the world, going as far back as 3000 years!

Do you know what else it is famous for? Or what other names it is known by? Google it to find out more!

**Can you point out Uttar Pradesh in this map?**  
**Can you now try to pin down the location of Varanasi in it?**



Barwe also loved writing. He maintained a regular art journal, wrote letters to his friends and also published a Marathi book.

Here is a detail from one of his journals. Look closely – what do you think this entry is about? Write down three guesses.



Image: Collection of Bodhana Arts Centre



93 # 9/55



15.5.88 Good mood for painting is that when you become aware of form and colour <sup>in space</sup> everywhere around ~~the~~ you.

you begin seeing what you had never seen before. In other words your inner eye opens. and you are surprised.

This is the complete page of the same journal. Read the accompanying text now. Is it similar to your guesses?

Now that you have read the text, is there something new you notice about the drawing that you did not notice before?\*

Were you also “surprised” when you noticed that detail? Is there any other emotion that you felt?

Head to our **Stories With Art** extra to try a different writing with art experiment!

\*In case you didn't notice before, this drawing includes a few letters from the English alphabet. How many can you spot?

Image: Collection of Bodhana Arts Centre



In fact, “seeing what you have never seen before” became Barwe’s strongest concern in art.

Head over to the **MAP Activity Worksheet** for an activity about seeing the unseen.







Barwe's play with the seen and unseen make his paintings more fun – almost like riddles that he wants us to solve. For instance, this painting is called *Real Unreal (Fishes)*.

### **LOOK CLOSELY.**

- Do you see any fishes?
- What parts of this painting, according to you, are real and what parts are unreal? Why?
- Can you guess where the source of light is? Is there only one?
- Why is there so much empty space?

**If this were a film poster or book cover, what do you think the film or book might be about?**



Playing around with empty spaces is Barwe's signature style. He loved placing everyday objects in unusual spaces. This lets us create whole new stories through what we unexpectedly see and feel about them now.

## **REFLECT.**

- Does this painting evoke a feeling or mood in you?
- Does it remind you of a place, person or a past event?

**If this painting were the start of a story, how do you think it would progress?**



## CREATE.



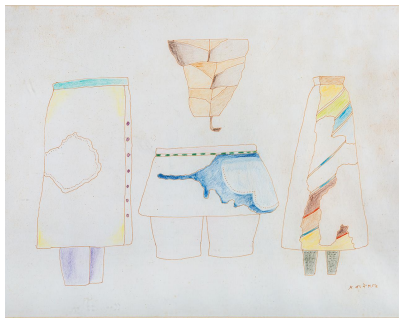
Prabhakar Barwe's paintings are full of things you see everyday placed in interesting spaces. What if you could recreate these things in 3D (using found items from your house) and turn his paintings into sculptural installations?

Let's take the example of the umbrella you saw in the last painting. You can create a miniature umbrella using toothpicks, craft paper, scissors and some glue! Go [here](#) to learn the entire process.



Pick any other painting from this pack and try recreating the components in 3D. Look around the house to find materials you can use for this project. Do you have discarded cardboard boxes, tea tumblers made of clay or extra spoons that might have come with your food delivery?

Don't forget to send us a picture of your creations at [education@map-india.org](mailto:education@map-india.org). We would love you see what you make!



Skirts, 1985  
Prabhakar Barwe  
Coloured pencils on paper  
H. 34 cm, W. 51 cm  
MAC.00712



Leaf with acorns, 1986  
Prabhakar Barwe  
Pen and ink on paper  
H. 38 cm, W. 56 cm  
MAC.00578



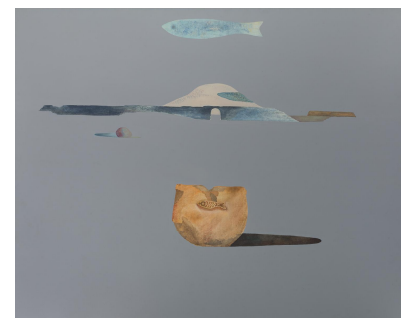
Carrot and other images, 1989  
Prabhakar Barwe and Abhishek Poddar  
Watercolour on paper  
H. 27 cm, W. 36 cm  
MAC.01857



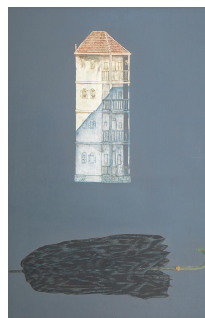
Chaitra Mood, 1992  
Prabhakar Barwe  
Oil on canvas  
H. 91 cm, W. 91 cm  
MAC.01312



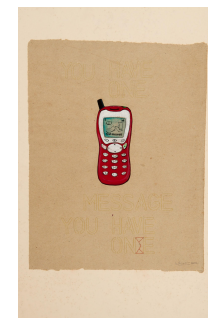
Untitled, 1990  
C. Douglas  
Mix media on paper  
H. 84 cm, W. 64 cm  
MAC.00538



Real Unreal (Fishes), 1988  
Prabhakar Barwe  
Oil on canvas  
H. 154 cm, W. 124 cm  
MAC.01420



The Shelter, 1989  
Prabhakar Barwe  
Oil on canvas  
H. 105 cm, W. 90 cm  
MAC.02174



Inbox, 2002  
V. G. Abhimanue  
Watercolour and pen on paper  
H. 40 cm, W. 25 cm  
MAC.00010





**MAP**

Museum of Art  
& Photography

**MAP**

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Bangalore 560 001, India

[map-india.org](http://map-india.org)

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