

5. Paintings and Illustrations

Synopsis

This module introduces the painted image and illustrations – two closely related visual media that communicate in similar and yet different ways.

Lectures

5.1 Introduction to paintings and illustrations

5.2 Paintings

5.3 Illustrations

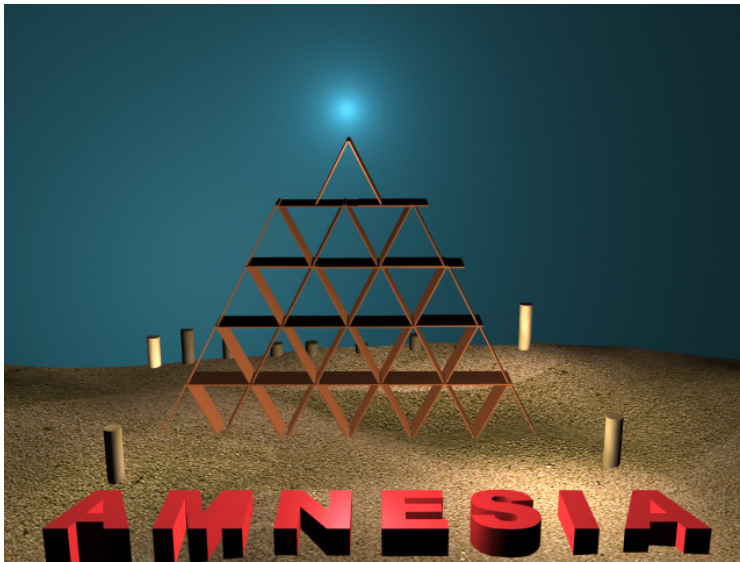


Fig 5.3.00

5.3 Illustrations

There can be a fine line that separates illustrations from paintings, but one principle that leads to a visual image being called an illustration, can be understood by looking at the origin of an image creation process. In case there is a very well-defined idea that already exists, the visual interpretation of this idea is most likely to be illustrative. Unlike an illustration that normally has an intended outcome or a destination, a painting often starts out with a sense of a journey but not a fixed destination. In other words, it appears that a painting is fuelled more by currents within the dimly lit recesses of the human mind and the human psyche than an illustration which is often a response to an idea to be communicated visually. To re-state this observation more clearly, one may observe that paintings have a license to be more open-ended, whereas illustrations by virtue of the responsibility to communicate, have to be unambiguous in what they communicate.



Fig. 5.3.01
An illustration by Durgabai, a Gond artist for a story in the children's magazine Chakmak.



Fig. 5.3.02a

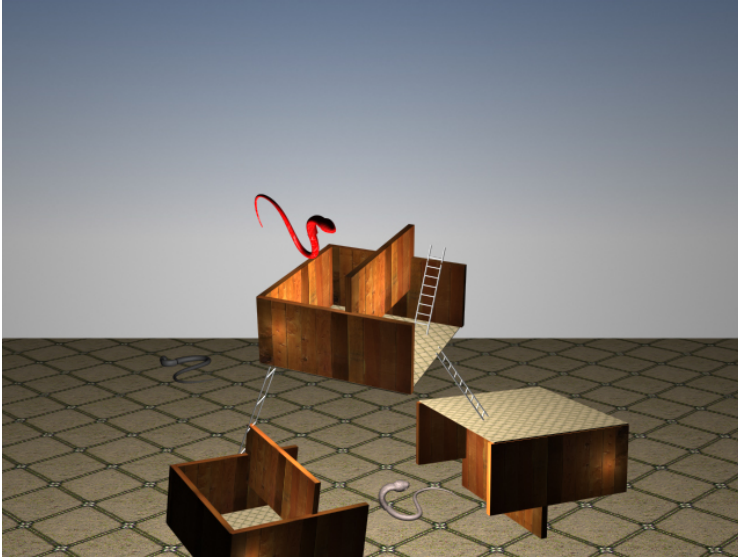


Fig. 5.3.02b
Illustrations for interactive multimedia executed with 3D computer tools.



Fig. 5.3.03a

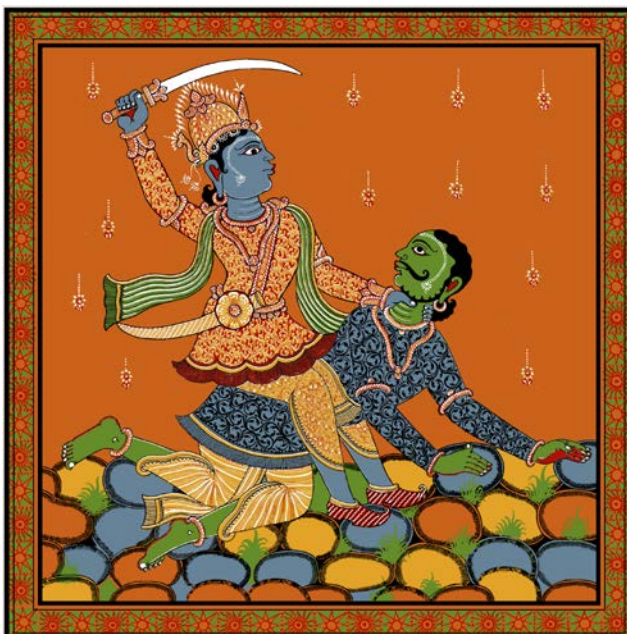


Fig. 5.3.03b

Illustrations done in the *patachitra* tradition, for two mythological stories. 'The Circle of Fate' is a haunting story about the divine bird Garuda. 'The Enigma of Karma' is a tale on the predicament of fate and destiny.

Early religious manuscripts were etched into palm-leaves and barks of trees using a pointed metal stylus. These incisions were filled with black-ink (such as carbon black from lamp soot). Dyes were used to colour the shapes enclosed within outlines to create manuscripts of remarkable beauty. The calligrapher and the visual artist contributed to illuminating texts that carried wisdom or at times ideas less exalted. Such manuscripts may be found in the collections of galleries and museums and it might be of interest to know that pharmaceutical companies today seek to digitize many of such texts with the intent of stumbling upon herbal remedies.



Fig. 5.3.04

The Four Horsemen of Apocalypse, a metal plate engraving by Albrecht Durer



Fig. 5.3.05
A woodcut illustration

Engravings on stone, wood and linoleum were used to replicate images. Etchings and engravings on metal plates was another medium for this. The invention and subsequent proliferation of the printing press opened up new possibilities for replicating images with greater ease. The letterpress printing machine used an etched metal block that could receive and transfer ink through a pad to the printing surface. The photo-lithography and offset printing presses developed the earlier techniques further. Contemporary printings machines such as the one used for printing of newspapers, magazines and books can print several thousand copies in a matter of minutes.



Fig. 5.3.06

Oleographs by Raja Ravi Verma were the first mass-produced visual images in India,

In India, one of the first persons to create mass-produced oleographs was the artist Raja Ravi Verma. He painted and illustrated stories from Indian mythology and can be regarded as the fore-runner of the calendar art of today. The frescos on the walls of Ajanta are referred to as paintings, though one may regard some of them as illustrations for some of the Jataka tales.

Different visual art traditions developed in different parts of India (and the world). The subjects of some of these were sacred and religious and for some they were matters of day to day life. Kalamkari in Andhra Pradesh, the Kalighat Pata paintings of Bengal, the Odishan pata paintings, the religious art of the Jain, diagrams and *mandalas* of tantrik Buddhism may also be regarded as attempts at illustrating esoteric and abstract thought visually. Many of these have also got a very intricate visual grammar. Artists commissioned to create these works were often required to undergo appropriate rituals before they were ready to start their work.

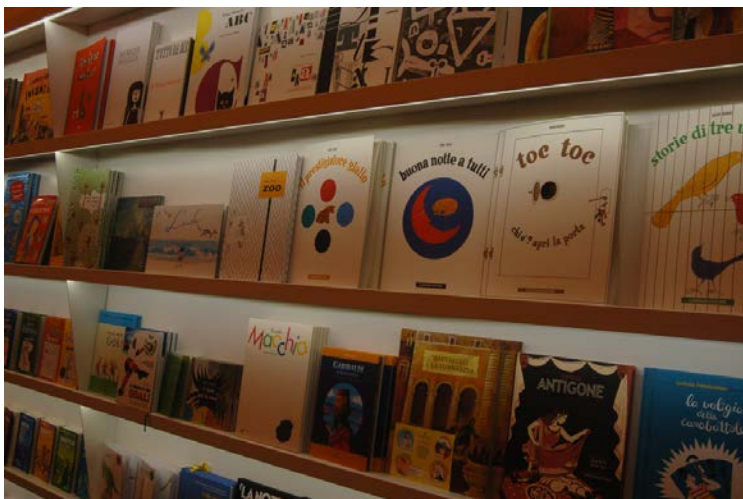


Fig. 5.3.07

Picture books for children make use of imaginative visual art and illustrations.



Fig. 5.3.08a



Fig. 5.3.08b



Fig. 5.3.08c



Fig. 5.3.08d

Illustrations for a story on roses who start fighting because each one believes that they are the best.



Fig. 5.3.09a



Fig. 5.3.09b

Illustrations for a picture book for children about Mr Slick, a monster and a boy with a magic umbrella.



Fig. 5.3.10a
Illustration for a picture book based on the adventure of three children climbing up a *machaan* in a clearing in the forest.



Fig. 5.3.11a



Fig. 5.3.11b

Illustrations for a picture book for children that is a tongue-in-cheek account of the big-bang theory in physics.

Comics and Graphic Novels

Picture books might be meant for children, but grown-ups are likely to enjoy them as much. Comics are read by adolescents and graphic novels have subjects for adult audiences. Such classification for content, whether in books or animation or films, is suggestive of a mindset in which human beings are boxed into children, adolescents and adults. Implicit in labeling content as meant for adults is a certain taboo towards violence and sex, which are regarded as subjects that adults understand well and subjects that are unhealthy for the young. The persistence of such attitudes, may be regarded as best as the incomprehension that most adults have of human sexuality – a fact borne out by several kinds of industries from pornography to romance; from pulp fiction novels and films to television channels that thrive on a kind of aggression and violence that does little to improve our understanding of the so-called dark side of human nature.

Another attitude that is equally prevalent is about comics being some kind of mongrel literature. While such an attitude is fostered by the huge amounts of mediocre comic-books available, the work of artists

such as Charles Schulz, Goscinny and Uderzo, Bill Waterson, demonstrate the possibilities of humour that is best addressed as comics. 'MAD' magazine is another example of a comic book that adopted a very unusual stance in the world of humour.

Caricature and cartooning is another field that requires a humorous world view and the ability to risk offending people. The art of political cartooning is a particularly risky art, but artists capable of dispassionate comment, manage to carve a niche for themselves. Shankar, Unny, Abu Abraham, are political cartoonists based in India. Hemant Morparia is occasionally political in his choice of subjects, though his humour comes from an upside-down view on topics that most people take too seriously.

Some of the first works to be regarded as graphic novels were insightful accounts of various events. Maus by Spiegelman was about the persecution of the Jews during the second world war; 'Little Gen' was an account of a Japanese family's experience of the nuclear holocaust. 'Bhimayana' is a recent graphic novel that describes the struggle of young Ambedkar in finding social acceptance.

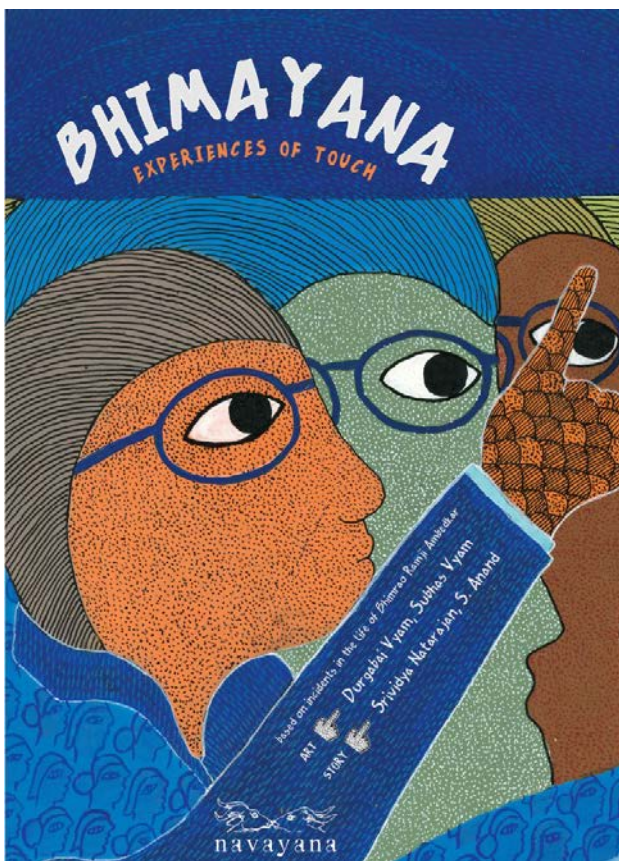


Fig. 5.10.12

The graphic novel, 'Bhimayana' on the life and struggle of Bhimrao Ambedkar.

There are other books that position themselves between books with texts and graphic novels. The beginner series books on subjects from Einstein to Quantum Physics; from Post-Modernism to Marx; from Food to Capitalism combine imaginative writing and illustrations to introduce difficult subjects to interested readers.

The book by the artist, on Marie Curie, is somewhat different than either a graphic-novel, or, the beginner-series books. The illustrations have a very evocative quality in these works.

Artists books

Many artists have adopted a form that has come to be known as the artists' book. Unusually treated with visual art that could be drawings, paintings, photographs and collages, these books stand out because of the care taken in production. Typically, these are also made as limited editions, for emphasizing the care taken in making them (unlike a printed book that is produced almost mechanically in very large numbers).

References

Annual of the Society of Illustrators, Nabu Press, 2010
Nevin Martell, Looking for Calvin and Hobbes, Continuum, 2009
Tony Kushner, The Art of Maurice Sendak, Harry N. Abrams, 2003
Gayatri Sinha, Indian Art: An Overview, Rupa, 2003
Art: A World History,
K.G. Subhramanyan, Magic of making, Seagull, 2007
The Parable of the Raintree, Candela, 1997
Bhimayana, Navayana, 2010
The Night Life of Trees, Tarabooks, 2007

Exercises



Fig 5.3.99

Select a subject that is of special interest to you and put down a creative interpretation of the subject as a brief note. Decide on a visual medium to illustrate the ideas that you have expressed. Refine your initial ideas and concepts and make a book where you have taken special care for the production aspects: the size, the printing and the binding of the book; in addition to the effort over the text and the images.