



Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



Department of MSME&T
Government of West Bengal

PATACHITRA

AUDIO - VISUAL STORYTELLING TRADITION





*A creation becomes Art when it is indebted to
the creator's memory and imagination*

- Abanindranath Tagore

Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal's art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines carved out of wood are examples of Bengal's artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





Durga
Pingla, West Medinipur



PATACHITRA

The word 'Pata' comes from the Sanskrit word 'Patta,' meaning cloth, and 'Chitra,' meaning painting. In Patachitra, stories are painted as frames on long scrolls. The painters are known as Patuas. The Patuas gradually unfurl the long scroll pata while presenting the story through their songs. The songs are known as Pater Gaan. One of the fascinating aspects of Patachitra's painting is the use of natural colours derived from local resources like fruits, flowers, and stones. The Patuas paint and sing on various themes like Epics and mythological tales (Ramayana, Mahabharata, Mangalkabya), historical and contemporary themes (biographies of great personalities, nuclear warfare) and social issues (women empowerment, child right, health, literacy). The folk painting tradition is also used as a tool for mass education and communication.

Bengal's Patachitra has been accredited with the tag of Geographical Indication (GI) in 2018.



Yama Pala: Scroll Patachitra
- Majramura, Purulia



THE TRADITION

There is debate regarding the exact time when Patachitra originated. Various oral forms of records date back to the 10th -11th century AD in Bengal. This folk tradition of scroll painting has been passed on to generations orally. Traditionally, the Patuas used to go from house to house with their painted scrolls and used tosing in front of the audience in return for alms and payment in kind. With the passage of time and with modernisation of media, the storytelling tradition of Patachitra was gradually getting lost. It has now been revived following the RCCH initiative. While the folk painting tradition now serve to be the major source of livelihood for the painters, the performative dimension of the tradition has also been revived in today's times.

Kamale Kamini
Daspur, West Medinipur





THE STYLES

The Patachitra painting is practiced in Paschim and Purba Medinipur, Birbhum, Bankura and Purulia districts of West Bengal. Patachitra comprises of three distinct styles, namely:-the Bengal style reflected in Medinipur and Birbhum variants of Patachitra, Purulia and Bankura Santhal style and Kalighat style.

Left-Krishnaleela
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

Right-Santhal Life
Bharatpur, Bankura

Mahabharata-Part of a 15 feet
long Scroll Patachitra
Daspur, West Medinipur



MEDINIPUR STYLE OF PATACHITRA

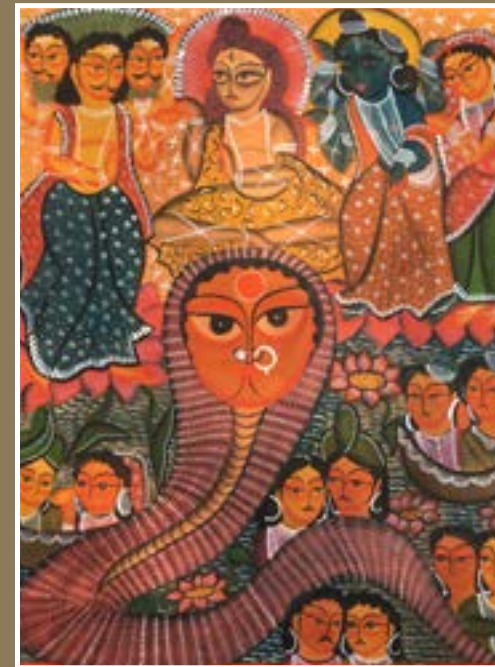
The stories depicted on the scrolls of Medinipur Patachitra can be religious or secular. These paintings were pictorial depictions of historical occurrences and popular myths. Medinipur Patachitra today is a classic emblem of a syncretic tradition – the Muslim Patuas drawing on various themes, reflects their aesthetic brilliance transcending the narrow divides of caste, creed and religion. Local folklores find classic manifestation in Patachitra scrolls. They paint on fish's wedding, a local ritual signifying the power dynamics and how the powerful subsume the less powerful in their purview.

Data Karna
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

Fish marriage
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur



Stories from Mangal Kavya find classic manifestation in Medinipur Patachitra. Manasa Mangal Pat – This Patachitra painting pictorially depicts scenes from Manasa Mangal, a puranic text glorifying Manasa Goddess, the Hindu goddess of snakes. The protagonist of the text, Chand Sadagar, defied Manasa and offered his worship to Lord Shiva, which angered the goddess. Manasa took revenge for this insult, where 8 of his sons lost their lives after getting cursed by the snake goddess. It is Behula, wife of Chand Sadagar's youngest son, who appeased the goddess with her offerings and brought to life her husband as well as her brother in-laws. The painting venerates Goddess Manasa and reflects the local beliefs and practices of the Patuas.



Manasa Mangal
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

The scroll painting of Patachitra were being used not only for entertainment but also as a medium of mass-education. The Muslim rulers soon saw how- this medium of mass-education could be utilized in the propagation of Islam. This inference is substantiated by the evidence of the large number of scrolls, known as 'Gazir Pat' dealing with the lives and miracles of Muslim pirs (religious preceptors) and other Islamic legends.

Gazi Pir
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur





Themes of stories present a local interpretation of the world seen through a mythological framework that is projected onto current events. With the passage of time, Medinipur Patachitra artists have also started drawing on social issues to enhance public awareness through their drawings. Precautions to be taken during COVID times, the massacre of Tsunami destroying lives and locality, the terrorist event of 9/11 and its impact and the Nirbhaya rape case, showcasing the demonistic side of human beings and how lust is the epicentre of destruction serve to be contemporary themes of Patachitra paintings. Other historical as well as contemporary themes such as the freedom struggles like the Indigo Rebellion, the Partition of Bengal, the Gujarat Earthquake, lives of freedom fighters like Khudiram and Bagha Jatin and historical figures like Rabindranath Tagore and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar have become common in Patachitra painting.

Opposite page Images From left to right

Tsunami
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

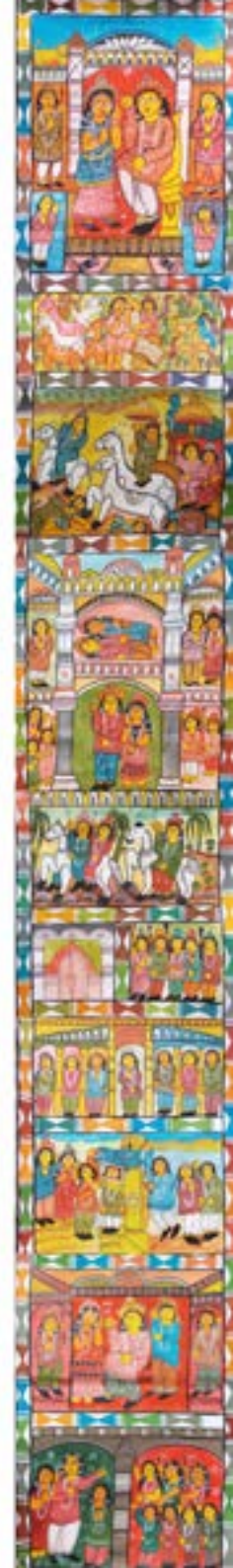
9/11
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

Pulse Polio Campaign
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

HIV Awareness Campaign
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

Female Infanticide
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

Early Marriage
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur





BIRBHUM STYLE OF PATACHITRA

The Birbhum Style is known for its depiction of stories from myths, legends and the epics, while stories from everyday occurrences are also part of their repertoire. The major difference between Birbhum and Medinipur style lies in the content and usage of colours. While stories of Mangal Kavya feature more in Medinipur style, stories of Chaitanyadev and his Bhakti movement feature to be major themes in Birbhum style of Patachitra. Additionally, in the usage of colours, Birbhum style uses a reddish base, which can be identified as a trademark style. Gopalon is one the popular themes on the utility of cow as the protector and nurturer of mankind is also pictorially drawn on the scrolls. The depicted tales show the doomed fate of those who disrespect cows and how the ones who protect the animal are blessed for their kindness.



Sindhubadh
Satpalsa, Birbhum

Gopalan
Satpalsa, Birbhum



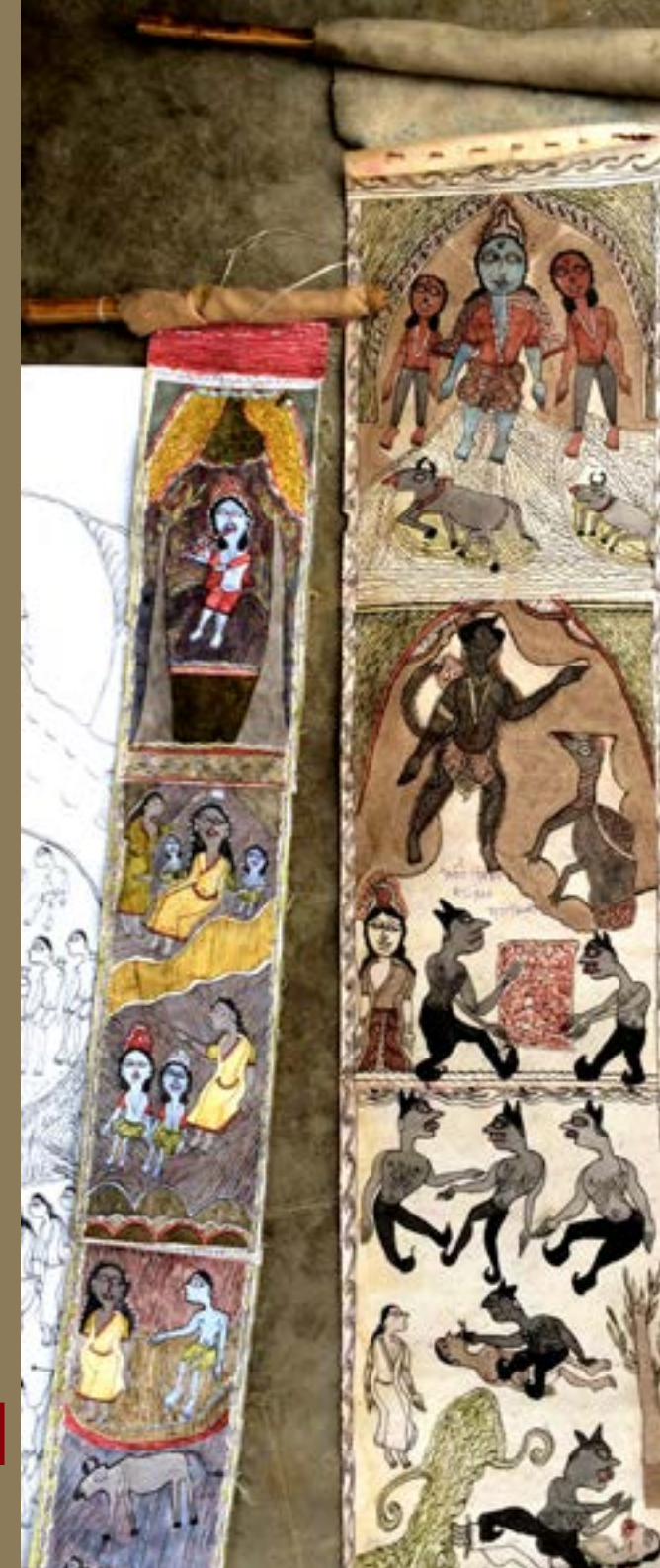
Chaitanya Leela
Itagoria, Birbhum



Gazi Pir
Satpalsa, Birbhum

PURULIA BANKURA SANTHAL PATACHITRA

The Patachitra tradition practised in Purulia and Bankura is known for its simplistic style and compositions, minimalistic background decoration and distinctive themes, which are strikingly different from the scroll paintings of Medinipur and Birbhum. Santhal Patachitra are essentially a ritualistic practice associated with events in the daily lives of tribal people. Unlike its counterpart in Medinipur, Santhal Patachitra is relatively lesser known to the outside world. And so is the artists' use of organic dyes, extracted from locally available stones. Created with simple, bold strokes, and usage of nominal colour, colour palette is limited to not more than two-three colours in the frames, they stand out for their sheer aesthetic brilliance.



Yama Pala
Bharatpur, Bankura



Most of the scrolls start with a representation of the Jagannath trinity, Brahma, and other Hindu divinities. The Patuas paint stories ranging from the origin of the Santhals to the likes of Madanmohan Leela, Krishna Leela and Raas Leela.

Pictorially narrating the origin of human beings on Earth happen to be one of the most popular themes of Santhal Patachitra. The Santhals see Marangburu, localised name for Lord Shiva and Durga as the creators of the world. The popular belief regarding how water came to Earth from goddess Durga's strand of hair and how the entire world was formed from a single drop of Marangburu's blood are brilliantly captured in Santhal Patachitra paintings. Images of Pilchu Buri and Pilchu Haram, the first ever humans on earth can also be found in these paintings. Stories of love, intimacy, marriage, conflict and reconciliation following mythological and fictive plots find special place in Santhal Patachitra.

Another popular plot of Santhal Patachitra is Yama Pala, depicting the Santhali perceptions of hell. It stems from the local belief in Karma, which states that human beings doing evil deeds in their lifetime will have to suffer in hell after death. The paintings portray Yama, the god of death punishing human beings, where images of sufferings sanction a distraught fate for evil beings and urges human beings to be good and kind to escape the torments of hell.

Santhal Birth
Bharatpur, Bankura

Yama Pala
Majramura, Purulia



THE KALIGHAT STYLE

The Bengal style of Patachitra can also be traced in Kalighat Patachitra. Predominantly urban, Kalighat styles developed in Kolkata in the 19th century, merging styles from various rural areas: satirical secular works mocking urban upper-class Bengali culture, using traditional folk idioms and mythological references to interpret city life. Kalighat Patachitra is Chowka or rectangular Pats. While the tradition at present is no longer practiced in Kalighat, the Patuas from Medinipur have revived this style and paints extensively using this style.



Kalighat style Patachitra
Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur



PROCESS

The process of Bengal Patachitra involves few steps which are carried out by the Patachitra artists with immense care and passion. They start painting by filling up the spaces with appropriate colours then make outline directly with the brush to create the forms. The detailing like ornamentation and designing of spaces done as final step of the painting.



Simplicity is the trademark of Santhal pats. The pats are also marked by minimal background decoration and usage of colour.

After drawing the main pat with thin black border, it is then filled with colours. The drawing technique of the figures is unique. The face is visible from the side, whereas there is the frontal vision of the torso and the legs have a side view. But total frontal view of the figures can be seen. The urge to keep the pats simple is a speciality and distinctiveness of the same.





After painting, a layer of recycled soft fabric is pasted on the reverse side of the paper to make the scroll stronger and long-lasting. Then, it is dried in sunlight.



COLOR MAKING

Raw materials used to create Patachitra include paint brush, paper, cloth and colours. The colours are extracted from natural sources, such as flowers, turmeric and coal, are then mixed with glue extracted from wood apples. The colours extracted from natural ingredients are collected in a coconut shell.

Red – Jafran/Lotkon - The seeds of Lotkon fruits are used to make the red colour. The seeds are removed from the dried fruit pods and rubbed by hand to extract the colour.

Yellow – Turmeric – Turmeric plant of ginger family is used by the Patuas to make the yellow colour. They crush the plant into small pieces using a pestle stone to extract the colour.

Green – Kundri – The leaves of Kundri plant are used to make the green colour. The leaves are crushed using a pestle stone and the colours are squeezed out.

Blue – Aparajita – The blue colour is made from the petals of Aparajita flower. The petals are crushed or directly rubbed onto paper to extract the colour.

Black – Soot – Previously, the Patuas made the black colour from soot, extracted from oil lamps, cooking fire, burnt rice grains or burning bamboo. Now, they also use soot from extract pipes of Lorries, which are scraped using a stick. The collected soot is then worked over with a finger to compress the powder and make the colour.



The tribal Patachitra artists are quite dynamic in using colours. Sometimes they use a number of colours or otherwise they stick to two or three. The artists use natural, herbal or organic colours. But some of them use artificial colors available in the market.

The source of the colours is listed below:

- Geru Pathar (local name): Gerua (Indian Red)
- Holud Pathar: Yellow (probably yellow ochre)
- Khorimati: White
- Bhushokali: Black
- Kamala Pathar: Orange
- Simpata: Green
- Pui metuli: Purple
- Boter Kuri: Pink
- Phanimanashar phol: Red
- Dela nil: Blue
- Palash Flower: Yellow



DIVERSIFICATION

NEW STORIES

The Patachitra artists have developed their skills in terms of new content making, painting on architectural spaces, diversified products, and different collaborations with artists from all across the globe. Coming out of their traditional parameters, the folk painting of Patachitra in today's times is finding new ways of expression. Airports, art galleries, and installations in many places have Patachitra paintings. The folk painting tradition is also getting used for illustrations in books and Graphic novels, stop motion animation, and backdrop designs in various events.

Corona Virus: Scroll Patachitra
-Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur



The Patachitra artists continuously develop paintings on life events and stories that has an impact on the humanity. New themes, experiments have been embodied inside the Patuas' repertoire, creating a living heritage that reflects political, religious, cultural and social events. Amidst the gloom of the pandemic of Covid-19, when the role of art and artists became central to people's lives, Swarna Chitrakar used seven frames to create her new Patachitra on the novel coronavirus crisis and painted pictures of the virus, patients as well as healthcare workers. She also depicted a scenario that showed people staying indoors and those outside wearing masks. While unfurling the Patachitra and singing the song, Swarna pointed to the characters in her artwork to elucidate it. The artists also depict story of environmental awareness and the need for protecting trees. The story narrates how trees provide us with oxygen, the importance of water bodies, and the ecosystem as a whole. Conservation of trees and planting of more trees are the morales of this story.

Ukraine war: Scroll Patachitra
-Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur



Environmental awareness: Square Patachitra
-Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur



DIVERSIFIED PRODUCTS

Patachitra for Corporate Gifting – Old Wine in New Bottle

Patuas are now involved in making a range of corporate gifting items by innovatively using their Patachitra paintings on a variety of decorative items. These creations reflect how traditional cultural pursuits are harmonised and integrated into contemporary lifestyle. Infused with the ethos of sustainability, the Patachitra painted corporate gift range are ideal for an innovative and sustainable hospitality and interior decoration sector.







PAINTED MURAL

The paintings that are divine and primitive, retaining the power of expression, festive exuberance and graphical freedom of the universe, is best reflected in the walls of hotels and airport. This wonderful artwork is also used in interiors by art connoisseurs today. Interior designers are thus more and more focusing on traditional art in creating new space design. Sometimes, it is the entrance, a wall of creativity, the roof. Institutes are creating murals with Patachitra painting in the boundary walls. Graphiti with Patachitra painting is in vogue. The galleries today are trying to go beyond established commercial relationships between buyers and makers of handcrafted objects and creating lasting value of dialogue between artists, designers, galleries and buyers.



GRAPHIC NOVEL & ANIMATION

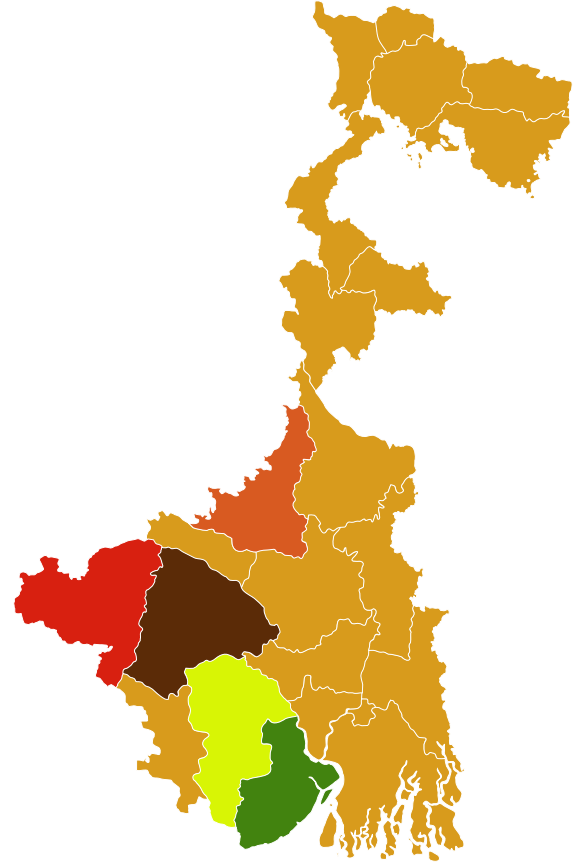
The artistry in some graphic novels also draws on long traditions of visual storytelling, sometimes combined with printed or spoken words. There has been many experimentation on using Patachitra in graphic novels, book illustration, stop motion animation, and film. Tara Books has experimented with two graphic novels illustrated by Patachitra artists. One is Sita's Ramayana, illustrated by Moyna Chitrakar and written by Samhita Arni. The other is 'I See The Promised Land', illustrated by Manu Chitrakar and based on a biography of Martin Luther King by American writer-poet Arthur Flowers. Other noteworthy graphic story books include "The Potua Pinocchi," Savitri bai – "Journey of Trailblazer." Danish production house Perle film collaborated with Monimala Chitrakar and Sonia Chitrakar from Pingla village to develop a stop motion animation on H.C. Andersen's story 'The Emperors New Cloths' for the project Hooghly Heritage Hub. As part of this project, Swarna Chitrakar also created an 8-foot scroll, pictorially depicting European settlements in the Hooghly region through Patachitra.



INSTALLATION

The folk tradition of Patachitra has been used effectively in installation art. Durga Puja in Kolkata has always been a platform for showcasing the traditional artistry of artists and craftsmen. Many Durga Pandals have been adorned by Patachitra art. The art form has also been used to create installations in the Gauriya Mission Museum, depicting a part of Shri Chaitanya's life, the Jharkhand Leela.





PATACHITRA HUBS IN WEST BENGAL

Naya, Pingla in Paschim Medinipur: Naya village in Pingla, Paschim Medinipur, is the most popular hub of Patachitra artists with over 250 practicing artists. The village, over the years, has evolved as a cultural tourism destination. An intricate tapestry of music and visual art makes Naya a delight for the visitors. The stories of women reaching out to the world inspires other, the touches of colour by National Awardee Anwar Chitrakar, listening to Pater Gaan, the painted village walls, the museum collection of Bahadur Chitrakar and the entire village giving the shape of a living museum attracts visitors across the world. The artists have a society of their own named 'Chitrataru'. An annual festival is held at the village celebrating the art. A folk-art centre along with a community museum is developed at Naya, Pingla by Khadi and Village Industries Board.



Chandipur in Purba Medinipur : Habichak, Nankarchak are vibrant villages of Chandipur where more than 200 Patachitra artists reside. The artists have developed their own society 'Habichak Nankarchak Lokoshiksha Shilpo Patua Samity' and also organises annual village festival. A folk-art centre is present at Habichak.

Itagoria and Chandpara in Birbhum : Birbhum style of painting finds its place in the villages of Itagoria, Chandpara, Satfalsa. Many of the artists have made their names individually, but the hub are lesser known to people. Jamir Bedia is one of the renowned painters of Itagoria, Babu Patua, Fulchand Patua are renowned painters of Chandpara and Arun Patua is a well known artist of Satfalsa.

Majramura in Purulia : Majramura, located in Purulia, is the village of Tribal Patachitra style of painting. Baul Chitrakar, Bijoy Chitrakar, Shaktikapoor Chitrakar are some of the prominent artists of the region.



Village Festival



The artists of Pingla celebrate their annual 3-day festival “POT Maya” since 2010 in the 3rd weekend of November. House in the village transforms into an art gallery. Visitors can interact with the artists, get to know about the stories behind their paintings, learn about the ways to extract natural colours and paint and collect some marvelous art works.

The artists of Chandipur also celebrate their annual 3-day festival celebrating local Intangible Cultural Heritage. The festival is organized by the artists’ collective called Habichok Nankarchok Lokoshiksha Shilpo Patua Samiti.



Resource Centre

A community museum displaying the Patachitras created by local artists has been developed with infrastructural support from the West Bengal Khadi & Village Industries Board in Naya, Pingla. The museum is managed by the local community and designed to preserve the traditional art form and to make visitors aware of the origin, process, different themes and formats of this form of art.



Contacts

Naya, Pingla, West Medinipur

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Golap Chitrakar	9735747547
Abed Chitrakar	9733601383
Sayera (Khatun) Chitrakar	9733601383
Torab Chitrakar	9775074169
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Itagaria, Birbhum

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Muktar Patua	9593301040
Laltu Patua	9593301040
Salema Patua	9564640068
Milan Chitrakar	8926859525
Mansur Patua	8927819951
Ripan Patua	9733191411
Chayna Patua	7407975204

Bonta, Birbhum

Rintu Patua	8145936626
Rabi Potua	9733615466
Kadam Patua	9641381176

Chandpara, Birbhum

Babu Patua	7864911870
Sabu Patua	8250274664
Moktar Patua	8972008814
Phulchand Patua	9735725716
Alok Patua	9647471870
Bakul Patua	8972936621
Jhuma Khatun	9734062417

Satpalsa, Birbhum

Arun Patua	9564619320
Barun Patua	9800909640

Majramura, Purulia

Baul Chitrakar	7864079673
Sattikapur Chitrakar	7602108634
Henadhan Chitrakar	6294567459
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Manik Chitrakar	816 7534213
Rabi Chitrakar	9609277363
Dijalal Chitrakar	9002547405
Bijoy Chitrakar	7584940217
Manbodh Chitrakar	9883878793
Goutam Chitrakar	8927795836

Lohadih, Bankura

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Dilip Chitrakar	9609027113
Atul Chitrkar	6294945322
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