

#IKAT

The Art of Designing Before the Loom

The weaver must essentially forecast where the design will fall before the yarn even reaches the loom



Long before Jacquard looms and modern digital printing made intricate textile patterns easier to reproduce, Indian weavers had already developed a remarkable way of creating precise designs in yarn. The technique is called ikat, a process in which yarns are tied, dyed and carefully aligned so that the final pattern emerges only when the fabric is woven.

From Patan Patola and Pochampally Ikat to Sambalpuri Ikat, the principle is deceptively simple but extraordinarily difficult to execute. The weaver must essentially forecast where the design will fall before the yarn even reaches the loom.

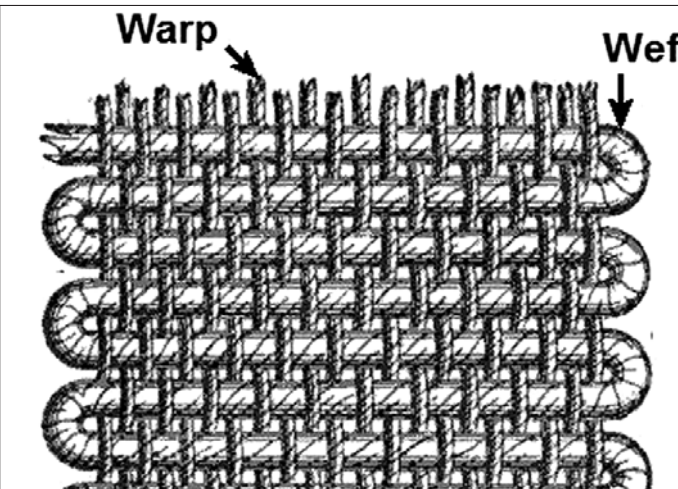
In traditional Patola, both the warp and weft yarns are resist-dyed according to the design. Sections of the yarn are tied to prevent the dye from reaching them, while other sections are dyed in specific colours. Once these yarns are placed on the loom, the patterns on the warp and weft must meet with extraordinary precision to create motifs.

This means the design is not painted onto an already woven saree. It is determined at the yarn stage.

What makes Patola different?

In a traditional Patan Patola, both warp and weft are planned, tied and dyed before weaving. The process can take considerable time because every colour and motif has to be calculated in advance.

A semi-Patola, by contrast, uses a single-colour warp while the weft is dyed according to the intended pattern. It still involves considerable preparation and skill. The preparation can take around 10-15 days, followed by roughly 3-4 days of weaving, depending on the design and complexity. The result is a textile whose pattern is integral to its construction. A



For Dutch group portraiture, class would have been immediately indicated to the viewer by dress and activity. Middle-class people wanted to be painted as moral hard-workers, while the new aristocrats would be portrayed in acts of luxury like talking or playing music. In *Beware of Luxury*, the modest house and plain clothing of its inhabitants indicate this is a middle-class family. Yet, the adults talk and strum instruments, while children play with pearls and glassware, activities that symbolize the leisure of an aristocratic family. By including contrasting symbols of different classes, Jan Steen may be mocking burghers who gain a little wealth and abandon their moral work. His subjects, indulging in good times and small riches, ignore their impending doom.



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The house is having the time of its life. The music is playing. The wine is poured. Jan Steen called this "Beware of Luxury." One person here is looking right at you. She is smiling like you are already invited in. And nothing here looks dangerous yet.

Look at the man running this house. He is grinning glass in hand, and one of the other men has a duck on his shoulder. Nobody here is actually in charge and because of that, the children get busy.

That child is not admiring the cabinet. They are helping themselves. And the little one found the pearls. The dog found the table. The pig found the flowers on the floor. A monkey is playing with the clock. Time itself, being wasted by a monkey.

The floor says everything, cards, a hat, pretzels, an overturned jug. Someone here is actually paying attention. She leans in to warn the man beside her. In her hand, roses, a warning dressed in flower.

He keeps reading his book. He misses the whole room. The woman of the house is asleep. Not resting. Gone. Steen left his warning down in the corner. Beware in times of plenty.

The children are not the problem here. They show us what happens when adults stop watching. This house is not falling apart later. It is falling apart now. And she never stopped smiling at you. The kids learned this from someone. What are yours picking up from you?

Beware of Luxury (in Dutch, In weelde siet toe), also known as Die verkehte Welt (The Upside-Down World), is a 1663 oil painting by the Dutch painter Jan Steen, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

The painting depicts a disorderly household given over to licentious or improper behaviour. The rowdy mer-

Beware of Luxury

#JAN STEEN



ymakers are arranged in an inverted triangle formation. At its center, a young woman, modeled by Steen's wife, Margriet van Goyen, flirts with the man of the house, smiling flirtatiously at the viewer.

Jan Steen's picture is a comedic distortion of a Dutch family home, and it serves as a warning to viewers of the foolishness and repercussions of living in disorder. As a genre painter who specialized in satirical scenes, Steen painted many works with similar themes, including *As the Old Sing, So Pipe the Young* and *The Effects of Intemperance*.

Like other works by Steen, *Beware of Luxury* invites the viewer to reflect on the virtues of temperance and the dangers of household disorder. The dog stealing meat from the table is a symbol of greed

and excess, and the playing cards scattered across the floor indicate the sin of gambling. The woman's wine over the man's crutch reinforces their sin of erotic desire. The two Quakers in the back may represent a biblical warning to the other members of the painting.

In the hanging basket, bad omens threaten to fall on the household, including a crutch, a sword, and a set of clappers that would signal illness like leprosy. The playing card, more prominent in Steen's similar painting *The Dissolute Household* (ca. 1663-1664) may be the unlucky jack of spades. The moral of the work is clear: sinners must expect penalty.

Another saying is brought to mind by the pig nuzzling the rose. The phrase "throwing roses before swine" is a Biblical expression



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Steen used himself and his family as models for many of his comic portraits. His own comic persona drinks, blows bagpipes, and carouses irreverently. Although some viewers might not have recognized the artist, many painting sales at that time were conducted face-to-face, so the artist's face in these farcical scenes would have been part of the joke. Later biographers often mistook Steen's fictional self-portraits for accurate portrayals of his life, leading to a common perception of Steen as a drunken ne'er-do-well. In this painting, Steen is the grinning man in the brown jacket. The woman in the center is his first wife, Margriet van Goyen. According to one biographer, she disliked that Steen often portrayed her as a "loose woman," though she willingly modeled for many such portraits during her lifetime. Jan Steen was known for his humorous and satirical paintings of "dissolute households," which often mocked the excesses of the rising Dutch bourgeoisie.

referred to wasteful or useless acts. The monkey stopping the clock reminds us of the saying, "Time is forgotten in folly." A "quacking" duck represents incoherent chatter. The duck on the man's shoulder most likely relates to his talk being pointless banter in which they have decided to ignore the mayhem around them.

The lemon, half-unpeeled, was a very common symbol in Dutch paintings. In part, it may represent the Republic's trade victories over Spain, while the sweet appearance of a sour lemon also contributes to the painting's theme of temptation.

For Dutch group portraiture, class would have been immediately indicated to the viewer by dress and activity. Middle-class people wanted to be painted as moral hard-workers, while the new aristocrats would



Celebrating the Power of Voices

Every year on September 30th, the world comes together to celebrate International Podcast Day, a platform that honours the storytellers, educators, and creators behind the microphone. Podcasts have transformed how we consume information, offering everything from deep-dive investigative journalism to light-hearted entertainment, accessible anytime and anywhere. The day encourages listeners to explore new shows, support independent creators, and recognize the growing influence of audio content in shaping culture and ideas. It's not just about entertainment, it's a celebration of connection, learning, and the power of voices that inform, inspire, and spark meaningful conversations globally.

#SALT

The Underground Elephants of Mount Elgon

When the animals find mineral-rich earth or rock, they can scrape, break and consume it. This behaviour is known as geophagy



In 1980, Kenya's Mount Elgon was home to one of nature's strangest sights. Deep inside enormous caves carved into the mountain's slopes, elephants were disappearing surprisingly deep into the caves.

At first, the behaviour seemed almost impossible to explain. Why would an animal that normally spends its days moving through forests and grasslands deliberately enter a dark, dangerous cave? The answer lies in an unusual combination of geology and an elephant's appetite for minerals.

A Mountain Made of Salt

Mount Elgon is an ancient volcanic mountain on the Kenya-Uganda border. Its unusual geology has created extensive caves within its slopes. Inside some of these caves are deposits of mineral-rich rock, including salts and other minerals that elephants need in their diet. Elephants are herbivores. Most of their food comes from plants, leaves, grasses, bark, roots and other vegetation. But plants do not always provide everything an elephant needs.

In heavily weathered tropical soils, minerals can be washed away by rain. This process, known as leaching, can leave vegetation and soils relatively poor in certain minerals. For an elephant, that can create



a problem. It may have plenty of food but still need additional minerals, particularly sodium. So, the elephants go looking.

The Search for Salt

An elephant's trunk and enormous teeth make it remarkably well equipped for this task. When the animals find mineral-rich earth or rock, they can scrape, break and consume it. This behaviour is known as geophagy, the deliberate eating of soil or other geological material. At Mount Elgon, the mineral deposits are inside caves. And that means the elephants have to go underground to reach them. They enter the caves, sometimes travelling deep into the darkness, using their tusks and trunks to break pieces from the walls. The caves effectively become enormous natural mineral larders. What looks like bizarre behaviour is therefore a nutritional strategy.

Why Go So Deep?

The remarkable part is not simply that elephants eat minerals. It is how far they are willing to go to obtain them. Elephants are enormous animals, yet they can navigate narrow, dark passages inside Mount Elgon. Over generations, their repeated movements have even contributed to enlarging some of the cave passages.

The sight is extraordinary: an elephant slowly disappearing into a mountain, following a route that seems completely unnatural for such a huge animal. But from the elephant's perspective, the cave contains something valuable. It contains minerals that may be difficult to obtain elsewhere.

Nature's Underground Pantry

The elephants of Mount Elgon demonstrate an important lesson about wildlife. Animals don't always behave in ways that make immediate sense to humans. What appears mysterious can become logical once we understand the animal's environment. The elephants aren't entering the caves because they have lost their way. They're going there because the mountain has something they need.

Deep beneath the forest, the volcanic rock provides a source of minerals. The elephants provide the muscle and determination to reach it. So, in one of Kenya's most extraordinary natural spectacles, an ancient mountain and one of Earth's largest land animals have created an unlikely relationship.

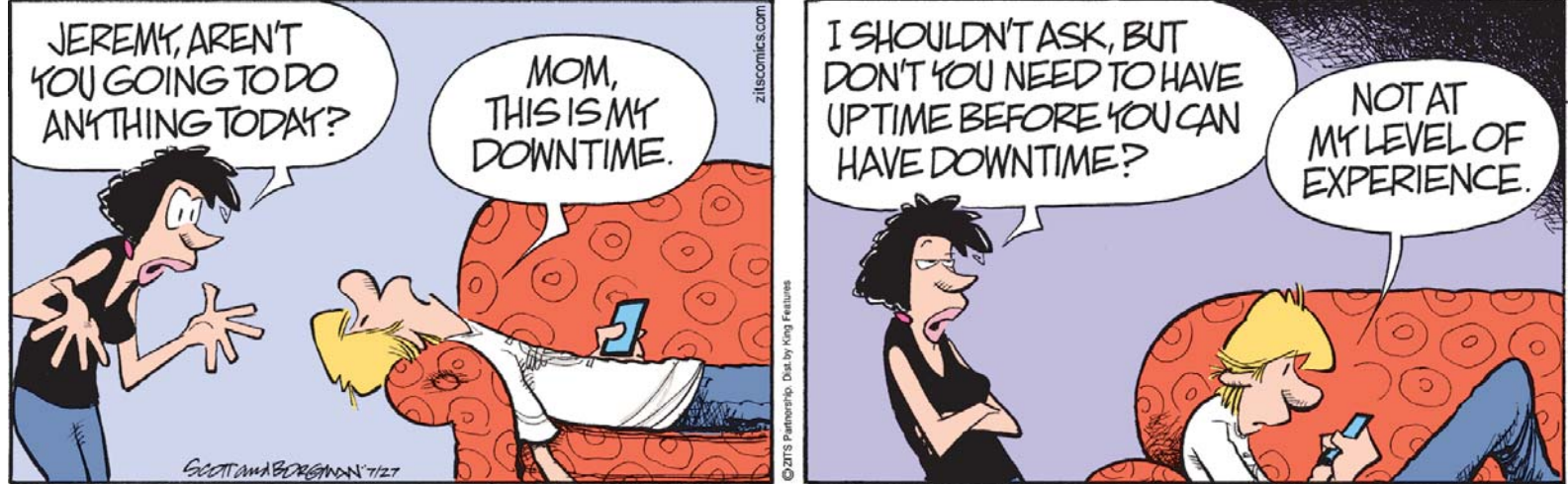


By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

THE WALL

