

Aarong unveils 44-foot kantha masterpiece by Samiul Alam



In a world driven by rapid industrialisation and mass production, the quiet persistence of handcrafted traditions stands as proof of resilience. One such tradition, Nakshi Kantha, has long been an intrinsic part of Bangladesh's cultural identity. However, few projects have elevated it to the scale and grandeur of MohaArongo: The Great Arena, an awe-inspiring 44-foot-long Nakshi Kantha installation, housed in Aarong's flagship store in Dhanmondi. Designed by Samiul Alam, this installation is not merely a piece of fabric but a living narrative of heritage, sustainability, and collective craftsmanship.

A reflection of Aarong's journey

At its core, MohaArongo encapsulates Aarong's extensive legacy. With a local supply chain encompassing over 75,000 artisans, including 30,000 working under the Ayesha Abed Foundation (AAF), Aarong has built a formidable ecosystem of craftsmanship across Bangladesh. Samiul Alam and his associate designer Nanziba sought to reflect the scale and impact of this journey through an installation that merges past, present, and future.

"We just tried to reflect on the gigantic force of Aarong's massive journey and the magical craft of its people," Alam explains. "Both the story and crafting of this Nakshi Kantha call back to the root, connecting artisans, their bond with nature, our ancestral existence, folklores, myths, heritage, and culture — all reliving in a new form, echoing a proud future."

Unlike traditional Nakshi Kantha, which is often a deeply personal endeavour, this installation is the result of 250 artisans working collectively over six months. The design evolved organically — what started as a printed layout on paper transformed with every touch of the artisans.

"MohaArongo embodies the excellence of collective energy in the force of creation," Alam says, adding, "Each artisan added their best skills and experiences into this seamless story."

To ensure that the authentic voices of artisans were preserved, the installation incorporated a blend of traditional and contemporary techniques including block print, tie-dye, screen print, wax batik, and shibori. These gave the piece textural depth and visual complexity.

Sustainability woven into the fabric

The installation is not just a celebration

of craftsmanship; it is also a statement on sustainability. Crafted from upcycled materials, it repurposes tailor-cutting waste, end-of-roll fabrics, rejected sample pieces, beads, jewellery pieces, and most importantly, recyclable sarees.

"The origin and purpose of Nakshi Kantha itself is a sustainable idea," Alam notes. "Kantha is created from old sarees, made into a blanket of stories. It fills our sleep with dreams and gives us the strength to live those stories. The same goes for this kantha as well."

By incorporating repurposed textiles and traditional kantha stitches, the installation bridges the past practice of sustainability with the urgent need for eco-conscious craftsmanship today.

A tribute to artisans

One of the most striking elements of MohaArongo is its golden sunrise sky, adorned with the names of artisans. This design choice draws inspiration from Samiul's experience in Paris, where he encountered Le Mur Pour La Paix (Wall for Peace), inscribed with the word "peace" in 32 different languages.

"The idea truly bloomed when we found names stitched on traditional kanthas in Aarong's archive," he recalls. "Often, those who stitch the kantha write their names in one corner. Since this is a big kantha, and a lot of people contributed, we decided to put all of our names in the sunrise sky — to reflect hope, prosperity, and gratitude."

Another compelling detail is the embroidered portraits of artisans handing over the iconic Aarong bag. This honours the faces behind the craft, allowing their stories to be visually represented within the piece itself.

Preserving tradition in a globalised world

In an era where automation threatens to overshadow handcrafted traditions, installations like MohaArongo serve as a powerful reminder of the human touch in craft. Yet, as the world moves towards fast fashion and mechanised production, what role does Nakshi Kantha have in contemporary design?

"The stitches of Nakshi Kantha are not limited to just Nakshi Kantha anymore, which is a good thing," Alam believes. "It's time to expand further."

He advocates for a coexistence of preservation and innovation keeping traditional techniques alive, while

allowing it to evolve in fashion and lifestyle. "As consumers, we must prioritise local crafts and techniques. That is how we keep this magic going. Growth will shine on our existence," he remarks.

Truly, standing before this 44-foot-long masterpiece, one cannot help but feel a deep-rooted connection to the past — a reminder

that every stitch, every repurposed fabric, and every artisan's name is part of an ongoing story. A story that refuses to fade, that insists on being told, again and again, through the enduring art of Nakshi Kantha.

By Ayman Anika
Photos: Courtesy

NO

MORE
5%

VAT

@

SAD

***Conditions apply**