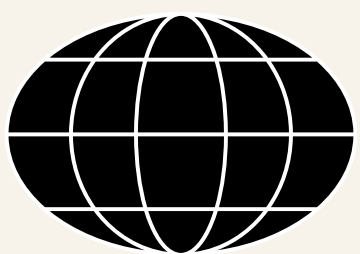
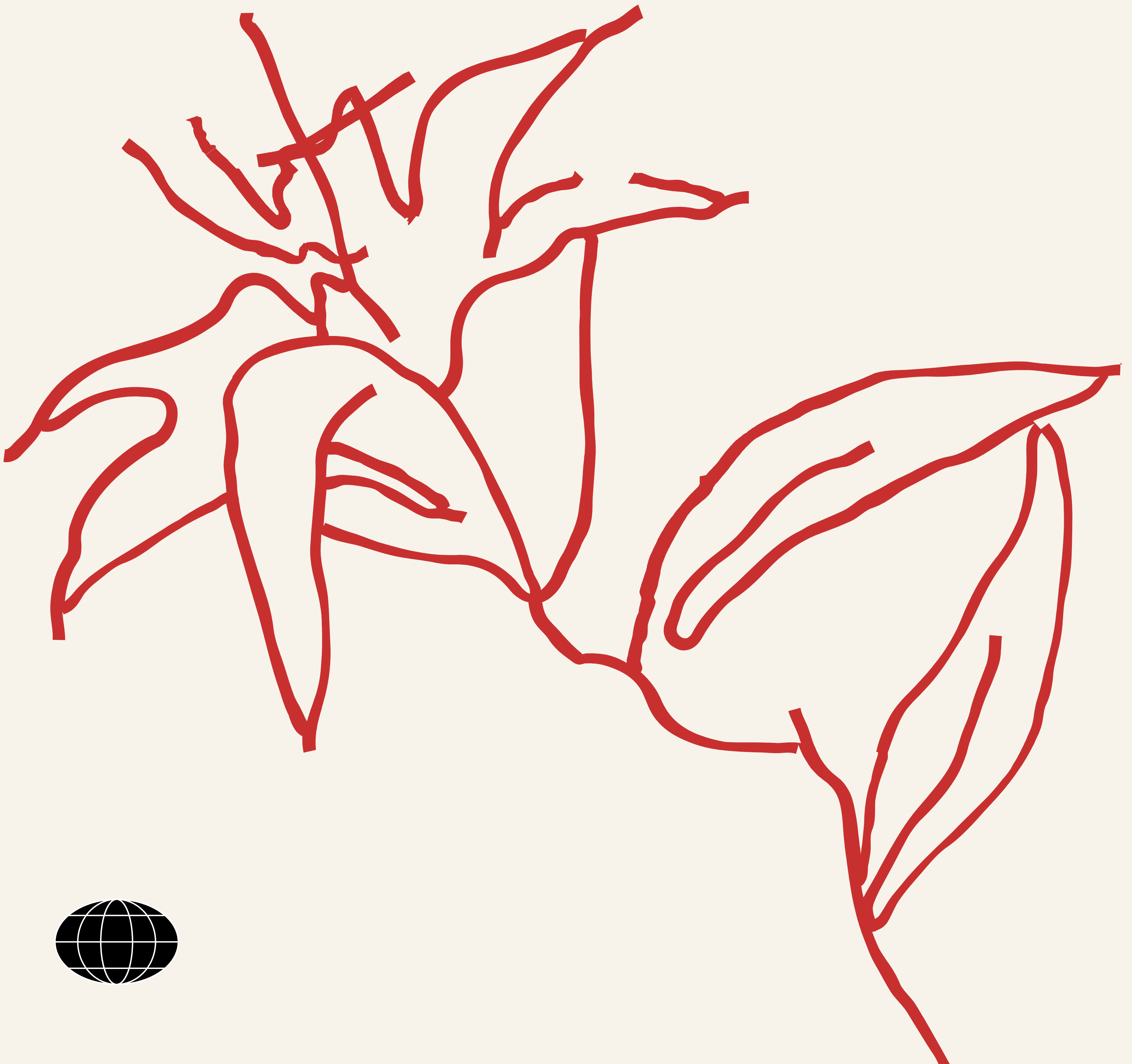


APPAREL
ALCHEMY

ISSUE 1

ETHIC THREADS
REVIEW



EDITORS NOTE

When I first conceptualized Ethic Threads Review, I had no idea where the idea would go; only that I wanted to spark conversation. Specifically, conversations about clothes and the stories they tell, because they can offer so much more besides practicality. I'm still so amazed by the support our magazine has received and can't wait to see what comes next!

Accompanied by the release of our new podcast, Fashion & the Future, I couldn't be more thrilled for the release of our first issue! This issue contains works that explore the dynamics of culture and fashion.

I truly hope the articles and stories you find in here bring as much creativity and joy to you as those who wrote them.

Bisous,

Diya Thennarasu
Editor-in-Chief



INDUSTRIALIZATION & INDIGO

ARTICLE

Xariyah Walker, California

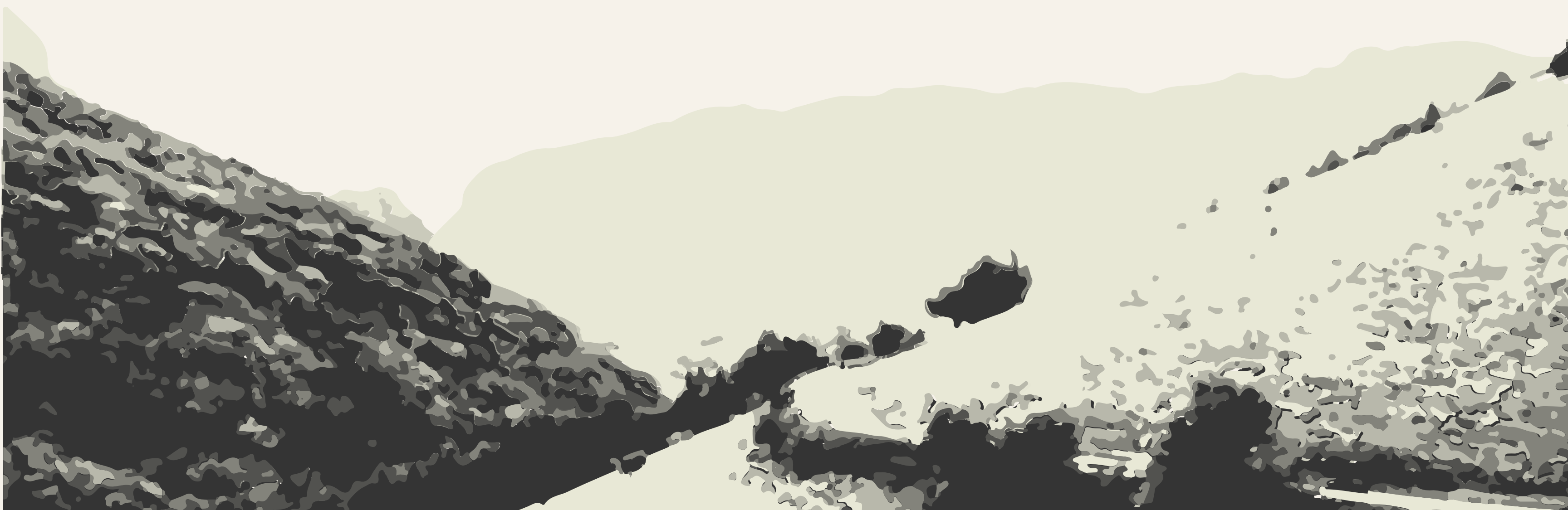
Indigo is the only natural blue dye to exist in the creative world, making its presence in our clothes inevitable. More specifically, it's what's used to create the color of denim; an essential textile in most closets. In modern times, the practicality and style of denim have become popular amongst all generations. However, that wasn't always the case.

Indigo rose to demand soon after the introduction of European colonial powers in the Americas and Asia. European colonists began to harvest indigo in excessive amounts, especially in the American South, South Asia, and Central America, where the labor-intensive process of dyeing was often done by enslaved people. As a result, indigo became incredibly valuable, inheriting the nickname, "blue gold." Indigo's bloody past is also documented by the transatlantic trade, where enslaved Africans were forced to harvest and process it in plantations under brutal conditions. In the American South, indigo was grown alongside cash crops like cotton and tobacco, contributing to an agricultural economy that relied heavily on forced labor.

Denim's link to indigo dates back to the fabric's origins in the 18th century. Denim jeans were primarily worn by workers, farmers, and laborers, embodying practicality and hard work. However, by the 1950s, denim began to take on a new cultural meaning, particularly in the United States. In popular culture, jeans became a symbol of untethered and carefreeness. Denim was now worn not only by farmers and workers but also by artists, musicians, and even political activists, who used it to communicate their values of independence, freedom, and nonconformity.

The cultural and racial significance of denim became particularly important during the 20th century, as it became associated with working-class culture, rebellion, and, eventually, youth counterculture.

Today, indigo-dyed denim is pervasive in fashion, and it's almost impossible to think of jeans and denim without associating them with both comfort and style. Yet, the history of denim is defined by incomprehensible patterns of racial and cultural oppression. Its entry as a commodity to a mass-produced market also says a lot about the relationship between exploitation and commercialization. The accessibility we have to dirt-cheap clothing exists because of the bridges between colonization, race, and global capitalism.



ROGAN ART

ARTICLE

Nita Ashoka, Texas

Across South Asia, painters who specialize in Rogan art are clamoring to preserve the historic art form. Rogan painting is a form of cloth painting originating from Persia, which later spread to India 400 years ago. The art involves boiling castor oil for multiple days until it develops a honey-like viscosity. Castor oil is the base of the paint, and gives rogan art its name, with rogan meaning oil in Farsi. Then, vegetable dyes are dried and ground into powders that are mixed in with the oil to create paint. Rather than a paintbrush, artists warm up the thick substance in their palms with a metal stylus to create various motifs onto fabrics. To do this, the paste is pulled into thin threads and draped over the canvas of choice, while another hand guides the flow of the paint from underneath the cloth. The fabric is then folded over itself to produce a mirror copy on the opposite side. These designs are often free-handed, leaving the end result entirely up to the artist's inhibitions.

However, this process is anything but simple. The castor oil acts almost like lava, often catching on fire over hot coal; as a result, the amount of people who can maneuver this part of production is reserved. Furthermore, the practice of Rogan art is often inherited through generations, meaning most full-time artists have to be born into a family or company practicing Rogan art. Because of the arts' physically demanding and strenuous properties, there are very few painters skilled enough to keep the practice alive.

The rise of industrial textiles throughout India forced many artisans to leave the craft for more lucrative work. Although Rogan art was popularized through bedding or ceremonial attire, businesses were

unable to keep up with the supply and demand of mass-produced goods, causing locals to lose interest. This issue was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which drove away tourists who once filled the industry. A lack of tourism halted sales and commissions, leaving residual Rogan artists with little to no sources of income. In response to these challenges, there's been a growing movement to preserve and revive Rogan's art. Many organizations and local governments have taken steps to support the few remaining Rogan artists by providing grants, training programs, and marketing assistance. These initiatives hope to increase awareness of Rogan painting both within India and internationally. One of the key strategies has been to focus on the cultural and historical value of Rogan art, highlighting its centuries-old heritage and its significance as an intangible cultural asset. For example, initiatives have been launched to help artisans showcase their work at global cultural festivals and art exhibitions, or through social media to reach global audiences by a more accessible means.

While efforts to preserve Rogan art are occurring, it's still at risk of eradication. The craft still has to battle against industrialization, globalization, and the ongoing pressures of a rapidly changing economy. However, the resilience of the artists who continue to practice Rogan painting is a testament to the deep cultural significance and beauty of Rogan art.



FASHION AS A CULTURAL DILEMMA

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Diya Thennarasu, California

Intricate beadwork and fabrics adorned with various illustrations contort around me as I callowly roll around on the floor of dresses, while my mother ruthlessly negotiates prices with a seller. In my contented state, I hear nothing but the soft crunch of sequins and delicate gems under my weight as I continue my contemporary floorwork. I grasp at the fabrics and blouses wanting to model them all at once, realizing you could live without many things, but to live without such grand dresses was the very essence of privation. This is it. This is right. This is where I'm meant to be.

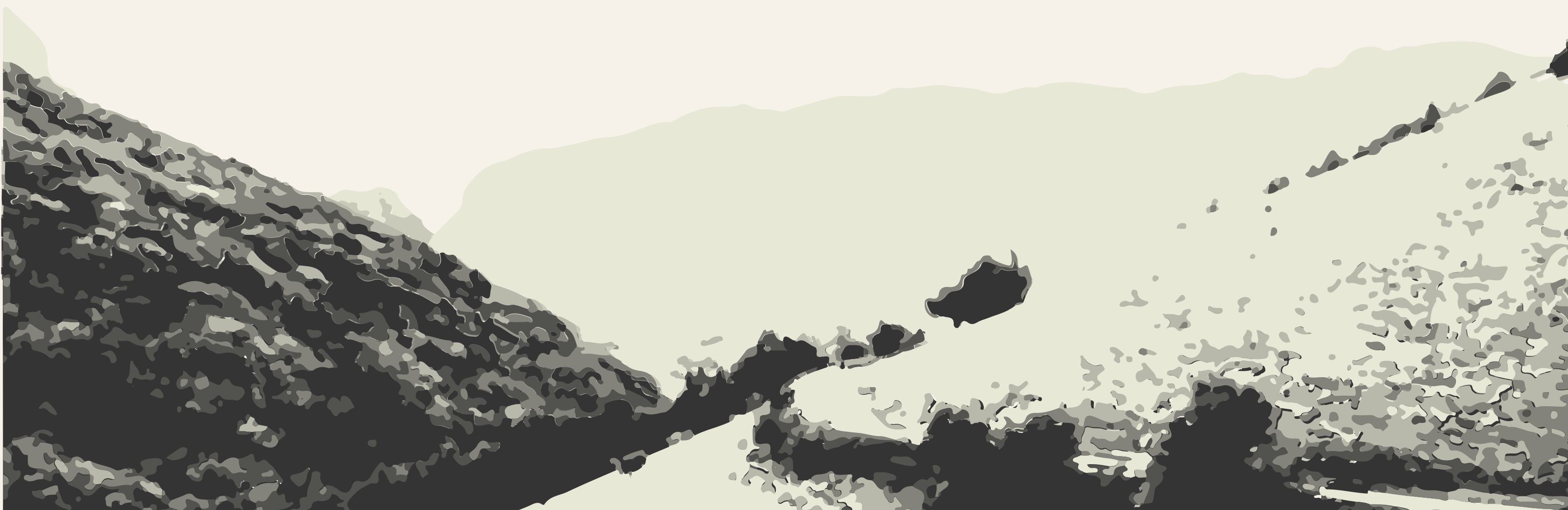
But first, let's rewind a bit. It was the summer of 2015 in Chennai, India, at a cluttered boutique that we'd stumbled upon among the various street shops. Beneath my saccharine, ice cream-coated fingers lay what appeared to be an endless supply of sarees, kurtas, salwars, and, well, any kind of dress you could imagine. The glittering colors and opulent designs of the clothes illuminated the tiny corner shop, making up for the broken, yellowing street lights. Every cubic inch of the shop seemed to be drowning in clothes, but I wouldn't have had it any other way. For most of my life, clothes, or classic Indian couture, were what I found most love and acceptance in. However, this reliance began to dissipate as I faced difficulty having to choose between Indian garments, and American ones living in the United States.

Growing up, I was never ashamed of my ethnic wardrobe in the States: in fact, I embraced it. For as long as I can remember, clothes have been an integral part of the way I represent myself. This obsession manifested over the infinite summers I spent across the globe. Despite the sweltering sun, I was always able to convince my cousins to take me to Chennai Silks and Pothys, even if I never made a purchase. Looking at the ethereal garments was satisfying enough. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that I loved clothes, especially Indian ones. Being Indian and telling the world through my clothes was something I never failed to embrace.

My perception of my cultural identity shifted dramatically as I faced cultural challenges in my American school. One of these moments occurred during my elementary school graduation. I had worn my favorite neon orange and royal blue churidar, with a bright red bindi to tie it all together. I distinctly remember excitedly jumping up and down, begging my mother to add the tiny dot to my forehead. As far as I knew, bindis were the epitome of grace and equalizers among chaotic cacophonies of color. As we waited in line, ready to walk up on the stage, the blue-eyed brown-haired boy in front of me kept turning around to look at me, as though he was trying to decipher my appearance. His captious eyes squinted in confusion and his judgment permeated the room. Finally, he decided to speak to me once he noticed my bindi. He started snickering, as he said, "Ew what's on your forehead?!" as though it was some infectious disease. The other girls and boys in their floral frocks and navy blue suit ties turned to me, processing the same thoughts as the boy in front of me: "What is wrong with this girl?" It took me a while to realize not everyone was looking at me with adoration, but disgust. This, along with the other disapproving stares from people I never knew as I walked up that stage made me angry: not so much at the people who did so, but at my culture. I resented my culture for making me feel out of place.

I wanted to experience this moment, this life, without being Indian—to share a side of me that everyone could look at and understand. I quickly became conscious of the way people perceived my external culture and formed this notion that all perceptions of it were malicious. Embarrassed, I began to hide this part of my culture, starting with shoving pounds of Indian dresses underneath my bed. In America, I didn't want to be that brown girl who dressed in imbecilic clothes. I wanted to feel normal. From that point on, I made an effort to venture into the journey of cultural separation, keeping my two worlds and wardrobes separate.

However, over the past few years, my two, never to cross paths with each other's wardrobes, have slowly made their way to each other. At the same time, so did my love for my Indian and American cultures. If you look into my closet now, you'll see lots of straight-legged and baggy pants, and various modern tops and jackets. You'll also see embroidered skirts and cotton blouses I inherited from my mother and grandmother. My culture isn't just a binary code of America or India. It's the refraction of metallic sequined shawls and pearl headbands. It's the juxtaposition of hand-me-down tulle dresses and thrifted leather jackets. It's the way half of my clothes are scattered on my bedroom floor while the others are neatly stacked in drawers for special occasions. My closet embodies my culture, which resides in its gaps, its unspoken words, and its physical characteristics. Essentially, my culture is intricately yet inexplicably woven into my wardrobe.



ON SANDY LIANG

ANALYSIS

Ava Hayes, New York

Sandy Liang is an Asian American fashion designer who created space for the AAPI community in a traditional exclusive space. Through her unique yet thoroughly popular design choices, she's been part of the revival of nostalgia and culture in fashion. Liang's first collection included a multitude of coats that became incredibly popular at New York Fashion Week in 2014. The jackets were said to be an homage to Liang's upbringing in Chinatown. Today, her style is best defined as hyper-femininity in its simplest form.

During Chinese New Year, Liang released a special collection of jewelry, even converting her father's Congee Dim Sum House restaurant as a place to host her Lunar New Year's party. The party "was a sea of signature Sandy Liang silk bows—as bags, in hair, on dresses, on shoes" (Vogue). It's clear that Liang does not shy away from celebrating her Chinese-American identity, and is ingenious when it comes to finding creative ways to communicate this aspect of herself through her designs. However, this wasn't a choice intended to leverage or navigate her career. When asked about her heritage's influence on her creative process in an interview with TeenVouge, Liang claimed "I've never tried to let it guide my career or identify me as just that, I'm so much more!"

Throughout history, Asian American artists and POC in general have often been forced into the spotlight solely based on their race, even when they are so much more than that. Liang's adamance to

intertwine her culture into her work rather than let her culture conform to her is an example of how many artists today are defining themselves before letting society define them. Here is an example of how many artists today are defining themselves before letting society define them.

Liang's recent collections heavily utilize bows, silk fabrics, and oversized silhouettes to create a unique interpretation of softness and effeminateness—terms, that under her control, feel modern and accessible rather than restrictive or stereotypical. In many ways, Sandy Liang has reclaimed elements of femininity that were once considered either too soft or too domestic and turned them into signature statements that feel empowered and deliberate. Her designs elevate traditionally "girly" elements, like bows and frills, by placing them in unexpected contexts, making them feel contemporary.

Liang's entire image defies the tokenization of Asian artists and offers an elegant and refreshing outlook on Gen-Z fashion short. Liang's hand in the fashion scene should undoubtedly be respected and looked out for in the coming years.



THE NICHEIFICATION OF FASHION

ARTICLE

Emily Wang, California

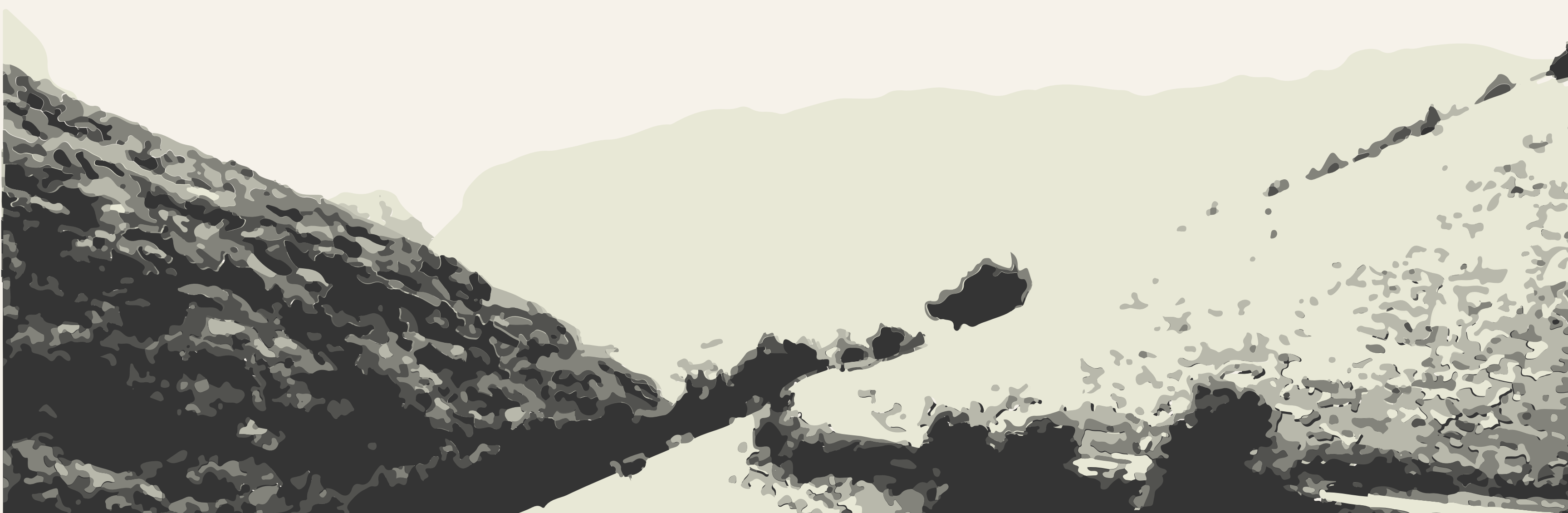
With the growing popularity of various “aesthetics” rising, especially following the most recent decade, individuality seems to be hanging on by a thread, so to speak. Such buzzwords have created a jarring presence for fashion in the modern world. Regardless of their popularity, these trends come across as disingenuous. There is no connecting thread between aesthetics, besides social media virality. Consequently, we’re seeing clothing production occurring at an alarming rate, since their existence is rooted in consumerism, not an actual subculture.

So what does this mean for the organic subcultures that seemed to have faded into obscurity? Subcultures have existed long before the 2020s, cultivating as a result of people who often use fashion to express themselves in similar ways. Though this like-mindedness often extends because these facades die down so quickly, there isn't enough consumer demand to sell out these clothes, giving companies less reason to create quality, sustainable items. Moreover, these create unorganized styles that look mismatched, rather than an attempt at dressing eclectically. If certain subcultures have become irrelevant, perhaps that is the result of the internet, not a lack of engagement.

But why exactly is this a problem? We can look at the growth of “core aesthetics” as a weaker version of earlier subcultures; they are more like short-lived trends as opposed to a lifestyle. People

are focused on individual pieces not styles. It would be easier to buy a single hair bow than completely uproot your wardrobe to be “coquette.” However, the cost of this is fast fashion. If one clothing item gains recognition, even if only momentarily, it is not surprising to see multiple iterations of it pop up in Zara or Shein. Because these facades die down so quickly, there isn't enough consumer demand to sell these clothes, giving companies less reason to create quality, sustainable items. Moreover, these create unorganized styles that look mismatched, rather than an attempt at dressing eclectically.

If certain subcultures have become irrelevant, perhaps that is the result of the internet, not a lack of engagement. Sure, experimenting with different styles can be fun, but what's the point if there is no intent behind it?



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