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The beauty and style of Kerala murals

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Abstract

Mural painting is fundamentally distinct from all other types of pictorial art. Painting is an ancient culture. Kerala mural painting is a well-known aspect of Hindu mythology in Kerala. Chitrastotra is a part of the Vishnu dharmottara purana, a book written in Sanskrit around 1500 years ago. Mural paintings abound in ancient temples and palaces in Kerala, India, dating mostly from the 9th to 12th centuries, when this form of art enjoyed royal patronage. Kerala murals are unrivalled in their subtlety, sharpness, and ethereal beauty. The murals in the Thirunandikkara cave temple are the oldest in Kerala. The following paper discusses the entire process of Kerala mural painting, how the work is done, their origin, culture, and other aspects.

Keywords: Mural, beauty, Kerala

Introduction

Murals are derived from the Latin word murus, which means "walls." Murals are paintings that are embellished on visual components such as the wall, ceiling, or other large permanent surfaces. Kerala murals stand out for their beauty, clarity, and symmetry, as well as their unrivalled linear accuracy. Kerala murals are distinguished by their simple and thematic presentation of idealistic reproductions of humans, animals, and trees with technical excellence, illustrated with rich and delicate strokes, and hued with bright colours.

The mural palette consists of five Panchvarna colours: yellow, red, green, black, and white, which are made from mineral pigments and vegetables. The themes are depicted using common iconographic symbols from the Puranas such as Ramayana and Mahabharata from Hindu mythology, which is stylistically illustrated with brilliance. The expressions are artistically depicted."



Source image: Internet

Fig 1

An overview to Kerala

Kerala, also known as "God's own country," is located on the Indian subcontinent's southwest coast. And it has a unique set of geographical features that make it one of Asia's most popular tourist destinations.

Tools and raw materials

Because of the materials used in the various stages of painting, Kerala murals are both aesthetically pleasing and environmentally friendly. Mural paintings use five colours that are made from minerals and vegetables such as leaves, fruits, stones, and ores. The colours are created in a wooden bowl with tender coconut water and neem tree extracts. Various coatings are applied to the wall to create a durable, robust, and clear layout ready for mural painting. The necessary tools and raw materials are:

- Plaster consisting of lime and sand
- Water
- Extracts (Juice) of Kadukka (Mussels)
- Burnt husk
- Tender coconut water
- Extracts of Neem tree
- Turmeric powder
- Soot
- Acrylic Paints (contemporary painting)
- Five colours or Panchvarna used are yellow, red, green, black and white
- Wooden bowl for mixing of colours

The types of brushes used originally were

- Flat brush: they made from the hair taken from the calves
- Medium brush: made from the hair taken from the belly of goat.
- Fine brush: made from the delicate blades of grass or tails of muskrats.
- Eyyam Pullu, a local leaf is treated and tied to the bamboo sticks.
- Now they using staple brush.

Painting process

The traditional method of drawing figures on the floor was known as dhuleechitramor powder drawing, and it was done with natural materials known as kalam. This art work is done in Kerala temples and scared groves, symbolising idols such as Kali and Lord Ayyappa.

First step: lekhyia karma-the sketch for painting is made of in great precision.

Second step: rekha Varma-detailing enhancement of the outlines are made.

Third step: varna karma-adding base colors per the sketch

Fourth step: vartana karma-shading will be done as per the color depth required

Fifth step: lekha karma-final outlining of the images with the core colors.

Sixth step: dvika karma-the final and finishing touches are done to the paintings.



Source image: Internet

Fig 2

Colour making process

They prepared for the painting by freehand drawing the images on the wall with cow dung ash mixed with coconut water. The outlines are clearly done with cow dung pencils, which are known as (kittalekhini). The shading is expertly coloured by symbolising the characteristics of each god separately. These colours are created by extracting leaves, roots, earth, and stones. Beginning with light colours, the colours are painted in the following order: yellow, red, green, blue, and brown. Black is used to delineate and bring life to the painting when it comes to shading. The painting is protected with a layer of pine resin and oil.

The five fundamental colors:

- Green-they extract of a local pants called eravikkaraor from mixed dried and powdered red leaves of neela amari (Indigofera) (blue in color) and eruvikkara leaves (yellow in color) are used in different proportions for shades of green.
- Black-from the soot of the sesame oil which is collected inside a mud pot or burnt husk
- Yellow-which is obtained from the turmeric powder or from fine ground laterite stones which is used for yellow and red, which is filtered and dried.
- Red-from the minerals like a mixture of lime turmeric powder
- White-which is obtained from lime





Source image: Internet

Fig 3

Themes and styles

The backdrops of these paintings were greatly embellished with flora, fauna and other aspects of the nature.

Few themes noted

- Anantasayanan
- Lekshminarayana
- Krishna with Gopis
- Nataraja as Dakshinamurthi
- Sastha on hunt

Styles

The process of making the colours with indigenous colours, the order of painting the mural with limited colours, and the outlines of "Ra Ra Ra" of the gods and goddesses from the Hindu pantheon are all eye-catching features of Kerala Murals.

Conclusion

India has a long history of mural wealth. These can be traced back to times beyond history. Murals, in general, are a type of valuable testimony of life from the past to the present. The rise of artists such as Raja Ravi Varma was also a factor in the decline of this traditional art form. Murals' accuracy and dynamism are the result of observation. Their position is with the cultured, despite drawing energy from rural art.

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