

Chitrakar del west Bengal [images, stories, words: Formative dialogues through the painted scrolls of female Chitrakars from West Bengal]

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Mariangela Giusti and Urmila Chakraborty, eds., Immagini, storie, parole: Dialoghi di formazione coi dipinti cantati delle donne Chitrakar del West Bengal [Images, stories, words: Formative dialogues through the painted scrolls of female Chitrakars from West Bengal]

Mantova: Universitas Studiorum, 2014. 98 pages. Paperback, 18,00 [euro]. ISBN 978-88-97683-39-1.

CHITRAKAR (citrakar) is the name of professional performers, commonly known as Patua (patuya) in West Bengal, whose handmade, colorful painted scrolls are accompanied by stories, sung while the scroll is unrolled, scene after scene. The painted scrolls, known as pats, narrated through the verses of the Bengali storytellers, are carriers of an interactive and multimedia traditional folk-art form. Their beauty and their unique narrative structure were highlighted in the urban environment of Kolkata as early as 1932 by the Bengali collector Gurusaday Dutta; since then, the charm and popularity of the pats has spread far across the Indian Ocean. Displayed in several world-famous museums, such as the Museum of International Folk Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Fowler Museum at ucla in the U.S., and at the British Museum in Europe, the Patuas eventually found their way to entertain the aesthetic taste of Italian audiences too. After the pioneering effort of the Italo-Bengali "Milon Mela" theater troupe, who invited the aged and experienced Dukhashyam Chitrakar (41) to perform in Italy, the most important event that quenched the Italian thirst for the exotic through the Chitrakars' paintings was held in Milan in 2012. Several pats were exhibited at the Museo del Fumetto (Museum of Comics) of Milan in September/October 2012. One of the curators, Urmila Chakraborty, a professor at the Department of Cultural Mediation in Milan, gave a lecture and asked students and participants to contribute with their reflections, poems, and thoughts (collected and published at the end of the book, 81-89). Following the exhibition, a workshop inspired by the Patuas' art was held with students and teachers of the Department of Intercultural Pedagogy at the University of Milan. Its outcome was a didactic exhibition called "Immagini, suoni, parole." That is where this book, and its title, come from.

If the reader expects to learn anything new about the Chitrakar occupational group and its cultural context, he or she could be easily embittered and disappointed. The book is a compendium of short articles written by students, researchers, school teachers, pedagogues, and cultural mediators, who were superficially exposed to the folk art of the female Chitrakars of Naya village (West Bengal). None of the contributors are trained in the study of oral traditions and verbal arts and none of the articles are based on previous scholarship on the subject or on fieldwork. The only...

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