

What We Write is Kennedy Hardwood's Keystone project for Boston University's Kilachand Honors College and School of Visual Arts. The project contains an exhibition of student work and one-on-one student interviews.

(digitalised and stitched selected pages to highlight Sayak Mitra's interview. Date: September 19, 2024)

Sayak Mitra

Sayak Mitra is an MFA Painting student, graduating with the class of 2024.



Sayak Mitra, *Paisley and Tax Dollar*, 35.25 x 47.25 in. Charcoal, pastel, acrylic, and oil on canvas mounted on panel

ig: @sayakmitra
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Sayak Mitra, *Sakshi Chhilo Siddharth* (installation view), 65 x 96 in. Graphite, acrylic, egg tempera, cardboard, aluminum signs, recyclable food packages, found woods, used gloves, burlap roll, stretched canvas, and reclaimed materials

What We Write

Kennedy Harwood

Introduction

Kennedy Harwood

Welcome to the *What We Write* book, the culminating product of the *What We Write* project. This two-year long research endeavor—and my Keystone project for the Kilachand Honors College—has yielded new discoveries around the importance of handwriting for artists, as well as bolstered community at Boston University's School of Visual Arts (BU SVA). We often understand handwriting as a tool for translating thoughts into written ideas, but handwriting is even more useful and uniquely evident in the processes of artists. While studies have revealed that the mind-to-body connection of writing by hand is broadly helpful in learning and retaining information, this project focuses on handwriting as a creative and generative process that grounds artists' work. By examining the ways in which BU SVA students use handwriting in their work, this research has revealed different behavioral patterns, making it clear that notation by hand—in words and images—is often the most essential first step in the development of artwork.

Over the course of the *What We Write* Project, I gathered qualitative data from current SVA students and facilitated conversations about handwriting and process. Over the 2023 to 2024 school year, the project encompassed a series of *Sketchbook Chats* in the BU Visual Arts Resource and Research Library (VARRL), an exhibition of student work, and one-on-one student interviews. This book documents each of the aforementioned project components as well as two essays on handwriting and community building. The project depended greatly on student participation and has built a greater sense of community in SVA, connecting students across class years and majors who may not have otherwise interacted. In addition to uncovering the exceptional value of handwriting for artists, it is my hope that this project serves to inspire other students to connect, create opportunities for one another, and participate meaningfully in their communities.

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interview: Sayak

Kennedy Harwood

Tell me a little about your work, what are your interests?

Sayak Mitra

I am interested in affirmative deconstruction, which is inextricably interdependent with history and culture. I attempt to investigate my artistic language through my empirical knowledge of human history, cultural flotsam, and social theory. Like any other deconstruction methodology, affirmative deconstruction requires a lot of research work, notes, and reflection until a moral compass appears.

KH

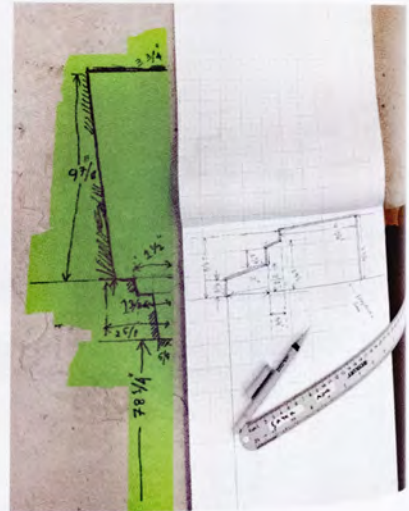
How does handwriting play into your process?

SM

I purposefully leave my handwriting to add humor, which subverts the illusionistic presence of the image. Sometimes I write to make my work more instructional instead of abstract or coded. Often, I take a sign painting approach to emphasize the production side of fine arts, and instructional writing becomes a font that adds an anonymous quality between graffiti and graphic design. My walls are filled with printed images and notes, and I love fluorescent sticky notes. I post the printed pages from the book or academic notes I am reading and add watercolor or ink remarks - need the spirit constantly. Sometimes page become artwork itself - kind of a silly thing I know. Since I want to give the artwork a fresh feel in every move I make, I generally don't stick to any of my process drawings or observational sketches. I love it when my work informs the unplanned and unsupervised afterthought notion of artmaking.



Sayak Mitra, *Dhulagarh Industrial Park*, 67 x 45 x 8 in. Acrylic, graphite, duct tape, food package, recyclable aluminum steel cans, on pegboard and wood



Sayak Mitra, *Look At Left When Entering (layout)*, 14 x 11 in. Marker pen, ink, gridded paper

KH

Can you tell me more about your process, what it looks like with handwriting?

SM

I work primarily on the concept of force - centripetal force and centrifugal force. Although it is a physics term but I feel comfortable with it because my ideas and the materials oppose each other rather comfortably merged. That being said, the only way I develop a solid structure for the concept is a diagram. A hand-drawn diagram with a flowchart or an infographic layout brings ideas and material together. Most of the time hand-drawn diagrams look pragmatic and often my shorthand-coded outline to develop certain stages of work. If it is three-dimensional work, I approach more engineering drawing on grided paper; otherwise, I write about material shapes or memes to loosen up the subject matter.

KH

In your work, how important is writing by hand?

SM

Handwriting works as a record of my presence. I use five languages - Bengali, English, Hindi and Sanskrit little bit Spanish. Last two decades, I have been putting a lot of effort into Sanskrit well to understand Indian scriptures - it is not easy to learn, unfortunately. Also, I am not fluent in Spanish, I can pick words, phrases, and instructions in public spaces because I lived for a while in a Spanish neighborhood in Southern California. I think I can make puns by mixing up different languages and often I write on my work so it becomes much more casual rather than uptight and serious.

KH

Do you return to your sketches or notes in the process of making?

SM

Yes, I very often return to my sketches, notes, annotations, and directional social text that I photograph. It is more like revisiting the primary idea. Since I consider images information, I extract the syntax of visual notes and index them. Notes and diagrams are basically working as an anchor so it can generate a torque to produce a tangible form. And most of the time I purposely procrastinate my process to allow back-and-forth quality and buy extra time to make more sketches, observational notes annotations. This kind of lateral process of generating pieces and relations very often overflows to make a new piece.