

Gurpreet Mankoo: Preserving Punjab’s Fresco Heritage

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The word ‘Fresco’ (taken from the Italian word Affresco, which means ‘Fresh’) refers to a timeless technique of mural painting, where pigments are applied to freshly lay wet plaster. This method contrasts with Fresco-secco (or Secco), where colours are painted onto dry plaster often used to enhance or correct true fresco work. Fresco painting, steeped in the heritage of ancient times, found its most iconic appearance during the Italian Renaissance. It became aenormous medium in the hands of masters like Giotto di Bondone, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Raphael, and later Diego Rivera. Their works transformed walls and ceilings into living tales of human emotion, divinity, and magnificence. In English, the term fresco is often insecurely applied to all wall paintings, leading to a collective delusion that wet-plaster painting was universally practiced. In truth, a wide range of materials and techniques including the subtle use of organic binders were normally incorporated, even in works considered Buon Fresco. Despite this complication, true fresco remains one of the most admired and durable art forms, symbolising both the spirit of its time and the hand of the artist in every brushstroke.

The origins of fresco painting trace back to ancient civilizations such as the Minoans and Romans. However, it reached its zenith during the Italian Renaissance, with masters like Cimabue, Giotto, Masaccio, Fra Angelico, and Correggio pioneering techniques like sotto in su (from below to above). Iconic works include Fra Angelico’s Annunciation and Giotto’s Nativity in the Scrovegni Chapel. Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling and Raphael’s Vatican Stanze murals remain the most celebrated frescoes in art history. By the mid-16th century, fresco declined in popularity, giving way to oil painting. The technique saw renaissance in the 20th century through Mexican muralists like Diego Rivera and artists such as Francesco Clemente.

The Living Walls of Indian Fresco Painting: Indian fresco paintings are a lively tapestry of culture, mythology, and history, etched into the walls of temples, caves, and Havelis for centuries. These murals have served as visual scriptures, preserving timeless narratives and spiritual wisdom. From the sublime Ajanta Caves, where the life of the



Buddha and Jataka tales unfolds in graceful detail, to the Ellora Caves, where Krishna and other deities come alive in vivid hues, each fresco is a window into India’s sacred past. In the Badami Cave Temples, royal and divine figures reflect the grandeur of the Chalukya Dynasty, while the Bagh Caves continue the Buddhist story telling tradition with quiet grace. The frescoes of the Shekhawati Havelis often called the open-air art gallery of Rajasthan capture scenes from daily life, mythology, and colonial encounters with unmatched folk charm. Even India’s folk traditions embrace fresco techniques, seen in the intricate Madhubani paintings that adorn walls and ceilings of homes, and in the minimalist, earthy Warli murals that speak of tribal life through rhythmic, symbolic forms. Together, these fresco traditions embody India’s enduring love for narrative, colour, and the sacred art of storytelling on walls.

Naqqash Gurpreet Mankoo is a fresco artist, from Punjab, India specializing in Mohrakashi, a traditional fresco painting technique from the Indian subcontinent. He is known for reviving this ancient art form, particularly within the Sikh heritage, and is involved in the restoration of heritage sites, including the Krishan Mandir, in Kishan Kot, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mankoo’s work also includes miniature paintings in Kangra and Dakshini styles, along with works on mythological themes. He is a part of the ‘revival of the vanish art’ movement, working to preserve and promote these traditional techniques.

Born in 1975 in the village of Jagraon, Punjab, Gurpreet Singh Mankoo hails from a devout Sikh family rooted in humility and spir-

itual tradition. His parents, Manjit Kaur and Sukhdev Singh were devoted followers of Sant Baba Asmedh Singh and Sewadaar Baba Isher Singh of Nanaksar, Kaleran, whose teachings deeply shaped Gurpreet’s early life. Immersed in the spiritual philosophy of his upbringing, he developed a profound admiration for Sikh teachings, which later found expression through his artespecialy in religious-themed works rendered in a refined realist style. From the young age, Gurpreet showed artistic promise and trained under Sardar Dilbagh Singh, a renowned realist painter from Ludhiana. His formal education in interior decoration, with a specialization in painting, was completed at the Academy of Interior Decoration, Delhi. As his distinctive portraiture gained popularity for its life-like quality and spiritual depth, he established the Mankoo Art Gallery at his residence, an intimate, family-led space that continues to serve the growing appreciation for his work.

With the firm support of his spouse, Kamalpreet Kaur, and their children Harmanpreet Kaur, Harsimrat Kaur and Partap Singh, Gurpreet Mankoo embraced a new artistic journey in mid-life: the complicated and contemplative technique of Mohrakashi. In 2015, a friend introduced him to the restoration work being undertaken at Darbar Sahib by Namita Jaspal, a renowned conservator and heritage consultant based in Chandigarh. His finely detailed drawings, sensitive use of colour, and evident passion for learning, earned him a place on the team restoring the traditional motifs and colours of Mohrakashi. Under Namita Jaspal’s guidance, and through intense self-study and research, he contributed to the restoration of ceiling and

wall motifs along the stairwell from the first to the second floor, during April and May of 2015. This immersive experience deepened his reverence for the craft, offering him the rare privilege of closely observing the brush work of great masters from the past.

His growing attraction for Mohrakashi soon led him to more restoration projects. Later in 2015, he undertook the revitalization of figurative motifs on the inner walls of the Krishna Mandir in Kishan Kot, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Gurdaspur district. By 2015–16, his work expanded to include the interiors and ceilings of Gurdwara Sahib in Mansuran, Ludhiana-West. Mohrakashi is a sacred process in itself- a chemical merger of natural materials during their wet stage to create melodious patterns that raise the surface into spiritual architecture. The ingredients, in their raw state, are coarse and unruly lime, in particular, undergoes months of water curing to release its inner heat. Only then does it bind with pigments extracted from stones. The artist, in turn, mirrors this transformation tolerantly blending, waiting, surrendering to create from many elements a unified soul. For him, each act of restoration is both prayer and practice, a journey toward inner and outer oneness.

Portraiture has long been his area of mastery. His evocative paintings of both local subjects and renowned personalities such as a striking oil-on-board portrait of actor Anupam Kher garnered attention in key exhibitions. Gurpreet Mankoo participated in numerous exhibition and attended workshops.

His work was showcased at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh in 1998, and later in 2001 at the Kalpana Art Society, Ludhiana. Among the highlights was Punjabi Dulhan, an oil-on-canvas portrait that captured the grace and cultural essence of traditional Punjabi bridal imagery.

His second major exhibition, a heartfelt tribute to Ghazal Samrat Jagjit Singh, was presented under the banner of the Sobha Singh Memorial Artist Group, Jagraon. With growing demand for his portraits, landscapes, and religious compositions executed in both oil and acrylic on canvas and board he established his own space: the Mankoo Art Gallery nestled within his residence. It became a haven for art lovers and patrons drawn to the sincerity and skill of his brushwork.

In 2017,he has exhibited his works Matsya

Avtar, 30 x 42 cm (Gouache on paper) at the ‘83rd All India Exhibition of Arts’, the Indian Academy of Fine Arts in Amritsar, Varaha Avtar (40 x 30 cm; Gouache on paper), was displayed at the Fourth International Art Exhibition, India-Netherlands, while ‘Love, Peace and Humanity’, was displayed at WTC Hague Art Gallery, Netherlands. He attended National Miniature Camp at Lalit Kala Akademi Art Galleries of Rabindra Bhawan in New Delhi. Presently, he is engaged in miniature art in Kangra tradition, based on mythological themes and in Das Gurus (ten gurus) in the Dakshini style of miniatures in Bengaluru. He attended camps of Miniature Painting artist at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi and North Zone Cultural Centre, Chandigarh and many more.

Continuing to expand his creative horizons, he began experimenting with various moveable surfaces and mediums to develop an experimental project that reinterprets the Mohrakashi technique in contemporary formats. As his commitment with the brushstrokes of great Mohrakashi masters deepened, so did his ambition to explore other traditional forms. This led him to study the Dakshini Vijayanagar style of miniature painting under the guidance of M V Kambar, a renowned artist based in Bengaluru. His artworks now grace collections across the globe, including institutions and private collectors in the USA, Australia, Singapore, and beyond. Currently working full-time as a miniature painter and freelance realist artist, he remains passionately committed to preserving and stimulating India’s rich artistic traditions. Driven by a constant curiosity, he aims to further research India’s traditional fresco painting practices, an integral element of the country’s architectural legacy. Especially prominent in the Havelis of Rajasthan and Punjab, these intricate murals capture mythological tales, scenes from daily life, and floral motifs, each stroke contributing to the cultural and visual magnificence of the region. Through his evolving practice, he hopes to breathe new life into these time-honoured forms and share their enduring beauty with future generations.

(The author of this article is former Principal, Govt. College of Art, Chandigarh, & Founder and served as OSD at National Institute of Design, Kurukshetra.)



Punjabi Sahitak Sabha releases four Punjabi Books

JANG S. VERMAN

Punjabi Sahitak Sabha (PSS), R S Pura, Jammu organized a literary meet in the residence of well known satire poet of Punjabi, Advo. Bhupinder Singh Bhargav at Tahli Morh, Miran Sahib on 30th June, 2025. Four books viz. Watna De Lekhe (poetry collection) and Swarg Di Bhaal (short story collection) written by Sdn. Hardeep Kour Deepak; ‘Kal Da Supna’ (Bal Sahit-Poetry) written by Ujagar Singh Mehak and edited by his son S. B P Singh Mehak); and ‘S. Manohar Singh (Jeevani Ate Kaav Rachna)’, edited by his son S. Gurdeep Singh Maskeen, were released in a very impressive function.

S. Gurmeet Singh DSP, SDPO, R S Pura was the chief guest on this occasion and Dr. Arvinder Singh Amn, former Additional Secretary, JKAACL presided over the meet. Dr. Baljit Raina, President, Panjanu Lekhak Sabha (PLS), Jammu, and S. Harjit Singh Uppal, President, PSS shared the dais.

S. Harjit Singh Uppal, President, PSS extended formal address. He welcomed the steps taken by S. Bhupinder Singh Bhargav to create occasion of book release of four Punjabi books. S. Charanjeet Singh, a Punjabi scholar of PG Deptt. of Jammu University presented his paper on the released book- ‘S. Manohar Singh (Jeevani Ate Kaav Rachna)’. S. Shamsher Singh Chohalvi and S. B P Singh Mehak presented their views during the programme.

Dr. Arvinder Singh Amn in his presidential address spoke in detail about the contribution of the writers of PSS, R S Pura, especially, S. Manohar Singh Chakar, his respectable and amiable personality, coupled with his literary contribution. He spoke in detail about S. Ujagar Singh Mehak, his editing of the works and the poetry of Chaakar. He read out poems from the books of Sdn. Hardeep Kour Deepak and appreciated the depth and technique adopted by her in her poetry.

S. Gurmeet Singh, SDPO, chief guest, related the great historical events and requested all to follow suit and keep the flag of our colourful history ever flying. Dr. Baljit Singh Raina reminded the audience about the memories of great writers of past times. He encouraged the upcoming writers to follow them and read their creations.

The programme was attractively conducted by Dr. Rajveer Singh, General Secretary, PSS. Vote of thanks was extended by Advo. Bhupinder Singh Bhargav who entertained the audience by his beautiful satire poem in Punjabi.

Summer Theatre, Dance and Painting Workshop of JKAACL culminates

JANG S. VERMAN

A 20 Days Children Summer Workshop of theatre, dance, and painting organized by the J&K Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages under the supervision and guidance of Smt. Harvinder Kour, Secretary, JKAACL, concluded on 3rd July, 2025 with a vibrant valedictory function at Abhinav Theatre, Jammu. Conducted from 12th June to 2nd July, 2025, the workshop aimed at introducing about 100 children to the creative world of theatre, dance and painting, helping them build confidence, expression and discipline through the arts forms. Ms. Deepika K Sharma, Secretary, Department of Culture, J&K, was the Chief Guest on the occasion. The event was attended by art lovers, cultural stakeholders, and proud parents, who appreciated the initiative.

In her address, Ms. Deepika K Sharma lauded JKAACL for its continued efforts in art & cultural education and talent development among children. She also appreciated the young participants for their enthusiasm, energy and performances as well as display of art works, the parents for



their encouragement, and the expert trainers for their tireless dedication in nurturing creativity.

Earlier, Dr. Javaid Rahi, Divisional Head, Jammu, JKAACL, formally welcomed the guests and briefed the audience about the objectives and structure of the workshop.

“This initiative is part of our commitment to cultural education at the grassroots level. These 20 days have not only trained the children artistically but also contributed to their personality development, teamwork, and confidence,” he said. The children

received on hand training under the guidance of well-known experts in their respective fields who worked with commitment and care to shape the young minds.

In theatre, renowned director Sh. Sunil Soni, assisted by Sh. Sahil Bazaz, led the sessions with great insight and energy.

painting, Sh. Suresh Kumar Sharma and Ms. Mahua Gupta inspired the children with imaginative techniques and vibrant ideas. The dance sessions, conducted by seasoned trainer Sh. Satish Chander and

his assistant Sh. Suneel Uppal, brought rhythm, coordination, and joy to the workshop. The performances were further enriched by the presence of skilled accompanists whose contribution added aesthetic and rhythmic depth to the presentations- Sh. Purshotam Lal on Pakhawaj, Sh. Rakesh Kumar on Dholak, and Sh. Sunil Joshi on Harmonium were appreciated for their seamless musical support throughout the sessions. The concluding event featured engaging performances and an exhibition of art-work, showcasing the children's learning and creativity developed over the past three weeks.

The programme ended with a vote of thanks by Ms. Sonali Arun Gupta, Additional Secretary, JKAACL. In her remarks, she expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Guest, expert trainers, accompanists, participating children, their parents, and the entire organizing team.

“This workshop was not just an artistic exercise but a celebration of imagination, teamwork, and confidence-building. We are proud of each participant and thankful to everyone who made this journey successful,” she said.

Hindi poetry book by Ashok Sharma Vashisht released

JANG S. VERMAN

Hindi poetry book titled ‘Kavita Ke Rang Ashok Ke Sang’ written by well known Hindi poet & writer of Jammu, Sh. Ashok Sharma Vashisht was released by Major General (Retd.) Govardhan Singh Jamwal at Jamwal Sahib’s residence on 3rd July, 2025 in a mini release ceremony. Sh. Vikas Manhas, Ms. Pratibha Bhatt and Sh. Hemant Singh Jamwal, who are contributing their articles describing the achievements of the army

men, were also present in the ceremony. According to Sh. Ashok Sharma Vashisht, “Purposeful discussion on many important issues took place with Major General (Retd.) Govardhan Singh Jamwal during the interaction with him.

He expressed his concern about the discrimination being faced by the Dogri culture. He also put light on many issues of historical importance. It may be mentioned here that Major General (Retd.) Govardhan Singh Jamwal is still so active

in his routine life.” He added that in spite of being sick, Jamwal Sahib spared his valuable time for him for this event. “I wish the speedy recovery of General Sir.” he further added.

It may be informed that Sh. Ashok Sharma Vashisht, the renowned Hindi poet & writer has written a large number of poems on various themes and issues related to contemporary life and present scenario around us. He has been felicitated by a large number of literary organizations in India.

