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ELENA BATURINA ON THE BE OPEN INDIA EVENT

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Philanthropist and businesswoman Elena Baturina, who founded creative think tank BE OPEN, talks about this year's BE OPEN India project, which takes place 11 - 28 February 2014

I created BE OPEN, a creative think tank, to give brilliant young creatives the chance to develop their ideas, to push the boundaries of their practice, make new discoveries and help shape a better future. We're still only in our second year, but we've already held events in some of the world's major creative hubs, bringing together students and leading design-world figures for mutual stimulation and inspiration.



The focus for our first year was 'the senses', and we explored the need to engage with people through multi-sensory design. This year, the focus is going to be on researching cultural attitudes and practices, from the north and south, to the east and west. We're launching a two year project called 'Made in ...' that will take us on a global tour to research traditional making practices around the world, looking at how different cultures are using indigenous handcrafting skills and evolving them, through technology and innovation, to make them relevant for the future.



The project starts in India (11 - 28 February 2014,) a country where you feel the powerful presence of both tradition and modernity. From the time of the Mughals through the Rajput, to the present day, Indian craftsmen have been commissioned to carve and inlay marble, wood and stone, to weave in silk and to mould in clay. 'Made In ... India' will showcase 23 of India's leading designers, exhibiting a curated selection of furniture, product and textiles at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi. The exhibition is called 'Samskara', meaning 'making perfect' or 'refining', which is the core of the 'Made in ...' experimental approach: applying new thinking, global influences, technology and commercial know-how to traditional handicrafts.



We've been working with a highly respected curatorial consultant on the project, Sunil Sethi, President of the [Fashion Design Council of India](#). He has been championing India's handmade product globally for over a decade, has helped us select today's most interesting makers for exhibition, promising professionals who draw inspiration from both local and global culture. The handicraft skills we're showcasing, handed down from generation to generation, can be and in some cases are already being, adapted and reinvigorated for the contemporary design world.



BE OPEN has commissioned award-winning architect Anupama Kundoo to design the exhibition space and structures for display. Kundoo's working method - collaborating with groups of craftsmen skilled in traditional techniques, who use indigenous materials to create buildings and structures that are environmentally sound and of socio-economical benefit - made her a natural choice for the project. These artisans have created a very distinctive textured surface as a dynamic backdrop for the products on show, quite the opposite of the shiny, reflecting granite surfaces that machines deliver. This tremendous legacy of skilled work and a willingness to take it forward into the future is a key element of the 'Made In...' series. One of her collaborations for this project has been to connect with students from around the world, part of BE OPEN's commitment to supporting young talent.



Our BE OPEN Talk: 'The future of making in a globalised world' will further examine this issue, with six high-profile, international speakers sharing their experiences of how contemporary brands are increasingly re-connecting with heritage and making as part of their production and marketing methodology.




We're running a competition for more than 40 Indian design schools to contribute their thinking on the subject, looking for design concepts across five home and fashion categories, to platform what is on trend for India's emerging generation of designers and to see if they can tap into traditional handcrafting skills to create objects that can stand out in today's competitive market place.

As much as anything, we want to challenge preconceptions about Indian making as, for many, Indian goods are associated with poor quality and cheap labour. Our project will prove that there is vast potential to reverse that perception.




BE OPEN 'Made in ... India': Samskara runs at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi 11 - 28 February 2014. Free entry.

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