

FRAGRANCE IN THE WARP & WEFT

New York-based textile designer Pallavi Padukone's experimental collection, *Reminiscent*, captures her favourite scents of Bengaluru in handwoven textiles



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It was a bag of lavender that helped textile designer Pallavi Padukone to keep calm and carry on while being cooped up in her studio apartment in New York. "The fragrance of lavender proved therapeutic for my mental well-being during the lockdown," recalls Padukone. An alumna of Shrishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Padukone had been toying with the idea of infusing scents into textiles while still pursuing a degree at the Parsons School of Design in New York in 2019, and so, it would be the reassurance lent by the lavender bag that would nudge her to take it seriously.

CULT FOLLOWING

SCENTS OF MY OORU

"My process started with the thought of textiles enveloping you in a comforting fragrance. The idea of using textiles for one's well-being was one that resonated with me especially during the last year with everything that has been happening around the world," she tells TOI from New York. While experiments related to infusing scents into fabrics chemically have been done, Padukone researched on ways to do it naturally — in that sense her finished project called *Reminiscent* may be among the first successful ones in the field. A collection of 11 handwoven and embroidered tapestries and wall-hangings, *Reminiscent* plays with smells Padukone associates with Bengaluru. Where 'Jasmine' evokes the smell of mallige in Malleswaram's flower market, 'Sandalwood' is about rekindling the



SCENTSUAL: Vetiver-scented wax beads embroidered on cotton; textile designer Pallavi Padukone; embroidery on silk organza with jasmine-scented cotton

warm memory of the sandalwood talcum powder on her grandmother's dresser, and 'Vetiver' is a tribute to the petrichor of Bengaluru's rains. Citronella, rose and clove are the other fragrances she has worked with. And as someone interested in sustainable fashion, she has used only natural dyes and pigments such as madder, cutch, red sandalwood, turmeric, beet and walnut. "I have given each fragrance a colour palette," she adds.

WEAVING IT IN

The idea of integrating scent into textiles requires a stretch of imagination. It's not about spraying perfume on the piece of fabric to have it smelling good



for a day or a week. It is about making the fragrance an organic part of the textile and in such a way that it lasts for a good amount of time. And that, as Padukone attests, involves a lot of trials. "I experimented with materials and natural ways of introducing scents into textiles. I looked at accessible pockets to hold fragrant materials and embed them in the construction of the woven fabrics," says Padukone who specialised in weaving and embroidery, both in her undergraduate and Masters courses. Some of the pieces had her remixing cotton and silk that was resourced from old silk saris bought from Bengaluru; for some others, Padukone chose to weave the (mostly) cotton yarn herself. For the piece called Vetiver (khus), she embroidered over the root.

"The idea of fragrant yarn itself, I felt, opened more doors to possibilities with regard to textile techniques," she notes before remembering the month-long experiments that went on in her kitchen to crack the right formula for creating a scented coating that would be applied to the yarn. "Through a lot of trial and error, I developed a natural coating for cotton yarn and beads using filtered beeswax, natural resin, essential oils and natural pigments for colour," says Padukone. The scents in the artworks she reveals can last anywhere from one month to three months.

Reminiscent was exhibited at Mana Contemporary in Jersey City as part of New York Textile Month in September 2020. "The Jasmine piece resonated with the viewers because you don't find the flower in the US," she says. The collection also received a special mention as part of the Dorothy Waxman International Textile Design Prize. Fragrance-infused textiles will continue to be a subject of interest for Padukone but before she signs off, she jokes at the irony of it all. "At a time when masks are the new normal and most events are online, I have chosen to work with scents — they require you to use your sense of smell, and they can't be photographed or experienced digitally. Scent is difficult to experience during Covid!" she laughs.

The collection can be viewed on www.pallavipadukone.com/reminiscent