

UNESCO Chairholder's Message

Ibn Arabi's aphorism, "The gnostic is not he who knows many things, but he who knows the connections between things,"¹ gestures towards a paradigm of knowledge that subverts the fragmented nature of disciplinary specialization. This notion converges with the principles of polymathy, wherein multiple epistemological frameworks intersect to refract a complex understanding of the world. As we inhabit the interstitial spaces between disciplines, and the boundaries between them begin to blur, we may uncover new modalities of knowledge that challenge the reified distinctions between fields of study. The mirror of knowledge is always already fragmented, and yet, it is in the act of reflection that we may glimpse the interconnectedness of things.

Intersectionality posits that individual and group experiences are shaped by multiple factors, including social, cultural, and epistemological contexts. In the context of polymathy and inclusion, intersectionality reveals the ways in which disciplinary boundaries intersect with demographic categories, revealing multifaceted experiences of inclusion and exclusion. By examining these intersections, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how knowledge production and dissemination are shaped by power dynamics and social contexts.

The recognition of disciplinary inclusion as a crucial aspect of promoting diversity and inclusion is central to the mission of the UNESCO Chair on Inclusion through Art at the Mariam Dawood School of Visual Arts and Design (MD-SVAD) at Beaconhouse National University (BNU). By focusing on disciplinary inclusion, the Chair aims to create a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between knowledge production, power, and identity. Through its work, the Chair seeks to promote an environment that values diverse forms of knowledge and expertise, cultivating innovative solutions to pressing issues. Relative to EART², the Chair aims to ignite a discourse around expression elsewhere – locating the discourse of creative expression beyond the arts.

The recent surge in global tensions has raised concerns about the possibility of a nuclear war, highlighting the fragility of our highly polarized world, shaped by the nation-state paradigm that has dominated the past century.³ This paradigm is closely tied to the forces of industrialization and overt nationalism,⁴ which have contributed to the compartmentalization of knowledge.⁵ Such compartmentalization has led to disciplinary siloing, where knowledge production and dissemination occur within isolated domains, limiting interdisciplinary approaches and resulting in a fragmented understanding of global issues.

In this context, rethinking the nation-state paradigm becomes essential. By adopting more inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches, we can gain a deeper understanding of global issues and work towards more collaborative and equitable solutions. The mirror of knowledge reflects back our own limitations and biases, and it is only by acknowledging and addressing these that we can move towards a more comprehensive understanding of the world.

In the contemporary era, the prospect of hope emanates from the confluence of minds, transcending the boundaries that have long compartmentalized knowledge. The UNESCO Chair on Inclusion through Art at MD-SVAD, BNU, seeks to dismantle these barriers, cultivating a paradigm where inclusivity is not merely an adjunct but a fundamental aspect of our pursuit of knowledge. By expanding the notion of inclusivity beyond the traditional categories of class, gender, race, and ethnicity, we aim to create a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between art, design, and society.

At BNU, the UNESCO Chair on Inclusion through Art finds a natural habitat, one that is deeply rooted in the institution's 21-year history of bringing together a diverse and vibrant academic community. Through its nonprofit ethos and scholarship programs, BNU has cultivated a rich environment that transcends traditional boundaries. The university's pioneering regional partnerships, including the UMISAA Scholars program, bring together talented students from across the SAARC region, rendering SVAD a singular art institution in South Asia.

MD-SVAD's curriculum has consistently defied geographical and political borders, embracing an interdisciplinary approach that permeates all its programs in Visual Arts and Design. The newly established Interdisciplinary Expanded Design and Art program (BA Hons IEDA) further pushes the boundaries of transdisciplinarity and polymathy. Under the aegis of the UNESCO Chair, IEDA has evolved into an initiative that encompasses a diverse set of activities, including the degree program (BA Hons IEDA), a festival, an incubation center, and this journal, all interconnected through an ecosystem of transdisciplinary explorations that leverages the power of creative expression.

As we launch The IEDAs Journal, a platform that navigates the intersections of art, design, and polymathy, we inhabit the threshold between past, present, and future. This inaugural issue, a testament to the complex relationships between art, design, and society, seeks to disrupt the boundaries between disciplines, generating a deeper understanding of the world through the convergence of diverse perspectives and methodologies. In doing so, we aim to create a forum for

critical inquiry that unsettles our assumptions and complicates our understanding of the world, leveraging the power of the written word to traverse time and space.

Through the lens of art and design, we aim to excavate new narratives, challenge disciplinary boundaries, and forge connections between creative individuals and communities. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."⁶ As we cultivate harmony and understanding through the IEDAs Journal, we invite scholars, artists, and practitioners to join us in this journey of exploration and discovery.

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