

Outlining the scope of the Fellowship

The Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, in collaboration with Royal Enfield, is pleased to announce the launch of a new fellowship platform. The Himalayan Fellowship for Creative Practitioners supports projects by creative practitioners working across diverse artistic mediums at the intersection of ecology and cultural knowledge, located in the Western and Eastern Himalayan regions, including the eight Northeastern states.

The Western and Eastern Himalayan regions are incredibly rich terrains in terms of their topography, ecology, demographics, and cultural heritage. Much like other climate zones in the subcontinent, these areas are facing challenges owing to fragile ecosystems, their vulnerability to climate change, large-scale deforestation, unsustainable tourism, cultural displacement, and a lack of sensitive approaches to conserving the diversity that exists across these landscapes.

The Himalayan Fellowship is framed to respond to the cultural and ecological urgencies in the Himalayan region, with a particular focus on themes of traditional cultural and knowledge systems, heritage and identity, questions of ecology and biodiversity, environmental justice, sustainability, climate change and natural resources. The Fellowship is outlined as an attempt to extend systems of support to creative practitioners who are working in these regions, responding to such urgencies, developing critical methodologies and highlighting alternative conservation efforts directed at awareness building, advocacy, documentation and community engagement.

The Fellowship will support artists and creative practitioners—individuals and collectives—from the Indian Himalayan Region. Through the aegis of this Fellowship, we are keen to work with and foreground sustainable and ecologically-grounded practices and methodologies that espouse long-term modes of collaboration with people and landscapes that are site-specific, community-oriented, and have strong creative and pedagogic outcomes that can be further activated and disseminated.

Himalayan-specific models of sustainable and ecologically grounded practices are the need of the hour, whether within industries such as tourism or within methods of sustaining local resources livelihoods. As a platform encouraging innovative and experimental approaches to artmaking, this Fellowship seeks to spotlight issues related to ecology and intangible cultural

heritage, forming closer associations and deep

understanding of local cultural and natural resources. Pushing the boundaries of how community engagement is construed, the Fellowship will also be an opportunity for creative practitioners from the region to present their collaborations with local communities and organizations on a more expanded stage, mapping new ways of responding to the needs and concerns of these stakeholders. It hopes to facilitate the exchange of ideas and practices between artists, resource persons, conservationists, and communities, in order to foster, build and strengthen collaborations between these groups and networks, marking a greater investment in the conservation and preservation of resources in and across the Himalayas.

Outlined below are some themes that fall under the scope of the inaugural edition of the Fellowship, listed to help clarify the ambit of the Fellowship. Please note that these have not been listed as watertight categories; rather, they serve as freely overlapping areas of focus. Our supported projects extend across any/all of the following themes.

- Traditional knowledge, cultural heritage and identity: Exploring the themes of traditional knowledge and practices in the Himalayas, including the ways in which these practices are interconnected with local ecosystems and landscapes, and the challenges faced by these communities in maintaining their cultural heritage in the face of environmental change. This could include projects undertaking documentation of indigenous knowledge systems, traditional cultural practices and their respective communities, highlighting Traditional Ecological Knowledge, sacred landscapes, oral histories and material cultures.
- Sustainability and resilience: Focusing on the ways in which communities are building more sustainable and resilient systems through local livelihoods and infrastructures, the systems and structures that uphold and preserve certain ways of life, while creating space for adaptation and change. This could include projects that look at the role of cultural practices in the context of environmental change and equitable futures, responsible tourism and waste management; how sustainability can be understood with regard to mass production and traditional craftsmanship, and how collective/community-led initiatives are mapping and revitalising sustainable ways of living.

- Climate change and adaptability: The cultural and social impacts of climate change on ecosystems, and how projects and practitioners are developing creative alternate pedagogies of awareness-building around land and water use; questions of environmental justice and advocacy for marginalised groups; how traditional cultural practices are being transformed in response to changing environmental conditions; the role of community-led initiatives in mitigating the effects of climate change.
- Ecosystems and biodiversity: Looking at relationships between humans and the natural environment, with a focus on the role of traditional practices in promoting biodiversity and ecological conservation, landscape ecology and the impacts of urbanisation in these regions; modes of safeguarding in the context of rapid urbanisation, large-scale migration, industrialisation and environmental change; exploring region-specific, community-specific ways of disseminating resources.