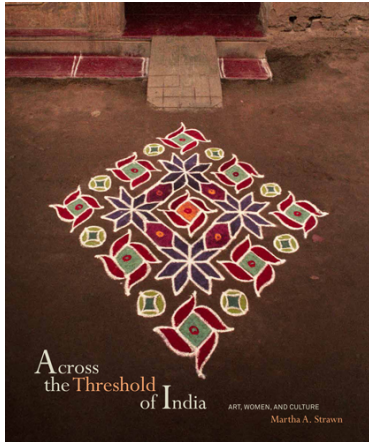


*Across the THRESHOLD of India: Art, Women, and Culture*

by Martha A. Strawn

with introductions by Kapila Vatsyayan and Mark H. Sloan, an historical essay by William K. Mahony,  
and drawings by Jack Colling

***An important and strikingly beautiful book about the sacred Hindu practice of threshold drawing!***



List price: \$75.00 U.S. (trade discount); price increases to \$95.00 (U.S.)  
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Edition: Hardcover/PLC with jacket

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Illustrations: 32 duotone and 167 four-color photographs by the author,  
7 drawings, and 1 color map

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In the Hindu world-view, *threshold* is a profoundly important concept that represents a passage between one space and place and another, creating a visual bridge between the secular and the sacred.

Accordingly, the literal threshold a person crosses when entering and exiting a home or business symbolizes the threshold one crosses between the physical and spiritual realms of existence. Hindus have long believed it is possible to affect a person's well-being by using diagrams to sanctify the "threshold space." The diagrams do so by "trapping" ill will, evil, bad luck, or negative energy within their colorful and elaborate configurations, thereby cleansing those who traverse the space and sending them on their way with renewed spirit, positive energy, and good luck and fortune.

The creation of the threshold diagrams is steeped in Indian history and culture going back thousands of years. Practiced by women, it was long considered a vernacular art. But, as this pioneering book reveals, the diagrams represent highly sophisticated mathematical and cosmological underpinnings that have been handed down from one generation of women to the next. As India has modernized and rapidly become more urban, however, more Indian women have acquired more complicated lives, allowing less time to continue the practice of threshold drawing and relying, increasingly, on homogenized pattern books. And so a longstanding and critically important expression of Indian life,

religion, and culture is becoming less common to the point the tradition is threatened.

*Across the THRESHOLD of India* reveals, the story of the threshold drawings for the first time, history of how the threshold drawings evolved, what they have meant and represent in Indian and Hindu culture, and how the practice became a high form of vernacular art for religious and everyday life. By combining her unforgettable photographs—most of which are in the permanent collection of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the nation's foremost research center for Indian culture and art—with the most recent scholarship on the history and art of the threshold drawings, Martha A. Strawn has given the world a unique and enduring gift. Her book is a work of *visual ecology* that perceptively portrays one of India's and the world's longest and least-known religious practices—the art of sanctifying space through the creation of threshold diagrams.

Blurbs:

"Martha Strawn's photographs reveal an ancient tradition unfamiliar to most outside of India. The intricate patterns of the *rangoli* diagrams, rendered in lyric detail, connect these Hindu women with others throughout millennia who have sought to find the divine within sacred geometries. Strawn effectively demonstrates how this inherited custom has evolved from a religious necessity into a fascinating and enduring form of cultural expression. This book is a welcome addition to the growing literature about Indian art and culture, with Strawn's timeless photographs at its center."

—Mark H. Sloan, Director and Senior Curator of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston, from his Introduction

"It still astonishes me that no one has focused on this very important aspect of the Hindu religious experience. This beautiful and informative book will be a first in this area and one that will fill an important gap."

—Vasudha Narayanan, Distinguished Professor of Religion at the University of Florida, past President of the American Academy of Religion, and author of *Hinduism*

About the Author

*Martha A. Strawn* is Professor of Art Emerita at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte and a photographer based in North Carolina and Florida who is recognized worldwide for combining aesthetic and scientific inquiries into the study of place that she calls *visual ecology*. She co-founded The Light

Factory Contemporary Museum of Photography and Film in Charlotte, and she has served on numerous boards throughout her career, including Friends of Photography and the Center for the Study of Place. She received a Fulbright Fellowship to India and also a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in photography. Her work is exhibited internationally in both art and science museums, among them the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Smithsonian Institution, Science Museum of Minnesota, San Diego Museum of Natural History, Princeton Art Museum, National Geographic Society Museum, Museum of Florida Artists, Mint Museum of Art, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston, and Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Her books include *Alligators, Prehistoric Presence in the American Landscape* (1997) and, with Yi-Fu Tuan, *Religion: From Place to Placelessness* (2009).

#### About the Essayists

*Kapila Vatsyayan* is a renowned Indian scholar of classical Indian art, architecture, and dance and the founding Director and Chairperson of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. She is the author of many books, including *The Indian Arts, Their Ideational Background and Principles of Form* (1995), *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts* (2003), and *Transmissions and Transformations: Learning through the Arts in Asia* (2011).

*Mark H. Sloan* is Director and Senior Curator of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston and the author and co-author of ten books, including *Force of Nature: Site Installations by Ten Japanese Artists* (2007), *Return to the Sea: Saltworks of Yamamoto Motoi* (2012), and, with Roger Manley, *Self-Made Worlds: Visionary Folk Art Environments* (1997).

*William K. Mahony* is the Charles A. Dana Professor of Religion and Chairman of the Religion Department at Davidson College, where he teaches courses on the religions of India. His books include *The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination* (1997) and *Exquisite Love: Heart-Centered Reflections on the Narada Bhakti Sutra* (2014).

*Jack Colling* is an artist currently based in Blairsville, Georgia. For fifty-nine years, he lived and worked in Central Florida, where he practiced the art of pen-and-ink drawing, specializing in nature, endangered species, and landscapes. His work is in numerous private collections and has been exhibited throughout Florida and Georgia.