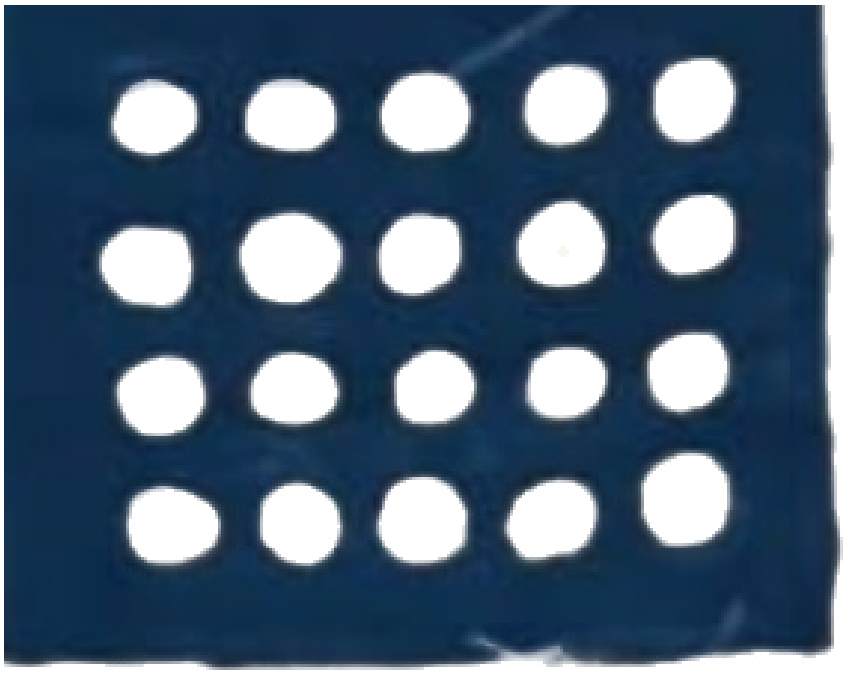
राष्ट्रीय डिज़ाइन संस्थान
National Institute of Design
मध्यप्रदेश Madhya Pradesh

OPEN ELECTIVE 2026

VERNACULAR PROCESSES

Learning from Place; The Intelligence of the Vernacular



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Vernacular practices are the result of a continuous relationship between people, place, climate, material and culture. Across India, communities have developed ways of building, making, moving, dressing, cultivating, working, performing and living that respond specifically to their local conditions. These practices may appear simple, but they often represent generations of observation, experimentation, adaptation and collective knowledge. This theme invites students to look beyond the visible forms of vernacular culture and investigate the processes, knowledge and principles that have produced them. Students will examine why particular materials are used, how forms and practices respond to climate and environment, how local resources influence making and construction, and how social and cultural practices shape everyday objects, activities and environments. The exploration may extend across diverse areas such as craft, architecture, food, agriculture, textiles, clothing, tools, movement, martial arts, games, performance, ecological practices, water management, repair and everyday systems of living. Through observation, documentation, conversations with practitioners and communities, and hands-on experimentation, students will learn to decode the intelligence embedded within vernacular processes. They will investigate not only what a community does, but why and how a particular way of doing has evolved, how knowledge is transmitted, and how practices adapt to changing circumstances. The workshop does not seek to encourage the replication of traditional forms. Instead, it encourages students to understand the logic behind the form or practice and consider how these principles can inform contemporary design challenges. In doing so, the vernacular becomes not a visual style to borrow from, but a source of knowledge that can expand the way designers think about context, adaptation, resourcefulness, resilience and place.



COURSES OFFERED:

1. **JEWELLERY DESIGN**
2. **खेल से खुलासे** – Revelations of Play
3. **KAALA JAADU**
4. **VISUALIZING ORAL TRADITIONS**
5. **BEYOND THE FIBRE: REIMAGINING MOONJ**
6. **KALARIPAYATTU**
7. **BEYOND 'TRADITION' & 'JUGAAD':** Decoding the intelligence of 'Local'
8. **COLORS & COMMUNITY**
9. **THEATRE** (People, Traditions and Performance)



1. JEWELLERY DESIGN

This elective explores the intersection of vernacular knowledge, material intelligence, and contemporary jewellery design. It investigates how traditional practices, shaped by the relationships between people, place, climate, culture, and locally available resources, can inspire new approaches to designing and making jewellery.

Students will explore the possibilities of wood and fabric as primary materials for jewellery making, examining their physical properties, tactile qualities, structural behaviours, and potential for material interaction. Through contextual research, observation, hands-on experimentation, and iterative prototyping, students will investigate traditional methods of making, joining, binding, weaving, layering, and assembling materials.

The course encourages students to look beyond conventional jewellery materials and aesthetics, discovering how vernacular principles such as tension, flexibility, interlocking, modularity, layering, repair, and resource efficiency can inform contemporary jewellery practices. Rather than replicating traditional ornaments or craft forms, students will reinterpret the underlying knowledge, techniques, and problem-solving approaches of vernacular practices to develop innovative, meaningful, and wearable design expressions.

The elective will culminate in a series of contemporary jewellery prototypes that demonstrate material sensitivity, experimentation, craftsmanship, and an understanding of the relationship between cultural knowledge and design innovation.



2. खेल से खुलासे
REVELATIONS OF PLAY

Across India, communities have spent generations inventing ways of playing that perfectly match their local climate, materials, and culture. A simple handmade toy, a street game, or a seasonal ritual is never just entertainment-it is a masterclass in resourcefulness, materials, physics, and social systems.

In this elective, you will look beyond the surface of traditional play to unpack the intelligence behind how objects and games are made and used. The course comprises of introduction to the area of vernacular toys and games. Students will be encouraged to find vernacular play; both in terms of the act of playing as well as concepts and materials related. Play culture will be a focus in this elective and discussions on how it has evolved will lead to understanding of learning from play. Students will also be encouraged to study vernacular systems and processes of play and to bring new design based on the same.

This course bridges multiple disciplines by exploring:

- Material & Craft: Why specific local resources are chose and how they are shaped.

- Systems & Mechanics: How game rules, materials, and spaces adapt to local environments.

- Culture & Interaction: How playful rituals shape human behavior and transmit knowledge.

Through hands-on experimentation, documentation, and dialogue with local makers, you will decode the design logic embedded in these vernacular systems. Students will be able to explore core principles of traditional play - resourcefulness, resilience, and deep contextual awareness and apply those to modern challenges in their own creative discipline.



3. KAALA JAADU

The Art of Tattoo has existed in India since eternity and has traditionally defined one's identity. Tattoos or gudna (in Hindi) were not just for beautification of one's body but for many reasons such as beliefs, religion, status, therapeutic and et al. They say tattoo markings were flaunted as jewellery the kind of jewellery no one could take away from them even if they were to lose all their worldly possessions. In India tattoo history ranges from the hills of the northeast to the vast span of deserts in the west.

This elective aims to bring to the forefront the elaborate history of Tattoo Art in India. Our endeavor is to conceptualize ideas which can be a fantastic representation of our heritage and culture. The traditional tattoo art is a rich dictionary of motifs and stories and through this workshop we want to rejuvenate some of these traditional gems. Through the workshop we can create souvenirs, jewellery, moving images, installations, visual narrative or documentation of tattoos which can form great gifting ideas.



4. VISUALIZING ORAL TRADITIONS

Long before knowledge was written, communities across India held it in speech: in recipes, riddles, sayings, myths, jokes, epics, beliefs and rituals, passed from one generation to the next. These oral forms are living systems of memory. They record how a community reads its climate, land, materials and relationships, and they adapt with every retelling.

This elective course asks students to turn to the oral worlds of their own regions and communities of origin. Through conversations with family and elders, or through a published oral text, students gather a piece of oral knowledge and learn to read between its lines for the principle, metaphor or logic that makes it work. Drawing on Loksutr's work with indigenous knowledge and oral worlds, the course introduces how communities sustain the intergenerational flow of memory, and what changes when that memory is retold.

Students then translate the intangible into the tangible. Working in their own disciplines, they give the essence of their chosen piece a physical form: an animation, a textile, an object, a visual narrative, a performance or a system. The aim is not to illustrate or replicate tradition, but to understand the logic behind it and ask how design can carry memory forward.



5. BEYOND THE FIBRE: REIMAGINING MOONJ

This course explores Moonj grass as a natural, locally rooted material and the traditional knowledge systems associated with its use in craft practices. Students will engage with the material, understand its properties, preparation and traditional construction techniques through hands-on sessions with a master artisan.

The workshop is being undertaken as part of the broader elective theme Vernacular Practices: Learning from Place – The Intelligence of the Vernacular. The intention is to encourage students to look beyond conventional design approaches and understand how communities have developed material knowledge, making techniques and functional solutions in response to their local environment, resources and cultural contexts.

Through direct interaction with the artisan, material exploration and experimentation, students will gain an understanding of the ecological, cultural and functional dimensions of Moonj craft. They will learn to observe, analyse and reinterpret traditional processes, exploring possibilities for contemporary applications through products, artefacts, structures or other tangible design outcomes.



6. KALARIPAYATTU

This elective introduces Kalaripayattu, the traditional martial art of Kerala, as an embodied vernacular knowledge system. It explores how movement, posture, balance, rhythm, breath, spatial awareness and disciplined repetition shape the relationship between the body, its environment and the community. Students will be introduced to the kalari as a learning space and to key elements of training, including body conditioning (Meythari/Meyppayattu), steps (chuvadu), stances (vadivu) and movement techniques (adavu).

Through practitioner-led demonstrations, guided beginner-level movement sessions, observation and discussion, the course will examine how knowledge is transmitted through oral instruction, imitation, correction, repetition and apprenticeship. It will also consider the social and cultural contexts in which Kalaripayattu has evolved, including its connections with performance and traditional body-care practices. The elective frames the body as a living archive of local knowledge and asks what designers can learn from a practice in which intelligence is developed through doing.



7. BEYOND ‘TRADITION’ & ‘JUGAAD’
DECODING THE INTELLIGENCE OF ‘LOCAL’

What makes an object smart? Is it a high-tech sensor, or is it a period of clever engineering using materials found right in your backyard?

In a world dominated by mass-produced plastic and factory-standard designs, we tend to label ‘local’ craftsmanship either museum-worthy ‘traditions’ or crude ‘jugaad’ hacks. In doing so, we miss out on the rich, context-driven design thinking that makes these objects actually work.

Local innovation doesn’t exist in a vacuum - it naturally overlaps with so many other ways humans create and adapt. That’s why this course dives into the entire spectrum of human problem-solving: from ancient ‘indigenous wisdom’ to time-tested ‘traditional knowledge’,our subject ‘Vernacular intelligence’ and all the way to ‘modern factory designs’ and even quick-thinking ‘jugaad’ hacks.

Together, we will reverse-engineer real-world items using three simple steps: figuring out how they work, discovering why they were made that way, and remixing their core principles to tackle modern problems like climate change and plastic waste. Through hands-on analysis, dismantling objects, and creative redesign challenges, participants will learn how old-school logic can power the next generation of sustainable, real-world solutions.



8. COLORS & COMMUNITY

What makes a place visually distinctive? Why do certain colours, materials, textures and objects become part of a community’s everyday identity?

This course invites students to explore the relationship between colour, culture, people and place through sensory observation and hands-on design experimentation. Moving beyond conventional colour theory, students will investigate everyday environments through sight, smell, sound and touch, documenting the visual and material character of local communities.

Through observation walks, field visits, visual documentation, material exploration and rapid prototyping, students will learn to identify patterns, interpret contextual clues and discover design opportunities within ordinary surroundings.

The collected observations will serve as the foundation for contemporary design explorations, encouraging students to translate their discoveries into original outcomes rather than reproduce traditional forms or motifs.

The course culminates in an individual Community Colour Story and a collective Colour & Community Field Atlas, bringing together the discoveries, visual narratives and design experiments developed throughout the course.



9. THEATRE
PEOPLE, TRADITIONS AND PERFORMANCE

The course aims to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of theatre and its relationship with human life, nature, and the surrounding environment, exploring its connections with music, dance, costume, and design.

It introduces students to the history and evolution of Indian theatre, the Natyashastra, vernacular performance traditions, and the traditional and contemporary practices of theatre. Through theoretical discussions, demonstrations, and individual and group-based practical exercises, students explore acting, voice modulation, punctuation, movement, stretching, facial expressions, eye movements, hasta mudras (hand gestures), and the concepts of rasa and bhava. The course also introduces the fundamentals of theatre and dance makeup, traditional and contemporary costume design, and costume development for theatre, films, and stage performances. Emphasis is placed on understanding the cross-pollination of art forms and the role of art and design in interpreting human experiences and engaging with nature. By combining conceptual learning with experiential practice, the course seeks to foster creativity, empathy, self-awareness, critical thinking, and collaborative skills, enabling students to appreciate theatre as a holistic medium of expression and an important intersection of performing arts and design.

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REGISTRATION OPENS: 13/11/2026 | FRIDAY | 4:00 PM

REGISTRATION CLOSES: 16/11/2026 | MONDAY | 4:00 PM

THE REGISTRATION LINK WILL REMAIN ACTIVE FOR **72 HOURS (3 DAYS) ONLY**.



NOTE:

- The allotment of elective courses is purely on a first-come, first-served basis.

- Each Elective course has a maximum of 17 students. However, the final number of students in each course may vary.

- Once the registration is done, no requests for modifications or resubmissions will be entertained.

- The assigned elective will be final and cannot be altered later.

- Failure to register within the specified timeframe may result in the allocation of an elective from the remaining available seats.

- Students should register only with the official email-id.