



concept: **PAOLA FERRAROTTI**

illustration: **VARIOUS ARTISTS**

8 Ways to Draw an Elephant is primarily an activity book — it features the elephant rendered in 8 different Indian art styles. Some styles are bold and graphic, others rely on delicate and intricate lines. Some use patterns, others work with decorative motifs. However, each of these styles captures what is characteristic of this magnificent beast — for some, it is the ears, others, the trunk, for yet others its size. While each elephant looks different, it is evident that they are all elephants!

The book is thus an early introduction to a very important idea in the arts — the idea of representation. Through a series of activities — colouring, patterning, tracing, decorating and creating their own elephant — children come to understand the role of the imagination in representing the real. They realise that art is as much about their version of what they see and how they represent that, as it is about what they actually see.

For the art educator, each of the 8 styles offers a unique context to think about the relationship between a particular art activity and the learning it fosters and enables.

Here is a list of things that educators who have worked with the book noticed:

- All children, from the youngest (usually 3+) to the oldest (8+) are fascinated by and love the elephant. This helps them take to **colouring or patterning or even tracing** the grey outlines on the page with affection. The outline acts both as a holding line, as well as one that encourages the child to begin work on a picture.
- Younger children are likely to start with images that comprise **simple outlines**, and which contain plenty of blank space. Many of them begin to **colour vigorously** and the results are often startling and dramatic. Older children use colour just as happily — for many of them, **integrating colour patches with patterns** can prove challenging and exciting. This is a skill demanded of many Indian indigenous artists — often colour has to be melded into images that are executed using very fine lines and dots.
- **Patterning is popular with older children.** Children copy patterns that are there in the book, as well as create their own. Patterning also nurtures **quiet enjoyment** — children relish the control that they learn to exercise over their hand, even as they **invent their own** imaginative patterns. Interestingly, in most Indian art traditions, younger artists are

put to work 'filling' blank spaces with fine lines, decorations and so on, before they learn to compose an entire picture on their own. This is the case with those who train in the Mithila and Mata-Ni-Pachedi art styles that feature in this book.

- **Talking and asking questions** help to guide some children into doing — for example, a lively discussion on what elephants eat led to the beast's large belly filled with shapes of leaves, stalks, nuts and fruits! The **connection between talking and drawing** is an interesting one, and can lead to the **most unexpected results** in the doing.
- Some children also draw more easily **when they have a story to tell**: this becomes useful when children want to not merely trace, pattern or fill, but **add to the composition**. The elements to be added emerge naturally as it were, when a child places the image on the page into a story she has made up. There are many **traditions of narrative art** in India, which work on the same principle: Patua art (featured in the book) is a good example of art that tells stories. Patua artists compose narrative pictures, and string them together with words that originally were songs.

