

Friends of
AseeMa



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Learn more about Friends of Aseema, or contact us, at friendsofaseema.org

Friends of Aseema is a registered 501(c)(3) corporation organized under Pennsylvania law. The official registration and financial information of Friends of Aseema, Inc., may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

Thank you for helping us make 2023 a banner year for Friends of Aseema!

This year, you increased your donations, held events, attended our events and markets. All of this has helped us to provide more support to the Aseema Charitable Trust, which has more than 25 years of experience in providing secular, high-quality, value-based education, and medical care to thousands of extremely marginalized slum children in Mumbai, and in a remote tribal region around Igatpuri.



Recently, two of our supporters and a board member visited Aseema in Mumbai. Madhuri Murli, one of our earliest supporters, wrote that she “left feeling good about the world we live in and assured of good people in it.” That mirrors my own feelings.

At an event this year, I explained in brief why I love Aseema: Aseema is a simple good in the world. It is not political. It is not religious. They do not discriminate. They are a group of diverse people working together to try to help extremely poor children get a chance to live a better life.

Aseema is an island of good in our tumultuous world. We can lift it up, support this effort, and learn from it.

Christine Biancheria
President, Friends of Aseema

H O O K Y

The Board Game



This year, Hooky, the board game we co-designed, was published by Rio Grande Games, to whom we are so thankful. Sales to date allowed us to sponsor a classroom at Aseema. More copies are available in some stores and online from smaller to larger sellers such as Amazon and Walmart.



One prominent Canadian reviewer named it her Number 1 Game of 2023, and a top U.S. reviewer labeled it "great" and listed it as Number 3 on his list of Most Surprising Games of 2023.

Here is a photo of two games of Hooky going at once at a tournament!



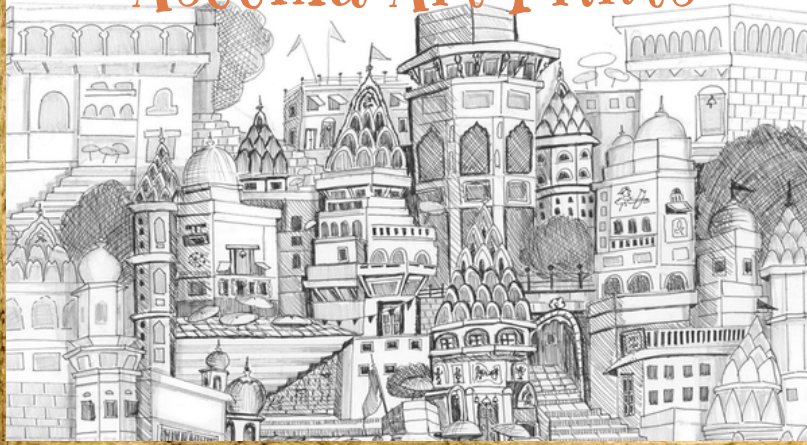
Flute Theory Madhuri Murli Live

Madhuri Murli, talented singer/songwriter and creator of Flute Theory, began supporting us in our early days, thanks to publicity created by Priyanka Chopra Jonas and her spouse Nick Jonas.



Madhuri stepped forward to hold an event in San Jose, California, featuring her original work and, instead of selling tickets, she asked attendees to donate to Friends of Aseema. What a treat that was!

Aseema Art Prints



'Benares,' by Seeta Jaiswal - more on [page 16](#)

As part of the Room 13 movement (a method for teaching art to children), Aseema students create astounding pieces, which we are pleased to help bring to the world! FoA sells [high-quality art prints](#) of original artwork by Aseema students, from which all profits go back to Aseema.

At a market, a gentleman approached our booth to purchase a print of a harp, made by a 14-year-old Aseema student. It turned out that the print was a gift to internationally acclaimed harpist Joel von Lerber of Switzerland. Here he is happily holding up his gift.



For examples and information about some pieces, go to [pages 15-18](#)

Original Artwork Steals the Show

This year, we organized two art events featuring original works by Aseema students and young alumni. The Undercroft Gallery, situated at the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, showcased the art throughout October and November. The exhibition sparked interest and fostered meaningful discussions, with a member of the art committee noting it as one of their most successful shows.



In December, we hosted the "Paint the Town" event at the Square Cafe in Pittsburgh. Attendees enjoyed a brief presentation on Aseema and its art program before engaging in an art auction. Described as "fun" by participants, the event not only provided entertainment but also generated significant funds for Friends of Aseema to further our mission.

We extend our gratitude to our sponsors, including Barth Rovnan LLC Trial Attorneys, Plummer Slade, Games Unlimited, Cathy Raphael, Patricia Garber, and others, as their support made this event possible.

And Over in India...



Aseema received a new building to which to relocate one of its schools, allowing about 300 more children to attend from the waitlist.

However, swift and costly renovations made this a challenging year. Friends of Aseema takes pride in contributing to the successful renovation, and the children starting classes love their new facilities.

This past year brought notable achievements for Aseema and India, with children eagerly anticipating India's successful August moon landing (pictured to the right).



**Aseema students competed in national rugby competitions, won prizes for their art, and collectively achieved a 98.3% pass rate on their board (SSC) exams this year.
Go, Aseema!**

2024

Financial Information At A Glance

We are pleased to report the following financial information in approximate and rounded figures:

Donations to Friends of Aseema:

\$150,000

Grants to Aseema:

\$93,000

These grants sponsored classrooms and all that goes with them: educational materials, field trips, classroom equipment, teacher salary, etc. We raised thousands at our art events as well! Thanks to your generosity, we are poised to provide more support going into 2024, with a grant request on the way.

Expenses

Approximately 11% of our intake went toward our own fees and expenses. This is higher than usual because of our spending on art events, but thanks to our sponsors listed above, the extra expenses were covered! None of our expenses was for officers, board members or volunteers.

THANK YOU DONORS!

COUNT ON ME, \$2,500+

A special recognition of Moez and Marissa Kassam and [Rio Grande Games](#) for extraordinary generosity – Thank you!

Nancy Bernstein and Rocky Schoen
Lynne Brown and Elizabeth Stokes
F. Dok Harris
Erin & Seana Miller

Christine Biancheria in honor of Madhuri Murlu
Patricia Garber in honor of Claire Pillar
Anonymous Donor in honor of Duncan McFarland on his 80th
and for Mary Ashton for her long support of Aseema
Anonymous Donor

BEST FRIENDS, \$1,000 to \$2,499

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LIST OF DONORS

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Ginny Hildebrand in memory of Jan Neffke
Anonymous in honor of D. Murlikrishnan
Anonymous in honor of Chris Biancheria
Anonymous Donors (4)

LIST OF DONORS

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LIST OF DONORS

FRIENDS IN NEED UP TO \$250, CONT'D

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Rachel Gay in honor of Veejay Gay
Shakshi Govil in honor of Shalini Govil
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Karen Eriksen in honor of Chris Biancheria
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Beverly Harris-Schenz in honor of Mary Tinsley
Andrea London in honor of Christine Biancheria
Anne Kirchmier in honor of Christine Biancheria
Dennis Clagett in memory of Margarita Rosenthal
Vrajesh Mehta and Family in memory of Muralikrishnan

Making a Difference

“Giving is not just about making a donation.
It is about making a difference.”
– Kathy Calvin



Friends of Aseema wishes to express tremendous gratitude for the hard work of our volunteers in bringing Hooky, the board game, to life and especially to **Tessa Samuelson** for her wonderful art and to **Erik Arneson** for demonstrating the game to others with such zeal and time commitment.



Friends of Aseema also is extremely grateful to **Colleen Briner**, of our advisory board, and **Karen Eriksen**, a volunteer, who worked so hard to help us put together two in-person art events and markets.

We extend a special thanks also to the many **Microsoft employees** who participated in a matching campaign, to the **United Women in Faith of the Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church** for inviting us to give them a presentation, and to **Will Halim and Storyburgh** for the invitation to our president to participate in [The Convos](#) on YouTube.





Saree Stack

Geeta Jaiswal

Taking inspiration from Henri Matisse's designs, the artist Geeta Jaiswal has created this painting of a stack of patterned clothes at a textile shop. Geeta's choice of saree materials captures the colorful nature of India.

Geeta Jaiswal completed her studies at Aseema in 2016. Geeta then obtained her bachelor's degree in commerce and works as a unit manager with ICICI Prudential Life Insurance and, with her brother, can now support her family. She has two siblings who also excel in art and all of whom grew up in extreme poverty. During COVID, Aseema offered Geeta financial support to make art for Aseema to help her use her talents to to survive the height of the crisis.

[Find a print here!](#)



Benares / Varanasi

Seeta Jaiswal

Seeta Jaiswal made this pen sketch of Benares, or Varanasi, during the height of the COVID crisis in 2021 at the age of 21. Her composition shows famous landmarks from the city, representing the collage of memories a traveler might take home.

Seeta completed her studies at Aseema in 2016. As of 2024, Seeta is pursuing her textile degree at Mumbai's prestigious Sophia Polytechnic College. She has two siblings who also excel in art. Aseema offered Seeta and her sister financial support to make art during the crisis to help support herself and her loved ones.

[Find a print here!](#)



Backwaters

Shahnawaz Shaikh

The artwork, done by Shahnawaz Shaikh (an alumnus at age 18), is a scene from Kerala's famous backwaters. In the picture, one can see a boatman gently rowing his boat down the stream. The reflection of the shrubs and trees in the narrow canal creates a realistic impression of the actual landscape.

[Find a print here!](#)



Colours of Nature

Balakrishanan "Bala" Arundhidiyar

Balakrishanan Arundhidiyar, known as "Bala," created this painting in 2020 at the age of 21.

Bala studied at Aseema from 2007 to 2016. He then completed junior college in the commerce stream. He made this painting in 2020 at the age of 21. He now works in the restaurant industry, but he remains dedicated to making art in his free time. During COVID, Aseema offered Bala financial support for which he created works of art.

Bala's love of colors is on full display. He enjoyed painting the intricate colors of the Kingfisher although the pink flowers also received his full attention. The shades of green in the background act as a weather forecast.

[Find a print here!](#)



Tsuru

Mohammed Zamil Sayyed

Mohammed Zamil Sayyed, at age 14, made this work, inspired by classical Japanese paintings. The composition shows cranes basking in the sweetness of nature.

Mohammed Zamil finished his studies at Aseema in 2016 after which he completed an arts stream at Rizvi College.

The paintings on this site were made primarily in Room 13.

[Find a print here!](#)