

TEXT: RITUPRIYA BASU PHOTO COURTESY OF JAIPUR RUGS



## NEW VOCATION

WEAVERS AND PRISON INMATES FROM RURAL RAJASTHAN TURN DESIGNERS FOR MANCHAHA, AN ONGOING INITIATIVE BY JAIPUR RUGS

In the courtyard of a house in rural Rajasthan, the familiar, steady rhythm of a loom rings through the day. In swift motions, weavers Aarti, Mintu and Kamli guide the clacking bars, pull the taught yarns and slice away at excess threads. Together, at this loom, they crafted *Bin Chakke ki Gaddi* (pictured), meaning a car without wheels, a luminous hand-knotted rug for Jaipur Rugs, created as a part of the Manchaha Initiative. Imagined by Kavita Chaudhary, the company's design head, Manchaha (which literally translates to 'from the heart') is a sustained initiative that turns the lens on the latent creativity of the weavers. Instead of working with mapped designs, Jaipur Rugs gave them *carte blanche*, allowing them to create their own compositions and handpick the palettes and yarns.

At the start of this year, as an extension of the ongoing project, Jaipur Rugs took this initiative into three prisons across Rajasthan, helping inmates learn the craft of hand-knotting, while "enabling creative expression and healing". Titled Freedom Manchaha, the venture enables inmates to explore new opportunities for a livelihood, and helps them find hope in a place where often there's none.

Weaving as an activity is known to be cathartic, but Manchaha and Freedom Manchaha also have skill and imagination woven into their ethos. "Weavers had been accustomed to following a set design for so long, that to create something straight from their heart initially seemed like a very confusing proposition," says Yogesh Choudhary, director at Jaipur Rugs. "But when they started blending their craft with imagination, there was no looking back." In search of inspiration, many weavers looked inwards, into the struggles and beauty of their lives. ▀