

## When Words Pause, the Lines Remain: Line, Language, and Art in Asia

By

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### Abstract

This article explores the significance of Line Art in Asian traditions, where the line functions as both a visual form and an extension of thought language. Drawing from worldwide and Indian practices such as Zen Enso and the works of artists like Rabindranath Tagore, Nasreen Mohamedi, and Zarina Hashmi, the study examines how Line Art carries rhythm, thought, and presence. It further reflects on a contemporary practice where the lines emerge as a continuation of poetic expression. In her own words and idea, “When words pause, the line remains,” the author makes a case for Line Art being within a space where language dissolves and visual expression sustains meaning, offering a bridge between silence, thought, and artistic creation. It is the sustaining thread of the article that transforms the understanding of writing and art in the modern evolutionary context.

### Keywords

Line, Art, Zen Enso, words

### Introduction

A line is the most basic element of visual expression.

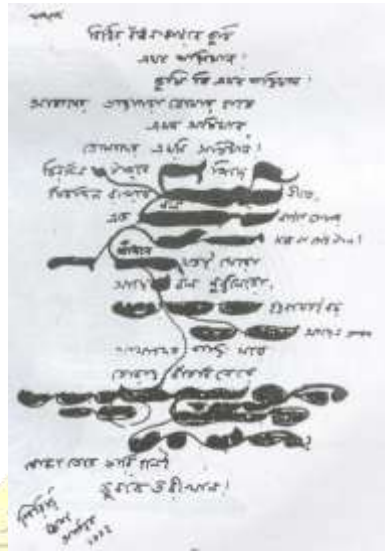
The simplest definition is: A line is a continuous mark made by a moving point across a surface.

**“Lines are like living things; they carry the rhythm of the mind.”**

**Rabindranath Tagore.**

The essence of the nature of the lines as observed by Rabindranath Tagore, on how creativity flows from the soul's call. Lines, whether in writing, art, or sketching, are

pulsating marks, vital extensions of our inner rhythm. The heartbeats of thought shaping breath as it fosters creativity and inner awareness. Tagore often explored this in his essays on art and aesthetics, like in the *Shantiniketan* reflections, where he saw drawing as a meditative dance of the mind. Tagore began drawing late in life, and his works were largely line-based ink drawings that emerged from his manuscripts and poetic imagination.



**Image 1: Rabindranath Tagore's Art**

The line has been defined as in many Asian traditions as more than a visual entity. It symbolizes so many things, a gesture of the hand, a trace of thought, a continuation of language. It carries presence, feelings and musings of outer and inner worlds. A whole cosmos in a point stretching from nothingness to infinity, often looping back to find itself in line art.

A line can exist before words, after words, and beyond words. Line art is where thought begins to move, even when words do not.

### **When Words Pause, The Line Remains**

Lines have carried the weight of words for as long as human memory goes. For myself, a newfound realisation echoes in these words. As a writer for the past 13 years, I have now found myself discovering the limitless potential of line art. The lines have beckoned for most part of my life, but nowadays they have morphed from carrying words to carrying

silences and thoughts in the form of shapes, marks and minimal structures that have their own meanings. Meanings that are open to interpretation in different ways than the linear trajectory of words in a language full of prerecorded essence and understanding.

When words pause, the line remains; I am reflecting and reconnecting with the moment when language reaches its limits. As a poet, I often begin with words, and along the way, there are times when feelings, thoughts, or images cannot be fully expressed through language alone. In such moments, the line becomes another form of expression, continuing the conversation that words have started. It is a transformation of the creative energy that spills over and makes images a form of communication and artistic release. The artist is transformed from within and jumps from one medium to another as the lines stretch across time and space, changing forms. Expressing the beauty and profoundness of life and the times we live in along the way.

For me, drawing lines is similar to writing poetry, albeit a line is a point that extends into infinity, morphing into forms of art, somewhat influenced by my journey as a writer. A line on paper carries rhythm, movement, and emotion, much like a line of verse. It allows ideas to flow visually, creating forms that suggest meaning without explaining everything directly. In this way, the line becomes a visual continuation of poetic thought. The lines are minimal, yet they hold symbolic and imaginative possibilities, inviting viewers to interpret them vividly.

In many Asian artistic traditions, writing and drawing share the same gesture through brush and ink. I feel connected to this philosophy, where the line is not only a mark but also a trace of thought and presence. When language pauses, the line continues to move, carrying expression beyond the boundaries of words.

### **The Zen Enso: The Single Line That Contains Everything.**

A striking example from Asia that reflects the idea “when words pause, the line remains” is the Zen symbol known as the Enso.

What is the Enso?

In Japanese Zen practice, it is a circle drawn in a single continuous brushstroke. The artist does not revise or correct the line, and the stroke must be completed in one spontaneous movement. The Enso is a representation of several philosophical ideas like emptiness and fullness, the cosmos, internal awareness, and the moment when that awareness strikes in movement. The most unique part of this practice is that it is drawn in only one breath-like gesture. The continuous line records the state of mind of the artist at that exact moment.

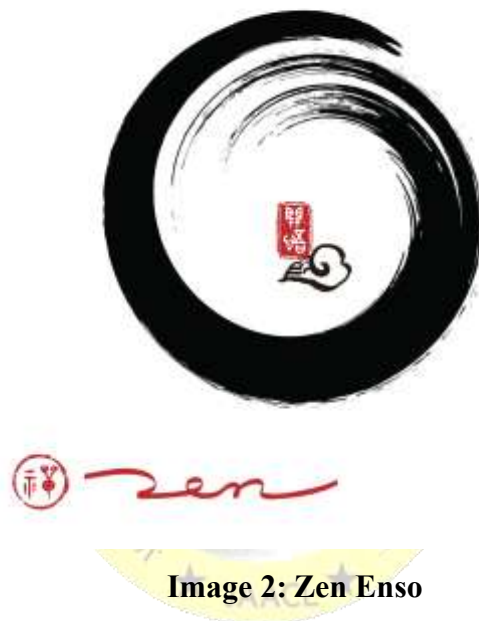


Image 2: Zen Enso

### Line Art as Meditation

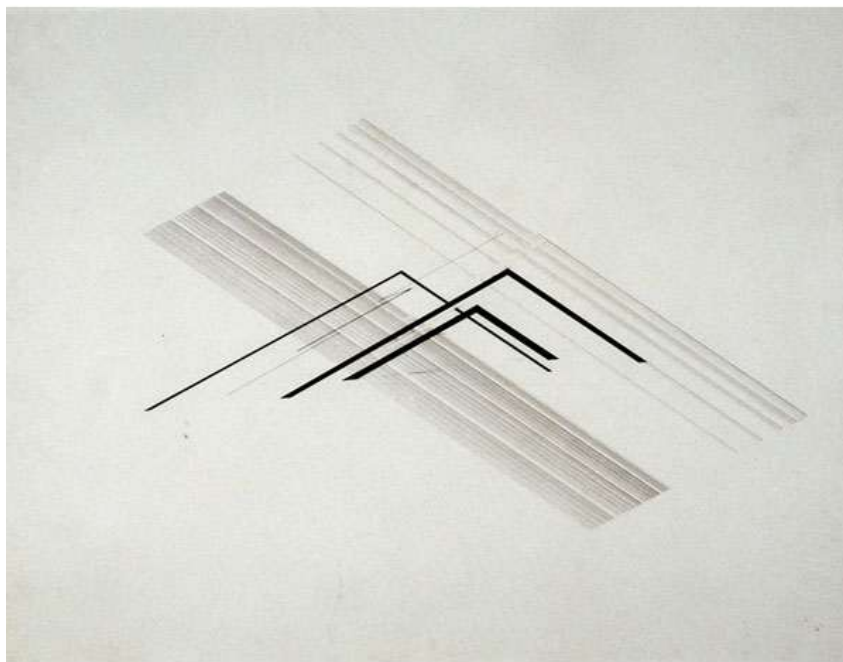
Zen monks often create ensos as part of meditation practice. The act of drawing becomes a way to express inner clarity and presence. There are no elaborate details or shading. It is just one line that holds meaning beyond words. In this sense, the enso demonstrates how a simple line can carry profound philosophical and emotional depth. The line becomes both gesture and insight, revealing the unity between mind, body, and art. The line art at its purest form in every sense of the word. In relation to Asian line traditions, the enso is a part of calligraphy, painting and poetry where the pen and the brushstrokes seek lines and forego them too, in search of understanding of the human mind and the passage of time. The same brush used to write a poem can also create an image. This shared gesture allows visual marks to continue expression when language itself becomes insufficient.

## Contemporary Resonance of Line Art

For contemporary artists exploring minimal line practices, the philosophy behind the *enso* remains deeply relevant. The idea that a single stroke can contain movement, thought, and presence echoes many modern explorations of line as a poetic form.

Nasreen Mohamedi, a famous modern Indian artist, works with pure line and minimal abstraction. Her drawings are delicate pencil or ink lines that are arranged in subtle geometric rhythms. She doesn't depict objects or narratives but has explored space, silence, and balance through repeated linear structures. Her work is meditative and architectural. The line creates a quiet visual field that invites contemplation and inner awareness.

Art historians have noticed that her work has influences from Islamic geometry, desert landscapes, and the regimented clarity of minimalism. Through her work, Mohamedi demonstrates how simplicity can convey profound visual harmony.



**Image 3: Nasreen Mohamedi Art**

Zarina Hashmi was an Indian printmaker who worked with minimal lines and geometric forms, exploring themes of memory, displacement, and belonging within her work. Her

artworks include maps, architectural plans, or fragments of script. Through woodcuts and etchings, she used spare linear forms to evoke journeys, borders, and emotional landscapes.

In her celebrated series 'Home Is a Foreign Place', she demonstrated how simple linear structures carry deep poetic meaning. Zarina's work has demonstrated unequivocally that the line can function not only visually but also as a metaphor for memory and identity.



**Image 4: Zarina Hashmi Art**

## **Conclusion**

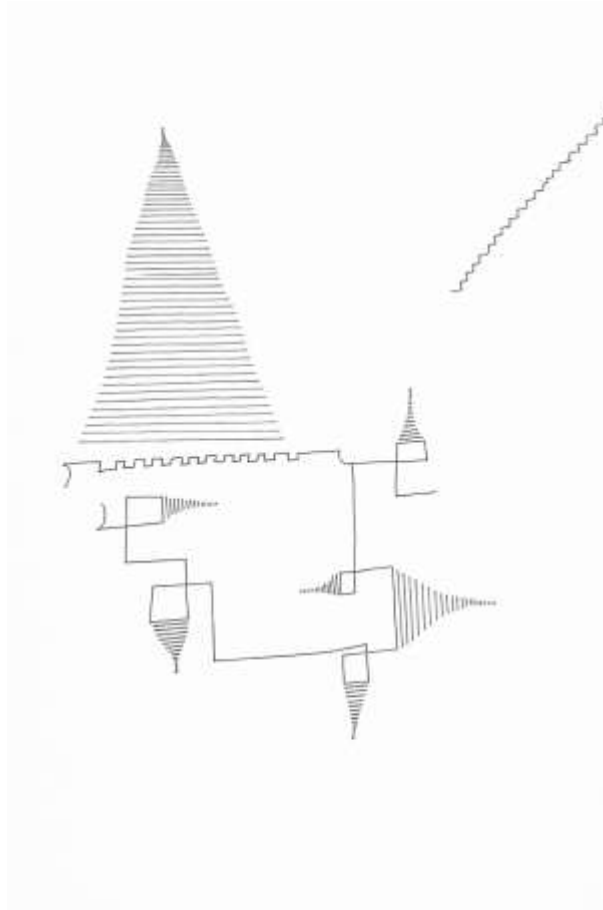
Line art in Asia reflects a deep connection between language, thought, and visual expression. From the Zen enso's single, meditative stroke to the quiet precision of Nasreen Mohamedi and the evocative mappings of Zarina Hashmi, the line emerges as more than form. It becomes a keeper of memory, rhythm, and presence. Across traditions, the line bridges what can be spoken and what remains beyond words. Line art becomes the transformer of spaces unseen.

This continuity reveals that the line is not confined to drawing alone. It moves between writing and image, silence and articulation, offering a space where meaning can remain open

and fluid. In many Asian practices, the same gesture creates both script and form, reinforcing the idea that expression does not depend solely on language.

In this light, the idea brought forth by the author, “When words pause, the line remains,” becomes both personal and universal. It reflects a moment where expression transforms rather than ends. The line continues the journey of thought, holding emotion and awareness in a minimal yet powerful form.

Ultimately, Line art reminds us that even in silence, there is expression-quiet, continuous, and infinite.



**Image 5: The Pilgrimage by Komal Gupta**

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### **About the Author**

Ms. Komal Gupta is an award-winning poet, writer, and well-being advocate, blending art with social impact. Founder of Papyri Connect, she champions wellbeing and literature. A G100 Advisory Board Member and Peace Partner with TAPN2U, she uplifts communities through poetry, storytelling, and advocacy, inspiring meaningful connections and creative expression worldwide. She believes in the power of words, arts, and culture to change lives and impact society in positive ways. A social entrepreneur on a mission to empower women in business and artisanal start-ups. She has worked as a Montessori Teacher Trainer and Preschool Principal and is currently on board as National Vice President of WICCI Arts Leadership Council.

