



+91 7558580463

www.arisafoundation.org

Pune, India

ARISA Foundation's Creative Lab Festival 3.0

Unconference 2026

India's first Unconference on the Neuroscience and Psychology of Arts, Aesthetics, and Creativity

When: **27th-29th March 2026**

Where: **Goethe Institut, Pune**

Breaking away from the usual lecture-and-listen format, the Unconference invites artists, researchers, educators, technologists, and community builders to share ideas in playful, unconventional ways—through interactive sessions, live performances, installations, and co-created dialogues. Instead of simply presenting finished work, participants experiment, question, and build knowledge together. It's not just a meeting of minds, but a living laboratory for exploring how neuroaesthetics—the science of how the brain experiences art—can help us reimagine beauty, movement, technology, and collective care.

Unconference 2026 explores the following themes:

1. Decolonising Research, Knowledge, and Pedagogy in Arts and Sciences

This theme examines how dominant, colonial, or exclusionary frameworks shape research and education. Sessions engage with inclusive, intersectional, and locally grounded approaches across art, aesthetics, psychology, and pedagogy.

2. Beauty: Aesthetics, Identity, and Mental Health

This theme approaches beauty as a social, emotional, and cultural experience rather than a purely visual or aesthetic category. It explores how beauty is felt, judged, and negotiated across personal, social, and clinical contexts.

3. Movement: Embodiment, Expression, Protest, Inclusion

Focusing on the body in motion, this theme explores movement as knowledge, expression, resistance, and healing. It spans performance, embodiment, disability studies, and somatic practices.

4. Tech and Creativity: AI, Ethics, and Mental Health

This theme examines how technology reshapes creative practice, perception, and psychological experience. It brings together critical and creative perspectives on emerging tools and platforms.

5. Culture, Community, and Healing: Art as Collective Care

Centered on Global South perspectives, this theme explores how art functions as collective care, cultural continuity, and social healing beyond clinical models.

Session Formats

The Unconference will feature a diverse range of session formats that encourage experimentation, dialogue, and embodied ways of knowing. These include:

- Installations
- Research Talks
- Interactive Talks
- Media-based Presentations
- Poster Presentations
- Dance and Creative Performances
- Workshops
- Participatory Sessions
- Live Experiments

Keynote Speakers

Prof. Anjan Chatterjee

Professor of Neurology, Psychology, and Architecture; Founding Director, Penn Center for Neuroaesthetics

Prof. Chatterjee is a leading figure in neuroaesthetics and the neuroscience of art. He is the author of *The Aesthetic Brain: How We Evolved to Desire Beauty and Enjoy Art* and has held leadership roles across international neuroaesthetics and neuroethics organisations.

Rukmini Vijaykumar

Bharatanatyam Dancer; Artistic Director, Raadha Kalpa

Rukmini Vijaykumar is one of the foremost Bharatanatyam soloists of her generation. Her work integrates classical Indian movement philosophies with contemporary choreographic inquiry, drawing deeply from the Natyashastra and the karana tradition.

Plenary Panel Discussion

Speakers:

Prof. Anjan Chatterjee, Founding Director, Penn Center for Neuroaesthetics

Dr. Nandini Chatterjee Singh, Cognitive Neuroscientist

Dr. Aarathi Selvan, Clinical Psychologist, Founder & Director, Pause for Perspective

Sudarshan Chakhale, Social Worker, Jyotiba Savitri Foundation

Moderated by Sudarshan Mahajan, Tiny Mic Story

Title

Holding Well-Being in Hard Times: Mental Health, Art, and Everyday Survival

Abstract

In difficult times, when people are focused on getting through the day, ideas like wellness, mental health, or art can feel distant or even out of reach. Yet in many lives and communities, care, creativity, play, and storytelling are already part of how people cope, connect, and survive. This panel brings together voices from neuroscience, mental health practice, community and policy work, and storytelling to explore what well-being looks like when survival is the priority. Rather than treating art and mental health as extras, the conversation asks how they fit into everyday life: how people calm themselves, make sense of stress, support communities, and hold on to dignity during hard times. The discussion invites reflection on how care and creativity show up in ordinary ways, and how access to mental health and cultural resources can be made more inclusive, practical, and rooted in real needs.

Invited Speakers Across Our 5 Themes

Dr. Aarathi Selvan

Dr. Nandini Chatterjee Singh

Dr. Andrea Orlandi

Dr. Jaison Manjaly

Dr. Sangeetha Menon

Aritra Chatterjee

Parth Sharma

Maruee Pahuja

Dr. Shantala Hegde

Dr. Dyutiman Mukhopadhyay

Sweta Mantrii

Sarah Rezaei