

Rags to Stitches

Quilting in India

Overview

Indian quilters are part of a living tradition that dates back 4,000 years to the Indus Valley civilization. The language of their quilts articulates the symbols and motifs familiar to these quilters and their communities. Whether made for use in the home, to signify religious asceticism, or to be given as gifts, the quilts are infused with spiritual significance and folk meaning. The eclectic imagery not only draws upon a host of classic themes but also upon the objects and events of everyday life. The remarkable, yet largely overlooked, quilts of India are an important class of Indian textiles.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq3-jZpe14U>

Kantha Quilts

Kantha (simply means : “patched cloth”) refers to both the tradition of producing these unique, colorful quilted blankets (making something useful and alluring out of discarded and unused items), as well as the craft and stitch itself (a small, straight running stitch specially in Bengali embroidery).

Kantha is a classical type of embroidery native to eastern South Asia, in particular Bangladesh and the neighboring Indian states of West Bengal and Odisha, along the Bay of Bengal. For this logic, it is treated a craft of the Bengal region (“Bengali”), which is not the same as Bangladeshi (meaning, of the country of Bangladesh).

Four images appear frequently on Bengali kanthas. As the sacred flower of India, the lotus represents the essence of life and often dominates the center of the piece. Or a mandala, the circular design used for meditation and signifying the cosmos, may be embroidered in place of the lotus. In the four corners, a tear-drop-shaped kalka (the Western paisley shape) or the Tree of Life often appear, pointing toward the center design. Both images remind us of the interconnectedness of life, the fertility of the world, and our participation in its abundance.

<https://blog.megannielsen.com/2021/09/indian-kantha-quilting-with-manjari-singh/>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZydH3Fanhos> (Use this)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxj3dafJEMM> (shows running stitch)





Kowdhi

Kowdhi is a hand quilting technique with origins in Karnataka region of India. India Quilt Festival brings you this Video from BuDa Folklore, a Honnavar based center which works on preserving and documenting local culture.

Karnataka is a state in southwest India with Arabian Sea coastlines. The capital, Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), is a high-tech hub known for its shopping and nightlife. To the southwest, Mysore is home to lavish temples including Mysore Palace, former seat of the region's maharajas. Hampi, once the medieval Vijayanagara empire's capital, contains ruins of Hindu temples, elephant stables and a stone chariot.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2dq5rJCt1A> (use this)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDAG89fQ8cY&t=48s>





Siddi Quilts

The Siddis are Indians of East African descent, whose ancestors were brought to India as slaves 400 years ago. Their quilts are distinctive in their use of color and the technique used in which **patches of repurposed clothing are placed over a cotton sari foundation and hand stitched with a running stitch**. They work from the outer border toward the middle. Watching Siddi women quilting and the community life surrounding them. I made the trip to Mainali to learn their way of quilting. Since returning home I have made 19 quilts in their manner and am about to return with some of mine to show them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F2CWgQKLzo>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/sewing-nancy-nancys-corner-henry-drewal/> (good)







Gudari

The patchwork quilts known as gudari are the most distinctive expression of the Siddi visual arts. Made by women for family members, gudari are used as sleeping mattresses in warm weather or as covers during the cool, damp monsoon season. Gudari are made of pieces of old, worn-out clothing gathered by the quilters from family, friends, or purchased in the local used-clothing market.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rM4zO1_h5s (wrapping the runway)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2f-iac10uY&t=6s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rjul9yulSNE>



Indian Patchwork Wall Hangings

Rajasthan is the largest state in the Republic of India and was historically home to the Rajputs, a class of warriors famous throughout India for their fierceness and ambition (of the roughly 600 princely states in existence at India's independence in 1947, two-thirds were ruled by Rajputs). It encompasses most of the area of the large, inhospitable Thar Desert. Nights on the desert are cold and people who live there use layers of quilts to keep warm. Jaipur is the capital of Rajasthan and is renowned for block printed fabric.

Throughout India's history, the textile arts received patronage from emperors and royal families. Their support was not always a selfless investment but a method of advertising and marketing themselves to their enemies and allies by a show of grandeur and opulence.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w_VpIMyEHo









Quilts of Goa

This film is about the Naari Artisans Movement and their work towards documenting quilts (godhadis) made by local artists from Goa, India. The project is in collaboration with the Goa State Museum.

Quilts in Goa were made by girls right from the time they attained puberty. They learnt the art from their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and neighbours. These quilts were made for new born babies, for the trousseau, as a gift to a new bride in the family, and for use of family members.

Quilts made for new born babies are popularly called '*manes*' and quilts made for older persons are called '*godhadis*'. These quilts are often made of old, used saris – '*saree godhadi*' or of scraps of fabric – '*patchwork godhadi*'

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiezYU3EefU>







Suchitra Mattai

When artist Suchitra Mattai received her artwork *Imperfect Isometry* back from its outdoor showing at the Sharjah Biennial, she noticed that the materials looked quite different. The constant sun on the installation of woven saris—traditional Indian women’s garments—had lightened the previously vivid colors of the silk, cotton, and polyester. These same saris made their way into Mattai’s later work *Exodus*, a massive wall hanging in the collection of the Momentary, a contemporary art space of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas. In *Exodus*, the sun-bleached saris are embedded in a landscape of fabric that dominates an entire wall.

The title *Exodus*, although well-known as one of the books of the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible, is more broadly defined as a departure or emigration (permanently leaving one’s home), and fittingly relates the journey of the saris from their origins around the world (she sources the saris from her family, friends, and women of the South Asian diaspora), to the installation at the Sharjah Biennial, to the museum in Arkansas. The saris can be seen as surrogates for the women who wore them: South Asian women now living in diaspora (the dispersion of people from their original homeland) throughout the world. But the title also reflects a more personal journey of the artist and her family that began decades ago in the South American country of Guyana.

<http://www.boiseartmuseum.org/exhibition/suchitra-mattai/>











Priya Ravish Mehra

Priya Ravish Mehra is a **textile artist and weaver, researcher and designer based in Delhi**. She is a textile consultant to several projects related to Handlooms and Handicrafts in India.

- <https://www.gallerythreshold.com/artist/priya-ravish-mehra/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObRaJctQKo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwP8Musixgk>







Bishakha Raviraj

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_FTsIS05tM&t=67s



Assignment Suggestions

- Use fabric scraps in an artwork; work intuitively