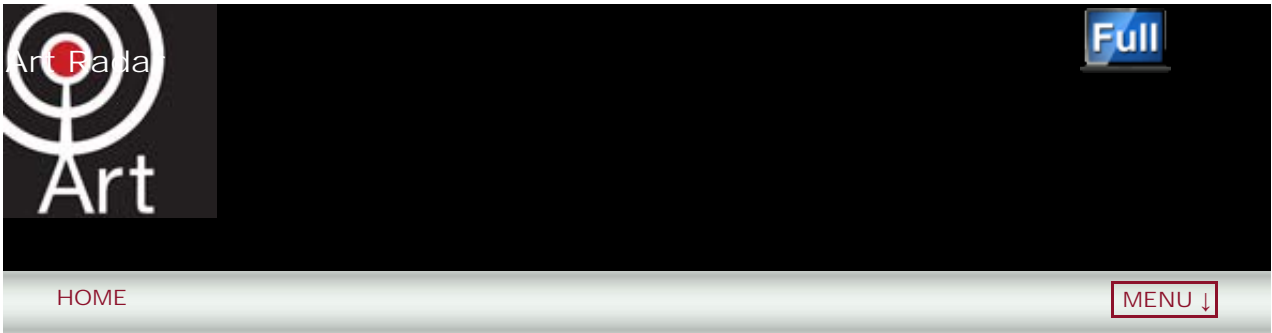


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The world in a teacup: India's Gopika Nath – artist profile

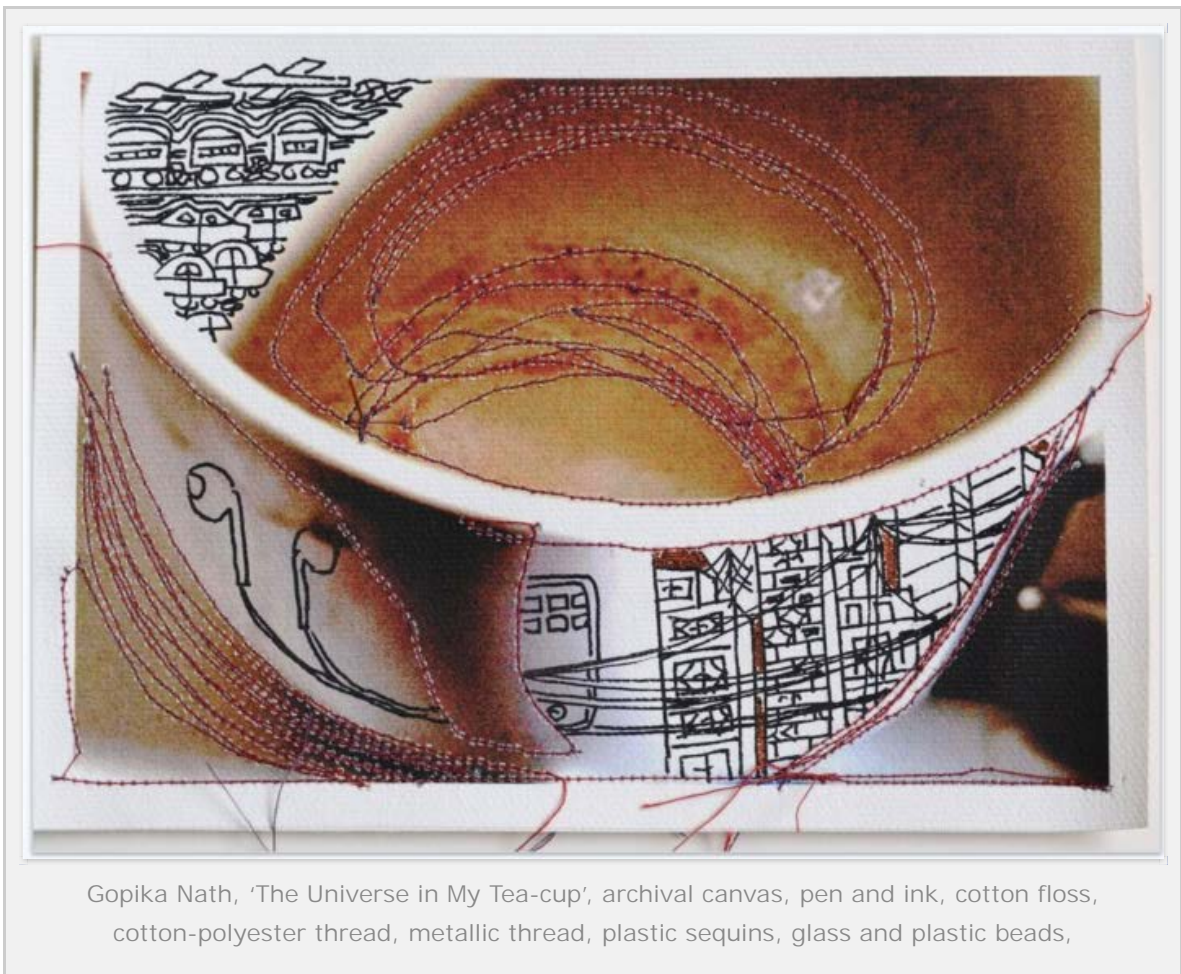
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Indian artist Gopika Nath creates cathartically cosmic universes that transcend the ancient framework of embroidery.

Art Radar profiles the Fulbright Scholar artist-craftswoman, for whom thread is a metaphor for life.



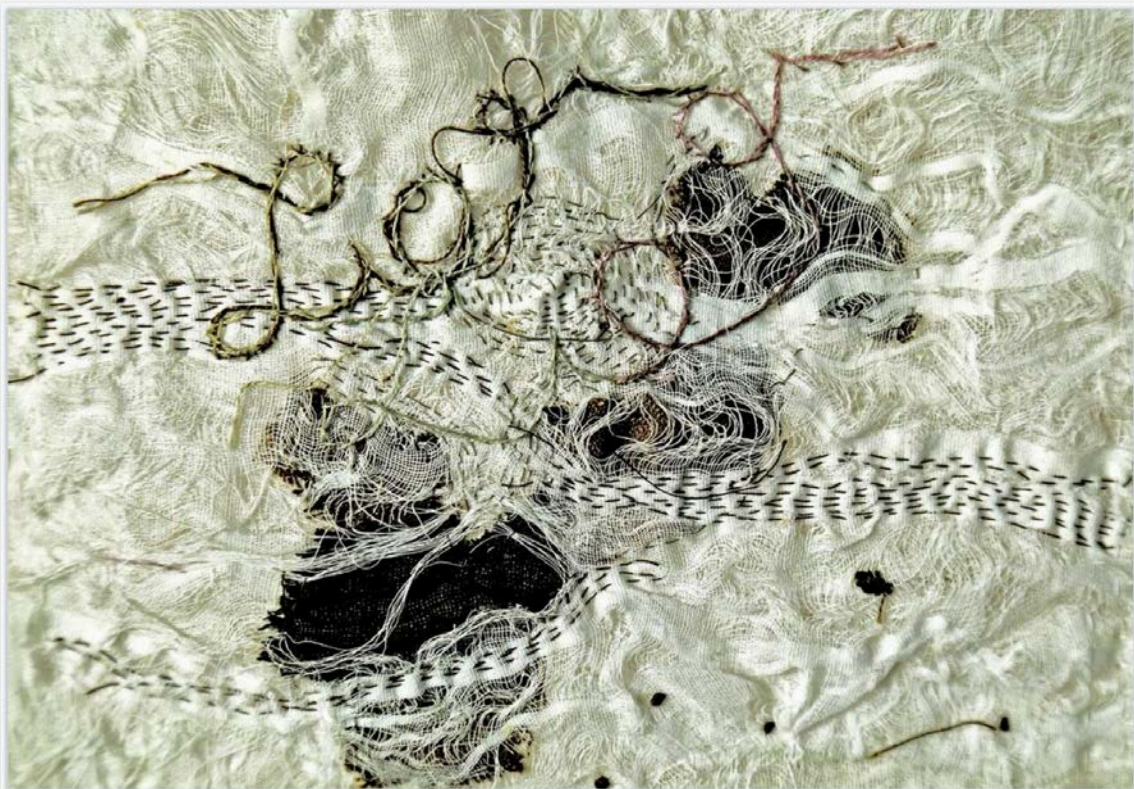
Gopika Nath, 'The Universe in My Tea-cup', archival canvas, pen and ink, cotton floss, cotton-polyester thread, metallic thread, plastic sequins, glass and plastic beads,

photography, digital print, hand and machine embroidery, hand drawing, set of 30, 10.25 x 8.5 in each framed. Photo: Amitabha Bhattacharya. Image courtesy the artist.

Birth by thread and air

Fulbright Scholar and London Central School of Art and Design alumnus [Gopika Nath](#) is a textile designer, fibre artist and writer who has been gently refashioning the ancient craft of Indian needlework for over four decades. Nath enrolled into a textiles course at university and quickly fell in love with weaving; as quoted by *Your Story*, Nath said that "[weaving] was like giving birth to something with just thread and air".

Nath found it "fascinating", and after working for some of the biggest names in the commercial sector, including Fabindia, Shyam Ahuja and L'affaire, Nath found her niche in exclusive hand-printed sarees and scarves. As a successful design professional, Nath taught traditional subjects relating to design, and has also had considerable experience working with crafts people in the rural sector.



Gopika Nath, 'Word-Stains I, Liar', 2014, cotton fabrics, cotton floss, cotton-polyester thread, layering, tearing, pulling, stitching, staining with tea-leaves, embroidery, 16 x 18 in unframed. Photo: Amitabha Bhattacharya. Image courtesy the artist.

As a textile artist, Nath chose the medium of embroidery. Writing about her artistic philosophy and its linkage to textiles in her 2016 exhibition "The Piercing Needle", Nath states:

The deep-rooted philosophy of Indian textiles, their history and excellence is a factor that has always inspired me. I have this deep yearning to make as beautiful, skilfully structured textiles, as our craftsman did, and still do. But [...] I need self-expression; I cannot work with skill alone.

The needle becomes the brush

In her re-contextualisation of stitching as contemporary art, Nath uses photography and digital painting on fabric alongside burning, shredding and embroidering. The result is a layered and poignantly evocative oeuvre, consisting of slightly melancholic yet cozily graceful compositions that "combine sutures, colour, texture, and a surface detailing that make the work appear both as a fragment of detail and an overall map of definition", writes Ina Puri in the exhibition catalogue of "The Piercing Needle".



Gopika Nath, 'Community of cups', 2010, cotton volie, cotton floss, cotton-polyester thread, photography, digital printing, tearing, layering, stitching, embroidery, 28 x 27 in unframed.

Photo: Amitabha Bhattacharya. Image courtesy the artist.

Such works navigate the delicate border between art and craft, forging a unique aesthetic that built on but stretched beyond the rigidity of tradition. She writes in her artist's statement:

Through my work as an artist, I discovered the potential of thread, cloth and embroidery to speak a language of feelings – of self-expression that was never a part of the ancient traditions of textile-making, which I so admire.

While embroidery is traditionally an exclusively feminine pastime, Nath's needlework transcends this by speaking the language of contemporary art. In questioning existing parameters Nath forged a highly unique personal iconography firmly rooted in the Indian ethos. Puri writes that:

The needle became the brush, seeking to illuminate, provoke and create an identity that went beyond the feminine domain. Needlework, associated for long with the feminine and domestic embroidery, now became experimental and contemporary, occupying a unique place in the art scene.



Gopika Nath, 'The Stain Tea Party', 2015, glass tea-cups and saucers, aluminium tea kettle, cotton and silk fabrics, glue, polyester-cotton thread, cotton floss, beads, sequins, copper wire, fabric table cloth. Photo: Shalini Jaikaria. Image courtesy the artist.

The world in a teacup

As *TimeOut* writes, "[\[a\] predominant image in much of \[Nath's\] work is the teacup](#)". The stitched images of empty cups stained with dregs reveal her "appreciation for the quotidian beauty of residue" – an aesthetic that provokes introspection, catharsis and transcendence. Lovingly recreating the complex surfaces and colour tones, Nath "finds the 'universe in her cup', as well as a release from the 'stains' of experience".

In her artist's statement Nath reveals that she loves her tea, which stains her cup with "lines so evocative that [she] spent the better part of two years recording them". Nath studied the dimensions of different cups and mugs, photographed the marks and stains, and translated them into digital images printed on fabric. She writes:

I then worked with layered images, using the „stains“ to reflect a state of mind. These marks became evocative of guilt, shame and blame, the kind of thoughts we carry around us that come up under self-reflection or introspection; of thoughts mulling over a cup of tea [...] looking at the dregs in my tea-cup and the world around it that creates the illusions of „stains“ in the mind, I found myself change.



Gopika Nath, 'Patterns of Transformation', 2015, cotton fabrics, cotton-polyester thread porcelain cup and saucer and copper wire, hand and machine embroidery, cutting, layering, staining with tea-leaves, burning. Photo: Amitabha Bhattacharya. Image courtesy the artist.

With her art, Nath thus lays bare the textures of her wounds in layers of fabric that bind memories and metaphors. The complex yet gentle topography of her stitched landscapes maps her private journey, which transforms into a cosmic, spiritual adventure for all who peer into her teacups. In the Nath's own words, her art soothes. She writes in her statement for *The Chai Project*:

My chosen path of work allows me to express what I feel. [...] I start going inwards with the repetitive movement of needle and thread. Going on and on, round and round, I find myself in deep meditative state. [...] Then it is just me and the needle and thread.

Michele Chan

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