



drawn with thread

an exhibition of recent works
by

gopika nath



seven art ltd.

gallery seven art ltd.

everyday she excavated herself
uncovering the lies of yesterday
in search of that sacred space...

What is this sacred space? It is not a place or a feeling but a state of being which though experienced remains elusive in the conundrum of city life. Living in urban India in this century, powered as it is by digital technologies which defy rather than accept the limitations of being human, the quest is for a certain equipoise that allows me to flow seamlessly despite the fetters and constraints of social integration. It is easy to be free when there are none, but it is only through interactions with others, through our relationships in life that we truly discover ourselves.

Drawn with thread on fragile organza and chiffon, paired with roughly hewn cotton; dance here, is a metaphor for life. Its grace is an inspiration while it's disciplined practice is an aspiration. The graceful dancer; gliding from one role to the next, one emotion to the next, one tempo to the next, with effortless ease, is evocative of that state of being which I refer to as 'that sacred space'.

High Rises; Narrowing Windows of Perception... [2008]

Cotton, cotton polyester, silk organza, silk chiffon

Stitch/embroidery [29 x 32 inches]



[Detail]

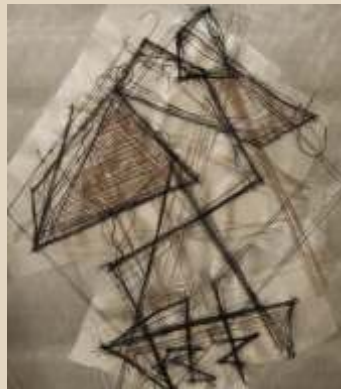


Embroidering upon stretched seer-sucker or chiffon, with loosely held, long stitches that distort once the fabric is returned to its original state, characterizes the sense of dysfunction in being which is felt and perceived. There appears to be no code of ethics for contemporary life in the ever-growing, ever-rising metropolises of urban India. Living in this world, adapting to it, has made us fragile but cutting like a knife; our instinctive goodness tempered with large doses of cynicism and distrust. The discomfort is not with the city, but what it does to us, distorting the way we want to be.

Like dance, life is a series of movements in thought. Sometimes fluid, sometimes tense, sometimes fragile, revelling or rebelling, frenetic and pensive, sensual and sexual, involved or detached, sparse or dense in detail. Dance is a picture of life, its fleeting moments, captured as memories of feeling. In our frenetic lives, with so much going on, it is feelings that overpower the intellect when: "the body says what words cannot." ⁱ Martha Graham's father in chiding her for not telling the truth once said: "Don't you know when you do something like this I always know? There is always some movement that tells me you are deceiving me. You see, no matter what you say, you reveal yourself – you make fists, you think I don't notice, your back gets very straight, maybe you shuffle your feet, your eyelids drop. Movement does not lie."

That Treacherous Dance of Anxiety... [2008]

Cotton, silk, silk organza, rayon and polyester cotton thread
Stitch/Embroidery [17 x 53 inches]



[Detail]



Where I speak from, in this current body of work, I do so at a very personal level, where the city with its corruption, terror, an unbelievable lack of civic planning, and equally so in compassion, decency, respect and common courtesy; thwarts and daunts to an extent that it diminishes rather than allows an exalted intellectual stance. Passionate hues of orange and pink contrasted with green reflect the emotional indignation, while the more ascetic tones of black, white and grey imply the discipline that keeps one going despite the odds. I was born in Bombay and have lived in cities ever since. Be it Calcutta, New Delhi, London or Gurgaon, the city has been my home and hide-out; escaping into its orchestras, museums, gardens or book shops. However, it can no longer be, for the cages of cement we now live in provide little if any scope for intellectual or emotional escape. To avoid being strangulated by its meandering highways, neon stares and gaping pot-holes; one has to engage with the city on a more mundane level of existence. Its sights and sounds impinge in every possible way. Even within the confines of a private, secluded space, there is no solitude.

The Crosses I Must Bear... [2008]

Rayon and cotton thread on silk organza.

Embroidery [14 x 15.5 inches]



[Detail]



If it isn't your neighbours having a party that keeps you awake all night, the villagers in the adjacent neighbourhood must have their 24 hour Ramayan paath, with loudspeakers blaring, because as one said, "hamare bhi toh koi ummeedey hoti hai!" In other words, they have to show off their newly acquired wealth and the police will not intervene in the eternal jagrans because as one DCP informed, that the Supreme Court ruling notwithstanding, "we have to respect the sentiments of the people". Yet consider what we do in the name of religion: senseless bomb blasts that are even more senselessly avenged in an on-going saga that seems to defy the noumenon of God and religion. Krishnamurti defined our predicament aptly when he said, "your leaders – religious and political – and your books – sacred and profane – have all failed, and you are still confused, in misery, in conflict."

I have worked from drawings commenced 15 years ago, watching dance performances of Daksha Seth, Maya Krishna Rao, Sonal Mansingh, and many others. Sitting in the darkness unable to see either paper or pencil, compelled me to stop trying to draw, but experience the rhythm. I drew not what I could see but what I felt; sometimes just letting the music and footsteps guide me. I got into the mode of dance; focussing on its transient but flowing essence.

Falling Apart [2008]

Rayon and cotton floss on silk organza. Embroidery

[14 x 16 inches]



[Detail]



These embroidered sketches are reminiscent of such moments which mirror life and its fleeting memories. In themselves these are not expansive. Together they form a larger, albeit fragmented picture, presented by multiples sewn together. The joining is awkward, it is intended to imply the sense of fragmentation felt in pursuing the ideal of a sacred space in the hustle and bustle of city life in contemporary India. The uneven gap between these pieces is intentional. The open, frayed seams and rough sewing are reflective of fragility, uncertainty and a resultant restlessness, imbuing the present state of being with a lack of sanctity, for which the search continues.

The idea of dance has been extended to encompass the physicality of working with needle and thread, where the movement of fingers as they embroider fabric, evokes the rhythm of a choreography rooted in the Indian tradition of hand-crafting. The culture of its hands has changed from being those of rural Indian skilled labour to a globally driven, urban intellectual dialogue. Via the video entitled 'Re-Thread', the viewer is invited to re-view hitherto perceived notions of hand-crafting through fingers that play the music of Robert Schumann's 'Kinderscenen' on the piano and also execute the embroideries on display.

What Words Cannot Say; The Body Speaks... [2008]

Rayon and cotton floss on polyester cotton. Embroidery
[9.75 x 11 inches]



The tradition of hand-crafting that exists presently is confined to rural areas of the country or practiced in city workshops where the artisan is valued merely for his skill in executing the craft. There was a time when craftsman had a dual role that encompassed designing and crafting. However, they no longer have a role in the creative concept of what they make and the concept of an urban-educated craftsman is as yet alien to the Indian context. Presenting 'Textile as Art' suggests a possible re-definition of the notion of craft where the ancient ideal of the craftsman, performing the dual role of defining the concept with the appropriate skill in the art of making, manifests in a contemporary vein. Through a return to tradition, re-invoking the ancient, stepping back to move ahead is the context of this dance; confronting the challenge of reconciling traditional practices with modern concepts of thinking, where the physicality of doing divulges the truth of our postures of being; in the spirit of the ideal that movement does not lie.

A Touch of Glitter Can't Hurt, Can it?

Cotton floss, silk organza, simulated gold and silver
leather on hand made paper. Appliqué and embroidery
Series VIII, III & IX of IX [6.25 x 8.5 inches each]



In 1984, I discovered Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in the library of The School of Oriental and African Studies in London. His writings have been a guiding factor ever since. Coomaraswamy says that the foundations of Indian culture and its civilization are reflected in the ideals of hand-crafting; where the "inseparable unity of the material and spiritual world"ⁱⁱ which defined the criteria for her social ethics, was deeply embedded. To this Jawaharlal Nehru added that the history of India may well be written with textiles as its leading motif, for no other craft shows such perfection and variety of techniques as the making of fabric. I have worked with textiles for almost thirty years and am deeply fascinated with its processes of making as were the Vedic seers.ⁱⁱⁱ I am in awe of the fact that cloth is made from a single thread which then permeates almost every realm of our existence. Ideas acquire an added dimension when I work with fabric and thread.

The concept of devotion inherent in the traditional practice of hand-crafting in ancient India is synonymous with the creation of the superb excellence in skill and diversity of Indian textiles. This has always appealed to me and intrigued for in embodying the concept of utility with a sense of aesthetics in making as well as in adornment, the craftsman is required to become one with the spirit of his being to competently perform the ritual of his craft. The discipline required to painstakingly make fabric can only be achieved through devout practice which is akin to worship. History provides ample evidence of the merit of the philosophies that governed these artistic practices, but time has eroded the relevance of this wisdom

A Touch of Glitter Can't Hurt, Can it?

Cotton floss, silk organza, simulated gold and silver leather on hand made paper. Appliqué and embroidery
Series IV of IX [6.25 x 8.5 inches]



Much removed from present-day comprehension, ancient India recognized a natural hierarchy, based not on material wealth but on level of evolution. There was no negation. All was harmonized for “all the forces of life are grouped like a forest, whose thousand waving arms are led by Nataraja, the master of dance.”^{iv} Everything was said to have its place and part in a divine concert where the differing voices and their dissonances create a beautiful harmony. The “conspicuous special character of Indian culture” has been defined as a “constant effort to understand the meaning and purposes of life, and a purposive organization of society in harmony with that order and with a view to the attainment of the purpose:”^v

The ancients divined that aware or not, we are all supposedly on a spiritual path. It is a natural consequence of being human. However, consciousness is the goal; the secret for successful living, for it is self-realization that empowers^{iv} and manifests itself. Art in this context cannot merely be cathartic self expression or a socio-political comment. It must go beyond this, beyond the environment of art galleries, to bring aesthetics into the realm of every-day living. This ideal drives my pursuit as an artist/craftsperson, for it provides not just expression, its meditative stance creates scope to resolve emotion as opposed to merely expressing it.

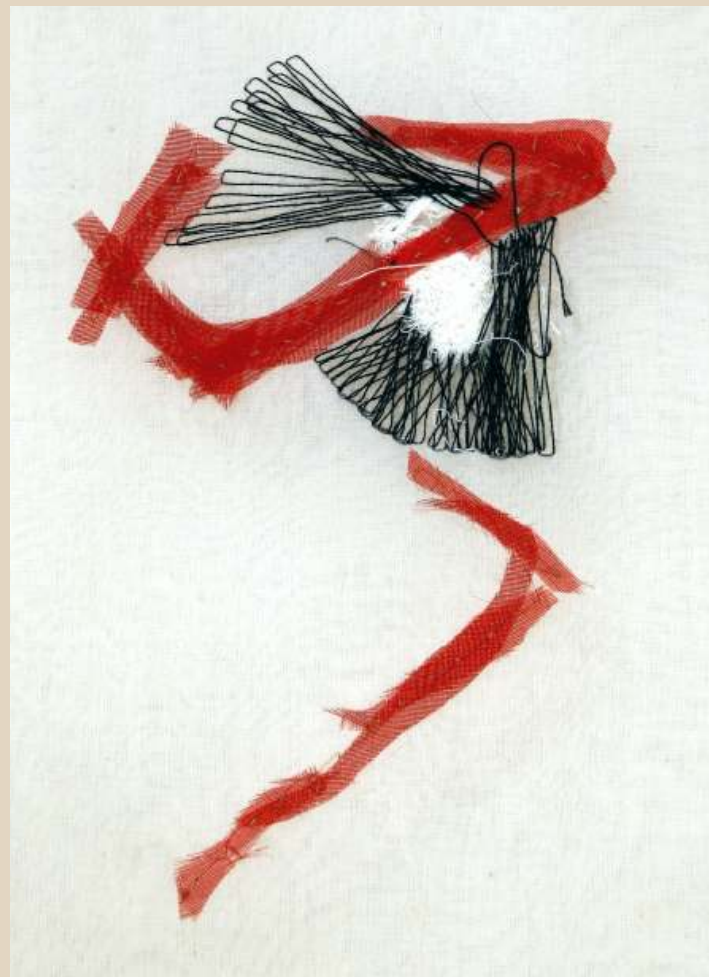
The Naked Truth... [2008]

Silk organza, cotton floss and gauze bandage, Appliqué and embroidery

Series I of VI [8.25 x 10.25 inches]



[Detail]



Art making is not the goal: it's the process which heals, acknowledges, informs and enriches. It is an aspiration to live in collective harmony; each aware of his or her insecurities, fears, limitations and strengths, pondering on issues of contention, finding a view-point in the chaos of emotion, to assert without necessarily wounding; in cognition that life is essentially about experiencing through the other, therefore respect for them. The ideology elevates art beyond the present dimension of a mere profession, towards being a way of life where "an artist is [was] not a special kind of person, but everyman a special kind of artist, otherwise less than a man."

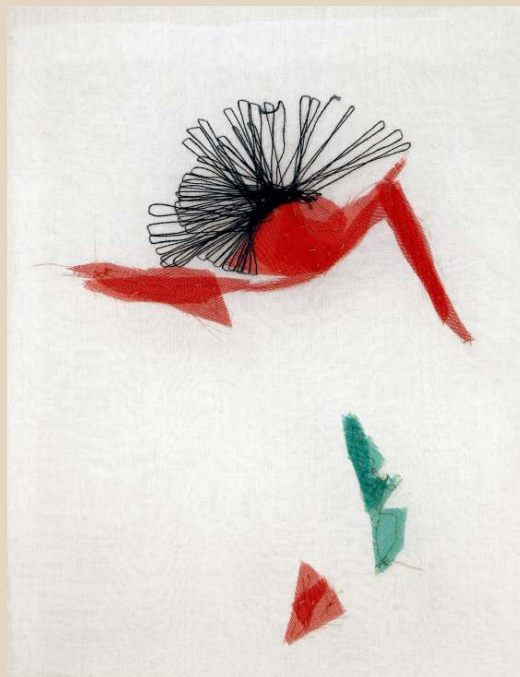
In my interactions with dancers and observations of them in performance, I have gleaned that dance for them, is a passion. If you do not have this, when you walk onto the stage, your presence is not marked. Spiritualists define life as "the eternal dance of consciousness that expresses itself as the dynamic exchange of impulses of intelligence between microcosm and macrocosm, between the human body and the universal body, between the human mind and the cosmic mind." It is only when we engage with these vibrations of intelligence with a passion for living that we 'dance'. In order to achieve this, we must open the seams of conscience; if need be, awaken the 'Raudra' of Shiva to engage with discipline and grace, on this urban-stage and its myriad dramas that presently deprive us of the sanctity of being.

The Naked Truth... [2008]

Silk organza, cotton floss and gauze bandage

Appliqué and embroidery

Series IV, II and V of VI [8.25 x 10.25 inches]



Dance in this context is not a performance for entertainment but a journey into the spirit of being, where there is scope for contemplation, for questioning the events of the day, uncovering its lies; observing the mind at work and play. Where, in thus excavating oneself, we discover our very own sacred space.

Gopika Nath | 27th January 2009

Photos : Madhavi Swarup

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- I. Martha Graham
 - II. Ananda K Coomaraswamy – The Dance of Shiva
 - III. Rig Veda; Hymn of Creation 10.130- the Creation of the Sacrifice.
 - IV. Romain Rolland – The Dance of Shiva
 - V. Ananda K Coomaraswamy – The Dance of Shiva
 - VI. “Rajavidya rajaghyam pavitram idam uttamam Pratyaksa vagamam dharmyam susukham kartum auyayam ” BhagavadGita IX.2
[The sovereign science, the sovereign secret, the supreme purifier is this; directly realizable, in accord with dharma, brings peace and permanence of happiness to men] - Swami Chiddhavananda, Ramakrishna Mission publication.
 - VII. Ananda K Coomaraswamy
 - VIII. Deepak Chopra - Synchrodestiny

Whispers of Freedom [2008]

Polyester-cotton thread stitched on silk organza.
Series I of VI [9 x 12 inches]



Whispers of Freedom [2008]

Polyester-cotton thread stitched on silk organza.
Series II of VI [9 x 12 inches]



Streets of Confusion [2009]

Polyester cotton, paper, silk organza Embroidery and digital printing
[18 x 19 inches]



[Detail]



Despite the Rents and Tears; A Vision Sustained... [2009]
Polyester-cotton, paper, silk organza Embroidery and digital printing
[17.5 x 18 inches]



[Detail]





Photo : Karm Chawla

A PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

Gopika Nath is a Fulbright Scholar, an alumnus of The Central School of Art and Design, London, U.K. **A Textile Designer, a Fiber Artist, a Writer** and a **Teacher**, her association with Textiles began in 1976. Her talent and expertise have been successfully employed by the **Corporate Sector**, the **Handloom Industry**, **Retail Organizations**, **Fashion Designers**, **Exporters** and **Educational** Institutes.

Working with textiles as '**Art for Wear**', she has created her own range of **exclusive sarees and scarves**, and also worked with some of the leading **Fashion Designers** of the country, creating specialty fabrics for **Rohit Bal**, **Gitanjali Kashyap** and **Ashish Soni**, among others. Her work has been exhibited in India and abroad. Of this it has been said - "Gopika Nath's professional competence matched with her free expressive sense of styling and designing has made her collection of sarees quite unique" and "her creations are so perfect that buyers cannot believe it is hand done --- she is a

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

- 1985 **Central School of Art & Design, London, UK**
BA (Hons.) in Art & Design.
Major Field - Constructed Textiles: Weave
- 1982 **Sir John Cass School of Art, London, UK**
Foundation Course in **Art & Design**.
- 1979 **New Delhi Polytechnic for Women, New Delhi**
Diploma in Textile Design (with Distinction)
Major Field - Surface Design.

FELLOWSHIPS:

- 2000 **Fulbright** Fellowship **for Visual and Plastic Arts**.
- 1996 **Study Tour/Exchange** sponsored by **Japan Foundation** Asia Centre 'Interaction with Asian Textile Design Experts' in **Japan**

EXHIBITIONS:

- 2008 Group Show - 'Satyagraha, A Soul Force'
curated by Dr. Alka Pande,
presented by **Teamwork films** at **Sandton Civic Art Gallery**
at the Nelson Mandela , **South Africa**
- 2007 Group Show – Vistaar, curated by Sushma Bahl
Presented by **Limited Editions** at
'The Stainless', Mira complex, Okhla, Delhi
- 2003 Group Show - 'Performative Textures'
Curated by Dr. Alka Pande
Presented by **Apparao Galleries** at
Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, Delhi.

painter, a designer, a colour specialist. If you choose to wear one of Gopika Nath's creations, it would be a bit like donning an original painting."

As a design professional, Gopika Nath is an **acknowledged leader** in more ways than one. In addition to teaching traditional subjects relating to design, she has conceived, designed and taught a **unique design sensitization programme for management professionals** and also conducts lectures on 'Design and Society in the Indian Context' highlighting various social issues that remain largely ignored in the business of Design. She has been at Guest Faculty at NIFT since 1989.

Working with various agencies under the aegis of the **Ministry of Textiles**, and private organizations, Ms. Nath has considerable experience of working with **crafts people** in the **rural sector**. In this regard, she has undertaken projects for design and development of fabric in **Block printing with natural dyes, Ikat fabrics** in cotton and silk for **Furnishing, Sarees** and **Dhurries** as well as **Kashmiri**, hand embroidered **chain stitch** fabric and **Crewel rugs**. She has also worked in the **tribal region of Bastar**, M.P. reviving the dying handloom art of the region. For someone who has worked so actively in the visual realm, her evolution from Textile Designer to **Textile artist** has been a matter of course. Once again she leads in this area as a "darer on virgin ground, one who really thinks for herself. Refreshingly different as some of her own offering is, one is even more pleased that she is questioning the currently accepted parameters of art. Her intellected stance may well help make the act of art, socially more fractious."

As a Textile Artist her chosen medium of expression is **Embroidery**. Having been exposed, quite considerably to the existing hand-crafted textile traditions of India, Gopika is inspired to Embroider, rather than paint on a canvas. She believes that **Textile Art**, in the Indian context, is a key element in defining the **future of India's hand-crafting legacy**. Working with needle and thread, exhibiting her work as an artist/

- 2001 **Art India Inc.** <http://www.artindiainc.com> (tehelka.com) E-Gallery Exhibition.
- 1999 Group Show - 'Confluence '99'
Vis-a-Vis, Khirki Village, Delhi.
- 1999 Group Show - 'Contemporary Textile Art in India'
British Council, Delhi.
- 1998 Group Show - "Painted Weaves"
Art Indus, Santushti Complex, Delhi.
- 1998 Group Show - 'Confluence '98'
Vis-a-Vis, Khirki Village, Delhi.
- 1998 'Artist of the Month'
Vis-a-Vis, Radisson Hotel, Delhi.
- 1998 Group Show - "Beyond the Canvas"
Vis-a-Vis, Khirki Village, Delhi.
- 1997 "Textile Dilemmas - To be worn or to be Hung ?"
Exhibition of painted and embroidered Textiles
Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, Delhi.
- 1997 Group show of Installation Art at Qutab Colonnade,
Gallery Pontiac, Delhi.
- 1996 Exhibition and Interaction with Asian Textile Design
Sponsored by **Japan Foundation** Asia Centre in Tokyo, Kyoto and Okinawa. [Japan]

craftsperson in the environs of the **Art Gallery**, she hopes to be able to lend dignity to the **notion of hand-crafting** as '**Art**', **beyond mere skilled labour**, as it is largely considered today.

While questioning the existing parameters of **Art, through Art for Wear**, Installations and other creative expressions of her ideas, Gopika is also working towards **evolving a personal iconography** through which she can present ideas and thoughts that have their **antecedents** in this **global society**, but are also **deeply rooted in the Indian ethos**. In this context **Hindu myths** and legends as well the Indian tradition of hand-crafting in ancient India, form key features of her **current research** and expression.

Gopika Nath is **well travelled** and **presents a world view** in all her activities and ideas. She has **studied in London**, and lived there for 7 years. As a Fulbright Scholar, she has spent time in the U.S. **researching Textile Art in America**, and has also **visited Japan**, sponsored by the **Japan Foundation**, on an exchange programme to meet and interact with **Asian Textile Artists/ Designers**. She is currently involved in various **Art** and **Design** activities. She also **writes** on issues **related to Craft, Art, Design** and **Textile as Art**.



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1991- Exhibitions of exclusive Hand-painted sarees and ensembles
1993 in Delhi and Bombay.

1985 House & Garden "Young Designer of the Year" [London U.K]

PUBLICATIONS:

Embroidery Magazine (U.K)

Art India Magazine

Art & Deal Magazine

Discover India (Media Transasia)

Swagat (Media Transasia)

Expressions (Sahara Airlines, in-flight magazine)

Life Positive Magazine

Monthly Column - 'Spirit'

CFO Connect

Dataquest

'I' (Quarterly of the Visual arts) **India Habitat Centre.**

The India Habitat Centre's Art Journal

Art India Inc. <http://www.artindiainc.com/art> (**tehelka.com**)

Indian Design & Interiors (Media Transasia)

Indian Express

Times of India

Hindustan Times

Articles on Textiles/ Craft/ Design related issues

La Mode International as Fashion Consultant

Contributed articles on various Fashion issues.

Elite (Media Transasia Publication)

Features on Current fashion trends and designers.

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