

THE 100% AUSTRALIAN OWNED TEXTILE ART MAGAZINE

#123  
2016  
\$9.95 AUD  
\$15.00 NZ

# TEXTILE

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ARTIST PROFILES \* EXHIBITIONS \* BEST PRACTICE \* REVIEWS

**INSPIRING ARTISTS**

**FROM AROUND THE GLOBE!**

*cindy steiler*  
↓



STORIES OF MIGRATION

**TWENTYONE+**



# Unravelling

## THE STAINS OF BEING



*She stitches in and out  
through layers  
of memories  
marked with thread.  
in stretches uniform*

*Going in and out  
without pausing  
to reminisce  
or ponder  
on fear and pain*

*An unfeeling needle  
moves on and on  
round and around  
As if in a trance*

*Punctuating wounds*

*Hurting  
to mend  
Holding together  
a disintegrating fabric*

*Its eye  
finds its way  
around shapes  
I could not have seen*

*Defining them,  
neat rows of kantha  
sculpt reminisces  
of an ear*

*Sometimes  
a skull*

*The cloth is worn  
The tension apparent  
of warp and weft  
pulled apart*

*Torn  
hues of brown, amber  
and umber  
harking of stains  
that cannot  
be washed away  
Stare back at me*

*A fragile fabric  
questioning  
the notion  
of  
a cleaned slate*

The Fabric that stares back at me, evocative of the fabric of being, compels the question of how I could possibly remove those marks that are now deeply etched in my mind and start all over again, with a cleaned slate.

Stains of the mind, how do we remove them?

Stains in a tea-cup can be scrubbed with some Vim and a Scotchbrite, but lines that crease the brow, somehow remain, getting deeper with age. For seven years, I have been occupied with the concept of cleansing these marks in the mind; those ideas that diminish our sense of self and cause us to feel ashamed.

The concept grew through observing left-over marks in my tea-cup, which became the inspiration for a large body of work that draws its impetus from tea-stains. These stains, images of stains and cups containing the stains, became the markers that framed my exploration of self, in the contemporary world, through tea, the tea-cup and dregs within.



▲ ▲ *Self-Doubt*, 2015, 39 x 34.75 inches. Cotton fabric and floss, cotton-polyester thread. Hand embroidery, machine stitching, burning, layering staining with tea-leaves.

Initially, I digitally printed them onto cotton voile. I then worked with layers of the same image, 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. I progressed to staining the fabrics with tea leaves, to speak of these 'stains' in the mind, not as mere observations of what was there but as something that I was able to take responsibility for making or creating through thoughts that diminished my sense of self.

There have been many instances in my life, where I think of what it would have been like had I done things differently. The list is endless, however I've realised I could not have done any different. Life played herself out such that this is what it was meant to be. I have never quite accepted the concept of destiny but started realizing that the only choice one ever really has, as is often said, is the attitude with which we accept what occurs in our lives.

This exploration was not necessarily comforting, and dealing with various feelings and thoughts, I would tear the fabric, pull it, distort the weave, creating bunches and bulges, which the running stitch, that I have chosen to work with, often exaggerated or quelled, depending upon the mood I wanted to portray. I had discovered the wonders of the running stitch through an article I read three decades ago on the Sujanis of Bihar and Kanthas of Bengal that use the running stitch to put together old and worn sarees and dhotis, for use as quilts. I liked the idea of taking the old and making something useful from what has been, fashioning it into something new. It allowed me the grace to pick up old memories, wounds and issues, deal with them through the process of tearing, layering and stitching to lend another perspective to things, renewing the spirit, taking control of the past towards deeper realizations which empower one, through the process of looking.

This piece is called *Self-Doubt*. It has been done over a period of time, in stages. It started as an experiment to paint with tea-infused water, but gradually evolved into a more complex piece. At the time I was working on it, I was feeling very upset with myself and doubting the way I had approached a certain situation. I was angry, I felt that I had short-changed myself and allowed the situation to become one that I was now ashamed of having been a part of. It took a while to stitch, first, with the machine where the frenzied motion and clackety noises drowned out the noise

in my head as I tacked the many, uneven textures and unequal lengths, layering them together. And having spent the heightened emotions thus then came the calmer and more reflective phase of hand-sewing using the Kantha or



running stitch. Going round and around the fabric, in uniform stitches that calmed the mind with the repetitive motions, allowing my thought process to become subtle and less agitated. After about a week or so of this rumination with needle and thread, I decided to rest it. I had intended to pick it up and continue with the concentric Kantha markings, going round and around the issue, trying to find a way out of the conundrum. But when I looked at it again some weeks later, the feelings, that had been instrumental in creating much of the texture and marks, had dissipated. I had even forgotten about them. I was emotionally detached from the situation and also the piece. So, I was now objectively looking from the point of whether it was complete or not. And, since the emotions were dealt with, it seemed done!

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