



## Seams of the mind

VISUAL ARTS

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For a moment, it might appear to be a page straight out of a truant schoolboy's notebook filled with randomly drawn lines and figures, or a stained, old quilt tucked away in a musty shelf of a cupboard. But as you look closely, you realize that beyond the amber-coloured stains and the haphazard sutures on the fabric, there is a creative process at work that is deeply contemplative and is carefully executed. It is this carefully-choreographed randomness that is the hallmark of the artworks of Gopika Nath. Using two distinct techniques of stitching and staining, she produces a range of abstract compositions that transform these quotidian practices into an exercise of introspection and personal recollection. Her latest solo exhibition, titled *The Piercing Needle*, organized by Gallery Sanskriti ended on February 6 and presented a carefully curated collection of artworks, installations and videos.

In these works, the two separate acts — staining and stitching — acquire specific meanings. The act of spilling tea, an unconscious exercise done in a state of absent-mindedness, is turned into a conscious, artistic process. She pours the amber-coloured liquid on the fabric and allows it to form random patterns. She then uses stitching, along with a host of other techniques such as burning, layering, shredding and tearing, to complete the process. Stitching no longer remains a quotidian practice associated with womanly virtues, but becomes an artistic tool used to create stunning compositions in the abstract idiom.

Many of Gopika Nath's themes are personal. Thus, we have works such as *An Awkward Marriage* (2013) and *Photograph Album* in which she burns, tears, shreds and stitches to depict the act of recollecting painful memories, which like tea-stains, are never wholly erased but preserved in altered forms in the recesses of the mind. In works such as *Mapping Mind stains* (2013), *Self Doubt* (2014) and *Fragments of the Whole* (2013), she gives the visceral feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment a tactile form through her imaginative rendering of the workings of the human psyche. A recurrent motif in many of her other works is the teacup. In *Community of Cups* (2010), she stitches digital prints of various cups on a quilted fabric to create an alluring patchwork. In *The Stain Tea Party*, the artist creates an installation made up of teapots, cups and saucers, and uses burnt pieces of cloth to resemble drops of tea split by an unmindful drinker. Once again, these stains become evocative of the stains of the mind — the feelings of guilt and shame — which emerge when others judge us. However, her artistic endeavour is deeply therapeutic. By stitching together bits and pieces of fabric, torn cloth and burnt photographs, she releases the shame and guilt associated with the experiences of being a woman.