

Fabric Thread Art Workshop

Visual Art Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
21st June 2014



A houseful of enthusiasts signed up for this workshop. The paid participation enabled me to invited three autistic children, Mamta, Anjali and from Udayan Care Orphanage, and two girls Kusum and Rani from Nai Disha an organization that provides learning to under-privileged children. In addition, I also invited two craftsmen from Bihar who have been doing embroidery since the age of five, by just watching their fathers and elders around them doing this work. All together there were thirty participants, including teachers, teenagers and corporate executives.

Doordarshan Television was recording the proceedings and mid-way through the workshop, after the participants had done some exercises to explore the potential of fabric and thread to express emotion, they interviewed some of the participants, including the children. When Sushma Khan, the producer said to fourteen year old Anjali from Udayan Care, that she had done well expressing her anger through the fabric exercise, but how would she express happiness, Anjali said, *"nahin jaanti"*, Shushma persisted when Anjali said, *"bhool gayee khushi hoti kya hai."* These words, pulled at my heart bringing forth tears. And they still have the same emotive power. Mamta, one of Anjali's mates, didn't speak throughout the workshop but when she was given fabric to play with, there was no hesitation in how she put it all together and how swiftly she created a fabric collage.

To begin with, I had shown the participants slides of international artists who work with needle and thread and then discussed my own work with them in greater detail. While looking at the work of others, there is much conjecture about the meaning etc, but it is easier to say exactly what was going on where, when I was working on a particular piece of embroidery. I then gave them words to play with. Volunteers from among the participant acted out the implied meaning without words - just the action, which was then translated into what they did with the fabric. The fabric and thread exercises were followed by some music and body work to relax and Garima Vashist, said she *"really loved the music therapy exercise"* which helped her open up to create an image using some Ajrakh fabric which she called ' See the World through My Eyes' – a globe of blue Ajrakh, a hand that continues this work with an eye that signified someone up there looking out for you.

Nilima and Nina, middle-aged, full of fun and willing to explore, came to this workshop to relive their childhood hobby centre days. Vibhuti, another of the participants later wrote on the facebook event page when I posted some of the photos saying: *"I was there today and saw all the talent in the group.....and I learned that there is lots that can be done to stimulate the creative juices..... Gopika, you have sowed the seed to help me overcome moments of loneliness to find a way to express my emotion"*

Other Comments / feedback on the workshop

" wonderful workshop Gopika, this kind of engaging creativity, out of the box ability, and playfulness will do a world of good for so many, thanks..... Chhaya"

"I must say that the Ajrakh cloth completely conveys my message.....This was truly after the music exercise we did yesterday.....I would name it as "SEE THE WORLD THROUGH MY EYES".....i have made a globe with blue Ajrakh print and the Godly hand says that continue with the work what you are doing or the role you are playing in this world.....Someone up is observing you!!!" - Garima Vashist

