

## Introduction to Workshops



Embroidery, as most of us in urban India understand it is imbued with the Victorian implication that this is women's work and considered more a hobby than a profession. Yet, most of the karigars who work for the Indian fashion industry, which relies heavily upon embroidery for its merchandise value, are mostly men. According to noted textile historian Rosemary Crill, there have been few societies where embroidery played as important a role as in India. Whether it was the rural tradition for dowry, wedding paraphernalia, the courts of Mughals or other ruling elite, embroidered textiles also played a significant role in adorning carved stone halls and dressing nobility. In addition, a thriving trade made Indian textile products famous for two millennia where embroidery was at the forefront of our rich textile tradition.

The hand-crafting traditions that the contemporary Indian fashion industry draws its sustenance from is a dying art, quite simply because the artisans today are looked upon more as skilled labour than the artist-craftspeople of ancient India. Here the craft supported them in mind, body and spirit and was not separate from daily living – it was not a profession per se but a way of life in an era when art was not what you did but how you did everything that you did.

This ideal has fascinated me for a long time and prompted me to become an artist-craftsman. As an Artist-craftsperson, I started working with needle and thread about eighteen years ago and found that there was so much peace in the process. Even today I love my time doing embroidery where thoughts just float about and I don't have to think or put my mind to anything other than what I am feeling and thinking. It's very calming and a huge stress-buster especially at the end of the day.

My work has also involved a return to the dual role of crafting wherein I have worked to redefine textiles as a medium of art and not just something of utility as a garment or house-hold linen. I have been teaching design students for the past two decades but in my endeavour to create awareness among the general public of all these facets of textiles and especially embroidery, I now conduct workshops for all ages and skill levels, including children. I am always amazed at the dynamics that unfold when children and adults work together and this time too, it was fabulous to see adults with no prior art background eschewing all inhibitions and working like the children around them. They responded in very interesting ways to the ideas and material that they were exposed to, which is always very satisfying to note.

I have also conducted art classes for children aged 5 – 12 years of age, teaching them the basis of drawing along with embroidery, papier mache, painting, paper sculpting and imaginative drawing etc.

