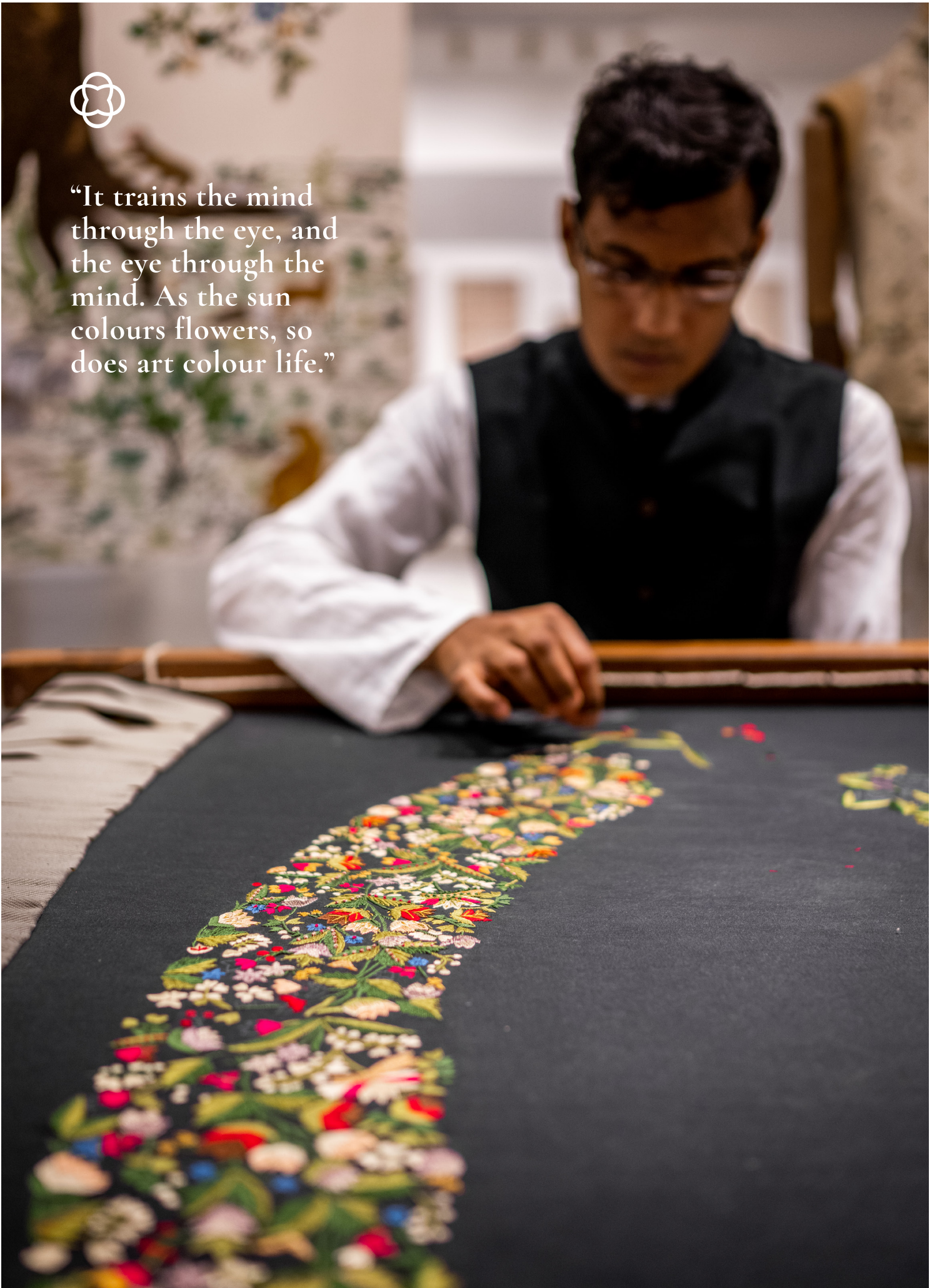




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“It trains the mind
through the eye, and
the eye through the
mind. As the sun
colours flowers, so
does art colour life.”





 CHANAKYA

CRAFTING TOMORROW





Chanakya's practice explores the ways in which we express ourselves and relate to one another, with an introspective focus.



Physical, spiritual and ecological themes from our natural world, and their implicit interconnectedness have been rooted in ancient and indigenous traditions for centuries.

Our affinity for nature — its majestic wonders as well as its boundless mysteries — manifest in organic shapes and forms. Underscoring these thematic notions are a series of crafted artworks imagined by Artistic Director, Karishma Swali, and brought to life by the master artisans of the Chanakya Ateliers.

Collectively, they create visual landscapes showcasing the mastery of hand-craftsmanship, reflecting the colours, energy, and harmony of earth, sea, sky and the cosmos.





Over a millennia hand embroidery and craft excellence have been integral to India's cultural fabric, they lend to the identity of communities and are an expression of their collective harmonies.



This inherent talent is present even today, kept alive and vibrant through the *guru-shishya* tradition of mentoring, the knowledge passed on personally and honed through apprenticeship.

Expanding on our rich cultural heritage and a three-decade long creative partnership with Maria Grazia Chiuri, Artistic Director of Dior Women's Collections, we bring forth a presentation dedicated to the creative spirit of our master artisans. Through their collective stories, we thread the past, present and the incredible savoir-faire of India's artisanal legacies.

We welcome you to discover eleven schools of hand-craftsmanship brought to life through this artistic collaboration.

1. CROCHET

The word crochet is derived from the French *crochet*, a diminutive of *croche*, in turn from the Germanic *croc*, both meaning “hook.” Knitted textiles survive from as early as the 11th century CE, but the first substantive evidence of crocheted fabric emerges in Europe during the 19th century. Earlier work identified as *crochet* was commonly made by needle-binding, a different looped yarn technique. In *crochet* the hook is used, without a foundation material, to make a texture of looped and interlinked chains of thread. As it became more sophisticated, *crochet* work approximated lace, antique laces such as Venetian raised lace.

Research suggests that *crochet* probably developed most directly from Chinese needlework, a very ancient form of embroidery known in Turkey, India, Persia and North Africa, which reached Europe in the 1700s and was referred to as “tambouring,” from the French “tambour” or drum. In this technique, a background fabric is stretched taut on a frame. The working thread is held underneath the fabric. A needle with a hook is inserted downward and a loop of the working thread drawn up through the fabric. With the loop still on the hook, the hook is then inserted a little farther. Throughout the ages, a variety of materials have been used: hair, grasses, reeds, animal fur, hemp, flax, wool, metal thread, silk, mohair, chenille, novelty mixtures and string.

Today, it has evolved to become a means of livelihood and self-expression for people across all social classes. *Crochet*’s cultural significance lies in its ability to serve as a symbol of cultural identity, promote social causes, and provide a means of creative expression for people across the globe.

KALPAVRIKSHA I

TREE OF LIFE

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Cotton thread

TECHNIQUE

Crochet

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, using a micro-crochet technique. The permeable nature of the surface creates patterned shadows formed by the dense foliage for a visual effect.

A recurring motif in cultures across the world, *Kalpavriksha* or tree of life, symbolises different aspects of interconnectedness between man and the natural world. The roots symbolise our foundations and a deep connection to our ancestry, the trunk represents strength and wisdom, and the leaves show us eternal hope, renewal and revival.



Detail from Kalpavriksha I

2. ZARDOZI EMBROIDERY — METAL BULLION

Zardozi translates to 'sewing with gold string'. It derives from *zar*, that is, gold, and *dozi*, embroidery. Zardozi work flourished in Lucknow under the patronage of the Nawabs of Awadh. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, zardozi became popular with the wealthy Hindu, Muslim and European social elite in various urban centres such as Hyderabad, Calcutta, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kashmir and Delhi.

Originally zardozi was done with pure silver and gold wires, also known as bullion, on silk, satin and velvet fabrics, and the process was known as *kalabattu*. These wires, now made in copper, are very fine and are wound into a soft flexible hollow tubes used to couch fabrics. The flat wire used is called *badla*, prepared from a flattened wire which is laid on the surface of the fabric, and when wound round a thread, it is called *kasab*. Smaller spangles or sequins with a hole in the centre are called *sitara*, and tiny dots made of *badla* are called *mukaish*. *Dabka*, also known as French wire, is a fine coil of copper wire used to conceal beading wire next to crimps and clasps. *Nakshi* is a flat metal wire coiled in an angular way similar to dabka except that it is thicker.

Historically, zardozi embroidery was considered a symbol of affluence, often likened to precious metals such as gold and silver. It is used as decoration for a wide range of applications, including ceremonial robes, decorative textiles, and religious offerings. It was used to adorn the walls of royal tents, scabbards, wall hangings and the paraphernalia of regal elephants and horses.

DARSHAN DWAR

WELCOME DOOR

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Metal bullion on low-pile velvet

TECHNIQUE

Zardozi embroidery

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective using the zardozi technique with a combination of pure silver metal bullion, semi-precious stones and metal sequins work.

Finely embroidered in metal bullion and silk threads, this artwork features two moons prominently placed in the top corners while elegant mythical figures flank the central motif of the sun. The borders are decorated with floral motifs and winding creepers that frame the artwork.



MOHUR RAASHI I
GOLD COIN ZODIAC

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM
Metal bullion on silk

TECHNIQUE
Zardozi embroidery

DESCRIPTION
Inspired from ancient Indian zodiac gold coins from the 16th century, this abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective using the zardozi technique with gold metal bullion.



Detail from Darshan Dwar



Detail from Mohur Raashi I

3. SATIN STITCH OR FINE STITCH

In sewing and embroidery, a satin stitch or damask stitch is a series of flat stitches that are used to completely cover a section of the background fabric. Narrow rows of satin stitch can be executed using a zigzag stitch or a special satin stitch foot. Some variations include bourdon stitch, brick stitch and long-and-short stitch, among many others.

The satin stitch is a common form of needlework traditions worldwide; it is notable in North Africa, South America, Western Asia, Southeast Asia, Indian Subcontinent and the Middle East. Satin stitch is also characteristic of Chinese embroidery. The use of satin stitches became more frequent in the late Tang dynasty to the early Song dynasty. During the Tang dynasty, figural imagery, which was partially influenced by the growth of Buddhist imagery, first appeared; this contributed to the decline of chain stitches as satin stitches could provide better render scenes of Buddhist donor figures. Satin stitches then became the popular embroidery technique later on.

Satin stitch is frequently made with embroidery thread, which has less twist than standard sewing thread. This gives a more uniform effect, with the individual threads' filaments merging to create a sfumato effect, a painting technique for softening the transition between colours, mimicking an area beyond what the human eye is focusing on, or the out-of-focus plane, likening the needle to a paintbrush.

KALPAVRIKSHA II

TREE OF LIFE

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Silk thread on silk

TECHNIQUE

Satin stitch

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, using contemporary variations of the satin stitch. Floss stitch has been used to work the embroidery in long and short stitches and satin stitch to create a sfumato effect.

A recurring motif in cultures across the world, *Kalpavriksha* or tree of life, symbolises different aspects of interconnectedness between man and the natural world. The roots symbolise our foundations and a deep connection to our ancestry, the trunk represents strength and wisdom, and the leaves show us eternal hope, renewal and revival.



Detail from Kalpavriksha II

4. LACE MAKING

Lace making has been an impressive cultural tradition in Europe and across the world. Although it is impossible to accurately date its emergence, iconographic evidence points to the period of the late 15th to early 16th century, when techniques of decorating textiles were being employed that led to the appearance of lace. It is believed that the etymology of the word *renda* (the Portuguese for “lace”) can be traced from the Catalan word *randa*, meaning edge or border. Perfected during the Renaissance, lace, whether made with hands, bobbins or needles, belongs to a mixed heritage of techniques, fashion and designs.

The production of bobbin lace essentially relies on highly-skilled artisans with a deep knowledge of tools and materials. The tools used are fine cotton threads, bobbins, pins, and needles. In traditional lace-making, pins are used to secure the rows to be worked by the bobbins, according to the design on the pricking card, thus making a lace mesh. Although they could use a hundred bobbins, lace-makers only worked with four at a time. Experienced lace-makers do not always use pricking cards and rely on their abilities to position the pins in order to produce lace.

The culture of crafting lace by hand, traditionally practiced by women, was brought to India by nuns and Christian missionaries who traveled from France, Portugal, Belgium, and other European countries.



5. ZARI

Zari (or jari) is an even thread traditionally made of real gold or silver used for ornamentation, especially as brocade in saris. The technique is commonly known as zari work or *zari ka kaam*. It was brought to India by Persian migrants between 1700-1100 BC; however, it flourished during the Mughal era under the patronage of Emperor Akbar. The craft was at its peak in the 17th century Mughal court, where it was widely used on garments, footwear, court decorations and equestrian ornaments. The motifs were inspired by nature like leaves, floral vines, trees and forest animals: a combination of flora and fauna wonderfully exhibited on cascading silhouettes.

Real zari is made from fine silver or gold thread is drawn from silver or gold alloys, which is flattened by passing it under equal pressure rotating rollers. The flattened silver threads are wound on the base yarn that is usually made of silk. Embroidery using metallic threads is called *kalabattu* and forms the zari. Here the metal ingots are melted into metal bars called *pasa* from which lengths are derived by beating it after treatment. It is then pulled through perforated steel plates to make it into wires, followed by the *tarkashi* process to make it thinner. The last stage is called *badla* where the wire is flattened and twisted with silk or cotton thread to become *kasab* or *kalabattu* with uniform evenness, flexibility, softness and ductility.

KALPAVRIKSHA III

TREE OF LIFE

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Zari

TECHNIQUE

Variations from the Zardozi and Aari school of embroidery

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, with metallic zari featuring intricate patterns of figurative branches of trees and meandering floral vines, inspired by an Indian forest.

A recurring motif in cultures across the world, *Kalpavriksha* or tree of life, symbolises different aspects of interconnectedness between man and the natural world. The roots symbolise our foundations and a deep connection to our ancestry, the trunk represents strength and wisdom, and the leaves show us eternal hope, renewal and revival.



Detail from Kalpavriksha III

6. KANTHA

Kantha is a centuries-old tradition of stitching together a patchwork of cloth held by running stitches. While the word *kantha* has no certain etymological root, it is believed to be derived from the Sanskrit word *kontha*, meaning rags.

One of the oldest forms of embroidery originating from India, its origins can be traced back to the pre-Vedic age (prior to 1500 BCE), though the earliest written record is found dating 500 years ago. Kantha refers to both the style of running stitch, as well as the finished cloth. It was a craft that was practiced by women of all rural classes, “the rich landlord’s wife making her own elaborate embroidered quilt in her leisure time and the tenant farmer’s wife making her own thrifty coverlet, equal in beauty and skill.”

The earliest and most basic kantha stitch is a simple, straight, running stitch using fine cotton threads forming imagery inspired from folklore, religion, mythology and personal stories of the artisans and their everyday rural life. The threads were traditionally pulled out of the borders of *saris* and *dhotis* and thus based on availability of materials, rather than a predefined colour palette. Kantha stitching is also used to make quilts, commonly known as *nakshi kantha*. Women in Bengal typically use old saris and cloth and layer them with kantha stitching to make a light blanket, throw, or bedspread, especially for children.

KALPAVRIKSHA IV

TREE OF LIFE

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Cotton thread on organic cotton

TECHNIQUE

Kantha

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, using fine cotton thread on a linen base fabric. Variations within a stitch are created by introducing or removing spaces, lengthening and shortening stitches, adding a stitch and other creative approaches.

A recurring motif in cultures across the world, *Kalpavriksha* or tree of life, symbolises different aspects of interconnectedness between man and the natural world. The roots symbolise our foundations and a deep connection to our ancestry, the trunk represents strength and wisdom, and the leaves show us eternal hope, renewal and revival.



Detail from Kalpavriksha IV

7. TOY MAKING

Toy making in India finds its origins long back to the time of the Indus Valley Civilization. Toys were then made of wet sand, mud, cloth and wood.

The cloth doll has been in existence for almost as long as cloth itself. The main reason for cloth being a popular material for dolls was because it's usually the easiest to find and use. Typically, these dolls were made of scrap fabric or discarded clothing and brought to life with a variety of needlepoint techniques and handcrafted for a loved one inserting personal references.

The rich cultural heritage of India through the ages can be vividly depicted through dolls from different geographical regions and the techniques used to craft them.

VAANAR VAN MONKEY FOREST

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

TECHNIQUE

Appliqué and patchwork with scrap fabric and needlepoint techniques

DESCRIPTION

The playful abstraction featuring toy monkeys is inspired by a mythical race of forest-dwelling people as depicted in Indian folklore, handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective using a variety of needlepoint techniques such as satin stitch, cross-stitch, micro-beading, appliqué and crochet, and scraps of Indian block printed textiles such as *Ajrakh* and *Bagru* dyed with natural, vegetable dyes.



PACHISI

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

TECHNIQUE

Appliqué and patchwork with scrap fabric and needlepoint techniques

DESCRIPTION

Pachisi is a cross and circle board game that originated in Ancient India. It is played on a board shaped like a symmetrical cross. A player's pieces move around the board based upon a throw of six or seven cowrie shells.

Handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, the game features a soft board made of scraps of Indian block printed textiles such as *Ajrakh* and *Bagru* dyed with natural, vegetable dyes and a variety of needlepoint techniques such as satin stitch, cross-stitch, appliqué, micro-beading and crochet. The players, also made from scrap fabric, are seated around the board depicting a leisurely scene from an Indian courtyard.



Detail from Pachisi



Detail from Pachisi

8. APPLIQUÉ

Appliqué is a decorative technique where surface fabrics of varied shapes and colours are stitched, spontaneously or decoratively, on to a background or base fabric. The word “appliqué” is derived from the French verb “appliquer” which stands for the meaning “to put on”. Similar to patchwork, appliqué can take any form: figurative, ornamental or geometric.

While leather and felt appliqués have been found on carpets, wall hangings and saddle covers in 4th century BCE tombs in Eastern Europe, the origins of it in India remain unknown. The history of Appliqué work in India can be traced as back to the women folk of the native communities of north Gujarat; the Kathis (the landowners), the Mahajans (the businessmen) and the Rabaris (the nomad camel herders).

Appliqué is found in many parts of India and is of several types. The most common is on-lay appliqué where the surface fabric is cut in the shapes of the desired motifs and stitched to the base fabric. In certain traditions, appliqué is combined with embroidery. Primarily practiced by women who belong to several communities; chief among them are Rabari, Ahir, Kanbi, Mochi, Harijan, Pipli and Chaudhary Patel. Against an arid and monotone landscape, the women of Kutch, carrying their old histories and cultural influences, find a way to relieve the starkness around them. They use vivid and colourful threads and embellish everything around them that is made of cloth. With equal vigour they embroider covers to be slung on the backs of their cattle and camels, or their stacks of quilts. In rural India, appliqué is used for to repair damaged fabric, in line with the Indian philosophy of mending items that may have otherwise been discarded.

KALPAVRIKSHA V

TREE OF LIFE

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Cotton and silk thread on silk

TECHNIQUE

Appliqué, needlepoint techniques

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by the master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, using a variety of needlepoint, patch work and appliqué techniques.

A recurring motif in cultures across the world, *Kalpavriksha* or tree of life, symbolises different aspects of interconnectedness between man and the natural world. The roots symbolise our foundations and a deep connection to our ancestry, the trunk represents strength and wisdom, and the leaves show us eternal hope, renewal and revival



GULMARG
MEADOW OF FLOWERS

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM
Micro-beads, needlepoint
techniques

DESCRIPTION
The abstraction is handcrafted by
master artisans of the Chanakya
ateliers with micro-beading.

Inspired by Indian flora and
fauna, this micro beaded panel
is a depiction of floral motifs
interspersed by the traditional
paisley to create an intricate
interplay between colour,
textures and forms.



Detail from Kalpavriksha V



Detail from Gulmarg

9. INTERDISCIPLINARY CRAFT - AARI

An ancient school of embroidery, Aari is both the name of a needle and a type of stitch that determines a style of embroidery. The Aari needle is hook-shaped (the other principal school of embroidery, Zardozi, uses the straight needle). It is a needle with a hole ("Aar"), into which the thread is introduced from below.

Aari is also a type of stitch created by looping the thread through stretched fabric using the hooked needle (with the thread being fed from below and the hook picking it up from the underside) – this creates a line of chainstitches (similar to the point chainette), and can be embellished with beads and pearls by threading them before plunging below, thus securing them to the fabric. It is used to embroider with harder materials like beads and sequins, but also simply thread.

NABH RAAT

NIGHT SKY

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM

Interdisciplinary craft on silk

TECHNIQUE

Variations from the Aari school of embroidery

DESCRIPTION

The abstraction is handcrafted by master artisans of the Chanakya Craft Collective, using variations from the Aari school of embroidery

A fine example of interdisciplinary craft done with *gota*, *kalabattu*, sequin and tiny glass beads on satin silk fabric, the design of this banner has been worked in two parts: the panel was hand-painted featuring mystical creatures inspired by Indian mythology, and the motifs were then embroidered with a multitude of techniques and materials including enamel sequins, a material innovated in the Chanakya ateliers in 2004, micro beads, lurex threads and silk yarns.



MOHAR RASHI II

GOLD COIN

Karishma Swali
& Chanakya Craft Collective

MEDIUM
Interdisciplinary craft on silk

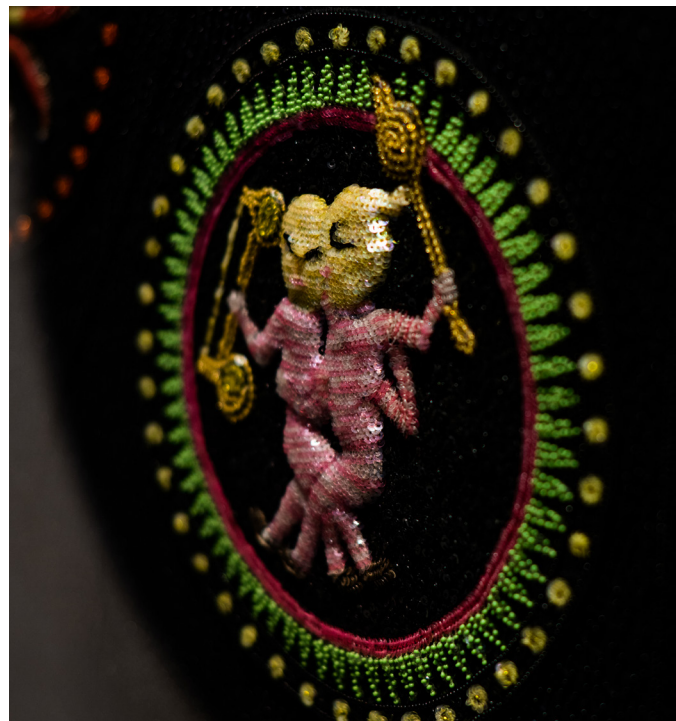
TECHNIQUE
Variations from the Aari school
of embroidery

DESCRIPTION
During the Mughal Empire, solar
months were conventionally
represented by the twelve zodiac
signs, which were used on a
series of coins. In each month
that was struck, the figure of the
constellation was on one face, as
if the sun was emerging from it.

Inspired by the gold coins from
16th century India, this spirited
abstraction is handcrafted by
master artisans using coloured
enamel sequins, metallic sequins
and glass micro-beads to give it a
playful disposition.



Detail from Nabh Raat



Detail from Mohar Rashi II



10. BLOCK PRINTING

For India, block prints hold a place of pride—the age-old craft of dyeing and colouring a fabric using wooden blocks has been perfected over generations. Whether it is Rajasthan's popular Dabu print, which uses the mud printing technique, or Gujarat's Ajrakh, featuring geometric motifs, each block print is symbolic of the country's vast heritage and rich culture.

The recorded history of block printed fabrics dates back to the Indus Valley civilization, around 3500 to 1300 BC. From the Harappan period onwards, the export of textiles, especially cotton, is confirmed.

During the Mohenjo-Daro site excavation, needles, spindles, and cotton fibres dyed with Madder (a red dye or pigment obtained from the root of the madder plant) were excavated. This proves that Harappan artists were familiar with Mordants (dye fixatives). It is believed that it was only under the Mughal patronage that block printing flourished in India. The Mughals introduced the intricate floral motifs that are still widely used in the hand block printed textiles from Rajasthan. Today, the art form is practiced in the states of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, apart from the aforementioned two.



11. WEAVING

The history of Indian textiles and weavers in India dates to ancient times. The origins of textile in India can be traced back to 3000 BC, during the Indus Valley Civilization. Indians then used homespun cotton as the material for weaving their garments. Textiles of Indian origin were one of the major products of trade and business in those times. Traditionally, the entire process of cloth making was self-reliant. The cotton / silk / wool came from the farmers, foresters or shepherds, and the cotton was cleaned and transformed by weavers themselves or agricultural labour community. Small handy instruments were used in the process, including the famous spinning wheel (also known as Charkha), mostly by women. This hand spun yarn was later made into cloth on the hand-loom by the weavers.

Examples of India's rich weaving history are Madras Checks and Pattu. Madras Checks is a traditional pattern used for sarees, lungis, pants and shirts in the South of India. The name derives from a city in Tamil Nadu, now known as Chennai. The design block is divided in bright, vibrant colours, where three colours are placed in the warp yarns and similarly three colors run in the weft shuttle. The warp is prepared with 7,500 yarns of silk thread and the weft shuttle is manually passed to-and-fro across the width, resulting in the weaving of more than 7,500 yarns per meter fabric. Pattu is the Tamil word meaning silk. In this, the natural fiber produced from the cocoons of mulberry silkworm allows to create the finest quality sarees that are considered among the best in the world, such as the so-called Kanchipuram or Kanjivaram silk sarees.











