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THREADS OF INNOVATION: ANALYZING THE USE OF CLOTH STITCHED METHODS IN SCULPTURES BY BENGALI ARTISTS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the changing methods employed by contemporary Bengali sculptors who combine experimental sculptural shapes with traditional textile art by employing stitched textiles techniques. In an area known for its rich textile history, including hand embroidery, patchwork, and kantha, this study explores how artists are recovering and reimagining these techniques within the context of modern visual language.

The paper explores the dual roles of cloth and stitch as material and metaphor signifying the body, memory, resistance, and domestic work through case studies of chosen artists. These artists frequently use traditional textile techniques like patchwork, quilting, and kantha embroidery, reinterpreting them into sculptures that subvert the boundaries of fine art and craft, permanence and fragility, and tradition and modernity. The study's methodology examines how stitched cloth sculptures engage space, texture, and temporality in distinctive ways through visual analysis, artist interviews, and archival investigation.

*This study highlights how regional traditions are being actively modified by analyzing Bengali stitched-cloth sculptures within broader discourses of postcolonial identity, feminist art practices, and material experimentation. Thus, *Threads of Innovation* redefines form, authorship, and the fundamental fabric of sculpture itself by presenting stitching as a radical gesture rather than an act of adornment.*

Keywords: Hand embroidery, patchwork, Kantha, Contemporary Bengali sculptors, stitched-cloth sculptures, Muslin, Jamdani

INTRODUCTION:

In Indian contemporary art, textile-based techniques are becoming increasingly potent means of material experimentation, identity construction, and narrative. The capacity of contemporary Bengali artists to blend tradition and invention, intimacy and critique, is particularly noteworthy in their stitched and sculpted textile pieces. This emerging style, in which cloth and stitched move beyond their traditional connections with domesticity and craft to become expressive sculptural languages, is examined in **Threads of Innovation: Analyzing the Use of Cloth Stitched Methods**

in Sculptures by Contemporary Bengali Artists.

Bengal has long been renowned for its unique textile heritage, which includes innovative patchwork traditions that arose from women's narrative-based cultures, complex kantha stitching, and rhythmic jamdani looms. These traditional practices are being referenced by contemporary Bengali artists, who are using conceptual and sculpture techniques to blend them together and form innovative style of cloth stitched method. These artists produce tactile, complex, and intensely evocative pieces by using cloth as their primary material and stitching as both a method and a metaphor.

With a rich history in textile traditions like kantha, jamdani, and batik—all of which represent a legacy of handicraft, storytelling, and cultural symbolism Bengali has long been a thriving hub for artistic experimentation. Bengali artists of today are changing these traditions rather than just carrying on them. Memory, body, gender, craft, and resistance are all interwoven through the use of cloth and stitching as sculptural techniques. These cloth stitched sculptures are more than simply items they are receptacles for criticism, emotion, and life experiences.

Stitched cloth is a method used by contemporary Bengali artists to subvert established narratives on gender, labour, identity, and material hierarchy. The lines separating art and craft, tenderness and strength, and political and personal are frequently blurred in these pieces. By cutting, binding, mending, and assembling, the artists challenge established systems of knowledge, power, and beauty in addition to creating shape.

In order to explore themes of identity, memory, and ecological fragility, artists like as Boshudhara Mukherjee, Sayan Chanda, and have extended the sculptural possibilities of cloth. As textile art moves from the periphery of "women's work" into mainstream institutional recognition-as demonstrated by its prominence at events like Delhi Contemporary Art Week and Art Dubai-this technique represents a larger cultural shift. Because of cloth's tactile qualities, pliability, and historical significance, artists can create immersive settings and totemic forms that inspire both individual stories and group rituals.

Finally, this study demonstrates that contemporary Indian textile sculpture is much more than a revival of traditional crafts; rather, it is a vibrant, idea-based art form that asserts cloth as a powerful narrative form in contemporary visual language, able to express intricate themes of migration, gender, and environmental stewardship in each stitch and fibre.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF BENGAL TEXTILE ART:

Bengal is one of the leading hubs for textile manufacturing on the Indian subcontinent, especially to its rich and intricate textile traditions that date back more than two millennia. Bengal created the perfect atmosphere for cotton farming and dyeing methods because of its rich water supplies and fertile deltaic plains. This inherent advantage eventually encouraged the development

of extremely complex textile crafts that would eventually have an impact on international marketplaces, cultural identities, and artistic practices. Muslin, a delicate handwoven cotton fabric valued for its lightness and beauty, was formerly the region's most well-known product worldwide. Jamdani, a labour-intensive weaving method that created elaborate designs woven straight into the fabric and was a craft that thrived under Mughal patronage, was equally significant. By reusing old saris into multilayer quilts embellished with narrative threads that represented everyday life, traditions, and spiritual themes, women in rural Bengal created Kantha embroidery see **figure 1**. These behaviours were social, symbolic, and artistic in addition to being practical



MRINALINI MUKHERJEE AS PIONEERING ARTIST FROM BENGAL:

Mrinalini Mukherjee, a pioneering Indian sculptor with a strong Bengal heritage daughter of artist Benode Behari Mukherjee of Santiniketan, transformed the use of fibre and natural materials in sculpture. Using hemp, jute, and colourful ropes, she used knotting, braiding, and twining techniques to create monumental sculptures. Although she did not stitch in the conventional sense, she pioneered fibre art in India by using textile methods to create sensuous, plant-human hybrid forms. Her sculptures, which have their roots in both Indian craft aesthetics and modernist abstraction, arouse spiritual, sensual, and mythological energies. For example see **figure 2** and **figure 3**.



*Figure 1 Mrinalini Mukherjee ,
Vanshree, Hemp fibre, 51×98×4"*



*Figure 2 Mrinalini Mukherjee, Yogini,
Natural fibre, 29×78×28"*

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS FROM BENGAL

SAGARIKA SUNDARAM



Figure 3 Sagarika Sundaram

Sagarika Sundaram in **figure 4** is a contemporary artist renowned for her innovative textile-based sculptures. She was born in Kolkata in 1986 and grew up in Dubai. Her international education at MICA, Parsons School of Design, and the National Institute of Design influences her artistic approach. She uses plant-based colours and traditional felting techniques to alter natural fibres like silk and wool. Themes of memory, transformation, and the interaction between the environment and the human body are all explored in her sculptures. She produces fluid, flowing shapes that blend the inner and exterior by cutting, folding, and layering felt, combining traditional textile techniques with contemporary artistic expression. Sagarika Sundaram's artistic work is solidly grounded in the utilization of traditional methods and natural materials, especially the age-old craft of felt-making. She uses plant pigments taken from roots, leaves, and rhizomes to hand-dye raw wool, which is her main medium. She starts with crosshatched layers of wool fibres, which are then felted by wetting, rubbing, and rolling, causing the fibres to join into thick, textured surfaces. Her sculpture method is both labour-intensive and intuitive. In order to examine differences between internal and exterior space, Sundaram frequently builds her forms from the outside inward. After felting, she works with the material by cutting, folding, and coiling it to reveal layers that are concealed and to create organic shapes that resemble plant and body structures. Her tactile sculptures express themes of memory, metamorphosis, and the interaction between humans and nature by fusing traditional textile techniques with modern issues. She honours craft traditions while extending their creative capabilities by creating rich sensory experiences with felt and colour.



Figure 4 Sagarika Sundaram, Bitch in Heat, 2025, hand-dyed wool, 54 x 58 x 8", Indian Art Fair 2025

Her art has cultural, ecological, and regional resonance since she uses hand-dyed wool and silk that have been coloured using botanical colours as shown in **figure 5**. Sundaram transforms craft into a performative, contemplative performance by using the time-consuming and traditional felting technique to arrange wool in cross-hatched layers. The fibres are then agitated, wet, and soaped to bind them. Echoing old ceremonial textile traditions,

Sundaram works spontaneously and frequently from behind, The fibres are then agitated, wet, and soaped to bind them. Echoing old ceremonial textile traditions, Sundaram works spontaneously and frequently from behind, creating without seeing the front till the very end. She blurs the lines between inside and outside, body and landscape, by cutting, folding, and unfolding layers of felt to reveal interior structures. Her creations preserve the memory of their production through their textures, serving as both artifacts and records of creation.

SAYAN CHANDA



Figure 5 Sayan Chanda

Born in 1989 in Kolkata, India, Sayan Chanda in **figure 6** now resides and works in London, UK, where he has made a name for himself as a prominent figure in modern textile sculpture. After extensive early involvement with Indian handloom clusters and folk weaving communities, he graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of Design in Textiles from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. He further refined his interdisciplinary approach, which includes weaving, dyeing, stitching, and clay work, in 2021 when he earned an MA in Fine Art from Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London. His work has been shown in group exhibits at places such as the South London Gallery, Saatchi Gallery, and Nature Morte, Dubai, as well as solo exhibitions, most notably *Between the Two Fires* at Cample Line, Scotland (March–June 2025). In keeping with his international involvement with textile traditions, he has also accepted esteemed residencies with the Sarabande Foundation in London and the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation's Thread program in Senegal.



Figure 7 Bohurupee 4 by Sayan Chanda



Figure 6 Dwarpalika by Sayan Chanda

Honouring their cultural heritage, Sayan Chanda sources vintage Kantha quilts, cotton cords, gamchhas, and hand-spun yarn from West Bengal and Mumbai. He combines these with found items such as metal parts, beads, and talismans made by hand from clay. He constructs iron or wooden armatures to form and tension his pieces, beginning with sketches and maquettes. In order to investigate themes of containment and unravelling, he weaves and knots textile strips over these, combining tight and loose parts. Chanda captures folk aesthetics and collective memory through needlework, embroidery, and natural colours. Form and design are guided by spontaneity in his intuitive, hybrid method, which combines weaving, stitching, dyeing, and clay work. Sayan Chanda uses totemic motifs and ritual materials in her textile sculptures, which serve as votive relics that examine memory, displacement, and protection. Tapestry-like panels of his Bohurupee series (2021–present) allude to Bengali folk-theatre masks and shapeshifting deities, provoking contemplation on the ways in which ritual artifacts influence collective identity. His woven pieces, which feature loose yarn and complex weaves, represent sites of entry into both individual and societal mythology. Using tapestries, ceramics, and charcoal drawings, Chanda turns the gallery into a temple-like setting in his solo exhibition *Between the Two Fires*, addressing patriarchal legacies and generational pain. Installations urge ritual-like involvement and evoke the sacred landscapes of Kolkata. In **figure 7** and **figure 8** Sayan Chanda's artworks are reflected.

MOUMITA DAS

Born in 1988 Moumita Das in **figure 9** is a modern Indian artist whose creations demonstrate a profound interest in the material and visual traditions of Indian textile production. She has become a prominent voice in the field of fibre art, where she blends traditional textile techniques with contemporary, conceptual frameworks, coming from a background rich in craft heritage and visual narrative. Academic training and a long-term investigation of indigenous materials and methods form the foundation of her artistic path. Das attended the prestigious faculty of fine arts at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, Kala Bhavana, which has long Das has continuously referenced the rich heritage of Indian artisanal crafts throughout her artistic career,

especially those related to weaving, natural dyeing, and embroidery. By creating earthy, textured pieces using natural materials like hemp, cotton, wool, jute, and khadi paper, Moumita Das's textile art combines cultural tradition with ecological consciousness. Her surfaces, which show a strong bond with environment and bodily memory, frequently mimic landscapes or topographical maps. Das stresses gradual, contemplative methods by using age-old methods including crochet, thread work, appliqué, hand stitching, and plant-based dyeing.

She emphasizes the process of creating as much as the finished product with her muted, natural colour scheme and layered, frayed textures. The artist's hand is obvious through the visible knots, seams, and tensions, which encourage sensory interaction. Das's art, which celebrates both material and technique in her craft, is situated at the nexus of contemporary art and textile heritage. It embodies time, touch, and transformation. Through the use of fibre as a narrative and reflective medium, Moumita Das's textile art intertwines memory, emotion, and environment. She produces layered, abstract forms that are influenced by natural materials like as bark and soil, drawing on ecological studies, traditional crafts, and personal experiences. Through tactile textures that mimic wounds or delicate bodily impressions, her art expresses fragility and resilience while examining the conflict between interior emotion and external form. Das elevates traditionally feminine, domestic practices to modern fine art through her methodical, meticulous technique. Because she believes that fibre has sensory intelligence, she considers it as a material and emotional agent. Her artwork highlights care and sustainability by utilizing natural materials like hemp, jute, and organic dyes. Das

ultimately uses textiles to create potent representations of gender, resistance, and memory. She offers a poetic and political reflection on labour, identity, and human connection through her work, which blurs the boundaries between art and craft, nature and body, examples of her artworks in **figure 10** and **figure 11**.



Figure 8 Newly growing forms by Moumita Das



Figure 11 Formation of Nature by Moumita Das

CONCLUSION:

The exploration of cloth and stitched methods in sculptural practices by Bengal artists reveals not only a rich interplay of tradition and innovation but also a strong commitment to sustainability. A highly intricate and innovative interaction with material, memory, and meaning may be seen in Bengali artists' explorations of cloth and stitching methods in their sculpture approaches. This study reveals how fibre-based techniques can be used not only for aesthetic purposes, but also for storytelling, cultural preservation, and sociopolitical criticism, using the works of modern artists such as Sagarika Sundaram, Sayan Chanda and Moumita Das. By adding contemporary relevance and individual expression, these artists reimagine traditional crafts including weaving, kantha stitching, embroidery, and dyeing. By combining traditional techniques with contemporary conceptual frameworks, Bengal artists prevent the historical marginalization of textile arts and elevate them within the contemporary art discourse. Tensions between strength and weakness, tradition and innovation, and individual and collective histories are expressed through their use of soft, organic materials in contrast to structured structures. By doing this, they transform sculpture into a tactile repository of feeling, identity, and resiliency, expanding its potential beyond form and volume. Their use of natural dyes made from minerals and plants further supports a sustainable strategy by

bringing the creative process into harmony with environmental awareness. In order to keep their art rooted in both ecological and ethical issues, these artists favour organic, repurposed, or culturally meaningful materials above manufactured or industrial ones. These Bengali artists support a sustainable manufacturing strategy that defies mass production and consumerist aesthetics by embracing labour-intensive, slow techniques like hand-stitching, weaving, and dyeing. Their creations function as tactile narratives that honour the materials and environments from which they originate in addition to human memory and emotion.

Bengal's textile sculptors produce works of art that are both culturally and environmentally responsible by avoiding industrial colours, machine-made decorations, and synthetic textiles. Their use of sustainable materials is a political and philosophical position that opposes consumerism, respects craft traditions, and promotes a more conscientious relationship between art and nature. It is not merely an aesthetic or pragmatic decision. It is suggested that future initiatives help these artists by giving them more exposure, providing financial assistance, and working with regional artisans and eco-friendly designers. This would make sustainability a major factor in Indian contemporary art production rather than a side option.

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3. <https://www.naturemorte.com/artists/mrinalinimukherjee/>
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