

## Engaging with Textile Traditions in Visual Art

**Image no:** 1

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *Thread for a Gita Govinda Textile*, 2009, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 2

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *Handloom*, Majuli, Assam, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 3

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *A Dancer Using Heavy Silk Brocade as a Prop in her Choreography (From: Dance of the Weave)* 2008, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 4

**Caption:** *Macro Multicolored Fabric Knitted Texture Background*, Video Footage, Envato Elements

**Link:**

<https://elements.envato.com/macro-multicolored-fabric-knitted-texture-backgrou-8C5C2UN>

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**Image no:** 5

**Caption:** *Weaving Traditional Mexican Carpet*, Video Footage, Envato Elements

**Link:** <https://elements.envato.com/weaving-traditional-mexican-carpet-G2743KW>

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**Image no: 6**

**Caption:** Avinash Pasricha, Detail, *Mrinalini Mukherjee in her Studio, Preparing for her Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art*, Oxford, Photograph, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no: 7**

**Caption:** Cattan2011, *Jute Hessian*, 2019, Photograph, Flickr, [CC BY 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://flickr.com/photos/68166820@N08/47848542041/>

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**Image no: 8**

**Caption:** Natrij, *Hemp Stalk*, 2002, Photograph, Wikimedia Commons.

**Link:** <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hanfstengel.jpg>

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**Image no: 9**

**Caption:** Krish Dulal, *Cotton in Bush*, 2018, Photograph, Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

**Link:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cotton\\_in\\_bush.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cotton_in_bush.jpg)

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**Image no: 10**

**Caption:** Elton Harding, *Ropes*, 2003, Photograph, Flickr, [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://flic.kr/p/sYNt8w>

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**Image no: 11**

**Caption:** Jyoti Bhatt, *Mrinalini Mukherjee Wearing one of her Fibre Works During Preparation for the Fine Arts Fair at MS University, Baroda, 1969*, Photograph, Asia Art Archive, Delhi and Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no: 12**

**Caption:** Mrinalini Mukherjee, *Yogini At Phenomenal Nature*, Met Museum, Breuer, 2019, Fibre, 73 x 199 cm, Flickr (Photographed by James Igoe). [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://flic.kr/p/2hcrkfH>

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**Image no: 13**

**Caption:** Mrinalini Mukherjee, *Naag*, 1986, Hemp Fibre, 200 x 83 cm x D. 42 cm, MAC.02864, Museum of Art and Photography, Bengaluru.

**Link:**

[https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/10336?src=srh&q=MAC.02864&oq=MAC.00487&\\_qtp=\\_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC](https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/10336?src=srh&q=MAC.02864&oq=MAC.00487&_qtp=_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC)

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**Image no: 14**

**Caption:** Mrinalini Mukherjee, *Pakshi*, 1985, Woven, dyed hemp, 260 x 95 cm x D. 70 cm, MAC.01215, Museum of Art and Photography, Bengaluru.

**Link:**

[https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/8764?src=srh&q=MAC.01215&oq=MAC.00487&\\_qtp=\\_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC](https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/8764?src=srh&q=MAC.01215&oq=MAC.00487&_qtp=_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC)

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**Image no: 15**

**Caption:** Mrinalini Mukerjee, *Nag Devta*, 1979, woven hemp fibre, 105 x 103 x 73 cm, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no: 16**

**Caption:** Mrinalini Mukherjee, *Vanshree At Phenomenal Nature*, Met Museum, Breuer, 2019, Hemp Fibre, 130 x 250 cm, Flickr. [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://flic.kr/p/2hcqrsZ>

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**Image no: 17**

**Caption:** *Jute Bag*, 2017, Photograph, Hippo Px. [CC0](#).

**Link:** <https://www.hippopx.com/en/bags-close-pattern-jute-bag-structure-bag-jute-418748>

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**Image no: 18**

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *Loom*, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, October 2010, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no: 19**

**Caption:** *Monika Correa at the Loom*, Photograph, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 20

**Caption:** Monika Correa, *Roots*, 1984, Warp: unbleached cotton, Weft: unbleached wool and black cotton, 115 x 97 cm, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 21

**Caption:** Monika Correa, *Purple Rose of Cairo*, 2013, warp: unbleached cotton, weft: handspun dyed wool, 154 x 96 cm, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 22

**Caption:** Monika Correa, *Mood Indigo*, 2019, warp: unbleached cotton, weft: vegetable-dyed indigo cotton, 157.7 x 86.3 cm, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 23

**Caption:** *Monika Correa at the Loom*, Photograph, Courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 24

**IMAGE CREDITS**

**Caption:** Nilima Sheikh, *Studies for Rozgar*, 2011, brush drawing and stencil printing on vasli paper, 23 x 30.5 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 25

**Caption:** Nilima Sheikh, *Each Night Put Kashmir In Your Dream*, exhibition at Chemould Prescott Road, 29 March - 29 April 2010, Casein tempera on canvas scrolls, painted on both sides, 304.8 X 182.8 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 26

**Caption:** Nilima Sheikh, *Rozgar*, 2011, brush drawing and stencil printing with casein tempera and gold leaf on vasli paper, Rozgar 1 and Rozgar 2: 234 x 77.5 cm, Rozgar 3 and Rozgar 4: 234 x 86 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 27

**Caption:** *Artist at Work*, Photograph, Courtesy of Nilima Sheikh.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 28

**Caption:** Nilima Sheikh, *Hunarmand*, 2014, Casein tempera on canvas scroll painted on both sides, 304.8 x 182.8 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 29

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *Weaver Settling the Muga Silk Yarn onto the Handloom Frame*, April 2010, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 30

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *Weaver Settling the Muga Silk Yarn onto the Handloom Frame*, April 2010, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 31

**Caption:** Briana Blasko, Detail, *Detail of a Chamba Rumal of Lord Krishna*, October 2010, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 32

**Caption:** Meera Mukherjee, Detail, *Untitled*, c.1980, hand embroidered cotton fabric, 55 x 48 cm, MAC.00487, Museum of Art and Photography, Bengaluru.

**Link:**

[https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/4957?src=srh&q=MAC.00487&oq=MAC.00487&\\_qtp=\\_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC](https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/4957?src=srh&q=MAC.00487&oq=MAC.00487&_qtp=_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC)

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The pliability of fabrics, along with their long and complex history in the Indian subcontinent, has prompted several material and conceptual explorations in modern and contemporary art practices.

Artists have adopted textiles as a medium, working innovatively with materials and techniques involved in their making. They also consciously explore the critical histories of traditional practices to shed light on the role of artisans in contemporary times, and raise important questions that provoke new ways of studying the history of Indian textiles. Let's look at the work of three Indian artists : Mrinalini Mukherjee, Monika Correa and Nilima Sheikh, whose practices reflect these explorations.

### **Materiality of Textiles**

The raw materials typically used for textile production have inspired visual artists to create imaginative artworks. Mrinalini Mukherjee was among the first Indian artists to experiment with fibres such as jute, hemp and cotton, as well as natural ropes, which she chemically dyed. As early as the 1970s, Mukherjee radically expanded the boundaries of Indian modern art by using such unconventional mediums to build robust sculptures.

Her works that embody organic and anthropomorphic forms, exude a sense of symmetry and feature subtle tonal variations. These large-scale sculptures that explore themes of mythology, nature and sexuality, tread the line between figuration and abstraction. In one of her defining works, 'Nag Devta,' Mukherjee uses tightly-knotted hemp fibres dyed in purple and green hues. This phallic structure, juxtaposed against a vulva, also morphs into the Hindu serpent deity, as we can see here.

Through her pioneering use of natural fibres, Mukherjee exposes the potential of seemingly ordinary materials by transforming them into sculptural forms.

### **Techniques of Textile Production**

A number of visual artists have also trained in methods of textile production, and incorporate these processes in their work. Monika Correa, a prominent textile artist, first learnt how to operate the loom under the renowned Finnish-American textile artist Marianne Strengell in Boston, and continued her training at the Weaver's Service Center in Bombay.

Through the technical skills she developed in the 1960s, Correa began weaving intricate tapestries that experimented with various gradients and textures, representing motifs inspired by nature. She routinely disturbs the linear and organised weaving processes and incorporates three-dimensional effects in her work through the innovative use of rough and textured wool and cotton. The resulting dynamism, as we can see here, has led the art historian Jyotindra Jain to express how these works embody a “kinetic quality.”

In addition to working directly on the loom and engaging with technical processes, Correa also raises a number of questions regarding gendered notions of labour and the caste-based implications of textile practices.

### **Re-Examining Traditional Practices**

Nilima Sheikh's explorations of the historic textile trade and labour industry reveal to us how artists can amplify the narratives of traditional artisans.

Influenced by her training in Thangka and Pichwai traditions, Sheikh's paintings frequently take the form of vertical panels and scrolls that embody multiple layers of meaning. Her 'Rozgaar' series depicts Kashmiri artisans engaged in traditional crafts. In Urdu, rozgaar means “livelihood,” and as we see here, the panels depict several images of artisans engaged in practices such as carding, spinning, weaving and stitching. Sheikh emphasises the postures of these labouring bodies at work as they engage in these rhythmic actions. The stencilled motifs and patterns we see across the panels recur across Sheikh's practice, and are made in collaboration with other artisans.

Her work, 'Hunarmand,' which loosely translates to “the talented,” is also dedicated to Kashmiri artisans, and features similar imagery of various craftspeople at work. The overlaid text recounts how the region historically

flourished as a mecca of the arts, drawing attention to the artisans whose practices are now threatened due to insurgencies in the region.

Through her representations, Sheikh ultimately traces the figure of the artisan, from being a subject of oriental curiosity during the colonial period, to a symbol of national revival during the freedom struggle. Her works compel us to consider the relationship between art and craft within contemporary contexts.

Textiles continue to serve as a potent subject and medium for artistic expression as age-old techniques and traditions lend themselves towards consistent reinterpretations and new possibilities — enabling present-day artists to explore broader themes and ideas.

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