

## Behold the Shapeshifting River

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Boshudhara Mukherjee's undulating tapestries conjure up robust interior landscapes, states **Jasmine Shah Varma**.



**Boshudhara Mukherjee.** egg.  
Uncoated canvas, enamel paint.  
126" x 96". 2018. © the artist.  
Photographs by Ashish Chandra.

REVIEW



**Boshudhara Mukherjee.** adi. Uncoated canvas, denim, fabric. 162"x 120". 2019. © the artist.

I step inside TARQ, Mumbai, but I don't see the customary text I am used to seeing on the entrance wall. I see an artwork. Boshudhara Mukherjee's woven tapestry is draped along the bend of the wall. It is a striking experience, and our first glimpse of *The Familiars*, a show driven by the tactile and visual presence of woven drape-like hanging objects.

There are veil-like tapestries suspended from the ceiling, but while they are all that is there, they are *not* all that is there. The shadows formed by the material on the wall are as much a part of the art experience. Some pieces are pinned to the wall at strategic spots, which give them the form they have. If the same piece was arranged in a different way, it would be a different piece of art.

The popular idea of how we see works on canvas is challenged in this exhibition. Mukherjee's work shreds this notion. Viewing *The Familiars*, viewers will question the idea that a work on the wall must sit within four sides of a frame, hung in a particular way and seen in a manner predetermined by the artist. The possibilities of the experience of art open up. That makes viewing an exhibition like this rewarding – there is this combination of the artist's acumen with the viewer's imagination.

What is an artist's process? With Mukherjee, it is to start at a point and let the tapestry grow, this way or that way, led by instinct and spontaneity. To draw an analogy, think of it as the river which flows along its course, constantly shifting shape according to the terrain. Here, the terrain would be analogous to the artist's thoughts and emotions. And then the viewer is inserted into that process, and it becomes *his* or *her* river.

The choice of material, be it a canvas, thread or fabric, is not accidental. Mukherjee repurposes painted canvases

or pieces of garments used by people close to her. All material is cut into strips for further use. For example, the work titled *adi* is made of denim and trouser fabric that belonged to the male members of Mukherjee's family. This work, as opposed to some of the others, is tightly knit, the mélange of strips giving it a variegated, blue-white marbled look. *bibi* draws inspiration from the spots and colour of the artist's 16-year-old cat. *egg* is loosely woven like a lattice, the colours are a bright motley of yellows and reds. Mukherjee uses multiple techniques for diverse effects – delicate and meticulous crochet pieces patchworked into a larger woven piece are resonant of fragments of thoughts, memories and experiences.

Mukherjee's art, guided by instinct and craft, is like a landscape of her interior world. How far can the viewer get into that space? Or can one find one's own experiences in these tapestries? Everyday experiences, feelings and responses are processed in this meditative process of crocheting or weaving. As a viewer, one responds with instinct, finding poetry and meaning in the work just as the artist discovered and expressed her own with every stitch.

The media note states that the show title *The Familiars* is inspired by the folklore about supernatural animal spirits that guide individuals. These works explore the ideas of kinship, belonging and rebirth. Some of these works were made during the 2020 lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, when most people found solace in their engagements with the immediate environment. The artist too would have transferred her experiences to the tapestries, weaving, stitching, patchworking her interior life between the folds and the stitches. /