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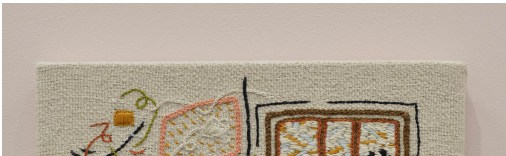
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# Areez Katki discusses craft, heritage and memory in his text and textile

New Zealand-based Katki talks about his diaspora, multi-faceted identity, and its translation into art as he prepares for his project to be presented at Colomboscope's seventh edition.

by [Shraddha Nair](#) | Published on : Oct 03, 2021

Areez Katki might be defined by many labels - artist, writer, weaver, storyteller, Zoroastrian, Indian, immigrant, but his creative practice is one which professes a broader label-free worldview. With myriad cultural influences, Katki's work is one which weaves together many stories. Concerned with cultural and spiritual structures, his art is an exploration of his own identity through the lens of [colonialism](#), sexuality, and materiality.



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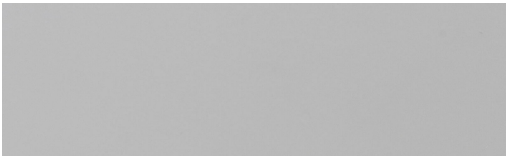
Self Portrait with Blue Desk(2018) by Areez Katki  
Image: Areez Katki

Although currently based in Aotearoa, New Zealand, Katki was born in Mumbai, India in 1989. In the hustle and bustle of life in the city of Mumbai, one can find many pockets of history, one of which is the Parsi community. While the exact date of migration is unknown, it is assumed that Persians migrated to India in order to escape persecution in Iran, at various points between the eighth and tenth centuries. Katki tells us about his lived experiences as a part of this diaspora. He says, “I did not actually grow up in Bombay/Mumbai! I was born there, but my parents both lived in the Middle East (Oman) and the UAE at the time. My mother left me in Mumbai for 10 months – with my grandparents who lived at a Parsi Colony in Tardeo. After which I was taken to be raised in Muscat, then Dubai. We then immigrated to Auckland, New Zealand when I was 11-years-old. But to answer your question about being a cultural minority in India, this is something I could only respond to as an adult when, in 2018, I decided to move into my grandmother’s old house, alone – I reclaimed this isolated family flat and decided to turn it into a studio and a research space. I suppose the experience may have been different for Parsis in the 90s, however, for me, it felt like I lived, for the first time, among a community of people that understood my heritage and the complexities of the diaspora were easier to unpack there. However, by 2018 I was also a migrant from New Zealand, a homosexual and a Parsi-born former priest. On one hand, the fact that I was a minority in India felt less pertinent than how it feels to be practically invisible, culturally as a Zoroastrian, in New Zealand. Identity became fodder for me to examine from both internal and external sources – memories held by the queer body and the migrant body”.



Thieves Market is a recent body of work made using glass beads  
Image: Areez Katki

Katki’s deliberate and intentional unpacking of his cultural landscape took him to various parts of the world, from India to Iran, but also through a range of media, material and craft. He further elaborates upon the dynamic interplay between these various factors saying, “For the most part these had no influence from parental figures – apart from early moments in my life of having been taught various textile-craft skills from maternal figures in my family – my mother, her mother (my grandmother) and aunts.





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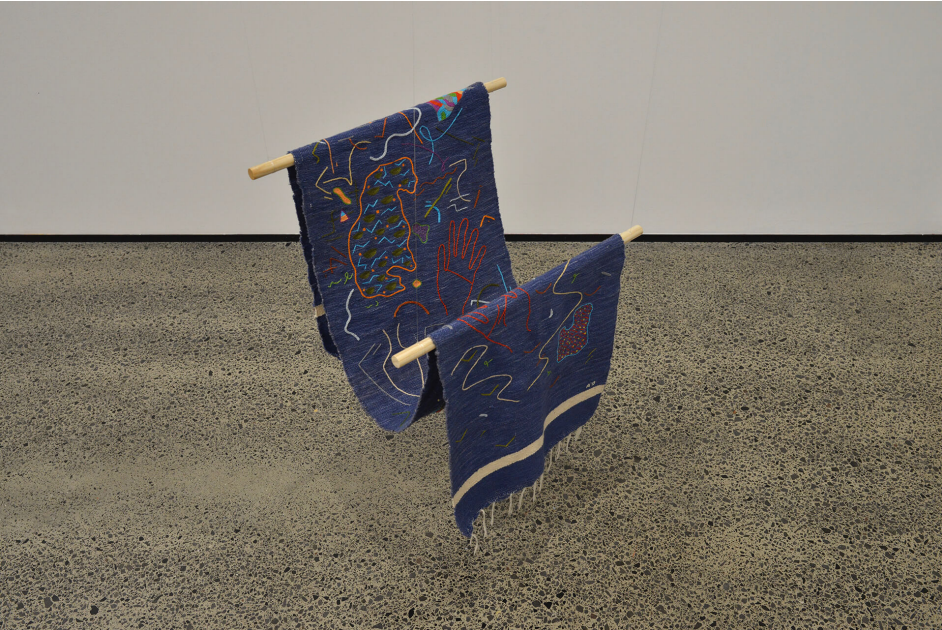
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*Trojan*(2021) by Areez Katki  
*Image: Areez Katki*

I suppose that, much like anyone in my position, the underlying intentions behind my material-focused projects come from a sense of curiosity and fascination with the surfaces of mediums that I have committed to engaging with: **textiles** and writing. My time in Iran and India proved incredibly nourishing for those aforementioned reasons: the ability to tap into memory and information that I did not otherwise have. The work then forms visceral and instinctual responses to cities around Parsi spaces, particularly in South Mumbai.



*Caspian Dispersion*, 2018, *Bildungsroman* installation view at Malcolm Smith Gallery  
*Image: Areez Katki*

These days I find myself captivated by the storytelling capabilities of both mediums — text and textiles, and often find myself being moved by the way a string of words or a line of stitching can both perform gestures that manage to communicate phenomenological questions around how we grasp or retain lived experiences—a library of memories, from deeply personal to the collective”.



*History reserves but a few lines for you* by Areez Katki  
*Image: Areez Katki*

A love child born from multiple cultural wombs, Katki’s work dives deeply into the nuanced behaviour of identity as an ever-evolving organism - one with memory, intuition and instinct. Inspired by his heritage and its surrounding art and craft, the artist takes on forms and gestures, incorporating them in his artistic practice via motif and material. He says, “Firstly, craft is such a charged word; one which I think needs to be inspected more thoughtfully. I think that anything done well, with integrity and rigorous commitment, should be deemed craft —and that includes any form of creative expression, which does

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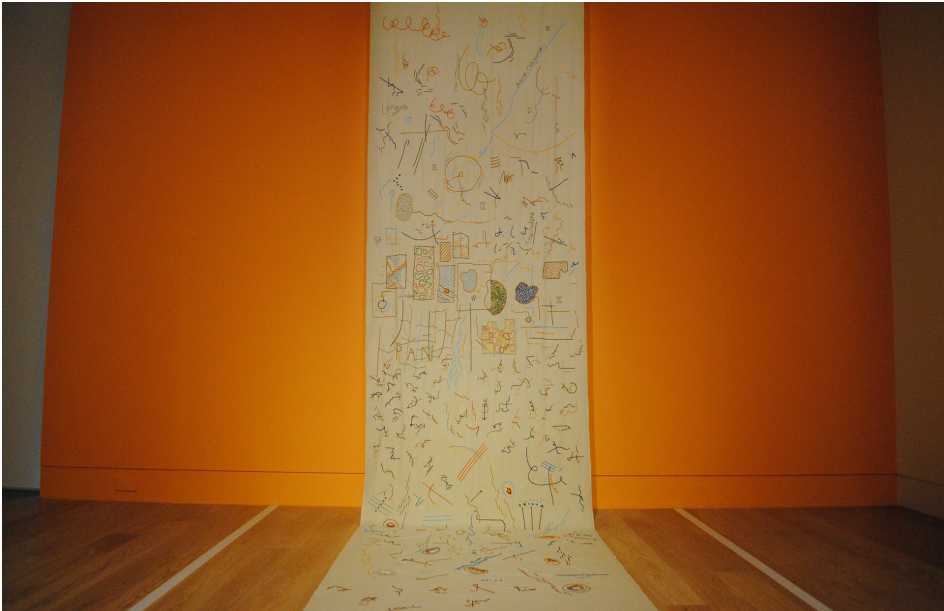
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*Ravel Scroll 3, 2016-17, installation view at The Dowse Museum*  
*Image: Areez Katki*

My engagement with craft and its histories via ancient trade routes and transcultural exchanges of knowledge are done with the intent to demonstrate work in physical form that perhaps cannot be illustrated in any other medium. Because cloth was one of the earliest trade commodities, especially between the Indian subcontinent, [China](#), Persia, Anatolia, and furthermore westward. Textiles, when woven, utilised and moved from site to site, have the ability to hold memory. I like using them as containers of both literal and metaphysical matter that gives the viewer a sense of incident; that there was something, and always will be, a history of unseen events that elude the dominant culture. The language of cloth is reactionary for me; it hopes to challenge contemporary art hierarchies that are fed by a Eurocentric and patriarchal capitalist system of viewing and consuming art. To quote Audre Lorde, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”.



Artist Areez Katki  
*Image: Courtesy of Areez Katki*

STIR is the exclusive international digital-media partner of the seventh edition of Colomboscope 2021, which is scheduled to take place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from January 20-30, 2022.

See the exclusive coverage [here](#).

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