

Interview by David K. Shields

# Areeez Katki A Stitch In Time





*How to puncture the sky and hear the stones sing. Install view.*  
Kunsterhaus Bethanien Berlin DE. Areez Katki 2025.

AREEZ KATKI'S PRACTICE moves at the pace of touch. Thread, cloth, language, and sound are gathered slowly - held long enough for memory to surface, not as fixed record, but as something living, porous, and willing to change shape. This is a practice that thinks as deeply as it feels: one that resists the urge to follow a single, straight path in favour of accumulation, intuition, and a willingness to be changed by the journey.

Born in Mumbai in 1989 and migrating with his family to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2002, Katki's movement across geographies is not incidental to the work - it is woven into its very fabric. Trained in Art History, English, and Creative Writing, and shaped by research journeys across Gujarat, Iran, and Azerbaijan tracing the origins of Parsi textile traditions and sites of Zoroastrian significance, his practice is animated by what is inherited, what is carried across borders, and what must be reimagined in order to survive. As he puts it with characteristic precision: "Stories, like us, are mutable - we keep evolving and growing with them".

At the heart of that storytelling is a tension between gesture and labour - between the spontaneous sweep of a drawn line and the slow, exacting work of hand-embroidered inscription. It is in this gap that something quietly political opens up: questions about whose work is valued, whose labour is made visible, and how race, gender, and history shape the conditions under which art is made and received. Working with found cloth - dust coverings, domestic textiles, materials that have already lived a life - Katki is not interested in nostalgia or reclamation, but in renewal: in looking at something that has neared the end of its use and asking what new stories it might still be able to carry.

Drawing on biomythography, fabulation, and the kind of critical thinking that his Zoroastrian upbringing both offered and complicated, Katki's work resists the idea that any story has only one true version. Memory, in his practice, is not something fixed and retrievable - it is a site of

rupture and possibility, continually reworked through imagination, care, and a deep ethical attentiveness to what we owe to histories that may not be entirely our own.

Exhibited across Asia, Oceania, North America and Europe, and held in numerous public and private collections, Katki's work has travelled widely in recent years landing with real force. *Vazhghān / Vocabulary I*, presented in Auckland in late 2024 with Tim Melville Gallery, brought his embroidered artworks to Aotearoa audiences; *The Rhapsode's Tools Will Build the Rhapsode's House* extended that conversation to Venice during the 2024 Art Biennale; and in what marked a significant Berlin chapter as the CNZ 2024/2025 Resident Visual Artist - where much of his recent embroidered and installation-based work has taken shape - *How to Puncture the Sky and Hear the Stones Sing* was exhibited in 2025 at Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Threads run, too, back to Mumbai, where ancestral cloth sourced from his grandmother's apartment has found its way into the work itself.

It's between these two centres, Berlin and Mumbai, that we catch the artist for the following interview. Elaborating for us on his practice in his own voice, and speaking to the questions it asks - about belonging, memory, and what we carry with us - Katki offers further insight into a growing oeuvre of work that, grounded in an embodied, feeling way of knowing the world, does not ask to be consumed, but to be held.

As this Chin Melts On Your Knee. Exhibition install view at TARQ Mumbai 2024.





*(extra)ordinary affects. Install view. Taxispalais  
Kunsthalle Tirol Innsbruck AT. Areez Katki 2025*

RIGHT *Essayer (Murmuration)*, 2022. (install view).  
Areez Katki Govett Brewster Art Gallery 2022

DAVID SHIELDS: Your practice has the feeling of something quietly carried for a long time. Do you remember when it first asked to be made?

AREEZ KATKI: There isn't a linear path that can be charted to arrive at the kind of enquiries that my practice looks into today. I've come to realise that it's futile to try and stay tracked toward just one path: with the many shocks and shifts the world keeps throwing at us, it feels important to stay agile and observant. But you're right, there has been a desire to carry something and nurture it wherever I go. The most portable concept, one I've continually held onto wherever my work takes me, is the desire to tell stories. Stories, like us, are mutable - we keep evolving and growing with them.

DS: Hand-embroidering drawings is an intimate, repetitive act - what does your body know now that it didn't when you began?

AK: That my back is not made of titanium! And that we are all entitled to periods of rest. I've come to see the value in time spent sitting still just as much as I do making. I've come to realise how passive periods are just as fulfilling and joyful as labour intensive ones. I've been urging myself to switch gears when the body asks for it.

DS: Do your hands ever arrive at meaning before your thoughts do?

AK: I'd say that this varies depending on the work and language I'm dealing with. For example, there was a series that I produced in Berlin last year, which attempted to capture sinuous scrawls and gestures I had prepared in pencil earlier on 1:1 scale across a large roll of unbleached paper. Though these were spontaneously made with pencil on a scroll of paper, I wanted to create a contrasting slowness on large bolts of found cloth that were used as dust coverings in my grandmother's apartment in Mumbai. I was aiming for a tight balance between the gesturally scrawled lines and the very deliberate act of embroidered labour. It became a study of hegemonies within art through the politics of bodily energy, race and gender. How, for some, a smooth sweep of the hand can result in a finished work—and how, for others, labour is a never-ending loop that consumes far larger quantities of resources such as bodily energy, emotional resilience and time.

DS: Do you think of embroidery in your practice as mark-making, inscription, repair - or something closer to breathing?

AK: Probably something closer to inscription and mark-making - not necessarily repair, because that would suggest that a thing was broken to begin with. Choosing to work with found cloth isn't, to me, an act of romanticising or reclaiming a past (nostalgia is a path I'd like to avoid as much as I can), but rather an appreciation of a thing that has neared the end of its use in material culture and looking at it with renewed purpose; looking at the new layers, stories that it now has the potential to carry. Look at the act of embroidery, then, as just another drawing tool. I chose it because my grandmother and her friends made me fall in love with it as a child. But I'll also say that I've recently come to realise how this love of embroidering can't remain my only tool for drawing or the only mode that my creative output should be framed by. It would be a disservice to them, to myself and to artistic freedom, to limit the possibilities to simply one medium.

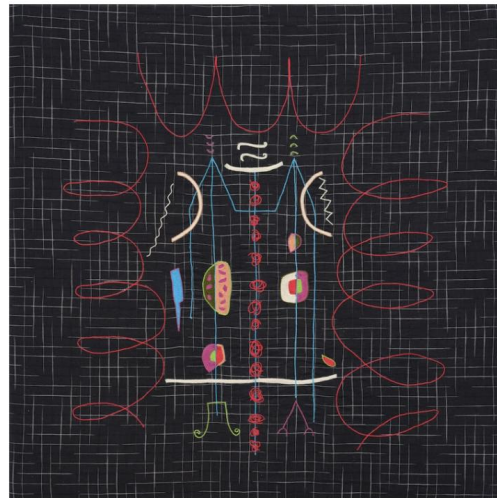
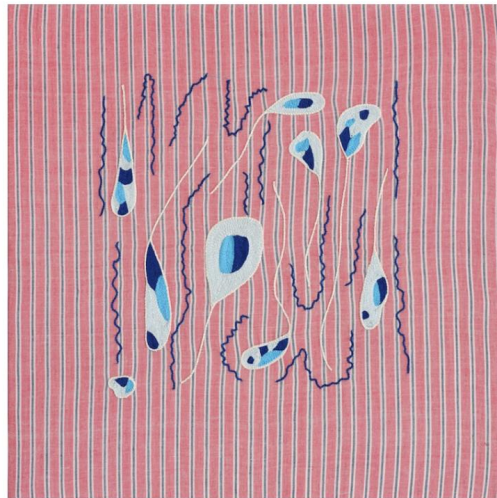
DS: Are there rituals - artistic or otherwise - that anchor you before entering a new body of work?

AK: I'd like to say that there was a clear path, again, but unfortunately my practice isn't quite as organised or easily reigned in to have specific rituals that ground it. I travel a lot, I keep holding theoretical material, myths and literary legacies in my mind to find ways to create associations that I find compelling or timely enough - befitting a contemporary reaction - to be framed within my ongoing enquiries. If I'm lucky enough to arrive at a secure departure point, it then leads to months of note-making, connecting contexts with physical and conceptual ligatures. This is then followed by periods of drawing, more research, sourcing, endless studies and experiments. I am very lucky to have had the space and resources to continue doing this for the past decade.

DS: Your work often feels like it's listening as much as speaking. What do you let the materials tell you before language enters the room?

AK: This notion of material culture having a 'silent witness' quality is really sweet. Cloth is so sensuous - it carries all the stains and traces of our bodily experiences. I'm always happy to lean into their humanness at any stage of the process, but also distance myself from it at some point in order to allow the material to speak for itself. Perhaps that explains why there's always a significant amount of negative space in my embroidered compositions. >





DS: When working with found cloth, how do you decide what histories are left visible and which ones you quietly overwrite?

AK: I like to hold my intuition accountable for this. Sometimes the pre-lived history of a found bolt of cloth can be traceable and this makes things a lot easier to fit into the context of a project that references historic provenance. There are always the more pragmatic strategies up for consideration too: scale, hue, texture, weight, even state of fragility. But more often than ever intuition and compassion tend to be the best compasses by which translation is made possible.

DS: Are there memories you've learned to approach obliquely, rather than head-on?

AK: Always: I was born oblique, quite literally! My poor mother. But yes, to quote E.M Forster's description of C.P. Cavafy, I like the notion of queerness that stands 'absolutely motionless, at a slight angle to the universe' - not just because of the consequences of historic queer positioning, but also the ways in which this obliqueness allows for world views to shift from their axis points and rupture.

DS: Is there a moment when a work tells you it's finished, or do you leave things deliberately unresolved?

AK: This is always up for interpretation for any material that one works with. I think, again, intuition often tells me when I feel like I've grappled enough with a singular panel or a sound-based work or a text. I'd like to see a thing for the potential that it holds rather than the notion of completeness or wholeness - because the former is rooted in feeling while the latter posits a kind of rigidity that I don't think does my work any favours.

DS: Do you consider your archives as sites of preservation, or as living organisms that are allowed to mutate?

AK: The nature of archival conservation and investigation is not limited to the pasts they arrive from. Our ability to engage with histories through learning is how we can keep them alive. In doing so we might encounter ourselves as mutable organisms that are capable of the changes and shifts we might wish to see in the worlds we move between.

DS: You work with biomythography and fabulation - what truths become possible only when fact begins to loosen?

AK: The notion of a singular truth is challenged by both of these methodologies. Growing up in

a small community of migrants who helm from an ethnominority tracing their identities back to Ancient Persia, we were often fed stories: fantastical myths, legends, allegorical tales rooted in morality, from an ancient past. While these are gorgeous cultural tellings that may be framed as metaphors suspended in the possibilities of interpretation, as we absorb this material as children, there is a crucial exercise that conservatism within heteropatriarchal structures tend to discourage: critical thinking. This is where the formative years of questing through personal interpretations of cultural material became so important to me; I want stories to arrive from various sources, as clay that may be reworked, reframed and formed within contemporary contexts that befit many experiences. To question the notion of singularity. I often think about Saidiya Hartman's concept of critical fabulation, which engages with the fractures and gaps from an archive as being spaces where we may grieve but also dwell in wonder. To harness the collective power of imagination and dream possibilities of queer futurity.

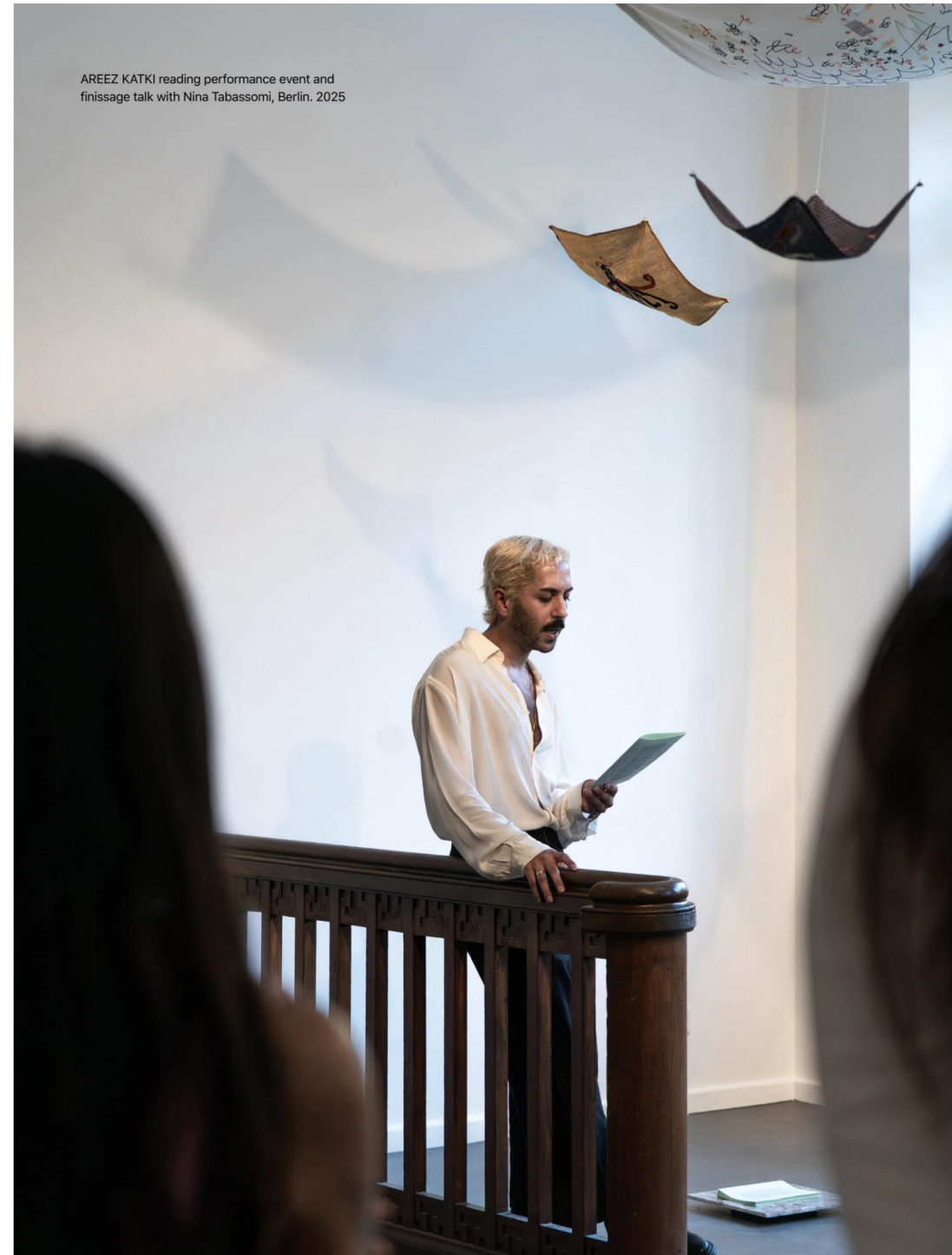
DS: How do you negotiate responsibility when reimagining memory that may not be solely your own?

AK: This is difficult. I keep grappling with the ethics of that responsibility. Authorship isn't something singular when stories, materials and gestures come funnelled through inter-generational sources. This is where I hold a lot of reluctance and tension in my body. So far, the safest way I've arrived at a point, where I can somewhat justify these acts of reimagining a collective memory, is by positioning myself as not an author but rather a vessel through which ancestral, intergenerational material flows. After I'm gone there will surely be others who will refine, edit and improve upon the mess I've undoubtedly created. More than anything I wish to open new discursive spaces that my nieces and nephews, future generations, may be able to step into and engage with critically.

DS: Your practice communes with ancestral knowledge systems without fixing them in the past - how do you keep them alive rather than aestheticised?

AK: Again, this is part of a desire to keep the pulse of ancient knowledge systems relevant to contemporary experiences. But I feel like geopolitical crises unfolding around us seem to do a great job of demonstrating how oppressive

AREEZ KATKI reading performance event and finissage talk with Nina Tabassomi, Berlin. 2025



structures that have prevailed keep the nefarious, power-hungry facets of human nature alive. So, in some ways, it isn't terribly difficult to locate methods of reframing some of the teachings I was introduced to as a Zoroastrian priest: to shed light upon the more reparative systems of social responsibility, of ecological coexistence, gestures and rituals from an ancient past, when history unfortunately keeps repeating itself.

DS: What does "inheritance" mean to you when it is embodied rather than documented?

AK: It means that I'm allowed to feel my feelings as a hybrid being, whose body holds material from elsewhere beyond my experience, and find ways to synthesise this tension into learnings toward a navigable futurity.

DS: How do you resist institutional frameworks flattening the complexity of those inheritances?

AK: There will always be institutions and people in positions of power who wilfully evade the labour of offering time and understanding around practices that don't offer simple answers or singular viewpoints. Perhaps this is something one should resist or feel frustrated about, but I also think that it can be done intelligently, in service of finding easier pathways to frame, making work comprehensible to popular imaginations beyond fine art and academic hierarchies. Sometimes I think that resistance seems futile in the face of such frameworks, especially if key points and messages are lost. The best one can do is keep refining the means by which they communicate, in order to retain the integrity of their thesis, while also opening new, gentler pathways to understanding. Personally, I'm figuring out how to arrive at points where my authorship and an audience's understanding can meet more harmoniously. This would, however, require mutual respect and understanding - which is rare and precious to find at a time in media history, when attention spans are so fleeting.

DS: Do you think of inheritance as something you receive, or something you continually remake?

AK: I think it is both. Without taking the time to develop, nurture and reframe our inheritances through the filters of time and contextual shifts, I think that the notion of inheriting anything, and simply keeping it as it is, is dangerous. Be it knowledge, materials, land, ideology, politics - without putting in the labour to understand how some systems can serve as teachable reflections of a past that we could grieve and hopefully grow

beyond; or how others might be adapted, held, celebrated and embodied, still, to be reworked within our present contexts.

DS: Your work moves across geographies - where have you felt most held, and where most productively untethered?

AK: The nature of helming from a community who has not had a geographically-grounded identity politic for over two millennia means that I have to sit both comfortably and uncomfortably with being untethered. It means to repeatedly represent myself and my community, and to play the role of the guest, no matter where I might've been born, lived or worked.

DS: How do you make room for softness inside histories shaped by displacement and postcolonial rupture?

AK: It isn't really a problem for me to make room for softness, in whatever form it might arrive; maybe it's through learned community gestures of levity, humour, sarcasm, or nonchalance, that the Parsi community has instilled in its kin. But rather than holding softness as a concept that is made room for, I think that some of those affects are activated to make sense of problems, such as those within the context of postcolonial ruptures. It allows for a transmutable and perhaps more bearable approach to subjects that we work with as members of a diaspora. I used to think of Be Oakley's Genderfail mantra, 'Radical Softness as a Boundless Form of Resistance' as befitting for some of these gestures, but more recently I think it's less an act of resistance - which denotes a form of heroism that I can't quite relate to - and more realistically about embodiment and a fear of taking up too much space. I suppose this circles back to the politics of displacement and how deeply embedded certain affects are - how we work with softness as a means of survival, in spite of the deep currents of rage that one might still harbour. Rage, too, can be useful.

WHAT STAYS WITH YOU, after time spent with Areez Katki's reflections, is the generosity of the thinking - and the honesty. He does not pretend the tensions in his work resolve. He simply keeps returning to them, with curiosity and care, finding in slowness and softness not a retreat from the world but a way of moving through it more truthfully. His is a practice in constant expansion, and one very much worth following.



Above  
Untitled (Ghalat), 2025

Right  
Untitled (Bishapur), 2025