



Chinmoyi Patel. *Constructions (Rising)*. Found concrete, foam, cloth, thread, football. 29" x 25" x 30". 2019. © the artist.

Paper, Threads, Dolls

Sandhya Bordewekar discusses the works of five Baroda artists who engage with diverse crafts-based methods in their art practices.



Nibha Sikander. *Moth.* Paper. Approx. 8.5" x 11.5". 2017. © the artist.
Photograph by Sukhdev Rathod.

When artists decide to use craft elements in their works, they take on a major challenge that can buttress or destabilize their metier. Whether used playfully or with serious intent, the artwork treads a precarious tightrope between gimmickry and meaningful contextualization of the craft practice employed.

Over the last decade, several artists in Baroda have experimented with crafts-based modes and have often pulled off some bold initiatives. Kruti Thaker has used fabric and embroidery traditions of her native Saurashtra with panache but one has not seen any of her work in the last one year. Chinmoyi Patel is another promising artist who draws from textural crafts-oriented practices.

One afternoon, she came to the school where I am a trustee asking for busted footballs. I am familiar with

Chinmoyi's art practice and know how she has juxtaposed wood, metal, ceramics and fabric to create works in the past. Her new sculptural project grew out of working with textiles to create cactus forms in planters as a designed product; she dramatically contrasted the rough, thorny cacti textures with foam-filled, bright, ikat fabrics that covered the soft forms.

The idea of the cactus as a hardy plant that thrives in the most adverse environment is explored in Chinmoyi's video art projects related to the changing rhythms of a city – the sprawl here reflects an irrepressible desire to flourish anywhere and everywhere. By re-imagining possibilities within the form of the cactus, Chinmoyi has extended her sculptural practice to include found objects. She collects debris from historical (not necessarily heritage) buildings such as large blocks of concrete and bricks with twisted metal bars. She then dresses the bars with fabric to simulate cactus arms. They are sometimes embroidered elaborately like exotic flowering cacti. These are quite different from the almost-naturalistic cactus forms she made earlier; these have a sharper conceptual edge and often do not look like cacti at all but like abstract forms that have organically grown limbs.

Not so with Nibha Sikander. One has to see her delicately crafted and minutely worked paper relief sculptures of moths and birds with a magnifying glass to catch the intricate nuances. Nibha started paper-cutting before she joined an art school and developed her own techniques that depended largely on the thickness of papers. To get a relief effect, she adds body and volume by layering and re-layering; this allows the work to be 'lifted' from the base, creating a quasi-sculptural effect. Though she studied painting at Baroda, she has stopped painting over the paper and uses coloured paper instead. An avid naturalist, the wooded environs of the Faculty at Baroda and her family home at Janjira have offered numerous opportunities for her to observe and photograph a rich variety of insects and birds. Her paper sculptures transform flat photographs into multi-dimensional images appropriating reality. Paper has a flexible quality – it is stiff yet can be folded or shaped into various forms. Participation in an exhibition exploring different facets of indigo in Ahmedabad recently required her to use different shades of the colour.

Sudipta Das's art practice has evolved particularly because of the inclusion and adoption of distinct crafts-based elements. Her large, relief-style canvases, as well as sculptural installations embrace the art of paper-cutting, tearing and staining, and the making of a certain kind of doll that she learnt during a residency in South

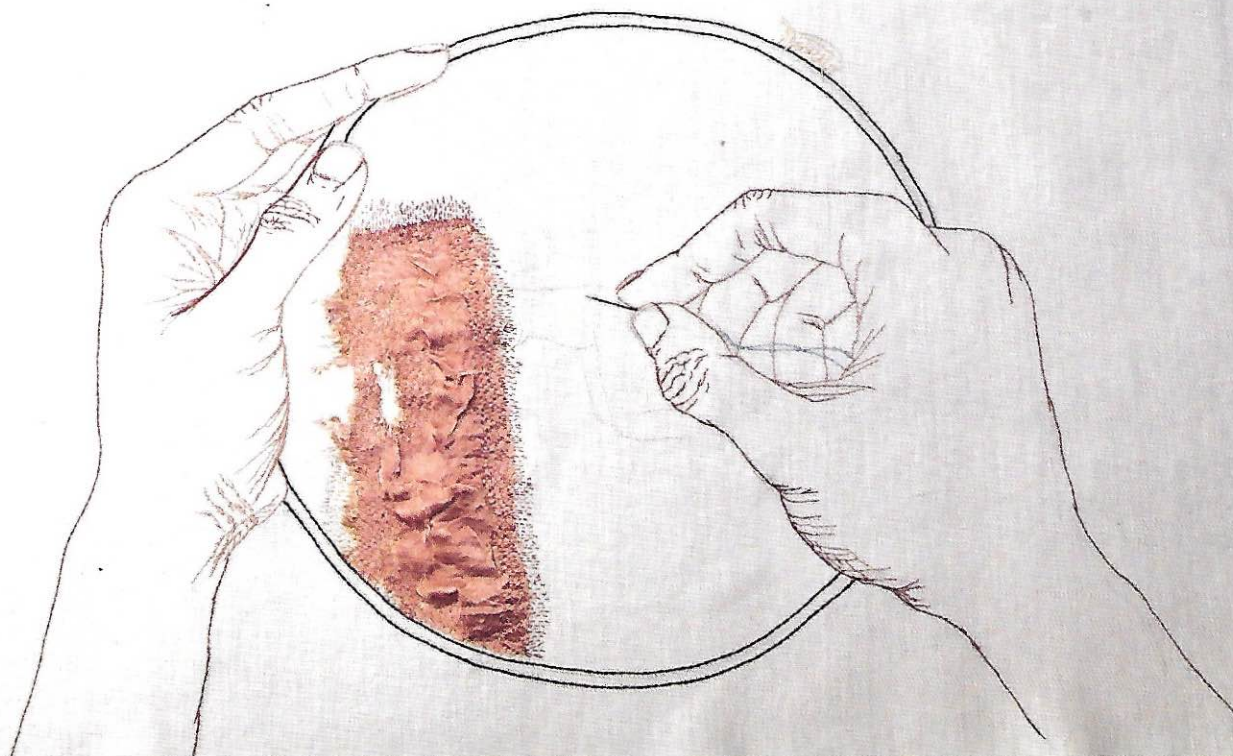
Korea. Since the recurring themes in her works are to do with large-scale migration, displacement and loss of identity, she uses torn bits of paper to create layers, sometimes pasting them or stacking them one upon and against the other, evoking the feeling of crowdedness and claustrophobia, helplessness and loss, and a yearning for a home left behind.

The papier mache figurine with its capacities to further a narrative allows her to move towards exploring personal histories of migration as founded in collective experiences. From relief-like figuration, interspersed in waves of pasted paper her work has moved to create

Her large, relief-style canvases, as well as sculptural installations embrace the art of paper-cutting, tearing and staining.



Sudipta Das. *An idea of a Borderless world.* Watercolour, coffee wash, old comic book pages on a wooden structure. 240" x 240". 2016.



Rakhi Peswani. *Practising Slowness* (Detail). Hand embroidery on linen. 10 works. Each work: 48 cms x 73 cms. 2014.

three-dimensional figures installationally. For Sudipta, cutting, pasting, staining and folding paper become acts of therapeutic release; these moves extend into generating an empathetic understanding of the loss of land and home experienced by others. Her figurines, however, are structured as location-specific – their postures, clothing, the bundles they carry, identify them as belonging to eastern areas of the sub-continent, a region with a history of short-term and permanent relocations. By using craft-based techniques as metaphors for dispossession and by contextualizing emotions with processes (such as the tearing and staining of the paper), Sudipta integrates intelligently craft-anchored practices in her art.

For Rakhi Peswani, it is a political choice to invest in crafting, given our fraught times. Rakhi's works are highly complex and nuanced, weaving together ideas, emotions, words and juxtaposing borrowings from other creative forms, to make strong statements, sometimes even to take an idea explored by another artist forward (for example, her

work *Envisioning the Seer* draws from Ingmar Bergman's film *Wild Strawberries*). Rakhi was initiated into the world of craft-based practices by her mother (she was inclined towards drawing, sewing, paper-based craft forms). Rakhi has nurtured a deep commitment through "certain conversational monologues with work, to understand continuities that finally bring out quality/craftsmanship in work." This has inculcated an attitude that has encouraged curiosity and a will to engage proactively with the world around. Rakhi uses multiple craft techniques – embroidery is a favourite and cloth is often the medium of choice that corresponds to the theme being explored. Painstaking physical labour that craft-making implies, suffuses Rakhi's work, whether in a sculpture or an installation. She celebrates this aspect of craftsmanship but also says, "The attitude towards craftsmanship makes for a detached attachment to processes and journeys more than an obsession with final outcomes or arrivals." /