

South Asian artists embroider their points at Villa Terrace

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Embroidery and other decorative arts make points beyond beauty in the exhibition "Ornate/Activate" at the Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum, 2220 N. Terrace Ave.

For "Alphabet," Vandana Jain hand-embroidered corporate logos – AT&T, BP, Cingular – in wool onto 26 linen panels. Zainab Hussain painted over the faces of women wearing hijabs in photographic portraits making "Sarah," "Hebah" and "Audrey" unrecognizable.



Vandana Jain embroidered 26 corporate logos — one for each letter of the alphabet— onto linen. “Alphabet” is on view in “Ornate/Activate” at Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum. (Photo: Vandana Jain)

The exhibition, on view through May 14, features work from more than 20 artists from the South Asian Women's Creative Collective, a group devoted to helping and promoting female artists and creative professionals. The collective defines South Asian to include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The artists lived all over the world; many are residing in the United States as immigrants.

Monica Jahan Bose made "Hawa," a white and red woodblock print on a dark blue cotton sari, in collaboration with a woman in her native Bangladesh.

Bose, who also served on SAWCC's board of directors, said it is a time for artists to think about the meaning of their work and how it relates to communities.

"Artists are at the center of change and of healing," she said. "Artists can bring people together – transcend everyday life and make them think about the big picture."

Issues addressed through the artwork range from gender and labor to economics and segregation. Kamal Badhey's series of photographs, "Portals and Passageways," tells the story of her family in Secunderabad, India, beginning with her oldest known ancestor who started a jewelry shop in 1884. Priyanka Dasgupta, along with Chad Marshall, laser-cut metal into a barrier similar to what separates men and women in mosques. Tiled in "humsa/hamsa" is the hand of Fatima, which symbolizes the hand of God or protection.

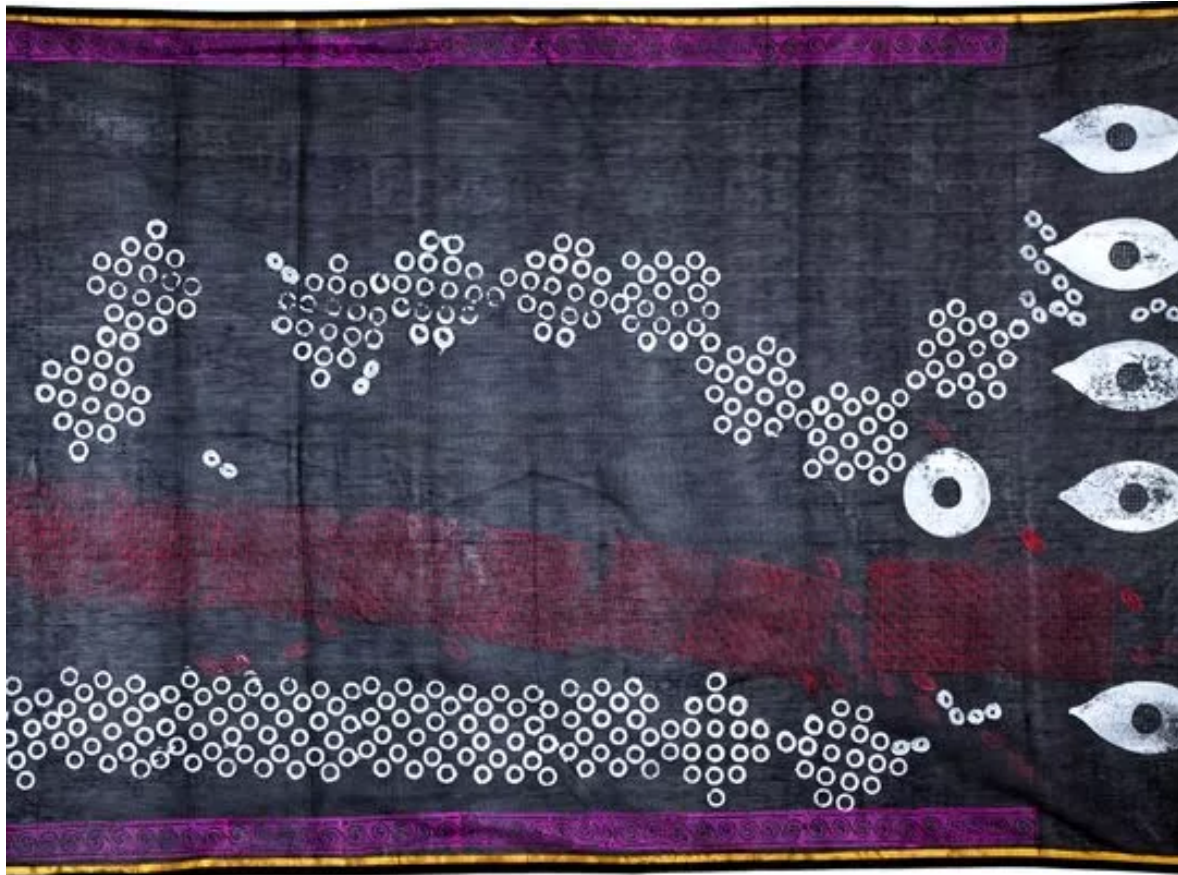


Zainab Hussain painted over the faces in a series of photographs of women wearing hijabs. "Sakina" is one of nine works in the series. (Photo: Zainab Hussain)

The show, curated by Alexander Campos, was first shown at Shirin Gallery in New York City in 2015 and Nirmal Raja proposed that it come to Milwaukee. Campos' goal was to show contemporary artists reclaiming traditional decorative arts to make larger statements.

The decorative art techniques "are not just being used for pure beauty but they're being used consciously to make commentary on contemporary issues," Campos said.

The Villa Terrace show was able to include more artwork than the original exhibition. The themes and sentiments continue to resonate. "Nothing here is outdated or irrelevant," he said.



Monica Jahan Bose's "Hawa," a woodblock print on a cotton sari, is on view in "Ornate/Activate" at Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum. (Photo: Monica Jahan Bose)

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