



OLD/ NEW THREADS

The Artists and Story
of Stitch Buffalo

CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Consider the story behind every stitch, every weave, and every knot.

Old/New Threads explores the relationship between textile art, economic empowerment, and community building through Stitch Buffalo, a textile arts center in Buffalo, New York.

Textiles have been a popular material for artistic expression throughout human history. From ancient times to today, craftspeople and artists have developed many different fiber art traditions—each with unique patterns and processes.

The sale of handcrafted items like shawls, ornaments, and decor can be an important source of income for textile artists, who help preserve and express a community's cultural identity through their work.

Grassroots organizations like Stitch Buffalo fill an important gap in the support network for local refugee and immigrant women. By supporting their artistry, providing a place to sell handcrafted goods, and bringing together diverse local artists, Stitch Buffalo fosters an inclusive community devoted to textile art.

Experience stories of heritage, innovation, and fellowship expressed through textile art in *Old/New Threads*.

(cover detail) **Hsar Hay Moo**, *Karen Woven Shirt*, 2024, cotton.

(from above) *Hkawng Lung and Munawara Sultana at Stitch Buffalo*, 2022. Courtesy Michael Mandolfo.

Refugee Women's Workshop, 2019. Courtesy Stitch Buffalo.

Mu Mu (left) demonstrating embroidery during a Community Education Class, 2019. Courtesy Stitch Buffalo.



STITCH BUFFALO

OVERVIEW

Stitch Buffalo is a textile arts center in Buffalo, New York committed to empowering refugee and immigrant women.

Founded by Dawne Hoeg in 2014 as a community meetup for refugee women, Stitch Buffalo has grown into a multifaceted arts organization.

Stitch Buffalo facilitates the sale of artist handcrafted goods, artist-led workshops, and the reuse of donated textile arts supplies.

PROGRAMS

The **Refugee Women's Workshop** is a thriving community of women artists from Bhutan, Burma, Nepal, Thailand, Egypt, Afghanistan, and beyond. These artists design and sew handcrafted goods for sale through Stitch Buffalo.

Through the creation of these textiles, each artist expresses cultural heritage and gains economic empowerment.

Community Education includes textile art classes taught by staff, community experts, or Refugee Women's Workshop artists. Each class inspires creativity and fosters cultural exchange.

Second Stitch is an initiative where donated textile supplies and equipment are reused by Stitch Buffalo artists or offered to the wider community at substantial discounts.



Scan Here to Learn More
About Stitch Buffalo

“ Munawara Sultana

“The moment I walked into Stitch [Buffalo]...I thought “Oh my God, this is heaven.”

I knew nobody here. I was new.
The weather was severe.

But then I found Stitch [Buffalo], and it's become a home for me.

I found friends that have become like family...they are why I stay in Buffalo.

Being surrounded by friendly people...Stitch is a place where you will find them. I have found a family...a second home.”

” Hsar Hay Moo

“I weave because I want to keep our [Karen] culture alive.

Our weaving, clothing, and language are a big part of our culture.

A big part.

I weave so I can try to keep it alive...to keep it in me and not forget it.

And so other people can know that this [weaving] is us.”

“ Palwasha Basir

“I have learned a lot of things from Stitch [Buffalo].

Before I used to only make dresses or do alterations for other Afghani people, and only know our style of dress.

But now, I know about other people [culture] and their designs.

I want to try and make works that mix Afghan traditional clothing with Western [style].

To create something special that everyone can use.”



(right) Detail photos of select artwork in the exhibition, 2024. Courtesy Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University.

MEET THE ARTISTS

Palwasha Basir is a trained tailor who arrived in Buffalo from Afghanistan in late 2019 with her husband Abdul and three of her five children. Basir makes traditional Afghan dresses, curtains, and contemporary designs.

Tila Bastola is one of the earliest members of Stitch Buffalo, creating embroidery work that includes geometric and figurative patterns. Bastola and her family arrived in Buffalo from Bhutan.

Kausila & Yamuna Biswa, a mother and daughter originally from Bhutan, enjoy creating decorative pom pom garlands, which can be found in many Bhutanese Nepali homes.

Mara Gamboa Guzman learned to make jewelry in her hometown of Puyo, Ecuador. Guzman arrived in Buffalo and recently became involved with Stitch Buffalo, continuing to create both traditional and contemporary beaded jewelry.

Anhar Ibrahim first learned macrame while in middle school in Egypt, and creates both large scale wall art and small jewelry works. After her daughter introduced her to Stitch Buffalo, Ibrahim also began teaching macrame in the local community.

Dah John came to Buffalo more than ten years ago after fleeing Burma as a refugee. John is a long-time Stitch Buffalo artist and teacher of embroidery workshops.

Hkwang Lung arrived in Buffalo from Malaysia, after fleeing Burma. She received her first ever paycheck from Stitch Buffalo at the age of 72. One of Lung's favorite works to create are animal ornaments decorated with intricate embroidery.

Mandari Magar was a farmer in Bhutan, before arriving in Buffalo after living in a refugee camp for twenty years. Magar enjoys using bright colors and sequins in her embroidery work.

Hsar Hay Moo learned her community's weaving tradition while living in a refugee camp in Thailand. Hsar creates both traditional clothing and contemporary works using Karen weaving techniques.



(above) Hsar Hay Moo working on a backstrap loom, n.d. Courtesy Stitch Buffalo.

Mu Mu and her family fled Burma across mountains and a river to a refugee camp in Thailand, where she took embroidery classes. Mu Mu also creates jewelry using Job's Tears, a plant native to Burma whose seeds are traditionally used as beads in Karen culture.

Najeeba Noori and her family arrived in Buffalo from Afghanistan. While fleeing the Taliban, Najeeba and her mother worked on finishing a large shawl decorated with rows of intricate shisha embroidery.

Hser Say Sher See came to Buffalo from Burma, and specializes in making the traditional Karen black embroidered worn by married women.

Munawara Sultana came to Buffalo from Pakistan in 2021, where she owned an Ajrak fabric business. Ajrak is a historic block print textile tradition connected to the Sindhi community and their cultural identity.

Additional artists include: Amber, Freshta Parwani, Zarghona, Lung Seng Htu, Mahjabin, Ta Phay, Karma, Naw Ma Ooh, Hiran Desai, Deo Kami, Zung Par, Dau Naw, Sema, Tek Rai, Judith Hlei, Zi Ram, Gulsom, and Bibi.

Exhibited Artworks

All works collection of the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University.

Palwasha Basir

Celebration Dress Top, 2024
poly velvet, beads, shells, and metal

Palwasha Basir

Dress with Shisha Embroidery, 2024
cotton and glass

Tila Bastola

Stitched Stories (Bhutan & Nepal), 2024
cotton and felt

Yamuna and Kausila Biswa

Pom Pom Garlands, 2023
cotton, bells and stone beads

Mara Gamboa Guzman

Beaded Necklace and Earring Set, 2024
beads and wire

Mara Gamboa Guzman

Floral Beaded Necklace, Earring, and Bracelet Set, 2024
beads and wire

Anhar Ibrahim

Large Macrame Wall Hanging, 2023
cotton and wood

Dah John

Embroidered Ornaments, 2023-4
cotton and felt

Hkwang Lung

Stitched Story, 2024
cotton and felt

Hkwang Lung

Rooster with Embroidery, 2024
cotton, felt and polyester fiber fill

Mandari Magar

Stitched Stories (Bhutan & Nepal), 2024
cotton and felt

Hsar Hay Moo

Karen Woven Shirt, 2024
cotton

Mu Mu

Job's Tear Necklace, 2023
Job's Tears seeds, glass, stone beads and metal

Najeeba Noori

Shawl with Shisha Embroidery, n.d.
silk, cotton and glass

Najeeba Noori

Embroidered Knit Caps, 2023
cotton, felt, wool and glass

Hser Say Sher See

Karen Black Embroidered Shirt, 2024
cotton

Munawara Sultana

Ajrak Quilt, 2024
cotton with ajrak print and cotton fill

Munawara Sultana

Ajrak Shawl, n.d.
cotton with ajrak print

Various Artists

Prayer Pouches, 2023
cotton, felt, bells, beads, glass, and sequins

Various Artists

House Blessings, 2023
cotton, felt, bells, beads, glass, stone beads and sequins

Project Staff

Curators

Dawne Hoeg, Executive Director
Stitch Buffalo

Edward Y. J. Millar, Curator of Folk Arts
Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University

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