



# 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 in 2019 and continues 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

All photos courtesy of the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University and Stitch Buffalo except where indicated.



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Donations welcome.*

