



# GROWING DIVINE



a modern textile collaboration of  
a Mormon, Muslim and Hindu  
artists from rural India

## HOWDY OR NAMASTE OR SALAAM ALAIKUM

Living in rural India is never dull. There are the unfamiliar sounds that jar your being like the call of a peacock or a jackal howling at night. There are the smells— we will leave those to your imagination. There are the sights of weddings dancing in the street, sequined sari-clad women perched on the back of motorcycles, naked holy men walking the roads. There is the constant pang of missing home. There are the frequent challenges like no electricity and a snake in the shoe cupboard and rats in the toilet and a culture that is often incomprehensible. There is the constant demand for patience and personal growth. It is not comfortable.

There is, also, the deep resounding belief that if my Heavenly Parents wanted me on this path, there must be abundance here. So I looked around to find my own personal abundance.

And it IS here, in many many ways. (I am looking out the door now to the golden green of tropical afternoon sunshine and it makes me take deep breathes of gratitude. Abundance.)

But one of my most favorite ways is the abundance of creation possibility. In India, I can create in ways that are simply not possible in America. I create furniture, spaces, businesses, books, clothes... and now, textile art.

I was looking for a way to play to my Indian friends' strengths. Hussain, a generations upon generations master embroidery artist, is exacting about form. He drives me crazy. I want things to roll and sway and rollick— and he demands precision and decision and tidiness. And our projects are possible and beautiful because of his demands. Kusum, a woman with magic hands, will tackle anything. She leads a village women's co-op in creating handicraft projects that help provide a livelihood (and a sisterhood) for all of them. Kusum will take an idea and twist and turn and from her hands comes something new and better than I had imagined. We laugh together often... mostly at ourselves.

I share almost nothing with these people. But we share this: we create.

*M. Arth*

# GROWING DIVINE

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These eight pieces of textile art were the collaboration of three artists living and working in rural India: A Mormon designer, a Muslim embroidery master, and a Hindu leader of a village women's co-op. While all three follow different faiths, they still share a few things in common: a love of beautiful textiles and God, among them.

For months they chatted, schemed, stretched, worked, (even cried), to make these works come to life. With minimal language overlap and sometimes through interpreters, they discussed how they each wanted the vision of Divine Growing to come to life— both the glory and the demands of life's growth. We hope you appreciate the skill and soul of these final pieces.

All profit will go to the village women's co-op to support their continued effort to improve the livelihood of hard-working women in rural Uttar Pradesh, India.





**THE SWIM**  
42" x 57"

Growth can knock us to the ground and leave us gasping. The demands can put us in a seemingly never-ending fetal position with swirls of dark. But I read the words of a wise artist, Annie K. Blake, "You can't dispel all the darkness. It is in us. Where you shine light, a shadow is always created and it is part of the beauty. But we've forgotten our ancient stories of journeying into the Underworld in order to find the key to Heaven. We, the heroes of our myths, go down into the dark places. We rescue and heal and swim through those parts of ourselves, emerging stronger and more vibrant for the contrast... we grow in darkness before we are born." This piece is the swim.



**MOTHER ANGEL**  
52" x 57"  
with credit to AshMae  
Hoiland's original watercolor

We live in a temporary state. A state where we try our best and know it will never add up. We fail as we grow. But, frankly, straight addition is not the point when you are partnered with the Divine. We reach with our best effort... and we are transformed. We become a more glorious being than we could ever have been on our own.





### **BEGETTING?**

41" x 50"

In Hinduism, destruction begets creation. And I think the same goes for us all... sometimes things have to break down before they can rise again. All of us need the refiner's fire to burn off the dross and let the divine power within us surge to a new place of growth. The trick in all of this is to keep your core... keep the shine... ensure a rebirth and not just an end.



## TRUTH TRIBE

21" x 42"

If you're going to survive the demands of this life, I would recommend you get a tribe like mine. We all need women who take all our junk and weave it into everyday life. They can handle our junk. They can handle us. They cheer us and lift us and celebrate us. Our tribe are those who reflect back to us the version we know we want to be-- and sometimes actually are. We all need a Truth Tribe.



## OFF A CLIFF

23" x 48"

Sometimes there is that moment in our life. We have been going along our everyday existence thinking that's what life was and is and going to be. And then there is this moment. This moment that "derails" us into a more demanding, growing, sometimes magical place. It's like we fell off a cliff and land in a whole new world. Perhaps we break our leg, or fall in love, or move to India, or have a child or or or. Who knows. It's not good or bad. It's simply life, now, in a new place... frothing.





## EXUBERANT

98" x 55"

Sometimes growth is the most beautiful thing you've ever experienced. Sometimes it comes with a surge of exuberance— when you know you are becoming the exact thing you and your Heavenly Parents all want you to be. And then the universe ripples and reverberates and resounds with JOY. The energy and surge and colors would be overwhelming— if they were not just exactly as they should be.

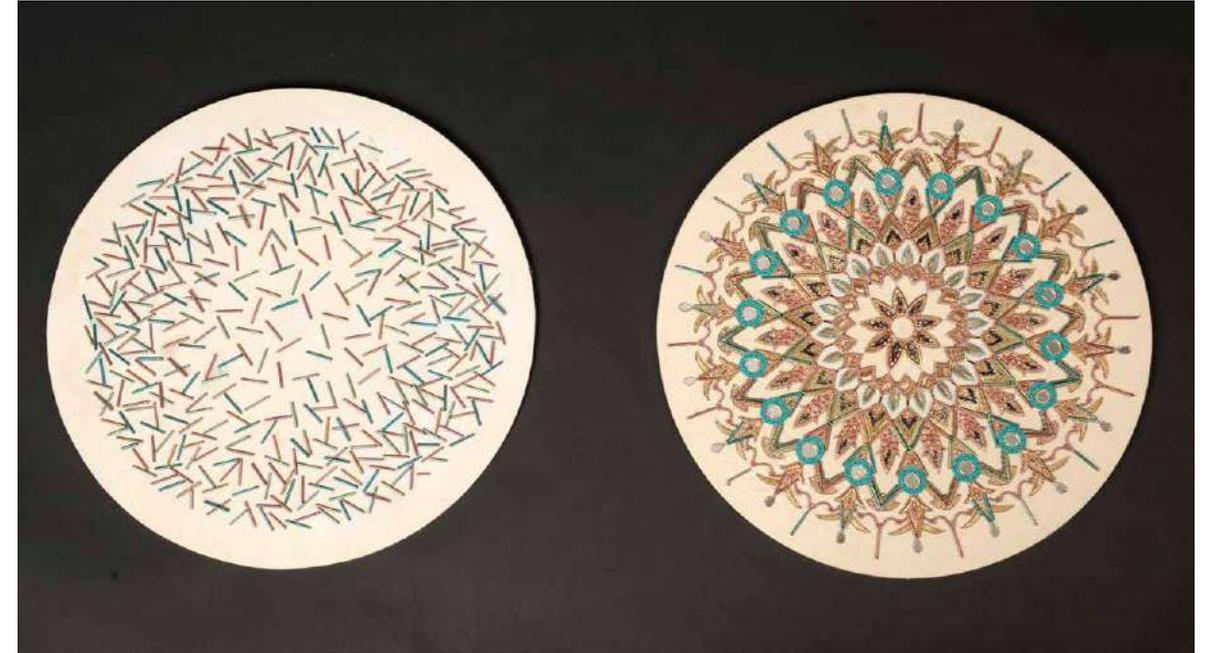




## INSPIRATION

48" x 48"

We all want the Divine in our life. The Divine Home is so rich and abundant that we know just a sliver of it would sustain us. But sometimes the touch of Divine is so fleeting and light and ephemeral, that it is hard to know it. If you look out of the corner of your eye, perhaps you'll catch a glimpse as It floats by. Perhaps you'll feel it brush your cheek as you turn. Perhaps you'll catch a piece of shine to sustain you. The Divine is here.



## LINE UPON LINE

19" diameter x two

We learn a little at a time... in fits and starts. And, from our perspective, the lines may never make sense. Life can be a hodge podge of a little bit of this and a little bit of that. BUT, seen from the perspective of our Heavenly Parents, all the lines fall into place creating a stunning tapestry of shine and glory. Know your lines carry magnificence — even when you cannot see through the chaos.





## McARTHUR KRISHNA

When I was in college, my horoscope told me that I would be a “ballerina, bull-dozer driver, trapeze artist.” I was a little bummed since I had planned on being a desert-princess-turned-bandit.

The truth is, I have always been a shape-shifter.

Business-woman, river guide, window-washer, waitress, Forest Service archeologist technician assistant, graduate student, backpacker, daughter, sister, mother, vixen, nice Mormon girl, traveler, writer, textile artist, NGO volunteer, and some day hope to be a true companion. But one of the best parts about being all these things and more – they all got good stories. And stories can be transformed into anything.



I grew up in small town golden green lovely rivers dancin’ wild and wonderful West Virginia and now live in cow-slalom temple chanting vibrant chaos yummy caramel rural and riotous India on a wild adventure... which is good. I am a children’s book author and textile designer; India provides fecund ground for both.

I take all my shapes and adventures and places and people — and weave them into new creations. Often this has been stories, but my textile art is pure joy. Spending time with color, line, and form puts me in

the divine space of timelessness... just ask my family when they are waiting on me.

But, I figure, if I am going to be a goddess someday I got to do a lot of playing around before. As a Mormon, I believe that I grow up to be like my Heavenly Mother. And I think of her as the ultimate creator — that nurturing spirits is the highest form of creation. Playing with fabric is not as demanding as nurturing souls— but it still is developing and stretching my creation muscles... growing divine. And, while creation changes me as an individual, it can also change the person who views it... and perhaps more.

As a person, I have been a shape-shifter. Now, I use my creative talents to shift the shape of the world.

-McArthur



## KUSUM PANDEY

Kusum was always a girl who wanted to DO things. Ever since she can remember her hands itch to be able to try things. She says, “When I see something new I immediately want to try.” A teacher in school saw she had a knack in home sciences and so she asked or Kusum’s help in mentoring students— even at this young age, Kusum knew the thrill of being able to share her skills with others.

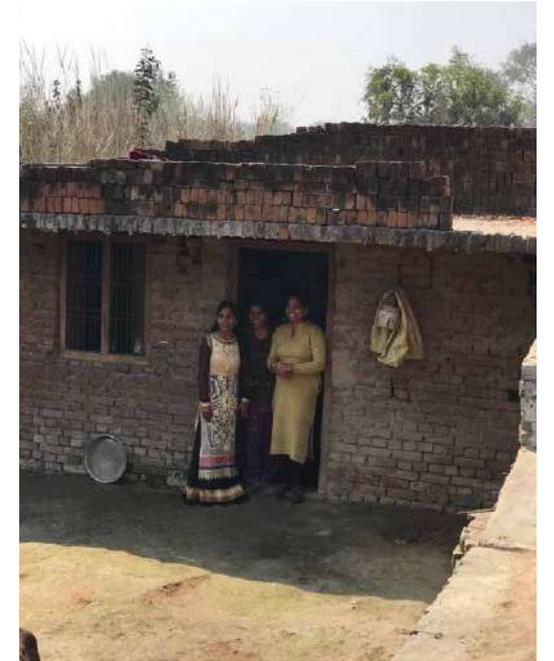
Her students speak of the same thrill. When an NGO who supported Kusum’s salary closed, the village girls refused to let her go. The students got together and hired her themselves by each paying 100 rupees (\$1.40) a month. One girl’s father loaned them a cow shed. They cleaned it out, tethered the



cows outside, and began to work. Kusum trains them, organizes the work load, and takes the finished products to market. When I asked Kusum where she got her ideas, she laughed, “Everywhere!... Everywhere I look.. then I learned how to Google search — wow. And now Pinterest!” Kusum is always full of laughter and an obvious drive to try new things.

It was not always an easy journey. Kusum’s mother didn’t want her to go and learn to do handicrafts, but her father supported her. While her mother felt the tuition of 50 rupees (less than a dollar) would be wasted, Kusum’s father said he thought she would succeed if she had a little training. Kusum married when she was 20. In the traditional way, she moved in with her in-laws... but in the very untraditional ways her husband fought with his family to let her continue her creative work. She said, “Each and every family member protested me going out of the home to work. My husband was the only who fought with the whole family to say I should take opportunities. For me it was a big challenge to travel 18km (11 miles). My husband said he would take care of our then three-year old so I could take the job with the NGO to teach village women handicrafts. My husband takes me to places when I need to go at night, he will encourage me. It is the traditional way to ask my husband, but I am lucky.” Kusum would get up at 5am to do the family work of making breakfast, making lunch, getting the children ready for school. When she left at 8 for the hour journey of eleven miles, he husband would watch their youngest child.

Kusum says, “Now I feel proud. My mother says I am as good as a son because I can support my family financially. I help pay my children’s school tuition, I help with family expenses, and I am able to help other village women earn for themselves as well. I am never tried of trying new projects— I do as many as I possibly have time for!”



## MR. HUSSAIN (INTERVIEWED BY McARTHUR)

Azhair Hussain Khan was a boy on a different path. His family had a history of working in trucks and transportation and so at a young age he trained to be a scooter mechanic. Every day after school he would go and learn how to fix scooters. Since he wasn't much interested in school scooter training seemed like a good idea— until the day of his accident. At age 13, he skidded out on his scooter and gravely injured his foot and leg. During the five month of recuperation he had time to consider what he wanted to do next. A neighbor who had trained in Lucknow embroidery work let the young Hussain come and spend time with him. (Lucknow is a nearby city and had been the capital of the Muslim nawab capital and has a rich history of embroidery work.) Hussain found himself drawn to the details of the work. Though he tried to join his father's transport business for a year, he found himself coming back to the embroidery work.

“Doing this work is much cleaner. Being a scooter mechanic was greasy on my hands and dirty. The men in the workshop talked rough. Embroidery means I can set up my own work and keep things tidy. Plus, I got no respect as a mechanic. Doing this work means people respect what I can do.”

Hearing Mr. Hussain (as we call him) talk this way is no surprise. He is meticulous— not an attribute commonly found in rural India where a frequent Hindi word “lughbhug” (approximate) is used to explain everything— including his own age and date of birth. But Hussain relishes precision in his work. When we sit down to work on a project he often demands I think more thoroughly to ensure he has the exact parameters. When I asked him what he thinks about the Writ and Vision project he explains that he likes the designs we have for the gallery... and he likes when I art direct to care about the exact way it should come out. As he said, “I don't like to do things I don't know how to do or I haven't done before”... and he shoots me a look over his reading glasses since he knows that's what I make him do all the time! He laughs and adds, “Creativity is an endless thing.”

He wants to get it perfect— and we are lucky to have him.

Mr. Hussain has been doing embroidery work for over 30 years. He has seen the rise, and perhaps fall, of the popularity of hand work. He explained that once upon a time every woman wanted some small

embroidery on every outfit. Wedding outfits could take months in their intricacy. Now, most people buy “ready-made” clothes and can't be bothered with getting embroidery done. He has struggled to find enough work in the last few years and even tried to find a job working in a factory line. This seemed a tragedy to me.

When I push him to know what his dream project is (feeling some guilt for making him do things he doesn't enjoy all the time) he says that he is already living his dream. “With this project, I have enough work to provide for my family. I don't have to worry. I would love to do more work for people in USA because that's a whole new world to explore.” I remind him he does not like new things and he asserts, “I don't have to go to USA. It is too dangerous for me. But I can enjoy the work of doing things that will please people... if people like my work, then I am proud.”

We are proud to be working with such a demanding and yet humble artist.

P.S. AND, Hussain can toss popcorn in the air and catch it in his mouth without fail. Truly, a talented perfectionist.



## **IN GRATITUDE**

My tribe, always. For my husband, for supporting my growth. And those whose contribution made this more glorious than it would have been otherwise: Brad Kramer, Mieka, Karoline, Char, Paige, Elise.

Artistic debts: Kate Purcell, Annie K Blake, AshMae Hoiland, and David Catrow. Photo credits: Jed Wells, Kathy McArthur