

The Intersection of Craft and Fine Art: Exploring the Role of Textiles in Contemporary Art of Pakistan

Sadia Safdar¹ 

¹Assistant Professor, Art and Design, Govt. Associate College for Women Manga Mandi Lahore, Pakistan.
Correspondence: khurramsadia69@gmail.com¹

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Pakistan has a rich historical background in textiles, which serves as a fundamental component of its cultural heritage. However, textiles are no longer restricted to upholstery and apparel in the contemporary era. These indigenous materials are being integrated into modern-era art practices and utilised in various innovative methods. During the 20th century, numerous artists began to incorporate textile materials and techniques into their work, creatively combining them with their art practices. The goal is to investigate the innovative incorporation of these methodologies into painting, sculpture, and installation art, thereby pushing the boundaries of both artistic mediums.

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative research methodology. This exploratory study examines the creative fusion of conventional textile materials and techniques in the work of contemporary Pakistani artists, with a particular focus on how modern artists employ these techniques to produce artworks that reflect the vibrant culture of Pakistan. Few contemporary artists are selected as a case study, for example, Masuma Halai Khawaja, Mussarat Arif, Imrana Tanveer, Mariam Hina Hasnain, Khadim Ali, and Imran Qureshi.

Findings: This study examines the integration of textiles and fine arts, also analyzing the impact of this fusion on both genres.

Conclusion: This study concludes that modern artists in Pakistan have begun to explore textile media and methods in their artworks, fostering creativity and showcasing both traditional textile craft art and the emerging artistic landscape of Pakistan. This promotes the innovative use of Pakistan's textile craft techniques and fine arts both nationally and worldwide, conveying a favourable image.

Keywords: Intersection of Textile and Art, Textile Art, Contemporary artists of Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The terms "art" and "craft" are often used interchangeably, but they have historically carried distinct meanings in terms of ideas and functions. Art is commonly seen as the manifestation or articulation of creativity and imagination, usually in a visual medium such as painting or sculpture, designed to produce objects that others value for their aesthetic or emotional resonance (Gell, 1998). Craft, on the other hand, is the skilled practice of creating useful or ornamental items by hand, often as part of a cultural tradition

Article History

Received:
May 11, 2025

Revised:
July 26, 2025

Accepted:
July 30, 2025

Online:
August 5, 2025

(Adamson, 2007). Art has long been associated with personal expression and high aesthetic standards, whereas craft has been linked to manual labor, technique, and the materiality of the work.

The convergence of art and craft has emerged as a crucial area of investigation in modern visual culture, questioning traditional separations between the intellectual and the manual, as well as the aesthetic and the useful. David Brett (1989) asserts that the marginalization of craft arises from ideological constructs rather than intrinsic disparities, indicating that the concept of craft has been historically influenced by societal and institutional prejudices rather than its genuine creative capacity. Lees-Maffei and Sandino (2004) elaborate on the interconnection between art, design, and craft, referring to these relationships as “dangerous liaisons,” wherein borders are consciously muddled to challenge hierarchical differences and redefine cultural value systems. These overlaps are not neutral; instead, they are a result of complex power relations, including those of gender, class, and institutional control. This highlights how craft has historically been devalued in comparison to fine art, mainly due to its association with domesticity and functionality. Margaret A. Boden (2000) adds a philosophical component by highlighting the significance of physical perception and cognitive involvement in craft-making. She contends that craft's manual and embodied nature significantly enhances its aesthetic and intellectual value. Instead of distinguishing between craft and art, she asserts that craft encompasses a distinct form of creativity, rooted in sensory perception, material engagement, and corporeal intellect. Similarly, Janis Jefferies (2011) examines how modern artists have reappropriated craft, particularly textile techniques, through a feminist perspective, positioning care, repetition, and closeness as legitimate forms of artistic labor. Jefferies contends that this “loving attention” is not only emotionally impactful but also politically significant, challenging modernist principles of detachment and promoting habits traditionally associated with femininity. Collectively, these viewpoints demonstrate that the amalgamation of art and craft transcends a mere stylistic trend, representing a fundamental re-evaluation of aesthetics, authorship, and cultural significance in modern practice.

However, in today's world, the strict lines between art and craft have become increasingly blurred. This mixing is the result of changes in culture, technology, and philosophy that make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two areas. Artists nowadays sometimes blend traditional craft techniques, such as weaving, needlework, ceramics, and carpentry, with fine art, making it challenging to distinguish between utilitarian design and expressive meaning. This mixing of styles not only elevates the status of craft in the art world but also alters the way we perceive materiality in visual culture.

Glenn Adamson (2007) and other scholars have advocated for an alternative perception of the role of craft in modern art, characterizing it as a site of resistance to industrial mass production and a repository of cultural memory. Julia Bryan-Wilson (2017) provides more detailed insights into how craft, particularly textile and fiber arts, has become an increasingly important means for feminists and political activists to express themselves in the 21st century. This mix has also been observed in South Asia, where digital technology is revitalizing traditional crafts and incorporating them into installations and conceptual art (Mitter, 2007). The convergence of art and craft in contemporary society serves not merely as an aesthetic endeavor but also as a discourse on social and political issues, such as identity, labor, and the democratization of creative pursuits. Understanding this synthesis provides a deeper and broader perspective on modern art production. Currently, this hierarchy has disintegrated, as artists adopt the skills, materials, and ideas of craft to produce works that go beyond conventional classifications.

The revival of textile art, along with the incorporation of traditional crafts into contemporary installations and artworks, highlights the variety of materiality and fosters discussions about individuality, heritage, and the significance of handmade objects in a rapidly advancing, technology-oriented society. In this dynamic environment, art and craft are not just merging; they are collaboratively establishing a realm where innovation intersects with tradition, and the definition of art is ever-broadening. Textile materials and techniques have made a significant appearance in contemporary art. Weaving, embroidering, tapestry, fibre arts, and carpet design are all forms of textile art that have seen a renaissance in the last hundred years as artists have given new meaning to textiles and their aesthetic potential. Textiles are widely

employed worldwide, including in Pakistan, as a dynamic medium for artistic exploration, merging craft and fine art, and fostering new avenues for expression. This movement represents a thorough re-evaluation of materials traditionally associated with domesticity and artistry, challenging existing structures within the realm of art.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology. This exploratory study examines the creative fusion of conventional textile materials and techniques in the work of contemporary Pakistani artists, with a particular focus on how modern artists employ these techniques to produce artworks that reflect the vibrant culture of Pakistan. Few contemporary artists are selected as a case study, for example, Masuma Halai Khawaja, Mussarat Arif, Imrana Tanveer, Mariam Hina Hasnain, Khadim Ali, and Imran Qureshi.

3. DISCUSSION

This exploratory study examines the creative processes and methods of Pakistani artists such as **Masuma Halai Khawaja, Mussarat Arif, Imrana Tanveer, Mariam Hina Hasnain, Khadim Ali, and Imran Qureshi** to examine and analyse how these artists deviated from their established practices and incorporated various materials into their creations to enhance creativity and inventiveness in their work.

Masuma Halai Khwaja is a versatile artist. Her artistic style integrates cultural, political, and historical viewpoints with personal experiences and individual narratives. She commenced her exploration of fine art driven by a profound interest in the richness and fluidity of textiles. In the early stages of her work, she depicted the grace of folds and the subtle interaction of light and shadow in her paintings, employing fabric imagery as metaphors for human experience (Ali, 2012). Khwaja delves into the concepts of self and shared identity, freedom and confinement, perspectives, and reality. During her earlier career, Khawaja employed a variety of subject matters to depict the lost self-identity of women in our stringent and traditional culture (Fig. 1). Her work progressively expanded as she integrated actual fabrics into her art, merging needlework and fabric manipulation with paint. Khawaja redefined the conventional domestic craft by interweaving layers of cloth, creating a medium of individual and political expression wherein each thread and fold articulates the intricacies of identity, femininity, and cultural history (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: *Gateway to Pakistan* by Masuma Halai Khwaja. Oil on digital print, 2017.
<http://vaslart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/8-7.jpg>



Fig. 2: *They Blend Different Shades of Green* by Masuma, 2022.
<https://karachiartdirectory.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/atr-1.png>

By employing this novel fabric technique, she creates pieces that blur the distinction between the physical and the abstract, seamlessly integrating art with craftsmanship. She procures materials from local markets in Karachi, incorporating elements of traditional needlework and fabric into her art, reinterpreting these abandoned remnants to create new narratives. She utilizes South Asian clothing, such as the sherwani, burqa, and sari, to contextualize events within culturally and politically significant frameworks (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: *The Honeymoon Period*, Embroidery in running stitch on linen cotton sherwani by Masuma. 2020.
<https://mittalsouthasiainstitute.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/3.-2020-The-Honeymoon-Period.jpg>

She also utilises kilims, carpets, and embroideries from Pakistan and the surrounding region to signify both physical and virtual links among individuals and locations. These subdued tapestries, acquired and recontextualised, elicit emotional profundity and tactile intricacy, contrasting traditional craftsmanship with contemporary interpretations. Khwaja states that textiles and apparel can be configured in several ways and have the capacity to convey narratives within culturally pertinent frameworks.

“My collection of work examines regional, cultural, and political contexts by exploring the origins of clothes, embroideries, and materials, interweaving storylines that, while grounded in South Asia, possess universal significance.” (Aziz, 2020)

Rumana Husain writes about Khwaja that, despite her trajectory being centred on textiles, she has recently begun to diversify her practice to encompass markedly various domains. Her multi-faceted creations compel spectators to reevaluate their perceptions of history, tradition, and authority. Her works encapsulate the intricacies of a dynamic world, where the past and present continually intersect, fragment, and redefine one another (Husain, 2024).

Mussarat Arif is a contemporary artist who incorporates the Kufic calligraphy style and traditional motifs into her artwork. The quest for self-discovery inspired her to enter the realm of creativity, getting inspiration from her native land of Sindh. (Arif, n.d.) She creates calligraphic art that adheres to the concepts of balance, proportion, rhythm, and unity (Fig. 4). She integrates diverse patterns and geometric motifs into her art, interlaced with phrases from the Holy Quran, which emanate a soul-stirring aura.



Fig. 4: *Rabb* by Mussarat Arif, oil and gold leaf on canvas.
<https://mussatarif.com/2021>

In her recent work, she employs a variety of techniques, including oils, acrylics with threads, and other materials. Her colour palette is accentuated by earthy tones, including red, brown, ochre, and black hues, as well as blue tones. The arcs, loops, ovals, circles, and both vertical and horizontal lines serve as design elements in her artworks (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Arif's recent work marks the beginning of a creative journey. To rejuvenate Pakistan's traditions and culture, she incorporates contemporary elements, such as Ajrak patterns, into her work. She also utilizes local materials, including *Seba* and yarn threads, interweaving them on canvas to produce a distinctive fusion of innovation (Akhter, 2024). Arif's latest work is a true example of the amalgamation of textile tradition with modern artistic expression. She demonstrates her profound engagement with identity and cultural legacy.

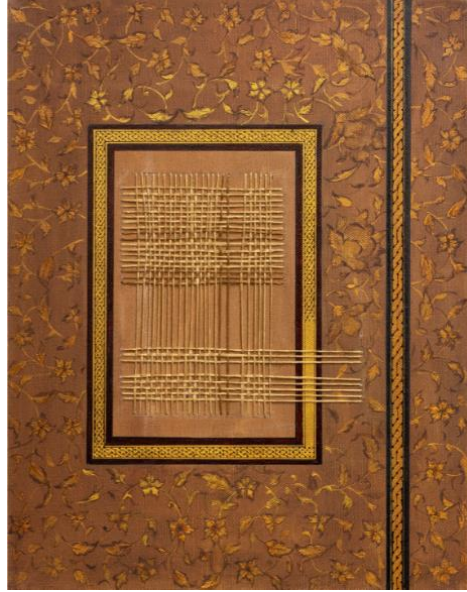


Fig. 5: *Seba* by Mussarat Arif, thread and oil on Canvas, 2022.
<https://karachiartdirectory.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/mussart-work-3.png>



Fig. 6: *Vibrations* by Mussarat Arif, 2022.
<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/mussarat-arif-vibrations>

Imrana Tanveer's artworks integrate weaving and textiles with conceptual digital art, resulting in visually striking and intellectually stimulating works. Her work serves as a commentary on her surroundings, making her a socially and politically aware contemporary artist. She combines art and crafts to address social and political challenges in Pakistan and abroad. She includes iconic imagery from Western and Pakistani art and culture to convey her message. Tanveer's distinctive approach encompasses complex weaving and the deconstruction of fabrics, which she uses to produce multilayered pieces that examine topics of consumerism, globalisation, and identity (Fig. 7). The tactile characteristics of the fabrics and the use of vivid, primary colours constitute the formal interests that provide ample opportunity for investigation and expression in her work (Drew, 2014).

One of her distinguished skills is her use of tapestry to create artwork, wherein she methodically lays out fabric to produce an installation. By doing so, she highlights the convergence of art and craft, raising textile material and techniques to the status of fine art, while confronting urgent socio-political issues through her profoundly symbolic use of materials. Imrana Tanveer persistently expands the limits of modern Pakistani art through her fusion of artistry and critique.



Fig. 7: *The Scream of the Scream* by Imrana Tanveer. Paper and Thread, 2013.
<https://www.taseerartgallery.com/imranatanveer>

Maryam Hina Hasnain, another eminent artist, explores various themes, including migration, individuality, identity, and culture, through mixed media such as painting, soundscapes, installations, and textile interventions. She is multidisciplinary and employs several unique methods of creation and exhibition. In her previous projects, she explores concepts of dividing lines and mixed identities (Fig. 8). She employed textile intervention to elucidate nonlinear historical narratives, particularly those related to the partition of South Asia in 1947. Hasnain constructs layered narratives through textiles, deconstructing and reassembling them in a manner that is at times violent and contemplatively passive. The artist's hand-dyed yarn in turmeric explores concepts of sensory memory and staining (Fig. 9). Hasnain redirects the possibilities and experimentations to which craft traditions are often relegated. In her various works, the carpet symbolizes centuries of trade, frequently facilitated by empires and colonialism. This, in turn, appears to be a stark contrast to today's oppressive visa regimes and limited global mobility.



Fig. 8: *Maps* by Maryam Hina Hussain
<https://www.instagram.com/maryamhinahasnainstudio/p/BoptClmnxkv/>

Utilizing the history of the textile trade and her personal experiences in South and Southeast Asia, as well as in London, she examines the politics and representation of artistic labor, frequently engaging in reflexive self-criticism regarding her role as an artist (Noor, n.d.) The artist distils symbols from video games and war rugs. The artists' methodology of creating and deconstructing fabric and symbols interrogates concepts of movement, motion, and control. Hasnain describes her work in her own words, saying that she creates a connection between images and objects by using unique textile materials. She utilises turmeric and saffron as pigments acknowledged by the East India Company's exploitation of the subcontinent (Hasnain, 2020).



Fig. 9: *Hostile Environment* by Maryam Husnain.
<https://www.maryamhinahasnainstudio.com/selected-work>

Khadim Ali of Afghan Hazara descent was raised on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Ali pursued miniature painting at the National College of Arts. His extensive exposure to the diverse histories and cultures of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Japan is prominently evident in his artworks. His early practice features miniature paintings that incorporate calligraphy and social-political narratives (Fig. 10). His artworks frequently depict demons, implying that the legendary figure of Rustam has been appropriated in modern times to rationalize hatred and violence, with his bravery now attributed to those who commit acts of brutality and subjugation. Ali is profoundly impacted by childhood memories of his grandfather reading *Shahnameh* for him, which is quite evident in his work. After gaining varied experiences and exposure, Ali incorporated tapestry and patchwork to create large-scale tapestries and installations (Fig. 11). He also worked on carpets inspired by the Afghan War. Ali's elaborate creations incorporate imagery from history, politics, literature, poetry, and mythology to examine contemporary issues, as well as personal experiences of oppression, relocation, and racism.



Fig. 10: *Untitled* by Khadim Ali, 2012.
https://mediacloud.saffronart.com/auctions/2012/paknovauc/khadim_12pak_08083_big.jpg



Fig. 11: *Birth of Demons 8*, by Khadim Ali, 2024. Embroidered silk, 113 x 126 in.
https://img.artlogic.net/w_3000,h_1700,c_limit/exhibit-e/65b96d8b105ea3d323069fd9/076bf7b4e42b802eb46e15f41cba9369.jpeg

Imran Qureshi is a distinguished Pakistani artist acclaimed for his innovative and distinctive fusion of contemporary art with traditional miniature painting techniques. His work adeptly integrates the complex elements of Mughal miniature painting with modern social and political issues of violence, displacement, and bloodshed, establishing a distinctive visual language that resonates with both local and global audiences (Fig. 12). Qureshi is primarily recognized for his extensive site-specific installations, in which he used splashes of red paint to conjure the dual picture of blood and blooming flowers. This recurring subject encapsulates destruction and renewal, highlighting themes of life, death, and resilience, especially amid political and societal upheaval. Qureshi's newest site-specific installations engage audiences with a compelling fusion of aesthetic beauty and incisive social critique. His most recent work, like his previous creations, centres on the dichotomy between violence and regeneration, a concept he has explored with greater profundity in recent years. This paradox encapsulates the vulnerability of existence and the possibility of optimism and recovery, combining the tradition with modern art. Qureshi's new site-specific installation, featuring cotton and nylon threads, serves as a significant commentary on the contemporary world's predicament, amalgamating and connecting, rather than merely being a visual spectacle (Fig. 13). His ability to transform public settings into venues for reflection of traditional crafts, compelling viewers to engage with these subjects emotionally and intellectually, establishes him as a significant figure in contemporary Pakistani and global art. In his recent works, Qureshi consistently examines concepts of textile materials and fibres through his distinctive miniature background.

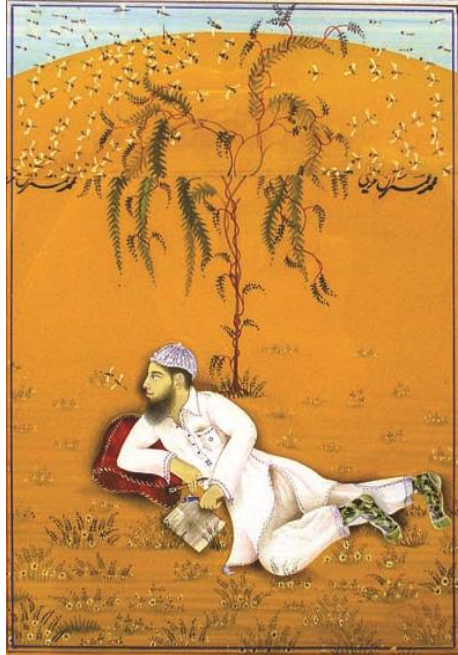


Fig 12: Moderate Enlightenment by Imran Qureshi, 2007.
https://mediacloud.saffronart.com/auctions/2012/paknovauc/imran_12pak_05644_big.jpg



Fig 13: View of Installation at the rooftop of the COMO Museum by Imran Qureshi, 2024.
https://thefridaytimes.com/digital_images/large/2024-03-03/imran-qureshi-unveils-second-exhibition-titled-home-at-como-museum-1709471560-1729.jpg

4. CONCLUSION

The changing panorama of modern Pakistani art illustrates a dynamic and considered intersection of craft and artistic endeavor, with textiles functioning as both a medium and an essential language. Artists such as Masuma Halai Khawaja employ thread as a symbol for disintegration and restoration, intertwining embroidered surfaces with socio-political criticism to interrogate notions of women's labor and marginalization. Mussarat Arif's utilization of traditional embroidery techniques serves as a tactile repository of cultural memory, facilitating a conversation between the aesthetics of quotidian textile activities and themes of identity and belonging. Imrana Tanveer confuses the distinction between craft and art by incorporating weaving and textile patterns into conceptual frameworks that examine consumerism, digital culture, and power dynamics, transforming fabric into a medium of critique and resistance.

Mariam Hina Hasnain's artwork frequently embodies a subtle, process-oriented interaction with fabric, intertwining abstraction with narrative elements that investigate individual and communal histories. Artists like Khadim Ali and Imran Qureshi, who are not specifically textile-based, evoke the spirit of craft with their painstaking surface work, hand-rendered detail, and profound respect for centuries-old techniques such as miniature painting. Their techniques exemplify the time, accuracy, and sensitivity requisite in craftsmanship, merging the distinctions between ornamentation and message, as well as labor and significance.

Collectively, these artists demonstrate how the utilization of materials from textiles and craft-based methodologies can challenge aesthetic hierarchies and recover marginalized narratives. The convergence of great craft and fine art in their work is intentional, reflecting embodied knowledge, ancestral ability, and the politics of creation. In Pakistan's current art landscape, where issues of nationhood, gender, identity, and memory remain pressing, textiles emerge as a robust and adaptable medium that artists utilize to express complex and often unspoken realities. This connection is not only a stylistic decision but a transformative act of altering the parameters of art, its creators, and the narratives it conveys.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

Author declared NO conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The author received NO funding to conduct this study.

ORCID iDs

Sadia Safdar¹  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4801-9527>

REFERENCES

- Adamson, G. (2007). *Thinking Through Craft*. Berg Publishers.
- Akhtar, A. (2024, August 22). *Multiple perspectives*. Retrieved from The News: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/1223025-multiple-perspectives>
- Ali, S. (2012, May 23). *Masuma Halai: Capturing the Imagination*. Retrieved from The Tribune: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/382974/masuma-halai-capturing-the-imagination>

- Arif, M. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://mussaratarif.com/about>
- Aziz, M. (2020, September 09). *The Fabric of Contemporary Art*. Retrieved from The News: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/magazine/you/707560-the-fabric-of-contemporary-art>
- Boden, M. (2000). Crafts, Perception, and the Possibilities of the Body. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40 (3), 289–301. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/40.3.289>
- Brett, D. (1989). *The Notion of Craft*. *Circa*, 47, 14–17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25557451>
- Bryan-Wilson, J. (2017). *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Correspondent, N. (n.d.). Retrieved from Taseer Art Gallery: <https://www.taseerartgallery.com/imranatanveer>
- Drew, E. (2014, May 06). "Interview: Imrana Tanveer. Retrieved from Emergentartspace.org.
- Gell, A. (1998). *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Hasnain, M. H. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.maryamhinahasnainstudio.com/selected-work>
- Husain, R. (2024, September 8). *Exhibition: Old patterns, New narratives!* Retrieved from Dawn: www.dawn.com/news/1857431
- Jefferies, Janis. Loving Attention: An Outburst of Craft in Contemporary Art. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft in Contemporary Art*. Ed. Maria Elena Buszek. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 222–42.
- Lees-Maffei, G., & Sandino, L. (2004). Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships between Design, Craft and Art. *Journal of Design History*, 17(3), 207–219. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3527113>
- Mitter, P. (2007). "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery." *The Art Bulletin*, 90(4), 531–548. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20619633>
- Noor, T. (n.d.). Retrieved from Artprize: <https://www.artprize.co.uk/maryam-hasnain.html>