

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Finding Oneself in an Indian Mirror

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I first met mirror cloth as a young girl. I loved the brilliant colors, the shine, the intricate stitching. The hand-crafted, repetitive patterns created a soothing rhythm, while the irregularities retained a softness, a humanness. For me, it was eye candy.

Years later as an art student I learned that this embroidery was created by nomadic people from the Kutch in Western India with a 1,500-year-old culture. The vivid embroidery is in stark contrast to their desert surroundings. One of those tribes was called Rabari.

Earlier this year, when I heard that a group of Rabari embroidery artisans from India were interested in giving a workshop in Los Angeles, I was excited. To make it even better, they were involved in Kala Raksha, a social enterprise that empowers artisans to explore their own visual traditions and expand their marketing expertise, rather than be at the mercy of larger corporate enterprises. My heart was there.

Kala Raksha's director, Judy Frater, had sent around a proposal to arts organizations in Los Angeles. But all the calendars were full, and everyone declined to sponsor the workshops, mostly with good reason given each organization's priorities.

Where did that leave me? I decided to sponsor the workshops on my own.

The Craft in America Study Center agreed to give us the space for free. How wonderful of them, given that their mission is to support domestic craft. Key individuals in the Los Angeles fiber community agreed to help get the word out despite several competing events. We were well on our way.

Word spread, and the first workshop nearly filled. So now I am sponsoring two Rabari embroidery workshops in Los Angeles, on July 20 and 21, 2012, as well as a Trunk Show on July 22, 2012. The full-day workshops will give an introduction to Rabari embroidery and traditional motifs, as well as provide instruction on the embroidery stitches and application of mirrors.



Registration is filing up fast but, there are still a few spaces available for each day. To register go [here](#).

The Trunk Show on Sunday, July 22, will be a wonderful opportunity to shop, meet the artisans, watch them demonstrate their craft and socialize over a cup of chai. If you're interested in coming email me at lori@lorizimmerman.com and I'll provide the address.

The Rabaris are Hindus and they have a fascinating origin story. According to Rabari legend, Lord Shiva gave Sambal, one of his devotees, three *apsaras* or celestial maidens, to marry under the

condition that he would not speak to them. If he violated the condition, the *apsaras* would be lost forever. Apparently the silent marriage flourished and one son and four daughters were born. The family grew larger and larger challenging their allotted space until one day Lord Shiva asked Sambal to leave the heavens to dwell on earth. Sambal agreed to the migration and from then on his family was called Rabari, or “Outsider.”

We invite you to leave your everyday life and spend an afternoon with these visiting Rabari artisans.

Lori Zimmerman is a fiber artist working in the Los Angeles area. Her work incorporates fabric painting, photography, freestyle hand embroidery and collage. Her studio also serves as a laboratory as she experiments with preserving natural specimens.

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