

Audio Guide Transcript

# Global Threads

**The Art and Fashion of Indian Chintz**

October 23, 2022–January 8, 2023  
Ticketed Exhibition Galleries

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

**STOP 1**  
**Taylor Hall**  
Introduction

**Speakers**

**Min Jung Kim**  
**Barbara B. Taylor Director**  
**Saint Louis Art Museum**

**Philip Hu**  
**Curator of Asian Art**  
**Saint Louis Art Museum**

[Min]

Hello, I am Min Jung Kim, Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

I am delighted to welcome you to the audio guide for *Global Threads: The Art and Fashion of Indian Chintz*, an exhibition organized and circulated by the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada. This exhibition traces the fascinating history, global transmission, and contemporary influence of painted and printed cotton textiles from India, popularly known as chintz.

Over many centuries, Indian artists and artisans perfected complex methods for textile decoration using plant-based substances to create an astonishing spectrum of vibrant colors that did not easily fade with exposure to light or washing. They developed dramatic and specialized designs to captivate new markets across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. These exceptional textiles played a major role in connecting cultures, influencing economic and political decisions, and revolutionizing fashion, industry, and global trade.

To tell you more, I would like to introduce Philip Hu, curator of Asian art and one of the cocurators of the exhibition.

[Philip]

Thank you, Min. This exciting exhibition presents a wide range of chintz textiles produced in India for its own domestic consumption as well as for various international markets, among them Egypt, Sri Lanka, Iran, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, Armenia, the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain. In a section on European and American dress and furnishing textiles inspired by Indian chintz, we address some of the historical

consequences that were inextricably tied to the production and consumption of cotton textiles in the United States before and after independence.

The exhibition concludes with the works of a number of contemporary Indian chintz artists who continue the innovation of this art form, with strong concern for environmental responsibility and sustainable practices.

The exhibition is a collaborative effort, and I would like to acknowledge the originating curator of the exhibition, Dr. Sarah Fee, Senior Curator of Global Fashion and Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum, and my cocurator for the St. Louis presentation, Genny Cortinovis.

This exhibition audio guide offers commentaries from several individuals. In addition to my voice and that of Genny Cortinovis, you will be hearing from other scholars, artists, and community members.

We encourage you to experience this guide in any order you like; you may follow it in numeric order or pick and choose. Each featured object can be located by following the floorplan on this webpage or by identifying the audio icon on the object's label in the exhibition. Whether you're listening from home or in the Museum galleries, I hope you enjoy this audio guide and your visit to *Global Threads: The Art and Fashion of Indian Chintz*.

## **STOP 2**

### **Made in India for Egypt**

*Textile Fragments*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**  
**Curator of Asian Art**  
**Saint Louis Art Museum**

Indian textiles may have been imported to Egypt as early as the second millennium BCE. Authors of Mediterranean antiquity commented on the nature of the fibers and color-fast dyes that produced exceptionally fine cloths. However, very few fabrics have actually survived.

In the 1930s a group of Indian trade textiles were found along the Red Sea ports of Egypt. This corpus of fragmentary textiles—all cotton and decorated by a resist- or mordant-printing technique, mostly through the use of printing blocks to stamp the resist or mordant onto the cloth—these textiles became known as the earliest major group of fabrics surviving from India. They were traded from Gujarat to Egypt, following the sea route past the Arabian Peninsula and then either transported overland to the Nile Valley or carried on ships north to the Red Sea.

Although there are a great many different designs, the vast majority is based on floral representations. These may vary from repetitive patterns of small, eight-petaled rosettes to highly ornate and realistic vines and flower heads. There are a few examples of animal representation, such as peacocks, but the only animal that appears with some consistency in all collections of Indian textiles found in Egypt is the goose, or *hamsa*.

How do we know that these fabrics are of such great age? Examples from a group of similar textiles in the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Oxford were analyzed in 1994 and 1995 by Oxford's Research Lab for Archaeology and the History of Art. Radiocarbon testing is a measure of the C 14, or carbon 14, in any sample. Carbon 14 is a radioactive isotope and therefore decays with time. The older a sample is, the less carbon 14 is in it.

## **STOP 3**

### **Made in India for Iran**

*Hanging with Cypress Trees, Monkeys, Birds, Islamic Inscriptions, and Hindu Figure*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**

**Curator of Asian Art**

**Saint Louis Art Museum**

The design of this chintz hanging demonstrates one of the many ways that Indian textile artists creatively adapted their products to the desires of specific clientele in other countries. While the Hindu figure is related to the religious background of the majority of India's population, the central motif of a cypress tree within a cusped niche appealed to neighboring Islamic cultures, chief among them Iran, formerly known as Persia.

The principal region supplying the Indian export trade to Iran was the Muslim kingdom of Golconda, which maintained close commercial ties with Iran through the port of Masulipatam, now known as Machilipatnam, in the modern state of Andhra Pradesh. Located on the Coromandel Coast of eastern India, at the northern extremity of the Krishna River delta, this port rose to prominence as a major center of maritime trade in the last quarter of the 16th century. Its growing importance after about 1570 was largely due to the consolidation of the Sultanate of Golconda under Ibrahim Shah, who reigned from 1550 to 1580. The sultan sent a ship each year to Iran laden with chintz textiles, and cloths with flowered designs achieved high prices. Masulipatam became renowned for its hand-painted, or *kalamkari*, textiles, such as this example. A steady trade in Iranian market palampores with flowering tree designs and in prayer mats continued from this city, and subsequently from other ports along the Coromandel Coast of India right up until the beginning of the 20th century.

## **STOP 4**

### **Made in India for Indonesia**

*Ceremonial Textile with Battle Scene from the Indian Epic Poem  
Ramayana*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**

**Curator of Asian Art**

**Saint Louis Art Museum**

This rare example of a ceremonial textile hanging depicts the penultimate battle in the epic poem *Ramayana*, when Rama and his monkey and bear armies fight the 10-headed Ravana and his hordes of demons. Rama and Ravana prepare to discharge magical arrows at each other. Rama is supported by his brother Laksmana, seen stringing his bow, and by his general, the monkey leader Hanuman, who gestures in veneration to his lord. Some members of Hanuman's army engage in deadly combat, while others carry rocks to build the land bridge to Lanka, or Sri Lanka, needed for the final siege of Ravana's fortress and the rescue of Rama's wife, Sita. Ravana is flanked by his general and by the demonic creatures in his service. This vivid and masterful example of south Indian textile painting, or *kalamkari*, demonstrates the artist's ability to capture in lively brushwork the energy and majesty of the epic battle.

Many Indian chintz textiles that were exported to eastern Indonesia, especially to the island of Sulawesi, have been exceptionally well preserved. This is because they were used infrequently—only for special ceremonial occasions—and passed down through the generations as treasured family heirlooms.

## **STOP 5**

### **Made in India for Japan**

*Pouches*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**  
**Curator of Asian Art**  
**Saint Louis Art Museum**

Foreign fabrics brought to Japan,—first by the Portuguese in the 16th century and later by the Dutch from the 17th century onward—were made into clothing and accessories. Chintz or brightly patterned cottons from India were especially desirable and very costly. These fabrics were known in Japanese as *sarasa*, derived from the Portuguese term *saraça*, for chintz textiles.

These beautiful, exotic Indian chintz textiles quickly became enormously popular among wealthy samurai and merchant classes. They stood out in stark contrast to common Japanese utilitarian blue indigo cotton fabrics, a textile the Japanese encountered every day. Some lengths of *sarasa* were made into kimono, others were cut into small pieces and tailored into precious wrappers for tea ceremony containers, display mats, tobacco pouches, pipe cases, and scroll box covers, replacing a previous preference for Chinese silk.

Examples of *sarasa* were used and admired in both types of Japanese tea ceremonies: *chanoyu*, which uses powdered green tea, and *sencha*, which uses steeped tea. In the Edo period fragments of Indian chintz or *sarasa* were routinely mounted in sample books known as *meibutsugire*, or “famed fabrics.”

## **STOP 6**

### **Made in India for Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora**

#### *Cope with Angels, Cross, and Dedicatory Inscription*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**

**Curator of Asian Art**

**Saint Louis Art Museum**

Many centuries of Armenian presence in India resulted in the emergence of a number of large and small Armenian settlements in several places. These were usually port cities along the coasts or port towns along major rivers, where trade was facilitated by access to transportation infrastructures.

The garment displayed here is known in English as a cope and in Armenian as a *shurchar*. It is a semicircular, capelike ceremonial garment worn by Christian clergy. The cope was produced in India for use in the Armenian Church and probably dedicated to the memory of a couple and their son. An inscription bearing their names and the date appears below a large cross at the center of the design.

The design is composed of a cornucopia motif, which is repeated over the surface of the garment. The placements are reversed on either side of the central cross and inscription, creating a mirror image.

The cope has an outer border of angel heads with wings, each face unique. The cope's motifs were most probably created by freehand painting, using a stencil to draw out the original design. The lining, however, is printed with a repeating pattern of small concentric circles like a bull's-eye.



## **STOP 7**

### **Made in India for Europe**

*Wall or Bed Hanging (palampore)*

#### **Speaker**

**Genny Cortinovis**

**Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design  
Saint Louis Art Museum**

I'm Genny Cortinovis, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Many of the earliest surviving chintz textiles are palampores, large bed or wall hangings or covers, and like this one, they often feature large flowering trees as their central motif. While tailored to Western taste, these impressive designs are a hybrid of many sources. Sinuous blossoming plants growing from rocky landscapes have roots in early Chinese and Iranian art. Yuan dynasty porcelain feature the motif, as do later Persian miniature paintings. Scholars suggest the flowering tree also has a relationship to European textiles.

The shape of the leaves and flowers and variety of patterns used to shade and enliven blossoming tree palampores developed concurrently with English crewelwork, a type of embroidery made with worsted wool fibers, called crewels, on a cotton-and-linen-blend ground. Like chintz, crewelwork embroideries were frequently created as bed hangings, composed of curtains, valences, quilts, and coverlets that enlivened and made more comfortable what was often the most expensive piece of furniture in a house. The designs of these typically English embroideries began to change in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century—sinuous blossoming trees, vines, serrated leaves, and large, blousy flowers replaced more regular, compact plants—right around the same time these painted cotton chintz bedcovers arrived in England. These two forms of patternmaking—embroidery and painting—practiced thousands of miles from each other, were, perhaps surprisingly, in perennial dialogue as they made their way across the world either as musters, or exemplars, as in the case of crewelwork, or as luxury textiles impacting local tastes, as with Indian chintz.

Their distinctive blending owed a debt to a wide range of media found on porcelain, lacquerware, prints, and even live plants circling the globe during this fertile period of trade.

## STOP 8

### Made in India for Europe

#### *Panel from a Set of Hangings*

#### Speaker

**Genny Cortinovis**

**Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design  
Saint Louis Art Museum**

While the intricate design of this chintz hanging—interlacing, scalloped ribbons edged in ultrafine vermicular, or wormlike, patterns and punctuated by tufts of fountainlike feathers—is truly showstopping, this textile is particularly exciting for its color. Unlike many chintzes of the same period, it retains its rich green, which more typically faded to gray-blue over time.

In the early 18th century green was only achieved by overpainting blue, usually indigo, with yellow dye, often derived from pomegranate skins or turmeric. Yellow dyes are unique in that they can be painted directly onto a cotton fabric, but they are notoriously fugitive. Despite their famed and well-deserved reputation for color fastness, the blue foliage of surviving chintz textiles probably started off green.

Indian chintzes like this one respond to brocaded silk textiles made in Europe in the 1710s and '20s. The Saint Louis Art Museum is incredibly lucky to have an English silk textile in its collection that closely mirrors the sinuous design and palette of this hanging. The joined panels once made up the skirt or petticoat of a fashionable gown. Likely made in Spitalfields, the silk-weaving capital of England, the textile is part of a genre of silk designs dubbed “lace-patterns” for their airy, netlike patterns and undulated ribbons.

Rather than reflecting contemporary European lace, scholars have surmised that these so-called lace-pattern silks were inspired by Eastern designs. The 1765 manual for silk designers, *Le dessinateur, pour les fabriques d'étoffes d'or, d'argent et de soie*, by Antoine Nicolas Joubert de l'Hiberderie describes a *persienne* as a textile with a satin and plain weave foundation in white and deep contrasting color embellished with colorful brocading and sometimes metal. This technical definition describes many lace-pattern silks of this period. A few drawings for lace-pattern silks of this time are labeled *persienne*, suggesting the term may refer to the style as well as weave structure. This

only further complicates the web of influence and trade amongst European and Asian textile designers and producers in the 18th century.

## **STOP 9**

### **Made in India for Europe**

*Panel from a Set of Hangings with Architectural Design*

#### **Speaker**

**Genny Cortinovis**

**Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design  
Saint Louis Art Museum**

The Bérainesque imagery, fanciful grotesques inspired by the work of Jean Bérain, chief designer to the court of Louis XIV, suggests this large panel, from a set of hangings, was possibly destined for France. Bérain's work was influential long after his death in 1711, thanks to the wide dissemination of his prints. The French were comparatively slow to enter the Indian textile market. The English East India Company had established factories more than 50 years before the French Compagnie des Indes was successful in securing trading territory. However, due to consumer demand, French participation increased substantially starting around 1650. This triggered a backlash amongst the nation's long-established silk, wool, and linen textile producers. The industries successfully lobbied for protection from the French government, resulting in a ban of imported printed and painted cotton from India and the printing of cotton in France beginning in 1686 and lasting until 1759.

Although not alone amongst its neighbors, France's prohibition lasted far longer than any other European country. Despite the harsh penalties—from fines to imprisonment and worse—a large underground network of chintz smugglers operated across the country. Records of confiscated goods offer an early snapshot of the types of chintz attractive to French consumers. Gillian Crosby's 2016 dissertation, "First Impressions: The Prohibition on Printed Calicoes in France, 1686–1759," notes the 1689 raid in Rouen uncovered some 940 pieces of Indian chintz as well as illegal French-made imitations, including "large chintzes" used for interiors. Inventories of illegal fabrics attest to the ownership of chintz furnishing textiles across many levels of society, from the professional classes with fully dressed four-poster beds and wall hangings like this one to working-class families with a solitary quilt.

## **STOP 10**

### **Creating Color**

#### *Painting Colored Pattern Process Set*

#### **Speaker**

**Renuka Reddy**

**Chintz artist**

**Bangalore, India**

Hello, I am Renuka Reddy, a practicing chintz artist based in Bangalore, India.

My journey in chintz started 12 years ago, when I came across a book called *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West*, written by Rosemary Crill and published by the V&A Museum in London. I found the images so incredibly beautiful that I wanted to make them. But I soon realized that the techniques that went into making historic chintz were not entirely practiced today, and the more I investigated the production process, the more fascinated I became with the knowledge gathered by historic artisans. Their imagination and resourcefulness can be seen in the production steps.

Chintz is hand-drawn, mordant-painted, and resist-dyed cotton.

Step 1 shows the hand-drawn and mordant-painting technique. This is made possible by treating the cloth with buffalo milk. The fat in the buffalo milk allows mordants to be drawn without spreading. This step also shows that someone figured out that a mordant is needed to dye with madder because dyes such as madder do not have a natural affinity to bond with cotton. And so, a mordant, in this case, alum, is used to bind the dye to cotton.

If you're wondering how the background turned white after step 2 and 8, it is done by soaking the cloth in sheep or cow dung overnight and then exposing it to sunlight in the day and repeating this process for a week to 10 days.

Another technique I find captivating is the indigo-resist dyeing, where all areas that are not blue are covered with wax and then the cloth is dyed in an indigo vat without producing cracks in the wax, as seen in step 6.

The mastery of these techniques produced cloth with superior color fastness and allowed mass customization. Chintz production process is incredibly efficient and

complex, where many natural ingredients interact in the most complex ways, and these mysteries continue to inspire me.

## **STOP 11**

### **The Dutch East India Company and Indian Chintz in the Netherlands**

*Woman's Short Jacket (kassakijntje) with Flowers and Phoenixes*

#### **Speaker**

**Genny Cortinovis**

**Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design  
Saint Louis Art Museum**

Look closely at this short jacket and you'll see a distinctive red over stitching running down its seams. This suggests the piece was made in Hindeloopen, a harbor town in the Friesland province of the Netherlands. Hindeloopen regional dress, especially for women, is arguably the most distinctive in the Netherlands and possibly the oldest. The ensemble consists of several elements: petticoats, a full, gathered skirt, bodice, undershirt, stays, and notably, a jacket—the long example called a *wentke* and a short one like this called a *kassakijntje*, from the French term *casequin*. The shape of the fitted-sleeve jackets have their roots in the 16th century. First made in wool, linen, and sometimes silk blends, colorful Indian chintz became the preferred fabric for these open-front garments in the early 18th century. The first reference to a Chintz *wentke* in Hindeloopen household inventories is from 1754, suggesting the garment was made and used many years earlier.

Hindeloopen has a close relationship to Amsterdam. Its families were involved in the Baltic trade and used Amsterdam as a cold weather port for their commercial vessels since their own was too shallow. It was in Amsterdam, the great depot for Asian goods imported by the VOC, or Dutch East India Company, that Hindeloopen women first encountered Indian chintz. They may have even been inspired by fashionable young Amsterdam students wearing their chintz morning jackets, or banyans, outside of the home. Chintz *wentke* and *kassakijntje*, typically worn during the summer, eventually became part of codified regional dress in Hindeloopen and was held up as distinctly Dutch at international exhibitions into the 20th century. Donned with checked fabric in corresponding colors, also imported from India, the ensembles attested to Hindeloopen's enthusiastic and creative embrace of these new global commodities.

## **STOP 12**

### **Mass-Produced European Chintz**

#### *Textile Panel*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**

**Curator of Asian Art**

**Saint Louis Art Museum**

This beautiful cloth, printed by Mahesh Chand Dosaya while he was still only a teenager, is a fine example of *dabu*, an ancient mud-resist, hand-block printing technique from Rajasthan in northwestern India. The practice almost died out in the last century but was revived and is today a flourishing business in many villages of Rajasthan. One of the most prominent contemporary practitioners is the Dosaya family, based in Bagru, near Jaipur.

The process of *dabu* printing is complicated, involving many workers and multiple stages of printing, washing, and dyeing. First the plain fabric received from the mills is carefully washed to remove any impurities, which may interfere with the dyeing process. Then designs are meticulously and painstakingly hand-printed onto the fabric using blocks, which are dipped into fast dyes. The next and crucial step involves the use of the mud resist, which makes this print so unique. Ingredients like mud, gum, lime, and waste wheat chaff are combined to make the *dabu*, or mud-resist paste, which is then patted over certain parts of the design. The paste is dried with sprinkled sawdust. This covering essentially protects parts of the fabric from the dye used later on, creating a unique and colorful effect.

After this process of printing, the fabric is spread out in the sun, where it completely dries out. It is then dipped into a vat of dye, dried again, and finally given a thorough washing to remove the paste and any excess dye. The dyes used are typically natural vegetable dyes and pastes. The unprotected parts of the fabric catch the color, while the *dabu*-covered areas remain plain. The fabric may be dyed more than once in different colors to give each part of the design a different hue.



## **STOP 13**

### **Anglo-American Factory-Printed Chintz**

#### *Factory-Printed Chintz Appliqué Quilt*

#### **Speaker**

**Genny Cortinovis**

**Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design  
Saint Louis Art Museum**

This large and expertly made chintz appliqué quilt was so treasured, it was passed down in the same family for more than 200 years before it was generously given to the Saint Louis Art Museum. Although unsigned, family documentation records the maker as Cornelia Ann Coventry Burling, a young resident of New York City. Burling's granddaughter Anna W. Pond McGrew recalled in a note contained in the family's papers that she received the quilt as a wedding gift in 1880 and that her grandmother commenced this quilt in 1816, and I quote, "and it was a year in the quilting frame," unquote. According to genealogical records, this would have been just before Cornelia's marriage to Lancaster S. Burling and the birth of their first child in 1818. It was probably made as part of her wedding trousseau. The still-shiny surface of its chintz appliqués suggests it was rarely used, reserved for special guests or occasions.

Chintz appliqué quilts like this were sometimes called *broderie perse* for their imitation of Persian- or Indian-style floral embroidery. While it's tempting to conclude that the assemblage of chintz cutouts was a creative way to reuse precious but worn textiles—which may have been the case with earlier appliqué quilts made of more expensive Indian chintz—these quilts were more likely made from new fabrics, possibly expressly manufactured for this use. The glut of relatively inexpensive British-made, factory-printed chintz fabrics in the US in the late 18th and early 19th centuries undoubtedly contributed to the ongoing popularity of the style.

## **STOP 14**

### **Cotton and the Consequences of Desire**

#### **Speaker**

**Geoff Ward**  
**Professor of African and African American Studies**  
**Director of the WashU & Slavery Project**  
**Washington University in St. Louis**

I'm Geoff Ward, professor of African and African American studies and director of the WashU & Slavery Project at Washington University in St. Louis.

Cotton provides a window into slavery as a global economic, cultural, and political system—touching everyone. Cotton fueled the growth of the British empire, drawing India, Africa, and much of the wider world into the cultivation, commodification, and consumption of this crop. Cotton would thus bind multitudes to the violence of slavery and to the fight for freedom.

Cotton at once shaped and became shaped by slavery's elaborate world system. Cotton harvested in India and the US South might be transformed into wool in the mills of Scotland and Wales and then shipped back to the plantations of the New World as so-called Negro cloth, apportioned to enslaved Africans to make the bare clothing seen in some of the images before you. Slavery sought to deny recognition and rights to human beings, and this dehumanization and degradation of subjugated people manifested in countless ways, including the production and uses of cotton.

Yet enslaved and free Black people fought to survive and thrive in this hostile environment—physically, culturally, economically, and otherwise—including through their own manipulations of cotton. Talented free and enslaved seamstresses, tailors, and dressmakers made clothing that not only protected the body but made people look and feel good and helped procure other resources and opportunities. Scarce cloth was traded among the enslaved in exchange for goods or favors and to build relationships. Black creatives also designed clothing for utility, not only to ease burdens of labor but to enable escape—creating outfits for deception and features that increased physical mobility while literally running for freedom. St. Louisan Elizabeth Keckley bought her own freedom from bondage with proceeds from the sale of her coveted dresses.

As we reflect on the history and legacies of slavery, including forced labor and human trafficking as enduring factors in the fashion industry, cotton helps us understand the organization of systematic oppression and domination as well as their resistance.

## **STOP 15**

### **Cotton Painting and Printing in Contemporary India**

#### *Hanging of Ajrakh Masterwork*

#### **Speaker**

**Philip Hu**

**Curator of Asian Art**

**Saint Louis Art Museum**

This textile is a contemporary *ajrakh* masterwork. *Ajrakh* textiles were traditionally worn as caste dress by sheep and cattle herders in the desert regions of Kachchh and Thar in northwestern India and Sindh in Pakistan. Readily identified by its distinctive combination of geometric and floral designs, the *ajrakh* technique produces double-sided, hand-printed cloth using carved wooden blocks, where the printing is traditionally done using indigo, madder, and other natural dyes that are made in-house by the family. The designs and patterns are inspired by the makers' Islamic religion.

The Khatri family is one of the surviving clans residing in the village of Dhamadka in the district of Kachchh, located in the northwestern Indian state of Gujarat. Abduljabbar M. Khatri, along with his two brothers, Razaq and Ismail, represent the ninth generation of the 400-year-old history of their ancestors residing there. Learning the traditional craft of *ajrakh* hand-block printing from his father, the late Khatri Mohammad Siddik, Abduljabbar and his brothers practiced the craft as children and successfully explored its possibilities further.

In the past 40 years *ajrakh* has not only been transformed from a rustic block print into a popular fashion fabric, it has also become the signature cloth of the Khatri communities at Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur in Kachchh and is their most successful product. In 2003 Abduljabbar M. Khatri received India's prestigious National Craft Award.

## **STOP 16**

### **Cotton Painting and Printing in Contemporary India**

#### *Woman's Sari with Leaf Pattern*

#### **Speaker**

**Mee Jey**

**Artist**

**St. Louis, Missouri**

Hi, my name is Mee Jey. I am an Indian artist based in St. Louis.

Today I will share briefly about sari, the traditional attire of India. It is a long-running fabric generally woven of natural fibers like cotton, silk, and fine wool, and also sometimes blended with synthetic fibers. Though the majority of saris are six yards long, *nauvari* saris are nine yards in total length. The ornamental end of sari is called *anchal* or *pallu*. Sari is draped differently in different parts of India.

This particular piece at the Saint Louis Art Museum is a silk sari with block prints on it. The leaf pattern on the sari was block printed using the *ajrakh* technique at the Pracheen, also meaning ancient or old, workshop in Mumbai, capital of Maharashtra state. Ahmed Latif Khatri and his son Sarfaraz specialize in printing and dyeing silk with natural colors extracted from biodegradable substances such as vegetables, roots, barks of plants, and flowers. The process involves some 16 different stages spread over 45 days to complete a single hand-printed natural-dye stole and close to three months for the sari to be finished.

The Pracheen workshop's motto is: "Do the earth a favor. Do not pollute the environment. Use natural dyes." Its practice respects the environment and honors the earth by reducing pollution, reviving the ancient Indian tradition of natural dyes, and enhancing the beauty of hand-block-printed textiles.