

DOMESTIC CADENCE OF UNRAVELING | SHRADHA KOCHHAR**EXHIBITION TEXT BY ANISA JACKSON****JUNE 6 – JULY 12, 2025****Reception: Friday, June 6, 6:00pm – 8:00pm**

35 Great Jones St, New York, NY 10012

Each strand of kala cotton in Shradha Kochhar's practice carries with it the quiet weight of time—spun not only by hand, but through memory, loss, and the intimate labor of care. Her process begins, deliberately and tenderly, at the *peti charkha*, a wooden spinning wheel gifted by her late father, one of his final offerings before passing. The act of spinning—rhythmic, repetitive, embodied—becomes both a craft and a ritual, a way to hold grief in motion. The soft whirr of the wheel echoes through her work like a lullaby and a summons, conjuring the past into the present.

In *Domestic Cadence of Unraveling*, cloth becomes a threshold between the personal and the ancestral, the tactile and the unspeakable. Kochhar's hand—sometimes steady, sometimes trembling—reminds us that what is made slowly holds more than shape. The spun thread itself becomes a kind of journal: at times violently twisted, uneven, tense; at others, smooth and flowing. Within the finished cloth, these variations remain visible—a vocabulary of grief rendered in texture, like an abstract alphabet woven through the fabric. Imbued with the presence of its maker, Kochhar's practice unfolds as a layered dialogue between memory, matter, and labor. At its heart, the exhibition is a shrine—a monument built slowly, over five years, through an evolving body of work.

It is a memorial to Kochhar's father, crafted through private ceremonies of making, unmaking, and ritual repetition. Across textiles, sculpture, and archive, the artist translates her grief into craft-focused acts: spinning cotton by hand, removing seed from fiber at the table, knitting on a loom until the thread snaps and must be repaired. The work carries the weight of countless gestures: weeping alone on a 14th floor apartment, spinning in a park, scrubbing surfaces with violent tenderness, walking for hours by rivers and sea. It holds the imprint of music—Sufi laments, techno, and Kashmiri folk songs of daughters leaving their fathers' homes. The blue of her father's favorite shirt recurs like a refrain; his last gift, a bottle of vodka, remains untouched. Through these acts of devotion, tension, and sound, Kochhar builds not only an archive of loss, but a space where love, rupture, and craft become inseparable.

Kochhar's family was not always embedded in textiles. It was loss that turned thread into livelihood. After the early passing of her grandfather, her paternal grandmother—Swaraj, whose very name means independence—found herself a single parent of four, with no entrepreneurial background and only her hands to rely on. Kochhar's familial hands were rarely still, always embroidering, knitting, mending, turning thread into a rhythmic form of survival—cloth was not merely ornamental, it was sacred. Textile, in this context, is inheritance, livelihood, and language. It gives shape to care, loss, and endurance.

Every step of her process is a return: to the seed, to the wheel, to the body in motion. Through her own research, she has begun cultivating a seed library, collecting and documenting heirloom and indigenous cotton strains across India and the U.S.—Sea Island, Suvin, Kala—building a cross-continental archive rooted in soil, labor, and lineage. Kochhar’s practice becomes an art of regeneration, both materially and historically. She engages in the daily ritual of interacting with cotton, spun on the *peti charkha*. The wheel was once central to campaigns of civil disobedience, and through this act, Kochhar connects with a wider web of global histories—of resistance, exploitation, and resilience.

Cotton is a fiber that has touched all of us. It has wrapped newborns and covered the dead. It has been used in sacred ceremonies, sold for profit, grown through enslavement, and carried forward by the endurance of Black and brown communities. It holds within it the contradictory legacies of colonialism and community, and Kochhar threads them into each work—a swaddle and a shroud in one.

Mounted on the wall like a reliquary, *The ocean reminds me of you* (2024) encircles a small photograph of Kochhar’s father’s blue collared shirt in miniature form, within a nest of knotted, flesh-toned fabric. Two outstretched hands hover above—gently touching, shielding—both protection and invocation. The soft, intertwined coils echo bodily forms: umbilical, intestinal, or perhaps simply the way grief loops around itself. At the center, the photograph—slightly obscured, intimate in scale—acts as both anchor and ghost. This piece becomes a soft monument to inheritance and entanglement, an altar where the familial archive is neither static nor glorified, but cradled, folded into form, and made tender through repetition. Yet the image resists specificity. Kochhar is not illustrating a family archive; she is abstracting it, distilling it into gestures, textures, and silhouettes. These forms trace how mourning often takes shape not through speech, but through touch—through hands that hold, encircle, and never quite let go.

Kochhar reconfigures cotton through acts of devotion. Cloth is no longer passive—it is a vessel. It becomes the white *kurta* worn by her father, lovingly worn, pressed, stretched, and folded into a box over the years. Not only an article of clothing but a site of longing: starched cotton that once touched the skin, still holding its creases like echoes of presence. Kochhar’s family rituals of garment care—ironing, folding, storing—are as integral to her understanding of cloth as spinning or knitting. These are the unseen gestures that carry lineage, that enact love, that transform the ordinary into the sacred. Here, textiles transport the viewer elsewhere—into longing and fugitive interiors. They become portals between generations, between past and present, between language and its gaps. They become evidence of care, of inheritance, of touch. They are both archive and afterlife. To follow her process is to witness not only the making of cloth, but the weaving together of time, history, grief, and repair. And yet, nothing is purely mournful. There is also joy in the making—hum in the thread, warmth in the hands, light in the cloth.

Kochhar’s knitted essays operate as visual poems—tender, abstracted meditations on the

body, care, and relation. In *sisters/witness* (2025), a large translucent textile stitched with pale thread depicts interwoven figures in a kind of suspended embrace, evoking a scene both intimate and mythic. Drawing from the tale of Vikram and Betal, and refracted through personal memory, the work speaks to the porousness of grief between sisters—how one can bear witness even across distance.

While Kochhar was 30,000 feet in the air on a transcontinental flight, her sister performed the final rites for their father: placing honey in his mouth, breaking his skull with the ceremonial stick, tending his body to the pyre. *sisters/witness* holds the tension of that moment—two sisters carrying the same loss in different postures, bound by the labor of holding one another through collapse, of cradling without words. The fragility of the sheer textile ground contrasts with the density of the stitched figures, underscoring how even the most delicate frameworks can be burdened with immense emotional weight.

In *balancing act* (2025), four figures are arranged in a loose grid: two integrated into the scaffold of a house-like frame, two resting inside. The airy sculptural form recalls the story of Shrawan Kumar, a tale of filial devotion told throughout Kochhar's childhood. Here, figures appear caught mid-motion—holding, bearing, supporting. The sculpture becomes a meditation on the burdens and blessings of kinship: the unseen labor of holding one another in balance across shifting terrains of care.

Across both works, Kochhar treats form as a site of relation, where movement becomes language and structure carries the weight of what cannot be spoken. These are not static compositions—they are spaces for feeling through the complicated intimacies of family, and the ways we witness each other in moments of both rupture and repair. Here, Kochhar draws out the gendered rhythms of domestic work: bodies woven into the architecture itself, their roles naturalized and held in place, while others seek refuge within. Spanning both works, the stitch becomes language, the textile a thinking space—charting emotional geographies where bodies blur, bear, and belong.

In *singing for white ash and bones* (2025) and *beneath the bell* (2025), animal and human forms co-exist in ambiguous entanglement—at once devotional and folkloric. Some figures ride or carry, others appear to merge: limbs bent in impossible configurations, bodies circling around faint traces of furniture, like the soft outline of a backwards chair. Kochhar does not abstract cotton into concept; rather, she anchors it in land, myth, and family, allowing the fiber's material memory to shape each form. These works hum with the logic of transformation—from raw material into fabric, from fabric into gesture, from gesture into grief-work. In *spell for stillness* (2025), the suspended bodies feel both ancient and tender, like fragments of a myth half-remembered or an offering left out for someone long gone.

Indigo-hued wall pieces present minimal, silhouetted figures—embracing, in motion, and

mid-reach in the work in my dream, *we drank whisky and danced our first and last time* (2025). Above the figures drift pale, irregular shapes—at first glance, birds or clouds. They are whispers, lifted from the mouth and scattered across the cloth, fragments of a codified language that escapes inscription. They rise, they scatter, they refuse to land. In this way, Kochhar shows how language—especially within families, across grief, across time—is often gestural, partial, and nonlinear. These floating forms are not declarations, but residues: of what could not be said, of what was said but not understood, of what was only ever meant to be felt.

For this body of work, Kochhar introduces indigo into her palette for the first time—a choice that carries both symbolic and material weight. Indigo, long a political dye—bound to histories of colonial extraction, forced labor, and resistance—also enters here as something deeply personal. The color threads through Kochhar’s own family life: her father’s blue shirt, worn and reworn, appears again and again—almost like a character in the work, a garment saturated with emotional residue. In the indigo knitted essays, blue becomes a space for both joy and mourning, for hope and grief, for the persistence of life after loss. In *kanta-zero* (2025), drawn from an early childhood memory, Kochhar revisits a moment of solace: her father sitting with her on the bed during an asthma attack, tracing zero (0) *kata*—crosses and knots—into the cloth as a quiet comfort.

In these works, color becomes a kind of carrier—of feeling, of presence, of time. The textiles murmur rather than shout. They suggest without declaring. There is a formal quietness that mirrors the ways family stories often circulate—half-spoken, tucked into ritual, embroidered into everyday acts. The works are full of these whispers: a hem line, a repeated stitch, a hand resting on a shoulder. They remind us that textiles are living, woven through with what is said, unsaid, and lost in translation. Here, indigo becomes not only backdrop but atmosphere: a deep, breathing field in which these figures continue to move, fade, and return.

In *scroll, chair, hand* (2025), a scroll is extended, a chair is vacated, a hand reaches. These symbols build an intimate iconography of mourning and maintenance. They are private ceremonies made visible: mourning rituals, familial scripts, repeated gestures carried out in solitude—folding, ironing, washing, weeping. These are the movements we return to when language fails, when presence becomes absence. They evoke the repetitions of daily care, domestic labor, and the emotional choreography that follows loss. One of the anchors in Kochhar’s personal archive is a family scroll—unfurled only in moments of mourning—that has recorded over two centuries of lineage. With each death, a new name is inscribed, continuing a practice of remembrance that stretches across generations. The scroll is not only a record, but a ritual: an object that gathers time, grief, and continuity in a single,

unfolding motion. The archive in Kochhar's work is never static—it is added to, touched again, made visible through repeated acts of care.

Shoes and empty bed (2025) frames a simple bed in handspun thread, circled by delicate crochet lace—reminiscent of doilies passed down. Beneath the bed, small shoes suggest the residue of a life once held in that space. Like much of Kochhar's work, it is both intimate in scale and in affect: not a depiction of grief, but of its aftermath—the lingering objects, the rituals of tidying, remembering, and folding things away.

Through this labor, her practice generates a physical archive of South Asian women's work, where grief and invisible labor are made tangible. Her hand-knitted sculptures and stitched essays are not merely representations—they are acts of devotion and inquiry. In separating fiber from seed, in every twist and loop, Kochhar enacts a ritual and a gesture. Craft becomes lament. Thread becomes prayer. Her pieces are built as future heirlooms—objects for those who may never meet her, but will recognize something in the thread. In Kochhar's hands, cotton becomes a living archive, holding the energy of hands that spun it, the weather of the season it grew in, the stories passed quietly between generations. Her works, intimate and monumental, become vessels—large enough to hold the weight of absence and the hum of a lineage.

Alongside her textile works, Kochhar's bamboo, cotton, and cement sculptures extend her vocabulary of care and process into more sculptural terrain. Made by slowly heating bamboo to bend it—without fracturing its delicate, fibrous structure—these forms speak to the patience and precision required to work with living material. These bamboo sculptures appear as airy, skeletal forms—like line drawings lifted into space. Woven planes of cotton thread stretch between openings, suggesting skins, membranes, or breath. The compositions oscillate between figuration and abstraction: some evoke limbs in motion, others the loose geometry of ritual diagrams or anatomical forms. In their spareness, they become vessels for encounter—each curve and crossing line a meditation on movement, holding, and touch.

Kochhar's approach invites the viewer to witness structure not as fixed architecture but as something porous, attuned to vulnerability and care. These sculptures are not declarations—they are offerings of form, held lightly in space, alive with the tension between fragility and presence. As with her spun cotton, Kochhar's sculptures are process-heavy and resolutely tender, tracing the slow ritual of healing across material and form.

Kochhar's practice is grounded in a profound commitment to thinking through making—a

tactile, embodied process where knowledge is not imposed upon the material, but drawn out through touch, repetition, and time. Her methods are slow and recursive, requiring the body's full attention: spinning cotton by hand, coaxing bamboo to bend without splintering, stitching each line of thread into cloth with care. In Kochhar's world, making is not separate from thought—it is thought. The process is slow, recursive, attuned to rhythm. It honors what cannot be rushed: grief, care, repair. There is a haptic intelligence in her work—knowledge that lives in the wrist, in the back-and-forth of the needle, in the tension of the thread. The material resists speed and demands presence, allowing ideas to emerge through the labor of the hand rather than the assertion of the mind. This approach transforms production into inquiry, object into offering, and memory into tactility. Through this process, grief is metabolized, rituals are reactivated, and language—particularly the language of inheritance—finds new forms.

To make thread from raw cotton by hand is to slow down time. It is an act of resistance against disposability and speed, but also a means of mourning. In the wake of death, when speech falters and the body cannot sit still, Kochhar turns to motion—scrubbing, spinning, stitching. These repeated movements become choreography: not of performance, but of survival. There is always a moment when the hands must keep working while the spirit breaks. Her textiles carry this tension—they are soft, often off-white or unassuming, but dense with presence, duration, and rupture.

Today, the legacy of cotton under empire and plantations is still palpable in depleted soils and precarious labor conditions. Yet, the story is not entirely one of loss. In the resurgence of handwoven textiles, in the return to indigenous cotton varieties, and in the revival of spinning by hand, there is an embodied reckoning. These practices reclaim more than technique; they reclaim time, dignity, and relationship—to land, to labor, and to one another. In Kochhar's work, cotton is reclaimed—not industrialized, but handled, breathed into, made intimate again. It becomes the rhythmic twitch of the wrist as one crochets through tears. It becomes the sound of a needle tapping wood. These small, repeated actions—spinning, stitching, pressing, weeping—form the architecture of Kochhar's work. Beyond a textile practice, it is the language of loss and the persistence of ritual. For Kochhar, the body is always implied: in the ghost of a shoulder seam, in the echo of a wrist's motion, in the ways that cloth has learned to hold. It is a language, a lineage, and a love letter written in fiber.