

# Threading through Time: Stories of Migration and Resilience

*Par Nair*



# ***Threading through Time Stories of Migration and Resilience***

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ODD Gallery at Dënäkär Zho*

## **About Par Nair**

Par Nair (she/her) is an Indian-Canadian multidisciplinary artist and educator who lives and makes in the GTA (Canada). The primary focus of Par's art practice is to investigate and explore lived experiences of the diaspora using decolonial methods and a return to ancestral practices through paintings, hand embroidery, installation, and creative writing. Par acquired her Master's (MFA) in Interdisciplinary Arts from OCAD University and has shown her works nationally and internationally. Notable showings include Nuit Blanche '23, Art Museum at the University of Toronto, Bradley Museum, Eastern Edge Gallery (NL), Craft Ontario, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Varley Art Gallery, The Textile Museum of Canada, Riverdale Art Gallery, Rajiv Menon Contemporary (LA) and The Kochi Biennale (India). Over her career, Par's practice has been supported by various OAC and CCA grants. In 2025, she was shortlisted as a finalist for The Salt Spring National Award and The CIBC National Art Prize. Par currently teaches drawing, painting and critical theory courses at OCAD University. Par also facilitates painting and hand embroidery workshops in collaboration with local libraries and art institutions, notably The Art Gallery of Burlington and The Royal Ontario Museum.



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Par Nair is a multitalented artist with many stories to stitch and tell.

After moving from South India to Canada in her early twenties, she was motivated to pursue degrees in painting and interdisciplinary arts at OCAD University to reflect on wayfinding through the world as an immigrant, a daughter, and a member of the South Asian community. Fifteen years later, Nair continues to expand her understanding of ancestral connection, ritual-making, and South Indian heritage by intertwining hand embroidery, installation, and poetic writing in her practice. She consistently exhibits her work across Canada to foster relationships with new communities and offer them a different angle on how they relate and respond to family heirlooms, everyday memories, and routines rooted in remembering matrilineal ancestors.

Nair was first deeply inspired by the kantha stitch, a popular hand-embroidery practice in Bengali culture, which was used by her grandmother from the Bengal Region. Although it is known for storytelling, her grandmother used kantha in a functional way by upcycling clothing to make baby blankets and towels for Nair. Guided by her intuition, Nair reimagines the functionality of Kancheepuram silk sarees, Kasavu Mundus, and cotton Salwaar to consider the possibilities for personal narratives and the obstacles that come with nostalgia, diasporic memory, and hybrid belonging. In *Threading Through Time: Stories of Migration and Resilience*, Nair invites us to encounter inner worlds of intimacy and inheritance, of unanswered questions and honest affirmations towards intergenerational relationship-building.

For Nair, word and thread are both transmitters of her personal aches and confessions as she faithfully reinforces the connection between the home she once knew and the one she continues to build in a new country. In her *Letters of Haunting series* (2022-23) and *Together* (2024), she walks through her wounds while expressing the grief that comes with loving at such a great distance from her mother and family. Nair distinctly embroiders the letters in her poems to appear full and legible on the front, and dotted and knotted on the back of each fabric. Her laborious process of hand-embroidery into these time-loved garments is like looking at a mirror, asking questions to the generation that shaped her reflection. As she traces the ghost of her mother's features into words, as seen in the red saree, Nair leaves room for her ancestors to fill in the empty spaces, remembering that their presence and strength have been passed on to help Nair find her own blend of colours in this life.

In her newest series, *What I can remember / what I can never know* (2026), Nair uses multiple freestyle hand embroidery surface stitches to translate the vibrancy and dimension of her grandmother's favourite essentials from her diary onto South Indian mundus. With a bright and bold palette, she reframes what imagery is considered worthy of being presented on a garment traditionally worn by men. These embroideries spotlight everyday domestic objects, including beauty products used by her grandmother, which featured faces of South Indian women on the brand's cover. Nair sees these beloved items as "intimate witnesses" to her grandmother's life and a way of providing comfort to South Asian diasporic communities looking for a memory of home.

As family archives can be seen as lifelong companions in each of our households, Nair often spends time with her grandmother's collection of photographs to inspire new textiles. In her work, *Her Language of Love 4* (2025) and her series, *Her stories were blue* (2023), she centers her stitches on the women in her life, their moments of togetherness and the labour that has been historically undervalued in South Indian domestic spaces. Like prepping a palette before a canvas, Nair's painterly style comes into play as she thoughtfully organizes the coloured threads before using a running stitch to create dashes of light and shadow in these portraits. She positions these figures dynamically across from the golden borders of the men's mundus to celebrate the personal spaces where mothers and daughters can rekindle their closeness. Her ongoing collaboration and re-interpretation of family photographs can be seen as a decolonial practice as she foregrounds the daily lives of these women whose existence is often placed within a fixed frame.

At the heart of Par Nair's work and practice is a commitment to preserving and expanding her personal and ancestral stories, histories, and relationships across a landscape of material memories. This exhibition encourages us to stitch together all parts of ourselves, the beauty and tension that come with carrying two or more homes close to our skin. Nair's connection with heirlooms of the past is a communication with a love older than her, one that has been guided into her hands to be mended, remembered, and dreamed forward.

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*Written by Samantha Lance*

*Independent curator, writer, and the Collections Manager for the Sault Ste. Marie Museum (Ontario, Canada).*