



## RELATED EVENTS

Events are free and open to the public, unless noted. Check [halsey.cofc.edu](http://halsey.cofc.edu) for up-to-date information.

### OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, April 5, 6:30 - 8:00 PM  
Free for Halsey Institute Members, suggested \$5 donation for not-yet members

### ARTIST TALK

Saturday, April 6, 2:00 PM

### CURATOR COFFEE CLUB

Friday, April 26, 9:00 - 11:00 AM  
Open to Halsey Institute Members  
Sponsored by blüm in Charleston

### HALSEY AFTER HOURS

Friday, May 3, 5:00 - 7:00 PM  
Free for Halsey Institute Members, suggested \$10 donation for not-yet members

### EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP

Thursday, May 16, 5:30 - 7:30 PM  
\$65 participation fee for Members. \$75 for not-yet Members. Space is limited. Email [HalseyRSVP@cofc.edu](mailto:HalseyRSVP@cofc.edu) to sign up.

### FAMILY DAY!

Sunday, July 14, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

# SPANDITA MALIK

## Meshes of Resistance

April 5 - July 20, 2024



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Spandita Malik** is a visual artist from India who is currently based in New York. Her work is concerned with the current global socio-political state of affairs with an emphasis on women's rights and gendered violence. Malik specializes in process based work in photography, recently with photographic surface embroideries and collaborations with women in India. Malik's work in expanded documentary and social-practice consciously emanates from the idea of decolonizing the eye and aesthetic surrounding documentary photography of India.

Malik received her MFA in Photography from Parsons School of Design in 2019. Her work has been featured in *Artsy*, *Art Spiel*, *Buzzfeed*, *Crafts Magazine*, *Musée Magazine*, *Harper's Magazine* and *Elephant Magazine*. She was named "Ones to Watch 2020" by *British Journal of Photography*. Malik's work has been exhibited internationally in China, France, Germany, India, Italy, New York, New Zealand, Russia, UAE, and the UK.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Joseph R. Wolin** is an independent curator and critic based in New York, and Consulting Curator and Editor at the Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College. He teaches in the MFA in Photography at Parsons School of Design and the MFA in Photography and Integrated Media program at Lesley University. Recent curatorial projects include exhibitions at Clamp and Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, and at Sean Horton (presents) in Dallas. His writing about art and artists has appeared recently in *Glasstire*, *Border Crossings*, *Public*, and *Frieze*, as well as in books and exhibition catalogues.

**THE HALSEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART**  
at the College of Charleston School of the Arts

### LOCATION

The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts  
College of Charleston  
161 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401  
[halsey.cofc.edu](http://halsey.cofc.edu)

### PARKING

Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

### GALLERY HOURS

During exhibitions  
Monday - Saturday, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM  
Open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays  
FREE FOR ALL

### CONTACT

(843) 953-4422 or [halsey@cofc.edu](mailto:halsey@cofc.edu)

### IMAGE CREDITS:

**cover:** Spandita Malik, *Farhana*. 2023. Photographic transfer print on khadi fabric, zardozi and gota-patti embroidery, beadwork, 34.5 x 45.5 inches

**this side, left:** Spandita Malik, *Parween Devi*. 2020. Photographic transfer print on khaddar fabric, phulkari silk thread embroidery, 43.5 x 53 inches

**reverse side, left:** Spandita Malik, *Charanjit*, 2023. Photographic transfer print on khaddar fabric, phulkari silk thread embroidery, 50 x 66 inches

**reverse side, right:** Spandita Malik, *Jyoti*, 2023. Photographic transfer print on khaddar fabric, phulkari silk thread embroidery, beadwork, 63.5 x 47 inches

All works © Spandita Malik

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## Meshes of Resistance

by Joseph R. Wolin

In the Mughal architecture of India, the *jali*, a pierced screen made of stone or wood, was used in windows, to divide rooms, and on railings and parapets. On exterior walls, the *jali* allows light and air to enter while mitigating the intensity of the sun or rain. Often carved in gorgeously intricate geometric or foliate patterns with symbolic meaning, the *jali* activates captivating plays of light and shadow that continuously change over the course of a day. The *jali* also provides the inhabitants of a building a view of the scene and happenings outside but keeps those indoors, particularly women, obscured from the gaze of strangers.

In Sanskrit and Indic languages derived from it, *jali* can also mean structures like a net or mesh, fabrics created from intertwined elements that can be used to gather things together or allow partial glimpses of whatever lies behind. This type of interwoven network possesses a tensile strength far greater than that of any of its constituent parts. *Jali* can also indicate a type of openwork embroidery.

Spandita Malik seeks out women in India who are hidden from view and makes them visible to the world, on their own terms. Traveling to a number of states and towns across a country that remains

plagued by endemic gendered violence, she has contacted women who, in her words, “are either not allowed to leave the house, due to their husbands or fathers, or they felt unsafe leaving the house. . . . Some women talk about domestic violence.” These women, however, have resisted their sequestration with the means they have at their disposal—namely, other women, who have banded together in groups centered on the practice of embroidery. Teaching each other regional styles of needlework, the women in these groups or collectives have created communities, networks of mutual concern, assistance, and interconnectedness. By selling their craft, they also earn a modicum of financial independence, which they must often keep a secret.

The artist meets these women, taking their photographs in a place and manner of their choosing. She transfers the images to local homespun muslin, a material that in this context carries echoes of Gandhi’s *khadi*, the cloth he encouraged Indians to weave in protest of forced dependence on British industrially produced fabric. Malik sends the portraits back to the women pictured, who then embellish their likenesses with embroidery, according to their own ideas about how they wish to be seen. Some add decorative framing borders or traditional patterns that might have little relation to the photographed scene. The repeating floral motifs in *Kirna Devi IV* (all titles are pseudonyms), for instance, act like a scrim, seeming to occupy a flat plane in front of the pictured interior. The needlework acknowledges the image only by breaking for the sitter and for the framed religious print hung high up on the wall, and by picking out Kirna Devi’s *dupatta*, or headscarf, in uneven registers of red ombré stitching.

Other women deploy embroidery to articulate elements within the photograph, often with considerable pictorial wit. *Noshad Bee* shows a woman sitting cross-legged in a corner of her home, the two walls behind her feature contrasting patterns, each executed in a different kind of stitching—leafy chainstitched tracery on the right and shisha needlework of quatrefoil geometric motifs, with alternating silver disks and gold squares, on the left. She has highlighted the floral pattern of her blue bedcovering with yellow thread and used the same stitching to redraw the lines of the deep violet ceiling above her, as well as the outlines of the objects on a high shelf, making them appear to glow like digital renderings. A dotted line of stitches outlining her *dupatta* turns the sitter herself into a cut-out, a paper doll, ready to be separated from her background, while the white flowers that embellish the white *dupatta* escape the confines of the garment to also veil her face, a single tendril curling around one eye as it simultaneously obscures her identity and draws attention to her gaze as she looks back at us.

And the sensibilities of still other needle-wielding women result in images that sit comfortably within the visual strategies of contemporary art. In the center of darkened interior, overlaid by a paisley field embroidered in shiny black and indigo, the subject of *Pooja* sits in a chair, her young son in a swing beside her. Pooja has covered all the exposed skin of both figures in flesh-colored thread, stitching their facial features on top and replacing their identifiable individuality with the unsettling protective disguise of a synthetic anonymity. In *Jyoti*, the embroiderer opts for a more minimalist aesthetic, creating a carpet of red and blue four-pointed stars on the floor and recreating her photographed *shalwar kameez* tunic and trousers with an identical outfit composed of regular bands of red and pale yellow stitches. Most remarkably, Jyoti has tethered herself to her own reflection in a mirror behind her with ten sets of dotted lines paired with catenaries of loose thread. And, in *Ranjeet Kaur*, a mazelike geometric pattern in red and pink occupies nearly the entirety of the interior, save for the sitter herself, some family photos, her home shrine, and a metal cup. Evoking the filigree of the *jali*, the stitching nonetheless overwhelms the room, causing it to feel suffocating, prisonlike. In these images, the women pictured embroider metaphors of concealment, confinement, isolation, and alienation, suggesting the psychic and emotional dimensions of their lived realities.

Enabling the women she photographs to shape their representations into self-images, Malik joins their networks of support, extending their reach far beyond the circumscribed worlds the women are forced to inhabit. Malik’s practice is profoundly interdependent and, while she stands as the author of her works, we may see them more clearly as collaborations between the artist and the necessarily pseudonymous subjects of her portraits. These women choose to no longer exist entirely obscured to the gaze of strangers but to cast a wider net, to join together with each other, with the artist, and with us, to enmesh themselves in a stronger fabric of resistance, stitch by stitch.

