

## Stitched Paintings

The *Kantha* as a form of stitched picture-making was a brainchild of the veteran artist Meera Mukherjee (1923 -1998) who formed it into a collaborative project and worked on it for almost thirty years of her artistic life. The *Kantha* has been referred to as “stitched painting” by Shri Nirmal Sengupta, the artist’s lifelong friend. Working with the children and women at Elachi and Nolgorhat in South 24 *Parganas*, then the outskirts of the city, the artist initiated a unique conversation that led to an unparalleled creative journey. The *Kanthas* (hand stitched and embroidered quilt made out of old *sis*) emerged from the drawings of a group of underprivileged, rural children. These drawings then found a distinct body as embroidery in the hands of local Muslim women to finally claim an aesthetic fulfilment under the nurturing supervision of the sculptor. She too often laid her hands on the *Kanthas* to usher their appearance as evolved visual designs. From the *Kanthas* again, Abu Taher, a traditional carpet weaver, weaves an exotic pictorial surface. Thus

“*Kanthas* from children’s drawings and paintings and carpets from these *Kanthas* are experimentations to show how creativity could be made to flow harmoniously among groups of people. Each person in a group and each group in the project contributing to the entire process make a rich, vibrant and lively language of art evolve.” These are most familiar lines to the friends and acquaintances of the late sculptor Meera Mukherjee. Meera’s consistent effort to explore creative potential of individuals and her ability to effectively direct them to one integrative whole open up some very important avenues enlivening the spirit of a craft form and modification of its purposes. In this project, the artist leads the way of the collective creative force, from child-art to more pronounced art forms involving traditional pictorial registers and complex technicalities. It was not only a major part of her artistic pursuit, but also amply reflected on the way she realised the social significance of art and its role in community life.

**Adip Dutta**