

TAPESTRIES

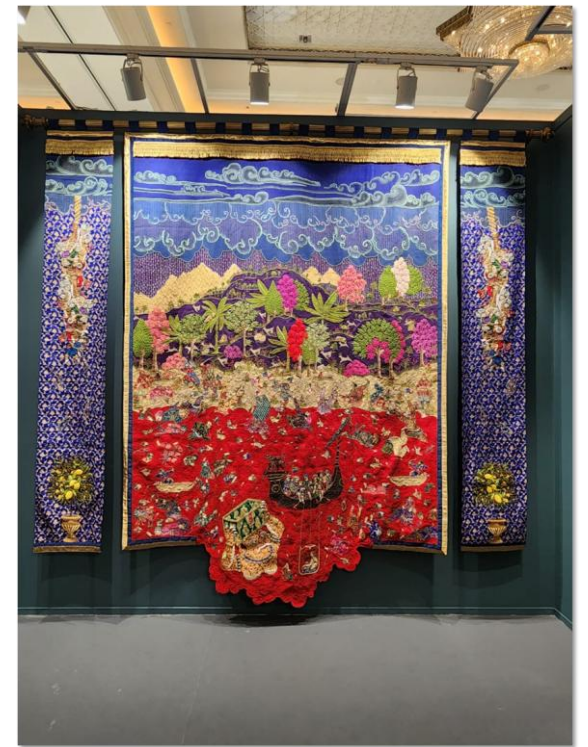
Adeela Suleman



Allegory of war



*Imperium Amidst Opium Blossoms:
A Kashidakari on the era of the East India Company*



Orpheus Descending

*Imperium Amidst Opium Blossoms:
A Kashidakari on the era of the East India Company
2023-2025*



Technique and craft :In *Imperium Amidst Opium Blossoms*, the medium is as significant as the imagery. The work is realized through *Kashidakari* (Persian for "free-flowing craftsmanship"), an intricate embroidery form deeply rooted in the Kashmir region and the aesthetic splendor of the Mughal era. Historically influenced by Persian aesthetics along the Silk Road and practiced primarily by men, this technique is most famously preserved in Gabba rugs. In the Gabba tradition, artisans create rich, textured surfaces by collaging dyed woolen patches- I use pure 100% silk for the applique- onto a base fabric, securing them with the distinctive *Kashidakari* chain stitch. My decision to employ this indigenous craft is a conceptual act of resistance. By prioritizing a high-art technique associated with the Mughal court—the very power structure the British deposed—I am visually asserting a lineage of South Asian cultural richness that existed independent of the Empire. This painstaking, human-paced labor contrasts sharply with the history of the British textile trade, which often relied on the mechanical reproduction and appropriation of South Asian designs. While the technique draws from Kashmiri heritage, the narrative depth parallels the *Ralli* quilting tradition of women in rural Sindh. Like *Ralli*, which is not merely a domestic hobby but a method of documenting colossal pain and loss, this tapestry archives complex histories. The work is ornamented with hand embroidery, beads, and sequins, using its seductive beauty to lure the viewer in—much like the colonial promises of "free trade." It is only upon closer inspection that the lush textures reveal their violent subjects: the warship *Nemesis*, the poppy fields of addiction, and waters stained by conflict. In this tapestry, the embroidery does not just decorate the history; it interrogates it.

Statement: *My tapestry, Imperium Amidst Opium Blossoms, is a rumination on the enduring, often painful, entanglements of commerce, conflict, and identity forged by the British Empire. This work is realized through the intricate Mughal-era technique of Kashida, which combines silk appliqué with hand-stitched embellishments. The use of this South Asian heritage technique is central, connecting the work to the region's rich artisanal traditions while reflecting on the Empire's impact. The tapestry fundamentally addresses the entwined fates of India's Tiger and Wales's Red Dragon. I interweave symbols of British power with those of resistance, specifically featuring Robert Clive (Clive of India) and Powis Castle. Clive's 1757 victory in India initiated the Empire, and the vast loot—including the treasures of Tipu Sultan, the 'Tiger of Mysore'—is housed in the Welsh castle, highlighting the transfer of wealth and colonial exploitation. I contrast Clive's greed with the defiant symbols of Tipu's tiger (now India's national animal) and the Welsh Red Dragon, an ancient symbol of resistance. This pairing allows the tapestry to weave dialogues of colonial conquest, reflecting on how Britain's Imperial spoils connect Wales to the Empire's legacy. The work extends its critique beyond South Asia to challenge the Empire's narrative of being a 'civilizing force.' It reflects on the brutal Opium Wars, where the East India Company, supported by Indian merchants, devastated China. The foreground uses imagery of addicts and seductive needlework that reveals the violence of the British warship Nemesis, symbolizing the devastation unleashed in the name of free trade. The border's final statement, entwining white poppies with the East India Company logo and Indian tigers, encapsulates the entangling of commercial greed and military strength.*

The reverse side of the tapestry, featuring a digital print with machine embroidery on calico print, represents the modern reinterpretation and legacy of these historical narratives. The politics and trade of calico prints and chintz fabrics were deeply intertwined with the operations of the East India Company in the 17th and 18th centuries. These textiles, with their vibrant patterns and high-quality craftsmanship, became highly demanded in Europe. The East India Company capitalized on this demand, importing vast quantities from India.

Through its layered textures and rich symbolism, Imperium amidst Opium Blossoms invites viewers to reflect on the complex legacies of empire, resistance, and the enduring impact on cultural and historical memory.



The Latin phrase "Deo Dvcente Nil Nocet" translates to "With God as our guide, nothing harms."

The *East India Trading Company*, otherwise referred to as the *East India Company* or the *British East India (Trading) Company*, and abbreviated as EITC or EIC, was a British joint-stock company and megacorporation formed for pursuing and monopolizing trade with the Indian subcontinent and East Indies, and later expanded to China and the Caribbean.

The East India Company traded mainly in cotton, silk, indigo dye, porcelain, salt, spices, linens, plantains, saltpeter, tea and opium.

The Company was granted a Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth I on December 31, 1600.



The steamship **Nemesis**, operated by the East India Company during the Opium Wars, showcased advanced technology. Its speed and firepower gave British forces a significant advantage in naval engagements against Chinese ships.

Powis Castle, a stunning medieval fortress in Wales, reflects a rich history intertwined with Robert Clive, a key figure in British India, and his son Edward Clive, who resided there. The castle houses treasures, including looted artifacts from India, highlighting the complex colonial legacies associated with their family.

Britannia symbolizes British strength, unity, and resilience. She represents maritime power, cultural heritage, and the enduring spirit of the nation.

Robert Clive was a British officer and founder of British control in India, instrumental in establishing the East India Company's dominance. Robert Clive's tenure with the East India Company primarily spanned from 1743 to 1774. He played a crucial role in the company's expansion in India, especially during and after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, which marked the beginning of British rule in India. Clive served as a governor of Bengal and returned to England in 1767, later resuming his role until 1774.

The **fiery dragon** has been read as a symbol of Welsh resistance to English rule from Medieval times.



During the Opium Wars, the Chinese government deployed **war junks** or **armed junks** as part of their naval forces, engaging in battles against British and Western powers to defend against opium trade and invasion. The two Opium Wars occurred in the following years:

First Opium War was from 1839 to 1842

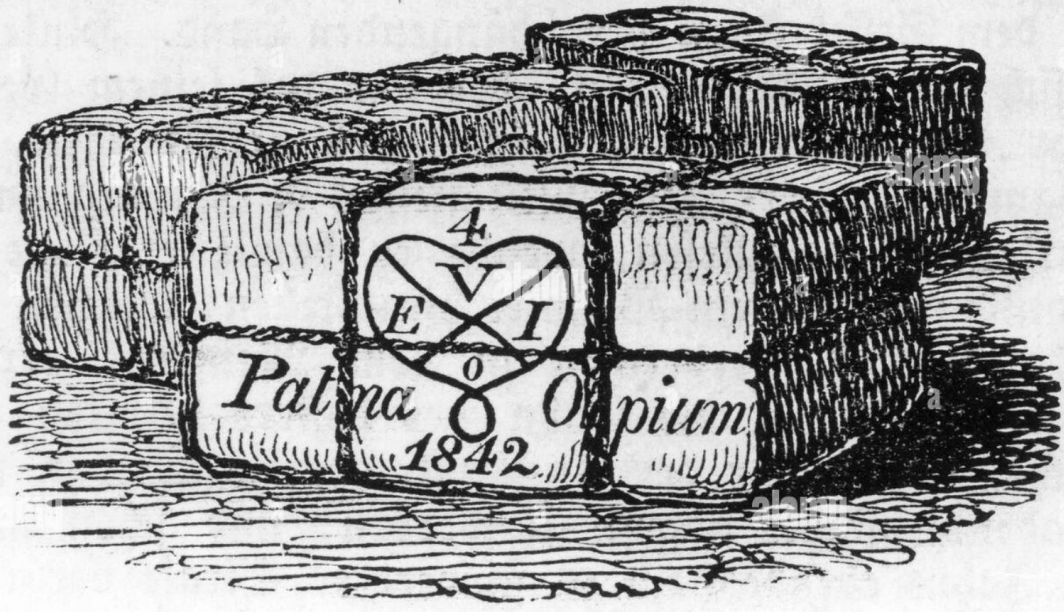
Second Opium War took place from 1856 to 1860

To Chinese emperor, the **dragon** symbolized imperial power and was considered a representation of emperor himself. The dragon was the emblem of emperor's divine Right to rule, embodying the balance of strength, wisdom and benevolence that an ideal Ruler should possess.

Emperor Daoguang ruled China from 1820 to 1850 and faced significant challenges, including the First Opium War. His reign was marked by internal strife, foreign pressure, and struggles to curb the opium trade's detrimental effects.

Page Boys: The East India Company actively engaged in the transatlantic slave trade, transporting enslaved people, including those from East Africa, to its various settlements. These African boys were used in a variety of domestic and service roles within the Company's establishments.

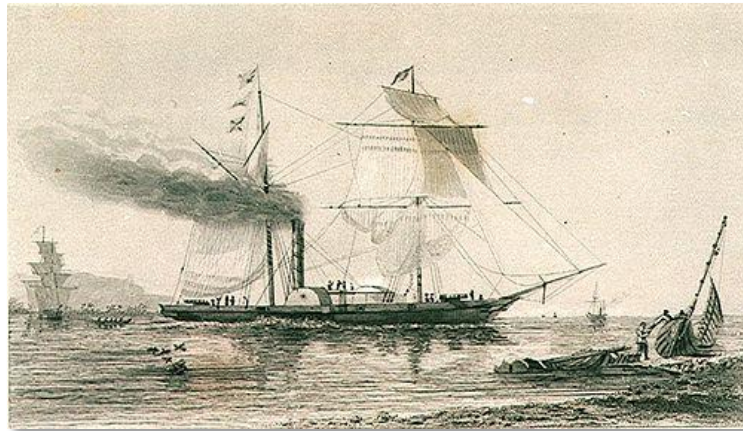
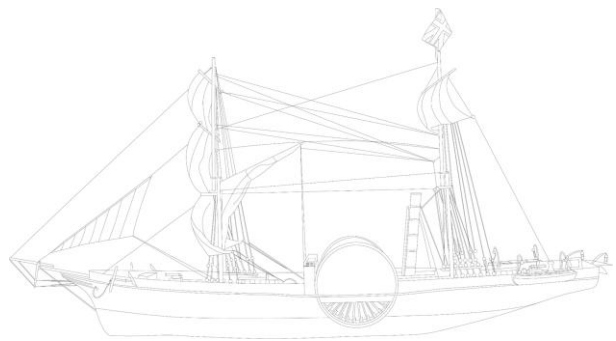
Tipu's Tiger: Tipu Sultan, known as the **Tiger of Mysore**, was a fierce ruler who staunchly opposed British expansion. His innovative military tactics and strong resistance significantly challenged the East India Company's ambitions. Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan engaged in four major conflicts with EIC between 1767 & 1799



VEIO stands for *Verification of the East India Opium*. This was a process or mark used to certify the quality and origin of opium that was processed in Patna, a major center for opium production at the time. Patna opium was highly prized and was subject to strict quality control measures to ensure its high standards before being exported, primarily to China during the 19th century. Verification was an important aspect of the trade to maintain the reputation and economic interests of the British East India Company, which had a monopoly over the opium trade.

The year 1842 is significant in the context of the opium trade due to its association with the conclusion of the First Opium War between Britain and China, which lasted from 1839 to 1842. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in August 1842. This treaty was the first of what the Chinese referred to as the "*unequal treaties*" because it imposed significant disadvantages on China to the benefit of Western powers such as *Cession of Hong Kong, Opening of five ports, Indemnity Payments and Extraterritorial Rights*





The steamship Nemesis was used by the East India Company during the First Opium War (1839-1842) against China. It is considered one of the first steam-powered warships used in combat and played a significant role in the British naval operations during the war. It was notable for its speed and maneuverability, which gave the British forces a distinct advantage in various engagements, including the capture of key ports along the Chinese coast.



Back of the tapestry has a Calico print from the portfolio *Calico Painting and Printing in the East Indies In the XVII and XVIII Centuries* by Geo. P. Baker , London Edward Arnold 1921.

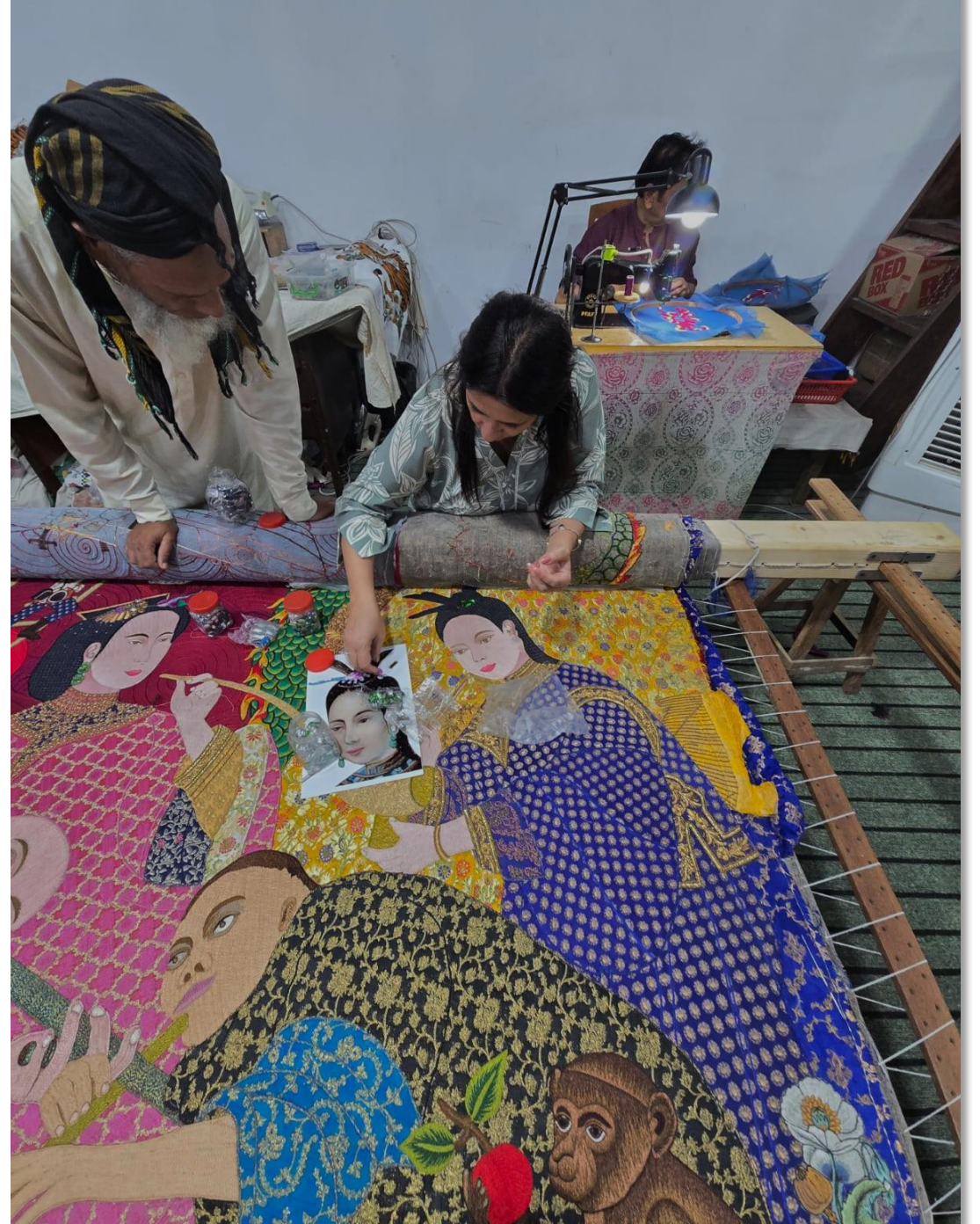
Calico print, originating from India, became highly sought after in Europe. The East India Company facilitated its import, transforming textile trade and influencing fashion during the 17th and 18th centuries.







Embroidery team : Shamim bhai, Tahir Bhai ,
Nasim Bhai, Khalil Bhai





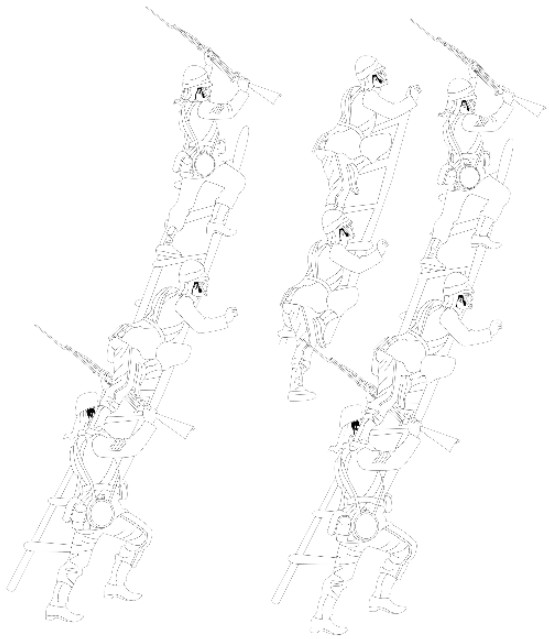
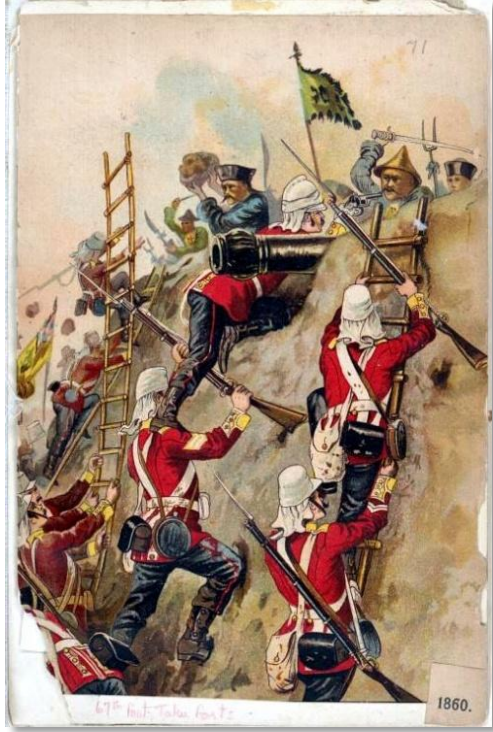


Emperor Daoguang who reigned from 1820-1850. He was the Chinese emperor during the first Opium War 1839-1842











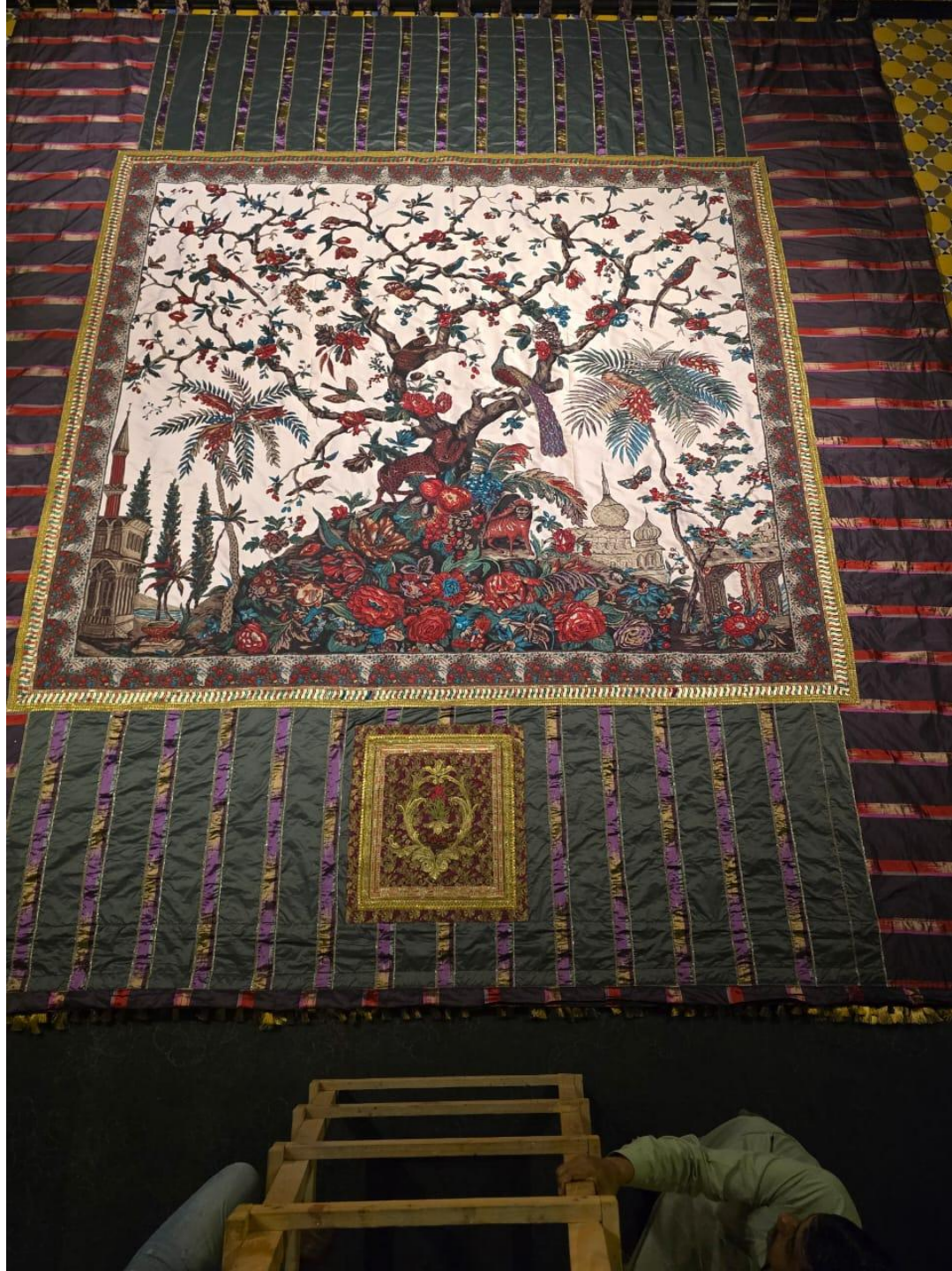
CHINESE OPIUM SMOKERS.







*Imperium Amidst Opium Blossoms:
A Kashidakari on the era of the East India Company*
Applique work , hand and machine free motion embroidery on
atlas jamawar banarsi,katan/ poth silk,brocade kimkhwab, brass,
crystal and zari tassels
210 inch X 188 inch
2023 – 2025
Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, Pakistan and Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, UK



Back of the tapestry

Allegory of War
2021-2022



Statement: *Violence is the most destructive activity known to humanity. In order to understand it, artists have, throughout history, merged colours, textures and patterns to depict wartime beliefs and ideologies, practices, symbols and values. Their work investigates not only artistic responses to terror but the meaning of violence itself.*

In Allegory of War, I explore the seductive nature of violence and the cyclical repetition of history. This work translates the precise, diminished scale of traditional Mughal miniature painting into a monumental textile narrative, effectively weaving the brutality of conflict into the soft, tactile medium of thread and fabric. The composition is structured vertically, connecting the celestial, the terrestrial, and the maritime. In the upper register, figures float in stylized vessels amidst rain and clouds, observing the chaos below with a detached, mythic presence. The central ground depicts a frenetic battlefield, populated by warriors, horses, and foliage rendered in the vibrant, jeweled tones of the royal court. Below, the scene dissolves into a turbulent sea where a ship tosses amidst drowning figures—a reference to both historical naval warfare and the contemporary tragedies of migration and displacement. My practice has always been concerned with the aestheticization of violence. By rendering scenes of decapitation, combat, and death through the exquisite, painstaking process of embroidery, I create a tension between the viewer's attraction to the object's beauty and the repulsion of its subject matter. The framing of the piece, flanked by heavy, theatrical curtains, suggests that war is a performance—a spectacle that we watch, often from a distance, where the bloodshed is sanitized by the distance of history or the screen. Allegory of War suggests that violence is not an anomaly, but a thread continuously woven into the fabric of human existence. It asks the viewer to confront how easily we digest horror when it is packaged in beauty.



Allegory of War
Applique work on cloth hand embroidery,
Atlas jamawar banarsi, katan/ poth silk, brocade and kimkhwab.
212 x 85 inches
2021- 2022
Midland Arts Centre , Birmingham .



Orpheus Descending
2022-2023



Statement: *In this textile triptych, rendered entirely in appliqué and embroidery, I weave together the distinct yet parallel mythologies of Ancient Greece and the Mughal tradition. Drawing visual inspiration from Mughal miniature painting, the work reimagines the boundaries between the celestial and the subterranean. The composition is anchored by a chaotic, crimson sea—a textural representation of the Underworld. Here, two narratives collide. From the Hamzanama, the demon Arghan emerges from "frothy, curling waves." With his spotted skin and flaming eyes, he presents a casket of arms—a gift of war and violence. Contrasting this figure of aggression is the tragic presence of Orpheus. Armed not with weapons but with his lyre, he seeks to charm the three-headed dog, Cerberus, and navigate the dark realm to reclaim Eurydice. While traditional mythology often depicts the divine descending to help, this narrative subverts that trope: here, figures descend from the stylized, cloud-filled heavens not to bless, but to loot the earth. Through the tactile medium of thread and fabric, this piece explores the intersection of love, loss, and greed, freezing the "frozen grimace" of the demon and the desperate hope of the musician in a single, woven moment.*



Orpheus Descending
Applique work on cloth hand embroidery,
Atlas jamawar banarsi, katan/ poth silk,
brocade and kimkhwab.
134 X 92 inches
2022-2023
Canvas Gallery, Art Dubai 2023