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### Lost In Transit

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**RIT**

**Lost In Transit**

By

**Drishti Bhandari**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Metals & Jewelry Design

School for American Crafts

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

April 16, 2021

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## **Abstract**

“I recognize, decontextualize, reconstruct.”

"Lost in transit" is the sense of loss that we experience when our heritage and stories are passed down to us. Like a game of Telephone, every generation loses a little of its past- which gets left behind. We do not have, in all originality, what the previous generation had. As we move through time, lived experiences change. We will never know what it felt like to live in a medieval kingdom, or to live through the renaissance. We will only ever have their echoes in pictures, stories and ruins. The only common thread is that all generations experience this loss, of the stories and lived experiences left behind and vanished in time. The loss stretches wider with every passing day.

This is a coalescence of history, art, and jewelry. By using the techniques of metalsmithing, print-making, etching, hand-painting, and burning I've tried to observe the various layers of interaction between generations and visual meaning.

## Introduction

In this world of words, language transforms and meanings change. Yet, there are ancestral objects passed down to us that stay the way they always were. Be it sculptures, silverware, jewelry, paintings or even the Paleolithic cave art/paintings - these are things we have inherited without any alterations, just damaged by time. The damage does not prevent our understanding of what they meant to us. For many of us, these objects mean so much. I was brought up in pulsating, vibrant India with a flourish of colors at every corner and where the heartbeat of life is so loud it rings through me today. We have seen empires rise and fall, leaving behind riches of art and architecture. In India, the costumes and customs play such a significant role in our lives that we treasure and preserve what heirlooms remain with us.

My body of work aims to highlight this sense of loss that occurs during transit. Mine is a series of conceptual abstract jewelry that investigates the remains of our international heritage, stories, and relics. By manipulating the forms, scale and text, I would like to illustrate the gaps in this generation, and of generations before ours. This is because subconsciously we let go of certain subjects, which harms how well we can record and preserve our lives. There are even things from yesterday that we forgot today and will never remember again. Through my work I want to convey this experience, which is very personal to me, yet very subjective to the viewers.

## Discussion of source and research

Conceptual art is a postmodernist art movement founded on the principle that art is a 'concept' rather than a material object. That is to say, the 'idea' which a work represents is considered its essential component, and the "finished product", if it exists at all, is regarded essentially as a form of an artifact. Is it merely a series of totally self-contained, self-explanatory forms of expression (like Abstract Expressionism), enlivened only by a heightened awareness of the process involved, or is it the communication of an idea.<sup>1</sup>

The French artist *Marcel Duchamp* paved the way for the conceptualists, providing them with examples of prototypically conceptual works. The most famous of Duchamp's readymades was *Fountain* (1917), a standard urinal basin signed by the artist with the pseudonym "R.Mutt", and submitted for inclusion in the annual, un-juried exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York (which rejected it). The artistic tradition does not see a commonplace object (such as a urinal) as art because it is not made by an artist or with any intention of being art, nor is it unique or hand-crafted. Duchamp's relevance and theoretical importance for future "conceptualists" were later acknowledged by US artist Joseph Kosuth in his 1969 essay, *Art after Philosophy* when he wrote: "All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from 'Meaning, Origins, Characteristics of Conceptualism.'  
<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/conceptual-art.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, London: 1998. p. 28



Fig 1 : 1917 : *Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp<sup>3</sup>

Language was a central concern for the first wave of conceptual artists of the 1960s and early 1970s. Although the utilisation of text in art was in no way novel, only in the 1960s did the artists Lawrence Weiner, Edward Ruscha,<sup>4</sup> Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry, and Art & Language begin to produce art by exclusively linguistic means.

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.<sup>5</sup>

Much of Barbara Kruger's work pairs found photographs with pithy and assertive text that challenges the viewer. Her method includes developing her ideas on a computer,

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<sup>3</sup> Hensher, Philip (2008-02-20). "The loo that shook the world: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabi". London: The Independent (Extra). pp. 2–5.

<sup>4</sup> "Ed Ruscha and Photography". The Art Institute of Chicago. 1 March – 1 June 2008. Archived from the original on 31 May 2010. Retrieved 14 September 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Sol LeWitt "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art", *Artforum*, June 1967.



later transferring the results (often billboard-sized) into printed images.<sup>6</sup> Examples of her instantly recognizable slogans include "*I shop therefore I am*," "*Your body is a battleground*," and "*You are not yourself*" appearing in her signature white letters against a red background.



Fig 2(a) *left* : You Are Not Yourself (1981)<sup>7</sup>

Fig 2(b) *right* :Barbara Kruger at ACCA, Melbourne<sup>8</sup>

What I have learnt from this research is the necessity to find the right concept, to adhere to the meaning of the process. The finished product might not please everyone and is subjective to an individual. Language and text is a form of expression, which

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<sup>6</sup> Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter (October 17, 1999). "She Has a Way With Words" *Los Angeles Times*. Barbara Kruger: Circus, December 15, 2010 – January 30, 2011 Archived December 24, 2010, at the Wayback Machine Kunsthalle Schirn, Frankfurt.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Kruger: Circus, December 15, 2010 – January 30, 2011 Archived December 24, 2010, at the Wayback Machine Kunsthalle Schirn, Frankfurt.

<sup>8</sup> BBarbara Kruger: The Globe Shrinks, September, 3 – October 23, 2010, Sprüth Magers Gallery, Berlin.

when used along with art gives the work a conceptual meaning. Sometimes I wonder, what art is without its meaning? It is merely pieces of materials that came together?

This intrigued me to experiment with materials like fabric with hand-painted text. These works were then destroyed under a rolling mill in order to understand the true nature of the piece.

## **Process and Evolution**

For most of my childhood, I was raised by my Grandparents. One would practice Jainism and the other, Hinduism. I grew up learning about both. One of the learnings that stuck with me was, "Learn, practice, forward" i.e., learn about the various ways of living a happy life, about the culture, its history, and roots, practice all the learnings in your daily life and pass on all that knowledge to everyone around.

My family, for generations, has been passing down their words of wisdom, values, and family heirlooms. These include scriptures, garments, silverware, trousseau, and jewelry. Every time my mother showed me the articles she'd received from my grandmother, I would just look at them in awe, wondering how carefully they have been guarded. Some of the articles are probably 150 years old. The only thing I could never get off my mind was, no matter how carefully you guard them, they were bound to ruin.

I remember a beautiful traditional Rajasthani Kundan<sup>9</sup> necklace, made with uncut diamonds that was passed down by my great-grandmother. It has Meenakari<sup>10</sup> on its back and over the years, the enamel coating started to break. Even though it didn't hold the monetary value it once held, it is one of the most prized possessions.

I used to obsess over all the jewelry and would wear it around the house feeling like the queen of the world. It was not just a piece of jewelry for me anymore. It became a part of my identity and that's when I realized the importance of learning about one's culture and history. It builds me into who I am today.

As I grew up, my fondness for jewelry kept increasing and instead of just wearing them, I started to design and create precious pieces. It was after I came to Rochester Institute of Technology, I started creating wearable art. Experimenting with unorthodox materials like paper, resin, dried leaves, fabric, and cement, made me realize the importance of thought behind the art and not just the material. A piece of fabric is as precious as a diamond.

Throughout my study at Rochester Institute of Technology, I found inspiration in artists who used unconventional materials as the core of their work. The works of *Arline Fisch*

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<sup>9</sup> Kundan is a traditional form of Indian gemstone jewelry involving a gem set with a gold foil between the stones and its mount.

<sup>10</sup> Meenakari is the process of painting and coloring the surface of metals and ceramic tiles through enameling.

intrigued me as she enjoyed combining literature, language, and philosophy into her studio works, like design and painting. Fisch's work stands out because many of her wearable crafts are crocheted using metal wire. (Drawing from ancient civilizations such as Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan, and pre-Colombian, she weaves the ideas extracted from past cultures with contemporary concerns to create layers of visual meaning.)<sup>11</sup>



Fig 3(a) *left* : Arline Fisch, *Coral Wreath*, 2013, necklace, coated copper wire, sterling silver, 30.5cm outer diameter, 17.8 cm inner diameter, photo: artist

Fig 3(b) *right* : Arline Fisch, *Corals*, 2008-2009, installation, coated copper wire, 20.3 to 30.5 cm high, photo: Will Gullette

The first piece I created was *The Autumn Leaf*. I etched traditional Henna patterns on it. I started moving towards the contemporary jewelry world, yet wanted to stay connected with my roots, my culture. This piece of jewelry was an amalgamation of my first experience of Fall and my last experience before leaving home. The techniques I

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<sup>11</sup> Elegant Fantasy: The Jewelry of Arline Fisch - <https://www.craftinamerica.org/artist/arline-fisch>

learnt helped me understand my materials better and how to incorporate them in my future works. This piece represented the beauty of fall with the intricacy of Henna.<sup>12</sup>



Fig 4 : Drishti Bhandari, *The Autumn Leaf*, 2018

Photo credit : Artist

For the final critique in Fall 2018, I created a piece with Aluminum, rolled down to the point it was thin as paper, along with hand-painted canvas and threads. It was a symbolic letter from the past. Something about the hand-painted Hindi lettering stuck with me and helped me move forward with my thesis, laying the groundwork. The hand-painted text were letters from my grandmother I received as a kid. The process leads me to preserve an old letter in the form of art. The rustic, distorted nature of the piece presented a sense of aging through time. This was the first time I used conceptual art with text in my work.

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<sup>12</sup> Henna is a dye prepared from the plant *Lawsonia inermis*.



Fig 5 : Drishti Bhandari, *Letter from the past*, 2018

Photo credit : Artist

## Critical Analysis

From the discussion above, following the conclusion, I created a series of conceptual art works that express the gap and loss of information between the generations. The pieces have been categorized into sculpture, wearable jewelry, and body jewelry. The loss of information has been portrayed by various techniques like burning, fading, painting, and 3-dimensional viewing points. The beauty of the pieces is not limited to their perfection, rather, it lies in their imperfections.

## Body Of Work

'Lost in Transit' is a series of work which aims to highlight the sense of loss between generations. Thumbprints are impressions used for identifying individuals from the unique pattern of whorls and lines. From far apart, one can not differentiate between two impressions, but close up they have a singularity. Much like a group of people who seem to share similar values and morals, each has their own unique identity.

I took the thumbprint, from my family (four generations) and used the impression as a repetitive form in my work. The unique pattern of whorls is filled with Hindi scripture writing from *The Bhagwat Gita*. (The Gita is a , is a 701-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the epic *Mahabharata* (chapters 23–40 of Bhishma Parva), dated to the second century BCE. It is considered to be one of the main holy scriptures for Hinduism.)<sup>13</sup>

As a child, I read the verses from The Gita and learned the way of living. The practices to follow and the reasoning behind them. Incorporating the text in my work presenting the cultural backdrop only seemed correct.

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald Neufeldt. Robert Neil Minor (ed.). *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gita*. State University of New York Press. pp. 31–33. ISBN 978-1-4384-1325-9.



Fig 6 (left), Fig 7 (right) : Drishti Bhandari, *Explorations*, 2019

Photo credit : Artist

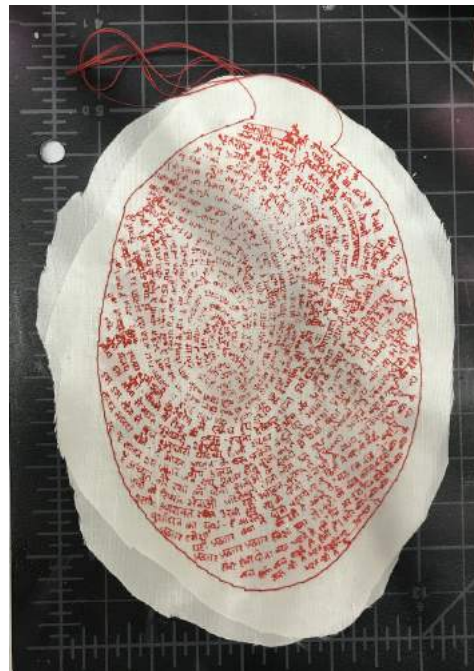


Fig 8 (left), Fig 9 (right) : Drishti Bhandari, *Explorations*, 2020

Photo credit : Artist





Fig 10 : Drishti Bhandari, *Chitti*, 2018

Photo credit : Corinne Catania

## **CHITTHI**

Chitthi in English means 'letter'. This piece is a representation of how with every passing generation, parts of a culture keep getting torn away and are lost somewhere in transit. What gets passed down then is a little torn from here and there, a little burnt at the edges, but is still our own culture. What still holds on to this culture are the frail, yet strong enough threads of the feeling of belonging and knowing that all the generations have in them.

This was created in 2018 and left untouched for a year. After a year, the piece had worn down, threads loosened and the fabric started fraying. At that moment, I realized the harmony between my concept and this piece. The piece had lost its original structure and grew over time, but in all form did not lose its originality. It had lost some memories, yet kept holding on through the frail threads left attached to it.



Fig 11(a) : Drishti Bhandari, *Bindu*, 2020

Photo credit : Corinne Catania



Fig 11 (b) *left* : Drishti Bhandari, *Bindu*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania  
Fig 11 (c) *right* : Drishti Bhandari, *Bindu*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

## **Bindu**

'Bindu' means point, from which Bindi is derived. Bindi is worn by Hindu women on their foreheads where it centers all the chakras of our body; it is said to align one's mind and exudes positivity. The first piece of the collection represents the individual identities coming together and concentrating their entire energy to a point of focus.

Single oval cutouts were thumb-stamped front and back using green ink and joined together in the form of strings using adhesive. Those strings then rolled up to form the circular base of the piece. Once the piece reached its 1-foot by 1-foot dimension, I decided to burn away the edges. Fire being unpredictable, I couldn't control the parts that burned down and I believe that is what made it a successful piece.



Fig 12 (a) *top* : Drishti Bhandari, *Dhundh*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania



Fig 12 (b) *left* : Drishti Bhandari, *Dhundh*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania



Fig 12 (c) *right* : Drishti Bhandari, *Dhundh*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

## Dhundh

Dhundh (dh-uh-nd-uh) meaning 'fog', and dhundh (dh-oo-nd-dh) meaning

'to find,' is a wordplay.

The piece talks about how I only know so many people in my family - my culture - the only ones that I've known personally. All the information that I have about everybody else is through the stories and the lore that I've heard about them. This says how I only have a foggy idea about all of these people who have been a part of my culture and have built it. How I will never know about my culture as much and as well as these foggy images of the people that were? This will never stop happening and the history of my culture will only keep fading away with time and the people farther away getting foggier and foggier.

This sculpture piece is an amalgamation of transparency and time. I have used literature, written in Hindi from The Bhagwat Gita. The thumbprint is unique in itself. I have colored prints, depicting the generations that are closer to me and have had a direct impact on me, being able to learn from them and the fading prints show the period where what would have been the present once, is now only the past fading away. The gradation on the opposite ends of the piece indicates the generations I never came across or never will. The strongest colour represents my great grandmother, whose values, which I believe were the strongest, which passed down to my grandmother and followed down to me.



Fig 13 (a) *top* : Drishti Bhandari, *Parchhaayi*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania  
Fig 13 (b) *bottom* : Drishti Bhandari, *Parchhaayi*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

## **PARCHHAAYI**

Parchhaayi, meaning 'shadow'. Just as a thumbprint is unique in itself, our cultures are unique too. It is these unique cultures that bring us together in a way nothing else can. There's a shadow of it that we have around us, this air of culture, that gives us our uniqueness, but also somehow pushes us a little more towards togetherness. Where we come from, our cultures are as much a part of our anatomies as are thumbprints and make us distinguished at the same time.

This piece is 3-dimensional, consisting of various thumbprints hung from the ceiling. It was created using laser-cut and etching techniques. The thumbprints with engraved text in Hindi were hand-painted with red acrylic paint. The pieces were designed and cut in decreasing diameter and hung from the ceiling with clear fishing wire. From a particular point, the prints all together seemed like a 3-dimensional thumbprint, and from the side view, you can see the different layers set together.



Fig 14 (a) *top* : Drishti Bhandari, *Amulya*, 2020, Photo credit : Komal Ashfaq  
Fig 14 (b) *bottom* : Drishti Bhandari, *Amulya*, 2020, Photo credit : Komal Ashfaq



## AMULYA

Amulya meaning 'priceless.' Precious stones aren't the only things that carry legacies in them. Anything that has been of importance in one's culture, automatically becomes precious, more precious than any diamonds or rubies. Be it a piece of clothing, a silver coin or even something as simple as a little marble box. The monetary value of it doesn't compare to the real value it holds in one's culture. It is a family heirloom, not just any other object and that is what carries the legacy of one's culture.

This piece is made from screen-printed silk and red ink. The pieces are filled with cotton and hand-stitched. The edges are burned to erase some of the fabric memory.



Fig 14 (c) *top* : Drishti Bhandari, *Amulya*, 2020, Photo credit : Komal Ashfaq

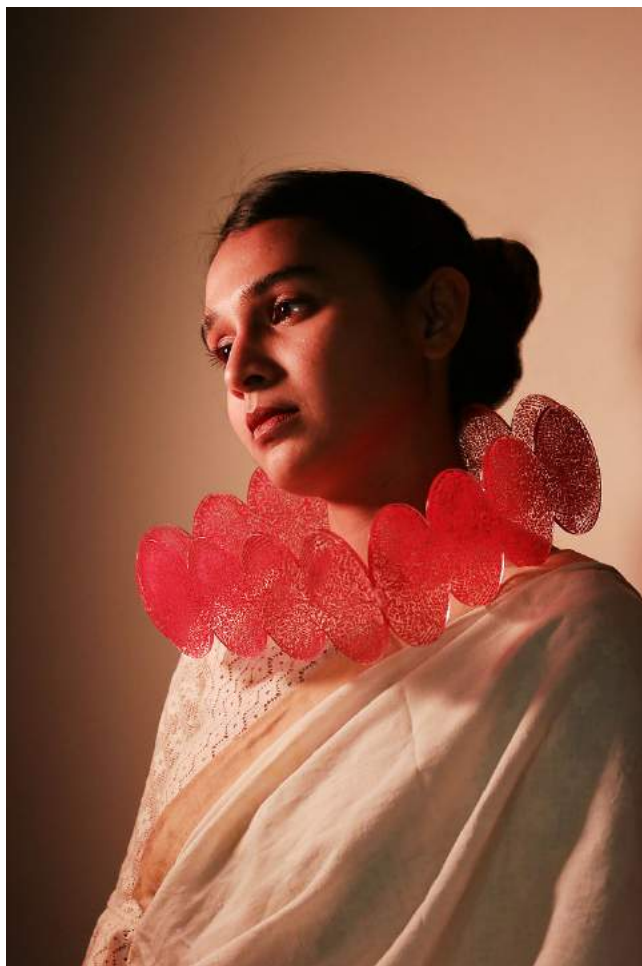


Fig 15 : Drishti Bhandari, *Virasat*, 2020, Photo credit : Komal Ashfaq

## **VIRASAT**

Virasat in English means ‘inheritance.’ This piece represents that however zany or out of the ordinary one’s culture might be, it has always been and always will be unique and a thing of beauty. A culture is an amalgamation of stories, people, beliefs, food, many art forms and emotions. One should always wear their culture proudly, accept it's its flaws as simply as one does with themselves.



Fig 16 : Drishti Bhandari, *Dhaaga*, 2020, Photo credit : Komal Ashfaq

## **DHAAGA**

Dhaaga, meaning ‘thread’ is a portrayal of how with every new generation coming in the world, a culture is taken forward. The thread keeps getting longer and longer, with the culture’s information being passed down, which of course has had its trimmings and addition of flounces along the years. However, the core of the culture still gets passed down and will be to the next many generations. It is like a Banyan tree, growing

in all directions, with so many different roots hanging off it, but all being birthed from the one tree trunk.

This piece consists of multiple engraved thumbprints, riveted together with silver tubes.

This body jewelry has movement and flexibility.



Fig 17 (a) : Drishti Bhandari, *Chaap*, 2020, Photo credit : Komal Ashfaq

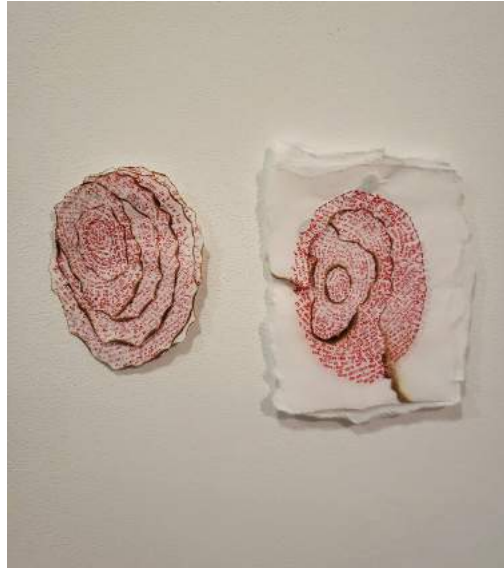


Fig 17 (b) : Drishti Bhandari, *Chhaap*, 2020, Photo credit : Artist

## **CHHAAP**

Chhaap means an imprint. The piece here mirrors the thought that even though a lot of information is lost in this game of Chinese Whispers, there still is some left of it. There's a chhaap of culture, of the ones before us in our lives which we shouldn't ignore. We mustn't let our curiosities die down and try to know as much as we can about our culture and its tradition. We must always know where our roots lie, learn the arts that have been part of our culture. We must hold on to whatever is left of our cultures while we still have the option of doing so.

These brooches are screen printed on Mulberry paper, which feathers beautifully when hand torn. The layers are torn and burnt in various ways, trying to depict the concept as

a whole and parts of it losing its memory. The papers are hand sewn together with a red silk thread, binding them together.



Fig 18 : Drishti Bhandari, *Aahat*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

## **AAHAT**

Aahat means faint sounds. All that I have today are these faint whispers of the generations before me. I have them in and around me - what they were, what they were meant to be and whatnot - everything in whispers.

This piece has an acrylic body, with embossed Hindi literature in the pattern of whorls. The cord has been riveted between two oxidised silver plates and placed on the back of the body using an adhesive. The body was put against the flame and it took its own course with the piece. It deformed the lower part, burning it down and slowly burning the piece upwards. The beautiful gradation happened because of the oxidation of the acrylic colour on the embossed acrylic. This piece reflects the full spectrum of loss and retain.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this series was to explore the sense of loss between generations and to examine myself throughout the process. I have successfully presented the concept of my thesis pieces. The pieces I believe are in harmony with all the art direction.

The extensive research of contemporary and conceptual art, led me to think in a direction that has made me what I am today. Learning new techniques and exploring various non-precious materials, with the guidance of my professors helped me finish

my thesis which started out as a few lines of thought and rough sketches. Coming from a commercial jewelry background, I did not know the freedom I could have with art and sculpture. It made me realise the value of work instead of the market price. Diamonds are not the only precious or valuable material out there. Any work consisting of thoughts and effort are far more valuable than a piece of rock. I did not use the orthodox techniques I was taught and rather divided into various other ways of bringing my work together as a whole, creating my own new techniques.

The efforts of combining contemporary art along with my history and culture have successfully been fulfilled with my presentation. Moving forward, I will walk on the path exploring the culture in me and bringing it to life through contemporary jewelry. My learning curve has been huge and I will continue to progress further.

In the end, translation is always an interpretation, but an interpretation is not always a translation. The only way to get a truly intimate understanding of the sense of loss is to embrace the change and grasp all the knowledge from one's surroundings.



## Installation Images



Fig 19 (top) : Drishti Bhandari, *Lost In Transit*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

Fig 20 (bottom) : Drishti Bhandari, *Parchhaayi*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania



Fig 21 (*top,left*) : Drishti Bhandari, *Dhaaga*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

Fig 22 (*top,right*) : Drishti Bhandari, *Virasat*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

Fig 23 (*bottom*) : Drishti Bhandari, *Dhundh*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania



Fig 24 : Drishti Bhandari, *Chitti*, 2020, Photo credit : Corinne Catania

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Elegant Fantasy: The Jewelry of Arline Fisch -

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Fig 2(b) : Barbara Kruger: The Globe Shrinks, September, 3 – October 23, 2010, Sprüth Magers Gallery, Berlin.

Fig 3 (a,b) : Elegant Fantasy: The Jewelry of Arline Fisch -

<https://www.craftinamerica.org/artist/arline-fisch>