

Kristen Gjesdahl

## Project Statement

The traditional textile that I used as my inspiration was a Kutch embroidery piece from Gujarat, India. There are many kinds of Kutch embroidery, stemming from the various tribal groups in the region. Some people say that the Kutch embroidery tradition was started by cattle breeders and others say that it originated with shoemakers<sup>1</sup>. The piece I referenced in my design is a type of Banni embroidery, also called Kutch Bharat. It was named after the semi-desert land called Banni in the Kutch district. Banni is a long piece of land covering 2,144 square kilometers and containing 44 villages. People living here often have jobs related to embroidery, leather, and dairy<sup>2</sup>.

Kutch embroidery creates an all-over surface embellishment, usually on cotton or silk fabric. Typical sources of inspiration lie in architecture, nature, and animals. Predominant colors include green, ivory, indigo, black, dark red, and yellow. More specifically, characteristics of the Banni embroidery include beads, mirrors, chain stitches, and buttonhole stitches. The most commonly used colors are red, orange, and yellow<sup>3</sup>.

For my design, I was inspired by the Maltese cross portion of the embroidery. I was initially drawn to the delicate interweaving of the thread which created such a beautiful motif. It reminded me of a Celtic knot, which typically do not have a beginning or end. I was interested in the structure of the Maltese cross, how it was created, and if it had a beginning and an end. Since the motif is so small on the textile, at times, the thickness of the thread makes it difficult to understand how the pattern is formed. First, I drew the knot at a larger scale, noting where the thread went over and under the other threads. Then I enlarged this drawing using the photo copy machine. After several explorations, I hand-cut this drawing out using an X-acto knife to explore the shadows that it would create. When I pinned this cut piece on the wall to take a shadow photograph, I had to make sure it didn't touch the wall so it would cast a shadow. Since the paper was so flimsy, I couldn't get the paper to hang flat, so the shadow produced was warped. In the shadow photograph, the shadow was black and the paper was white. I liked how the shadow was the first thing you saw when looking at the photo and retained that aspect in my final design. Originally, my drawing was composed of smooth, continuous lines. I was unconsciously making assumptions and generalizations about what the knot looked like to make the design look more "perfect." However, the process of hand cutting resulted in harsher edges, angles, and inconsistencies. I retained these rough edges in my final design because they add interest and unexpectedness to the composition. In combination with the warped shadow, these imperfections make my final design compelling and visually interesting.

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<sup>1</sup> "Kutch Embroidery." Loom Tree. Accessed October 26, 2016. <http://www.loomtree.com/pages/kutch-embroidery>.

<sup>2</sup> "Embroidery of Kutch." India Netzone. 2008. Accessed October 26, 2016. <http://m.indianetzone.com/artical.aspx?iwebpageid=9894>.

<sup>3</sup> "Kutch Embroidery."