

SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

Beading Material and Meaning in the Parsons MFA Textiles Program

by Anette Millington

Parsons School of Design | The New School
New York, New York, US | newschool.edu/parsons/mfa-textiles

The communal studio at the MFA Textiles Program at **Parsons School of Design** is buzzing with making and explorations in hybrid textiles, including a multiplicity of approaches to beading. Two recent graduates, **Aradhita Parasrampur** and **Alyssa Schulman**, activate bead making and bead embellishment to advocate for justice and relocate our human relationship to the natural world.

“The MFA in Textiles at Parsons encourages experimentation with hybridity. It is rooted in craft, and I think that aspect of the program is unique. At the same time, all the students are inspired to be innovators. For me, bead work was the practice that I was really interested in for my capstone thesis and the program guided me to make a special contribution,” explains Parasrampur.¹ She has designed a system of bead making to help replace toxic petroleum-based products. Working with algae she has formulated beads with a variety of colors, textures, shapes, and properties, including beads formulated with jellyfish protein that are bioluminescent and change color in UV light. Parasrampur has innovated these novel qualities to make the beads engaging in many different settings, ensuring use and reuse over time.

Stringing delicate bead netting which cascades over the body and in space, the work is not only an astonishing feat of textile science, but also of beauty. Parasrampur speaks of the

Top: **Aradhita Parasrampur**, *Kelp Polymer Beading Sample*, 2022. Handmade kelp beads and thread, 12 in x 12 inches. Photo by the artist.

Bottom: **Aradhita Parasrampur**, *Bioluminescent Textile*, 2022. Handmade beads, jellyfish protein and thread, 12 in x 40 inches. Photo by the artist.



Alyssa Schulman, *Your Knives Cut Deep: Sweater*, 2022. Naturally dyed, knitted and bead embellished plant fiber felt. Photo by the artist.

innate draw she has felt toward beading since childhood. She finds the considerable time required in bead practice to be essential to its meaning. “Beading is very delicate, and fragile, and something of value because of the human contribution that goes into it,” Parasrampur explains. “When beading, I always remind myself to recognize interconnectedness, which is essential to form a balance between the people and the planet. This is rooted in circularity, reciprocity, and communication.” She describes the act of beading as both a personal, sensory experience and an act connected to her larger vision for the future of design.

Commitment to textile practice in service to others is a pillar of practice in the MFA Textiles program and is also seen in the work of Alyssa Schulman, who uses her bead embellishment to advocate for animal welfare, challenging industries which use animals as products. Schulman felts plant-based fibers which are then applied to machine-knitted structures and transformed into animal carcasses, as well as items she associates with the fashion industry, such as bags and sweaters. Schulman explains, “I’m using the luxury associated with beading to depict wounds. Taking luxury and flipping it on its head to show the suffering behind many of our industries.”² Using a variety of beading techniques and natural dye, the work evokes a reverent care and awareness of each animal while interrogating human consumption.

The MFA in Textiles within the School of Fashion at Parsons specializes in hybrid textiles that integrate craft and technology, on the bedrock of sustainability, social justice, and wellbeing. Continual inquiry and introspection, linking textile development to purpose, is a centerpiece of the program philosophy. The program was envisioned and established by **Li Edelkoort** and is led by the founding Director, **Preethi**



Alyssa Schulman, *Your Knives Cut Deep: Handbags*, 2022. Naturally dyed, knitted and bead embellished plant fiber felt. Photo by the artist.

Gopinath. Parasrampur and Schulman are the third generation of the program’s graduates and were mentored in capstone thesis work by **Preethi Gopinath**, **Gabi Asfour**, **Travis Fitch**, **Soojin Kang**, and **Anette Millington**.

¹ Aradhita Parasrampur, interview with author, June 2022.

² Alyssa Schulman, interview with author, June 2022.

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Alyssa Schulman, *Your Knives Cut Deep: Wound* (detail), 2022. Naturally dyed, knitted and bead embellished plant fiber felt. Photo by the artist.