



Article

XXIst-Century Samarkand Embroidery: Tradition and Mastery

G. A. Maxkamova¹

1. PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) in Art Studies, Head of the Department of Fine Arts and Technological Education, Samarkand State Pedagogical Institute

Abstract: This article provides information about contemporary embroiderers of the Samarkand region and their creative activities. It presents an analysis of the manifestation of traditional elements in their works and highlights their artistic skills and craftsmanship. Interesting observations are made regarding the preservation of traditional embroidery techniques and their interpretation in modern artistic practice.

Keywords: Bosma Embroidery, Natural Dyeing Method, Symbolism of Patterns, Silk, Viscose, Chain Stitch, Zardevor, Tokchapo' Sh and Bolinpo' Sh, National Fabrics, Atlas Silk Fabric

1. Introduction

Today, interest in traditional folk decorative and applied arts is steadily increasing. At the same time, our artisans are actively creating new and innovative handicraft products. These works are also attracting significant interest from foreign tourists. Contemporary craftsmen continue their creative explorations by combining traditional artistic principles with modern approaches in their works [1, 2].

It is well known that Samarkand embroidery has attracted public attention through its new patterns and products. Today, many embroiderers are engaged in this craft within the regional branch of the Hunarmand Association in Samarkand. We observed and analyzed the work of several of these artisans [3].

Shoira Mahmudjonovna G'aniyeva, an embroiderer, was born on July 23, 1952, in Samarkand. She is a master embroiderer of Samarkand and has been a member of the regional "Hunarmand" Association since 1997. Shoira G'aniyeva represents the sixth generation of a family dynasty of embroiderers. Currently, she works at the handicraft center of the Ruhobod Complex in Samarkand, where she has established a "Master-Apprentice" school [4].

2. Methodology

The fabrics produced by Shoira G'aniyev in the *bosma* technique, characterized by raised floral motifs, are distinguished by their exceptional quality. Creating embossed floral designs on fabric is a highly complex process that requires considerable labor and skill. The patterns are first transferred onto prepared fabric using templates. The main ornamental lines are printed in black and are known as *bosma*, a term derived from the Uzbek word meaning "to press" or "to imprint." In her artistic practice, she uses exclusively natural dyes. For example, white dye is obtained from apricot, red from the madder plant (*Rubia tinctorum*), black and brown from pomegranate peel and green walnut husks, yellow from the *sarbosh* plant, and light yellow from onion skins and henna. When coloring floral motifs, she relies solely on natural dyes extracted from the leaves, roots, and

Citation: Maxkamova, G. A. XXIst-Century Samarkand Embroidery: Tradition and Mastery. Central Asian Journal of Arts and Design 2026, 7(3), 11-15.

Received: 15th Apr 2026

Revised: 05th May 2026

Accepted: 20th May 2026

Published: 12th Jun 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

fruits of plants and trees. Pattern templates are mainly carved from pear wood. However, interpretative innovations are rarely observed in her works. As art historian B. Nodir has noted, contemporary artisans are expected not only to preserve ancient traditions but also to introduce new stylistic approaches into their creative practice. The works of master embroiderer Shoirra G'aniyeva have been exhibited numerous times and have received high recognition. In 2007, she was awarded the UNESCO Quality Seal certificate. She has trained many accomplished apprentices and was honored with the “**Shuhrat**” Medal for her services to the nation (according to the Press Service of the Samarkand Regional Department of Tourism Development). Through her profession, she has traveled to Germany, Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and the United States, where she presented examples of Samarkand embroidery. She also regularly participates in exhibitions throughout Uzbekistan. Discussing the function of the traditional embroidered textile known as *bolinpo'sh*, the artisan recalls that when a bride was escorted to the groom's home, the *bolinpo'sh* was carried above her from all four sides as a ceremonial covering. The central circular motif symbolizes the sun, while the four flowers surrounding it represent the four weeks of a month. The twelve lunar motifs along the border symbolize the twelve months of the year. These designs express the wish that the bride's life in her new home be filled with light and prosperity. Furthermore, when a bride's dowry was brought to the household, decoration of the home traditionally began with embroidered textiles. The white fabric symbolizes daytime, while black represents night. The circular depictions of the moon and sun signify the wish that the home remain illuminated and blessed both day and night. The embroiderer states that she has trained hundreds of apprentices. Although activities slowed during the pandemic, she intends to further develop this work as circumstances permit. She personally designs embroidery patterns for her students and collaborates with the labor exchange office. Upon completion of training courses, apprentices are required to pass an examination in embroidery. She personally selects the fabrics and threads used in instruction. For natural threads, she prepares dyes herself from walnut leaves and husks, mulberry, onion skins, and wild rue (*isiriq*).

3. Results and Discussion

As the master explains: “We usually begin teaching children this craft from the age of seven. We place their first works in a chest and advise them to look at them again after ten years and compare them with their current work. In this way, they can see for themselves how much they have grown and improved [5].”

Today, Shoirra G'aniyev is engaged not only in embroidery but also in painting floral motifs on silk fabrics. She notes that she spent ten years studying natural dye production, gaining extensive experience in the process. She plans to publish these findings as a practical handbook for artisans. The craftswoman has also been included in a catalogue of Central Asian artisans specifically for her expertise in decorating fabrics using the batik technique [6, 7].

Davlatoy Yunusova was born in 1965 in Andijan. After marrying and moving to the Nurota district of the Samarkand region, she learned the local art of embroidery practiced by the community and has produced numerous embroidered items up to the present day. Her works include men's and women's outer garments, interior decorative items such as pillows and *lo'labosh*, curtains, *bolinpo'sh*, *tagjoy*, as well as prayer rugs and decorative curtains. The embroiderer mainly obtains silk fabrics and silk threads from the Fergana Valley region. She uses single-colored white, yellowish, blue, and greenish *adras* fabrics, as well as *atlas* silk textiles [8]. Viscose threads are primarily used for products intended for the domestic market. The threads are often dyed using natural methods. Most of her products are exported abroad. The embroidery is executed exclusively with the help of a traditional embroidery awl (*bigiz*) [9].

Oqila Sheraliyeva, aged 58, was born in 1964 in Urgut. She is from the village of Alohutun in the Urgut district and is a member of the “Hunarmand” Association. She learned embroidery from her mother during childhood and is now teaching the craft to her daughters-in-law. She creates silk embroidered items such as *zardevor*, *tokchapo’sh*, and *bolinpo’sh*. Her work is primarily executed in the *bosma* technique, although she occasionally decorates the edges with chain stitch (*yo’rma chok*) using a *bigiz*. Oqila’s workshop contains embroidery examples representing various regional traditions, including decorative front panels of *bo’g’joma* from Laqay, O’ratepa, Shahrisabz, Zomin, Baxmal, and Jizzakh. According to the artisan, many of these items are exported to Turkey, where they are used as stage decorations and props in historical film productions. She notes that demand for embroidered products has declined in recent years, and the number of foreign customers has decreased since 2015. She attributes this trend to the fact that the labor and expenses required to produce embroidery are often not adequately compensated [10].

The silk used in her work is imported from the Fergana Valley and has become considerably more expensive. At present, *kantli ro’yijo* textiles for bridal dowries are mainly produced on a custom-order basis. These items are embroidered in the *bosma* technique, featuring a somewhat coarser texture and synthetic threads. Their patterns commonly depict rosettes enclosed within tubular motifs. The color palette is predominantly black with limited additional colors, while the floral motifs are rendered in bright pink and sky-blue tones [11].

Kubaro To’xtayeva was born in 1964 in Urgut. In 1983, she married into the family of the potter Mahkam Obloqulov in the “Yuqori Qalang’ar” neighborhood of G’os village, Urgut district. She learned the art of embroidery from her mother-in-law, Sabohat Rahmatullayeva, and continues to practice the craft today [12].

She embroiders together with her two daughters-in-law, her granddaughter, and several apprentices from the village. Her work is distinguished by a unique technique. She primarily embroiders on ordinary market cotton cloth (*bo’z*) using the *bosma* method, employing hand-spun silk threads dyed with natural pigments. The embroidery designs are drawn by a young woman from the village. The patterns are sketched with a simple pen using light-colored ink. Circular motifs are created with the aid of round plates or dishes. The fabric used is plain white cotton cloth, which is soaked in water for two days to increase its density and durability. Afterward, it is given to a pattern designer who transfers the design onto the fabric. The edges of the finished pieces are folded and sewn by machine [13].

The threads are hand-spun silk yarn produced by women in Urgut, while Kubaro herself dyes them using natural methods. Because the threads are handmade, their thickness is not always uniform. She prepares dyes from natural materials such as walnut, *o’sma* (woad), mulberry, and stove soot. The resulting thread colors include white, brick-red, yellowish, beige, and asphalt-gray tones. The items she produces are mainly *bolinpo’sh* and smaller versions of *suzani*. Her embroidery incorporates symbolic motifs characteristic of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Urgut embroidery, including *oba*, teapot, horseshoe, pepper, star, and sun motifs. A distinctive feature of Kubaro To’xtayeva’s work is her color palette [14]. While traditional Urgut embroidery was typically rich and multicolored, her works are characterized by delicate shades of beige and yellow. This restrained palette gives her embroidery a unique visual appearance. Despite being executed in the *bosma* technique, no thread knots are visible on the reverse side of the fabric, demonstrating the artisan’s exceptional craftsmanship. According to Kubaro, these natural color tones are particularly appreciated by foreign tourists. The edges of her embroidered pieces are decorated with handwoven bands. These bands feature the traditional “fish-eye” motif and are woven by neighboring women. Kubaro herself does not draw embroidery patterns. She explains this practice through an old local belief: “If an embroiderer both

designs and embroiders the pattern herself, it may bring misfortune.” This traditional view continues to influence her work. Today, the custom of preparing a *bolinpo ‘sh* for a bride’s dowry remains alive in Urgut. Both families traditionally contribute this item to the bridal trousseau [15]. In funeral ceremonies, if a young girl or young bride passes away, it is customary to cover the coffin with a *suzani* and a *bolinpo ‘sh*. For example, a single *bolinpo ‘sh* measuring 1.5 × 1.5 meters costs approximately 20–25 US dollars. Since this price is considered expensive for many local residents, the primary buyers are foreign customers. Kubaro interprets the teapot motif in her embroidery exclusively as a symbol of hospitality. The horseshoe motif represents protection against the evil eye and misfortune. Nevertheless, unlike traditional Urgut embroidery, her works do not display the vibrant multicolored palette historically associated with the region.

Mavluda Hamdamova, a representative of the embroidery tradition of Urgut district in the Samarkand region, was born on January 13, 1959. The embroideries she creates captivate viewers and draw them in through their rich variety of patterns, fabrics, and colorful threads. Her designs include floral motifs such as flowers, leaves, and branches, as well as depictions of teapots, knives, and daggers. In addition, her works feature various birds, including doves, nightingales, peacocks, and partridges. While bird motifs in historical Samarkand embroideries traditionally appeared as decorative elements within larger *suzani* compositions, Mavluda Hamdamova now embroiders them as large, independent motifs. Her embroidery techniques include *bosma, yo ‘rma* (chain stitch), *chinni xayol*, and *duro ‘ya* (double-sided embroidery). She works on *adras*, silk, and other woven fabrics using cotton and silk threads of various colors. Occasionally, she dyes threads using natural pigments derived from pomegranate, onion skins, and walnuts.

The artisan produces miniature versions of traditional Samarkand *suzani* embroideries. The reason for creating smaller formats is their practicality: they are easier to transport while preserving the colors, fabrics, and ornamental characteristics of authentic Samarkand *suzani*, differing only in size. In addition, she receives commissions from restaurants and hotels throughout Uzbekistan for rectangular cushions embroidered in the *yo ‘rma* technique. Mavluda Hamdamova expresses great satisfaction with the recent growth of domestic tourism. Whereas previously her customers were mainly foreign visitors, today guests from various regions of Uzbekistan also visit her workshop, become acquainted with her art, and purchase her products. The embroiderer interprets the teapot motif as a symbol of hospitality. This image is closely connected with Uzbek customs, particularly the tradition of offering water to guests upon their arrival. As one of the oldest motifs in Samarkand embroidery, it reflects the hospitality and generosity of the Uzbek people. Today, the embroidery traditions of Mavluda Hamdamova are being continued by her daughters-in-law, son, and grandchild. Whenever she receives a commission, she creates an additional copy for herself, later drawing inspiration from its floral motifs or color combinations for future works. I still have many ideas for the further development of embroidery art,” says the artisan.

Among her creative works are costumes designed for folklore ensembles, decorated with embroidery on the sleeves, collars, and hems. Another remarkable example of her craftsmanship is an embroidered headscarf. This piece attracts particular attention because it is embroidered identically on both sides, making it almost impossible to distinguish the front from the reverse side. An examination of Mavluda Hamdamova’s work demonstrates the importance of careful fabric and thread selection. One of the distinctive features of her embroidery is the use of fine silk threads to create dense embroidery on thick cotton cloth. Conversely, she applies thicker threads to delicate fabrics, producing lighter and more sparsely patterned designs. This contrast is a characteristic feature of her artistic style.

One of her older works—a rectangular cushion design—is also noteworthy. The pattern was created using the patchwork (*quroq*) technique with black and white cotton

threads. The remaining colored threads are synthetic fibers, decorated with bright colors and geometric motifs.

Mavluda Hamdamova is an artist who worthily continues the traditions of Urgut embroidery while simultaneously developing her own distinctive style. In particular, she has created original interpretations of the traditional “*To‘pbarggul*” motif, demonstrating both respect for tradition and creative innovation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, contemporary Samarkand embroiderers are distinguished by their mastery of compositional design, refined aesthetic taste, and highly skilled embroidery techniques. At the same time, their creative work demonstrates a deep engagement with the heritage of previous generations of embroiderers. Their artistic practice reflects the preservation and adaptation of traditional ornamental motifs, embroidery methods, and color schemes, ensuring the continuity of Samarkand embroidery traditions while responding to contemporary artistic and cultural demands.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. M. G‘aniyeva, Personal interview, Aug. 23, 2021.
- [2] S. M. G‘aniyeva, Information recorded by the author, Nov. 25, 2021.
- [3] *Catalogue of Women Artisans of Central Asia*. United States, 2023, p. 103. [Online]. Available: https://catradeforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CA_RU-1.pdf
- [4] M. G. Abilkasimovna, “Samarkand machine embroidery and trends of it in the 20th century,” *Excellencia: International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 74–79, 2024.
- [5] M. G. Abilkasimovna, “Samarkand machine embroidery and historical trends of it,” *Excellencia: International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 69–73, 2024.
- [6] S. F. Adylova, *Traditional Embroidery of Uzbekistan*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Fan Publishing House, 2018.
- [7] N. S. Sodikova, *Applied Arts of Uzbekistan*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Sharq Publishing House, 2019.
- [8] A. A. Hakimov, *Decorative and Applied Arts of Central Asia*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: San‘at Publishing House, 2017.
- [9] M. M. Rahimov, “Development of national handicrafts in Uzbekistan,” *Culture and Arts of Central Asia*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 44–52, 2021.
- [10] B. A. Tursunov, “The role of handicrafts in preserving cultural heritage,” *Journal of Social Research*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 33–41, 2022.
- [11] UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris, France, 2003.
- [12] R. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture*. London, U.K.: Thames & Hudson, 1999.
- [13] V. M. Masson, *The Culture of Central Asia*. Moscow, Russia: Nauka Publishers, 2002.
- [14] M. M. Ismailov, “National embroidery traditions of Uzbekistan and their artistic features,” *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 58–66, 2023.
- [15] World Crafts Council, *World Crafts Council Report on Traditional Crafts and Cultural Heritage*. Brussels, Belgium, 2022.