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ARTIST PROFILE :: Nandita Mukand at One East Asia

BY YEN PHANG



Entropy Flourishes, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 47 x 67 x 12 cm, 2017.

Nandita Mukand talks with us about her second solo exhibition "Forest Weft, City Warp", which is currently showing at One East Asia as part of Singapore Art Week. Mukand discusses her meditations on nature as a city-dweller, how flora inspires her work, and how she visually expresses the continual changes that occur in life, death and decay.

Artitute: The title of your latest solo is "Forest Weft, City Warp". It sounds like for you, your experience with nature is interwoven with your time living in an urban environment. Tell us more about how the natural environment informs your life in the city, and inspires your current work.

Nandita Mukand: Observing nature has become one of my ways of trying to process my urban experience. When I walk alone in the mountains and forests I often have access to another dimension. It feels like I can step out of my everyday life and see it from the outside with a lot more perspective. There are many many themes in Nature that have found their way into my everyday life and also my art making. Here are some examples.



The Dust Holds Untold Treasures 1, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 67 x 77 x 10 cm, 2017.

The process of growth and decay in nature occurs over long periods of time and this is one of the things that fascinates me. For example when I encounter an old tree I am aware that it has been around for generations before and will be around long after I die. Our life spans seem small and insignificant in comparison and this allows for a special perspective on our day to day affairs. I am fascinated by the surfaces of the natural world specifically the barks of trees. I am fascinated by the fact that on these surfaces one can see the passing of ages-the marks of storms weathered, the wind, the rain. These surfaces have developed over decades, sometimes centuries in accordance with natural processes that can neither be hurried nor delayed.

The animals and insects that have lived and made their way on these surfaces, the moss and fungi that grew on them and then their own growth marks. Time in nature is marked by the biological process of life, of growth, decay and mortality. Back in the city these rhythms feel alien to us as we surround ourselves with gadgets, vehicles, electric lights, the internet- advances in technology that disrupt our relationship to natural rhythms.

My work finds inspiration from forests- from trees and plants and lichens and moss and fungi and mushrooms. From things that grow and decay. It is important to me to find the time to walk alone in the forests and mountains and garner my inspiration from there. I have been participating in artist residencies in wilderness areas around the world –twice in Australia, once in Spain. Last year I was in Sweden for an art installation and visited another artist residency in the Swedish Lapland. Even in Singapore, I seek out the Nature reserves and park areas and am especially attracted to the wonderful old trees here.



What the Wind Whispers 2, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 54 x 70 x 10 cm, 2017.

A: In your latest series, you've opened up the surface and have embraced sculptural elements in your painting-object. Do share with us a little more about your materials and process.

NM: When I am in nature I sit on the forest floor and I make sketches of the trees, the plants. And I let my mind quieten and take in everything around me and from this inspiration flows. I make notes in my sketchbook. Back in the studio these drawings and these thoughts that I noted down become the inputs from which the work develops. The process is very organic, responding to what I have before me at every stage.

This latest series of work developed as an extension of my painting practice. My abstract paintings on canvas are highly textured and also explore aspects of Nature and its relationship to our lives in the city. Even though the paintings are highly textured I felt the need to push the materiality of the work even further. I wanted to specially use cloth and other urban materials to further the dialogue about the relationship of cities to nature. The interwoven threads of cloth was a way to think about the interconnection between the city and nature.



Sunshine Groves, Cloth, Paper, Rope, Wool, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 96 x 77 x 20 cm, 2017.

I started with cloth, placing it on a stretcher very similar to a painting but in a way that emphasized the warp and the weft and the very materiality of cloth. From being flat surfaces on a stretcher I felt I needed to experiment with breaking away from a flat surface to a surface that had form. Finally I took the work off the stretcher altogether. Once it was off the stretcher it began to take on organic forms and I felt it was better suited to expressing ideas of organic growth.

The opened up surfaces make the artwork into a kind of "urban veil" made by breaking down materials of everyday urban use and also industrial materials and fashioning them into forms and textures inspired by growth and decay – "urban veils" that disallow the clarity that I experience in nature.



The Sky Grows out of the Mud, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 54 x 62 x 11 cm, 2017.

A: How do you choose the materials that you work with?

NM: Materials are chosen for the depth of meaning they invoke.

When I walk alone in the forests and in the mountains, often I have had a keen awareness of how my body is as organic as the trees, plants, and earth around me. It is only the story in my brain which tells me I am a separate identity – the ego which tries to assert itself. When out in Nature I am able to know myself to be a part of Nature and also of all other living beings. I use cloth in these works – its interwoven threads become an expression of this interconnectedness at the spiritual level.

Using everyday urban and industrial materials and breaking them down into forms and textures of the natural world is a way of reflecting on ideas of entropy, the cycles of our world, and connection with nature.



The Dust Holds Untold Treasures 1, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 73 x 85 x 9 cm, 2017.

Also some materials like toilet paper lend themselves to performative processes and in this way evoke meaning. For example the forms of the installation are actually formed by my own fingers. They are a trace of my body yet they appear to be like corals or flowers or fungal growth. They are a reflection on how our bodies are also a part of the natural world.

My work is often built up in layers waiting for one layer to dry before the next can be applied and in this way the work cannot be hurried and grows at a certain pace or rhythm dictated by the materials. In this series this effect has been even more pronounced as not only have I used materials like paint and paper that need to dry but also materials like plaster and epoxy resin that have a curing time.

In other installations (not in this exhibition) I have employed natural materials like dead plants and seeds for the depth of meaning that they invoke. E.g. seeds for the idea of potentiality and dead plants to symbolise ephemerality of life and cycles of Nature.



Entropy Blossoms, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 70 x 80 x 20 cm, 2017.

A: Just from the visual experience itself, your work evokes the tactile. Has your mark making process evolved over time as well, along with your relationship to support and colour?

NM: Yes definitely. I have been interested in tactility as I believe it evokes bodily responses and pulls the viewer from the realm of thought to the realm of feeling. Mark making is something that is very important to me as it is a kind of direct expression that the artist leaves on the work, a true impression of the artist's psyche. While mark making in drawing and painting captures these aspects more easily, I am interested to create marks with materials in three dimensional space that have the same kind of intimacy that marks on paper and canvas have. I am always looking for ways to create a kind of tactility that can evoke a sensuous response in the viewer. In a way this too is something I bring from my painting practice into my sculptural works.

A: What have been the highlights for you in your practice and career so far?

NM: My two solo exhibitions have been very critical in my artistic journey as each has been a kind of milestone to take stock of my practice up until that moment. It is a time to look back and see how the practice is evolving and to think about what to take forward.

My installation artworks at the Orebro Biennale in Sweden last year and also at 8Q, at the Singapore Art Museum have been amazing opportunities to stretch the limits of my work and to learn from the possibilities and resources such experiences can afford.



Each Little Flower that Opens, Cloth, Paper, Plaster, Wool, Epoxy Resin, Paint and Wire, 98 x 108 x 11 cm, 2017.

A: What's next for you in your thematic explorations? How do you see your practice evolving?

NM: I would continue to explore the current themes of spirituality and materiality in my work. Nature will still be one of the influences. My practice evolves organically through the processes of the work and of living life rather than some preconceived plans and ideas and I expect it to be so in the future as well.

"Forest Weft, City Warp" will be on show until 28 January 2018 as part of the Singapore Art Week at One East Asia Gallery, located at 15 Scotts Road, #09-03 Thong Teck Building, Singapore 228218. The gallery is open from Mondays to Fridays from 12 to 7pm, and on Saturdays from 12pm to 4pm. For more information on the exhibition, visit their website at www.oneeastasia.org/art-projects-current-events. There will be a meet-the-artist session on 24 January 2018, from 7 to 9pm.

For more information about Nandita Mukand, visit her website at www.nanditamukand.com, or check out her facebook page and instagram account.

#NATURE NANDITA MUKAND ONE EAST ASIA SINGAPORE ART WEEK



Yen Phang

Despite his legal training, Yen has chosen to pursue a career in the visual arts. Apart from being a closet-painter, Yen Phang is largely still an unknown quantity. Forever random, but always polite.

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