

Drawing From Nature:

Three Perspectives

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Millo Ankha



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What does contemporary Indian art that engages with nature and environment look like? Emerging artists Meghna Singh Patpatia, Millo Ankha and Abdulla PA explore this through their works.

In their paintings, photographs and installations, these artists suggest that it is still possible to find beauty in a contaminated, climate crisis-stricken planet, that all is not lost.

Fantasy and documentary, ritual and science, collective memory and personal preferences coalesce in their works to highlight the theme of interconnectedness and co-existence.

The three artists speak to Benita Fernando about their artmaking practices that honour the natural world.

MEGHNA SINGH PATPATIA

*Visual artist
Mumbai, Maharashtra*



Portrait credit:
Praseed M Varma

Meghna Singh Patpatia has been making her “painted drawings” since 2016, presenting a surreal world where co-existence is key. Beasts—real and fantastical, terrestrial and aquatic—thrive alongside each other. Humans occupy this space, too, but Singh Patpatia conveys their presence in unique ways.

With two solo shows and several group shows to her credit, Singh Patpatia has been using her ink drawings to both observe and celebrate natural forms. Her most recent solo show, *The Garden of Icarus*, was at gallery Art and Charlie in Mumbai in 2022, in which the Icarus myth is used to draw parallels to the delicate balance of ecosystems and how nature must adapt to human progress.

Since 2021, after the pandemic’s lockdowns, Singh Patpatia delved into sculptural assemblages, which extend and translate her landscapes into three-dimensional forms.

From her studio in Mumbai, the artist speaks about her dreamlike worlds, their building materials, and art in a time of climate crisis.

edited excerpts:

*Let's start with one of your more recent larger works, **Realms of Convergence**, which was shown as part of a group exhibition called **Rhizome—Tracing Eco-cultural Identities in 2023** and displayed in the Natural History section of the **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS)** in Mumbai.*

It was hung like a tapestry and appeared seemingly edenic, featuring different creatures, including the mythological simurgh.

What was the story behind it?

In Persian mythology, the simurgh comes to Earth and shakes a branch of a tree, which spreads these seeds across the world. From them, trees and islands come up, marking the beginning of time. That story resonated with me and I wanted to illustrate that.

The simurgh is like a phoenix but there are many interpretations, given how it's been illustrated in books, sometimes as a griffin. It also has elements of these other birds. There is a story of how 30 birds of Paradise live in the simurgh and he flies away with them. The stories are fecund and symbolise a lot of growth through the simurgh.

In all my works, if you notice, everything moves towards a light source. It's a phenomenon called transverse orientation, where a moth is drawn to a flame. That, for me, is a parallel to our own destruction. We are going towards the light and in the name of progress, we are also burning a lot on the way. So all my compositions have these elements pulled towards the light. In this one, there's that convergence but the simurgh is also coming down, symbolising the union of the earth and the sky.

The simurgh is coming towards the home tree and there is a convergence of the natural world with man-made structures, such as the hot air balloon shaped like a cabbage. It is the exit of foliage, with our natural resources drying up. This is the perfect symbol for me to show the joining of two worlds.

The cabbage-hot air balloon features prominently across many of your works. The same goes for the cabbage itself.

Why are you drawn to this form?



*Detail from Analog Terrarium (Polyptych), Ink
gold leaf on paper and textile, 2022 /
Meghna Singh Patpatia*

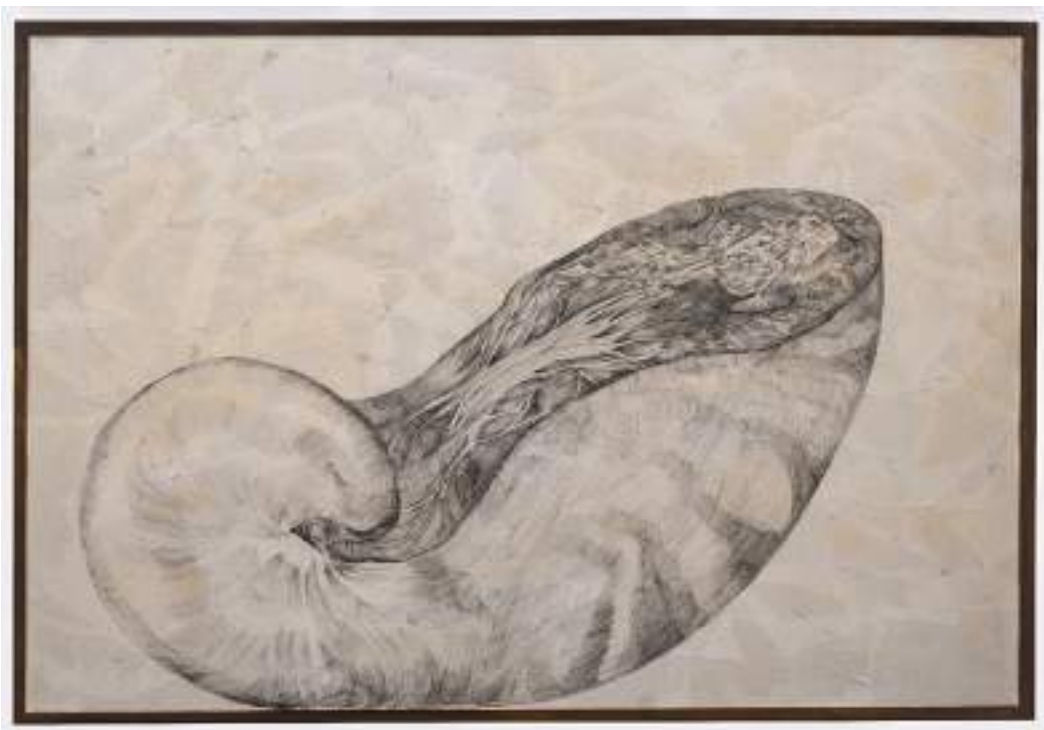
The cabbage-hot air balloon is drifting off from our planet, through a drying up of what our natural world has to offer.

In old French and English illustrated books, you see these cabbage patches. Parents would tell their children that they were found in a cabbage patch. So that's why you'd see these patches and a little baby.

The cabbage symbolises birth and growth. It's obviously leafy and luscious in that way. Besides, it is also beautiful to draw, to explore visually for an artist. There are so many discoveries to be made in it and it's a mysterious vegetable to me.

Just like the cabbage, you have other tropes—the observatory, the moth, the nautilus, and the underwater helmet among them. They seem to tie your works into a continuous narrative.

Why do they feature so often?



Faraway Wonder, Ink on paper and textile, 2020 / Meghna Singh Patpatia

My work is like a storybook that goes from one chapter to the next. These are elements that I've become comfortable with visually and I feel connected to them because they are personal. I want to pay homage to these creatures, and my works are a tribute to their existence, giving them that honour in this world that may not be about them anymore. Mixing them with the future, with man-made elements and the coexistence is what makes it meaningful to draw them.

The observatory and the submarine helmet are our human presence in this world. I don't like to show human beings directly, at least not at this stage. It's like we are everywhere, right?

Instead there are symbols of our presence and how we manipulate resources to suit us. And it's always like a navigation tool. The helmet, for example, is how we submerge ourselves in water to observe marine life. The hot air balloon, too, is surveillance happening from a height.

Your landscapes seem ahistorical, almost timeless, interspersed with mythological and fantastical elements.

How did you arrive at this kind of world?

It's like a search for that world. I've been living in the city for many years, so when I do get a chance, I love being in a more natural setting.

This world is based on my memories, the many different visuals that you experience. I grew up in a fecund environment, in Salalah, Oman. It was a beautiful landscape and was untouched back then. I remember going through mountains and seeing water bodies and foliage that was magical. That stayed with me.

I was always drawn to works that had surrealistic elements, such as those by Hieronymus Bosch and Salvador Dali. Later I was drawn to Dutch still life and Pieter Bruegel. Also stories, not just art. I am a fan of The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter and Grimm's Fairy Tales. So for me, those factors play a much larger role than trying to make a statement. I'm a bit of an escapist. I'm not a reality-based person.

1.4 *What does the hermit crab represent in your work?*

I was obsessed with shells and molluscs through school and college. At the Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai, where I majored in Painting, we were given an assignment to imagine what we would be if we were to choose a creature or a non-living thing. I chose the hermit crab because as they grow they keep changing their shells. I felt like I am closest to a hermit crab. I have changed so many homes and cities that I had to adapt a fair bit.

There was also the nautilus, which I had seen in many Dutch still life paintings. We don't get those locally, right? I was intrigued by that shape and why they were used so ornately. Again, it was visually exciting. It adapts to different temperatures and, when it senses danger, it shrinks. When it's comfortable, it opens up. As it has these anthropomorphic characteristics, the shell symbolises us.

1.5

After graduating from the Sir JJ School of Art, you studied art conservation and worked as an art conservator before taking up painting again.

In what ways has your role as conservator influenced your artistic life?



Realms of Convergence, Ink gold leaf on paper, textile, velvet border, wooden discs with magnifying glasses, 2023 / Meghna Singh Patpatia

I've always had an inclination for older paintings as you can see from all the art in this studio. I wanted to be able to restore them and honour them. It's the same kind of sentiment of taking care of something.

In the process of conserving, I discovered this way of making my works. I was working on a Ganesh Pyne from a private collection and it's then that I realised that paper layering with archival adhesive was required to create a strong support that surrounds the actual artwork. That's how I began creating my own surface to draw on. I did little experiments and it was like discovering a new language and a new visual journey for these creatures.

Could you tell me more about this process of layering?



I use linen cloth which allows for translucence in my works. I paste handmade Daphne paper made from shrubs from high altitude Himachal Pradesh on it. The paper is grainy and organic in texture. It has veins and is very cabbage-leafy. I tear it and paste it using adhesive and water to create a sort of terrain. It becomes my base to draw on. It's not a flat surface at all.

Details from Realms of Convergence, Ink gold leaf on paper, textile, velvet border, wooden discs with magnifying glasses, 2023 / Meghna Singh Patpatia

My last full-time job was at the [then-GVK's] Terminal 2 of the Mumbai airport, where they needed a person to head a large-scale art management role. I developed some health issues during the project, from which I had to recuperate for six months, during which period I came around to painting. It was a big wake-up call but I realised that I had to find my language and paint again.

I still restore art alongside my own art practice. I love restoring and repairing. I actually want to open a repair shop. Restore and repair.

Let's talk about your found object assemblages and terrariums
These also merge the natural world with the manmade, mechanical one.

In what ways do the assemblages connect to the paintings?



Analog Terrarium, a painting from 2022, is a set of separate works that are framed together but are isolated, and each terrarium is a kind of landscape.

The sculptural assemblages have a similar kind of narrative—these are isolated bubbles that we lived in during the pandemic and it was also like being submerged in water. The handblown glass cases were made by [American glassblower] Brent Sheehan at Rural Modern Glass Studio in Chembur. It has these magnifying glass-like parts to create a distorted, uneven view that is like looking through water. Again, it's like a submarine helmet. Each of these terrariums have found objects and creatures in them thriving as an ecosystem.

There is a Shell Asylum series in the assemblages. These are about the diaspora of the Sikh community who migrated outside the country. I am part Sardar, part Bengali myself, and both sides have a large diaspora outside the country. The turban keeps a Sardar grounded to his home. Wherever he goes, he retains his identity through his turban. The shell is the turban.

Analog Terrarium - Here I was, Found object assemblage with wooden base and spherical glass, 2022 / Meghna Singh Patpatia

Do you think practices such as yours, which use nature themes and natural forms, need to directly address the climate crisis and the rampant environmental degradation that we see today?

I have friends whose works are about mining and they have grown up in families which have been doing that. I am a citybred person and I haven't been exposed to these situations. For me, my own story and the stories surrounding these creatures are part of a magical journey, an alternate universe.

So, while I am aware of the issues and I do my part to help with these situations, like going on a protest, it's not something I do with my painting, at least not right now.

I am asserting the presence of the natural world visually. I don't want to manipulate that into any kind of conversation that creates a hype. If I wanted to do that, then maybe it would be as a graphic novel. Here, it's nicer to keep the visual poetry open, to allow interpretation.

People do have strong opinions about some of these works. They think these are dystopias. In one of my works, there is an oyster that has a nail inside it instead of a pearl. That's how deep we've gone into the seabed. Stories like these do come up in my works but, for me, it's just speculation and observation.

MILLO ANKHA

Storyteller
Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh



Portrait credit:
Prakash Bhuyan

It was in 2016 that the shift happened from dentistry to storytelling for Millo Ankha. Based out of Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, Millo uses photography, text and drawing to explore environment, gender, her community of Apatani people, and their indigenous worldview, among other themes.

In 2021, Millo was awarded the Iyarkai Grant by Chennai Photo Biennale for her project *Kormo Bekoduku (Seed is Sprouting)*, which documents local flora and their significance in the cultural, spiritual and medicinal practices of the Apatanis. Her current project is *Braiding Roots* supported by the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art and Royal Enfield, under the aegis of The Himalayan Fellowship for Creative Practitioners 2023, in which she explores her community's practice of braiding and weaving totems as an active native language.

The artist speaks about both projects, their connections to community and environment, and unlearning the outsiders' gaze.

edited excerpts:

Braiding Roots involves the Myoko festival of Ziro Valley. This year, Myoko took you to your mother's village.

What was the experience like?

There is an intersection between both projects. In Kormo Bekoduku, I was focusing more on traditional ethnobotanical knowledge. This time, with Braiding Roots, I am exploring the traditional knowledge of agyangs (totems). I am going into the nuances and details and using a white screen as an intervention. I take it to people's homes and set it up while people are making agyangs. It becomes a kind of walking studio, whether it's by their fireplace, outside their homes, in their courtyards or their gardens.

I never got to see my mother's village so closely earlier. Even for Kormo Bekoduku, what I did was mostly from my father's village, the Millo side. This time, I got to enter sacred groves and the homes of my maternal side. And I started to imagine my mother growing up in this village and the small lanes and nooks and corners of this village. It was healing for me. One lady from mother's village said, "You may be a Millo but your real seed has come from this village." That really shook me.



Millo Anka's mother Millo Aepa with an egg in the palm of her hand. In the indigenous worldview of the Apatani, egg yolks are omens to decide which rituals have to be performed (2020) / Millo Anka

Totems are ritual-based and they could be an embodiment of an uui (malevolent or benevolent spirits). Most agyangs are placed outside the house, in the farms, sacred groves and clan forests. They degenerate on their own time, going back to the earth, though one is advised not to manhandle it.

There is the lyayu likhang agyang, which is placed inside the house, and made specifically for clarity of speech and mind, articulation, wellbeing, and for miji migung, which is our oral literature. You can take it down only when the house is torn down. Even when your house is being repaired, you have to take it outside. Very few people can make these totems now. One of the people who made this totem said, "Imagine if we forget to make these. Then what do we do?" This project gave me enough time to go back to my elders and just sit and listen and talk. I don't even want to take photos.

There are days when I just go and record the conversation. I feel the knowledge is very much alive. It's breathing. It is still being passed. It's not something of the past.

When I go to Shillong or Nagaland, people there ask me, "You guys are still animistic?" And I have to tell them, "Yes I am. I'm not a convert." Maybe they feel nostalgia for a world they don't know anymore. They're fascinated because maybe they feel I am coming from a living thing.

You once spoke to me about the Donyi Polo, about belonging to this kind of spiritual idea.

How has it influenced or shaped your work?

I must first clarify between Donyi Polo and Danyii Pwlo. The former is an organised faith. It copes with the loss of the nyibu (shaman) and the priests. It was a response to the rapid conversions to other organised religions in the state. Donyi Polo movement archives and records all the chants mostly in a book. There are no sacrificial rituals, which means after a few years, some rituals would be lost.

It differs from the original philosophy of Danyii Pwlo because we don't have a concept of temples or churches. It is more about embodying. The world is free-flowing and we pass through it as if it's a very continuous thing rather than confining it in a building. Fields, farms, forest, mountains, beyond the seen—it's a continuous flow.

2.3 *And how has this belief permeated into your practice?*

For a long time, even as a child, even in college, and when I was initially interested in photography, I saw photo essays of tea estates and tribes from the North East. I used to wonder how I could ever express my lived reality. I wasn't finding references about my lived realities, at least from the country, from Indian photography circles.

One of the first things that I took photos of was my mother's hand with the egg yolk. It wasn't the best photo but I realised that for others, it may be just holding an egg yolk, but if you show one of my elders, they will read the yolk in the photo. You want to know the indigenous worldview? I'll show you the indigenous worldview. Can you read the egg or not?

I have a video of people trying to tell the outcome of the elections using an egg yolk. It's funny to witness that. We are part of the modern nation state and some have used it.

How do we write about our world? How can I show it through photographs? It's something I'm trying to understand.

2.4

You are interested in the idea of the domestic space and the importance of the hearth.

Do you think these are gendered, feminine spaces? How does it play a part in your work?

If you think about it, you will say that the domestic space is in the house alone. I cannot agree with that. We do not come from concrete jungles where we call the domestic space as within four walls and outside it is someone else's property. For generations, even as our ancestors migrated to the present epoch, we have been blessed with farms and fields and vegetable patches and bamboo groves. All of that is part of our domestic space, right? These are spaces that women work in. Men also go and do their gathering work here.

For us, home and village are domestic spaces and different from the clan forest. We respect the clan forest's boundaries.

Could you tell me more about the photograph of the man with the leaves on his back?



Millo Anka's uncle Millo Habung with the sacred niiji yanii plant (2021-22) / Millo Anka

It's my favourite. I remember my uncle and I kept trying to go to the forest and we couldn't because it was raining. One day, it was just so bright and he knocked and said, "Come, come, we are going." And then he actually went to find this leaf for me.

And why is it important? This leaf is very sacred. Any offering of meat or eggs, and everything that we do, any ritual—we use this. I wanted to see this plant niiji yanii (*Kavalama urens*) in the forest because I was curious. I can see the leaves coming into the village, but we don't have these trees in the village. It's only in the clan forest.

To be seen and heard is a privilege. More often than not, I am comforted by people who trust me with their time and stories, which connect us. It was not right for me to assume everything I understood about “environment and conservation” aligned with the traditional ethnobotanical knowledge. I felt there was a void that modern science couldn't fill.

When I facilitated a workshop, women who were part of it—mostly gaon buris (female village elders)—took up space and shared their knowledge about their relationship with the land. This activated my renewed perspective.

In a key conversation I had with my father around the same time, he shared his wisdom: “It is not we who conserve the forests, it is the forests who conserve us.” This really guided and helped me navigate the process.

With Kormo Bekoduku, initially I was conscious because of the politics of it all. I was afraid to misrepresent, just because I had access to the community. We are so informed about the visual representation made by outsiders, it takes a while to revert the gaze. That changed after the Angkor Photo Workshops [in Cambodia] in 2023, which broke down the entire structure for me.

Photography was beginning to feel like a burden. I had to prove myself to be a photographer because I didn't come from a background of institutions, I understood this from a lateral perspective.

You can't be living inside your head when you are on the field. That was taking away from the interactions I was having. And you can see that, that bit of distance in Kormo Bekoduku. There were few images where I was comfortable getting closer but overall, the playful element wasn't coming. Now I am playful, more comfortable. With Kormo Bekoduku, I was struggling to understand the gaze, the curiosity because the people do get intimidated and then I also have to take the burden of their intimidation.

It's why Kormo Bekoduku became a foraging project, like I am archiving plants. You'll see the typography of the leaves that I collected.

But with the ongoing totems project, that process isn't there—that broke down for me with Angkor Photo Workshops. For me, it's not about the camera. Even if I didn't have the camera, would I make something? Would I go and learn? The camera is a tool for archiving, something that I use like a pen.

This is also partly because of the realisation that my elders can be nyibus (shamans), and they can also be fathers or daughters. They are not just in a box.

You founded the Aama Collective in 2021, bringing together women photographers from the North Eastern region.

Do you see variations in these themes of nature, conservation and environment come up within the Aama Collective?

I think these themes come up naturally. I don't have to even bring them up because they are a part of our stories. And just to be able to share stories from every region, the mythologies in these places. These are things we exchange in Aama through just storytelling.

Once, Junisha Khongwir, one of the members, was saying how before she left home, her mother gave her a grain of rice so that she could remember to come back and eat. It's simple anecdotes and stories like these that activate our mind and bring the rootedness into our own region in our own way. Maybe my story from Arunachal Pradesh should be very different from the stories from Meghalaya or Manipur, but we can all see that little thing that flows and how connected we are, our communities are to the landscape, and how it is entangled with our identity and culture.

When we have our meetings, the ones where we share stories or dreams, we talk about these micro-stories. We don't have to over-explain these to each other. We naturally understand each other, in a way that is not the case with those who are unfamiliar with these regions and traditions.

ABDULLA PA

*Multidisciplinary artist
Thrissur, Kerala*



A shell, a seed, a bone, a pebble—these are the building blocks of Abdulla PA's installations. What falls from the trees and what gets washed on the shore are welcomed into his works, which draw attention to the design of the natural world, signalling both its strength and fragility.

Abdulla studied painting at the Government College of Fine Arts in Thrissur but has since then expanded the media he works with. He was awarded an honourable mention in the State Award category by the Kerala Lalitha Kala Akademi in 2020-21. This year, he was part of the Stiftung Kunstdepot Residency Programme in Switzerland.

There is a sparseness to Abdulla's installations that allows the richness of the natural world to shine through. The artist speaks about his interest in biomorphism and biomimicry, and how natural debris can be a repository of memories.

edited excerpts:

A recent project took you to Switzerland and had you using UV paint.

Can you take us through Luminous Voids?



Luminous Voids, Biomorphic objects made from mount board, UV colours and UV light, 2024 / Abdulla PA

This is a collaborative project with [Swiss] artist Katja Loher in a private museum in Switzerland. We worked in a grain silo that was converted into a private art museum. The silo is about 25 metres deep and the collectors [Christoph Hürliemann and Elisabeth Weber] asked us to do an installation within this space.

Katja and I put three types of elements—earth, air and water. Air has yellow winged and floating seeds, and feathers. Blue is water, with shells and bones. Red is earth with seeds, leaves, and mushrooms. I took the designs from nature and transferred them into objects and painted them with UV colours. I used mount paper that I cut by hand or by laser.

The silo is about eight storeys high and you have to look down into it to see the installation. It was hectic working on this but it has come out really well.

Prior to this, you were collecting scrap materials and metal objects and you used them as themes and materials in your early works.

Was the shift to collecting natural objects also linked to the pandemic?

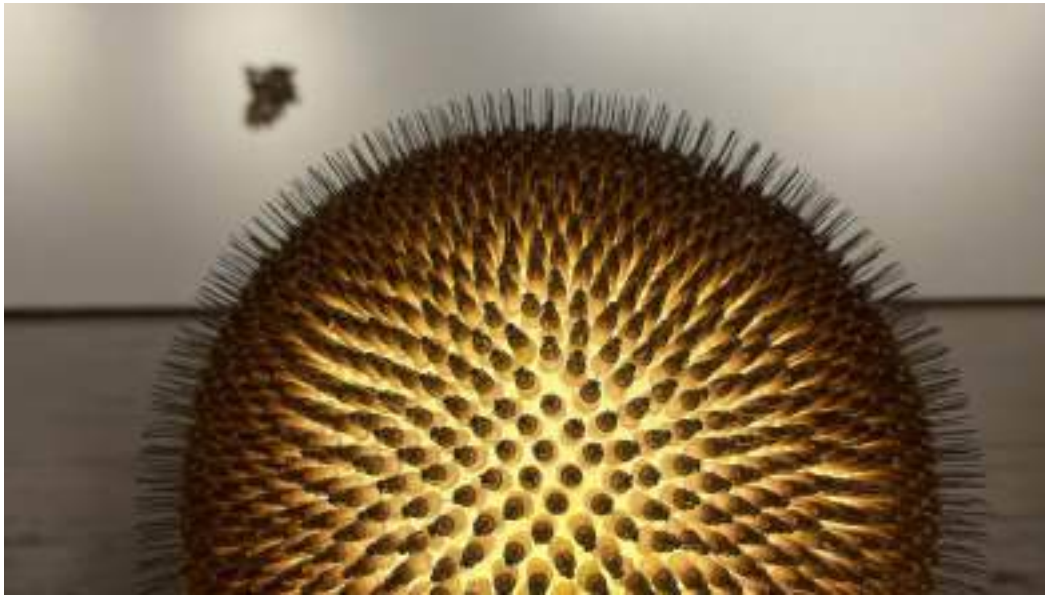
Yes. I used to have a strategy. I had six or seven paths I could take to college. I would never reach on time because I knew all the scrapyards on each path and I would visit them before classes started. I was visiting them for six years or so. The scrapyards were interesting. When we visit a scrapyard, we know what is happening in our surroundings. Every waste goes to the scrapyard. That way we get to know what is happening in a factory, why particular scrap is there, or that an old house got demolished and so on.

I would collect so much scrap because there is another reason for it. I love to experiment and, as an artist, if you are buying material, then the cost is too high and beyond your budget. Taking from the scrapyard means material is cheap and you don't have to fear experimenting. That's the basic thing. When the lockdowns happened, we got frightened and we were afraid of touching anything in a scrapyard. That's when I shifted to nature. We weren't afraid of that.

My house is between the scrapyards and the coast and that's how I turned to the other side during the pandemic. In a scrapyard, you can predict what's happening. When I shifted focus, I had a sense of wonder.

In your solo show, *Nomadic Archive*, which ran from December 2023 to January 2024 in Durbar Hall Art Gallery in Ernakulam, you showed a work that appeared to bring together both these worlds. It was an orb made of syringe needles but looked very much like a natural form.

What was the idea behind it?



Untitled, Syringe needles and light, 2023 / Abdulla PA

This work had about 3,000 needles. Before Covid, as you know, we had the Nipah outbreak in Kerala. I had started this work before I shifted to the found objects from nature. It was the kind of work that had to grow. I couldn't get 3,000 needles from one store. I had to collect it over days and get the help of a doctor.

These needles have a light in them that comes and goes. It looks beautiful from far but if you wish to touch it, your hand will bleed. Making this work was difficult, too. I believe nature is playing the same role. In a forest, you may see a beautiful red fruit. But that fruit is also dangerous.

Kerala has a layered history of trade and colonisation, much of it connected to natural resources.

Are you drawn to the political and historical significance of the objects you use?

I wonder about some seeds, particularly that of the rubber tree. I used it in an installation that was part of Idam [a collateral group show of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2022]. The rubber tree has a deep history. It comes to the coast from the mountains, through the river, and then the sea. I studied the history of rubber, how it's found in the Amazon and how people collect it from there.

I learn more about the objects I find through personal memories, however. With the installation in Idam, visitors told me more about the objects I had used. In another group show that happened in Thrissur, one of my friends who visited it—a fisherman—saw an object I had used and identified it as the bone of a fish. It doesn't look or feel like a bone but it is from a koondhal [squid]. He said they use it to polish cycle wheels. Like this, every object has a lot of memories.

I am primarily interested in the objects, their form, their construction. I once saw a fruit that in Malayalam we call odhalanga [Cerbera odollam]. It looks like a mango. It's found in the riverside and probably drifts and travels to the sea. It will travel a lot. After that, it takes a different shape and its structure looks amazing. I collected many of these and I met an old man on the beach, who called to me and asked why I was collecting this fruit. He told me that the fruit is known as the suicide fruit.

Your most popular work till date is the one you showed in Idam at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2022. It was simply an arrangement of natural objects that were combed from your neighbourhood.

How did you arrive at its final form?



Most people draw when they wish to mimic nature. I tried that, too, but finally realised that I cannot replicate it. I felt that by doing so, the authenticity was lost. So I realised that I have to put it exactly the way it looked.

There were 300 objects in the installation in Idam and an even larger version, 12 metres across, in Nomadic Archive.

Shadows played a vital role in that work.

Do you consider lighting and shadows in a deliberate fashion?



The shadows interconnect in that work. The shadows are like the soul of the object. I first thought of the shape of the objects and then the shadows brought another layer. Another perspective comes in.

Sometimes you don't know why you do some things but you do them. It's only after many years do you understand why. That's how this is for me. I just follow my intuition.

With works like these, where you highlight the form and construction of natural seeds and debris, you are questioning the idea of the artist.

If you are presenting natural objects as they are, then what is the role of the artist?

It's a kind of break. Some people may say that only a skilled person is an artist. This is a challenge to them. This is also art. This is also connecting people. Only canvas and oil need not be art. Art is for people. If they can connect, if they get a kind of emotion, then the art will work. I don't want to divide painting, sculpture and applied art into separate categories. I want to bring them all together.

3.7 Your paintings are starkly different in theme from your installations. They have a lot of imagery derived from your family, your identity and your community.

Do you think your nature-based installations can also present these themes?

I ask myself the same questions. The paintings are personal and autobiographical. All my works are interconnected but we have to also think of a broader perspective. With nature, we can't mark a religion. Nature is for everybody. We can't put it in a particular box. In painting, we can do that.

However, these themes sometimes enter my installations. In Seeds, I connected the nature themes to the ones in my paintings. The seeds have nails in them. While growing up, during the "seed time" or childhood, we put an injection into people. When they grow up, they still have the injection.

That never goes away. The injection is all that we teach children about religion and how it stays with us even when we grow up. I arranged them in a semi-circle, like a sunrise or a sunset. We can interpret it either way.

3.8

Some might say that a seed belongs to the earth and not in an artwork.

What do you think?



The purpose matters. If we want to learn about our body, we have to cut into it. That's what is happening here. I am not grabbing everything. If we get one diamond, and we go looking for every diamond that is out there and destroying everything in the process, then that's a problem.

Seeds (detail)
Natural found objects, 2023 / Abdulla PA

You are based out of an area that has a lot of biodiversity. Yet, not every beach in India has that kind of diversity or even access. Take Mumbai's coastline, for instance, which is continuously developed for infrastructure.

Does location play an important role in your practice?

Location matters. For the installation in Idam, everything I showed in it was collected from only a five kilometre radius of the beach. Nothing was from outside it. That's why most people who saw that installation connect to it. It's because of their childhood memories. The base has to be like that. So I can't leave Thrissur.