



Rina Banerjee

Make Me a Summary of the World

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Edited by

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With contributions by

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Lauren Schell Dickens

Rachel Kent

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Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
San José Museum of Art



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Foreword

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) and the San José Museum of Art (SJMA) are honored to co-organize the first American retrospective of the work of Rina Banerjee, an artist whose astounding sculptures and fantastical works on paper challenge and redefine conceptions of art making, identity, and citizenship.

The multidimensionality of Banerjee's aesthetic is traced by the exhibition *Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World* and this companion publication. Born in India, the artist emigrated at a young age to the United Kingdom and then to the United States. Exposure to a myriad of cultures and identities, both new and as seen through the lens of her country of origin, has allowed Banerjee to singularly position herself as she partakes in the global dialogue of exchange through materials. Her work exposes the apparatuses that compose the fabric of heterogeneous and contemporary American life and provides a meaningful intervention within the history of American art.

We are thrilled to have been able to work closely with Banerjee on this retrospective. To us, she is now Rina, and we are sincerely grateful to her for her artistic vision, and for trusting us to shepherd and realize this important project.

Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World was conceived by Jodi Throckmorton, PAFA's curator of contemporary art, who has led the project with grace

and informed it with passion and keen intelligence. It has been a true pleasure to work with and learn from Jodi and co-curator Lauren Schell Dickens, curator at SJMA. We are deeply grateful to them for their scholarship and dedication to this immense and beautiful project.

This publication includes insightful essays, an incisive interview, and a thorough chronology. We are thankful to the scholars who made such valuable contributions: Rachel Kent, who explores Banerjee's identity and work through the lens of traveling; Allie Biswas, whose interview examines Banerjee's perspective in the 1980s and 1990s during the advent of multiculturalism; Laurel V. McLaughlin, who showed incredible patience in researching and compiling perhaps the only comprehensive chronology of Banerjee's practice to date; Lauren Schell Dickens, whose expertise and focus on Banerjee's works on paper provide an insight into another important aspect of the artist's work; and Jodi Throckmorton, whose essay traces the trajectory of Banerjee's career in sculpture and installation. This publication would never have taken flight without the masterminding of Judith Thomas, PAFA's director of exhibitions, whose tireless efforts, insight, and good humor kept the project on point.

The exhibition has been made possible by the support of Banerjee's generous gallery partners, including Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco; Galerie Nathalia Obadia, Paris/

Brussels; Ota Fine Arts, Singapore/Shanghai/Tokyo; and L.A. Louver, Venice, California, all of whom have championed her practice around the world. Additionally, the exhibition was brought to fruition by loans from the enthusiastic collectors and institutions listed on page 13. We are thrilled that they joined us on this momentous occasion as we showcase Banerjee's extensive oeuvre and share it with audiences across the United States, and extend to them our sincerest gratitude as we add to the scholarship of those in the contemporary field who seek to tell an inclusive history of American art.

We are extremely thankful to the patrons who enabled us to bring this exhibition to the Philadelphia and San José communities and to tour venues throughout the United States. We are proud to have received generous grants from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Coby Foundation, the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the William Penn Foundation, the Richard A. Karp Charitable Foundation, as well as support from Emily and Mike Cavanagh, Jonathan L. Cohen, Charles and Kathy Harper, Connie and Jules Kay, Laura and Richard Vague, Isabel Stainow Wilcox, Tad Freese and Brook Hartzell, Marsha and Jon Witkin, Wanda Kownacki, and a Cultural Affairs grant from the City of San José.

At PAFA, our deepest thanks go to the chairs of the museum committees, James C. Biddle, J. Brien Murphy,

and Winston I. Lowe, for their commitment to and support of the project. We are immeasurably grateful to Jay H. and Susie Shah for graciously hosting a beautiful evening last spring to introduce the project to the wider Philadelphia community, and thank Tad Freese for hosting a similar gathering in the California Bay Area, at which he shared his enthusiasm and support for Rina's work.

We are delighted that this exhibition will travel to the Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, California, the Frist Art Museum, Nashville, Tennessee, and the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Our heartfelt thanks to our colleagues at the Fowler, director Marla C. Burns, Bridget Dulong, and Rachel L. J. Raynor; at the Frist, executive director and CEO Susan H. Edwards, Mark Scala, and Trinita Kennedy; and at the Nasher, director Sarah Schroth, Trevor Schoonmaker, and Reneé M. Cagnina Haynes.

Brooke Davis Anderson

Edna S. Tuttleman Director of the Museum
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Susan Sayre Batton

Oshman Executive Director
San José Museum of Art



Acknowledgments

Even after we have been immersed for years in this project, Rina Banerjee's art continues to reveal itself to us in new ways. Our partnership with the artist has similarly unfolded, as she quickly became part of our institutional families. It has been a great pleasure to work so closely with Rina—reveling in the lush worlds that she creates, wandering through her abundant titles, learning where to source the freshest ingredients for her creative recipes (unsurprisingly, akin to the way she sources materials for her work), and celebrating her recent successes, such as the 2017 Venice Biennale. We are deeply grateful to Rina for so generously giving her time to this project and for exploring her past work with us—even, in some cases, taking on the task of re-creating sculptures that no longer exist.

This project began at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) during Jodi's job interview, when she named Rina as an artist with whom she aspired to work. Thanks to early encouragement from PAFA's former museum director, Harry Philbrick, and sustained support and confidence from president and CEO David Brigham, *Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World* was given the institutional framework within which to thrive. We sincerely thank PAFA's Edna S. Tuttleman Museum Director, Brooke Davis Anderson, and San José Museum of Art (SJMA) Oshman Executive Director Susan Sayre Batton for their incredible enthusiasm, dedication, and persistence in making this project happen.

We owe many thanks to PAFA's director of exhibitions Judith Thomas and curatorial assistant Laurel V. McLaughlin. This project would not have been possible without their hard work. Judith adeptly led work on the publication and managed the installation—as always, going above and beyond with careful editing and thoughtful problem solving. Her determination and good humor saw us through all the challenges. Laurel's extensive

research on the chronology, including the precise wording, spelling, and capitalization of Rina's titles and the location of the works, has been exceptional. She also created a significant manual for the exhibition, which gives detailed instructions on installing each sculpture. Her scholarship is foundational to the legacy of Rina's work.

This publication is the result of many long hours of hard work by numerous talented individuals. We very much appreciate the contributions of Rachel Kent and Allie Biswas, who worked closely with Rina on an essay and an interview, respectively, enriching the volume with both Rina's voice and their vital thinking on her work. PAFA's manager of imaging services, Barbara Katus, provided her extensive expertise in digital image files and color correction, often dealing with challenging installation images. Our team is ever grateful to L. Jane Calverley for her careful editing; Anjali Pala and Miko McGinty for their beautiful work on designing this publication; Adrian Lucia, Ed Marquand, Melissa Duffes, Meghann Ney, Kestrel Rundle, and all the staff at Lucia | Marquand; and Tausif Noor, who provided helpful comments on the manuscript.

We are immensely thankful to the team of skilled and indefatigable people who worked on the planning and implementation of this massively complicated installation. At PAFA, senior registrar Jennifer Johns ably negotiated complicated loans from around the world. Chief preparator Mark Knobelsdorf capably led the installation crew, with critical support from assistant preparator Michael Gibbons. Paintings conservator Mary McGinn advised on the preservation of Rina's work. Conservation technician Elizabeth McDermott helped with framing and labels. Director of facilities management Ed Poletti and sculpture shop manager John Greig helped us think through Rina's complicated installations, including hanging her beautiful work in PAFA's Historic Landmark Building. John Umphlett, who has long worked with Rina, shared

his considerable experience and helped to install many of the large-scale works in the exhibition.

Special thanks to SJMA's director of design and operations, Rich Karson, who designed the exhibitions in both Philadelphia and San José. We feel lucky that this project was informed by Rich's vision, ingenuity, and unflappable attention to detail. In San José he was enthusiastically supported by associate exhibition designer Daniel Becker and preparator Aaron Jackson Lee. Registrar Anamarie Alongi handled the magnitude of the project with aplomb, and Randy Bricco, facilities manager extraordinaire, kept the building shining. Thanks to Jeff Bordona, director of education, and Paulina Vu, manager of museum experience, for wading into the complexities of Rina's vision in order to illuminate it for diverse audiences. This exhibition could not have been realized at SJMA without the efforts of the development department, tirelessly led by Kristin Bertrand.

PAFA's education department, led by director of museum education Monica Zimmerman, created an exciting roster of programs and activities that will help share Rina's work with a wide audience. This exhibition was also shaped by dean of the School of Fine Arts Clint Jukkala; the PAFA development team, especially manager of government and foundation relations Alison Campbell-Wise, vice president of major gifts Megan McCarthy, and director of government and foundation relations Larry Passmore; and PAFA's marketing department, led by Malini Doddamani.

PAFA's team was supported by an incredibly devoted and hard working group of interns, including Liam Bailey, Tessa Haas, Abigail Lua, and Grace Bullock. We thank them for their conscientiousness and enthusiasm. Our deepest gratitude goes to Anna Evtiugina, the Muskie Fellow at SJMA, whose wide-ranging research and organizational prowess were of immense assistance.

We extend sincere thanks to the staff members at Hosfelt Gallery, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, L.A. Louver, and Ota Fine Arts—especially Kimberly Davis, Dianne Dec, Todd Hosfelt, Yohsuke Ishizuka, Charlotte Ketabi-Lebard, Ellen Mahoney, and Nathalie Obadia—who helped us to track down works and introduced us to lenders. We are also indebted to Deepanjana Klein at Christie's for her untiring support in this capacity.

Thank you to the public institutions and private collectors (listed on page 13) that agreed to share Rina's work with the public. Their support of Rina—and this exhibition and publication—are greatly appreciated.

We were encouraged by the PAFA collections committee's early commitment to the project through two major acquisitions of Rina's work. Additionally, we would like to especially thank Emily Cavanagh, Tad Freese, Charles and Kathy Harper, Dipti Mathur, Anne McCollum, Donna Ostroff and Carl Capista, and Isabel Stainow Wilcox for their steady support and endless enthusiasm. We share the profound thanks for our funders and tour venues as detailed in the directors' Foreword.

We hope that, like us, visitors to the exhibition and readers of this publication will find the work of Rina Banerjee to be alluring and absorbing.

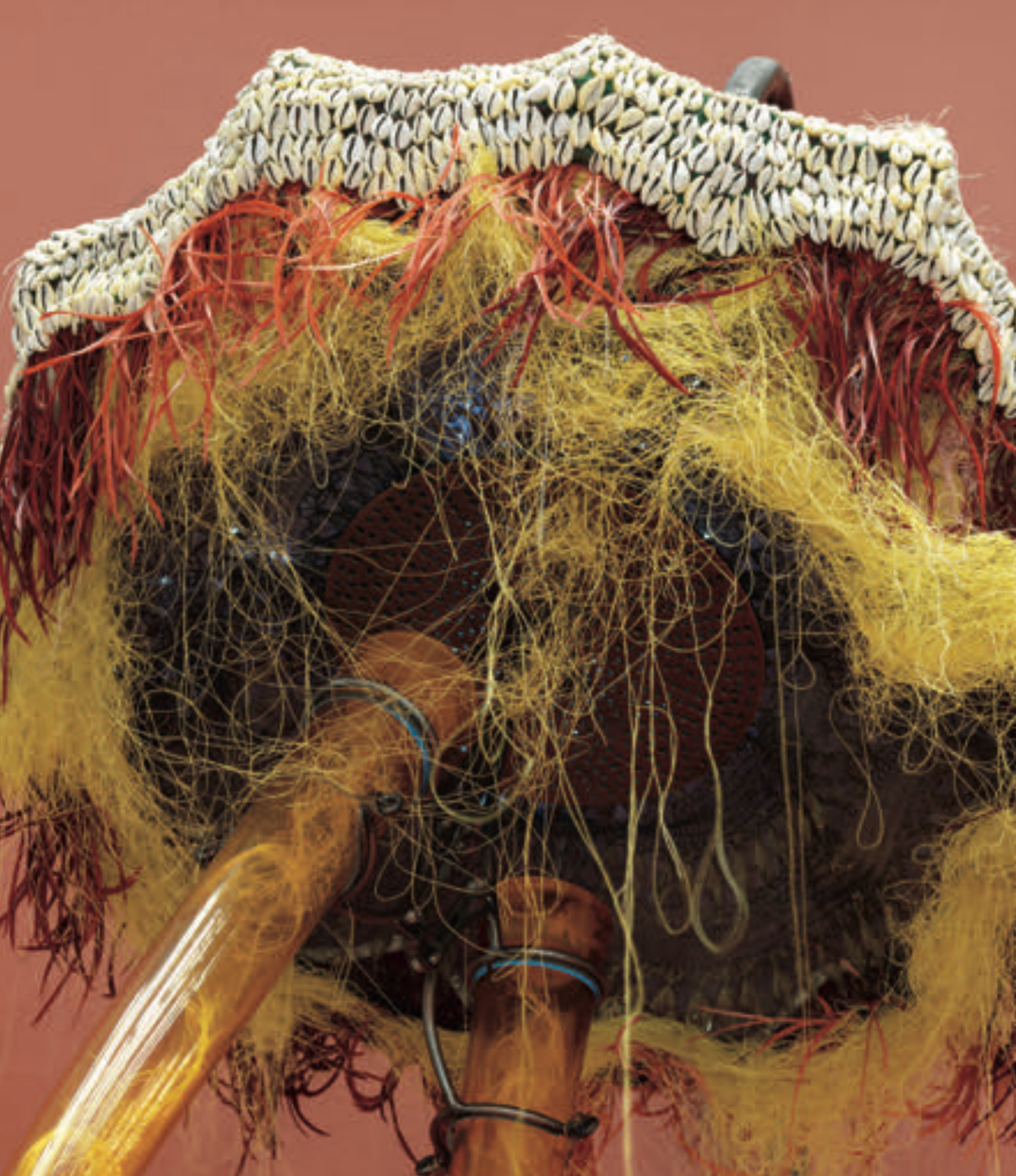
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Lauren Schell Dickens

Curator
San José Museum of Art





Lenders to the Exhibition

Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts at Fine Arts
Museums of San Francisco

Rina Banerjee

Charles Betlach II

Bernadette de Bonrepos

Brooklyn Museum, New York

Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art
moderne/Centre de création industrielle

Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, Florida

Tamar Efrat

Ford Foundation

Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany

Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Florence and Daniel Guerlain

Frédéric Guilbaud

Catherine and Alan Harper

Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco

Jenkins Johnson Collection

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India

Komal Shah and Gaurav Garg Collection

Wanda Kownacki

Mathur Family Collection

Diana Nelson & John Atwater

Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

Jessica & Greg Ransom

Skot Foreman Gallery

Tanja and David Smith, Düsseldorf, Germany

Tiroche DeLeon Collection

Isabel Stainow Wilcox

Private Collectors



Make Me a Summary of the World

Jodi Throckmorton

Our nation, the Global Garden, is a centralized place, determined to bring the Other back here to domesticate it. This space imposes an unnatural verticality; while our fences may be drawn high, they are perforated and permit access to the Out There. Our architecture skillfully penetrates the skies, yet we cannot see beyond the grounds of its towers. It is this limited vision that betrays us—surprises us with our vulnerability to the world at large.

Rina Banerjee¹

Rina Banerjee's work is made from materials sourced throughout the world. She is a voracious gatherer of objects—in a single sculpture one can find African tribal jewelry, colorful feathers, light bulbs, Murano glass, and South Asian antiques in conflict and conversation with one another. Her approach to assemblage and installation represents a new version of hunting and gathering facilitated by the Internet, which enables materials to be efficiently sourced and delivered from all over the globe. While the visual culture that she experienced as a child in India greatly influences her aesthetic, her immigration to the United Kingdom and her love of the diverse culture of her current home, New York City, form the core of her practice.

Banerjee's emergence as an artist in the late 1990s parallels the expansion of the global art world and the Internet. Institutions and galleries began to give more consideration to underrepresented artists and the ideas of these artists began to shape the agenda of the art world. Art fairs and biennials proliferated in Asia (Banerjee found great success in the emerging contemporary Asian art market, for example) and the contemporary art world began to feel borderless.

Amid the current increasingly factious turn toward nativist politics, her reflections on the splintered experience of immigration and the entangled inequities of our globally connected world seem ever more prescient and vital. As noted by art critic Holland Cotter in an early review of Banerjee's work in 2000, her art "works not just West to East but in both directions."² While it is critical that her art be read in all of its cultural and political complexity, it is equally important that Banerjee's work be considered



Plate 1

Viola, from New Orleans-ah . . . , 2017, Murano glass horns, Indian rakes, seed beads, steel, Yoruba African mask, oyster shells, cowrie shells, Charlotte dolls, polyester horse hair trim, Korean silks, Indian silks, vintage Kashmir shawls, French wire Ferris wheel, Congolese elbow bangles, colonial mirror sconces, Japanese seed glass beads, sequins, threads, dimensions variable. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Museum Purchase, 2017.⁵³ Installation: *The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, Prospect.4, New Orleans, LA, 2017–18

within the context of art made in the United States. She is powerfully positioned to reflect on the nation from inside and outside, exposing its “limited vision”³ and claiming her position within its narrative of art history.

Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World brings together examples of Banerjee’s extraordinary work spanning twenty years. The exhibition presents a singular opportunity to consider the cross-temporal connections and overlapping themes that unite her sprawling installations, exquisitely crafted sculptures, and ethereal paintings. The exhibition and this publication are modeled on Banerjee’s diffuse, non-linear approach to art making and explore the overlapping themes in her career. Instead of a chronological progression, this format acts as a “mind map” of the artist’s work, with the large-scale installations serving as nodes from which emanates a network of thematically related paintings and sculptures. This essay takes a similar approach by designating six of Banerjee’s most significant works as intersections for divergent ideas.



Viola, from New Orleans-ah, an African Woman, was the 19th century’s rescue worker, a global business goods raker, combed, tilled the land of Commerce, giving America a certain extra extra excess culture, to cultivate it, making home for aliens not registered, made business of the finer, finer, had occupations, darning thread not leisure with reason and with luster, in “peek a boo” racial disguises preoccupied in circulating commerce, entertaining white folks, pulling and punching holes in barriers, place that where was once barren, without them, white banks made of mustard and made friendly folks feel home, welcomed and married immigrants from far noted how they been also starved, fled from

servitude and colonial dangers, ships like dungeons, pushing coal in termite wholes, churning fire, but always learning, folding, washing, welcomed as aliens. She wandering, hosting, raising children connected to new mobilities and most unusual these movements in Treme’, New Orleans was a incubating, enmeshed embedded in this silken cocoon when she land, she’s came to be parachute mender, landed those black immigrant peddlers from Hoogali network of new comers⁴

Viola, from New Orleans-ah (2017; plate 1; fig. 1) is a twenty-first-century Winged Victory of Samothrace after the Hellenistic version from the 2nd century BCE (fig. 2). Banerjee’s goddess appears to have just landed triumphantly on a bed of oyster shells, wings still fluttering, with a diaphanous parachute trailing behind to soften her descent. She carries glass beads, silks and shawls, a toy Ferris wheel, glass horns, and sundry other objects on her body. There is weight to her wings and strength in her stance. She is oddly familiar, yet conspicuously foreign; a vision from the future with vestiges from the ancient world; paradoxically rooted though itinerant.



Fig. 1 *Viola, from New Orleans-ah* . . . (detail)



Fig. 2 The Winged Victory of Samothrace (Nike), 2nd century BCE. Hellenistic, marble. Musée du Louvre, MA 2369

In *Viola, from New Orleans-ah*, all of the major themes that Banerjee focuses on in her work come together—the lasting effects of colonialism and its relationship to globalization; immigration and identity; gender and sexuality; and the global causes and impacts of climate change. Unlike most of her work, which is often an amalgamation of myths, histories, places, and times, this sculpture responds to the real story of Viola Ida Lewis, an African-American woman from New Orleans who, in 1906, married a South Asian immigrant named Joseph Abdin.⁵ Their marriage represents the African-American community's acceptance of Bengali immigrants, many of whom came to the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and found work in the country's burgeoning car and steel factories. This acceptance, however, comes with a theft of identity—the “Bengali peddlers,” as they were known, were documented by the government as mulatto or black because of their dark skin color; thus, the history of this group is difficult to define and differentiate. Early

American global commerce came from marital unions like that of Lewis and Abdin—these families ran import businesses, with the women playing key roles in bringing to New Orleans silks and embroidered fabrics, such as those assembled in Banerjee's *Viola, from New Orleans-ah*. At the time, the British Empire was heavily taxing imported fabrics from India in order to render British-made cloth more attractive;⁶ consequently this new market, beyond British control, flourished. Finally, the piles of oyster shells lying at Viola's feet are a reminder of our shifting environment—the oyster population has declined rapidly in the last one hundred years.

This extraordinary work, made for the 2017 Prospect Triennial in New Orleans, is the culmination of one of the most exciting periods of recognition in Banerjee's career. As one of the most important artists of the post-colonial diaspora living in the United States, Banerjee has consistently gained visibility for her work internationally, especially in Asia and Europe, and including the 57th Venice Biennale, *Viva Arte Viva*. While Banerjee had remained relatively unknown to museum audiences in the United States, more recently she was included in important exhibitions such as the Prospect Triennial, *Greater New York* at MoMA PS1, and *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions: South Asian Art in the Diaspora* at the Asia Society in New York. Such prominent exposure and recent recognition from her home country is long overdue.



Infectious Migrations—An Uncertain Bondage is Deserved When Threatening Transmission

The abstracted silhouette of a female form seems to seep through the gallery wall in *Infectious Migrations* (1999; plate 2a–c), Banerjee's installation made for the 2000 Whitney Biennial. Covered with plastic tubing, the form is a medical experiment gone awry. It takes over an almost thirty-foot-long wall and towers above viewers—the contagion cannot be contained. This work explores the tension between inclusion and the dangerous idea of a contaminated “other”—migration likened to the spreading of disease. It is a dark reflection on migratory identity and the AIDS epidemic in India, which spread rapidly in the

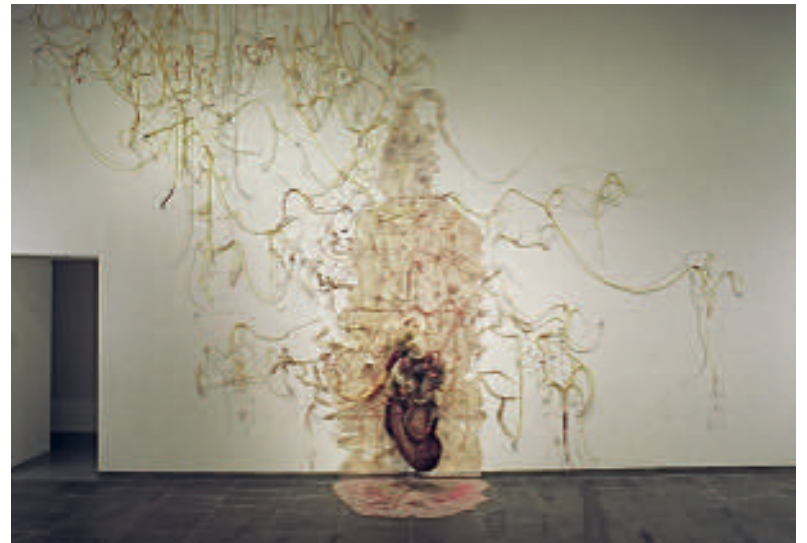


Plate 2a-c
Infectious Migrations from the series *An Uncertain Bondage is Deserved When Threatening Transmission*, 1999, incense sticks, kumkum, Vaseline, turmeric, Indian blouse gauze, fake fingernails and eyelashes, chalk, foam, feathers, fabric, Spanish moss, light bulbs, wax, Silly Putty, quilting pins, plastic tubing, latex and rubber gloves, acrylic and dry pigment, dimensions variable. Installation: The Whitney Biennial 2000, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2000

1990s and early 2000s. This installation calls out prevailing fears in the United States of people from other cultures, an important acknowledgment and criticism, especially in the context of the leading biennial of American art.

The first ten years of Banerjee's life were spent in migration. Her family left her birthplace of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta),⁷ India, for London in 1967 and, by 1970, had moved to Queens, New York. Aside from a five-year period when the family lived in Philadelphia, Banerjee grew up in the syncretistic space of New York City. Though she lived for only three years in South Asia, the region of her birth would come to define (rightly or wrongly) how she is positioned as an artist and as a United States citizen. While the culture of India certainly came to influence her work, the textiles, colors, and histories from her birth country were delivered through the perspectives and adherence to tradition of her parents. Objects took on added meaning as they were moved to a new country and became filtered through the experiences of first-generation immigrants.

In the footsteps of her father, Banerjee studied polymer engineering at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Her sensitivity toward uncommon sculpture-making objects and her non-hierarchical approach to materials evolved through her studies of plastics. Though she took a job at Penn State University as a research engineer, Banerjee found herself making paintings and drawings in her free time—a pastime that led to her earning an MFA from Yale School of Art in 1995.

Banerjee openly discusses the difficulties that she encountered at Yale and the influence of her time there on the development of her work:

Coming out of school, the subject matter was always drawn from notions of my unique identity, separate from my classmates; that I was Indian, and my classmates and faculty were not. So, the whole subject matter was really shaped out of their recognition that I was different from them, and for me, to talk about that meant I had to talk about my migration into the US, and the whole identity question—what it means to be an immigrant in this country.⁸

This question of identity has come to characterize Banerjee's career. Much of her work defies and, in fact, obfuscates



Fig. 3 *Home within a Harem*, 1997, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. Installation: *Out of India: Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora*, Queens Museum, NY, 1997–98



Fig. 4 *American Tourist*, 1996, mixed media, 22 × 7 × 3 ft.

race and ethnicity, but it is still often discussed within the context of her South Asian heritage. Her work calls upon a multiplicity of identities, not based exclusively on a person's culture of origin (or gender), but instead on self-identity and the spreading and fragmentation of cultures throughout the world. The work that she made in the late 1990s, most of which, sadly, no longer exists, often used this opposition as inspiration. In works such as *American Touristor* (1996) and *Home within a Harem* (1997) the materials that she chooses (silk sari cloth, fluorescent light bulbs, black netting, and colorful powders) create a whiplash of cultural associations (figs. 3–5). Through this confusion, to which the viewer brings his or her own object and material associations, one finds Banerjee's perspective on the hybridity of identity. As Martinican philosopher and revolutionary Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), “Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: ‘Who am I in reality?’”⁹ Banerjee inverts the burden that Fanon's question implies, pointing out that the “problem” lies not with an absence of identity on the part of the immigrant, but with Western fear and ignorance of the Other.

Often more than fifty words in length, with idiosyncratic spellings, Banerjee's titles are meant to more fully engage the viewer in the amorphous globalized world that her work evokes. An essential element of her artwork, they represent Banerjee's rebellion against the English language's worldwide domination and, according to her, are “an attempt to massage it to speak for a vast number of people who use it sparingly, awkwardly, creatively under the pressures of globalization, colonization, and commercialization of English culture.”¹⁰ They also bring to mind the idea of “code-switching”—a way of intentionally or inadvertently mixing languages or modes of expression in the same conversation. This is, perhaps, most evident in contemporary literature—authors such as Louise Erdrich and Jhumpa Lahiri, for example, are often noted for written dialogue that reflects this hybridity of language. The words in Banerjee's titles are akin to the materials that she uses in her sculpture—each one bouncing off the other to create distance and proximity that mimic global culture.

While Banerjee's culture of origin was never her core subject matter, much of the early interpretation of her



Fig. 5 Rina Banerjee installing early works, c. 1997



Plate 3a–b

With breath taking . . ., 2008, glass vials, jute charpai (cot), shells, cotton thread, plastic skull, sari textile, 144 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 101 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 24 in.

Courtesy of the Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Ltd. Installation: *Allure*, Gallery Espace, New Delhi, India, 2008–9



work centered on her South Asian heritage and gender or positioned her as an outsider. In a catalogue for *Fermented*, a 1999 group exhibition at Parsons School of Design in New York, one of the curators, Amy Sadao, even noted, “I don’t want to attempt to under-read the meaning of the spices in terms of your Indian identity, but at the same time critics and people seem to over-read that, over invest.”¹¹ Though Cotter presciently noted that her work continued to look “less and less culturally specific,”¹² other early reviews called her a “petite, soft-spoken artist”¹³ or relied heavily on Banerjee’s “exotic” position. Banerjee’s work helped to challenge this dialogue around identity politics in the visual arts by problematizing the idea that personal identity is rooted in a single culture or a person’s culture of origin; instead, she proposes that it is a constantly evolving negotiation between the self and mainstream cultural forces.



With breath taking consumption her commerce ate while she was being eaten

With breath taking consumption (2008; plate 3a–b) is seductively dangerous—one can imagine the silky feel of feathers against the sharpness of shards of glass vials. There is a creature at the center of the rickety jute bed that threatens to bite. A horrible act driven by desire has happened here. Yet the bed, with its snaking tail of cowrie shells, thread, and the vials and feathers, seems to be transforming into a revengeful mythological creature.

Banerjee’s work, while unabashedly celebrating sexuality, purposefully provokes anxiety and even revulsion. Her titles build to orgasmic climaxes and sculptures such as *Wondering Heron* (2007; plate 4) and *Sex-bait* (2017; fig. 6) use leather whips and feathers to hint at the physical sensations that bind pleasure and pain. Anthropologist Carole S. Vance begins her germinal publication, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (1984), by stating:

The tension between sexual danger and sexual pleasure is a powerful one in women’s lives. Sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency. To focus only on pleasure and gratification ignores the





Plate 4
Wondering Heron, 2007, mixed
media, 79 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 38 x 54 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Private
Collection, Paris, France, courtesy
of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/
Brussels



Fig. 6 *Sex-bait . . .*, 2017, antique Italian-American sconce, Murano glass black horn, African handmade glass beads, German porcelain Victorian negro head [period contemporary descriptor], ostrich feather duster (black), ostrich feather duster (white), Murano glass beads, 22 × 18 × 10 in.

patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live.¹⁴

This struggle between pleasure and danger, especially as it relates to the conflicting desire for and fear of the Other, is one of the key themes of Banerjee's work. She equates object and sexual fetishization in her sculptures, critiquing the importance and value that is given to material things, as well as their potential to provoke desire and arouse. Through this fetishism of objects, Banerjee continues to



Fig. 7 *She was now in western style dress . . .*, 2011, cowrie shells, rooster feathers, gourds, acrylic horns, ceramic balls, plastic netting, amber glass vials, violet glass bulbs, false glass doe eyeballs, silk and synthetic Lanvin for H&M ruffled red dress, mannequin, 73 × 65 × 65 in.

explore the object-driven ethos of colonialism and globalism, as well as the ways in which these patriarchal "isms" delimit our understanding of gender and sexuality.

Banerjee only occasionally presents representative depictions of the body in her work; instead she assembles hybrid creatures that are not quite human, not quite animal. For example, the sculpture titled *She was now in western style dress* (2011; fig. 7) is an elephant-like figure adorned in a dress that was part of a collaborative clothing line developed for the multinational fashion retailer H&M by the luxury brand Lanvin. The sculpture refers to the now ubiquitous presence of Western-style dress all over the world—at once a newfound freedom and a system of



Plate 5

Little Red Riding Hood, 2010, rooster feathers, steel, knitted mesh, wood, rhinestones, deity eyes, wooden doll, mink fur, cowrie shells, thread, 60 × 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 24 in. Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, Paris, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

oppression encouraged by global consumerism. Banerjee protects this figure with a thick cowrie-shell skin, a talisman-like necklace of glass vials, and horns that protrude from the ears and underneath the skirt. She reclaims colors—in this case a burning red—that have been rejected by Western society because of, as artist and writer David Batchelor argues, their association with “the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological.”¹⁵ Her *Little Red Riding Hood* (2010; plate 5) is, of course, similarly cloaked in red—the color, which represented the main character’s sexual maturity and vulnerability in the fairy tale, becomes a statement of power through Banerjee’s reclamation. This hybridized Little Red Riding Hood, with clenched fists and knitted mesh tail, is ready for battle with the wolf. The figures in these sculptures are at once awkward and beautiful, calling to mind the misogynist push and pull of idealization and dehumanization that characterizes colonialism and contemporary global culture.

This transition from vulnerable to powerful through hybridization brings to mind feminist theorist Donna Haraway’s influential 1984 essay “A Cyborg Manifesto,” which calls for the acceptance and even celebration of the complex relationship between mankind, machines, and nature. Haraway argues against the binaries of male/female and western/eastern that have been perpetuated through patriarchal structures and traditions. Instead, she demands a more nuanced way forward that embraces the complexity that results from the convergence of many points of view. Haraway writes:

The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. Cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling.¹⁶

This resistance to traditional gender definition and Orientalism through cyborg notions of the self manifests in the work of other artists such as Huma Bhabha, Chitra Ganesh, and Wangechi Mutu, who, like Banerjee, use collage and assemblage in their work to merge intersect-

ing identities. For Haraway and Banerjee, the cyborg is a vehicle to explore the way forward, perhaps the only way forward; transhumanism will transcend issues of gender, race, and class, and repudiate essentialism.

There is no doubt that conflicting perspectives intersect in Banerjee’s work. She derives power from hybridity—resting comfortably with what Haraway describes as “the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true.”¹⁷ This certainly relates to Banerjee’s approach to sexuality, which, like Haraway’s cyborg universe, is post-gender. Just as her work defies easy cultural association (would it so often be labeled South Asian if Banerjee’s name were different?), it is seldom explicitly gendered. In fact, she gives the viewer an awareness of their own gendered biases (no doubt perpetuated by the spreading of Western patriarchal culture through colonialism and globalism) when considering materials—pink feathers are feminine, a rope masculine. Her work reflects a contextual understanding of gender through which individual parts take on new meanings in relationship to each other. In doing so, her work exemplifies Haraway’s cyborg, as well as what historian Mrinalini Sinha describes as a “global perspective on gender”—a conceptualization of sex that is not only understood through the lens of Western society, but as part of a complicated web of global and local meanings.¹⁸



A World Lost: after the original island appears, a single land mass is fractured, after populations migrated, after pollution revealed itself and as cultural locations once separated did merged, after the splitting of Adam and Eve, shiva and shakti, of race black and white, of culture East and West, after animals diminished, after the seas’ corals did exterminate, after this and at last imagine all water evaporated, . . . this after Columbus found it we lost it, imagine this.

Thousands of years and millions of miles and meanings are condensed in just one cowrie shell. In *A World Lost* (2013; plate 6; figs. 8–9), a site-specific installation created at the Smithsonian Institution’s Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC, Banerjee used hundreds of cowrie shells to depict the major river systems in Asia. A delicately balanced canopy of glass horns, netting, light bulbs, and ostrich eggs in nests floats above the snaking shell rivers. Via ancient trading routes like the Silk Road, cowrie shells traveled from the Maldiv Islands to China, India, and, eventually, the African coast, becoming, through global exchange, “the most widely used primitive currency in world history.”¹⁹

One can trace a lineage of globalization through the evolution in use, meaning, and value of the shell—from origin to, through Banerjee’s mediation, art object. Today, with one click, Banerjee can purchase online an overwhelming variety of cowrie shells to be delivered to her New York studio in two days or less. No longer a valuable currency, yet still globally exchanged, cowrie shells are now popularly used as decorative elements on clothing or in homes. Banerjee has sewn these small, shiny shells in elegant patterns on domes and used them as protective skin for chimerical figures, transforming their purpose and value yet again. They are now part of an art object—shipped and shown all over the world and once more part

of a global market. (This becomes even more evident and complicated when Banerjee’s work goes through customs—the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has taken great interest in the specific type of shells that she uses, for example.) Each sculpture is a collision of times and cultures, itself an object of value and exchange.

A World Lost presents a powerful message on the social and economic inequalities inherent to the global movement of people and goods and the impact of these exchanges on our natural world, while also commenting on female labor.²⁰ The idea for the installation began to take shape on a trip Banerjee took with her mother to Bangladesh, where they sold some of her family’s property. They visited people who had been living on their land and Banerjee witnessed two girls from the family collecting and purifying water for the day’s activities—one was digging to get to the water below the earth, while the other was straining it through cloth. All of this work to offer Banerjee a glass of water and, more importantly, to ensure the family’s basic survival. This is a common occurrence all over the world (from which the United States is not exempt—consider the contamination of the water in Flint, Michigan) and women regularly bear the brunt of collecting the water, often by traveling away from home at high risk of violence and rape. The plastic cups in *A World Lost* allude to this very personal example of how larger



Figs. 8–9 *A World Lost* . . . (details)



Plate 6
A World Lost . . ., 2013,
mixed media, 132 x 234 x
128 in. Courtesy of the artist
and Galerie Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels. Installation:
Perspectives: Rina Banerjee,
2013–14, Freer Gallery
of Art and Arthur M. Sackler
Gallery, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC



Plate 7a-b

The world as burnt fruit . . ., 2009, fans, feathers, cowrie shells, resin alligator skull, globe, glass vials, light bulbs, gourds, steel wire, Japanese mosquito nets, 90 × 253 × 90 in. Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. Installation: *Forever Foreign*, Haunch of Venison, London, UK, 2010



changes in the environment are affecting our daily lives. The cups themselves are in part responsible for the degradation, as our oceans and rivers fill with plastic and other detritus.

In creating a mythical world that suggests an alternative, more symbiotic, vision for human interaction with our planet, Banerjee's work, again, links with the speculative writing of Haraway. The writer, in her book *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene* (2016), proposes the term "Chthulucene" for a new era of cooperation, in which humans become part of a non-hierarchical interspecies network. Rather than accepting the inevitability of environmental destruction, Haraway suggests that "the unfinished Chthulucene must collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the exterminism of the Capitalocene, and chipping and shredding and layering like a mad gardener, make a much hotter compost pile for still possible pasts, presents, and futures."²¹ Banerjee similarly acts as both interpreter and fortuneteller, making visible the environmental risks of our globalized world, while pushing these ideas to their fantastical limits.



The world as burnt fruit—When empires feuded for populations and plantations, buried in colonial and ancient currency a Gharial appeared from an inky melon—hot with blossom sprang forth to swallow the world not yet whole as burnt fruit

The world as burnt fruit (2009; plate 7a–d) is part creation myth and part ominous warning about the future; the work seems to exude the aroma of an overripe melon. Banerjee tells the viewer in her title that the gharial "swallow[ed] the world not yet whole as burnt fruit," yet one gets the sense that this crocodile, native to northern India and on the "critically endangered" list, is destroying the world that it created. The fighting, the greed, the environmental degradation have become too much—the sweetness of the world is now scorched beyond remedy. The gharial's swallowing of the world speaks of appetite, of the insatiable desire to consume and conquer that characterized the colonial era and has now taken on new forms in our global consumer society.

In 2011, this sculpture was part of an extraordinary solo exhibition of Banerjee's work at the Musée Guimet in Paris titled *Rina Banerjee: Chimeras of India and the West*. Founded in 1889, the institution was the dream of French industrialist Émile Étienne Guimet (1836–1918). The collection of Asian art that he accumulated on his travels became the core of the museum's holdings—it is now considered one of the most important institutions for Asian art in Europe. Banerjee's work—arranged among ancient Khmer sculptures and Tibetan paintings—shifted the power dynamic of this institution. As she noted, "Globalization means that we no longer need to go on 'expeditions' the way Victorian explorers did. The East has arrived."²² Banerjee's "expeditions" told the story between the artifacts—the strife of how these objects came to live in France. Her work enacts an invasion in the Guimet galleries.

Despite its obvious beauty and sensuality, Banerjee's work oozes with this Orientalist unease: her gold-threaded fabrics, jeweled surfaces, and Anglo-Indian antiques are steeped in the atrocities of colonialism. To be lured in by seductive colors and textures that seem to reverberate with temptation, only to be confronted with disorder and mutation, is to in some way experience the jarring duplicity at the core of this history. These tropes of Orientalism are alluring, but Banerjee uses them to corrupt, not encourage, further fetishization of the Other. As curator and critic Anuradha Vikram notes, it is "the often contradictory interplay of desire and subjugation that drives colonization, a relationship that implicates everyone in a society in which colonial impulses are at work."²³ International trade has long fueled Orientalist fantasies, which can even be identified in early American paintings and decorative arts. Orientalism, as coined by Edward Said in 1978, perpetuated stereotypes of the East as held by the West and served to denigrate Asia's long history of accomplishments in order to further strengthen American and European powers.

Artist and writer Joyce Brodsky, in her article "Reorientalism and globalisation: transnational artists from India and representations of the 'other,'" interprets Banerjee's use of "lush colors" and a "plethora of ornamental baubles" differently. She believes that Banerjee is "capitulating to the desire for exotic, ornate, sexual, and stereotypical representations associated with Indian

culture and religion.”²⁴ This capitulation, or, to use a more positive term, strategy, is apparent in many stories of immigrant success. Using Banerjee’s *Viola, from New Orleans-ah* as an example, the “Bengali peddlers”—with their American-dream-like stories of perseverance, ingenuity, and prosperity—capitalized on a thirst for exotic objects in order to earn a livelihood. They were subsequently erased from the history of global commerce in the United States. Brodsky essentially asserts that Banerjee is Orientalizing herself in order to appeal to the global art world’s continually evolving desire for the new and different.

It is interesting to consider Brodsky’s argument against Vikram’s discussion of artist Kara Walker’s (b. 1969) *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014; fig. 10), a massive sugar “Mammy” figure crouched in a sphinxlike pose that was installed in the former Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn in 2014. Walker’s use of African-American stereotypes in this work was consistently criticized. Vikram notes that “Walker’s work, marked by an oppositional aesthetics and meant to impart a strong reaction, reflects and manifests harsh realities present in the larger world.”²⁵ Is Walker’s employment of these stereotypes a capitulation to a primarily white art audience or an attempt to subvert this audience—to make them complicit in racial stereotyping? Artists like Banerjee and Walker are put in a cultural double-bind. If Banerjee uses the tropes of Orientalism in her art, she is seen to be pandering to an audience that craves the Other; if she removes traces of Asian culture from her work, she is seen to be catering to an audience that craves sleek, “biennialized” art. She is acutely aware of this contradiction. In fact, Banerjee states that “at present, I am often regarded as a puzzle when I exhibit abroad. Why are you showing here and who are your galleries/institutions back home in the US? My shape requires that the whole take on a different shape altogether and that the space left for me to fit into must be less rigid, more plastic.”²⁶

As Banerjee suggests, perhaps it is the museums, galleries, and biennials—art world structures that reinforce cultural power—that need to change. The placement of Banerjee’s work at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts—the first museum and school of fine arts in the United States, founded over two hundred years ago—demands that this question be considered. Returning to



Fig. 10 Kara Walker (b. 1969), *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant*, 2014, polystyrene foam, sugar, approx. 35½ × 26 × 75½ ft. Installation: Domino Sugar Refinery, a project of Creative Time, Brooklyn, NY, 2014

Vikram’s thoughtful essay, she asks, “Is Walker’s work being presented with the intention of engaging new and diverse art audiences or with the goal of making homogenous and affluent art patrons appear inclusive?”²⁷ Are museums (including the institutions on this exhibition tour) essentially performing a kind of Orientalization on artists like Banerjee? It takes these questions to change the ongoing story of the art of the United States—a story that has long excluded, and in many respects continues to exclude, women and artists of color—categories that Banerjee has tried to evade throughout her entire life.



Plate 7c-d
The world as burnt fruit . . . (details)



Make me a summary of the world! She was his guide and had traveled on camel, rhino, elephant and kangaroo, dedicated to dried plants, glass houses—for medical study, vegetable sexuality, self-pollination, and fertilization her reach pierced the woods, country by country

Under the protection of a paper Chinese parasol, a stream of glass chandelier pieces drips down a delicately balanced mountain of horns, vines, and sponges in *Make me a summary of the world! . . .* (2014; plate 8; fig. 11). Banerjee is the guide to this adventure, showing her version of the world while demanding that the traveler bring his or her own associations and experiences to the trip. The universe that she creates in this assemblage is less centered and coherent and more cross-referential and hybrid—a world made richer through a harmony of interdependence.

Banerjee's work has consistently connected the atrocities of colonialism to our expanded and trafficked global present. The power dynamics of this world are ever changing—from Western imperialism (in the early twentieth century, seven European nations ruled over one third of the world's population) to decolonization and now the surging influence of global capitalism.²⁸ At a time of rising isolationism in the United States and a resistance to globalism that is spreading throughout the world (exemplified by British prime minister Theresa May's assertion that "if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere"²⁹), Banerjee's arguments for a borderless approach to art making and a world of mutual international alliance become increasingly important.

Banerjee exposes the conflicted fear and desire for the Other—the United States' ability to take advantage of



Fig. 11 *Make me a summary of the world! . . .* (detail)

the influx of cheap goods made possible by globalism while isolating itself within administrative borders, restrictive immigration policy, and the threat of physical walls. Making a "summary of the world," or a "global garden," to return to Banerjee's words at the start of this essay, will always be an inconceivable goal—but with Banerjee as our guide, it begins to seem possible.

Plate 8

Make me a summary of the world! . . ., 2014, wood rhino, Chinese umbrellas, sea sponges, linen, beads, pewter soldiers, grape vines, glass chandelier drops, acrylic horns, wire, nylon and bead flowers, 7 × 4 ft. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels





Notes

1. Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, *Five by Five: Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art, April 18–July 5, 2002* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2002), unpaginated.
2. Holland Cotter, "Art in Review; Rina Banerjee," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2000.
3. Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, *Five by Five*.
4. Banerjee's titles, which read like poems, are presented in this essay as section headings in order to emphasize their importance in understanding the artist's work.
5. Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 74.
6. G. K. Ghosh and Shukla Ghosh, *Indian Textiles: Past and Present* (New Delhi, India: S.B. Nangia for APH Publishing Corporation, 1995), p. 161.
7. The city was known as Calcutta at the time of Banerjee's birth, and this is the name that she prefers to use. However, the current name will be utilized in this publication, with the exception of the artist's interview with Allie Biswas.
8. Rina Banerjee and Jane DeBevoise, "Presentation with Rina Banerjee," transcribed and revised by Ali Van (New York, NY: Asia Art Archive in America, October 20, 2011), p. 2.
9. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2005), p. 182.
10. Christian Gether, Stine Høholt, and Ranjit Hoskote, *India: Art Now* (Berlin, Germany: Arken Museum for Modern Art, 2012), p. 21.
11. Rina Banerjee, *Rina Banerjee: Antenna* (New York, NY: Bose Pacia Modern, Inc., 2008), unpaginated.
12. Cotter, "Art in Review; Rina Banerjee."
13. Deepika Shetty, "Suggestive sculptures that move by New York-based artist Rina Banerjee," *The Straits Times*, February 3, 2015. Accessed August 15, 2017. <http://straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/suggestive-sculptures-that-move-by-new-york-based-artist-rina-banerjee>.
14. Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston, MA: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984), p. 1.
15. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London, England: Reaktion, 2008), pp. 22–23.
16. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), p. 154.
17. Haraway, p. 149.
18. Mrinalini Sinha, "A Global Perspective on Gender: What's South Asia Got to Do with It?," in *South Asian Feminisms*, ed. Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 356–57.
19. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Coins and Currency: An Historical Encyclopaedia* (London, England: McFarland & Company, 2003), p. 122.
20. Hetty Lipscomb, "On Rina Banerjee's 'A World Lost,'" Smithsonian Institution Freer Sackler Blog, July 19, 2013.
21. Donna Haraway, *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 57.
22. Rina Banerjee and Zehra Jumabhoy, "Rina Banerjee," *Artforum*, June 22, 2011.
23. Anuradha Vikram, *Decolonizing Culture: Essays on the Intersection of Art and Politics* (San Francisco, CA: Art Practical Books and Sming Sming Books, 2017), p. 134.
24. Joyce Brodsky, "Reorientalism and globalisation: transnational artists from India and representations of the 'other,'" *Visual Studies*, 30:3, 2015, pp. 264–79.
25. Vikram, p. 33.
26. Rina Banerjee artist's statement in connection with proposal for PAFA exhibition, February 2016.
27. Vikram, p. 37.
28. Ivan T. Berend, *The History of European Integration: A New Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 125.
29. Max Bearak, "Theresa May criticized the term 'citizen of the world.' But half the world identifies that way," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2016. Accessed February 11, 2018. <https://washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/05/theresa-may-criticized-the-term-citizen-of-the-world-but-half-the-world-identifies-that-way/>.



Plate 9

A bewildering variety of enemies . . ., 2007, gouache, ink, metallic ink, glitter on paper, 27¼ × 35¼ × 2 in. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the artist, 2013.10.2



Plate 10
A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve . . .,
2012, steel structure, plastic horns,
fans, 500-watt bulbs, balls, wire,
sari cloth, 85 x 38 x 39 in.
Private Collection

Beauty was not in the East—her figure was in part a repellent I and his aura was not so neat. The locus of a pleasure stolen from deceit, stubborn and excessive the oriental was transformed in part as objects of sexual bad habits.



Plate 11
2013, acrylic and collage on watercolor paper, 29¼ × 44¼ in. The Collection of Catherine and Alan Harper



Plate 12

Friendly Fire . . ., 2015, steel structure, textiles, beads, feathers, thread, bulbs, 46 × 48 × 35 in. Private Collection, Rydal, Pennsylvania



Plate 13

From the plantation . . ., 2010, light bulbs, tulle, cotton rope, cowrie shells, silver wire, spoons, globe, thread, brown vials, 70 × 32 × 32 in.



Plate 14a–d
When scenes travel . . . bubble bubble (still), 2004, video, 8:45 minutes, color, sound, looped. Courtesy of the artist

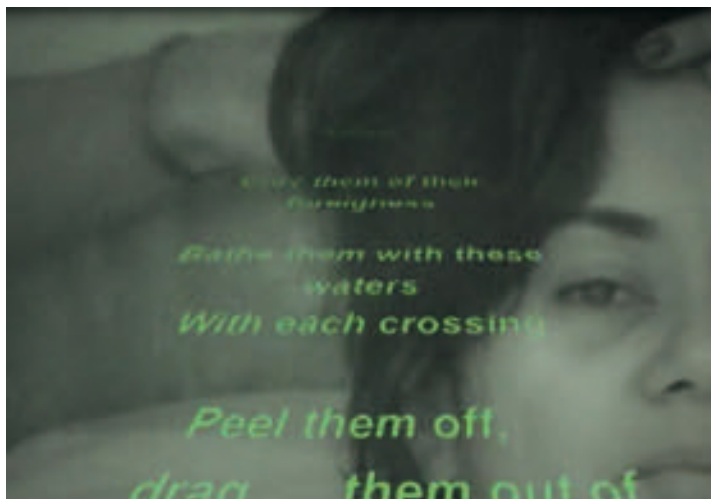


Plate 15a-d
 Coconut Oil (still), 2003, video, 12:30 minutes, color, sound, looped. Courtesy of the artist

Plate 16

With tinsel and teeth . . ., 2006, one wood table, one chandelier (metal, plastic, glass bulbs, ceramic ornaments), box of ornaments, 133 × 45 × 35½ in.





A Fluid She: The Drawings of Rina Banerjee

Lauren Schell Dickens

All that we know moves. The universe is expanding, molecular particles vibrate in constant motion, the earth rotates while its tectonic plates shift with increasing speed, and empires and cultures collide, intertwine, and diverge altered. Such fundamental circulation—of blood, rivers, commodities, cultures, and people—illustrating the unfixed nature of our world, is both a framework and residue that marks Rina Banerjee's art. She assembles objects and materials colored by a smorgasbord of allusions accrued through global circuits of commerce. For Banerjee, who was born in Kolkata, India, and spent a few years in London before moving to New York City at age seven, migration defines her personal history. In her practice, she evocatively combines materials from disparate histories, cultures, and origins into beautiful, cacophonous, and unsettling creations of seemingly limitless allusion.

Over the past twenty years, Banerjee has produced hundreds of drawings—inks, acrylics, watercolors, and various mixed media on paper and panel—which have received limited attention in her critical reception.¹ The artist herself tends to speak of her practice in terms of objects, points of entry into a tangled skein of commerce and identity, all the while continuing to prolifically paint and draw on paper and wood panel. It is perhaps a dubious effort to isolate one form of production within an artistic oeuvre built on interwoven material histories and themes of hybridity and interconnectedness. But Banerjee works in wholes. She explores entire objects, entrenched material lineages, histories of color, the entirety of the colonial world, India, New York, biology—each a universe pulled whole into Banerjee's orbit. This essay endeavors to extract one part of her oeuvre, the drawings, and examine it as a porous, disjointed, and circuitous synecdoche for her larger practice. Unpacking such densely layered and referential work is imprecise at best—rather like disentangling an impossible knot—but it is through this effort to isolate that the entrenched connectivity of Banerjee's world emerges.



The idea of a picture as a material, corporeal thing that must be flown, floated, or carried across the surface of the earth for transmission is anachronistic in our instantaneous present, where a click of a button immediately sends



Fig. 1 John James Audubon (1785–1851), *The Birds of America*, Plate 431, *American Flamingo*, 1824–38, etching and aquatint, hand-colored, 40 × 28 in. Courtesy of the National Audubon Society

an image across the globe.² A painted portrait might exist as a physical thing hung in a museum, but the image, the representation, is immaterial. Studies of the material object and representational image are generally separate. While the discipline of culture examines things, it comes up methodologically short in relation to representation. The history of modern painting and drawing, by contrast, focuses on pictorial analysis and tends to neutralize the materiality that is so fascinating to Banerjee. This interface between an image's visual and material registry is the subject of what art historian David Joselit terms "transitive painting" of the 1990s, which he defines by "its capacity to hold in suspension the passages internal to a canvas, and those external to it."³ Acknowledging the physicality of a canvas—its movement from place to place, and its

subsequent translation into new contexts—parallels what we might call one of Banerjee's sculptural concerns: the circulation and subsequent transformation of objects through networks of global commerce. But it is the internal passages—and the reckoning of pictorial representation with materiality—that are at stake in Banerjee's drawings.

In a study of the movement of images through British America and the United States in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, historian Jennifer L. Roberts examines the way images—paintings and fine art engravings—designed with mobility in mind, internally register complications of their own transmission. Shifting "geography *inhabits* pictures rather than simply surrounding them."⁴ In other words, the pressures of global transit are evident in physical markings—creased corners or scratches—as well as in the illusionistic representations themselves. (This builds on Joselit's transitive painting, which is unconcerned with pictorial representation.) In John James Audubon's (1785–1851) compendium *The Birds of America*, to take one of Roberts's examples, the avian subjects were painstakingly rendered at life size in an effort at scientific veracity, and the images printed, bound, and delivered to subscribers in the 1820s and 1830s. The physical heft of oversized paper is a sort of surrogate for the physical bird. The flamingo, for example, is rendered with head bowed, a compositional concession to the limitations of the page (fig. 1).

I mention Audubon's flamingo not as a stylistic touchpoint for Banerjee—though pink feathers, birds, and elongated necks do frequent her visual vocabulary—but as an example of how an illusionistic image might register its material existence. While Banerjee's drawings rarely acknowledge their physical support in a literal manner, there is representational insistence on flatness and an ungrounded suspended quality to the drawn environments. *In transparent soil she spoke to welcome her more mouthy voice* (2015; plate 17) features a red, decoratively stamped background that suggests a wall-paper, denying depth and compressing all of the figures, awkwardly disjointed in scale, into the picture plane. The breasted rabbit-faced figure overwhelms the smaller females who appear to float atop a bullet-hole-riddled plane, which further flattens. Such unstable perspectival shifts could reference Indian court painting (itself a selective absorption of Islamic influences), a distorted adoption



Plate 17

In transparent soil . . ., 2015, black ink, acrylic paint, crayon, gold and silver metallic paint, copper leaf, with collage of marbled and other decorated paper, on paper, 66 × 45¾ in. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum Purchase, Gift of Denise B. Fitch, 2017.24



Plate 18

Bacteria . . ., 2012, acrylic on watercolor paper, 30 × 22 in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo

of Greenbergian formalism, or a Petri dish, a shallow glass container in which disparate biological cultures (the duality of the term is not lost on Banerjee) grow and express themselves alongside each other, as in *Bacteria* (2012; plate 18). Personified bacteria—multi-limbed and limbless, some brown, some green, sprouting wings, a tail—swirl in an atmospheric agar. The gravityless, indeterminate space is punctuated by small holes burned through the paper, revealing its flatness. In some sense, Banerjee's sustained engagement with drawing is a reaction to museological history that she sees as relegating non-Western histories to objects (ceramics, textiles, etc.), while reserving painting and drawing for Western histories. Cultures defined by nomadism were by definition engaged with the tactile and mobile characteristic of their art.⁵ Though hardly nomadic in a traditional sense, Banerjee fills her drawings with suggestions of diasporic groundlessness and mobility, a pictorial registration of the artist's and the artworks' own unmoored state.



Banerjee relishes a world of marvelous and evocative objects—brown glass vials, acrylic horns, silk and synthetic fabrics, ostrich eggs, dazzling African beads. A motley collection of exotic treasures and gaudy trinkets (value judgments likely reversed in different parts of the world), encompassing both the synthetic and the natural, occupy a central position in Banerjee's work. Sourced from the Internet's virtual marketplace and her own neighborhood in the Garment District of New York City, the materials are extracted from one cultural and economic context to another. This co-opting of materials, bearing the entangled residue of histories, cultural meanings, and personal associations, is evident in the drawings as well, many of which, like *Puff Puff* (2005; plate 19), incorporate glass beads, pearls, sari fabrics, sequins, copper, silver, and gold leaf, as well as distinct pigments such as soot, turmeric, and kumkum, tactile additions that paradoxically heighten one's awareness of the flat paper. Many of these materials have functioned as currency, a nod to commerce that Banerjee makes explicit to contemporary audiences by occasionally including elements of US money. In *If lotion and potion could heal* (2006; plate 20), leaves cut out from dollar bills sprout from the spindly breath connecting two



Plate 19 *Puff Puff*, 2005, collage on paper, pearls, glue, glitter, acrylic, ink, graphite on paper, 30 x 22 in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–331

wide-eyed figures. The British traded Indian cotton fabrics for slaves in West Africa during the eighteenth century, and similar but divergent barter histories emanate from spices, beads, and precious metals. There are material histories written into some colors—lapis, for example, taking its name from the blue stone, and indigo, the color of the British colonies.⁶ The sequins, glitter, and synthetic materials allude to a world of ornamentation, beauty, and fashion. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai keenly observes, objects gain value and authenticity—a devious term to which we will return—through circulation, rather than the opposite.⁷ A dollar has value only when spent; squirreled away in a drawer it is inert. Movement, in other words, is inherent to systems of value, and for Banerjee, “ornament has a currency that paper money cannot have.”⁸



Plate 20

If lotion and potion could heal . . ., 2006, mixed media on paper, 38 × 50 in. Courtesy of Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco



Plate 21

Her black growth produced such a sprinkle of ultimate fears . . ., 2006, mixed media on paper, 40¼ x 44½ in. Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Plate 22
Queen of Cuddles, 2009, acrylic and ink on watercolor paper, 12 × 9 in.

Many of Banerjee's early drawings are rendered against the curious backdrop of schematic plans for air ducts and electrical passes at Columbia Center for Disease Control in New York City. In the artist's hands, these semi-transparent sheets of networked passages, rendered in precise indigo lines on vellum, allegorize more broadly a different type of movement concerned with contamination, infection, and fear-driven containment. The schematics have appeared repeatedly in Banerjee's drawings since 1999, for example, *Her black growth produced such a sprinkle of ultimate fears* (2006; plate 21), *Untitled (Dying fishgirl and angel above)* (2006), and *She is An Uncertain* (2007; plate 23). Even after using all of the original pages, she has continued to employ digital copies, as in *Sudden dispossession paled her already pliant body* (2009; plate 24). A ghoulishly white woman apparates, legs spread, perhaps a mother—haloed, with a cutout of the earth pasted onto her belly and splattered with blood. The loose, expressive gesture of the acrylic and the organic, visceral subject contrast with the logical angularity of the schematics. The juxtaposition seems to refute the possibility of biological containment.

Initially, Banerjee incorporated these schematics as components of a sculpture or installation. In the drawing installation *Lingering and Longing: In View of Two Places* (2000; fig. 2), decorative, wandering shapes cut from the mechanical plans, loose clumps of colored thread, feathers, and painted figures were adhered directly to a window and tethered by red thread to an adjacent wall composition. The work spatially illustrated the nature of diasporic bifurcation, split loyalties and longings, while physically existing in a sole location. By 2006, the drawings with circulation ducts had migrated into frames, and began themselves to circulate, mirroring the artist's thematic shift away from the specificities of her Indian-American experience and toward a more encompassing embrace of diaspora. Historically, portability is inherent to the development of image-making: from pre-modern practices of ritual image procession, panel and canvas were developed as a way to transport a picture independently of its architectural surroundings, free to circulate with the whims of the global commodities market.⁹ That on some level collectors favor more portable and storable paintings



Fig. 2 *Lingering and Longing: In View of Two Places*, 2000, site-specific drawing installation on windows of Bose Pacia Gallery, New York (now Bose Pacia Modern, Inc., New York)

(though not necessarily drawings) over cumbersome sculptures fuels Banerjee's drawing production. Tongues, intestines, and ingestion tracts figure prominently—see any number of drawings, including *Her black growth produced such a sprinkle of ultimate fears* and *Queen of Cuddles* (2009; plate 22)—biological acknowledgment that surely concedes an artist must eat (and, by extension, sell). This idea of consumption, not only of food but of culture and identities as they circulate through global markets, is crucial to understanding Banerjee's work. To recognize her drawings as objects of commerce is not dismissive, but connects the *internal* concerns of the drawing (identity as consumed and expressed) to its *external* circulation as an object of commercial consumption. According to Banerjee, "There is a huge history in trying to make objects that will sell and you can't disassociate with the world of migration and colonization and occupation."¹⁰ Many methods of production and markets that feed global commerce stem from colonial experience, and industries developed in colonized India, such as textile and jute production, still undergird economies today. Colonial and contemporary histories of commerce are entwined.

Paper is the support for many of Banerjee's drawings. Though materially friable and biodegradable, it is the privileged medium of history in the West, volumes of which fill libraries where knowledge is reified and controlled and



Plate 23

She is An Uncertain, 2007, ink, acrylic on Mylar, 46½ × 50½ in. Tanja and David Smith, Düsseldorf, Germany



Plate 24

Sudden dispossession paled her already pliant body . . ., 2009, ink, acrylic on Mylar digital print, 41 x 75½ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012-334

representations of the Other are formulated. In 1910, an institute modeled after European archives, Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak Mandal, was founded in Pune, India, for researchers of Indian history, in an effort to refute colonialist characterizations of India as lacking history and learning.¹¹ This nationalist project was documented in storehouses of paper records, materially identical to the fibrous parchments by which British declarations and contracts ruled the colonies. Other nationalists, such as Gandhi, rejected the British “habit of writing history,”¹² instead reclaiming paper’s materiality and initiating a movement of handmade industries, specifically to weave cloth that in turn became paper.

Within art-historical discourse, works on paper tend to be regarded as lesser, unresolved preambles to the more declarative media of paint and stone. This sidelining was embraced by some American feminist artists, Nancy Spero (1926–2009) and Kiki Smith (b. 1954) among others, who exploited paper as a revolutionary space of female empowerment. For years, drawing was largely a private practice for Banerjee. Flat works existed as elements of larger installations, but not as discrete works. While her sculptures were gaining national attention, gallerists and curators declined to show her drawings, deeming them, as the artist recalls in conversation with the author, too traditional or not ambitious enough.



For Banerjee, like many female artists of her generation, politics are connected to the body, and while the figure haunts her sculptures, in the drawings it comes to the fore. Figuration, in the parlance of US feminists of the 1970s and 1980s, was an urgent declaration of the female body, rescuing it from social and political invisibility and erasure. While she was completing her MFA in painting and print-making at Yale School of Art in the mid-1990s, Banerjee’s professors discouraged her from including objects in her canvases—a holdover from the twentieth-century formalist allergy to registers of the body, female or not. Works from this experimental period wrestle with a forcibly abstracted, absented body. One untitled work from 1994 (plate 33) uses brocade lace and chiffon silk pigmented with minerals, clear references to feminine clothing. Its surface, encrusted with insects and beads, holds a clump of

synthetic hair—a fiber loaded with references to culture, tradition, and sexuality—from an African-American weave store in New Haven. A binary embryonic form haunts the right side of the canvas. The work was made while Banerjee was a teaching assistant in the Introduction to Feminist Thought class led by Laura Wexler, Yale’s Professor of American Studies and Professor of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Wexler’s interdisciplinary approach to visual anthropology, applying pressure to a photographic punctum to expose a multiplicity of meanings, spurred Banerjee’s interest in excavating layered references within a practice or material. Under Wexler, Banerjee studied historic practices of sati (suttee), or widow burning, documented in photographs held at Yale Divinity School. Practiced in India and northern Europe, this reduction of living female bodies into ash on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands was a violent act of abstraction. By incorporating objects in powder form, such as sulfur and turmeric, and metonymic elements such as hair and sari fabrics, Banerjee registered a present, though masked, female body. Such intentions were kept concealed, a sort of self-containment in the male-dominated environment at Yale; figuration would not explicitly erupt in Banerjee’s work for another decade. As we have already seen, burnt holes (and what appear to be gunshot holes, residue of another type of domestic violence) surface again in later drawings.

While Banerjee’s drawings could be characterized by an insistence on the body, her figures are as often disfigured as they are figured. Corporeal clarity ebbs and flows. A nearly translucent plumed being emerges from an equally feathery flower in *Golden Opportunity* (2006; plate 26), and the generous flesh of two coiffed beauties melts and comingles in *Learn of their discovery* (2013; plate 25). Chimerical and multi-limbed, amoebic and limbless, tailed or rabbit-faced, such shape-shifting constitutes a tactical means of insisting on bodily presence, without demanding a normative legibility. Wispy, delicate hair morphs from allusions to sexuality and beauty to suggesting cilia, the organ of both sensory exploration and locomotion in microscopic protozoan creatures. In “A Cyborg Manifesto,” feminist theorist Donna Haraway describes identity as seeming “contradictory, partial and strategic,”¹³ to which Banerjee might add, “amorphous.” This straddling of abstraction and figuration, thingness



Plate 25

Learn of their discovery . . ., 2013, acrylic on watercolor paper, 30 × 44 in. Private Collection, Miami



Plate 26

Golden Opportunity, 2006, mixed media on paper, 30 x 22 in. Private Collection, courtesy Galleria dello Scudo, Verona, Italy



Plate 27

Winter's Flower . . ., 2009, oyster shells, fish bone, thread, cowrie shells, fur, deity eyes, copper trim, ostrich egg, epoxy American buffalo horns, steel, fabricated umbrella structure, steel stand, pigeon-feather fans, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 61 x 78 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Courtesy of the Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Ltd.



Plate 28
Human Traffic, 2015, ink, acrylic, and
collage on watercolor paper, 90 × 36 in.



Plate 29
Mother gathered Three . . . (detail), 2017,
acrylic, wood panel with collage, 80 × 40 in.

and representation, denies the stability of either/or, a strategy that applies as much to shifting formulations of diasporic identity as the fluid perimeters of gender, ethnicity, and even humanness.

Banerjee's process typically begins with the application of a water-based medium in loose abstract gestures and forms, from which, in the artist's words, the figure emerges. There's an aleatory, even circumstantial aspect to the figures' formations that poignantly parallels the entwining of identity and place, enmeshed yet separate, in alchemic interaction. When Banerjee's figures do emerge from this fluid surround, many of them remain in ungrounded, interstitial space. In *Human Traffic* (2015; plate 28), fantastical hybridized figures seem to swim and tumble above an aqueous sand floor with sinewy kelp and swirling fire. One double-jointed figure with a wingish arm sprouts antleresque branches from her head. Another thistle-armed body seems to float, inverted, on a cottony pink cloud. A small red-dotted ostrich form has a hairless human face. The scene churns with movement, giving one the sense of cosmology in progress. "The unfinished world is a world where justice prevails. This is a paradise, a floating world that never touches sky or earth, but always reaches for it. There is a mystery in not finishing, not having the answers. Self doubt, the dark, the dangerous, the ugly,"¹⁴ is the domain Banerjee claims for her work. Populated by gravity-defiers—birds, winged creatures, and flies—those who reject rootedness—nomads, refugees, fish—and resolution.



It is worth pausing to consider the conceptual and material practice of collage in Banerjee's work. At its emergence in early twentieth-century art, collage was an attempt to make sense of fractured existence, to recompose a shattered world while preserving its discord. Berlin Dadaists made photomontages that dismantled specious wholes clipped from newspapers. In the twenty-first century, with the onslaught of photographic and digital imagery, the medium proliferated.¹⁵ In her drawings, Banerjee mostly adheres to the traditional matrix of the artist's hand, eschewing photographically produced elements with the recurring exception of the cutout of the Earth, already noted. Another interesting outlier is a drawing in which

the artist appropriated a photographic studio portrait of a merchant in Kolkata, which she found at a library in Boston. In this drawing, *Exploding head staggering with an unpredictable thirst for lectose, phlegm, bile, pollen or spores this world became liquid from particle, spewed forth her reason* (2009; plate 30), the merchant's mix of Eastern and Western clothing, and untraditional haircut, are evidence of the globalization process. Severing his head from his body, exploding brain lobes and intestines pour out, sensitive tentacles that both absorb and transmit. Importantly, however, even though bisected, the entire image remains. Banerjee is not editing—nothing is removed—but aggressively, viscerally in this case, asserting the porosity of existing wholes with imaginative fictions. She describes this fealty to the whole as a "metaphor for how people adapt their identities to something new while retaining a sense of their original selves—and for the way people are accepted while still being perceived as Other."¹⁶ It is not her style to dissect or fragment objects, but to preserve the integrity of their wholeness, more akin to assemblage artists, like Betye Saar (b. 1926). But while it is a residue of use and memory that gives Saar's materials their patina, Banerjee sources new objects, defined more by their geographic or contextual displacement than specific biographical resonance. While collage is often a clandestine act, circumventing property laws and violating copyright, she purchases her materials, highlighting her participation in a global tourism.

Banerjee's deep interest in language, the stringing together of words, is another form of assemblage. Her lengthy, poetically dizzying titles are more evocative than informative, providing a tantalizing and slippery mise-en-scène for the visual image. Banerjee deliberately contorts standard diction, "aware that I speak the English language because I am Indian, and that it's not mine, so I like toying with it, making it bend, stretch, reach."¹⁷ Such linguistic acrobatics fly in the face of the specificity of scientific nomenclature, distorting the precision with which language is used to identify and reify. Ironically, transporting Banerjee's work across certain international borders requires paperwork containing explicit scientific identification of each natural component, as though the act of "naming" renders it known and containable.¹⁸ Banerjee's own scientific background has led her to a different conclusion: "Science embodies an awareness of other



Plate 30
Exploding head . . ., 2009, acrylic, lace, beads, nylon, collage on paper, 30 × 22 in.



Plate 31

Ligaments wait to stretch . . ., 2015, silver leaf blue, ink, acrylic on birch wood panel, 20 × 20 × 1½ in. Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

worlds, worlds that coexist with us, but which we cannot experience or know.”¹⁹ Dramatic shifts in scale that equalize water droplets and planets predispose the viewer to strain for details, physically oscillating between proximity and distance, a reminder of relationships and worlds not accessible to the eye. The entire volume of narratives and leagues of possible allusions woven through a single drawing are unknowable. Her nimble syntax enhances this mystery, embracing poetry over precision, suggestion over explanation.



Perhaps the marginalization of Banerjee’s drawings results from the fact that drawing—a product of a manual gesture—is always a form of interpretation rather than evidence, and as denizens of the twenty-first century we still seek evidence in misplaced ideas of authenticity. “In Western art, to explore something you cannot identify with is a kind of dishonesty, because authenticity is a compass. . . . Authenticity does not exist for the diaspora.”²⁰ Banerjee

traffics in symbols of the Other, stripped of “authentic” context and repurposed in a personal matrix of associations. Trinkets, purchased during travels (or at Pottery Barn to give a domicile the aura of a traveled person), are, like fashion, a means of constructing selfhood, trophies to display our sophistication. *Beneath the surface* (2015; plate 32) features vaguely Nepalese-style cloud landscapes, while in *Ligaments wait to stretch* (2015; plate 31) weepy Japanese cherry blossoms coexist with multi-limbed goddesses and Western dress, an amalgamation of stories from many cultures, a cosmic soup of creation and apt visual metaphor for assimilation and identity formation. Never pure, Banerjee’s hand articulates a multiplicity of styles, guided by cultural curiosity and tourism. Perhaps poet Oswald de Andrade’s characterization of the Brazilian ability to “cannibalize” other cultures,²¹ assimilating diverse influences into an idiosyncratic context, is a useful metaphor for how Banerjee grazes on and digests cultures. Using a visual vocabulary unique to the drawings, she shows gaping jaws, threatening and seeking tongues, digestive systems, effluvia entering and exiting the mouth in unsettling form. Her titles are full of devouring, sucking, swallowing, spraying, spewing, and excreting. This language evokes the energetic consumption of cultures, identities, and commodities. For Banerjee, identity is not about heritage and ethnicity, but choice. Some might say she lives in a world of her own making, not limited by those identities “authentically” ascribed to her (whatever those might be). But origins are complicated—objects are not contained by particular histories—so the “dis” in displacement rings untrue, except as a continuous process of movement. It is the true melting pot, and imagined or not, it is where Banerjee’s work resides.

As Appadurai points out, discontinuities in knowledge about the origins of commodities lead to problems involving authenticity and expertise.²² As mobility and technology permit the multiplication of objects of prestige, there is an ironic need for ever-shifting perimeters for authenticity. And while Banerjee’s sculptures could potentially be dismantled and reduced to discrete objects, the drawings cannot be undone. Their melding of cultural sources, digested by the artist and fused in the expression of her hand, cannot be untangled. In spite of the saccharine colors and gilt, there is a threatening edge, for to transgress is not only to work across a line of propriety, but

to strain under its weight. For all the drawings' seeming frivolity, there is a dark, desperate wrestling. Mark-making is a powerful tool for defining and making the world.

Though the development of Banerjee's work is deeply rooted in personal experience, its processes and materials speak to collective experience that reaches laterally across geography and genealogically spans time. Storytelling and origin stories are important in diasporic traditions, heritage refracted through filters of geographic dislocation, as genealogies tumble forward in time; as with all storytelling, there is a healthy dose of fiction—vague memories of childhood that have been reimagined over the years. Banerjee's drawings initiate world creation without completing it. There's an awkwardness, a brazenness, a delicacy that seems to occupy the hazy territory of mythology and origin stories, hung on acute detail in vague settings. It is a chaotic, post-colonial and open-ended process of migration and association. It alights momentarily on a moment of clarity, before molting into a new meaning.

Her oeuvre is one of movement—a snapshot of a moving stream from which she retrieves then releases her work, to float into another time/space and continue to transform. Chimeras, shape-shifting figures (bodies succumbing to puberty, childbirth, and menopause), identities are never fixed and neither is the artist's. In *Peculiar was her manner* (2009; plate 34), which Banerjee has referred to as a self-portrait, the woman alights momentarily in the frame. Barbarous thorns and a feather braid emerge from thick hair, marking the woman as both dangerous and migratory. Around her throat swims a burgeoning inchoate creature, orange and tadpole-like. The woman, with a bindi on her forehead, wears an introspective (possibly smug?) expression and a calm smile.

One of the challenges of concretizing Banerjee's work is that her meaning changes over time, over a matter of days. Each drawing expresses such a concatenation of ideas, so opulently burdened with precise, ensnared histories, that "meaning" inevitably wanders down different associative paths at various moments. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus says, no man ever steps into the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.

Time—wading into the river at multiple times on myriad days—is paramount to witnessing the transformation. Banerjee states that her work is a slow read. Yet rather

than crystallizing over time, more and more elements vibrate in their orbits. What at first appeared to be fixed flows on, endlessly, into vibrant new territories.

Notes

1. Terminology, as with all taxonomies, is of interest to Banerjee. While her works on paper could also be termed "painting" or "collage," with deference to the artist's wishes, I will refer to them all as drawings, an open term that denotes mark-making in various mediums, including painting.
2. This discussion of physical image movement draws heavily on the excellent work of Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
3. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October* 130, Fall 2009, p. 129.
4. Roberts, p. 3.
5. Roberts, p. 163.
6. See Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
7. See Arjun Appadurai, Introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 3.
8. Jane DeBevoise and Rina Banerjee, "Interview with Asia Art Archive in America," *Presentation by Rina Banerjee*, October 2011. Accessed January 18, 2018. www.aaa-a.org/programs/presentation-by-rina-banerjee/.
9. See Roberts, p. 3.
10. See DeBevoise and Banerjee.
11. Holly Shaffer, "The Indian Evidence Act," *Third Text*, DOI 2017, p. 9. Shaffer discusses the Mandal with reference to Dayanita Singh's photographs of the archive.
12. Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) quoted in Shaffer (unpaginated).
13. Donna Haraway, quoted in Maura Reilly, "Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms," *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (London, New York: Merrell, 2007), p. 41. Jodi Throckmorton also cites Haraway in her essay for this publication.
14. Courtney Martin, "Rina Banerjee: Interview," *Wild Things*, trans. Annette Mester, ed. Morten Skriver et al (Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts, 2010), p. 26.
15. A discussion of the collages of Wangechi Mutu, a close friend of Banerjee, is interesting for comparison. See Courtney J. Martin, "Fracture and Action: Wangechi Mutu's Collages 1999–2010," in *Wangechi Mutu: My Dirty Little Heaven* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 47–55.
16. Banerjee writing on Donald Lipski in the brochure for *Five by Five: Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, April 18–July 5, 2002, unpaginated.
17. Interview in *India: Art Now*, Arken Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj, Denmark (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2012), p. 86.
18. See Throckmorton's essay.
19. Banerjee in "500 words" artforum.com, June 22, 2011. Accessed January 18, 2018. www.artforum.com/words/id=28485.
20. Interview with Banerjee, *FWD Media*, February 29, 2016. Accessed January 18, 2018. www.fwdlife.in/art-with-rina-banerjee.
21. Oswald de Andrade and Leslie Bary, "Cannibalist Manifesto," *Latin American Literary Review*, vol. 19 no. 38 (July–Dec 1991), pp. 38–47.
22. Appadurai, p. 44.

Beneath the surface away from land the
wreckage of big Empire split to be spoken,
not to be broken, pitted and potent with
pollutants powered to command did this
to press three to four nations always ready
to leap into motion, in brief eruptions came
emancipation, cultural collisions, tumbled
and trembled to form brave nation



Plate 32
2015, acrylic, ink, mica, gold, marble,
paper collage on watercolor paper,
90 x 52 in.



Plate 33
Untitled, 1994, dry pigment on oil and linen, 15 × 15 in. Courtesy of the artist



Plate 34

Peculiar was her manner . . ., 2009, ink, acrylic on unbleached watercolor paper, 15 × 11 in. Mathur Family Collection



Plate 35

She drew a premature prick . . ., 2011, female mannequin form (14 years tall girl), amber bottles, epoxy American buffalo horns, steel arm brace, Banarasi Indian wedding sari trim (silver, silk), Victorian replica doll head, Indian jewelry (22 kt. gold plated), glass magnifying dome, replica deer eye (glass), wooden elbow bangles (Congo), wood, 90 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo. Installation: *The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2011–12



Plate 36

It Rained so She Rained, n.d., ink, acrylic, and mixed media on handmade paper laid on board, 29¼ × 21¼ in. The Komal Shah and Gaurav Garg Collection



Plate 37

In dream with grin . . ., 2006, steel, floral sticks, dry mushrooms, plastic heads, feather fans, horn, preserved alligator head, cowrie shells, linen threads, copper wire, 47 × 47 × 31½ in. Collection Bernadette de Bonrepos, Paris, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Plate 38
She dazzled the gardner . . ., 2007, mixed media, 36 × 46 × 36 in. Mathur Family Collection

Plate 39

A Jane of all trades . . . , 2011, acrylic and ink on paper, 29% × 22 in. Courtesy of Tamar Efrat



Flourish me different in wind and drift
and breezes set sale always in motion and
mindful adaptation, in not yet settled fertile
selection, in open folds and ceaseless creases,
in remote reaches this was wrinkled and
snagged touched stopped with what nature
teaches came to shed peel so these layers
as evolution loosens makes us each time,
every time this a tiny bit different



Plate 40
2014, steel, textiles, beads, pearls,
feather fans, 36 x 36 x 26 in.
Collection of Wanda Kownacki



Plate 41

Wishing Waters and Grey Spell Is Enchanted Her Funny Foe, 2009, ink, acrylic, enameled paint, stamp, geography map cut and glued, textile material glued on paper, 27½ × 19½ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012-332



Plate 42

With Moon-Shine and Money . . ., 2007, acrylic, ink, collage on paper, 27½ × 20 in. The Collection of Catherine and Alan Harper, New York



Plate 43

The song of a thousand flies . . ., 2011, acrylic and ink on paper, 15 × 11 in. Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Collection



Plate 44 (above)

When signs of origin fade . . . , 2017, turtle replica in resin, vintage shell lampshades, steel armature, Polynesian wood mask, Pyrex filtration lab glassware, feathers, thread linen, silk, amber vials, cowrie shells, seed beads, pearls, 127 × 186 × 35 in. Collection Dragonfly, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels. Installation: 57th Venice Biennale, *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017

Plate 45 (right)

In the Land of Milk and Fat, 2000, vines found in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York; putty, plastic, magnesium, vermillion, organza, beeswax, feathers, light bulbs, toy plastic wheel, two used bedroom slippers, Mylar architectural plans for Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, red thread, push pins, 36 × 180 × 24 in. Skot Foreman Gallery





Rina Banerjee: Global Traveler

Rachel Kent

Rina Banerjee's extraordinary art captures the feminine and the "foreign" through color and ornament, beauty and underlying menace. Working with sculpture as well as drawing and watercolor, she draws on multiple visual and cultural references from around the world. Banerjee's universe is intensely colorful, brimming with excess. Her childhood experiences in Kolkata, London, Philadelphia, and New York (where she lives today) enable her to speak of a vast global diaspora—immersed in cultures and histories that coexisted, often uneasily.

Banerjee's sculptural works combine disparate, hybrid elements. Employing feathers, shells, beads, spices, gourds, birds' eggs, light bulbs and thrift store trinkets, they reflect the ethnic diversity of the New York neighborhood in which she lives, as well as the diversity of experience that has underpinned her life from the outset. The introduction of sound and smell gives some works a wider sensory dimension, and individual pieces vary in scale from smaller, more intimate objects to larger constructions that suggest a human scale. Monsters, mythical creatures, shamans, animals, and demigods all find expression in the works, which have a curiously evocative, otherworldly quality. Inviting recognition and, sometimes, repulsion, they sit between our world and another, far beyond.

Reflecting on her abundant practice, Banerjee observed in a 2011 interview, "I could never be a minimalist artist," adding, "I am interested in corrupting fine art with everything I wish for."¹ Her drawings and watercolors utilize an array of cultural sources, generating a rich tapestry of meaning. "I get a real charge from ancient Tibetan, Himalayan, and Indian art. I am obsessed by the clouds in Chinese and Tibetan paintings and their representation of strange creatures and mystical worlds Both Eastern and Western references are deposited in the work."² Expanding further on notions of orient and occident, Banerjee explains, "I am interested in making visible what cannot be explained by [this dichotomous way] of seeing the world."

Banerjee's sculptures likewise reflect this bowerbird sensibility, combining objects and surfaces in surprising, often unexpected ways. Textiles underpin much of the artist's three-dimensional practice with their varied textures and colorful patterns, from Chinese silks to West African wax prints. This approach to surface and ornamentation generates an art that is idiosyncratic and highly

personalized: a kind of dream universe, or wonderland. At its core, however, lies a rejection of decorum in place of deliberate, riotous excess.

Various conceptual threads are woven into Banerjee's artistic practice, from questions around diasporic identity and world politics, to those of gender and sexuality, decoration, and the natural world. Situated on the global stage, Banerjee's art resists simple categorization; it reflects her South Asian ancestry and diverse world experience, yet is not exclusively defined by either. Moreover, it reflects on the feminine, but pushes back against cliché or stereotype. How to position her practice represents a challenge for scholars, for she slips between multiple identities and reference points with surprising agility.

"I make work as diverse as I feel I am," Banerjee observes today. "It allows me to stay in the present and offers a contemplation or reflection." Identification, according to Banerjee, first begins with the recognition of one's humanity; yet, she says, "we are strapped down by gender and ethnicity." She observes that one must carve a different space, outside of these categories, in which to be, "So, for me, the first step is that I'm human."

"Mobility" is a word that recurs in Banerjee's artistic vocabulary. It is particularly fitting for an artist for whom the experience of migration—moving since childhood from one context to another, settling then uprooting again—has been the norm. "Mobility is very important in understanding identity," she says, adding, "It can happen when you're not moving also. It's about how you receive the world." Banerjee cites her mother's experience as a young girl in Bangladesh, growing up during war and witnessing the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, as significant in this regard. The only child of a large landowner and traditional healer in Dhaka, she relocated to Kolkata upon marriage, leaving her property behind and traveling back and forth thereafter. Her mother sold her last piece of land in Bangladesh in 1981, after which, Banerjee says, there was nothing and no one left to return to.

One of Banerjee's vivid childhood memories is of a paternal uncle who gave her beautiful silk scarves. A Muslim, unlike her mother's Hindu family, this relative introduced her to the notion of color in relation to identity. Greens and blues were Muslim colors, she explains, while pinks and reds were associated with Hindu marriage, and everyone wore white in the countryside. Color was very

important, but so too was clothing; during and after Partition, for example, Hindus asserted their identity via fashion and dress. Through her uncle's gifts, and her mother's attire, Banerjee came to understand early on how elemental clothing was in asserting one's identity and self.

Looking forward, as well as back, Banerjee observes that "visibility"—rather than invisibility—lies at the core of the migrant experience in America today. "The politics of our times with reference to immigrants and foreigners creates a hyper-visibility for people who live here. They were not visible initially, but have become [so] in a cloud of suspicion. A lot has changed in the United States," she says, "and certain people are very afraid to wear certain things for fear of violence. The idea of the 'foreign' and the feminine have become joined together in 'policing' one another, as well as being the subject of suspicion. So clothing or cloth becomes a good way of talking about this."

Locating a feminine—and, indeed, feminist—voice in Banerjee's practice does not limit the work or exclude other, equally rich readings. An exploration of gender does, though, contextualize the artist's concerns around color, dress, ornament, and excess. Reflecting on the Indian ritual of marriage, for example, Banerjee talks of female wedding attire in relation to the concept of a gift; traditionally, the bride is dripping with jewels, like a lavish box of treasures. Looking more widely at the history of trade along the Spice Route, to China and Nepal, she draws parallels between the exchanging of goods and of female bodies. The correlation of objects and value are, she says, "strapped to the bride," who is "adorned with what her husband will gain, according to the value system of the world." She is quick to point out that this does not reflect one's own intrinsic value, but a darker aspect of the way in which "we exchange bodies for money and property."

"There is a deep insecurity about being alive as a woman that is torturous to the male psyche," Banerjee observes. "It is almost like trying to apologize for her existence, to justify her value in the world. How many children, how many possessions, pageants and so forth . . . it almost undermines the possibility of *being real*. Thus the idea of decoration or ornament, to the point of being excessive, reveals a deep-seated fear about biological difference."

Excess is reflected in Banerjee's art works and their extended titles, which often read like poems. One such work, from 2013, literally bursts forth from the gallery wall in a dramatic flutter of pigeon feathers, glass beads, wedding sari fabric, cowrie shells, and light bulbs. In its evocative title, it expresses the frozen terror of the bejeweled bride: *imperial and Imposing, her body was ready for wedding—she articulated the splendor of lush gardens and bounty, unpolluted waters, untouched and unearthed territories, her body was mounted, frozen and waiting* (2013; plate 46). Looking across the artist's delicate watercolors and collages on paper, the subjects are predominantly female—human, animal, hybrid, erotic, airborne; some with hair fanning out into leaves, fruit, and tendrils; others with breath as spatters of blood. As noted by Jodi Throckmorton,³ the words *she* and *her* recur in their titles, as do references to magic, desire, and transformation.

Reflecting on her object-based practice, Banerjee observes that sculpture is historically a "treasured male domain." As a female South Asian American artist working in the present, there is "a kind of trespass" involved in producing sculptural works—especially when what one makes is large, bright, excessive, and joyously unapologetic. "To make something large draws attention to presence and a lack of portability," she comments. "In its largeness my work can be as big as a human figure—it takes up space."

Incorporating objects and textiles from a variety of world cultures heightens this sense of trespass, while reflecting her global experience as an individual and artist today. "I have never wanted to be considered only South Asian or American, but an individual who lives in situ with many neighborhoods and subtleties—Korean, Chinese, Caribbean, and so forth." Leaving London for New York with her family at the age of seven, she recalls, "We grew up in Korean and Jewish neighborhoods, shopped at the Spanish market. Boundaries were crossed at the level of food, for example." Noting the absence of a large Indian community in 1970s New York, she concludes, "You had to create your own culture . . . I am who I am because of these experiences and awareness of the world." Banerjee's sculptures convey a sense of "home" through their eclectic worldliness, a space where different cultures jostle alongside one another and dreams of the future are shared.

Artifacts and references absorbed during her visits to the Arts of Africa, Americas, and Asia collections at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, also find their way into Banerjee's art. Manual or "low" technologies, the incorporation of cowrie shells, ways of tying wire and arranging collage—of "wrapping things together"—all find voice within Banerjee's accumulative practice, in which objects are fixed yet flexible. Attracted to the idea of objects that are both functional and aesthetic, handmade and manufactured, she cites the commonplace broom as just one example, with its combination of natural and synthetic materials—a bunch of grasses, tied twice by hand, attached to a plastic stick.

Banerjee's sculptures draw on all manner of materials—natural and manmade—from gardening items like jute and seagrass twine, to seashells from India and the Philippines, to textiles from Korea, India, and China, and much more. Acknowledging their complex histories of production and global distribution, she constantly switches between materials, "If only to say there is an individual who lives outside of being female; that is human, connected to plants and animals." Refusing to be tied down by gender or heritage alone, her creative approach is one of flexibility and reinvention. "I am always trying to escape from that constraint. And I can, but I have to be so acrobatic and strategic about what I use."

The experience of the immigrant in New York is like that of a patient in the doctor's office, Banerjee observes: "One is always waiting to be diagnosed." A sense of looming danger and contagion hovers beneath the surface of her works; usually expressed indirectly, it is sometimes confronted head-on. In 2000, Banerjee was selected for the Whitney Biennial while still a relatively unknown artist in New York. Her response to the invitation was the ambitious, sprawling work *Infectious Migrations*, from a wider series entitled *An Uncertain Bondage is Deserved When Threatening Transmission* (1999; plate 2a–c). Spreading across the gallery wall in a branch formation, it spilled downwards onto the floor like pooling liquid. At its center was a figure made from fabric, light bulbs, and feathers, with multiple heads and arms. Its lower body suggested the digestive system of an insect's body, devouring all around it.



Plate 46

imperial and Imposing . . ., 2013, light bulbs, pigeon feathers, steel carbon wire, copper, silk thread, glass beads, cowrie shells, trim, wedding sari, seed beads, wood, horn, fleece, 38 x 34 x 23 in. Courtesy of Isabel Stainow Wilcox

Infectious Migrations drew inspiration from the AIDS epidemic in India and Africa.⁴ Noting that the spread of HIV was by then controlled in the Western world, Banerjee took a wider, global perspective. “I thought, ‘what about the rest of the world—why are we not talking about it anymore?’ This was the point where I began thinking about things not as an Asian, Indian artist but as a human being in this world.”⁵ In the work, human references—fingernails and false eyelashes, fabric, latex, rubber gloves—were connected by lengths of plastic tubing and incense sticks. Like a map of contagion unfurling across the globe, the work was beautiful and sinister to behold.

Despite their sense of lurking menace, there is a tactility and rich sensuality to Banerjee’s sculptural works. Banerjee states that the incorporation of music, scent, and light in her recent works suggests a kind of “universal language.” Their organic forms frequently evoke the human body with its curves and crevices, as well as the organs within. Reflecting on the corporeality of her sculptural work, Banerjee describes her wonder at seeing certain shapes in nature that mirror the human body—the gourd, for example, with its bulbous, curved form and smooth, golden-brown skin.

Drawn to organic shapes that reflect internal organs, the sexualization of the body, and “how we are built inside,” she toys with connections in nature: corals in relation to the coiled lobes of the brain, intestines, and more. These ideas are taken to their extreme in one sculpture from 2008 that presents a bodily-like form as an unraveled mass of internal organs, spilling outwards from a wooden divan across the gallery floor. The consumption of desire and flesh itself is expressed in the work’s cryptic title, which reads: *With breath taking consumption her commerce ate while she was being eaten* (2008; plate 3a–b).

“There is a sense of play coming out of profanity,” Banerjee says, “but also discovery in terms of the limits of sexuality, as the opposite of the rational—as something ‘dirty’ . . . I cannot help but think there should be a different way of seeing sexuality, the body and its extremities.” Clothing is like architecture, according to Banerjee; it houses our bodies, our eyes being windows, and our orifices entry and exit points. “Architecture is all about the body, the body is all about cloth, and cloth is informed in turn by the body. It reveals the language of nature and it’s important to confront this, as we will continue to make

certain separations and connections otherwise—for example, the feminization of the East, and the West as more masculine.”

Interestingly, several of Banerjee’s large-scale sculptural works have taken the architecture of India’s greatest palace shrine, the Taj Mahal, as their focus. Rendered in ethereal pink plastic lattice in 2003,⁶ then as a colorful cascade of jellyfish forms supported by bamboo in 2006,⁷ the works suggest a cavernous body with organs inside (plates 47–49). Love and mourning have given the Taj Mahal its timeless meaning; so, too, they shape the human heart.

Ultimately the interconnectedness of all things—animal, plant, human—lies at the core of Banerjee’s creative vision. The artist remembers traveling with her mother to Dhaka to visit her grandfather, an elderly man, when she was three years old. He lived in a hut surrounded by homeopathic medicine vials, she recalls, and used a mortar and pestle to grind dried organic matter in his little room. Here, she speaks of the indigenous people of Bangladesh: a community known locally as “shaltins” who lived in the jungle and brought herbs to her grandfather for his medicines.⁸ Their ancient healing tradition reflected the harmonious co-existence of humanity and nature, outside of conventional agriculture, Banerjee recalls; yet much of this centuries-old knowledge is lost or rejected today. “The kinds of separations that we make [between different knowledge systems] have to do with fear of loss, or contamination of identity,” she says. “All of these things have to co-exist, which requires a healthy culture and a way for us to express our anxieties.”

In 2017, Banerjee presented a suite of recent and new sculptural works in the curated *Arsenale* exhibition *Viva Arte Viva* for the 57th Venice Biennale. They included two flower forms, one an open sunflower and the other a closed bud (plates 50–51).⁹ According to the artist, they suggested the idea that all living things are born out of blackness, whether the universe or the womb; that light is then perceived and things grow in response to light; and that color is acquired for the life-sustaining purpose of protection or attraction. “To be born, to grow and to expire is the cycle of life,” Banerjee says of the works, which were augmented with a combination of sounds—the humming of bees, the undulating music of a “snake charmer” overlaid with jazz—and the introduction of fragrance.





Plate 47a–b

Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love, 2003, plastic, antique Anglo-Indian Bombay dark wood chair, steel and copper framework, floral picks, foam balls, cowrie shells, quilting pins, red-colored moss, antique stone globe, glass, synthetic fabric, shells, fake birds, 226 × 161 × 161 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels. Installation: *Chimeras of India and the West*, Musée national des arts asiatiques, Guimet, Paris, France, 2011



Plate 48 (above)

Lure of Place, 2006, linen mosquito nets, ceramic horns, school chairs, garden hoses, laboratory glassware, globes, bamboo, wire, lights, 118 x 118 x 157½ in. Installation: 3rd Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Hachi Community, Sanada Primary School, Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture, Japan, 2006

Plate 49 (opposite)

Within a new and robust capitalism . . . (detail), 2007, amber vials, light bulbs, wire, ankle bells, gourds, shells, cow horns, cowrie shells, brass bells, pigeon feathers, glass, twine, moss, sand, plexiglass, 157½ x 157½ x 118 in. Installation: *An Archaeology*, Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK, 2007





Plate 50a
Rina Banerjee working on *Excessive flower . . .*, c. 2016

Plate 50b
Excessive flower . . ., 2017, thread cotton, cowrie shells, glass bottles, wire, linen, silk, mirrors, vintage trim, cable, steel armature, copper tubes, seed beads, porcupine needles, cock feathers, peacock hairs, faux eyelashes, speaker, Frozen Charlotte doll heads, 72 × 48 × 36 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Museum Purchase, 2016.37a

Banerjee's most recent project,¹⁰ for the 2017 Prospect Triennial in New Orleans, harkens to previous works and took the form of a hybrid figure that is part human and part creature (2017; plate 1). Resting on two giant black pincers, it has a skeletal body, garden rakes for mandibles, and an African mask for a face. On its back is an unfurled, winged parachute, and an emergency light sits on the gallery floor behind its splayed back legs. The work's extravagant title, a full paragraph in length, makes references to "aliens not registered," "new mobilities," "black immigrant peddlers and new comers." In its choppy poetic rhythm, it recalls past histories of migration and the current, desperate wave of human traffic across land and sea, in response to the global refugee crisis.

Reflecting on the world today, Banerjee describes the complexity of being an immigrant who refuses to be co-opted by the politics of the host country. "Anyone who comes as a foreign artist and lives in the United States faces a certain sense of resistance to American imperialism in the world. But they are [also] caught in the American situation and feel gagged on both sides." Describing the art world as a metaphor for the wider world, filled with "charges and resistances," she proposes instead a new kind of identity through her practice. It is flexible, resilient, forward facing and outward looking—that of the global traveler today.

Notes

Author's note: All quotes by the artist in this essay, unless otherwise specified, are drawn from two unpublished discussions between the author and artist, conducted in Venice in June 2017 and London/New York in October 2017.

1. Rina Banerjee discusses her exhibition at Musée Guimet, *Artforum*, June 22, 2011.
2. Ibid.
3. See Throckmorton's essay, pp. 18–23
4. For further discussion of *Infectious Migrations*, see Throckmorton, pp. 18–23.
5. Presentation by Rina Banerjee, Asia Archive in America, October 20, 2011, www.aaa-a.org/programs/presentation-by-rina-banerjee/.
6. See *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love*, 2003, p. 149.
7. See *Lure of Place*, 2006, p. 149.
8. Banerjee notes that this group formed part of the ethnic community of Bangladesh, the Saontals, who were the original inhabitants of India. See www.saontalvoice.org/about_saontal_community.html. The "shaltins" are also referenced in Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray's final film, *Agantuk* (1991); Ray is a filmmaker who has been profoundly influential for Banerjee.
9. See *Excessive flower . . .* and *Women did do this in shining*, both 2017, pp. 156–57.
10. See *Viola, from New Orleans-ah . . .*, 2017, p. 157.

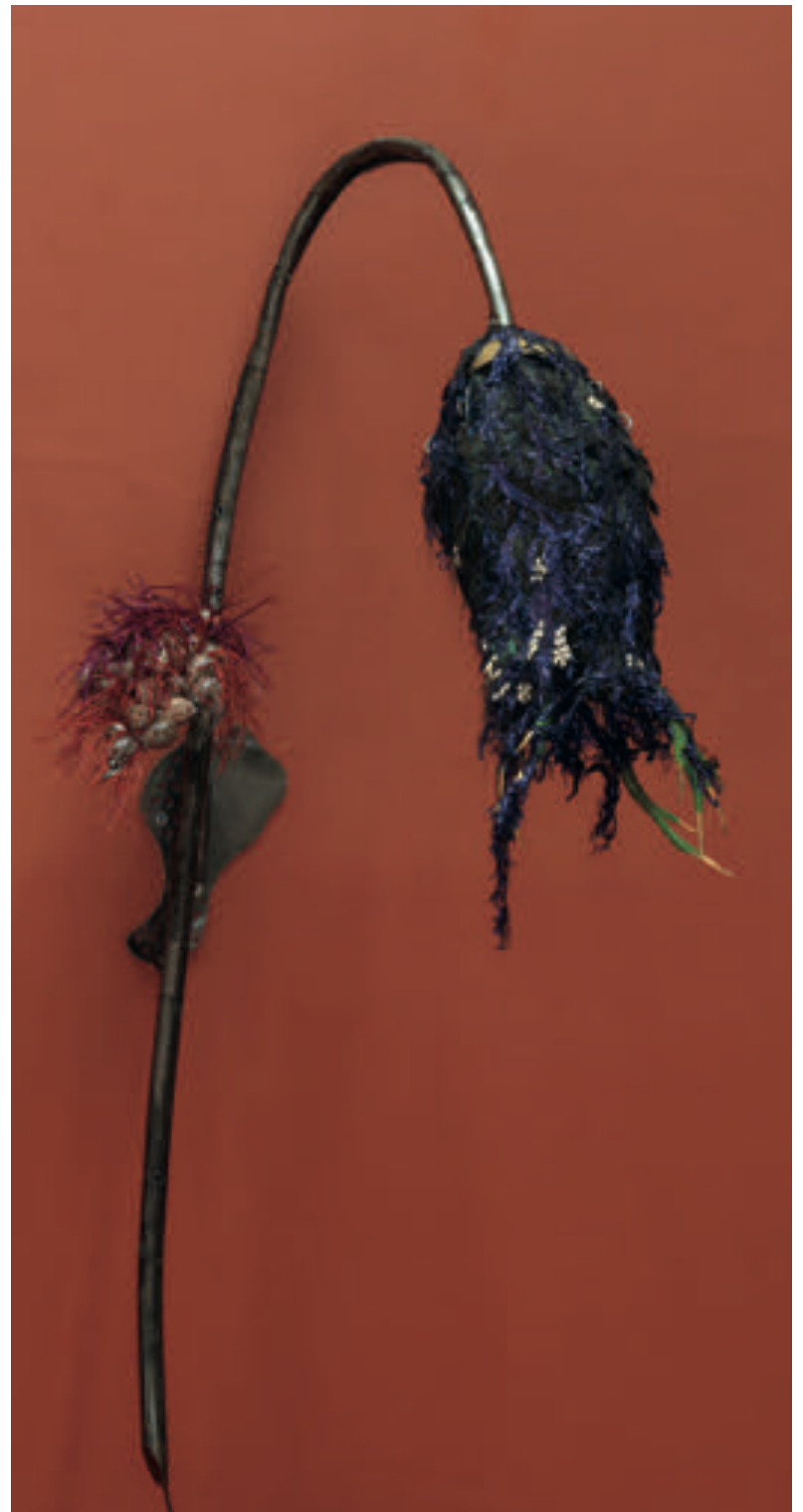


Plate 51

Women did do this in shining . . ., 2017, thread cotton, cowrie shells, glass bottles, wire, linen, silk, mirrors, vintage trim, cable, steel armature, copper tubes, seed beads, porcupine needles, cock feathers, peacock hairs, faux eyelashes, speakers, Frozen Charlotte doll heads, 48 × 76 × 32 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Museum Purchase, 2016.37b

From the oyster's shell it fell
with a neck of dangling bells
a flirtatious alligator who
put upon us a bodily spell

Plate 52
2006, metal bells, steel, fans,
appleseed necklace, dry preserved
alligator head, dry loofah, 108¼ x
49¼ x 27½ in.





Plate 53
Dodo bird . . ., 2014, acrylic, ink and collage on watercolor paper, 30¼ × 22 in. The Ford Foundation



Plate 54

The gene was his mule . . ., 2014, acrylic, ink, marbled paper collage on watercolor paper, 29 x 25 in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo

Plate 55

More like turkey . . ., 2015, ink, acrylic, 23 kt. gold, copper on paper, 14 × 10 in. Courtesy of Diana Nelson and John Atwater





Plate 56

Birds of Appetite She Who is Exiled Now Hovering, Circling, 2007, mixed media, 58 × 38 in. Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany



Plate 57

Lentil flour . . ., 2008, shells, plastic, gourds, nylon hair, 47¼ × 31½ × 51 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Plate 58

Tropicalization of nature, Henri-Rousseau restraint, 2007, horn, feather fans, gourds, bulbs, wood, fabric, peacock feathers, metal bells, 51¼ × 32¼ × 26⅞ in.
Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Plate 59

In Full Blooms . . ., 2006, ink, acrylic, enamel painting on paper, 29 × 21½ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012-333



Interview with Rina Banerjee

Allie Biswas

Rina Banerjee's sculpture *Infectious Migrations* (1999; plate 2a–c) and the exhibition in which it was first seen, the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2000 Biennial, are useful markers for understanding the evolution of her practice, as well as the ways in which her work has been framed.

The immense abstract work (variable up to thirty feet long), which Banerjee created specifically for the space designated to her at the Whitney, depicts a woman's body fashioned from an assortment of objects, including gauzy fabric, incense sticks, light bulbs, rubber, and foam. The fine, looping forms that emerge from the central figure escalate along the wall, while the cloth that shapes the base of the figure seems to melt from the wall into the ground, creating a kind of residual pool. The artist's starting point for this work, which she has discussed in relation to the AIDS epidemic of the time, was a selection of discarded architectural drawings that she had found on the street, blueprints for a preventative disease center at a hospital in Manhattan. This amalgamation of materials—whether found, purchased, familiar or uncommon—has become a template for Banerjee, where two- and three-dimensional objects are regularly integrated and function as a medium for her art.

Other than being an important work for the artist in terms of solidifying her interest in scale, space and materiality, *Infectious Migrations* heralded Banerjee's intention to make the distinctions between traditional sculpture and installation less clear. Her presence in the Whitney Biennial positioned her with other American artists emerging at the turn of the millennium who identified themselves with a similar sculptural practice, exploring how everyday objects could be used and redefined in an artwork. Reflecting on the exhibition, Banerjee recalls being placed in a gallery that included the work of Sarah Sze, Shirin Neshat, Paul Pfeiffer, and Richard Tuttle.

The Biennial also provides a sense of the wider cultural context in which Banerjee's art was being viewed at the time. This was the artist's first major exhibition after graduating from art school in 1995, and it signaled a moment of change. The exhibition's scope was focused on being international—a term that was beginning to be replaced at the start of the new millennium with the notion of the global. As artists began to travel more, or to associate themselves with several locations due to the processes

of globalization and migration, those from regions that had previously been considered peripheral to the main Western art centers were now being recognized. This coincided with an increase in art fairs and biennials, aided by emerging economies from around the world, which decentralized existing structures and added to the phenomenon of the artist as a nomadic figure. Receptive to the shifts of the period, many of the artists chosen by the Whitney for the 2000 Biennial were born outside the United States, and the institution made a point of hiring a team of curators from across the country in order to represent regional perspectives rather than those generated within the art hub of New York. The exhibition also allowed the museum to incorporate Internet art into its program for the first time.

When Banerjee made *Infectious Migrations*, the idea of representing or being informed by this growing preoccupation with global culture was not necessarily of concern to her as an artist, at least, not in any clear-cut way. Her experiences at the Yale School of Art in the early 1990s, where she began to experiment with found objects, had made her aware of her own identity. The responses that Banerjee received from classmates and faculty in relation to the art that she was producing singled out her “Indianness,” posited as a unique difference. Banerjee’s considerations of her own immigrancy led to developing an understanding of what “global” could mean. For her, immigrant identity was a way to break down boundaries, not create them. *Infectious Migrations* was the result of Banerjee’s fascination with the contaminating nature of disease. Here was a condition that had the power to connect all parts of the world.

During Banerjee’s time as a graduate student at Yale, conceptual art that favored a minimalist aesthetic was ubiquitous and was informally described as “smart art.” Banerjee was unable to relate to the projects of her peer group. Instead, she was keen to test the possibilities of diverse media. As a candidate in the Painting MFA program, she grounded her initial artistic endeavors in a process of transition. These first experiments, in 1994 and 1995, saw 3D objects being balanced on top of canvas-like foundations, which were then partly covered with dry pigment (p. 74; plate 33). During this time Banerjee was thinking back to her childhood, drawing upon her surroundings: decorative elements that took the place of a standard picture, whether plastic figures of

deities on her parents’ shelves or taxidermy in neighborhood restaurants. Her layered compositions sought to question if things that were physically available to her could be the painting itself.

Although readings of Banerjee’s work have often centered on facile interpretations relating to the artist’s biography or personal identity, the curatorial frameworks in which her art has been examined have, to date, been for the most part largely varied, and have helped to elucidate the breadth of Banerjee’s practice. Perhaps most important to note is the variety of artists with whom Banerjee has exhibited in group displays, and, consequently, the scope that her own work grants. The bibliography on Banerjee’s work to date, however, has preferred to repeat established convictions about the artist. The following interview is the result of several conversations I had with Banerjee during January 2018. Our discussion intends to offer a detailed, as well as accurate, outline of the journey upon which she embarked when she was initially developing her practice as an artist. It also provides frank perspectives on the contexts in which she emerged, and within which, two decades later, Banerjee continues to be placed.

Allie Biswas: Your biography is often shaped by your initial degree in polymer engineering, followed by a brief spell working in a lab. Was this start in science as vital to your work as an artist as has been suggested?

Rina Banerjee: I was such a bad student in engineering that I gave it up after three years and went to the Cleveland Institute of Art. It was like a sedative, opening up a science book, and the engineering department at Case Western was also deeply sexist; I was one of two women on the course. I had been given a transfer scholarship to Cleveland and was asked to choose the college where I would finish my degree. I decided to go back to Case Western for my final year because I had less coursework to do—that’s how I ended up with a degree in engineering.

It always seemed irrelevant to me, how you were positioned as a scientist in the first instance, particularly as you never bring it up of your own accord.

I’m sure there is something here about wanting to present my career as unique—an artist who has had this window of experience—but ultimately, what is being alluded to is that our whole culture is obsessed with the idea of South

Asians being rooted in the sciences and engineering. So I think this focus has just been a way to make me exotic.

It is about stereotypes: this artist fits our expectations.

Exactly. And in some sense, America is trying to take the credit for me being an artist: we were able to break the mold that her culture is heavily invested in; we made her into an artist instead! What they're trying to say, in effect, is that they are not responsible for this stereotype—it is relied upon by South Asians, not white Americans.

So the way you have been framed is based on race, and underlying this framework is the perspective that the culture here made you “free.”

There is an identity that I believe is particular to the American, that of being the maverick who is undoing something or rebelling. The narrative is that art is not something that easily happens to people from Asia, in contrast to how Americans and Europeans become artists. This is because being an artist requires a certain level of resistance, and an overall desire to imagine. What is interesting, of course, is that I got into engineering because my high school kept on pushing me. I wasn't even allowed to take art classes.

What gets dictated to students through their school education is not necessarily separate from how their parents are trying to guide them, particularly if they are seen to excel in something.

The middle-class institution is global. It is obviously not just a South Asian desire. The middle-class safety net: you get an education, you go into a profession. But America made me great; I think that's part of the story here.

Given this insinuation, it is particularly interesting that the people who were influential to you early on, who supported your interest to follow art, were figures who were not part of the mainstream New York art world. You were encouraged to apply to art school, to take a Master's degree, by a professor at Penn State University. Can you tell me about this time?

After finishing at Case Western, I took a job at a lab based at Penn State University in 1988. My boss wanted me to enroll in the PhD program at the university, so I started taking coursework in engineering. But I also took a

painting class with Santa Barraza. She is a Chicana woman, and her art was concerned with border politics. I ended up spending a lot of time with her, and this is what allowed me to learn what an artist does. It was Santa who told me that I was good enough to apply to Yale. She wanted me to apply to Yale, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Maryland Institute College of Art. Those were the top places. In 1991, I left my job at the lab and enrolled in the MFA program at Penn State, so that I could create a portfolio to use for my applications. I was there for a year and worked exclusively with Santa.

What kind of art were you being exposed to through your studies?

We would take trips to New York. I remember visiting Phyllis Kind, an important gallery that was showing black artists. I was meeting people such as Howardena Pindell, Betye Saar, and Renee Cox. I began to see different kinds of sensibilities for the first time. During that period, people were trying to figure out how to talk about this art. They didn't know about the history of African-American art and how it might impact contemporary work, for instance. I was also introduced to Latino and Hispanic artists, through the community Santa knew in Harlem.

I know that David C. Driskell was another important figure for you.

He convinced me that I should be an artist. I met him at a College Art Association conference. I was pretty impressed by him, though I didn't know he was an important person at that time. He told me that he was both an artist and an art historian, and I remember asking how it was possible to be both. He told me that you had to be both when there was no one writing the history for the kind of art you were making. I started to understand that I needed to look at that model. But I didn't really have a context to understand what he was saying. He was saying something that I hadn't seen yet. I do feel as though I came into contact with Santa and David at the right time. Here were people who were trying to re-route art history.

How did these perspectives relate to the wider art community you had so far experienced, whether at the Cleveland Institute of Art or other professors at Penn State?

I was aware that there was a negation of contemporary art within academia. Art historians were not interested in talking to artists who did not fit a mainstream type. For example, Santa knew that her colleagues were not interested in her history, in what she had experienced. They were not interested at all. She also knew that advocates of feminism were not talking to women artists from all walks of life. So while I didn't relate these things to my art for a long time, I did feel as though I had already been subject to those politics—certain inequities. Applying to and attending Yale made those politics very clear.

How were you beginning to think about your own art?

The notion of the “third space” was being created, which wasn't just referring to artists who could go back and forth between cultures, but also a signaling of exhibitions that included a range of artists; a real mix. They were not necessarily representative of people from their cultural heritage, but, rather, something in between. Also important was the idea of content. I remember seeing the work of Edward Kienholz and Joseph Cornell. Artists who were using flea market objects; things that were not precious. But they offered various positions, whether psychological or political. I was trying to figure out what my content would be—what I was interested in.

You arrived at Yale School of Art in 1993, enrolled in the painting program, but you quickly realized that your interest was in objects. As you began to use them, what were these first experiments like?

I started in that vein, of abstract painting, which had made up my portfolio. I had referenced artists that were still held up at that time—Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock. Santa Barazza had told me that the places that hold power can only see you if you make things that look like what they already know. But within a couple of months I was stretching fabrics onto which I would print things, mostly using dry pigment. I was really trying to seek out this juxtaposition between forms; natural things, as well as things that were not natural and perhaps felt awkward. I was using ginger leaves, ginkgo leaves, tree roots. I would mix these with natural things from the body—fingernails, people's hair. I would finely chop the hair and use it as if it were pigment, gluing it to the surface of the canvas (p. 74; plate 33). People couldn't tell that it

was not normal pigment, but, at the same time, the surface was different enough for them to want to ask what it was that they were looking at.

Categories have always been important, then, in terms of how you think about which materials to use.

I was really interested in the way we recognize what is natural, as opposed to knowing that it's natural. And then these things that were manufactured, like the pigment. Processed fabrics made up another category. I also started thinking about light bulbs, which has obviously stayed with me. I was just learning to figure out a process that defined the work. It was very important that the process had something to do with the content.

What was the first work you made that relied solely on objects?

The first work I made that was considered sculpture by faculty was formed from a tree root. I snipped off the end and then put mussel shells on it. I would take the circular saw and jab into the root to make a little channel for the mussel shells to sit in and be cradled. There was a physical connection between these things. It was really important when I made that object that it looked like natural growth. But, of course, it was not. So there was a conflict between this one natural thing, the root, and the mussel, which actually grows like that in real life, but would not be growing on a root. I constructed something that could only happen if a human made it.

You were taking printmaking classes at this time.

How did this medium help to develop your work?

I made woodcuts and printed them onto fabric, either something synthetic or cotton. The cotton didn't register a response as such, but when I used silk, or something that *looked* like silk, the other students and teachers would think about it as being Indian. They would assume it was a sari. I started to realize how important it was for the viewers to identify the material as an object. In their minds, anything that was just cloth by itself, or anything that glittered or had color, was connected to Indian clothing when looking at my work.

Presumably you were also realizing how your work was read in relation to what they assumed about you, and, consequently, your intentions. How did you navigate such interpretations?

I was working in a bubble that really had nothing to do with anything that was being said. I think my peers could probably sense that. It was important to dismantle the faultiness of their language, which, I believe, was invested in a blindness—to not actually see what the material is. But I didn't want to get myself into a hole where I was one of those Indian people who doesn't want to associate with India at all, because they consider themselves very moderate or are embarrassed in some way. I felt as though I was being manipulated to take a defensive position, which I didn't account for, so, instead, I wanted to do something that was a combination of things in which I was interested. My handling of the situation at the time was: this response is interesting, I'll keep it at the back of my head, but I really need to do the things that I want to do without being self-conscious about being Indian, or being ambitious about assimilation, or attaching myself to some idea of what is American.

That's interesting—you embraced these problematic responses to your work rather than rejecting or disputing them.

I knew it had to be a conversation, and I had to be the person who directed it. I needed to speak to what was being said. This is what I continued to do as my career developed. So some of what I put into my work had to be things that could be recognized as part of the dominant visual language. Should I use something that contradicted what was expected from me, at least it would create a more provocative conversation, and one that was hopefully more sincere.

Would it be right to say that you didn't feel any affinities with your classmates, or the overall art school culture?

Their work was not interesting to me at all. It was both conceptual and stylistically very minimal. I was interested in an aesthetic that was messier and less rigid. And it was a very segregated atmosphere. The department would take one foreign student and two students who were not white—every year. That was the quota. They told me that they hadn't had a South Asian in ten years. Also, touching



Rina Banerjee with her sculpture *Viola, from New Orleans-ah . . .*, Prospect.4, New Orleans, LA, 2017–18

on what we spoke about earlier, the preoccupation for identifying me as a “typical” South Asian who goes into engineering was established right away. There were other students who had come from non-art backgrounds—somebody had a medical degree; another person was an architect—but they were not bothered about their previous experiences. Their earlier lives were not seen as impacting on their goals as an artist.

The first major exhibition you were shown in after leaving art school was *Out of India*, at the Queens Museum in 1997. Did it feel as though your recent experiences at art school were being repeated, given

that you were being presented within this framework of artists from India?

I was surprised, but I was also the only artist in the show who was American, and Jane Farver, the curator, had a different aim. She wanted this conversation about diaspora to sink in. I remember that she was inviting artists from China to exhibit their work in New York at that time, so you can imagine, she was a pioneering person. Funnily enough, the other artists in the show, who were based in India, wondered why I was in the same exhibition as them. I wasn't Indian enough, as an artist who had left India at the age of three and grown up and lived in New York since the age of seven. I didn't really belong in that setting, in their eyes. There certainly wasn't any sense of kinship.

Do you want to emphasize the theme of migration in your work?

I would say that my interest in the subject matter has to do with the whole sociopolitical system that doesn't allow people who are of a certain class and ethnicity to enter the dynamics of this country. They are always in this waiting room called "immigrant."

You were able to turn this notion on its head when you participated in the group exhibition *Yankee Remix* in 2003–04 (figs. 9 and 10; p. 133). Using the collection of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, you explored how "outsider" cultures formulated the identity of the New England "Yankee" figure.

It was an important early exhibition for me in that respect. The curator, Laura Steward, wanted to pick artists that you would never think of for a show on New England identity. I was shown with Zoe Leonard, Lorna Simpson, Annette Messenger, and Martin Kersels. While I had already been and continued to be included in shows that relied on "Indianness" for their curatorial framework, this was certainly not a constant, and I was presented in just as many exhibitions that did not care about that. As part of my research for *Yankee Remix*, I went to Otis Library in Boston and was fascinated that most of what is considered as the country's treasure, the belongings of the wealthiest people of the colonial period in the US, was from elsewhere. A lot of it was from the East India Company and

China. Maybe every once in a while you would get this New England jar that they kept the butter in and things like that, made locally. All of the clothing was from abroad, Madras, Calcutta,* Cape Town. It was a world of consumerism.

And, at the same time, there was a burgeoning culture of consumerism around this point in your career, propelled by the globalization of contemporary art. I wonder how this impacted artists in the US who came from immigrant backgrounds? Did this phenomenon open up possibilities?

I remember that Jane Farver was the first person to use the word "global," during the *Out of India* show. The term was just emerging. I don't feel as though it changed things intrinsically—divisions still existed, and they continue to exist. There isn't this "global artist" category in the way that we like to think there is. Artists belong to countries and genders and communities, because we still live very segregated lives. What I will say, though, is that, in practical terms, artists began to travel more, and their work was being exhibited in a wider international sphere.

Your participation at art fairs grew during the early 2000s. Was this the most obvious way for you to relate to this idea of globalism?

It went from sporadic biennials to art fairs all over the world. The Frieze Art Fair in London was launched in 2003 and I showed there for the first time in 2005. Then in 2007 I had a solo show at a fair in Shanghai. The idea of place opened up. I don't think there was any reason for me to be at those fairs, but I had to go, because nobody knew how to install my work. These trips were very important for my learning. I was being exposed to how people were communicating with each other. I was influenced by what I was seeing, from all of these different countries.

Do you think that there was an aesthetic that was defined as being "global"?

In trying to find a way to recognize what global art might mean, attention was given to work that referenced any kind

*Although Madras and Calcutta are today called Chennai and Kolkata, Banerjee prefers to use the names of the cities at the time of her birth.

of colonial history. This occurred in my work, because of the kind of materials I was using. Words like “experimental” and “untraditional” were heard, which were considered to indicate a global aesthetic. My work also touched on themes that were starting to be discussed—tourism and expansionism. I was particularly thinking about ways to talk about this market of exchange, and how people are identified culturally through that market. It was really all about commerce, which I still of course think about a lot now.

Commerce is often discussed in relation to mobility in your work. Do these concerns equate to freedom? You have talked about travel as a psychological and intellectual need. Is this what mobility ultimately means to you?

I think my interest in mobility is really about seeing if I can mobilize how I feel about my own identity. People who think they’re from a culture, and feel stabilized by its security, are not noticing how their own culture is constantly adapting to other cultures, because of this sense of “home” that they are tied to. What does it mean to adopt multiple cultural identities? And how does this occupancy reshape identity? I think learning about different cultures creates more passages. That is what mobility is for me, and we need it in order to exist. In a broader context, mobility isn’t about cultural unity, but rather realizing that the world cannot be a series of restrictions that police you.

I think authenticity is also a part of this conversation. Showing an object that looks as though it is from somewhere distant, because of its unfamiliar appearance, for example, might persuade a person to think that it is “real,” that it actually originated from this other place.

There is a preoccupation with authenticity. I don’t know why it comes to the fore, because I’m really not trying to

make authentic work. How do you read the work of someone who uses objects as they find them, which originate from various traditions? Clearly I didn’t go to Africa to get this mask. That’s a very important point. The mask came here. I am not going to a country and embracing its culture firsthand.

So, for you, the marketplace is an essential space for the breaking of boundaries, and underlines your point about cultural production as a collaborative entity.

My point is that there is so much trafficking—over-trafficking. This is a different, more cynical narration, than the interpretation about cultural unity. These things that we call authentic—I’m laying claim to the fact that they’re not authentic at all. They’re produced because the consumer, who is dominantly Western, wants them. So they are very hybrid in terms of their cultural location, and, yes, they are made out of the cooperation and collaboration of different cultures to produce this market. That’s what it means to have a marketplace. I would say that my work is very focused on how the market is expressed in terms of these connections, rather than trying to offer unification.

Thinking about the most recent stage of your career, over the last decade, do you feel as though the climate in which you function as an artist has fundamentally changed since you started making art twenty years ago?

I just don’t feel that there has ever really been a context for me to associate myself with. I do feel like an isolated figure and there is a lot of division among artists, as there is among all people. From my experience, one of the things that I continue to hold on to is that people often think that they are part of the family, and when they realize that they are not, it comes as a big blow. You will be told that you are not part of the group and that you cannot have access to it. People don’t share power easily.

Plate 60

A Elephant—She Was not So Small . . ., 2008, ink, acrylic, enamel painting on paper, 15 × 11 in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–330



Her captivity was once someone's
treasure and even pleasure but she blew
and flew away took root which grew,
we knew this was like no other feather,
a third kind of bird that perched on
vine intertwined was neither native
nor her queens daughters, a peculiar
other.



Plate 61

2011, Anglo-Indian pedestal 1860, Victorian birdcage, shells, feathers, gourds, grape vines, coral, Fractured Charlotte doll heads, steel knitted mesh with glass beads, Kenyan tourist sculptures, apple gourds, 7 × 7 × 6 ft. Cornell Fine Arts Museum, purchased with funds from the Michel Roux Acquisitions Fund, 2016.20. Installation: *Displacement: Symbols and Journeys*, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, Florida, 2016



Plate 62
Bone Flower, 2007, mixed
media, 47 × 26 × 49 in.
Private Collection, Paris,
France, courtesy of Galerie
Nathalie Obadia, Paris/
Brussels



Plate 63

The Intellectual Explorer . . ., 2008, ink, acrylic, enamel painting on paper, 30 × 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012-329

Plate 64

Buried in stump . . ., 2015, silver leaf blue, ink, acrylic on birch wood panel, 20 × 20 × 1½ in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels





Plate 65

Umbrella of fruit fell to her green reason, 2007, acrylic and ink on paper, 27½ × 19½ in. Collection of Charles Betlach II



Plate 66

The promise of self rule . . ., 2008, wooden Victorian ladies chair, one dozen Chinese electric altar lamps, one pink paper Chinese umbrella, one long sisal mesh net, three miniature animals, cow horn, wire basket, 168 × 48 × 39% in. Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany

Chronology

Laurel V. McLaughlin

Note: The data provided here is based on facts the contributors to this publication have confirmed with the artist and her archival records. This chronology follows Rina Banerjee's exhibitions in order to demonstrate her career across cultures, locales, and artistic movements. An asterisk indicates that the exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue. Because of the length of some of Banerjee's titles, abbreviated versions are included here. For full titles and media of RB's work cited in this chronology and included in the exhibition, see the List of Works (pp. 147–57). The works and artists that are named within the exhibitions are cited due to their relevance to this retrospective and Banerjee's oeuvre.

1963

Rina Banerjee (RB) is born in Kolkata, India, to Dolly Banerjee (formerly Mukerjee) and Bimal Kumar Banerjee (1925–2018). She has two siblings, Anjana Banerjee (b. 1960) and Chandana Banerjee (b. 1964).

1967–1974

The family emigrates to Kensington, London, UK, and later Manchester, UK; then, in 1970, moves to New York, USA, for RB's father's job as a nuclear engineer. They eventually settle in Corona, Queens, NY.

1974–1979

RB moves to Philadelphia in fifth grade, where she attends the Fox Chase School. The family lives in a Victorian house near the Fox Chase train station.

1979–1981

The Banerjee family returns to New York City. RB attends Benjamin N. Cardozo High School in Bayside, Queens, for tenth through twelfth grades.

1981–1984

RB attends Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, and begins a pre-med major, but soon switches to engineering.

1984–1985

RB attends the Cleveland Institute of Art for one year on an art scholarship.

1985–1988

RB returns to Case Western Reserve University to finish her coursework in polymer engineering.

1989–1993

RB takes a research job in polymer engineering at Penn State University, State College, PA. She eventually leaves the lab, enrolls in the MFA program, and is married.

1993–1994

Attends Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT, MFA program, and majors in painting and printmaking. RB's early works feature oils, acrylics, dry pigment, hair, and wax on canvas in a predominantly abstract mode, such as *Untitled* (1994). Many of these works were not given titles by RB and have never been exhibited.

1994–1995

RB graduates from Yale School of Art in 1995.



Fig. 1 Rina Banerjee, New York, c. 1996

She teaches the course Introduction to Feminist Theory at Yale University with Dr. Laura Wexler.

September 1–24, 1995: *Intuitive Mixed Media: works by two women artists*, Art Barn Gallery, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro. RB participates with Kristy Deetz, shows the work on paper *Dangerous Goods* (1995), among others.

1996–1997

RB teaches general fine art, painting, and drawing courses at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA (fig. 1). She takes a studio at 31st Street and 10th Avenue, New York.

1997–1998

RB teaches a course on Feminist Art Theory at Penn State University.

July 17–September 14, 1997: *A.I.M. Artist in the Market Place*, Bronx Museum, NY, RB's first group exhibition, curated by Lydia Yee and Marysol Nieves; RB shows *American Touristor* (1996; no longer exists), her first hanging installation.

October 8–November 6, 1997: *fermented*, Arason Gallery, Parsons School of Design, New York, curated by Amy Sadao and Barbara Hunt, group exhibition. RB exhibits *Tele Space Fist* (1999; fig. 2), a work using soft materials and fake fingernails, demonstrating her continued investigation of feminist themes and the fantastical.

October 22–November 21, 1997: *Hybrid Harem*, Dana Arts Center, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY. RB exhibits *Filthy Hands*, *Robotic Desire* (c. 1996); “her large lustrous eyes seemed indifferent” (1996); *Contorted Reactions to Europeans* (1997); and *road side home* (1997; fig. 3), among others, most of which incorporated elements of soft sculpture using textiles.

December 9, 1997–March 22, 1998: *Out of India: Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora*, Queens Museum, NY. A seminal exhibition curated by Jane Farver, it is one of the few surveys of Indian art in the US showing work by artists born 1914 through 1971 and those making work in the aftermath of Indian independence in 1947. Importantly, it features international artists who were born in India but live elsewhere. RB shows *Home within a Harem* (1997; no longer exists), one of her first large-scale installations, which includes her signature cowrie shells, an Amish bed, kumkum powder, and turmeric. The installation utilizes mass-produced and hand-made materials in order to describe the wide spectrum of objects connected to the cultural concept of “home.”

RB also shows work in *Research Revision Reconstruct*, Old Dominion University,



Fig. 2 *Tele Space Fist*, 1999, mixed media, 60 × 10 × 5 in.

Norfolk, VA, and *Seeking Beautiful Indian Girls*, Gallery 401, Toronto, Canada.

1998–1999

July 16–September 20, 1998: *Urban Encounters*, New Museum, New York, curated by Gregory Sholette. RB shows *Ferengi Bed* and *Octopussy* (both 1997; no longer exist). Each sculpture embodies misconceptions concerning women from the East and the feeling of foreignness.

RB teaches a course on Mixed Media and advises for the MFA program at the University of Chicago, Illinois.

Ananya Kumar Banerjee is born on October 23, 1998, and is featured in RB's practice, such as the 2000 documentary made for *Infectious Migrations* (1999) at the Whitney Biennial and later collaborations.

December 1, 1999–January 30, 2000: *Bodies of Resistance*, Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT, curated by Barbara Hunt.* Seven-

teen international artists address issues of the body and disease in contemporary society. The exhibition travels to Kwazulu Natal Society of the Arts in Durban, South Africa, for the International World AIDS Conference in 2000. RB presents early hybrid drawing-installation works from the 1999 series *An Uncertain Bondage is Required When Threatening Transmission*, including: *Feet Upon Path*; *Joining George Washington*; *elastic partners*; *Purity*; and *revealing*; in addition to the large-scale installation *The Nature of Illness* (no longer exists).¹ The installation-drawing, *Purity* (fig. 4) features turmeric powder, native to South Asia. This work, along with the installation *Home within a Harem*, is a precursor to RB's monumental work at the 2000 Whitney Biennial, *Infectious Migrations*, which uses spices. The use of such materials reveals her innovation with South Asian forms, applying them to global contexts in which they accrue meaning in relation to immigration, associating the experience with poor hygiene,



Fig. 3 *road side home*, 1997, mixed media, 2 × 4 × 4 ft.



Fig. 4 *Purity* from the series *An Uncertain Bondage is Required When Threatening Transmission*, 1999, acrylic, ink, turmeric, mixed media on vellum, 40 × 40 in.

ethnic cleansing, contaminated nation states, and in some cases, disease (from a Western perspective). RB plays upon stereotypes applied to immigrant communities in order to reveal their fallacies.

2000

RB lives in New York City and Albany, NY. She takes a studio at 72 Berry Street in Williamsburg, NY, and teaches courses on figurative drawing, mixed media, and art theory at Bennington College, VT.

March 23–June 4: 2000 Whitney Biennial, New York.* Invited by curators Maxwell L. Anderson, Michael Auping, Valerie Cassel, Hugh M. Davies, Jane Farver, Andrea Miller-Keller, and Lawrence R. Rinder, RB stages her monumental installation *Infectious Migrations*. The 2000 Biennial is known for its “international” approach when compared to its more nationally focused iterations. RB espouses this international approach in her installation,

which migrates across the space like an infection.

April 16–September 10: *Good Business is the Best Art: Twenty Years of the Artist in the Marketplace Program*, Bronx Museum. Group exhibition curated by Lydia Yee and Marysol Nieves examines the professional development of artists in the marketplace. Alongside artists such as Tomie Arai, Katharina Bosse, and Glenn Ligon, RB shows *Postcolonial Broom—Spider Woman* (1997–2000; fig. 5),² a wide-spreading wall installation of gauze, beads, and industrial tubing that foregrounds the materials and critique embedded within *Infectious Migrations* and its analysis of exoticism.

May 11–June 17: *Exoticism was for Sale*, Project Room, Debs & Co., New York. For her first solo exhibition, RB creates the installation “*She preferred the flowers*” (2000; no longer exists), described as a “monstrous digestive system in which handfuls of colored ritual powder and spices are trapped” amid “layers of clear plastic wrap” by Holland Cotter in *The New York Times*.³ This is the first instance in which RB uses plastic wrap as a sculptural material, designating it as a visible barrier symbolizing invisible obstructions faced by immigrants.

May 11–June 24: *Auf Wiedersehen, Admit One* Gallery, New York. Solo exhibition featuring numerous sculptural works that continue RB’s engagement with themes of disease and infection in relation to travel and migration: *Growths on Appendages* (c. 1998) from the series *Objects of Superstition*. RB also shows *Fly* (1995); *Untitled* (1999/2000); *Cloud and Prickly Blouse* (both 2000);⁴ along with *Hidden, beneath her beetle stained lips was this other tongue not yet sprung; In the Garden, Scientists Dreamed; In the Land of Milk and Fat*;⁵ and *Tobacco and Coffee* (all 2000).

July 20–August 18: *The Magic City*, Brent Sikkema (now Sikkema Jenkins), New York, curated by Trevor Schoonmaker. RB’s installation *I dream of Genie* (2000; fig. 6; no longer exists),⁶ using yellow Saran wrap, foam, and found materials, is featured. The group exhibition examines cultural politics through works that engage elements of the fantastical, enlisting artists such as Barkley Hendricks, Roberto Visani, and Wangechi Mutu.

August 22–September 28: *Contemporary Art and Identity: South Asian Diaspora in North America*, Baum Gallery of Fine Art, University of Central Arkansas, Conway. RB shows the installation *Resisting Rest* (1999; no longer exists).

October 26–November 30: *Antenna*, Bose Pacia Gallery, New York.* RB’s solo exhibition presents works that Sujata Moorti describes as demonstrating the experience of “belonging to two places



Fig. 5 *Postcolonial Broom—Spider Woman*, 1997–2000, cement, wax, latex, pins, fabric, found objects, utensils, light bulbs, foam, trimmings, branches, Body Shop compact, hair, hairnets, beads, threads, gauze, 10 × 10 ft.



Fig. 6 *I dream of Genie*, 2000, oil lamp, pillow, Saran wrap, foam, beeswax, fabric, poly-fill, Plasticine, netting, dimensions variable

and simultaneously of not belonging to either place.”⁷ The exhibition includes RB’s series *Diasporizing Umbrellas*, featuring *From Iodine to Indigo*; *Leg of Land a Foot Away*; *Eruptions*; *With Impatience and Privilege*; *With Judgment in Dreams*; *With Resilience and Thought*; and *With Rupture and Complicity* (all 2000). The site-specific drawing installation on the windows of the gallery, *Lingering and Longing: In View of Two Places* (no longer exists); the photo collage *Fluent* (no longer exists); the paintings⁸ *Land*; *Rush*; and *Gut* (all 2000). The sculpture *Cholera Belt*; the sculptural series *Clothed Tentacles*, including the works *blubbery and pliable*; *moist and revealing*; and *ointment and rigidity*; and the installation *Exoticism was for Sale* (all 2000).⁹

2001

Debs & Co., New York, represents RB from 2001 to 2003.

May 1–June 1: RB and Barbara Hunt jury the exhibition *Shaken and Stirred* with the South Asian Women’s Creative Collective at Bose Pacia Modern.

June 24–October 7: *Crossing the Line*, Queens Museum.* The exhibition addresses cultural shifts in the Queens neighborhood. RB shows the site-specific installation *Transporting Cinderella* (2001; no longer exists) at the Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam Temple, Flushing, Queens, and the installation “*On my tippy toes*” (2001) at the museum.

September 7–October 13: *Phantasmal Pharmacopeia*, Debs & Co., solo exhibition, closes in aftermath of September 11. RB presents two large-scale installations, *In the Dream Garden* (2001; no longer exists); and *The Garden of Grass and Brilliance* (fig. 7; no longer exists); Saran-wrapped rooms with soft sculptural works inhabiting them, such as *Flowering*; *Prickly Organelle*; *Furry + Fuzzy Organelle*; *Itsy + Squeaky Organelle*; *Phantasmal*

Pharmacopia; and *Tiny Tickles of Organs* (all works 2001).

September 8–November 25: *Brooklyn!*, Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, FL, explores the New York borough’s emerging art scene. RB shows the work on paper *Gut* (2000).

September 23–October 28: *Interval: New Art for a New Space*, SculptureCenter, Long Island City, NY. The exhibition celebrates the SculptureCenter’s new space through commissions by twenty-seven artists. RB shows *Cellar Reach* (2001; no longer exists),¹⁰ in which she highlights a cellar as the building’s “organs,” made from gum, Silly Putty, slime, powders, and Saran wrap, suggesting both a “parasitic and transformative relationship” with the space.¹¹

During this time, RB travels to India, where she makes her “paintings” *Filarial*; *Leprosy*; *Leishmaniasis*; *Malaria*; *Schistosomosis*; and *Typhanosomia*



Fig. 7 *The Garden of Grass and Brilliance . . . , 2001*, mixed media, 17 × 8 × 8 ft.

(2001). These works were inspired by the “reservoir of disease” that she encountered, both in the sense of actual tropical diseases and in relation to the flows of migration, a metaphorical relationship first explored in *Infectious Migrations*.¹²

2002

April 5–May 27: *Phantasmal Pharmacopeia*, Painted Bride Center, Philadelphia, PA. RB’s first solo exhibition in the city is curated by Susette Min and challenges the conception of the “garden” as an Edenic paradise. Rather than adhering to myth, RB deconstructs the comfort and familiarity of the garden in her dystopic and hybridized interior, featuring a large-scale installation of the 2001 “paintings” named after tropical infectious diseases from Africa, India, the Caribbean, Central and South America that defined a modern understanding of tropical

medicine. Here RB’s innovations with text, rendered in materials such as googly eyes and kumkum powder, shown across the walls of the installation, hold an equal place with the artworks. RB also exhibits the two Saran-wrap installations, *In the Dream Garden* and *The Garden of Grass and Brilliance*, from her 2001 Debs & Co. exhibition, with their accompanying sculptures.

April 18–July 5: *Five by Five: Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York, curated by Shamim Momin.* RB exhibits *A Stranger is in Our Paradise* (2002; fig. 8; no longer exists).¹³ The premise of the show encourages contemporary artists to draw inspiration from other contemporary artists. RB bases her work on Donald Lipski’s *Water Lilies #61* (1991).¹⁴ In the catalogue, RB claims that she was inspired by Lipski’s subversion of the flag and his recombination of its symbolic potential, which she restages in the form of an island with an “American flag embalmed in water . . . a plantation of tiny American flags and a penny bank in the shape of a globe.”¹⁵ She calls this a metaphor for the nation: “contained, colorful, and ordered, but always on the brink of bursting at the seams.”¹⁶

August 7–30: *Freshen: New York Artists*, Washington Square Gallery, San Francisco. RB’s work features in the group exhibition, guest curated by Kóan-Jeff Baysa.

2003

March 24–April 5: *Broken Mirror: The Midnight’s Children*, Leroy Neiman Center Gallery, Columbia University, New York. Curated by artist Chitra Ganesh, the exhibition shows work by contemporary artists from South Asia and the US whose practices focus on interpretations of history and myth. RB shows the work on paper, *Her hair was so long and carelessly wicked* (1997).

May 1–3: *Specificity*, Riva Gallery, New York, curated by Odili Donald Odita, focuses on how artists address large topics in extremely pointed ways.* RB shows *A Stranger is in our Paradise* (2002).

RB’s works included in Art Contemporary in Spain (ARCO), curated by Omar Lopez-Chahoud, in Madrid.

2004

Newman Popiashvili Gallery, New York, represents RB from 2004 to 2006.

RB moves her studio to 48 S. 4th Street, Williamsburg, NY.

April 17–August 15: *Open House: Working in Brooklyn*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY, is a group show with over three hundred works by two hundred practitioners from Brooklyn, curated by Charlotta Kotik. The exhibition emphasizes the practices of multigenerational, multiethnic, and multinational artist communities, tracing the changes and transformations in Brooklyn. RB shows *A Stranger is in our Paradise*.

May 24, 2003–April 20, 2004: *Yankee Remix: Artists Take on New England*, a collaboration between MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, and the Boston-based Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, curated by Laura Steward.* RB participates with Ann Hamilton, Annette Messenger, and Huang Yong Ping, among others, providing the opportunity to engage with nineteenth-century archival materials. RB exhibits *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love* (2003; fig. 9), her large-scale, pink plastic wrap, floating Taj Mahal, using nineteenth-century antique elements, cowrie shells, and fake birds as a commentary on the contemporary phenomenon of the “heritage industry” involving travel and tourism. *Contagious Spaces, Preserving Pinkeye* (2003; fig. 10; no longer exists), an installation that incorporates New England history—using



Fig. 8 *A Stranger is in Our Paradise . . .*, 2002, mixed media, dimensions variable



Fig. 9 *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love*, 2003, plastic, antique Anglo-Indian Bombay dark wood chair, steel and copper framework, floral picks, foam balls, cowrie shells, quilting pins, red-colored moss, antique stone globe, glass, synthetic fabric, shells, fake birds, 226 x 161 x 161 in. Installation: *Yankee Remix: Artists Take on New England*, MASS MoCA, May 2003–April 2004

letters from Indian colonial history—an altar, and optical devices to create a cross-temporal interaction between East and West, past and present, is also included.¹⁷

June 5–27: *Sunset/Sunrise*, Smack-Mellon Contemporary Art, Brooklyn, NY, curated by Courtney J. Martin and Amanda Church, examines the concept of the horizon line and its associations across media and landscape.* Seventeen international artists participate, and RB displays the only two video works of her career, *Coconut Oil* (2003) and *When scenes travel . . . bubble bubble* (2004), which explore colonial perspectives of travel and the domination of “the other.”

2005

February 3–March 5: *Suspended Ornament/Suspended Place*, Suite 106 Gallery, New York. Two-person show with Goran Tomcic. RB presents two works on paper, *Puff Puff* (2005) and *Tongues Reach* (2004).

February 27–June 5: *Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now*, Queens Museum. RB shows the two video works, *Coconut Oil* and *When scenes travel . . . bubble bubble*; and an early version of her 2006 sculptural installation (plate 16; p. 49) entitled *With tinsel and teeth, Gem and Germ* (2005), which quotes the 1968 Beatles song “Back in the USSR,” demonstrating the fusion of Western and Eastern cultures. RB’s works are seen within the exhibition context as exploring pre/post September 11 identities in the US, and examining diasporic identities within NYC in particular as a new locus.

March 13–September 26: *Greater New York*, MoMA PS1. Long Island City, NY. Klaus Biesenbach invites RB to exhibit in this group exhibition, originally created for emerging artists, whose 2005 iteration specifically investigates NYC as a mobile and diverse area. RB shows *Tropical Fatigue and the Seven Wanderings: You Are Not Like Me* (2005),¹⁸ a sculptural installation in which hanging briefcases and domestic objects symbolize the

temporary and liminal reality of “house” and “home,” especially for women in the Global South.

May 20–July 16: *Exceeding Paint/Expanding Painting*, Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York, group show curated by Karen E. Jones, features RB, Louise Lawler, Yinka Shonibare, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, among others. RB shows *In this wishing jar, where pigments take flight and limbs reach . . .* (2005), a painting utilizing spices as a form of post-colonial critique.

October 15, 2005–July 23, 2006: *Agra/Taj Mahal: The Making of a Legend*, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA, curated by Karina Corrigan. RB’s monumental installation, *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love* activates the museum’s colonial antiques. The massive pink plastic wrap Taj Mahal installation, in combination with the PEM permanent collection, questions the traveler’s imaginary and the colonial gaze.

November 17–December 23: *Time’s Arrow—Twelve Random Thoughts on Beauty*, Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, NY,



Fig. 10 *Contagious Spaces, Preserving Pinkeye*, 2003, installation of altar, Taj Mahal, tea sets, dollhouse, optical sculptures, dimensions variable. Installation: *Yankee Remix: Artists Take on New England*, MASS MoCA, May 2003–April 2004

curated by Janine Cirincione, investigates beauty's lasting value in works by artists RB, Chitra Ganesh, Fred Tomaselli, and Alyson Shotz, among others.

2005–2008: *Figures of Thinking*, travels to Richard E. Peeler Art Center, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN; McDonough Museum of Art, Youngstown, OH; Tufts University Gallery, Aidekman Arts Center, Bellingham, WA; University of Richmond Museums, Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art, University of Richmond, VA.* Curated by Sandhini Poddar and Vicky Clark, it includes the work of RB, Simone Leigh, Mona Hatoum, and Wangechi Mutu, among others. The exhibition explores global society through the figure.

2006

Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels represents RB from 2006 to the present.

January 27–March 5: *Black Moon Island: Contemporary International Drawing*, One in the Other Gallery, London, UK.

April 5–July 2: *Harlem Postcards*, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, includes RB in a collective meditation by contemporary artists on the neighborhood of Harlem as an artistic center.

June 14–18: *Silver pearl girls and Gardens*, Newman Popiashvili Gallery, VOLTA show 02, NP Gallery, Basel, Switzerland. RB shows the sculpture *Birds without Paradise: Sulfur Flower* (2006).

July 23–September: 3rd Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Japan. RB's *Lure of Place* (2006; no longer exists), a large-scale, green mosquito net Taj Mahal installation, is installed at the vacant Sanada Primary School, Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture. *Lure of Place* is RB's second Taj Mahal in a series that investigates the architectural form and symbolism of love, death, and tourism. In this specific installation, RB uses communally constructed fabrics and materials,

including chairs, from abandoned schools in order to tie the local site more closely to the Triennale, challenging its increasingly globalized nature.

September 30–October 4: Art Forum Berlin 2006, Germany. RB's work is featured by Galerie Volker Diehl.

October 12–15: Frieze Art Fair, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, London, UK. RB shows *Tropical Fatigue and the Seven Wanderings: You Are Not Like Me*.

October 15–December 31: *Intersections: Shifting Identity in Contemporary Art*, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI, curated by Jennifer Jankauskas, focuses on artists with diverse cultural heritages.* RB exhibits the sculpture *A Stranger is in our Paradise*; the works on paper *Seeing Structures that Contain Loops and Lose Ends* and *Two Figures Pollinating in Nature* (both 2005); and the video *When scenes travel . . . bubble, bubble*.

Fantasies Without Travel Will Travel, AMT Gallery, Como, Italy. RB exhibits *Land* (2007), a work that is later reused within another work on paper,¹⁹ demonstrating her media-specific innovation with the circuitous lives of commodities.

Sardanapale Syndrome, Galerie Dukan & Hourdequin, Marseilles, France. RB participates in a group exhibition with Alicia Paz and Enrique Marty.

2007

Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany, represents RB from 2007 to 2010.

RB participates in a group exhibition at Galerie Nathalie Obadia at Shanghai Art Fair, China, and shows the work on paper *A bewildering variety of enemies* (2007).

January 13–February 28: *Foreign Fruit*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris. RB's first solo exhibition in France exemplifies her

employment of organic forms as circumventions of colonial authority within culture. *With tinsel and teeth*, *Gem and Germ* is the centerpiece of the exhibition, along with new sculptural works such as *Feathery fountain horn and fury finger nail* (2007); *From the oyster's shell* and *In dream with grin*; and three works on paper, *Her black growth produced such a sprinkle of ultimate fears*; *If lotion and potion could heal*; and *In a delicate storm* (all 2006).

March 19–April 5: *I Fear, I Believe, I Desire*, Gallery Espace, New Delhi, India, curated by art critic and curator Gayatri Sinha.* The group exhibition features contemporary art that queries how everyday experiences compose identity. Notably, RB displays her works on paper concerning disease, which she created while in India, in this, her first group exhibition in the country.

September 6–9: *SH Contemporary*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Shanghai.

September 20–December 16: *An Archaeology*, at the Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK, curated by Elizabeth Neilson.* RB creates an interactive installation and monument, *Within a new and robust capitalism* (2007; fig. 11) for this solo exhibition. The work, which emerged from a residency at 176, the Zabłudowicz Collection's London space at 176 Prince of Wales Road, encourages visitors to participate within tourist culture, travel, and migration and its intersections with memory by contributing their personal objects and written notes inside a Taj Mahal installation. This "Amber Taj" is the final Taj in RB's series of the iconic structure.²⁰

September 27–October 23: *Where the Wild Things Are . . .*, Galerie Volker Diehl,* a solo exhibition which examines the "fusion of cultures, dreams, and reality" embedded in both the foreign and familiar.²¹ RB exhibits the works *A World at*



Fig. 11 *Within a new and robust capitalism . . . (detail)*, 2007, amber vials, light bulbs, wire, ankle bells, gourds, shells, cow horns, cowrie shells, brass bells, pigeon feathers, glass, twine, moss, sand, plexiglass, 157½ × 157½ × 118 in. Installation: *An Archaeology*, Zabludowicz Collection, London, UK, 2007

a Loss; In a Land Far Far Away; My Sugar pot grew and grew; The alterity of nature in the tropics; "The three little bears" (all 2007); and *Golden Opportunity* (2006).

2008

February 29–May 25: *Exploding the Lotus*, Culture Center for Hollywood, FL, curated by Jaishri Abichandani and Jane Hart, features RB's work alongside numerous South Asian artists whose art subverts traditional cultural and political understandings of their national origins.

March 13–May 24: *Distant Nearness*, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS, shows the work of RB, Subodh Gupta, and Bharti Kher. RB

exhibits sculptures *Dollops of creamy ropes; Lentil flour; Sweet Cheese; and This winter brew blistered her cheeks* (all 2008), each of which incorporates the smells and tastes of India that RB maintains within her household. She claims that she feels a sense of removal from India, but in practices such as cooking, RB features sensory attributes from her birth country. She also shows the installations *A very dry and very tidy heat swept into her land* and *A World at a Loss* (both 2008); sculptures *Golden prickly spoons drowned in west stew* and *The promise of self rule* (both 2008); the works on paper *Benevolent Bird; Her mother flirted piles of eyes; The World, Civilization and the Domain of Death*; untitled; and *With*

Moon-Shine and Money (all 2007); and later works on paper *A World Made of Nature Created her Untidy Beauty Captured Her Maker's Eyes; and Do you believe in magic—in a young world's heart* (both 2008).

May 8–June 7: *Evolution*, Max Lang Gallery, New York, curated by Marc Wellman, investigates biomorphic contemporary art.* RB shows her sculpture *What on earth can be more blessed by mine nostalgia's rest . . .* (2006/8) from the series *Ethnic Dolls*.

June 21–September 30: *Indian Focus*, Espace Claude Berri, Paris, France, presents the dialectic between tradition and modernity. RB's sculpture, *Tropicalization of nature, Henri-Rousseau restraint* (2007) demonstrates her employment of cultural stereotypes, modes of circulation, and the accrual of meaning within contemporary commodity culture, a major theme that develops within her later sculptural practice.

August 23–September 23: *Everywhere is War (And Rumours of War)*, Bodhi Art Gallery, Mumbai, India, curated by Shaheen Merali.* The group exhibition includes works by RB, Anju Dodiya, Subodh Gupta, and Reena Kallat, among others.

September 9–October 26: *Dyed Roots: the new emergence of culture*, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto, curated by Camilla Singh, investigates the ways in which identity is both composed and constructed through exterior factors in instances of cultural contact. RB shows *A very dry and very tidy heat swept into her land*.

November 6, 2008–January 10, 2009: *The Flowers of Evil Still Bloom (Spleen: Les Fleurs du Mal)*, Cueto Project, New York. RB exhibits her sculptural work, *Death becomes you–Egyptian Nile antelope hunted, 1968–found 2008*

(2009; fig. 12), which includes an antelope head, bulbs, and sari cloth, demonstrating her mid-career inclusion of found objects, particularly animal heads, that function as symbols of death and decadence. The group exhibition employs a European-oriented curatorial framework inspired by the Symbolist Movement.

December 3–6: *Art Unlimited*, Art Basel 39, Switzerland. Galerie Nathalie Obadia features RB's large, domed installation *In an unnatural storm* (2008), which challenges capitalist and colonial power structures that support excess and environmental disaster, instead inventing a fearsome post-colonial natural force.

December 19, 2008–January 13, 2009: *Allure*, Gallery Espace, New Delhi. A solo exhibition in which RB exhibits works on paper *Caught with fin and feet a funny foe*; *Flower Horse & Garden Feelers*; *Tinker Bell*; and *Wild Flower* (all 2008); in addition to the work *With breath taking consumption* (2008), a floor installation in which two figures devour one another atop a charpai, revealing the dangerous quality of RB's feminism.

2009

February 14–May 10: *Pretty is as Pretty Does*, SITE Santa Fe Contemporary Art Center, NM, group exhibition curated by Laura Steward, aims to push the boundaries of aesthetics through the problematization of the binary of the beautiful and sinister. RB contributes *I'll get you my pretty!* (2009/11), a large-scale, site-specific installation. Her title references the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*, and the work utilizes materials such as bottles, fans, cowrie shells, a Texas longhorn steer, porcelain, and saris spread across the floor underneath a large dome structure. Here, RB interweaves modern myths from the West with the materiality of domesticity and accoutrements of womanhood from India.

March 12–April 25: *Mythologies*, Haunch of Venison, London, UK.* RB's first commercial exhibition in London, curated by Ben Tufnell with James Putnam. The group exhibition features over forty international artists, such as Kiki Smith, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, and Carlos Amorales, responding to the exhibitions of non-Western societies and cultures that had been presented in the former space of The Museum of Mankind, the galleries housing the British Museum's ethnographic collections. The works thus explored the museum as a site that explains, explores, and contrasts cultural interpretation. RB shows *The promise of self rule*.

April 24–July 11: *Look into my eyes and you will see a world unexplainable, out of place*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels, Belgium, is a solo exhibition in which RB's doll-like figures appear in sculptures such as *Can you believe the beast in her beauty was born out of a vilified attack*; *When could this 'Oriental Flower' bloom*; and *With or without name she was blue* (all 2009); and works on paper such as *In the turn of things* and *Sudden dispossession* (both 2009). The literal representation of feminine forms, as opposed to a metaphorical rendering through materiality, is made explicit in RB's works from the first decade of the twenty-first century. They are often paired with titles evoking familiar fairy tales, such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *Goldilocks*, which provide both a celebration and critique of the circulation and representation of female bodies in Western culture. RB explores how these stories matriculate into Eastern contexts and resonate with the societal positions of women in the Global South.

May 1–August 30: *Wonderland: Through the Looking Glass*, Kunsthal KAdE, Amersfoort, Netherlands, curated by Robert Roos, is a group exhibition bringing together artists whose works use fairytale imagery, such as Jake & Dinos Chapman and Marcel Dzama, among others.* RB shows the sculptures *For the Love of Falling Fearless*; *Sweet cheese*; *The alterity of Nature in the tropics*; and *This winter brew blistered her cheeks*; (all 2009).

June 17–July 31: *Anomalies: From Nature to the Future*, Rossi & Rossi Gallery, London, UK,* curated by artist Jaishri Abichandani, investigates previous identifications of "Indian" or "South Asian" art through the work of fourteen South Asian women who were born in the UK or US.²² RB shows two works on paper that provide scathing commentaries concerning Indian identity, either through tradition or industrialization: *A Shampooing surgeon he is—sent*



Fig. 12 *Death becomes you—Egyptian Nile antelope hunted 1968—found 2008, 2009*, gourds, bulbs, mount, globe, brass light ornament, wire, gold embroidered sari cloth, antelope head, wood, 7 × 3 × 2½ ft.

vapor and steam and *Military science, modern war and a ruthless sense of mass manufacturing* (both 2009). She also exhibits *Beastly Flower* (2009; fig. 13), a sculpture from her series of three flowers, which will eventually include *Winter's Flower* and *When could this 'Oriental Flower' bloom* (both 2009).

October 7–28: *Rina Banerjee and Raqib Shaw*, Thomas Gibson Ltd., London, UK. RB shows recent mixed-media works on paper such as *His Tongue and Tail Grew Fond of her Money Leaves*; *Outside the Garden and Inside the Jungle Where the Heat Played*; and *Green Human Fruit Hung Low* (all 2007); *A World Made of Nature*; and *Charmed by Climate and Cottony Faces* (both 2008), in this two-person exhibition.

December 9–18: *Lo Real Maravilloso: Marvelous Reality*, organized by Gallery Espace, New Delhi, held at Rabindra Bhawan Galleries, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, India.* The group exhibition, curated by Sunil Mehra, focuses on magical realism. RB shows the sculpture *In the canopy of the stars life was made*

and the work on paper *The end when she came* (both c. 2009), each of which alludes to the cosmos as a source of life.

2010

Haunch of Venison, London, UK, represents RB from 2010 to 2013.

March 3–7: *Without face: Cultivating the foreign*, an RB solo exhibition, is hosted by Galerie Nathalie Obadia at the Armory Show, New York.

March 19–April 17: *Bring me a Lion: An Exhibition of Contemporary Indian Art*, Cecille R. Hunt Gallery, Webster University, St. Louis, MO.* The group exhibition, curated by Jeffrey Hughes and Dana Turkovic, investigates the discourses of modernity and capitalism within Indian culture and features RB alongside Dhruvi Acharya, Jaishri Abichandani, and Tushar Joag, among others.

April 9–May 15: *Forever foreign*, Haunch of Venison.* RB's solo exhibition includes *She's my country* (2009; fig. 14), a sculpture with saris, Chinese lanterns, cowrie

shells, and a Texas longhorn steer skull arranged in a feminine form, both dominating and beautiful, at "home" in its Indian materiality and similarly made "foreign" in its uncanny structure. RB also shows her work *From the plantation* (2010), which includes a globe, spoons, and brown vials providing medicinal solutions to colonial histories, and the work on paper, *Peculiar was her manner* (2009), which critiques perceptions of foreignness.

April 23–October 31: *Path of the Elegance between the East and West*, Boghossian Foundation, Villa Empain, Brussels, Belgium, explores the exchanges between the East and West, situating "elegance" as a space of welcoming the "other" at home. RB's works on paper, *In an eclipse between culture and wild* (2007) and *Towards a world made profound* (2009), with her sculpture *When could this 'Oriental flower' bloom*, are featured alongside works by Lee Bul, Anish Kapoor, and Ergin Çavuşoğlu, among others.

June 14–August 22: *Fantasy Worlds/ Fictive Spaces*, The 242nd Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition, London, UK,* curated by Fiona Rae, presents RB's work *For the entire city a fragile hostility dazzling silks and no constraints* (2009) alongside works by Cecily Brown, George Condo, Nigel Cooke, and others.

June 24–August 22: *Fantasmagoria: Le Monde Mythique*, Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France, curated by Pascal Pique.* RB participates with Philippe Mayaux, Olaf Breuning, and Patrick Van Caeckenbergh, among others. The exhibition explores contemporary phantasmagoria, or fantastic events, tracing the phenomenon's roots back to the nineteenth century in present-day evocations. RB shows *She's my country*.

June 24–September 19: *Wild Things*, Kunsthallen Brandts, Odense, Denmark, curated by Lene Burkard.*



Fig. 13 *Beastly Flower*, 2009, steel, shells polyester, linen, feathers, diameter 110 in.



Fig. 14 *She's my country . . .*, 2009, Texas longhorn steer skull, cowrie shells, saris, steel planters, Hindu ceremony thread, antique mannequin, globes, wire, kitchen towel rack, glass beads, brass shells, Chinese umbrella, Japanese mosquito nets, bone beads, copper trim, African necklaces, Chinese lantern, 22 kt. gold powder, 99½ × 50 × 102 in.

Polly Apfelbaum, Marianne Grønnow, Jennifer Steinkamp, and RB explore interactions between the organic and the artificial. RB shows *I'll get you my pretty!*

September 25, 2010–January 16, 2011: *Roundabout*, City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand, engages discussion between artists from different locales, examining global art-making practices. RB shows *Manufacturing the exotics and other serious amusements* (2009).

October 22–December 12: *Finding India, Art for the New Century*, MOCA, Taipei, Taiwan, features twenty-nine artists from India, highlighting the nation's global presence.* RB exhibits the installation

With breath taking consumption; the sculpture *In the canopy of the stars life was made*; and the work on paper *Mushroom and Moon* (2008).

2011

February 25–September 4: *Roots in the Air, Branches Below: Modern and Contemporary Art from India*, San José Museum of Art, CA, curated by Kristen Evangelista, presents modern and contemporary art from India drawn from private collections in the Bay Area. RB's work on paper, *pink silly bubbly and naughty* (2009), is included.

February 26–March 26: *PANGEA: Art at the Forefront of Cultural Convergence*, Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco. RB

and seven other artists participate in a multimedia exhibition that highlights practitioners whose works problematize the binary of high and low culture through the incorporation of non-Western mythologies in their narratives. RB shows *A red bird* (2011), a sculpture made from resin horn, doll parts, Indian jewelry, and, most prominently, a Lanvin for H&M designer dress, providing a revelatory commentary on the material circularity of luxury and commonplace goods and their interaction with the female body. This sculpture is later reused in *She was now in western style dress* (2011), reiterating RB's propensity to recycle materials from earlier work and revealing her interest in the lives of objects.

May 22–July 13: *Rina Banerjee: Imagining the Other Half of the World from Here*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris. Solo exhibition showing sculptural works *Preternatural passage* and numerous works on paper such as *Change Me*; *Circuitous and sinusoidal*; and *I wished upon your falling dot* (all 2011).

May 25–September 26: *Rina Banerjee: Chimeras of India and the West*, Musée national des arts asiatiques, Guimet, Paris, France, curated by Caroline Arhuero. Her first large-scale museum solo exhibition features fifteen installations and ten drawings from 2005 to 2011, alongside objects from the museum's permanent collection.* Includes installations such as *She was now in western style dress*; *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love*; *The world as burnt fruit* (2009); and *Upon civilizing home* (2010; fig. 15) within the context of an exhibition that explores globalization and its relation to colonialism and contemporary innovation in cultural production.

June 9–July 30: *East Ex East*, Brand New Gallery, Milan, Italy, curated by Jane Neal, brings together artists from the East whose careers have led them to the West.*

The works in the exhibition showcase memories, freedom, and the feeling of “in-betweenness.” RB shows the work on paper, *The two were misbehaving Rani and rakhshasni raving and ranting*. . . (2011).

June 11–October 6: *Avant Première*, Art Plural Gallery, Singapore, is the gallery’s inaugural group exhibition and features the works of RB, Marc Quinn, Karim Rashid, and Chu Teh-Chun, among others. RB shows the works on paper *Ivory hunters*; *Queen of Cuddles* (both 2009); and *In moist winters* (2010).

July 5–August 5: *Summer Group Show: Sculpture*, CRG Gallery, New York, presents RB’s work *A heart of two anchors* (2011).

August 6–14: *Fabular Bodies: New Narratives of Art in the Miniature*, Harmony Art Foundation, Coomaraswamy Hall of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai, India, curated by Gayatri Sinha. RB is one of twenty-four artists invited to present contemporary work that reinvents the traditional miniature in a variety of media. She shows the works on paper *Her hair was not herself*. . . and *Swing swing* (both 2011).

August 6–November 6: *Our Magic Hour: How Much of the World Can We Know?*, The Yokohama Triennale, Japan, curated by Akiko Miki, queries the mysteries of everyday life, such as magic, supernatural phenomena, mythology, legend, and animism, through the work of sixty artists. RB restages her installation, *I’ll get you*

my pretty!, a work concerning Western mythology using globalized materials sourced from various cultural contexts, such as her native India.

September 12: *Facets of the Figure*, staged at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, by Rodman & Renshaw LLC, McCarton Foundation, and Quintessentially Art, and curated by Gary Krimerhmoys. The exhibition explores renderings of the human figure within the contemporary context. RB shows three works on paper; *Ivory hunters* and *Queen of Cuddles* (both 2009); and *In moist winters* (2010).

October 15, 2011–January 29, 2012: *The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India*, at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco,* is a group exhibition of nineteen artists. RB displays the sculptures *A heart of two anchors*; *Lotions and potions* (fig. 16); and *Tender was her wound, pink and playful was her mood* (all 2011); and the installation *She drew a premature prick*. The exhibition focuses on contemporary art from artists living in India, but also those working from its diaspora, such as RB. Three main themes emerge from the exhibition: embodiment, the politics of communicative bodies, and the imaginary.

October 22, 2011–April 29, 2012: *Roundabout: Face to Face*, Tel Aviv Art Museum, Israel, curated by Varda Steinlauf, presents works, including RB’s, that reflect a global community composed of creative expression and artistic exchange, despite border disputes and cultural differences.*

December 17, 2011–February 10, 2012: *Fragility*, Art Alive Gallery, Gurugram, India, curated by Rakhee Balaram, reveals the material preciousness embedded within works by South Asian practitioners. RB’s works on paper *Fetal and Funny* and *Her reason did not rhythm* (both 2010) are shown.



Fig. 15 *Upon civilizing home . . . , 2010*, mixed media, 40 × 30 × 40 in. Installation: *Chimeras of India and the West*, Musée national des arts asiatiques, Guimet, Paris, France, 2011



Fig. 16 Installation view featuring *Lotions and potions . . .*, 2011, in *The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2011

2012

January 12–15: Art Stage Singapore 2012, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York, RB shows *With Moon-Shine and Money* and *Umbrella of fruit fell to her green reason* (2007).

January 23–December 19: *Crossings: Time Unfolded II*, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India, curated by Roobina Karode, explores the dialectic of permanence and transience.* RB shows her installation *The world as burnt fruit*, which evokes the memento mori symbolism of a flower as a metaphor for the world.

January 25–29: Indian Art Fair, Okhla, India. RB shows *Wild and Monstrous* (2012).

March 22–May 3: *Misunderstood Part I*, Noga Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel, curated by Reply All (Yasmine Datnow and Maïa Morgensztern), presents the work of RB, Talia Keinan, Wolfe von Lenkiewicz, and Hennessy Youngman (Jayson Musson), who engage with shifts in information and communication, specifically the way in which splintered identities are shaped through globalization.

May 17–20: *A World of Lies*, Gallery Espace at Art Hong Kong 2012. RB's solo exhibition includes the sculptures *A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve*; *A Lady of Commerce*; and *Wild and Monstrous*; alongside numerous works on paper, such as *The last population unsorted and tangled* (all 2012).

July 24–August 31: *Walk in Asia* at Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan, features the works of seven contemporary artists who reconsider the structure of Asian relations both internally and externally through an examination of neighboring countries and their relationships. RB shows three works on paper.

September 8–October 6: *Look Both Ways*, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, features RB's installation *She drew a premature prick* in addition to work by numerous other artists on the gallery's roster, as a celebration of its new space and its dedication to diverse cultural values.

August 18, 2012–January 13, 2013: *INDIA: ART NOW*, Arken Museum of Modern Art, Skovvej, Denmark, is one of the largest exhibitions of Indian art in Danish history with work by thirteen

artists.* The goal of the exhibition is to map cultural, scientific, and commercial exchanges between India and Denmark. RB exhibits *Lentil flour*; *Her captivity* (2011); *Preternatural passage* (fig. 18); and *She was now in western style dress*.

September 7–November 17: *Creationism's Kiss*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels. In her second solo presentation at the gallery, RB exhibits works that reflect her conception of Creationism, inflected by religious doctrines, the theory of evolution, and cultural hybridity: the sculptures *Hanuman's (Hindu deity, monkey god) flight is evolution's climb*; *Her captivity*; and *To touch two genders* (all 2012); and the works on paper *A collision central to our imagination* and *Earthly gas* (both 2012).

October 26–27: RB participates in a panel with Rakhee Balaram, Naeem Mohaiemen, and Iftikhar Da; concerning the paradigm of diaspora in South Asia, planned in conjunction with the exhibition *After Midnight: Indian Modernism to Contemporary India, 1947/1997*, at the Queens Museum, in collaboration with the Asian/Pacific/American Institute at New York University. The exhibition is organized by Dr. Arshiya Lokhandwala and examines the modern/progressive and the global/contemporary.

November 14, 2012–January 17, 2013: *13.0.0.0.0*, RH Gallery, New York. The group exhibition presents RB's installation *She drew a premature prick*, which evokes the conundrum of temporality within ritualistic systems, in its exploration of the Mayan Long Count date, the end of the 13th Bak'tun cycle on December 23, 2012.

December 8, 2012–April 14, 2013: *7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Gallery of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia,* includes RB's sculptures *A heart of two anchors*; *A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve*; *From the*

jungle in lore of the Colonial frontier; and With or without name she was blue and who knew (2009), in its investigation of transformational landscapes, engagement with the city, and the adaptability of local cultures within the globalized world.

2013

Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo; Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco; and L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice, California, represent RB from 2013 to the present.

April 5–10: *Ideas of the Sublime*, Vadehra Art Gallery, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. RB shows her sculpture *A Lady of Commerce* with her work on paper *In moist winters*, alongside sixteen other artists whose works meditate upon the centrality of art within human experience.

April 28–November 11: *Sculptrices*, Fondation Villa Datris, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, France, presents artists Louise Bourgeois, Meret Oppenheim, Camille Henrot, and RB, among others, in an exhibition celebrating feminine sculpture.

RB shows *Beastly Flower* and *The alterity of nature in the topics*.

May 28–July 13: *Tender Mahal-Lifted*, Hosfelt Gallery. RB stages *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love* alongside works on paper such as *Umbrella of fruit fell to her green reason* in this solo exhibition.

May 30–July 6: L.A. Louver includes RB's *Her captivity* and the work on paper *Beauty was not in the East* (2013) in a group exhibition (fig. 17).

June 1–November 24: 55th Venice Biennale, *Glasstress: White Light/White Heat*, at the Berengo Studio, Murano Glass Project,* curated by James Putnam and Adriano Berengo, presents newly commissioned works by sixty-five practitioners, including RB, exploring the themes of light and heat.

June 21–July 21: *Vivid Strata: New Representations of Asia*, Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, a group exhibition displaying modes of figuration. RB's works on paper, such as *From a life that is never tasted*



Fig. 17 Rina Banerjee working on paintings in her studio, c. 2013

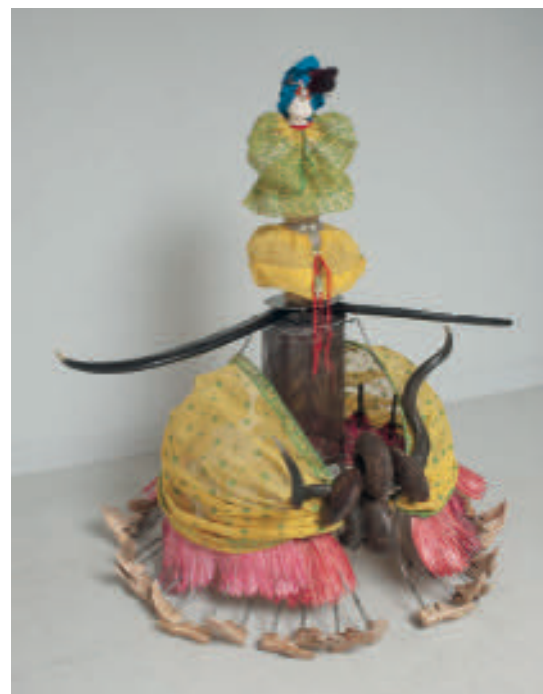


Fig. 18 *Preternatural passage . . .*, 2011, steel armature, vintage porcelain baby doll head, wooden spindle, cowrie shells, red thread, vintage birch wood shoe form (size 9–10), Bengali sari, feathers, horns, costume wedding jewelry, 36 x 60 x 60 in.

when girls at home are arrested (2012), are shown alongside works by Firoz Mahmud, Takao Minami, and Tomoko Kashiki.

July 13, 2013–June 8, 2014: *Perspectives: Rina Banerjee*, at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. In a solo feature, RB installs her monumental work *A World Lost* (2013). Inspired by the river systems in Asia, it presents a diverse ecosystem of migration and transformation.

October 3–December 7: *Seven Sisters*, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, features works by RB, Carrie Mae Weems, Mickalene Thomas, and Toyin Ojih Odutola. The works probe the intersections of ethics, race, culture, and self-expression.

October 16, 2013–March 31, 2014: *Daniel and Florence Guerlain Donation*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, an exhibition of new acquisitions of works on paper, curated by Jonas Storsve, includes RB's *Puff Puff* (2005); *In Full Blooms*

(2006); *A Elephant—She Was not So Small* and *The Intellectual Explorer* (both 2008); *Wishing Waters* and *Grey Spell is Enchanted Her Funny Foe*; and *Sudden dispossession* (both 2009).

November 22, 2013–January 31, 2014: *What am I made of and how do you know my name?*, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo. RB's solo exhibition questions the construction of identity and proposes a multicultural and hybrid existence as an antidote to former categories of selfhood. She displays works such as *A heart of two anchors*; *Ground has risen to sprout new plant* (2013); and *Groundlessness made them different caught them out in the open* (2013).

2014

February 7, 2014–January 4, 2015: *Astralis*, Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, Paris, France,* curated by Pascal Pique, shows RB's work in a group exhibition centering on the concept of other worlds and the visionary access to them.* RB presents *A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve*; *Clouds of warm gold* (2012); *Solitude, in cognito* (2014).

March 17–June 15: *Of Men and Worlds*, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, France. RB's work features in an exhibition curated by Alain Berland that explores human nomadism.

May 8–June 28: *Disgust*, L.A. Louver. RB's solo exhibition focuses on her evocations of excess and disgust in her works as a means to explore the establishment of cultural boundaries. She shows the sculptures *Explorers not fortune tellers*; *In thick bush and among thieving nomads*; *Make me a summary of the world!*; *Soldier: overseas and out of place* (all 2014); and *She was now in western style dress*; and the works on paper *All these organs so too the oral and anal*; and *Courageous odors violent and natural* (both 2014).

July 12–August 16: *Holding It Together: Collage, Montage, Assemblage*, Hosfelt

Gallery. RB exhibits *I am all that could stretch*, a work on paper made from the collaged elements of acrylic, ink, silk sari cloth, and gold thread, and *Flourish me different*, a sculpture composed of various types of steel, textiles, beads, pearls, and feather fans (both 2014).

July 16–August 31: *Cross Section: Recent Acquisitions*, Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, CA, explores themes of race, cultural identity, and gender, featuring works by RB, Olafur Eliasson, Pae White, and Mika Rottenberg.

September 16–December 30: *Metaphysical*, Mimmo Scognamiglio Artecontemporanea, Milan, Italy, curated by James Putnam, exhibits RB's work alongside that of seven other artists in an effort to examine the supernatural or extraordinary. RB shows the sculptures *Beastly Flower* and *Hanuman's (Hindu deity, monkey god) flight is evolution's climb*; and the work on paper *The task, virtues of courage, loyalty and the perils of desire, fear* (2012).

September 20, 2014–March 1, 2015: *Interrupting Entropy: Selections from the Betlach Collection* at Santa Clara University, CA, exhibits works that explore natural forms of chaos.* RB presents the work on paper *Umbrella of fruit fell to her green reason*.

October 17–November 14: *Kaleidoscope India*, Maison Guerlain, Paris, France, curated by Caroline Messensee, features RB's sculpture *Little Red Riding Hood* (2010) in a display of the multiple realities of India, both in the East and West.

November 20, 2014–January 6, 2015: *Grounding Future Queer*, The Sheila C. Johnson Design Center Galleries, Parsons School of Design/The New School, New York. Curator Tony Whitfield explores the possibilities of the queer. RB shows *Dangerous World* (2010); from Exit Art portfolio *Ecstasy*.

November 21–December 20: *Appropriate Disruption*, Jacob Lewis Gallery, New York. The group exhibition examines the artistic gesture of appropriation and its recontextualization within artwork. RB shows *She was now in western style dress*.

2015

Jacob Lewis Gallery, New York, represents RB from 2015 to 2016.

January 13–May 10: *Song of Myself*, Palmer Museum of Art, Penn State University, takes American democracy, embedded within Walt Whitman's 1855 poem, as its theme. Artists in the exhibition include RB, Laylah Ali, Rashid Johnson, and Shirin Neshat, among others.

January 23–March 21: *Rina Banerjee: Migration's Breath*, Ota Fine Arts, Singapore. The solo exhibition presents RB's new works on paper, sculptures, and lithographs, such as *Ethnic and Race braided long hairs* (fig. 19); *In thick bush and among thieving nomads*; *Sweet Baby*; *Under the wandering reach* (all 2014); and *Beneath the surface away from land the wreckage of big Empire split to be spoken* (2015).

April 10–June 6: *Rina Banerjee: Tropical Urban*, Jacob Lewis Gallery, New York, is a solo exhibition that explores cultural identity through materiality. RB displays *A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve* (2015), and the work on paper *Dodo bird* (2014).

May 10–July 12: *New Ways of Seeing: Beyond Culture*, Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, Long Island City, NY, co-curated by Jan Garden Castro and Eileen Jeng, includes RB's *She was now in western style dress*.

June 5–July 25: *Exposition d'été* at Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels, includes work by RB.

July 11–15: *Eye Contact*, Improvised Showboat #9, Brooklyn, NY, curated by

Erika Ranee, explores the concept of vision within the context of an advanced technological age through the work of Nina Chanel Abney, Ellen Gallagher, RB, and others.

September 12–October 24: *Human Traffic*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris. RB's solo exhibition includes the monumental work on paper *Human Traffic* (2015); as well as *Ligaments wait to stretch* and the sculptures *Buried in stump*; *Fury of the fringe*; *Heredity in variation and reproduction*; *In Mute Witness* (all 2015); and *Make me a summary of the world!* The exhibition examines the theme of movement and the circulation of bodies in times of war, terrorism, poverty, and migration.

September 15–December 6: *Artist Making Movement*, Asia Art Biennial, Taiwan Museum of Art, Taichung, curated by Iris Shu-Ping Huang, presents artists from over seventeen Asian countries grappling with issues concerning human rights, borders, and socioeconomic fluxes.* RB shows five works, the sculptures *Explorers not fortune tellers*; *Mangroves of Alien and Native froze and foamed* (both 2014); *A heart of two anchors*; *She was now in western style dress*; and the work on paper *The gene was his mule* (2014).

September 20, 2015–February 28, 2016: *Donation Florence & Daniel Guerlain: Centre Pompidou*, Nordic Watercolor Museum, Skärhamn, Sweden, curated by Jonas Storsve, exhibits RB's works on paper in the Centre Georges Pompidou's permanent collection.

October 11, 2015–March 7, 2016: *Greater New York*, MoMA PS1, curated by Mia Locks and Peter Eleey, includes RB's *Preternatural Passage*. Departing from its usual celebration of emerging artists, this iteration of the survey focuses on the intersection between emerging and more established artists across New York.

2016

April 6–June 5: *Hey You! ~ Who Me?*, 32 Edgewood Gallery, Yale School of Art, features alumni from the Fine Arts program and presents RB's early mixed-media work, *What is Left Undiscovered Finds Home in Exile* (1994).

April 22–June 11: *Women in Print* at Pace Prints, New York, includes RB's work *Solitude, in cognito* (2014), a hard and soft ground etching, drypoint, relief, digital printing, collage, and handcoloring, shown alongside the work of printmakers such as Helen Frankenthaler, Shahzia Sikander, and Pat Steir.

May 21–September 4: *Displacement: Symbols and Journeys*, The Cornell Museum of Fine Arts, Winter Park, FL,

examines the multiple manifestations of displacement across the globe.* RB shows the sculptures *Her Captivity* and *Lady of Commerce*.

September 3–November 30: The Busan Biennale, *Hybridizing Earth, Discussing Multitude*, the Busan Art Museum, South Korea,* curated by Yun Cheagab, features two exhibitions, the first showing Chinese, Japanese, and Korean avant-garde art prior to the 1990s and the second presenting the global biennale system that emerged after the 1990s. RB's sculptures *Ethnic and Race braided long hairs* and *Mangroves of Alien and Native froze and foamed*; and the work on paper *Gargantuan Crawler* (2014); were shown among numerous other artists' works from South Asia.

September 9–October 8: *20th Anniversary Exhibition*, Hosfelt Gallery, features numerous artists from the gallery's roster, including RB with her work on paper *In transparent soil* (2015).

October 5: RB lectures at the New School in the Parsons Fine Arts Visiting Artist Lecture Series.

2017

January 24–February 18: *Rina Banerjee: A bundle of twine and difficulties of the tongue* at Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo. The solo exhibition focuses on displacement and replacement within culture based on language and a sense of belonging.

January 28–March 4: *Rina Banerjee: Human Likeness*, Hosfelt Gallery, shows RB's works that reflect the interconnectedness of humanity despite experiences of dislocation. The recent sculptural works *Friendly Fire* (2015) and *Sex-bait* (2017); the installation *Sap of earth n' blood* (2017; fig. 20); and works on paper, such as *Heaven's no place for girls* (2016), are on view.

February 4–September 17: *In all modesty—Archipelago Di Rosa*, MIAM (Musée



Fig. 19 *Ethnic and Race braided long hairs . . .*, 2014, mixed media, 71 × 40 × 24 in.

International des Arts Modestes), Sète, France,* curated by Julie Crenn, is a group exhibition that explores “modest art” or what the exhibition terms “borderless art” of many different sensibilities—craft, music, cinema, theater.

March 4–April 8: *Boundless* at Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, shows the works of RB, Yeessookyung, and Yayoi Kusama. RB’s works include the sculpture *Ground had*

risen to sprout new plant and the works on paper *Bacteria* and *Fungi* (both 2012).

May 13–November 26: *Viva Arte Viva*, the 57th Venice Biennale, curated by Christine Macel, investigates the artistic act within a lineage of humanism.* RB presents *Addictions to nut and leaf aroused*; *Excessive flower*; *In Noiseless Soils*; *Out of hollowness of world*; *When signs of origin fade*; and *Women did do this in shining* (all 2017).

June 23–August 13: *Hello, City!*, Daejeon Museum of Art, Daejeon, South Korea. Group show of work by thirty-seven artists whose practices mine their experiences with nation, race, language, and religion. RB shows *Untitled*, 2017, a wall drawing with a centrally-placed feminine form, breathing organic material onto the surrounding walls. The work harkens back to RB’s early wall drawings, such as *Purity*, while also incorporating a pointed feminist perspective.

June 27–August 6: *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions: South Asian Art in the Diaspora*, Asia Society, New York, shows RB’s *Mother gathered three and no more dirty stones* (2017). The exhibition includes nineteen artists from the South Asian diaspora, such as Khalil Chishtee, Shahzia Sikander, and Naeem Mohaiemen, whose works query notions of home and migration.

August 26–September 9: RB shows works on paper at Gallery Collection, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo.

November 18, 2017–February 25, 2018: *Prospect.4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, New Orleans, LA, curated by Trevor Schoonmaker.* RB displays *Viola, from New Orleans-ah* (2017), a sculpture that links the African and Indian diasporas in the United States through materials sourced from both locations.

2018

June 23–August 11: *Frankenstein’s Birthday Party*, Hosfelt Gallery, celebrates the two-hundredth anniversary of Mary Shelley’s masterpiece through a presentation of experimental works that push the boundaries of the monstrous.

August 25–October 28: *Open Spaces*, Kansas City, MO, curated by Dan Cameron, features over forty projects by international and national artists, such as Ebony G. Patterson, Nick Cave, and RB, sited throughout the city.



Fig. 20 *Sap of earth n' blood . . .*, 2017, steel, wood, glass, silver leaf, cowrie shells, sea shells, taxidermy eyes, vintage saris, 145 × 100 × 100 in. Installation view: *Hello City!*, 2017, Daejeon Museum of Art, Daejeon, South Korea

Notes

1. *The Nature of Illness*, accompanying text written by RB: In the King's garden the world has discovered juices, syrups, oils and secretions of plants live./ After being driven mad with illness/ This other palace unknown to God./ Away from pure clean air/ In tropical climates and stifling jungle atmosphere./ Where scientists lived in constant fear./ drugs used both for food and medicine in deed./ Used for ritual purpose in communicating to the Gods./ Finally it can be brought back./ But it all had to be found beyond, deep in the heart of Empire.

2. Holland Cotter, "ART REVIEW; A Showcase for Emerging Talent Nurtured Within the Same Environment," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2000. *Postcolonial Broom-Spider Woman*, accompanying text: She furiously waves her legs. Beneath her evidence of a foreign kind of domesticity seems to be reason for her activity, exotic, ritual, spectacle and threatening she arranges and rearranges. This is the domesticity of empire. Spellbound and caught

3. Holland Cotter, "Art in Review, Rina Banerjee," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2000.

4. *Prickly Blouse*, accompanying text: He assembled a small caravan with the help of a muslim friend,/ an intellectual character. He loaded up as much as possible leaving/ behind an object or two which had no obvious value. The British admiral could not appreciate these feelings expressed with aplomb by this muslim man./ He immediately organized he treasures for transport to the King's garden./ In the Garden, scientists dreamed of penetrating/ this forbidden vegetable Kingdom that was Asia./ They even welcomed an uncertain danger, tired as they were of the "Age of Reason."

5. *In the Land of Milk and Fat*, accompanying text: My parents constructed a tree house with an impressive collection of vines designed to reach far into Asia. But the most difficult plants he undertook in his experiment were his children, who were not sons. A naïve gardener, he was forced to come to terms with the extraordinary influence of his prisoner. In breaking his bond with home, curiosity turned to anger.

6. *I dream of Genie*, accompanying text: He who was considered the most intelligent man of modern times was aroused. Various feelings of joy and melancholy pressed hard within him. Scholars once spoke enthusiastically of this container, an oil lamp. A gentle rubbing performed soon revealed his genies. He was all but consumed by her magic. Delicately clothed her flesh exuded out from the tiny mouth of the oil lamp. No longer existing.

7. Sujata Moorti, "Antenna Press Release," Bose Pacia Gallery, September 2000.

8. Though RB's works on paper are described as such in this chronology, the artist refers to them as "paintings."

9. *Exoticism was for Sale*, accompanying text: "She preferred the flowers unfamiliar to her childhood, coarser and more violent, flowers which appear to feed on meat, so intensely alive they were too frightening to touch."

10. *Cellar Reach*, accompanying text: From the underbelly, from the down under, to the surface of visibilities. If nature seems flawed, impossible, infuriating, and moving, what humans create is even more intractable. The human garden is a manipulated space of scientific procedures, invested in the eternal dream of the transformation of a body out of original place. Disease, medicine, culture, fashion, religion, and nationalisms wave freely, rewinding time into the past and then into the future. It is this chaotic present of unleashed boundaries signed as race and gender: geographies that challenge our desire for a global whole.

11. *Interval: New Art for a New Space* press release, SculptureCenter, September 23–October 28, 2001.

12. Described as such by RB in a conversation with the author, September 16, 2017.

13. *A Stranger is in our Paradise*, accompanying text: Ours is a fortunate place, the Best Island, and the center of an unknowing,/ unmeasured world at large. /— Said one fly to the other fly / Upon close consideration, surely, one must realize that all peoples, those /who have made themselves remote and unyielding, are not at all pleasurable. /Many of us even have deep disdain for those who have infiltrated Best /Island. Many of them have no relation to us expecting a common envy for what they cannot be. We are not responsible for bringing moral, intellectual /and physical light into the recesses of their unfortunate cultures, perpetually /struggling for existence. Finally extinction of these beings is deserved — /justified by our sensible order. /— Said the other fly

14. Donald Lipski (b. 1947), *Water Lilies #61*, 1991, glass tubing, water, American flag, and metal clamps and hook, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Joel M. Barish, 95.252a-b.

15. Grace Glueck, "ART REVIEW; 'Five by Five: Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art,'" *The New York Times*, June 14, 2002.

16. Rina Banerjee, *Five by Five: Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, April 18–July 5, 2002.

17. *Contagious Spaces, Preserving Pinkeye*, accompanying text: "In time our gathered things rise into the dusk even as memory endures,

memory still simmering, while thickening with uncertain places made foreign, places with people, ignored. When country recedes into Nation, and Nations wait to be swallowed into a world. Home divides, selecting the "here" as domestic and mundane and the "there" as foreign and spectacular – suttleing it away while loaning it's appearance of uniqueness, borrowing it's recognizable meaning making it forever an image to be sent. Soon, locations will not profit, will bleed into each other, will not need significance and travel will not need mention and if 'things' disappear-images of them stay and stay without attachment. Our tourism will be left to visits with the familiar constructed into make present and past, our own presence will have no differentiated scent."

18. *Tropical Fatigue and the Seven Wanderings: You Are Not Like Me*, accompanying text: / (Banana leaf #1)/ Can you see – You are not like me, I am seen as your privilege fatigued /by your use of me./ (Banana leaf #2)/ You consume large quantities of exotic stuff, /You would climb into the Himalayan hills for health, relaxation and ayurvedic relief,/ You could easily indulge in mysterious yoga practices/ (Banana leaf #3)/ You could enjoy all of these cultural pleasures, they render you more/ cosmopolitan, but not me./ (Banana leaf #4)/ - You can clear your mind, save your sanity; dissolve all urban depressions with each exotic pilgrimage./ - Bring your self to the perilous depths of Asia, Africa, China, etc/ and all it adventure, be seen as heroic, but not me./ - Yes, there are even medications for "the fear of falling sick in a/ very strange place" which cure you like you had a snake bite./ (Banana leaf #5)/ But, after a place loses its charm, its exotic quality imagined terrors/ make way, seek you, but not me./ (Banana leaf #6)/ Gripped and afflicted by something unknown you wish for this place to/ be completely eaten, eaten alive – in willful desire to assimilate it/ you grasp for what is not yours, not like you and run like the Dickens./ (Banana leaf #7)/ Like you I can be capable of the same errors, in another life I were / more white it could have happened to me, easily.

19. This work is reused as *In what seemed at first a monster's colonial dream*, 2008, mixed media on panel, 71 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 47 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

20. This is how the artist referred to the work in a conversation with the author, September 16, 2017.

21. "Where the Wild Things Are. . . Press Release," Galerie Volker Diehl, September 27–October 23, 2007.

22. RB was included in this exhibition, even though she was born in India, because of her upbringing in the US.



List of Works

As discussed by the authors, it is an important part of Banerjee's practice to use idiosyncratic language patterns in her titles. In addition, the artist carefully crafts the language used in her media lists. This compilation provides the complete title, date, media, and dimensions, when available, for each work referenced in the chronology; all content has been verified by the artist.

Works are listed chronologically by year, and alphabetically within each date designation. Works without dates are listed within the year that approximates their creation. Works that are cross-listed with two dates appear under the earlier date. Works in the exhibition are indicated by plate and/or figure and page numbers. Works on view vary at each venue.

1994

Untitled

Dry pigment on oil and linen, 15 × 15 in.
Courtesy of the artist (plate 33; p. 74)

What is Left Undiscovered Finds Home in Exile

Hair, dry pigment, mica, steel, polyester, nylon faux hair, 15 × 15 in.

1995

Dangerous Goods

Ink, chiffon, dry pigment, 12 × 12 in.

Fly

Foam, dry pigment, vintage hat, dimensions unknown

1996

American Touristor

Mixed media, 22 × 7 × 3 ft. (fig. 4; p. 20)

Filthy Hands, Robotic Desire

Wall sculpture, 6 ft. (height)

"her large lustrous eyes seemed indifferent" (from the series *Entering the Harem*)

Mixed media, 4 × 2 × 1½ ft.

1997

Contorted Reactions to Europeans

Mixed media, 3 × 2 × 1½ ft.

Ferengi Bed

Medium and dimensions unknown

Her hair was so long and carelessly wicked

Mixed media, 16 × 2 × 2 in.

Home within a Harem

Mixed-media installation, dimensions variable (fig. 3; p. 20)

Octopussy

Medium unknown, 6 × 3 × 2 ft.

Postcolonial Broom—Spider Woman ("Gazing back spellbound at the epoch behind us, in a perpetual present marked only as 'post.'")

1997–2000, cement, wax, latex, pins, fabric, found objects, utensils, light bulbs, foam, trimmings, branches, Body Shop compact, hair, hairnets, beads, threads, gauze, 10 × 10 ft. (fig. 5; p. 130)

road side home

Mixed media, 2 × 4 × 4 ft. (fig. 3; p. 129)

1998

Infectious Migrations, Growths on Appendages (from the series *Objects of Superstition*)

c. 1998, medium unknown, 7 × 3½ × 2 ft.

1999

Feet Upon Path (from the series *An Uncertain Bondage is Required When Threatening Transmission*)

Vellum architectural drawing for Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, dimensions unknown

Infectious Migrations (from the series *An Uncertain Bondage is Deserved When Threatening Transmission*)

Incense sticks, kumkum, Vaseline, turmeric, Indian blouse gauze, fake fingernails and eyelashes, chalk, foam, feathers, fabric, Spanish moss, light bulbs, wax, Silly Putty, quilting pins, plastic tubing, latex and rubber gloves, acrylic and dry pigment, dimensions variable. Frédéric Guilbaud, France (plate 2a–c; p. 19)

Joining George Washington, elastic partners (from the series *An Uncertain Bondage is Required When Threatening Transmission*)

Vellum architectural drawing of Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, dimensions unknown

Purity (from the series *An Uncertain Bondage is Required When Threatening Transmission*)

Acrylic, ink, turmeric, mixed media on vellum, 40 × 40 in.

Resisting Rest

Foam, incense sticks, dry pigment, coiled chiffon, wrought iron bed, dimensions variable

revealing

Vellum architectural drawing of Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, dimensions unknown

Tele Space Fist

Mixed media, 60 × 10 × 5 in. (fig. 2; p. 129)

The Nature of Illness

Mixed media, installation dimensions variable

Untitled

1999/2000, mixed media, dimensions unknown

2000

Cholera Belt

Sponge, wooden box, thread, dimensions unknown

Clothed Tentacles, series of four works:
Blubbery and pliable; *Crusty and clogged*;
Moist and revealing; *Ointment and rigidity*
Sponges, glass containers, dimensions variable

Cloud

Cotton pigment, thread on canvas, dimensions unknown

Diasporizing Umbrellas, series of seven works: *Eruptions*; *From Iodine to Indigo*; *Leg of Land a Foot Away*; *With impatience and privilege*; *With Judgment in Dreams*; *With Resilience and Thought*; *With Rupture and Complicity*
Umbrellas, dimensions variable

Fluent

Peacock feathers, museum wax, photographic paper, pins, ink, thread, dimensions variable

Gut

Mixed media on panel, 72 × 48 × 1 in.

Hidden, beneath her beetle stained lips was this other tongue not yet sprung

Vellum architectural drawing for Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, acrylic, wax, fabric, straws, vermilion, 5 ft.

Land

Medium and dimensions unknown

Lingering and Longing: In View of Two Places

Vellum, threads, peacock feathers, dimensions variable (fig. 2; p. 59)

I dream of Genie

Oil lamp, pillow, Saran wrap, foam, beeswax, fabric, polyfill, Plasticine, netting, dimensions variable (fig. 6; p. 131)

In the Garden, Scientists dreamed of penetrating this forbidden vegetable kingdom that was Asia. They even welcomed an uncertain danger, tired as they were of the "Age of Reason."

Medium unknown, 48 × 36 × 36 in.

In the Land of Milk and Fat

Vines found in Williamsburg, Brooklyn; putty, plastic, magnesium, vermilion, organza, beeswax, feathers, light bulbs, toy plastic wheel, two used bedroom slippers, Mylar architectural plans for Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, red thread, push pins, 36 × 180 × 24 in. Skot Foreman Gallery (plate 45; p. 87)

Prickly Blouse

Cotton blouse, beeswax, quilting pins, dimensions variable

Rush

Medium and dimensions unknown

"She preferred the flowers unfamiliar to her childhood, coarser and more violent, flowers which appear to feed on meat, so intensely alive they were too frightening to touch"

Saran wrap, polyester fabric, glass beads, peacock feather, 15 × 27 ft.

Tobacco and Coffee

Dry pigment on canvas, 14 × 14 in., with accompanying text: It was a kind of pepper./ The roots were ground to paste and chewed up by the honest folk./ The chewers did not themselves partake of this rich man's drink which tasted "sharp and stimulating."

2001

Cellar Reach

Grass, foam, found objects, glitter, clay, shells, glow light, fragrance, dimensions variable

Filarial, Leprosy

Acrylic on handmade batik paper, dimensions unknown

Flowering, Prickly Organelle

Mixed media, 10 × 10 × 6 in.

Furry + Fuzzy Organelle

Mixed media, 20 × 23 × 10 in.

In the Dream Garden factors of renewal came from elsewhere and almost disappeared without leaving scent had it not been for our thickly skinned houses. These manipulated lawns preserved in hothouses are a tropical triumph. Bizarre as they were they need fine cultivation, tenacious pampering, it is our ambitious transporting of beetles, ants, worms, and even fungus that surrendered these plants to our safe keeping
Mixed media, 13 × 10½ × 30 × 8 ft.

Itsy + Squeaky Organelle

Mixed-media sculpture, 4½ × 4 × 6 in.

Leishmaniasis

Acrylic on handmade batik paper, 15 × 13 in.

Malaria

Acrylic on handmade batik paper, 19 × 23 in.

"On my tippy toes"

Body-pressed blue Saran wrap with plastic tubing, turmeric, dimensions variable

Phantasmal Pharmacopia

Mixed-media sculpture, dimensions unknown

Schistosomosis

Acrylic on handmade batik paper, dimensions unknown

The Garden of Grass and Brilliance:

"A flock of pigs were led by children who escorted their bodies, covered with scratches and tick bites feared that certain aquatic birds, beasts from underworlds and other world might soon suck on them. Clouds of flies, bugs and bats swirling down from dark foliage hung over their heads. They swallowed mouthfuls of moist air like thick soup. Immersed in the fragrance of unearthly possibilities they receded further into the jungle seeing greed."

Mixed media, 17 × 8 × 8 ft. (fig. 7; p. 131)

Tiny Tickles of Organs

Mixed-media installation, 56 × 28 × 30 in.

Transporting Cinderella

Slippers based on those for the Ganesanjali Hindu Temple, dimensions variable

Typhanosomia

Acrylic on handmade batik paper, 13 × 15 in.

2002

A Stranger is in Our Paradise/Ours is a fortunate place, the Best Island, and the center of an unknowing, unmeasured world at large
Mixed media, dimensions variable (fig. 8; p. 132)

2003

Coconut Oil

Video, 12:30 minutes, color, sound, looped. Courtesy of the artist (plate 15a–d; p. 47)

Contagious Spaces, Preserving Pinkeye

Installation of altar, Taj Mahal, tea sets, dollhouse, optical sculptures, dimensions variable (fig. 10; p. 133)

Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love

Plastic, antique Anglo-Indian Bombay dark wood chair, steel and copper framework, floral picks, foam balls, cowrie shells, quilting pins, red-colored moss, antique stone globe, glass, synthetic fabric, shells, fake birds, 226 × 161 × 161 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 47a–b; p. 94–95, fig. 9; p. 133)

When scenes travel . . . bubble bubble

Video, 8:45 minutes, color, sound, looped. Courtesy of the artist (plate 14a–d; p. 46)

2004

Tongues Reach

Mixed media on paper, 20 × 30 in.

2005

In this wishing jar, where pigments take flight and limbs reach. . .

Mixed media, 72 × 72 × 108 in.

Puff Puff

Collage on paper, pearls, glue, glitter, acrylic, ink, graphite on paper, 30 × 22 in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–331 (plate 19; p. 55)

Seeing Structures that Contain Loops and Lose Ends

Mixed media on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Sqwaak and squat . . . trembling from end to end

Mixed media on paper, 30% × 22¼ in.

Tropical Fatigue and the Seven Wanderings: You Are Not Like Me

Suitcases, feathers, furniture, eggs, banana leaves, butterflies, peacock feathers, horn, 10 × 5 ft.

Two Figures Pollinating in Nature

Mixed media and burn holes on paper, 30 × 22½ in.

2006

Birds without Paradise: Sulfur Flower

Medium and dimensions unknown

From the oyster's shell it fell with a neck of dangling bells a flirtatious alligator who put upon us a bodily spell

Metal bells, steel, fans, appleseed necklace, dry preserved alligator head, dry loofah, 108¾ × 49¾ × 27½ in. (plate 52; p. 101)

Golden Opportunity

Mixed media on paper, 30 × 22 in. Private Collection, courtesy Galleria dello Scudo, Verona, Italy (plate 26; p. 64)

Her black growth produced such a sprinkle of ultimate fears that a shadow of silver emerged from it to watch herself watching and followed all worldly movements

Mixed media on paper, 40% × 44% in. Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 21; p. 57)

If lotion and potion could heal—for certain her oils—her diamonds, her gold and spices will prepare us all to peel away all resistance to one place and one face.

Mixed media on paper, 38 × 50 in. Courtesy of Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco (plate 20; p. 56)

In a delicate storm of some mystery they fluttered, fell and with both feet standing neatly upon nice rice pettled flowers

Mixed media on paper, 50 × 38 in.

In dream with grin she kissed and licked his alligator wings, peeled his toes of all its nails and waled at the site of killing

Steel, floral sticks, dry mushrooms, plastic beads, feather fans, horn, preserved alligator head, cowrie shells, linen threads, copper wire, 47 × 47 × 31½ in. Collection Bernadette de Bonrepos, Paris, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 37; p. 78)

In Full Blooms She Made All the World Sweat with Unnatural Flora

Ink, acrylic, enamel painting on paper, 29 × 21½ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–333 (plate 59; p. 109)

Lure of Place

Linen mosquito nets, ceramic horns, school chairs, garden hoses, laboratory glassware, globes, bamboo, wire, lights, 118 × 118 × 157½ in. (plate 48; p. 96)

Untitled (Dying fishgirl and angel above)

Mixed media on tracing paper of architectural drawing for Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, 35% × 48% in. Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

What on earth can be more blessed by mine nostalgia's rest . . . in the presence of the overwhelming white her tedious ethnic dress made her effortlessly brite—fruit of nature as is I, her sinking sweat, her reliable ethnographic addiction brought upon her a self and self-inflicted gaze (from the series Ethnic Dolls)

Mixed media, 82 × 56 × 55 in.

With tinsel and teeth, Gem and Germ: "get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged"

One wood table, one chandelier (metal, plastic, glass bulbs, ceramic ornaments), box of ornaments, 133 × 45 × 35½ in. (plate 16; p. 49)

2007

A bewildering variety of enemies from there where riches belonged stole the hearts of lesser kings who then thieved in places which fared well by commerce so hairy

Gouache, ink, metallic ink, glitter on paper, 27¾ × 35¼ × 2 in. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the artist, 2013.10.2 (plate 9; p. 40)

A World at a Loss

Globe, wooden altar, fake grass, glass lantern, black sand, ostrich egg, twenty-four pink feather fans, 108 × 72 in.

Benevolent Bird

Acrylic, ink and collage on paper, 30 × 22½ in.

Birds of Appetite She Who is Exiled Now Hovering, Circling

Mixed media, 58 × 38 in. Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany (plate 56; p. 106)

Bone Flower

Mixed media, 47 × 26 × 49 in. Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 62; p. 122)

Eve in earnest and with an agreeable discomfort ripened, bruised and curious like fallen fruit in sleep

Acrylic and ink on paper, 30¾ × 22¼ in.

Feathery fountain horn and fury finger nail

Steels, feather fans, shells, threads, nylon fiber, sticks, copper wire, cow horns, 74 × 34 × 15½ in.

Green Human Fruit Hung Low. . .

Watercolor, ink, mica, acrylic on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Her mother flirted piles of eyes caught by net and nails and fooled her sturdy harvest to deliver powered promises to kings

Acrylic and ink on paper, 27½ × 20 in.

His Tongue and Tail Grew Fond of her Money Leaves

Ink, acrylic, collage on watercolor paper, 30 × 22 in.

In a Land Far Far Away

Two ceramic bowls, iron elephant door stopper, five gourds, six Chinese white umbrellas, thirty assorted feather fans, 120 × 36 in.

In an eclipse between nature and wild a bold cloud grew strong of files that followed her unnatural beauty left undying

Mixed media on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Land

Acrylic, mixed media on birch wood panel, dimensions unknown

My Sugar pot grew and grew, bloomed with oriental flavors shampooed magic mountains, and grassy tops

Acrylic, ink, newspaper collage, glass beads on handmade paper, 16½ × 12 in.

Outside the Garden and Inside the Jungle Where the Heat Played. . .

Ink and acrylic on watercolor paper, 50 × 39 in.

She dazzled the gardner with her branches so brazen, so feathered and fearless, she warmed his breath, Tickled his taste and then reached deeper with horn and nails to puncture his need to greed

Mixed media, 36 × 46 × 36 in. Mathur Family Collection (plate 38; p. 79)

She is An Uncertain

Ink, acrylic on Mylar, 46½ × 50½ in. Tanja and David Smith, Düsseldorf, Germany (plate 23; p. 60)

The alterity of nature in the tropics, devoured by an urban curiosity displayed her serpent as a jeweled dragon-snake, positioned Adam with an aurora of normalcy, illuminated Eve's other side

Purple snake in acrylic chest with light fixtures, vintage library light, vintage satin quilted fabric, dry crocodile head, synthetic hair, stuffed with plastic beads in body, 22 × 16 × 13 in.

"The three little bears,/the three little beasts,/the three little countries/ Oh where, Oh where/ shall goldey locks sleep,/ in the comfort of commerce,/ in the hands of your labor/ she was at temptations beds,/ Oh where, Oh where/ can she go no more"

Three cots wooden, hemp, synthetic hair, stuffed snake body, plastic skull, metal oversized scissors, antique "trouble" light, 120 × 72 × 108 in.

The World, Civilisation and the Domain of Death

Acrylic, ink, mica on paper, 30 × 22½ in.

Tropicalization of nature, Henri-Rousseau restraint

Horn, feather fans, gourds, bulbs, wood, fabric, peacock feathers, metal bells, 51¼ × 32¼ × 26¾ in. Private Collection, Paris, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 58; p. 108)

Umbrella of fruit fell to her green reason

Acrylic and ink on paper, 27½ × 19½ in. Collection of Charles Betlach II (plate 65; p. 126)

Untitled

Acrylic, ink, mica on paper, 27½ × 20 in.

Within a new and robust capitalism the sword, the ugly and resistant oyster and the pearl made by the oyster's collection of debri soon grew to mean so much when in the world resistant economies opened wide and the market would soon be a single place a pearl made out of commerce and empty of place, rid of oyster

Amber vials, light bulbs, wire, ankle bells, gourds, shells, cow horns, cowrie shells, brass bells, pigeon feathers, glass, twine, moss, sand, plexiglass, 157½ × 157½ × 118 in. (plate 49; p. 97, fig. 11; p. 135)

With Moon-Shine and Money, she whistled her Siren's plea. Her lizard tongue then only threw vines into sky of rupees, tricks and trickles then you could see

Acrylic, ink, collage on paper, 27½ × 20 in. The Collection of Catherine and Alan Harper, New York (plate 42; p. 85)

Wondering Heron

Mixed media, 79¾ × 38 × 54¾ in. Private Collection, Paris, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 4; p. 24)

2008

A Elephant—She Was not So Small but Her Weight Was Exaggerated to Capture Her for a Commerce Amused

Ink, acrylic, enamel painting on paper, 15 × 11 in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–330 (plate 60; p. 119)

A very dry and very tidy heat swept into her land, lulled her country to a simmering sleep and all the while—culture was left ungroomed and grisley—grew an African horn, paddle her vessel, grew wild green chinese umbrellas dry and dirty skirted about to catch each gentle wind for sale, blew hard a creamy and fertile commerce

Mixed media, 57 × 104 × 69 in.

A World Made of Nature Created her Untidy Beauty, Captured her Maker's Eye but not Once but Thrice "Culture" who Played her a Fool, Maimed her Walk and Unsweetened her Magic

Acrylic, ink and mica on paper, 22¼ × 30 in.

Caught with fin and feet a funny foe

Acrylic and ink on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Charmed by Climate and Cottony Faces

Mixed media on paper, 30¼ × 22 in.

Dollops of creamy ropes, chinese tails, silvery horns and the wild reluctance of natives

Rope, shells, string, feathers, bulbs, plastic net, wire, 70 × 36 × 50 in.

Do you believe in magic—in a young world's heart

Acrylic paint, ink, mica on paper, 40¼ × 70 in.

Flower Horse & Garden Feelers

Acrylic ink and pencil on paper, 26 × 22 in.

Golden prickly spoons drowned in west stew gathered chunks of pink foul sweetened with mustard seeds and perfumed with nuts and flower

Pink pigeon plumes, Chinese fans, shell collar, amber vials, gold wire spoons, 30 × 48 × 30 in.

Lentil flour, chickpeas mixed fermented friedballs presented in the leaf of bananas could cure the hunger of a labouring man

Shells, plastic, gourds, nylon hair, 47¼ × 31½ × 51 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 57; p. 107)

Mushroom and Moon

Acrylic, mixed media ink on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Sweet cheese and harvest flowers draped the meat's head with blessings of weddings

Eight plume pigeon feathers, skulls, shell collar, Chinese fans, amber vials, three gold-color wire spoons, gold-filled wire, one oversized utility clear bulb, 50 × 36 × 23 in.

The Intellectual Explorer as a Underdeveloped Two Headed Man Pillaged and Parroted the Dreams of Natives. His Fruit Was an Individual Identity

Ink, acrylic, enamel painting on paper, 30 × 22½ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Donation from the Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–329 (plate 63; p. 123)

The promise of self rule, played on her mind's paradise, paralysed her curiosity and then only had she the will to erect her sitting beauty from sleep

Wooden Victorian ladies chair, one dozen Chinese electric altar lamps, one pink paper Chinese umbrella, one long sisal mesh net, three miniature animals, cow horn, wire basket, 168 × 48 × 39½ in. Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany (plate 66; p. 127)

This winter brew blistered her cheeks—made of hot peppercorns and fuzzy pearl onions wilted her masters tough meat

Pink plume pigeon feathers, rabbit fur, horn, cloth, 33 × 16 × 20 in.

Tinker Bell

Acrylic and ink on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Wild Flower

Mixed media on vellum architectural drawing for Columbia Center for Disease Control from 1968, 44 × 40 in.

With breath taking consumption her commerce ate while she was being eaten

Glass vials, jute charpai (cot), shells, cotton thread, plastic skull, sari textile, 144¼ × 101¼ × 24 in. Courtesy of the Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Ltd. (plate 3a–b; p. 22)

2009

A Shampooing surgeon he is—sent vapor and steam to a client unclean and uncomfortable with brassy plates of paste and vegetable pills, sent to all who wailed and whined, sent as Indian tradition

Ink, acrylic on paper, 12 × 9 in.

Beastly Flower

Steel, shells, polyester, linen, feathers, diameter 110 in. (fig. 13; p. 137)

Can you believe the beast in her beauty was born out of a vilified attack on her mother's moment when she and she a shared sexuality

Mixed media, 28 × 37 × 18 in.

Death becomes you—Egyptian Nile antelope hunted 1968—found 2008

Gourds, bulbs, globe, brass light ornament, wire, gold embroidered sari cloth, antelope head, wood mount, 7 × 3 × 2½ ft. (fig. 12; p. 136)

Exploding head staggering with an unpredictable thirst for lectose, phlegm, bile, pollen or spores this world became liquid from particle, spewed forth her reason

Acrylic, lace, beads, nylon, collage on paper, 30 × 22 in. (plate 30; p. 69)

For the entire city a fragile hostility dazzling silks and no constraints

Cotton thread, gold-plated brass wire, skunk skull, plastic coyote jaw, fabric, steel, cowrie shells, 62 × 56 × 39 in.

For the Love of Falling Fearless upon freedom's flowers burning orange and prickly too as are Empires and Rajas, Queens, politicians fail

Ink and acrylic on Mylar digital print, 48½ × 80 in.

I'll get you my pretty!

2009/2011, bottles, fans, cowrie shells, dancing bells, glass vials, Texas longhorn steer skulls, porcelain, saris, pewter toy soldiers, plastic animals and soldiers, stones, moss, globe, Chinese tea-straining spoons, feathers, crochet lace, glass light bulbs, mica powder, white sand, Hindu ceremony thread, 14 × 20 ft.

In the canopy of the stars life was made. Between flora and fauna our DNA was sent. Now Life and Death too shall mate and make haste to split thrice the mice in our DNA that nibbles at life to make death

c. 2009, linen tinsel, shells, gold wire, silk, cotton, feathers, glass beads, quartz beads, 72 × 36 × 30 in.

In the turn of things, once what was fair with use of trains, rains and planed dragged out into the world a familiar pleasure for friends neighbors and foreign healers that will at once separate us from seeing through our backs, made

Mixed media on paper, 30 × 22 in.

Lifted in droplets, each of these spots, spores, soiled to split shared what was a dome and is home and cannot be owned in a dirty and vivid commerce

Mixed media on paper, 69 × 49 in.

Manufacturing the exotics and the other series circus amusements

Ink and acrylic on paper, 88 × 52 in.

Military science, modern war and a ruthless sense of mass manufacturing pealed thunder from sky and plated her bones with gold but her slaves could not bring her a certain future

Ink and acrylic on handmade paper, 12 × 9 in.

Peculiar was her manner, has an uncertain number of flaws . . . was she foreign?

Ink and acrylic on unbleached watercolor paper, 15 × 11 in. Mathur Family Collection (plate 34; p. 75)

pink silly bubbly and naughty they floated out of eurasia ready for explosions

Ink and acrylic on watercolor paper, 30 × 22 in.

Queen of Cuddles

Acrylic and ink on watercolor paper, 12 × 9 in. (plate 22; p. 58)

*She's my country . . . her breath exploded
of purrid death and folly. Her tresses
snagged the most prickly greed lured
cultures to wet their beds severed family
and prayed on hope . . . she is at war*

Texas longhorn steer skull, cowrie shells, saris,
steel planters, Hindu ceremony thread, antique
mannequin, globes, wire, kitchen towel rack,
glass beads, brass shells, Chinese umbrella,
Japanese mosquito nets, bone beads, copper
trim, African necklaces, Chinese lantern, 22 kt.
gold powder, 99½ × 50 × 102 in. (fig. 14; p. 138)

*Sudden dispossession paled her already
pliant body, spawned new green hope in
her air drying and in a incorruptible haste
she was all a thing of the world not a place*

Ink, acrylic on Mylar digital print, 41 × 75½ in.
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, Musée national
d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle.
Donation from the Collection of Florence and
Daniel Guerlain, 2012, AM 2012–334 (plate 24;
p. 61)

*The end when she came, she came with
insect & flair weather but when she left
she waited first for*

Ink, acrylic paint on Rives paper, 30 × 22 in.

*The world as burnt fruit—When empires
feuded for populations and plantations,
buried in colonial and ancient currency a
Gharial appeared from an inky melon—
hot with blossom sprang forth to swallow
the world not yet whole as burnt fruit*

Fans, feathers, cowrie shells, resin alligator skull,
globe, glass vials, light bulbs, gourds, steel wire,
Japanese mosquito nets, 90 × 253 × 90 in.
Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art
(plate 7a–d; pp. 30–31, 34–35)

*Towards a world made profound
simmering in alien curiosities she lay
folded by golden tree and descending
sheets of clouds*

Mixed media on paper, 37 × 29 in.

*When could this 'Oriental Flower' bloom
is it's virtues of native curled into its
own, pitted with an alien heritage, ethnic
co-habitation and unnatural segregation
unveiled will it then leave place gasping
for a way out into our volatile air to bloom
again*

Mixed media, 110 diameter × 102 in.

*Winter's Flower—Raw materials from sea
and from foul and even from some exotic
mice was eaten by a world hungry for
commerce made these into flower,
disguised could be savoured alongside
whitened rice*

Oyster shells, fish bone, thread, cowrie shells,
fur, deity eyes, copper trim, ostrich egg, epoxy
American buffalo horns, steel, fabricated
umbrella structure, steel stand, pigeon-feather
fans, 21½ × 61 × 78½ in. Courtesy of the Tiroche
DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Ltd.
(plate 27; p. 65)

*Wishing Waters and Grey Spell Is
Enchanted Her Funny Foe*

Ink, acrylic, enameled paint, stamp, geography
map cut and glued, textile material glued on
paper, 27½ × 19½ in. Centre Pompidou, Paris,
France, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de
création industrielle. Donation from the
Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, 2012,
AM 201–332 (plate 41; p. 84)

*With or without name she was blue
and who knew when she could slip into
another mood for her understandable
unwillingness to do, to speak to, to feel
and determine her next move rests in
her nest as would a Refugee*

Mixed media, 62 × 37 × 28¾ in.

2010

*Dangerous World (from Exit Art portfolio
Ecstasy)*

Archival digital print on paper with two
screenprinted spot colors, hand-coloring and
collage, Edition of 50, 30 × 21¼ in.

*Fetal and funny they clustered around her
somewhat sunny and as many. Then in a
flurry she drew from them her full hurry
primitive and plain she pretended to play
into Darwin's danger mixed and mingled
her selectivity did not wander*

Mixed media on paper, 15 × 11 in.

*From the jungle in lore of the Colonial
frontier eager explores compelled by
fantasy and fortune savoured oral texts,
imagined more held the foreign captive
as part of an untidy garden*

Steel, dancing bells, fabric, coconut shell, plastic
fruit netting, floral picks, light bulb, Hindu
ceremony thread, glass beads, wire, 112 ×
44 × 38 in.

*From the plantation secret texts translated
and plagiarized described medicinal
plants both marvelous and monstrous
invited the world to be swallowed incited
the world to be swallowed as if medicine*

Light bulbs, tulle, cotton rope, cowrie shells,
silver wire, spoons, globe, thread, brown vials,
70 × 32 × 32 in. (plate 13; p. 45)

*Her reason did not rhythm with her
partner's kind for he was man and she
was not he . . . nor his type of fan but who
she is remains entangled, changes with
race, religion, country and culture and
then who knows when these elements do
take to rain on thee then shall follow floods
below her—ripen green canopies open,
and wings leap laden with red fruit to
be eaten. . . . transformation will speak.*

Mixed media on paper, 15 × 11 in.

*In moist winters her travels wild and dark
blistered sharp flowers, damp fruit and
strange love*

Ink and watercolor on paper, 36 × 51 in.

Little Red Riding Hood

Rooster feathers, steel, knitted mesh, wood,
rhinestones, deity eyes, wooden doll, mink fur,
cowrie shells, thread, 60 × 29½ × 24 in.
Collection of Florence and Daniel Guerlain, Paris,
courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/
Brussels (plate 5; p. 26)

*Upon civilizing home an absurd and
foreign fruit grew ripened, made food
for the others, grew snout, tail and
appendage like no other*

Mixed media, 40¼ × 30 × 40¼ in.

2011

*A heart of two anchors, take one bird and
take one butcher, from ear to ear, it's a
familiar end yet she was with a wide grin,
while meat and medicine poured, even
played with the poverty of country, was
still an unknown friend! So she withdrew
her smile to clear one anchor that was
not her faith, the other was my mother's
brother, enchanted china, giggled with
Africa and strayed to stay in whips of lamb
leather, feathers stained, her shells would
raise the last anchor human hate*

Mosquito net, fish bone, umbrella, artificial horn,
pigeon feathers, 91 × 43 × 38 in.

*A Jane of all trades, a bricolage
advantageous in action, courageous
in thought her girlish splendor never
burdened by disposable culture could
safeguard against snake bites with
nets woven by nails as her nature was
not frail*

Acrylic and ink on paper, 29% \times 22 in. Courtesy
of Tamar Efrat (plate 39; p. 81)

*A red bird with gullet of glassy glands
dripped forth upon her chest and as
Noah's ark to which all kinds of feathery
creatures flew knew not what this bird
knew. She as from no place but two and
in her flutterings, crowing, gurgling too
made anew a nest in America that drew
and drew.*

Lanvin for H&M dress, resin horn, shells, doll
parts, Indian jewelry, bulbs, wire, steel, gourds,
feathers, wedding sari, 72 \times 103 \times 36 in.

Change me

Acrylic ink, rice paper collage, steel powder,
mica, graphite, iron fillings suspension on
watercolor paper by Arches, 30 \times 22 in.

*Circuitous and sinusoidal her broken
English was amusing deflected language
that was quite confusing, spiraling
into something that opened away into
something and nothing was the same
again as English wasn't the only name
game*

Acrylic, ink, and 18 kt. gold on watercolor paper,
29% \times 22 in.

*Conquering her creation she disturbed
evolution*

Ink, pencil, acrylic on watercolor paper,
29% \times 41% in.

*Her captivity was once someone's
treasure and even pleasure but she blew
and flew away took root which grew, we
knew this was like no other feather, a
third kind of bird that perched on vine
intertwined was neither native nor her
queens daughters, a peculiar other.*

Anglo-Indian pedestal 1860, Victorian birdcage,
shells, feathers, gourds, grape vines, coral,
fractured Charlotte doll heads, steel knitted
mesh with glass beads, Kenyan tourist
sculptures, apple gourds, 7 \times 7 \times 6 ft. Cornell
Fine Arts Museum, Purchased with funds from
the Michel Roux Acquisitions Fund, , 2016.20
(plate 61; p. 121)

Her hair was not herself. . .

Mixed media on paper, 30 \times 21 in.

*I wished upon your falling dot that did
drop upon this one colonial knot, a fairy, a
ghost, and a witch she was not. Margaret
Mead who could study me, transformed
the West to surprise the rest, modern
she loosened my limbs floated me in,
my tribes with ancient customs, barbaric
rituals planted and seasoned English
speaking regions, separated American
morality aided in undignified conquering
of territory.*

Acrylic, ink, thread, embossed paper, silk
handmade paper and rice paper on Mylar,
76% \times 41% in.

*Ivory hunters, rubber merchants, labor
traders, farm hands, like ancient tree,
Banyan tree threw it's tangerine roots
from his pale mouth, scraped the earth of
wealth with bodies jumping, swaying and
swirling, black and brown limbs flying,
small hands churning to feed the cream
she made with this crimson flesh to
colonial kings too far to see, so make
them sing with no remorse while nature
and savage flicker, to cease upon a
candles glow.*

Original lithograph made at Edition Copenhagen,
Edition of 75, 39% \times 26% in.

*Lotions and potions like rivers where in
quick motion, as well as essential oils and
culture's notions, where these cultures
would once be locked in harbor or empires
court now took ride on the global, opened
themselves up to mysterious and foreign
incantations*

Mixed media, 32 \times 25 \times 16 in.

*Preternatural passage came from wet
whiteness and mercantile madness, paid
for circular migrations, she went thirty
six directions that is all the more different,
where empire threw her new born and
heritage claimed as well, this lady bug
was not scarlet her wound was rather
shaped like garlic seemed colored, a
bit more of sulfuric, could eat what was
fungus her cloth punctuated by tender
greenness she seemed to be again
pregnant*

Steel armature, vintage porcelain baby doll
head, wooden spindle, cowrie shells, red thread,
vintage birch wood shoe form (size 9–10),
Bengali sari, feathers, horns, costume wedding
jewelry, 36 \times 60 \times 60 in. (fig. 18; p. 141)

*She drew a premature prick, in a fluster of
transgressions, abject by birth she new not
what else to do with this untouchable reach,
unknowable body as she was an ancient
savage towed into his modern present*

Female mannequin form (14 years tall girl),
amber bottles, epoxy American buffalo horns,
steel arm brace, Banarasi Indian wedding sari
trim (silver, silk), Victorian replica doll head,
Indian jewelry (22 kt. gold plated), glass
magnifying dome, replica deer eye (glass),
wooden elbow bangles (Congo), wood,
90% \times 30% \times 40% in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts,
Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo (plate 35; p. 76)

*She was now in western style dress
covered in part of Empires' ruffle and
red dress, had a foreign and peculiar
race, a Ganesha who had lost her head,
was thrown across sea until herself
shipwrecked. A native of Bangladesh
lost foot to root in Bidesh, followed her
mother's full stop on forehead, trapped
tongue of horn and groomed a ram-like
under stress*

Cowrie shells, rooster feathers, gourds, acrylic
horns, ceramic balls, plastic netting, amber glass
vials, violet glass bulbs, false glass doe eyeballs,
silk and synthetic Lanvin for H&M ruffled red
dress, mannequin, 73 \times 65 \times 65 in. (fig. 7; p. 25)

*Swing swing she was her Swamy's
sunshine while moo specks, flakes and
frost flirted with her shape. The others not
those who had fallen out of grace because
of unfortunate race missed her but stayed
though out of her way.*

Acrylic, ink, mica flakes on watercolor paper,
15 \times 11 in.

*Tender was her wound, pink and playful
was her mood*

Cowrie shells, silk cord, ostrich egg shell,
wire, deity eyes, crystal, epoxy, plastic fruit nets,
steel, glass, seashells, plastic, cotton thread,
cultured and freshwater pearls, feather fans,
28 × 44 × 15 in.

*The song of a thousand flies and a sudden
rage made her drop all her contents and
stitch her veins to make them plain again*

Acrylic and ink on paper, 15 × 11 in. Courtesy of
Jenkins Johnson Collection (plate 43; p. 86)

*The two were misbehaving Rani and
rakhshasni raving and ranting. . .*

Ink and acrylic on watercolor paper, 22 × 30 in.

2012

*A collision central to our imagination, a
god of one, one particle without mission
clapping bones, clatter, freed red fruit for
a million seasons*

Mixed media on paper, 11¼ × 15 in.

*A Lady of Commerce—Wooden. Hers is
a transparent beauty, her eager sounds,
her infinite and clamorous land and river,
ocean and island, earth and sky . . . all
contained, bottled for delivery to an open
hole, a commerce so large her arms
stretched wide and with her sulfurous
halo—a ring of glass, she will swallow it all.*

Hand-painted leaded glass chandelier, wood
figurine, vintage glass bottles, chandelier
ornaments, birdcage, steels, wood pedestal,
lace, cowrie shells, taxidermy deer paws, Indian
marriage jewelry, ostrich eggshells, porcelain
doll hands, silver leaf, gold leaf, wire, linen cord,
marble baby doll hands, 120 × 48 × 48 in.

*A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve, a Monkey
cheated leaped, from limb to limp in open
air, curled a mischievous and bulbous
melancholy in tail that sailed and with a
single cough, a sudden drip, a curtain of
bubbles, tears spilled to send land liquids,
fertilizer, all fluid migrations leaking
abroad and across*

Steel structure, plastic horn, fans, 500-watt
bulbs, balls, wire, sari cloth, 85 × 38 × 39 in.
Private Collection (plate 10; p. 41)

*Bacteria: In combat 540 wild beasts in
green fury took refuge in curdled milk,
kindled friendship with nomads skimmed
butter as treasure absconded with
proteins warmed milk until certain odor
blew more flora*

Acrylic on watercolor paper, 30 × 22 in. Courtesy
of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo
(plate 18; p. 54)

*Clouds of warm gold punctured by
pearls with cool luster rested like
pillow on her nape's crane and then
a meditative shyness overcame her,
although she was stark and ascetic her
mood changed—was deeply luxurious,
bathed in industrious Heritage. Her
culture had many corridors, courtyards
why not one of each tenant.*

Acrylic, 23kt. gold on birch wood panel,
12 × 10 in.

*Earthly gas, blue and blue crept
water when need and desire this God
with no rest created her creatures at
Neptunes' breast*

Mixed media on paper, 23¼ × 16½ in.

*A life that is never tasted when girls at
home are arrested. Gold ties, tighten, play
her a fool time, time and time again and so
it can be imagined chocolate drips from
tomato clouds will finally loosen and I will
stick, sticky in love with freedom as this
simple spring will widen and her heavy
shouldered arms will lighten.*

Acrylic, ink, 23kt. gold leaf on paper, 22 × 15 in.

*Fungi: it drew the friendliest types,
magnetic to older types, those whose
permissive personalities made permanent
stain can be even used as strong dye,
while they had small color crafted life
from leftovers, fussy although furry
swam but stayed away from bleach and
sister chlorine*

Acrylic on watercolor paper, 30 × 22 in.

*Hanuman's (Hindu deity, monkey god)
flight is evolution's climb*

Steel, wire basket, silk velvet, glass beads,
Victorian eyeballs, silk braids, shells, bronze,
plastic, fabric, Chinese umbrella, 55 × 55 × 27 in.

*The last population unsorted and tangled,
smaller and larger, darker and brighter
all fell under her black umbrella, nets
thrashing from her red mouth.*

Acrylic, ink, rice paper collage on paper,
70 × 40 in.

*The task, virtues of courage, loyalty and
the perils of desire, fear*

Ink, acrylic, gold on paper, 16½ × 23¾ in.

*To touch two genders too quickly made by
god to be eternally apart, his world and
her was nested, entangled*

Steel, ostrich eggs, 10 × 13 × 14 in.

2013

*A World Lost: after the original island
appears, a single land mass is fractured,
after population migrated, after pollution
revealed itself and as cultural locations
once separated did merged, after the
splitting of Adam and Eve, shiva and
shakti of race black and white, of culture
East and West, after animals diminished,
after the seas' corals did exterminate, after
this and at last imagine water evaporated
. . . this after Columbus found it we lost it,
imagine this.*

Mixed media, 132 × 234 × 128 in. Courtesy of
the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/
Brussels (plate 6, figs. 8–9; pp. 28–29)

*Beauty was not in the East—her figure
was in part a repellent I and his aura was
not so neat. The locus of a pleasure stolen
from deceit, stubborn and excessive
the oriental was transformed in part
as objects of sexual bad habits.*

Acrylic and collage on watercolor paper, 29¼ ×
44¼ in. The Collection of Catherine and Alan
Harper, New York (plate 11; p. 43)

*Ground had risen to sprout new plant,
uttered first spoken its difference from
black black soil toward a white tight sky,
a colored sapling winged but bashful
gifted a diversity with one sharp bite of
chromosomes monstrous as it devoured
what it is in air and earth to live again
each time different slanted time.*

Feathers, glass beads, glass vials, steel wire,
acrylic horn, ceramic ball, horn, 23½ × 35½ ×
17¼ in.

*Groundlessness made them different
caught them out in the open, boundless
and against instinctual suspicion they
knew now of unequalness like twine
this arrested, dropped some disguise,
allusions moistened reversed her garden
of alienation*

Acrylic, ink, watercolor paper, 40 × 60 in.

*imperial and Imposing, her body was
ready for wedding—she articulated the
splendor of lush gardens and bounty,
unpolluted waters, untouched and
unearthed territories, her body was
mounted, frozen and waiting*

Light bulbs, pigeon feathers, steel carbon wire, copper, silk thread, glass beads, cowrie shells, trim, wedding sari, seed beads, wood, horn, fleece, 38 × 34 × 23 in. Courtesy of Isabel Stainow Wilcox (plate 46; p. 92)

*Learn of their discovery, their complex
physiological construction and fierce
competition they grew attached and grew
abnormally became lively with each others
fondness for excitation*

Acrylic on watercolor paper, 30 × 44 in.
Private Collection, Miami (plate 25; p. 63)

2014

*All these organs so too the oral and anal,
and nasal, drops and globs like snail, slug,
slip and slide, dissolve all our strength*

Acrylic and ink on paper, 40 × 59½ in.

*Courageous odors violent and natural
cut open veils of decency reveals the
misformed, the funny and peculiar and
all such oddities in a grand gesture,
a assertion of the physical.*

Acrylic and ink on paper, 30 × 40 in.

*Dodo bird and her Extinction met Dutch
sailors in the Indian Ocean while they
were looking for fortune and existence
both plain and simple sailed into new
worlds and paradises or experience
death was one notion.*

Acrylic, ink, and collage on watercolor paper, 30 × 22 in. The Ford Foundation (plate 53; p. 102)

*Ethnic and Race braided long hairs and
coiled and entwined. Oh how it made and
made, ate, ate in shade, slumbered and
soiled her reflection to see this faked—
nations make me small sweet cakes.*

Mixed media, 71 × 40 × 24 in. (fig. 19; p. 143)

*Explorers not fortune tellers travel back
and forth at last to tell you whats not and
whats what, they maybe made of every
leather his head looks to too many paths
curious of all that appears vast, whats
remote and feared and repulsive can*

Glass beads, peacock feathers, knitted steel, acrylic, steel, 43 × 14 × 35 in.

*Flourish me different in wind and drift
and breezes set sale always in motion
and mindful adaptation, in not yet settled
fertile selection, in open folds and
ceaseless creases, in remote reaches
this was wrinkled and snagged touched
stopped with what nature teaches came
to shed peel so these layers as evolution
loosens makes us each time, every time
this a tiny bit different*

Steel, textiles, beads, pearls, feather fans, 36 × 36 × 26 in. Collection of Wanda Kownacki (plate 40; p. 83)

Gargantuan Crawler

Ink and acrylic on paper, 22¾ × 15 in.

I am all that could stretch

Acrylic, ink, sari cloth silk with gold-thread embroidery, 12 × 9 in. Courtesy of Jessica & Greg Ransom

*In thick bush and among thieving nomads
devotion was mined and all the world
could be saved as missionary was made
into medicine*

Feathers, silk, stone beads, turtle shell, glass, silk flowers, doll parts, brass candlesticks, cowrie shells, porcelain on copper, Plexiglas, 74 × 22 in.

*Make me a summary of the world! She
was his guide and had traveled on camel,
rhino, elephant and kangaroo, dedicated
to dried plants, glass houses—for medical
study, vegetable sexuality, self-pollination,
fertilization her reach pierced the woods
country by country*

Wood rhino, Chinese umbrellas, sea sponges, linen, beads, pewter soldiers, grape vines, glass chandelier drops, acrylic horns, wire, nylon and bead flowers, 7 × 4 ft. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 8, fig. 11; pp. 36–38)

*Mangroves of Alien and Native froze and
foamed, rose and rose, opened and closed
and one in all grew calm who knew*

Steel, plastic, nylon, light bulbs, shells, wire, cotton thread, feathers, 52½ × 27 × 31½ in.

*Soldier: overseas and out of place his
species seeded dead to grow as common
place, bore beautiful flowers of wound,
carnage discovered a resin sticky like
sweat. He had courage and loyalty when
everyone wept and came home emptied
while we slept.*

Mixed media, 81 × 20 × 30 in.

*Solitude, in cognito, origin appears as if
fact, pure and transparent, encounters
the force of separation from other worlds,
to limit the unimaginable trespasser to
represent her as untamed, articulate,
creates her as an altered self, different,
exotic, maddening she can dissolve all
that is continuous.*

Hard and soft ground etching, drypoint, relief, digital printing, collage, hand-coloring, 20 × 24 in., image size 15¾ × 19¾ in. Edition of 30

Sweet Baby

Ink, acrylic, collage on handmade paper, 24 × 16½ in.

*The gene was his mule. Mendel with his
peas in the monastery in thick garden
made variety, made mischief while green
ponds, unripe flower took to crossing,
blended fluids so dominant was recessive*

Acrylic, ink, marble paper collage on watercolor paper, 29 × 25 in. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo (plate 54; p. 103)

*Under the wandering reach these are
the parts of the world wind water lava
light live.*

Mixed media, 47 × 39 × 33 in.

2015

*Beneath the surface away from land the
wreckage of big Empire split to be spoken,
not to be broken, pitted and potent with
pollutants powered to command did this
to press three to four nations always ready
to leap into motion, in brief eruptions
came emancipation, cultural collisions,
tumbled and trembled to form brave nation*

Acrylic, ink, mica, gold, marble, paper collage on watercolor paper, 90 × 52 in. (plate 32; p. 73)

*Buried in stump while knitted together
at side in a illusion a roar of birds and
predators pickled on earth in one spray
of air played.*

Silver leaf blue, ink, acrylic on birch wood panel, 20 × 20 × 1½ in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalia Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 64; p. 125)

*Friendly Fire signal to me this limb lean
without width long as sudden snake made
phantom to eye disarm him of his tired
heel and spectrum of distaste. . .*

Steel structure, textiles, beads, feathers, thread, bulbs, 46 × 48 × 35 in. Private Collection, Rydal, Pennsylvania (plate 12; p. 44)

*Fury of the fringe, largely restless, faint
and fragile at every start, it's first breath,
jumpy and punctured as you see to let it
be by way of watching fires grow, keep
the wildness of our heart*

Mixed media, 43 × 18 × 27 in.

*Heredity in variation and reproduction,
an extension of self in movement and in
flight could fly never never too far and
forever always to be divided into the
individual and the frightening face of
the diminished other.*

Wood, steel, glass, 75 × 44 × 28 in.

Human Traffic

Ink, acrylic, collage on watercolor paper, 90 × 36 in. (plate 28; p. 66)

*In Mute Witness at the outskirts and
out of center she forms a final creased
edge of makeshift settlements, a dark
and iridescent thorn of horn pierces all
home with the hard and the green of
unripe fruit*

Wood spindles, aluminum cloth, waxed nylon, wood, steel armature, Murano glass horns, rooster feathers, silk tassel, cowrie shells, hemp cord, silkscreen print silk cloth, red cotton thread, acrylic paint, tribal jewelry, baca fibers, 67 × 43 × 49¼ in.

*In transparent soil she spoke to welcome
her other more mouthy voice, sliced open
tunnel, mountain and air, tugged, tumbled
even tackled to rise lighter, higher more
quicker knocking who?*

Black ink, acrylic paint, crayon, gold and silver metallic paint, copper leaf, with collage of marbled and other decorated paper, on paper, 66 × 45¼ in. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum Purchase, Gift of Denise B. Fitch, 2017.24 (plate 17; p. 53)

*Ligaments wait to stretch in an identity
that could double find home rubble find
refuge in disguise*

Silver leaf blue, ink, acrylic on birch wood panel, 20 × 20 × 1½ in. Private Collection, Paris, France, courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 31; p. 70)

*More like turkey no turtle she scattered
her verbal*

Ink, acrylic, 23 kt. gold, copper on paper, 14 × 10 in. Courtesy of Diana Nelson and John Atwater (plate 55; p. 105)

*Not so silent, outspoken when there
be disgusting disaster she be named
"Sky" loved both bees and flies. Seasons
surrendered when her temper chased
away and colored flaming and flowered
sent her pleasures of spring to widen,
open where once then and hence before
could be waiting could now be rendered
in her tickle and fancy!*

Acrylic, ink, collage on watercolor paper, 29 × 23¾ in.

2016

*Heaven's no place for girls, no sand, no
flowers no count of curls no irons to flatten
nor straighten or curl your coiled corns,
your hair would not leave you naked as
girls when all but one could leave open
my calls to trumpet her thoughts, stainless
steel bikini and sanding wheels for girls
who will not open*

Blue silver leaf, acrylic, aluminum leaf, ink on paper, 66 × 30 in.

2017

*Addictions to leaf and nut aroused, curled
currency and culture to itch and moan as
arrivals of plants from plantation, not just
servants or slaves exploded, swelled to
levels fantastic but without majestic magic
hurt to ripen.*

Steel armature, feathers, fabric, glass beads, thread, dried gourds, silver leafing, 42 × 42 × 28 in.

*Excessive flower, hour by hour, banal and
decorative, banished and vanished of
power, reckless and greased she steals
like jewel thieves, fierce, always in theater
as actor, often captured in oils, thrown
in air, robbed in vitality as death appears
for all who have more color—see her as
unequal in sting to sun and processions of
pomp if in marriage and funeral bearing in
mind possessions of inheritance acquired.*

Thread cotton, cowrie shells, glass bottles, wire, linen, silk, mirrors, vintage trim, cable, steel armature, copper tubes, seed beads, porcupine needles, cock feathers, peacock hairs, faux eyelashes, speaker, Frozen Charlotte doll heads, 72 × 48 × 36 × in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Museum Purchase, 2016.37a. (plate 50a–b; p. 98)

*In noiseless soils, underground, a length
of distanced poured to the below touched
no air, rooted in piles of more root upon
more piles not weeded and not watered
grew even as no light entered to stare.*

Steel armature, feathers, fabric, glass beads, thread, shells, gourds, silver leafing, 34 × 18 × 34 in.

Mother gathered Three and no more dirty stones, tossed them to sky that could break what had hardened her ground and without frown or flirt of flower father like grease or butter slipped aside to free from forty and some more grown men who held her as housewife like plant life with three or no more daughters

Acrylic, wood panel with collage, 80 × 40 in.
Courtesy of the artist (plate 29; p. 67)

Out of hollowness of world She punctured tight twisted curled horn, meaty teeth a waning of emotion

Silk, nets, sequins, beads, bottles, shells, feathers, Murano glass, 71 × 43¼ × 17¾ in.

Sap of earth n' blood, leaky, which adaption may deliver one baby, to clear ethnicity and transparent gender in centre and in likeness of parents, baby by wife, baby by husband from side to side, upon smiling country and unnatural culture appeals to no science or hidden DNA this that may collect to throttle all these other extreme parts, swallow to swallow until silence.

Steel, wood, glass, silver leaf, cowrie shells, sea shells, taxidermy eyes, vintage saris, 145 × 100 × 100 in. (fig. 20; p. 144)

Sex-bait, in likeness to fish bait to catch her as disloyal, in likeness to Eve, arouse her fear, to create racial panic of blacks jewels like honey to stir and stir poison n' passion, minted lynchings in likeness to money.

Antique Italian-American scone, Murano glass black horn, African handmade glass beads, German porcelain Victorian negro head [period contemporary descriptor], ostrich feather duster (black), ostrich feather duster (white), Murano glass beads, 22 × 18 × 10 in. (fig. 6; p. 25)

Viola, from New Orleans-ah, an African Woman, was the 19th century's rescue worker, a global business goods raker, combed, tilled the land of Commerce, giving America a certain extra extra excess culture, to cultivate it, making home for aliens not registered, made business of the finer, finer, had occupations, darning thread not leisure with reason and with luster, in "peek a boo" racial disguises preoccupied in circulating commerce, entertaining white folks, pulling and punching holes in barriers, place that where was once barren, without them, white banks made of mustard and made friendly folks feel home, welcomed and married immigrants from far noted how they been also starved, fled from servitude and colonial dangers, ships like dungeons, pushing coal in termite wholes, churning fire, but always learning, folding, washing, welcomed as aliens. She wandering, hosting, raising children connected to new mobilities and most unusual these movements in Treme', New Orleans was a incubating, enmeshed embedded in this silken cocoon when she land, she's came to be parachute mender, landed those black immigrant peddlers from Hoogali network of new comers

Murano glass horns, Indian rakes, seed beads, steel, Yoruba African mask, oyster shells, cowrie shells, Charlotte dolls, polyester horse hair trim, Korean silks, Indian silks, vintage Kashmir shawls, French wire Ferris wheel, Congolese elbow bangles, colonial mirror sconces, Japanese seed glass beads, sequins, threads, dimensions variable. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Museum Purchase 2017.53 (plate 1, fig. 1; pp. 16–17, p. 115)

When signs of origin fade, fall out, if washed away, trickle into separations, precipitate when boiled or filtered to reveal all doubleness as wickedness. Vanishing act that migration, mixation like mothers who hid paternity who could name move me slowly reveal me only when my maker stands straight

Turtle replica in resin, vintage shell lampshades, steel armature, Polynesian wood mask, Pyrex filtration lab glassware, feathers, thread linen, silk, amber vials, cowrie shells, seed beads, pearls, 127 × 186 × 35 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels (plate 44; p. 87)

Women did do this in shining when her spare threads and vines crimped, wrinkled in lines could force a clear high shimmer of Bud, blue black flower all boney and new, will upon will, came with whispers of new

Thread cotton, cowrie shells, glass bottles, wire, linen, silk, mirrors, vintage trim, cable, steel armature, copper tubes, seed beads, porcupine needles, cock feathers, peacock feathers, faux eyelashes, speakers, Frozen Charlotte doll heads, 48 × 76 × 32 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Museum Purchase, 2016.37b (plate 51; p. 99)

Untitled

India traditional paper, watercolor, ink, pen, feathers, pin, dimensions variable.

Date unknown

It Rained so She Rained

Ink, acrylic, and mixed media on handmade paper laid on board, 29¾ × 21¾ in. The Komal Shah and Gaurav Garg Collection (plate 36; p. 77)

Contributors

Jodi Throckmorton is the curator of contemporary art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Prior to joining PAFA in fall 2014, she was curator of modern and contemporary art at the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Kansas. Previously she was the associate curator at the San José Museum of Art, California, where she organized the exhibition and publication *Postdate: Photography and Inherited History in India* (2015). Other projects include *Nick Cave: Rescue* (2018); *Paul Chan: Pillowsophia* (2017); *Melt/Carve/Forge: Embodied Sculptures by Cassils* (2016); *Alyson Shotz: Plane Weave* (2016); *Bruce Conner: Somebody Else's Prints* (2014); *Questions from the Sky: New Work by Hung Liu* (2013); *Dive Deep: Eric Fischl and the Process of Painting* (2013); *Ranu Mukherjee: Telling Fortunes* (2012); and *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward: Paintings by Joan Brown* (2011).

Lauren Schell Dickens has been curator at the San José Museum of Art since spring 2016. Previously she was assistant curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and curatorial consultant at the National Gallery of Art, both in Washington, DC. Her recent exhibitions at the SJMA include *The House Imaginary* (2018); *Propeller Group* (2017); *Diana Al-Hadid: Liquid City* (2017); and *The Darkened Mirror: Global Perspectives on Water* (2017). Other projects include *Question Bridge: Black Males* (2013); *iona ROZEAL brown the battle of yestermore* (2013); and Peter Forgacs's *The Danube Exodus* (2009). She holds a BA from Yale University and an MA from Columbia University.

Allie Biswas was born in Scarborough, England, and studied at King's College London and Birkbeck, University of London. She started her career in the research department at Tate. Artists she has interviewed include Wolfgang Tillmans, Rashid Johnson, Zanele Muholi, Antony Gormley, Susan Cianciolo, Subodh Gupta, and Serge Alain Nitegeka. She is the co-editor of a forthcoming anthology of critical texts relating to the Black Arts Movement.

Rachel Kent is the chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney. She has presented exhibitions across Australia, the Asia Pacific region, and North America, and speaks and publishes widely on contemporary art and curatorial practice. She has curated major career retrospectives with leading international artists for the MCA Australia, including the solo exhibition *Kader Attia*, also on view at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2017); *Tatsuo Miyajima: Connect with Everything* (2016); *Grayson Perry: My Pretty Little Art Career* (2015); *Annette Messenger: motion / emotion* (2014); and *War Is Over! (if you want it): Yoko Ono* (2013). In collaboration with the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MACM), Canada, she organized Runa Islam's MCA Australia survey (2010), as well as the exhibition *Yinka Shonibare MBE*, which traveled to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (2008–10). Kent has worked with numerous contemporary artists from around the world, including Lee Bul, Olafur Eliasson, and Wangechi Mutu, among others.

Laurel V. McLaughlin is a doctoral student in the history of art department at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. Her dissertation investigates migratory aesthetics in contemporary feminist performance in the United States. She earned a BA in art history and English from Wake Forest University, North Carolina; an MA from The Courtauld Institute of Art, London; and an MA from Bryn Mawr College. She worked as a curatorial assistant on *Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World* at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as a Bryn Mawr College McPherson Curatorial Fellow. McLaughlin has co-curated *SWARM*. (2018); *Infinite Spaces: Rediscovering PAFA's Permanent Collection* (2018); and *Beyond Boundaries: Feminine Forms* (2017) in addition to working as a curatorial assistant on *Nick Cave: Rescue* (2017); *Subversion and Surrealism in the Art of Honoré Sharrer*; and *World War I and American Art*, at PAFA, and *International Pop* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (all 2016).

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88; plates 4, 5, 6, 7a–b, 7c–d, 8, 11, 13, 16, 20, 21, 25, 29, 30, 33, 36, 37, 38, 53, 57, 58, 60, 64; Throckmorton figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 11; chronology figures 13, 14, 18; GNO/Bertrand Huet/tutti image: plates 16, 20, 21, 24, 25, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 53, 58, 62, 64; chronology figures 13, 14, 18. Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco: plate 12. Jacob Lewis Gallery: p. 8; plate 10. Jenkins Johnson Gallery/Donald Felton: plate 43. Josh Nefsky: plates 35, 46. Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art: chronology figures 9, 10. ©Musée national des arts asiatiques (MnaaG), Guimet, Paris: dit.RMN/Raphaël Chipault/ Benjamin Soligny: jacket, plates 4, 47a–b; chronology figure 15; MnaaG/Muriel Mus-sard/2011: p. 35. National Audubon Society: Dickens figure 1. Ota Fine Arts (OFA), Shanghai/ Singapore/Tokyo: plates 18, 32, 54; OFA/ Jeannette May: plate 32. PAFA/Barbara Katus: pp. 12, 189; plates 14a–d, 15a–d, 33, 50b, 51. Rina Banerjee Archives (RBA): pp. 50, 89, 110; plates 2a–c, 9, 11, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 34, 40, 42, 45, 47a–b, 50a, 52, 55, 61, 62, 65, 66; Throckmorton figures 3, 4, 5; chronology figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 16, 19; RBA/Dario Lasagni: plate 22; RBA/T.

Kobayashi: plate 48. Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York/Jason Wyche/©Kara Walker: Throckmorton figure 10. The Tiroche DeLeon Collection, Gibraltar and Gallery Espace, New Delhi: plate 3a–c. William Widmere/New York Times: Throckmorton figure 1, p. 115. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts/John White/Phocasso: plate 35; chronology figure 17. Zabłudowicz Collection, London/Stephen White: plate 49; chronology figure 11. Zach Smith Photography: pp. 3, 146; plate 1.

Jacket: *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love*, plate 47b, p. 95; pages 2 and 146: *Viola, from New Orleans-ah*, plate 1, p. 16; page 4: *Wishing Waters and Grey Spell Is Enchanted Her Funny Foe*, plate 41, p. 84; page 8: *A Mad Woman, an Eternal Eve*, plate 10, p. 41; page 11: *Beauty was not in the East*, plate 11, p. 43; page 12: *Excessive Flower*, plate 50b, p. 98; pages 14 and 38: *Make me a summary of the world!*, plate 8, p. 37; page 50: *Sudden dispossession paled her already pliant body*, plate 24, p. 61; page 88: *Take me, take me, take me . . . to the Palace of love*, plate 47b, p. 95; page 110: *With Moon-Shine and Money*, plate 42, p. 85.

Installation view of Rina Banerjee: *Make Me a Summary of the World*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 2018–19, showing *Excessive flower . . .* (plate 50b; p. 98) and *Women did do this in shining . . .* (plate 51; p. 99), both 2017



This book is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World*, co-organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the San José Museum of Art.

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia:
October 27, 2018–March 31, 2019

San José Museum of Art, California:
May 18–October 6, 2019

Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, California:
December 8, 2019–May 31, 2020

Frist Art Museum, Nashville, Tennessee:
July 24–October 25, 2020

Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina:
February 18–July 11, 2021

At the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World* is made possible by the William Penn Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, Isabel Stainow Wilcox, Emily and Mike Cavanagh, Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai/Singapore/Tokyo, The Coby Foundation, Charles and Kathy Harper, Connie and Jules Kay, and the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation.



Contemporary Exhibitions in 2017–18 are supported by
Laura and Richard Vague

Special Exhibitions in 2017–18 are supported by
Jonathan L. Cohen

At the San José Museum of Art, support for the exhibition catalogue is provided by Richard A. Karp Charitable Foundation, Tad Freese and Brook Hartzell, Marsha and Jon Witkin, Hosfelt Gallery, Wanda Kownacki, L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, and the City of San José, Office of Cultural Affairs.



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Throckmorton, Jodi, editor. | Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, organizer, host institution. | San José Museum of Art, organizer, host institution.

Title: Rina Banerjee : make me a summary of the world / edited by Jodi Throckmorton ; with contributions by Allie Biswas, Lauren Schell Dickens, Rachel Kent, Laurel V. McLaughlin.

Other titles: Rina Banerjee (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts)

Description: [Philadelphia, PA] : Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts ; [San José, CA] : San José Museum of Art, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018022573 | ISBN 9780943836447 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Banerjee, Rina, 1963—Exhibitions.

Classification: LCC N7310.B354 A4 2018 | DDC 709.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018022573>

Co-published by Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and
San José Museum of Art

www.pafa.org

www.sjmusart.org



SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

Distributed by ARTBOOK | D.A.P.

75 Broad Street, Suite 630

New York, NY 10004

www.artbook.com

Produced by Lucia | Marquand, Seattle

www.luciamarquand.com

Edited by L. Jane Calverley, Judith M. Thomas

Designed by Anjali Pala, Miko McGinty Inc.

Typeset in Fakt Pro by Tina Henderson

Proofread by Tessa Haas, Abigail Lua, and Laura Iwasaki

PAFA production managed by Judith M. Thomas

Color management by iocolor, Seattle

Printed and bound in China by C&C Offset Printing Co., Ltd.