

Published Date:	Monday 10th June, 2019	Publication:	Mumbai Mirror [Mumbai]
Journalist:	Urmi Chanda-Vaz	Page No:	31
MAV/CCM:	1,649,067/206.65	Circulation:	615,056

# The art-life continuum



dimensionality of ceramics. Since 2017, she has participated in number of solo and group shows including *Liminal*, her first solo exhibition at TARQ in September 2017, and project *Resurg* at TARQ's booth, Art Basel, Hong Kong (2019), among others. Mahajan's abstract sculptures may be seen as frozen ideas expressed through natural objects like clay, paper, metal, rag, cotton, rust, porcelain, plant fibres. These objects transmute into art through burning, baking, glazing and painting at her studio and acquire life and new meaning.



Samanta Batra Mehta is another highly-acclaimed mixed-media artist, although her principal style is layered paper collages. Her work has been exhibited at various international venues, including at the Queens Museum of the Arts; the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts; Aicon Gallery and Saffronart in New York; and Fondazione Fotografia, Modena and Artopia, Milan. In Batra-Mehta's art is a constant yearning for the idea of home, which she expresses using vintage photographs, textbooks and prints. Combining them with biological and botanical motifs and intricate cut work, she creates ethereal pieces of work that become conduits to a human yet magical past.

Wadhwana artfully brings together three vastly different artistic tracts with the hope that visitors will recognise the themes that run through our deep, collective dreams; that they will see how no matter in which language the answers are sought, the questions remain the same.

*Osmosis is open to the public till Aug 10, 11 am to 7 pm, at TARQ in Colaba. Visit: [www.tarq.in](http://www.tarq.in)*

Works from *Osmosis*, a group exhibition, curated by Shaleen Wadhwana (top; inset), at the TARQ art gallery in Colaba

## A new exhibition tears down the walls between life and death, the body and the mythic, memory and imagination

Urmi Chanda-Vaz  
[mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com](mailto:mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com)

TWEETS @MumbaiMirror

As the site of birth, the wellspring of existence itself, a woman's body is the knower and keeper of the secret of life. Therefore, when stories about creation, transformation, and transcendence are told in her voice, they sound most lucid, seem most vivid. Little wonder then, that art educator, Shaleen Wadhwana, has chosen three women artists to represent the "symbiotic universal truths of life, namely death, distance and belonging" for her curatorial debut, *Osmosis*. The group exhibition — comprising works of artists Rithika Merchant, Samanta Batra Mehta and Savia Mahajan at TARQ art gallery in Colaba — explores these constant yet mysterious ideas.

This may be Wadhwana's first attempt at curation, but this exhibition is by no means a lucky strike. Her tryst with art has been a long one, with several degrees and scholarships under her belt, and projects with museums, galleries and exhibitions. She is currently a visiting faculty at the

From left to right:  
 Artists Savia Mahajan,  
 Rithika Merchant and  
 Samanta Batra Mehta



Design Management Department of MIT Institute of Design, Pune, and the Humanities curriculum designer for their Innovation programme.

In fact, the idea of this exhibition came to her in the very classroom where she teaches, when her students brought up the subject of the history of death. It led to a deeper enquiry into the evolution of eschatological rites and rituals, and the inter-cultural similarities and differences of such practices. As more questions about symbiotic universal truths like life, death, home, and belongingness arose, *Osmosis* was born as a space for contemplation.

Wadhwana feels that such existentialism "embraces us in our present times in the same way it embraced our ancestors". Despite all the progresses in science and all the information at our disposal, those elemental questions continue to baffle and entice us. This exhibition, she hopes, will be a domain where these "concepts can be linked with contemporary art practices".

While the artists Wadhwana has chosen are definitely contemporary — all highly successful and practising — they may be dubbed antiquarian in their sensibilities.

An unmistakable refrain of rootedness runs through the general body of work of all these women, not just in those exhibited here. In Rithika Merchant's love of mythological motifs, in Samanta Batra Mehta quest for the past, and in Savia Mahajan's choice of materials of the earth lie these testimonies.

Rithika Merchant dives deep into comparative mythology to derive inspiration for her vibrant watercolour and gouache-on-paper works. A BFA from New York, Merchant is prolific and has exhibited extensively in the last decade in India, Spain, Germany, France and the United States — in both solo and group shows. As modern as her training and exposure is, Merchant's works are consistently reminiscent of the primitive. Sacred geometry, mythical beasts and birds, nymphs and goddesses, these works evoke creation myths and magic to represent the ideas of life, death and the afterlife.

Savia Mahajan's enquiry into the primeval is quite literal, as she chooses to work with mostly organic materials. Having trained as a painter in Mumbai, her artistic expression has gradually moved towards the