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# ART *India*

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## SHIFTING SEASONS

A **JSW** INITIATIVE

# Fractured Intimacies

Soghra Khurasani's deceptively calm landscapes are sites of desire and deracination, says **Shweta Upadhyay**.

In Soghra Khurasani's solo *Shadows Under My Sky* held at TARQ, Mumbai, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, landscapes are like documents on which she inscribes experiences of the body, its traumas and narratives of displacement. They are not only geographical terrains but also biographical accounts. Her earlier works were fierce proclamations of the end time, with depictions of infernos, fields boiling like a cauldron, red rivers, singed flowers, charred craters, and landscapes submerged in colours that were raw and rife with rage; in her present series, the end time is not seen as a conflagration, an active catastrophe, but insidious and covert like an intimate enemy. The colours look faded in some works as if the sites are undergoing slow erasure, and the apocalyptic weather has been replaced by starlit nights, purple and cyan fields.

Khurasani employs woodcut and etching techniques. Line marking, a process key to her work, gains in complexity with layered colours and textures. This includes the gesture of cutting that invokes the themes of severance and unbelonging present in her works. The scratched surfaces have the semblance of peeled skins, agricultural tracts, pathways, fields, skies and mountains. By using non-naturalistic colours, she also transforms them into expressionistic realms of feelings, thoughts, affects and fantasies.

*As Deep As – 1* features a red scar surrounded by emerald forests. This gash, which is caught in a state between bleeding and coagulating, is roughly in the shape of a petal or a butterfly's wing. You wonder if this is a mass grave leaking out blood or a cicatrice left by uprooted trees and habitats? It seems like a painful location, a chronic

wound, imbued with beauty and injury, where spectres of bruised skins, erased bodies and lost homes coalesce and congeal. You can pursue phantoms of disappeared birds, evaporated lakes and forgotten languages in the thickets of this eerie, mangled forest.

The ground is pitted with cavernous fissures in *Shadows under my Sky – 1* as well. Apart from fissures, dome-shaped mounds recur in her works, for example in *Peeled – 1*, *Peeled – 2* and *Nightfalls – 12*. In *Peeled – 1*, the pink colour of the mound is reminiscent of the sandstone used in Indo-Islamic architecture. In some works, the pathways look combed as if after a search operation. Most of these empty spaces are suffused with the melancholy of the hour of dusk. Haunted by the absence of the future, these liminal places hold a lingering, residual desire for the resurrection of dead time, for the wounds to heal, for renewal and regeneration. Khurasani raises questions about the systemic prejudices and exclusion of Muslim bodies through her works. Her series *In Her Unknown World*, which was featured on ART India's Instagram handle, had chronicled the experience of being evicted from her rented house for being a Muslim.

*Shadows under my Sky – 2* shows a landscape consisting of a red and green hill and a black field on which a strange, tuber-shaped path is cleared. This path, which resembles a thick pointing finger, is riddled with boulders and rocks. It is a bewildering landscape that indexes danger. *Fragile 3* features a brown landscape that looks like a hungry mouth with its tongue out. Khurasani depicts how the relationship with one's homeland, especially when one's sense of belonging is challenged, is defined by a fractured intimacy, and is riddled with hidden scars, ruptures and hurdles. /



**Soghra Khurasani.** *As Deep As – 1.* Woodcut print on paper. Print size: 31.6" x 22". Paper size: 38.1" x 25.1". In an edition of 3. 2021. © the artist.