



## *Mentors*

Describing this exhibition Paulina Sokolow notes, "To be a mentor means to be an experienced individual, generously sharing your knowledge with others. In 2016, CFHILL had another exhibition with the same title. That show was curated by New York-based Richard Herron, who brought us a group exhibition in which he united the surviving pioneers of the Act Now movement with artists from subsequent generations whose practices and careers had been informed by them... In this edition of *Mentors*, however, what we encounter is, rather, eight individual oeuvres, hailing from very different parts of the world and incorporating diverse practices, to the point where they could be said to represent different universes. Our mentors."

**Rithika Merchant** studies epic mythology that reaches beyond the barriers of geography, all while evolving her own visual language, based on a vast collection of figures, and symbols. Inspired by, among other things, traditional Indian art and Mongolian miniature painting, her fundamental knowledge in Indian mythology and iconography allows her to expand the language she builds throughout her artistic practice, a language that has the ability to transcend boundaries and differing beliefs, and still is easily interpreted by the viewer. Her work, a fantasy marred with animal and plant life, can be read and seen as a narration of a collective human history.

Through her work the artist creates a red thread binding together our understanding of the power of human relationships, and the dependance we have in one another. Powered by travel and exploration, the Mumbai born Merchant currently resides in Barcelona, Spain, and has studied at *Parsons The New School for Design* in New York and at the *Hellenic International Studies in the Arts*, on Paros, Greece.

She has collaborated with French fashion house *Chloé* on several collections and was awarded the Vogue India Young Achiever Of The Year award in 2018, along with being named one of Vogue Magazine's *Vogue World 100 Creative Voices*. Most recently she won the Sovereign Asian Art Prize – Vogue Hong Kong Women's Art Prize in year, as well as *Le Prix Dessin Paris 21*. Despite the accolades the artist's focus on her craft is almost compulsive, her paintings hold both a familiar and exotic quality; using material and technique that vary from embroidery and collage, sewing mother of pearl buttons onto the canvases, creating an alluring draw into work that combines craft and painting.



Even though Merchant creates enormous detail in outlines and composition in her highly figurative paintings she should not be identified as a graphic artist. Additionally, the artist uses her work to recognize global issues such as climate change, evident in her praised painting *Harvest of the Land of Plenty*, a mixed media collage from 2020. The five paintings presented in this exhibition offer insight into the artist's world, allowing the viewer to delve into this continuous artistic language where nature and ritual collide. With titles such as *Lycanthropy, 2015* the artist offers us a glimpse into her fascination with the mythology and the occult. This theme is continued throughout, evident in the painting *Hildegard von Bingen, 2014* a reference to the revered 11th century saint-like mythicist, nun and writer. Time and again Merchant draws upon history

intertwined with beautiful botanical imagery, references to folk art and mythology to create very dramatic, and romantic examinations of her own imagination.

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