

CULTURE

Saju Kunhan's new show 'Home Ground' journeys back to his roots in Kerala

On view at Mumbai's Tarq Gallery, Saju Kunhan's second solo show reflects on his ancestry through a range of media

By Uma Nair

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Location History- Old Puthankulam, 2021. Image Transfer, Brass Inlay on Teak Wood 18 inches x 27 inches. Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and TARQ.

Gravitas filled geographies, ancestral histories and translating fragments into contemporary choreography—Trichur and J.J. School of Art trained Saju Kunhan's latest unveiling at Tarq in Mumbai is the stuff of antiquity wrapped in the crucible of time.

'Home Ground' connects us to his ancestral home in Palakkad. Kunhan has been engrossed with maps for the past five years. The resilient teak panels look like tablets in images, as they unveil scenes steeped in history and anthropology. In an interview in 2017, he said, "My process is that of transference. I take screenshots of the zoomed images on Google Maps. Roughly, I have around a thousand screenshots for one artwork. I take printouts and then shift the details on to the wooden panels."



Ancestral histories/ stories #4, 2021. Image transfer on teak wood 15 x 11 inches. Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and TARQ.

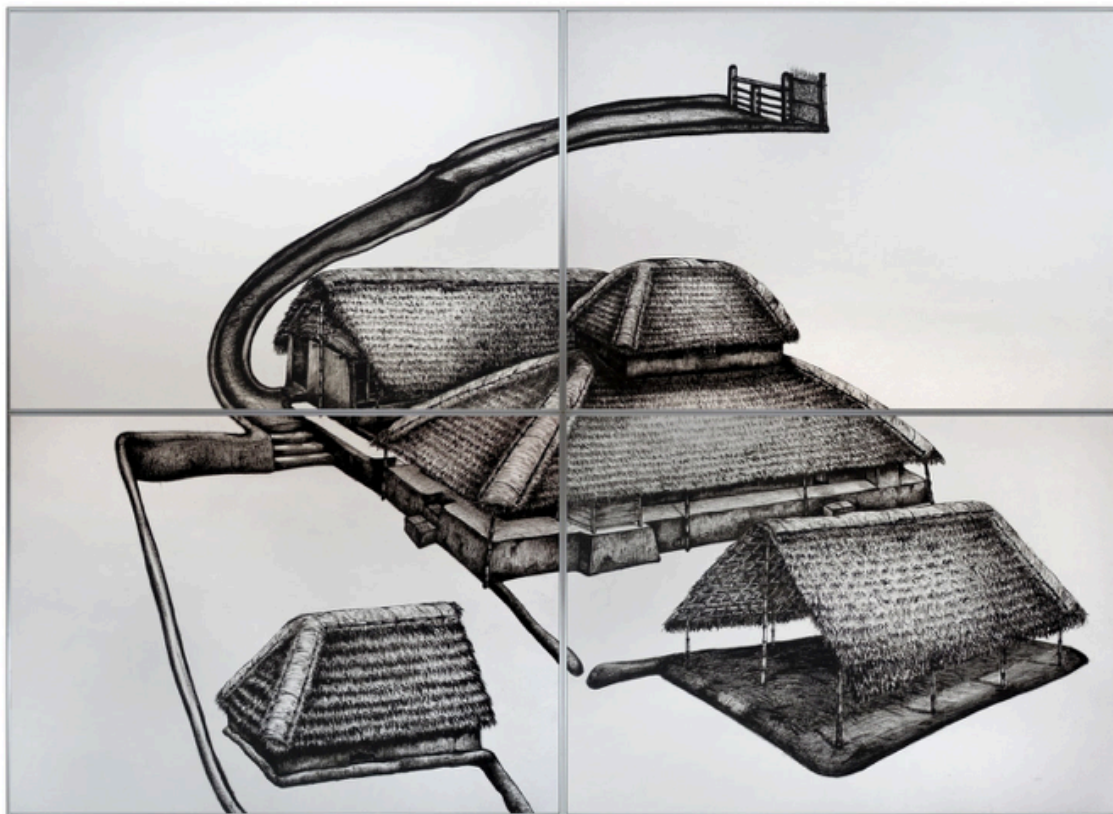


Veettukarodathe #2, 2021. Engrave & image transfer on found red oxide floor piece 14 x 9.5 x 2 inches. Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and TARQ.

Multiple Odysseys

In this exhibition, Kunhan presents moody edit odysseys, as he continues to explore themes of migration and displacement through his method of image transfers on teak wood. The personal side of Saju's practice has him representing his ancestral home, and the multiple migrations undertaken by his family. Kunhan plumbs the depths of memories of his ancestors to create works that chart his family's past of migration, displacement, colonialism and conquest.

Tarq's Hena Kapadia says that through his engravings on remnants of red oxide flooring from his ancestral home in Palakkad, Kerala, Kunhan reflects on the history of his family through the oral narratives shared with him by the previous generations of his family.



Veettukarode, 2021. *Pigment Ink on Paper & Metal Frame. 60 x 44 inches Set of 4.* Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and TARQ.

Monochrome Magic

A quartet of monochrome magic is espied in his four panelled image *Veettukarode, 2021* (pigment Ink on paper and metal frame). The beauty of the roofs and the aerial view of the parts bring home the beauty of T.S. Eliot's words in *Four Quartets*:

*"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable."*



Home Ground, on view at Mumbai's Tarq Gallery. Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and TARQ.

Charismatic Corollary

Ancestral Histories/Stories is vintage vitality captured in the grains of teak wood. The ships with their sails, the horses, the people—all punctuate the theme and create a charismatic corollary. The piece-de-resistance of the show, however, are *Settlement 1 and 2—a panoramic presentation of the dwelling, both as a zoom in focus as well as a cluster.

Kunhan uses mixed media with precision to create a raw and rough hewn textural terrain on the wood. He interweaves personal history to geography to create a mapping that has a dual significance.



It is All About the Globe, 2021. Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and TARQ.

Globe and Gravitas

Placed on a rubber tyre, sliced through its central hemisphere, two halves of a globe makes a sculptural installation that represents the insignia of global reach, with the gravitas of migration and its politics. *It is All About the Globe, 2021*, is an installation created in mixed media on teak wood and automobile tyre. It weaves itself into an experiential mesh, in which the globe sliced and viewers' subjectivity both intertwine organically with one another, creating rich textures of daily life in its matrix. The beauty of this show lies in its richness born of balancing the visual and the verbal. As an artist, Kunhan combines contemporary forms of abstraction with visual vocabularies reminiscent of prehistoric times to create ancestral histories brought forward in the prism of time.

Saju Kunhan's 'Home Ground' is on display at Mumbai's Tara Gallery till 26 March 2022

