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arts to
hearts♥
MAGAZINE



COVER ARTIST RITHIKA MERCHANT



Festival of the Phoenix Sun, 2022
140 x 100 cms / 55 x 39.3 in
Mixed media collage with gouache, watercolour, ink,
coloured pencil and magazine cutouts on paper.



Meet RITHIKA MERCHANT

Our Cover artist

Interview by Charuka Arora

Rithika Merchant is a visual artist from Bombay (Mumbai), India. Her work explores the common thread that runs through different cultures and religions. Similar myths, stories and ideas are shared by cultures all around the world, her paintings explore this concept while also featuring creatures and symbolism that are part of her personal visual vocabulary.

Nature plays a pivotal role in her work and is emphasised by the use of organic shapes and non saturated colours. Her paintings and collages are made using a combination of watercolour and cut paper elements, drawing on 17th century botanical prints and folk art, to create a body of work that is visually linked to our collective pasts.

Merchant received a BFA in Fine Arts from Parsons School of Design, New York. She has been showing her work all over the world. A few of her recent solos shows are: Festival of the Phoenix Sun at Galerie IJ, Paris (2022); Birth of a New World at TARQ, Mumbai (2021); Mirror of the Mind at Galerie IJ, Paris (2019); Where the Water Takes us at TARQ, Mumbai (2017); Ancestral Home at Galeria Bien Cuadrado, Barcelona (2017); Intersections at Galeria Combustion Espontanea, Madrid (2016); and Luna Tabulatorum at Stephen Romano Gallery, New York (2015).

Merchant collaborated with Chloé, a French fashion house on multiple collections for which she was awarded the Vogue India Young Achiever of the Year Award at its Women of the Year Awards 2018, as well as named one of Vogue Magazine's VogueWorld 100 Creative Voices. She is also the winner of the Sovereign Asian Art Prize 2021 - Vogue.



Vega, 2021
16.5 x 16.5 in
Embroidery hoop with watercolour,
gouache and ink on paper



Vela, 2021
16.5 x 16.5 in
Embroidery hoop with watercolour,
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So Rithika, can you tell us a little bit more about your recent project "The Eye, The Sky, The Altar"? It's your first monograph, correct? Can you tell us a little bit more about your works and practice from these past years?

This is my first monograph and I'm very excited about it! It's a look at the last 4 to 5 years of production and it's a nice overview of how my work has evolved during that period of time. It also includes a conversation with Fariha Róisín. She's a writer and a dear friend – it's a casual, quite insightful conversation. It feels like a bit of a career milestone to to have a book. The book itself is so beautifully designed – we worked with Zeenat Kulavoor at Bombay Duck Designs and she designed this incredible book which ended up being a beautiful art object.

What have you enjoyed the most about this collaborative creative project? How do you think your experience has been about it?

I loved it because I worked with Hena from TARQ, Adeline from Galerie LJ and Zeenat from Bombay Duck Designs. The main creators of the project are all women, so that its very special to me. Working with three incredible women made me grateful for community aspect of it. All our little zoom meetings, sitting together and planning are so dear to me. I just loved working with all these inspiring and strong women to put this project out in the world. The creative experience working with people that you feel very aligned with is also very fulfilling.

What has it felt like looking back at your work produced in the past 4-5 years?

It feels...affirming. It's kind of nice to look back on the past few years of work and see all of the work that I've made. I try to be really present while I'm making the work, and often before I've absorbed it fully once it's done – the works go to exhibitions then I just never see them again. So it makes me feel accomplished to look back on it all and see it all in one place.

Can you see your journey or how you evolved as an artist with all these works in the monograph? Do you see any kind of connection or story that you feel marks you?

The monograph has been arranged according to themes rather than chronologically. So for example, like there's a section that's just collages, one for "altars and talismans" etc.

It's been interesting to see how symbolism has evolved in my work. It's been really cool to look back at what I was thinking about when I made those works at the time and where I was in my own creative journey. The way the book is arranged is also going to give the reader more insight into that as well.

We are thrilled to have you as the cover artist for our magazine's first 'Invite only' issue with the theme 'Here are the women artists'. Can you tell me a little bit about your journey as a woman in the arts? How has that been so far?



*What's your intention for this monograph?
What do you want people to experience through it?*



Image Credit @Bombay Duck Design

It's turned into a beautiful art object. So, in many ways it's a great way for my audience and people who have followed my work for a long time to actually almost have a piece of my art in their home. It's a lot more affordable than my paintings. It also gives so much more insight into my creative journey. I don't really talk that much about it and you only get so much when you follow someone online or if you go and see an exhibition. So having everything together will give a lot more understanding of me as an artist.

Her work has been written about in The New York Times, The Huffington Post, Vogue, Elle, Harpers Bazaar, Verve Magazine, The Hindu, The Indian Express, Hyperallergic, Architectural Digest, and others. Merchants work is held in public and private collections including the Chloe Archive, Palais Galliera, Musée de la mode de la Ville de Paris, Collection de Bueil & Ract-Madoux and The Sarmaya Arts Foundation.



Tantalus, 2020
25.5 x 19.6

in Gouache, watercolour and ink on paper.



It's lovely to see that you respond to my work so much - I am very grateful and excited to be the cover artist. We have made a bit of a friendship through the podcast and our conversations after that, so thank you for including me in this!

In terms of my journey, I feel like I have been really lucky and also for most part I've worked with other women. It's been really good honestly, especially as a young artist I've always felt very safe with the other creative women. Hena and I have in many ways almost grown up together. We've gone through so many phases of the gallery and my career together. Just having another woman support me through all of it has been a very heartwarming experience.

What do you think has been your biggest struggle being a woman artist? Let's see what that comes up with.

I think the biggest - especially when I was younger - was feeling nervous to speak up . I have also talked about this in my podcast interview with you on the Arts to Hearts Podcast. I was raised by parents who always taught me to speak up, but I do remember feeling quite nervous at the beginning of my career. Also, learning to set boundaries - which I have gotten pretty good with now.

What's that one advice that you would like to give to other emerging women artists who are reading this right now?

I would say to commit yourself deeply to your craft because that's the best piece of advice I've personally gotten. And, Consistency is key. That's the advice that I was given and it's advice that I've followed and I feel like it has gotten me quite far.

One last question before I let you go - what's coming next for you? What are you working on that you can share with us?

I'm going to Senegal in the month of November for a one month artist residency. I'm very excited about that I'm looking forward to seeing how this new place is going to influence my work. I plan to engage with the local community and learn more about the folklore and the mythology of the land. I'm really really looking forward to that!

I've got a solo show coming up next year in London at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery so I'm in the midst of working on that as well.