

# VOGUE

## Artist Rithika Merchant's workspace is rooted in nostalgia and minimalism

The visual artist keeps an organised work desk and is particularly fond of a palette that has seen her through many a canvas

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*Amidst packed schedules, bursts of inspiration, euphoric successes and unexpected snags, what makes some of India's most ingenious minds tick? For many, it is the sanctum of their workspace that fosters a fertile environment for the creative muse to visit. In this series, 10 aesthetes—some of whom subscribe to the doctrine of practised minimalism, while others favour the tenets of calculated maximalism—set out the functional tools, sentimental tchotchkes, nostalgic postcards and visually pleasing objets that elevate their professional lives.*

A visual artist from Mumbai, Rithika Merchant's evocative paintings and collages made using a combination of watercolour and cut paper elements explore myths, stories and ideas shared by different cultures, featuring creatures and symbolism that are an integral 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. Drawing on 17th-century botanical prints and folk art, Merchant has created a robust body of work that is visually linked to our collective pasts.

The 36-year-old artist has exhibited extensively since her graduation in Fine Arts from Parsons School of Design in New York including a number of solo exhibitions in India, France, Spain, Germany and the United States. She has also collaborated with Chloé, a French high-end luxury 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 in 2018, in addition to being named one of Vogue Magazine's VogueWorld 100 Creative Voices.

Below, Rithika Merchant gives us a peek into her altar of activity:



### What does a typical workday look like for you?

I like to rise early and start the day quietly and alone. I take my time, have breakfast in bed, read the news and check my emails. It's usually around 10 AM by the time I shower and sit down at my desk. I work and potter around in my studio till lunchtime and then take a break to cook something quickly. Occasionally I will meet a friend for tea or a walk in the morning instead. I then go back into my studio and stay there till about 5 PM. Somewhere in between, I usually lie down and have a 30-minute nap—napping is a really important way for me to recharge creatively, and if I skip it, I feel it!

In the evening I hang out with my husband; we have tea and snacks, and then depending on the season, we'll either go for a swim or do some sort of stretching and exercise at home. Dinner is almost always home-cooked and then we either wind down for the day with Netflix or reading in bed. If I have a deadline coming up or I'm just in the mood for it, I go back into my studio after dinner as well and work for a few hours.



**Do you have any rituals that you need to do before you start a work day?**

Just that I start every day quietly and slowly with tea in bed while I read.

**Tell us about the significance of some of the items on your work desk.**

I don't keep a lot on my desk. Just a jar of brushes, pens, my box of paints and my palette. My tools are pretty much the only things I need, and I like to keep the surface as empty as possible to have space to spread out and work.



**What's your favourite item on your desk and why?**

My palette—I've had it for years and I get quite sentimental thinking about all the paintings and projects it's been through with me.

**What's your work desk vibe—minimalist or cluttered? How does it define you?**

Minimalist and organised. I keep it as clear and empty as possible to give myself the maximum amount of space to paint. I also think it's nice to have an open empty space—it's like having a clean slate for new ideas.

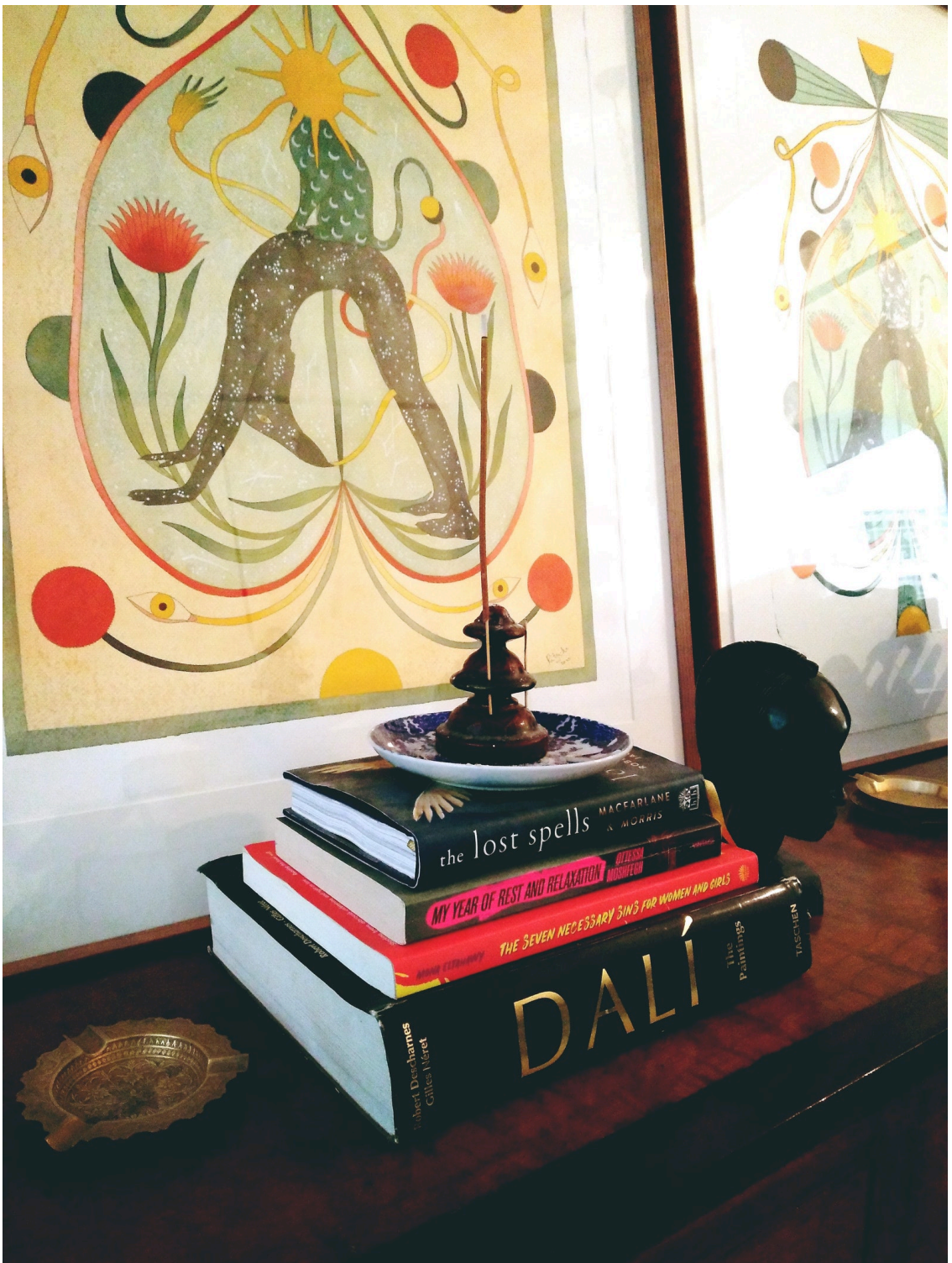


**How does your workspace inspire or ground you as a creative?**

I just moved into a new studio that is exactly at tree level. All I can see from my windows is foliage, and in Mumbai, that's a real treat. I feel like I work in a tree house now, which is beautiful. My art depicts nature and botanical elements, so seeing so much of it the moment I look out is incredible. I'm grateful to be able to create in such a lush space, where I get to gaze at birds and greenery all day.

**How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance?**

I don't—my work pretty much finds its way into all areas of my life and I find inspiration everywhere. I do try to switch off a little on holiday though.



**What's the best work advice you have given or received?**

People tend to romanticise what artists do, but being an artist is a profession just like any other and requires a lot of hard work, patience and a thick skin. It's a massive risk as well and there are constant ups and downs. You have to be very committed to it. The best piece of advice I have gotten is to just show up and work on my art every single day even if I don't feel like it—to constantly hone my craft, be committed and make things happen for myself.

**What excites you about what you do?**

I get to create and inhabit all the new worlds I build through my works. It's exciting to tell a story and build a world and characters in and around it.

**What are you currently working on?**

I'm deep in preparation for my upcoming show at Kristin Hjellegjerde in London, opening next year.