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# ART *India*

THE ART NEWS MAGAZINE OF INDIA

BACK TO NATURE

A **JSW** INITIATIVE



## Contributors



**VIBHA GALHOTRA** is a conceptual artist working in a variety of media, including sculpture, photography, printmaking, video, drawing and text. Her work is influenced by nature, climate change and the anthropogenic issues of our age. Her large-scale sculptures address the shifting topography of the world under the impact of globalization. Galhotra sees herself as being part of the restructuring of culture, society and geography, both of New Delhi, where she lives, and of the world at large. She uses her work to redefine her own existence in contemporary society, both philosophically and structurally. Offering an alternative to the conventional approach to studying the environment, Galhotra seeks to expand the discourse to include topics pertaining to tradition, history, economics and political intervention. At present, Galhotra is a fellow of the Jerusalem International Fellowship program 2020. She was awarded the Asia Arts Future Award in 2019. Her works are part of many public collections worldwide, including the KNMA, India; 21c Museum, USA; Seattle Art Museum, USA; and Gates Foundation, USA.

**ANJUM HASAN** is the author of the novels *The Cosmopolitans*, *Neti, Neti* and *Lunatic in my Head*; the book of poems *Street on the Hill*; the short story collections *Difficult Pleasures* and, most recently, *A Day in the Life* which won the Valley of Words Fiction Award, 2019. Her books have been shortlisted for the Sahitya Akademi, Hindu Best Fiction and Crossword Fiction awards. Her short stories, essays and poems are widely published. She lives in Bangalore.



Photograph by Zac O' Yeah



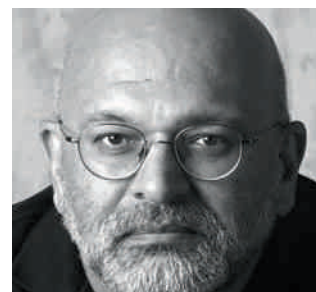
Though she trained as a painter, **SAVIA MAHAJAN**'s practice began moving away towards Ceramics since 2010. She has worked extensively at a pottery studio in Mumbai, which has given her the space to experiment and develop many of her ceramic processes and techniques. These developments resulted in *Liminal*, her first solo exhibition at Mumbai's TARQ, in 2017. This was followed by a group exhibition, *Mutable: Ceramics and Clay Art in India Since 1947*, curated by Annapurna Garimella and Sindhura D.M. at the Piramal Art Foundation, Mumbai, in 2019. Savia has been a part of several projects including at the India Art Fair in Delhi (2020), the solo project *Resurgō* at TARQ's booth, Art Basel, Hong Kong (2019) and group presentations including *Osmosis*, curated by Shaleen Wadhwa at TARQ in 2019. She was also represented at the Sculpture Park at the Nahargarh Fort, Jaipur (2018-19) curated by Peter Nagy, and the Indian Ceramics Triennale, Jaipur, (2018) curated by Anjani Khanna et al.

**ATUL BHALLA** has explored the physical, historical and political significance of water in the urban environment of New Delhi through artworks that incorporate sculpture, painting, installation, video, photography and performance.

His recent solo shows include *Anhedonic Dehiscence* at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi (2018); *You always step into the same river* at SepiaEYE, New York (2015), *On the Edge* and *Ya Ki Kuch aur ...* at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi (2011 and 2014 respectively). His work was also part of the first Kuala Lumpur Biennale 2017.

Bhalla was the Mellon Artist Research Africa fellow at WITS University, Johannesburg (2018) with the project *The Excavated distance of gold* that examined acid mine drainage in gold mines. Recent group exhibitions have brought his work to FotoFest Biennale Houston in 2016 and 2018. His work has been part of *Walk On: From Richard Long to Janet Cardiff – 40 years of art-walking*, curated by Cynthia Morrison-Bell at NGCA Sunderland, UK and *West Heavens, Place – Time – Play: India China Contemporary Art* curated by Chaitanya Sambrani in Shanghai (2010).

He lives and works in New Delhi.



## Editorial

In our collective imagination, the natural world has held the promise of continuous abundance. It has inspired paradisiacal visions, yes, but it has also been experienced as hierarchical, and red in tooth and claw.

In the face of the technological revolutions of the last couple of centuries, the contest between the natural world and the human world has progressively intensified. The urban dystopia is the toxic location where the present has been anchored for several years. How do we belong to these dangerous times, this catastrophic age, as propagators and inheritors of crises that include the Global Climate Change and the Coronavirus Pandemic?

And what anxieties do we carry as we look towards nature as a sanctuary for repair, a haven for recuperation? How complicated is our relationship with its contrary enthusiasms? How do we acknowledge both its fragilities and its overwhelming capacities – its power to damage, its potential to heal? In the issue this time, we trace the engagement of artists and writers with this idea, especially over the course of the last ten months that have threatened to diminish us in unforeseen ways. Caught between nostalgia and a sense of disquiet, what kind of critical convalescence is possible for us as masked victims of self-isolation?

More than 25 of our leading artists and art writers dwell on these questions in the *Special Feature*. When interior landscapes and the terrains around us leak into each other, they allow for an unpredictable circulation of expressive intensities – Atul Dodiya, Rashid Rana, Sheba Chhachhi, Roobina Karode and Iranna GR explore these new intersectional topographies while Sudarshan Shetty, Madhvi Subrahmanian, Neha Choksi, Savia Mahajan and David de Souza delve into the schism that exists between that which is manifest and that which is invisible in propositions of naturalness – love, permanence, desolation, regeneration, appearance, reality and their illusions are delicately probed and weighed in their work. In diverse capacities, Jayashree Chakravarty, Atul Bhalla, Bharti Kher, Ravi Agarwal, Shubigi Rao, Aradhana Seth, Vibha Galhotra and Suhasini Kejrival respond to the cataclysmic intimations of the Anthropocene – the pressures of escalating environmental destruction, widening social disparity and what can well be called, collapsing human systems. And finally, the protocols of negotiating and adapting to the natural world and the insistent inter-dependencies that we are part of, feature in presentations by Manisha Parekh, Manisha Gera Baswani, Subodh Kerkar, Sandhya Bordewekar, Shweta Bhattad, Sukhdev Rathod, Rohini Devasher and Benitha Perciyal.

In the *International Review*, Arshiya Mansoor Lokhandwala discusses how the Yokohama Triennale curated by the Raqs Media Collective addresses issues of global distress and empathy. Among the reviews, Meera Menezes considers Reena Saini Kallat's exploration of partitioned rivers as Sandhya Bordewekar files a report on Sarasija Subramanian and Astha Patel's investigation of the many betrayals of nature.

In an Exclusive, we share excerpts from Amitav Ghosh's latest book that tells a cautionary tale about respecting boundaries and controlling excess. At its heart is an exploration of the ecologies of greed, desire and atonement. The spell cast by Ghosh's verse is complemented by the transfixing artwork by Salman Toor.

We carry Jayashree Chakravarty's immersive *Earth as Haven* on the cover. Created out of a wide range of materials, the robust, womb-like installation carries lush overlapping images of organic forms – as a shrine to nature and its mysteries, the work offers an assurance of cross-species rehabilitation that is inter-relational.

Gleaning information and insight even as you explore a theme make for the abiding joys of editing a volume. We enjoyed rustling up this issue; hope you enjoy partaking of it.

Warm regards,

Abhay Sardesai



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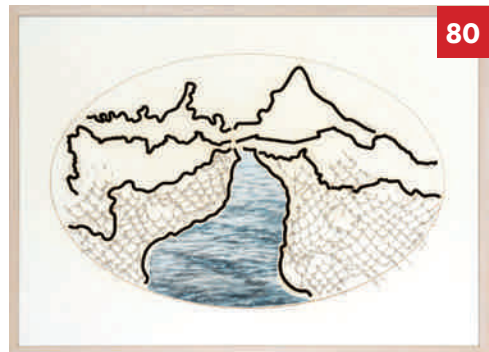
## SPECIAL FEATURE: BACK TO NATURE

26/ “The landscapes within us reach out to the natuescapes around us,” declares **Atul Dodiya** as he dwells on his new suite of 270 watercolours.

28/ **Jayashree Chakravarty** seeks to alert the world to the ecological dangers that lie ahead.

30/ Which river flows through us? **Atul Bhalla** addresses guilt and its ruptures.

32/ **Rashid Rana** contemplates a mound of rubbish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century even as Caspar David Friedrich’s wanderer surveys a sea of fog in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**Reena Saini Kallat.**  
*River Drawings.*  
Gouache, charcoal,  
graphite, nails and  
electric wires on laser  
cut and embossed  
Arches paper.  
44” x 32”. 2020.  
Image courtesy of the  
artist and Nature Morte.

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38/ “We have terraformed to a grotesque degree,” claims **Shubigi Rao** as she sets up a confrontation between compostable forest material and an image of an early 18<sup>th</sup> century wunderkammer.

40/ Light and shadow invest **Madhvi Subrahmanian’s** *Forest* with a shifting significance.

42/ **Bharti Kher** has been releasing a *Virus* since 2010 and hopes to do so till 2039.

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48/ Sardine-shaped skins of a musk melon and crushed migrants returning home: **Aradhana Seth** offers a telling metaphor.

50/ Ash to ash: **Iranna GR** conjures up the tree of life.

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54/ **Subodh Kerkar** plants mussel shells in the sand to conjure up the shifting patterns of the ocean.

56/ Firecrackers and sweets that sprout after you sow and *water* them? Check out **Shweta Bhattad’s** Gram Art, urges **Sandhya Bordewekar**.

58/ The mask in **Vibha Galhotra’s** prescient work from 13 years ago represents the human will to adapt to ecological changes.

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62/ “Just cradle my homology between the dead calf, my lover and the stone,” offers **Neha Choksi**.

64/ **Sukhdev Rathod** makes contact from the edge of a forest and explores the contradiction between urban and rural worlds.

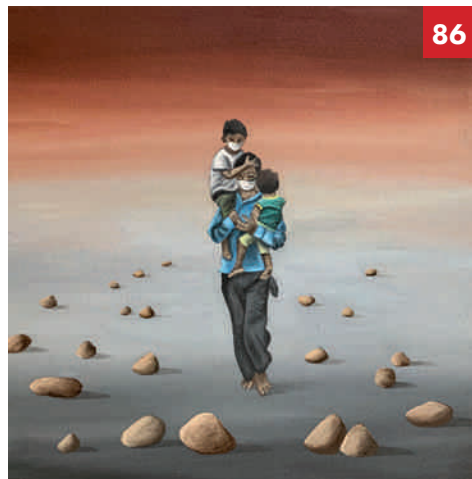
66/ A sense of equilibrium between Nature and Us is the real need of the hour, insists **Manisha Parekh**.

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72/ Knuckles and their knots, palms and their hollows, fingers and their bony linearities register their presence in the clay that **Savia Mahajan** kneads and fires.

74/ A desolate billboard in the middle of nowhere is **David de Souza’s** metaphor for being abandoned in the wilderness.



**Sarika Mehta.**  
*On the Way.*  
Oil on canvas. 12” x 12”.  
2020. Image courtesy  
of Gallery White.

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The seventh edition of the Yokohama Triennale, curated by the Raqs Media Collective, explores art in the shadow of disaster, notes **Arshiya Mansoor Lokhandwala**.

## REVIEWS

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83/ Anusha Yadav’s photographic portraits celebrate gender fluidity and explore identity positions, points out **Lajja Shah**.

86/ Sarika Mehta’s *Home* consists of lockdown landscapes, informs **Sandhya Bordewekar**.

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**Ketaki Sarpotdar.** From the series *Bravo!! 1 & 2*. Etching. 18.7”x 22.4”. 2018. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

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**Amitav Ghosh’s** *Jungle Nama* brings alive a gripping tale from the Sunderban. **Salman Toor’s** drawings add to the magic.

## 106/ PHOTO FEATURE

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The body and the city, interiority and mortality: **Meera Menezes** fondly remembers Anjum Singh (1967-2020).

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**Jayashree Chakravarty.**  
*Earth as Haven: Under the Canopy of Love.* Cotton, fabric, Nepali paper, tissue paper, jute, dry leaves, tea stains, clay, synthetic glue, acrylic colour, sequins, glass and wooden beads, and steel rods. 2017. Curated by Roobina Karode. At Musée Guimet, Paris. Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), New Delhi. Image courtesy of KNMA, New Delhi, and Akar Prakar, Kolkata. © Jayashree Chakravarty.



# DOWN TO EARTH

SAVIA MAHAJAN



Shortly after the lockdown what I longed for was to run to the beach. Confronted with the sea's terrifying beauty, peering into the large fluid mirror of the rushing water, my fear slowly disappeared. I remembered what I had once read – that I am around 60% water myself.

The sea – the element that is the wave is the element that is me. We are nestled so beautifully in our interconnectedness. As a ceramist, the clay I knead and mould and fire is an extension of the clay that my breathing self is contained in. In *Exhume*, I register my presence through the impressions made by my hands in the clay – of knuckles and their knots, palms and their hollows, fingers and their bony linearities. The work is a record of touch; a document of connections; an exploration of material memories. What is form and non-form? And how is the artist present and absent at the same time? As parts of this worldly mosaic, we are all special but we are inter-dependent as well.

The pandemic has made it clear that we cannot continue to sit tight in our air bubbles. If we could move outside our air-conditioned rooms and experience the wind that carries pollen and spores; if we could realise that the land is not for exploitation but for the wilderness to thrive and the oceans for the rest and repair of the reefs; we would be doing our duty as children of the earth, citizens of the universe.

Can we prioritise the health and wealth of the earth? Can we connect with a larger collective consciousness? Can we make choices that are not selfish? The more questions we ask, the more urgent amends we make, the sooner we awaken the germ within us that is in tune with the natural world. If the pandemic does not ignite our will to act, we are better off being dead matter for new life to grow.

(Facing Page) **Savia Mahajan.** *Exhume.* Ceramic, Manganese Dioxide-based clay body, Calcium Carbonate-based glaze and 24 Carat gold fired at 1200° and re-fired at 750°. 22" x 22" x 4" (Installation size variable). 2017. Image courtesy of the artist and TARQ. © the artist.