

STUDIO

***Pietra 13* by
Savia Mahajan, 2023**
Paper clay, iron oxide
and china clay based
slips, grog, foraged
earth pigment
8 x 10.5 x 6.5 inches


Were we to stumble upon Savia Mahajan's books in a museum of artefacts, we might wonder what kind of catastrophic event these objects now sealed shut and nearly transformed into stone might have witnessed. Unable to read its pages, we would never know whether they contained the sacred or the ordinary, whether they were once prayer-books or ledgers. However, these sculptures are entirely contemporary.

Taking books whose identities we cannot glean, Mahajan layers each page with clay in a manner that both materials become intertwined. She then places pieces of found glass and rock on them before fir-

ing the whole sculpture at 1,250°C. Any lower and the book disappears, but at this temperature the sculpture hardens into a durable thing. That is, a book that has swollen, curled, and taken on a somewhat different shape, but still looks like itself with its jagged pages and thick cover.

Yet, the magic remains in the unexpected transformations that take place inside the kiln: the glass melts and forms reflective pools; clay and rock fuse together; or, sometimes, a book simply splits into

two. The ink, the very matter of the book, isn't visible and perhaps disappears with the heat.

With these sculptures, Mahajan makes us confront the spectrum of temporalities that surround us—that of a book which gathers ideas and knowledge built over decades or even centuries; that of a rock whose formation far exceeds our own understanding of time; and that of her sculptures themselves that will likely outlive us all. 

— BY ZEENAT NAGREE

