

CULTURE

For 16 years, nobody knew what this artist looked like. Now, Princess Pea's mask is off

On November 6, Princess Pea will open her first solo exhibition, *वज़न*, under her true name: Natasha Preenja

BY SHREYA AJMANI

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Instagram.com/@princesspeaindia

In 2009, a curious figure began to glide through the halls of the [India Art Fair](#) in Delhi. A person with a comically large, anime-inspired head, heavily accentuated doe eyes and green space buns for hair walked by the booths calmly, uttering no words. Her presence folded the chatter of the fair into a hush. She called herself Princess Pea.

Princess Pea emerged from the crucible of societal comparisons between her and her sister, with discussions of their bodies being seen as “acceptable” in everyday conversation. She was called ‘Pea’ for her diminutive stature; her sister was called ‘Pumpkin’ for being overweight.



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Pea's headgear initially grew out of a desire to create distance from this vapid cacophony around her. Concealing her identity allowed her thoughts to take flight, neither anchored by the past nor pulled towards the future. When Pea went on walks, her mask piqued the curiosity of children, who wanted to speak to her and take pictures with her. But this accessory wasn't for shock value alone. Her 2018 project, *Proxies*, at the India Art Fair raised questions of female identity and self-worth; *Rituals* in 2022 drew from Mughal miniatures to depict women's inner worlds. Another time, as part of a

non-profit initiative to help raise awareness about women's healthcare, Pea asked women and schoolgirls in Delhi to write an open letter to society, then made them reflect on why most of the words they'd used boiled down to 'shame'. After creating multiple variants of the mask, Pea began sharing it with the women around her, including housewives, small entrepreneurs and differently-abled women from across India. The headgear concealed their true identities and allowed them to speak freely.



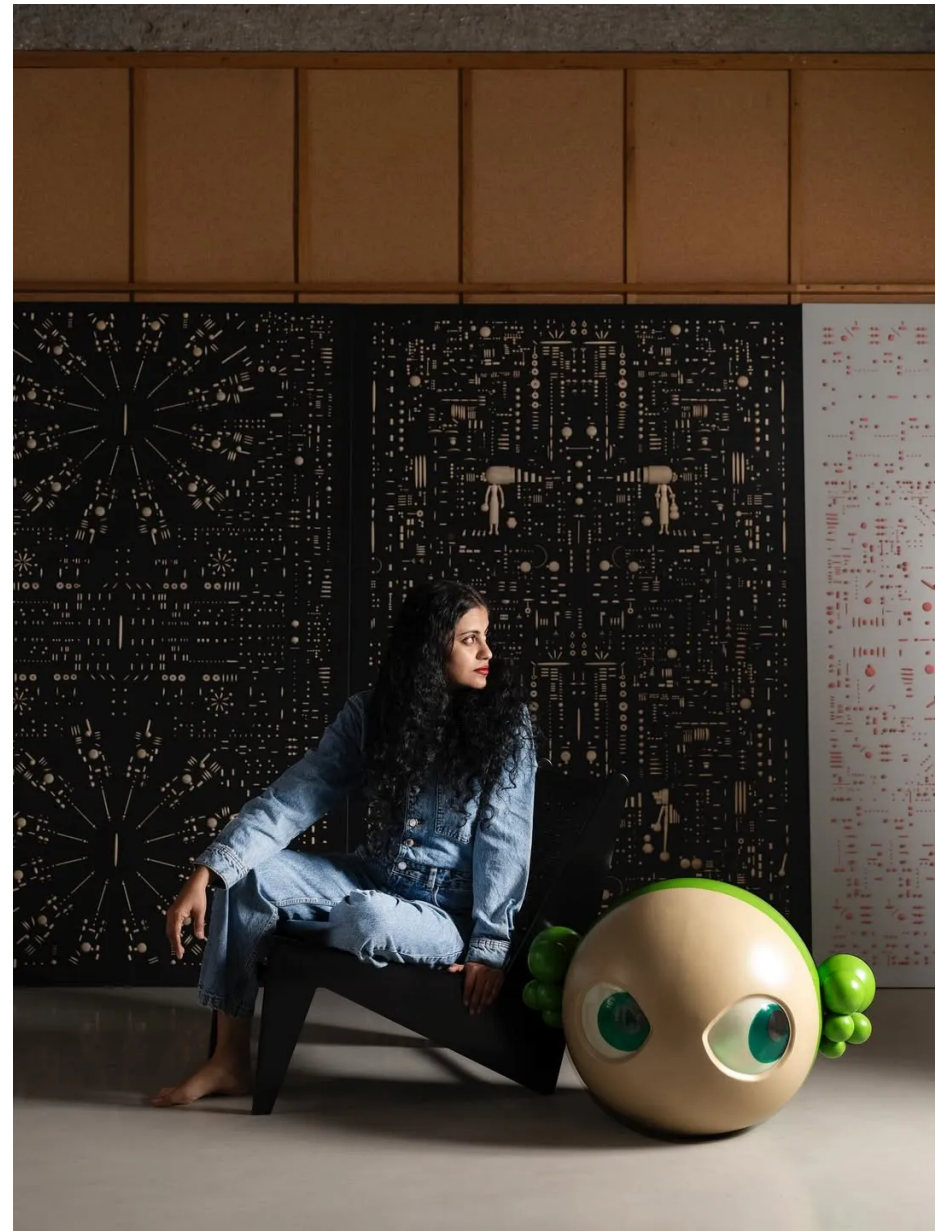
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Until now, not much was known about the woman behind the mask, except that she was born in Ferozepur, studied in Delhi College of Art and lives in Gurugram. But after nearly two decades of hiding in plain sight, Princess Pea is stepping forward. On November 6, she will share her first solo exhibition, *वजन*, at Tarq in Mumbai, this time under her true name: Natasha Preenja.



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The decision to reveal her identity came about through a natural evolution in Preenja's practice. "Anonymity allowed me to observe the world through a softened lens, to listen, to absorb, to build quietly," the artist says. "I find myself returning to the same questions of perception: what does it mean to be truly seen, not as an image or a symbol, but as a woman working, listening and creating in her studio?"



'Pool of Infinity' series, cut from Ankudu wood. [Instagram.com/@princesspeaindia](https://www.instagram.com/princesspeaindia)

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Mothers, Bodies of Stone (Form 111), 2024. Courtesy of Natasha Preenja and TARQ

As Preenja grew, from girl to woman to mother, so, too, did Princess Pea. Through an evolution in scale and materiality, *वज़न* provides proof of this growth. So while the artist continues her 15-year collaboration with turned-wood toy women artisans from Etikoppaka, a coastal village in Andhra Pradesh, '*Mothers, Bodies of Stone*' marks her foray into marble, each sculpture a stand-in for the woman forced to shoulder the invisible weight of grief and unrequited desire. *वज़न* allows the delicate wooden toys and sturdy marble sculptures to coexist, each reflecting and amplifying the other, together revealing femininity in all its malleability and resilience.



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'Body in Stone' from the 'Pool of Infinity series'. Instagram.com/@princesspeaindia

What will become of Princess Pea? "She'll continue to create work that represents women and their invisible labour, honouring them in the belief that the intergenerational knowledge carried and passed down through women forms the backbone of collective memory and survival," Preenja says.

As for how you should refer to her now? "Both, as you prefer," the artist smiles.



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