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Artist Envisions a New Way Forward by Bringing It to Life in Intricate Paintings

By Sage Helene on April 18, 2026



Exoskeleton, gouache, watercolor and ink on paper, 2024

Contemporary artist [Rithika Merchant](#) centers her practice on building intricate visual cosmologies. Working in watercolor, gouache, and collage, she develops a symbolic language shaped by nature, cosmology, and shared human narratives. Her work moves between mythology and speculation, using storytelling as a framework to reflect on time and space in relation to humanity.

Her latest series, *Pillars of Fruit and Bone*, extends this inquiry into a fully realized cosmology, one that feels at once ancient and speculative, grounded in deep time yet oriented toward possible futures. "*Pillars of Fruit and Bone* is the fifth part of a sequential, world-building mythology that unfolds across five interconnected bodies of work," Merchant tells My Modern Met. In earlier pieces, her figures search for answers in the sky, the stars, and ancestral knowledge. Here, they begin to construct. The question shifts from how to understand collapse to how to build again.

Across these compositions, life exists at the threshold of becoming. Merchant draws on the concept of Abiogenesis not as a strictly scientific framework, but as a poetic and metaphysical proposition. Bone transforms into fruit, structure yields to growth, and inert matter gathers latent vitality. Her hybrid beings, neither fully human nor entirely other, act as intermediaries that suspend distinctions between organism and environment, body and cosmos. "I have my own lexicon of symbols and creatures that I use in my work [...] symbols that are universally recognizable," she explains, emphasizing her intent to create figures that transcend fixed identity and invite projection.

Merchant interweaves organic and built forms, suggesting systems of survival that operate as both biological and engineered. "These works propose a unique path to building and sustaining a new world," Merchant shares, pointing to ideas such as engineered pollination and self-organizing ecosystems inspired by ant colonies. She draws on mythological and speculative structures that echo ancient cosmologies and imagined futures.

The natural world anchors this cosmology as a generative force rather than a backdrop. "Nature is the common thread that links all of my works and universes," Merchant notes. She mirrors the internal logics of living systems, where growth and decay move in cycles rather than straight lines. The title, *Pillars of Fruit and Bone*, holds this duality in tension and proposes a world where nourishment and structure, ephemerality and endurance, sustain one another.

Merchant grounds the work in a continuous meditation on time and transformation. She engages directly with the ecological realities of the Anthropocene and its uncertain aftermath, imagining a future that must begin again. "I believe that everything is cyclical in nature," she reflects, "and this body of work looks at how past ideas and modes of existence can be reimagined for life anew."

What emerges is not a utopia, but a proposition, a vision of life reorganized through interdependence rather than extraction, guided by systems that remain both spiritual and ecological. Merchant's worlds do not settle into fixed destinations; they evolve as living diagrams, maps of becoming that invite viewers to consider existence beyond the limits of the present.

Rithika Merchant creates immersive worlds blending mythology, nature, and speculative figures.



The Observatory, gouache, watercolor and ink on paper, 2025.



Aerial Superstructure I, gouache, watercolor and ink on paper, 2023.

Pillars of Fruit and Bone explores cycles of growth and decay through hybrid features and organic structures.



Regolith, gouache, watercolor and ink on paper, 2023.



Silo, gouache, watercolor and ink on paper, 2023

Her intricate watercolors, gouache, and collages visualize a post-human cosmology where life and the cosmos intersect.



Installation View, Pillars of Fruit and Bone, 2025



Installation View, Pillars of Fruit and Bone, 2025

Rithika Merchant: [Website](#) | [Instagram](#)

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Sage Helene is a contributing writer at My Modern Met. She earned her MFA Photography and Related Media from the Rochester Institute of Technology. She has since written for several digital publications, including *Floar* and *UP Magazine*. In addition to her writing practice, Sage works as an Art Educator across both elementary and secondary levels, where she is committed to fostering artistic curiosity, inclusivity, and confidence in young creators.

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