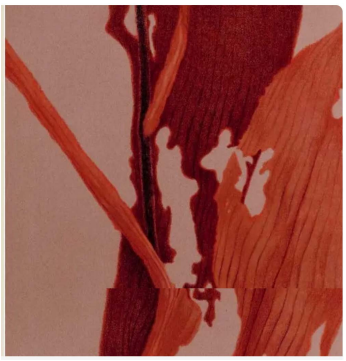
Mumbai art exhibition highlights endangered Himalayan medicinal plants and traditional knowledge

Updated On: 20 November, 2026 09:26 AM IST | Mumbai | Rumani Gabhare

Through botanical archives and layered compositions, artist Garima Gupta traces the effects of climate change on plants and the communities that depend on them





Rheum australe; (right) Dactylorhiza hatagirea

By definition, homesickness refers to the unhappiness one experiences when away from home for an extended period. However, for Garima Gupta, an artist and researcher based in New Delhi, the term takes on a more layered meaning. Through her exhibition Home-sick, currently on view at TARQ, Gupta considers sickness as both a symptom and a witness — a condition through which stories of exhaustion, displacement and care become perceptible.

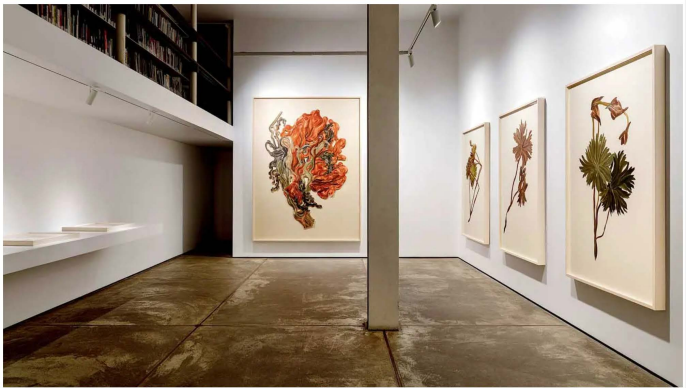
This comes together from years of research into medicinal plants and the traditional knowledge systems surrounding them. Speaking about the project, Gupta says, "The exhibition emerges from a sustained period of research, where I began working with the Herbaria's records of medicinal plants collected across the Trans-Himalayan belt. In the years since, fieldwork with Amchis (traditional Tibetan/Himalayan medical practitioners), Shamans, and foragers across Ladakh, Sikkim, and Kalimpong helped me get in contact with the people, practices, and landscapes through which medicinal knowledge is held, transmitted, and threatened."



Aconitum heterophyllum Composite

The research also took a personal turn when Gupta found herself grappling with her health. In hindsight, she began recognising how her body had been signalling that something was wrong. It was perhaps the first time she thought about what was going on inwards within her own body. This experience further informed the exhibition's exploration of sickness, vulnerability and care.

The works focus on four species — Rheum australe, Neopicrorhiza scrophulariiflora, Aconitum heterophyllum and Delphinium vestitum as each of them carry a history of medicinal use plus traditional knowledge.



A view of the exhibits at the gallery

Explaining her choice of specimens, Gupta explains, "They were all part of the archive that I am working with and their IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) status ranges from Vulnerable to Endangered; apart from that, they were also traded for Ayurveda along with the Tibetan and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and on the other hand climate change is reshaping their habitat, lower altitude plants are moving higher because of heat while higher altitude plants find their habitat shrinking."

She elaborates on her artistic approach, "I began cutting through images of plant specimens, pulling them apart, rearranging them and layering them with colour-smeared paper. Through this process, we try to move beyond the scientific record and find ways of registering the impact of climate change on the very landscapes these plants originate from. As I layered and reassembled these fragments they came together much like the exposed geological formations of the bare Himalayas, where layers of matter fold, buckle, shift and crumble under pressure."



Bergenia ciliata. Pics Courtesy/Tarq; Artist

Detached from their original scientific context, these fragments take on new meanings, moving between botanical records, landscapes, animal bodies, dreams and decay, or as Gupta rightly says, they become "records of vulnerability, transformation and the slow unravelling of familiar ecologies."



Garima Gupta

Till December 19; 6 pm to 9 pm
At TARQ, Ground Floor, KK (Navsari) Chambers, AK Nayak Marg, Fort.
Entry Free