NATIONAL PAVILION OF INDIA

La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

61st International Art Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia

GEOGRAPHIES OF DISTANCE

remembering home

NATIONAL PAVILION OF INDIA

Organizing Partners

संस्कृति मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
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NITA MUKESH AMBANI
CULTURAL CENTRE

SERENDIPITY
ARTS MUNJAL INITIATIVE FOR CREATIVITY

With the support of Indira Gandhi National Centre For The Arts and Lalit Kala Akademi

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Commissioner:
National Gallery Of Modern Art
Ministry Of Culture

Curator:
Amin Jaffer

Exhibitors:
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Ranjani Shettar
Sumakshi Singh
Skarma Sonam Tashi
Asim Waqif

With special thanks to Istituto Italiano di Cultura, New Delhi
and Art India Magazine for their support.

Sincere gratitude to the many individuals who have helped to realize this Pavilion.

संस्कृति मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
CULTURE
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Shri Vivek Aggarwal
Secretary, Ministry of Culture

The India Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2026 is conceived as a purposeful articulation of India's cultural vision in a rapidly evolving global context: one that reflects the depth of our artistic heritage alongside the vitality of contemporary Indian practices increasingly shaping the global cultural discourse.

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, has led this initiative with clear intent and conviction. We recognize culture as a dynamic force of civilizational agency: one that informs dialogue, strengthens cultural relations, and contributes meaningfully to the social fabric and well-being of our communities. The Pavilion is thus envisioned as both a cultural and intellectual proposition - bringing together diverse artistic voices, rooted in India's civilizational ethos and our age-old, traditional materials such as bamboo, thread, and earth. The works carry the textures, memory, and quiet fragrance of the land itself, reimagined through contemporary artistic expressions.

A defining strength of this endeavor lies in its public-private partnership model. The Ministry has worked in close collaboration with cultural institutions, private partners, and the artistic community to realize a shared vision of scale and excellence. This initiative also seeks to establish a framework for sustained and collaborative engagement supporting India's continued and consistent presence at the Biennale Arte 2026 while enabling agility, fostering innovation, and ensuring that India's artistic excellence is presented meaningfully across global platforms.

India's Pavilion serves as the focal point of a wider presence of "India in Venice" - a constellation of our artists, ideas, and engagements that together reflect the breadth of Indian creativity on the world stage. This broader participation underscores the growing significance of the visual arts within India's creative economy. Our artists today occupy an increasingly prominent position in international circuits, contributing not only to aesthetic discourse but also to wider cultural and economic ecosystems. Supporting their presence at the Biennale Arte 2026 reaffirms our commitment to enhancing visibility, fostering exchange, and strengthening the infrastructure that sustains creative practice.

India's participation is, above all, an invitation - to engage with our ideas, our narratives, and our ever-evolving cultural identity. It proceeds from the belief that culture remains one of the most meaningful ways of dialogue between societies, and that art, at its most compelling, does not merely reflect the world but actively reshapes it.

We present the India Pavilion with both responsibility and confidence - in our curatorial vision, in our artistic expressions, in our broader engagement through programing, and in the enduring capacity of culture to forge connections that transcend geographies.

NITA MUKESH AMBANI
CULTURAL CENTRE

Isha M. Ambani
Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre

To support the National Pavilion of India at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia is both a privilege and a moment of immense pride for all of us at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre. We are honored to partner with the Ministry of Culture in presenting India on what is widely regarded as the most respected platform for contemporary art in the world.

NMACC was created to serve as a dynamic force for the fine and performing arts in India. From the beginning, our vision has been to foster a global cultural dialogue that transcends boundaries, bringing the best of India to the world and the best of the world to India. Supporting the India Pavilion at Venice is therefore a natural extension of that commitment - an opportunity not only to celebrate artistic excellence, but to affirm India's cultural confidence at a pivotal moment in our nation's evolution.

The artists featured in the exhibition, *Geographies of Distance: remembering home*, represent some of the most compelling voices shaping contemporary Indian art today. Their practices are deeply rooted in material traditions, yet speak powerfully to the present. We, at NMACC, have already had the privilege of presenting the work of Asim Waqif and Ranjani Shettar, and to see their practices on a global stage in Venice is deeply meaningful. It reflects our ambition to create sustained visibility for Indian artists, both nationally and internationally.

I strongly believe that when Indian artists are given the space, infrastructure, and institutional support they deserve, they do far more than participate in global conversations - they actively shape them. The Pavilion extends that ethos outward, signaling that Indian creativity is not peripheral but central to contemporary cultural discourse.

The exhibition's exploration of home, memory, and belonging feels particularly resonant today. India is experiencing extraordinary transformation, and home is no longer defined solely by geography. As an institution rooted in India yet engaged globally, NMACC strongly identifies with these themes. The Pavilion's reflection on diaspora and emotional ties to one's origins mirrors our own mission: to celebrate the richness of Indian civilization while participating meaningfully in a global cultural conversation.

Our support of the National Pavilion of India is one facet of a broader philanthropic commitment to arts and culture. Through NMACC and the Reliance Foundation, we have collaborated with international museums, supported landmark exhibitions, and invested in accessible cultural infrastructure. We are equally committed to promoting Indian art abroad and bringing world-class experiences to Indian audiences.
At Venice, India will not simply be represented. It will be heard, felt, and remembered. To stand alongside our artists as they carry India's stories to the world is an honor I cherish deeply.

SERENDIPITY ARTS
MUNJAL INITIATIVE FOR CREATIVITY

India has always understood something that the rest of the world is still learning to articulate. Ours is a civilization shaped by multiplicity; by the layering of faiths, forms, languages, and traditions over millennia, each absorbing and transforming what came before it. The classical and the folk, the sacred and the vernacular, the ancient and the urgently contemporary: none of these have ever been truly separate in Indian life. They meet in the bazaar, in the festival, at the confluence of rivers. The composite is not a compromise. It is, in fact, our strength.

Serendipity Arts was built from this understanding. Not a festival in the conventional sense, with its programs and ticketed doors, but a proposition: that culture is not a destination but a condition of public life. That when the arts are given room to breathe within the city itself, the city becomes something more than the sum of its streets.

Over ten years, and through the work of hundreds of artists and curators across disciplines, we have tried to recover and amplify that spirit, and to do so through a model of partnership that I believe is essential to the future of culture in India and beyond. Goa showed us what this looks like in practice: for ten days each December, performances filled market squares, workshops spilled into colonial courtyards, and the city became a living exhibition.

Goa proved what collaboration makes possible: public mandate meeting private agility, creating something that genuinely belongs to everyone, not just as an audience, but as participants.
Our co-presentation of the India Pavilion at 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, developed in partnership with Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and NMACC, carries this conviction onto one of the world's most significant cultural stages. What we bring to Venice is not simply an exhibition. It is a way of thinking about culture: plural, performed, alive to its context, and in conversation with the world. In choosing to foreground the performing arts alongside the visual - music, movement, the live and the unrepeatable - we are asserting something about what Indian culture is, and how it has always worked. It does not sit still. It does not wait to be observed. It draws people in, transforms the space around it, and leaves something changed.

This is what culture can do when public vision and private commitment meet, and the arts are trusted as a democratic force. The world is watching India not only for its economic momentum, but for what it offers as a civilization: a model of coexistence, of difference held together through shared forms of beauty. Serendipity Arts exists to give that model form, and to carry it - from the streets of Goa to the canals of Venice, and wherever the work takes us next.

Sunil Kant Munjal
Serendipity Arts

Dr. Amin Jaffer

Curator

India today is in a state of accelerated change, with sustained economic and demographic growth accompanied by a boom in technology. Neighborhoods are renewed, cities are reshaped, new ways of living and working succeed those of the past. The physical transformation of space is accompanied by greater physical movement within and outside the country, which sees millions of Indians leaving their places of origin to lead new lives.

In response to the Biennale Arte 2026 theme, ‘In Minor Keys’, the National Pavilion of India invites visitors to reflect on these conditions of change, and asks how we define home when the places in which we grew up are far away or no longer exist.

The five artists gathered here - Alwar Balasubramaniam, Ranjani Shettar, Sumakshi Singh, Skarma Sonam Tashi, and Asim Waqif - each evoke home through material and making. Working with soil and thread, bamboo, natural fiber, and papier-mâché, their practices are rooted in India’s material traditions, yet their questions are urgently contemporary: as time passes, what of our home remains? What disappears? What do we actively sustain?

This catalogue - with a curatorial essay and texts by the artists themselves - is a homage to these artists and is intended as an extension of the exhibition itself: a space in which the question of home continues to unfold through evocative photographs and resonant words.

I am grateful to each of the artists for the generosity and spirit with which they have engaged this shared enquiry, and to the Ministry of Culture for entrusting me with this significant curatorial role. India’s presence on the stage of the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia carries weight - historical, cultural, and artistic - and the responsibility of giving shape to that presence, however provisionally, is one I approach with both humility and conviction.

This project, which sees the realization in Venice of not just five major artworks, but also an ambitious performance program, would not have been possible without the support of Isha M. Ambani, and Sunil Kant Munjal, who belong to two of India’s leading multi-cultural art and performance platforms.

This Pavilion acts as a space for collective reflection on the evolving nature of belonging in today’s world. Through the materiality of their work, the five chosen artists do not merely represent India, but actively investigate the enduring human impulse to construct ‘home’ amidst the currents of change.

GEOGRAPHIES OF DISTANCE

remembering home

Dr. Amin Jaffer

Home is not always the place where we live today. Sometimes it is the place where we once lived and which we remember - or a place that we reconstruct through memory and feeling.

For those whose lives are shaped by change or by distance - across regions, continents, and generations - home becomes less a fixed place than a portable condition: part memory, part material, part ritual, and part personal mythology. It is assembled through fragments and through evocation rather than through permanence. *Geographies of Distance: remembering home* is based on this understanding. It proposes home not as a stable construct or physical space but as an idea continually re-made in response to change.

Today, India is undergoing a moment of accelerated transformation. Cities expand vertically and horizontally, absorbing villages, erasing and redrawing neighborhoods. Towns renew themselves at an unprecedented pace, driven by new infrastructure, technology, and economic growth. The physical change in environment is accompanied by a growth in mobility. Within India, internal migration has become a defining reality. People move fluidly between states, languages, and cultural zones in response to opportunities for education, employment, and marriage. Some leave the country altogether, forming part of a diaspora that is now increasingly recognized for its contribution across sectors. For Indians who decisively move away, a close link to 'home' persists not only through family ties and responsibilities, but also through the possibility of retaining an official identity as an 'Overseas Citizen of India' (OCI).

Indians form part of a diaspora that is both adaptable, visible, and influential across the globe. But the movement of people from the subcontinent around the world is nothing new. The earliest evidence of Indians living and working abroad dates to the 3rd millennium BCE, at which time we know that communities of Indians resided in Mesopotamian cities. Archaeological finds and texts show sustained Indian presence over thousands of years across the Persian Gulf and West Asia, in Egypt and along Eastern Mediterranean ports, in Southeast Asia and East Africa. In the colonial and post-colonial periods, Indian communities took - as they continue to take - root in Africa, Europe, the Americas, and Southeast Asia, whether because of geopolitical ruptures and changes, or for economic or personal reasons, forming networks that connect them to India through memory, marriage, faith, practice, and material exchanges.

Constituting nearly twenty percent of the world's population, Indians today inhabit multiple homes simultaneously - physical, spiritual, remembered, and imagined. *Geographies of Distance: remembering home* situates itself within this condition, asking how the idea of home persists when the physical place disappears. Across cultures and disciplines, a remarkably consistent pattern emerges; home is less about ownership or architecture, and more about familiarity, belonging, and continuity.

The India Pavilion brings together five contemporary artists - Alwar Balasubramaniam (Bala), Ranjani Shettar, Sumakshi Singh, Skarma Sonam Tashi, and Asim Waqif - whose practices engage deeply with material traditions that span millennia. Working with soil, thread and embroidery, natural fibers, bamboo, and papier-mâché, these artists draw upon materials that have shaped India's domestic, architectural, and devotional cultures over centuries. Their works do not simply evoke the idea of home; they enact it through material and labor. In doing so, as artists, they propose a vision of home grounded in nostalgia but also in the act of making.

Installed within the Isolotto, a fourteenth-century warehouse in the Arsenale of Venice, the exhibition unfolds in a structure historically dedicated to the storage and sale of commodities. The Isolotto is not an architecture of dwelling but of circulation - a place where materials once arrived, were stocked, and departed again. This context is not incidental to the India Pavilion project. It reveals how material culture is in constant movement, shaped as much by departure as by arrival.

Across the exhibition, 'home' appears fractured, suspended, scaffolded, or vulnerable. It is not presented as a finished object but as a process - something continually assembled, repaired, and reimagined. This approach reflects a broader reality: in a time of rapid change, 'home' is rarely secure. It must be actively sustained. Alwar Balasubramaniam's practice begins with the earth itself. Working in rural Tamil Nadu, he draws soil directly from the landscape surrounding his studio. For this exhibition, he presents two fractured soil works formed from material native to his region. These works bear visible fissures, cracks, and ruptures - marks produced through drying, evaporation, and the natural behavior of the material.


Sindh
B 6/9
'Rehmat'

Terracotta holds a foundational place in Indian art history. From prehistoric figurines and early settlement cultures through devotional sculpture and village ritual practices, clay has been one of the most enduring sculptural media on the subcontinent. Bala's work recalls this long lineage not through imagery, but through continuity of material. The earth itself becomes the work of art. Crucially, Bala allows natural forces to shape his creations. Heat, gravity, and time act as collaborators rather than obstacles to a finished piece. The resulting fractures are not signs of error; they are records of process. They speak of vulnerability, but also of endurance and assimilation with the environment.

In the context of *Geographies of Distance: remembering home*, Bala's works establish home as something grounded yet not controllable. The land that sustains us is also subject to erosion, extraction, and damage. To remember home here is to acknowledge our dependence on the earth, and the fragility of that relationship.

If Bala begins with the ground beneath our feet, Sumakshi Singh begins with what has disappeared. Singh recreates her demolished family home in New Delhi using thread and embroidery - materials deeply embedded in Indian domestic, economic, and artisanal traditions. Rather than reconstructing solid walls, she traces them. Architecture becomes line, outline, and memory. A building that once enclosed life now exists as a ghost of itself.

Embroidery in India has historically been a means of transmission - of skill, identity, and belonging - often practiced within the home or in a workshop and passed through generations. By employing embroidery to reconstruct architecture, Singh draws a link to the women of her family, who embroidered together as a shared activity and a productive form of bonding.

The home she evokes no longer exists physically; a condition familiar across contemporary India, where redevelopment frequently erases spaces. Singh's response is both documentary and nostalgic. She engages in an act of patient reconstruction stitch by stitch. In this way, the house is remembered into being.

Singh's work resonates strongly with Bala's fractured surfaces. Both artists address loss not as an abstract concept, but as something embedded in material. Where Bala allows the earth to crack, Singh accepts the impossibility of full recovery. Home survives here as a thread outline, sustained by memory.

Ranjani Shettar's sculptural practice is grounded in hands-on engagement with material. Working in rural Karnataka, she draws upon India's ancient craft traditions to create intricate sculptural elements inspired by flowers - forms that appear to defy gravity. These works invite viewers to move around and beneath them, encouraging an embodied experience of space, with characteristics of a garden - unfolding slowly, inviting visitors in to marvel at its beauty.

Gardens and flowers occupy a significant place in Indian sacred, cultural, and domestic life. Flowers are used in veneration and celebration, in exchanges of affection and marriage. From ancient texts to today, the garden is an extension of home; for those in cities without gardens, public parks in India play an important role. Shettar's work draws upon this lineage, translating natural rhythms and India's rich floral notes into sculptural language.

In a contemporary world dominated by speed, digital fabrication, and industrial production, Shettar's slow, manual processes become a quiet reference to past ways. Each element bears the trace of time and repetition. Home, in her work, is not simply shelter, but a rhythm of making and tending, like the tradition of painstakingly creating an elaborate meal.

Skarma Sonam Tashi's work returns the exhibition to the scale of the dwelling, but one under threat by changes in building technology. Working in papier-mâché, he creates sculptural forms that evoke traditional Ladakhi architecture. In Ladakh, domestic structures have historically evolved in close dialogue with the environment. Earth-based materials, thick walls, and compact forms respond to extreme climatic conditions. Today, these traditions face erosion as contemporary construction techniques and new architectural models of development take hold. Papier-mâché, with its lightness and fragility, becomes an eloquent medium through which to address this vulnerability. Tashi's works appear delicate, almost provisional, yet they carry the weight of cultural memory. They stand as quiet counterpoints to the dominant materials of concrete and steel.

Asim Waqif's contribution introduces a distinctly urban register to the Pavilion. Using bamboo - a material ubiquitous in Indian construction - he creates a sculptural installation that evokes building in process. Flexible, temporary, and endlessly reconfigured, bamboo supports buildings under construction while remaining largely invisible within architectural narratives. Waqif brings this infrastructure into focus, transforming it into an environment in the process of change.

Bamboo has deep cultural and ecological resonance. Used for centuries in housing, for tools, musical instruments, and ritual objects, it embodies adaptability and resilience. Waqif's bamboo scaffolding becomes a metaphor for contemporary urban life: fast-paced, rapidly changing, and unstoppable.

Next to Waqif's soaring scaffolding-inspired sculpture, other artworks at the National Pavilion of India appear both fragile and endangered, the invasive bamboo and the contemporary construction it conceals, determined to displace our collective past. Waqif's work reveals an inevitable aspect of life; life is constantly evolving.







The exhibition's title, *Geographies of Distance: remembering home*, acknowledges that separation is not only spatial but temporal and emotional. Home may be far away because of migration, generational distance, or loss. Yet it remains present - present in materials, gests, and memory. My own relationship to home is shaped by distance. I was born in Rwanda to an Indian merchant family that decisively left the subcontinent in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Like many families of the Indian Ocean world, ours carried India across continents through recollection and practice rather than physical presence. My mother raised me with a description of her father's family house in Jamnagar. Although she did not know it, she knew its configuration - down to the location of a courtyard swing or '*Jhoola*'. So firmly rooted was the house in my identity that I tried to find it when I started to travel in India for my field research on domestic interiors.

This exhibition emerges not just as an autobiography, but as an enquiry into how - in a rapidly changing environment - each of us defines home. The works on view assembled here articulate, through different materials, an emotion that many Indians within the country and across the diaspora experience: that home is something we reconstruct repeatedly, often unconsciously, through what we conserve. To remember home is not simply to look backward. It is an active practice - one that requires consciousness. In a moment of acceleration and displacement, remembering becomes a form of keeping our origins alive.

Geographies of Distance: remembering home offers no singular image of India or the Indian experience. Instead, it proposes a way of understanding - through material, through ritual, through memory - about what it means to belong. In doing so, it invites visitors to reflect on their own geographies of distance, and on the homes they continue to carry. Across the exhibition, distance is not treated as rupture, but as a space in which belonging is continually reconstructed. The works speak to lives shaped by migration within India - through marriage, labor, and opportunity - as well as to the global Indian diaspora, for whom home often exists as a conjunction of tastes, sounds, rituals, and gestures rather than a physical address. In this sense, distance becomes productive: it sharpens memory, intensifies attachment, and demands acts of care.

To be Indian, as these works quietly suggest, is to carry continuity across change. Home is not guaranteed by geography; it must be sustained through remembering, ritual, and repetition. *Geographies of Distance: remembering home* does not seek to define Indian identity conclusively. Instead, it creates a space in which identity is felt - through material, through labor, and through the persistent human desire to belong, even when one's geographic origin is far away.

Photographs from Artists' Studios
© Priyadarshini Ravichandran, © Philippe Calia

Alwar Balasubramaniam



Bala, aged nine, in Chennai, 1980.

Alwar Balasubramaniam (Bala) works from a studio in rural Tamil Nadu, where his practice emerges from an intimate dialogue with the natural world and the landscape surrounding his home. Engaging directly with materials such as soil, clay, stone, and organic matter, his work evolves through sustained, hands-on interaction with processes, time, and environment.

Born in 1971 in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, Bala received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Government College of Arts, Chennai in 1995, after which he continued his studies in Edinburgh and Vienna. In 1998, he was an artist-in-residence at The MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire. Following this, Bala returned to Bangalore, where he lived and maintained his practice until 2015. He subsequently relocated to the countryside near Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, where he established his home and studio and continues to live and work.

His work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations at leading institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi; Seattle Art Museum; École des Beaux-Arts, Paris; Lalbhai Museum, Ahmedabad; Essl Museum, Austria; and National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, among others. His work has also been included in major international exhibitions such as the 1st Singapore Biennale and the 18th Sydney Biennale. Since 2002, Bala has presented 13 solo exhibitions at Talwar Gallery in New York and New Delhi.



Please would you describe the work you have made for the India Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia?

The work I have created continues my long-term exploration into the nature of the earth. It is the physical result of the bonding and separation of earth and water. These forms emerge from the cracks created as water evaporates from the soil. The way the land drifts, segments, or becomes isolated serve as a symbol for our own fragmentation - the act of distancing ourselves from the whole or from one another.

Your work is a deep reflection of your attachment to the land on which you were born and on which your ancestors lived. Have you ever lived away from home and if so, what was the experience like?

I was born in Tamil Nadu. Since early childhood, I lived elsewhere, traveling and living in Europe and the US, but always returning to Southern India. It's like an ever-expanding circle of places and experiences while the center remained intact, in its place. Then over a decade ago, I settled in a village; it has always been my roots, of birth and a connection to this land that is both physical and spiritual.





What does your work say about the emotional connection we have with the soil beneath our feet?

The word ‘human’ derives from the Latin *humanus*, which shares a root with *humus*, meaning ‘earth’ or ‘soil.’ We are earthlings. When I began this work in my outdoor studio, earth recorded everything: fallen leaves, the footsteps of monkeys and squirrels, the movement of birds, snakes, and lemurs. The Earth is a home for all of us. Everything we see - trees, insects, animals, and humans - comes from the Earth, lives upon it, and will eventually merge back into it. What we leave behind are simply traces; our history.

You often describe earth, water, wind, and evaporation as collaborators in your work. In your work for the India Pavilion, at what moment does authorship pass from your hands to nature’s agency?

I don’t see it as a handoff between myself and nature; it is a true collaboration. In one sense, we are a part of nature ourselves, though often divided from it by our own egos.

How much of the final form of this work was anticipated, and how much emerged through processes you deliberately allowed to remain uncontrollable?

I plan the work, but I remain open to the flow. Anticipating the final form is like raising a tree: the leaf knows to move toward the light and the root knows how to explore the underground. If you provide the right environment, the flowers will bloom and the fruit comes. I facilitate the depth and the ratio of water to clay, but the earth knows how to move and crack. I am simultaneously a part of the process and a witness to it, a labor of love where self and selflessness merge.

The work appears abstract, yet it is materially rooted in a specific landscape. How important is it for you that the viewer understands its geographic and environmental origin?

I often wonder, when we look at clouds, we recognize them as clouds even though no two are alike. Are these forms abstract or representational? It is the nature of the form that allows us to understand it, reaching beyond its specific origin. While this work originated in a specific geographic region, it must ultimately connect to something universal.

The surface seems to record duration - drying, waiting, transforming. How does time function in your understanding of home, especially in contrast to modern notions of speed and mobility?

Yes, the work is a physical trace of time, often representing a month, two, or even more. Its creation is deeply dependent on natural rhythms - the sunrise and sunset, the rain and wind of the seasons, and the shifting moisture levels of the months. Regardless of the fast-paced life we lead, we find a necessary balance when we align ourselves with these natural cycles. While we use days, weeks, and years to measure time for our own convenience, time itself cannot be reversed, paused, or accelerated. It makes us reflect on the fact that time is truly only the present moment; all else is either memory or expectation or hope.

This work occupies both sides of a wall. What conceptual or symbolic role does the wall play for you - as a boundary or threshold? What is the difference between the two sides?

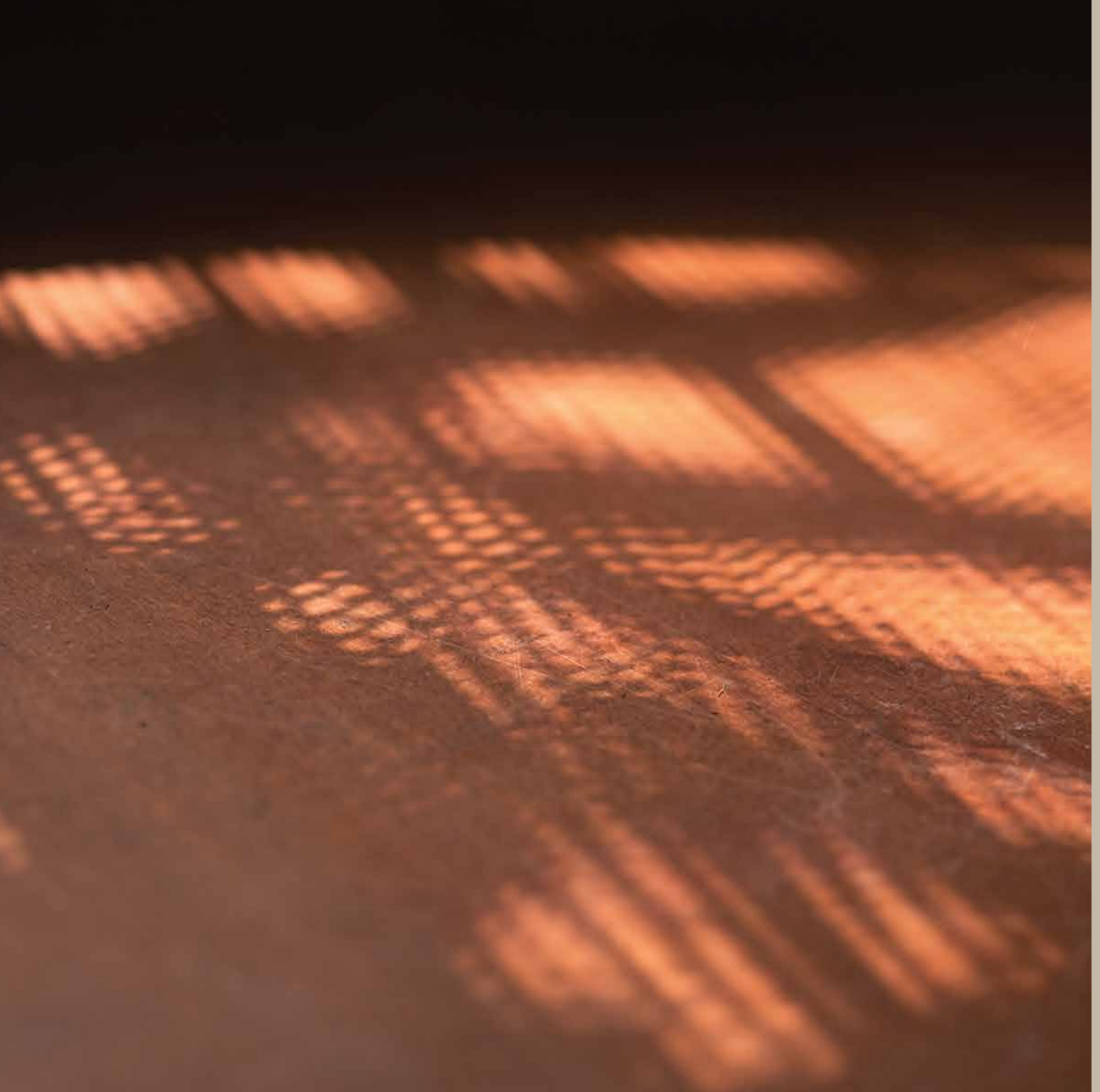
The work extends from the front to the other side of the wall. One side features my intentional exploration of ‘drift’ and cracked earth. The other side, however, is a larger terrain that holds the imprints of many beings from our land. During the making of the work, peacocks, monkeys, and snakes crossed the threshold and left their imprint on the work in process, serving as a reminder of Earth as home - not just for us, but for all living things.

Your processes are slow and durational. How does time - waiting, drying, cracking, settling - become visible or legible in this work?

If one observes carefully, they will notice that in the work, every crack was created over time naturally rather than by impact. The fissures vary from small to large and shallow to deep, depending on the environment I had created with variation in depth of the earth, exposure, temperature - more time allows for more depth.

Within the broader narrative of the India Pavilion, how do you see your work conversing with ideas of home, memory, and distance?

The earth that was used to create this work comes from around the studio and the home that I created over a decade ago near my ancestral village in Tamil Nadu. This earth comes from land that was home even before I existed and will continue after me; it traverses time and generations and certainly geography as well in this case, and in this process it creates new ones and restores earlier memories, like a living entity.







© Alwar Balasubramaniam
Image Courtesy: Talwar Gallery, New York | New Delhi
Photo: K.G.R. Gokul

Your work for the India Pavilion seems to carry the imprint of earth itself. How do you understand soil not just as material, but as a repository of memory and lived experience?

The work is about water separating and life becoming dormant while the soil waits for rainfall. These earthen cracks are like excavated memories - like the grain in wood, lines in a stone, or layers of a shell. The earth is both the witness to these cycles and the ultimate destiny of all beings.

The fissures resemble fault lines. Do you see these cracks as signs of rupture, resilience, or continuity - and how might they echo personal or collective histories of home?

I see the rift as a trace of separation - water leaving the earth for the sky, only to return as rain. This reunion brings an abundance of life, a cycle I see in Tirunelveli (which translates to 'Sacred Paddy Hedge' in Tamil). '*Thiru*' is the sacred, '*Nel*' the paddy or rice, and '*Veli*', the hedge. It is a continuous, rich natural cycle.

Photographs from Alwar Balasubramaniam's Studio
© Priyadarshini Ravichandran

Presented in Venice, far from the soil from which it originates, how does the work negotiate the tension between geographic displacement and emotional rootedness?

Displacement only creates tension if I put myself in a box. When I step out of that, I see that earth is earth. Emotional rootedness comes from reflecting on the fact that everything in existence must go through these natural cycles, and the earth carries that history and memory forever.

Venice is a city defined by erosion, humidity, and fragility. Did the La Biennale di Venezia's context influence how you thought about longevity, decay, or vulnerability in your work for the India Pavilion?

Although I have made works that evaporate and disappear, when I work with natural forces, I strive to make the final result stable. If the work were to simply decay, it would lose its point. Despite being composed of earth and inspired by nature, these forms are constructed to withstand the humidity, erosion, and moisture of Venice.

The materials originate in rural Tamil Nadu but are presented in Venice. How do you think about the ethics and meaning of transporting earth-derived substances across continents?

My methods and materials have a specific origin, but the core theme is not limited by geography. I see myself as Indian-born but a citizen of the world; similarly, the earth from Tamil Nadu is simply a part of one Earth.





Sumakshi Singh



Sumakshi, aged two, in the garden of 33 Link Road, New Delhi, 1982.

Sumakshi Singh's practice examines memory, time, and the shifting boundary between tangible and immaterial space. Working from a studio in Gurgaon, the artist uses thread, textiles, and embroidery to create delicate, often translucent environments that evoke architectural forms without solidity. Her intricate compositions translate personal and collective histories into spatial experiences, where built structures dissolve into traces. In her work, memory is articulated as a fragile yet enduring presence, unfolding across space rather than fixed within it.

Sumakshi Singh was born in 1980 in New Delhi. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2001 from Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, and a Master of Fine Arts in 2003 from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Her works have been featured in solo and group exhibitions across international venues, including the Gallery of Modern Art, Queensland; Saatchi Gallery, London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyon; Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome; Mattress Factory Museum of Contemporary Art, Pittsburgh; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), New Delhi.

She has participated in major international events, including the 2nd Kochi-Muziris Biennale and the 3rd Vancouver Biennale. She also gave visiting lectures at Oxford University and Columbia University.



Please would you describe the work you have made for the India Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia?

I am creating an immersive installation in which visitors will move through a labyrinth of life-sized, broken architectural fragments of a home. Crafted from delicate white thread - thinner than hair - these gossamer architectural membranes are suspended in air, reminiscent of memories drawn from the ether.

Though I have lived across states and countries, my idea of home remained tethered to 33 Link Road - a house built by my refugee grandparents in Delhi. Listed as our permanent address on official documents, it was a site of annual gatherings, stories, weddings, and sleepovers; a room at the back where my mother was born, and a room at the front where my grandfather died.

33 Link Road was considered 'home' not only by family, but by friends and the wider community - many of whom never officially lived there. This potent container of shared histories now stands demolished - its once-solid, sheltering surfaces dissolved into immaterial remembrance. As an homage to the afternoons spent in this home, knitting and embroidering with my grandmother, I recreated the architectural details of the house using thread.

In place of brick and mortar, fragile white thread renders hard architecture into soft, spectral webs of memory. Experienced as apparition rather than structure, every nut, bolt, hinge, and brick becomes an insubstantial, porous skin, challenging the solidity of both - the form and the idea of 'home.' These veil-like membranes mirror the language of memory itself - flattened, translucent, as if pressed between the pages of a book.



Sumakshi, aged nineteen, knitting with family members at 33 Link Road.





Your work reconstructs a house using thread - one of the most fragile materials imaginable. What kind of 'home' can exist in such a state of vulnerability?

I think there is something deeply vulnerable about being human. In a world shaped by transience, we long for stability, for belonging, for a sense of permanence. 'Home' becomes that symbolic anchor - the place we believe will hold us steady. And yet, for many, that anchor is fragile or lost, through displacement, war, or the slow erasures of urban redevelopment.

What is asked of us is subtle and difficult: to stretch across an entire spectrum - to hold our need for safety and grounding alongside the truth of impermanence; our desire to continue belonging to a place that may no longer exist; to move through our days with a necessary, tender act of wilful believing - that what supports us today will still be there tomorrow - knowing full well that it may not.

The fragile, threaded architecture of the work inhabits this tension - between shelter and exposure, attachment and release, presence and disappearance. The installation becomes a meditation on what persists within us, even as the outer world dissolves. It unfolds as a dialogue between form and essence, material, and immaterial.

Thread implies labor, repair, and care. Whose labor does this house recall?

My relationship to slow, labor-intensive threadwork comes from the women in my family. I grew up watching them sit together in the garden, embroidering in quiet companionship and exchanging stories. I learned threadwork through proximity, not instruction, and so for me it holds a sense of intimacy, of softness and connection, of knowledge held and diffused through presence and shared time. In Punjab, where my family comes from, women would often gather to create *phulkari* embroideries that carried stories - small, intimate moments from everyday life rather than grand historical narratives. Some *phulkaris* were collectively embroidered for a bride's trousseau as she prepared to make a new home. In my work, however, thread becomes a way of reflecting on the fragility and loss of home.

I make this work by embroidering onto soluble fabric; once the stitching is complete, the fabric is dissolved, leaving behind lace-like thread drawings. The process is slow and attentive, shaped by repetition.

While making it, I consider with the way embroidery - often associated with women's domestic labor - has historically been regarded as secondary to practices like weaving (in India, largely men's labor). Embroidery is seen as decorative rather than structural, as surface rather than substance. For me, this mirrors the historical positioning of women's labor - as supplementary rather than foundational.

In my work, when the base fabric disappears, only the embroidery remains. What was once considered ornament becomes the essential framework, holding both the form and the narrative together. This quiet inversion unsettles inherited hierarchies - between surface and structure, figure and ground, primary and secondary - and asks us to reconsider how value is assigned and whose labor is remembered. It is an homage to these softer histories.

Does the transparency of the structure invite intimacy - or distance - from the viewer?

It does both. Thread, as a material is intimate, it's tactile - we all know how fabric feels against our skins; we live with it every day. The slow, patient, hand-done labor carries a human presence as do the cracking windows, peeling walls, open doorways; they hold the residue of lived experience, traces of a life once occupied.

Yet this familiarity cannot be fully entered. These walls cannot provide refuge, the architecture cannot be lived in. It remains insubstantial and weightless, closer to an apparition than a structure. Shimmering like a mirage, it hovers just beyond reach - close enough to feel, distant enough to remind us of what can no longer be held.

Is the house meant to be entered emotionally, physically, or imaginatively?

This is a house that cannot be inhabited. Its surfaces offer no shelter. Ethereal and porous, they are flattened like structures of the past, pressed between the pages of a book.

What the house offers instead is a different kind of entry - shaped by the poignant human desire for safety and belonging, and by a viewer's own experiences of love and loss. It is entered through vulnerability rather than occupation, opening a space that is felt and recognized rather than physically held.

You often reconstruct structures that no longer exist. Is your practice an act of preservation, mourning, or reimagination?

The creative process, for me, is alchemical. It moves through many emotions and intentions at once, shifting both the work and the person making it. This project began in a place of grief and rawness. Yet as I began to refine the work outwardly, something within me slowly began to soften.

Before its demolition, I visited the home with a sketchbook and measuring tape. Spending time there - measuring each element, touching its surfaces, drawing them, listening closely to how they wanted to be translated into thread - became a slow, repetitive practice of attention. As I allowed myself to move deeper and broader into the feeling of loss, it gradually opened onto a profound sense of gratitude. Gratitude for these weathered surfaces, now finished with their quiet purpose.

In time, through the sustained act of returning to each surface, each texture, and each remembered detail - allowing them to unfold and take on new form - preservation, mourning, and reimagination gently converged into something like slow, repeated acts of love.

What is lost when cities modernize - and can art recuperate that loss?

When cities modernize, what is often lost are not only buildings, but the slower, more intimate histories held within them. Ways of living, gestures of care, and rhythms of daily life disappear quietly, without ceremony. Yet absence is not the same as erasure. It carries weight and power; it carries presence.

I don't know if art can recuperate what is lost in any literal sense. It cannot restore what has been erased, nor return us to what once was. But it can pause us. It can hold attention in places where speed demands forgetting. Through acts of looking, making, and remembering, art can offer a different kind of continuity - not as reconstruction, but as presence. It can give form to what lingers, make space for mourning, and allow us to acknowledge what mattered. In this way, art does not recover loss so much as sit with it - carrying forward what might otherwise slip away.





What does ‘home’ mean when its physical markers have vanished?

I think this is the question I am trying to explore through the work. When its physical markers have vanished, ‘home’ no longer lives in walls or addresses. It becomes something carried - held in memory, in the body, in gestures of care and attachment that persist long after the structure itself is gone. I am searching for it in an essence that transcends the shape it once inhabited; in traces that linger within us, in how we move through the world, what we return to, and what continues to shape our sense of belonging.

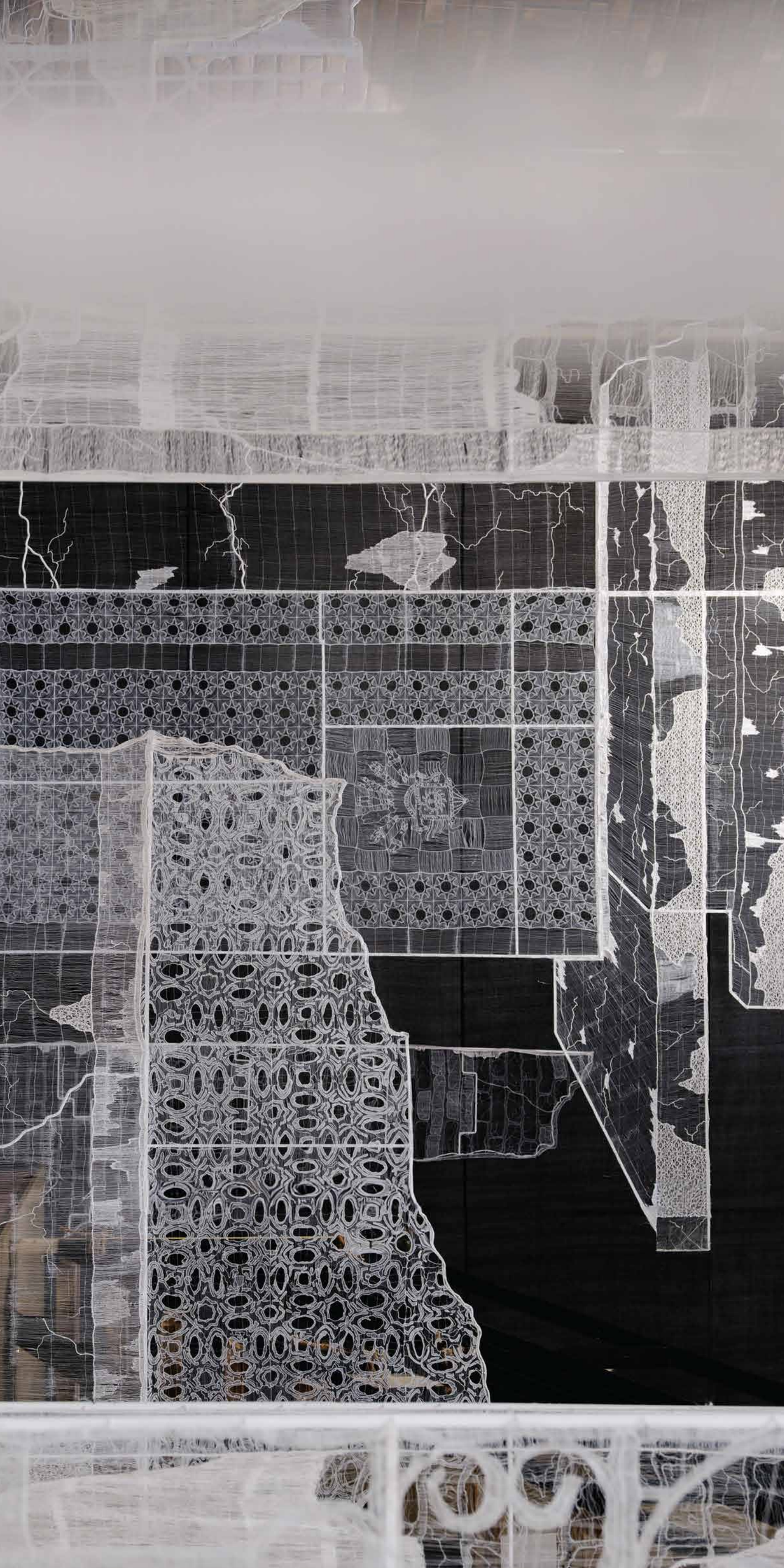
When the form of something so deeply significant disappears, what remains is not absence but a subtle presence. Can a home endure - as a feeling, a rhythm, a way of inhabiting time - formed through love, repetition, and lived experience rather than material permanence?

Installed in Venice - a city built and defined by fragility - how does this house converse with its surroundings?

Venice is a city shaped by fragility - by water, time, and the slow negotiation between permanence and decay. It endures through continual acts of care, repair, and attention, held in a delicate balance between endurance and dissolution. In this context, the house enters quietly, already in conversation with its surroundings, reflecting Venice back to itself not as spectacle, but as a shared condition.

Photographs from Sumakshi Singh’s Studio
© Philippe Calia





Ranjani Shettar



Ranjani, aged eight, in Hassan district, Karnataka, 1985.

Ranjani Shettar's practice takes its rhythm from nature, while many of its methods are drawn from India's centuries-old craft traditions. Her work mediates thresholds between craft and art, tradition and modernity, the physical and the spiritual, while transforming the simple and mundane into the magical.

Born in 1977 in Bangalore, for two decades, she has lived and worked near Sagara, Karnataka, where her studio practice is shaped by sustained engagement with her environment. She received a BFA in Sculpture from the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath (1998), followed by a Master's degree.

Her work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations at leading institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (The MET); Barbican Centre, London; Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. These exhibitions have established Shettar as a significant figure in contemporary sculpture, with sustained institutional engagement over two decades.

In addition to these solo exhibitions, Shettar has been featured in major international group exhibitions and biennials including at Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA); Art Institute of Chicago; 55th Carnegie International; 5th Moscow Biennale; 10th Liverpool Biennial; 9th Lyon Biennial; 8th Sharjah Biennial; and 15th Sydney Biennale. Other notable presentations include Cartier Fondation, Paris; Fondation Hermès, Singapore; Walker Art Center; and Marian Goodman Gallery. Since 2004, Ranjani has been featured in 11 solo exhibitions at Talwar Gallery.



Please would you describe the work you have made for the India Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia?

I would describe it as a culmination of decades of practice. I am driven by forms, space, and colors - the tension between shapes, surface, texture, and line. Having used handwoven cotton fabric, steel, and lacquer for nearly two decades, I am applying everything I know about it to this work. I view my sculptures as pure forms; I explore how I can shape material to achieve my composition. This artwork consists of multiple elements that come together like a choreography. Together, they form a visual experience characterized by harmony, rhythm, melody, cadence, and crescendo.

While some music is written for a solo performer, others are composed for an orchestra; for me, this piece is an orchestra. I am creating musical phrases in my studio which I will later assemble on-site into a final composition.

Your work draws deeply from the natural world around you, in rural Karnataka. Do you think of nature itself as a form of home?

I cannot think of anywhere other than nature where I feel truly at home. I observe the natural world with curiosity, looking for both solutions and inspiration. I am particularly fascinated by the adaptations in flora; in nature, everything has a use and a purpose.





Much of your practice unfolds slowly, through repetitive and meditative handwork. In a fast, digital, and global context of India today, does this slowness act as a form of resistance or remembrance?

The process of creating my artwork is personal and sacred to me. Working slowly allows me to reach a certain depth with both form and material. This deliberate pace offers insights that would not be possible without sustained physical presence.

Although I plan my works carefully, particularly given the engineering demands of sculpture, I remain open to change. Discovery is essential to my process. There are moments when a form or solution suddenly reveals itself, and those moments feel almost magical. I am not interested in working on something where everything is predetermined; slowness allows space for revelation, adaptation, and trust. It gives the material and the process the freedom to lead.

You often transform humble, everyday materials into forms of intense beauty. Is this transformation connected to how ordinary, lived experiences become sacred or meaningful?

All of my life, even before training as a sculptor, I have watched people transform materials into utilitarian objects. So, this is deep in my psyche. Consequently, I do not differentiate between sculptural materials and everyday ones.

Your forms frequently echo flora and organic growth without directly representing them. Are these abstracted natural forms memories of specific landscapes, or do they point to a more universal, internalized sense of nature?

They primarily reflect an internalized sense of nature. For this project, however, I also looked closely at flora from a wide range of landscapes - from the tropics to the tundra, and from swamps to sand dunes. I am fascinated by how microcosms emerge within gardens and forests, shaped by interdependence and, at times, competition.

Your work occupies a space between the physical and the spiritual. Is home, for you, something material and tactile, or something sensed, remembered, and felt?

Home is a state of mind for me.

This installation is entirely handmade at a moment when technology dominates artistic production. What does the act of making by hand preserve that might otherwise be lost - culturally, emotionally, or spiritually?

Working by hand is a personal choice rather than a statement. It is deeply satisfying to be working with my hands. We are called humans because we use our hands; in fact, twenty percent of our brain capacity is reserved for our hands, that says something about the beings we are. We shape our thinking through our hands. There is so much that can only be achieved by hand, and I love that. I wouldn't be an artist if I couldn't use my hands to make art.

Why suspension - what does it mean for these forms never to touch the ground? In Venice - where architecture itself seems to float - how do these works recalibrate our sense of balance and belonging?

Suspension allows me to play visually with gravity. It enables a sense of weightlessness - of ascent, floating, and hovering - as though this is the only way these forms can truly exist.

Was the experience of nature a seminal one in your childhood?

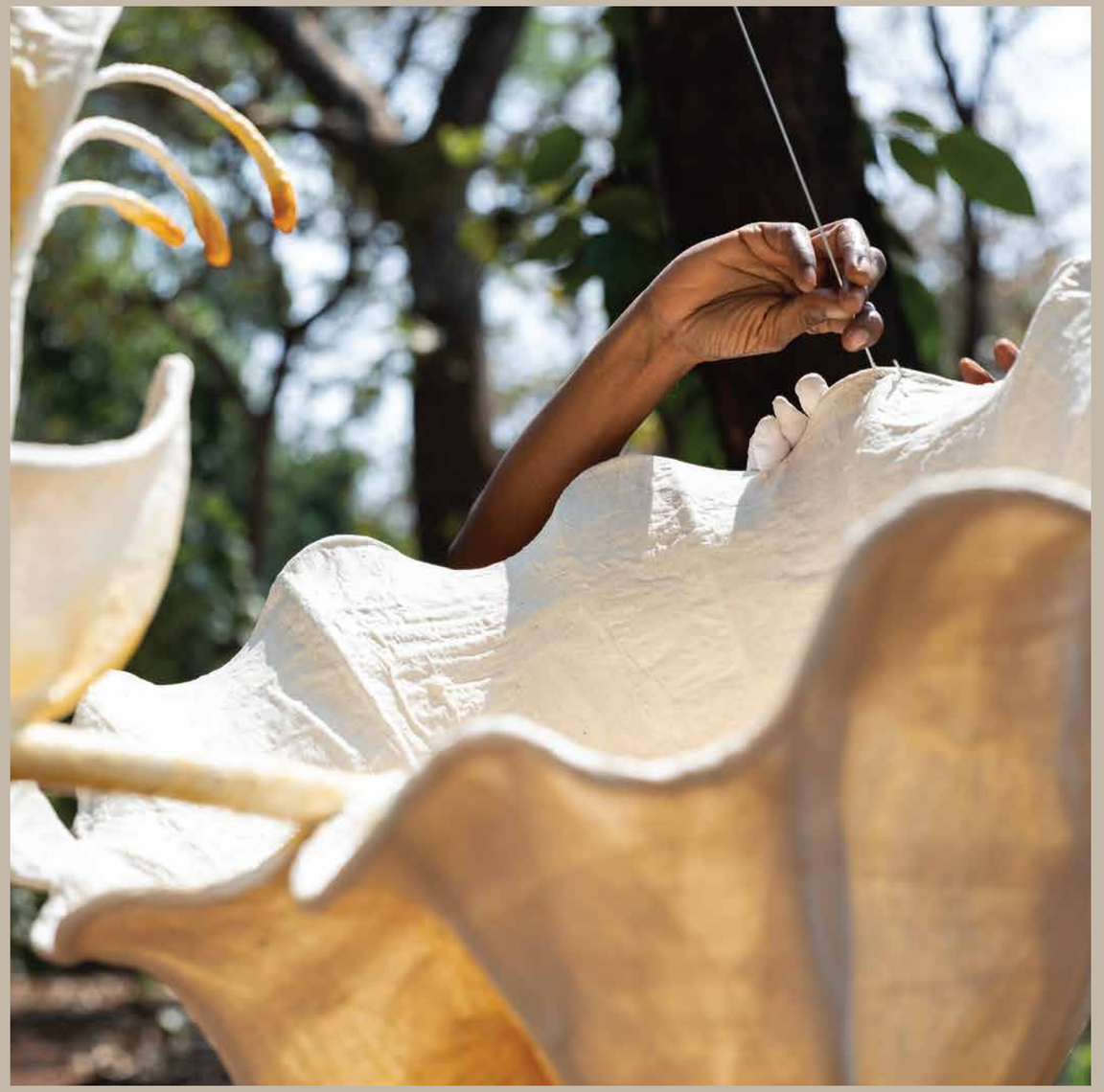
It really was. It may sound nostalgic and idyllic to say so, but life was much simpler back then. My world was small: a blade of grass was a forest, and a single rose was an entire garden. My little home was my whole world.

There was time to get drenched in the rain and jump in and out of puddles; to listen to the cacophony of insects and toads in the evening, which felt like a live orchestra; to watch a new leaf sprout and grow while also keeping count of the yellowing ones. Sunsets and sunrises painted my world. Shape-shifting clouds along endless horizons made it seem limitless. Countless hours spent under a luxuriously dark sky, gazing at the stars during long power outages, remain vivid memories.

From these unhurried experiences, I developed a keen sense of observation. They taught me patience and an appreciation for the small things in life. I built an inner reservoir that I still dip into for wisdom, strength, and perseverance. I also learned to sense changing seasons and shifts in the living world - flora and fauna around me. In a tropical country, seasonal changes can be subtle, and in a bustling city it is easy to miss their essence entirely.

Over time, I have realized that it is this simplicity and joy that everyone is seeking, and that we hope future generations will continue to experience. We want our home, this Earth, to nurture and protect our species.







Have you ever lived outside Karnataka, and if so, what was the experience like of being away from the place where you grew up?

Instances of living outside of Karnataka have been brief. Growing up, I relocated many times with my parents due to my father's job. As a child, these moves felt welcoming, exciting, and adventurous. My entire family embraced each relocation with enthusiasm. It allowed me to reinvent myself, start fresh, make new friends, and learn new things.

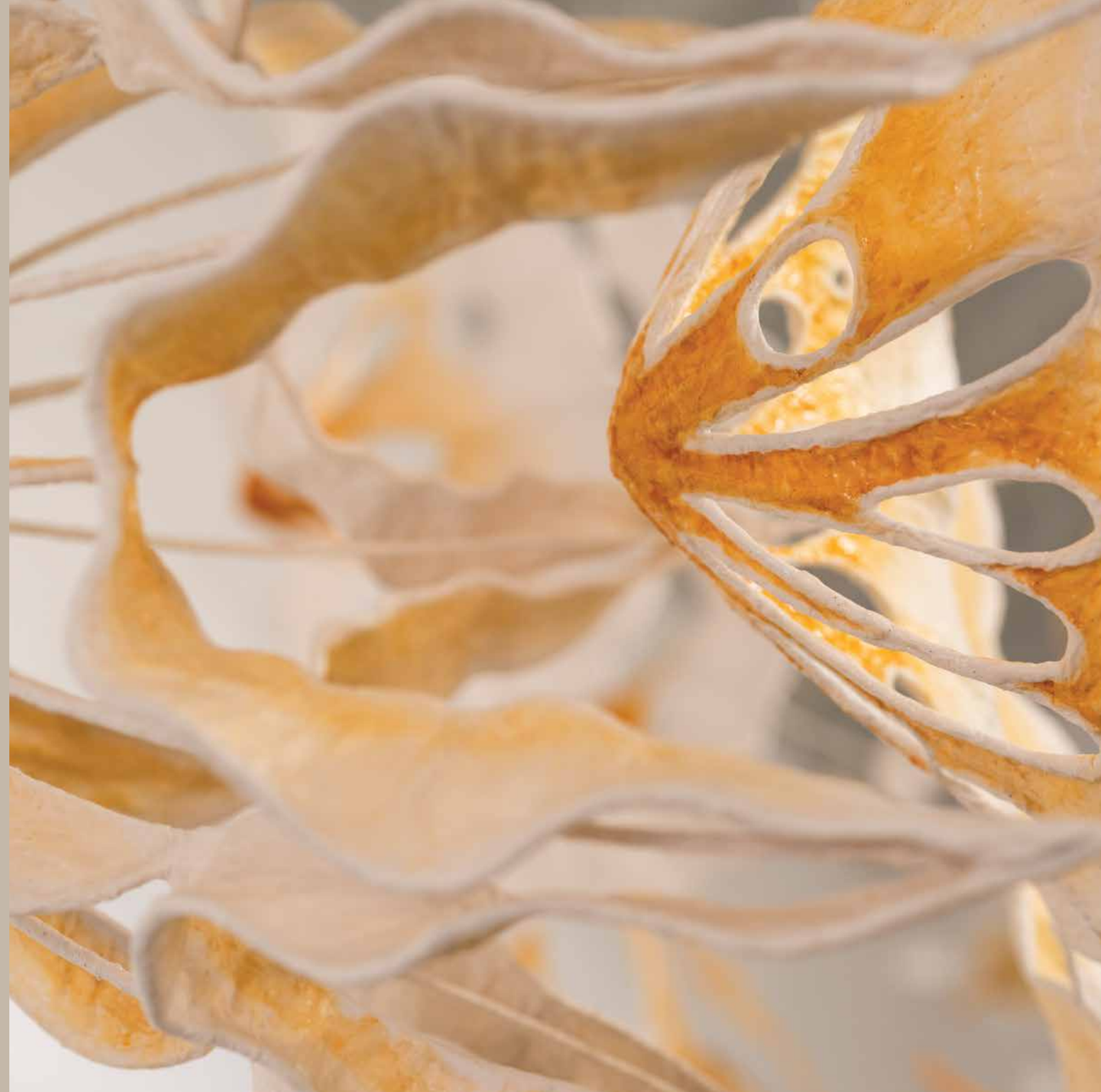
With that mindset ingrained early on, whenever I have lived outside my home state or country, I have felt an instant connection to the new place. Art and culture intensely absorb me.

Nearly two decades ago, my husband and I relocated to rural Karnataka. We felt a strong urge to move somewhere remote and greener. Our cities are bursting at the seams, and migration to larger cities is largely unidirectional. My family's move was a reverse migration. Our cities can no longer support endless inflow, and this model is simply not sustainable.

What does it mean for your work to travel to Venice - another city shaped by fragility, memory, and historical layering?

I love how this city keeps the memory of time, architecture, and history alive while simultaneously embracing the contemporary. It demonstrates the possibility for different eras to coexist elegantly. Questions about how we face the future are present everywhere today, but they feel especially palpable in Venice.

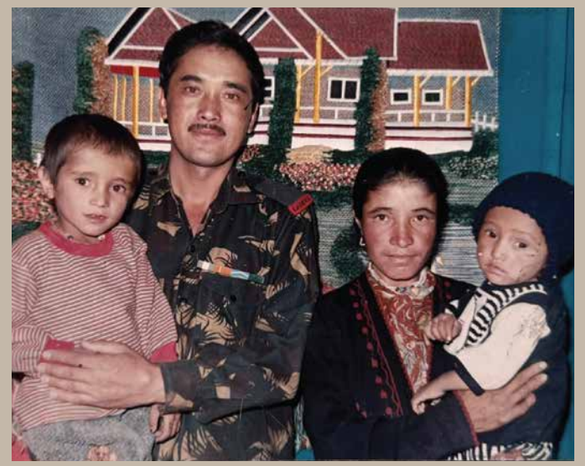
Photographs from Ranjani Shettar's Studio
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Courtesy: Talwar Gallery, New York | New Delhi

Skarma
Sonam Tashi



Tashi, aged four, with his father, mother and sister,
in Kargil, Ladakh, 2001.

Skarma Sonam Tashi's work draws from the landscapes and built forms of his native Ladakh. Using repurposed materials such as papier-mâché, cardboard, clay, and egg trays, he develops sculptural installations that echo mountains, glaciers, and vernacular architecture. By transforming discarded materials into large-scale yet fragile structures, he reflects on environmental precarity and the need to sustain fragile ecosystems and ways of living rooted in the region, shaped by climate, terrain, and eco-friendly approaches.

Skarma Sonam Tashi was born in 1997 in Sapi, Kargil. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Institute of Music and Fine Arts, Jammu in 2019, and a Master of Fine Arts from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan in 2021. He works between New Delhi and Ladakh.

He did a residency and solo show at Ladakh Art and Media Organization (LAMO), Leh, Ladakh 2021. His work has been included in exhibitions such as the 64th National Exhibition of Art, and the 63rd National Exhibition of Art held by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. He has also presented work at the National Crafts Museum, New Delhi. He has received the Lalit Kala Akademi Scholarship for 2021-2022, alongside grants including the Space118 Fine Art Grant for 2024–25. He participated in the Sa Ladakh land art exhibition in Leh, Ladakh in 2023.

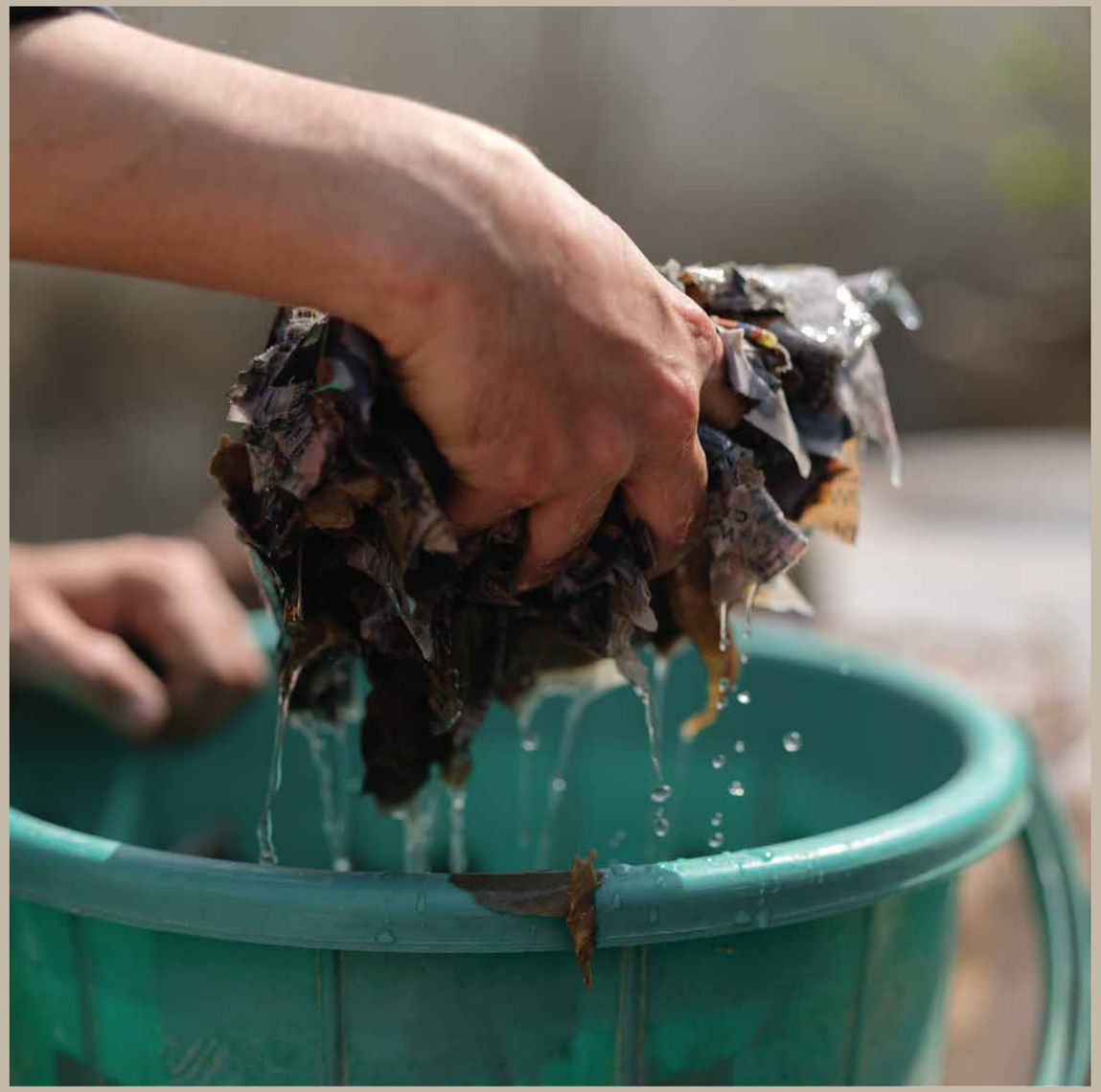


Please would you describe the work you have made for the India Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia?

For the India Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia I have created an installation which is titled ‘Echoes of Home’ that reflects my relationship with my homeland, Ladakh. The work draws on traditional Ladakhi houses, which are built using earth, stone, wood, and collective knowledge passed down through generations. The work constructed from recycled cardboard, papier-mâché, and clay appears on the mezzanine like a settlement resting on a mountain slope. A small portion of it is visible from below where the viewers get some attention, and curiosity, that will lead them to walk through the stairs and mezzanine to experience more closely. They can see and feel the textures, the structure of houses which is mirroring the emotional journey of remembering home. Rather than recreating a specific structure, the work evokes fragments of walls, roofs, textures that speak of shelter, care, and fragility. The work becomes a quiet meditation on belonging, distance, and the sustainability of traditional ways of living in a rapidly changing world.

Ladakhi houses are traditionally built to respond to climate, landscape, and community. What does it mean to recreate them in papier-mâché?

Recreating Ladakhi houses in papier-mâché allows me to translate the wisdom of building architecture in harmony with nature into a contemporary visual language. Traditional Ladakhi homes are climatically intelligent structures designed to retain warmth in winter and remain cool in summer. Built using mud, clay, stone, and timber sourced from the local environment, they reflect deeply sustainable construction practices. By using papier-mâché, a material made from discarded books and newspapers, I shift these durable forms into a vulnerable state. This transformation reflects the current reality of many such houses, which are slowly being abandoned, altered, or eroded due to changing lifestyles, and urban aspirations. Papier-mâché also carries memory; it contains traces of written knowledge and lived experiences. Through this medium, architecture becomes less about permanence and more about remembrance.





Papier-mâché suggests impermanence and lightness. How does this material transform the idea of shelter?

I transform the papier-mâché to shelter from a physical structure into an emotional condition. Traditional houses are built with materials found in nature, whereas papier-mâché gives the idea of reusing materials in Ladakh; homes are repaired and maintained by reusing the materials. By using a lightweight and biodegradable material, I emphasize the idea that shelter is a living process rather than a fixed object. I am not only using papier-mâché but also binders which I prepare myself. I boil tamarind seed powder and lime powder in an equal ratio for 15 to 20 minutes. I also use different hues of clay for pigmentation. These methods are being used in many crafts and functional objects in some parts of India. The material also absorbs time; it can crack, soften, or dissolve. This impermanence does not weaken the idea of shelter but deepens it, suggesting that safety and belonging are relational rather than material. Papier-mâché allows the house to breathe, age, and respond mirroring how both landscapes and cultures adapt under environmental and social pressures.

How does displacement - geographical, cultural, or environmental - enter the work?

In Ladakh, displacement often occurs gradually: people leave villages for education, healthcare, or employment, while houses remain partially occupied or slowly abandoned. For example, my family used to live in a village, then we moved to a city for better education and opportunities, but we lost our age-old practices like farming and grazing animals. So abandoning home is not just about losing home itself but losing other traditional practices. This slow thinning of life is reflected in the material fragility of the work. Environmentally, climate change has altered water availability and agricultural rhythms, making traditional ways of living harder to sustain. Culturally, modern construction materials replace earth-based techniques, disconnecting architecture from land. My installation captures this layered displacement by positioning the work on a mezzanine visible but not immediately accessible. The viewers have to walk through the stairs and move towards the installations to see it closely. The viewer's movement echoes the experience of longing and distance.

What aspects of Ladakhi domestic architecture cannot survive modern development?

The most vulnerable aspects of Ladakhi domestic architecture are not structural, but social. Traditional houses depend on collective living, seasonal rhythms, and shared responsibility. Contemporary life prioritizes speed, individual ownership, and use of materials like concrete that are detached from the land. As lifestyles change, the patience required to maintain earth-based homes is often costly. Flat mud roofs, thick earthen walls, and stones for foundations are replaced by concrete cement that ignore climatic intelligence. What disappears is not just a form, but the wisdom of how to read the weather, how to repair with soil, and how architecture responds to community rather than consumption.

Does the fragility of the material you've used to make this work echo the vulnerability of mountain cultures today?

Yes, the fragility of the material directly echoes the vulnerability of mountain cultures. Ladakh exists in a delicate balance, ecologically sensitive, geographically isolated, and culturally specific. Climate change, tourism, and urban aspirations place increasing pressure on this balance. By using fragile, recyclable materials, I mirror this condition of fragile ecology. The work does not attempt to appear strong or permanent; instead, it accepts vulnerability as a truth. The materials demand care, just as mountain cultures require thoughtful engagement rather than exploitation. Fragility here is not weakness, but a reminder that sustainability depends on attention and responsibility. The installation asks viewers to recognize that what appears delicate is often what sustains life, and once neglected, cannot be easily restored.

How do memory and imagination intersect in your reconstruction of these houses?

Memory provides the foundation, while imagination fills the gaps. I do not reconstruct specific houses from Ladakh; instead, I work from remembered textures, proportions, and sensations. The forms emerge from lived experience walking through villages, touching walls, playing with clay, stone, and woods. Imagination allows these memories to shift, soften, and adapt to a new context.

In Venice, the houses become both familiar and unfamiliar, grounded in Ladakhi identity yet open to interpretation. This intersection allows viewers to project their own memories of home onto the work. In this space, architecture becomes emotional rather than documentary and a quiet landscape shaped as much by absence as by presence.

Your work engages deeply with landscape and material memory. How does this sensibility reflect your own life experience?

I grew up in Ladakh, where landscape shapes daily life and materials are never separate from their source. Stone, soil, and woods are not abstract elements, they are part of lived experience. My work emerges from observing how the traditional homes are built, repaired, and inhabited over time. Material memory is personal to me because the papier-mâché is prepared from the old notebooks and old papers which I learned from; my own exploration of materials to create artworks. Using these materials connects my present life as an artist with the past knowledge systems that shaped my upbringing. The act of making is slow and manual, reflecting how life unfolds in mountain regions. My art is not an external observation of Ladakh, but an extension of my own relationship with land, memory, and belonging.


Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation

How do you represent tradition and transformation in your work?

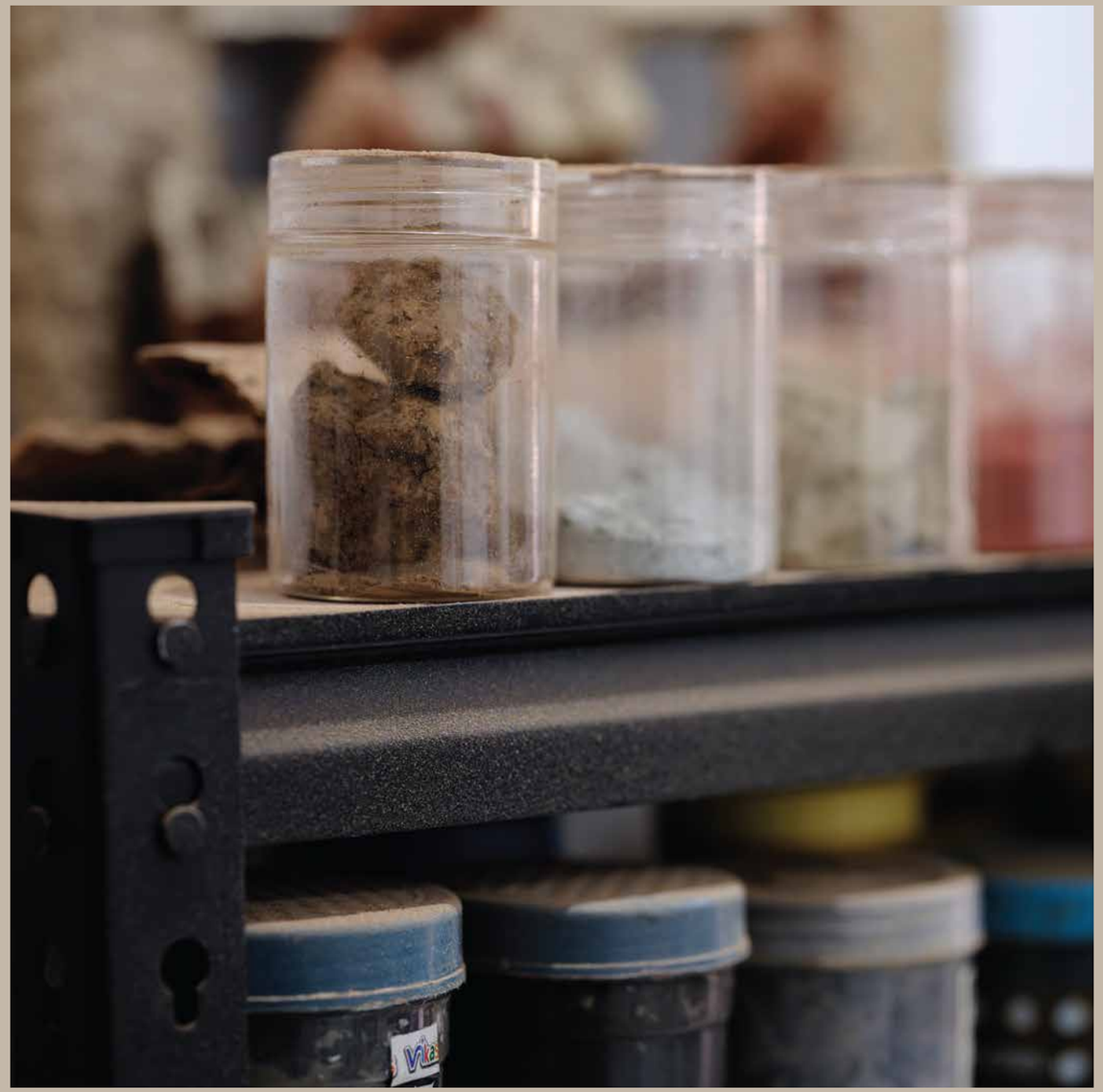
I represent tradition through form, material logic, and process, rather than direct replication. The architectural language of Ladakhi houses remains present, but the materials shift from earth and stone to cardboard, papier-mâché, and clay. This transformation reflects how traditions evolve rather than disappear.
The work acknowledges change without resisting it aggressively. The transformation is subtle, echoing the Biennale Arte 2026 theme, 'In Minor Keys'. What remains constant is the relationship between humans and land. By allowing materials to appear fragile and incomplete, I suggest that tradition survives not through preservation alone, but through conscious care and reinterpretation.

What does 'home' mean when viewed through ecological rather than architectural lens?

When home is viewed through an ecological lens, home is not a structure but a relationship. It is shaped by access to water, soil, climate, and collective knowledge. In Ladakh, traditional homes exist because of careful adaptation to the environment rather than domination of it. This perspective shifts focus from walls and roofs to sustainability, care, and balance. My work reflects this understanding by reusing materials that suggest sustainability. The houses in 'Echoes of Home' do not assert permanence; they coexist gently with space. Home becomes an ongoing dialogue with nature, one that requires responsibility rather than ownership. This ecological lens allows home to be understood as something we participate in, not simply inhabit.

How does your material practice speak to sustainability and continuity?

My material practice is rooted in reuse, repair, recycle, and minimal intervention. By working with discarded paper, recycled boards, and clay, I extend the life of materials that would otherwise be waste. The use of natural binders such as tamarind seed powder, lime powder, and clay connects contemporary practice with traditional knowledge systems. Sustainability, for me, is not only about materials but about the processes; slow making, manual labor, and awareness of impact. Continuity emerges through this rhythm of reuse and recycle. The materials carry histories before entering the artwork and continue their journey afterward. This cyclical approach reflects Ladakhi life, where nothing is wasted and everything is recycled.







How do people in Ladakh adapt - or resist - contemporary life pressures?

Adaptation in Ladakh is complex and uneven. In urban towns, like Leh, people adopt new materials like the use of cement in the construction of houses and new urban lifestyles for comfort and convenience, while most villages continue to maintain traditional practices. Resistance often appears softly, through continued use of earth-based construction or seasonal migration rather than permanent relocation. However, economic pressures and aspirations make it difficult to sustain older ways of living. My work does not judge these shifts but observes them. The fragile houses I create reflect this in-between state of neither fully traditional nor entirely modern. They exist in transition, much like Ladakh itself, negotiating survival between heritage and change.

What parallels do you see between Himalayan landscapes and the fragile balance of historic cities like Venice?

Both Himalayan landscapes and Venice exist in constant negotiation with environmental forces. In Ladakh, glaciers and water cycles determine life; in Venice, tides and erosion do the same. Both places rely on human adaptation rather than control. Climate change intensifies these vulnerabilities, making sustainability an urgent concern. What connects them is fragility not as weakness, but as a condition that demands care. By bringing Ladakhi domestic forms into Venice, I highlight this shared sensitivity. The work becomes a meeting point between two geographies that remind us how deeply human survival is tied to environmental balance.

What resonances emerge when Himalayan domestic forms appear in Venice - a city equally shaped by environment and fragility?

When Himalayan domestic forms appear in Venice, a dialogue emerges between two fragile landscapes shaped by the environment. Venice, like Ladakh, exists in constant negotiation with nature. The glaciers are melting in Ladakh and water levels are rising in Venice. Both places depend on human ingenuity to survive within sensitive ecosystems. Placing Ladakhi architectural forms in Venice highlights shared concerns about sustainability, preservation, and the future of living with nature rather than against it. The work does not claim similarity, but resonance. In both contexts, homes are threatened not by sudden destruction but by gradual environmental and cultural shifts. This meeting allows viewers to reflect on how different geographies face parallel vulnerabilities, reminding us that the question of home is global, not regional.

Photographs from Skarma Sonam Tashi's Studio
© Philippe Calia



Asim Waqif



Asim, aged eight, with his hand-painted bicycle, in Hyderabad around 1986.

Asim Waqif employs natural and recycled materials, including bamboo, timber, scrap metal, and plastic, in monumental installations that reflect on waste, resource use, and ecological imbalance in today's world. Combining manual labor with experimental construction, his structures are frequently temporary and interactive, oscillating between the realms of art, architecture, design, and ecology, with a particular focus on the urban environment.

Waqif was born in 1978 in Hyderabad and in 2000 obtained a bachelor's degree in architecture from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. After early work in film and television, he transitioned to an independent video and documentary-based practice. Today, he works in New Delhi.

His work has been presented in solo exhibitions at institutions including the Mattress Factory Museum of Contemporary Art, Pittsburgh; and Hayward Gallery, London. He has also participated in major group exhibitions at venues such as the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi; Queens Museum, New York; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. His projects have been included in international events, including the 2nd Islamic Arts Biennale; 5th Kochi-Muziris Biennale; Colomboscope 2017; and the 5th Marrakech Biennale. He was a Visiting Scholar at the Rhode Island School of Design.



Please would you describe the work you have made for the India Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia?

I have been working with bamboo on and off for almost 30 years. At first it was a cheap and versatile material to play with when I was an architecture student. I have worked from plantation and harvesting to artisanal craft and architecture, and this project is informed by all these cumulative experiences. Within set boundaries determined by artistic, curatorial, and spatial considerations, I want to create a bubble of artisanal collaboration and exploration.

Scaffolding is typically temporary, functional, and unseen. Why elevate it into the center of the work?

In recent years, construction practices in the world have increasingly favored industrial materials such as steel and concrete. Historically, rural housing systems were grounded in the use of locally sourced, sustainable materials. The broader shift toward standardized (*pakka*) construction models, has, over time, contributed to the diminishing visibility of certain traditional architectural methods.


KOMATSU
interem





Does this bamboo structure represent construction, repair, or perpetual incompletion?

For me, work and life are in constant flux, ever changing and adapting. However, I prefer to leave the interpretation to the viewer rather than give a prescriptive description.

Bamboo carries ecological, vernacular, and informal connotations. How do these histories operate within the installation?

On a research trip to Barpeta (Assam) last year, I saw frantic construction of brick-concrete houses. I stepped into one and was struck by the heat. There were only 2 tiny opaque windows and the GI roof was radiating. Outside, the older house made with *ikra* and bamboo with a thatch roof was airy and cool, but in disrepair. The Rural Housing Scheme only provides grants to make *pakka* houses out of brick, cement, and GI sheets. The earthquake building code promotes only steel or reinforced concrete structures. As a result almost no new houses of the traditional architectural typology are being constructed in rural India.

In the kitchen, where the hosts offered us tea, almost all the utensils were made of metal or plastic. None of these are produced locally. Traditional use of bamboo in utensils, baskets, *ikra*, and construction is disappearing under the pressure of developmental aspiration and the lure to participate in the market economy. Often, artisans don't want the younger generation to continue their work.

Contrast this with boutique studios in Mumbai and Milan, where bamboo is being hailed as a wonder-material in terms of sustainability. However, there seems to be little that trickles down to the artisans themselves, whether one looks at economic or creative opportunities. The creative roles have been usurped by the designer, while the fabricator is expected to merely follow instructions.

Scaffolding mediates between old and new buildings. How does your work inhabit that threshold?

I am keen to intervene with existing architectural spaces and transform their spatial experience.

Does the viewer stand inside a site of possibility or instability?

Instability.

Placed in Venice - a city constantly propped, repaired, and reinforced - what new readings does the work acquire?

Venice, in the La Biennale di Venezia form, is a place where viewers come with the expectation of suspension of disbelief to see unique and sometimes weird interpretations by arts practitioners. For me this project is no different for being located in Venice, it would feel the same in any European city. It has nothing to do with Venice specifically.

Your work often uses debris, bamboo, and reclaimed materials. How do these materials embody urban change in India?

I think sometimes of a future archaeologist, say 3000 years from now, sifting through what we will leave behind. River rocks replaced by concrete and brick debris rolling down with the water, the era of paper coffee and chai cups, the decimation of natural materials, the explosion of construction, the ubiquity of the excavator around the globe.

Many of your installations feel provisional or under construction. How does this relate to the instability of contemporary urban life?

How much effort is put into the preservation and conservation of artworks once it leaves the artist's studio? It is as though the object has seen whatever creativity was possible and now is cursed to live in stagnation forever.







Your structures often invite collapse or decay. Is failure or loss an intentional narrative device?

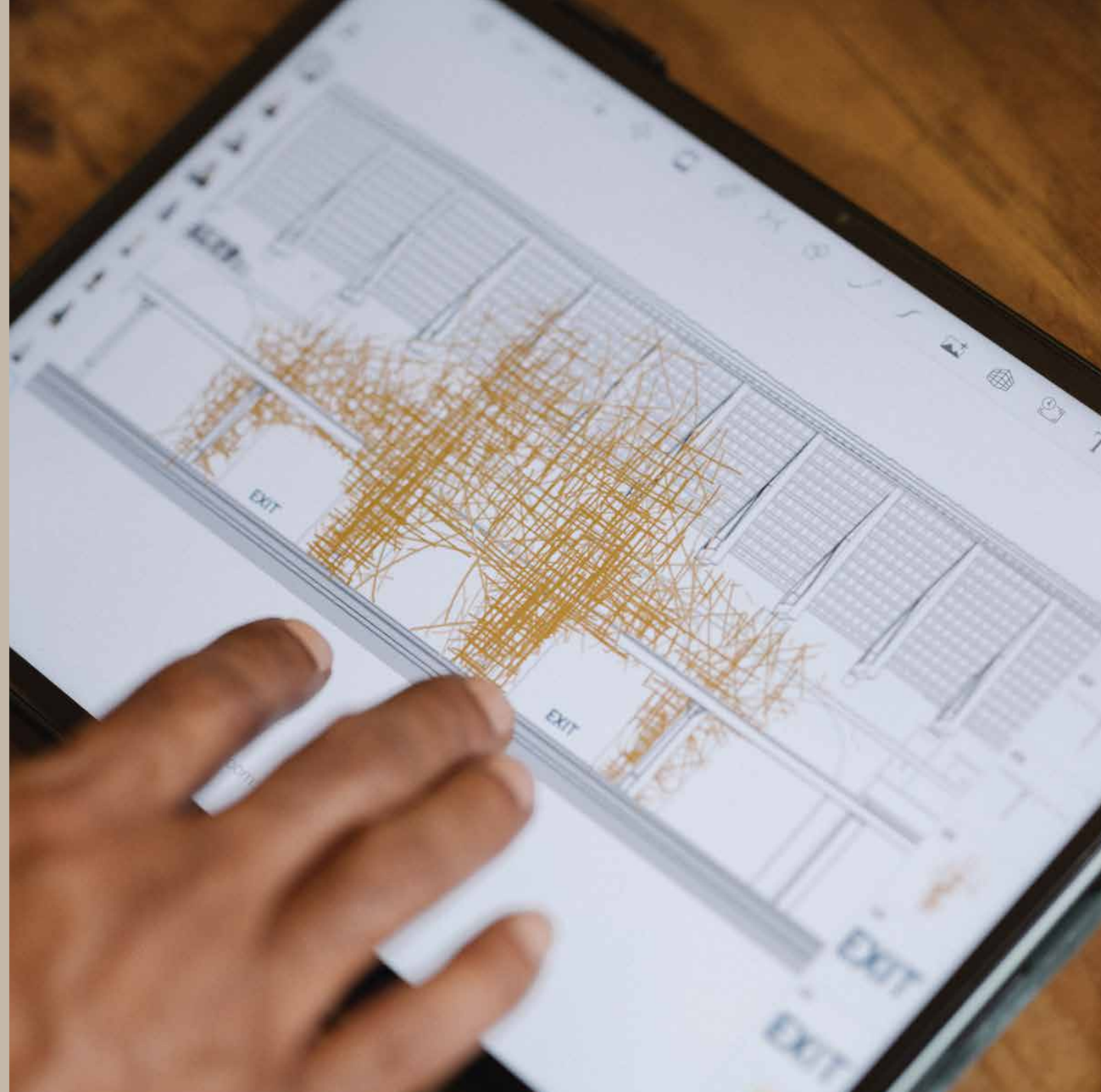
By removing an art intervention after some time, the viewer is allowed to remember the artwork and its experience. I think this memory has much more potential than the art object itself.

How does your work address the tension between planning and lived reality in Indian cities?

It is ironic that the discourse around sustainability today is promoting concepts like closed-loop systems, local-renewable resources, and low-energy footprint, as though they are new ideas. In my view, these concepts are an integral part of almost every pre-industrial society. However there seems to be so much polarization today that people with different viewpoints rarely sit together to discuss, let alone work together.

There are both advantages and problems in vernacular systems as well as new technologies. Traditional knowledge is based on many generations of trial and error that is sensitive to the local context, ecology, geology, and climate, however the practice itself can get bogged down by repetition and ritual. New technologies provide us with a tremendous amount of resources, but can produce a lot of unwanted by-products. I believe that one can develop much more sensitive systems for the future if we look at vernacular and new technologies as complementary mechanisms that can work in tandem, and even help offset each other's shortfalls.

Photographs from Asim Waqif's Studio
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Dr. Amin Jaffer

Dr. Amin Jaffer is Director of The Al Thani Collection, an encyclopaedic holding of over 5,000 works of art spanning millennia, representing the vision of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani. Formerly Senior Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum and International Director of Asian Art at Christie's, Jaffer has authored and edited several notable publications including *Furniture from British India and Ceylon* (2001) and *Made for Maharajas: A Design Diary of Princely India* (2006). He co-curated *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800* (2004) and *Maharaja: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts* (2009) both at the V&A Museum as well as exhibitions of The Al Thani Collection at the Palazzo Ducale, Venice; Forbidden City, Beijing; Grand Palais, Paris; State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco; and Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo. He was commissioning editor of *Beyond Extravagance: A Royal Collection of Gems and Jewels* (2013, 2019) and *Hôtel Lambert* (2020).

Jaffer led the development of The Al Thani Collection's museum space at the *Hôtel de la Marine* in Paris, which opened to critical acclaim in 2021. Since its inception, the space has hosted exhibitions in collaboration with institutions such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, the Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. In 2023, he was appointed as Artistic Director of the Islamic Arts Biennale, held in Jeddah from January to May 2025. He serves as Curator of the National Pavilion of India at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, 2026, and plays a curatorial role in the upcoming Yuge Yugeen Bharat Museum, New Delhi.

Geographies of Distance: remembering home

Alwar Balasubramaniam

Drift, 2026
Earth and resin
Panel size: 264.16 x 213.36 x 15.24 cm
Overall size: 551.18 x 304.8 x 15.24 cm

Not just for us, 2026
Earth, resin and paddy grains
551.18 x 304.8 x 12.7 cm

Realized with the support of Talwar Gallery.

Technical Support:
Muniswamy M
Umapathi Raja

Papanaasam Kudisai's Artisans:
Velkumar
Kutta Raja
Murthy

Installers:
Andrea De Sutti, Davide Fioretti,
Daniele Bertino, Iurri Bacioii, Florin Monea,
Millo Levorato, Maurizio Compagnin,
Eugenio Rossaro, Domenico Bergamo

Sumakshi Singh

Permanent Address, 2026
Silk, cotton and nylon thread
stretched on steel frames
1219.2 x 822.96 x 609.6 cm

Two elements of this project have been graciously lent by the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art and Y.D.C.

Realized with the support of Exhibit 320.

Project Manager & Studio Assistant:
Tanya Singh

Artisans:
Birendra Nath Sarkar
Samarjeet
Bikas Burman
Randhir Prasad

Installers:
Ram Kumar, Giuseppe Di Liberto,
Alessandro Marinello, Millo Levorato,
Gigi De Santi, Matteo Meneghini,
Davide Baldoni, Maurizio Compagnin,
Mattia Spoladore

Ranjani Shettar

Under the same sky, 2026
Handwoven cotton fabric, steel and lacquer
823 x 914.4 x 548.6 cm (Variable)

Realized with the support of Talwar Gallery.

Studio Manager: Srinivasa Prasad BH

Technician: Vinod

Assistants: Manjula, Ramesh, and Chetan

Installers:
Mirco De Nat, Davide Baldoni, Luca Segato,
Davide Fioretti, Alberto Tuchtan, Alessandro Marinello,
Giuseppe Di Liberto, Daniele Bertino,
Andrea De Sutti, Eugenio Rossaro

Skarma Sonam Tashi

Echoes of Home, 2026
Papier-mâché, clay and MDF board
243.84 x 487.68 x 121.92 cm

Realized with the support of Quiet Art Movement.

Assistants:
Jamyang Namgail
Stanzin Samphel
Urgain Zawa

Carpenters:
Giuseppe Di Liberto
Andrea de Sutti

Asim Waqif

Chaal, 2026
Bamboo, cane, reed weaving and
various lashings
Size: Variable

Architect: Shantanu Singh Heisnam

Artisan Manager: Rahul Singh Gautam

Project Manager: Eureka Khong

Head Artisan: Ajmal Islam

Artisans:
Subash Roy
Md Dilshad
Bidesh Dhara
Mohamad Khoka
Rasid Alam
Nausad Ali
Mohammad Arif

Riggers:
Alessandro Soccoli
Enrico Finotto
Gian Luca Maccagnan
Marino De Colle

Installers:
Ivan Bosser, Mattia Spoladore

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Sanjeev Kishor Goutam, Director General, NGMA
Sovan Kumar, Deputy Secretary, Lalit Kala Akademi
Tanya Goswami, Consultant, Ministry of Culture

Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre

Rajshree Bakshi, Senior Vice President, RIL
Rishita Shah, Chief of Staff, RIL
Anisha Mukherjee, Curator, RIL

Serendipity Arts

Smriti Rajgarhia, Director
Minaal Mehra, Associate Director
Moakshaa Vohra, Programmes Manager

With special thanks to
Isha M. Ambani
Sunil Kant Munjal

Curatorial Team

Curator: Amin Jaffer
Associate Curator: Ashvin E. Rajagopalan, Ashvita's
Assistant Curator: Sushmit Sharma, NGMA
Production Lead: Nibedita Mishra, ASIGN
Project Manager: Niraja Deshpande, ASIGN

Programming

Serendipity Arts

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Antriksh Chandra
Ashutosh Badal
Deeksha Vats
Faraz Abbasi
Jatin Kaushal
Nitya Iyer
Paridhi Badgotri
Prarthana Tagore
Prerna Jaiswal
Rohit Jha
Saranbir Singh Arneja

With thanks to the wider team at Serendipity Arts, whose support across departments contributed to the realization of the India Pavilion.

Galleries & Organizations

Exhibit 320
Nature Morte
Quiet Art Movement
Talwar Gallery

Logistics

Transworld Logistics

Documentation

Studio Art Objects

Media, PR & Design

Brunswick Group
Ting
Schbang

Production Team: Italy

A Consulting Venice
Bianca Arrivabene
Mascia Pavon
Andrea Colopi
Maria Vittoria Ferro
Vittoria Salvan

Technical Director & Light Designer:
Marciano Rizzo

Lighting Technicans:
Jacopo Pavan, Luca Mondin

Safety Manager:
Vincenzo Casali Studio

Designer:
InMovimento Design

Engineer:
Andrea Bondi
Intea s.r.l

Suppliers:
Imput Level
LT Group s.r.l.

Opening Hours

May 9 - November 22, 2026

Venue:
Arsenale di Venezia
Campo de la Tana, 2169, 30122 Venezia VE, Italy

Summer opening hours:
Tuesday to Thursday 11 am - 7 pm (last admission 6:45 pm)
Friday to Sunday 11 am - 8 pm (last admission 7:45 pm)

Autumn opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday 10 am - 6 pm (last admission 5:45 pm)

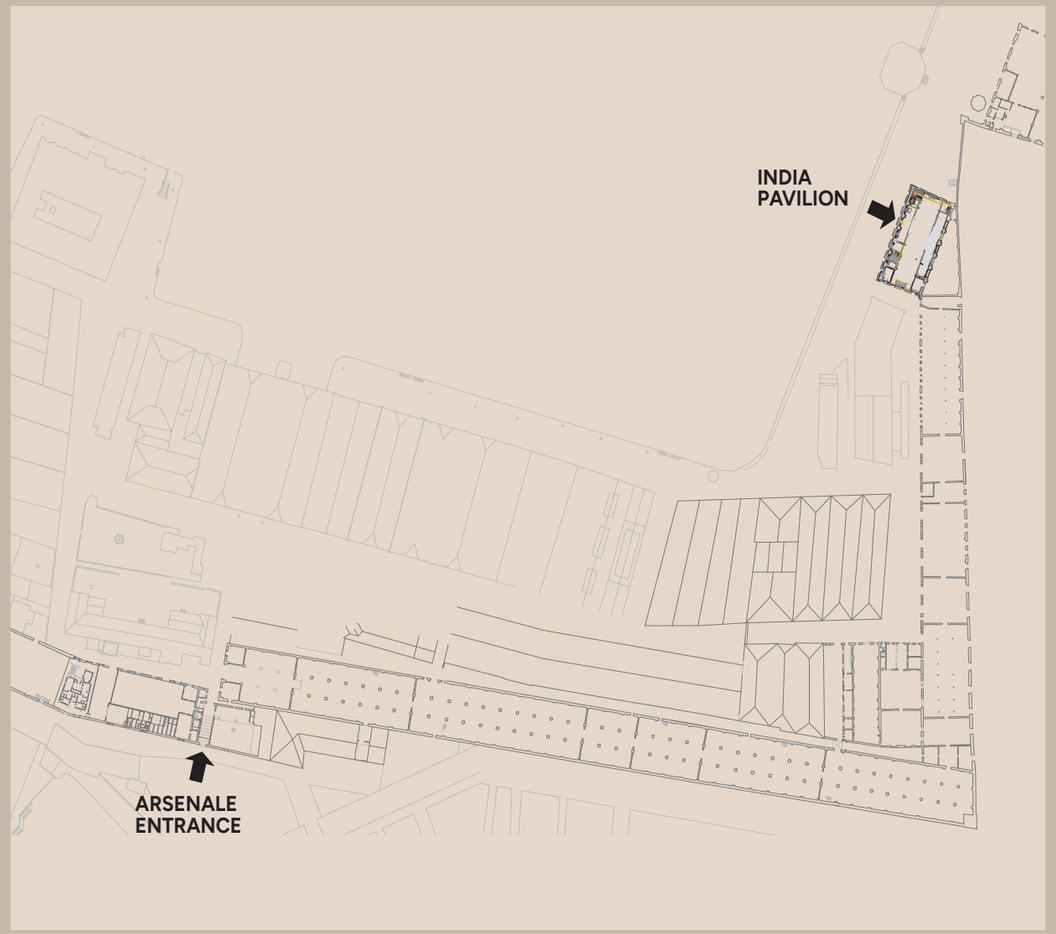
Closed on Mondays
(except 11 May, 1 June, 7 September, 16 November)

The Pavilion will stage an extended programme of live performances, concerts, and public interventions across Venice, animating the city through six months of shared experience.

Download and post Pavilion images
tagging @indiainvenice
#GeographiesOfDistance

www.labiennale.org
www.indiainvenice.com
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How To Get There



Home is not always a place we return to.

Sometimes, it is what we carry with us.

In memory. In feeling. In lived experience.



संस्कृति मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
CULTURE



NITA MUKESH AMBANI
CULTURAL CENTRE



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