

RINA BANERJEE

Irresistible Earth

Wednesday 28 October – Saturday 19 December, 2020



Rina Banerjee, *Fastened to two walking sticks*, 2020
Mixed media, 130 × 50 × 70 cm (51 3/16 × 19 11/16 × 27 9/16 in.)



Rina Banerjee, *Winds and Grassy sky took peacock throne*, 2020
Watercolor and ink on paper, 88,9 × 61 cm (35 × 24 1/32 in.)

Galerie Nathalie Obadia Brussels is pleased to present Rina Banerjee's new solo exhibition *Irresistible Earth*, an uncontrollable and unconditional love is bestowed to us upon birth while ours is love for her, Nature that grows like ripening fruit both fermented and fresh drives our ambition to expand and all the while a universe seemingly cooling and heating like sour tongue airing, widening, making our earth to move away from sun, it's migrating destiny unknown, drifting outward to echo voiceless Nature, a wisdom for you and I to draw out like tight curled tongue. Why is hers, her nature and our nature too so coupled but loose, coiled and tangled with tails, horns and Unclipped nails, messy and monstrous parts these her humans drizzles fortune and violence untasted into time. Why would you not open your mouth and allow your scent to swell over, your senses to identify this tooled mind, to let see right from wrong? Earth, a watery cradle held me newborn, allowed me to play with Nature, like school friends, will she now not protect me from your other creations as you would Love or a sunny day from grey.

In 2000 Rina Banerjee received international acclaim with her installation *Infectious Migrations* at the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial exhibition in New York. Since then, Banerjee's work has been included in fourteen art biennials and most recently in the 57th Venice Biennale, *Viva Arte Viva* in 2017. Her traveling retrospective, *Make Me a Summary of the World* will tour to five US museums between 2018 and 2021, providing the artist with institutional recognition in the United States. It started at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in Philadelphia and is currently on view at its fourth venue, the Frist Art Museum, Nashville, Tennessee. The exhibition claims twelve reviews and is mentioned in almost all art journals and magazines.

The Indian-born artist and a 50-year veteran of New York City since the age of seven describes her work as follows: 'I make objects that use the sensual qualities of materials... to lure the viewer. Arranged in a disturbing, often surrealistic manner, these elements create a psychologically charged space. The viewer is both pleased by the exotic object and simultaneously perplexed by its assertions.'

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As a former trained scientist with an academic education in Diasporic identity and politics of migration, she explains our global ambition. Banerjee's artistic work must be seen in the context of immigrant identity both gendered and racial, currency of beauty and spirituality, commerce and environmental issues, nature and the overarching orientalism that marks contemporary culture as the fruit of colonialism. With an abundance of subjects played out through poetic texts, embodied through ethereal paintings or through sculpture-making objects of diverse ethnic and contemporary materials, Banerjee creates a narrative of a universal cultural connection, in constant flux at the pace of our disruptive contemporary world.

In the exhibition *Irresistible Earth [...]*, thirteen colorful, chimeric sculptures and fairy-like drawings are presented. With this body of works Rina Banerjee addresses the theme of biodiversity and the evolution of nature in our ever-changing globalized world to emphasize the divinity of nature and the feminine role within. The eccentric characters displayed as grotesque and phantasmagoric figures that are reminiscent of both Indian and global mythologies and histories, question current topics such as global warming, impacts of climate change, immigration and identity issues. The connectivity with the earth and with humanity through mobility and technology underscores the necessity of achieving a global society in which all living things are united, where ethnicity is no longer a socio-political obstacle and intercultural equality is sovereign. The horizontal state of Banerjee's vision is like an open door where semantic thinking is encouraged to remain connected to the world by becoming "one place", united by Mother Earth.

Rina Banerjee's sculptures are instantly recognizable: idiosyncratic refined color-aware sculptures made from an excessive use of diverse artifacts throughout the world. Sourced from bazaars in urban locations to antiques stores in New York City, and from flea markets in Venice or Paris to the internet's virtual marketplace, her sculpture-making objects are assembled by materials such as textiles from Indonesia and Korea, beads from Afghanistan, remains of animals, shells from Philippines, quills from Africa, feathers from Canada, skins, furs, lace and knitted steel, marine rope and shipping jute, graphite, brass and copper, minerals, coal, wood, oils, etc. Each material has a special history, expressing a specific 'other' culture and is woven, assembled and installed with a particular "meaning making" to be visible and that cannot be expressed by a one-dimensional, uncomplicated vision of the world.

One of the main themes in Banerjee's work can be seen in the mural sculpture that champions gender equality on the world stage: *Fastened to two walking sticks and lopsided imagined she in a world without opponents, unburdened by squabble and masonry bricks, she a prop propped up man from man not capable of understanding the parts that ripped and torn like partition, camps, detention pockets and passport tangles bottled black glory and tangerine blossom., 2020.* The object arrangements in the sculpture illustrates a feminine form created by an antique ethnic head in copper where the body is shaped with black morning glory flowers, pheasant feathers, silver and brass lace, plastic nets and antlers. The choice of materials is very precise and represents on the one hand feminine beauty, but on the other hand also the slowness of women's participation in society because for too long they were forced to stay indoors, at home.

Through her assemblage approach of mixing incompatible materials infused with an amalgamation of worldly stories, Banerjee creates a semiotic imagery in which identity is no longer formed on the basis of ethnicity and gender, but is rather an assimilation of various influences from today's global mobile civilization. *'The polysemy of Banerjee's orientalist assemblage sculptures provokes multidirectional associations, and their sensuousness is designed to stimulate desire and enchant the viewer.'*²

Also presented in the show and equally important are Banerjee's works on paper. The compositions of her drawings are inspired by Indian miniature and Asian art, where colorful patterns and grotesque, monstrous figures intertwine and float in an extraordinarily curious universe. Unlike her sculptures, where the corporeal aspect can be read through an ensemble of ornaments, the drawings bring the figure, often of the female body, to the foreground. The lines between masculine and feminine, human and divine have blurred, creating a strong representation of our current world population as seen through the eyes of the artist. Rina Banerjee's silhouettes are made with precise contours that subtly cut out the contours with richly colored ink. The composition is airy and displays features of female figures and sometimes a decorative motif.

The mythical creature in the drawing *Pulled from the heavens, sky unpolluted she slipped as if on banana peel and split two folds, each a future on hold,* illustrates a female hunter being pulled by the hair after slipping on a banana leaf, losing all her arrows and floating in a green colored sky. The artist proposes the idea of human fear for transformation and for change with regard to the urgent care of the earth by humans.

The titles are the artists' introspection on her allegorical work. A title of an artwork is usually indicative, but is rarely the case with Banerjee's lyrics. The often-long titles of dizzying poems with rhythmic intervals refer to Indian and Western fairy tales in which the main character is always female, but never mentioned. Banerjee consciously plays with the diction of the English language because of its dominant role in human connectivity in the world.

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The titles are a coherent part of her work in which the artist gives the viewer an open window to recognize or discover certain nuances in order to interpret the work in a completely different way. An example of this metaphorical pun is conveyed in a title such as *Winds and Grassy sky took peacock throne from Delhi to mushroom dome in my vicinity as geographhy without place, names, locations in world, without addresses and as did real estate waited in costal crevices for commerece's designs, irresponsible and a unpliable commercial disobedience took flower (2020)*. Given the historical connection between colonialism and capitalism, the female figure with a mushroom-domed hat is an explorer seeking a brighter future into new unknown territories where the Earth has been freed not only from ownership and exploitation, but also from our globalized society in order to preserve Mother Earth for all humans.

All in all, Rina Banerjee's visual language can be described as fantastical realism in which multiple cultures, identities and commodities are assimilated. In her eccentric work, existing cultural stereotypes are appropriated for critical purposes to undermine dominant Western perceptions and especially the notion of "authenticity." Banerjee dissects the culturally and economically mobile framework of the Western colonial past as well as the present multifaceted diaspora that characterizes our contemporary culture, highlighting the delicate balance between East and West. The multitude of identities and cultural associations in her work mimic the global culture of our amorphous globalized world, and in her narrative, Banerjee offers us a new kind of hybrid identity, all related to Mother Earth.



Rina Banerjee, *Pulled from the heavens*, 2020
Watercolor and ink on paper, 88,9 × 61 cm (35 × 24 in.)

1. 1997 : catalogue A.I.M. (*Artists in the Market Place*), Bronx Museum, curated by Marisol Nieves and Lydia Yee, Bronx, New York.
2. A. Ring Petersen, *Migration into art. Transcultural identities and art-making in a globalized world*, 2017, p. 128.

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Born in 1963, in Kolkata, Rina Banerjee lives and works in New York.

Rina Banerjee was born in Kolkata, India in 1963. She grew up in several cities, briefly in London and Manchester, but mostly in New York, where she currently lives and works. She received her Bachelor of Science in Polymer Engineering at Case Western University and took a job as polymer research chemist for a few years before changing her profession entirely to art. Her break from science was initiated by joining Yale University's School of Art for a Master of Fine Arts in painting, graduating in 1995. Her education at Yale straddled around the themes of ethnicity, race and migration with Professor Dr Laura Wexler and focused on historical photo archive and ethnographic reading. Upon graduation, Banerjee taught college studio practice, feminist art and theory in visual culture for several years. After seven years of teaching, Rina Banerjee has been practicing exclusively her studio work for over twenty years.

Rina Banerjee's work has been exhibited internationally. She was part of fourteen biennials across the globe and her work has been exhibited in many countries including but not limited to the USA, France, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, China, India, Singapore. Her work was discovered internationally when she was exhibited at the Whitney Biennial in 2000, followed by Greater New York at MoMA PS1 in 2005. Her first major solo international exhibition was at the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques - Guimet in Paris, France, in 2011. In 2017, Banerjee's work was part of *Viva Arte Viva*, the 57th Venice Biennale with an ensemble of sculptures in the International Pavilion at the Arsenale.

Rina Banerjee's retrospective, *Make Me a Summary of the World*, is currently touring through American museums: it started at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia in 2018, it travelled to the San José Museum of Art in 2019 and to the Fowler Museum of Art at UCLA, Los Angeles in 2020, it is currently on view at the Frist Art Museum, Nashville, and it is going to be presented at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham in 2021.

Rina Banerjee's works are included in many private, institutional and public collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the SF MoMA, San Francisco, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, the San José Museum of Art, San José, the Brooklyn Museum, New York, the Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College, Florida, the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, the Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, and many others in the United States, Europe and Asia.

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Rina Banerjee
Irresistible Earth
28 October - 19 December, 2020

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4 September - 22 October, 2020

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