



*Earth as Company* (detail), 2020 - 2023. Hand dyed crochet, electrical casings, cords, marine rope, carpet threads and steel. 43 5/16 x 19 11/16 x 15 3/4 inch. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

## **RINA BANERJEE** *BLACK NOODLES*

**April 26 - June 10, 2023**

**Perrotin is thrilled to present the gallery's first exhibition with Indian-American artist Rina Banerjee. On view through June 10th, *Black Noodles* brings together both archival and new works, representing the artist's first significant survey in New York City. Banerjee is known for creating artworks that evoke topics of colonization, race, gender, commerce, economics, and migration.**

These topics span the globe, and Banerjee herself might be imagined as an intrepid voyager. She was born in Kolkata, India in 1963; grew up in Philadelphia and Queens; worked as a research polymer engineer at Penn State; earned an M.F.A. from the Yale School of Art; and has since shown her work prolifically throughout the world—from designing a capsule with fashion house Dior, to representing America at the 55th and 57th Venice Biennales.

In this exhibition, *Black Noodles*, mixed-media paintings that hang throughout the space could have been made by a voyager who recorded their encounters with wondrous beings on land and sea. Several of these are on large, buckling pieces of paper, as if Banerjee turned over a map or chart weathered from salty, wet air aboard her ship and jotted down the likeness of a beast she newly encountered. In the resulting works, animals, plants, and human figures dance together in radiant puffs of color, glittering texture, and singular geometries. In this wondrous world, characters seem to have a voice, implied by Banerjee's titles that use the first-person pronoun, like in a work from 2022, *I am not afraid of you said the Elephant to the Rodent*. Narrating the adventure they are captured in

by the artist, these creatures grapple with their world. "*Take me I am yours" ...said the Worm to her Bird*. In fear, in danger, in love they are as fantastical and confused as characters in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*. Whoever washes up in Banerjee's paper works seems to hail from such literary shores, characterologically rich.

Is the title of Banerjee's exhibition, *Black Noodles*, therefore a reference to characters who might figure such a description—hair of Medusa, dark serpents in rivers, eels or squid with long tentacles in the vast deep?

Looking at her monumental sculpture *Black Noodles*, we might imagine ... once upon a time, a steel propeller from a ship fell into the ocean. It dragged a thousand miles, visiting every shore, drag-netting sand and debris. By the time it finally docked in New York, it looked like a creature. Its metal structure suggests a stomach filled with briny remains. Milk-glass chandelier shades swirl like big fish eyes in the belly of a whale. Did tattooed Queequeg from *Moby-Dick* leave a copy of his iconic tattoos on this creature too—a grand design at the base? Like a sea monster, washed from the depths, from countless shores, *Black Noodles* seems like a character wetting the walls of Perrotin gallery.

For decades, Banerjee has developed similar forms that suggest eccentric creatural bodies with the visuals of heterogeneity—the combination of many things—as in Giuseppe Arcimboldo's 16th-century portrait heads that stack, for example, different fruits or fish together to make a face.



*I am not afraid of you said the Elephant to the Rodent*, 2022. Mixed media on paper. 19 5/8 x 12 13/16 inch. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



*In Making America*, 2020-2023. Metal, rice paper, glass, sequins, cotton, horn wire, porcelain and silver leaf. 39 3/8 x 22 7/8 x 21 11/16 inch. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

And, this speaks to the depth of human identity. Aren't we all, finally, containers filled with such heterogeneous substance? Don't we all emerge from the depths, our mother's wombs, already entangled in too much history and culture, that hardly sticks together, and yet somehow does? All of us are chimerical or Frankenstein-like mixtures of many heritages, places, experiences, losses, gains, beautiful and ugly, generations that came before us, all their mistakes and triumphs. No easy summary can describe a human being. Banerjee seems to test how deep one's identity can be.

The title of her sculpture *Contagious Migrations*, for example, may reference the traffic of people, goods, or disease via colonization, enslavement, immigration, or trade. Banerjee assembled *Contagious Migrations* with everything from luxurious feathers to rubber gloves, heterogeneous materials hanging together in a fine equipoise, and delicately choreographed to suggest the body of some chimerical being. Is that a wildebeest, or the beak of a giant squid emerging from the wall at center? Are there two giant eyes ogling at us? Is the map-like ground on the wall its shedding skin; or is it an atlas of all the shores it visited along a migratory path? Or is this no body at all; just a mere jumble? Like Arcimboldo's works, Banerjee's sculptures make uncanny characters that squirm, shapeshift, dissolve, and reform again. Faces barely stick together.

Consider the list of materials she used to make *Contagious Migrations*: Incense sticks, kumkum, Vaseline, turmeric, Indian blouse gauze, fake fingernails and eyelashes, chalk, foam, feathers, fabric, Spanish moss, incandescent light bulbs, wax, putty, quilting pins, plastic tubing, acrylic, and dry pigment. Banerjee fishes these diverse items from walks, the internet, warehouse shopping trips, and then, once back in her studio, she boils these components in her cauldron with just the right ingredients to conjure these creatures. All of Banerjee's sculptures on display here indeed have limbs, horns, feathers, or tentacular appendages that activate space as real creatures might, as if the gallery is a menagerie.

— Jason Vartikar

Joan Tisch Teaching Fellow, Whitney Museum of American Art

### **More information about the artist >>>**

#### Biography

Rina Banerjee (b. 1963, Kolkata, India), is a mid-career artist based in New York City. She received her Bachelors of Science in Polymer Engineering from Case Western Reserve University in 1993 and an MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art in 1995. Notable solo exhibitions include a traveling retrospective in the United States (Frist Art Museum in Nashville, San Jose Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts), a survey exhibition at Musée Guimet in Paris, and participation in the 55th and 57th Venice Biennales. Banerjee's work has also been included in important group exhibitions, such as Centre Pompidou, National Taiwan Art Museum of Fine Arts, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others. She currently serves as the postcolonial critic of the Yale MFA program.