

ISHITA CHAKRABORTY
I Recall The Forest Inside Me

Sept. 19 - Oct. 25, 2025

Opening: Thur., Sept. 18, 6 - 8pm

Rämistrasse 33, 8001 Zurich

Artist Talk with Nadia Schneider Willen

(Co-Direction Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst – Collection): Sept. 27, 4pm

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present *I Recall The Forest Inside Me*, the first solo exhibition of Manor Art Prize 2024 winner for the Canton of Aargau, Ishita Chakraborty (1989 in West Bengal, India; lives and works in Möriken, Switzerland) in the gallery.

Growing up on the riverbank of the Ganges and at the foothills of the Himalayas in India—a piece of forest I always carried inside me! In my artistic practice, I always question what makes something native or alien? So, in my diary, from my residency in the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest last year, I weave these echoes, "I Recall The Forest Inside Me".—Ishita Chakraborty

At the center of this solo presentation lies an engagement with land and landscape—envisioned simultaneously as a realm of contemplation, beauty, peace, spaciousness, growth, and vitality, and as a site of exploitation of natural resources, of man-made borders, migration, and border violence. The new and newly installed works—ranging from drawings on canvas cutout glued on Indian sari fabric to a wall painting, works on paper, a glass sculpture, and porcelain objects—unfold these dualities within the spaces in Rämistrasse.

On the ground floor, the wall painting *The Soil We Were Born* (795 x 300 cm) - tropical trees, painted in dark gray chalk- unfurls along the wall and wanders to the upper floor. This mural is complemented by a vividly colored painting on canvas, affixed to sari fabric, cut along its contours to depict a plant that has been brought from the Global South during colonial occupation. For this work, the artist drew inspiration from rainforest wallpapers, archival materials on plantations, botanical illustrations on saris, and photographs taken during her residency in the Amazon region. *Agave* (213 x 91 cm) — a blooming agave — is painted in lush green. Some of its blossoms and foliage bend downward, revealing their reverse—their 'spine': an ethnic 'Chapa' print sari in orange and red floral patterns. Such saris are inexpensive cotton fabrics with vibrant colors and floral motifs, most worn by women in rural or domestic settings. Since last year, the artist has been developing this technique in a series of plant and fruit representations, including cacao, coffee plant, maize, sugarcane, tobacco, banana, geranium, rubber tree, and edelweiss. Many of these plants bear entangled histories: they contributed both to the enrichment of colonial economies and to the aesthetic appropriation of tropical flora in the global North.

Next to the wall mural the work on paper *I Recall The Forest Inside Me I* (31 x 46 cm, framed) depicts a figure almost entirely veiled by a map, leaving it all but unidentifiable. For this work, the artist photographed herself draped in a cloth. The resulting pigment print on cotton paper was then hand-colored, a gesture through which the map itself was inscribed. The map shows an old British-Indian plantation map from the colonial period: the artist's body thus bears the colonial cartography like a second skin. How do post-colonial bodies from people of colour carry the traumas of colonialization?

The first room of the upper floor is dedicated to further works from the series *I Recall The Forest Inside Me* showing the artist cloaked in maps that for example document illegal soya cultivation and gold mining in the Amazon rainforest alongside maps of disputed border regions and historical topographies or maps from the former British colony on the Indian subcontinent. Maps can be read as colonial instruments, historically serving to consolidate power structures—claiming territories, delineating borders, and establishing regimes of control, often at the expense of Indigenous populations and their systems of knowledge.

The gallery space on the left houses *Between the Land and Sea I* (110 × 200 × 60 cm), a barrier crafted entirely from glass, in which light both reflects and refracts. On the walls, new versions of *Resistance II* are displayed: barbed-wire forms made from unglazed porcelain, individually hand-shaped by the artist and arranged on the wall like a secret script. Both works, created from fragile materials, point to the vulnerability of our systems and raise questions about the structures of power and mechanisms of control that continuously surround us.

The exhibition space on the right features various framed botanical illustrations in the same technique used in *Agave*. They are attached to the wall like a herbarium collection, showing how plants have been taken from their original environments and used in new cultural contexts. This series of works traces the movement of plants intimately connected to colonial histories. Some of these 'exotic' plants have adapted over time and even become part of national identities.

With *I Recall The Forest Inside Me*, the artist invites us to reflect on the entangled relationships between ways of living, environments, and gender in a postcolonial context, with particular attention to the role of women in plantation economies and in agriculture across the Global South. Despite the seriousness of the works on display, the artist maintains a certain lightness through her poetic approach, thereby opening access to their meanings.

About the artist: Ishita Chakraborty's work engages with socio-political and geopolitical questions. She is interested in zones of geopolitical and socio-economic tension as well as in the imbalance between the Global North and South. Narratives of displacement—of humans and other forms of life—are a consistent and essential element of her practice. The artist has held solo exhibitions at institutions including Aargauer Kunsthhaus (2025/2023), Museo Vincenzo Vela, Mendrisio (2025), *Whispering Benches*, PH Public Project (2022), Prameya Art Foundation, New Delhi (2020), Art Container Zurich, and Kunstraum ZHdK (both 2019). She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, such as Kunsthhaus Zürich, Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe, Museo Villa dei Cedri, Bellinzona, RIZQ Art, Abu Dhabi (all 2024); Aargauer Kunsthhaus (2024/2023/2021); Kunsthalle Charlottenborg, Denmark (2023-2024); WE ARE AIA, Löwenbräu Kunst, Helmhaus Zürich (both 2022); Löwenbräu Kunst, Zurich (2021); and Kunsthhaus Zofingen (2017). She has been granted, among others, the Pro Helvetia Brazil Amazon Residency, Manor Art Prize Aarau, Aargauer Kuratorium Art Grant (all 2024); Hyundai Art Grant, India (2022), and Credit Suisse Art Grant (2021) and nominated for Prix Mobilier Art Geneve (2024). Currently, her installation *The River Flows In Our Veins* is on view inside the historic wooden bridge in Turgi as part of the project *ART FLOW – Art in the Limmatal*.

About the gallery: Galerie Peter Kilchmann was founded in 1992 by Peter Kilchmann in the emerging Zurich-West district. Between 1996 and 2010, it evolved into an internationally renowned gallery representing artists from Switzerland, the United States, as well as various European and Latin American countries. The gallery gained recognition for exhibitions that challenge established narratives and highlight critical, non-Western perspectives. In 2011, the gallery moved to larger premises at Zahnradstrasse 21 in the Maag district of Zurich-West. Continuing its expansion in 2021, the gallery opened a second location at Rämistrasse 33 near the Kunsthhaus Zurich in the heart of Zurich. The most recent milestone in the gallery's ongoing growth was the inauguration of a branch in the Parisian district of Le Marais in October 2022.

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