

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

VIBHA GALHOTRA

BEYOND  
THE  
BLUE



Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to present *Beyond the Blue*, an exhibition of new work by Indian conceptual artist Vibha Galhotra (b. 1978) at the gallery's 524 West 24th Street location. This third solo presentation of Galhotra's work at the gallery is spatially and conceptually divided into two parts: the first imagines looming catastrophe on earth as the planet's resources are depleted, and the second examines questions of survival and interplanetary escape. Together, they act as a warning, imparting a sense of urgency before environmental displacement forces the population into space.

Galhotra's practice centers on environmental concerns and the consequences of industrialization and globalization. Offering a counter to the conventional approach to environmental studies, Galhotra seeks to expand the discourse to include history, theory, political intervention, economy, tradition, and culture when considering the current state of the environment. Her process-oriented practice is based on both research and intuition; her work dwells between the personal and public, reality and belief, and science and spirituality to explore the shifting landscape of contemporary society.



*Wounded*, constructed Korean Hanji Paper  
72 in (dia) x 5 inches, 2020





Installation View: *Beyond the Blue* Gallery Jackshainman, New York, 2020



Installation View: *Beyond the Blue* Gallery Jackshainman, New York, 2020



# The Yamuna on Mars

## Annapurna Garimella

The red iron oxide surface of Mars must be made hospitable. Or, we must find a way of inhabiting it hospitably. Vibha Galhotra, through her new exhibition *Beyond the Blue*, is responding to the growing number of propositions that are being enacted across the world in High Net Worth (HNW) environments that seek to create routes to another world for High Net Worth Individuals (HNWI). This escape from Earth is a retreat from the environmental, social, political, and spiritual disaster we are already in the process of making. Galhotra's work takes seriously and aims to visualize and comment upon that which, for most of us, still looks only like an apocalyptic “what-if.”



*Windblown Sand* (from the series *Life on Mars*), (detail)  
nickel coated ghungroos, fabric, polyurethane coat  
72 inches (dia) x 5 inches, 2019.

With the help of local women from the neighborhood of her studio in Delhi, she has crafted visual science fiction in very rigorously selected media. A series of Martian landscapes, *Life on Mars* comprise of metal bells or *ghungroo* in shades of brown and blue embroidered on canvas, the *Wounded* series of cast, white Korean paper fiber discs, each marked with scours, pocks and pustules and meant to suggest a lifeless Earth, and a delicately imbalanced glass bead and steel wire towel *Fragile* come together as works that are robust in craft but visually austere.

To make these doomsday what-ifs real, she has been using the tools of realism for nearly a decade to create her fictions. Here, when I use the word fiction, I am not opposing it to the idea of fact but indicating that fiction is its own kind of facticity. The sediment from one of the most polluted riverbeds in the world, the Yamuna, has become her paint the evidence in the form of water bottled as well as used to grow distorted and epoxied vegetables, a performance arena and her non-human collaborator (*Manthan*) and more. These real, material elements have been used by Galhotra to create visuals that stand as beautiful art of the Anthropocene Age while in this show, she also critiques the current desires of astronomy.



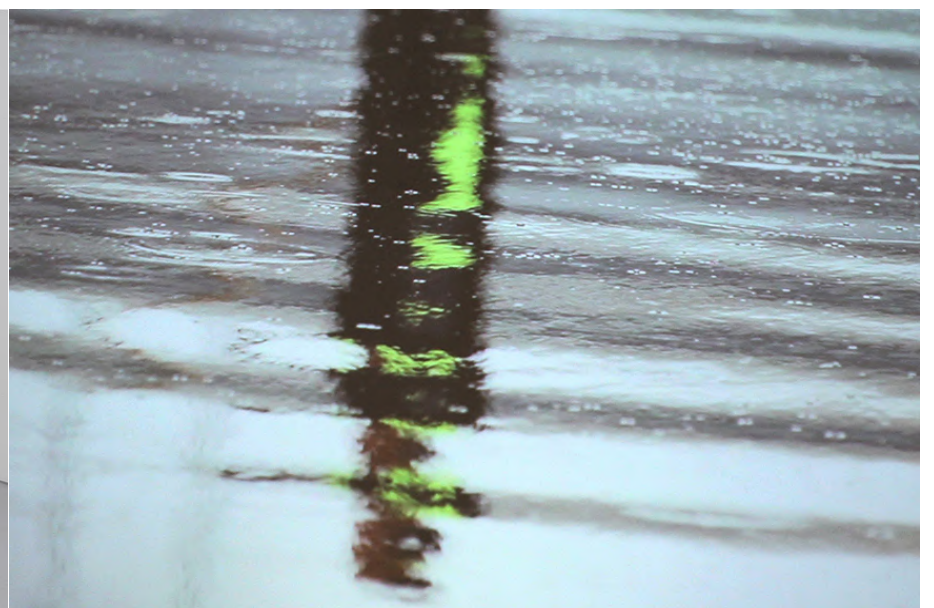
*365 Days*, 4 x 4 in (each of 365)  
Mixed media paper works, river (yamuna) water and glass bottles  
2012



*365 Days*, 4 x 4 in (each of 365)  
Mixed media paper works, river (yamuna) water and glass bottles  
2012



*Consumed Contamination*,  
vegetables from yamuna bed embedded in resin  
15 x 7.5 x 2 in each



*Manthan*  
Single channel Film, Duration 10 min. 43sec.  
2015





*Windblown Sand* (from the series *Life on Mars*)  
Ghungroos, Fabric, Metal, 72 inches dia. x 3 inches  
2019





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Her art is best perceived as visual science fiction, as acts of imagination that create things in a genre already familiar to us since 1818 through modern literature, when Mary Shelley first published *Frankenstein*. The growing importance and dominance of a scientific orientation to the world, and later the universe has meant that scientism is celebrated, criticized, and used to imagine human life in the language and aesthetics of science.

The late Raymond Williams (1921-88), a cultural critic whose voice continues as a beacon of clarity and precision, wrote a brief essay published posthumously on science fiction as a genre, which he humbly titled “Science Fiction.”<sup>1</sup> He identified three types of Sci-Fi: Putropia, Doomsday and Space Anthropology; he wrote that the first two were well on their way to being so popularized, becoming what he called “a profitable exercise of the formula,” that they soon would cease to do any serious work in shaping a new turn in the human imagination.

If utopian romances combine a yearning for the unattainable (romance) with that which cannot be attained (utopia), their Sci-Fi versions produce future secular paradises. Putropia is Williams' name for fiction that imagines “future secular hells.”<sup>2</sup> Doomsday Sci-Fi, by extension, ends life through atom bombs, weird unplanned or planned events, that diminishes the solar system, so that the torture of living with human complexity and indeed, human imagination, comes to an end. The third category, Williams' favorite, is Space Anthropology, which attempts to find “new tribes and new patterns of living”<sup>3</sup>

The Sci-Fi theme of space exploration as a form Space Anthropology developed a visual counterpart after the Cold War when total annihilation brought about by nuclear war seemed imminent, and hence the need to imagine life on other planets seemed a way to manage collective anxiety. The potential obliteration of our planet allowed us to explore what it means to be human or another species in conditions unfamiliar to us earthlings (will we stop being Earthlings if we move to another planet?).<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, in a 1965 essay, wrote that the imagination of disaster in science fiction films thrived on the “aesthetics of destruction” and the “peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking a havoc, in making a mess.”<sup>5</sup>

Putting in place this short history of Sci-Fi literature and films, we turn to Galhotra's studio-produced science fiction which she made in response to research by The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and European Southern Observatory (ESO). Below are three images of the surface of Mars made in the last decade. The image on the left is by M. Kornmesser, an artist working with the ESO, which shows his imagination of what an aqueous Mars would have looked like 4,000,000,000 years ago. It is an officially sanctioned image because he has taken data provided by images from scientific instruments launched into space by a government institution and created a visual narrative.

The picture makes Mars, today mostly arid and often interpreted as “angry,” appear soft and inviting, and unsurprisingly, somewhat Earthlike. The central picture is a “real” image of a newly made crater on Mars, produced and disseminated by the NASA/JPL-Caltech/University of Arizona, which is then made more tantalizing in the way Keith Cowling of the amateur astronomer's website



SPACEREF interprets it.He writes: *An impressionist painting? No, it's a new impact crater that has appeared on the surface of Mars, formed at most between September 2016 and February 2019.*

*What makes this stand out is the darker material exposed beneath the reddish dust. It looks blue because it's a false color image, which combines several color filters to enhance differences between material compositions. The light blue indicates an absence of brighter, redder dust where the impact blast scoured the surface, revealing bedrock below. The very bright blue could be ejecta with a different compositionA that was thrown by the impact.*

*The blue color isn't ice. This impact was near the equator, not in a region where we'd expect shallow ice below the surface.*<sup>6</sup>

Cowling makes the scientific image, which stands as data and evidence, become more meaningful and powerful by referencing a prestigious art history, Impressionism, and then negating it as art and making it science. The Wikipedia page that uses this image, not by going directly to the NASA image, but by referencing Cowling's post and refracting his rhetorical gesture into some variety of fact; the title of the Wikipedia use of the image states “Impact crater uncovered suspected surface water ice (est 2016-2019).”

Galhotra's *Life on Mars* series sidesteps the interpretation of the blue—Is it water? Is it the color of some matter exposed or transformed by the impact? etc.—and indeed, the feasibility of making of Mars as a possible site for human habitation; instead, her art re-narrates such speculation and facticity through a double maneuver. If the white cast paper fiber sculptures in *Wounded* erase show Earth as fragile, injured and devoid of life, the colorfully crafted canvases of the *Life on Mars* series show how creative, scientific and financial resources have been activated by the lure of a possible Yamuna on Mars. The soundless bells in varying shades of brown make images of aridity sensuously pleasurable and when the blue colored bells surprisingly appear, it inaugurates in the viewer the same excitement that scientists and businessmen feel about the possibility of water on Mars. The body of work It plays with the lure of the image series produced by astronomers and machines and posits to its viewers the idea that human imagination entices by creating what it wants to see: another space of human colonization and profit. In this condition, Galhotra's art, working with the same, widely accessible images of official astronomy and deploying an “aesthetics of destruction” while bringing order and beauty to the detritus of cosmic disasters and human imagination, makes it possible to ask the following questions. If a Yamuna was found on Mars, could it become anything but polluted in the hands of Earthling-Martians and their ambitions? Why then would life be any different there when we are not changing here?



European Southern Observatory/M. Kornmesser, Artist's Impression of how Mars may have looked four billion years ago, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mars#/media/File:An\\_artist%E2%80%99s\\_impression\\_of\\_Mars\\_four\\_billion\\_years\\_ago.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mars#/media/File:An_artist%E2%80%99s_impression_of_Mars_four_billion_years_ago.jpg)



Impact Crater formed between September 2016 and February 2019 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mars#/media/File:PIA23304-Mars-ImpactCrater-Sep2016-Feb2019.jpg>



Vibha Galhotra, “Gullies” (from the series “Life on Mars”), detail, 2019

1.Raymond Williams, “Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction Studies* Vol. 15, No. 3 (Nov. 1988), pp. 356-360.  
2.Ibid., p. 357. On Utopian Romance, see Patrick Parrinder, “Summary” *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-utopian-literature/utopia-and-romance/6A70BB4DD6E442BC7C622B45BF228CB7>, accessed on March 4, 2020.  
3.Williams, p. 359.  
Films and television shows such as *Planet of the Apes*, *Alien*, *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek*, even *Star Wars* were rarely about imagining different humanity but were more about humans and anthropomorphic non-humans in other settings. 4.Even Spielberg's lovable *ET* is a human idealization of friendship. In this sense, there is not much difference between the logic of *Gilligan's Island* or the *Love Boat*, the former about castaways, and the other about life on a cruise ship. While the *Love Boat* makes people smiley and sexy, space exploration induces by turns, grim confidence, stoic humor, or epic emotions. Nevertheless, whatever the setting, human imagination has not developed a mature idea of a different human being. What humans do in space, even centuries later seems awfully like what humans do on earth now. It is both the limitations of popular artistic imagination, that is the limits of the genre and perhaps it is also the limits of humans to imagine themselves otherwise.  
5. Susan Sontag, “*The Imagination of Disaster*,” *Commentary* (October 1965), p. 44.

Dr. Annapurna Garimella is a designer and an art historian. Her research focuses on late medieval Indic architecture and the history and practices of vernacular art forms in India after Independence. She heads *Jackfruit Research and Design*, an organization with a specialized portfolio of design, research and curation. Jackfruit's recent curatorial projects include *Vernacular, in the Contemporary* (Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi 2010-11) and *Mutable: Ceramic and Clay Art in India Since 1947* (Piramal Museum of Art, 2017) and *Barefoot College of Craft* in Goa (Serendipity Arts Festival, 2017-18).Her newest book is a co-edited Marg volume titled *The Contemporary Hindu Temple: Fragments for a History* (2019). Garimella is also the Managing Trustee of Art, Resources and Teaching Trust, a not-for-profit organization with a research library, conducts independent research projects and does teaching and advisement for college and university students and the general public.













Installation View: *Beyond the Blue* Gallery Jackshainman, New York, 2020

# To Love What's Closest to Us in a Time of Climate Emergency

Corinne Erni

At the end of the movie *Ad Astra* (2019), after having traveled to Neptune only to learn the painful truth that his father had gone mad during his search for intelligent life on the limits of the Solar System, astronaut Roy McBride says: “I’m unsure of the future, but I’m not concerned. I will rely on those closest to me, and I will share their burdens, as they share mine. I will live and love.”

Roy continues, about his father, “He captured strange and distant worlds in greater detail than ever before. They were beautiful, magnificent, full of awe, and wonder. But beneath their sublime surfaces, there was nothing. No love or hate. No light or dark. He could only see what was not there, and missed what was right in front of him.” The data retrieved from his father’s base suggests that humans are the only intelligent life in the galaxy. This awareness inspires Roy to return to Earth with a newfound optimism and to reconnect with his estranged wife Eve.

I am not sure if Vibha Galhotra shares Roy’s optimism that we are still capable of loving what is closest to us and save our humanity—which means preserving Earth as it is the only place we know for sure where we can exist.; or if she is saying that we might have already screwed it all up, and it is too late; even if we find life on other planets, we will go there and do what we did to Earth—destroy it. While inhabiting Mars may well be a future possibility, as Elon Musk of SpaceX promises, Galhotra’s new exhibition, *Beyond the Blue*, points to a more profound truth about ourselves. That our scientific and technological achievements will not be our saving grace because our inherent greed and selfishness will lead us to exploit and undo our habitats, and ultimately ourselves, no matter where we go. She is asking, What will save us now? If not science and technology, will it be religion and spirituality, activism by a youth that has everything to lose, or “green capitalism” as flaunted at the World Economic Forum this year?

Galhotra’s beautifully mournful and minimalist exhibition feels like a turning point in both her career and our existence on Earth. At a time when the world is increasingly ravaged by the effects of climate change, from flooding to wildfires and pandemics, while faced with political inertia and schisms, it is hard not to be sarcastic and still believe in humanity. Galhotra seems to echo environmentalist and founder of 350.org, Bill McKibben<sup>1</sup>, who warned us thirty years ago that the neglect of common good, society’s unchecked



materialism, and hunger for natural resources would lead to humanity's demise. In his new book *Falter*<sup>2</sup> McKibben says that we must save not only our planet but our humanity, as new technologies of genetic engineering and artificial intelligence strip our lives of meaning and are giving a small elite the power to radically alter who we are as a species—here on the Earth and beyond.



*Wounded*  
Constructed Korean Hanji Paper  
72 in (dia) x 5 inches, 2020

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furrows and bruises that we see in the works on paper, which were cast from the hardened concrete, layer upon layer. Intuitively, Galhotra invokes the worst-case scenario in the brand-new book, *The Future We Choose 3*, by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac—the architects of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement—which describes what life on Earth will be like by 2050 if we fail to meet the Paris climate targets of containing the Earth from warming further. Vast areas of the planet will become increasingly inhospitable to humans—extreme hurricanes, tornadoes, tropical storms, and wildfire will surge, killing thousands of people and displacing millions. Food and water supply is already unpredictable and scarce or contaminated. Diseases and pandemics are rampant. The rise in mass migrations, food riots, and civil wars are what the future beholds. Furthermore, as if that is not enough, in many places, the air is hot, heavy, and clogged with particulate pollution.

This feeling is reinforced by *Fragile*, a hanging structure revealing a world map made of intricately woven glass beads. As if exhausted from human exploits, the frail structure hangs, doubled over, on a steel rod. The delicate material reminds us of the debilitating state of the world and therefore our own existence, which can disintegrate at any time. By juxtaposing the processes of construction and deconstruction, Galhotra highlights that the world is being held together by a thread, urging us to wake up before it snaps.

Where do we go from here?

Galhotra offers a way out, albeit with a sardonic tinge, in the second part of the exhibition, *Life on Mars* though the same size as the works in *Wounded*, the tondos here have a different, grave and substantial presence suggesting that we have arrived at another planet that promises extraterrestrial life. Approaching the four tondos *Ejecta*, *Windblown Sand*, *Gullies*, and *Alcove*, we seem to be looking at heavily pixelated images of mysterious landscapes complete with mountains, craters, valleys, streams, and deserts that are rendered in Martian hues of brown, taupe, grey, and blue. Galhotra created these works based on imagery from the research of various space agencies, especially NASA's work, since 2005 to find water beyond our planet. In essence, just recently, NASA's planet-hunting telescope TESS (Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite) discovered another planet the size of Earth, which could potentially host liquid water on its surface. By deconstructing and reconstructing the images, Galhotra asks: will this interplanetary migration liberate us from our short-sighted habits and behaviors and bring a new set of social, economic, and political hierarchies? Or will we colonize another planet in the same way we colonized Earth?

A closer look at the tondos in *Life on Mars* reveals that they are crafted entirely from ghungroos—thousands of little nickel-coated bells—Galhotra's signature material. Ghungroos are one of the most basic and ubiquitous elements in Indian culture, used mainly as ornaments worn by women, and in musical anklets by classical Indian dancers. In yet another reference to performance—the anklets accentuate the sound and rhythm of complex footwork in Indian dance—Galhotra's futuristic vision is titillating. We are made to believe that these environments are welcoming, making an escape from Earth, as shown in *Wounded* entirely possible. As with much of Galhotra's work, there are deeper layers: historically, gunghroos represent seeds, connecting this artwork to the Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva, a hero of Galhotra's, who is fighting multinational corporations like Monsanto that are forcing genetically modified crops on Indian farmers, destroying native seeds and the farmers' livelihood. Blue, a small, elliptical, cyanide-colored glass sculpture hovering in the back of the gallery, connects the notion of the precious seed to another, increasingly fought over an existential resource—water. The delicate sculpture also evokes feeling blue over what we are about to lose.

Why am I still coming away hopeful from *Beyond the Blue*?

Galhotra has created an exquisite exhibition through sublime abstraction, asking profound questions about who we are as humans and

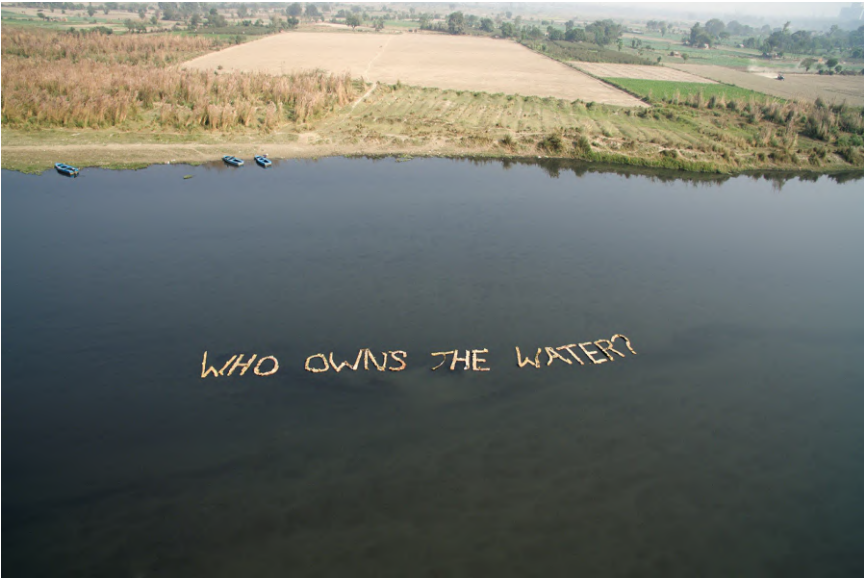


*Fragile*  
Glass Beads,Stainless Steel  
2020



evincing our collective vulnerability and resilience, which we so badly need in today's fractured world. In *Beyond the Blue*, she purposefully weaves together elements of her multilayered practice, not only demonstrating a unique command of process, form, and material but a commitment to environmental activism and a strong belief in our commonality as humans that draws from both science and mythology. “An individual isn't as distinct an entity as it seems. No life is an island... We're much more networked, much more fragile, more ephemeral,” says ecologist and PBS host of Saving The Ocean, Carl Safina. In a similar vein, the Bhramaand stipulates that the universe is cyclic and infinitely expanding with no beginning or end, meaning that the energy we release into it will come back to us.

Galhotra is from the utopian city of Chandigarh—Le Corbusier's visionary urban construct intent on balancing built-up areas with green spaces. Growing up in that city stimulated her yearnings to create visions for overcoming the struggle between natural and human-made spaces, tradition, and futurism. These dichotomies run deep throughout her practice. Inspired by Land Art pioneers such as Andy Goldsworthy and Agnes Denes who reimagined existing environments with living sculptures made out of organic materials, Galhotra also made interventions such as *Red River Dividing the Land* (Oxford, 2006), where she built a zigzagging fence of twigs and red strings to divide a green landscape, questioning artificial divisions between people and nations, In *Who Owns the Water ?* (2017), she floated leaves making up these words on the Yamuna River; and *Who Owns the Earth* (2016), she used local horse manure in Mongolia to form these words. These early explorations of inequality in ownership and accessibility to declining resources—earth, air, and water—have become edgier in later works, and with a more refined urgency in *Beyond the Blue*.



*Who Owns The Water ?*  
Installation Mixed Media,  
3 mts x 30 mts, 2018



*Red River Dividing the Land*  
Found Twigs and Red Thread  
2005



*Who Owns the Earth ?*  
Installation Mixed Media, 3 mts x 30 mts  
2016



Galhotra's penchant for collaborations is evident from projects such as, *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (2006), when she worked with women in an Indian village to produce a cook book project studying the genealogy of local food practices, to an ongoing dinner performance project, *Who Owns the Water?* in which she invites thinkers and practitioners from a broad range of fields to come together over a meal to discuss issues related to water.

The trajectory of Galhotra's practice reflects how climate change itself has progressed and how artists have responded to the crisis over the past 10-15 years. It is inspiring to see how many of them, including Galhotra, are invested in addressing the causes, manifestations, and remedies, not only as visual and sensory conveyors of what is happening (as in “data visualization”) but as active proponents of solutions in collaborative projects with architects, scientists, technologists, activists, and policymakers. Galhotra is an artist who deeply understands the need to be a part of a bigger conversation. We need artists like her to get scientists like Roy in *Ad Astra* to return to Earth and help us engage in meaningful work out of love for what is closest to us.



*Who Owns the Water ?* Dinner performance project, Asia Society, New York, 2019

<sup>1</sup>Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, Random House, 1990.  
<sup>2</sup>Bill McKibben, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*, Henry Holt and Co, (2019).  
<sup>3</sup>Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, *The Future We Choose: Surviving the Climate Crisis*, Manilla Press, (2020).

Corinne Erni is a curator of contemporary art. She has been the Senior Curator of ArtsReach and Special Projects at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, NY since 2016, where she's planning an exhibition with Tomashi Jackson in summer 2020. From 2010-2015, she ran Ideas City at the New Museum, a collaborative and creative platform that explores the future of cities with arts and culture as driving forces. She's co-founder of ARTPORT\_making waves (2006), an international curatorial platform on art and climate change currently presenting WE ARE OCEAN, a collaborative, cross-disciplinary, multi-city project and official contribution to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.



# Vibha Galhotra in conversation with Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi

**Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi (Aditya):** Artists across the world today are seen as catalysts of change both on the frontline and in cultural spaces. How do you negotiate this renewed artistic responsibility as someone who has been working with issues concerning environmental degradation? Furthermore, what unique doors can this pledge open-up beyond the existing languages of action and activism?

**Vibha Galhotra (Vibha):** I believe artists of all times have responded to their immediate environments. Throughout history, they have been the harbingers of change through paradigm-shifting thoughts and actions. Drawing upon this premise, I, too, in my artistic journey have been fixated with the idea of climate and environment, highlighting pressing ecological concerns of our time in the hope of redressal.

Climate and environment are interwoven with the political, social and especially economic structures of society. A particular class of people, unfortunately, control these systems which dictate the present and future of our planet we call home. A privileged few who are now eager to finding life on another planet, while one we currently reside on continues to perish. It makes me question if we or the next generation will at all manage to find abode on another planet, and if the humans will again destroy it as they did to the Earth. It is the reason why, the ideas of interplanetary migration and space race seem instead, ironic to me. Further, questions of equal and ethical cohabitation with other species are yet to be given due consideration.

The process of migrating to another planet also begs the question of who will set the rules? What merits will these be based on? While monetary resources could be a dominant deciding factor, what else will influence this trajectory of escape? Following Darwin shall it be 'survival of the fittest'? Departing from these questions, in the series *Life On Mars*, I decided to take images of the planet Mars (from space agencies such as NASA) speculating to find water on the planet along with other natural resources such as minerals. While the images come from open-source studies, I am fascinated with the idea of investing in a supposedly “utopian” dream of another planet. The images presented as part of this series are surreal and abstract as the idea of living there. As an observer of time where we live in the pool of millions of images, each made up of a gazillion pixels. I decided to source these images and re-appropriate them into my work.

To answer about what art can do, I am also not sure about which specific new directions it will take us in this context planetary change. I make art without any specific end goals; it is more about posing questions of and to the world we live in.

**Aditya:** The relationship between materiality and meaning has been central to your practice; nickel-coated ghungroos, glass beads, cement casts, paper pulp, still and moving images come together to present and reflect on surfaces of the Earth and beyond. Can you speak about your bonding with these materials and how they help translate critical imagination into an image?

**Vibha:** Materials, site-specificity, and the process are of real importance in my practice. I feel that each material and its usage carries within it a particular context in general. However, in the process of re-purposing the same in my work, I explore the duality of content in terms of form and material; beauty and threat, darkness and agility, fear and hope, science and storytelling, data and abstraction.

Being born in the age of consumerism, we are bombarded with objects. Sometimes, the excess of it all burdens the senses, narrowing the scope of what excites us. Therefore, by reconstructing an object, I can create something new, and the usage of the same excites me. I often hear people questioning why I address the hard-pressing issue of climate change and human behavior in an intoxicatingly beautiful way. My answer to that is – why not. The aesthetic is a crucial element in the art of storytelling. People around the world have painted reality to showcase its dire ugly state. However, the latter has not always stimulated change or action. Therefore, my approach to highlight the ugly by juxtaposing it with the beautiful, might shake people, perhaps even reminding them that degrading beauty of the natural world is worth preserving.

When I made a series of staged photo works called *Negotiated Necessities*, I attempted a critique of the hyper-consumption as it is played



*Negotiated Necessities*, Digital Print on Archival Paper, 2008



out in the late capitalist experience. The motif of masks became a satirical form signifying the human willingness to adapt to ecological and lifestyle changes in the name of progress. In these series of staged frames, the mask seemingly blends into our daily lives and fashion choices with alarming ease. Through these photographs, I hoped to strike a chord with the viewers and hint towards the fact that the environment is falling apart not just on streets and in far off cities, but in their own lives, including personal spaces. The work was a wake-up call for those who avoid and deny the constant changes that are happening around them. I like using satire to deflate the heaviness of the situation and give people a chance to react to the vulnerability of the image.

In my work, *Fragile*, a geographical map of the world, is layered over with translucent glass beads woven in the form of a fabric hanging on a rod. One may not notice the map unless one pays great attention. At first sight, the work is mesmerizing and beautiful, but a more in-depth look reminds one of the fragilities of the world at present, leaving one to ponder the disturbing question of where are we going?

While I work with a range of material and mediums, Ghungroos have been recurring in my practice for the past few years, as I have consistently used them to represent the processes of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of structures, thoughts, behaviors, concerning the environment.

**Aditya:** Philosopher Achille Mbembe reminds us to think about acts of reparation amidst the 'end of the world' rhetoric that dominates discussions around the planet Earth today. The landscapes of the world you present as part of the Wounded series show no signs of life whatsoever. Does that mean we are too far from repair?

Vibha: The earth is a vast ecosystem, and we are only one in the billions of species living on this planet. Hence, the question is not actually about the earth's survival, but of the species, humans are endangering, including vulnerable communities. Foucault stated that "Man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." He alerts us that it is the human species that might be irreparably damaged and not the planet itself.

Here we are, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, still hoping to find the right strategy of survival in the convulsing ecological order of the world.

While I doubt that I can take an absolute position to answer this question of whether we are too far from repair, however, I will advocate for the slowing down of the consumerist order.

**Aditya:** The pixels simulating the Martian surface present a warm and welcoming picture of an alternative life that awaits humans currently on Earth. What do you think will be the challenges of this interplanetary utopia?

Vibha: I am as uncertain about this absurd, utopian idea of migration and colonizing another planet as I am about science and its prediction of what future might hold. I find the idea of the space race an inequitable power play, which, even if successful, will be another temporary escape.

**Aditya:** As an active voice on issues around the environment, what slogans do we suggest for generations to come?

Vibha: Slow down else we (humans) will perish soon.



*Fragile*  
Glass Beads,Stainless Steel  
2020

Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi is a writer, and curator based between New Delhi, and New York. In the past decade, he has worked in research and curatorial projects with Park Avenue Armory, Asia Society, in New York and Devi Art Foundation, Raqs Media Collective, Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. His recent solo curated projects include *Missing Hue of the Rainbow and Dissent Library* (2019) at Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College / Hessel Museum of Art, New York, *In the Presence of Others* (2016), Korean Cultural Centre, New Delhi. Mopidevi was also a Curatorial Advisor for *When Artists Enter the Factories* exhibition at Brooklyn Army Terminal, New York (2019). Mopidevi's single and collaborative writing has appeared in *John Akomfrah: Signs of Empire*, New Museum, New York (2018), *Songs for Sabotage*, New Museum + Phaidon (New York / London, 2018), *Information: Documents of Contemporary Art*, MIT Press + Whitechapel Gallery (London, 2016), *Raqs Media Collective: Case Book* (Toronto, 2014), *INSERT2014 Publication* (Delhi, 2014), *An Autocorrected Journal* (Manila, 2014), among others. He is also a regular writer for many journals and publications, including Hong Kong-based OCULA.





Vibha Galhotra is a New Delhi based Indian contemporary visual artist who works with numerous artistic mediums, ranging from sculpture, photography, printmaking, video, installation to drawing, and text. The artist often utilizes found and performative objects to create multi-sensory pieces and installations. Her work dwells between belief and reality, public and personal, science and spirituality, and the construction or deconstruction of social systems around our environment in the age of Anthropocene.

Galhotra was an *Asian Cultural Council Fellow 2017* in the US, pursuing continual research on belief and reality to

intervene on the subject of Anthropocene. She studied art at Kala Bhavan Santiniketan, where she completed her Masters in 2001. A recent awardee of the *Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency* in 2016, Galhotra has been honored with numerous awards over the course of her artistic career including *Asia Arts Future - Asia Arts Game Changer Awards India 2019*; *YFLO Woman Achiever of the Year Award* in 2015; *Inlaks Foundation Fine Arts Award* in 2005-06; the National Scholarship from the Human Resource Department, Government of India in 2001-02; and the Artist Under 30 Award, Chandigarh State Lalit Kala Academy Award in 1998.

Galhotra's ongoing project *Who Owns the Water?* recently hosted a participative dinner gathering commissioned and hosted by the Asia Society (New York), November 2019. The project addresses the state of the shared resource of the Earth's water- its importance as a fundamental element, its pollution, scarcity, ownership, preservation, and role in the future course of the economy. The project will culminate in a film and will premiere at the Asia Society's inaugural Triennial of Asia, which will be held in New York in June 2020.

In addition, Galhotra was a visiting artist at the Vermont Studio, 2019. She is also in the process of preparing for her project *Black Cloud* in collaboration with the MdbK, Leipzig as part of Zero Waste curated by Hannah Beck-Mannagetta and Lena Fließbach.

In addition to her numerous solo exhibitions, Galhotra's work is prized in many public collections worldwide. Such collections include the KNMA (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art), India; The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, Miami; Casa Masaccio Arte Contemporanea, Italy; Gates Foundation, USA; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; Essl Museum, Austria; Devi Art Foundation, India; Casoria Contemporary Art Museum, Italy; Galerie Gut Gasteil (an open-air art museum), Austria; Saga Art College, Japan; Europas Parkas, Lithuania; 21c Museum, USA; ABC Gallery, India; Margulies Collection, USA; Pizzuti Collection, USA; Seattle Art Museum, USA; Haryana Cultural Affairs Department, India; and the Consulate General of the United States, India.

Vibha Galhotra: *Beyond the Blue*

February 21-March 21, 2020

Jack Shainman Gallery

524 W 24th Street, New York

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My studio staff: Manveer Singh, Garima, Shushma, Maya, Sangeeta, Sunita, Sandhya, Deepa, Geeta, Khushboo, Anita, Maya Ritesh Solanki, Rehan Saifi, Imran Saifi, Younis Khan.

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