

But our connection with the ineffable and Universal can only be touched on through a grounding through spatiotemporal context. Deploying practices of Kintsugi, with the clear and present undertone of wabi-sabi, one hears the whisper of memory of the leaf's past biological role as part of larger tree system, now captured by the naked act of preservation, highlighting the beauty of "passing", and the poetry of impermanence.

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<sup>1</sup>Appleyard, J.A. *Coleridge's philosophy of literature: the development of a concept of poetry 1791-1819*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1965, p 55.

<sup>2</sup>Over the past few decades, the paradigm of a centrally-planned "garden city" has been reframed to "city in a garden" with a corresponding loosening up of central planning to embrace input by private actors, corporate entities, and non-profits. Zhuang, Justin, "From Garden City to Gardening City", *Biblioasia*, Apr to Jun 2013, <<https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg/vol-9/issue-1/apr-jun-2013/garden-city-gardening/>>

<sup>3</sup>In certain Eastern philosophies, *time isn't spoken about "in abstracto"*. Instead, it is seen through the lens of the concrete physical object, "*based on concrete beginnings and endings of events and processes*" Cheng, Chung-ying. "On the Hierarchical Theory of Time: With Reference to Chinese Philosophy." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 1983, 10.4:, p. 357

<sup>4</sup>Each individually framed work also bears the initials of the street that the leaves were gathered from, along with the date and month.

<sup>5</sup>Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*, Harper & Row, 1985, pp 240-41

<sup>6</sup>In Chinese philosophy, the word of time actually "reflects people's observation of objective changes in external natural phenomena". Liu, Wenying. *Zhongguo Gudai Shikong Guannian de Chansheng he Fazhan (The Origin and Development of Ancient Chinese Conceptions of Time and Space)*. Renmin Chubun, Shanghai, 1980, p 2

<sup>7</sup>Or to put it another way, will we find a more personal understanding and felt-experience of time that escapes the 'domination of 'Cartesian dualism' ? Adam, Barbara, *Time & Social Theory*.1990, Polity, Cambridge, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup>Adam, Barbara, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards*, 1998, Routledge, London, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup>Adam, Barbara *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards*. 1998, Routledge, London, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*, Harper & Row, 1985, pp 240-41

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Appleyard (1959:55) APPLEYARD, J.A. *Coleridge's philosophy of literature: the development of a concept of poetry 1791-1819*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1965, p 55.

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### About the Writer

**Yen Phang** relishes in the biological, researching modern vulnerability. He's currently investigating 1) neurotic interfaces and the anxious object, 2) contemporary paradigms of health and strategies in aging.

### About the Artist

**Alpana Vij** is a Singapore based contemporary artist. Her practice employs painting, found objects, photography and video to explore themes of perception and what constitutes 'objective reality'. She is inspired by the Buddhist concept of śūnyatā or emptiness that focuses on the transitory and ephemeral nature and interconnectedness of all phenomena. She seeks to use her ritualized and meditative art making as a reflexive process to question and understand these teachings and to create immersive experiences that poetically engage the viewer in a dialogue.



### POSTCARDS FROM AN EXTRACTED ENCOUNTER IN TIME

One enters the glass doors of **Hearth** to be greeted by **A Remembered Place**, objects that encapsulate personal histories in cubic form, reminiscent of archaeological digs, excavations, geological investigations. Within their diminutive scale, the embedded layers speak to sedimentation over time. Clean, uniform, perpendicular edges point to a sense of careful extraction, to their own boundaries and finiteness, to units, metrics, and measurement. Object-making always includes a choice in framing, marking beginnings, and endings.

Such is necessarily our larger human experience as it is expressed through the temporal. This brings to mind Coleridge's own relationship with the natural world, where,

... the universe itself - what but an immense heap of little things? - I can contemplate nothing but parts, and parts are all little! - My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great - something one and indivisible - and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! - But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!<sup>1</sup>

The layers almost seem to sink with bodily materiality and bubble up with gelatinous texture. Landscape here stretches beyond the confines of matter itself, of the laws of gravity, nestled in a suggested framework of mapping.

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**A Remembered Place** acts as both lynchpin and confluence of processes of seeing and making, opening up questions of how one encounters artwork/installation. This series marks both the entrance and the center of the main gallery space, inviting a traversal of distinct yet linked sections that invite dispersed

pockets of meditation on the act of looking in the Present, and the varied qualities of one's subjective Being in Time.

It informs one's viewing of **And Still They Rise**. The viewer first experiences the work from afar, as if viewing a wall pattern, then is drawn in close to observe the modular elements. Is it documentation? Colour field? An archive? A loose tapestry? Note-taking?

The leaves curl and ripple off the white wall, but yet arranged in uniform orientation and regimented spacing. It reminds us of the conditions of Place, particularly in a city where greenery has been largely planned, zoned, and government-led.<sup>2</sup>

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**Rhythm of the earth 1,2 and 3** is placed in a strident manner - unapologetic, equanimous, and quietly present. The works in the series are reminiscent of mountain scenery, where Alpana Vij's decisive drips and slow flows of concrete lead us to imagine the process of painting and formation as a 'letting go' of the artist's gesture, with marks made more by gravity and weight.

Each piece is not a reaction to its sibling. They stand on equal footing beside each other not as trifurcation, but as doorway, as portal, privileging the emptiness in between. Space and walls are implicated within the visual movement of Objects-in-an-exhibition. It feels less like merely a display, and more of an opening, where image and surface are not destination but rather invitation. We don't just "look at" ...our mind wanders through.

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With **This here now 1 and 2** the grouping of these works into diptych format expands on the movement of extraction. The work tips either into a depiction of landscape, or sheer abstraction, depending on the viewer's approach. As an image, they hint at the organic shaping of river tributaries over time through the overlapping of different shades of concrete, or the slow weighted flow of magma and glaciers.

There is an aged, textured surface quality to these works that belie any convenient fall-back onto a minimalist reading. They bear a weighted presence, sensitivity to materiality and the haptic, an intuition of the emerging and transient nature of sensed phenomena.<sup>3</sup>

Within this steadfast presentation of earthly matter is the substrate of the primacy of time braided together with the lived strands of Vij's painting practice.

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The same action happens in the viewer's mind with the unbridled dialogue between the modular and the whole in the work **What do I see when I see a fallen leaf?**<sup>4</sup> Here, the preservation of each leaf through museum-quality framing points towards an enduring quality that comes with the intention to preserve.

The choice also to use vintage Japanese 24K thread from the 1920's brings another layer of the Past and historicity. Time thus finds its compass and reference from our standpoint as a viewer in the Present, but the act of framing is ever-shifting, always contingent upon our appreciation of any "thing" or phenomena.

The mind can imagine that shadow of a few leaves falling in the wilderness; the mind is a wonderful thing. But what about all the shadows of all the other leaves on all the other branches on all the other scrub oaks on all the other ridges of all the wilderness? If you could imagine those even for a moment, what good would it do? Infinite good.<sup>5</sup>

Each leaf is a moment, a pause. Yet, the choice of staining of the woodgrain of the frames pulls us back to see how each individual unit is always a step in a moment of a larger arc, which is in itself merely a fragment, sensed in real time, constantly changing<sup>6</sup>, finding a point of rest in the specificity of the conditions of objects in the moment, but also acknowledging the change embedded in a form that looks final, at least for now.

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Through the criss-crossing sightlines and dialogues between the main space of the gallery, one's grip upon meaning-making is opened up to alternative readings of time. Indeed, can one escape the understanding and experience of Newtonian conceptions of time and space? Isn't our bodily experience of the art encounter inevitability bound up with our traditional linear conceptions of the art visit, comprising entrance, perusal, and exit?<sup>7</sup>

Newtonian time ... with its sterile 'independence of time and space'<sup>8</sup>, where impersonal metrics 'excludes life ... knowledge ... any kind of human activity, emotion, interest and frailty'<sup>9</sup>. However, the show acts as a vessel for the simultaneity of different temporal readings within a single physical space and encounter, inviting a further shift into a sense of unknowing... a questioning of finitude, closure, genesis and finality.

Through Vij's ever-shifting scale and material use, one's experience of her works between each series becomes more conversational in nature, leaving room for continued negotiation and speculation. In Ursula Le Guin's novel *Always Coming Home*, she writes:

This thing is nothing to do with us. This thing is wilderness. The civilized human mind's relation to it is imprecise, fortuitous and full of risk.<sup>10</sup>

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We end with a singular mended leaf. Carefully stitched, with meticulous webbing. Is it embroidery? Repair? Decoration? An act of care? A woven talisman or dreamcatcher?

It is a bridge between what we think is happening outside in the world and what is just about to happen inside us, an invitation through entrancement to the fateful frontier between what makes us and what we think makes the world.

However behind the idea of nature-as-interface, there is a much deeper sense of a connection with that which has already been there, before human interference and central-planning:

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking [...] I seem rather to be seeking [...] a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists.<sup>11</sup>