

ĀVĀHANA - INVOCATION

A solo exhibition by Amita Makan

Oliewenhuis Art Museum, 5 October -14 November 2021

oliewen@nasmus.co.za



Above: *Agnicayana*. Opposite Page: *Snow Protea* (Detail)

“How do you make a compelling story out of an abstract idea like gradual climate change?”
- Steve Paulson, from an interview with Amitav Ghosh

The series Āvāhana–Invocation of 18 hand-embroidered works is a stitched manifestation and expression of my disquiet introspection to the growing scientific data of our disappearing Southern African landscape.

Philosopher and activist Vine Deloria observes that the Native American people have a greater regard and reverence for “space” in comparison to a Western conception that accords greater value to linear time. Deloria argues that, whilst “temporal narratives can defer ethical choices by reference to abstract future endpoints, spatial thinking allows no such evasion since it is insistently focused on

the world as it is.” The writer Amitav Ghosh, in reference to Priya Satia’s books, observes Native American oral narratives that are rooted in “particular places and the geographical and botanical features that are emplaced in them, accord a significant degree of agency to non-human elements of the landscape”.

Āvāhana–Invocation explores a reimagined landscape of the shifting Southern African geographical spaces and non-human elements in the relentless loss of the rare and ancient fynbos floral kingdom, perennial drought, dwindling butterfly populations and the steady demise of ancient baobab trees.

The deliberate use of the “synthetic” as a medium in the artworks express the paradox of an insatiable human desire for the fabrication and consumption of things that fuel climate change. The visible impact of climate







Above: *Āvāhana-Invocation II*.
 Opposite Page: *Āvāhana- Invocation I*



Water Mantra (Detail)

change is the voice of these non-human elements. Nature is an active agent, not to be deferred. Her voice is manifest through a deadly global pandemic, raging wildfires, flash floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, heat waves, droughts and famines.

These tensions are re-enacted in my embroideries. The precious vintage saris and beadwork, from ancient tradition and skill, are ceding to derivatives of the eternal plastic. Polyester, shiny sequins, synthetic coated beads, nylon and polystyrene packaging and synthetic threads within Perspex are metaphors of a consumerist culture premised on desire. Stitched Ubuntu and Buddhist philosophies, ancient Hindu mythologies and rituals, including Sanskrit mantras and rangoli – sacred geometric designs inspired by nature – invoke in each of us to be mindful, active agents to protect our precious space.

In an essay in the exhibition catalogue, art historian H el ene Tissier es writes, “Sometimes the decorative nature of Makan’s work suggests a stance that could seem ambiguous: the plastic is beautified and does not disturb the viewer with its presence. In this context, the imposing plexiglass frame, which serves as a sarcophagus, re-centres these questions, highlighting the illusory and destructive nature of human behaviour: do we really want to be able to gaze only upon replicas of these flowers or plants – imitations without ecosystemic value?”

Tissier es goes on to say, “the rendering of nature into art aims to question the... domination of nature which gradually leads to the disappearance of thousands of species, breaking the food chain, disrupting the regulation of the ecosystem.” References are also made to the philosopher F elix Guattari



Leucospermum lineare (Detail)

who “decries the work of politicians who ... have proven unequal to the task assigned to them... “He contends that only an ethical-political linkage between environment, social relations and human subjectivity will be able to answer these questions. For him, it is essential that individuals change their way of acting, their conditioning”... reconstruct their subjectivity, rework their social relationships and break free of their passivity.”

Oliewenhuis Art Museum is located at 16 Harry Smith Street, Bloemfontein and is open to the public from Monday to Friday between 08:00 and 17:00, and on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays between 09:00 and 16:00. Entrance is free and secure parking is available for visitors. A ramp at the entrance of the main entrance provides access for wheel chairs, while a lift provides access to the Permanent Collection display areas on the first floor.

For more information on Oliewenhuis Art Museum please contact the Museum at 051 011 0525 (ext 200) or oliewen@nasmus.co.za.

Stay up to date by following Oliewenhuis Art Museum on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for all upcoming exhibitions and events.

References:

Where is the “Great Climate Change Novel”, A conversation with Amitav Ghosh- Los Angeles Review of Books, Steve Paulson interviews Amitav Ghosh
<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/wheres-the-great-climate-change-novel-a-conversation-with-amitav-ghosh/>

Amitav Ghosh on Priya Satia’s books : ‘History has given us tools for upending dominant narratives’
<https://scroll.in/article/998495/amitav-ghosh-on-priya-satias-books-history-has-given-us-tools-for-upending-dominant-narratives>

Tissière, Hélène : “Amita Makan: Art of Thread (knotting/unknotting) and ecology” in *Āvāhana-Invocation* exhibition catalogue, 2021