

The calm female voice of a machine describes a daydream in which she walks into a lake slowly submerging. Her head is left above water. She moves -glides- across the water, head above and body submerged below. The head above water is conscious. Here we are presented with a disembodied figure. Below, a body moves through water and we enter a dream space soaked with the possibilities of incarnation.

Rao's limb-like mangrove fragments are objects arranged in the space. Periodically they shift into new constellations and clusters. Rao's process of making is slow and meditative. Each object is left unfired, drawn over in ink and burnished to create a smooth, finished object that belies its origins, suggesting potential and possibility through delicate fragmentation. A risky love is found in what is rendered vulnerable, through a making that is tender and painstaking. Water would bring disintegration to these clay objects. A nascent materiality emerges and is suspended. It veers towards disintegration and even dissolution, yet remains intact just enough to mark space and boundary.

A lake is a body of water that feels manageable in relation to the individual. There is a transpersonal aspect of a lake that feels relatable, compared to coastal sea waters where the mangrove plant dwells. Lakes are fertility and transition. A lake is a mirror, a source of reflection and opportunity for change. The mangrove plant comes from the sea, symbolically touching on the collective. Historically the sea is life, formless, stable and unchanged. However the sea water in which the mangrove plant grows is full of salt. Salt renders water undrinkable. It contains a toxicity that can sicken and dehydrate, even kill.

The objects suggest fragments of the mangrove plant and draw from Rao's research into its rich species. The mangrove plant grows in tropical climates and always in community. Its roots intertwine to create safe havens for many species of fish and other sea creatures. A kind of plant-mammal, the mangrove holds space for others by marking boundaries in land and sea while storing carbon within its roots and branches. Its propagules migrate great distances before settling to create new roots which anchor between land and sea to create an innate liminality.

An individual figure moves through through a lake disembodied as fragments of solid mass beckon, bones strewn on an ocean's floor. Body parts are isolated in slow, adaptive movements. Mirroring creates space to breathe, as Rao inhabits the ethos of the object.

The mangrove thrives in the in-between of land and sea. Its uncanny ability to breathe salt water can be seen as an activation within the space of the liminal. Salt is strategically excreted through the plant's waxy leaves not unlike the ink and polish of Rao's objects, and the materiality of her garments.

One can think of breathing saltwater as facing into what is toxic in both external and internal realms. It is in this way that what is toxic may metabolize and transform: an elusive alchemy.

Here the alchemical vessel is the home, a 498 square foot house built in 1913. This house is *inhabited* by Rao with a desire and an awakening of the Mother. Rao's framework of porous boundaries and awkward communication attempts to make space with each addition of movement. A quaternity is found in the vertical and horizontal, in an imagined body slowly sinking and a real body inching along the floor. Even more so, one begins to *feel*.

*Written by Yamini Nayar in response to work by Rujuta Rao.*