

Weird and wonderful

British artist Anj Smith brings her world of dark landscapes and strange creatures to Mumbai in her debut exhibition, finds **Zeenat Nagree**.

British artist Anj Smith's paintings are set in dark, forbidding landscapes and are often peopled by eerie creatures. On her small canvases, delicate brushstrokes and thick impasto come together to create fantastical images that slip between portraiture, still-life and landscape painting. Smith pays great attention to detail, not only in the weird and wonderful sartorial choices of her protagonists but also in the unusual beasts and birds that find their way into her paintings. Smith makes her India debut this fortnight at Galerie Isa in a solo exhibition titled *Woods Without Pathways*. The 34-year-old artist, who has mainly shown her work in the United Kingdom and in the United States, tells *Time Out* about the people and places she paints.



Artful pose Anj Smith's *Satyricon*

How would you describe the landscapes in your paintings?

The events happening in my paintings could be taking place anywhere, it's important to me that the environments are never specifically located, for that very reason. The landscapes often function more like portraiture, even if the figure is absent – portraits of a current way of thinking or of certain anxieties. They can be a way of visualising an uncanny sense of threat.

Why do you lean towards painting the female figure? Do you see any of the works as self-portraits?

Everything an artist makes is a self-portrait in a way. But no, I don't intend my work to be seen as a literal self-portrait. Women do feature but often the figures exist between genders. A close friend who had an extremely difficult time changing gender has become a sort of muse. Previous paintings, like *R* (2010) and *The Combattant* (2010), were the first to directly reference his experiences. His struggle to identify with either gender after disastrous post-surgery depression left a vivid impression on me. I've always

been interested in [American philosopher] Judith Butler's update of 70s feminism, towards ideas of the self that aren't bound by binary gender considerations. My friend's experience made me think further about existing in a state between or beyond gender, as he was forced to during his years of surgery. Our identities are now in a state of flux, even gender has slipped its physical moorings. This sense of instability and shifting ground permeates the way I think about making my paintings.

Why do you prefer to keep your paintings small?

In the past, my smallest paintings have been about the size of a postcard, though they're actually getting larger these days. I like the intensity of small work, a painting doesn't have to be the size of a billboard to hold a wall. I have also always responded to the intimacy of a small work, the way it demands the viewer to physically bend to look into it, it is a different experience to casually pacing by. It's possible to view my work in layers, in this way, depending on proximity. The careful viewer who

approaches the work up close and gives time to the experience will be rewarded by events that are invisible from a distance.

You paint the clothing of your subjects in minute detail.

It's not just clothing, other parts are painted with great attention too, and within a single work, there are usually different types of painting. The detail is not about being precise and definitely has nothing to do with technique. It's about reflecting certain ideas surrounding obsession and hysteria. Regarding the clothing specifically, when I'm deliberately quoting something, I used to only paint from life, prints and fabrics from a particular fashion season, for example. Then I discovered that the memory of a jacket had changed slightly in the painting from the actual object and I liked that. After all, don't we wear clothes as ideas and concepts that aren't restricted by the actual physical reality of the clothes?

Woods Without Pathways opens at Galerie Isa on **Thur Sep 6**.

Exhibitions

How to use this section

Galleries and other venues are listed by geographical area. Listings relating to photography, architecture and design are at the end of the section. Exhibition listings also include information on related activities. Events comprise student shows, lectures, performances and screenings. Admission for all art venues is free unless otherwise stated. Venues are shut on public holidays and Sundays, unless otherwise stated.

🚉 denotes the nearest train station.

🚌 denotes the name of the nearest bus stop.

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail (Time Out, Essar House, PO Box 7964, 11 KK Marg, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai 400 034), email (listings@timeoutmumbai.net) or fax (6660-1112). Include details of event, dates, timings, address of venue, nearest train station and bus stop, telephone number and any entry fee. *Time Out* is a fortnightly publication, appearing on the stands every other Thursday. **Deadline for information is ten days before publication.** Listings are free, but inclusion cannot be guaranteed due to limited space.

Nariman Point to Colaba

Art Musings

Group Show A selection of works from the gallery's collection by Shibu Natesan, Sudarshan Shetty, Bose Krishnamachari, Gopikrishna and Raghava KK. Ongoing. *1 Admiralty Building, opposite Dunne's Institute, Colaba Cross Lane, Colaba (2216-3339).* 🚉 Churchgate (WR), CST (CR Main & Harbour). 🚌 Sassoon Dock. Daily 10am-7pm.

Chatterjee & Lal

five The gallery celebrates its fifth anniversary with a group exhibition by artists such as Ashish Avikunthak and Rashid Rana. Ongoing. *Kamal Mansion, First Floor, Arthur Bunder Road, Colaba (2202-3787).* 🚉 Churchgate (WR), CST (CR Main & Harbour). 🚌 Radio Club. Tue-Sat 11am-7pm.

Chemould Prescott Road

EDITOR'S PICK **Of bodies, armour and cages** Shakuntala Kulkarni responds to the assaults of city life with body armour made of cane. Photo and video documentation of Kulkarni's performance is displayed along with the armour. Ongoing. *Queens Mansion, Ghanashyam Talwar Marg, Fort (2200-0212).* 🚉 Churchgate (WR), CST (CR Main & Harbour). 🚌 Khadi Bhandar. Tue-Sat 11am-7pm.