

Époque Hannam Approved | Soumya Netrabile
October 12, 2023



The Embankment, 2023, Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, 30 x 40 in.

Gana Art presents a solo exhibition "Soft Fascination" by Indian-born artist Soumya Netrabile (b. 1966), based in Chicago, USA. Netrabile draws inspiration from everyday scenes and memories encountered during her daily walks in the forest to depict the inner landscapes. A graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she has been actively exhibiting, recently having solo exhibitions at venues like Anat Ebgi (Los Angeles), Pt.2 Gallery (Oakland), Andrew Rafacz (Chicago), and The Journal (New York).

Soumya Netrabile's work doesn't aim to construct precise scenes like realism but rather showcases the process of finding the essence of nature through colors and forms from her memories. As the artist herself states, "Most of my plant forms are fictitious. Like landscapes, through plants, I can continue to accumulate experiences of painting and color, and from here, I can further explore the invisible threads that connect my emotions to the medium and form." Thus, she has consistently created flat artworks that seem to capture sensory experiences of specific moments within the landscape rather than realistic representations. She emphasizes the vitality of nature through the bright and intense colors of various plant forms. These elements repeat in her work, creating a rhythm and infusing a cheerful feeling. The tangled landscapes of various plants visualize a sensory experience akin to the refreshing feeling of the wind on one's face when passing through a dense forest, not a manicured garden.



Soumya Netrabile «Soft Fascination»

Her work, seemingly positioned between abstraction and classical landscape painting, derives from a deep immersion in nature. As can be seen in her routine of daily forest walks followed by studio work, she fills the canvas based on what she sees and feels daily. In a manner similar to how a poet constructs rhythm and rhyme to bind a poem, for her, a painting is a process of unraveling delicate fragments of memory and completing a poetic imagination. The ability to express the simultaneity of all the elements in the forest she experienced is grounded in her long-standing familiarity with the subject, nature. She has mentioned her desire to share her immersive experiences, sitting in a concentrated space, observing the forest's smallest elements, much like one of her favorite activities, kneeling and searching for insects and small creatures along winding forest paths. Her art focuses on things that can seem utterly ordinary without careful observation, like footprints from someone who walked through the forest, dead insects in a meadow, fallen ripe apples swaying in the wind, and small insects perched on leaves. This level of immersion mirrors the poet's attitude of responding to the subtle and becoming deeply absorbed in understanding the world through contemplative observation. In this way, nature becomes both the poetic language the artist seeks to manifest and the metaphor for her worldview.

The title of this exhibition, "Soft Fascination," refers to a phrase found in an article Soumya Netrabile recently read, "How to Embrace Doing Nothing." In the article, the author recommends activities that allow mental relaxation during moments of rest, such as strolling in nature or watching the waves. Psychologists at the University of Michigan define these activities as "soft fascination." In contrast, "Hard Fascination" includes activities like watching television or using smartphones, which are considered to disperse attention and actually exclude rest. In contrast to "Hard Fascination," Soumya Netrabile's work emphasizes the connection between nature and the mind, describing the soft fascination she experiences in the forest.



Soumya Netrabile 《Soft Fascination》

Recently, Soumya Netrabile has been reflecting her belief in the connection between nature and humanity by placing human figures in her landscape paintings that depict the contemplative atmosphere of the forest. For instance, in the artwork "Mother and Child" (2023) featured in this exhibition, you can find the figures of a woman and a man at the top, and the title suggests a mother-child relationship. Just as the vague representation of the mother's figure in the background, the plant forms, drawn without distinct shapes, overlap ambiguously with no clear boundary between background and subject. Furthermore, the forms of the figures, drawn in shades of pumpkin and green, harmonize with the deep pinks and reds of the plant forms, which are closer to flesh tones. This color arrangement symbolically represents the complex interplay between nature and humanity, bridging the gap between them. This goes beyond reproducing Netrabile's memories of walking through the forest as an observer and serves as evidence of her exploration of the relationship between humans and nature.



Mother and Child, 2023, Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, 30 x 40 in.