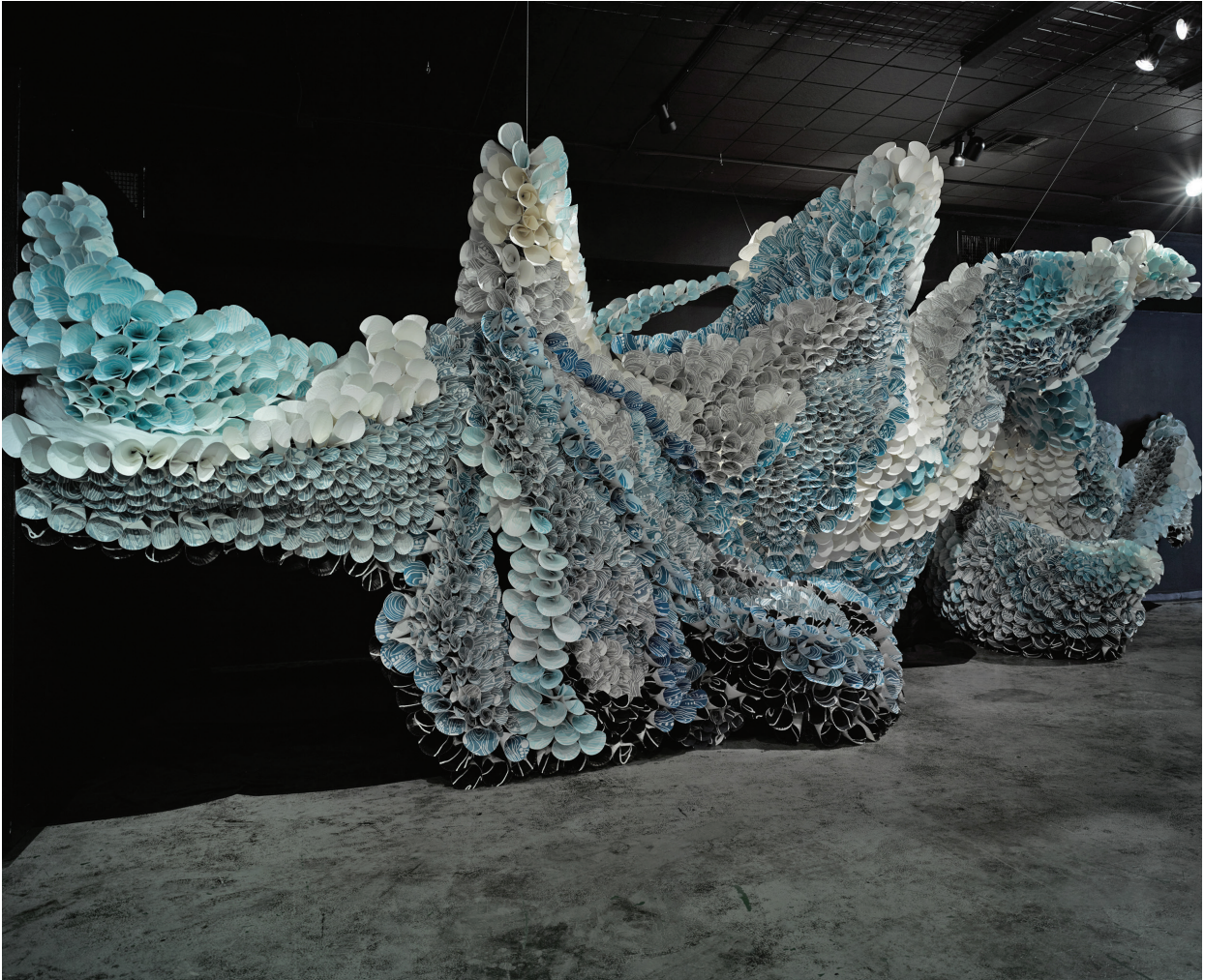


ABHIDNYA GHUGE

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*PAPER PLATE PERSPICACITY*



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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SEPTEMBER 26 - NOVEMBER 12, 2015

AUSTIN, TEXAS

# ABHIDNYA GHUGE

## PAPER PLATE PERSPICACITY

Beauty. Time. Mortality. Material. Immateriality. Insight. Process. Transformation. Transcendence. Wonder. All of these thoughts run through my head as I scan Abhidnya Ghuge's installation, *Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace* and four smaller pieces, *Breath Beneath Water; Burning Water; Bronchiolar Truth; Vibrations of Dream*. Her work envelops the viewer. At once, I see too much and I will myself to focus. Yet the act of *experiencing* Ghuge's work does not allow something so uncomplicated.

Instead I ask a single question: What can nearly 7,500 paper plates do? In Ghuge's hands, the plates shrewdly transform the environment, and in doing this, encourage the viewer's meditation on transience.

The monumental site-specific installation, *Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace* sits on the floor of the gallery as it undulates across the floor and reaches toward the ceiling. The colors, including blue, blue-grey, black, and white are featured on the outside of the structure; inside, the colors include green, yellow, blue, and white. The architectonic installation becomes an interactive environment in which the interplay of light and space is infinite as the viewer is beckoned into and sits inside a cave that is composed of thousands of paper plates. Meanwhile, Ghuge's other smaller works are confined—*limited*—to the wall and feature a variety of colors, including blue, red, yellow, white and black.

The works differ in the ways in which the plates are installed in each piece: in *Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace*, the paper plates are placed, not glued, in wire mesh. At once, they are independent forms that also depend on each other. In three of the art works on the wall,

*Breath Beneath Water; Burning Water; Bronchiolar Truth*, the plates are cut into smaller sizes and attached together to create organic forms that flow across the composition. *Vibrations of a Dream* features both cut plates and paper plate forms similar to the larger installation. Individually each of the four works is a separate universe that the viewer can explore endlessly.

Comprised of printed paper plates, the transformative aspect of the large-scale *Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace* is apparent. It takes time to see and to experience the installation. In order to capture the meaning, the essence of the work, the viewer must understand its temporal aspects, and experience the environment microscopically and macroscopically. Ghuge's work, a temporary space for meditation

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*"I once was what you  
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and escape, must be discovered. At once the unassuming plates dematerialize, and together they are transformed into something meaningful. These objects create an ethereal space that previously existed only in the mind of Ghuge—and the sheer quantity of the plates creates a beautiful sublimity that envelops the viewer.

Taken individually, the humble quality of the object asserts itself and reveals the significance and subject of this new environment. Not a traditional medium for sculpture, the plate, in its quotidian context, is unremarkable and disposable. In this way, it is a symbol of transience and a reminder of death. This flimsy, vulnerable object is an icon of mortality, a 21st-century *memento mori* intended

to remind us all of the fate that we cannot escape. Like Masaccio's skeleton, lying on a sarcophagus at the base of his innovative and poignant 15th-century *Trinity* fresco in S. Maria Novella in Florence, above which an inscription eerily admonishes, "I once was what you are now, and what I am you also will be," Ghuge's plates force the viewer to reflect on the impermanence and futility of earthly pursuits. The plates belong to a long tradition of art works that encourage viewers to meditate on the brevity of life.

In a way both rooted in art historical tradition, but entirely her own, Ghuge shows the viewer the power of one small object and its ability to transform. What once was familiar becomes exceptional and unexpected. Ghuge creates a new world, but a perceptible one. She uses the paradox of the medium to exhibit insight into things of great importance: ultimately the plates transmute individually and as an environment into something precious and meaningful.

In fact, the art historical context for Ghuge's work is diverse. Beyond the tradition of *memento mori*, most apparent is the debt that Ghuge's work owes to contemporary American artist Tara Donovan (b. 1968). Donovan describes her installations as "site responsive," since her art work responds to and fills the environment for which they are created. Further the materials that she uses in her installations are often humble objects themselves, such as drinking straws and Styrofoam cups. Donovan crafts these unnatural objects into forms that recall nature.

The similarities to Ghuge's work—in both everyday materials and undulating, monumental installations—can be easily apprehended. Yet Ghuge's work is not as austere as Donovan's. Further, the concepts



behind and the subjects of Ghuge's work are drawn from more personal experiences. In this way, Ghuge's work calls to mind minimalist sculptors like Eva Hesse (1936-1970). Like Miriam Schapiro (1923-2015), Ghuge blurs the line between art and craft. Her meticulously printed plates emphasize pattern and call attention to the significance of the decorative arts. The installation is rooted in handicraft.

Beyond the influence and inspiration of contemporary artists, though, Ghuge's work is specifically inspired by Indian patterns and by nature. In fact, Ghuge's work connects two cultures. She incorporates the visual culture and a past lived in Mumbai with the sensibilities born from a life made in East Texas.

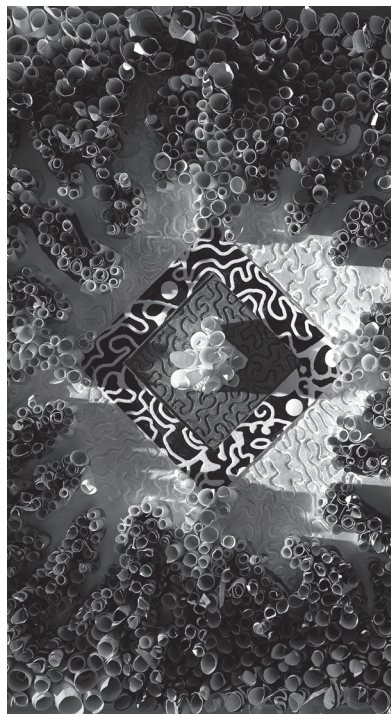
In Ghuge's previous work, henna patterns and her Indian heritage inspired the woodblock designs, and there is some evidence of this influence here. Yet the repetitive patterns on the plates have since evolved into more nuanced shapes. The topographical forms on display in *Unwrapped Saint*, *Percolated Peace* and all four of the wall pieces are more topographical and the organic designs are similar to human microscopic pathological imagery. Once again Ghuge connects her work to the human experience, the natural world, and temporality.

In fact, beyond the sheer number of plates, it is the act of creation, the printing on the objects themselves that contributes to their preciousness. The laborious process and production of thousands of plates—each one printed and then placed in Ghuge's new universe—may not be apparent on an initial viewing, but must be recognized to appreciate the installation fully. Further the printing of the plates enables the artist to revisit memories as she creates new ones for herself and for the viewer. The blocks of birchwood on display at this exhibition allow the

viewer to understand the process. Ghuge includes two woodblocks that she created and used to print her paper plates—while one woodblock was used for the designs in this installation, the other features henna designs from her earlier work. The presence of the woodblocks offers a window into the artist's arduous practice, which is an investigation into material and process.

What can Abhidnya Ghuge's nearly 7,500 paper plates do? These objects, taken individually and together, can reflect, represent, transcend, and transform our world; in doing this, *Unwrapped Saint*, *Percolated Peace* as well as *Breath Beneath Water*; *Burning Water*; *Bronchiolar Truth*; *Vibrations of Dream* raise questions about material and process, transience and culture, preciousness and mutability.

-Dr. Jill Blondin | Richmond, Virginia



*Bronchiolar Truth*, 2015, carved birch wood; woodblock monoprint on paper plates, paint, 24" x 24" x 4"

## MEDITATIONS ON NATURE

Abhidnya Ghuge wants you to think about time. The earth has been in existence for billions of years. Yet human time moves quickly. One life can be over in the blink of an eye. What do we do with our time on this earth? How do we add value to our life, and to others' lives?

Ghuce is a paper artist whose large installations act as meditations on time and space. She fills the gallery with sprawling three-dimensional sculptures that suggest natural forms—sponges, star fish, or other sea creatures whose extenuated bodies undulate gracefully with the pulsing flow of water, or colonies of coral, anchored to the ocean floor yet ever-so-slowly growing, reaching up toward the light. Or perhaps they suggest a honey-comb, or colonies of the microscopic cells that make up all living things. Or maybe her works suggest slow-moving environmental forces. *Unwrapped Saint*, *Percolated Peace* was inspired by a glacier, a dense accumulation of ice that flows, forms, and deforms over years, even centuries.

Yet the denseness and power of a glacier is in stark contrast to the delicate materials that make up this artwork. *Unwrapped Saint*, *Percolated Peace*, like other Ghuge works, is created with thousands of paper plates, each one hand-printed.

Ghuce begins with a hand-cut woodblock that she carves herself. She inks the woodblock, layers it with paper plates, and runs them through a printing press, so that each plate is both printed and embossed. Thousands of plates of different colors, textures, and patterns become the palette for her three-dimensional "paintings."

The artwork is beautiful to look at. The subtle colors, ranging from black at the bottom—anchoring the piece to the floor,

giving a visual weight to the sculpture—to lighter colors at the top, suggest a sense of calmness, restfulness, almost as if one is gazing into an aquarium to watch pulsing jellyfish or sponges.

The form contains a hollow cave in the center; a small chair invites you to come in and sit. Once inside, you are enveloped and transported momentarily to another place and time. Perhaps you are sitting in a glacial crevasse or a shell-encrusted grotto. In nature, grottos are natural caves that flood at high tide, but this effect has been replicated since ancient times by garden designers who want to create contemplative and devotional spaces. Time stops and the world outside is left behind.

The artwork is not just three-dimensional, the surface itself is three-dimensional due to the cone-shaped, rolled paper plates, and below that, each flat surface of the plate is actually textured with thick applications of ink. The thinness of the paper allows the light to come through, and in this space you can really see the details of the individual paper plates, the colors of the ink, the patterns, and the textures. Some of the plates are painted with designs that resemble peacock feathers, or perhaps papyrus leaves; others suggest the veining of leaves or perhaps strands of sea grass. Even the white plates are embossed with patterns, curlicue shapes reminiscent of shells. Yet the light also emphasizes the fluted edges of the paper plates, insisting upon the plates' essence as paper plates, not fine art material. Colors and shapes change as you walk around the sculpture.

In creating these large installations that transform the space of the gallery, Ghuge wants to transport viewers into another space, if just for a moment, to contemplate their own place in the universe.

The artwork is dedicated to a close friend's teenage son, Sidharth, who died in a freak

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*It's a way to draw us into another way of thinking about life, and our role on this earth.*

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accident back in her native India. His life was taken from him at an early age, before he reached adulthood, prompting her to contemplate the role of each individual on this earth.

Perspicacity is not a commonly used word these days, but it means acuteness of vision or discernment. Here, the simple paper plate is more than itself, more than just a common, mundane implement of the contemporary household. It's a way to draw us into another way of thinking about life, and our role on this earth. We are the paper plate—disposable, living only briefly on this earth—but each plate is unique and individual.

This work is made of thousands of paper plates, of different colors and textures. Assembled together, they suggest a colony of living creatures. Or, taking Ghuge's metaphor further, the groupings of plates suggest the possibilities of human communities, or the collaborative process, in which the whole is greater than any one of its parts and any one individual can achieve more by working with others. It suggests the potential for change through collaborative efforts.

In this show, Ghuge's large glacier is accompanied by several smaller works, which reveal her artistic process. The inclusion of the wood blocks and the woodblock/paper plate works aims to give viewers a fuller picture of her artistic practice as well as the chain of creativity leading up to the final installation piece. These works more directly reveal the

hand-made process of the piece and the uniqueness of every paper plate. In these smaller works, we get a clearer picture of the themes that inform her artwork. Ghuge has lived in Texas for over two decades, but draws her inspiration from her childhood in India. In the two blocks on display, the fine carving suggests creeping vines replete with curling tendrils, blossoms, and leaves.

These patterns relate to other three-dimensional works she has created, that similarly suggest her meditation on natural forms, especially birth and growth: seed pods, cocoons, bubbles, blossoms, vines. These forms suggest the mutability of life, the ability to change and transform from one thing to another, both physically and spiritually. Her artworks themselves also suggest mutability, since the shapes seem to change and transform as one views them from different angles. Ghuge was trained as a physician, so it's not a surprise that her thoughts turn to living creatures, geological time, the building blocks of the human body, environmental forces, the systems of nature of which each individual is only one small part.

In this digital age, we don't often stop to ponder the origins of life or the inter-connectedness of living systems. We want our information to come at us quickly. We consume it, we throw it away, we move onto the next thing. Unlike huge living colonies of coral, for example, which take thousands of years to form, we want rapid growth, instant gratification. *Paper Plate Perspicacity* reminds us to slow down and make those connections with nature and with other living beings, and to make the most of our time here on this planet, because time is bigger than us.

-Dr. Margaret Stentz | Austin, Texas





*Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace, 2015, wood block mono printed paper plates, fabric, on wire, 10' x 26' x 12'*

Cover: *Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace, 2015, wood block mono printed paper plates, fabric, on wire, 10' x 26' x 12'*





*Unwrapped Saint, Percolated Peace, 2015, wood block mono printed paper plates, fabric, on wire, 10' x 26' x 12'*

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 36th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,885 artists in 298 visual art exhibitions, 123 music, dance and theater events, 15 film festivals, 26 literary readings and 555 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from

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