

*Visual and performing artist,
Neha Kudchadkar is happy
to juggle her various roles
as long as they contribute to
personal growth*

*The
making of
an artist*



Something polis

What drew you to ceramics?

NK: I used to practice Ikebana in school, and so I was always surrounded by beautiful ceramic pots. From the beginning the flower arrangements I made were not just about flowers, but about how the flowers, the vessel they were arranged in, and the room around it were related to each other and to me. Enrolling into a ceramics degree program was a deliberate, thought out decision. I wanted to make my own pots. In the end I never made any! I became interested in other possibilities of the medium. I consider myself a ceramicist. I understand the material. It suits my temperament. I am interested in its physicality, its fragility, it's immediacy. I am also interested in the social, political, technical, and geological history of the material. Even though I work in various media, I think through clay.

How has a formal art education impacted your career?

NK: My formal education in ceramics has been critical to the way I make and to the way I teach today. Both, the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, and the Royal College of Art, London were major catalysts for growth at different points of time in my career. The RCA, where I majored in ceramics and glass, helped broaden my understanding and vision of what a clay-based practice could be. My time there completely revolutionized my practice. But, it was the invaluable, rigorous, course at Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry that set the discipline it takes to build a life as a ceramicist. It also became the root of my friendships and allyships within the Indian ceramics community.

CERAMICS

Describe your style.

NK: I do not have a fixed style. My approach varies from project to project; it is determined by the questions I have posed to myself at that time. In making the work, I am making a move towards a resolution, and the result is entirely the product of my inquiry. To me the process of making is as critical, if not more critical, than the final product. The process and the research I undertake drives the 'style' and also determines the medium.

For instance, *home/land* is a series of three photographs made in Israel and the West Bank, that document the performance of rooting myself in a 'foreign' land. The sites at which these images were made are of tremendous importance to the work, loaded with meaning. They were made quickly, and without permission in a private garden with the backdrop of sabra fencing in Jerusalem, in Kiryat Arba, a Jewish settlement in the West Bank, and at the separation wall in Hizma, a suburb of Jerusalem broken by the wall.

In *Handjob*, which is a tool-kit for loving, each 'digital' tool was modelled as a prosthetic directly on my finger, in response to a particular incident from that day. A mold was then made from it, and it was slip-cast to make the five editions of the tool-kit. The tools serve various real and fictitious functions. They can be used to caress, nurture, groom, and love, and come with a complete instruction manual. Because it is made on my body, it does not quite fit anyone else. But this misfit is interesting to me.

What inspires you?

NK: I am extremely aware of my social, emotional, political, environmental surroundings, and my work stems from that awareness - from my position as actor, observer or acted upon, and the questions



Above & below: *Handjob* (2018)





home/land

that I constantly ask of myself and of my immediate environment. It is important for me that the process of making is a process of learning and personal growth. I draw inspiration from words, images, body language and gesture.

What goes into a solo show?

NK: My last two solo exhibitions were curated by Marie Du'Pasquier, with whom I have been collaborating for close to two years now. For *Pinch Your thumb and Three Fingers (2018)*, I had a skeletal structure for *Handjob* when Marie proposed the collaboration for the Mumbai Art Room. There was a short, intense period of making and resolving the final working time for the show. In preparation for *All That is in This Thing (2019)* I had the rare luxury of spending time in residence at the CAN, Centre de'art Centre d'art Neuchâtel, conceptualizing what

I wanted to make for the show later in the year. I spent a month reading, researching matter, and the nature of information one holds in the body, and began extracting information from my body in various media. Once I was back in my studio in Mumbai I played with and manipulated this information to make the series of work titled *Molt*, which was shown at Display in Berlin. *Molt* is an exoskeleton of sorts - removed from my body but not without it.

Marie and I have also been thinking of the exhibition space as a 'contact zone' and have been looking at engaging with other artists and practitioners within the context of the show. And so, for both of these shows, we invited other voices and presences to come into the gallery space and activate it with performances, workshops, conversations and artist talks.



1

How do you balance creativity with the commercial side of it?

NK: Not very successfully! Most of the shows that I have participated in over the last few years have been non-commercial. This has afforded me the space to experiment and develop my work without the pressure of having to make a sale, which is extremely liberating. On the other hand, it is not the most sustainable way to work. I have been supporting my art-making with occasional teaching jobs. I have also won a few awards over the years that sustained my work and helped me travel and learn. It will be good and ideal to reach a point where my work becomes collectable, but I am prepared to grit my teeth and ride it out for a few more years before I have to change course.

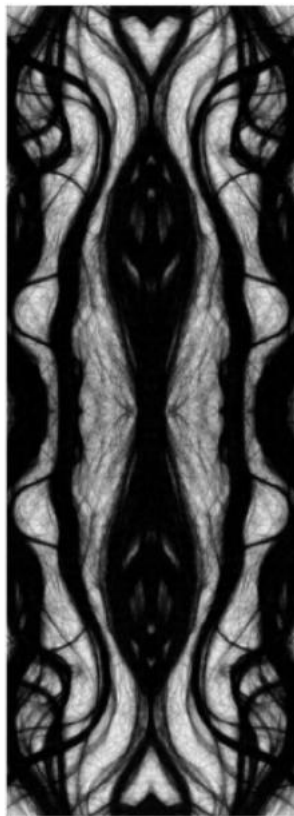
How do you juggle your various roles - ceramicist, dancer, teacher, and collaborator?

NK: All the various roles I am committed to inform each other and give greater depth to my practice. Being interdisciplinary is vital to my way of thinking and making work.

Over the years, and with some difficulty, I have found a way for these roles to flow into each other. I am learning to be content if, in everything that have done I have given my best and most honest contribution in the particular circumstances. One thing that I am extremely grateful for is a super strong support system. At both *beej* and the Indian Ceramics Triennale, I work with people who are supportive of my multi tasking. It can get extremely messy, stressful and overwhelming at times, but I am too greedy. I still need to and want to do all this, this way!



2



3

1, 2, 3. *Molt* (2019)
4. *Thought Casts*, Group of 7

Tell us something about *beej*.

NK: A performing arts collective in Mumbai, *beej* was founded by my friends and colleagues, Sanjukta Wagh and Pranali Kakade, and myself. We are trained Kathak dancers and interested in how we can explore the form as a medium of expression, grounded within the context of today; a language to tell stories relevant to us. We work in the spirit of mutual growth and collaboration. As a collective, *beej* addresses the three strands of process, performance and pedagogy. The *beej* garage works towards initiating conversation and critical discourse around the dance making process and dance culture. Our productions involve dance and theater work that is not bound by the traditional repertoire, and informed by contemporary context. The *beej* school of Kathak explores various interdisciplinary tools and methodologies to generate a holistic approach to classical dance education.

What has teaching others taught you?

NK: Teaching can be an extremely rewarding experience. I do not teach full-time, but I do enjoy the short projects I undertake with students from different disciplines. My greatest learning has been to understand and accept where each person is in their personal journey and try to move forward from there. Teaching has also taught me to question and critique constructively, a skill that I often use on myself when I step back and reflect on projects.

What's next?

NK: I hope that this is the year in which I finish building my studio, which is a couple of hours outside Mumbai. It will be good to have a generous, quiet space to make work and think.

nehakudchadkar@gmail.com



4