

MAPPING MEMORY  
 MADHVI SUBRAHMANIAN  
 GALLERY CHEMOULD, MUMBAI, INDIA



Untitled: from the series *Mappa Mundi*, 2017  
 Earthenware, Clay slip and Gold dust, 18 x 35 inches

Forest, 2017  
 Collaboration with the audience, Stoneware, Glaze and Unfired Clay  
 6 trees - 8 to 66 inches height - small to large



Madhvi Subrahmanian creates a tactile experience in her recent solo show *Mapping Memory* at Gallery Chemould in Mumbai, where questions about the disconnect of contemporary times with its environment are brought forth. Clay, her chosen material of self-expression, has led the way in her journey. For her the material encompasses the entire organic world and encapsulates within itself all of human history. Simultaneously fragile and strong, it echoes the dynamism of both nature and the human spirit. As Madhvi weaves her story, of journeys and geographies, of memories past and present, between cities, countries, home and studio, she invites her viewers to contemplate on their own memories of the earth – the substance that we are all made of and that we all return to.

The exhibition comprised of eleven installations that flowed from one to the other providing a conceptual and sensory experience that was both interactive and immersive. At the onset of the exhibition was the installation *Forest* - a collection of trees/cities that sets the stage for the show. At the core of the show lies the dialogue between urbanisation and nature. The tall tree-like forms with the tiny houses perched high up in space are playful and bring to mind the cities described in the book *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. The audience was invited to engage with the installation making and adding trees to the installation and contemplating their own personal connection with city and nature. This provided a platform to reconnect with a primal collective memory of mark making and collaborative energy. In the wall text of the exhibition, culture theorist, art

critic, an  
 installatio  
 talk of c  
 trees. En  
 participat  
 trees in t  
 and belo  
 ground c  
 effect an

The galle  
 ft. and i  
 discs for  
 across 1  
 porcelain  
 as the ut  
 village. V  
 in India,  
 precious  
 they for  
 usually f

Rolling P  
 Porcelain  
 Vitre si  
 2 sets |

Through  
 recessed  
 journey  
 and per  
 spaces  
 in her v  
 16th ce  
 they w  
 from gr  
 Mumbai  
 glimme  
 like riv  
 kintsug  
 than it  
 transfo  
 memor  
 now se



Being an urban artist Madhvi draws on analogies between the vertical life of cities and physical form of trees, expressed in the work *In the Shadows of the Trees*. The light sculpture made up of small tree like buildings set on a wall shelf casting long shadows in the shape of trees. The installation alludes to trees as collateral damage of expanding urbanization; where the memory of their very existence before every new road or building comes up recedes from our collective consciousness into shadows.

Embedded within any change is the inevitable expansion expressed in Madhvi's spiral installation called *Growth*. Made up of over 700 tiny cones the hypnotic movement of the spiral captures ones attention. Distance markers throughout the advent of time, be they milestones from yesteryears or plastic cones to direct vehicular traffic today, are at the core of this work. Traversing through movement of growth, the form of the spiral dots the moment of memory through time. Juxtaposing the artist's method of building forms in clay and the metaphorical idea of eternal change and growth through dynamic energy.



*Growth*, 2017  
Stoneware and Clay Slip, 60 inches diameter

Madhvi Subrahmanian was trained under Ray Meeker and Deborah Smith at the Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry and attained her Masters in Fine Arts from the USA. Madhvi has been a recipient of several awards including the Charles Wallace Grant and India Foundation of the Arts. She has participated in residencies in many countries such as Japan, China, Korea, India, Thailand and US. Her sculptures and installations can be seen in several private and public collections such as the Mumbai Domestic Airport - India, Shigaraki Ceramic Sculptural Park - Japan, and Fule Museum in Fuping - China. Madhvi's work was recently featured on the cover of *Art India* magazine and has been published in international journals, such as *Ceramic Art and Perception*, *Nueve Keramik* and in books like *Smoke Firing* by Jane Perryman and *Contemporary Ceramics* by Emmanuel Cooper. A large installation titled *Ode to the Unknown* commissioned by the Singapore Museum - Indian Heritage Center is currently on display for 6 months. Madhvi lives and works in Mumbai and Singapore.

[www.madhvisubrahmanian.com](http://www.madhvisubrahmanian.com)

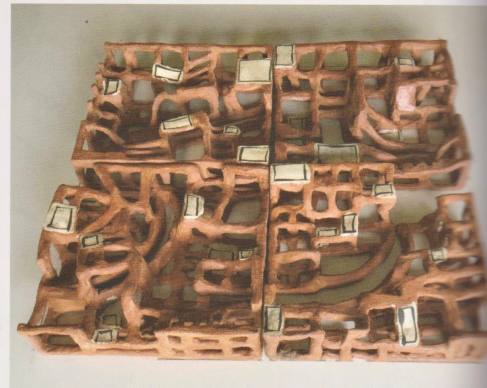


*Tree of Life*, 2017  
Stoneware 14 x 11 x 6 inches

While *Mappa Mundi* maps a journey in a city, *Floor Plan* in earth red stoneware zooms into the recesses of small crevices and tiny spaces. Adajania questions it 'What is that floor plan?' *Hollowed out, evacuated of human presence, do these ruins of a post-industrial landscape embody the artists account of the ravages of the Anthropocene era?* The earth is like the global memory bank, and the ever-supportive ground beneath our feet is a testament to that. Encompassing history through its crevices, this artwork is a composite of an aerial view of a metropolis, detail of an urban plan and an archaeological site.

*Mapping Memory* pushes the boundaries of the medium allowing for a multi sensory immersive and interactive experience. The power of memory and connection with the earth is evoked in every one of her installations. Be it her collaborative installation *Forest* where she invites her audience to make trees in clay or her interactive rolling pins, Madhvi facilitates a connection with the most soulful part of the human experience - the sense of touch.

*Floor Plan*, 2017  
Red Stoneware, 21 X 21 inches





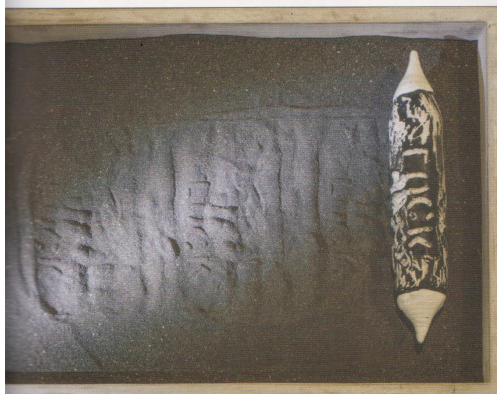
critic and curator Nancy Adajania describes this installation as, 'In the exhibition space, viewers will find balls of clay and sticks, with which to fashion their own trees. Embracing sociality the artist invites her viewers to participate in the unfolding of her project. By imprinting the trees in the gallery, they renew their sense of participation and belonging. And so, Madhvi Subrahmanian maps a ground of trust, distributing the collective potentialities of affect and creative energy through the white cube.'

The gallery is large with an exhibition space of 4500 sq. ft. and in this white cube, white porcelain 'cow dung' discs formed an installation titled *Upla* that stretched across 16ft on a white brick wall. Although white and in porcelain they are unmistakably and easily recognizable as the ubiquitous cow dung patties seen in every Indian village. While the cowdung patties may be commonplace in India, having the lowly object transposed into the preciousness of porcelain is striking. In their whiteness, they forever immortalize the imprint of its anonymous, usually female maker. Mundane objects often have the



*Upla*, 2017

Porcelain, Glaze, Cowdung Ash, 36 x 190 inches approx, Variable Edition | Site specific



*Rolling Pins*, 2017

Porcelain, Clay slip and Glaze, On powder coated metal rack | Housed in Vitreous Vitrine size: 48 x 18 x 32 inches  
2 sets | love: luck: life: health: wealth: fame. | love: travel: family: health: heart: give.

Throughout the show, Madhvi invokes and captures the memories in the deep recesses of her mind. Specifically she maps and traces the routine of daily journeys in the *Mappa Mundi* series. 'Change' is a constant, both professionally and personally for her, having moved several times between geographies and spaces. It is no wonder that an expression of perpetual journeying finds voice in her works. 'Mappa Mundi' is Latin for maps, as they were known in the 16th century. Madhvi borrows two aspects from the 16th century maps, that they were round and inaccurate. Her world painted in colours of the earth from green to rust, in which she embeds the clays taken from both her cities - Mumbai her city of birth and Singapore where she currently resides. Gold dust glimmers in the lines retrieved from memory of her daily journeys, reflecting like rivers glinting in the sun. The process is inspired by the Japanese art of *kintsugi* where broken ceramics is repaired with gold, making it more precious than it was before. Adajania describes it thus 'In the manner of a *kintsugi* artist transforming a crack into an epiphany, Madhvi uses gold to fill and line her memories of journeys made and *culs-de-sac* overcome. Blurring and morphing now seem to be her preferred strategies.'

ability to evoke memories of, and speak to, the concepts of identity, gender, displacement, longing and home as the *Upla* does here. It raises questions around the current 'cow' politics in India and the very notion of 'purity' associated with the cow and the colour white.

While the *Upla* preserves the memory of the hand of its anonymous maker, the *Rolling Pins* hold fast the hand of the artist. The *Rolling Pin* installation consists of 6 rolling pins on a metal stand set on the wall and another set of 6 placed in vitrines with finely sieved black construction sand. This interactive installation invites viewers to roll the familiar household object to reveal the marks it holds. Clay, with its inherent material memory, is like a time capsule, holding and preserving forever every dent, scratch and impression left on its surface made permanent by fire. The *Rolling Pins*, hold the imprint of the human hand with its dense mapping of criss-cross lines embedded with words from the palm readers vocabulary like: Life, Love, Health etc. With each turn of the rolling pin, encased memories in the fired clay are released unfurling the hand of the artists and words from the limitless possibilities of the future.

Untitled: from the series *Mappa Mundi* (*Kintsugi*), 2017

Earthenware, clay slip and gold dust- *kintsugi*, 28 x 33 inches

