

CHITRA GANESH

Chitra Ganesh, Urgency or The Thick of Time, Flash Art Magazine,
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Urgency or The Thick of Time

A graphic narrative by Chitra Ganesh

In her practice, Chitra Ganesh reflects on long-received cultural constructions of female sexuality and power, reimagining these concepts in visual narratives characterized by a strong mythological component that has come to constitute the artist's complex visual imaginary. Ganesh rethinks the canonical narrative of our world order and history by deconstruction, focusing on liminal spaces where mythology and contemporary life meet – in this sense, her studies in comparative literature and semiotics are revealing, as well as her early studies of social theory and deconstruction, both seen as tools for accessing or recovering historical cultural texts – from literature and film to visual art. Ganesh subverts the official canons of history through a production that utilizes the functions and structures of a story itself: the written word. Her experimental poetics are conveyed in mythical texts accompanied by drawings, both in print and animated forms, imbued with a feminist and queer sensibility. A mash-up of old Bollywood images and songs, graffiti, lyrical poetry, and erased moments of South Asian history, draws upon Ganesh's upbringing in New York City as a child of Indian immigrants.

Her visual grammar uses the trope of "jungle," understood not only as wilderness but also as a reference to an old Indian colonial idiom used to describe women rebelling against convention. The artist developed the theme of diasporic identity – and of femininity inevitably linked to it – by taking inspiration in part from popular visual imagery: the comic books that Amar Chitra Katha has published since 1967, a genre used to teach Hindu mythology to Indians and children of the Indian diaspora. Reflecting on the role this comic book series has played in shaping her experience, Ganesh challenges the rise of Hindu nationalism's linear narrative by offering multiple and heterogeneous positions in her work. Drawing from the aesthetics and fragments of ACK comics, Ganesh reframes the paradigms of collective memory, trying to shape a new form of contemporary visual culture.

For this issue, the artist has conceived this graphic narrative starting from a reflection on the concept of biodiversity, and a meditation on current states of uncertainty and fragmentation. Fusing image and text, she constructs a multilayered narrative that animates the interconnected nature of being.





EVEN IN WINTER,
THE TREES WITH
THEIR BRANCHES,
LIKE OPEN VEINS
TO THE SKY....

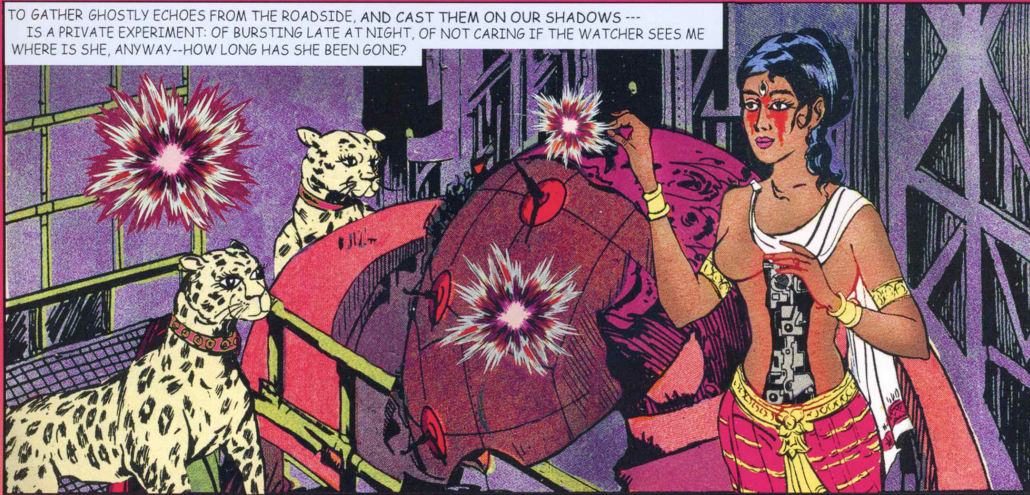
I REMEMBER US THEN:
INTERLOCKING MAZES, THE
SPECIES WE ONCE WERE,
& THE STORIES WE
TOLD, OF WATER AND
OF SKIN

THAT NIGHT IT SEEMED ~ A MOUNTAIN HAD DISAPPEARED FROM ITS STATION -- WALKED AWAY FROM THE HORIZON, ONCE AND FOR ALL. THAT NIGHT \geq TIME \leq : UNFURLED ITSELF LIKE A PARACHUTE, EXTENDING FROM HER FINGERTIPS, FLUTTERING LIKE A TORN SAIL...





TO GATHER GHOSTLY ECHOES FROM THE ROADSIDE, AND CAST THEM ON OUR SHADOWS ---
IS A PRIVATE EXPERIMENT. OF BURSTING LATE AT NIGHT, OF NOT CARING IF THE WATCHER SEES ME
WHERE IS SHE, ANYWAY--HOW LONG HAS SHE BEEN GONE?









INSIDE THE LOOKING GLASS,
A MURDER OF CROWS CALLS HER BY
HER CHILDHOOD NAME:

WITH ROSES SPILLING
OVER HER SHOULDER,
RIDING A LONE
GRAY WOLF

THOSE DAYS
WERE LIKE RIVERS,--
LIKE RIBBONS OF SAND
RUNNING THROUGH
YOUR FINGERS

WEB OF
INFINTE
SELVES"

WILL THERE EVER, WILL THERE EVER, WILL THERE EVER
BE AN AFTER...

IF I COULD SHOW YOU
MY VEINS, WOULD YOU TELL ME
STORIES ABOUT THE CONTINENTS
THEY LED INTO (CENTURIES AGO--?)
OR WRITE ME A POEM ABOUT
THE REMNANTS OF SCARS-- LIVING,
BENEATH PALM PRINTS, LINING
CAVE WALLS FOR 10,000 YEARS
OR MORE ?

{SUICIDE LIKE A MARBLE, ROLLING
AROUND HER OCEAN'S FLOOR}



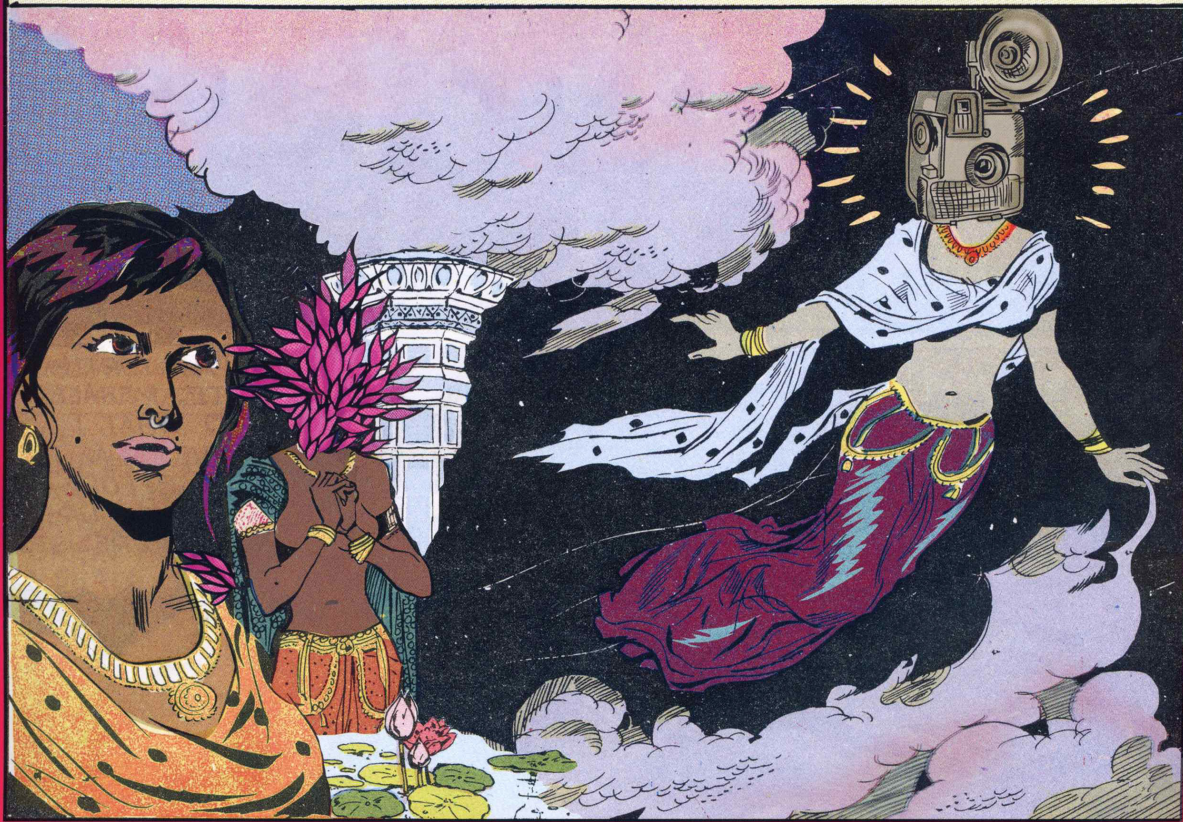
IN ANOTHER QUADRANT, INSTRUCTIONS ARE WHISPERED
FROM UP ABOVE: "WATCH THAT PIT IN YOUR STOMACH
TURN INTO A BLACK ROSE."





Postscript:

ON MOONLESS NIGHTS LIKE THIS, HER WORDS DRIFT INTO THE SOUNDPROOF ROOMS OF MY MIND. IN THE SPACE BETWEEN OUR HEARTBEATS, COULD YOU WHISPER BACK TO ME EVERYTHING SHE EVER TOLD US? {...OF HER BUTTERFLY WINGS, OF OUR VOLCANIC ASH.}



OUR LADY OF THE HOUR {OUR SUBJECT} IS TIME. SHE WAS: AN ABANDONED HOUSE DRAWN FROM MEMORY, SHAKING LOOSE THE CONTENTS OF MY INSIDES... INVISIBLE CONTINENTS AND IMPROBABLE FUTURES, PLUCKED FROM THE EDGES OF DAWN... THE HAND OF FATIMA ON ME, HER LIGHT & AMPUTATED TOUCH. TOOLS OF HER TRADE? A SPIDERWEB, A RAINBOW, AN EYE THAT CANNOT CRY...





Chitra Ganesh's current and upcoming solo exhibitions include: "A city will share her secrets if you know how to ask" at Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art from October 18 through June 2022; Sultana's Dream, Rochester Art Museum, Fall 2021; Hales Gallery, New York, November 2021; and Contemporary Calgary (forthcoming Fall 2022). Group exhibitions include: "Born into Flames: Feminist Futures Bronx Museum" through October 2021; the Honolulu Triennial (forthcoming January 2022); and "New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century," at Berkeley Art Museum through January 30, 2022.

