

CHITRA GANESH

Martha Schwendener, What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now, The New York Times,
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Chitra Ganesh, *Nightswimmers*, 18 November 2021 - 5 February 2022, Hales New York, Photo by JSP Art Photography

It's often noted in the biography of the Brooklyn-based artist Chitra Ganesh, that she studied semiotics at Brown University, the American epicenter for an academic field that examines the uses and interpretation of cultural signs and symbols. This is not an insignificant detail; it's crucial to unlocking how she approaches a vast range of images and ideas. Ganesh's painted, drawn and sewn assemblages are like Borgesian libraries or delirious, encyclopedic archives. They combine South Asian cosmologies, Bollywood posters, queer histories, comics and science fiction to suggest hybrid narratives and utopias. Ganesh is at the height of her semiotician-creator powers in her current show, "*Nightswimmers*."

"*Death Dancer*" (2021), a delicate image painted with watercolor and tea on paper, features an underworld guardian inspired by Citipati, a Tibetan deity who symbolizes death's eternal dance. Other works here explore sexuality, motherhood and how nature and humans are intertwined. "*Untitled*" (2021) is a lush assemblage of pressed flowers, paint and glistening flakes of mica (silicate minerals) on paper. In the work, the head of a female figure with a bricked-up belly and stone-arched vulva morphs into a blossoming cherry tree.

Birth, efflorescence, reincarnation and resilience prevail in "*Nightswimmers*." Canny viewers will also detect an undercurrent of activism. The sentence, "They tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds" is spelled out in thread, sewn into one of Ganesh's works. Often heard at present-day rallies, this battle cry can be traced back to ancient Greece, reminding us that art, beauty and struggle are often interlinked.