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500 WORDS

## Rina Banerjee

06.22.11

RECENT | ARCHIVE

- Rina Banerjee discusses her exhibition at Musée Guimet
- Clifford Owens talks about his current work
- Kate Forde talks about "Dirt"
- Zin Taylor talks about "The Units"
- Ryoji Ikeda talks about his latest work
- David Gordon reflects on the life and art of Max Gordon



Left: **Rina Banerjee**, *Upon civilizing home an absurd and foreign fruit grew ripened, made food for the others, grew snout, tail and appendage like no other*, 2010, mixed media, 40 x 30 x 40". Right: **Rina Banerjee**, *Take me . . . to the Palace of Love (detail)*, 2003, mixed media, 13 x 13 x 22".

*Rina Banerjee's iridescent sculptural installations—full of silky fabric, feathers, beads, and tiny, tinkling shells—as well as fragile drawings of birds, beasts, and floating demigods, are about journeys, real and imagined. Her offerings weave their way around ancient Asian artifacts in "Chimeras of India and the West," her latest exhibition, which is on view at the Musée Guimet in Paris until September 26.*

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Newest Reviews

- Matt Connors and Fergus Feehily
- Jadranka Kosorcic
- Carlos Cruz-Diez
- Uta Barth
- "Never Let Me Go"
- "SKIN SO SOFT"
- Elliott Hundley
- Ei Anatsui
- Cao Fei
- Peter Buggenhout
- Anthony Lepore
- "Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now"
- Tom Wudl
- John Neff
- "Magical Consciousness"

**MY MOTHER TOLD ME** that my first name is special because it is not typical in India—it is spelled differently. Hence, I was free to be what I wanted, or so I presumed. I was born in Calcutta, but I grew up in London and, then, New York, where I now live. Growing up abroad [as we called it] was a strange experience in the 1960s; there were so few Indians in the West. My parents saw themselves as international citizens. Maybe they imagined a future that we are just beginning to glimpse. I dream of this willingness to close the gaps between cultures, communities, and places. I think of identity as inherently foreign; of heritage as something that leaks away from the concept of home—as happens when one first migrates. Even my interest in science embodies an awareness of other worlds, worlds that coexist with us, but which we cannot experience or know. The sky, the stars, and the earth contain so much more than we think. This is why, when I finished my degree in polymer engineering at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, in 1993, I quietly moved toward art.

I could never be a Minimalist artist: I am interested in corrupting fine art with everything I wish for. I want adventure and to feel the same sense of command that I imagine an explorer or a scientist would—like a visitor trespassing. My art is about the value of our desire to travel. I am not interested in being wrapped around any country or community so tightly that it cannot allow this; the need to travel is psychological, intellectual, and emotional. Freedom is the most expensive commodity; nature the most dangerous beauty. My work examines both. My art depicts a delicate world that is also aggressive, tangled, manipulated, fragile, and very, very dense. My first installations were made between 1997 and 1999 for exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Queens Museum of Art, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Like my early paintings, they contained pigment, shells, feathers, textiles, saris, lightbulbs, suitcases, umbrellas, and eyelashes. The point was that these objects could be remade each time, could traverse language and be massaged into new meanings.

"Chimeras of India and the West" was the brainchild of Jacques Gies, the director of the Guimet. Globalization means that we no longer need to go on "expeditions" the way Victorian explorers did. The

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East has arrived. I think Gies believes that the Guimet should reflect this. My exhibition is one of the projects in "The Manufactory of Contemporary Art in Asia" series, which explores the interaction between heritage and contemporary creativity. The show offers works made between 2005 and 2011. Curator Caroline Arhuero orchestrated a dialogue between them and the museum's permanent collection. One of my favorite sections is the library, which houses the elephant chair, as we call it. I love it. The chair is a symbol of power, and a peculiar growth emerges from it like a trunk—as if it were giving birth to the Hindu elephant-headed god, Ganesha. It represents the violence that is involved in transformation. This is very apt, given that the library is a place where knowledge is kept and controlled and representations of the other are formulated.

In many ways, the show is about examining cultural production. I get a real charge from ancient Tibetan, Himalayan, and Indian art. I am obsessed by the clouds in Chinese and Tibetan paintings and their representation of strange creatures and mystical worlds, where protagonists enact battles and falter in ways that lead to horrific tragedies. In my drawings, red trees grow upside down and bear dark fruit, and beasts with multiple heads walk or swim [rather than fly] in the sky, spilling fruit like tears. At the Guimet, one of my sculptures conjures a figure with a ram's head, wearing a red dress and a nose ring. I have also included black buffalo horns, from America, and Kenyan gourds. Both Eastern and Western references are deposited in this work.

Where you live impacts who you are. I am a Non-Resident Indian, living in New York. I think it is important to ask what this means.

— As told to Zehra Jumabhoy

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## Clifford Owens

06.18.11



Clifford Owens in his studio at MoMA PS1.

*Clifford Owens's upcoming exhibition at MoMA PS1 comes out of his long-standing interest in what he considers to be underacknowledged histories of performance art. Rather than reperforming works or simply exhibiting documentation, Owens will interpret and embody twenty-five scores provided by contemporary African-American artists. Public performances at the museum throughout the summer (including events on June 19, June 25, and July 29) will generate the raw material for the works on view in "Anthology," which opens November 13.*