
PRESS RELEASE

STAIN CANON

Presenting works of Anikesa Dhing, liactuallee and Priyanka Paul

Stain: from Old French *desteindre* which means 'tinge with a color different from the "natural" one'

Canon: from Latin, from Greek *kanōn* which means 'rule'

- The group exhibition opens on **Tuesday, November 12, 2024 at 6 pm** at Gallery XXL
- The curation of **STAIN CANON** is the proposition for new origin stories that reflects on the act of queering the visualization and curation within the contemporary art scene
- The exhibition imagines three stories of new origins which are plural, personal, futuristic

Gallery XXL presents **STAIN CANON**, a group exhibition that presents the works of Anikesa Dhing, liactuallee and Priyanka Paul. Opening on November 12, 2024 coinciding with Art Night Tuesday, the exhibition inquires the canonisation of origin myths by presenting artworks that emerge from fantastical, memory-based and intersectional narratives as the seed for new origin stories.

The exhibition precedes the opening of **Art Mumbai scheduled from November 14 - 17, 2024** where Gallery XXL will display the works of **ten Indian and International artists at Booth 36**. The two exhibitions are catalysed to showcase works of artists with unique and distinctive practices – confronting the personal within the urban as it dynamically negotiates with the space-time of the different institutions of art.

The group exhibition titled **STAIN CANON** marks the first time XXL is exhibiting liactuallee and Priyanka's works while Anikesa has collaborated with the gallery in the past; the trio now coming together to break open novel possibilities for storytelling that emerge from mediums such as crochet, objects and prints. What finds the locus for curation of artworks and its display as well as design is a shared story for imagining origins that can be plural, vulnerable, and futuristic.

The artists, who have worked on these themes independently, find a confluence in **STAIN CANON** as a point of encounter with artworks and audiences in order to expand on practices that were germinated through different residencies: **Khoj International Residency in collaboration with Misk Art Institute** which Anikesa completed earlier this year, the **Hampi Art Labs Residency** taken up by liactuallee in 2024 and through a grant Priyanka received by the After Party Collective for the **Wienwoche Festival of Art and Activism, Vienna** in 2020.

About the Exhibition

STAIN CANON is the proposition for new origin stories that reflects on queering the visualization and curation within the contemporary art scene. Showcasing the works of **Anikesa Dhing, liactuallee and Priyanka Paul**, the exhibition invokes a confluence of a trinity. As science fiction, multimedia art and objects – in image and form – through mediums of crochet, prints, canvases and rugs come together, the artworks lend themselves to aesthetics often perceived as kitsch.

Kitsch, often considered to be of naïve imitation, eccentric, gratuitous or of banal taste – now questioning what entails art in a time when definitions of any set of history or intellectual ideas or origins find themselves in crises. Simultaneously, the artworks coalesce fictional, psychological and historical time to further dilate the varying meanings of origin, its connotations and attached values to ultimately put forth three stories of origin which unlike most origin myths are not written by men.

One, a primordial soup re-imagined in a fictional space-time as diverse forms of cellular structures and inanimate materials are stitched together in the form of crochet with works created by liactuallee. As the act of stitch and the subculture of punk comes together, what looms around are objects that are now creatures for a new origin. At its core of this origin is stitch – an act, a gesture, a loop; to make, to mend, to join; The singular unit of a gesture, repetition resulting in the sum total of its parts. And Punk – about rebellion, counterculture, post-capitalism, decolonisation and enthusiasm.

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Two, the origin of objects in the presence of bodies that are absent. A travel back to childhood through Anikesa Dhing's canvases and objects, where psychological time pendulates from remembrance and recollection to laughter and forgetting, and in between that persist several objects – in image – long after their practical use have withered away. With humor and vibrancy, these everyday items transform commodities into sensorial journeys through love, nostalgia, pain and in that the impersonal items extend to the origin of new experiences, individual selves, and materials.

Three, a network of lands which visibilise alternate histories – pushing the margins to be seen, heard and felt like never before and lead to the creation of a belonging that is posthuman, intersectional, yet, also reproducible in a tangible medium. Herein lay those realities that were never a part of history, but in contemporaneity exist with their eccentricities – reclaiming what defined their different origins that expose the interconnected nature of social categorizations – color, class, gender, caste, sexuality – as they apply to an individual or a group.

In these an overlapping of interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage, critiquing those who form a canon. For history, for language, for land – to be decolonised, in a play within and with the network. The canons discolored through a stain within the confines of Gallery XXL, wherein urbanity is now used as a tool to topple many origins, and envisage new beginnings

Artist Bios

Anikesa Dhing

Anikesa Dhing completed her undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Fine Art from MS University, Baroda. Anikesa's works are a vibrant panorama of objects, painted and woven into a variety of mediums and scales stripping them off of their specificity.

Anikesa's paintings are portraits of intimate settings where the absence of a presence is felt. Bodies have seemingly disappeared in the network culture and objects remain. The visual bombardment of the images mimics the anxiety of transitoriness and desire, in such a manner that it narrates the story of an object as a prime protagonist.

The artist's work comments on the agency of objects we claim to possess and how these inanimate objects begin to hold within them memories and emotions. Anikesa investigates the sentimental tendencies materialism holds and the transactional values of an object-oriented universe. Wondering whether these sentiments are built collectively or individually, the artist unpacks how the notion of 'things' becoming a great part of the personal, cultural, and social histories lead to a consequent development of a sense of mundaneness.

Her work further examines the behavioral effect of everyday visuals where the loss of objects and images act as markers of time. The artist says, "Hoarding objects under the veil of memorabilia and holding onto memories provides us an unseen comfort, but in actuality, these images and items tether us to our past so tightly that it becomes torturous."

The bold pastel colors in the works help the artist instigate the viewer to be overwhelmed by the image and create a subconscious reality where the object-oriented universe is warped. Even the three-dimensional works Anikesa creates, often resembling moving articles that can be used for seating, are sculpted to be devoid of the function they appear to provide.

Anikesa's works were most recently exhibited at "Embark VI/VII" at The Ark Foundations of Arts, "The Desired Scaffold" at Gallery XXL, "Mute/Unmute" at Method India, "Lost Fragrance of Infinity" held at Space 118, Mumbai and at a solo exhibition titled "Ice-Cream Melting at the Bouncy Castle" at Anant Art Gallery. In August 2024, Anikesa was chosen for the Khoj International Residency in collaboration with Misk Art Institute. The artist currently lives and works in Baroda, Gujarat.

liactuallee

liactuallee graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities in 2016 and later earned a postgraduate diploma in Aesthetics, Criticism, and Theory from Jnanapravaha, Mumbai.

li makes art as an act of survival. The fragility of identity labels has led actuallee to embrace their transient nature. Having grown up between three continents, their search for belonging often came short which motivated them to create future worlds where

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they do not struggle to be their amorphous self. Focusing on the possibilities of envisioning collective destinies, they use their imagination and obsessiveness to escape the confines of the current conditions.

By weaving and stitching ecological fiction into their work, li encourages viewers to explore alternative realities informed by overlooked ecosystems which lead to new ways of thinking. This is expressed through the fluidity present in the art they make, speculative characters and landscapes that are equally filled with spontaneities and intricacies.

Through repetitive gestures—whether a loop, stitch, or mark—li constructs environments that evolve through re-articulation. Grounded in hope and utopian visions, their work honors the value of natural resources, including human labor. Repetition becomes a way to expand visual storytelling, connecting craft, queerness, and ecology.

li's interdisciplinary practice has further compelled them to inquire into materials like fiber, ceramics, upcycled textiles, recycled and cotton yarn to cultivate a practice in soft sculptures. The artist has participated in artist residencies, such as Space 118 Mumbai, and Space Studio Baroda and exhibited at Emami Art Kolkata and Art Incept in New Delhi. li has left their mark in their community by painting public murals in Bandra, Mumbai. Their inaugural solo exhibition, "Soft Invasions, Stitchpunk Visions," took place at Method Bandra in June 2023. They were honored with the Artdemic "Textile & Fiber Art" Grant 2024 and participated in edition two of SA Ladakh, Asia's highest land art festival. Most recently in 2024, they completed a residency at Hampi Art Labs. actuallee has also been selected as an artist-in-residence for India Art Fair 2025, and continues to work and live in Mumbai.

Priyanka Paul

Priyanka Paul is a multidisciplinary artist from Mumbai, India. Their work revolves around themes of social justice, self-exploration, and understanding marginalisation. Their work is known for its use of comedy and poetry.

Priyanka's art draws from their lived experiences which are informed by their queer and Ambedkarite and anti-caste sensibilities. They write, "My work reflects my feelings and emotions. It is the continuous altar I build in honor of my anger, my grief, my joy, my deep love for the people and things that sustain my existence in this realm." Priyanka uses their work to traverse through history, the modern world, and the future — to interrogate the basis of systemic past beliefs of current beings and how future imaginations are shaped by it.

They draw what they are surrounded by and what they aspire to inhabit – a casteless world centered around building kind and sustainable communities through friendships and ecosystems that are considered alternative yet should not be. As Priyanka writes, "At the core of my work will always be honest storytelling that disrupts the demand for performance and throws vulnerability in your face."

Priyanka uses bright and pastel colors which steer away from hues of black and grey that can be considered grim, in order to entice the viewer to engage with topics that are observed as "too political" or "too serious" in popular culture. The artist employs each pixel and line to tell a new story in the condensed visual plane they create. If one looks closely, Priyanka's compositions feature multiple stories within the same frame which is a form of subversion and the artist exercises this with the tools of humor, poetry, and the material with which the works are created.

Priyanka has chosen digital art as their primary medium for the lack of materiality it possesses, and its versatility to be reproduced, reused, translated, and communicated across different channels. The medium has the ability to float through time and space, existing yet not possessing the quality of being held. Digital art for Priyanka represents a sense of informality in the institution of art, the spaces it occupies, and the privilege of those who practice it, while rupturing the notion of exclusivity within the arts and shifting the narrative of those who claim to consume and own it.

Priyanka earned a Bachelor of Mass Media from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai in 2019 and has been working on a variety of projects since 2016. Their work as an independent illustrator and writer has been published with organizations such as Gucci, Vice, Malala Fund, Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network, Vogue, Google, Twitter, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Amazon, and Netflix among others. Priyanka contributed as a columnist to DNA India until 2017 and since 2023, has been

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working with Mid Day India. They have participated in many conferences and workshops including the “Conference on Social Media Influencers and the New Political Economy in South Asia and Africa” hosted by the University of Michigan in 2022 where Priyanka delivered a presentation on Social Media Hierarchies and its Subversion by Marginalised Creators on the Digital Landscape. Their writing on anger, mental health, and current affairs for teenagers has been published in Mid Day India, Vogue India, Vice India, DNA India, and The Wire. They have also been awarded the “Top 100 Digital Stars” in the Changemakers category by Forbes India in 2023 and the “Feminist Voice of the Year” by Cosmo India in 2020. In 2020, their works were exhibited in Indianama’s “Reimagining India,” and were awarded a grant by the Wienwoche Festival for Art and Activism to create an illustration on the theme “Party at the End of Gender Normativity.”

About the Gallery

Established in 2023, Gallery XXL is an urban contemporary art gallery based in Mumbai, India. The gallery represents and showcases a roster of Indian and international artists whose practices are rooted in a variety of disciplines that broaden the understanding of established categories and catalyse diverse exchanges through processual exhibitions, treating the gallery as a fluid institution which presents dynamic negotiations to the idea of a ‘white cube.’

With its name echoing Jean-Michel Basquiat’s city walk from Downtown 81 (Dir. Edo Bertoglio,) when he described his medium as “extra large,” Gallery XXL extends a desire for imaginations to be XXL, an abbreviation for ‘extra, extra, large’ and brings it to the city of Mumbai in order to examine the ambitious scale of visuals and conversations prevalent in urban art.

Arjun Bahl, Giulia Ambrogi, Thanish Thomas and the late Hanif Kureshi, the founders of St+Art India Foundation joined hands with Joe Cyril (Director, Gallery XXL) to start the space-time for Gallery XXL. Founded in 2014, St+Art India has been supporting street art in the country through public art projects. With the experience of creating artistic interventions in public as well as private spaces coalescing in order to widen engagement with urban art, aesthetics and culture work in the Indian context, St+art extends its vision to facilitate institutional representation for urban contemporary artists through exhibitions at Gallery XXL.

Team

Giulia Ambrogi, Arjun Bahl, Thanish Thomas, Vidur Sethi, Sarah Malik, Faraz Khan, Akhil Kattamanchil, Guru Pednekar, Aarti Jain, and Babu Gundanoor.

Annexures

The attached annexure includes the artist’s portraits, artwork captions and the drive consists of the invite and high resolution images of the artworks. For any more information, please contact sarah@galleryxxl.com.

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