

**HOLDING
BEAUTY
WEARING
MASQUES**

RAJ SHAHANI

ANAMKARA ART

PRESENTS

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SCULPTURES BY RAJ SHAHANI

Holding Beauty, Wearing Masques.
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I try to bring strong emotional presence in my work, something I see and sense from the people I meet. I want to convey this strong emotional impact it has on me, an inner beauty, a strength. Usually the first stages of work, this is where the energy of creation is the strongest, things start to emerge but the multitude of possibilities is still here. I want to preserve it, I want people to feel this energy through the work. I don't want to hide all these marks of creation under the perfection of the surface and of the form."

"My sculptures are very personal, there is a lot of me in each sculpture. It's always about my vision of life, of the universe, I am just a filter, the idea is always to show something universal but through my own filter. My energy can be seen in my sculptures, it's all there. I work fast, I want to capture a presence, an emotion. I work a lot with my hands, I do not always finish a piece, leave a part of mystery, leave the imagination go free and imagine things.

"What is interesting in is the moment of creation itself, what happens in the studio between me and my creation, how do I handle this energy, but also all the struggle, the frustration, the deception. I have to deal with all these emotions while creating and to me it's all about that. It's not about what kind of artwork I want to produce, of course I always start with an idea, a concept that I want to express, but all the struggle and beauty happens while I am working and the result will depend on how I interact with all this energy. This is the most beautiful thing to me. "

- Raj Shahani

Masques were an allegory of ballet, ball, opera and people in a fancy dress competition in 16th century Europe. People wore masks and dressed in ways and acted out mythologies in theatrical performances where the audience participated in the reverie along with the actors. Raj Shahani presents a set of sculptures for Camellias sculpture garden, poetic renditions in stone, bronze, wood and ceramic that attempt to expand our imagination and perception of beauty so we come to recognise ourselves and flaws as beautiful and accepting of life.

Raj Shahani places pieces of Burma teak behind shining plates of metal – copper, gold, silver, panchadhatu, bronze, tin, brass and steel, reminding us of the ethereal presence of materials used in sculpture, but it also hides something valuable behind by a veneer of a shining metal. That shining metal is our alter ego, our 'Mukhowta', the mask that we don hiding our real beautiful selves in wood.

Raj repairs wooden makaras or corbels with bronze, brass, copper, panchaloha, silver, gold, steel and aluminium embellishments that are functional, minimal and simple but made of shining metal. They contrast with the wood but attract the eye due to their luminosity. Much like the clothes we wear to hide our bodies and distract the eye with brands to not reveal ourselves. We fear ourselves for the traumas we hold, the years we spend with our body in the journey of life, but the scars we hide are like the patina and textures the wood takes upon itself with aging. The beauty of old wood lies in its weathering and not the polish. Taking two long worn-out logs of teak Raj makes facsimile of dents, breakages and fissures in bronze and copper. He displays them in the alcoves, the real wood hiding behind the metal. An aesthetic measure is at play - we aren't ever made to feel complete with our adornments.

How do we mirror our fantasy and fears as adults? That self which sits behind the alter of ego - ones whose secrets are never known but arise in the arts, the music and literature we pursue.



Raj Shahani sought himself out of difficulties of severe dyslexia and ADHD as a child - sketching. His drawings were alter egos, superheroes and people he saw himself as, not one scorned, bullied or isolated for being himself. Popular consumer advertising selling cosmetics and fashion in the 1970s in India would always appear with renditions of celestial beings in the female form often called 'Apsaras'. Within cinema sequences the mode of fashion for Actors in Bollywood were drawn from these indigenous nymphs and fairies. Raj began seeing them as his superheroines, they embodied his spirit and he would endlessly doodle apsaras that he saw on magazine covers, creating dance sequences of a queer universe he would inhabit many years later. On a train back from a holiday in Calcutta he bought a terracotta Bankura horse, a large five-foot horse that he placed on his sleeping berth as he stood the two-day journey to Bombay. His fascination was with terracotta and the horse not as an inanimate object but one that came alive in his universe of day dreams. In the same dreams he saw himself as an Apsara, a divine celestial genderqueer being eager to entertain, dress and dance, seek many loves and exist without question.

At school he would make elaborate experiments with papier-mache, cardboard and paste fashioning human bodies his sisters would then steal to play as dolls. Years later, having settled in New York, Raj would come across Apsaras in the Metropolitan Museum, divine bodies that had broken arms pillaged from India for the antique trade by colonial adventurers. He would want to repair them, return them to their environments at home, allow the rain, dust, soot and vermilion of India to settle on them. Then as an artist at the Art Student League of New York he began sculpting people at ballet first until the apsara began to reappear. The Tribhanga geometric division of the body in Indian classical dance or sculpture also known as the triple-bend position with knees bent in one direction accentuating the waist became a form he was keen to explore in sculpture. He moved to Bombay in 2021 to explore a project where he would rescue and repair statues from sculpture studios that had been abandoned because of cracks, fissures and accidents. Their worth diminished as their beauty was imperfect. He would repair them

with more valuable material and metal. A marble statue would be completed with bronze or one stone with a rarer stone. His studio in an industrial estate in Sewri became a place to expand his experiments so suddenly waste paper outside his compound became an ingredient for him to go back to his attempts at making human bodies out of paper as a child. This March 2024 at DLF Camellias Raj Shahani opens his magnum opus with a circular constellation of sculptures in bronze, marble, granite, stoneware, glass, terracotta, ceramic, iron and paper, each one of them are apsaras mirroring who Raj is - an artist a performer, someone we all love, but yet alone.

by Sumesh-Manoj-Sharma



SAKSHI

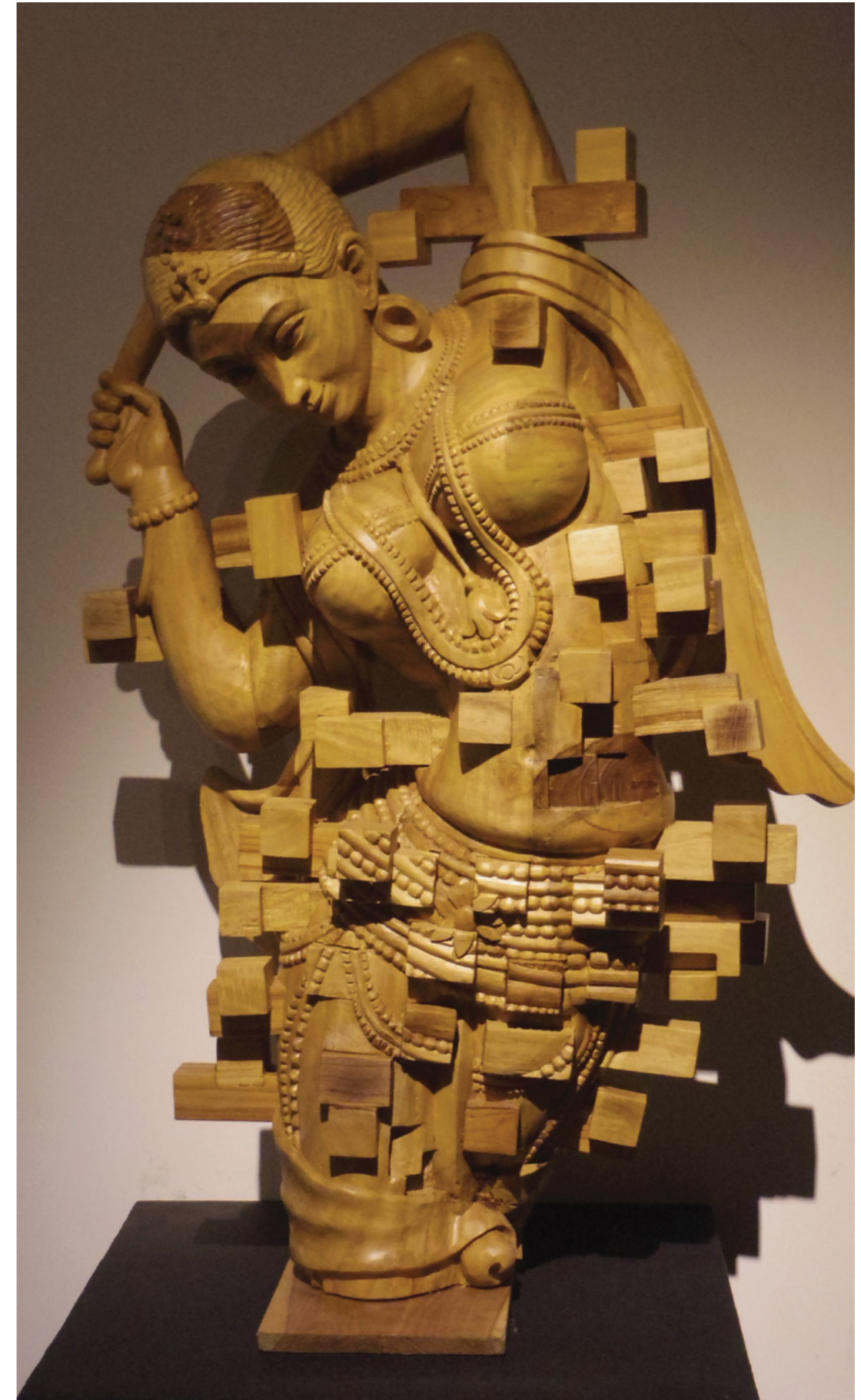
Sakshi or 'Witness' is an image drawn from the Metropolitan Museum's Indian collection is an Apsara who witnesses the destruction of herself. This statue was the first of his series that he saw in New York and began contemplating his journey of restoring and repairing these stone sculptures.

Recycled Cardboard, 3 ft

KUMBHINI

Kumbhini or one with the womb, is the mother, motherhood when is expected is a burden when enjoyed as an act of love and procreation willingly it is the most beautiful adorned by a woman.

Rescued Multiple pieces of different Wood, 3 ft





RASIKA

Destruction in the digital age is pixilation. Earlier they would break. Rasika is one who seduces, a tyranny she is burdened with because of her beauty.

Rescued Multiple pieces of different Wood, 3 ft

GOPALI

Gopali or the one of Krishna is a statue that stands on iron rods. She is one of Krishna or Gopal - the cowherd who is Radha. Radha to be with Krishna could never do so with easy despite her beauty. Using glazed terracotta Raj etches onto her skin one of his poems translated in Sanskrit.

Glazed Terracotta and Iron Rods, 5 ft





MOHINI

Mohini is the Hindu goddess of enchantment and the only avatar of Vishnu. Moh is also attachment, here the statue is caged in its own beauty suffering the consequences of her seduction and the gaze that falls upon her. Refusing enchantment is now her strength as enchanting someone was her weapon earlier. Raj's poem sits etched here.

Glaze Terracotta with Iron Armature, 4.5 ft

MANSI

Mansi is the voice of ones heart she stretches out her body in happiness and splendour, she is sure of who she is in her form and this forms a delight in her presence. She holds you gaze but does not return it. The brass on the pink stone embellishes and decorates.

Pink Stone and Brass, 6 ft





SHIRA

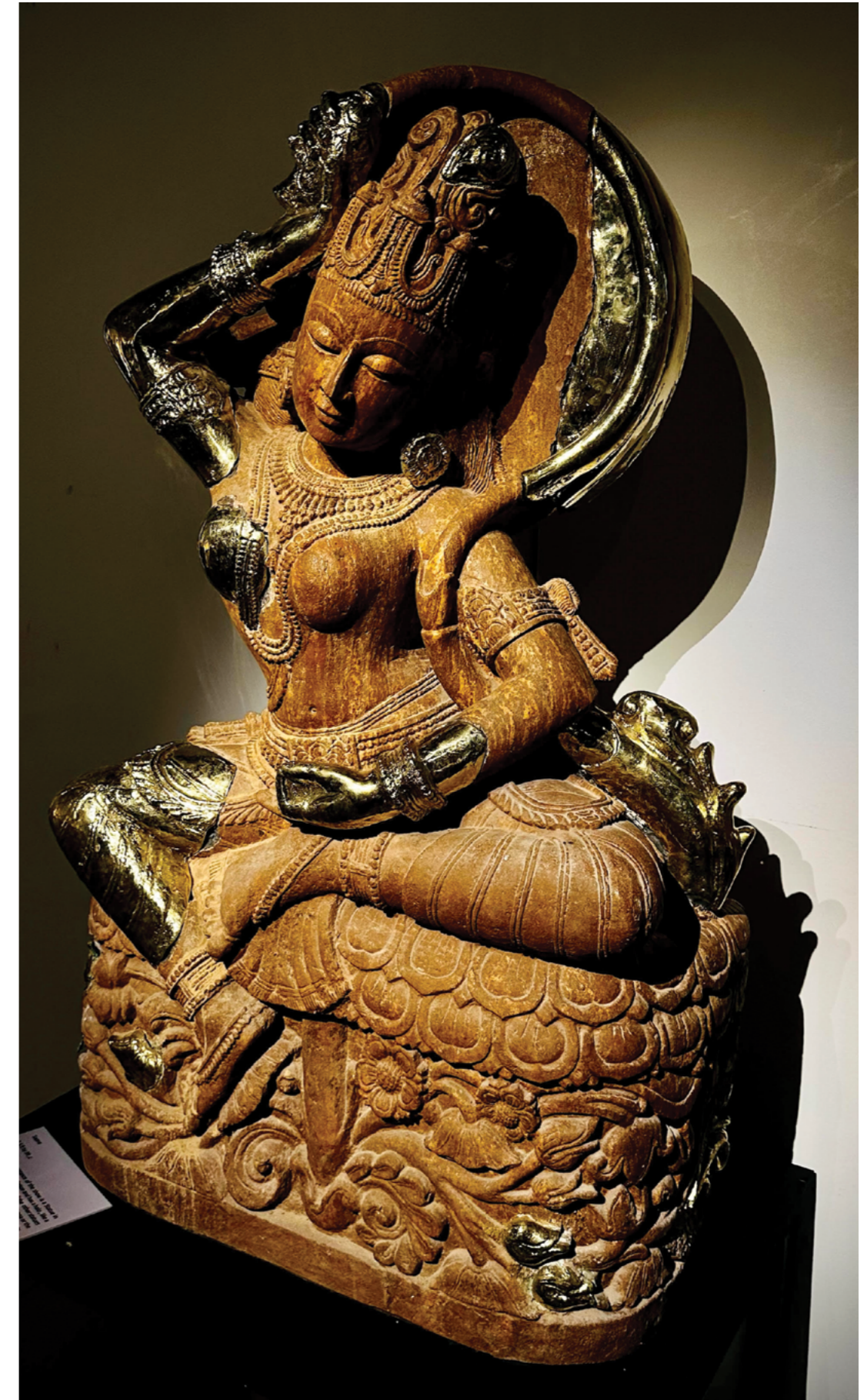
Shira means music and singing in Hebrew, it's a beautiful tune, here the statue is the princess of Poetry, in Indian sculpture the dance forms were accompanied by Ragas or poetry. Here her stone head and legs are held together by a brass torso allowing her to dance again.

Red Sandstone with Brass, 5 ft

SAPNA

The piece de resistance of the show is a Statue in dream form, she is mediation and has a halo, like a female Buddha. She embodies all the other statues their truths, paradoxes and illusions. Sapna or the dream reminds us of how beauty is illusionary. Repaired using brass it alludes to the Zen Buddhist aspiration of finding beauty in imperfection.

Red Sandstone and Brass, 3.5 ft x 3 ft





HOOR

Hoor in Arabic means beautiful, as emblematic she is of beauty, she is also of gentle poise, she is in the sitting posture and is seen admiring herself in dance as well as caressing her breast. Self-love and positive narcissism she holds all the beauty every woman holds.

Red Sandstone and Brass, 3.5 ft x 3 ft

TILOTAMA

She is an apsara who holds a ultimate beauty in her fragmented parts, one who is composed of the finest particles of beauty, she is sculpted by the divine architect Vishwakarma. Her undoing is what Raj repairs.

Grey Granite Stone and Brass, 6 ft





AHILYA

Ahilya is one who is not ugly, she stands her in the dance form, Raj has sculpted her in stone and completed her in brass from the reference of the statue at the Metropolitan Museum, New York. She is proud, confident and happy in dance and gesture.

Grey Granite Stone and Brass, 6.5 ft

MEGHA

Megha or the clouds in Sanskrit, is a fragmented statue in stone standing tall with the aid of an iron armature. She seems to grow out of the iron rods, she represents the mind clouded with pain and trauma, lost in its cloud of thoughts but still present in this world promising life in the form of rain.

Granite with Iron Armature, 5.5 ft





SHILPI

Shilpi of the one who is sculpted using faux granite in resin and completed using mother of pearls. Granite is a stone that is known for its strength and rigor. Mother of Pearls are delicate and their inlay intricate. This juxtaposition of opposing quality is apt for a sculpture named 'Shilpi' which translates to 'One who is Sculpted'. Shilp in Sanskrit means sculpture.

Faux Grey Granite in resin with Inlaid Mother of Pearl, 5 ft

SHAKUNTLA

Shakuntla is the heroine of Kalidasa's epic *Abhijanshakuntlam* of love gone astray, lost and recovered, Dushyant is away but not lost. Epic love is always painful and Shakuntla here is pierced by rods, fragmented and fragile in ceramic but held together by the chords of love that are as sturdy as steel.

Stoneware Ceramic, Iron Rods, Steel Frame, 3.5 ft





NEELIMA

Neelima is a statue who holds the hue blue and is fragmented with a torso that is matt black using stone ware ceramic and lower bad that has been decorated with the Gita Govinda in the Mandhubani style of painting.

Iron & Steel Grid, Fragmented Stone Wear, Glazed Madhubai Painting,
6.5 ft x 3 ft

MANJULA

Raj builds an Apsara's body from an intricate amalgamation of wooden fragments to denote the melodies of the Ragas in Indian Classical Music and the notes of instrumental music to which the Apsara's danced. Manjula in Sanskrit means melodies of beauty and delight.

Intricate Pixelated Wood, 6 ft





MANEKA

She stands tall, entices and holds your gaze, she is in dance form and is complete. The most mesmerizing apsara who is intelligent, and spontaneous in her ways, she keeps us captivated and in joy. Using the gray of granite she is completed by blue mother pearl, the rarest of pearls.

Faux Grey Granite in resin with Inlaid Mother of Pearl, 6 ft

SARPA DEVTAS SNAKE GODS

The two snake sculptures are made from a jute rope adorned with an iron hood and tail. Calling them 'Sarpa Devtas' they are drawn from the sacred Sarpa Kavus or Snake Groves of Kerala, through which water sprouts towards a blue sky above beckoning our belief in nature. Protecting us.

Jute Rope and Iron





MAITRI SOUL FRIEND

A serene statue of a 'Black Buddha' in 'Ashtadhatu' or eight metallated alloy made of gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, tin, iron, and mercury sits matching the equilibrium the artist attempts with nature. Buddha preached distance and detachment in the realm of the Nagalokas. Over the years in New York many Afro-American scholars and polymath thinkers such as Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal, Africa have drawn deep connections with African Animist worship of non-violence with that of the Buddha's teachings. Diop pointed out in his paper *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, 1974 - the African origins of Buddha with examples of his knotted hair and adherence to non-violence. Our forest sanctuary of once discarded wood is now alive in a long tradition of self-reflection and prayer.

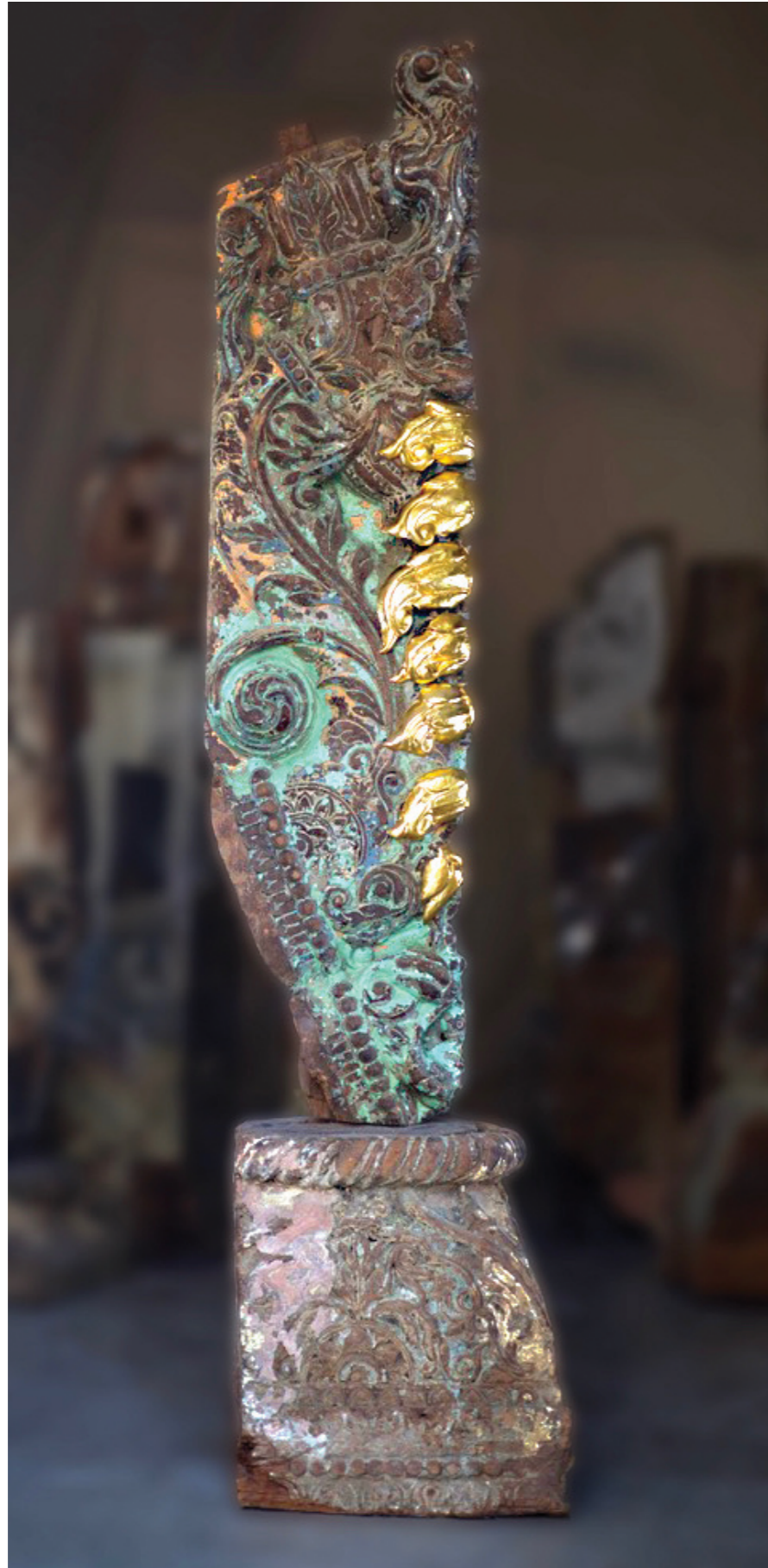
Gold, Silver, Copper, Lead, Zinc, Tin, Iron, and Mercury

MAKARA CORBEL

The small corbel has a vine of floral elements emerging from the jaws of the dolphin. This makara with a 'panchoha' or 'panchdhatu' alloy. The Gangetic dolphin is a very sacred animal that is the vehicle or vahana of the Ganges, India's sacred river. Panchaloha or Panchadhatu is an alloy of gold, silver, copper, zinc and iron and is used across Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism to make sacred idols and utensils for worship. Giving the makara of the Gangetic Dolphin a 'Panchaloha' embellishment Raj plays on the dichotomy or sacredness and pollution. 'Makara' in Ancient Indian texts is revered as the vahana or vehicle of the Mother Ganges, a river that has power to purify but one we often pollute. This dichotomy is inherent in the Modern Indian psyche which is lost to grandstanding and statements.

Gold, Silver, Copper, Zinc and Iron



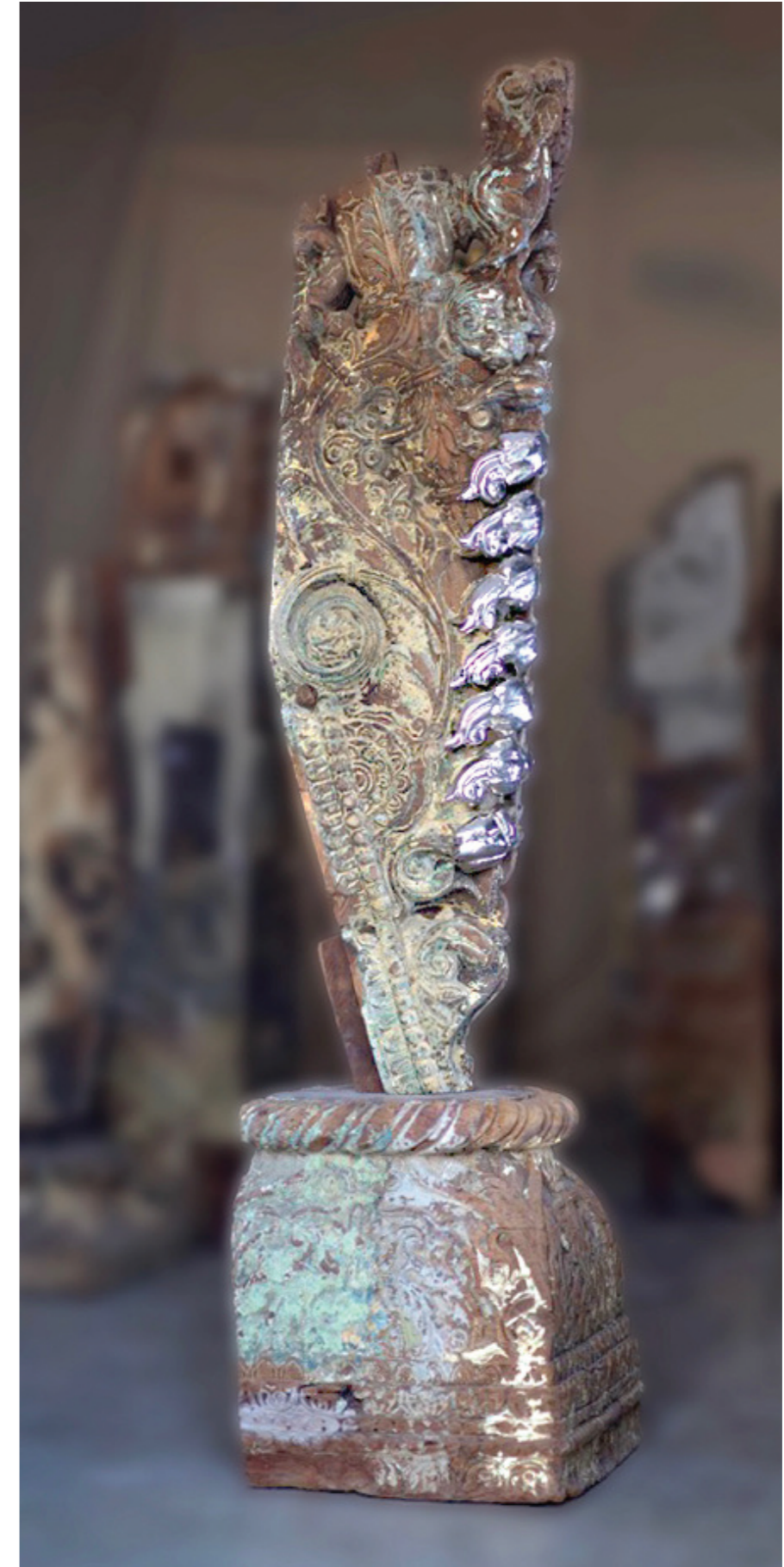


SWARNA GOLD

The 'Annapakshi' a common makara corbel seen in Tamil architecture is formed by a Swan head and beak with a peacock's bloom. The bird holds a vine in its beak as a symbol of being able to distinguish milk from water or truth from falsehood. 'Swarna (Gold)' is one of two anapakshis where the peacocks is embellished with a gold plating.

RAJATA SILVER

The 'Annapakshi' a common makara corbel seen in Tamil architecture is formed by a Swan head and beak with a peacock's bloom. The bird holds a vine in its beak as a symbol of being able to distinguish milk from water or truth from falsehood. 'Rajata (Silver)' is one of two anapakshis where the peacocks is embellished with a silver plating.





KANSA BRASS

'Kansa (Bronze)' is part of a four sculptures where Raj makes the brackets vertical in an upright standing position by giving them legs using bronze, tin, steel and aluminium. Using the same metals, he fills in the cavities left in by the pillars and wooden fixtures that have been taken apart. By filling them in he makes a cosmetic effort at making them complete again using a shining surface. An aesthetic measure is at play - we aren't ever made to feel complete with our adornments.

TINA GERMAN SILVER

'Tina' is part of a four sculptures where Raj makes the brackets vertical in an upright standing position by giving them legs using bronze, tin, steel and aluminium. Using the same metals, he fills in the cavities left in by the pillars and wooden fixtures that have been taken apart. By filling them in he makes a cosmetic effort at making them complete again using a shining surface. An aesthetic measure is at play - we aren't ever made to feel complete with our adornments.





LOHA STEEL

'Loha (Steel)' is part of a four sculptures where Raj makes the brackets vertical in an upright standing position by giving them legs using bronze, tin, steel and aluminium. Using the same metals, he fills in the cavities left in by the pillars and wooden fixtures that have been taken apart. By filling them in he makes a cosmetic effort at making them complete again using a shining surface. An aesthetic measure is at play - we aren't ever made to feel complete with our adornments.

PANCHADHATU PENTA ALLOY

'Panchadhatu' is part of a four sculptures where Raj makes the brackets vertical in an upright standing position by giving them legs using bronze, tin, steel and aluminium. Using the same metals, he fills in the cavities left in by the pillars and wooden fixtures that have been taken apart. By filling them in he makes a cosmetic effort at making them complete again using a shining surface. An aesthetic measure is at play - we aren't ever made to feel complete with our adornments.



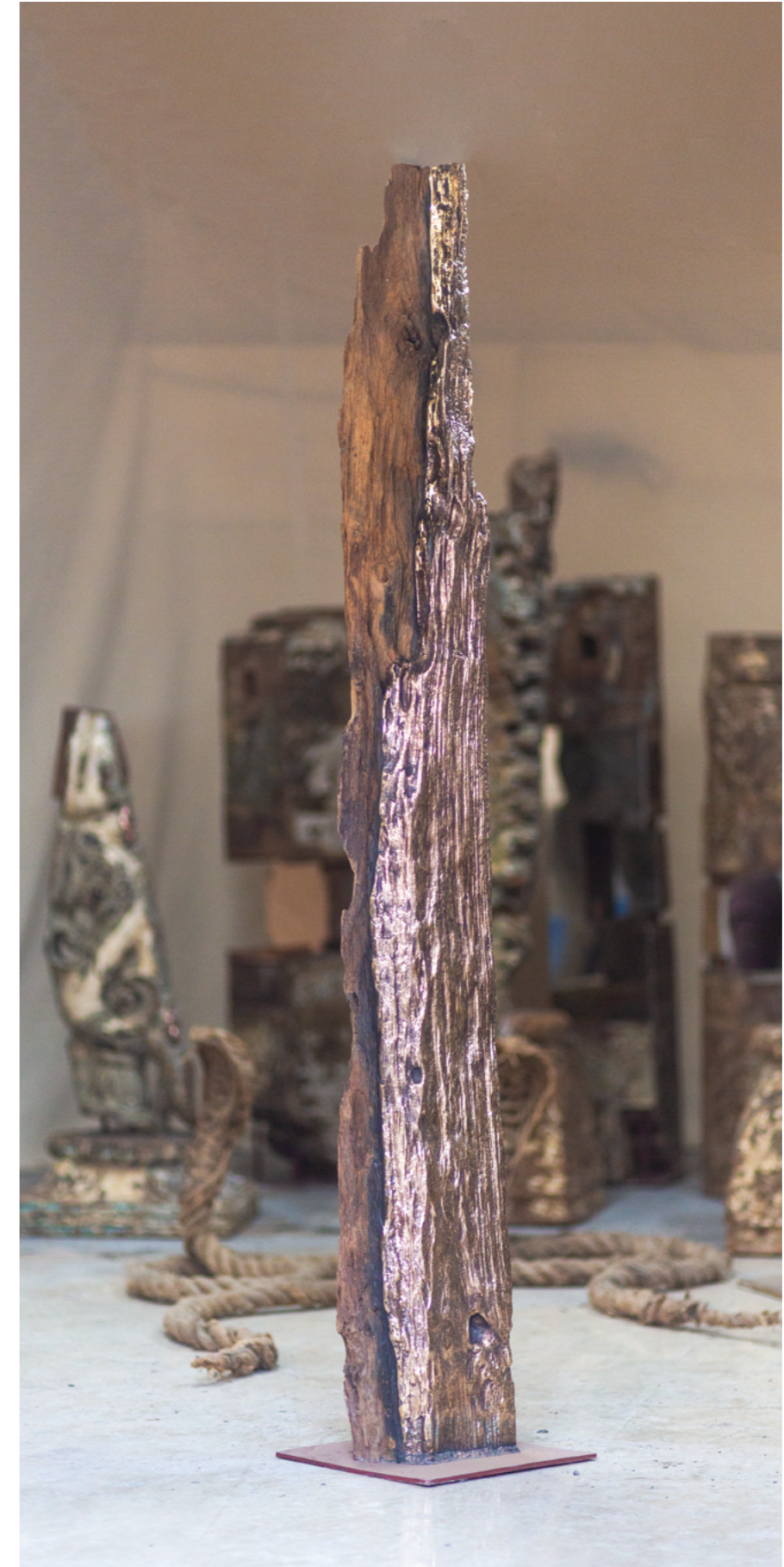


PITALA BRASS

The beauty of old wood lies in its weathering and not the polish. Taking two long worn-out logs of teak Raj makes facsimile of dents, breakages and fissures in bronze and copper. He displays them in the alcoves, the real wood hiding behind the metal. 'Pitala (Brass)' is one of the two sculptures of the logs that in their veins hold memory of the forests.

TAMBRA COPPER

The beauty of old wood lies in its weathering and not the polish. Taking two long worn-out logs of teak Raj makes facsimile of dents, breakages and fissures in bronze and copper. He displays them in the alcoves, the real wood hiding behind the metal. 'Tambra (Copper)' is one of the two sculptures of the logs that in their veins hold memory of the forests.





RAJ SHAHANI

Raj Shahani (1960, Bombay) grew up in Mumbai and lived between the Middle-East and the United States since 1982. Coming out as queer at the age of 37 he began to break away from his career as a product-designer to more artistic pursuits until he began making sculpture at the age of 57 having enrolled himself into the Art Students League of New York. Interested by the play between material as metaphors of human subconsciousness and ego manifesting in beauty. He had his first solo show in 2019 called *Caesura/Continuum* and then in 2023 *'Old Fires Keep on Burning!'*, both at the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai. In November 2023 he had a solo presentation at the Centre of Contemporary Art, Bikaner House with a show titled *'Colour, Stone, Chintz, Grain and Statue'*. In 2022 he had a solo show at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, New York and Caelum Gallery, Chelsea, New York. He designed the backdrop of Royal Bombay Opera House for a chamber music concert from Switzerland called *'Continuum'*. He also designed the award for the New York Indian Film Festival in 2020. His work has been featured in the *Architectural Digest*, *Vogue*, *Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, *Elle*, *Mumbai Mirror*, *Mid-Day*, Cover story in the *Sindhian Magazine*, *Seema Magazine* - New York.

ANAMKARA ART

AnamKara is a space for the arts based in Delhi initiated to commence a dialogue between artistic practices from India and the World. Drawn from the Celtic phrase 'Anam Cara' or 'Soul friend', we hold a universalist mandate as our vision for exhibition-making in the space.

The universal need across humanity to engage and produce art is an essential covenant for Universalism. We at AnamKara through the process of exhibition making would like to engage an audience for artists with diverse practices who use varied mediums, conceptual imaginaries, and cultural contexts. Based in Delhi we inhabit a socio-political reality where we witness an urgent need to participate in an internationalist dialogue in the arts both aesthetically and conceptually. India is at a historic moment in history, a country celebrated for its diversity and known for its radical hospitality which echoes the Zulu phrase 'Ubuntu' or 'Humanity to others'.

The inception of AnamKara stemmed from the shared vision of Priyanka Kheterpal and Sukhbinder S Heer. Priyanka Kheterpal is an HR professional who has worked with the Boston Consulting Group and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Sukhbinder S Heer is a Corporate Finance professional in the United Kingdom and previously the Managing Partner of RSM Robson Rhodes - a partnership of Chartered Accountants. After collecting art for a decade, their global experiences and consulting insight gave them a holistic view of the opportunities that the Indian Art Scene presented. International Artists were seldom seen on the scene and a space dedicated to an international exhibitions program was for the asking.

We conceive a series of residencies that culminate in exhibitions where we work with artists internationally with a focus on artistic practices from the Middle East, Africa, and the Indian Diaspora. Inviting artists to India to

engage with artisans where a collaboration of conceptual ideas with artisanal knowledge will culminate in a syncretic image that mirrors our current cosmopolitanism. We curate exhibitions scenographed for an audience that can engage complex layered artist practices with simplicity. AnamKara has previously worked in the field of home architecture where we have provided turnkey art offerings for interiors. The multiplicity of medium is the chore of our aesthetic vision. Experimentation with art sets our gallery apart and our artists practices have ambitions for a community. We at AnamKara propose to be 'Soul Friends' to our artists, audience, and collectors.



SUKHBINDER S HEER - Co Founder

Sukhbinder is the driving force behind Anam Kara Art, serving as its Promoter and Co-founder. With a background in corporate finance, he seamlessly combines financial expertise with a passion for the arts. Sukhbinder's vision ensures that Anam Kara thrives as both a creative space and a financially solid venture, making it an innovative hub for artistic expression.



PRIYANKA KHETERPAL – Co Founder

Priyanka is the co-founder of Anam Kara Art, where she oversees the gallery's global operations. Her role encompasses leadership in strategy, business development, technology, and finance. Before Anam Kara, Priyanka served as the Global HR Director at Boston Consulting Group, working across markets in the US, Europe, and Asia. Prior to that, she contributed to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle and India.

ANAMKARA ART

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HOLDING

BEAUTY

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WEARING

MASQUES

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