



# UMBARTHA

MONALI MEHER

SOLO SHOW

17 JANUARY - 5 MARCH, 2023

VHC

VIDA HEYDARI

CONTEMPORARY



*Umbartha*, a Marathi word that translates into the doorstep or threshold, is layered metaphorically with implications of home, travel, crossovers, change, time and memory. In Monali Meher's exhibition at VHC, the works on display range from the artist's primary works when she had just left India in the early 2000s and build up to more recent ones from 2017 by which time India and Belgium were both home to her. Having lived in Europe, first Amsterdam and now Ghent, Meher has also exhibited and performed across India at galleries, museums and public spaces. *Umbartha*, the artist's first exhibition in Pune, the city she was born in is a homecoming of works that explore transitory notions of the threshold. In the context of the large oeuvre of the artist's practice on display, *Umbartha* ensues *Falling Star* (2019) an exhibition that encompassed fifteen years of Meher's journey as an artist. Wrapped objects, residual performances, drawn emotions and photographs thread mediums across space and time. Self-portraits, scale and installation extend the viewers eye beyond looking and into experiencing.

Arrivals and departures over thresholds are apparent in the way Meher's works oscillate materials, processes and concepts. *Umbartha* as a metaphor and form also holds a significant place in Pune's cultural history. As a departure, the release of *Umbartha* by Jabbar Patel in 1982 featuring a young Girish Karnad and Smita Patil set a new benchmark in vernacular film history for women in society with a narrative that explored a woman's life – her choice to leave home, establish an identity and pursue a career – all at the risk of alienation from her family. In considering the crossing over of thresholds as an arrival or homecoming, Meher refers to a traditional marital ceremony, *Grahpravesh* during which a new bride crosses over the doorstep of the house to enter her husband's home for the first time. The discoveries, risks, thoughtforms and achievements that these bold steps over thresholds reveal are an ongoing process of Meher's artistic practice.

Upon entering the exhibition at VHC, red *Wrapped Bows* (2015) stretch the viewer's eyes to peel heights and nooks of space

that may otherwise go unnoticed. The red thread is a primal root that links Meher's *Umbarthas* across time. It has travelled with her through explorations in mediums of performance, photography, drawing, sculpture and installation. Meher refers to red wool as a comment on the world's state of calamity in war and nature while also wrapping and covering objects in their entirety to provide them with a second (perhaps protective) skin to appear mysterious and preserve the original spirit of its being. Layered with memory, place and time, the identity of these objects is transported into the artist's own experiments with self-recognition and identity that bring with them cities and countries that Meher has lived in over the years.

The body and self-portraits transform metaphorically to represent the artist's life struggles, responsibility, relationships, emotion, change and hope. In *Hunt Hope* (2013), camouflage, red embroidery and thread link the veil to question identity in war and politics while also drawing in the artist's use of costume and fabric. The process of covering, layering and revealing act as a play on the interchangeable meanings of the artist's works. Meher's move to Europe in the early 2000s was a constant acceptance and rejection of self-recognition. She turned to her body to look at the sacredness of what she held of home beyond the threshold.

Drawings, paintings and embroidery emerged as a part of this process alongside photographs and self-portraits to highlight the use of emotion and consideration of the body as a medium.

A workshop with Marina Abramovich, *Cleaning the House* (2004), in Jerez, Spain, was a significant period in Meher's life that influenced not only her performative practice, but also the way in which she experimented with materials, emotion and sound. The artist's early performances germinated from her need to be in front of the public and questioned whether her actions were acts for an audience or for herself. The contrast of change is laid bare in performances such as *Old Fashioned* (2003), in Amsterdam and in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, followed by performances in Beijing and Mumbai. The words – 'Anger',

'Hate', 'Crime', 'Violence', 'Racism', 'War' – appear as text on a pile of potatoes that the artist then cleaned, peeled, washed and boiled, as a symbolic replacement of alternate action. In a more recent performance, *Bound/ Unbound* (2017), Meher invited her audience to tie objects with red thread to her body. She then toiled through the streets of Kathmandu and while walking, gradually unburdened herself of these materials as a symbol of letting go of baggage of association and memory. The process of walking has been a significant part of the artist's performances. Whether it is inside a space or outside, walking is something that the artist constantly engages with during her performances, such as *Visiting Brooklyn Bridge*, New York (2016), *Visiting Pearl*, Guangzhou (2011) and *Visiting Marmara*, Istanbul (2013). Often walking barefoot, Meher also looks at this as a way of earthing herself, similar to *Terra* (2009) that directly links the earth and soil back to the artist's first *Umbartha* at her home soil, Pune.

Landscapes and languages of places with reference to the body are a part of Meher's vocabulary. *First Departure*, a series of photographs from Meher's performance at the Sinop Biennale, Turkey (2008), sees her atop an abandoned truck that resembles a sight one may have experienced in certain instance of mass groups of people or migrants travelling from one place to the next – leaving home yet rooted. Shoes thread in here with their references to journeys, maps, personal explorations, travellers' histories. The artist's long engagements with the outside and walking, became objects of recurrent preservation in *Tracing the Threads* (2017). The maps on which these shoes are threaded are also a layer of Meher's practice to locate geographies of place, wanderings and eventually homecomings to *Umbarthas*.

– Veeranganakumari Solanki, 2023

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References from: *Falling Star*, Monali Meher, Works 2004 - 2019, Solo Exhibition, 2019 at CJK Mariakerke, Ghent, Belgium



## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

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"In 1998, I performed, 'Reflect: A personal window display', with the statement, 'Nothing is permanent and it's nature's law'. The performance had no beginning or end, conceptualising ideas within the framework of personal references that inform the fragile division between my life and my art."

'Time' as a factor, is central to my practice, whether it's a wrapped object or a performance. I use time as medium, which is extended, assembled and captured in my atmospheric and ritualistic performances showing the cyclical circles of destruction and renewal. Involving various disciplines, my art practice reflect decay, hybridisation and transformation.

Creating new identities, reshaping belongings, intimacy, a dialogue of matter and memory – all these constitute the language of my work. Furthermore, the aspects of continuity, repetition, vulnerability, duration, temporality, awareness, situation and public involvement are also inherent qualities that inform my oeuvre. The process witnesses my quest for defining the trace of time, its territory and extensions into the real world. Beyond this, I draw an ontological thought of time influencing human essence and evolution. Two different spaces interact in a self-reflecting process of transit, change and affected repetition. I elaborate a philosophical exploration of the human, in order to point out its process of construction, through the antithetical notions of private versus collective memory, feeling of longing versus belonging, intimacy versus conflict and familiarity versus unfamiliarity. I try to merge these processes into my work, so that the viewer gets a notion of time through a process of dilation and re-connection.

*Umbartha*, a Marathi word that translates into the doorstep or threshold, is layered metaphorically with implications of home, travel, crossovers, change, time and memory. In my first solo exhibition at VHC, the works on display range from earlier works when I had just left India in the early 2000s and build up to more recent ones from 2017.

*Umbartha*, my first exhibition in Pune, the city I was born in is a homecoming of works that explore transitory notions of the threshold.











## TRACING THE THREADS (2017)

### Installation

Faux Leather, Wool, Printed Canvas, Shoes, Cloth and Metal  
Variable Size, Big Piece: 150 x 245 cm (59 x 96.5"),  
Small Piece: 68 x 140 cm (26.5 x 55")





## BOUND / UNBOUND (2017)

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### Performance

Digital Print on Silk Baryta Hahnemuhle Paper

Edition: 1/3 + 2 a. p.

109.5 x 162.5 cm (43 x 64")





# OLD FASHIONED (2006)

## **Interactive Performance**

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper  
Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.  
28.5 x 38 cm (11 x 15")



# OLD FASHIONED (2006)

## **Interactive Performance**

Video 9:16 mins  
PAL Format, With Sound





## OLD FASHIONED (REMAINS) (2005) – 1

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### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

28 x 34.5 cm (11 x 13.5")



## OLD FASHIONED (REMAINS) (2005) – 2

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### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

28 x 34.5 cm (11 x 13.5")



## OLD FASHIONED (REMAINS) (2005) – 3

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### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

28 x 34.5 cm (11 x 13.5")





## OLD FASHIONED (REMAINS) (2005) – 4

### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

28 x 34.5 cm (11 x 13.5")



## OLD FASHIONED (REMAINS) (2005) – 5

### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

28 x 34.5 cm (11 x 13.5")



## OLD FASHIONED (REMAINS) (2005) – 6

### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

28 x 34.5 cm (11 x 13.5")





## SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 1

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
38 x 46 cm (15 x 18")



## SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 6

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
39 x 49 cm (15 x 19")



## SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 2

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
47 x 48 cm (18.5 x 19")





# SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 3

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
49 x 47 cm (19 x 18.5")



# SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 4

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
47 x 46 cm (18.5 x 18")



# SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 5

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
50 x 38 cm (19.5 x 15")





**SEVEN MODIFIED HEARTS (2008) - 7**

**Mixed Media Work**

Wool, Handmade Paper, Black Japan Ink  
39 x 49 cm (15 x 19")





## HUNT HOPE (2013)

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**Performance Photograph**

Digital Print on Canvas, Wool  
60 x 40 cm (23.5 x 15.5")





## WRAPPED BOWS (2015)

### **Installation**

Metal and Wool

Variable, 16 Pieces

62 x 20 cm (24.5 x 8") each





## FIRST DEPARTURE (2008) - 1 & 2

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### Performance Photographs

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Editions: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

43 x 34 cm (17 x 13.5") each





## FIRST DEPARTURE (2008) – 3

### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

34 x 43 cm (13.5 x 17")



## FIRST DEPARTURE (2008) – 4

### Performance Photograph

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle Matte Photo Paper

Edition: 1/5 + 2 a. p.

43 x 34 cm (17 x 13.5")









## MONALI MEHER

*"In 1998, I performed, 'Reflect: A personal window display', with the statement, 'Nothing is permanent and it's nature's law'. The performance had no beginning or end, conceptualising ideas within the framework of personal references that inform the fragile division between my life and my art."*

— Monali Meher

'Time' as a factor, is central to her practice, whether it's a wrapped object or a performance. She uses time as medium, which is extended, assembled and captured in her atmospheric and ritualistic performances showing the cyclical circles of destruction and renewal. Involving various disciplines, Meher's art practice reflects decay, hybridisation and transformation.

Meher graduated from Sir J. J. School of arts, Mumbai. Received 'Unesco -Aschberg' residency, Vienna 1998, Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten 2000- '01, Amsterdam. She Performed and exhibited internationally; Tate modern, Sinop Biennale Turkey, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Art Dubai, 'Rebelle', MMKA Arnhem, NRLA Glasgow, Prague Biennale 5th, MAXXI museum Rome, Guangzhou Live, China, IPA Istanbul Modern Museum, 4th Thessaloniki Biennale, Venice International cinema and performance art, Bochum kunstmuseum Germany, ICASTICA '13, Arezzo Biennial, where Meher received the prestigious '*Golden Chimera Award*' for innovation and originality, in 2016 performed at 'Ritual Traces' SAWCC New York, Beijing Live, & participated in Dakar biennale. In 2017 Kathmandu Triennale and Manifesta HQ Amsterdam, 2018 'Connecting Threads' BDL museum Mumbai, in 2019 Stedelijk kunstakademie, Kunstroute Waregem, and 'Walking's New Movements', conference at University of Plymouth, UK. In 2020 she participated in a group show, 'Living, Forgiving, Remembering', De Kerk, Museum Arnhem & 'ben Cobra' at Cobra museum Amstelveen. In 2021 Kunsthall 3,14 Bergen, Norway, performed at Arctic Action VI in Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen. In 2021-22, she was part of online 'Upcycling' Sinop biennale 8, Turkey.

Monali Meher lives and works in Ghent, Belgium.



# MONALI MEHER

Born in 1969, Pune, India  
Lives and works in Ghent, Belgium

## Education

1990: B. F. A. (Fine Arts) in Painting, Sir J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai

## Solo Exhibitions (Selected)

- 2022: *The Beginning Of A New Beginning*, Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2022: *Unknown Landscape*, Het Atelier, Bruges, Belgium
- 2019: *Falling Star, (Works 2004 – 2019)*, CJK, Mariakerke, Ghent, Belgium
- 2017: *Roots and Threads, Borders and Pieces*, Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2016: *Spirit House*, Museum Van Alle Tijden, Beugen, Brabant, The Netherlands
- 2013: *Meat Markets and Spirit Houses*, Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2009: *Departed, Assembled, Wrapped, Captured: Time*, Project 88, Mumbai, India
- 2009: *Measures & Weight*, Live Funds, Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2008: *Departed, Assembled, Wrapped, Captured: Time*, Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## Group Exhibitions (Selected)

- 2022: *Silent Land*, Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2022: *Upcycling*, Sinopale 8, Online Sinop biennale, Sinop, Turkey
- 2021: VAICA 2, Field of Vision, presented by Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum and Comet Foundation, Mumbai, India
- 2021: *Love Thy Neighbor*, Asia Triennial Manchester 2021, Manchester Poetry Library, Manchester, UK
- 2021: *Imaginary Travels*, Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2021: *Living, Forgiving, Remembering*, Kunsthall 3,14, Bergen, Norway
- 2020: *Collector's Item*, Contemporary Art Collection of Sanders, Centraal Museum Utrecht, The Netherlands
- 2020: *Living, Forgiving, Remembering*, De Kerk, Museum Arnhem, The Netherlands
- 2020: *Ben Cobra*, curated by Aziz Bekkaoui, Cobra Museum Amstelveen, The Netherlands
- 2018: *Connecting Threads: Textiles in Contemporary Practice*, curated by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta and Puja Vaish, BDL Museum, Mumbai, India
- 2016: *What we have overlooked*, Museum Arnhem collection-show, Gallery Framer's Framed, Amsterdam, Netherlands

- 2016: OFF biennale, Medina, DAK'ART 2016, IFAA, KAANI & Yataal Art, Dakar, Senegal
- 2016: *AS ONE, NEON+MAI* (Marina Abramovic Institute), IMMATERIAL, Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece
- 2015: *Spiegeloog/Mirrored Eye*, curated by Mirjam Westen, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, The Netherlands
- 2015: *Der Fremde in Mir*, SMAHK, Stedelijk Museum Assen, The Netherlands
- 2014: *Sparsha: Ritual and contemporary*, Kunstmuseum Bochum, Bochum, Germany
- 2014: *Threads*, curated by Mirjam Westen, Museum Arnhem, The Netherlands
- 2013: *Souvenir*, curated by Lucie Fontaine, Galerie Perrotin, Paris
- 2013: *Auspiciously Red* Installation, Casa delle Culture, ICASTICA 2013, (Glocal women) 1<sup>st</sup> Arezzo Art Biennial, Italy
- 2012: *Re-Picturing the Feminine: New and Hybrid Realities*, curated by Marnie Dean, Gallery OED, Cochin, India
- 2012: *Contemporary Renaissance* curated by Veeranganakumari Solanki, Casa Masaccio Museum, Tuscany, Italy
- 2011: Prague Biennale 5<sup>th</sup>, Art in general, *Crossroads: India Escalate*, curated by Kanchi Mehta, Prague, CZ
- 2011: Hong Kong Art Fair (*ArtHK11*), Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam



**Performances (Selected)**

2022: *Gilded*, Gallery Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2022: *In Search Of A Lost Monastery*, site-specific performance, Het Atelier, Bruges, Belgium

2021: *mUSE*, Installation and performance, Kunstnersenter Spitsbergen, Arctic Action VI, Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway

2021: *Old Fashioned*, installation and collaborative performance, Zomersalon '21, Kunsthal Gent, Ghent, Belgium

2020: *Old Fashioned*, group exhibition, *Living Forgiving Remembering*, De Kerk, Museum Arnhem, Netherlands

2019: *Visiting Sutton Pool*, site- specific performance, at conference, *Walking's New Movements*, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK

2019: *Curve, Carve, Cultus, Maart kunstroute Waregem*, Zaal 29, Stedelijke kunstacademie Waregem, Belgium.

2017: *Golden Bend*, Manifesta in-house series, Manifesta HQ, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2017: *bound/unbound*, Patan Museum, Kathmandu Triennale, Kathmandu, Nepal

2016: *Red & Twisted*, bEIJING LIVE 1, Danish cultural center, 798 districts, Beijing, China

2016: *One Drop of Blood*, Museum Arnhem 'What we have overlooked', Gallery Framer's Framed, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2016: *Visiting Brooklyn Bridge, Ritual Traces* by SAWCC Funded by Mondriaan Funds & NYC Culture, New York

2016: *Illuminare la roccia da 1910 per 1918*, Biennale Arte Dolomiti, Ex- Caserma Monte Rite, Cibiana di Cadore, Italy

2015: *LIVE/LIFE* Interactive performances & Installations in public space curated by Monali Meher, Gent, Belgium

2015: *Visiting Renos, anders sein*, Kulturforum Alte Post, Neuss, Germany

2014: *Balance III*, Guangzhou Live 5, International performance Art, China

2014: *Reverse/ Rewind/ Replay: Ten Acts from the Past, Sparsha*, Kunstmuseum Bochum, Bochum, Germany

2014: *Balance II*, ACTUS III, Académie des Beaux-Arts saint Gilles, Brussels, Belgium

2014: *Terra*, Venice International experimental cinema and performance art festival, Palazzo Ca' Zanardi, Venice

2013: *Forward/ Backward/ Rise/ Fall*, 4<sup>th</sup> Thessaloniki Biennale Old Intersections- Make it New, Greece

2013: *Visiting Marmara*, Istanbul Modern museum and IPA (International performance platform) Istanbul, Turkey

2013: *In Determination, ICASTICA 2013*, 1<sup>st</sup> Arezzo Art Biennial, Arezzo, Italy

2012: *A Dialogue with water*, iLAS 2012, Live action 7 Gothenburg, Sweden

2012: *Mass*, Kala Ghoda Festival, Kala Ghoda, Mumbai, India

2011: *Silent Act*, December 18<sup>th</sup> Global art action, International Migrants day, Museumplein, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2011: *Mass*, Guangzhou Live 11, International performance Art festival, Guangzhou, China

2011: *Golden Quadrilateral*, MAXXI Museum, Rome, Italy

2011: *Morose, Infr' Action Sète*, Festival international d'Art Performance, Sète France

2010: Fake performance scene of tragic end in the old church, Museum - Nacht, Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, Nederland

2010: *In Determination, NRLA 2010* (National Review on Live Art) Glasgow, Scotland

2009: *In Determination II*, Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, India

2009: Two headed with Fish Posture, group exhibition, rebelle, Art and Feminism 1969-2009, mmka, Arnhem Netherlands

2009: *Old Fashioned*, (Me/Folly, mobile, Holger Nickisch), Aachen, Germany

2009: *Old Fashioned*, Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, NCPA, Mumbai, India

2009: *In Determination*, Supported by Mondriaan Foundation, Art Dubai

2009: *Terra*, Festival FEM, Gresol, Cultural Centre La Merce, Girona, Spain



## Awards and Residences

- 2022: *Het Atelier*, Artists Residency, Bruges, Belgium
- 2013: *Golden Chimera Award*, ICASTICA 2013, 1<sup>st</sup> Arezzo Art Biennial, Italy
- 2012: Residency Casa Masaccio Arte contemporanea and MK Search Art, San Giovanni Valdarno, Tuscany, Italy
- 2004: *Khoj* International Residency, Funded by Hivos, New Delhi, India
- 1998: *UNESCO- ASCHBERG*, International Artists Residency, Federal Chancellery for Arts and Science, Vienna, Austria

## Funded Projects

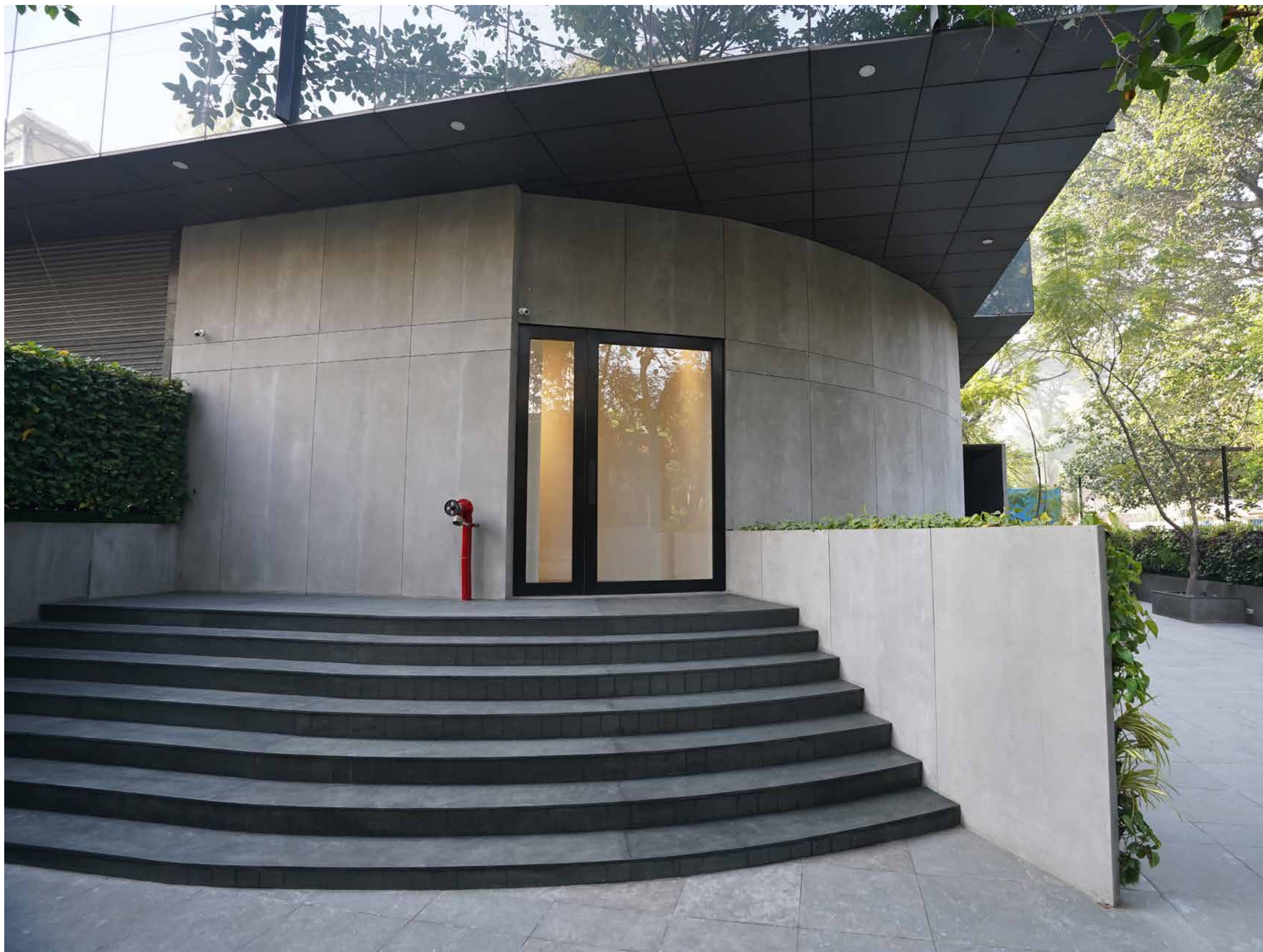
- 2021: *Arctic Action VI*, Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway, funded by Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- 2019: *INSPIREREN-INSPIRATIEON*, funded by Provincie Oost Vlaanderen Transitiereglement Gent-Glas, Belgium
- 2017: International grant by Mondriaan Funds, performance at Patan Museum, Kathmandu Triennale
- 2016: International grant by Mondriaan Funds & NYC Culture, performance, *Ritual Traces* by SAWCC New York
- 2011: *The Bridge Is Open*, Public Space Project, installation under Willem's bridge, Haarlemmerpoort, Amsterdam, funded by AFK, Fonds BKVB

- 2009: Travel grant Mondriaan Funds, performance *In Determination*, Art Dubai
- 2009: LIVE Fonds, Fonds BKVB, Project *Measures & Weights*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2001: *Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten*, Funded by Nuffic, Huygens grant, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2000: *Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten*, funded by Dutch Ministry foreign & Affairs (BUZA/DCOIC) Amsterdam

## Collections

Museum Arnhem | Centraal Museum Utrecht | Rijksmuseum Amsterdam | AMC Amsterdam | Akzo Nobel | Sanders ten Holte Collection | Jacqueline de Jong | Rabo Bank | Rogues Consult NV  
And many private collectors





VHC  
VIDA HEYDARI  
CONTEMPORARY

VHC is founded by Vida Heydari, a curator and gallerist with over 14 years of diverse experience in the global art world. She has worked with accomplished Indian, Iranian and Chinese contemporary artists and has also consulted for various private and public collections.

Established in 2020, VHC is Pune's newest contemporary art gallery. VHC celebrates art by partnering with artists, promoting their work and connecting them to art lovers. The gallery showcases works by local and international artists and through its collateral programs aims to contribute to the cultural fabric of Pune city. VHC endeavours to create a platform to encounter and engage with relevant contemporary art practices from around the world.





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