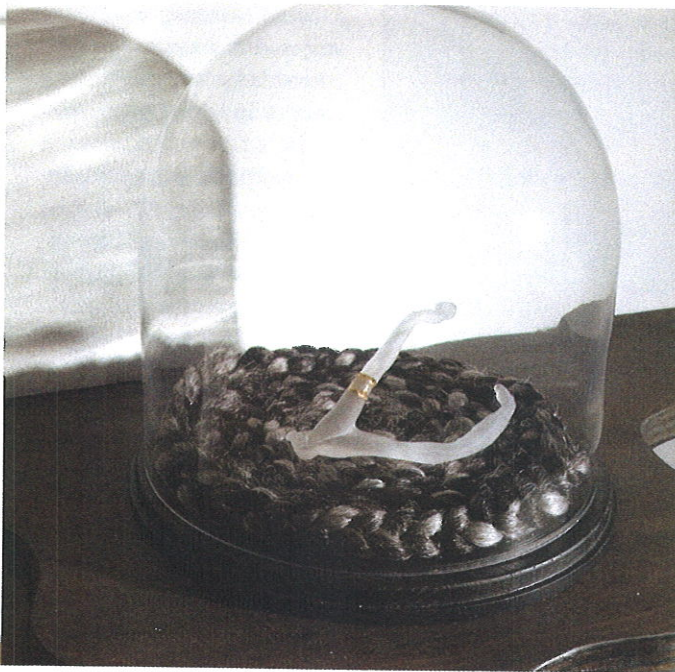


# sculpture

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other than as art. In *Mercy Doesn't Grow On Trees*, an armoire is mounted above a shelf holding a bell jar, which contains a broken and carefully mended glass wishbone on a circular bed of braided gray hair. *Keys to the City* levitates an old (silenced) cabinet record player; the table underneath holds glass keys resting on black sand. The keys represent Arline's generosity with her time, as the key-holder for the neighborhood, and I believe the sand represents the lives that she nurtured.

A pair of levitating, worn, light green doors was, for me, the most haunting work in the show. Strings of pearls join the doors, echoing those around Arline's neck in the portraits. A translucent glass walking cane hangs on a brass duck-head coat hook among the pearls. Below, a worn and rusted footstool holds two more glass canes. Evidently, Arline left them lying around. The poignant title, *I Knew You Before You Was Born*, captures Arline's voice. Olujimi created the glass canes, keys, and wishbone with the help of Leo Tecosky and Dorie Guthrie at Urban Glass in Brooklyn.

The final object in the show, *Where From Here*, consists of two beautifully restored antique brass door-knobs facing each other in a corner. They ask viewers from "here" what collective action may come next. All of the works in "Solastalgia" were created in 2016, including a series of serigraphs commemorating victims of violence and documenting the pressures of development on urban neighborhoods. With or without knowing the symbolism behind every image and object, this was a stirring and thought-provoking exhibition.

—Jan Garden Castro

**STOUFFVILLE, ONTARIO,  
CANADA**

**Xiaojing Yan**

**The Latcham Gallery**

*Cloud Cell*, the central component in Xiaojing Yan's recent exhibition "Hybrid Vigour," is a splendidly ethereal and luminescent installation. Constructed of thousands of freshwater pearls suspended on monofilament between two aluminum squares, this cloud-like rendering uses light and space to great effect. As in the contemplation of clouds,

there are many interpretations. Yan's references include the scholars' rocks prevalent in Chinese gardens, which have been used as objects of meditation since ancient times. The eroded limestone that Yan renders through air and light has visual properties reminiscent of the mountainous landscapes seen in Asian brush paintings, but it can also be read as an ominous mushroom cloud, or even a death's head.

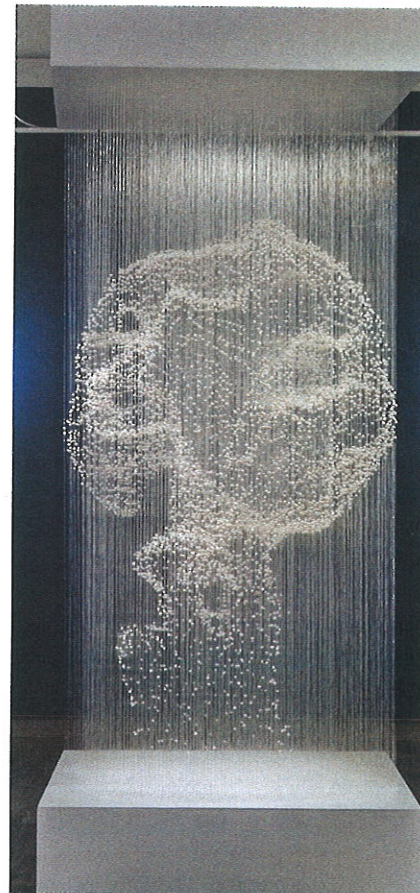
In terms of image and material, Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull comes to mind, with its cold, glittering surfaces and its intimations of mortality. But this notion emerges as a counterpoint to Yan's piece, which is evanescent and porous, something with soft reflective possibilities and made from materials that develop through an organic connectedness to water, a gentleness rather than force. Diamonds deep within a

Above: Kambui Olujimi, *Mercy Doesn't Grow On Trees*, 2016. Wood, glass wishbone, gold leaf, bell jar, and ratchet straps, 12.5 x 4.5 x 2 ft. Right: Xiaojing Yan, *Cloud Cell*, 2014. Freshwater pearls, aluminum, and monofilament thread, 96 x 45 x 45 in.

stony crucible of igneous rock are compressed over eons, while pearls are an accumulation inside a small animal. The interplay of light and air continually re-creates the piece as it is viewed from all sides. Pearls and delicate filament shimmer ever so slightly, implying the ebb and flow of natural forces.

Yan also explores the visual attributes of moving water, alluding to both the creation of pearls and the wearing away of limestone that creates the evocative shapes of scholars' rocks. Sumi ink and water combine on rice paper scrolls and in a video aptly titled *Ink-Water-Stone*.

Several patinated bronzes based on lingzhi fungi were installed in Donald Judd fashion, as if they had emerged directly from the wall. Traditionally considered to possess spiritual properties with medicinal uses, they are called the plant of immortality. Similar to the bracket



fungi in North American forests, they also echo the mushroom cloud that can be imagined in *Cloud Cell*.

Both the suspended cloud cell and the gravity-defying bronzes are salient metaphors for the nature of the immigrant experience, held between two worlds and speaking the languages of both. A paradoxical combination of serenity and menace is embodied in Yan's work, where thoughts of health and well-being intersect with anxieties associated with personal and global issues. Yan has lived in Canada for 15 years, most of her adult life, and while her studies began in Nanjing, she earned an MFA in sculpture in Pennsylvania. Her work consistently achieves an overlap of traditional Chinese references and the concerns of contemporary art, thus the hybridism alluded to in the exhibition title.

—Margaret Rodgers

## NEW DELHI

### Sudarshan Shetty

#### National Gallery of Modern Art

Sudarshan Shetty, describing his recent installation, *Shoonya Ghar* (emptiness is the house), has said that it “challeng[es] my own relationship with the market as an artist. Since it is a museum show, this is an opportunity to push those boundaries in my work rather than doing a retrospective, which is what I was offered.” And push boundaries he did, with élan, combining diverse mediums and materials to seamlessly blend the distant past with the present. The inspiration for this body of work came from the great 12th-century Nirgun poet, Gorakhnath, specifically his *dohas*, or couplets, that speak hauntingly of inhabitants in settlements and places. Shetty has tried to give a form and function to these lines in architectural imagery.

As he says, “The structure and the images within this particular poetry can both be read as architectural in evocation. So, the first response was to build something that could be shown within the existing architecture of the gallery space.”

Poems are open to interpretation, and *dohas* are particularly difficult to interpret given their ambiguous words and cryptic meanings. The placement of words is so exalted and precise that one needs to delve deep for understanding. Shetty's decision to give architectural form to poetry written centuries ago, therefore, was unusual and tough. The exhibition combined several mediums, with film being central. The narrative—planned in minute detail—offers glimpses of everyday life, the chilling drops of blood toward the end somehow coming together with the wooden architectural constructions.

As Shetty explains, “There are four buildings made out of wood that came from dismantled structures in and around Mumbai, as a way of weaving those unknown stories into the piece. The structure was then dismantled in my studio and taken to an abandoned stone quarry to be reassembled again. There is a cavity in the mountain made by taking away the stone to build elsewhere, and it was a symbolic gesture of rebuilding in this site, only to be disassembled and put back together later in the gallery. While these buildings were in the process of being rebuilt, we shot musicians and actors playing out a loose-ended narrative which is an integral part of the show.” The script of the film came first, and the design of the structures took shape once the script was in place.

As Shetty says, “The elements are old, but it is all in my own idiosyn-

cratic design. I'm interested in playing with the notion of what is old, what is new, what is real, what is not. What does this structure mean, and who would reside in it, or what does it mean as an art object and who would buy that?” Every individual at some point in life has moments when he or she feels alone and isolated. *Shoonya Ghar* had the unnerving ability to strike at this loneliness and emptiness.

—Chitra Balasubramaniam

## DISPATCH

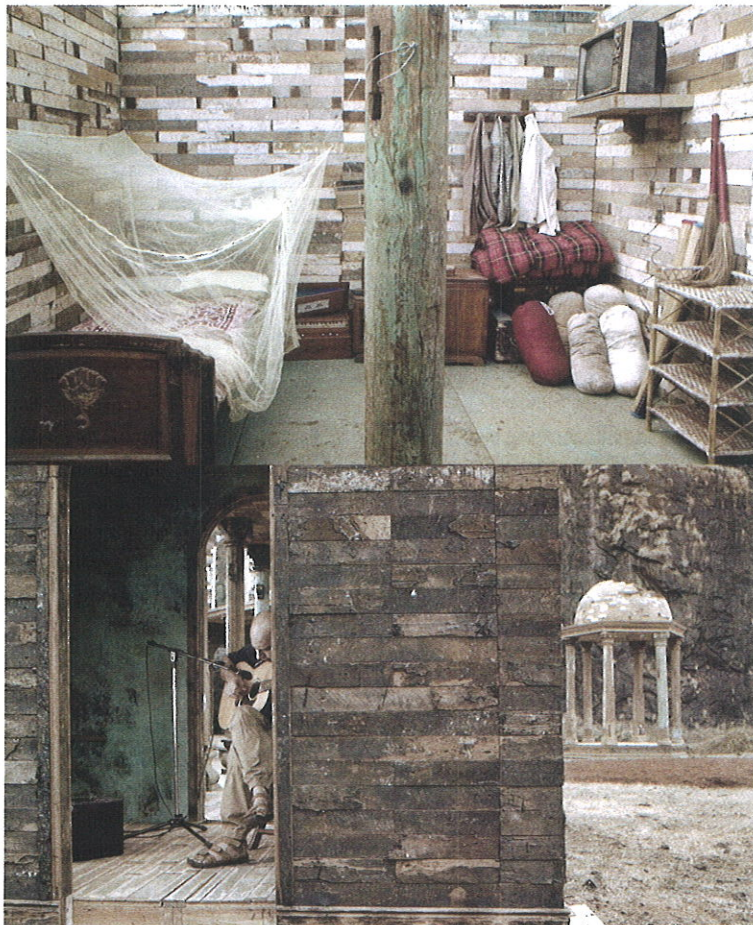
### WASHINGTON, DC

#### “Wonder”

##### Renwick Gallery

From kaleidoscopic prisms to twinkling LED lights, nine room-size installations inaugurated the Renwick's second reboot since its opening in 1859. Natural references and the importance of labor prevailed, as did explorations of growth and accumulation with materials of everyday life. By featuring contemporary artists Jennifer Angus, Chakaia Booker, Gabriel Dawe, Tara Donovan, Patrick Dougherty, John Grade, Janet Echelman, Maya Lin, and Leo Villareal, the Renwick opted to revitalize its original mission—it was the first private museum in the U.S. dedicated to the visual arts. This decision seemed to defy years of being the Smithsonian Institution's venue for decorative arts and crafts, signaling perhaps the Renwick's final blow to the distinction between the two genres.

Color, shadows, and geometry stood out in the Villareal, Dawe, and Echelman installations. Villareal's suspended LED sculpture, *Volume*, created substance out of a transparent rectangle, boldly engaging the grand staircase of the Beaux-Arts building with a jolt of 21st-century technology. Like a skilled puppet master, he programmed the lights—encased in stainless steel strands—to blink and dim, evoking the thrill of the night sky or the mesmerizing patterns of a Bach fugue. A sense of the ephem-



Sudarshan Shetty, *Shoonya Ghar*, 2016. Second-hand teak from a dismantled structure and video, 2 stills from installation.