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BHASHA CHAKRABARTI *When I Get That Mood Indigo*

July 28 – September 3, 2021

Opening Reception

Saturday, July 31 from 6 to 8 pm

M+B is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Bhasha Chakrabarti. *When I Get That Mood Indigo* is the artist's first show with the gallery and runs from July 31 through September 3, 2021, with an opening reception on Saturday, July 31 from 6 to 8pm at **M+B Doheny** (470 N. Doheny Drive).

Bhasha Chakrabarti dances with Indigo and divulges its secrets. Truth be told, we are all touched by the color as it proliferates the interstices of South x South ecologies. While its etymology identifies Indigo as a “product of India,” the history of the blue dye is globalized — major 18th century Indigo plantations were found in India and the American South, forging a commercial entanglement between the so-called “old world” and “new world” orchestrated by the profiteering colonial metropole in Europe. Chakrabarti represents these overlapping imperial cartographies in *“It’s a Blue World”* (2021) by threading ancient and colonial era Indigo trade routes on a global map. Crafting these works with Indigo sourced from around the globe on quilted fabric, Chakrabarti traces the transnational history of this blue pigment and dye, while simultaneously affirming that mapmaking *and* quiltmaking are worldmaking endeavors.

Several of Chakrabarti's recent works are quilts, in part because of the transnational feminist potentials of women's textile arts, as well as the assemblage techniques required for quiltmaking that parallel the networked origins of Indigo dye and of quilting itself. It was as a museumgoer and budding artist in NYC that Chakrabarti serendipitously encountered an exhibition of Gees Bend quilts, which she immediately felt an intimate connection to as a South Asian woman. Years later, Chakrabarti drove from New Haven to Gees Bend, Alabama, where she manifested the very solidarities and community building with China Pettway, Mary Ann Pettway, and numerous other esteemed Gees Bend artists that felt so viscerally possible to her the first time she viewed quilts from Gees Bend. Under their tutelage, Chakrabarti learned to quilt in a place which felt to her as an oasis. It was through quilting and companionship-apprenticeship with Black women artists in Gees Bend that Chakrabarti could further wrestle with the aesthetics and entwined histories of Indigo.

The Duke Ellington jazz standard, “Mood Indigo,” from which this exhibition takes its title proclaims; “You ain’t never been blue, till you’ve had that mood Indigo.” Indigo is often referred to as the bluest blue. This becomes an aperture through which Chakrabarti experiments with the color blue. Blue itself is abundant with irony: there is its expansive sense of freedom and nature — the color of the sky and the sea — yet the materialist production of blue (Indigo) dye is embedded in the afterlives of colonial plantations. In Yoruba cosmologies, for example, blue evokes power and royalty, while in Indian Rasa Theory, the blue-Black color, *shyama*, is associated with the erotic. In ancient Indian paintings and manuscripts, multiple gods and

M+B

goddesses described in texts as shyama (blue Black) or krsna (Black), are rendered using Indigo. In *To Be So Black and Blue (Chiffon as Shyama Sundara)* (2019-2021), Chakrabarti transposes a painting of Chiffon (her friend and fellow artist) onto one of her quilts, styled in the blue hue and accoutrements (a peacock feather) of the Hindu God Krishna, also known as, Shyama Sundara, using oil paints that she has milled from Guatemalan Indigo. The name Shyama Sundara translates to “dark and beautiful,” while the name Krishna means Black; what does it mean to associate his godly Blackness in Hindu art and literature with the Blackness of peoples of African descent in the Americas and beyond? Growing up as an African-American woman in a Great Migration (Georgia to Connecticut) family, Black vernacular often referred to dark-skinned Black people as “Blue-Black.” While the saying is often laced with colorism, the notion that someone can be so Black that they are blue adds another valence to Chakrabarti’s experiments with Black/American figures as Hindu gods, goddesses, and mythological figures, such as in the works *To Be So Black and Blue (Iman as Kali)* (2019-2021) and *To Be So Black and Blue (Dominic as Neela Madhav)* (2019-2021), as well. To be clear: Chakrabarti is not introducing Blackness to Hindu mythology, as the translations from Sanskrit to English are unequivocally about dark, Black skin. In a refusal to ignore the capaciousness of Blackness as a color and racial subject-position, Chakrabarti stages an intervention into a South Asian worldview where deified figures are conceptualized as Black in color while racial readings are overlooked. Confronting racial Blackness in Hinduism proposes an invigorating spiritual lens for Black-Asian connectivity.

The Black figures on Chakrabarti’s quilts are rendered in smoky, vibrant blue hues, and given African-American musical lyrics/titles in the Blues-inflected tradition of Jazz. Black Americanness, and the sentiment that “Black is Beautiful” is a global reckoning to be made, informs Chakrabarti’s excavations of alluring Indigo scenes in her own cultural heritage. This is not a case of a non-Black artist trafficking in the hyper-visibility and racial fetishism of Blackness, but instead the artwork produced out of Chakrabarti’s intimacies with Black life, Black thought, and through a rigorous study of Black and Asian solidarities and intimacies.

Even before Duke Ellington’s jazzy serenades, Indigo carries with it a revolutionary fervor: the Stono rebellion in 1739 on a South Carolina Indigo plantation when enslaved people took up arms against their captors, and the Indigo revolt (Nil bidroha) in 1859 Bengal where peasant farmers burned Indigo depots and resisted British imperial exploitation of Indian workers. Chakrabarti references these revolutionary histories in the Indigo text pieces on paper made from pulped jeans titled *Blue Notes* (2021). Indigo is the color that makes jeans blue; Chakrabarti appropriates used denim jeans in multiple works, including her quilts like *The Devil’s Blue Dye* (2021). Denim has historically been a symbol of the rural working class, reaching its fiery peak in the Black Power era as the Black Panther Party’s sartorial flare included blue jeans and denim jackets.

When I Get That Mood Indigo is a radical, multisensory poetics that: crosses the Indian Ocean and the Mason-Dixon line; inherits traditions of bricolage; animates the sonic-visual potentials of textiles; and mines the terrain where Black and Blue touch. “That Mood Indigo,” thus, is not merely to feel blue in terms of sadness, but also to be enchanted with vivacious uprising against the elite, the global histories of Blackness, and a color that is ubiquitous and overflowing with riddles left unsolved.

— Alexandra M. Thomas (New Haven, July 2021)

Alexandra M. Thomas is a Black queer feminist art critic and PhD candidate at Yale University.

Bhasha Chakrabarti (b. 1991, New Dehli, India) is an MFA candidate in Painting and Printmaking at the Yale School of Art. *When I Get That Mood Indigo* at M+B is her debut solo exhibition. The artist has also exhibited in group shows at Lyles & King (New York); Blum & Poe (Los Angeles); and Gallery Gertude (San

M+B

Francisco, CA). Chakrabarti was awarded a Fountainhead Residency in 2020. Her works have been written about in *The New York Times*, *Artsy*, *Juxtapoz*, and *Arte Fuse*. Bhasha Chakrabarti lives and works in New Haven, CT.

Location: **M+B Doheny**, 470 North Doheny Drive, Los Angeles, California 90048
Show Title: *Bhasha Chakrabarti: When I Get That Mood Indigo*
Exhibition Dates: July 31 – September 3, 2021
Opening Reception: Saturday, July 31, 2021, 6 – 8 pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm

For inquiries, please contact info@mbart.com.

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