

RICHI BHATIA

ANTEVASIN

THE ONE WHO SITS AT THE
BORDER OF TWO WORLDS

June 15 – September 10

Richi Bhatia is a multimedia and performance artist whose work invites us to engage with liminality, challenging normative categories that shape our understanding of the world and our relationships with its human and nonhuman inhabitants.

Spanning multiple sites across India and the United Arab Emirates, her work is at once intimate and transnational. It asks us to sit uncomfortably with the deep interconnections between heritage, livelihood, home, and community-making with various forms of violence and exploitation. The 'Antevasin' – the one who sits at the border of two worlds – serves as a guiding figure. Through both process and form, Bhatia's work illuminates the porous, shifting boundaries between lifeworlds and deathworlds, where beauty and obscenity often coexist. The exhibition resists any single protagonist piece; instead, each unfolds layered mediations on life, death, food, species, gender, labor, and embodiment.

Bhatia's work is quite literally grounded in her own skin: living with a visible skin condition for over a decade prompted her to reimagine her body in terms of scales, leading to an investigation of skin and scale in fish.

Bhatia's focus on fish scales opened up a broader inquiry into the interstices between body and meat, meat and food, market and livelihood. Incorporating both ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches, she grounds much of her practice in fish and meat markets, engaging with the lives of humans and animals whose labor and bodies are entangled within the food industry.

In *The Animals, The Bodies, and Coefficient of Time* (2025), a series of shelters constructed from fish scales evoke the exterior and interior contours of migrant and temporary worker accommodations in India and Dubai. Their forms are also shaped by furniture arrangements and displays observed in the meat market. These structures are the result of repeated visits to markets and conversations with market workers about their relationships to their labor and to non-humans as meat. The forms register the physical work of butchering, scaling and layering, while also invoking olfactory memory—the persistent smell of fish and meat.

Ceramic work, *Prone to Change...* (2025) resembling sausages and other processed meat forms emphasize how removed these shapes are from the bodies that made them.

Her three-channel video work, *The Girl, the Donkey, and an Elixir for Life...* (2022-2025), is a multispecies performance created in collaboration with an abandoned donkey in Leh, India. The piece reflects on gender roles and animal intimacies in traditional butter production, a practice historically carried out by women—who churn butter in sheepskins—and traded by men via animal caravans along the Silk Road, a tradition some nomadic tribes in the region continue today. The video's soundscape merges the harsh

climate and living conditions of Leh with the rhythmic chants sung by women during domestic labor. In its final act, the churned butter is fed to the donkey—an offering acknowledging the animal labor embedded in this cultural and culinary practice, collapsing the boundaries between giver and receiver, laborer and beneficiary.

The corporeality of Bhatia's practice extends into the words of market workers, which she weaves with strands of her own hair, into a handmade book *Include Some, Exclude Others* (2025) featured in the installation *Table – Bed ii* (2025). Words such as “ojhri” (stomach lining in Urdu) written in multiple languages—Urdu, Arabic, Hindi and Sindhi—trace the transnational journey of a bodily fragment entangled in the global meat industry.

In *Table – Bed ii* (2025), the tablescape and its utensils become mutable sites of transformation, rather than fixed objects with static meaning. The installation combines artworks and market-sourced materials—raw ‘ojhri’, animal hide, the book, water collected from melting fish market ice, and small ceramic forms reminiscent of salami. Here, food is both a sustainer of life and a site of suffering.

Further assemblages reveal the artist's iterative methods: through *Vessels i, ii, and iii* (2024-25) and *Assemblages* (2025), she offers us an archive of raw materials collected from multiple locations and probes the connections between them. Her method is revealed in her art, including her own discomfort. The audience in turn must engage with an entire sensorium, including smells and sights that could also evoke revulsion.

An Antevasin is one who sits at the border of two worlds. By traveling with Bhatia between market and studio, composition and decomposition, form and function, human and nonhuman, India and the UAE, we come to see this border not as a line of separation but as a space of reflection and radical possibility.

Text by Neha Vora

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Artist biography:

Richi Bhatia (b. 1990) is a multidisciplinary artist based in the UAE. Her practice spans drawing, performance, object-making, food intervention, and assemblage. Rooted in embodied research and long, labor-intensive processes, her work explores the body as a sensing tool navigating memory, illness, environment, labor, market, and social systems. Blending the private with the public and the human with the nonhuman through performance and ethnographic inquiry, she invites audiences into encounters that challenge normative categories and passive spectatorship. Her works and performances have been featured at Foundry, Gallery Isabelle, Al Serkal Foundation, New York University Abu Dhabi, and Bikner House, New Delhi, among others. Bhatia also works within the curatorial premise apart from her own artistic research practice.