

THE DAILY ORANGE

SLICE OF LIFE

Visiting artist Rina Banerjee's multinational identity inspires her artwork



Surya Vaidy | Contributing Photogri

At the 'Matters Out of Place' discussion on Tuesday, Feb. 21, artist Rina Banerjee was joined by professors Timur Hammond and Lawrence Chua at the SU Art Museum. Together, they discussed diasporic communities and how Banerjee expresses that in her art.

By Evelyn Kelley | ASST. CULTURE EDITOR

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Born in India and raised in the United States, artist Rina Banerjee said she perceives herself as foreign. She utilizes her work as a way to express this feeling, as well as various racial diasporas.

“(My art) is the door I will open, allowing maybe perhaps the idea of diasporas to be explored,” Banerjee said.

Banerjee is the Syracuse University Art Museum’s visiting artist this year, as well as the Jeannette K. Watson Distinguished Visiting Professorship in the Humanities. At Tuesday’s discussion, called “Matters Out of Place,” the artist joined geography professor Timur Hammond and architecture professor Lawrence Chua to discuss the inspirations and multinational [background](#) behind her installations.

Banerjee’s “Take Me to the Palace of Love” has been on display at the SU Art Museum since Jan. 19, and embodies a large, pink floating replica of the Taj Mahal. Inside this structure, Banerjee placed an antique Anglo-Indian Bombay dark wood chair, decorated with pink, foam balls and floral pieces.

Banerjee’s transition from India to America is part of what motivated her to highlight various themes — ethnicity, race, migration and diasporic communities — in her artwork, she said.

Hammond connected this idea of diasporic communities and migration to the intuitive connection people have between certain kinds of materials belonging to specific places. Hammond used the example of how people connect trees to being in forests and sand on beaches. This intuitive connection is something Hammond says is translated onto people, and that oftentimes, people assume that certain kinds of individuals are supposed to be in certain places.

“That attitude is incomplete for all sorts of reasons, as it doesn’t account for the role that migration plays,” Hammond said. “So much of Banerjee’s project is thinking about (the) experiences of migrants and diasporas as they move to new places and develop new ways of living in the world.”

Speaking from an immigrant’s perspective, Banerjee discussed how it can be difficult for people to authenticate themselves when they are considered “exotic.” She works to translate this perspective into her art, she said.



One way Banerjee does this is by incorporating a variety of materials from different parts of the world, to visually and symbolically include various communities and identities.

Freshman Arietta Hallock said this was something she had no idea about prior to the discussion, and found it interesting how the many different parts each offered their own story.

“I had come to see this exhibit with no background on it before, so it was really interesting to hear her take on the art,” Hallock said.

Banerjee discussed how, for people of diasporic communities, restraining their identity to one place can be difficult. However, art can connect various identities into one installation, yet still reflect the different communities, she said.

“Art offers these kinds of ways in which to see yourself and become a place to really talk about where identity comes from and when it becomes hard to contain,” Banerjee said.

Banerjee shared insight into her personal relationship with artwork from around the world. Sometimes, it’s easy to feel like an outsider when looking at artwork that does not exactly correlate with her experiences, she said.

However, Banerjee introduced the idea of “trespassing” through art to thus learn about different cultures, people and backgrounds. She offered the idea of placing yourself in the artwork, both to allow viewers to grasp the pieces and to create a sense of attachment to the rest of the world that may not look like you.

“That’s one of the joys of jumping into another person’s shoes,” Banerjee said. “It’s to see how many different shoes you can wear.”

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