

Nirveda Alleck

portfolio



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Born in 1975, Nirveda Alleck is a multidisciplinary artist from Mauritius. She undertook her undergraduate studies at Michaelis School of Fine Art in South Africa, and did her MFA at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland in 2001. She has participated in international workshops in Namibia, South Africa, India, Lebanon, Mali and Mauritius, and had held residencies at the Bag Factory Studios in Johannesburg as well as in Scotland, Reunion Island, Namibia, Mali, and Mauritius.

She was offered a Francis Greenburger Fellowship in 2011 to undertake a residency at Art Omi in the USA. Nirveda Alleck has participated in numerous international exhibitions: Diplomatic Immunity in NY in 2001, 11th Triennale India in 2005, Pan African Arts Festival in Algeria in 2009, Francophonie Games in Beirut, Arts Actuels Biennale in Reunion Island, World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar. She was part of Focus 11 Contemporary Art Africa at Art Basel in 2011, and also received in the same year the Bank One Emma Award in Arts and Culture in Mauritius. Her work was amongst the 3 shortlisted for the FNB Johannesburg Art Fair Prize in 2011.

Alleck was a laureate at the Dak'Art Biennale 2010, where she was awarded the Soleil d'Afrique Prize, and she was again part of the Dakar Biennale in 2012. Her recent video works have been show at the College des Bernardins in Paris, Marakesh Biennale Parallel projects, Africa Utopia in London, and Analogue Eye at the National Arts Festival in South Africa.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work uses the support of paintings, videos, installations and performance. Over the years, my work has been about discovering and analyzing people and cultures from different places, and reflect upon the characteristics that are distinct to them. I have worked with oral narratives and by interacting with my subjects, I attempt to synthesize preconceptions with the real both in installations and paintings.

In the Continuum series, done in South Africa, Mauritius, Beirut, the Chagos Islands, Reunion Island, Mali and the USA, I have been fixating on one constant: the human subject. By erasing and whitening out of the background of these paintings (and videos), the immediate visual context is negated. But by the same token, this augments the sense of the presence of these subjects, who are fixed on the surface of the canvases. The act of painting photorealistic figures is not new, but lifting the figures out of their adjacent visual backgrounds makes them part of a larger 'diasporic' state of being, almost a conceptual family. A mock-anthropological thoroughness in referencing the photographic material that I use as source ensures that there is no sentimentality. The portraying of these subjects eschews a colonial gaze, refuses a rapport de force, revealing instead, the invisible forces that give shape to subjectivities.

At the same time, lifting a tree out of its natural state and into a gravity defying position allows for meaning to be created and permeated, as stories that unfold over generations.

VIDEOS AND PERFORMANCE VIDEOS

Title: One Color, 2011

Duration: 2min 36

One Color was a performance done in a sacred lake in Mauritius whose water was mixed many decades ago to holy water brought from the Ganges in India. It is a symbolic performance in defiance of traditional belief systems, while being also a transgression of self imposed values and beliefs. It is a performative silent voice, which in its ritualistic act, brings change in an individual, forcing something to happen, forcing meaning to evolve and challenging in a frenzied attempt for the divine to manifest. Through this performance I question both my own belief systems and appropriation of it, while also investigating people's need for affirmation and acceptance within the larger collective that is bound by rituals and traditions.





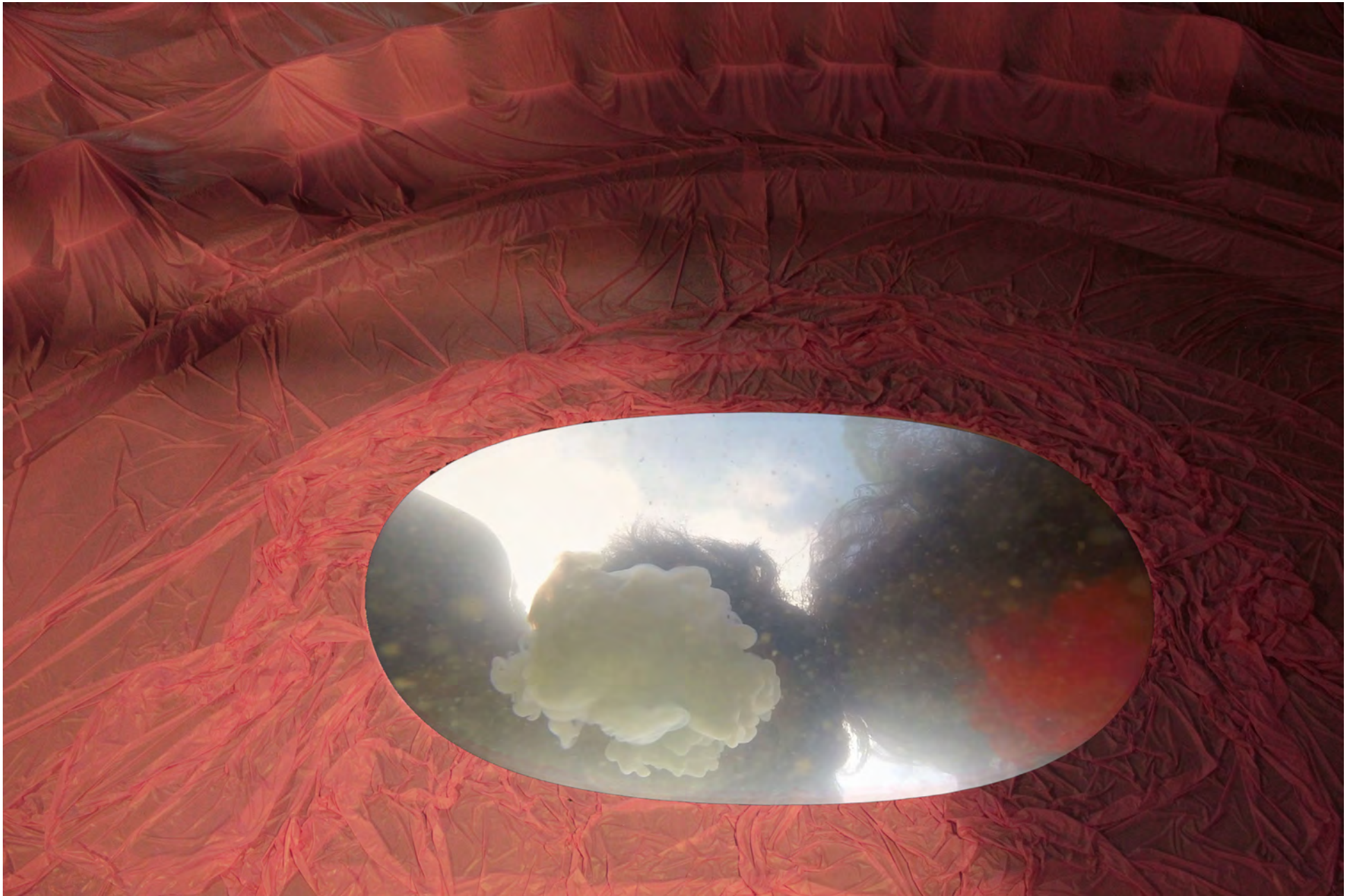
Conversations, oil on canvas, 100 cm x 100 cm, 2011

One color video is usually accompanied by the painting Conversations on the adjacent wall



The Return, 2011
Duration: 2min 04

The Return is a poetic play on the idea of metamorphosis and transcendence where symmetry gives an illusion of what could be an idea of the sublime. The body disappears into the holy water, as a journey back to the beginnings.



Par'leau, collaborative work with Katia Bourdarel, May 2015, Mauritius
Installation view
video projection and pink plastic
8 min looped video

This performance based work was created in the sacred lake of Grand Bassin in Mauritius, whereby milk and red pigment became the words one uses to speak to water, in an attempt to coerce things to happen, by subverting and perpetuating myths and rituals.

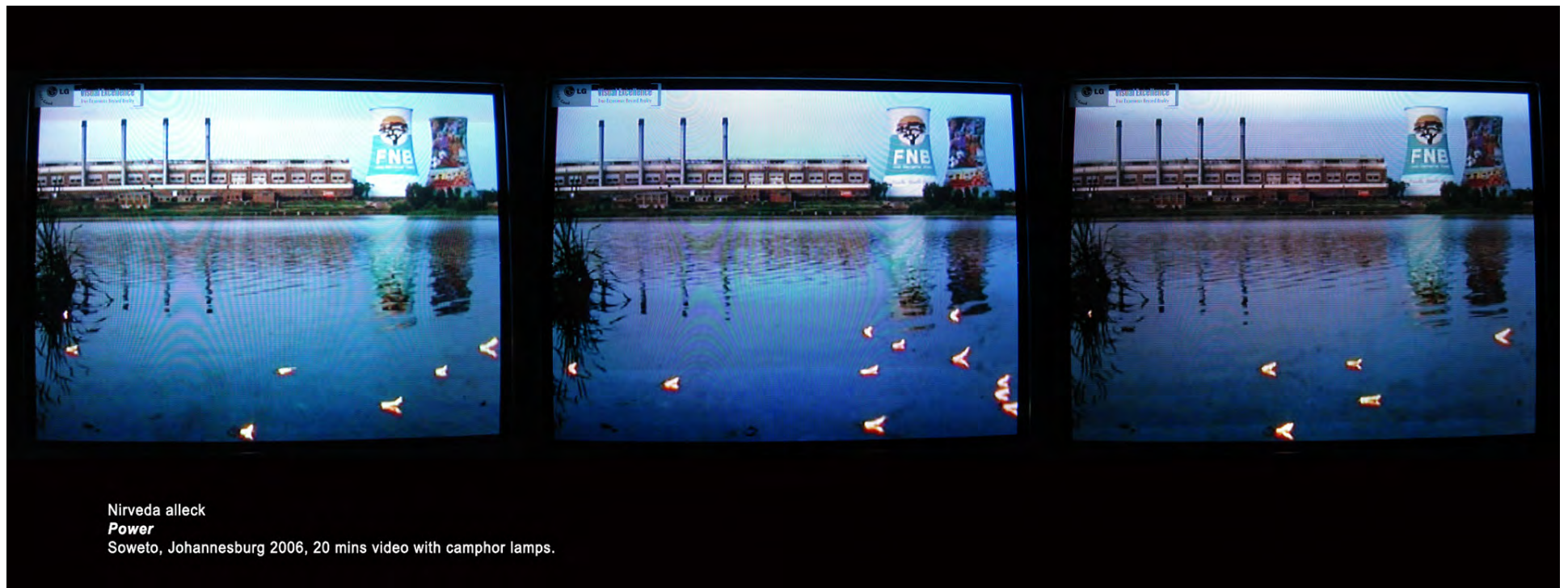
Par'leau video performance
Mauritius, 2015
3 min looped video





My work done in Mali reflects the spirit of a traveler who is in quest of a destination. To properly obtain the Malian experience, I traveled nfrom Bamako to Timbuktu, that mythical place that I had formed in my head throughout my life after I had read of it when I was a child. In a week I felt all in me has changed, rather my preconceptions of Mali and what it could be, and I went through feelings of never getting there, and I felt I never got there even when I was presentthere physically. This constantly changing world, where cheap Chinese plastic has found its way to Timbuktu...

I presented 2 videos playing simultaneously as a single piece of work that reflects this feeling of never actually getting there. At the same time I experimented with traditional Malian Bogolan technique where I attempted to bridge the gap between contemporary art discourses and readings of the pictorial surface and traditional meanings imbedded over years of developing an aesthetic that is particular to that country.

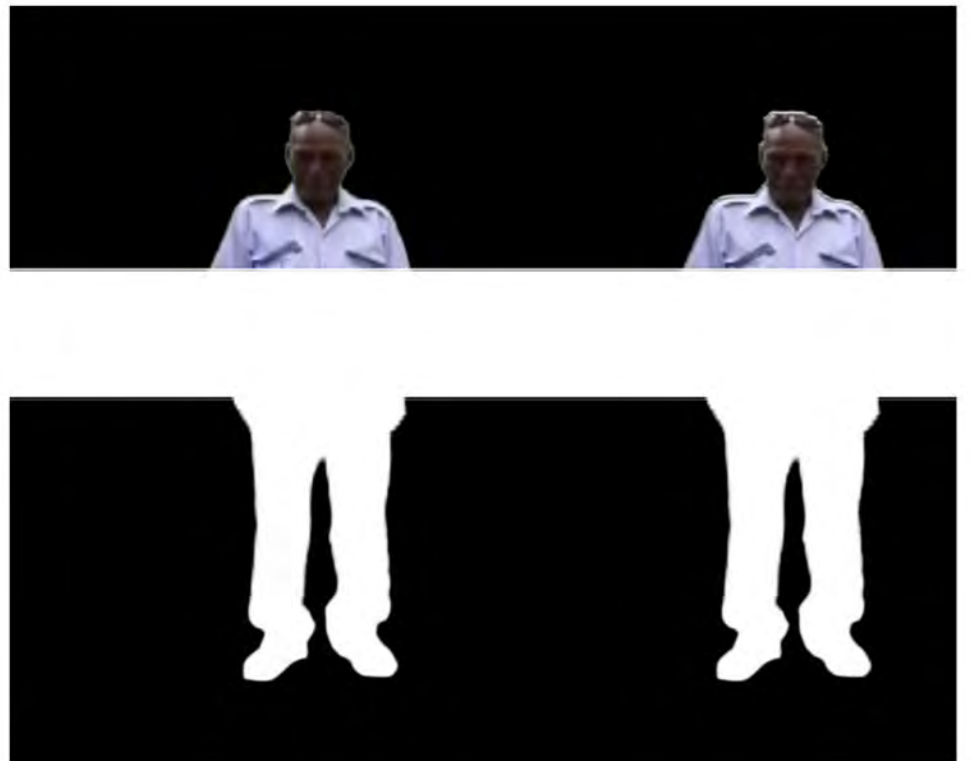
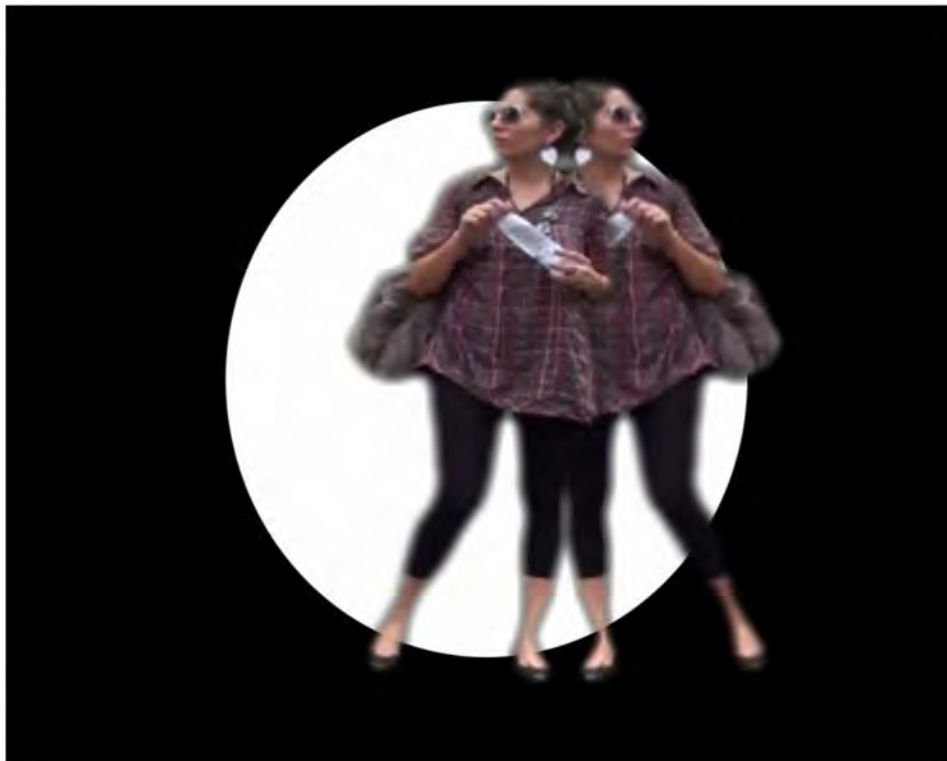


Power is a video work of 20 minutes until that was made in Soweto Johannesburg. It shows the slow movement of about 150 lit camphor cubes that float across the screen in the lake dying out at sunset. The only sound heard is that made by the touch of fire against water, and in the background we can see Mandela and the South African people on one one tower, and the elitist FNB bank on the other...
(still images)



Red Bath
2 min performance video, Mauritius 2011





Continuum Reunion Island, 16 minute video, with sound and text, looped,
2009 Reunion Island
(still images)

VIDEO INSTALLATIONS

Ephemeral is an installation comprising of 9 inverted trees, in a circular space, with one ton of sea salt, and a video projection that moves in a circular motion onto the surface of the wall inside the space. The video shows Continuum Reunion, a video work that involves people from Reunion Island who agreed to be filmed during a residency there. Each protagonist hovers in the projected space that is animated, with texts suggestive of our insular state. This video invites contemplation and reflection upon the notions of existence and being in an island with identities being constructed perpetually.

The salt acts as a reminder of the sea that surrounds these hybrid identities, and with time and the movement of visitors in the space, solidifies to an almost compact block. The inverted tree is an analogy to new beginnings and reconstructed identities.



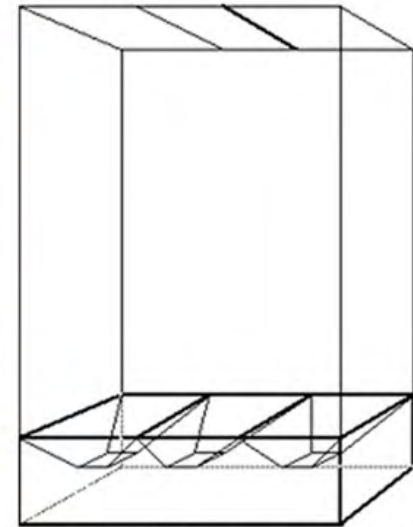
Nirveda Alleck, *Ephemeral*, Installation, Biennale Arts Actuels, Reunion Island, 2009



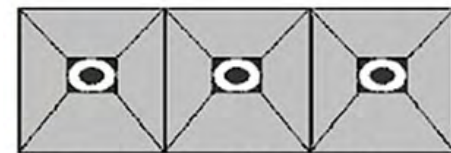
Ephemeral Installation view

Gist is an installation piece that involves a custom made dandelion seed processor, and video projection. It is an attempt to control the psychological effects that natural occurrences and materials convey. A video projection showing the nesting habits of crows is projected through the processor. The sound of the crows triggers the fan of the processor, which in turn makes the dandelion seeds move up the glass case in an erratic dance. By containing and limiting the effects of each element, the phobia that each element generates is contained and in turn limited.

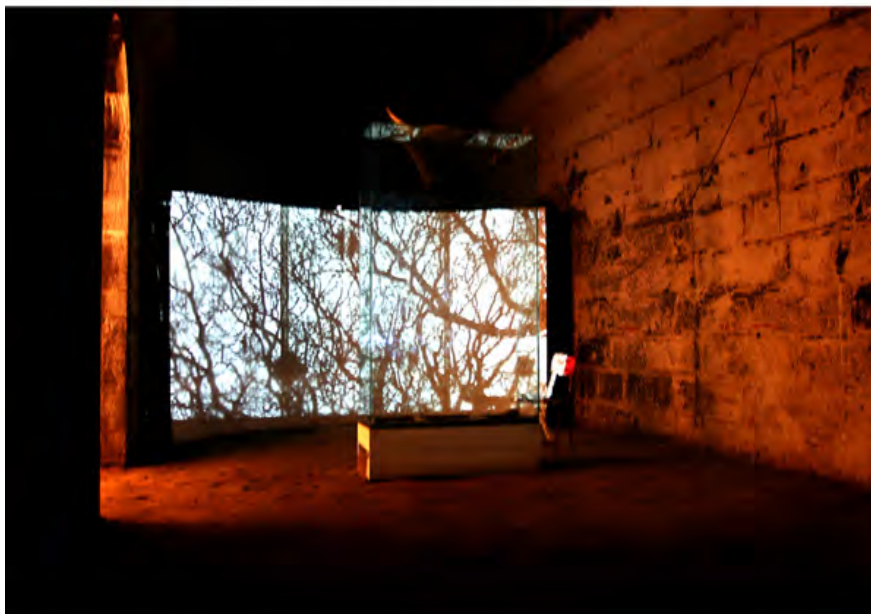
Shown in Tramway, Glasgow 2001 and Triennale India 2005



glass case with processor at the bottom



processor involves 3 fans and 3 directional funnels to enable seeds to move up



Nirveda Alleck

Gist

installation with video projection, sound, dandelion seeds, cotton and metal chair



Memories of a Banyan Tree
installation with banyan tree roots, plaster and fibreglass casts, indian red pigment, and video projection
variable size
2014



Memories of a Banyan Tree
details





Memories of a Banyan Tree details

8 mins looped video projection

The video shows the sea as through the eyes of a migrant travelling at sea, with an automated text reciting Dante's Divine Comedy in different languages superimposed, in strong accents (french, english and hindi), giving an insight onto the vista that a protagonist is seeing, but creating a confused mumble as to the comprehension of the text by the migrant. This work attempts to explore how identities have been constructed with regards to migrants that came to Mauritius from India during the beginnings of indentured labour.

I have used plaster and fiberglass casts of my own face in an attempt to subvert ritualistic and religious practices of venerating female hindu goddesses that are in ritual epresented by rocks and devoid of facial features. These religious practices were brought from India by the indentured labourers.



Nirveda Alleck
The seed of doubt, 2005
Installation and video

This piece comprised of a 4.5m high tree that was placed in a gallery, its branches pushed into the closed space so as to restrain the spread. At the bottom, a looped video showed a fixed camera on the coming in and going out of the tide. The title, “The Seed of Doubt” was an attempt to transfer into pictorial image how doubt creeps in and settles in our minds, overtaking the space we inhabit in our heads, while the video allowed for a meditative state, that would enable that to happen.



A Breath of Life, site specific installation, Okombahe, Namibia
2m x 3m x 4.5m, 2008

This site specific installation was created during a residency in the remote village of Okombahe in Namibia. The idea was triggered by a story I had read or dreamt or imagined when I was a child, about a tribe that would place their dead on the roots of an inverted tree that was placed in the ocean. With the rising of the tide, the body would be taken in by the waves for its final journey. This installation was done next to a cemetery, with a chain of plastic flowers blowing in the wind around the trunk. The flowers were collected from nearby thorn bushes, blown away from the cemetery- which I collected and dyed in red color.



River Cast, site specific installation, 2008, plaster and pigment.
This was a piece where I poured coloured plaster in the flowing river stream in Namibia, in an attempt to take a cast of the flow of water.



Torso Print, coloured plaster, 2008, site specific installation, Namibia.



Nirveda Alleck, Kalyug, cement cast and pigment, 2013

Kalyug, meaning the Age of Darkness, is a work based on the ritualistic practice of venerating the Kali Goddess, represented by eight black rocks, usually devoid of facial features. Each black rock is a representation of each reincarnation of Kali. I have cast my face on each block of cement, subverting and in defiance of religious beliefs, by transposing my own face onto the image of the faceless 'God'.



Kalyug, 8 blocks of cast cement and pigment, 2013, Reunion Island

Salted Divas, 2016

Installation with plaster cast, salk, red indian pigment

80 x 80 x 80 cm





Lightly snowing amongst pink clouds
cotton wool
2001



Nirveda Alleck
Together we shall sail the world
site specific installation with bunker bed and cotton wool,



That shall keep me safe
site specific installation with cotton wool
Times Square Gallery, September 2001



Nirveda Alleck
"The Missing Link", Installation with boat, light, and sound of running water
8mx 2m variable, 2007, La Citadelle, Mauritius



Unable To Sleep in 2003 was a work done in 2005, using a text that was written 2 years before that. In this installation, the metal bed in the space was topped with ice blocks that had about 150 frozen roses in them. Throughout the exhibition opening, the ice melted and spread through the space, taking temperatures down by about 4 degrees in the room, and at the same time, alluding to a certain lost romanticism in life. Underneath the bed was some canvases placed in mid air, which collected the stain of the fading roses, as a record of the process.

EVERY PASSING MINUTE MAKES IT CLOSER TO MY BEDTIME. I FEEL MORE AND MORE UNEASY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF SLEEP AND RELAPSE INTO THE TIMELESS WORLD THAT IS MY OWN. ALL IS SO EASY THERE, AND IT IS SO EASY TO LEAVE EVERYTHING FOR TOMORROW. TOMORROW I'LL THINK OF A PLAN. MAYBE I'LL GET RICH SOMEHOW; MAYBE I'LL FIND THE INSPIRATION TO WORK. MAYBE I'LL BE AN ARTIST. MAYBE I'LL DO WHAT ARTISTS DO. MAYBE I'LL BE PART OF THE GAME. MAYBE I'LL BELIEVE SO MUCH IN MYSELF THAT ALL OF THESE WOULD BE POSSIBLE. MAYBE I'LL DO NOTHING. MAYBE NONE OF THAT IS IMPORTANT. MAYBE ALL IS POINTLESS. MAYBE I SHOULD JUST DIE. WOULD IT MATTER?... MAYBE I'LL TAKE A LIFE INSURANCE PLAN. [...] A FLEETING MEMORY, TOO FAR AWAY TO BRING MEANING TO LIFE, THIS LIFE ON THIS EARTH. FALLING RUINED EVERYTHING. WISH I WAS A TIME MACHINE. WISH I WERE NEVER HERE, WISH NOTHING EVER HAD HAPPENED. GROUND ZERO. NO LUMP IN MY THROAT, NO ACHING STOMACH. NO SINUSES. WISH I DID NOT HAVE TO WORK. I WISH I COULD STILL EAT CHICKEN AND FISH AND WISH I WERE NOT GUILTY AFTER EATING AN EGG. WISH I COULD SWIM WITH THE TURTLES, I WISH I COULD GO HOME. I WISH MY MOTHER WAS HERE. I WISH MY DAD WAS HERE TOO. I WISH I WAS NOT HERE. I WISH THE DINOSAURS WERE STILL LIVING, AND THAT THEY WERE FRIENDLY. I WISH TELEVISION NEVER EXISTED. I WISH I COULD TAKE FIVE SHOWERS A DAY. CLEAN MYSELF OVER AND OVER UNTIL NOTHING IS LEFT. I WISH I HAD A LOVER WHO LOVED ME. I WISH I REMEMBERED THE MOMENTS I HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE. I WISH CANDLES WERE NEVER INVENTED. MAYBE I AM NOT WHO I THINK I AM. MAYBE I AM SOMEONE ELSE LIVING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S BODY. MAYBE IF I TAKE A COURSE IN PHILOSOPHY I MIGHT SEE SOME SENSE. MAYBE I SHOULD JUST GO TO BED. I WISH I HAD BOUGHT SOME MORE WINE.



3 Mythical beings
Stone and cast iron
2m high each
2013



Sometimes love is just not enough,
Installation with stuffed mongooses, 2005

This work holds a narrative around 2 mongooses who committed suicide but for different reasons. The work was done in response to the finding of the bodies of a Mauritian couple of young lovers of mixed race, in a lake in 2005.

PAINTINGS

Since 2006, I have undertaken to study people from different countries and make them both my subject of investigation and an active participant in the project “Continuum”. My demarche was to seek people from as many different localities and culture and bring them all together in a space on equal footing, devoid of their physical backgrounds, with their body, clothing, color and mannerisms being the only possible clue of their origins.

Continuum is an ongoing body of work that seeks to explore notions of identity and the self. The project started during a residency in South Africa in 2006, and since it has evolved with subjects from different countries (Mauritius, Lebanon, Reunion Island, Mali the USA and the exiled Chagossian people). This is undertaken through a process of meeting people on the streets and asking them to pose for the camera. Through these photos, the subjects are meticulously rendered in painting with their double personae also represented thus alluding to the inherent complexities of the ego and the dual state of being. While acting as a record of the people who constitute the space, the process also allows to reflect upon the ideas of representation and self-representation that involves one to be aware of the seeing/seen mechanisms. The background has been left white so as to allude to the changing habitat and social scene. At the same time, it provides scope for positive hopes and also acts as a blank slate when one is confronted to all the subjects, regardless of their surroundings- the canvas thus becoming an ocean of possibilities, and the people, an assertion of each one’s individuality and by extension, each one’s embodiment of the society in which the person evolves.

Working in a laborious photorealist manner, I have so far attempted to realize a utopian pursuit by building upon formalist picture making processes and playing upon notions of inclusion and exclusion, so that the reading prompts questioning from the side of the viewer.

In the case of the exiled Chagossian people, I incorporated images based upon photographic memorabilia that the inhabitants left the island with over 40 years ago when forced by the British to vacate the island in exchange for Mauritius’s independence. These visual narratives have given rise over the years to a sort of existence in limbo, belonging to no place, except in the memory of a space. I have treated the body as a site of memory and memory itself as being a physical space. At the moment I am resolving another series- Continuum USA which juxtaposed to the Continuum Chagos, generates political undertones and points out to the continuing effects of colonization.



Continuum SA, 2006, detail



Nirveda Alleck
Continuum, 2006
Oil on Canvas, 360cm x 150cm
South Africa



Nirveda Alleck
Continuum Mauritian
Oil on Canvas, 450cm x 120cm



Continuum Mauritius 2007, detail



Nirveda Alleck, *Continuum Beirut*, 2009, oil on canvas.



Continuum Chagos
Oil on canvas, 120 cm x 450 cm
2011



Continuum Chagos, detail





Continuum Mali, 2011, Oil on canvas, 1m x 2m



Nirveda Alleck, *Continuum USA*, Oil on canvas, 400cm x 125 cm, 2011-2012



Conflict, 2004, self portrait
oil on canvas, 2m x 2m



Death of a conflict, 2008, self portrait
Oil on canvas, 2m x 2m



Believable Blue, 2011, Oil on Canvas, 120cm x 120cm



noir sur blanc
noir sur terasse
blanc de blanc
sable doree arb
couleur de peau
noir de pioche
histoire d'interpre
toutes heritage
sur noir noir sur bla
cre noir traces noir
res de noirs noir
noires negres des
codes des enchain
plumes attristees
da noir images de bl
heritage blanc coule
des sang du plu
lumiere noir noir
peuplier noir peup
noir corps noir
traces dans des sa

blanc sur noir
noir de la fume
blanc des sable
res dorees
couleur de chair
histoire de parler
bert vest histoire
verts sur noir jaune
incrouges sur noir en
somes noirs histo
histoires traite des
raires traites
noirs des chaines
noirs sur blanc images
ancs heritage noir
ur de chair couleur
me plume d'histoire
parler liste noir
lier blanc cause
heritage des noirs
bles dorees

L'heritage, oil on canvas, 350 cm x 120 cm, 2015



A Balancing Act- plaster vessels with moss and coral debris





Entangled- photography, part of A Balancing Act Series, 2016



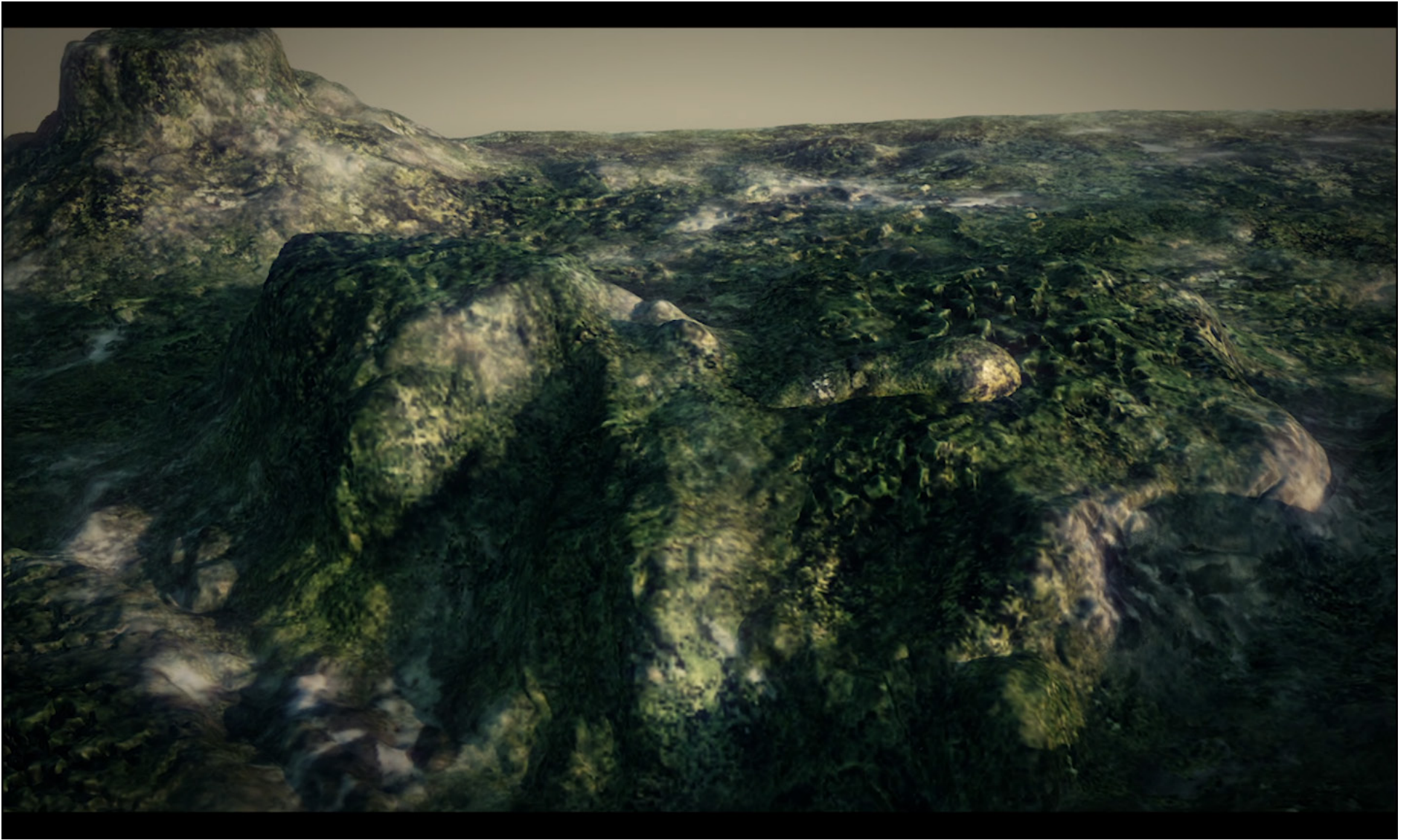
Arise, video still, part of A Balancing Act Series, 2016



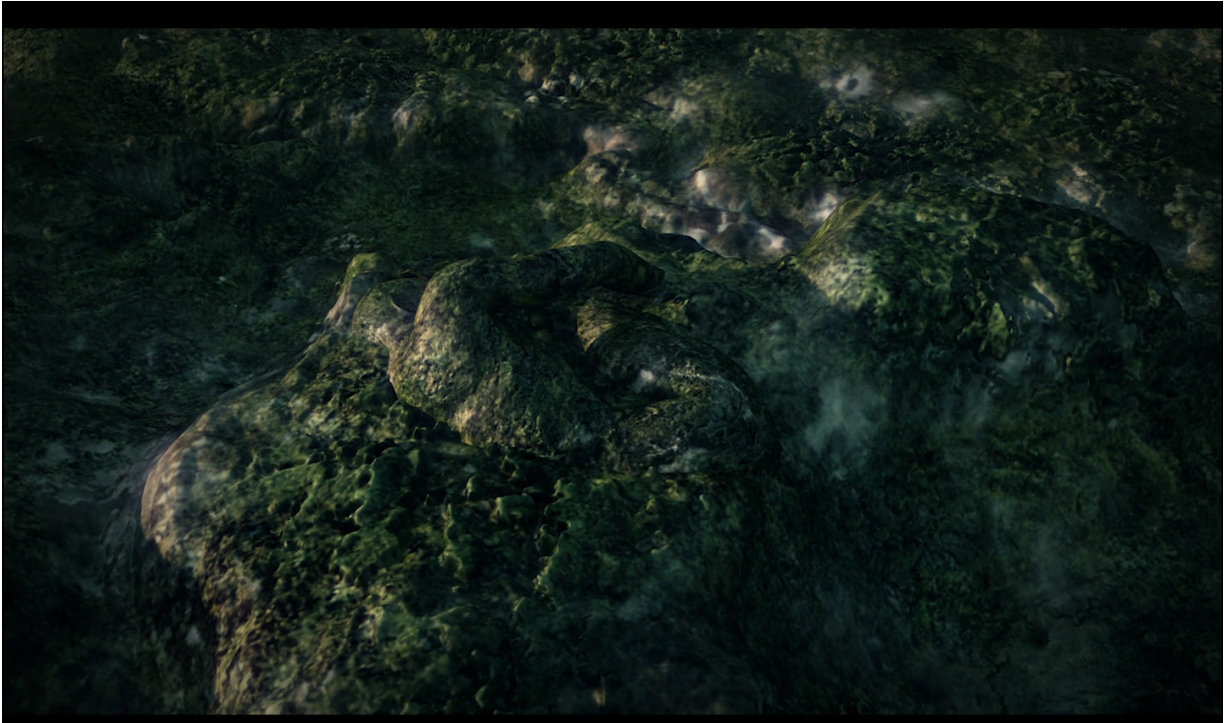
Arise, installation with plaster and moss, 7m x 7m x 80 cm, Mauritius, 2016



Detail of Arise Installation



Arise, video, 8 min loop, 2016
3D video of an imagined rising of the sea bed around Mauritius.



Arise video stills

