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INDIA

## Soghra Khurasani woodcuts waft scenic bounty

January 6, 2025, 1:55 PM IST / Uma Nair in pLUMAge, India, TOI

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### Uma Nair

Critic and Curator Uma Nair has been writing for the past 34 years on art and culture. She has written as critic for Times of India and Economic Times. She believes that artis... MORE

In 2021 when I curated Yatra Nariyastha, a Women's Day show at NGMA in Delhi Soghra Khurasani's work was loaned for the show by Tarq Mumbai and it stood as a testimony to the explorations of woodcuts and etchings in India in the hands of a brilliant printmaker from MS University Baroda Soghra Khurasani. Soghra had a historic show at Tarq Mumbai that was called Shadows of Sky and in it she stated:

"My new series of works ... are forms of shadows of sky, paths, agricultural land, scratches on land, bruises of skin, weed plants and these forms remind me of nature its lifecycle and the dark side of existence; through this series of works I mostly share my thoughts on growth, life, care and hope."



Fast forward to 2024 and her show that opens at the **Mumbai Art Weekend (2025)** has a series of woodcut prints and etching works that continue to explore themes of unity and identity through the fragile landscapes and forms that she observes from her studio just outside Baroda. Distinct and decisive it is the finesse of artistry and the facets of her imagination that weave into nature's gradient in this show so aptly titled *Grounded*.



### **Grounded to Remain**

The titles of her series reflect her love for the geophysical anatomies of the places she remains rooted to. *Grounded to Remain* are two works that match the human gaze for its earthiness and the botanical essence of plantar tints that Soghra brings alive with her dexterous strokes. Her ability to play with tonal gradations and gravitas both become the imperative intensities that define the depth of her landscapes in this exhibition. It is the grainy texturing that reveals itself in hues of resonant colours and tones that speak of a certain intensity in both reflective reverie as well as passionate, pulsating rhythms.



### **Fertile 3 and 4**

*Fertile 3 and 4* remind us of the language of great Japanese masters who studied the landscape and created their own sojourns born of embers of their own consciousness. Soghra too plays with her own identity rooted in her inner inheritance of revelations and rhythms of human maternal love that emanate like multiple earth songs. Sensorial are her woodcuts that echo the seasons of earth's bounty.

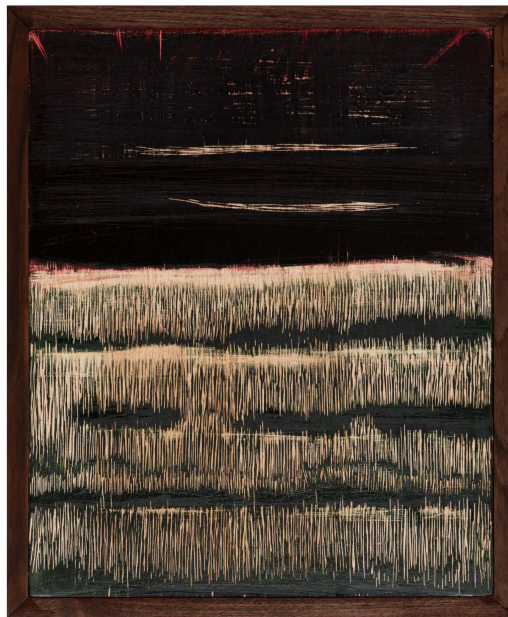


In a wider expanse of discursive synapses here are a pair of works that are ripe with art historical and social references, as she effortlessly employs visual metaphors to silently express her beliefs on a wide arc of subjects like religious and national identities, casteism, and racism and gender bias. For the past few years now she has placed intimate connections between human bodies and nature at the centre of her practice, along with natural forms as a grounding framework.

### **Pristine 3 and 6**



Within her reflections on the relationship between self and nature Pristine 3 and 6 are two woodblocks that revel in the poetics of interconnectedness on the earth. This pair seem more like a Darwinian meditation ,at once making us aware of shared ideals within the fractured prisms of our own making. While the signature idea of roundedness remains the turquoise tinted landscape is a woodcut that spells the hymns of gladness of the beauty of the earth and skies and quiescent niches. Contours in these works have their own symphony of shades and sublime significance. In the silence of her studio one can imagine how she senses the breezes that blow and create their own notes of emotive evocations wrapped around the moisture laden or arid dryness of atmospherics.



In the framing of colours she paints a poetic epitaph to colours of the wind and the earth. Within the penumbra of pain and poetics we sense the essence of epiphanies that seek to surround the reservoir of hope amidst sadness and sorrow and trials and tribulations. Repetition and revelations flirt with each other to create a consonance that builds a corollary of conversations about how contemporary artists all over the world find new vocabularies for the art of woodblocks.

In many ways one remembers the historic show of Wassily Kandinsky in New York's Guggenheim where his epic woodblock Church was a testimony to the beauty of visualisation as well as the art of observation. At Tarq, Soghra's *Grounded* brings back so many memories and opens a new chapter into the makings of page-turners in the art history of women artists in India.

Of course, when you look at the many hues and layers of ingenuities you recall the beauty of singer Vanessa Williams singing: *Can you sing with all the voices of the mountain / Can you paint with all the colours of the wind?* And within those thoughts comes the great sage and author of the Tao of Physics, Fritjof Capra who said: "Ecology and spirituality are fundamentally connected, because deep ecological awareness, ultimately, is spiritual awareness." This exhibition reaffirms Capra's philosophy and weaves a web of conscious awareness, language, and conceptual thought in the practice of contemporary printmaking in India.

Images: TARQ MUMBAI

