

"Suchitra Mattai: Landfall" at grayDUCK Gallery

The artist's channeled chaos vividly explores relationships between the natural and human worlds

REVIEWED BY WAYNE ALAN BRENNER, FRI., DEC. 21, 2018



Take Quiet Leave by Suchitra Mattai

If you look at a field of flowers in the spring, especially if you're outside of Texas and there are more than just the swaths of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes that you're almost jaded to by now, your eyes are going to be newly thrilled by the swarm of colors and shapes, by all the channeled chaos of floral patterning that reproduction requires.

Let's say that if someone's works of art do no more than replicate that sort of thrill, then the display's a success. And that, criticism be damned, any deeper meanings or cultural resonances in the works are what the Cajuns call lagniappe.

At grayDUCK Gallery right now, there's a show called "Landfall" that features the mixed-media creations

of Suchitra Mattai, a globe-trotting native of Guyana, South America, who currently lives and works in Denver. You want deeper meanings and cultural resonances, you're going to get them in this show.

"Through installations, mixed-media drawings and paintings, collages, and video," reads the artist's statement, "I explore how our natural environment(s) shapes personal narratives, ancestral histories, and constructions of 'home' ... Landscape allows me a wide visual lens within which to situate intimate cultural artifacts and discuss the inextricably intertwined relationship of the natural and human worlds."

So there's a rich substrate on display here, some of it readily apprehended through viewing, to burrow your brain into while your eyes are soothed, delighted, and, yes, thrilled: Thrilled by Mattai's bold and diverse palette, with complementary hues giving way to (or suddenly interrupted by) an outburst of clashing colors, and very little primary about them; delighted by the combinations of media – Take Quiet Leave's vintage needlepoint of a woodsy cabin set en fuego with newly embroidered additions, backgrounded by a roiling inferno in blazing acrylics, all of it staged on a panel of taupe vinyl – and the effective ways they subvert cliché; and soothed by the instances of simple pointillism among the swirling patterns, such as those murmurings of gold dots in the titular Landfall.

Let's definitely call out that Landfall, because it fills an entire wall in grayDUCK's expansive gallery – painted right on that wall, as a commission – and because there's a framed portion within the piece that's a video projection of an ocean, but especially because ... well, you know, a person sees a lot of similar imagery when they frequent galleries IRL and trawl as many online depots of aesthetics as an art-loving journo tends to. And Landfall's giant wave, painted with an expressive brush that has relentlessly dripped its blue and white curves toward the floor, curling toward a crash at the west end of that grayDUCK wall, is a singular sight. It's a wave that, without being visually derivative of other than nature's own fluid dynamics, is about the most memorable, the most iconic wave I've seen since Hokusai gave us that one particular view of Mount Fuji among his 35 others.

And I'm waving now, too, reader – waving you down to this gallery on East Cesar Chavez, because Suchitra Mattai's got all the walls of grayDUCK vividly "discussing the relationship of the natural and human worlds," and I reckon your eyes would enjoy listening in.

"Suchitra Mattai: Landfall"

**grayDUCK Gallery, 2213 E. Cesar Chavez, 512/826-5334, www.grayduckgallery.com
Through Dec. 23**