

embody

CURATED BY
WENDY AMANDA COUTINHO

WITH

DARSHAN MAHAJAN
HRUSHIKESH BISWAL
ROHIT MESTRY
CHARANDAS JADHAV
NEHA KUDCHADKAR

JĀMAAT

***“I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, inspect them, walk around them.
But as for my own body, I do not observe it: to do so, I would need a second body,
which would itself be unobservable.”***

Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception. (1945)

curatorial note

A site of universal familiarity, the human body lies at the intersection of several lived, continuous, and subsequent realities. It is, both, a canvas upon which histories are written and an active agent in the creation of new narratives. Through *embody*, we traverse the idea that the body is not a singular, isolated form but a living, evolving space. Drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, this exhibition situates the body as both subject and object—simultaneously experiencing the world and serving as a repository for its marks.

Unlike Cartesian dualism, which separates mind and body, *Phenomenology of Perception* posits that the body is not a mere object in the world but a living subject that experiences, perceives, and interacts with its environment. This phenomenological perspective informs the exhibition's narrative, positioning the body as a dynamic site, where personal and collective histories intersect; a living archive, a bridge.

The embodiment philosophy challenges the dichotomy between mind and body. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice argues that the body is not just an object in the world but the very means through which we perceive and interact with the world. The body, for Merleau-Ponty, is a lived reality, an ongoing process of becoming and experiencing, inseparable from consciousness. He suggests that the body is a site of knowledge, where memory, culture, and identity are stored not just in the mind but in the very tissue and form of the body. This philosophical view has influenced contemporary art, particularly in performance and body art.

Throughout art history, the body has served as both a literal and symbolic representation of human experience, power, identity, and transcendence. From the idealised forms of Classical sculpture, such as Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, which celebrated athletic symmetry and divine proportions, to the Renaissance's *Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo da Vinci, which mapped human proportions to the cosmos, the body was seen as a harmonious expression of perfection. However, in the modern era, artists like Schiele and Bacon fragmented the body, exploring alienation, trauma, and decay, reflecting the psychological and social forces shaping human existence. Contemporary artists such as Abramović and Orlan have used the body as a medium to interrogate identity, gender, and cultural boundaries, transforming it into a site of vulnerability and collective history. These evolving depictions reflect shifting understandings of the body and its essence in human history.

embody enables viewers to reconsider the body as more than a solitary entity, where each artwork challenges the assumed self to reconsider the boundaries of individuality, inviting each one to witness the interconnected narratives that 'shape us'.

By bringing together diverse artistic practices, the exhibition offers a multifaceted exploration of embodiment, challenging us to see ourselves as deeply intertwined within the realms we inhabit.

The human body, as a lived experience, is shaped by social, cultural, historical, and ecological factors, serving as both a vessel of personal identity and a site of social meaning. Cultural practices and body rituals embed the body within systems of identity, status, and belonging, often reflecting connections to community, heritage, or spiritual beliefs. Simultaneously, the body functions within social structures shaped by expectations of beauty, health, and ability that marginalise those who deviate from normative standards. Furthermore, feminist, queer, and postcolonial theories highlight the body's dual role as a site of both oppression and resistance, revealing its deep entanglement with broader societal dynamics.

Borrowing and reinterpreting personal and collective histories, the featured artists explore the body as a site of resilience, transformation, and impermanence. Darshan Mahajan begins this dialogue with deeply personal works that transform his mother's CT scans into blooming floral motifs. By filling the imaging voids with beads and threads in a collaborative process involving his family, Mahajan mirrors the disintegration and reconstruction of familial bonds. This intimate exploration transitions seamlessly into Hrushikesh Biswal's mythic narratives, where the body transcends the personal to embody interconnectedness and cosmic cycles. Drawing from the *Pattachitra* tradition, Biswal's intertwined figures and intricately rendered motifs elevate everyday relationships to monumental significance, positioning the body as a timeless symbol of cultural continuity.

This exploration of the body's duality deepens with Rohit Mestry's visceral depictions of nude figures, which interrogate identity and societal norms. His works challenge 'set' standards and explore individuality through sensory markers like taste and smell, critiquing the commodification of the body in contemporary culture. From this corporeal focus, Charandas Jadhav shifts the lens to ephemerality, using wax sculptures to underscore the transient nature of the human form. Their inevitable disintegration reflects time and entropy, challenging notions of permanence and stability—emotional and physical. Lastly, Neha Kudchadkar views the body as a palimpsest, layering memories, scars, and histories in black-and-white photographs and 'fragmented' sculpture. Her works present the body as both a canvas and an archive, bearing traces of lived experiences and cultural narratives.

Together, these artists offer a multifaceted exploration of the body, weaving personal and universal narratives into a cohesive and thought-provoking tapestry.

embody is not merely a presentation of art; it is a call to introspection, inviting us to trace the marks we carry and to recognize the shared stories etched into the fabric of our existence.