

Rina Banerjee's Positive Reflections on Disgust

July 9, 2014 By [intsculpturectr](#) in *In the Studio* Tags: [Jan Garden Castro](#) [Leave a comment](#)



David Pagel praised Rina Banerjee's solo show titled "Disgust" at L.A. Louver in the *L.A. Times* for its "stunning sculptures, fluid paintings, and whiplash drawings," noting:

Banerjee's four sculptures steal the show. Each is made of hundreds if not thousands of small objects she has wired and strung together with the fastidiousness of a dressmaker and the devotion of a miniaturist. Cowry shells, rooster feathers, gourds, acrylic horns, ceramic balls, plastic nets, glass vials and swathes of silk are among the materials Banerjee combines in her hallucinatory sculptures, which appear to be figures, both animal and human, still lifes or landscapes. The best ones shape shift, changing their nature as you move around them.

The newness of the objects Banerjee uses is striking. It distinguishes her work from traditional assemblage, which, for the past 60 or 70 years has romanticized detritus, particularly that which has been cast off by societies infatuated with new-and-improved conveniences.

Instead of junk-picking her stuff, Banerjee appears to buy it online, from specialty sites and off-the-beaten-path outlets. Strange as it may seem, this intensifies the lostness at the heart of her art, amplifying its insistence that we are all shipwrecked—and that global culture is as much about isolation as it is about connectivity.[1]

Banerjee elaborated on choosing "Disgust" as a theme for this exhibition: "I'm looking at it in a positive reflection – what it takes to move away from the course of the present that we sometimes call critical thinking and critical feeling. We can be disgusted by corruption, by injustice. It may propel us to heal ourselves or we may be driven, by a pied piper, off of cliffs. When all seems lost, disgust triggers us to go in the right direction – to walk away from self-hatred, from horrific things like child slavery, from oppression and gender gaps due to positions of control and power.

"Disgust is a way to understand how we train ourselves to hate a different gender, a different race. That alienation drives us into self-damage in the long run. Disgust is an innocent emotion – it maneuvers away from rational thinking – as my daughter undergoes



[_https://iscbookreviews.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/she-was-now1.gif](https://iscbookreviews.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/she-was-now1.gif)

Rina Banerjee, *She was now* in western style dress covered in part of Empires' ruffle and red dress, had a foreign and peculiar race, a Ganesha who had lost her head, was thrown across sea until herself shipwrecked. A native of Bangladesh lost foot to root in Bidesh, followed her mother full stop on forehead, trapped tongue of horn and grew ram-like under stress, 2011. Cowrie shells, rooster feather, gourds, acrylic horns, ceramic balls, plastic netting, amber glass vials, violet glass bulbs, false glass doe eyeballs, silk and synthetic Lanvin ruffled red dress 73 x 65 in. dia. (185.4 x 165.1 cm). Copyright Banerjee. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

puberty, I'm aware that she feels a separation from boys, and some of that is not to her advantage. Teenagers worry about their body odor in ways that clarify who is male and who is female."

By chance, Banerjee has invited me to visit her new apartment on the upper West Side instead of her midtown studio. I enter a space with her hand-painted designs on the foyer walls, an apartment filled with light that opens out in several directions. Her paintings grace the living room and hallway; under the sofa is a black box with some of her drawing materials; she shows me a red and white tree sculpture that she is hand-beading. The armature came from Anthropologie. Banerjee explains: "I've been working with the concept of the tree. There is always this idea of the vine, the vegetable, and flora and fauna in the sculptural work. The tree in a lot of cultures is an important symbolic architecture in the landscape... The tree has different significance in Eastern and Western societies and in science... and in

demonstrating our connections to animals. The tree also shows the hierarchy of food consumption in Western thought...



(<https://iscbookreviews.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/explores.gif>)

Rina Banerjee, Explorers not fortune tellers travel back and forth at last to tell you whats not and whats what, they may be made of every leather his head looks to too many paths curious of all that appears vast, whats remote and feathered and repulsive can, 2014. Glass beads, peacock feathers, knitted steel, acrylic, steel. 43 x 14 x 35 in. (109.2 x 35.6 x 88.9 cm). Copyright Banerjee. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

"I don't have a recipe by which I make the art work. It all grows out of an interest in objects. I wanted to widen the vision of the historical source for finding objects and making them into sculpture – to move beyond found objects. I find objects through an international eBay market – objects from India, England, Germany, Italy come to your door, which is bizarre in itself and relevant to our contemporary life style. I also use souvenirs of worlds different from our own and some everyday stores like West Elm, CB2, Pier One, and Pottery Barn that define middle class. When I find porcelain horns, gourds, dried objects, and seashells, I have definite ideas why those objects could be important to use. I take objects that mean a certain thing and use them for other meanings. For example, my wire construction animals refer both to animal head trophies and to headless store manikins. The trophies that would be on a wall now have been given whole body structures. Human bodies that act as hangers for clothes now have heads."

Banerjee was modest about the huge amount of books in her study; she summed up her philosophy simply: "I find there is not enough

optimism in the world. It takes great patience to acknowledge the presence of the world in front of you as opposed to the specific community we move within. We're at a crossroads because it's so difficult to achieve that; I'm convinced that it's required for our human nature to survive and to preserve living healthily. I think I share this goal with many people all over the world. Being an artist allows you to not be distracted and to think of the larger thing that we all need."



([https://iscbookreviews.files.wordpress.com/2014/07](https://iscbookreviews.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/rina_2.gif)

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Rina Banerjee in her studio.

Rina Banerjee (www.rinabanerjee.com (<http://www.rinabanerjee.com/>)) was born in Kolkata, India and lives and works in Manhattan. After earning an engineering degree at Case Western Reserve University's Institute of Technology, Banerjee earned an MFA at Yale University in 1995. Her numerous solo and group shows include: Thomas Gibson Ltd. in London, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Gallery Espace in New Delhi, Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris, Galerie Volker Diehl in Berlin, the Arken Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, and Musée Guimet in Paris.

At press time in May, Rina Banerjee was working on three upcoming shows: a group exhibition, *Metaphysical*, curated by James Putman in Milan, a June group show in Brazil, and a large solo show opening November 23 at OTA, a Japanese gallery in Singapore. Films on Banerjee, on the L. A. Louver website, are: <http://www.lalouver.com/html/rina-banerjee-bio.html> (<http://www.lalouver.com/html/rina-banerjee-bio.html>)

By [Jan Garden Castro](http://blog.sculpture.org/jan-garden-castro/) (<http://blog.sculpture.org/jan-garden-castro/>)

[1]David Pagel, "Scraps lead to elegant whole," *L.A. Times*, May 14, 2014: D3. See also "Artist Explores The Feminine Grotesque In Magically Weird Exhibition," *The Huffington Post* (online) by [Priscilla Frank](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/Priscilla%20Frank) (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/Priscilla%20Frank>): updated: May 13, 2014.

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