

# Fragmented Memories of Urban Landscapes

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My practice explores urban spaces through dichotomous ideas of construction and destruction, preservation and regeneration through built and organic environments. Mapping cityscapes through narratives of the past, present and future, my preoccupation with building a research-based practice on the subject has led me to work with several mediums that started with drawing and painting and now include sculpture and found objects. Having lived in several large metropolitan cities such as Chicago, Kolkata, Bombay and now Bengaluru, I am drawn towards the architecture of spaces and its contradictory nature. My artwork questions the permanence and temporality of urban spaces, using objects and landscapes in the city that are going through forms of ruin and decay, by preserving or regenerating them or building new ones that resemble modern ruins.

Modern ruins that we can date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century still hold the romanticism of the recent past that is absent in our own age, that of the promise of an alternative future. These are ruins that constitute abandoned and broken buildings, urban decay, desolate cities and architecture that no longer serve a purpose, where our imagination completes the images in our minds to what came before. They are rubble-infused urban endings that are demolished or fragmented, reflecting the transience of a city through its material decay and inherent flux.

Fragments (1) & (2) are inspired by broken walls of historical sites or monuments and caves destroyed as a part of urbanisation or political and violent acts in history (Figures 1 & 2). They are indicative of a lost heritage, with impressions, marks, fissures and air pockets embedded in the cast, to now exist only as artefacts like those displayed in a museum.

Deep Map is a term that William Least Heat-Moon (1991) in his book 'PrairyErth: A Deep Map' coined for multiple ways of perceiving a place through all its layers. Using the method of deep mapping, I explore layered narratives that are specific to actual geographical areas. My work merges the multiple metropolises I have inhabited, and is rearranged in diverse configurations, making it adaptable to multiple ways of seeing. In doing so, I build connections with complex and unforgiving materials to create composite works that call for speculation and reflection.



Figure 1. *Fragments (1)*, mixed media painting with casted concrete, copper leaf and resin," 12" x 9" x 14", 2022

*Fragmented Landscapes* (1), (2), and (3) were conceived as the aftermath of a site that has been destroyed, akin to a man-made disaster such as an earthquake or a demolished old house (Figures 3-5). These works were inspired by the transforming city of Bengaluru, as witness to a city constantly under the process of being built and rebuilt. The physical act of breaking the roofing tiles, replacement by concrete, or the shattering of the cement to create broken organic shapes, are a comment on the changing landscape of Bengaluru. Reassembling the pieces like a puzzle resembles a staged archaeological site that could have been fragments unearthed from the dust as in an archaeological dig.

*In Between the Nooks & Crannies* was created as a 'deep map' of a fictional landscape that existed in a liminal space of the real and imaginary, amalgamating natural and urban forms seen from an aerial perspective (Figure 10). Drawn during the onset of the pandemic, the work is an intuitive deep dive of traversing physical and metaphysical spaces through its curves and bends, triggering memories of known and unknown spaces, subconsciously drawing from the landscapes of Bengaluru and Bombay to create a liminal space.



Figure 2. *Fragments* (2), mixed media painting with casted concrete, bronze oil pigment and resin, 9"x11.5"x1", 2022

Figure 3. *Fragmented Landscapes* (1), mixed media painting on casted concrete, roofing terracotta tile and resin, 10" x 6.5" x 7," 2022



Figure 4. *Fragmented Landscapes (2)*, mixed media painting and metal dust on casted concrete, roofing terracotta tiles and resin, 9" x 9" x 7" x 1", 2022

Organic forms of drawing that flow across the surfaces are derived from studies of decaying material that I developed while visiting dumping grounds and seeing piles of rubbish lying in heaps by the side of the road, that now seep through all of my works forming stylised patterns of unrecognisable traces of material objects, that fuse into the natural landscapes creating new terrains.

Copper as a colour reoccurs as lustrous facades, with the ability to tarnish and decay over time just like cities do if not preserved. Experimenting with a range of industrial and artistic materials over the years has led me to create a lab of recipes for my work with interventions of cement, papercrete, home-grown crystals, found tiles, scrap metal and resin amongst others (Figures 6-9). The process involves breaking, repurposing, casting, growing and preserving objects as well as layering and collaging of paper, using the materiality to physically direct the perception of metaphorical, inhabited and abandoned spaces.

Cities form a network of patterns, where architectural spaces compress, collapse, overlap, merge, build and rebuild in a non-linear pattern like time. They reflect the history and the heritage of a culture, portraying immense complexity that can never be pinned down; whether they are decaying in ruins or rising to new heights, they are constantly evolving.

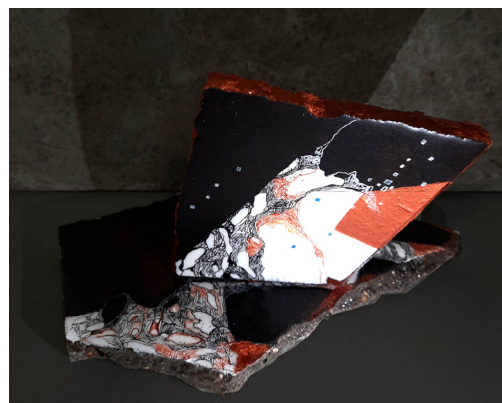


Figure 5. *Fragmented Landscapes (3)*, mixed media painting on casted concrete, roofing terracotta tiles with resin, 7" x 4" x 6," 2022

Rocks, facades and stones - both natural and man-made - are markers of time past, akin to tree rings. Fragments of spaces and buildings, the remains of geological forms, bricks extracted from a demolished house or a prehistoric cave, and construction sites that lie abandoned in the hopes of being completed someday, remind us of the loss of perfection. In some cases, the stones are chiselled, carved, and pressed like stamps with tools leaving grooves, indentations, and marks on the surface much like petroglyphs. In other instances, they are remnants of painted, layered and gilded forms.

Robert Smithson (1996), an American artist, wrote that ruins are 'dynamic' calling them '*dialectical landscapes*' that are deep-rooted in the 'geological past and a catastrophic future'. These landscapes are stuck somewhere in the middle of building and disintegrating, hence creating modern relics that do not follow a specific chronological time. Similarly all objects, even if they hold no inherent value in our present, eventually evolve to new versions of themselves, becoming relics, begging the question of what is of vital significance in our present-day to preserve and what is to be left to take its natural course. In an ever-expanding metropolis, these works are not only reminiscent of the loss and the pathos of decay and desolation but also give the hope of growth and regeneration.

In the era of the Anthropocene where the nature of landscapes is dictated by human impact, my current concerns are borne of studying the natural rock and stone formations found in and around Bengaluru and other parts of Karnataka, such as the peninsular gneiss, megaliths and stone circles.

My practice now explores the liminal memories of rock formations, historical sites and rock crystals that remind me of a microcosm and petroglyphs that are made by human and natural forces and how they co-exist with or are encroached or replaced by their urban counterparts. These may include man-made excavation sites such as abandoned buildings, quarries and under construction areas, buildings that replace megaliths and piles of rubbish that heap to form hills and mountains. The dichotomy of both these terrains and the way they intersperse, break through, overlap and

overtake each other, is something that I am interested in exploring within my practice.

We live in an age of an 'inheritance of loss', as these ruined landscapes determine the age of a city, serving as necessary reminders of what came before, that are being erased from physical and public memory and replaced by newer facades. At times such as these, there are natural disasters that forcibly reveal the contours beneath the cityscapes through cracks and fissures, and the entropy of the built. The trauma or discontinuity associated with the displaced memory of these ruins is necessary on a collective level, serving as powerful metaphors of absence and loss that lead to reflection and restoration.



Figure 6. Detail of a stone from the series *Fragments of Earth* (1), mixed media with ink, metal dust, scrap metal and resin, " 9.5" x 7" x 2", 2018

Figure 7. Detail of a stone from the series *Fragmented Landscapes* (5), mixed media drawing on casted concrete and resin, 6" x 4" x 1", 2022

Figure 8. Work in progress - experiments with making miniature sized paper stones, mixed media collage with graphite on paper (variable sizes)

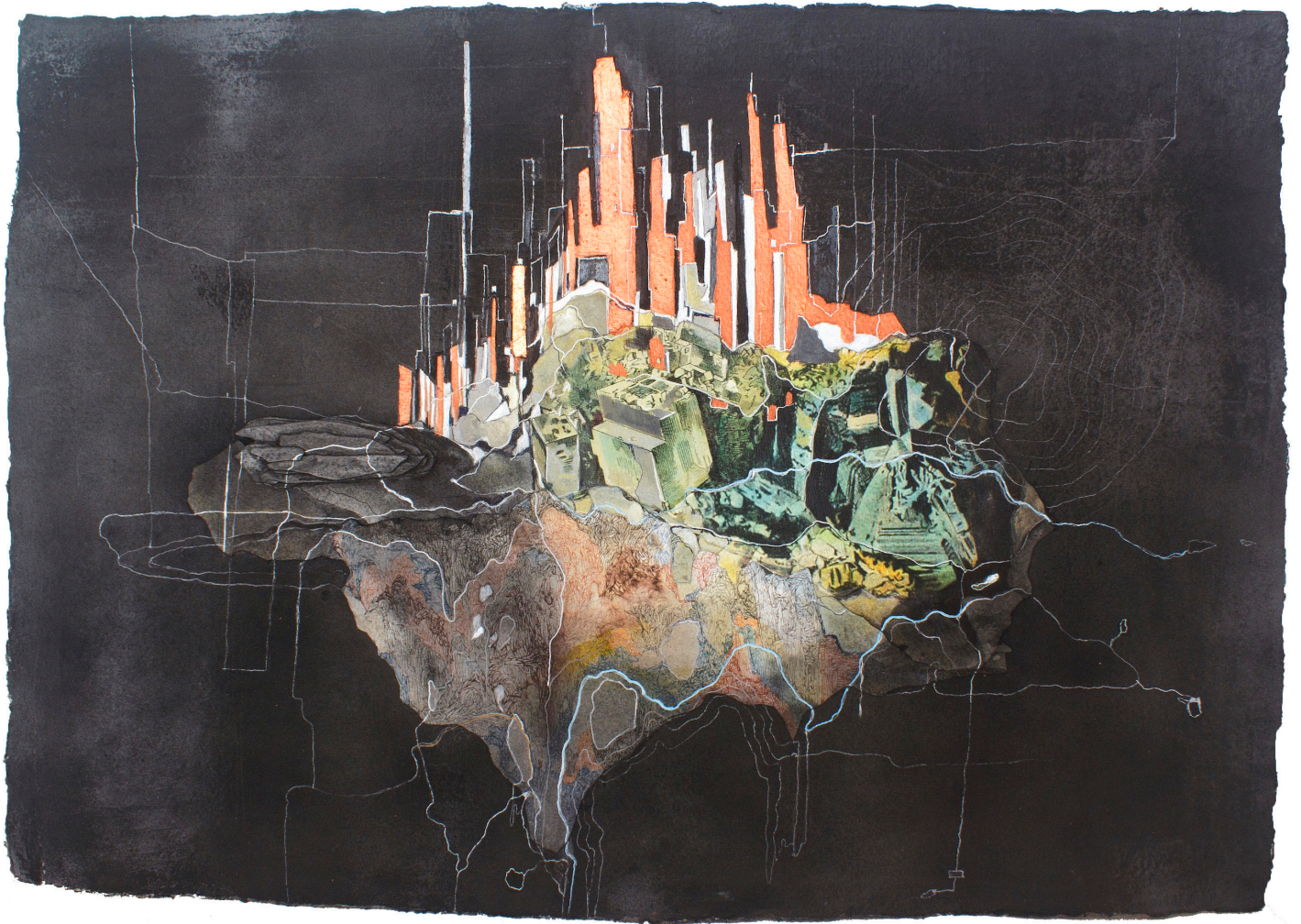


Figure 9. *In between the Cracks & Fissures*, mixed media painting on cotton rag paper, 27" x 17", 2022

### References

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Figure 10. *In Between the Nooks & Crannies*, mixed media drawing on paper, 48" x 36," (9 panels), 2020