

RAJNI PERERA

Futures

Rajni Perera (b. 1985) came to Canada with her family in early childhood from her birthplace, Sri Lanka, and has established herself in recent years as one of Canada's leading contemporary artists. Her paintings and sculptures draw on such diverse traditions as science fiction, Sri Lankan art, Indian miniatures, medieval armour, and South Asian textiles, gathering in all of history as she looks ahead to an uncertain future threatened by climate change and looming social inequities. Her future goddesses prevail over dystopic realms, mutating to adapt to their challenging environments. Looking to the past and to the future, and endowed with a powerful diasporic imagination, Perera is singularly equipped to express the chaotic, often frightening, and sometimes hopeful world in which we find ourselves today.

Sarah Milroy, Chief Curator, McMichael Canadian Art Collection

This exhibition is organized and circulated by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection with support from Canada Council for the Arts.

RAJNI PERERA

Sri Lanka, 1985

1. *Flood*, 2020

Mixed media on marbled paper, 76.2 x 61 cm
Collection of Robin and Malcolm Anthony

“In an age of climate apocalypse and viral pandemics, what can we do, and how can we untether ourselves from the bind of the modern world and its trappings and ailments? In *Flood*, a painting that both sounds and feels biblical, a body is turned away from us, bearing tea to the psychedelic winds that encroach. Or is it that the sand dunes are moving like tornadoes through our collapsing urban environments, their colours like a Technicolor coat, forcing us to take our homes and the objects we love with us on the road to somewhere else?”

—Fariha Róisín, author and activist

2. *Storm*, 2020

Mixed media on marbled paper, 76.2 x 61 cm
Collection of James McKellar

3. *I take a journey, you take a journey, we take a journey together*, 2020

Leather, trim, cotton, beads, metallic thread, beeralu lace, rubber gas mask, 25.4 x 22.9 x 17.8 cm
Collection of Paul and Mary Dailey Desmarais III

“Giving up just because the future looks rough is not viable. History suggests that to do so would be to forgo many better futures yet to come. In the meantime, our job is to imagine and use those visions to fuel our actions.”

—Britt Wray, climate activist

4. *Flood Mask*, 2020

Textile on gas mask, 27.9 x 30.8 x 20.3 cm

McMaster Museum of Art, McMaster University, Hamilton,
Ontario, Museum of Art Collection Trust, 2021

5. *Ancestor 2*, 2019

Mixed media on paper, 121.9 x 91.4 cm

Collection of Dr. Parambir S. Keila and Ms. Anji Patel

6. *Traveller #5*, 2019

Mixed media on paper, 152.4 x 101.6 cm

Royal Bank of Canada Art Collection, commissioned
by the RBC Curatorial Department

7. *Ancestor 1*, 2019

Mixed media on paper, 121.9 x 91.4 cm

Collection of Dr. Parambir S. Keila and Ms. Anji Patel

8. *Three Archers*, 2022

Mixed media on paper, 111.8 x 58.4 cm each

McMichael Canadian Art Collection, purchased with funding from the Edith Kennethea Dunn Memorial Fund to Celebrate Women Artists, 2022

“Perera’s work underlines an important truth: it is the communities that have long lived under existential threat, for whom climate chaos is not their first calamity, that hold the deepest wells of wisdom about how to live well in dark times.”

—Britt Wray, climate activist

9. *Peaceful Cobra*, 2019

Mixed media on paper, 50.8 x 40.6 cm

Collection of David Heden

“I want to bring science fiction into fine art. I want to paint about the lives of Brown and Black people through this lens. It’s the story of resilience, of survival, or creating abundance, opulence, when there’s nothing for you there and nothing you inherit. These stories happen in both science fiction and in immigrant lives.”

—Rajni Perera

10. *Seated Sentinel*, 2019

Mixed media on paper, 50.8 x 40.6 cm

Collection of David Heden

11. *Portrait Study (1)*, 2022

Mixed media on paper, 63.5 x 45.7 cm

Collection of Peter Goring

***Portrait Study (2)*, 2022**

Mixed media on paper, 63.5 x 45.7 cm

Collection of Liza Mauer and Andrew Sheiner

12. *Drawing 2*, 2020

Mixed media on paper, 29.8 x 22.2 cm
Collection of Shadan Saber

***Drawing 3*, 2020**

Mixed media on paper, 29.9 x 22.9 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown

***Drawing 4*, 2020**

Mixed media on paper, 27.9 x 22.9 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown

13. *Plane Bend*, 2020

Brass-plated metal, lead, frosted glass, wiring, 91 x 61 x 61 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown

Perera's forays into abstraction are rooted in her bodily experience. "That's the type of work I like," she says of works such as this. "It talks about energy, reproductive energy, and the electricity inside the body."

14. *Drawing 1*, 2020

***Drawing 5*, 2020**

***Drawing 6*, 2020**

Mixed media on paper, 48 x 35.6 cm each
Scotiabank Fine Art Collection

15. *Palapa*, 2018

Mixed media on paper, 27.9 x 20.3 cm
Collection of Vanessa Runions

16. *Not Waiting*, 2018

Mixed media on paper, 27.9 x 20.3 cm

Collection of Peter Goring

“While Perera’s recurring strong women of colour, hybrid warrior-animal figures, spiritually attuned ancestors, and forthcoming relatives inspire hope, they are also alive with warning. The power holders of the world are creating dystopian futures now for all of us, adding a quadruple dose of danger for the most marginalized.”

—Britt Wray, climate activist

17. *I speak of everything*, 2021

Hand-marbled and dyed textile, acrylic gouache, stone, wooden beads, 271.8 x 204.5 cm

Collection of Antonio Murzi and Diana Morgan

18. *The Curtain Call (1980)*, 2021

Marbled, painted, and beaded textile, 271.8 x 204.5 cm

Collection of Arati Sharma and Satish Kanwar Family

“Science fiction requires boundless imagination. The unleashing of imagination has always been a key survival strategy with tangible effects, as well as a portal through which something else can be found, even in the most harrowing situations.”

—Britt Wray, climate activist

19. *Dancer 2*, 2018

Mixed media on millboard, 101.6 x 81.3 cm
Collection of Ivan Lin and Jeff King

***DANCER*, 2018**

Mixed media on millboard, 101.6 x 61 cm
Christine and Andrew W. Dunn

***DANCER*, 2018**

Mixed media on millboard, 101.6 x 61 cm
Private collection

20. *Rings for Truth*, 2019

6 cast bronze rings on a display pillow, 33 x 2.5 cm diameter each
Courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown

21. *Untitled*, 2021

Mixed media on paper, 60.6 x 45.7 cm
Collection of Peter Goring

22. *Revenge 3*, 2019

Polymer clay, aluminum, paint, leather, lace, Ring for Truth
(solid cast bronze wearable unit), 34.3 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown

23. *Lagoon*, from the *Phylogeny* series, 2023

Acrylic gouache, chalk, charcoal, ink and pencil on hand-marbled paper, 117 x 168 cm

Collection of Jad and Roula Shimaly

***Desert*, from the *Phylogeny* series, 2023**

Acrylic gouache, chalk, charcoal, ink and pencil on hand-marbled paper, 117 x 168 cm

Private collection

24. *Tata*, from the *Phylogeny* series, 2024

Acrylic gouache, chalk, charcoal, gel pen and pencil on hand-marbled paper, 61 x 36.8 cm

Private collection

“Phylogeny is a body of work addressing themes of climate change and destruction, cross-species mutation, and extinction, including that of humans ... These fabricated mutations must be based on imagined projections of terrestrial species, drawing from scientific projections of biome change. The idea, in fact, is to engage with animal physiology, time, and change as expandable ideas, and to investigate the meaning of showcasing how a speculative physiological future affects different living bodies.”

—Rajni Perera

25. *Nesting, from the Phylogeny series*, 2024

XPS polystyrene foam, acrylic paint, epoxy mastic, synthetic fur, dyed feathers, sheep bone, deer bone, plastic, plaster, varnish, wooden base, 91.5 x 35.5 x 76 cm; 96.5 x 49 x 74 cm (base)
Collection of Paul and Mary Dailey Desmarais III

26. *A Starry-Eyed Subspecies*, 2022-2023

Polyurethane foam, wood, cowhair, polymer clay, epoxy clay, weaving, 177.8 x 274.3 x 152.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Hugues Charbonneau

FLOOR PLAN

1st floor

Salle Nicole et René Després et Jeannette et Luc Liard



