



Soumya Netrabile | Residency Interview 2022



Soumya Netrabile, Bear Canyon, 2022, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches.

Soumya Netrabile was born in Bangalore and currently lives and works in Chicago. She received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BSEE in engineering from Rutgers University. She has had recent solo exhibitions at Andrew Rafacz (Chicago, IL), Pt.2 Gallery (Oakland, CA), and Terra Incognito (Oak Park, IL). Recent group exhibitions include La Loma Projects, Los Angeles, CA; Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles, CA; Trinta Gallery (Santiago de Compostela, ESP); PRACTISE (Oak Park, IL); and KARMA, New York, NY. Her work is included in both public and private collections.

Amanda Quinn Olivar: To start, please tell our readers about your background and art practice.

Soumya Netrabile: I am originally from India, but I've lived in the United States since I was seven. I live and work in Chicago, which I've called home for several years. I'm primarily a painter, but I also make ceramic sculptures. The paintings have consumed most of my time over the last few years, so I cannot work on the ceramics as often as I'd like. My recent work is mainly semi-abstract and connected to my evolving relationship with the forest near my home. Over the last few years, I have been spending a lot of time inside a local forest preserve, observing and absorbing phenomenological experiences and studying the numerous relationships inside its ecosystem.

AQO: What's the most important part of your process?

SN: Honestly, this is hard to reduce because I see all the active components as essential. The input from observation and interaction with nature, animals, and people are as crucial as the various painting experiments and processes in the studio. And then, the many influences from reading, research, listening to music and looking at art also inform the work. It's difficult for me to assign more value to one part over the others.

AQO: How did you learn about She Curates: The Residency?

SN: I was invited and sponsored by Liza Shapiro and Georgia Powell, who make up the team at CURA Art. Along with Mollie Barnes, they emailed me in the spring and asked if I'd be interested in doing a residency at Villa Lena, located in the region of Toiano. I'd never heard of this place before, so naturally, I looked it up and was immediately taken with the house and the locale. Of course, I soon agreed to go. What attracted me most to this opportunity was that the villa was remotely located and surrounded by 500+ hectares of dense forest. I was eager to have four weeks to explore and learn about a different natural environment and discover the nuances of a different kind of light.

AQO: What was the highlight of your time there?

SN: There were two! First were all the people I met—artists and the staff who worked at the residency. There were people of different disciplines from all around the world—painters, filmmakers, ceramicists, photographers, chefs, and yogis. Everyone had unique backgrounds and generously shared their stories, dreams, and opinions over the most delicious meals. The camaraderie and energy were exceptional.

The other highlight was the land surrounding Villa Lena. The landscape in Toiano was, on the surface, bucolic and peaceful but also held strange undercurrents which were enchanting yet unsettling. The nature and wildlife had an almost primordial quality to them. Every time I went into the inner parts of the forest, I felt like I was traveling to a different time. As the weeks went on, I became more and more intrigued by the psychic energy that existed in the depth of the forest. It's not something I will easily forget.

AQO: What are you doing right now, and what impact do you think The Residency will have on your career?

SN: Right now, I'm back in the studio making work for a solo in November at Part 2 Gallery in Oakland. I also have a group show in New York around the same time.

I'd never done an artist's residency before, so this was a beneficial learning experience. I know I would like to do another one. As far as the impact on my career, that's a hard thing to predict. The art world is so mercurial, so much of it being out of my control, that I don't like to set up too many expectations. Aside from my new friendships and connections, I think the residency experience increased my audience. The hotel connected to the villa hosted weekly aperitifs where hotel guests would pop into the studios, and through these, I met many new people. But really, I believe the significant impact going forward will be my experience of the land itself.