

made between 1964 and 1987, during Brazil's military dictatorship; and most of Adnan's small canvases (and one artist's book) were from 2015: They were built out of the tender geometric language she developed in the wake of Lebanon's catastrophic civil war. Yet the gallery didn't address these contexts and instead focused on certain formal affinities among the works.

Small rectangular canvases lined the main room: Adnan's on one side, Saldanha's on the other. Though the artists' approaches to picture making seem similar, they are not. Adnan's palette (lemon yellow and petal pink, sky blue and grass green) is lighter, airier. Her small blocks of color, which she shapes using a palette knife, are thickly piled up on top of each other with cheerful imprecision. Saldanha uses a brush, and her squares and circles are constructed out of tight, obsessive marks. Her palette is darker, too, full of bruised purples, dirty browns, and the occasional chunk of black or gray. In one of Adnan's paintings, *Untitled*, 2016, the artist uses five flat fields of breezy color to suggest a peaceful mountain range, while Saldanha's *Cidades* (Cities), 1964, has the detail and tension of a busy metropolis (the works on display here grew out of her early paintings of colonial towns).

Schneemann's canvases, large and violently gestural, were cloistered off in their own room—as if the gallery had thrown up its hands, flummoxed by how to integrate them into the show. One can understand the decision: They pale alongside Adnan's and Saldanha's quieter and more sophisticated compositions. For instance, in *Early Landscape*, 1959, her aggressively sweeping brushstrokes seem like generic, expressionistic posturing. The paintings looked dated and were interesting mainly as rarely seen curiosities. Of course, unlike Adnan and Saldanha, Schneemann was at the beginning of her career when she made them. She eventually amplified her extraordinary vision to great acclaim through other media, such as performance and film.

So why show these disparate bodies of work together? In its promotional materials, the gallery makes a vague case for studying relationships between landscape and the body. But I think the value lay elsewhere, as the artists worked to develop unique visual languages in response to their surroundings. Seeking joy and invention in a world that does everything it can to demolish such kinds of progress is an act of resistance. In her book *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* (2005), Adnan lists a torrential stream of nervous activities undertaken during a time of war (watch the clock, eat, visit the bathroom). But she also describes going to the ocean, luxuriating in its loveliness. And briefly, she feels happy, advancing into the waves.

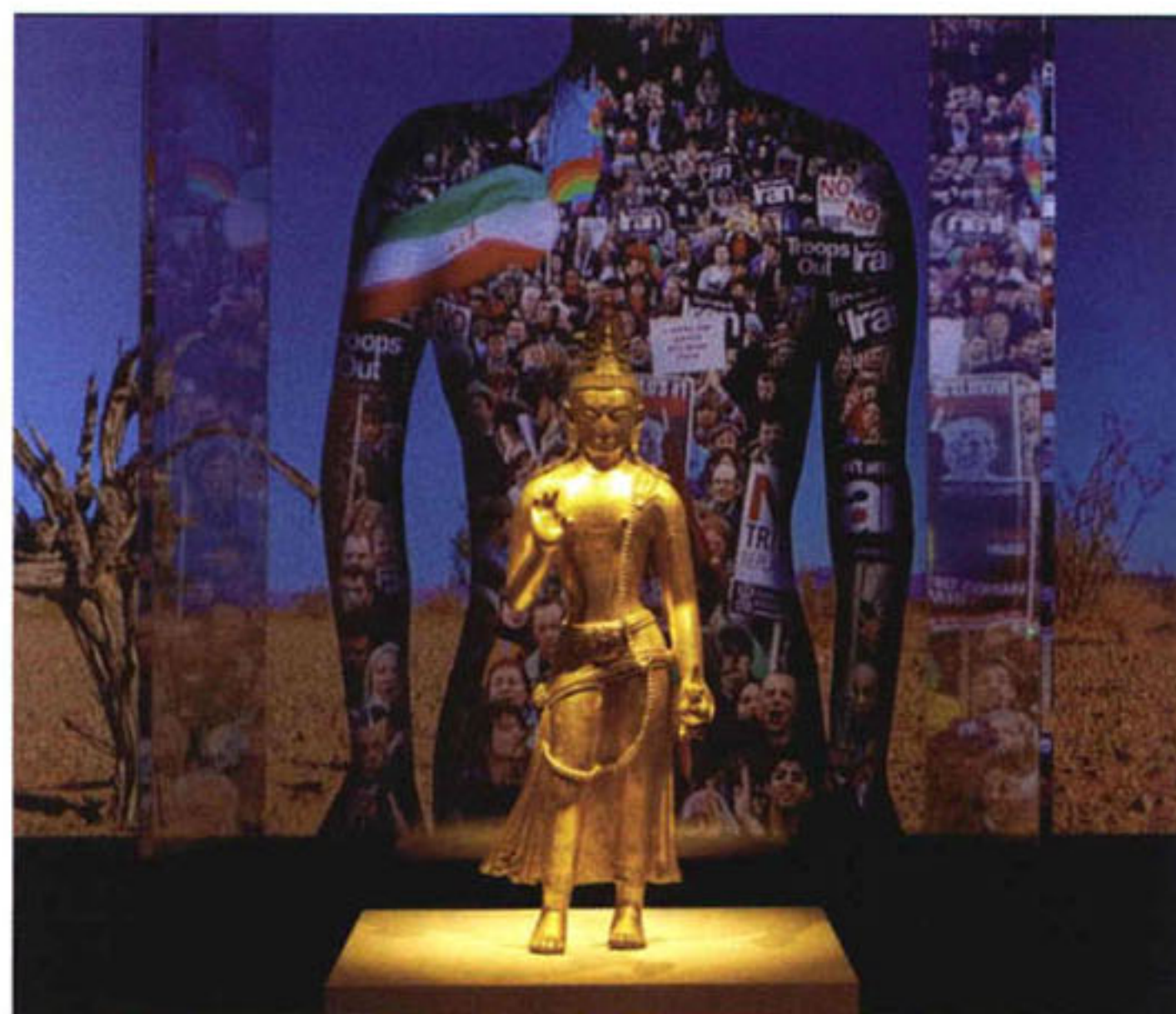
—Ania Szremski

## Chitra Ganesh

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

As part of the Rubin Museum of Art's yearlong exploration of the "future," Brooklyn-based artist Chitra Ganesh took inspiration from the institution's collection of Tibetan art to examine how the dystopic present can be changed for a better tomorrow in two separate, yet connected, exhibitions. The title of the core exhibition, "The Scorpion Gesture," for which she created five animations (her first and, by my lights, rather successful foray into the medium) refers to a Tibetan Buddhist hand gesture, or mudra, that represents the endless possibilities of transformation embodied metaphorically in the scorpion—a creature the Western imagination typically casts as threatening.

The apocalypse is made a spectacle in Ganesh's videos, all of which are projected on the walls of the second- and third-floor galleries. *Metropolis* (all works 2018) ends with the resurrection of Maitreya, a bodhisattva who will appear at times of conflict to become the next



View of "Chitra Ganesh," 2018. Foreground: Artist unknown, *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, ca. late 18th century–early 19th century. Background: Chitra Ganesh, *Silhouette in the Graveyard*, 2018. Photo: Phoebe d'Heurle.

Buddha and mark the beginning of a new age. In the video, Maitreya is a multi-limbed female cyborg, as formidable as she is seductive. The goddess is an amalgamation of the bronze Maitreya statues in the museum's holdings, the female robot of the titular 1927 film by Fritz Lang, and the protagonist of the movie *Aelita: Queen of Mars* (1924) by Yakov Protazanov. Here, Ganesh mobilizes a sexy palette of vibrant colors and sometimes incorporates animated bursts of glitter for good measure. Yes, the end of the world is scintillating—death, after all, is more palatable when it's all wrapped up in Broadway sizzle.

Of course, Ganesh is known for marrying a Pop-inflected playfulness with horror. For instance, the figure in *Silhouette in the Graveyard*, outlined with hot-pink neon, sits in a lotus position, then morphs into a standing body with three breasts. Images of contemporary protests, such as those connected to Black Lives Matter and the Free Palestine movements, fill the silhouette. Around the figure plays a montage of footage from forest fires, torrential storms, and other ecological catastrophes. Installed directly between the animation and the viewer is a gilded statue from the eighteenth century of the Future Buddha, who quietly demands that the observer be an agent of change. The animation, like two other videos in the show, is motion-activated, lending the work an element of surprise that makes it hard for the viewer to disengage.

In "Face of the Future," a related exhibition installed in the Rubin's basement, Ganesh commissioned film posters from seven emerging artists who revamp traditionally white, heteronormative science fiction films. Tuesday Smillie's *A Way Out of Noway*, 2018, advertises a movie that doesn't exist, titled after a lecture by the American trans activist and filmmaker Reina Gossett. Smillie's über-camp poster features Gossett as the main attraction. On the surface of a celestial body rendered in soft pastels is Gossett, looking defiant while blowing a raspberry. She wears a peekaboo-style black negligee and is festooned with a garland of red roses; she holds up a dildo/scepter made of purple crystal. She is not unlike Jane Fonda in Roger Vadim's interplanetary sex romp of 1968, *Barbarella*—but Smillie's star, unlike Fonda's character, is nobody's plaything.

Ganesh has turned the museum into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that tweaks out traditional notions of time, sex, gender, and history. The Rubin offers up a perfect context for the artist to limn the divine and countenance the dangerous, as good art made with a big heart and a sharp mind should always do.

—Alpesh Kantilal Patel