

**CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF THE ARTS**

**FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: Ranu Mukherjee**

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*Editor's note: FACULTY SPOTLIGHT is an editorial series that showcases CCA's wide range of professional faculty members.*

**Ranu Mukherjee** has been a member of the MFA Fine Arts faculty since 2004 and now also teaches in the MA in Social Practice & Public Forms program. She has a thriving art practice; her work has been exhibited and screened in major cities throughout the world and is included in private collections as well as collections of the San Jose Museum of Art and the Kadist Foundation.

The last of Mukherjee's three-part, yearlong solo exhibition at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, Extracted, is on view until August 14. Commissioned for the museum's 50th anniversary, this exhibition draws inspiration from California's Gold Rush, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the ancient text *The Classic of Mountain and Seas*, and the museum's own collection.

**You work in many different media. What is your favorite medium to work in, and why?**

I am most known for my hybrid films -- moving image works that combine digital, painted, and photographic source material.

I see the moving image work and my static work on paper or cloth as my primary mediums, which are connected. I am not going to choose one over the other -- I need to do both to be satisfied as a maker, shifting between the digital space of the animation and the more tactile experience of making a painting.

In both modes I enjoy working with collage-like methods: cutting or removing things, composing in space and time, and thinking about what happens when seemingly disparate things share a world. Amalgamating researched and produced source material is a way of describing the way we perceive through fragments.

I also think of color as a living thing, a medium in itself.

**What drew you to teaching? What keeps you interested?**

Chris Fisher, one of my graduate professors at the Royal College London, drew me to teaching. He brought me in to do an artist's talk and studio visits at Goldsmiths College and it went well, so they hired me as a lecturer (equivalent to adjunct).

I loved teaching as a continuation of the dialogue around art making and the presence of art in the larger cultural landscape. I still love to be in this space of emergent ideas and practices with others and to see the world reflected in the way students are grappling with how to make work.

**What does CCA offer that sets it apart?**

I can think of several things:

- The faculty is great and full of range. I really value working with my colleagues to make the best program we can. I realize I only know a small percent of how amazing they all are, even within the programs I teach in.
- CCA is an outward-facing institution. Engagement with the larger questions of our time and the relevance of contemporary art are inherent. I have had the opportunity to bring classes and class projects outside of the institutional spaces, collaborating with other organizations. Students get a lot of real-world experience here.
- There is a characteristic focus on the intersection of craft and concept, and on the relationship between personal and societal questions. Each professor/artist handles it differently, as we expect each student to.
- The interdisciplinary culture of the MFA program makes sense to me, and I think that is not the norm for US institutions.

**What is the best piece of advice you've received?**

I remember one of my graduate professors saying that I was trying to slow the image down. I was not making moving images at that time and the comment really resonated with me and surprised me in a way, because he was seeing something I was doing that was actually a goal for the work, which I didn't understand at the time.

I still think about the problem of how to slow people down enough to encounter artwork and feel that it behaves differently, in a bodily way, and to suggest another kind of encounter with the world, especially in a very marketing-dominated culture.

So, though his comment didn't take the form of advice, it became kind of mantra-like later.

**What (or who) inspires you?**

I am inspired by the constant movement and change I feel in the world around me, even if it can be difficult.

I am inspired by cities, deserts, forests, creatures, speculative fiction (both journalistic and literary), holistic world views, and my kids -- as well as by countless other art and artists, visionaries and practices that I have been lucky enough to encounter.

I am compelled by the ways art takes up time and space differently to most things. I am compelled by questions around being a body in the early 21st century.

I am compelled to create hybrid visual languages that contribute to widening cultural representation in contemporary art, and the perceptions of relations between culture and ecology.