

# Didactic and Artwork Descriptions for Rajni Perera: Futures

On view February 13 to May 17, 2024 at McMaster Museum of Art.

This solo exhibition of works by artist Rajni Perera is curated by Sarah Milroy and is organized and circulated by McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

## Museum Stairwell – glass case

*Flood Mask, 2020.*

A sculptural gas mask adorned with various textiles of velvet, lace, leather, gold lining, tassels, and pearls. The mask rests on a mount behind a plexiglass case.

This artwork is on view outside of the main gallery space because it is not originally part of this exhibition. This artwork is part of the McMaster Museum of Art permanent collection, it is on display because it is by the artist Rajni Perera.

## Levy Gallery – Main Exhibition Didactic

*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, Executive Director and Chief Curator, McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

Organized and Circulated by McMaster Canadian Art Collection with support from Canada Council for the Arts.

## Levy Gallery – Artworks, clockwise/left-to-right

### Levy Gallery – walls

*Portrait Study (2), 2022.* Mixed media on paper.

A seated figure, depicted in profile, drawn and painted on brown paper with mixed media. The person is sitting on an intricate circular stool next to a side table, while they hold a green plant in a funnel like vessel. The person's head is wrapped with a tall headpiece of orange fabric, their eyes are mutated into elongated double eyes, and they are wearing a mint green tunic, green gloves, argyle printed bottoms and blue over-the-knee boots.

*Portrait Study (1)*, 2022. Mixed media on paper.

A person seated on an intricate chair of geometric shapes; positioned diagonally within the frame. They are depicted on brown paper and painted with vibrant mixed media. The right hand is positioned on their lap, while the left is raised and holding a small bunch of green plants with white blooms. The person is wearing a little white hat with a finely detailed netting over their eyes and nose, along with a dark blue gloved tunic, long skirt, and split toe boots or socks.

*Ancestor 1*, 2019. Mixed media on paper.

A mixed media portrait of a kneeling figure with multiple starry irises on each eye. There is a large orange orb of light with a light blue outline as contrast behind the person. The background is gold. The person also has their hand inside their satchel, reaching out for something.

*Flood*, 2020. Mixed media on marbled paper.

A mixed media painting of a masked figure with their back facing the front. Their legs are covered by the marbled background to showcase flooding that is reaching to the person's thighs. There is a tray of a marble-patterned pottery set, with the person holding onto a black string.

## Levy Gallery – center room, clockwise/left-to-right from plinth

*Revenge 3*, 2019. Polymer clay, aluminum, paint, leather, lace. Ring for Truth (solid cast bronze wearable unit.)

A clay sculpture of a red hand with a long-pointed bronze ring on the index finger. The hand is wearing a white lace & leather bracelet that is layered three times.

*Palapa*, 2018. Mixed media on paper.

A mixed-media drawing on brown paper, depicting a person with their knees bent and left arm raised. The person is adorned with an ornamental necklace shawl of blue, red, white, and black geometric patterns, 4-layered skirt, and two sharp cones of blue and red, worn on their knees.

*Not Waiting*, 2018. Mixed media on paper.

A mixed-media drawing on black paper, depicting a seated person with their knees up. The futuristic being is unclothed, except for a fluid blue head shawl and shin guards of ornamental designs in yellow, blue, red, and black and white detailing.

## Levy Gallery – walls

*Storm*, 2020. Mixed media on marbled paper.

A mixed media painting of a long-masked figure in distress & walking through a marbled storm. The person has multiple eyes & double irises on each eye, along with two lips appearing through the mask. They are holding a blue patterned satchel partially covered by the storm's streaks. They are covering their eyes with their arm.

*I speak of everything*, 2021. Hand-marbled and dyed textile, acrylic gouache, stone.

A large textile of hand-marbled and dyed patterns; depicting the backside of a seated nude in the foreground and an outstretched leopard above, in the background. Red anthurium flowers and white leaves surround the animal, while the nude emits a green aura. The background of the textile is layered with a deep navy blue, blood orange fringe, and wooden beads in a curtain-like position.

## Levy Gallery – glass case

*Rings for Truth*, 2019. Cast bronze rings.

Six long-pointed bronze cast rings are seated diagonally on top of a terracotta-colored pillow, decorated with gold tassels. All rings are facing parallel to each other.

## Levy Gallery – walls

*The Curtain Call* (1980), 2021. Marbled. Painted, and beaded textile.

A large marbled and hand-painted textile depicting half a body from the waist down; knees bent and legs facing the right side. The body is black; formed with white spirals and showing pubic hair. From the waist, an overflowing floral arrangement of large, red anthurium flowers, spiky green leaves, and white beading. The central image is on a marbled background of grey, light orange, yellow, and peach color variations; framed with a border of braided textile and circles.

## Levy Gallery – wall across from glass case

*Dancer 2*, 2018. Mixed media on millboard.

A mixed media painting of a nude blue dancing figure facing  $\frac{3}{4}$  away from view, with their fingers and hands being of a lighter blue. Their head is pointed, and there is a band of pattern stretching from the hip to the knee.

## Levy Gallery – walls

*Traveller 5*, 2019. Mixed media on paper.

A mixed media portrait of a figure in a long ornate green argyle cloak, holding a marble-patterned sphere. There is a dome infrastructure behind in the background with three rows of trees wrapped around the building. The figure has multiple starry-iris eyes & an extra eye underneath the lips. They wear a narrow crown above the head, with hooped earrings & a marble-patterned necklace.

## Tomlinson Gallery – Artworks, clockwise/left-to-right

### Tomlinson Gallery – walls

*Drawing 4*, 2020. Mixed media on paper.

A drawing of a black arm delicately holding a small, marbled sphere; depicted on textured orange paper.

## Tomlinson Gallery – plinth

*Plane Bend*, 2020. Brass-plated metal, lead, frosted glass, wiring.

An abstract sculpture of brass-plated round metal plate, in a bent shape, holding a glowing light sphere made of white frosted glass. The sculpture is secured by metal screws to a large museum pedestal.

## Tomlinson Gallery – walls

*Drawing 1*, 2020. Mixed media on paper.

An abstract drawing on brown paper of round forms morphing into one another in hues of green and blue, with terracotta caps on opposite sides of the formation.

*Drawing 2*, 2020. Mixed media on paper.

An abstract drawing on beige paper of a rounded 3-dimensional form, drawn with a shaded pencil technique.

*Drawing 3*, 2020. Mixed media on paper.

An abstract drawing on brown paper. Long oval shapes are drawn with gel markers as they balance on top of one another while holding two marbled spheres.

*Drawing 5*, 2020. Mixed media on paper.

An abstract drawing on yellow paper that appears to be a study for the *Plane Bend* (2020) sculpture. The form is shaded with a white pencil and a led pencil. The sphere is depicted with marbled texture.

*Drawing 6*, 2020. Mixed media on paper.

An abstract drawing on orange paper of a rounded 3-dimensional form coated with bronze, left side with a black and white gradient, and a small sphere sitting atop.

## Tomlinson Gallery – covered plinth (far left)

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

A sculptural rubber gas mask adorned with leather, cotton, beads, pearls, floral designs of metallic thread, and lace trimmings.

## Tomlinson Gallery – walls

*Three Archers*, 2022. Mixed media on paper.

A triptych of tall mixed media artworks depicting three archers dressed in bold and vibrant clothing, all of them created on yellow marbled paper. From the left: an archer getting ready to launch their arrow, in the middle: an archer depicted from the back with the bow and a satchel of arrows on their back, and on the right: an archer using their right hand to grab an arrow from the satchel on their back.

*Seated Sentinel*, 2019. Mixed media on paper.

Mixed media depiction of a seated figure in profile, the skin is red, and the eyes are mutated from one to three with stars instead of irises. Seated on a hilltop, the person is using the left arm to hold their tall headpiece. Wearing vibrant clothing of orange, blue, and golden yellow, their headpiece has loose strings encircling them as if blowing in the wind.

*Untitled*, 2021. Mixed media on paper.

Side profile portrait of a brown skinned person with mutated eyes, lips, and fingers. They are wearing vibrant and boldly patterned clothing and head covering while holding a golden rod with a spherical red shape attached to it.

*Peaceful Cobra*, 2019. Mixed media on paper.

The back of a standing figure who is dressed in vibrant and bold patterned clothing. They are wearing a facemask, tight head cap, a tunic with big and wide shoulders, and a belted gold ornament on their lower back. In the right hand is an unknown instrument. The background suggests a barren landscape in colours of orange, lavender, and off-white.

## Tomlinson Gallery – covered plinth (immediate right)

*Drought Mask*, 2021. Various textiles, gas mask, bronze crochet needle.

Sculptural gas mask adorned with leather, frayed cotton, lace, bronze crochet needles at the temples, and a long textile extending and covering the back of the mask.

## Tomlinson Gallery – walls

*Ancestor 2*, 2019. Mixed media on paper.

A large, mixed media portrait of a futuristic being painted in a court-style manner. The background is of a flat bronze colour. The person is bald; wearing a short and finely detailed net covering. Their eyes are mutated into long, narrow-shaped eyes with multiple stars replacing the human iris, the nose is double pierced, and they are wearing black hoop earrings. The figure is wearing a regal long black robe with sleeves of blue florals and a red shawl draped over the left shoulder. One hand is hidden beneath the shawl and the other is adorned with a glove.

*Dancer*, 2018. Mixed media on millboard.

A mixed media painting of a nude turquoise figure facing  $\frac{3}{4}$  to view, with white fingers and hands. Their head is pointed, and there is a green band of pattern stretching from the back to the knee.

*Dancer 4*, 2018. Mixed media on millboard.

A mixed media painting of a nude black kneeling figure facing  $\frac{3}{4}$  to view. Their head is stretched to a rhombus shape, with one end of the shape coloured with red & white stars. On the belly of the person, there is a blue outline of a rhombus surrounded by a red outline of an oval.