

Ajay Kurian
Missing Home

May 27–July 9, 2022

When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first splendour, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang "Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!

But one cried of a sudden—"It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light and one of the stars has been lost."

The golden string of their harp snapped, their song stopped, and they cried in dismay—"Yes, that lost star was the best, she was the glory of all heavens!"

From that day the search is unceasing for her, and the cry goes on from one to the other that in her the world has lost its one joy! Only in the deepest silence of night the stars smile and whisper among themselves—"Vain is this seeking! Unbroken perfection is over all!"

—Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 1910

For over a decade, Brooklyn-based artist Ajay Kurian has produced a body of work that delves into the juggernaut of home, surfacing the blemishes it leaves on self-understanding. His sculptures and installations concentrate the shifty mechanisms of denial, such as assimilation, generational trauma, and dislocation, that underwrite contemporary diasporic experience. Suspended above a bed of fallen pine needles spanning 47 Canal's gallery floor, the new sculptures that comprise Kurian's "Missing Home," began as daubs of paint—pressed, then smeared out according to the spill made by their own reflection. These impressions are outlined and translated onto sheets of foam-core, their extremities scored and curled into three-dimensions and then fortified with plaster and fiberglass. Paint is applied to imply a vibratory derma, with irradiating pleats of color—peacock, seafoam, tamarind—that vie, as opposing desires do, for the primacy of your attention.

Kurian's entities loom larger than the human form. The hovering *Mantis* (all works 2022) makes a gesture resembling embrace, as if to take you home with it, rather than the other way around. A large green disc—something like a chemically fried palm-frond, or crown—bisects the tripartite entity *Throne*, making the suspended object appear both as a seat, as well as its sitter. *Harena* assumes the shape of a car's rear-view mirror, but also the façade of a theater. Its nature is Orphic: a wide-angled frame for the tragedy of looking back. Kurian's *Tirtha*, named after the Sanskrit word meaning both "watering hole," and "crossing point," and used in religious contexts to refer to holy pilgrimage, is a work of galactic purples and pinks with a vacant center. I'm reminded of a scene early on in Vijay Sharma's 1979 straight-to-VHS biopic *Gopaal Krishna*

in which the infant God's mother pries open her son's mouth to find a whole cosmos swirling inside. Kurian's *Tirtha* inverts the myth—here is a gaping maw, torn through space.

From the exposed red coils encased around the model home in Kurian's free-standing sculpture *Death Related Sensory Experience*, a mass of electric heat convects with the gallery's temperature to produce the phenomenon known as a heat shimmer—a mirage, in which the eye-line between the viewer and the object at the center of the sculpture is spread, as if by some liquid force whose effects resemble memory's warp—or is it simply doom?

However much Kurian's new suite of works index ancient and premodern forms, these beings appear like survivors of some unbidden future, pulled back into the present. We must believe our eyes.

—Shiv Kotecha, May 2022

A note from the artist: Thanks to Shiv Kotecha for the time he's spent with my work and the words he brought to it. Thanks to Kristina Stallvik for her late in the game life saving assistance. Thanks to Adrian Podpirka and Armen Enikolopov and Sandy Smith for helping me to safely bring my idea to life. Thanks to Jasmine Imani, Winn Mosi Hastings, Stephen Shaheen, Kamrooz Aram, Pooneh Maghazehe, and Jacob Kassay for sustaining me. Thanks to my mom and my dad and my sister for too many things.

Ajay Kurian (b. 1984) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He recently participated in "On Nationalism: Borders and Belonging," (2021-2022) a group exhibition organized by the Racial Imaginary Institute. He has had solo exhibitions at Sies + Höke, Dusseldorf (2019); CAPRI, Düsseldorf (2016); White Flag Projects, St. Louis (2016); Artspeak, Vancouver (2014); Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2013) and Audio Visual Arts, New York (2011). In 2017, he participated in the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. He has also exhibited work in group exhibitions at K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2018); Øregaard Museum, Copenhagen (2017); Art Commissions GI on Governor's Island, New York (2015); MoMA PS1, New York (2015); the Fridericianum, Kassel (2014); CAM Raleigh (2012); Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City (2013) and White Columns, New York (2011). His work is included in public collections including the Aishti Foundation Collection, Beirut and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.