

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

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Ajay Kurian

Through July 9. 47 Canal, 291 Grand Street, Manhattan; 646-415-7712, 47canal.us.



Ajay Kurian's "Tiresias" (2022) in his new show, "Missing Home." Ajay Kurian and 47 Canal, New York

An air of sacred stillness envelops Ajay Kurian's latest show. A whiff of danger, too. The only way to approach his new sculptures is to traverse the layer of pine needles strewn across the floor. They can be slippery, so anyone less than sure-footed will need to walk with care. Kurian, a Brooklyn-based artist, turned heads in the 2017 Whitney Biennial with Nike-sneaker-wearing, Muppet-like effigies that combined pop culture and provocation. (One wore a T-shirt with the words "All holes matter.") Somber in comparison, this show is titled "Missing Home." Road trip? Prolonged exile? Both, maybe.

A series of striking new sculptures resemble Rorschach ink blots whose organic shapes suggest moths and pelvic bones, heraldic lions and many-armed deities. Casting dramatic shadows under spotlights, the vertically symmetrical forms evoke humanity's ongoing attempts to depict a fearsome cosmic order, through icons past and present. But whose icons, from what century? One senses that the sculptures, at a loss for answers, mourn the ways that cultural memory can get jumbled and enshrined as part of diasporic experience.

An artwork in the back room looks more straightforward at first, innocuous even: a toy-model-scale house and palm tree set. But the bulky pedestal beneath hides ceramic heating elements that reach up to 1000 degrees Celsius when powered on. "Sculpture is hot please do not touch," reads a sign nearby. And with that caveat, shimmering-hot air rises around the figurines: an agonizing mirage for someone missing home. *DAWN CHAN*