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# Paper City and Ghost Modernity: In Conversation with Ranjana Steinruecke

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Contemporary Indian artist Manish Nai has a rather unique **artistic** style. He often works with found and discarded objects- recycling old clothes and newspapers, compressing books and various kinds of fabric- transforming them into sculptural pieces that are both overwhelming and playfully nostalgic. His practice finds new forms for old objects through remolding by twisting, cutting, and folding, and abstracting the material to create something new.

We visited Manish Nai's current exhibit at [Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke](#) in Mumbai titled '*Paper City and Ghost Modernity*' last week where his latest works are being showcased. Using a variety of materials ranging paper, second-hand books, wood, cardboard, and copper procured from informal traders and recycling units in different neighbourhoods across Mumbai, Nai's works evoke an instant curiosity in the viewer. Within minutes of walking in, one can't help but be gravitated towards this piece resembling a series of skyscrapers made out of recycled books. Stacked on top of one another with precision, the old faded pages form a beautiful gradient of colour that is characteristic of this artwork.



Manish Nai, 'Untitled (II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX)', 2018, old books and wood

You can see the stark visual contrasts of Mumbai speaking to you via the monumental height of the towers vis-a-vis the complete lack of space between each individual book. "His fascination with the city really comes out in his artwork," says Ranjana Steinruecke, who co-founded the gallery in 2006 and has worked closely with Nai for the past 12 years now. "Manish takes his time to find the objects he needs to work with. I've known him to drive hours to find a billboard that perfectly captures his vision (see image below), or in this case, sift through thousands of books from *raddiwallahs* to find the right shape, size and colour he's looking for."





Manish Nai, 'Untitled, 2018', pigment print on Hahnemühle paper

Shape and texture rather than content seem to be what Manish Nai is trying to capture through his art. One of the artworks on display is a series of novels and legal handbooks that he has compressed and exposed to water over a period of time. You can see them placed next to one another in what, at first glance, seems to be more like a collection of prehistoric rocks. When I ask Ranjana if there was any reason for his choice of legal books, she shakes her head. "He's not really interested in the themes or genres of the books, but the structure and outer skin that he finds unique to each one."







Compressed legal books and paperback novels, Installation View I, II, III

Paper City and Ghost Modernity is as much about the nature of the materials as it is about the city they're from. Hidden behind Nai's work is his love for Mumbai, and his passion for finding value and desire in discarded elements of the city, from its blank billboards to undervalued everyday objects. The exhibition has drawn a number of visitors who are fascinated by the unique mediums and materials Manish Nai uses to express his ideas and are often surprised by the multi-dimensionality of his work.

The exhibit is on till March 7th at [Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke](#), so if you're in Mumbai and are interested in seeing something truly unique, make sure you drop by.

