

ARTFORUM

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Alwar Balasubramaniam

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View of “Alwar Balasubramaniam,” 2016.

Any clear distinction between the human and the natural in Alwar Balasubramaniam’s refined sculptures has become increasingly blurred since he abandoned Bengaluru, India, for his ancestral village in Tamil Nadu. His latest exhibition features a series of textured monochromes, the surfaces of which uncannily resemble geological formations shaped over millennia. A trio of cast fiberglass panels—two unique but similar works, both titled *Rain in the midnight*, 2015–16, as well as *Under current*, 2015—re-create rippled beds carved by water flowing over earth and stone. Graphite gives the surface of the former works their inky sheen, while the latter, smaller in size, approximates the patina of oxidized copper or bronze.

Privileging sedimentation over erosion, the craggy surfaces of a different group of panels—a diptych titled *Dunes*, 2012; and three more cast fiberglass pieces titled *Wind Waves*, 2012; *Wings of the wind*, 2014–16; and *Burst*, 2015—are built up through the slow, careful addition of acrylic (and occasionally pigment, soot, and glue) subjected to the artist’s artificial air currents carefully orchestrated in the studio. The colors—synthetic-looking red, blue, and white—are the sole overt indications of his hand. These objects quietly introduce a sense of nature’s *longue durée* into the process of artistic creation, making the cumulative effects of imperceptible forces visible.

Other works return to familiar Balasubramaniam territory: the existential relationship between self and corporeality, which the artist has previously interrogated through works in various media that usually begin from a cast of his body. *Body as shell*, 2011–15, presents a figure as a deflated sheath crumpled on the floor, carved from sandstone. *Shell as body*, 2015–16, a large, broken, cowrie-shaped terra-cotta pot, reinforces the idea of body as vessel. Neither work, however, dictates what exactly they might hold.

— Murtaza Vali