

NEK CHAND

(born December 15, 1924 in Shakargarh, Pakistan; died June 12, 2015 in Chandigarh, India)

It is not often that we as gallerists, have the opportunity to exhibit work that we consider a wonder of the world and that has not been pillaged or stolen from its original site. Such is the case with a group of figurative cement, and cloth sculptures made by the late master artist Nek Chand.

Nek Chand, a man of undeniable genius but with no artistic training, came from the humble origins of a small Punjabi village. He fled his home during the partition of Indian and Pakistan in 1947 and settled in India's most modern city, Chandigarh, the government buildings of which were designed by the renowned architect Le Corbusier. As a government roads inspector, Chand witnessed the building of Chandigarh as it gradually replaced the many rural villages that were razed in the process.

From 1958 to 1965 Nek Chand collected the discarded materials that were the result of this urbanization process before beginning his "unauthorized" - secret - rock garden project. When his garden was discovered, the government threatened to remove it. Chand, however, managed to overcome the ire of the officials, who eventually provided the artist with 200 workers for his project. Officially inaugurated in 1976, the garden is now a forty-acre sculptured landscape filled with thousands of human and animal figures made from broken glass, smashed crockery, bicycle frames, Coke bottle tops, colorful plastic bangles, slate and tile, broken earthenware pots, and countless other materials. Surrounded by a densely forested gorge at the edge of Chandigarh, the park also comprises a network of waterfalls, make-believe castles, open air chambers, and connecting paths. Nek Chand's garden is a resting place for the spirits of God's creatures. When we look at Nek Chand's work we are not only seeing what is right in front of us but also seeing the incredible decades-long struggle he went through to preserve his visionary monument, politically, socially, and personally.

A mantra is a blessed selected group of words which, when repeated over and over, becomes a prayer, a blessing and/or a form of trance meditation. Anyone who has visited Nek Chand's Rock Garden, or has seen film or photographs of the site, has been profoundly moved by the magnificence of the garden's visual rhythms and metaphors. His massive physical poem of recycling, along with of the Watts Towers in Los Angeles, CA built by Simon Rodia (1876-1965), Ferdinand Cheval's (1836-1924) Palais Idéal, in Hauterives, France, and Joe Minter's (b. 1942) African Village, Birmingham, AL, is one of the most well-known sites in the world.

Chand generously gifted a number of cloth, and ceramic, and cement sculptures to the Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. The Children's Hospital sold those pieces to benefit other programs that needed funding.

Randall Morris

Solo Exhibitions:

2017: The World in a Garden: Nek Chand, John Michale Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

2016: Rock Garden, 15th International Architecture Biennial Exhibition, Venice, Italy

- 2015: Nek Chand: The Rock Garden Sculptures Exhibition, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK
- 2007: Nek Chand, RIBA Gallery, Liverpool, UK
- 2006: Concrete Kingdom: Sculptures by Nek Chand, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2005: Rock Garden, The Kingdom of Nek Chand, The Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 2000: Nek Chand: Healing Properties, Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
- 1997: Nek Chand Shows the Way: Sculptures from the Rock Garden of Chandigarh, Waterman's Art Center, Brentford, UK
- 1996: Nek Chand, Asia Society, New York, NY

Group Exhibitions:

- 2022: Summer Improv: Bibi's Choice, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
- 2019: Outsider Art Fair New York, represented by Jennifer Lauren Gallery, New York, NY
- 2018: Rebel Clay, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
Lloyd's Treasure Chest, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM
- 2017: Exhibition A#7, The Museum of Everything, Hobart, Australia
Fables and Fairytales, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2016: Maverick, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
The Museum of Everything, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Netherlands
Outsider Art Fair, represented by Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
Journey's Into the Outside, The Gallery of Everything, London, England
- 2015: Tantra, Anonymous, and Vyakul, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
- 2014: Raw Vision - 25 Years of Art Brut, Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, France
- 2013: Alternative Guide to the Universe, Hayward Gallery, London, England
- 2011: Perspectives: Forming the Figure, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2009: Exhibition #1, The Museum of Everything, London, England
- 2007: Wandering Wisconsin, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

Vernissage de Nek Chand et Jivya Soma Mashe, Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, France

2005: Bestioles, The Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland

Awards:

2013: Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi Honour

2007: Medal of the City of Paris, France

1984: Padama Shri Award, India

1980: Grand Medaille Vermeil, Paris, France

Collections:

Raw Vision Collection, Herts, UK
De Stadshof Collection, Utrecht, The Netherlands
The Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland
John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM
American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, MD
Capitol Children's Museum, Washington, D.C.
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI
Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA
Rubin Museum of Art, New York, NY
Museum of Naïve and Marginal Art, Jagodina, Serbia
Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art

Publications:

L'art brut by Collectif Martine Lusardy, Michel Thévoz. Paris, Citadelles & Mazenod Editions, 2018

Rock Garden in Chandigarh: A Critical Evaluation of the Work of Nek Chand, S. S. Bhatti, White Falcon Publishing, 2018

Nek Chand, Creator of a Sculpture Kingdom in India, Dies at 90, Nida Najer, New York Times, June 14, 2015

In India, a secret garden that rocks, Mark Magnier, Los Angeles Times, December 6, 2011

The Collection, the Ruin and the Theatre: Architecture, sculpture and landscape in Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Soumyen Bandyopadhyay and Iain Jackson, Liverpool University Press, 2007

Nek Chand: A Tale of Two Cities, Leslie Umberger, Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists, Princeton Architectural Press and John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 318-343, Princeton, NJ, 2007

Concrete Kingdom: Sculptures by Nek Chand, by B. D. Anderson, Folk Art, 31, nos. 1-2.: 42-48, Spring/Summer 2006

Nek Chand's Outsider Art: The Rock Garden of Chandigarh, Peiry, Lucienne Piery and Philippe Lespinasse, Flammarion, 2006

Concrete Kingdom: Sculptures by Nek Chand, C. Russell, Raw Vision, 55: 65, 2006

Nek Chand's Outsider Art: The Rock Garden of Chandigarh, Lucienne Peiry, Flammarion, Paris, France, 2005

- Le Royaume De Nek Chand, Iain Jackson, *Raw Vision*, 53: 69, 2005
- Another Nek Chand Garden - in South India, Anton Rajer, *Raw Vision*, 53: 10, 2005
- Intimacy and Monumentality in Chandigarh, North India: Le Corbusier's Capitol Complex and Nek Chand Saini's Rock Garden, S. Irish, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 38.2: 105-115, 2004
- Politicised Territory: Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh, *Picturing South Asian Culture in English*, Iain Jackson, Open House Press, Liverpool, England, 2003
- Nek Chand: Creator of a Magical World, John Maizels, *Vernacular Visionaries: International Outsider Art*, The Museum of International Folk Art and Yale UP, 66-77, Santa Fe, NM, 2003
- A Fantasy Land, or the Soul of the City? The Nek Chand Rock Garden, Chandigarh, India, G. Rawinsky, *The Folly Journal*, 3 Winter 2003: 43-52, 2003
- Politicised Territory: Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh, Iain Jackson, *Global Built Environment Review* 2 (2): 51-68, 2002
- Nek Chand's Bicycle, A. S. Negi, *Raw Vision*, 35: 29, 2001
- Rock Around the Rock Garden in Chandigarh, Anton Rajer, *The Folk Art Messenger*, 14:2, 23-25, 2001
- Nek Chand: an early encounter, M. N. Sharma, *Raw Vision*, 35: 28, 2001
- Nek Chand at Kohler conference and exhibition, R. Morris, *Raw Vision*, 31: 20, 2000
- Nek Chand's Story, Anton Rajer, *The Folk Art Messenger*, 13:1, 4-9, Winter/Spring 2000
- Nek Chand: Healing Properties, Leslie Umberger, Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2000
- Nek Chand Shows the Way, S. S. Bhatti et al, Waterman's, London, England, 1997
- Mela culture at Rock Garden, M. Saxena, *The Tribune*. Chandigarh, India, 19, 1995
- Nek Chand - A visit with the master visionary, P. Reeve, *Raw Vision Magazine*, 9: 34-42, 1994
- Architecture, Power and National Identity, L. J. Vale, Yale University, 1992
- Nek Chand, L. Ditzen, *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, Berlin, Germany, 1991
- Rock Garden, Chandigarh, S. Bhatti, *Indian Institute of Architects Journal* 55(2): 31-38, 1990
- The Rock Garden of Chandigarh, S.S. Bhatti, *Raw Vision*, 1: 22-31, 1989
- Rock Garden Di Nek Chand, S.S. Bhatti, *Casabella* 52 (550): 21, 1988
- Hoard of Trash Becomes Works of Art: Indian Elevates Garbage to Sculpture, Robert Mahoney, *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1988
- The Rock Garden: A panorama of the life-work of Padam Shri Nek Chand, Ludhiana, M.S. Aulakh, Tagore Publishers, 1986
- A fantasy garden by Nek Chand flourishes in India, B. Schiff, *Smithsonian* 15: 126-35, 1984
- Rock Garden in Chandigarh: a critical evaluation of the work of Nek Chand, S.S. Bhatti, The University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia, 1982