

NIKA PROJECT SPACE PRESENTS EXHIBITION 'BEGHOST' UNVEILING TIMELESS ECHOES TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES OF GEOLOGY AND ART

Sculpting time through the lens of transformation, Nika Neelova's solo exhibition mirrors the constant flux of material exchanges that define our world by merging chemistry, alchemy, and geology.

Opening Preview: May 16, 2024
On View: May 17- October 5, 2024



May 15, 2024 (Dubai, UAE) – NIKA Project Space presents '**Beghost,**' a solo exhibition by London-based artist **Nika Neelova**, on view from **May 17 – October 5, 2024**. The show will feature sculptures, crafted from various materials including glass, clay, and fossilized shark teeth, offering a speculative view of the ancient marine life that once inhabited Buhais Geology Park and Jebel Buhais, an archaeological site in Al Madam Plain (Sharjah, UAE). Narrating a story of transformation and decay, the new works are placed in direct dialogue with fossils from Nirmal Rajah's collection, the archaeologist, who in 2015 led an expedition to discover fossils in the Ariyalur district in Tamil Nadu, contributing to the production of the first English documentary focusing on India's remains.

'Beghost' traces the history of Sharjah region backwards, endowing the desert with the spirit of water that has long disappeared, but has left its fossilized traces in the geological record, encrypted in the rocks. The artist engages with the vast materiality of the geological history, exploring further how rock erodes into sand and clay,

sand with silica becomes glass and clay petrifies upon contact with air, hardening into form. Reflecting these natural sequences, all materials of Neelova's sculptures are engaged in a constant cycle of metamorphosis, alluding to the never-ending recycling of matter on the planet, merging chemistry, alchemy and geology.

Following the impressions of Neelova's research trip to the UAE in August 2022 supported through the Residency & Research programme by NIKA Project Space, the artist reflects: *'This terrain was, in fact, the site of a prehistoric sea that covered most of Arabia until geologically recent times. I imagined the ancient waters buried under the sand dunes, the landscape changing slowly over 93 million years, descending into the blue underworld. Among the layers of sedimented time and these prehistoric rocks, the exhibition conjures the oceanic subconscious of the desert, of the sand dunes haunted by the memory of water, and their watery ancestors.'*



The glass medusas' sculptures titled *'Medusa series,'* 2023, are crafted from antique chandelier fragments, fused with handblown flame-like glass elements. Inheriting their shapes from fire, the sculptures remind us of the primary purpose of their forebears, the chandeliers, to provide light, and at the same time reflect the transparent qualities of the animal itself. The inverted fragmented tree-like sculpture *'And their phantoms,'* 2023, holds hundreds of decapitated rose stems made from fossilized shark teeth of extinct species dating over 30 million years, set into hardened clay, thereby bridging the futility and short life span of flowers with the vast temporalities of deep time. The ripple stone piece titled *'Stones,'* 2023, created by fingerprints left in soft beds of petrified clay, witnesses the moments of interaction between humanity and nature, mimicking the pockmarks on the planet's skin, a vast network of now dying lakes. Strwn across the upstairs floor of the gallery, the skeletal

lemniscate sculptures, 'Untitled,' 2021, reference the ouroboros, an ancient symbol of a mythical snake devouring its own tail, representing the eternal cycles of destruction and rebirth. Reminiscent of the remains of prehistoric creatures, the sinuous flowing sculptures are made from reclaimed handrails from several flights of stairs.



Sophie J. Williamson explores in her essay 'Seepages' the concept of decay as a flexible architecture forever reconstructing itself by Reza Negarestani, who explains that all structures, physical or socio-political, are perpetually unraveling, only momentarily appearing whole. 'Beghost' mirrors this concept, illustrating the transient nature of reality, where distinctions blur between human and non-human, organic and inorganic, all destined for continual material flux and recycling on Earth, existing between geological cycles, and eroding time scales.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

'Beghost' by Nika Neelova will be on view at NIKA Project Space from May 17 – October 5, 2024.

Address:

NIKA Project Space

Al Khayat Avenue, Unit 11, 19th Street Road – Al Quoz 1. First Al Khail Street, Dubai, UAE.

About NIKA Project Space

NIKA Project Space is a UAE-based gallery that fosters the artistic inquiry of emerging and established artists and curators internationally, with a focus on practitioners from the Global South. Founded in 2023 by Veronika Berezina, the gallery serves as a platform for artistic discourse and experimentation and champions the work of female artists and curators. In addition to exhibitions which focus on conceptualization, abstraction, and philosophical inquiry, NIKA Project Space offers a critically engaged programme that emphasizes contemporaneity and dialogue through talks, performances, and educational initiatives. The gallery also hosts a research programme, inviting artists to create impactful new works that implement research-based and experimental creative processes, ultimately facilitating the exploration and portrayal of nuanced societal experiences and historical narratives. Located in Al Khayat Avenue in Dubai's industrial district Al Quoz, the 250-square-metre NIKA project space is designed by award-winning international practice T.ZED Architects to serve as a catalyst for artistic, cultural, and philosophical inquiry.

The NIKA Project Space Residency & Research programme supports experiments in art, creative practice and interdisciplinary dialogue. It provides a platform for artists to delve into the cultural and social nuances of a chosen region, offering a depth of experience that fosters the exchange of ideas. Launched in 2022, the programme invites artists to create new work using research-based and experimental creative processes, facilitating the exploration and representation of nuanced societal experiences and historical narratives. The programme ranges in length from one week to a month, and fosters connections between the artist and the local community by embedding them within a region's cultural and social fabric. Through artistic collaboration and exploration, the programme aims to bridge cultural gaps and promote understanding. The artists collaborate with locally based curators, bringing the issues and experiences of the Global South to a worldwide audience.

nika-projects.com

About Veronika Berezina:

Veronika Berezina is the founder of NIKA Project Space, a UAE-based gallery that fosters the artistic inquiry of emerging and established artists and curators. Committed to providing a space for discourse and critical engagement, Berezina opened the doors to NIKA Project Space in Dubai in March 2023 and has since worked in tandem with international practitioners, with a focus on artists and curators from the Global South. Through a considered approach, Berezina is building a rigorous roster of artists and focusing on expanding the gallery's research programme and publishing arm. Born in St. Petersburg, Berezina formerly held a career as a lawyer. In 2022, she relocated to Dubai to pursue her goal of opening a gallery. NIKA Project Space evolved from over a decade of private collecting and patronage.

About Nika Neelova:

Nika Neelova lives and works in London, where she received her Masters Degree from the Slade School of Art, after graduating with a BA degree from the Royal Art Academy, KABK. Her work has been exhibited in the United Kingdom and internationally, recent solo exhibitions include 'Very Like a Whale' at the Santorini Museum in Greece (2023), 'Thaw' at Noire Gallery in Turin (2023), 'One of Many Fragments' at the New Art Centre, Roche Court (2021), 'Silt' at Brighton CCA (2021), CELINE Art Project curated by Hedi Slimane for Celine London (2021), [Ⓛ] [Ⓛ] [Ⓛ] at Garage MCA (2021), 'Ever' at The Tetley, Leeds (2019).

Selected group exhibitions include: '(Everything) is not what it seems' curated by Mara Ambrosic for the Piran Coastal Galleries Museum (2023) & NITJA museum, Oslo (2022), From Birth to Earth, Parafin, London (2023), Frieze Allied Editions (2021); 'Her Dark Materials' curated by Philly Adams (2021), Art Newspaper 40th Anniversary project (2021), 'She Sees the Shadows' curated by Olivia Leahy and Adam Carr for DRAF & Mostyn

museum, Wales (2018), 'Seventeen. The Age of Nymphs' curated by Daria Khan for Mimosa House, London (2017), 'Theatre of the Absurd', Green Art Gallery, Dubai (2017).

Nika Neelova was awarded the Kenneth Armitage Young Sculptor Prize, the Land Security Prize Award, the Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award and was the winner of Saatchi New Sensations. In 2017 Neelova attended an alternative study program organised by the Wysing Art Centre in Cambridge. In 2019 she was awarded the Arts Council National Lottery Grant supporting the development of her practice.

Nika Neelova first gained recognition for her large scale sculptures and sculptural installations, depicting complex, imaginary environments that suggest a place or a landscape out of time. She participated in numerous residencies and her work is represented in various public and private collections internationally.

About Nirmal Rajah:

Nirmal Rajah, originally from India and now based in the UAE, is deeply passionate about exploring and educating others about the natural world. Currently serving as the head of education at the Mleiha Archaeological Center in Sharjah, Nirmal has a bachelor's degree in zoology, a master's in biotechnology, and is about to begin his Ph.D. Since 2008, he has dedicated himself to the study of evolutionary biology and paleontology, actively collecting fossils and studying them.

Nirmal's commitment to sharing knowledge extends beyond academia. He has been involved in projects aimed at popularizing paleontology, including contributing to the production of the first English documentary focusing on India's fossils in 2015, aiming to showcase his homeland's rich geological heritage to a wider audience. He has also co-founded a YouTube channel dedicated to discussing natural history, attracting over 123k subscribers.

Apart from scientific publications, he has also authored a book, a prehistoric fiction based on the prehistoric fauna and flora he encountered through fossils in Southern India. It was published by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. Nirmal is a member of the Royal Society of Biology, the Indian Society for Evolutionary Biologists, and the Indian Society of Earth Scientists.

Outside of his professional pursuits, Nirmal enjoys exploring geologically significant sites across India, the UAE, and beyond. Additionally, he is a part-time astronomer, often engaging in discussions about the universe with others when he's not discussing Earth's history.

Image Credits:

1.Nika Neelova. *Untitled*. 2021. Wood. Variable dimensions. Courtesy of The New Art Centre, Roche Court.

2.Nika Neelova. *Medusa series*, 2023. Handblown glass, reclaimed antique chandelier parts. Variable dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist.

3.Nika Neelova. *And their phantoms*. Fossilised shark teeth set in clay, epoxy, oil. 2023. Image courtesy of the artist.