

BISHAL MANANDHAR

Mundane objects always speak to me. I find meaning and beauty within them. My whole practice is about elevating common and neglected objects and appreciating them the way they are. Sometimes, my artistic transformations are small, as I strive to maintain their realness and original aesthetics, in other instances the transformation is more dramatic. I have always seen potentiality in objects far beyond their commercial values.

Lately, I have been working with burlap rice bags. I try to understand the objects through an initial deconstruction; by ripping them apart and separating the different components of the rice bag from thread, to labels and zippers. Once this exploration through destruction is complete, I re-assemble these pieces in novel ways.

Growing up in Kathmandu, Nepal, rice itself makes me nostalgic. I grew up eating a big meal of rice twice a day my entire life. I experience burlap rice bags with the same nostalgia, but in a different way. In the case of rice bags, it engages all my senses from the texture of burlap when I touch it to the smell that comes from the bags. It also reminds me of all the labor involved in producing bags of rice from the cultivation of rice farmers to workers making burlap rice bags from jute. To appreciate this labor, I added my own labor by taking the bags apart and hand stitching them together in different compositions.

In this work, both the physical transformations of the bags and the act of collecting bags from local restaurants and the community are significant components of the artwork. This interaction between the bag which carries food into people's homes, the community who then collects these now "empty" bags, and my art process has been fascinating for me. The amazing relationship between burlap rice bags and each bag's owner in their daily life is one of sustenance, family building and small acts of care, but once the bag is empty, it is thoughtlessly discarded. I rescue these burlap containers from a new life as garbage and bring them, instead, to a life in the gallery.



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