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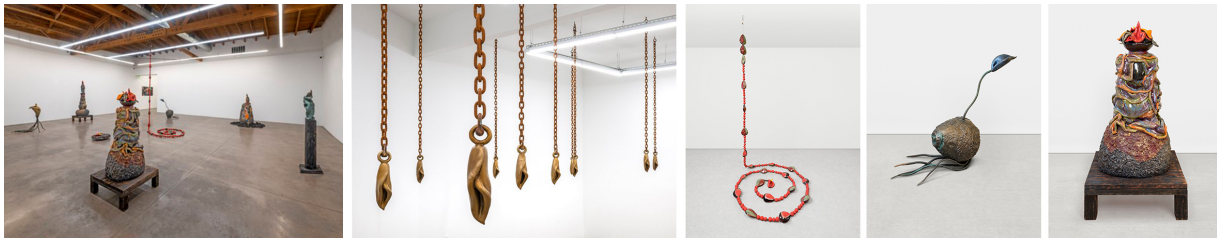
Ashwini Bhat: 'The Morning After The Fire Swept Through'

*Exquisite Forms Filled with Hope*

Shoshana Wayne Gallery

August 28 - October 25, 2025

by Jody Zellen



The ceramic sculptures on view in Ashwini Bhat's exhibition, *The Morning After The Fire Swept Through*, explore the cycles of nature. Bhat relocated from Southern India to the foothills of the Sonoma Mountains in Northern California. She arrived in 2017 around the time of the Tubbs Fire, and since then has watched how nature rebuilds itself after a catastrophe. Her works are a reflection of these patterns — the emergence of life from the scorched earth — and a search for beauty amidst devastation.

Her clay, wax, and bronze sculptures are portraits of her body (most are titled self-portraits), but also celebrations of the land. The primary form in the exhibition is the calla lily which grows in abundance on Bhat's property, and her sculptures trace the life cycle of the plant from "bud to bloom to burst." The plant's sensuality is illustrated in Bhat's pieces.

The back room is filled with the bronze multiple *Self Portrait, Becoming* (all works 2025). Twelve of these pieces in addition to the unique work *What Will It Take / For Us To Awake?* hang from the ceiling via thick chains with a rusty patina (which are integral parts of the sculptures). A looping score emanates from a set of small speakers resting out of the way on a shelf. The sound of chiming bells is interspersed with a female voice that poetically recites the title of the exhibition, *The Morning After The Fire Swept Through*. This gives the work both a hopeful and chilling aura.

The suggestion of 'fire sweeping through' is haunting for Los Angeles, especially in light of the recent Palisades and Eaton fires. Yet Bhat's experience with fire was inspirational and prompted her investigations of California ecology and climate change, in addition to the biomorphic forms that resulted from the flames. Working in glazed ceramics, she notes, also requires great heat. While the fire within the kiln is part of the process, she acknowledges its powers outside of that controlled environment.

*Self Portrait, Dailiness* is a work about ritual. During daily walks Bhat would roll a small ball of clay in her hands. Eventually, 108 were glazed in red and sequenced with larger breast-shaped seed pods into a giant rosary chain that begins at the ceiling and hangs

to the floor in a large spiral and ending with a vibrant red calla lily. *Self Portrait, Nude* stands about waste high. It is a giant calla lily cast in bronze. Rather than a stem, Bhat extends wiry tentacles from the bottom of the bulb which become a base that suggest legs and the potential for movement. *Self Portrait, Uprising* is a similarly personified form. Here, the spathe of the calla lily is attached to a long stem that extends from a bulbous pod situated on top of an array of tentacles.

Although many of the aforementioned works are bronze, Bhat is best known as a ceramicist. She has refined skills in building large-scale ceramic vessels that display a sophisticated sense of color and texture. *Self Portrait, Bloom* and *Self Portrait, Burst* juxtapose multi-color glazed ceramic forms with materials that suggest fire: charcoal in *Burst* and a scorched wooden platform in *Bloom*. While the bases of these works reflect destruction, but as the eye travels up — traversing a body from toe to head — both pinnacles burst with life.

While Bhat witnessed and perhaps internalized nature's violence and destruction, she has been able to transform these experiences into something beautiful and positive. Her exquisite forms are filled with hope. She acknowledges change and in natural cycles of birth, death and regrowth. Her sculptures capture the essence of this process and celebrate the fact that in California, life comes from conflagration.

<https://artnowla.com/2025/09/11/ashwini-bhat-the-morning-after-the-fire-swept-through/>