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Seeds of calm energy: Public artist Kumari Nahappan's Singapore Biennale installation – video interview

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A look back at Singaporean conceptual artist Kumari Nahappan's work with nature and sound at the Singapore Biennale 2013.

In a three-minute video interview produced by Singapore Art Museum, Kumari Nahappan, a Singapore-based multimedia artist, talks about her site-specific installation, *Anahata*. For the 2013 work, in an effort to explore different states of being through the colour red, she piled 2000kg of saga seeds into a cone-like shape in the centre of an exhibition room in the Singapore Art Museum.

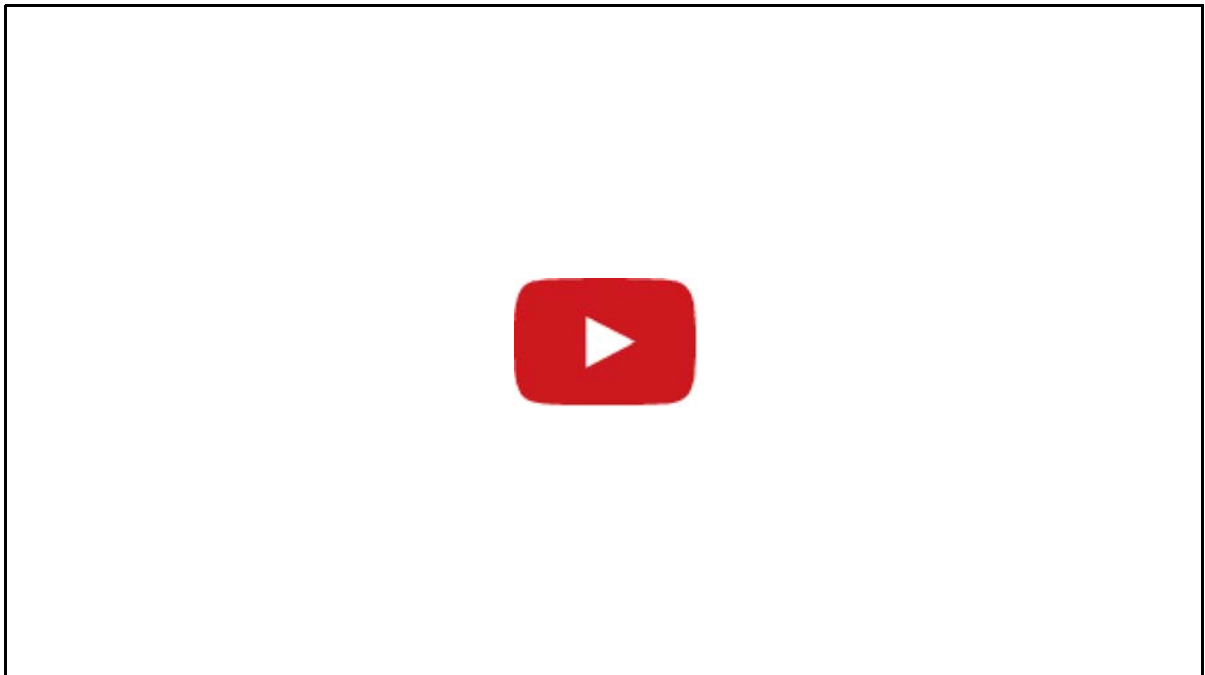


Kumari Nahappan, 'Anahata', 2013, saga seeds, sound, dimensions variable. Collection Of

The Artist. Singapore Biennale 2013 Commission. Image by Thomas Timlen (Flickr).
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In the video interview, Nahappan explains that for *Anahata*, she wished to bring together a collection of red seeds. "Seeds are mysterious; [they] have a lot of potential and this potential energy is something that I want to bring together," she said. Her mountain of saga seeds is positioned so that "it's flagged by the wings of the building, and this is the spine and the heart is in the centre. From here flows everything," she further explains. The seeds, which flow down from the centre of the pile, have a "dialogue with the various reds in the room" as the energy they contain leaves the room.



"I've had a love of saga seeds since I was a child," Nahappan says in the interview. "In days when a lot of things were not available, this became a part and parcel of life, you know, pick up seeds, use them to count, put them into bottles and store them." She began using saga seeds in her art in 2000, having collected the little red gems for "over a period of eighteen years", because of the connection she sees between the colour of the seeds (red) and the emotions the colour invokes in the viewer. As Nahappan explains,

When you look at the spectrum of colours, red is a colour that I feel speaks about everything. You know, it's a colour that connects, it's a colour that speaks about love, passion, aggression, anger... My take on it is to show that it could be a calming colour.

She hoped that, during the Biennale period, the red artwork would create a calm space in which visitors could feel a strong sense of community connection, a "presence of putting something together." Nahappan enhanced her Singapore Biennale installation with a rhythmic, heartbeat-like sound, a choice the artist made because of the meaning of the word *anahata*, which means "unstruck", "unhurt" and "unbeaten" in Hindu mythology.

More on Kumari Nahappan

Nahappan is well-known for her iconic and monumental public art sculptures in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Europe. Born in 1953 in Klang, Selangor, Malaysia, she was a teacher in London before undertaking formal artistic training at LaSalle College of Arts, Singapore. She also holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia. Since 2007, she has held numerous solo and group exhibitions and shown in countries as diverse as China, India, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain and Germany.



Kumari Nahappan, 'Anahata' (detail), 2013, saga seeds, sound, dimensions variable. Collection Of The Artist. Singapore Biennale 2013 Commission. Image by Thomas Timlen (Flickr). Licensed under Creative Commons.

Several of Kumari Nahappan's public sculptures can be found in Singapore including *NUTMEG* (2009, ION Orchard), *Pembungaan* (2010-2011, Lobby, Plaza and Walkway, OUE Bayfront); and *SAGA Sculpture* (2007, Changi Airport Terminal 3). Many more works have been installed abroad, among them *Wild Chilli Couple* (2009-2010, Gtower, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) and the award-winning *Tango* (2012, Zhongshan Park Entrance, Changning District Collection, Shanghai, China).

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Lisa Koh

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