

**Reading Rämistrasse #172: Olena Legorova on Ishita Chakraborty at Peter Kilchmann,
Olena Legorova, Zurich, September 2025**



In *I Recall The Forest Inside Me*, Ishita Chakraborty transforms Galerie Peter Kilchmann into something between an archive and an ecosystem, where drawings, sari fabric, pigment prints, fragile glass and porcelain sculptures coexist in a quietly radical ecology of forms.

Set against the painted walls are plant-shaped canvas cut-outs backed with sari fabric. The selection of plants reflects their circulation under European colonial rule through plantation systems in South Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. These crops, including agave, cacao, tobacco, coffee and sugarcane, became key instruments of imperial extraction and global trade.

The forms resemble scientific illustrations, prompting reflection upon the politics of 'discovery' or the biocolonial commodification of Indigenous knowledge. The sari backings of the hand-painted illustrations, mass-printed cottons commonly worn by rural working-class women, extend the critique from a botanical context to social economy and histories of labour, class and caste within textile and plantation systems. The artworks become sites where the flora of the colonial empire is 'sewn' onto the fabrics of inequality. Some attached to the walls, some suspended in the air, cropped and unframed, they echo the fragmented and detached sensibility of post-internet visual culture. The wall drawings, too, resist constraint, expanding beyond control, and in doing so they challenge the very premise of containment that the white cube usually represents.

Chakraborty's works on paper deepen the layering of identity and geography. In a series of pigment prints, a figure is draped in maps of disputed border regions and topographies of historical plantation landscapes. Nearly lost beneath these lines of conquest, the figure emerges subtly as the artist hand-colors the surface, adding a layer of subjectivity to history. One could see this practice echoing postcolonial concerns articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak or Édouard Glissant, observing how bodies and landscapes carry, and can reclaim, the weight of colonial legacies.

Upstairs, *Between the Land and Sea I*, a crowd control barrier constructed entirely from glass, refracts the light into shifting patterns. Its delicacy is juxtaposed with its conceptual weight: a boundary both transparent and impassable. Nearby, *Resistance II* takes the form of barbed wire crafted in unglazed porcelain. Together, these pieces attempt to transform materials of violence and segregation into emblems of vulnerability – specifically the fragile, ongoing precarity experienced by those subjected to exclusion and control. Moving beyond historical analysis, these works turn toward urgent contemporary concerns, opening a space to understand the artist's broader artistic trajectory.



Ishita Chakraborty, *I Recall The Forest Inside Me*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, 2025
Foto: Sebastian Schaub

Chakraborty, born in West Bengal, now lives and works between Switzerland and India. Three years ago at Awareness in Art in Zurich her work operated through conceptual storytelling, merging research and poetry in reflections on displacement, memory and colonial mapping. Her art has been shown since in several museum settings including the Aargauer Kunsthau this summer, and it now occupies a leading commercial gallery – not only a significant step in the artist's career but also an interesting shift in how such discourse-driven practices are being positioned.

In *I Recall The Forest Inside Me*, the artist weaves her own lived experience into a planetary frame, where questions of migration, ecology and belonging blur the lines between native and alien, home and exile – topics polarizing our world more and more in the face of wars and economic instability. Yet, despite the seriousness of the subject matter, the exhibition retains a tone of lightness and grace. The artist leans towards the poetic as a mode of resistance, rewriting the world through reflection rather than confrontation.

I Recall The Forest Inside Me is both poetic and political. Peter Kilchmann's decision to present a show with such critical, socially engaged content realized in a challenging installative format stands as a subtle statement against the prevailing caution of the market, where an increasing number of galleries and fairs retreat into the predictable safety of neutral stances and oil on canvas. Here, the gallery takes a certain risk: it embraces the ephemeral, the processual and the materially fragile. The exhibition navigates the tension between marketability and conceptual depth, which often demands time and resists easy consumption. This very challenge, however, is part of its strength, inviting reflection that persists well beyond the visit.

Ishita Chakraborty, *I Recall The Forest Inside Me*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Rämistrasse 33, 8001 Zürich, 18 September–8 November 2025