



Press Release

A Summer of Gods and Goddesses

14.07.24 > 15.09.24

Opening Sunday 14th July 2024, The Gallery of **Everything** presents *A Summer of Gods and Goddesses*: an installation of original sculptures and figures by **Nek Chand Saini** (1924 – 2015).

Born in 1924 before the Partition, **Saini** was a village-born child whose family fled to India as refugees. He would eventually go on to become a cultural figure of myth and mystery - not only in India, but worldwide - with an unclassifiable practice, situated somewhere in between land art, landscape architecture and the vast realm of the folkloric vernacular.

As an artist (a term he disavowed), **Saini** was more elusive than his legend implies. He was a freehand designer, an inveterate recycler and a lifetime visionary, whose employment as a roadside inspector with the Public Works Department of Chandigarh gave him the means, access and confidence to embark on the private project which consumed his adulthood.

Originally titled *The Kingdom of Gods and Goddesses*, **Saini's** physical dreamscape was partially inspired by childhood fables of magical empires, recounted to him by his mother before their forced emigration. Yet it was his engagement with Chandigarh, the capital city designed by Albert Mayer, Matthew Nowicki and Le Corbusier which sparked his inner fire.

If some saw **Saini's** unexpected installation as a reaction against the architectural invasion, the artist was never precise on the point. **Saini** had initiated his informal environment in the late 1950s by gathering rocks and salvaging materials from the city's demolition sites. That it evolved into a major *gesamtkunstwerk*, hidden within the forest and executed without decisive format, was simply the conclusion of his stubborn determination and drive.

Until 1972 none knew of the project except **Saini**. The discovery of a secret maze of narrow walkways and sloping gardens, and of its populations of cement, ceramic, bangle and bottle-top, led first to public condemnation, and then to an outpouring of national support. Endorsement by the likes of Indira Gandhi succeeded not only in preserving the site, but engaging the public administration in its preservation, maintenance and development.

The site was christened *The Rock Garden* by the authorities; and its future was secured under the leadership of its charming and unyielding creator, **Nek Chand Saini**.

Today *The Rock Garden* welcomes in excess of 3 million visitors a year - generating significant revenues for a city which now proudly claims ownership. In his lifetime, **Saini** never formally acknowledged his role as author of this oeuvre; nor did he recognise the unauthorised land-grab, which formed the basis of his monumental artwork, as a political or post-colonial gesture. This, despite its radical organic form and content, and its contrast to Chandigarh's monumental concrete structures and disruptive architectural lines.

Instead, **Saini** acknowledged his role in building a legacy for everyday Indian people: a place where they could simply go, discover and be.

In this centenary year of **Nek Chand Saini's** birth, The Gallery of **Everything** honours his profound achievement with an installation of works from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, including original ceramic and bangle figures created by **Saini** and his team of workers.

THE GALLERY OF EVERYTHING



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The Gallery of **Everything** is London's first commercial space dedicated to artists and makers beyond the cultural mainstream.

The Gallery of **Everything** displays self-taught, art-brut, spiritualist, vernacular and other non-academic material from the 19th century to the present day, alongside contemporary artworks by diverse creators of every colour, class, gender, race and neurology.

The gallery's programme includes group and solo exhibitions, art fairs, talks, readings and happenings.

For more information, please contact Sakhshi Mahajan: ge@gallevery.com or +44 20 7486 8909.

The Gallery of **Everything**
4 Chiltern Street, London W1
T +44 20 7486 8909 M +44 7809 195 625

www.gallevery.com
ge@gallevery.com
[@gallevery](https://www.instagram.com/gallevery)

