

Artist Statement

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I was recently in my birth village of Helambu during the annual Tsechu festival, watching elders shape *tormas* as they talked, joked, and caught up with one another. Barley flour and butter are kneaded into a dough, then formed into simple shapes—cylinders, cones, triangles, cubes—that are gradually worked into more intricate and elaborate structures. As a kid, I was drawn to this process, and the elders would sometimes make me small animal figures to play with. But when the *tormas* were placed on the altar and the rituals began, something shifted. The low, droning chants and the thunder of instruments carried a physical force, stirring the body in a way that felt like there was a tremor in the chest, resembling the sensation of fear but not quite it. In those moments, the *tormas* felt animated, as if the sound itself had entered them. They became charged presences, thresholds into a world of deities and spirits.

Seeing it again as an adult, I could still access some of those sensations, but I also had a different reaction altogether. There was something playful about the whole process. Watching the *tormas* being made reminded me of children shaping playdough and how they invent and animate worlds of their imagination.

My interest in *tormas* emerged through a kind of happenstance in my earlier work, where I was trying to make “pure” abstract paintings. Over time, the unconscious resemblance of those forms to *tormas* became self-evident. What began as an accident became a way to explore how forms can hold memory and meaning, and what one’s inherited sensibilities and leanings might reveal about identity and the tensions surrounding it. In Tibetan Buddhist practice, *tormas* can represent deities, spirits, or forces in the world. They are also used as offerings, protections, or tools within rituals. In my paintings, these forms become more porous and unstable—open to symbolism but not fixed to a singular meaning. They become vessels for what the mind can externalize, whether it be deities, natural landscapes and processes, a flock of birds, or scenes of conflict. At the same time, they point inward, reflecting something closer to the movement of the mind—emotions, thoughts, and energies that don’t stay still for long.

The history that *tormas* carry is also an important consideration in my practice. They have possible roots in the earlier Bon tradition of the Shangshung kingdom, oriented more toward a relationship between humans and the natural world—mountains, rivers, celestial bodies, animals and unseen forces embedded in the landscape. These manifest in my recent works where I include

organic materials like rice grains and tangerines, alongside industrial materials such as cement and steel, referencing the highly manufactured landscape we now inhabit and the precarious state of our living environment in the face of the global climate crisis.

Between the forms we hold and the memories we carry, negotiating belief with play, and reason with imagination, my work sits in this dualistic/ambiguous space, making sense of these different ways of seeing without resolving them too quickly.