

Slow Looking: Pranav Lal

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Seven Coloured Earth

Pranav Lal

India, 2018

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Digital Photography with an aspect ratio of 5 to 3 or approximately the shape of a postcard with a portrait orientation.

This colour photograph features a landscape with smooth mounds of packed, earthy sand shaded in various colours.

This early morning or late afternoon photograph captures presumably naturally-formed earth mounds, starting from close up and slanting 20 degrees down to the right from the horizon.

I will describe this photograph in thirds, from the bottom to the top, with the first two thirds taken up by the folds of earth in the foreground and middle distance. And the top third comprised of trees and sky.

The lower third of the photograph is a close view of a nearby mound. Its texture is rough like coarse sandpaper. The monotone sandy brown earth has slopes and valleys. Vestiges of plant roots bleached white by the sun are scattered in and through the scene. At the right lower edge of the photograph is a tiny bright green seedling with four leaves.

The middle third of the photograph features more and more mounds of earth as the perspective moves us farther away by making each mound smaller. Ribbons of different shades of browns run vertically through them. On the far left the colour is that of chai or milk tea changing to a rust brown, then sandy brown to a then ashen brick colour. On the right muted greens appear in soft browns. Moving further the brown contains more of an orange and yellow hue and farthest to the right it appears to be imbued with grey.

Into the top third of the photograph the mounds taper away, cresting to form a bank. Under a wide swath of bright blue sky with wispy white clouds, is a dense area full of dark green leafy trees. Underneath the trees, separating them from the mounds of earth, there is a line of short, wooden fencing with a bright green lawn just beyond it, as if part of a public park.

The image is tilted to the right so that the horizon line is on an angle, further emphasizing the angle of the earth mounds. This gives a slight sense of vertigo.

This photograph was taken in the island country of Mauritius, located in the Indian Ocean. It depicts the Chamarel plain of the Rivière Noire District in the south west of the country. A naturally-occurring geological formation, the Seven Coloured Earth is a small area of sand dunes. The sand has taken its undulating form through rainfall and the decomposition of volcanic rock. It is the iron and the aluminium that have helped create the colours. The sands separate and settle into different colours which, depending on the light, can appear as brown, yellow, red, purple, violet, blue and green. The plain has been a popular tourist attraction in the country since the 1960s.