



URMILA MOHAN  
MOVING HOME



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October 3 - December 5, 2010  
HUNTERDON ART MUSEUM

## MOVING HOME

*Moving Home*, Urmila Mohan's installation for the Hunterdon Art Museum, explores her ongoing interest in the relationship between identity and material culture. Mohan takes the ubiquitous Styrofoam packing peanut as a starting point for the exhibition and uses it as a central motif to provide both imagery and meaning. By fashioning packing peanuts out of clay, a breakable material, she subverts their intended usefulness and makes them symbols of fragility.

Working at The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, Mohan also created fabrics and wallpaper that incorporate the image of the packing peanut into a camouflage pattern. She uses these materials to transform the gallery into a domestic space. A matching "traveler's suit" hangs in the room, suggesting the missing human presence that is required to complete the idea of home.

Upholstery, curtains, wallpaper, and clothing offer protection to the furniture, windows, walls and people they cover; they can also hide or obscure identity or express personal style. In a way they function like a second skin. Ironically, while these textiles metaphorically "wrap" objects and bodies in packing peanuts, they are ultimately no more effective a protection than Mohan's ceramic packing peanuts, further

underscoring the fragility of people and their possessions.

The meaning of the word “home” is heavily weighted, and highly personal. When we refer to “home” we often mean our place of origin, yet we also use the same word to describe the place where we reside. The objects we choose to decorate and fill our homes connect us to our memories, ideas and yearnings for home. Material culture not only signifies personal identity, it also provides valuable links to a larger collective experience, even when those links are broken.

What happens when we leave one place for another? How do we create a home? What do the things we take with us, and the things we leave behind reveal about us? And while we take precautions with our breakable possessions, can we ever really protect ourselves? In *Moving Home*, Urmila Mohan has created a safe haven in which to ponder these questions.

Mary Birmingham  
Director of Exhibitions  
Hunterdon Art Museum





## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

As an immigrant artist in the U.S., I am interested in how materials embody contemporary cultural phenomena. Having moved multiple times with significant changes in geographic and psychic space, I am intrigued by how people relate to their (changing) environments.

In *Moving Home* I use the ephemeral packing peanut as a symbol of the permanence as well as the transience of home – the two different yet related states of being rooted and routed. I subvert the functionality of packing peanuts by casting them in white clay slip and hide their image within the screenprinted camouflage pattern on fabric and wallpaper. By covering the elements of the installation, like the wall, upholstered couch and disembodied traveler's suit with packing peanuts "skins," I represent the corporeality of surfaces and question how we create, define and simulate identity.

**TRAVELER'S SUIT**  
2010, SCREENPRINTED COTTON, PACKING PAPER, BODY FORM



## **ARTIST'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This show is dedicated to Krishna Reddy for helping me make and move home.

Thank you to Mary Birmingham and the staff and volunteers at the Hunterdon Art Museum for support and guidance.

Parts of this installation were created at different locations. All screenprinted materials were produced at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia. Warm gratitude goes to Christina Roberts and Lucy Lau who generously shared their time and expertise during my apprenticeship in 2009.

I am especially obliged to Susan Amann, Country Squire Pottery, Somerville, New Jersey, who patiently fired numerous clay peanuts.

Finally, this show would be incomplete without the assistance of Steve Tonucci, Michaels Decorators, Philadelphia, and Chandan Harisinghani, Lucky Textiles, Chennai, India.

Hunterdon **Art** Museum  
center for art, craft & design

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[www.hunterdonartmuseum.org](http://www.hunterdonartmuseum.org)



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Front and back covers: **Packing Peanuts** (detail), 2010, Three color screenprint on cotton.

Front inside cover: **Rug** (detail), 2010, Slipcast white earthenware.

Back inside cover: **Window Screen** (detail), 2010, Screenprinted devoré on fabric.

