

# NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Urmila Mohan's art installation explores identity as related to material dwelling

By RALPH J. BELLANTONI  
CORRESPONDENT

As mornings dawn frosty and clothes grow thicker, people pack away their summer things. The fragile items get nestled into a bed of packing peanuts — but beware the packing peanuts Urmila Mohan makes!

## ABOUT ART

Mohan's Hunterdon Art Museum installation "Moving Home" uses packing peanuts as its central motif for exploring issues of space, identity and material culture. But instead of shock-absorbent Styrofoam, she casts her fragile ceramic replicas from clay slip.

The Glen Gardner-based artist and writer was born and raised in India and received art education in New Zealand. Her global changes of residence make her intimately familiar with the emotions and accessories of uprooting and transplanting.

"Having moved multiple times, with significant changes in geographic and psychic space, I am intrigued by how people relate to their changing environments," said Mohan. "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."

Mohan transforms the museum gallery into an ambiguous domestic space. She augments her packing peanut "rug" with wallpaper, curtains and upholstery that incorporate images of the ubiquitous Styrofoam nuisances into a camouflage pattern. A proverbial "empty suit" hangs forlornly mid-room, contrived in the identical motif (see photos, right). The mixed-media environment represents the culmination of a year's work at various sites, including The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia.

"True to its theme," said Mohan, "parts of the installation were designed and produced at different locations."

The museum also hosts a "Fire Works" display. Rather than "bombs bursting in air," this show presents work by 13 artists who harness fire in their art-making processes.

These artists employ blowtorches, candles, bomb fuses, fireworks, soldering irons, incense sticks and other fiery tools for melting, fusing, scarring, smoking or otherwise

altering and adapting materials for expressive purposes. The exhibit includes pieces by Rob Tarbell, Donna Ruff, Rasika Reddy, Jihyun Park, Norman Mooney, Dana Melamed, Karen Margolis, Abby Leigh, Rosemarie Fiore, Jim Dingilian, Pritika Chowdhry, Davide Cantoni and L.C. Armstrong.

ART BY URMILA MOHAN

Urmila Mohan's Hunterdon Art Museum installation uses packing peanuts as its central motif for exploring issues of space, identity and material culture. She casts her fragile ceramic replicas from clay slip.



## MOVING HOME: AN INSTALLATION BY URMILA MOHAN

11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays  
through Dec. 5 • The Hunterdon Art  
Museum, 7 Lower Center St., Clinton

• Suggested admission is \$5

• 908-735-8415;

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