

Friends of South Asia

Fall 2023



Figure 1 Curator Fahmida Suleman speaking at an FSA tour of ROM exhibition, “Being and Belonging” in front of pieces by Tayeba Begum Lipi. Photo: Piali Roy

Message from the Chair

Friends of South Asia (FSA) has had a busy summer and fall with tours of ROM’s “Being and Belonging: Contemporary Women Artists from the Islamic World and Beyond,” the Art Museum, the Gardiner Museum as well as partnering with Spadina Museum for “Silk Road to Spadina,” which featured saris donated by FSA committee member Meenaskhi Sibal, and a talk by ROM curator Dr. Sarah Fee.

I encourage you to see “Being and Belonging,” which runs until January 7, 2024. And while the Sir Christopher Ondaatje South Asian Gallery is closed for a refresh, take time to visit the Currelly Gallery where there will be an installation from the sari donation by Jayashree Khimasia. We hope to see you at the Museum! – Piali Roy, Chair

Tours at the Art Museum and the Gardiner Museum



Figure 2 (left to right) Durga Rajah, Nimisha Bhanot, and Atif Mikhail Khan. Photo: Piali Roy

On Wednesday, July 19th, over twenty members of FSA set off for a double-hitter, touring the South Asian works of the University of Toronto's 2023 Master of Visual Studies Studio and Curatorial Studies program, followed by Heidi McKenzie's solo show at the Gardiner Museum.

The U of T exhibition, housed in the Art Museum located in University College, featured Atif Mikhail Khan's curatorial work and the visual art of Nimisha Bhanot and Durga Rajah.

Khan began explaining the meaning of his curatorial title, *My Final Prayer*. Taken from the words of Frantz Fanon, an Afro-Caribbean psychoanalyst and philosopher famous for his writings on anti-colonial revolution, Khan's assemblage of works speaks to the dislocations and dis-memberings of bodies and spirits by colonization, imperialism and the anti-colonial desire to recast and refigure. Khan wove a complex narrative by connecting his past academic interests in geopolitical policy to the vagaries of current theatres of globalized war and violence, where Fanon's evocation can add valuable insight. Khan had curated four works: a lengthy video entitled "Weak Enough to Hear: A Deluge in Six Acts" (2019) by Pevjak, a collective comprising of the artists Rouzbeh Akhbari and Felix Kalmenson; ceramic pieces from the "Consuming Caribbean" series and "Midnight Robber" (2020) by Thomas Haskell; paper and mixed media installation

“resurgent artefacts” (2023) by Jasmine Gui with Abby Ho and Justine Wong and naakita f. k.’s “Stone Tape: A haunting” (2021).

Pevjak’s video offers a fictional, non-linear, disruptive narrative of the ghosts of a boy killed by British troops in 2003 in Iraq in the Euphrates River, showcasing the river and its surrounding landscape as guides in the re-remembering and memorializing the lost lives and bodies in neocolonial warfare. The haunting of the ghost of seemingly forgotten violence returns in naakita’s query into visibility and invisibility, actual vs. ghostly presence raised by her video. The distortions and disruptions of human spiritual worlds are also further evoked by Gui’s work with Ho and Wong, where Gui’s poetry accompanies Daoist talismans that include pressed words that are linked to grief, stretched and pulled on paper. Lastly, Haskell’s evocative and vivid ceramic pieces, featuring fruit and plants, such as papaya whose myriad of black seeds are embedded with human teeth, evoke the vagaries of Afro-Caribbean histories and the consumption of bodies, flesh, teeth, and bones, offering, in khan’s view, echoes of Fanon’s “my final prayer.”



Figure 3 Photo of artist Nimisha Bhanot in front of her artwork. Photo: Piali Roy

The notion of memory continues in Nimisha Bhanot’s work, which she described as investigating her personal archive of digital and photographic memories from screenshots, text messages, home videos, and assemblage of portraiture, which collectively probe South Asian diasporic identities, with attention to the socio-political

role of women and femmes. Criss-crossing and juxtaposing Hindu nationalist diatribe and protest, early and more recent South Asian female media personalities (Jaya Chandrasekhar and Arvinder Sahota), and screening and painting screenshots of scenes from Indian popular cinema, Bhanot's work presents a vibrant, mixed media examination of transnational media, communication and identity formation.

The exuberance of Bhanot's work was followed by the existential, black-and-white photographic distillations of Durga Rajah. Speaking of the "ambiguity of existence," Rajah's mystical photographs, shown in an impossibly black square space with no descriptions, were created by lying on the ground with a camera on her chest in a room lit only by a single light fixed above the lens. The absence of descriptions, Rajah mentioned, was to remove the barriers of interpretation, illuminating the essentiality of breath in life and creation and a valuable pause in our over-exposed, media-saturated world of incessant selfies.



Figure 4: Heidi McKenzie in front of her work at the Gardiner Museum. Photo: Piali Roy

We then walked to the Gardiner Museum to see Heidi McKenzie's "Reclaimed: Indo-Caribbean HerStories." McKenzie began with challenging our collective historical awareness, asking the audience what we knew about indentured labour from India to the Caribbean from the mid-19th century. That history of labour inspired McKenzie's engaging multimedia exhibition that casts a feminist spotlight on the telling stories of Indo-Caribbean female migrants. This includes a collage of the so-called "Coolie Belles" postcards, where "Coolie" is a pejorative word used to describe a South Asian labourer,

Indo-Caribbean indentureship silver jewelry and then, large, abstract figurative sculptures that echo some of the jewelry themes, such as the coin, symbolic of how Indo-Caribbean wore their wealth. Perhaps the most subtle yet compelling work was a wall-mounted set of contemporary portraits. These were not painted but made on porcelain and lit from behind, depicting Indo-Caribbean women holding portraits of female ancestors. In this way, the installation further invoked the reclamations of 'herstories' that inform the exhibition as a whole. – Nitin Deckha

Sari Display in Currelly Court Opening December 16



Figure 5 Sari, 1950s. Woven silk and metallic thread. Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. 2023.34.1. Gift of Jayshree Khimasia.

We wrote about Jayashree Khimasia's donation of saris to ROM in our Fall 2022 newsletter. ROM held a special event honouring this endeavour in the spring of 2023. A selection will be displayed in the Currelly Gallery, opening on December 16. Drop into ROM to see some South Asian representation in this main space!

Upcoming Tour of Sarindar Dhaliwal's Show at AGO

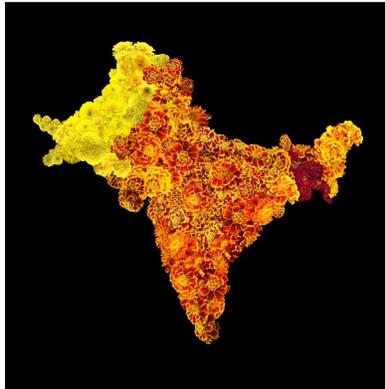


Figure 6 Sarindar Dhaliwal. *The cartographer's mistake: the Radcliffe Line*, 2012. Chromira print, 107 x 107 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario. Purchase with funds by exchange from the J.S. McLean Collection by Canada Packers Inc., 2020. © Sarindar Dhaliwal.

Join us on Sunday, December 10 at 2 pm for a free tour of Sarindar Dhaliwal's exhibition at the AGO. Sign up at this link: <https://bit.ly/3MNW8jL>

Watch: Experimental Visions



[Learn about the extraordinary work](#) of three women artists, Tazeen Qayyum, Sumaira Tazeen, and Reeta Saeed, and about the impact of the renowned National College of Art in Lahore on their careers. This program marks a landmark donation of their artwork into ROM's collections in honour of Pakistan's 75th anniversary, supported by Ali Adil Khan. Their works are also part of "Being and Belonging!"



FSA Membership

Membership in Friends groups at ROM is a fantastic way to financially support the Global South Asian collection at the Museum. A long history of generous benefactors led to the creation of the gallery, an endowed curatorship, innovative programming, and ongoing education about South Asian art, culture, and history.

Friends of South Asia

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Friends of South Asia is organized by ROM's Department of Museum Volunteers to provide support for the Museum. ROM is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

Alternate accessible formats are available upon request.

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