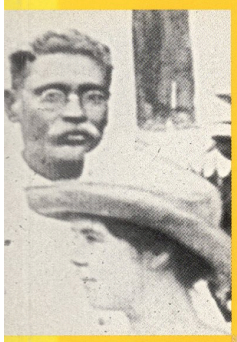
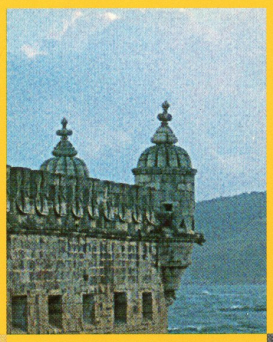
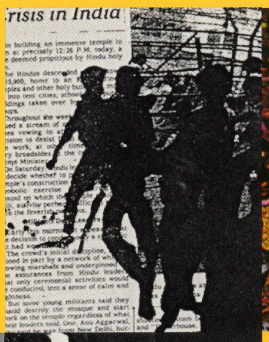
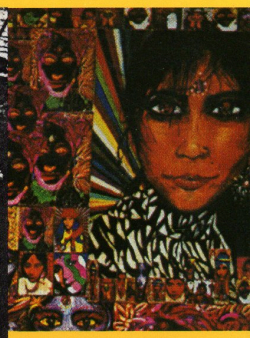
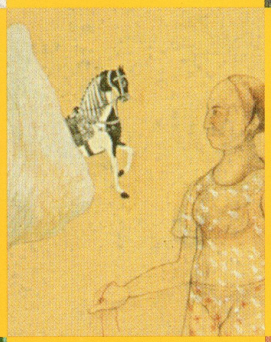
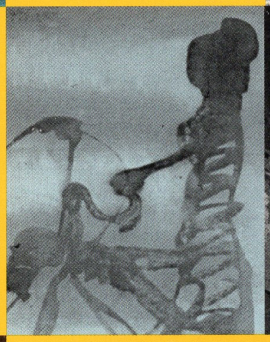
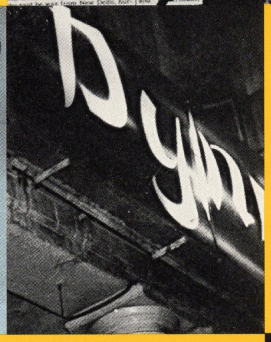
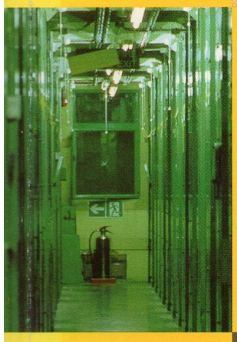
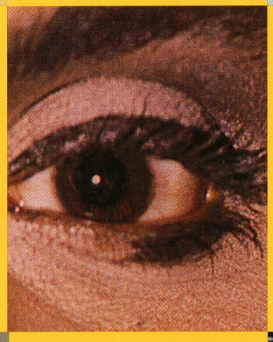
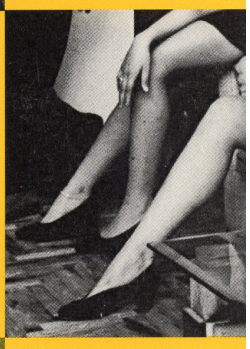
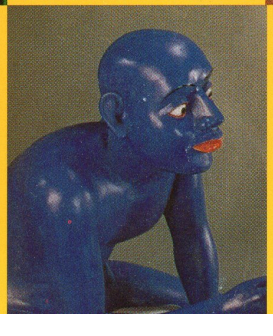
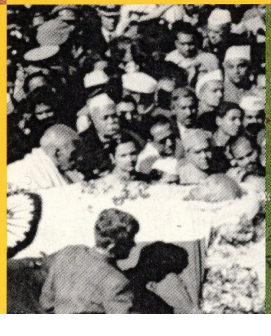
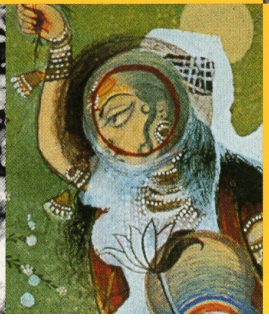
Out of INDIA

Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora

Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora

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Essays by

Jane Farver, Curator

Radha Kumar

QMA

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Inside and Out of India: Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora

by Jane Farver

Out of India: Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora brings artists from what was colonial India together with artists of South Asian descent from other parts of the world, including Britain, the United States, Thailand, and Canada. In tribute to the 50th anniversary of the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan, this exhibition begins with a selection of works by **Homai Vyarawalla**, India's first and, for some time, only professional woman photographer.

When she was born into a priestly Parsi family in Navsari-Gujarat in 1913, Homai's birth horoscope predicted she would roam with royalty. Encouraged by her future husband, Vyarawalla took up freelance photography while attending Sir J.J. School of Art in Bombay. As a husband and wife team they did photo features and covered wartime activities for the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and the Far Eastern Bureau of the British Information Service in Delhi. Carrying her equipment with her on a bicycle, Vyarawalla photographed everything from fancy-dress parties at the Delhi Gymhkana to the first Independence Day address at the Red Fort, and everyone from Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, and the Mountbattens to Queen Elizabeth and Ho Chi Minh. Her camera captured the intense optimism of the early years of the nation as well. However, by the early 1970s, Vyarawalla had stopped working altogether, depressed by a new breed of politicians and by security systems that prevented her from photographing individuals and events as she wished.

Vyarawalla and other photographers working in the early years of the Indian nation were consciously engaged in constructing the image of the nation. From their photos emerged

> ...the visage of the politician as the romantic hero of the times — a dreamer and a visionary — the Nehrus and the Gandhis and a whole band of 'nationalist' politicians who appear before the camera with disarming candor and geniality. It is a sort of image construction which the hermeneutics of that time 'permits,' enabling us an easy entry into a nation in formation. And it is precisely such a visual formation the present resists, despite the far more accomplished penetrative powers of present day camera technology. What her Rolliflex lacked in terms of technological sophistication is abundantly compensated for by the fact that she is as much a recorder of events as an accomplice in them.[1]

Vyarawalla's work, which went unremembered for many years, was "rediscovered" in 1986 by photographer **Satish Sharma**, whose work offers a marked contrast to hers. Sharma makes portraits of political leaders not from Vyarawalla's insider position, but by photographing the effigies, posters, and other surrogate images India's politicians now offer the public in place of themselves.

Postwar painters, sculptors, and printmakers in India were also involved in the creation of a national image, and they were attracted to Modernism because it represented progress and change for India. In the words of Geeta Kapur, the artist aspired to become a central national figure — a concept based upon a myth of lost communities, nationalism, and modern utopian idealism. Modernity went largely unquestioned, or if it were it was on the basis of a constructed, secularized tradition invented in the name of nationalism. In recent years, however, Indian artists have begun to interrogate the past. As Kapur states:

> In so doing, we recognized in hindsight a certain bad faith in some of the terms of nationalist cultural discourse. In particular, the sectarian and religious was not looked at directly but was often smuggled in, making both the modern and the secular into well-meaning but too quickly exposed masquerades....What most needed questioning in recent decades was the artist's presumed expertise in slicing through the layers of this stratified society, as if to touch simultaneously the high caste, the *dalit* (a person of low caste, an untouchable), and the tribal cultures — to draw from them imaginative inspiration but to leave the source compressed within a too steeply hierarchical structure. What also needed to be challenged in the postindependence period was the mapping of the artistic imaginary onto a transcendent horizon, for this was the scale at which the heroic self-representation of the national artist was pitched.[2]

Most of the artists in this exhibition have had no direct experience of colonialism, and early postcolonial debates over indigenism and the creation of a national identity, a nativist aesthetic, or a self-consciously "modern" Indian culture mean little to them. As Ranjit Hoskote has said of such artists:

> As the momentum of nationalist sentiment has waned and our prior concept of the nation-state has fallen into discredit, the pressure on the artist to participate in the national drama has been greatly diminished. [They] are able to side-step the demands made on them by a conscriptive notion of citizenship and indeed, have subjected that notion to critique.[3]

These artists seem to be responding to *denationalized* condition, a term I have borrowed from Sau-Ling C. Wong's essay, "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads."[4] He identifies three main factors that contribute to this denationalized state. Wong is speaking specifically of Asian Americans, but his thoughts can be applied to South Asian and British artists as well. First is

what Wong calls "the easing of cultural nationalist concerns" due to changing demographics in the Asian American population and the influx of theoretical critiques from various quarters ranging from the poststructuralist to the gay and lesbian. He sees the easing of cultural nationalism (which was committed to an aggressively masculine agenda) as the growing acceptance by Asian Americans of Asian influences (which were formerly often identified as feminine) once disavowed out of fear of exoticization.

The second factor Wong cites is the increasing permeability in the boundaries between Asian Americans and 'Asian Asians' brought on by the economic and political positions now being assumed by Asia and America. As capital becomes increasingly transnational, borders become lesser obstacles, and workers migrate the world. E-mail, fax, inexpensive jet travel, and less costly international telephone rates have greatly increased communication and travel back and forth between South Asia and Europe or North America, at least for those of a certain socioeconomic class. Information from around the world can be accessed globally and instantaneously via the Internet; newspapers are available in many languages; the latest H/Bollywood productions can be rented at the video store; and the latest music, books, and art magazines are also attainable. Immigration is not the one-sided attempt at assimilation it once was; nor is it any longer possible to avoid outside influences by staying "home." However, as Wong states, increased penetration of cultural borders can, paradoxically, have other consequences, such as the worldwide rise of various forms of fundamentalism that insist on absolute purity and inviolate borders.

The third is a shift from a domestic perspective focusing on Asian Americans as an ethnic/racial minority within the national boundaries of the United States to a diasporic perspective that views Asian Americans as but one segment of a global dispersal of people of Asian origin. Only a diasporic perspective can accommodate complex backgrounds like those of some artists in this exhibition, who were born or lived in places such as Africa or the Caribbean before migrating to Britain or the United States. Possessing a kind of double vision, they insist upon their right to multiple subjectivities; and their cultural identity is not constricted by geography.

Geeta Kapur may be speaking of the easing of cultural nationalism when she asks, "What was the norm that needed to be dismantled in Indian art? I would answer that there was a properly clad, national/modern that was by and large male. And it may be that it is being stripped bare by the brides, even!" [5] Kapur is pointing out the role women artists have had in recent years in de/reconstructing the identity of the Indian artist, citing artists such as **Nalini Malani**, whose paintings, performances, and films address the effects of neocolonialism. Malani's watercolors in this exhibition are about mutilation, betrayal, and control; they point to a fractured social contract and bad faith. Her timeless figures defy specific classification and speak to any and/or all cultures on the roles of women and men, those discriminated against, and the underprivileged. Two of Malani's works in this exhibition are related to *Heiner Mueller's Medea*, a large collaborative project she did with Alaknanda Samarth in Mumbai (Bombay) in 1994. Malani has written about this work:

> ...the nexus between the alchemist princess Medea — who was marginalized as a barbarian in Corinth — and Jason the colonizer, was a metaphor for the Third World and the First World — a nexus that preoccupies me a great deal...it was a sadomasochistic relationship that could only lead to death and genocide. Intolerance, degradation and projecting the bad into the other are the makings of a fascist society. We experienced strong shades of this with the Bombay riots in the winter of 1992. [6]

The Bombay riots Malani refers to took place after an event which shook India to its core: the destruction by Hindus of the Babari Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.[7] For many artists inside and outside of India this event was a signal call that the old secular ideal was endangered.

New York artist **Vijay Kumar** was a child of partition who had to leave his birthplace of Lahore and move with his family to Lucknow, a city close to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. He describes Lucknow as a beautiful city known for its polite language and gentle manners which taught him people of different backgrounds could live with tolerance and respect for each other. When Kumar read the December 7, 1992, *New York Times* article about the razing of the mosque, he immediately was moved to make work about it. That article and subsequent others became the grounds for his *India Portfolio*, a series of 18 intaglios and photoetchings. Over photoetchings of the articles Kumar superimposed a second plate of his own drawings, and they, as well as a sense of his outrage and despair, seem to emerge directly out of the printed words.

New Delhi artist **Vivan Sundaram's** *HOUSE* also was created in response to the communal violence surrounding Ayodhya. This work, part painting, part architecture, has walls of white handmade paper, a rusted steel skeleton, and a fragile glass ceiling. Shapes of hand tools and common objects — a shovel, a saw, a paper window — are embossed on two walls, and the third is covered with the artist's vigorous markings and the outline of a hand. On the fourth wall, delicate stains trace the rusting of

industrial materials onto the paper. Inside, a small steel bench is placed next to a bowl filled with water, beneath which glimmers a video image of fire. Are we looking at a hearth fire or a house on fire?

In Indian villages, one can now see at night the flickering blue light of a television screen emanating even from the doors and windows of houses as small as this one. (40 million of the population of 950 million now own televisions). Some suggest that television is contributing to communal tensions not only by making poorer Indians aware of the widening gap between themselves and the rich,[8] but also by fueling nationalist fervor through religious programs:

> ...the new discovery is the dramatization of religious tales. A major event in the history of Indian television was undoubtedly the broadcasting of the *Ramayana* in the form of a serial rivaling the length of "Dallas" or "Dynasty," starting in January, 1987. This has done more than anything else to make a standard version of the epic known and popular among the Indian middle class. Moreover, it greatly enhanced the general public's knowledge of Ayodhya as Rama's birthplace and therefore as one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Uttar Pradesh. In this way the controversy concerning the mosque built "on Rama's birthplace" has become an issue that is highly loaded with affect in the popular imagination." [9]

Sundaram's India is a contemporary one, where old traditions and new influences constantly jar intrudingly upon each other, and he refuses to find comfort in either. His is an India in a state of social trauma brought on by what author Nigel Harris calls:

> ...integration in the world economy via what is called liberalization — the stage and style of capitalism which the IMF and the World Bank dictate to the developing world. This is an internationalism under duress in that its first condition is the delinking of growth from any form of nationalism but precisely through the diabolic inversion of the needs of manoeuvre between the first and third worlds....
> Institutionally, the old socialized state, the embodiment of the social contract, is also being reordered. It had for so long been the dominant partner in the national alliance that its withdrawal in favour of private interests — those supposedly integrated into world markets — is continuing to cause social shocks. Furthermore, world markets seem to demand such a degree of flexibility on the part of national economies in response to external changes, that the old structures produced by the political will of the social contract are no longer defensible — the large public sectors directed along political rather than economic lines, welfare, health, education and housing programmes, and so on.[10]

The city of Bombay permeates **Atul Dodiya's** paintings. His *Sunday Morning, Marine Drive* is a view of Bombay's Back Bay from Marine Drive toward Malabar Hill, the expensive residential area visible across the bay. Strolling pedestrians, a cow (sacred to Hindus), a man sleeping on the median strip, and a deformed beggar share the painting space with several images of the painter, including ghostly outlines of the figures of two men — one urinating into the bay, and one using nose drops — that refer to the pollution of the city and its waters. The painting, which depicts the city's most popular promenade should, perhaps, be retitled. Bombay is headquarters of the Shiv Sena, a militant Hindu political party whose numbers are growing at a rapid pace, even attracting members from the lower ranks of the city's police force. The Shiv Sena-led government in Maharashtra has given new names to the city and many of its streets and landmarks. Bombay is now called by its Marathi name Mumbai, while Marine Drive is now called Netaji Subhashchandra Bose Road.[11]

Dodiya's *2nd October* depicts Mumbai, recognizable by the distinctive tower in the background, on Gandhi's birthday. The statue of Gandhi is being garlanded by a solitary worker in a giant crane; and the painting's surface appears torn and ruptured and in the same state of decrepitude as parts of the city itself. Dodiya asks whether Mumbai, Gandhi's home from 1917 to 1934 and the city where he launched his *satyagrahas* (civil disobedience movements), was arrested, and sent to prison, might not owe more to his legacy than perfunctory obeisance in the form of official garlands of flowers.

Mumbai was one of the cities hardest hit in the aftermath of Ayodhya when violent episodes took place immediately after the mosque was destroyed and exactly one month later. Over 1,000 people in the city were killed — the majority of them Muslims. The killings were instigated and carried out in Mumbai by the Shiv Sena, which, although banned, was, according to a number of reports in English-language news media, actively supported by Mumbai police.[12] Violence erupted again in Mumbai on March 12, 1993, when 13 bombs were detonated throughout the city, killing 250. The stock exchange, the Air India building, three of the top-rated hotels near the airport, and other commercial establishments were destroyed. Although no one claimed responsibility for the bombings, many Indian politicians blamed Pakistan for planting the bombs as punishment for the many Muslims killed in the riots. One hundred eighty-nine people were arrested in connection with the bombings, but the cases have not yet been solved.

"Hand Me Your Keys" is Atul Dodiya's depiction of the thousand-armed demon goddess Durga, an incarnation of Shiva's consort Parvati. In Dodiya's painting, Durga assumes the form of a metal detector, ubiquitous in Mumbai after the bombings. Body parts — appropriated from Picasso's *Guernica* — are scattered throughout the work, and the attributes of the many-armed goddess surround the metal detector. In the works in this exhibition Dodiya is commenting on the effects of modernity and technology on India.

The introduction of technology into India is also of interest to **Ayisha Abraham**, whose series of computer-manipulated colonial photographs, *...looks the other way*, considers the role of the camera in the invention of identity as well as the history of religious conversion in India.

Abraham's father came from the Syrian Christian community while her mother's family was upper-caste Hindus converted to Protestantism by Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in the 19th century.[13] Such conversions were rare because they resulted in the loss of caste status. Photos from her mother's family, which prompted Abraham to investigate the concept of conversion, were also the source for *...looks the other way*. This title refers to a 1925 photo taken in Madras of a group of Indians and whites (missionaries?) posing for the camera. As the others stare into the camera, one Western woman is looking at something off in the distance, disrupting the hierarchical colonial image. Abraham has stated, "...'look' and 'other' seem to imply the historical linking together of techniques of seeing and of vision with that of studying and looking at the 'Other', racially, culturally, etc...." [14]

Using computer-manipulated imagery which is (re)producible without a negative, Abraham questions the "photographic truth" of the colonial images. By converting them — by making subtle changes or focusing on small, seemingly unimportant details in them — she is able to give a different visual account of empire and to elucidate the roles women played in both colonial and national patriarchal cultures.

Issues of caste also occupy the works of **N.N. Rimzon** and **Ravinder G. Reddy**, particularly in relation to the many who were outside of the Hindu caste system, which in addition to Muslims and Christians included Untouchables, called *Harijans* or Children of God by Gandhi, and also known as the scheduled castes or *Dalits*.[15] The Dalits, who were not allowed to live near or even be seen by caste members, took care of corpses and worked in trades such as tanning or shoemaking. They were not allowed to drink from the same water sources as the upper castes, nor were they permitted to enter temples lest they pollute those who came into contact with them. Untouchableness was formally abolished in 1950 by the Indian constitution which also reserves admissions to universities, a percentage of government jobs, and a number of Parliament seats for scheduled castes as remediation. The caste system's hold on educated urban India is slipping, but the practice continues on many levels, particularly in rural areas:

> Despite fifty years of freedom, well-trained and enlightened administrators, and politically correct rhetoric at all levels, caste continues to enslave village society. Each week brings a new horror story into the national press. A Dalit woman is stripped and paraded naked through the streets of her village because her son dared to steal from an upper-caste Thakur....In one village twenty-two "uppity" Untouchables are gunned down in an upper-caste massacre; in another, four hundred Dalit families are burned out of their huts for daring to demand the legal minimum wage for their labors. These are not isolated incidents, in that dozens like them are reported every year. But on the other hand they are not cause for despair about the prospects of social change in rural India. Indeed they are evidence of resistance to change rather than of the impossibility of it. The victims of these crimes had dared to challenge the proscriptions of the traditionalists; they had tried to lift the dead weight of the ages off their backs. [16]

Trivandrum-based N.N. Rimzon often uses certain traditional Indian symbols, such as the Tirthankara Jain figure or the sword, to reflect the tensions of a multifaceted India where regional, national, and increasingly international influences are at odds. *Faraway from One Hundred and Eight Feet*, included in this exhibition, is comprised of 108 (a multiple of nine and an auspicious number in Hindu rituals) identical terra-cotta pots with a handmade broom and a length of rope protruding from each. Rimzon's pots snake like a spinal cord in a long sinewy line on the ground. *Faraway from One Hundred and Eight Feet* refers to a time when entrance to the city of Poona (now Pune) was denied to any Untouchable who was not wearing a pot (suspended from the neck) and a broom (attached at the leg). The pot was to catch any of their spittle that might pollute the ground, and the broom was to wipe out all traces of their footsteps.

Unglazed terra-cotta pots like those in Rimzon's piece have been made in India's villages in a continuing tradition for over 4,000 years; and the craft of its more than one million potters has been little affected by the modern world. Since prehistoric times, the vessel has been regarded as a symbol of the mother

goddess and used for secular and religious functions. The potter generally provides for the needs of his local vicinity, using clay that comes from the earth nearby. His wares return to the earth when broken or no longer needed in an endless recycling of its resources. Rimzon's use of repetition in *Faraway from One Hundred and Eight Feet* is evocative of this ongoing tradition of human labor, as well as a sense of connection to the Indian soil.

Beneath their sensuous gilding and rich colors, Visakhapatnam artist Ravinder G. Reddy's iconic figures possess the features of the laboring class, the Dalits, and the tribal peoples. They betray a caste system that still determines purity by birth lines and Aryan features. Figures in his *Family*, quietly absorbed in daily tasks are, by being naked and colored Krishna's blue, removed from the world of the profane to that of the sacred. Reddy's monumental *Krishna Veni*[17] elevates one of India's village women to a state of divinity. As he reclaims status for those he depicts in his sculptures, Reddy also reclaims the right to continue and extend one of the greatest sculptural traditions the world has known. With humor, he transforms classical Indian sculpture into popular fetish objects, recognizing and retaining the eroticism of the earlier tradition in the contemporary one.

Sau-Ling C. Wong made the point that cultural nationalist concerns had eased due to the influx of critiques from various quarters.[18] As many artists, formerly silent or invisible in the South Asian community, began to press for their concerns to be recognized and acknowledged, they made possible multiple subjectivities within South Asian identity.

Nasreen Mohamedi was, like Nalini Malani, one of the women artists in India who helped to "dismantle the norm in Indian art." Born in Karachi, she moved to Bombay in 1944, was educated in London and Paris, taught in Baroda, and died in Kihim in India in 1990. Geeta Kapur has said of her:

> I want to make the proposition that Nasreen's work is about the self and body through a series of displacements, and that those insistently elided questions offer up the meaning of her work. That therefore she is within a great lineage of abstraction in a way that no other Indian artist is and that also she is without the tradition being a woman artist working in India at a time when there were few others of her kind.[19]

Mohamedi's abstraction offered an alternative to the productions of the male-dominated world of Indian figurative painting. She created painstakingly ruled drawings which like works of Agnes Martin or Carl Andre employed the grid. However, Mohamedi favored a more intuitive and poetic sense of geometry, and her grid was never absolute. The source of her work was to be found in Islamic architecture, or in the photographs that she took, but chose not to exhibit, of a street in the rain, waves on a beach, or the paved courtyard at Fatehpur Sikri. From these she abstracted the sense of a body in space, of light and shadow, of sound and time. Her drawings are all the more remarkable for their control and precision in that Mohamedi suffered from a debilitating physical condition.

Sunil Gupta was born in India, holds Canadian citizenship, and resides in Britain. As an active curator and critic, Gupta has been at the forefront of efforts to bring the black arts movement (which in Britain includes artists of Caribbean, South Asian, and Middle Eastern heritage as well as African) to the attention of a wider public. In his *TRESPASS 3* series, Gupta has been working with specific sites, "reinserting" historical evidence no longer obviously present back into the landscape. He records this evidence in the form of computer-generated iris prints composed of juxtaposed disparate images.

TRESPASS 3, which Gupta produced as part of his fellowship in photography at Essex University, places the landscape surrounding Essex in a new context. Although the ports of Essex once did a thriving business in the slave trade, no physical traces of that history remain. Gupta's seemingly unconnected images reveal the trade and migrant history that Essex shares with non-European countries. His images forge psychic links between visible commercial, industrial, or tourist enterprises and the unseen individuals who labored in connection with them.

Samena Rana (1955-1992) was brought to the United Kingdom from Pakistan to receive medical treatment for an injury she received at age nine. Rana spent the remainder of her life in Britain, and in a wheelchair. As a photographer Rana explored the double issues of identity and disability; and as an activist she advocated greater accessibility to photo studios, darkroom facilities, colleges, and galleries. She fought to open up the male- and able-bodied-dominated profession of photography to the disabled.

Rana's strong, sensuous images project an atmosphere of danger. Fabrics and jewelry in deep, rich colors and textures mix with shards of glass or mirrors, the gleaming edge of a knife blade, and/or images of herself and her wheelchair. Rana has written about her work:

> The images encompass my past, present, and future.... Through the layers of water, diffused colours and a series of metaphors, I reconstruct my feelings which are about loss, trials and reclamation. There is a great sense of confusion and vagueness about myself and about my identity in the latter

> images. Especially when I first became (dis)abled and came to England, a sense of isolation, displacement and fragmentation prevails. Harmony and integration come and go and the broken pieces do become cohesive, even the grey metallic wheelchair merges itself with the more sensual aspect of myself. Aesthetically womanhood and (dis)ability become integral to each other. [20]

Poulomi Desai, **Permindar Kaur**, and **Chila Kumari Burman** are all children of immigrant parents. Such individuals often have a special way of coping with their bicultural situation, which author Sonali Fernando describes in the following way:

> ...For the children of migrants, however, knowledge of their parents' cultural codes is usually partial or derivative. Their skill is in moving laterally from one cultural code to another, they produce meaning synchronically (by simultaneous association) as much as diachronically (by history or code). This is an associative practice, a way of working dynamically and honestly with partial cultural memory and diverse contemporary experience, rather than a linear practice that seeks to excavate or reinforce tradition. It requires a different kind of intuition. What happens is a kind of "doubling" of vision, though not one that entails dualism. [21]

London artist Poulomi Desai's color inkjet prints, *Shakti Queens,* offer a glimpse into an often hidden lifestyle. Her South Asian transvestite subjects are beautiful, vulnerable, and engagingly open to her camera. Furthermore, they have stars in their eyes — Hindi film stars, to be exact. Desai is interrogating Britain's exoticization of India, but her manipulated images raise further issues of identity and sexuality, and lead viewers to question their own preconceptions.

Desai has stated that much of her work is intrinsically classified as South Asian or about women, but is not a direct response and she doesn't feel she has to be a positive role model. This attitude is a distinguishing mark of artists of younger generations. As more South Asian artists emerge in Britain, North America, and elsewhere, and there are more exhibitions, catalogues, and critical evaluations of the work of South Asian artists, the pressure for artists to represent anyone beside themselves is lessened. Permindar Kaur, a British artist of Sikh origin, has stated that she no longer feels there is a direct polarization between two distinct cultures in her work. While her work may still contain questions of identity, or contain references to a different religious or historical life, her work is directly related to the personal. Kaur makes objects that have their sources in domestic settings or childhood — beds, cots, chairs, dolls, and dolls' clothing. However, something in their scale or demeanor makes it impossible for the viewer to obtain comfort from them. Because of her Sikh origins, there is always the temptation to read the works as coming from a diasporic sense of dislocation and loss. But, this is by no means the only possible reading of her work. Kaur's polar fleece dolls are limp and faceless, and they assume postures that speak of unhealthy relationships. Like dolls a therapist might use to interrogate an abused child, the 76 dolls in *You and Me,* included in this exhibition, stand in for us and allow us to project our histories onto them.

Chila Kumari Burman is the daughter of a Hindu-Punjabi family that emigrated to Britain in the 1950s and settled in Liverpool. Burman was one of the first South Asian British women to study at an art school and produce art of a political nature. Lacking a support structure when she was a beginning artist, she has worked to create one for others by curating exhibitions, writing criticism, and participating in many residencies in schools and colleges.

Burman refuses to be constricted to any traditional or expected image of a South Asian woman. She has instead created multiple identities for herself, including: the goddess Kali; the Rani of Jhansi, who fought the British during what was called the Mutiny of 1857; Phooli Devi, who sought to avenge the Untouchables; Hindi screen goddess Meena Kumari; and the "Wild Woman between Two Cultures," an expert at the Japanese martial art of Shotokan. These alter egos appear in a dizzying array in *Fly Girl Watching the World*, a mixed media and laser print work in which both identity and medium are manipulated to form a seemingly endless range of possibilities.

Burman's other works in the exhibition are cibachrome prints based on family photos. To these photos — which depict her father's tiger-topped ice-cream van; her mother, grandmother, and the Queen; and Burman with her sister at Bootle Girls Grammar School — she has added color and superimposed imagery to heighten their narrative quality, as she utilizes the personal to address issues of community, ethnicity, and nation.

The increasing permeability in the boundaries between South Asian artists and South Asians living outside of the subcontinent can be seen in the works of a number of the artists in *Out of India*. Now residents of New York City and Houston, Texas, respectively, **Mariam Ishaque** and **Shahzia Sikander** are both from Pakistan. Each reclaims and contemporizes the tradition of Indian miniature painting in her work, but in different ways. Ishaque's delicate, almost monochromatic works emphasize the contrasting use of space in Western and Indian miniature painting traditions. In *Flat-Footed Traveler*, Ishaque sets up Western

perspective in the landscape, then subverts it by inhabiting the space with identically sized horses, denying the woman in the composition any potential for movement or escape. *Bachelor's Travels I* traps the figure of a woman within a web of lines, defining a space that refers to Western abstraction. Ishaque's paintings consistently point to the immobility of women within certain social constructs.

Even while she was studying miniature painting at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Shahzia Sikander transgressed the rules of the medium of the miniature; she would change their format, depict herself in them, and violate their decorative borders. When she came to the United States to study at the Rhode Island School of Design, she retained the painstaking method of the miniature, burnishing handmade paper and making her own vegetable dyes. However, she transgressed further by inserting contemporary forms into the miniatures to create fantasies that combine art historical, mythological, religious, and personal imagery. Within the confines of the miniature, Sikander may add an area of pure abstraction, paint the veil of a Muslim woman over the Hindu image of Durga, or indulge in radical shifts in scale. By inventing a vocabulary of loosely painted forms that reflect her concerns as a woman and an artist, Sikander aims to "highlight some fundamental issues of resistance, misrepresentation, and cultural exploitation." [22]

Rina Banerjee, born in Calcutta, arrived in the United States from London at the age of seven in 1970 with the first influx of Indians on the East Coast. She grew up in LeFrak City, Queens. Banerjee's essentially abstract sculptures and installations evoke a presence that is sharply feminine. She combines alluring materials like silk sari cloth, brilliantly colored pigments, and incense in an exoticized mix with more unlikely materials, such as stuffing from an old couch, burnt-out light bulbs, pins, duct tape, and string. In some cases, furniture is used to allude to the body. Like Permindar Kaur's dolls, Banerjee's works have a surrogate quality, possible stand-ins for women who have violence and lunacy projected onto them daily.

Banerjee has the ability to invest the abstract with conceptual content and to make art of exceptional visual beauty out of unthinkable materials. Her hybrid works attract and repel but also always contain humor. Banerjee says, "The viewer is both pleasured by the exotic object and simultaneously perplexed by its assertion." [23] This same dynamic affects the hybridized immigrant who must deal with lingering colonialist and racist mechanisms on a daily basis.

Born in Dublin and raised in Trinidad, **Shani Mootoo** now resides in Vancouver, Canada. To locate herself as an emerging painter in a country with a strong regional landscape tradition, she incorporated henna and *mendhi* (bright Indian dyes) and photocopied images of herself into her works. Mootoo found she liked working with the photocopier because it was "a machine without a history"; and she used it to create a series of vibrant posters and prints. Plastering these on walls in imitation of those in urban areas, she created "Ad Walls" that attracted through their color and pattern, but which also contained messages that reflected her diasporic perspective. Like Chila Kumari Burman, Mootoo resists conforming to preconceived notions of identity, stating: "I'm so often turned into a specimen — a raced, queered, gendered, or nationed person. All those things are part of me, but when isolated, they change me from a complex person — like we all are — to fit a theory." [24] Mootoo, who also resists being limited to any single medium or discipline to express her ideas, has also worked in video and is a published author.

Allan deSouza was born of Indian parents in Nairobi, Kenya, raised in Britain, and lives in Los Angeles. For his series *Threshold*, deSouza has been "photographing waiting or in-transit space, places of arrival and departure, anticipation and release; spaces located physically within but often legally outside the national border." [25] Supposedly neutral, airports and train stations are, in fact, sites of power and anxiety for those hoping to cross borders into new lives. Presented in small format, these locations have the jewel-like beauty of Indian miniatures, but further examination reveals a desolation in them and possible danger. Travel of another kind is examined in deSouza's second series of small-format photographs. Statues of elephants and Mughal domes and minarets may speak of the Indian subcontinent, but they do so from sites in Portugal, the Taj Mahal Casino in Atlantic City, and Disneyland.

New Delhi photographer **Pablo Bartholomew** traveled throughout the United States to photograph his *Indians in America* series. He depicts Jains eating tacos in upstate New York; Sikh farm workers eating *parathas* for lunch in Yuba, California; and Indians riding on a float decorated with a mammoth American flag in New York City. More poignant images include a Sikh funeral in California and a Hindu marriage in Connecticut, both carried out in American vernacular-style edifices; and thousands of South Asians praying in front of the Unisphere in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Through Bartholomew's lens we see the myriad ways Indian immigrants have learned to adapt this country to their cultural needs, and vice-versa.

Dayanita Singh's photographs of those she calls well-to-do, metro business people and their families provide us with a view of a lifestyle almost as hidden as that of Poulomi Desai's *Shakti Queens*. In the world of Indian photography and in photographs of India, where we have come to expect images of aching poverty, exotic spirituality, or landscapes of beauty and terror, images like Singh's are rare. Her subjects have leisure time, money, servants, and pets. Singh's insider's view of the lifestyle of her friends, families, and acquaintances, a kind of lifestyle generally thought to exist only in Western cities, offers one of the only truly alternative views of contemporary life in India.

A number of the artists in this exhibition possess the complex backgrounds that only a diasporic perspective can accommodate. **Zarina** was a child of partition whose family and friends were among the millions who left their homes to seek shelter and safety elsewhere. When the circumstances of her later life demanded that she move often and create homes in many cities, she came to understand that home is not a permanent place but a concept we carry within us. That idea took the form of a house-on-wheels, and it has become a central image in her work. One of Zarina's works, included in this exhibition, incorporates thousands of tiny peripatetic house/wagons made of painted cast aluminum embarked on a nomadic journey. This work's title is taken from a line from the Urdu poem, *Morning of Independence*, written in 1947 by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, that reads, "Somewhere the flotilla of sorrow will come to rest." *Homes I Made/A Life in Nine Lines*, also included, is a portfolio of nine etchings with chine collé. Each print depicts the floor plan of a house Zarina has lived in since leaving India in 1958. Beginning with Bangkok and ending with New York, the series also includes New Delhi, Paris, Bonn, Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Santa Cruz.

Mohini Chandra traveled to the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji to research her family's history. Her ancestors were indentured servants who left India to work in Fiji, a community that has experienced a second diaspora due to recent political, cultural, and economic pressures.[26] *Album Pacific* is an installation of the backs of photos Chandra collected from albums and wallets along the way. The photos are hung in a complex map delineating her family trees and the journeys the photos and their owners have made since early in the century. As the fronts of the photos are not visible, we are left to decipher those diasporic journeys and relationships through the wear and tear and markings and inscriptions on the reverse. We deduce the stories of Chandra's subjects in the same fragmented and cryptic way that many diasporic individuals learn their own histories.

In **Shaheen Merali's** installation, *Going Native*, the viewer is invited to rest in pristine white canvas deck chairs, to watch a videotape of Franciscan monks gathering and dispersing on an otherwise deserted Goan beach, and to listen to a soundtrack of samples of Goan, Indian, and Western music, mixed with the sound of breathing and lapping waves. [27] Slides of tourists relaxing and engaging in various activities at Goan swimming pools and beaches are projected onto the viewer and the deck chairs.

Goa, one of the most beautiful parts of India, has seen multiple occupations throughout its history, from the arrival of the Portuguese in 1510, followed by the Jesuit missionaries led by St. Francis Xavier in 1542, to those still following the "hippie trail" that leads to Goa's beaches today. For Merali, a British artist of Indian heritage born in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, a visit to Goa is loaded with implications of doubled colonialisms. Portugal's Vasco da Gama was the first European to visit Tanzania, and the Portuguese conducted trade along the coast until 1698 when they were expelled by Arabs from Oman. The British took over the area, then called German East Africa after World War I, but many Indians were forced to leave when certain African states gained their independence. That Merali visits India as a British tourist, as well as a native once or twice removed, is reinforced by the slides projected onto the deck chairs, which include shots of his own family engaged in leisure time activities. As Merali describes it, the installation was

> …wholly derived from my polarised native/tourist experiences of visiting Goa, India. This shattered wholeness, a minefield of cultural/personalised references could only be physically encountered through a reconstruction based on how one survives through 'one's own biases', the sense of nationalism or racial identity played a pivotal role, emerging as it does in the articulation and inscription of culture's hybridity.[28]

London artist **Zarina Bhimji** was born in Mbarara, Uganda. Her interest in researching and interacting with environments and institutions has led Bhimji to work in, and make photo-based work about, a variety of places ranging from a pathology museum in a London hospital to the Orientalist environment of Leighton House, home of Fredrick Lord Leighton, artist and president of the Royal Academy. Her work, *It is Like a Brightness in the Heart*, addresses the vital importance of having free access to books. It was photographed at the British Library, where, like Karl Marx and many others, Mohandas K. Gandhi found inspiration in the ideas of others.

Navin Rawanchaikul, who was born of Indian parents in Thailand, currently resides in Fukuoka, Japan. He says that his works focus on the relationship between art and everyday life, and that he is especially interested in offering ordinary people an opportunity to join in as part of a collective art experience. Rawanchaikul has asked members of the main temple, a vital meeting place for Indians of all generations in Chiang Mai, to write messages about their experiences of life in Thailand and mail them to the exhibition, *Out of India*. Visitors to the exhibition will have an opportunity to reply. Other collaborations Rawanchaikul has organized include: an exchange between schoolchildren in Atlanta, Georgia, Kwangju, South Korea, and Chiang Mai, Thailand; a cooperative venture between artist Rirkrit Tiravanija and 20 *Tuk-Tuk* [29] drivers in Chiang Mai; and projects for a taxicab that has housed Navin Gallery Bangkok and featured changing exhibitions by invited artists since 1994.

Through their work, artists in this exhibition challenge notions of identity, ethnicity, and the nation and provide insight into current cultural conditions both inside and outside of what once was colonial India.

Endnotes

1. See Sadanand Menon, "Honouring the 'Mother' of Indian Photographers," *Economic Times New Delhi,* 12 September 1993, 12.

2. See Geeta Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996), 60-61.

3. See Ranjit Hoskote, *Private Languages* (Mumbai: Pundole Art Gallery, 1997), 3-4.

4. From Sau-Ling C. Wong, "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," *Amerasia Journal* 21, nos. 1, 2 (1995): 1-27.

5. Kapur, 60-61.

6. Nalini Malani as quoted by Kamala Kapoor, "Nalini Malani: Missives from the Streets," *ARTAsia Pacific* 2, no.1 (1995): 51.

7. Babari Masjid (1528) was a mosque built during the Mughal Dynasty said to have replaced a Hindu temple commemorating Rama's birthplace. In 1856, the British put a railing around the mosque and built a platform outside for Hindu worship and allowed Muslims to continue to pray inside. The government closed the site to both communities in 1947. Hindus placed Rama's image in the mosque in 1949, giving rise to a rumor that Lord Rama had appeared to claim his temple. Riots ensued, but the image was never removed, and Hindus and Muslims both sued to lay claim to the site.

In 1984 the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a Hindu nationalist movement, demanded the site be reopened, which was granted by a 1986 court order, setting off communal violence all over north India. In September 1989, the VHP began organizing processions to bring "sacred bricks" to Ayodhya to build a temple in place of the mosque. Some 300 lives were lost, many in Bihar where the Muslim population of Bhagalpur was decimated. However, the VHP was allowed to lay its foundation stones — many of which came from the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, and South Africa — outside the mosque on so-called undisputed lands.

In 1990, extreme violence erupted against the Hindu population in Kashmir; and riots were widespread when V.P. Singh's government increased the number of reserved places for the scheduled castes. Lal Kishan Advani, leader of the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP),which was allied with the Rahtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the VHP—both Hindu nationalist movements—started on a ritual procession from Somanatha in Gujarat to Ayodhya to construct the new temple to Rama on October 30. He was arrested in Bihar, but his followers marched on to the mosque, stopping only when police opened fire. V.P. Singh's government lost the BJP's support in parliament and fell on November 16.

The VHP launched a video and audio cassette campaign about the October 30 events in Ayodhya claiming police killed thousands and suppressed the evidence. Ashes of Ayodhya martyrs were carried throughout the country in a ritual campaign. This brought victory to the BJP in the 1991 elections, and led to a BJP government in Uttar Pradesh. The VHP continued to demand the mosque be demolished to build the temple, and on

Shahzia Sikander

Born in 1969, Lahore, Pakistan
Lives in Houston, TX

Shahzia Sikander
Uprooted Order Series 3, no. 1, 1997

Education

1995 MFA, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
1992 BFA, National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1997 Deitch Projects, New York, NY
Yerba Buena Gardens Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA
Beyond Surfaces, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1996 *Knock, Knock, Who's There Mithilia, Mithilia Who?* Project Row Houses, Houston, TX
1995 *Fourth Space*, Gallery S.A.R.D., New York, NY
1993 *Ordered Space*, Sol Koffler Gallery, Washington, D. C.
Miniatures, Pakistan Embassy, Washington, D. C.

Selected Group Exhibitions

1997 *Transversions*, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, Johannesburg, South Africa
Project Painting, Lehman Maupin Gallery, New York, NY
Biennial Exhibition, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
Selections Spring '97, The Drawing Center, New York, NY
Core 1997 Exhibition, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Eastern Edge, Laing Gallery, Newcastle, UK
1996 *Core 1996 Exhibition*, Glassell School of Art, Houston, TX
Houston Area Exhibition, Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, Houston, TX
1995 *A Selection of Contemporary Paintings from Pakistan*, Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA
1992 *New Artists, Recent Works*, Rhotas Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan

Flat-Footed Traveler, 1996
Egg tempera and collage on panel, 16 x 12"
Collection of the artist

No Pain, No Gain II, 1995
Egg tempera on panel, 12 x 9"
Collection of the artist

Permindar Kaur
(London, UK)
Falling, 1995
Polar fleece and arctic fur
76 figures; each approximately 4 x 5 x 1"
Collection of the artist

Vijay Kumar
(Brooklyn, NY)
India Portfolio, 1993
18 etchings with photograph etching, 12 x 16" each
Collection of the artist

Nalini Malani
(Mumbai [formerly Bombay], India)
Betrayal, 1993
Watercolor on paper, 22 1/2 x 30"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Control, 1993
Watercolor on paper, 22 1/2 x 30"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Mutant, undated
Acrylic, charcoal, and conte on paper, 28 x 35 1/2"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Shaheen Merali
(London, UK)
Going Native, 1992
Canvas deck chairs, videotape, audiotape, and projected slides
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

Nasreen Mohamedi
(Vadodara [formerly Baroda], Gujarat, India; deceased 1990)
Untitled, undated
Pen and ink on paper, 20 x 28 1/2"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Untitled, undated
Pen and ink on paper, 23 1/2 x 29 1/2"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Untitled, undated
Pen and ink on paper, 20 1/2 x 20 1/2"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Untitled, undated
Pen and ink on paper, 23 x 29"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Untitled, undated.
Pen and ink on paper, 20 x 26 1/2"
Collection of Chester and Davida Herwitz

Shani Mootoo
(Vancouver, Canada)
A Landscape of One's Own, 1995
Color photocopies, approximately 61 x 44"
Collection of the artist

The Urbanites' Fiction, 1996
Photographic work composed of 174 color photographs, 79 x 53 1/2"
Collection of the artist

Samena Rana
(London, UK; deceased 1992)
Four photographs from *Flow of Water*, 1990
C-type color photographs, each 17 1/2 x 24 3/4" (framed dimensions)
Collection of Panchayat, London, UK

Navin Rawanchaikul
(Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Fukuoka, Japan)
from Chiang Mai on September 28, 1997
Installation, postcards, postcard rack, and telephone. Room dimensions: 15' 31/2" x 18'10"; rack: 57 x 9 x 9"; telephone approximately 9 x 7 3/4"
Collection of the artist

Ravinder G. Reddy
(Visakhapatnam, India)
Family, 1997
Polyester-resin fiberglass, gilt, and paint, 42 x 82 x 52"
Collection of the artist

Krishna Veni, 1997
Polyester-resin fiberglass, gilt, and paint, 76 x 75 x 74"
Collection of the artist

N. N. Rimzon
(Trivandrum, Southern India)
Faraway from One Hundred and Eight Feet, 1995
108 terra-cotta pots, straw, and rope
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

Satish Sharma
(New Delhi, India)
10 photographs from *Deconstructing the Politician*, 1990-96
Black-and-white photographs
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

Shahzia Sikander
(Lahore, Pakistan, and Houston, TX)
Uprooted, 1995
Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, and tea on *wasli* (handmade paper), 8 1/2 x 7 1/4"
Collection of Aliya Hasan

Uprooted Order Series 3, no. 1, 1997
Vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, and tea on *wasli* (handmade paper), 6 7/16 x 3 1/2"
Collection of Joseph Havel

Uprooted Order Series 3, no. 2, 1997
Vegetable color, dry pigment, and watercolor on *wasli* (handmade paper), 13 1/8 x 9 1/2"
Collection of Jacquelyn and Bruce Brown

Dayanita Singh
(New Delhi, India)
All the Women of the Guptoos Family in Their Traditional Saris, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Bina Rao's Family Meet for Evening Tea in Her Bangalore Apartment, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Dolly Jabbar in Her Colonial Calcutta Home, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

The Guptoos are a Large Traditional Joint Family in Calcutta. Grandparents are Still Heads of the Family, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Nina Chauhan and Her Daughter Practice the Tango, which They Are Learning at a Dance, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Prasad Bedappa and His Daughter and Their Two Dogs in Their Apartment in Bangalore, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Rita Dhody and Her Two Daughters in Their Sea-Facing Apartment in Bombay, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Samara Chopra and Her Friend Pooja Dress Alike for a Photograph Lesson and Deen Dayal, the Caretaker, is Amazed at How Quickly They Have Grown, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Sybil and Her Daughter Sunanda in Their Calcutta Home. In the Background a Maid Walks By, 1997
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 20"
Collection of the artist

Vivan Sundaram
(New Delhi, India)
HOUSE, 1996
Kalam Kush handmade paper, steel, glass, wood, cement, water, oil, pigment, television
Approximately 6 x 6 x 6'
Collection of the artist
Courtesy of OBORO Gallery, Montreal, Canada

Homai Vyarawalla
(Vadodara [formerly Baroda], Gujarat, India)
After being sworn in as the first governor-general of India on 15th August, 1947, Lord Mountbatten was to be given guard of honour in front of the Council Hall, but the serge of jubilant people was so great that the function had to be abandoned. Picture shows him waving at the crowds who were shouting for him to show himself.
Black-and-white photograph, 15 3/4 x 21 3/4"
Collection of the artist

The ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were immersed in the Triveni River at Allahabad by his relatives and followers. Among those present on the boat carrying the urn were his son Devdas, Mrs. Sirojini Naidu (called the Nightingale of India), her daughter Padmaja, Maulana Azad, and Dr. Jeevraj Mehta.
Black-and-white photograph, 15 3/8 x 22 1/4"
Collection of the artist

Dr. Rajendra Prasad became first president of Free India in 1950. Before going to the Council Hall in Delhi to take the oath of office as president, he visited Mahatma's Samadhi (the place where he had been cremated) at Raj Ghat to pay respect to Father of the Nation. With him was his wife Rajvansi Devi, Sardar Patel, and other relatives and friends.
Black-and-white photograph, 16 x 22 1/8"
Collection of the artist

The funeral pyre of Mahatma Gandhi at the cremation ground at Raj Ghat, Delhi. The religious ceremony was officiated by his second son who lighted the pyre (January 31, 1948).
Black-and-white photograph, 15 3/4 x 22 1/8"
Collection of the artist

Lord Mountbatten with his wife Edwina and daughters Pamella and Lady Lumly and his son-in-law paid their respects to the Mahatma by sitting on bare ground in front of the funeral pyre. With them is Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, a staunch follower of the Mahatma (January 31, 1948).
Black-and-white photograph, 15 1/16 x 21 7/8"
Collection of the artist

Crowds gathered on the ramparts of the Fort on the 16th August to see Nehru and other leaders. Picture shows only one-fourth section of the big crowd with Jama Masjid on the skyline (Delhi).
Black-and-white photograph, 15 x 22 3/16"
Collection of the artist