

What Empire Took, What Empire Left emerges from a central provocation: what happens when the sacred is violently dislocated—not only from place, but from time, ritual, and meaning? Across South Asia, deities, manuscripts, and ritual objects have been removed from living contexts and reclassified within Western museums, where they are aestheticized, contained, and severed from the cosmologies that once animated them. This exhibition confronts that rupture.

Rather than simply narrating histories of loss, it interrogates the conditions that enabled such displacement—colonial epistemologies, illicit markets, institutional complicity, and the enduring frameworks of museology that privilege possession over presence. From Nepal's emptied temples to the dispersal of India's bronzes, from Gandharan sculptures in Pakistan to the systematic erosion of Bangladesh's terracotta heritage, the exhibition traces a region-wide history of cultural dismemberment.

Yet this is not a lament. Through contemporary artistic practices, *What Empire Took, What Empire Left* activates a counter-archive—foregrounding acts of return not only as restitution, but as epistemic resistance. It calls for a rethinking of South Asian art history itself: not as a neutral canon of objects, but as a field marked by violence and in urgent need of decolonial reparation, where memory, belief, and sovereignty are reclaimed.

Cover Image:

Divya Mehra – Returnism, Dimensions variable

Photo Mural

Courtesy the artist, MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina, Canada)

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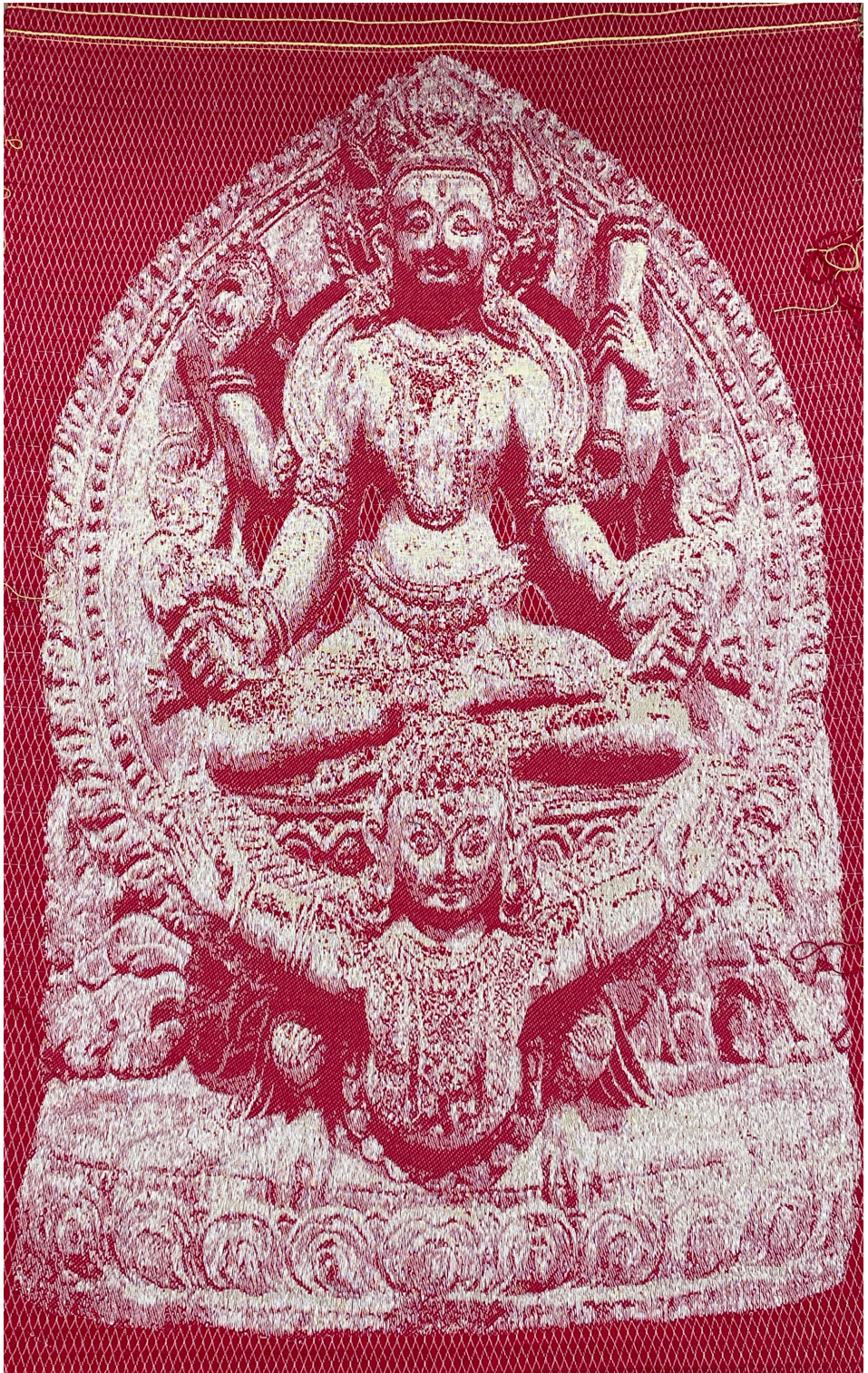
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MUSEUMS, BORDERS AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN IN SOUTH ASIA





Bishal Manandhar - Bishnu and Garudh, 48 x 28 inches,
hand woven jacquard weaving, 2024

What Empire Took, What Empire Left

MUSEUMS, BORDERS AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN IN SOUTH ASIA

CURATED BY DR. ARSHIYA MANSOOR LOKHANDWALA

Temsüyanger Longkumer

Reetu Sattar

Shaurya Kumar

Raqs Media Collective

Mithu Sen

Divya Mehra

Marium Ghani

L.N. Tallur

Roshan Mishra

Bishal Manandhar

Jagath Weerasinghe

Supported by:



Venue:



Namita Saraf



Namita Saraf is the co-founder of the Saraf Foundation and the Director of Taragaon Next. She divides her time between Kathmandu and Mumbai, dedicating over 20 years to her roles as a collector, patron, and curator in both countries. Deeply committed to promoting Nepali art, culture, and traditions, Ms. Saraf actively supports initiatives through Taragaon Next, Sagarmatha Next, and the Nepal Architecture Archive; the three flagship projects of the Foundation.

Through these initiatives, she collaborates with young Nepali artists, fostering their growth and creating opportunities for their work to thrive both locally and internationally.

Dr. Arshiya Mansoor Lokhandwala



Dr. Lokhandwala is an art historian, curator, and founding director of Lakeeren Gallery, Mumbai. Her notable curatorial projects include *Prussian Blue: A Serendipitous Color that Altered the Trajectory of Art* (KNMA, 2023), *The Archaeology of the Self: Archives, Anarchives and the Artist* (2023 amongst others. Her exhibition *Re-Worlded: Seventy Years of Investigating a Nation* (2017) earned her the Curator of the Year Award by India Today.

She has also curated *After Midnight: Indian Modernism to Contemporary India 1947/1997* at the Queens Museum (2015). Since 2019, she has lectured at the Art Institute of Chicago, teaching South Asian Art and Postcolonial Studies. With over 300 curated exhibitions, Dr. Lokhandwala writes extensively on globalization, feminism, and postcolonial studies.

What Return Cannot Repair: Museums and Colonial Afterlives in South Asia

DR. ARSHIYA MANSOOR LOKHANDWALA

"This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies... The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds."
— Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), xi.

Colonial loss in South Asia cannot be measured by counting the objects that left. What disappeared was sometimes tangible: a deity, manuscript, textile, ceremonial ornament or archaeological fragment. Yet empire also divided land, reorganised labour, weakened local economies, classified communities, dispersed archives and transferred the authority to write South Asia's histories elsewhere. It did not simply remove objects from the region; it altered the relationships between objects, people, place and history.

The colonial museum institutionalised this transformation. Sacred images became sculpture, manuscripts became collectible folios and living practices became ethnographic evidence. As Tapati Guha-Thakurta has shown, archaeology and museums in colonial India did not simply discover the past; through collecting, classification and display, they produced the categories through which it became knowable. Objects removed from South Asia were then used elsewhere to construct authoritative histories of the cultures from which they had been separated. The deeper dispossession was of the authority to name, interpret and transmit one's own world. Spivak's account of epistemic violence names this injury: colonial knowledge reorganised the terms through which South Asia could be represented and heard.

Not every South Asian object in a Western museum was stolen. Objects travelled as gifts, purchases, diplomatic exchanges, ritual transfers and, sometimes, for protection. Museums have conserved vulnerable works and made dispersed histories available for study. But legality does not settle legitimacy. An acquisition may have complied with the law of its time while

remaining inseparable from colonial inequality. Who set the terms of movement? Who was authorised to give, sell or interpret the object? And who gained the right to write the history that followed it?

What is lost when an idol moves from a temple into a museum? Its material body may survive, but its world does not travel with it. The deity is separated from architecture, sacred ensemble, landscape and community. It no longer receives water, flowers, food, cloth, music, tika, touch or procession. The reciprocity of *darśan*—seeing and being seen—becomes museum spectatorship.² A presence embedded in ritual time is identified by dynasty, date, medium and provenance. These categories produce knowledge, but cannot contain the object's social biography.³ Presence becomes representation; sacred life becomes collection history.

The distinction between “sculpture” and “deity” matters. One is a material and aesthetic category; the other names a being held within reciprocal obligations. A temple image may be awakened, dressed, fed, cooled, carried in procession or put to rest. Its identity is sustained through these acts and through its relation to architecture, festivals and local histories. Coomaraswamy's insistence that things are made for particular purposes and places, “and not simply ‘for exhibition,’” points to what is suppressed when the museum isolates an image as an example of period, region or style.³ Display enables scholarship, but can make meaning appear to reside entirely inside stone or bronze. The empty niche tells us otherwise. Meaning also resides in bodies, places, memories and care. Provenance cannot end with a list of owners; it must ask which relationships were interrupted, which obligations ceased and who still recognises the object as more than property.

What Empire Took, What Empire Left begins with this separation of matter from relationship, but it deliberately moves beyond the sacred object. Tamsüyanger Longkumer's *Return to Sender: Fake Totem No. 32* places a replica of a colonial boundary pillar at the exhibition's threshold. Marking the India–Myanmar frontier, the pillar invokes a line that divided Naga territories and continues to separate communities, kinship networks and ancestral lands. By adopting the language of museum conservation, shipping and deaccession, Longkumer converts the border from an apparently natural fact of geography into an artefact manufactured by empire.

Colonialism did not only remove cultural property. It surveyed

territory, classified populations and transformed mobile social worlds into governable spatial units.⁴ These territorial arrangements were inherited by postcolonial states and continue to shape sovereignty and belonging. A boundary pillar ordinarily makes power appear self-evident: one nation ends here and another begins there. Longkumer's "fake totem" reverses that naturalisation. Once exhibited like an object awaiting dispatch, the border becomes fabricated, historical and available for interrogation. There is no deaccession procedure for territory. The pillar cannot simply be packed and returned to Britain. This is the limit Longkumer places before the exhibition: museums may return portable objects while land appropriation, border-making and political fragmentation remain intact. If an object can be repatriated, can a line be returned? And if not, must it be erased?⁵

From this fixed line, Reetu Sattar's *Shabnam* (2023) follows another colonial geography: the routes through which Bengal's muslin travelled while the history of its production was scattered across archives around the world. The twenty-two-minute film stitches archival images, hidden narratives and uneasy encounters into a deliberately unsettled account. Muslin's almost weightless refinement can easily romanticise Bangladesh's artisanal inheritance. Sattar begins with that seduction, then turns it inside out. For three centuries, this plain white cloth—woven in modest workshops through extraordinary technical knowledge—was entangled with courtly consumption, slave economies, imperial trade and colonial expansion. Its beauty cannot be separated from the unequal systems through which it circulated.⁶ The movement of beautiful cloth is also a history of economic restructuring. The East India Company entered existing systems of manufacture through monopoly power and coercive contracts; later, hand production confronted an industrial economy centred in Britain.⁷ In muslin, extraction runs through fibre, labour, tariff, taste, archive and market. No single returned object could repair the loss of technical knowledge, economic autonomy or authorship.

Trained in theatre and working across performance, video and text, Sattar makes this fractured archive bodily. Bengali speech and readable English translation arrive out of time with one another. The delay interrupts the promise that archives can be made transparently available through translation: the non-Bengali viewer must wait for meaning, while the Bengali-speaking viewer encounters language before its institutional mediation. This temporal gap becomes the film's political form, producing

small, untranslatable moments of discomfort around materiality, authorship and collective loss. Shabnam—"night dew"—does not reconstruct a complete history. It visualises the churn of encountering what has been dispersed and asks how a displaced history reshapes belonging. To recognise collective loss, the work suggests, is already to begin reconnecting history to the place from which it was estranged.

Sattar locates loss in labour and archives; Shaurya Kumar encounters it in the architecture of the empty niche. In *Where Yoginis Once Danced*, thirty-six monochrome photographs document surviving forms at a temple originally dedicated to sixty-four Yoginis. The photographs linger on vacant niches, weathered stone and broken sculptural sequences. Some missing figures may be identified in museum databases, but identification cannot reassemble the sacred ensemble, ritual practices or female cosmology to which they belonged. Scholarship on the Yoginis has shown how their dispersal fractures an architectural programme and a complex Tantric tradition in which powerful female divinities operated collectively, not as isolated masterpieces.

Kumar's *It's Mine; No It's Mine; Now It's Yours; No It's Ours; Yes It's Missing* moves from architectural absence to the contemporary traffic in sacred bodies. The Mahabharata dice game in which Draupadi is wagered becomes an allegory for the antiquities trade. Twelve deliberately crude 3D-printed deities, modelled from grainy media images, occupy a handwoven game board. Their plastic surfaces recall tourist souvenirs even as the missing originals circulate through a high-value market. Deities become pawns among thief, dealer, collector, museum and state. Restitution is necessary, but the legal victory of ownership cannot alone repair the loss of worship, place and community.⁹

Kumar exposes the stories built around displaced objects. Raqs Media Collective stays with what cannot be known. *Autoluminous* (2024) brings together approximately seventy-two small laser engravings on silk-coated paper and a larger laser-etched image of a headless seated Buddha on aluminium composite panel. The figure recalls the damaged Buddha friezes on the outer walls of Kesariya Stupa in Bihar, but no surviving record establishes who damaged them or when.¹⁰ Raqs will not turn that gap into a convenient narrative of colonial theft or iconoclasm. Doubt here is not evasion. It is a refusal to replace one authoritative account with another simply because it serves the present. The installation connects the Kālāma Sutta's defence

of doubt with *sabbaṃ ādittaṃ*—"everything is burning"—from the Buddha's Fire Sermon.¹¹ The laser draws the Buddha and inscribes language by burning the surfaces, leaving heat, soot, smell and residue. Fire is not an image added to the work; it is how the work is made. Across the repeated paper engravings, energy accumulates as material expenditure and as a demand for vigilance. Biological, political and technological systems are fuelled by us even as they consume us in turn. The museum's promise of illumination is caught in the same problem: every attempt to make the past visible expends energy, leaves debris and carries ethical consequences.¹²

Raqs leaves the damaged past unresolved. Mithu Sen begins with a different impossibility: what happens after an object is released from the museum? Hiraeth (2023), a single-channel video documenting her performative intervention at the RISD Museum, stages a satirical farewell for a Gandharan sculpture of Shakyamuni Buddha in the collection. Its provenance is incomplete. Little is known about its earlier history, donor or collector, and there is no secure account of how it entered the museum or precisely where it belonged. Sen imagines the Buddha departing without knowing where—or whether—he can return.¹³

The Welsh word *hiraeth* describes longing for a home that has disappeared or can no longer be recovered. Suspended between museum and homeland, possession and freedom, the Buddha embodies the uncertainty of return when provenance has been severed. Sen does not use fiction to replace evidence. She uses it to expose the affective histories that catalogues cannot contain. Repatriation here cannot mean transporting the sculpture to a guessed origin. It would require rebuilding memory, belief and cultural relationships without pretending that historical time can be reversed. Return becomes not the neat conclusion of a colonial journey, but the uncertain beginning of another life.

Sen's fictional departure finds a material counterpart in Divya Mehra's *Returnism*. While researching the MacKenzie Art Gallery's collection, Mehra discovered that a sculpture removed from a shrine beside the Ganges in Varanasi in 1913 and catalogued as Vishnu was actually Annapurna, goddess of nourishment and "Queen of Banaras." Misidentification had produced a second displacement: the object remained materially present while its gender, sacred identity, place and history of worship disappeared within the museum catalogue.

Mehra's research contributed to a rare instance in which an artist's intervention helped produce an actual repatriation. The University of Regina transferred the sculpture to India, and in November 2021 Annapurna travelled ceremonially to Varanasi before being installed at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, where she re-entered ritual life.¹⁴ Returnism records more than an institutional correction. Cataloguing is not neutral description; it can estrange an object from itself. Here, an artist moved restitution from museum debate into an actual change in the object's legal, geographical and sacred condition. The title borrows former British prime minister David Cameron's dismissal of demands for the Koh-i-Noor as "returnism," exposing how restitution is cast as ideological excess while retention passes as neutrality.¹⁵

Mehra's case is exceptional. Mariam Ghani's photographic prints *Removed*, *Limbo*, *Dismembered* and *Spectacular* occupy the far more common condition in which return remains obstructed. They trace Afghan antiquities and archives through war, museum looting, trafficking, iconoclasm and foreign collections. *Removed* draws upon ICOM's Red List of vulnerable object types; *Limbo* concerns identified works that cannot readily be returned; *Dismembered* follows manuscripts fragmented across collections and digital archives; and *Spectacular* confronts the empty Bamiyan niche, where destruction became a globally circulated image.¹⁶ Photography becomes an unstable form of custody: it preserves a trace of what is missing while showing how loss is converted into evidence, inventory and spectacle.

Some Afghan objects were stolen; others were moved abroad for protection and remain suspended between preservation and return. Ghani places this mobility beside—but does not equate it with—the experience of displaced Afghans. Cultural objects may be granted sanctuary while Afghan people confront visas, asylum regimes and fortified borders. International systems decide who and what may cross, remain or return. The prints take the discussion beyond provenance into the aftermath of war and foreign intervention, where people and cultural memory remain subject to decisions made elsewhere.¹⁷

L. N. Tallur's *Interference* (2019) turns from displaced archives to a history that has settled into matter. Produced with the Junagadh Museum, the 4K video records the manual cleaning of part of a monumental nineteenth-century carpet made by inmates of Junagadh Central Jail, imprisoned for their participation in the struggle against British rule.¹⁸ Once installed in a palace

darbar hall, the carpet moved from prison labour to royal display and finally museum custody. That trajectory condenses the exhibition's concerns: an object can survive several political orders while the coercive labour embedded in its making recedes from view.

In extreme slow motion, dust acquires the scale of weather, smoke, even bombardment; the displaced sound recalls distant artillery. History does not reside only in the carpet—it erupts from it. The dust cannot be securely classified: it is at once dirt, bodily residue, evidence of use and the sediment of time. Cleaning is necessary care, yet it also decides which matter belongs to the object and which may be discarded. Tallur thus reveals conservation as an act of historical judgement. The museum does not merely preserve what has survived; it continually defines the boundary between object and residue, value and waste, authorised history and what is swept away. Within this exhibition, Interference asks whether restitution can return an object without also recovering the obscured labour and political struggle lodged within its material life.¹⁹

Roshan Mishra carries this problem into the sacred neighbourhoods of the Kathmandu Valley. Disappearing Devatās and Fading Faith uses etched fibreglass and stone to evoke absent deities. Their translucency is essential: the images appear simultaneously visible and missing, like afterimages held in place by memory. Śiva-Pārvatī refers to a twelfth- or thirteenth-century image stolen from the Thapahiti water conduit in Patan in the late 1960s and now held by the British Museum. Standing Buddha invokes a fifth-century figure stolen from Deopatan-Chabahil in 1985 whose present location is unknown.²⁰ One deity is preserved but displaced; the other has vanished into the opacity of the market.

In both cases, theft leaves more than an empty niche. It alters the routes, offerings, stories and forms of care organised around sacred presence. Mishra's phrase "fading faith" does not express nostalgia for an unchanging tradition; it identifies a feedback loop. Theft weakens the material focus around which practices gather, while weakened practices make remaining images more vulnerable. Nepalese heritage activists have shown that documentation and transnational pressure can reconnect stolen images with exact sites and living custodians.²¹ A source community is not merely the historical supplier of an object. It is a present and changing participant in determining the object's

future.

Bishal Manandhar's *Threads of Faith* (2023–24) responds to this history by translating images of museum-held Nepalese deities and ceremonial ornaments into Jacquard weavings. The textiles do not claim to replace displaced objects. Instead, they make visible what representation cannot carry. A woven image may preserve memory, but it cannot reproduce the ritual efficacy of an idol or sacred necklace. Such objects were created to receive prayer, tika, offerings, touch, adornment, weather and continuing care.²²

The work exposes a fundamental tension between conservation and sacred continuity. From the museum's perspective, light, touch, water and handling threaten material survival. Within ritual life, transformation through use may be part of the object's intended existence. The museum conserves matter by arresting precisely these relationships. Manandhar's woven surfaces therefore occupy the distance between image and presence: petitions for reconnection that acknowledge their own inability to restore sacred life.

The distance between physical return and restored sacred life becomes most explicit in Jagath Weerasinghe's ten-part painting and collage, *Tara's Lament: Where Is Home If All Homes Are Colonial?* (2025). The work gives voice to a specific sculpture: the nearly life-size, eighth-century, solid-cast gilded-bronze figure of the Buddhist goddess Tara from Sri Lanka, now in the British Museum. It entered the museum in 1830 through Sir Robert Brownrigg, former governor of British Ceylon; the precise circumstances of its removal remain contested. In Britain, Tara's sacred body was judged through Victorian ideas of nudity and restricted from public view.

Weerasinghe transforms this colonial and museum biography into a first-person lament. Tara recalls removal, shipment, measurement, classification and confinement. Yet she also asks what repatriation would return her to. If transferred from the British Museum to a postcolonial national museum, she may cross a geographical border while remaining classified, displayed behind glass and separated from worship. Her location would change while her condition as a museum object remained intact. Weerasinghe does not use this possibility to argue against restitution. He insists that decolonisation cannot be reduced to a transfer between sovereign institutions. As scholarship on museums in South Asia has demonstrated, the postcolonial

museum is not simply the opposite of its colonial predecessor; it inherits and refashions colonial forms through the competing demands of nationalism, public culture and living belief.

Across these works, restitution never follows a straight line from removal to return. Colonialism reorganised land, labour, knowledge, belief and sovereignty, and transferred the authority to interpret South Asia's past to institutions outside it. A displaced object is evidence not only of what was taken, but of what was broken around it. Some relations can be renewed. Others are irreparable. To admit that is not to argue against restitution. It is to refuse the fiction that return cancels displacement.

The difficult questions begin precisely where the shipment ends. Is the return of a deity sufficient if the community sustaining its sacred life has dispersed? Can an object be restored without returning authority over how it is named, interpreted, displayed—or withheld from display? To whom should it return when state, museum, worshippers and source communities make different claims? And how do we address dispossessions that cannot be packed into a crate: a colonial border, a destroyed craft economy, a scattered archive, or ritual knowledge lost with the object?

Museums do not merely preserve history; they determine which histories become visible, credible and accessible. Provenance research, digitisation and collaboration are necessary, but they cannot substitute indefinitely for redistributing ownership, access and decision-making. Nor can "universal heritage" conceal the unequal histories through which certain institutions became universal while other societies were deprived of the material foundations of their histories. If the possessing museum continues to define the meaning and terms of return, restitution risks becoming another performance of the authority it claims to relinquish.

The opposite of theft is not simply ownership. The harder task is to create forms of custody answerable to history and forms of care answerable to those for whom an object exceeds objecthood. *What Empire Took, What Empire Left* moves beyond asking, "Should the object return?" What was dismantled so that it could enter the museum, and who continues to live with the consequences? Return is not an act of generosity. It is an acknowledgement of an unresolved obligation. Its measure is not only whether an object crosses a border, but whether relationships and cultural authority are restored—and whether the

power that governed removal has begun to change.

Return is not the end of an object's journey. It is the moment responsibility begins.

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6. Sonia Ashmore, *Muslin* (London: V&A Publishing, 2012); Ruby Ghuznavi, "Muslin: The Fabric of Bengal," in *Textiles from India: The Global Trade*, ed. Rosemary Crill (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2006), 55–69; Reetu Sattar, *Shabnam*, artist's wall text supplied for the exhibition, 2023; International Film Festival Rotterdam, "Shabnam," IFFR 2023, <https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2023/films/shabnam>; Arushi Vats, "Reetu Sattar," *Sharjah Biennial 16*, Sharjah Art Foundation, 2025.
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10. Raqs Media Collective, *Autoluminous*, artist's wall text supplied for the exhibition, 2024. Materials: ontological assertion; approximately seventy-two laser engravings on silk-coated paper (212 × 298 mm); laser-etched Buddha on aluminium composite panel (approximately 23 × 37 in.).
11. "Kesaputtiya Sutta: To the Kālāmas," trans. Soma Thera, *Access to Insight*, 1994, <https://www.accesstinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html>; "Ādittapariyāya Sutta: The Fire Sermon," *Samyutta Nikāya* 35.28, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1143–44.
12. Raqs Media Collective, "Autoluminous (Everything Is Burning)," 2024, <https://works>.

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23. British Museum, "Standing Figure of a Female Deity (Tārā)," collection no. 1830,0612.4, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1830-0612-4; Courtauld Institute of Art, "Reflections on the Statue of Tara from Sri Lanka at the British Museum," accessed August 10, 2026, <https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/reflections-on-the-istatue-of-tara-i-from-sri-lanka-at-the-british-museum/>.
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Return to Sender, 2026

Fake Totem No. 32

72 X 45.6 CM, 67.8 X 10.3 CM, 45.6 X 106 CM, 72 X 9.5 CM

CONCRETE, WOOD

TEMSÜYANGER LONGKUMER

This work extends the discourse of repatriation beyond cultural objects to questions of territory, sovereignty, and belonging. While growing efforts are being made globally to return looted artefacts, the larger structures that enabled their extraction, land appropriation, border-making, and the fragmentation of communities remain largely unaddressed.

Centred on the replica of a colonial boundary pillar marking the border between India and Myanmar – an arbitrary line that continues to divide Naga communities across the two countries. The installation treats the border itself as an artefact. An object of colonial manufacture that has been enforced and continues to function as an instrument of division. By adopting the visual language of museum conservation, shipping, and deaccessioning, the work invites viewers to imagine forms of restitution that extend beyond collections and into the realm of land, autonomy, and collective memory.

If objects can be repatriated, can a line be returned? And if not, must it be erased?



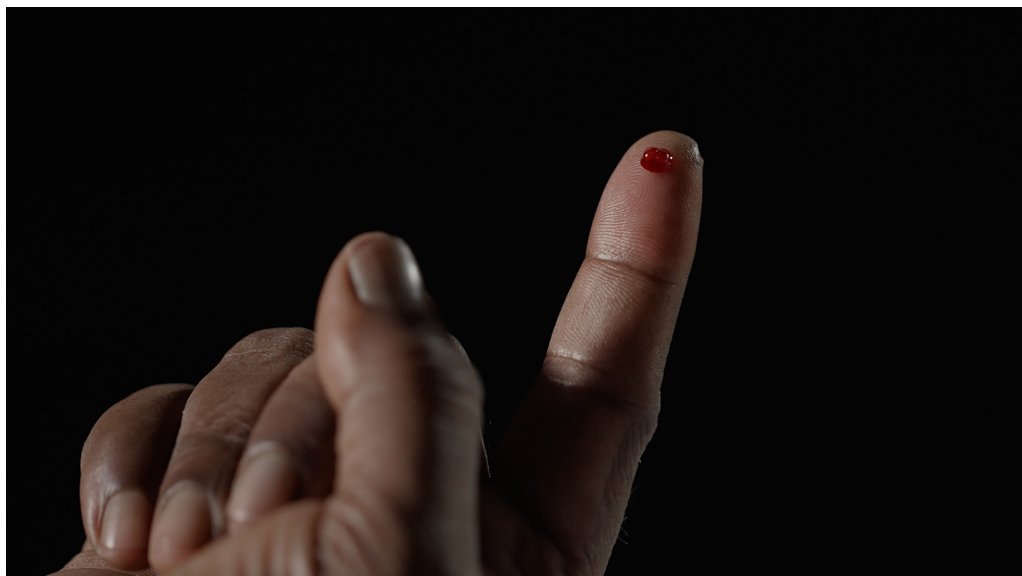
Reetu Sattar

Shabnam, 2023

Film, 22 minutes 32 seconds

Commissioned by British Textile Biennial with support from
Samdani Art Foundation, Dhaka

REETU SATTAR



In *Shabnam*, the fragmented history of the fabrication of muslin and its scattered documentation across archives all over the world is stitched back together in a piece that is as stunning as it is confrontational. The result is a patchwork of uneasy encounters, hidden narratives, and archival images in which the discomfort of inequality is made tangible to the viewer- IFFR.

One can be easily romanticized by the idea of muslin which evokes curiosities about Bangladeshi rich heritage. For 300 years this plain white cloth made in humble huts played a pivotal role from the slave trade to the expansion of colonialism. *Shabnam* (Night Dew) is about discomfort around the contemporary positional crisis in relation to colonial histories.

In this film the language Bangla is used in a manner where the difference in time between the sonic experience and the readable translations creates a performative nature of discomfort. The



time gap between the two experiences transgress experiences of untranslatable micro moments of discomfort around materiality, institutions, authorship and knowledge of collective loss. How do you show the churn in your stomach when you find yourself in irrevocable loss? How a displaced history reshapes a sense of belonging? How do you justify the way of looking at images and artefacts that are found in archives? In this film the artist tried to visualize a churn, a rumble when exposed to lost archival materials connected to positional histories and coloniality. Identifying collective loss and making a connection to it is an act towards recognizing shared histories and loss in its original place.

Reetu Sattar

All That Could Be Held Closely, 2025

Vintage wooden cabinet, photi kapas seeds, photi kapas cotton, kuchia fish skin, bovine bone shrew, photograph of archivist Raghunath Basak, Raghunath Basak's account book wrapped in lal shalu, muslin-designing implements including maku and malshi, rusted iron mould of a weaver's finger, embroidered strip, blade, and cut threads from a loom.

REETU SATTAR



All That Could Be Held Closely takes the form of a cabinet of memory, assembled from the material remnants of Dhaka's once celebrated muslin tradition. Sattar begins with an old teak box discovered in Chowkbazar, its surface bearing nearly a century of familial use. Recognising the owners' reluctance to relinquish an object so intimately bound to their history, she transforms the idea of the heirloom into a meditation on what communities preserve when histories themselves are disappearing.

Within the cabinet, Sattar gathers fragments connected to the production of muslin: revived photi kapas seeds and cotton;

kuchia fish skin, traditionally used to keep the fibres supple; fragments of bovine bone once used in preparing cotton; weaving implements including maku and malshi; and a rusted iron mould of a weaver's finger. Alongside these are a photograph and account book belonging to Raghunath Basak, evoking the knowledge, labour and records that have been lost alongside the textile itself.

The cabinet operates as both archive and reliquary. Rather than reconstructing muslin as a complete history, Sattar preserves its fragments—material, mnemonic and bodily. What can no longer be fully recovered is instead held closely, making loss itself an intimate form of inheritance.

For the purposes of this exhibition, these objects have been recreated, as the originals could not be made available.

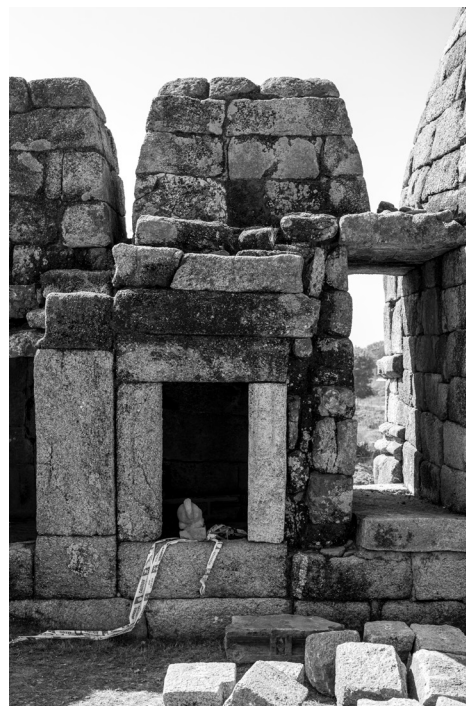
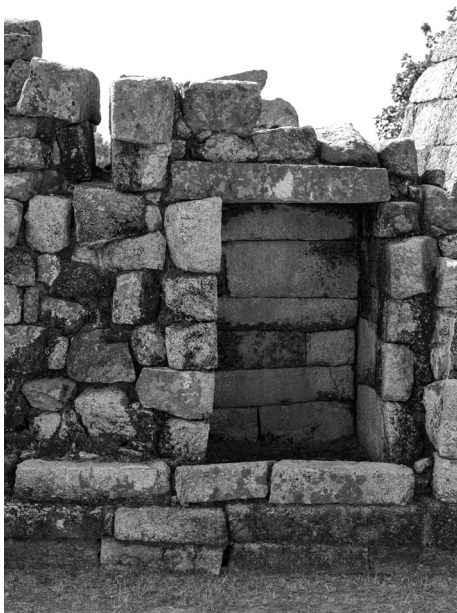
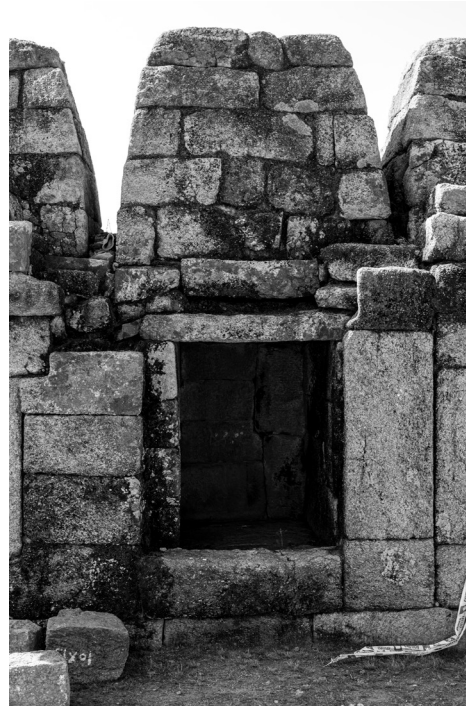
Where Yoginis Once Danced, 2025

Digital Photographs, 14 x 21.5 inches, 36 prints

SHAURYA KUMAR

This series documents a Yogini temple in India, originally dedicated to sixty-four powerful female divinities, as were other Yogini temples. Only thirty-six sculptures were partially reconstructed by the Archaeological Survey of India; Kumar's thirty-six photographs document these surviving forms. Once a vibrant centre of Tantric worship, the sacred site today stands partially emptied, its sculptures lost to colonial extraction, illicit trafficking, neglect, or dispersal into museums and private collections. Kumar's monochromatic photographs linger on vacant niches, weathered stone surfaces, and overgrown architectural remains, transforming absence itself into the subject of the work.

The haunting emptiness of the shrine speaks not only to the loss of individual sculptures but to the disappearance of an entire cosmology. The missing Yoginis become metaphors for cultural erasure, interrupted ritual traditions, and the fragility of collective memory. As art historian Padma Kaimal has observed, the histories surrounding displaced Yogini sculptures often reveal deeper anxieties surrounding the power and autonomy of the feminine divine. Through these evocative images, Kumar invites viewers to contemplate what remains when sacred presence is reduced to absence.



Shaurya Kumar

It's Mine; No It's Mine; Now It's Yours; No It's Ours; Yes It's Missing, 2016

Handwoven tapestry with wool, dye, 10 X 10 ft and Twelve 3D printed sculptures of varying sizes

SHAURYA KUMAR



In this large-scale installation, Kumar draws a compelling parallel between the infamous dice game in the Mahabharata—in which Draupadi is wagered and publicly humiliated—and the systematic plundering of Indian temples and sacred heritage. Constructed from a monumental handwoven wool tapestry and twelve 3D-printed sculptures, the work examines the networks of deception, greed, and power that underpin the global trade in looted antiquities.

The ten-by-ten-foot tapestry is configured as a checkerboard, evoking both the game of dice and the national flags of countries



that currently house displaced Indian artifacts. Across this symbolic field stand twelve 3D-printed sculptures modeled from grainy newspaper and media images rather than the original objects themselves. Their crude, plastic appearance recalls inexpensive tourist souvenirs, foregrounding the uneasy relationship between authenticity and replication, a central issue in the notorious Subhash Kapoor trafficking scandal, where stolen idols circulated through international markets under fabricated provenances.

As visitors move through the installation, they encounter a landscape in which sacred objects become commodities and cultural heritage becomes a contested terrain. The gods are transformed into pawns within a global game of acquisition and display, displaced from the communities that once revered them and left in a state of perpetual uncertainty, awaiting the possibility of return.

Autoluminous, 2024

Installation with Ontological assertion, Laser-engravings on silk-coated paper (212 mm x 298 mm approx 72 prints total) & Laser-etched Buddha figure on Aluminium Composite Panel (23x37 inch approx)

RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE

Autoluminous is an index of our (Raqs') awareness of the inscription of energy into every waking, sleeping and dreaming moment. It demands that we think about, and with, energy, as we live in the energy-field that is the world today. We could think about doubt about constituted authority as a kind of energy, something that ignites consciousness into vigilance and alertness.

In a previous work, the video titled 'Provisions for Everybody' (2018/2022) Raqs have already marked the Kesariya Stupa in Bihar as the site where the Buddha's sermon in praise of doubt (The Kalama Sutta / Discourse to the Kalamas) provides philosophical anchorage for radical skepticism towards all forms of constituted authority.

The image of the Buddha deployed in Autoluminous echoes a diptych, 'Ignition' (2020) by Raqs that references the decapitated icon-friezes of seated Buddhas on the outer walls of the Kesariya Stupa. There are no extant historical records that demonstrate when and by whom these icons were damaged.

By drawing a decapitated Buddha image in fire, with laser, and by inscribing the key words ('sabbam adittam' / 'everything is burning') of the Ādittapariyāya Sutta (The Fire Sermon), Raqs invite anyone who witnesses this work to face the danger, delight and consequences of an intimacy with energy. To do this is not to turn one's face away from the 'everything' that is 'burning' (desire, delusion, doubt) as per the accepted understanding of the import of The Fire Sermon, rather, it is to face the consequences of figuring out how we ourselves are constantly becoming the fuel of the life-processes (biological, social, technological) that we consume and that consume us in turn. Perhaps this is a rewriting of the fire sermon, in letters of fire.

This requires a mental dance following the to-and-fro of the oscillating arms of the laser engraving machine, and a willingness to expose one's senses to the metabolic processes, to the soot and smell of the debris and residue of all our thoughts and actions.



'The Fire Sermon', is also the third section in T.S. Eliot's five part poem, 'The Waste Land'. It ends with a short passage that condenses the 'Everything is Burning' declaration of the Ādittapariyāya Sutta into a pithy passage that says - "Burning, burning, burning, burning. O Lord Thou pluckest me out. O Lord Thou pluckest, burning."

Eliot's 'Fire Sermon' directly addresses the debris of everyday life by inventorying the flotsam and jetsam afloat in urban water-courses, and the residues of chance encounters.

Autoluminous reminds us that every use of energy needs to be a deliberative act.

Mithu Sen

Hiraeth, 2023

Single-channel video of a performative Intervention at RISD Museum of a Fictional Farewell 2023

Duration: 25:08

Rhode Island School of Design 2023

MITHU SEN



Hiraeth—a Welsh word describing a longing for a home that may no longer exist—becomes the emotional ground of this performative intervention. Imagining Buddha Shakyamuni adrift, performed at the RISD Museum after his fictional release, the work stages a satirical farewell that reflects on looting, colonial violence, and the fragile afterlives of cultural memory.

Suspended between departure and impossible return, Hiraeth questions whether repatriation is simply the movement of an object, or an ethical act of restoring memory, belief, and cultural sovereignty. Through fiction and performance, it unsettles the museum's claim to neutrality, inviting us to reconsider restitution not as possession regained, but as an ongoing process of listening to histories that continue to seek their way home.

Returnism, 2022

Dimensions variable

Photo Mural

Courtesy the artist, MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina, Canada)

DIVYA MEHRA

In the fall of 2019, Mehra was invited to work within the MacKenzie Art Gallery's (Regina, Canada) collection for her solo exhibition, *From India to Canada and Back to India (There Is Nothing I Can Possess Which You Cannot Take Away)*. During her research, she learned about the looting expeditions of the gallery's namesake, Norman MacKenzie, and his friend Edgar James Banks, who was the inspiration for the fictional character Indiana Jones. Mehra also discovered, in MacKenzie's notes, a story about a small stone carving held and catalogued in the museum's archive. The carving had been stolen by MacKenzie during a 1913 trip to Banaras, India. Believing the figure to be the Hindu deity Vishnu, he haphazardly catalogued it as such, and it remained misidentified for over a century.

Recognizing that the clearly female figure was not Vishnu, Mehra contacted Dr. Siddhartha V. Shah, then Curator of South Asian Art at the Peabody Essex Museum. Noting the ladle and small bowl of kheer she held, Dr. Shah identified the carving as Annapurna, the goddess of nourishment, also known as the "Queen of Banaras."

Mehra's ongoing conversations with John G. Hampton, then Director of Programs and Curator at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, led to the repatriation of the carving to India in 2020. For her solo exhibition that year and to mark the return, Mehra created *There is nothing you can possess which I cannot take away (Not Vishnu: New Ways of Darśana)*, a work placing a 2.4-pound bag of sand (the weight of the repatriated carving) on top of an altar inspired by the film, *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The sandbag, purchased from a Hollywood prop store and artificially aged with coffee and dye, mirrors the film's scene where Indiana Jones swaps a sacred idol for a decoy of equal weight. The work underscores the extractive violence of collecting property and possessions while insisting on the possibility of restitution.

Today, in the vault of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, on a shelf marked "Oriental Antiquities," a cavity carved for the stolen figure of Annapurna now holds Mehra's artwork, *There is nothing you can possess which I cannot take away (Not Vishnu: New ways of Darśana)*. Her facilitation of the statue's return to India in 2021



marks an extraordinary achievement and precedent: while widely discussed, divestment and repatriation are rarely realized in practice. These are tangible steps institutions—particularly those that have historically benefitted from the fetishization and theft of other cultures—can take toward repair.

Installed as a floor-to-ceiling photo mural, the image confronts our audience with a perspective normally reserved for curators, registrars, and collections staff.

The title of the work refers to former British Prime Minister David Cameron's flippant dismissal of restitution when asked about the possibility of repatriating the Koh-i-Noor diamond to India: "They're not having that back. I certainly don't believe in returnism, as it were."

A reasonably held belief that a “moral claim” exists, 2022

Letterpressed postcards from the National Gallery of Canada Boutique
6" x 9"

Edition: 4, Exhibition Copy

DIVYA MEHRA

In October, 2022, ahead of King Charles III's coronation, Mehra sent a letter to the monarch requesting the return of the Koh-i-Noor diamond to India before Queen Consort Camilla was slated to wear it during the crowning ceremony. Mehra letterpressed this appeal on a postcard purchased from the National Gallery of Canada's gift shop. The front of the postcard depicts a painting by Canadian landscape painter Lawren Harris, whose work as part of the Canadian "Group of Seven" was instrumental to the aestheticization of Canada's colonial empire, which was also built on a painful legacy of stolen land and resources. In 1849, the British East India Company seized the Koh-i-Noor from Duleep Singh, the 13-year-old Maharajah of the Punjab, then ceded it to the British Royal Family with the annexation of the independent Sikh kingdom. To date, the Crown has rejected all demands for the Koh-i-Noor's repatriation.



Spectacular (Bamyan), 2026

Dismembered (Khalili + IL), 2026

Limbo (GhazniPanels+MetBuddha), 2026

Removed (Red list). 2026

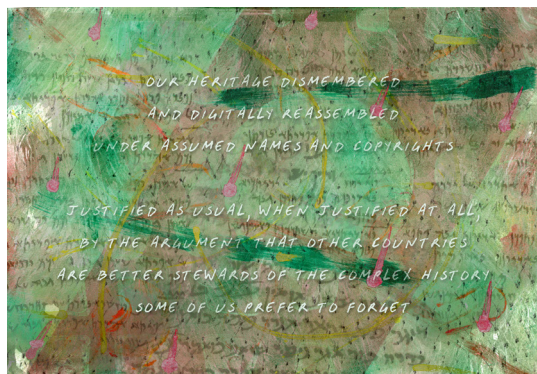
60 x 46.36 cm, Forex digital board. All image credits are courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.

MARIUM GHANI

This series of prints combines analog printmaking and drawing with digital collage, annotation, and printing to reflect on different aspects of the question of repatriation in relation to Afghanistan. During the Soviet occupation and Afghan civil war periods (1979–1993), many archeological sites in Afghanistan were looted and objects trafficked to fund the efforts of various groups of fighters (the mujahidin) that formed to resist both the Soviet Army and Afghan Communist governments. Untold numbers of Afghan antiquities, many from pre-Islamic periods, entered the global market during this period, most with false provenances.

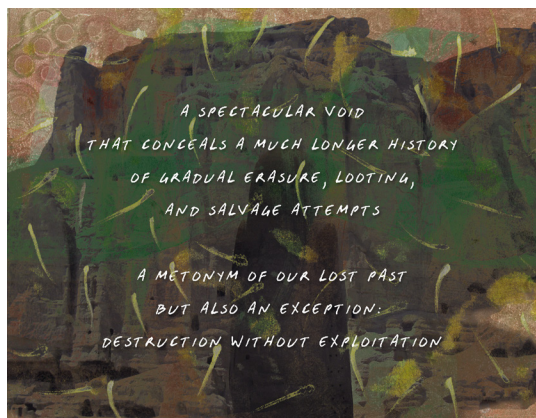
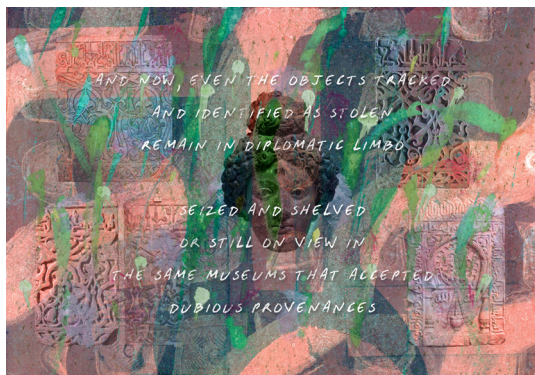
As the civil war between the mujahidin wreaked havoc in 1991–93 and the Taliban consolidated their power in 1993–95, antiquities trafficking was replaced by wholesale destruction of pre-Islamic relics and sites. Most famously, the contents of the archeological museum in Kabul were looted or shattered during the civil war (after which the remaining shards were preserved by the museum staff for later reconstruction) and the last standing colossal Buddha of Bamyan was brought down by targeted explosives as an act of spectacular, deliberate iconoclasm once the Taliban regime was firmly installed.

The Afghan Republic constituted after the U.S. invasion and emergency Loya Jirga in 2001 reinstated pre-1979 laws and signed onto international treaties related to art and antiquities trafficking, after which some substantial efforts were made to trace and return objects trafficked during the 1980s and 1990s. Since the fall of the Republic and the return of the Taliban, these objects can be identified or seized but not returned, because the Taliban government is not recognized or trusted by the international bodies



Dismembered (Khalili + IL), 2026

Limbo
(GhazniPanels+MetBuddha),
2026



Spectacular (Bamyan), 2026

Removed (Red list). 2026



administering repatriation, and it is strongly suspected that looting of archeological sites has actually resumed under their watch. Ironically, precious objects easily leave Afghanistan and allegedly cannot return, while Afghan refugees meet tremendous friction when trying to pass the same barriers to entry, but have been informed that their country is now “safe” enough that they can be denied protected status and deported back to the place they fled.

The images in “Removed” are from the ICOM Red List of Afghan objects at risk, which specifies that all images are included merely as representative of types of objects frequently trafficked, not as specific objects known to have been trafficked. The images in “Limbo” include items known to be trafficked but not returned, including panels from the palace of Mas’ud III in Ghazni from the collections of museums across the world, which are all thought to have been looted from the Kabul Museum during the Afghan Civil War, and a Gandhara-era Buddha from Hadda held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was stolen from the Afghan Institute of Archeology. The documents in “Dismembered” are Judeo-Persian from the so-called “Afghan Genizah” found in northern Afghanistan and held in the Israeli National Library, subsequently digitized for their online platform Ktiv; and the Khalili Collection of Alexandrian-era Aramaic manuscripts from Balkh, currently platformed through Google Arts & Culture. “Spectacular” features a view of the cliff niche where the colossal Buddhas of Bamyan once stood, surrounded by hundreds of smaller caves that also once featured Buddhist frescos and sculptures.

L.N. Tallur

Interference, 2019

4K UHD video

Duration: 5 minutes (loop)

L.N. TALLUR



Interference (2019) is a slow-motion video that captures the manual cleaning of a rug originally installed in a palace in Junagadh, Gujarat. The ornate textile, with its geometric floral pattern, was produced in the late 1800s by inmates imprisoned for their role as freedom fighters during the struggle against colonial Great Britain.

As the rug is beaten, a surprising amount of dust is released, forming dense, smoke-like plumes that engulf the laborers and the artifact itself. The work alludes to the sediment of time and the release of what lies embedded beneath dominant historical narratives.



The sound is slightly out of sync with the action, creating an echoing effect reminiscent of distant mortar fire. The billowing dust clouds evoke images of cities under aerial bombardment, drawing associations with contemporary conflict zones such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. The act of cleaning becomes entangled with ideas of violence, erasure, and the unstable nature of memory.

The work was developed in partnership with the Junagadh Museum, Gujarat. Special thanks to Junagadh Museum; Varia Kiran, Vandita Jain and Bhanu Pratap Singh.

Roshan Mishra

Disappearing and Devatās and fading Faith (I), 2026

Śiva.Pārvatī,

Material: Eching on fibre glass, stone

49 x 44cm

Photo: Tapahiti Patan

Print on French cartridge

Work relates with the 12/13th century Śiva Pārvatī, currently on display at British Museum

Original location: Thapahiti Water Spout, Patan

Stolen in the Late 1960s

ROSHAN MISHRA



The body of artwork reflects the loss of Devatās, not only from physical spaces, but also from memory, ritual, and the everyday life of neighborhood and communities. The transparent image of the Devata is intentional. It represents the invisible presence of removed sacred Devatās from the community that were once at the part of daily worship.

Today, many are scattered across museums and private collections around the world. Their transparency symbolizes what has been lost and its existence in the community's memory. The bond between people, place, and their lost Devatās still lives within the community in an invisible manner. But that connection is becoming increasingly fragile now. As cities are urbanized and the traditional ways of life has changed, there is a growing fear that these memories, beliefs, and the connection may one day fade or be forgotten altogether.

This work urges Western museums, auction houses, and private collectors to acknowledge and rectify the historical injustices, which led to the displacement of these sacred Devatās, as their true meaning comes from the communities, rituals, and landscapes to which they belong. The work emphasizes the need to reconnect the tangible with the intangible so that living cultural traditions can get continuity. Keeping the sacred beings far from their original homes carries ethical, moral, and decolonial responsibilities that cannot be ignored by museums, auction houses, and private collectors.

Roshan Mishra

Disappearing Devatās and fading Faith (II), 2026

Standing Buddha

Material: Etching on fibre glass, stone

98 x 37cm

Photo: Deopatan- Chabahil, Kathmandu

Print on French cartridge

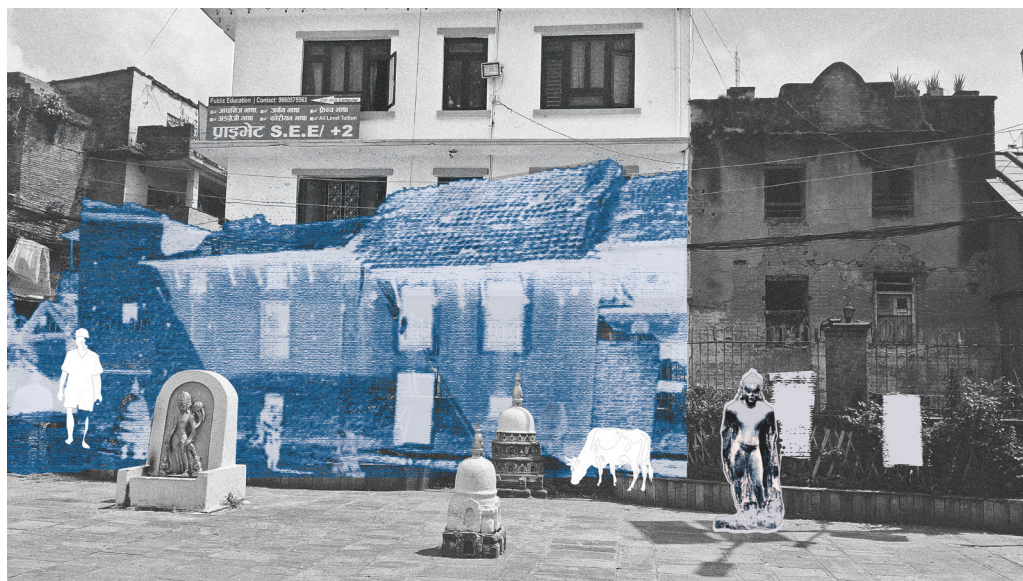
Work relates with the 5th century Standing Buddha.

Current location is unknown

Stolen in the Late 1985

As the area has become increasingly urbanized, the living traditions and devotional practices surrounding this Buddha are gradually fading.

ROSHAN MISHRA



Threads of Faith

Taleju Bhawani's Necklace- I
168 inch x 28 inch
Hand Woven Jacquard Weaving
2023

Ganesh
28 inch x 38 inch
Hand Woven Jacquard Weaving
2023

Taleju Bhawani's Necklace - II
40 inch x 28 inch
Hand Woven Jacquard Weaving
2023

Bishnu and Garudh
28 inch x 28 inch
28 inch x 40 inch
Hand Woven Jacquard Weaving
2024

Vishnu and Garudh
46 inch x 28 inch
Hand Woven Jacquard Weaving
2024

BISHAL MANANDHAR

Faith is more than belief. It is a living relationship between people, place, and the sacred.

When gods and goddesses are removed from their temples and displayed as artworks in museums, auction houses, or private collections, they are separated from the communities that give them meaning. In the name of preservation, sacred objects are transformed into aesthetic objects, stripped of the rituals, relationships, and cultural practices that once sustained them.

Religious idols, ceremonial jewelry, textiles, and ritual objects were never created simply to be viewed. They were made to be worshipped, touched, adorned, and cared for. They belong in spaces where offerings are made, tika is applied, prayers are spoken, and blessings are shared. Exposure to sunlight and rain cannot be prevented but is part of their intended life.

These objects do not derive their significance from their material form alone. Their meaning lives in daily acts of devotion and in the communities that continue to care for them. Removed from that context, they become disconnected from the purpose for which they were created. For those who worship them, this is not only the displacement of cultural heritage—it is the disruption of a living faith.





In this series of Jacquard weavings, I depict several sacred artifacts that were on display at the Art Institute of Chicago last year. They have since been removed from public view, and I hope their absence reflects a process of repatriation. By translating these museum-held objects into woven textiles, I invite viewers to consider the histories of displacement they embody and the possibility of return. The work reflects not only the beauty of these artifacts but also broader questions of cultural stewardship, living religious practice, and the restoration of sacred objects to the communities that continue to give them life.

Tara's Lament: Where is home if all homes are colonial? 2025

Acrylic and collage on canvas, 10-piece work, each 50x50CM

JAGATH WEERASINGHE

I am Tara.
Beloved mother of my daughters
and sons worshiped in reverence.
Centuries passed, my feet
caressing the golden soil of my
land.

One day, as if an unforeseen
thunder, striking before torrent
rain
I was awakened from my reverie
By the anguished whispers of my
children.
They whispered in fear.
"We hear voices, the white men
have come
from a faraway land.
They will burn what they don't
understand
and loot what is not theirs."

I smiled- not because I didn't
fear,
but because I knew what was
coming
And what must be done.
Living on an island of abundance
An island that allured centuries
of strangers
I have remained in the fearful
anticipation
Of these ever-present perils of
conquest.

'Bury me in my forest,' I said.
Let me hide beneath my golden
soil.

When the storm passes, dig me
up, and I shall return to you'.

For over two hundred years,
I slept beneath the soil
beneath the leaves in my
beloved forest,
remembering the chants of my
children.
in anticipation of the day of
awakening.
The memory of their fire offerings
kept me warm
through centuries of darkness.
For centuries, my children
remembered where I was
buried—in stories.
I awaited.

Then one day I heard voices and
I heard their hesitant footsteps.
My children came, yes— they
came
But followed by the command of
white men.
Who had deciphered the stories
and the legends.
they pointed to where to dig.
And when they found me, they
didn't chant.
They wrapped me in silence and
shipped me across the sea.

The skies changed
The language changed
Brought to the land of the white
men.

I was placed not in a shrine,
but in a box of glass, in cold
judgment.
For them, I was an object of
'obscenity'.

So, I was locked away in a dark
room.
Secretum, they called it.
In a mansion with tall columns, It
is our museum—they said
a glorified store built for their
spoils of conquest.

And then they did to me
what they had already done to
my children.
They measured me; my limbs,
my breasts, and the curve of my
hip. They weighed me like I was
gold to be priced.
They scraped my skin and took
pieces from my body
Samples, they said—to test my
origin,
As if I did not already speak the
tongue of my land,
As if the centuries of love and
devotion were not proof enough.

They called it knowledge,
It was the halitus of empire, evil
and toxic.
Over a century I spent in their
cold Secretum—
not preserved, but segregated.
Not revered but indexed.

Years passed.
Once again, I heard the voices of
my children.
'Send her back!' they cried.
'Return what was stolen!'
In the name
Of repatriation
Of justice.

Of heritage.

And I ask, one day,
if I fly back to my land—
The Lanka I knew
will you take me to my forest? To
my temple?
Will I feel again the fragrance of
frangipani, the rustle of prayer
cloths,
the warmth of barefoot
reverence?

Or will you bring me to another
mausoleum
where time stands still
A building whose foundations
were poured
by the same hands that once
colonized my land and my
children?
Will you place me again on a
pedestal beneath fluorescent
skies
imprisoned within glass walls
empty of devotion?

Will you measure me anew?
Catalogue me with new words
More polite, perhaps
But still estranged and left in cold
silence?
Will I become a national
treasure?
Displayed in a hall built from
conquer's dust and the
fractured pride of a state,
A state that estranged my
children from each other?

Tell me:
In this forged menagerie called
the Museum,
who will speak to me?
Who will bow, not with curiosity,
but with love?

Do my children still know my
name?
Or has it become a footnote in
a heritage guide, spoken only
when the tourists come?

Do their hands still fold in
prayer—
or only their fingers click for
selfies?

If this is repatriation,
why does it feel like another
exile?

Why can't I be not an object of
history—
but a mother reclaimed?



Bishal Manandhar

Bishal Manandhar is a multidisciplinary American-Nepali visual artist whose work examines the beauty and potential of overlooked, discarded, and voiceless objects. Using materials often considered waste, he creates works that challenge patterns of consumption and encourage viewers to reconsider the value of everyday materials.

His practice also focuses on culturally significant artifacts that have been looted or displaced and are now housed in Western museums. Through weaving and material-based processes, Manandhar reimagines these objects as living carriers of history and identity, advocating for their cultural and spiritual reconnection to their places of origin.

Living in Chicago as a Nepali immigrant, Manandhar draws from his upbringing in Nepal, where limited resources encouraged reuse and care for objects. This perspective continues to shape his work, which restores meaning and presence to discarded materials and displaced artifacts.

Divya Mehra

Divya Mehra (b. 1981, Winnipeg) is known for her meticulous attention to the interaction of form, medium, and site. Her works are a reminder of the complex realities of displacement, loss, and oppression. Mehra's work has been exhibited, screened, and commissioned by Frieze Sculpture, Los Angeles; Creative Time, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; Queens Museum of Art, New York; MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco; Nuit Blanche, Toronto; and the Embassy of Canada in Washington, D.C. She has been featured in publications such as the New York Times, Times of India, ArtAsiaPacific, Hyperallergic, The Globe and Mail, and The Washington Post. Mehra's work is in numerous public collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Global Affairs Canada; and the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina. She is the recipient of the 2022 Sobey Art Award. Mehra lives and works in Seattle.

Jagath Weerasinghe

Jagath Weerasinghe is one of South Asia's most influential contemporary artists, archaeologists, and cultural theorists. A pioneering figure in the development of Sri Lankan contemporary art, he coined the term "90s Art Trend" to describe a generation of politically engaged artists responding to the social, cultural, and ideological upheavals of the late twentieth century. His multidisciplinary practice spans painting, installation, drawing, writing, and public memorials, exploring themes of memory, violence, spirituality, history, and postcolonial identity.

As a founding member of the Theertha International Artists' Collective, Weerasinghe has played a pivotal role in advancing experimental contemporary art and nurturing emerging artistic practices in Sri Lanka. His work has been exhibited internationally at major platforms including the , Singapore Biennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and the Asia-Pacific Triennial. In the late 1990s, he was commissioned by the Sri Lankan government to create Shrine for the Innocent, a national memorial dedicated to victims of political violence, to name a few. He served as Professor at the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, where his research focused on art history, archaeology, heritage preservation, and cultural memory.

Mithu Sen

Mithu Sen is a conceptual artist who explores myths of identity, and their intersection with the structures of our world, whether social, political, economic, or emotional and performs her work across mediums to explore hierarchies and conventions with particular reference to 'myths' of language, sexuality, market, and marginalisation. Braiding grotesque fiction, personal ephemera, and piercing humour to obscure societal codes, the by-products of her conceptual practice take the forms of drawings, poems, performances, videos, glitches, and instructional interventions.

Sen works fundamentally as a performer, tangling with the politics of language, disciplining of bodies, conventions of society, and polite impositions of the art world. Known for her provocative, alluring, and playful examination of these hierarchies, Sen is committed to perpetual unbecoming through performative interventions, symbolic and linguistic counter-narratives and intricate territorial tracings.

Sen has exhibited and performed in major international forums including Sharjah Biennale 15, APT9-9th Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane; Guggenheim Museum, New York (2016); Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan, USA; Kochi-Muziris Biennale; Dhaka Art Summit; Tate Modern Project Space, London and a major survey show at ACCA, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne in 2023 among many other forums and institutions.

She was awarded the Skoda Prize in 2010 and the Prudential Eye Award for Contemporary Asian Art – Drawing in 2015.

Raqs Media Collective

Raqs Media Collective was formed in 1992 in Delhi, India by Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. The word 'raqs' in several languages denotes an intensification of awareness and presence attained by whirling, turning, being in a state of revolution. Raqs Media Collective take this sense to mean 'kinetic contemplation', and a restless entanglement with the world, and with time. Raqs enlists objects such as an early-modern tiger-automata from Southern India, or a biscuit from the Paris Commune, or a cup salvaged from an ancient Mediterranean shipwreck, to turn them into devices to sniff and taste time. Devices unfold thus in order to undertake historical subterfuge, and philosophical query. Raqs practices across several media, making installation, sculpture, video, performance, text, lexica and curation. In 2000, they co-founded the Sarai program at CSDS, New Delhi and ran it for a decade, where they innovated on infrastructural conditions of practices and knowledge production, and also edited the nine-volume Sarai Reader series.

Reetu Sattar

Reetu Sattar is a performance artist and filmmaker who works with theatre, video and text to explore themes of collective memories, missing histories and personal objectives. Her exhibitions and performances have been showcased in Rotterdam, Sydney, Liverpool, Tokyo, London, Paris and Singapore. Based in Dhaka, she is a member of the arts collective Britto Arts Trust. The short film *Harano sur/Lost Tune* (2019), documenting a performance that took place at Dhaka Art Summit in 2018, had its world premiere at IFFR. She returns with the film *Shabnam*, selected for IFFR 2023. She has shown Istanbul, Sharjah, Jogia, and Liverpool Biennial, British textile Biennial as well as venues including the British Film Institute, London; Alserkal Avenue, Ishara Art Foundation, Dubai; Artspace, Sydney; Palais de Tokyo, Paris and NTU CCA Singapore. Her performances have been staged internationally at venues in London, Birmingham, Bangkok and India to name a few.

Roshan Mishra

Roshan Mishra is an artist, curator, and museum professional from Nepal, based out of Kathmandu. His work as an artist is largely centered on abstract painting and sculptural installation. Through abstraction, he tries to explore the connections that exist between human, objects, nature, and the universe. His geometric compositions explore themes of space, energy, and infinity, which allows viewers to contemplate relationships beyond the visible.

In his sculptural installations, Mishra works with readymade objects and forgotten materials, transforming them into works that evoke memory, his own poetry, history, and cultural aspects. By recontextualizing such objects, his practice intends to reveal the hidden stories they carry and explores the relationship between materiality, memory, place and culture.

Shaurya Kumar

A native of Delhi, India where he studied printmaking and painting at the College of Art; Shaurya Kumar graduated with his MFA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2007. Since 2001, His works have been installed at venues including the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum; Gallery Odyssey, Mumbai; Sundaram Tagore gallery, NYC; Queens Museum, NYC; Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul; Lakeeren Gallery, Mumbai; Artifact Gallery, NYC; LACDA, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Georgia; Schneider Museum of Art, Oregon; Charleston Heights Art Center. Shaurya Kumar currently lives and works in Chicago, IL. He is a Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is also serving as the Chair of Faculty and the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Academic Affairs.

Temsüyanger Longkumer

Temsüyanger Longkumer (b. 1976, Lapa, India) is an interdisciplinary artist based in London. An alumnus of the Govt. College of Art and Crafts, Guwahati, Assam (BFA, 1998), the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MVA, Printmaking, 2000), and the Royal College of Art, United Kingdom (MA, Printmaking, 2003), he explores a variety of mediums and traditions including drawing, installations, printmaking, sculpture, and time-based art, within his practice. His work delves into contemporary cultural and political flux, and serendipitously conceived ideas. Longkumer's thematic fluidity across diverse materials reflects his joy in exploration and his approach to 'making the moment'. Temsü's work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale (2023), Kochi Biennale (2018), and Singapore Biennale (2019) and hosted by notable institutions including the Museum der Kulturen in Switzerland, the India International Centre in New Delhi, Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, and the Horniman Museum in London, where one of his sculptures resides in their permanent collection. He has also undertaken residencies at esteemed institutions, including the Fondazione Pistoletto in Italy, Lalit Kala Akademi in India, Pepperton UK in London, Cite International Des Arts in Paris, and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge.



The Saraf Foundation is a non-profit organisation, based in India & Nepal, rooted in three generations of commitment to the Himalayan region. Founded to preserve, document and activate the cultural, architectural and natural heritage of Nepal and the Greater Himalayas, it now operates under two integrated strategic verticals: HERITAGE and NEXT.

Established in 2016 by cultural patrons Arun Saraf and Namita Saraf, the foundation works at the intersection of heritage preservation, contemporary art, architecture, creative learning, and community engagement.

www.thesaraffoundation.org

Our Initiatives

NAA

The Nepal Architecture Archive (NAA) is a dedicated space for the study, preservation, and interpretation of Nepal's architectural and urban heritage. Rooted in the belief that built heritage tell social, cultural, and political stories, the Archive brings together drawings, photographs, maps, oral histories, and field documentation to create an evolving record of the country's-built environment.

www.nepalarchitecturearchive.com

TARAGAON next



Taragaon Next is Kathmandu's first contemporary space dedicated to built heritage, urban planning, culture, and the arts. The story of the rapidly industrializing city of Kathmandu unravels inside our modernist and modular brick structures.

www.taragaonnext.com

Sagarmatha next



Sagarmatha Next is a place to explore, experiment and push the boundaries around global topics of sustainability, climate change, and natural resources. You can use our space to reach out to the world through your art.

www.sagarmathanext.com