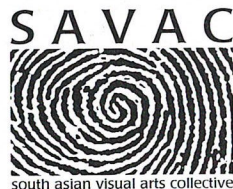




Baum Gallery of Fine Art, McCastlain Hall, University of Central Arkansas,
101 McAlister, Conway, AR, 72035, USA / T 501 450 5793
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Hours: Mon.-Sat.: 10am - 4pm, Tues.: until 8pm

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SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Collective)
401 Richmond St. W., Suite 450
Toronto, ON, M5V 3A8, Canada
T 416 340 1452 / F 416 340 1418
desh@ican.net (Attn. SAVAC)

Contemporary Art and Identity: South Asian Diaspora in North America ◦ Neena Arora ◦ Sylvat Aziz ◦ Shelly Bahl ◦ Rina Banerjee ◦ Kiren Budhia ◦ Allan deSouza ◦ Ameen Gill ◦ Nikolas Groot ◦ Alia Hassan- Khan ◦ Annu P. Matthew ◦ Tamara Zeta Sanowar- Makhan

Baum Gallery of Fine Art / University of Central Arkansas
August 22 - September 28, 2000
Presented in collaboration with SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Collective)

SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Collective) was founded in 1993 by a group of artists in Toronto, Canada. SAVAC was created to facilitate the production, presentation, and distribution of Diasporic South Asian contemporary art. Since then, SAVAC has become a collective with year-round programming, including exhibitions, artist talks and skills-building workshops. SAVAC continues to develop a network of alliances, nationally and internationally, and this exhibition will be the collective's first project in the United States. ○ *Contemporary Art and Identity: South Asian Diaspora in North America* brings together eleven visual artists from Canada and the USA who have exhibited with SAVAC and the Desh Pardesh Festival/Conference in Toronto. As a historical survey of the 7-year exhibition history of SAVAC, the project aims to highlight some of the diverse practices being explored by South Asian artists in the Diaspora. Focusing on the range and variety of visual expressions that are being produced by these artists at the turn of the century, this is not a thematic or media-specific exhibition. Many shared concerns and formal relationships do exist in the works of the participating artists, but the exhibition also highlights the disparity that can arise out of cultural and geographic specificity. The works resist the homogenizing tendencies of the dominant South Asian identity, and hopefully, facilitate a rich and textured reading of the contemporary views of the artists. ○ Rashmi Varma / SAVAC Steering Committee

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The South Asian-North American Artist's Dilemma ○ The discursive history of North American - South Asian art is one of stereotyping and disparity. Shaped by multiple, overlapping, and usually hierarchic, notions that impose Western modernism and contemporary art as the framing and defining systems upon which to conceptualize South Asian art, the visual arts discourse is burdened by either having to explain how South Asian art constitutes itself as Western equivalent or by apologists explaining South Asia's uniqueness. If unique, then 'Indianness' and tradition becomes the focus; if modern/contemporary then the insidious, and at this point truly banal, Western analogies frame artistic polemics. Usually it is not a clear either/or situation, and some combination of alternating views coalesce. How to remove the 'West,' — by that I mean, how to deflate or even neutralize the term 'West' as a dominant value — to see non-Western art? How to remove ethnicity and authenticity as value criteria? As agency replaces dated essentializing of geography and locality, peoples and cultures, arts and styles, discourse opens and how things (art) change, or what Homi Bhabha refers to as the "inbetween" space, emerges.¹ ○ During the past few decades contemporary South Asian art has been highlighted in numerous international and prestigious forums. Those concerned with the art market will be quick to remind us of the successful Sotheby and Christie's auctions of Indian modern/contemporary art, or of the prolific spread of exclusive galleries of late. In North America, a pivotal exhibition at the Asia Society, "Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions" during 1996 thundered onto the New York art scene (and onto Vancouver, B.C.), and for some critical viewers it became apparent that art is elsewhere too.² ○ While many critics in the West remain contentedly oblivious to these elsewheres, globalization is collapsing the cultural central/peripheral spaces. Now unencumbered by fixity of place, creativity and visual culture rapidly transmits and metamorphoses. In North America, vital and productive South Asian Diaspora artists are making bold visuals addressing hybridity. Diasporic art is a sticky subject, but one I think needing greater attention.³ Those living in Diaspora, do they retain their Indianness? Does one lose Indianness after a certain time lapse, or after a generation abroad? This, of course, is essentialized thinking and misses the point. ○ It is the debunking of ethnic/religious/gender/sexual stereotypes, with all their ugly prejudices, or romanticized ideals, which artists in this exhibition address. Hybrid identities and one's self examination is a personal matter, and topic of art universally; subject is self. Artists in this exhibition explore their personal journey in our globalized, hybridized 21st century. It is within the rupture of newness, or 'in-between' places, and the dialectics of global and localized that we can view this contemporary art. ○ Dr. Andrew L. Cohen / Department of Art, University of Central Arkansas.

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1. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Power* (London: Routledge, 1994). 2. Apinan Poshyananda, et al, *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (New York: Asia Society, 1996). 3. See Jane Farver, et al, *Out of India: Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1997).

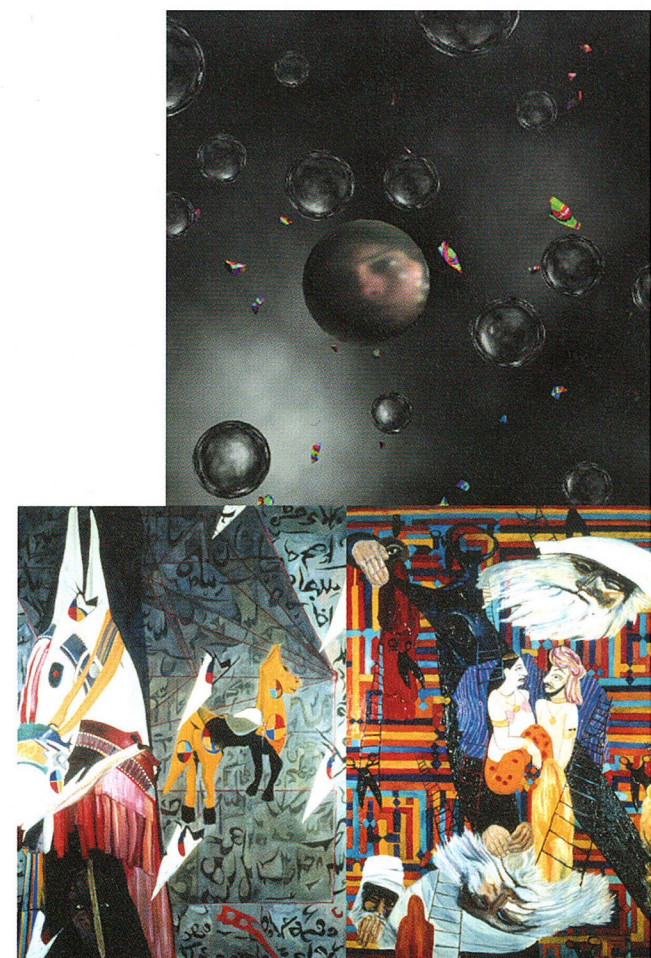
Neena Arora The digital images in *Dangled-Up* are hybrids: my face and body placed into unreal environments. I have placed myself into an atmospheric space, portraying a dream-like/hovering sensation. This space is artificial. ○ These images relate to my identity, and living in North America in a constantly changing urban environment. I am of mixed heritage and have identified with both 'sides' (South Asian and Irish American - raised in Canada). I feel displaced but a security exists within this. A floating in-between feeling. I refer to 'popular culture' in my work, as North America is always in the process of creating itself. Within this culture are many individuals who are linking directly to strong traditions and cultures of 'other places'. This displacement that we face, requires re-inventing, re-creating and at times artifice. ○ In the end I want these to be strange yet beautiful illusions. They are somewhat surreal.

Sylvat Aziz These paintings refer to issues of space in an Islamic context; political and domestic, public and private. As well, they examine strategies of dominance and control of these spaces and interpret the games of existence between the male and female domains where relative strengths, though clearly ascribed, continually shift. Technically and materially the paintings are within the Western European tradition but the pictorial and ornamental references, particularly the symbolic imagery, are often of Muslim Arabic classicism. The inclusion of original photographic material results in a layered field of information meant to explore what is, and isn't, without expressing a judgment. ○ The images are coupled and superimposed; compared with the stuff of myth, religious allegory and folk story and meant to provoke a flow of information driven by an eccentric time machine. This in turn reflects a venerable culture's sense of ease regarding time; a culture so often changed through political maneuvering, religious upheaval, economic crises and military exigencies that the idea of a socio-cultural continuum can be based only on accommodation, flexibility and, finally, absorption. As on a carousel, outward perspectives change but are experienced slower from the hub; the perception of these changes depend on the rider's position.

Shelly Bahl Within my art practice I have been exploring the history and exoticification of Indian art and culture. My work plays with and questions the practices of Orientalism, kitsch appropriation and the mass-production of culturally specific imagery. I have been deconstructing and re-contextualizing elements from a variety of historical periods and artistic movements. I have used images of women from Hindu temple sculptures and Mughul miniature paintings out of context to question notions of authenticity, as well as to give the original artworks new meanings through technical manipulations. ○ The installation *Take-Away* (2000) aims to create a small domestic environment within the art institution, that plays with notions of home décor, exotic motifs and cultural appropriation. In the work, I bring together

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Neena Arora
Dangled-Up, 2000
Digital print
11.5" x 17"

Sylvat Aziz
Maqamaat: Carousel, 1999
Oil, pigment, dye on cotton duct
Diptych 84" x 136"

Shelly Bahl
Take-Away, 2000 (detail)
Ink on wallpaper, wood,
glass, and ink on paper
105" x 102.5" x 16"



mass-produced household items and South Asian cultural imagery. This installation explores the current public fascination with *Indian Chic* in fashion and popular culture, as well as the glorification of ethnic consumerism/ consumption. I am interested in the contemporary transmission of visual culture, and the means through which culturally specific images are appropriated in the public realm. ○ The wallpaper in the installation is over-printed with cliché South Asian motifs, and the gallery visitors are encouraged to participate in the consumption of these motifs by taking away printed napkins displayed on a tea table.

Rina Banerjee *What is the "nature of illness"?* In a time where the electronic age has dissolved boundaries created by nations, the private transgresses the public in an altered state of aggression. An examination of mobility manifested reaches the most intimate of places to expose the never still self. Migration in complete contradiction to the act is displacement, exile and associated with punishment and discipline, at least on a mythological level. Migration associated with disease has evolved parallel dialogues that attempt to disseminate control over the foreign body. A compulsive act of separation is entertained both in order to concretely preserve and illuminate the past. Identity politics in the discussion of displacement struggles to normalize hybridity into a "healthier" more familiar place of rest. ○ Colonial medicine confronted with the vast array of different people and place upon conquest and occupation furthered its capitalistic venture. We have inherited from Colonial medicine. The notion of "other" as a resistant and unhealthy unit, which needed ready assimilation legitimizing the most aggressive methods, was a phenomena that predates contemporary global imperialism. These pieces enact the three spaces of interrogation: Marriage, Sexuality and the Intellect.

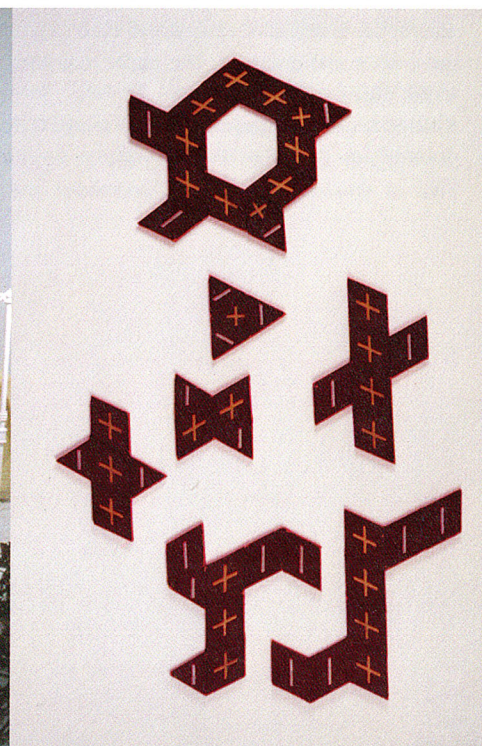
Kiren Budhia The aim of this work is to link physics and spiritual experiences, for both, solid matter is made up of vibrating subatomic particles. The theory of unfolding geometric solid forms is used in physics to understand the bonding of subatomic particles. The practice of the eight fold noble path in Buddhism provides us with a way to observe our physical body as a subtle entity then sensations. ○ I have chosen the unfolding structures of molecular solid forms to represent the functioning of the subatomic particles. Color and signs are used to portray the perpetual state of change of the subatomic particles. The color red in translucent wax emphasizes flow and the mathematical symbols for addition and subtraction are used as references to electricity. ○ To introduce the notion of non-audible vibrational properties of subatomic particles, I have applied a listening technique. This technique is based on the principle of raga in Indian classical music. Pitch in the Indian musical system, not being absolute, can be used to describe any aspect of Reality. The combinations of notes are arranged in scales, in an aesthetic way and are given certain names. These scales have their own mood therefore they are characterized with emotions, which may vary according to time

Rina Banerjee
Resisting Rest, 1999
 Foam, incense sticks,
 dry pigment, coiled chiffon,
 wrought iron bed

Kiren Budhia
Unfolding Solids, 2000
 wax on canvas
 36" x 84"

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and season. There are seven basic scales, which I have juxtaposed with the subatomic particles by giving the latter names used for Indian musical notes.

Allan deSouza My work has mainly used the racialized and sexualized body as a template, partly to consider colonial relationships in their myriad configurations of exploration, discovery, desire and fear. In the last five years I have been mostly working in photo series, photographing public architectural spaces and landscapes, creating narratives about migration, return, nostalgia, and yearning. While suggesting autobiography, the work also uses strategies of fiction, masquerade and elusiveness in order to refute readings of authenticity. ○ The *Terrain* series consists of fabricated, table-top landscape models that have then been photographed. They transpose particular landscapes that I have visited, and experienced partly through their association with nationalist discourses, such as the South West deserts evoking mythologies of the frontier. They also refer obliquely to nineteenth-century American painters such as Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church whose landscapes celebrated the sublime and the idyllic, as well as the patriotic, the masculine and expansionist. The *Terrains* re-site landscape as a national(ist) projection of the racialized, gendered body, partly by their fabrication from – among other materials – bodily detritus such as hair, eyelashes and ear wax.

Ameen Gill My current work is inspired by a trip I took to India in 1996. I was born and raised on the West Coast of Canada. This was my third trip to India, but this time I was going in search of answers. Who I was, where I was from and where I was going. ○ I quickly realized India is where my parents were from, and I am a Canadian of Indian heritage. My brother has traced our family tree back 6 generations. We are fortunate to have many well-preserved photos dating back to the 1920's and earlier. I want to find out as much as I can about our family history. I am fascinated by the stories about my ancestors. ○ In my artwork I have been exploring the format of artist's books (hand-printed and hand-bound). The format of the accordion-fold book lent itself naturally to the ideas I had of documenting my journey in India and my family tree. The story is told via a long running image made up of maps, photos, journal entries and drawings. The paper is printed on both sides and bound with handmade Indian paper and silk trims.

Nikolas Groot The ideas behind the triptych, *Half-Caste/Full-Caste* began to evolve several years ago as part of an ongoing research into the histories of colonized peoples and the politics of ethnicity. The artwork addresses the issues of a caste ideology imposed on

communities of mixed race in the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The title "Half-caste/Full-caste", is taken from the word half-caste, a derogatory term that evolved during the British Raj in India as a label for individuals of Eurasian decent (*Anglo-Indians* as they were eventually called). In creating this work, I tried to examine what significance ethnicity and caste identity played in molding the lives of children, in both past and present generations. How had the birth of negative caste ideologies bonded as well as separated communal associations? I examined my childhood, in juxtaposition with the lives of children from the Calcutta slum of Tiljallah, and the resulting cultural void that lies between. ○ Silk-screened writings and brief journal excerpts, in Bengali translation, form a sub-narrative in this series. The words are the autobiographical reflections of an Anglo-Indian boy, and although naturally ambiguous, they serve to contextualize the work culturally, while maintaining their own semiotic meaning. The viewer is likewise invited to reflect on his/her own evolution and historical identity.

Alia Hassan-Khan *Suitcase Story* is based on a series of New York Times articles I had been collecting over a period of a month. This was at the time of the Indian Airline hijacking when the U.S. State Department was considering putting Pakistan on its list of terrorist countries. *Suitcase Story* is an attempt to investigate the determining nature of these media representations. One's national identity; especially as a minority, is defined to the public by what appears in the news media. I am interested in investigating this role of the 'terrorist' and presenting a visual narrative that brings into question its textual counterpart. ○ There seems to exist a constant Third World 'threat' to global security. A paranoia of countries that seem unable to have any control over their extremist groups. The fictions created by media tactics serve to fuel and propagate this fear to the public. The possibility of a Third World country having enough sophisticated technology adds to the fear as they could probably start a nuclear war any minute; or their terrorist could make bombs out of anything — recycled garbage; and any place could be a potential site for the attack. In this project I am creating a fiction of this sort; where fragments of newspaper articles and images of the trajectory of a small red suitcase present possibilities and threats whose reality is contingent to the viewer's imagination.

Annu P. Matthew The portfolio, *Bollywood Satirized*, is a critical commentary (parody and satire) on the societal expectations that I experienced as a woman growing up in India. To create this work, I start with Indian movie posters, a



Allan deSouza
Terrain # 4, 1999
C-Print.
16" x 20"

Ameen Gill
The Mango Tree, 1999 (detail)
Book # 1
Lithograph/Artist book
7.75" x 14.5"

Nikolas Groot
Half Caste/Full Caste, 2000
(part 3 of 3)
Photograph on panel
and silk screen

reflection of the popular culture and the melodrama of Indian life. The visual and aural presence of cinema in India is the result of the largest commercial film industry in the world that produces close to one thousand movies a year. Most of the film industry is concentrated in Bombay, which is also called "Bollywood". Using digital technology to alter the posters, I re-interpret the images of Indian movie posters to make satirical social commentary based on my experiences. As Michelle Daniel of SAVAC wrote in 1999, "The posters are blatantly satirical; they humorously challenge traditional gender roles and behavior in Indian society." The final images include found images, text and self-portraits. The work explores issues such as the position of women in Indian society, the dowry system, arranged marriages, discrimination based on skin color and inter-racial relationships. This project was done with the support of The Visual Studies Workshops, Rochester, NY and the New York State Council of the Arts New Technology Grant and a fellowship/residency from the Anderson Ranch Arts Center.

Tamara Zeta Sanowar-Makhan *A Member of the Family* and *unLOVED STORY* are a commentary on a child's desire to kill one's abuser, and reference the danger imposed on children that accompanies the domestication of the gun as a family object. These issues are reflected in the work through what was my personal childhood perspective on the relationship between violence, guns and power. *unLOVED STORY* was created in response to two special reports in Ms. and Emerge magazines, which chronicled the desperate situation for women in prison in the US. The reports brought to attention problems with the judicial and correctional systems, especially around the issues of mandatory drug testing. *unLOVED STORY* is accompanied by resource materials and a quote from the activist Angela Davis: "To stand up for the rights of women in prisons is to challenge racism and poverty and to resist becoming an incarcerated society... the 'crime problem' can only be addressed ultimately by the eradication of poverty, by the eradication of circumstances that lead people to commit the kind of crimes for which most are sent to prison." (1998)



Alia Hassan-Khan
Suitcase Story, 2000 (detail #3)
 C-Print
 28" x 10"

Annu P. Matthew
Kala Patti, 2000
 Digital Print
 36" x 80"

Tamara Zeta Sanowar-Makhan
A Member of the Family, 2000
 Photograph in red box
 7" x 9" x 12,75"

Neena Arora has been creating installation works and performances since the time that she left Ontario College Of Art And Design in 1993. She has shown with SAVAC and other artist collectives in and around Toronto. Primarily her work references issues of identity and the body. Upcoming group exhibitions will be held at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and the Queens Public Library Gallery, New York. **Sylvat Aziz** holds Masters degrees in literature and in art. Her studies began in Lahore, Pakistan then on to Pratt Institute, New York, and Concordia University, Montreal. She has exhibited sculpture and painting at Venice; Istanbul; Bradford, England; New Delhi and Lahore, as well as many major public and university galleries in Canada. Her research is focused on problems of representation and the politics of space in early Islamic art and architecture and the influences, conflicts and compromises addressed therein. She currently teaches at Queen's University, Department of Art, Kingston, Ontario. **Shelly Bahl's** artistic practice is primarily in installation art, drawing/painting and video. She has a BFA from York University (1993) and an MA in Studio Art from New York University (1995), and has been exhibiting in North America for the past 9 years. She is currently participating in group exhibitions at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Ottawa), and in Toronto at the York Quay Gallery, Meg Gallery and A Space Gallery. Bahl is active in the Toronto arts community, and is currently a Curatorial Resident of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She was recently the recipient of a Shastri Indo-Canadian Senior Arts Fellowship, for an artist residency and exhibition in India. **Rina Banerjee** received her fine art training at Yale University where she acquired an MFA degree. Ms. Banerjee was a recipient of the Norfolk-Yale Drawing award and Skowhegan School of Painting scholarship. Ms. Banerjee has been an active educator in the areas of Cultural Studies and Women's Studies in the Visual Arts while teaching at Bucknell University, Penn State University and the University of Chicago. In addition, her work has been exhibited at the Bronx Museum of Art and the Queens Museum Art in New York City. In this year Ms. Banerjee has exhibited her work in the Whitney Biennial 2000, Brent Sikkema, Debs&Co. Presently she lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. **Kiren Budhia** was born in Ndola, Zambia, Africa of Hindu parents and presently lives and works in Montreal, Canada. His earlier sculptures in stone and metal explored the essence of material. Sculpture allowed him to experience "apprenticeship". Apprenticeship is not only a transfer of technique but also a "guru" system of understanding physical characteristics of all things including thoughts, feelings and perceptions. His frequent projects in India promoted a visual awareness that enable the exchange of sometimes conflicting ideas. One of these exchanges is painting. His present preoccupation is the practice of meditation and its ability to penetrate visual awareness. The mind in a state of awareness

is the predominant motivation of inspiration. **Allan deSouza** was born in Kenya and raised in England. He holds a BA (Hons) from Bath Academy of Art in England, an MFA in Photography from UCLA, and has participated in the Independent Study Program (Critical Studies) at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He has exhibited extensively in Britain and in the US, including The Photographers Gallery, London; the Whitney Museum, NY; Queens Museum, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Miami; as well as Galeria Mitra, Lisbon; Vancouver Art Gallery and at the Third Havana Biennale, Cuba. His fiction and critical writings have appeared in various journals and anthologies. **Ameen Gill** graduated from Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1989 in 2-D Studies. She has been concentrating on printmaking, and has been exhibiting her work regularly in Vancouver as well as in group exhibitions nationally and internationally. She was an active member of Malaspina Printmakers Society, serving on the Board, and in 1999 as the Vice President. In addition, she has been a guest artist at Langara College, Emily Carr Institute, and Burnaby Central High School. In 1998, she taught an Introduction to Printmaking class at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. Presently she is living in Seattle and working at Stone Press Editions, a collaborative lithography studio. **Nikolas Groot**, artist and photographer, was born and raised in Toronto, Canada to a European father and South-Asian mother. His work over the past few years has predominantly addressed universal notions of ethnicity and their impact on one's own sense of placement and origin. He draws on personal experiences as an individual of mixed origins, in both his artistic and social work. Groot is a graduate of the Dawson Institute of Photography in Montréal, Québec and the Ontario College of Art and Design. He has exhibited in Canada and Europe and his work can be viewed as a featured artist on the web (www.photography.ca). **Alia Hassan-Khan** completed her Bachelor's degree in Sculpture from the Indus Valley School of Art and

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Architecture in Karachi Pakistan (1994). In 1995, she came to the U.S. for an MFA at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. In 1998/99 she attended the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. She has been in several group shows in both Pakistan and North America, and is interested in maintaining her practice in both places as she is equally interested in their social politics. She will be participating in a group show in New York City in December and is currently working on a documentary about recent Pakistani immigrants in the Greater New York area. **Annu Palakunnathu Matthew** is a fine-art photographer and an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Rhode Island. Her varied cultural and educational experiences in Britain, India and now America influence her photography. Her metaphorical "personal" imagery has been nationally and internationally exhibited in Canada, India, Bangladesh, England and France. In the past 2 years, she has received the Pam Joseph artist-of-color fellowship for a residency at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, and has attended artist residencies at Light Work and at the Visual Studies Workshops. Her work has been published in Nueva Luz, The Photo Review, Exposure, Lenswork, Photo District News, Photographers International, Frontiers and Photo Metro. **Tamara Zeta Sanowar-Makhan** is a Canadian-born artist of Trinidadian heritage and diverse (Indian, African, Aboriginal, and European) ancestry. Since early childhood she has been strongly exposed to the arts through the creative influences of her artistic mother and maternal grandparents. The artist, a graduate of the University of Toronto, has completed studies in the areas of literature, science and fine arts. She has been actively involved in the Toronto arts community for the past ten years as an exhibiting artist, exhibition coordinator and art teacher. Her work, which has received national and international attention, primarily addresses issues of injustice such as racism, sexism and domestic violence.