

alienNATION

York Quay Gallery II, York Quay Centre
Harbourfront, Toronto, Canada

Friday August 17 8pm–11pm
Saturday August 18 noon–11pm
Sunday August 19 noon–6pm

Curator: Rachel Kalpana James

OPENING RECEPTION

Saturday August 18 4pm–6pm

ARTIST TALK

Sunday August 19 4pm–6pm

presented by **SAVAC**

SAVAC



south asian visual arts collective

SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Collective)
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MAGIC FEET
CANADA

SAVAC's latest show, alienNATION, showcases work by six established South Asian artists of diverse stories. The spectre of movement and travel and their implications record the journeys undertaken by South Asians of the diaspora. The artists of this show, in their use of figurative painting, collectively seek to document our stories of who we are, how we got here and the emotions that constitute our identities. Here, South Asian artists, by nature a disparate and varied grouping, uniquely tell multiple stories of alienation.

Using the body to tell a story is not new. Nor is the experience of dislocation and displacement. The tale of 'strangers in a strange land' is one that is oft told by artists whose roots (routes?) to North America are relatively recent in the annals of time. Sometimes the land isn't strange, but we are estranged. And so, tales of alienNATION can be told in as many ways as there are travelers/artists.

Asma Arshad Mahmood tells her stories through a nude female body/bodies. Hazy, unclear images of the female form fill the canvas. Light obscured and shadowy forms waft through her pieces. Asma's work is sensual without necessarily being sexual. Nude images of women in South Asia are still unusual enough to be noteworthy (often confined to erotic statues from yesteryear). But here, nakedness is natural without being sensational. Women are their most essential, stripped of all that is extraneous. This is who we all are - alone.

Dhruvi Acharya also uses the female form. Her work documents the tension between home (on the other side of the world) and home (the new one). At first glimpse, the pieces bring a smile to the viewer because they are 'cartoon-esque'. At first. As one looks more carefully, one begins to sense sadness, contradiction and darkness, the constant companions of her subjects. Her colors evoke another place, not here. Multiple layers comprise her pieces, the multiple layers that we all carry with us. Rounded images of womanhood are a joy, as we see ordinary women living regular unglamorous lives. They have bubble thoughts. Their insides are of flowers. They sit at computers and dream of other worlds.

Uday K. Dhar's self portraits from his "Doppelganger Series" speak for the Other. The Other that can be vilified and demonized is portrayed with a fierceness that is intense. Immigrant communities carry the knowledge that they are now the Other with them as they travel through their new lives in their new (or not so new for many of us) homelands. Dhar incarnates himself using Indian deities to portray demons, rakchashas, bhoots, resident aliens, foreigners, ghoulish creatures all, no? We could be and are these displaced souls. Invisible, omnipotent, ever present.

Shaan Syed presents a completely different perspective on the theme of alienation. The forces of globalization, celebrity (and lack thereof) are taken on in his "The Everyone I Know Series". It is an ambitious lifelong project that makes becoming immortalized a possibility for most of us who most likely will not have 15 minutes of fame. Syed uses memory to recreate everyone that he knows. There is a photographic quality to the series. And yet, where does art begin and reality

end? What is fiction and what is fact? How does the individual fit into a world that is getting smaller and yet more dislocating than ever? How does one retain one's sense of self in this new world order? As he says in his statement, "to live, and not somehow be validated or recognized is terrifying".

Moeen Faruqi tells tales of the City. He says, "I believe that people of the modern metropolis share a common alienation which comes of migration and exile, of being in unfamiliar surroundings, both physically and mentally". Men and women, in a darkened universe, share a canvas yet remain apart. His works are harshly painted and speak to estrangement and loss, love and death. The impact of exile marks the faces of his subjects. And every so often, we are afforded glimpses of brightness and sunny days but the weight of memory and displacement may be too much to overcome.

Chitra Ganesh uses history as inspiration to portray those who are marginalized and subjugated. Works on display are part of a series inspired by the life of Phoolan Devi - the so-called 'Bandit Queen' of India. Phoolan Devi was murdered July 2001, making these pieces all the more poignant. The paintings reflect the artist's interest in the intersections of violence, class and gender as well as her interest in how Bollywood and the mass media tell (mangle?) our stories. 'My paintings create a space for narratives excluded from history, re-imagining femininity and national identity.' One individual woman's oppression - as well as her resilience - forces the viewer to try to understand Phoolan Devi's world.

Each artist, through their display of a body of work, has used the human figure to evoke feelings of estrangement, loneliness, sadness, despair. We cannot forget that alienation comes with many faces. And so, in the end, what the viewer is left with is the universality of the human condition.

Vanita Varma, August 2001

SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Collective) is a Toronto-based non-profit arts organization committed to the development and exhibition of contemporary South Asian visual arts both locally and internationally.

Rachel Kalpana James is a visual artist and the Executive Director of SAVAC. She graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1993. Since graduation she has exhibited her photography, mixed media and installation work in Toronto, the United States and India. She has also curated visual art exhibitions, literary events, and multidisciplinary arts festivals.

Vanita Varma works at a local women's sexual and reproductive health clinic. She was one of the editors of Shakti Kee Awaaz: Voices of Strength, an anthology of writings and artwork by young South Asian and Indo-Caribbean women. She has been a volunteer with Desh Pardesh at several festival/conferences and presently on the Board of the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAP). South Asian art is one of her passions.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Dhruvi Acharya is a native of Mumbai (Bombay), India and currently resides in New York City. She began painting her memories of "home" soon after her arrival in the USA in 1995. Dhruvi received her MFA from the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore and actively exhibits in solo and group shows in the USA and India.

Uday K. Dhar was born in London, England and spent his childhood in Patna, India. In 1971 he immigrated with his family to the United States. Uday studied architecture at Columbia University, New York and worked as an architect. From 1991 to 1994 he lived in Berlin Germany and while there began to focus on painting. He had his first solo show at Gallery 7 Raben, Berlin. Since then, Uday has also exhibited in New York, Los Angeles and London.

Moeen Faruqi is an artist, poet and educator. His work has been exhibited widely including the Bangladesh Biennale, Indus Gallery, Pakistan National Exhibition, and Chawkandi Gallery.

Chitra Ganesh was born and raised in New York City, and is currently pursuing her MFA at Columbia University School of Art. She is a recipient of the College Art Association's Professional Development Fellowship Award, and recently completed a residency at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Her paintings have been shown in India, Brazil, and North America. Chitra also serves on the Board of Directors of SAWCC (South Asian Women's Creative Collective) and works as part of SLAAAP! (Sexually Liberated Asian Artist Activist People) in New York City.

Asma Arshad Mahmood was born in Lahore, Pakistan. She studied painting from Mansur and Hajra Rahi. After moving to Colombia, she trained as a ceramic and pottery artist and studied and worked with local artists. In 1991 she had her first painting exhibition in Bogota. In 1993 she became the Art Correspondent for the daily MUSLIM and had her first solo show in Pakistan. Asma worked with Raja Changez Sultan in 1996. Presently, she is a docent at the Art Gallery of Ontario and a board member of SAVAC. Asma has had more than fifteen international exhibitions to date.

Shaan Syed is having a difficult time coming to terms with his rapidly dwindling 20's. Fortunately he turns to painting to exorcise this anxiety. He has shown extensively in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa and has work in private collections around the world. In 1995 he co-founded "sense-art", the Montreal based arts production/promotion duo committed to the presentation of emotionally based and sense-provoking artwork. Syed has made numerous television and radio appearances in Montreal with sense-art. His work has been featured in Trade Int. Art Magazine, Lola, Xtra!, Ottawa's Capital Xtra!, Montreal's Volute, Hour and Mirror, and the San Francisco based Trikone Magazine. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design, Syed lives and works in Toronto and is currently represented by SPIN Gallery.



Moeen Faruqi
The End, 2000
Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 in



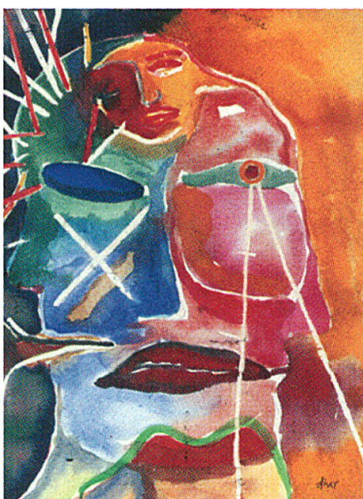
Chitra Ganesh
Bandit Queen Keeps a Secret, 1998
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36 in



Asma Arshad Mahmood
In Wake of Colin David, 2001
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in



Dhruvi Acharya
Goddess of Souls, 2000
Acrylic on panel, 5 x 5 in



Uday K. Dhar
Doppelganger Series, 1992
Mixed media on paper, 16 x 20 in



Shaan Syed
The Everyone I Know Series, 2000
Acrylic on canvas, 7 x 7.5 in