



**Rashmi Varma** is currently based in Toronto and works in multiple disciplines of design – interiors/architecture, fashion - and the visual arts. Her work explores the intersection points between the various art forms. She is on the Board of Directors of SAVAC and this is her first curatorial project with the collective.

**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.

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**GALLERY HOURS**  
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# REBIRTH OF SPACE

**Avantika Bawa**

**Cyrus Irani**

**Astra Howard**

CURATED BY  
**Rashmi Varma**

PRESENTED BY  
**SAVAC**

**April 4 – 27, 2002**

OPENING RECEPTION  
Thursday, April 4, 2002  
7 – 10 pm



With the globalization of capital, culture, and populations, and the accelerating pace of everyday life, the spaces that surround us have become increasingly homogenized and remote. Space, like virtually everything else, has become commodified, such that the experience of space – be it a new restaurant, the latest club or café, and especially travel – an orienting theme for one of the artists in this show – becomes another indulgence in consumption.

Rather than going down the congested highway of consumption, the three artists in this remarkable show, Avantika Bawa, Cyrus Irani, and Astra Howard, suggest approaches to inhabit and/or inscribe space – which, in very differing ways, combine feelings of immediacy and intimacy. Hence, the ‘rebirth’ of space, more than pointing to how spaces have become absorbed into consuming practices, may be precisely the desire for an intimate connection with one’s environment, and ultimately, a less alienated everyday life.

For this show, Bawa will travel to Toronto to create a site-specific installation. This suggests the malleability of her creations as well as a desire to respond to space, curiously, and playfully, as if it were a found treasure. On top of the sheer physicality of a wall of bricks, Bawa proposes to place a white, cardboard box, upon which she will painstakingly draw figures. On the level of detail, the drawing on the box has the ability to draw the viewer in to take note of a seemingly banal pile of bricks. At the level of form, Bawa deploys her interest in Minimalism, engaging in a formalist aesthetic of simplicity and essence that is effective in making the massiveness of the bricks and their latent energy palpable.

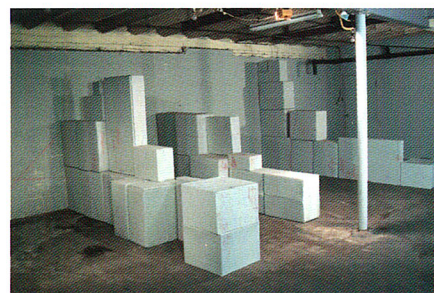
This layered process of ‘birthing space’ involves the repeated focusing of attention, thus mimicking the function of the camera. It also describes the image making process of Irani. Irani finds travel brochures that feature cruises, cuts out pictures of the ships, makes models of their interior spaces, and then photographs them. Cruise ships allow travelers to penetrate ‘exotic’ places, but detachedly and quickly, without intimacy. Irani’s fragile representations of massive cruise ships ask us to examine and reappraise their logic, flipping their role as a travel facilitator, to one that functions as a barrier to other places and peoples.

Bawa and Irani, respectively, use drawing and model making in order to create the sense of a delicate closeness to a larger object. Howard heightens the drama of delicacy by interposing her tissue-wrapped body in that seeming non-place, the urban construction site. While we are drawn to the figuration of Howard’s body, it is the tissue, or veil, that indexes its own fragility against the dirt, rock, and earthmovers of construction. In addition, it also marks the estrangement of the human, and by extrapolation, the social, from the incessant cycle of construction and destruction of the built environment in the service of speculative real estate development that is a familiar scenario in cities worldwide.

Using very distinct approaches and materials, the artists demonstrate the necessary construction of space as an ongoing process of situating our minds and bodies, in a changing environment. Their works reflect a curiosity and guarded optimism that we can achieve feelings of attachment, meaning and intimacy with even the blandest, consumerist and/or overwhelming spaces.

Nityanand Deckha, March 2002

**Nityanand Deckha** is an urban anthropologist, and is writing a book on the role of heritage, community development, and cultural enterprise in the repackaging of London. He holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Rice University. Recently returned to Toronto, he works in consumer research strategy and is a Fellow in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University.



**Avantika Bawa**  
Grey Knots, 2000  
Pigment and latex on cardboard  
36 x 22 x 15 ft



**Astra Howard**  
Operation Scope, 1999 – 2001  
Photograph, 20 x 24 cm



**Cyrus Irani**  
Norwegian Sky Oceanview  
Statesroom, 2001  
Colour Print, 11 x 14 in

#### ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

**Avantika Bawa** was born in Ootacamund, India and currently resides in Savannah, Georgia. She received her B.F.A. in Painting from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and an M.F.A. in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in '98. Her work has been exhibited widely in India, Russia and the United States. In addition to exhibiting works, she has curated and coordinated shows. Avantika currently teaches at the Savannah College of Art and Design where she is a Professor of Foundation Studies.

**Astra Howard** is renowned on the streets of Sydney, Australia for her unexpected street performances involving and engaging with the local community. Her multi-disciplinary approach and action research methodology challenges the symbolic understanding and representation of public space interactions. "Designing Community: Vagrant Landscapes for Transitional Bodies" entitles her PhD investigations.

**Cyrus Irani** best describes his work as an intersection between the disciplines of architecture, photography and design that both comments on and reinterprets the built environment. Cyrus is a young Toronto artist and recent graduate of the University of Toronto/Sheridan College Art and Art History Program.