



On the Occasion of its 20th Anniversary,
The South Asian Women's Creative Collective Presents

Archival Alchemy

Curated by Saisha Grayson | At Abrons Arts Center



Priyanka Dasgupta, *Where Straight Lines Fail*, 2016. Installation (video, sculpture, archival documents), dimensions vary. Courtesy of the artist.

Exhibition Dates: April 6–May 10, 2017

Opening Reception: April 6, 6-8pm

Venue: Abrons Arts Center, Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand Street (at Pitt Street) New York, NY 10002

Participating Artists: Golnar Adili; Marium Agha; Blank Noise (Jasmeen Patheja & anonymous Action Heroes); Priyanka Dasgupta; Sabba Elahi; Index of the Disappeared (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani); Amy Khoshbin; Maya Mackrandilal; Zinnia Naqvi; Yamini Nayar; Nirmal Raja; Patience Rustomji; Himali Singh Soin

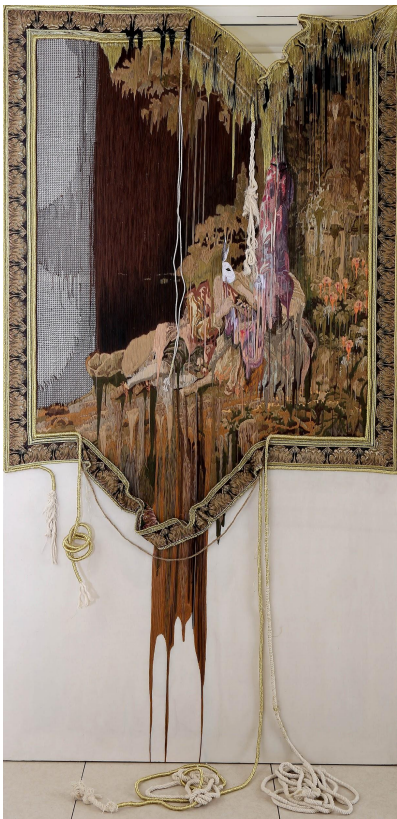
NEW YORK, NY, March 3, 2017 - The South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC) is pleased to present its 20th anniversary visual arts exhibition, *Archival Alchemy*, guest curated by Saisha Grayson. Opening April 6, the exhibition takes over all three gallery spaces at Abrons Arts Center, and features thirteen artists and collectives from throughout the diaspora, working across artistic media to investigate the resonances found in an archival past on the contingencies of the present. Archives are often cast as places of nostalgia—institutions for anchoring flights of fancy with the hard reassurance of facts; repositories for reinforcing “History,” capital “H” singular “y.” But those who take issue with the historical narratives that these archives traditionally uphold also find them productive resources for contesting the very stability and authority that they seem to ensure. Artists, especially those from diasporic and postcolonial positions, are critically positioned to work their magic on this archival fodder—rich with mutable, malleable material that can be remixed to new ends. Through this process, conventional understandings of a given reality are put through the grinder of repressed narratives, alternate experiences and gaps filled in by desire, imagination, and intuition. Along the way, artists confront the voids where evidence of individual lives, subversive strategies, and subaltern histories has been erased.

At a moment when South Asian communities, women and immigrant neighborhoods like the Lower East Side are being targeted by an evidence-averse administration, this exhibition will also offer an opportunity for nuanced reflection on the complex global and personal histories that shape conflicting views of our contemporary moment. Several works explore the role that archives play in creating official histories, papering over dissent and managing the disappearance of non-citizens, while others present or produce counter archives that resist such erasure and offer strategies for empowerment. These include a new site-specific work for Abrons Arts Center's street-facing windows from *Index of the Disappeared* (2004 - present), a collaborative project by artists Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani that charts the documentary trail of U.S. immigration and international policies post 9/11, and now in the era of Trump.



Yamini Nayar, *Past Present*, 2013. Lightjet print, 40" x 50". Courtesy of the artist.

As part of *Archival Alchemy*, a full-day concluding event on Sunday, May 7th, will bring together panel discussions with artists, activist and community representatives, and skill-sharing workshops for those seeking increased visibility or strategic invisibility within the bureaucratic and digital archives of our day.



Mariam Agha, *Courtier in Love – A Two Dimensional Portrait*, 2015. Yarn and rope on reclaimed tapestry and fabric, 96 1/2" x 51".
Courtesy of Aicon Gallery.

About the Curator

Saisha Grayson is a curator, writer, art historian and teacher focused on the intersections of contemporary art, feminist politics, and cultural activism. From 2011 to 2016, she was Assistant Curator at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, where she organized the Museum's presentation of *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey*, curated *Chitra Ganesh: Eyes of Time*, and co-curated *Agitprop!*. Most recently, she co-organized *I want a president... (a collective reading – DC)*, a socially-engaged public art project that culminated in an action at The White House during the 2016 Creative Time Summit in DC. Grayson is also a Ph.D candidate at the Graduate Center, CUNY where she is finishing her dissertation, *Cellist, Catalyst, Collaborator: The Work of Charlotte Moorman*. Her writing has appeared in print and online journals, including *n.paradoxa*, *Moving Image Review* and *Art Journal (MIRAJ)*, *e-flux* and in museum and gallery publications.

About SAWCC

Founded in 1997, the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC) is a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to the advancement, visibility, and development of emerging and established South Asian women artists and creative professionals. SAWCC has served South Asian women by providing a physical and virtual space to exchange ideas and feedback, and profile their creative and intellectual work across disciplines. Through its various programs, the group has earned a reputation for showcasing cutting-edge work that deals intelligently with issues of gender and cultural representation.

2017 SAWCC Visual Arts Committee: Sarah Burney, Ambika Trasi

Social Media:

[facebook.com/sawccorg](https://www.facebook.com/sawccorg)
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For press images & additional information email: press@sawcc.org

About Abrons Arts Center

Abrons Arts Center is the performing and visual arts center of Henry Street Settlement, supporting the presentation of innovative, multi-disciplinary work. The Center cultivates artists in all stages of their creative development through educational programs and residencies; and serves as an intersection of cultural engagement for local, national, and international audiences and art-workers.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Saturday: 11 AM-6 PM;
Sunday: 12-6 PM; Exhibition Closed on Mondays.

Catalogue

Archival Alchemy is accompanied by a catalogue with artist biographies, full curatorial narrative, and essays to be released upon the exhibition's closing.



Phoolan Devi
(1963-2001)

"I tried to submit, as my father said I should, but I was unable. I was like my mother. There was too much anger in me."

Popularly known as "Bandit Queen" Phoolan Devi was born to a poor, lower caste family in rural India. As a young person she was known for her independent nature: resisting her male cousin's theft of her father's land and her marriage as a child to an older man who raped and beat her. She endured years of caste-based violence, from wage theft and beating to repeated rapes. At 16 years old she left her village permanently and joined a group of bandits. During a spate of inter-group violence (in which her lover was killed), Phoolan was captured by higher-caste bandits from the fractured group, locked in a room, and gang-raped for several days. After escaping with the help of lower-caste villagers and bandits, she returned to the village with a newly-formed group who killed 22 male members of the caste that raped her; many of whom had not taken part directly in the rape but who she still held responsible. At 24 years old, she surrendered to police, was charged with 48 crimes, but never had a formal trial. After 11 years in prison she was released. Two years after her release, she ran for parliament and won. She was assassinated by a group of higher-caste men in retaliation for the villagers she had killed. Phoolan's story comes to us from several accounts, including her autobiography, which she had to dictate upon her release from jail because she was illiterate, the only word she ever could write was her own name.

THUG/LIFE is a series of cards that seeks to complicate the term "thug" (a term that comes to English from the Hindi term for bandit)- to re-appropriate it as a term of empowerment. THUG/LIFE is the life of the infiltrator, the life of the revolutionary, the life of resistance. THUG/LIFE acknowledges the complex relationships between violence and gender, race, and power, while tracing paths out of violence through the re-tellings of the life-stories of "thugs" who have come before us.

Maya Mackrandilal, *THUG/LIFE Cards*, 2015. Printed postcards, set of 3, 6" x 4" each. Courtesy of the artist.



Amy Khoshbin, *The King's Army*, 2016. Digital collage, framed photographic print, dimensions vary. Courtesy of the artist.

Our Supporters

This exhibition is generously funded by the New York Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council of the Arts.



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South Asian Women's Creative Collective

110-112 West 27th Street #603, New York, NY 10001 | www.sawcc.org | info@sawcc.org