

RAJIV MENON CONTEMPORARY

Rajiv Menon Contemporary Presents Group Exhibition
The Past is a Country: Indo-Nostalgia in Contemporary Art

Featuring Manjari Sharma, Bhasha Chakrabarti, Vikrant Bhise, Anoushka Mirchandani, and more. Several of the nineteen emerging and mid-career artists from South Asia and its diasporas make their U.S. debut.



On view May 15 - June 3, 2023
Press preview: May 14 from 10am - 12pm
3110 West Sunset Boulevard

Los Angeles, California – Rajiv Menon Contemporary is pleased to present *The Past is a Country: Indo-Nostalgia in Contemporary Art*, an intergenerational group exhibition bringing together artists from South Asia and its diasporas to examine the intersection of politics, identity, history, and emotion through a culturally-specific lens of nostalgia. The exhibition contextualizes “South Asianness” around an ephemeral emotional experience as it relates to memory, and contends with an era of political tumult, climate change, fractured communities, and the patterns of migration of South Asians. A new gallery that opened in November 2023, this is Rajiv Menon Contemporary’s third exhibition. The gallery is one of the few in the U.S. and the only gallery on

the West Coast dedicated to South Asian and Diasporic art. Based in Los Angeles and founded by Rajiv Menon, Ph.D., the gallery's program focuses on artists from South Asia and its diaspora and brings dynamic and nuanced perspectives on South Asian art to the forefront of culture in Los Angeles and beyond.

The Past is a Country presents work across mediums and of varying scale by nineteen artists, the majority having never exhibited in the United States. The artists are Mohd. Intiyaz,, Vikrant Bhise, Soumya Sankar Bose, Bhasha Chakrabarti, Misha Japanwala, Sivasubramaniam Kajendran, Shyama Golden, Firi Rahman, Shradha Kochhar, Utkarsh Makwana, Hamid Ali Hanbhi, Asad Ali Qulandar, Swapnaa Tamhane, Mussarat Arif, Russna Kaur, Anoushka Mirchandani, Manjari Sharma, Noormah Jamal, and Sanié Bokhari.

The artists touch on the concept of Indo-Nostalgia in different ways. Manjari Sharma's series of photographs reconstruct mythology and reinterpret Hindu iconography found in Indian calendar art, pointing to the heightened distribution of Hindu imagery in India in recent years. Since her exhibition at the Phoenix Art Museum, this is the first commercial showing of Sharma's series. Bhasha Chakrabarti's paintings of her mother alongside a quilt made of her father's clothing reference the history of quilt-making as feminine labor as well as a form of resistance and storytelling in West Bengal, India, Hawaii, and Alabama, United States. Vikrant Bhise, who makes his U.S. debut, uses the writings of the late B.R. Ambedkar, the anti-caste social reformer and political leader to examine casteism and the history of political revolutions in his paintings. Sivasubramaniam Kajendran also makes his U.S. debut and employs religious Catholic iconography to contend with loss in Sri Lanka, particularly the devastating effects of the country's civil war and the 2004 tsunami, finding beauty and absurdity in grief.

Says Rajiv Menon, the gallery's Director and Founder, "*The Past is a Country* is an important exhibition of South Asian and Diasporic art, bringing some of the region's most dynamic voices to Los Angeles, especially during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. With the strides being made around South Asian representation in Hollywood, it was essential for me to add nuance to this vital conversation and draw out the emotional and aesthetic textures of South Asian communities through visual art. The concept of Indo-Nostalgia gives a glimpse into the emotional responses that emerge from our specific cultural worlds and shows how the past is simultaneously melancholic and utopian, romantic and critical."

Image: Bhasha Chakrabarti, *Bridge Called My Mother's Back III*, 2023, encaustic on used saree, mounted on panel 16 x 16 x 2 in. Photo courtesy the artist.

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