

NEWS + EVENTS

New Directions in South Asian Art



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RISD's first Vikram and Geetanjali Kirloskar Visiting Scholar in Painting Chitra Ganesh is back on campus this semester teaching a seminar on Drawing, Narrative and Materiality in Contemporary South Asian Art. In addition to presenting specific contemporary artists and their practices to the mix of graduate and undergraduate students in the class, Ganesh is situating their work within the socio-political context in which it was created.

To that end, Ganesh organized a panel discussion on New Directions: Contemporary Art in South Asia, which took place on Tuesday, November 4 in the Metcalf Auditorium. Moderated by Courtney J. Martin, an assistant professor of History of Art & Architecture at Brown, the talk featured three distinguished experts on contemporary South Asian art: Karin Zitzewitz, Assistant Professor of Art History and Visual Culture at Michigan State University; art historian Rakhee Balaram, Assistant Professor of Art and Art History at SUNY Albany; and Iftikhar Dadi, Associate Professor of Art and History of Art at Cornell University.

Zitzewitz began the conversation with an examination of artists Vivan Sundaram and Naiza Khan, from New Delhi and Karachi, respectively, both of whom engage contemporary avant-garde idioms within their work. Zitzewitz explores their overlapping strategies, focusing on the materiality of detritus, ruination and politics at the city (vs. national) level. She is also interested in the rise of NGOs (or nongovernmental organizations) and the pivotal role they play in the art world. As "the state radically contracted," she points out, "any previous ambition to support South Asian artists on the state level evaporated."

Assistant Professor Rakhee Balaram picked up on the India-Pakistan relationship, asking more directly in her portion of the talk, "What is the nature of the South Asian diaspora?" She showed work by a wide range of diaspora-based artists – including Ganesh and Anish Kapoor – and spoke about the 1947 division of India and Pakistan as a pivotal moment and a lasting wound that continues to compel South Asian artists to create – both inside and outside the borders of their homeland.

That historic upheaval also inspired *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, a traveling exhibition from 2012 co-curated by Associate Professor Iftikhar Dadi that came together at Cornell. The show encompassed not only the India-Pakistan partition but political partitions in general – a distinction that also reflects Dadi's interests as a scholar. He shared images of paintings and installations exploring issues of nationalism and redrawn political lines, noting the related "dilemmas of identity and belonging" that they engender.

During the Q&A session that followed, several speakers touched on the importance of the Gwangju Biennial in recognizing Pakistani artists since the 2008 collapse of the contemporary art market, noting that many South Asian artists who once relied on teaching for survival are finally able to support themselves by selling their work. In speaking about art from the region, Dadi points out that "South Asia is closer to Africa than Asia in terms of post-Colonial infrastructure and development, which is the region's mega issue."

Chitra Ganesh is exhibiting recent work in *Suppose the Universe*, a solo show continuing through November 21 at RISD's Memorial Hall Gallery.

–Simone Solondz