



Kaveri Raina

Kaveri Raina was born and brought up in New Delhi, India. In May 2011 she graduated with Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting and Photography from the Maryland Institute College of Art; and in May 2016 she graduated with her Masters of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the recipient of the James Nelson Raymond Fellowship and currently is an Artist in Resident at Ox Bow Residency in Saugatuck, MI. She is represented by Hammond Harkins Gallery in Columbus, OH and is an Artist in Resident at BOLT Residency in Chicago, IL, where she resides.

- ¹ Duras, Marguerite. *India Song*. New York: Grove Press, 1976. Print, pp. 42–43.
- ² Foucault, Michel. “Power and Strategies.” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Print, p. 141.
- ³ Jay, Martin. “A Parting Glance: Empire and Visuality.” *Empires of Vision*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. Print, p. 609.
- ⁴ Duras. *India Song*. P. 13.
- ⁵ Shah, Sneha Vijay. “Under the Gavel: India by Christie’s.” Chicago: Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Spring 2015. Print, pp. 11–14.
- ⁶ Mitra, Sramana. “The Coming Death of Indian Outsourcing.” *Forbes*. February 29, 2008. Accessed: Tuesday, September 13, 2016.
- ⁷ Araeen, Rasheed. “Art and Postcolonial Society.” *Globalization and Contemporary Art*. Edited by Jonathan Harris. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print, p. 373.
- ⁸ Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print, pp. 332–333.
- ⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. Print, p. 169.

Matt Morris is an artist, writer, and sometimes curator based in Chicago. He has presented artwork nationally and internationally. He is a contributor to Artforum.com, Art Papers, ARTnews, Flash Art, Newcity, and Sculpture; and his writing appears in numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. He is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati, and earned an MFA in Art Theory + Practice from Northwestern University, as well as a Certificate in Gender + Sexuality Studies. Morris is a lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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Hyperreal Hanuman: Painting into Global Flows

by Matt Morris

VOICE 1: *Couldn't bear it.*
VOICE 2: *No.*
VOICE 1: *India—couldn't bear India?*
VOICE 2: *No.*
VOICE 1: *What couldn't he bear about it?*
VOICE 2: *The idea.*¹

In order for the west to assert its superiority within the expansion of a global economy, it has depended on dichotomies like ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional,’ ‘re-fined’ and ‘primitive,’ ‘cerebral’ and ‘merely decorative’ which have been mapped across its conquests, persistently capitalizing upon the richness of resources in these new territories while subjugating them under terms that uphold an im-balanced, asymmetrical relation of power. The mechanisms of culture in which visual art practices are certainly inclusive have been critical in the circulation of this rhetoric, so that domination is not only traced within law and exchange rates, but also in tastes, stereotypes, and slyer psychologies that persist long past independence from imperial rule. To note sly tactics, see how my west is ‘it’ and its multiple conquests a ‘they,’ so that the position from which I speak is displaced from these powers’ prowess? None of us are outside but rather embedded within these relations of power. As Foucault insists, “It seems to me that power *is* ‘always already there,’ that one is never ‘outside’ it, that there are no ‘margins’ for those who break with the system to gambol in.”² And yet, just because there are no margins does not mean that there aren’t people who have been marginalized. And yet, “what makes any analysis of the unequal power relations entailed by an imperialist relationship difficult is that the players in the game are rarely divisible into perpetrators and victim, oppressor and oppressed—or, for those defending motives, protector and beneficiary—with clear-cut identities on each side.”³

To paint as Kaveri Raina paints is to build worlds, at least in the form of propo-sitions. Her canvases are mostly scaled to the artist’s own body, often dyed with rich violets and greens, and occupied with flatly painted signs scrambled into effusive narratives about their own making. “*There were people there all the time. They are behind either a row of plants, or a fine net screen, or a transparent blind, or smoke from perfume burners.*”⁴ In her painting “Will I Be Missed,” 2016, what appears as a map of India in the lower left corner drifts upward into a landscape denser and more disoriented, an alternative state Raina prefers over rigid border-lands. These possibilities rendered in supple patterns, luscious form, and—most particularly—layering, contends with a history of “worlding” at massive scales remembered now in such efforts’ primary instrument, the west’s imperial coloni-zation of realms including Raina’s native India, the residual impressions of which the east continues to perniciously capitulate.

One finds what Martin Jay calls “indirect hegemonic acquiescence” prior even to the British empire’s official colonization of the Indian subcontinent. Even as East India Company traders sold cultural materials back to Great Britain, many of the actual objects were designed particularly to satisfy European predilections, with Indian motifs applied across them in weird hybridizations—so that the east was no more than an idea carried on proven physical vehicles of western taste.⁵ Sneha Vijay Shah notes that as early as 1836 with the founding of the Calcutta Mechanics Institution and School of Art, European professors oversaw art stu-dents who produced decorative objects that were in demand in the west.

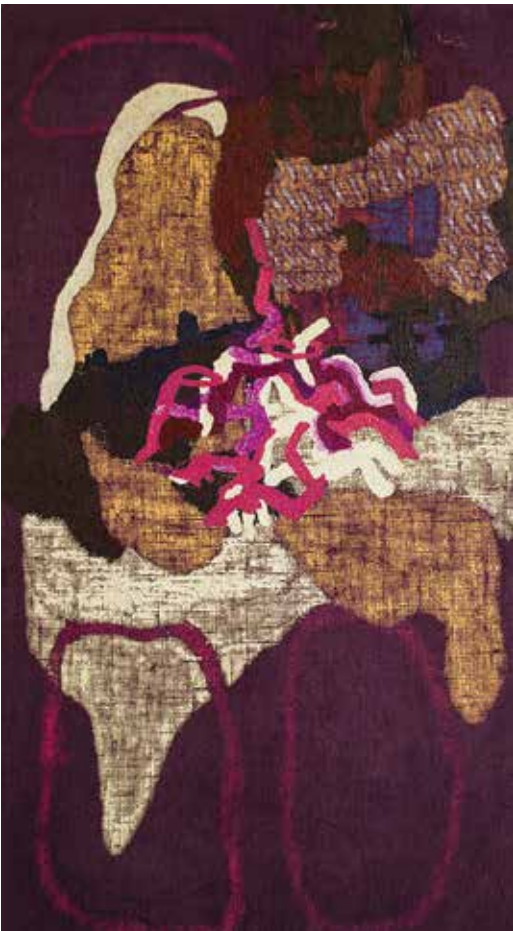
Long past India’s Independence in 1947, its dealings with America and Europe show a tricky business of reacting to the desires of world colonizers, catering to demand, as in the tech support service industry in India—nearly always out-sourced service labor from the U.S. and other western countries—that in the past decade has the estimated worth of thirty billion dollars and more than four million jobs, comprising more than seven percent of the nation’s gross domes-tic product. Sramana Mitra considers in *Forbes* how this is not lateral cultural exchange: “Yet, India, for all its glory, is still the world’s back office. India’s tech industry is a ‘services’ industry. The Indians don’t do the thinking. The customers do. India executes.”⁶

As in these issues of politics and economics, Rasheed Araeen articulates the pressure for which emerging non-western and immigrant artists like Raina are made to perform:

The ‘other’ artists must carry the burden of the culture from which they have originated, and they must indicate this in their artworks before they can be recognized and legitimated. Their works must carry identity cards with African or Asian signs on them...by defining his/her artistic role and potential exclusively within the migratory and diasporic experiences. In this situation, how could the young ‘other’ artist, excluded from the paradigm of modernism and removed from its history, intervene in what are historically determined structures, both of art production and legitimation?⁷

Following upon this sketch of a world stage into which Raina’s artistic produc-tion operates, I wonder with Araeen about the contours and details of possible interventions by artists expected to bear signs of their otherness within western contexts. For Raina, who has lived in the United States since her family’s im-migration when the artist was eleven years old, the aesthetic reference points from which she works are hybridized not unlike those early East India Company products. She provisionally invites the assertion that the post-colonial world is now flat, absolutely horizontal, evenly distributed, in order to measure the effects against the promises of the late twentieth century’s high-minded, multi-culti internationalism. Her worlds are collapsed across the fronts and backs of loosely woven burlap supports, stretched over wooden frames—underlying structures that border the final compositions. Tectonic shapes are painted from the back-side, pressing through the fabric’s weave, mapping the site of Raina’s ensuing fan-tasies. The paintings resist being coded into overly stabilized dichotomies; east is not always the back, nor west the front. Rather, the works model the flip sides of open-ended arguments with attention to where one locates a point of view. Spicy, earthy hues puddle juicily into post-industrial plastic (sub)continents that drift across all sides, embedding the burlap grid into sensuous formal arrangements.

Will I Be Missed | Acrylic, dye, burlap | 70" x 40" | 2016



Raina builds worlds in order to comprehend how worlds are built. The 2016 painting “Forgot-ten Pleasures” demonstrates the collapse of what Hardt and Ne-gri describe of the shift from im-perialist east/west dichotomies as “a machine of global striation” into the emergent world mar-ket that “in contrast, requires a smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialized flows.”⁸ At the center of this painting are two parallelograms overlaid in grey-ish mint-and-burgundy static. This image is also Raina’s pro-cess: her method of ever-shift-ing planes serves to analyze an itinerant’s deeply felt treks along the global flows by which society is now networked. A crowd of wildlife and green ropes mark out these floating planes amidst cultural marginalia not con-tained in flattened, emergent world orders.



On Head Mukut
Acrylic, dye, burlap
70" x 40" | 2016

ly, modernist) legacies in painterly abstraction heretofore withheld from the retooling a truly globalized project would certainly welcome.

One of Raina’s most recent canvases, “On Head Mukut,” revisits the forms held within “Hanuman Mukut,” upending them in the sorts of permutations one finds throughout Hindu epics like *Ramayana*, in which a cast of cosmic figures return again and again under different guises, with different powers and allegiances. Here, the *mukut* crown is not worn but overturned, a formal play that indicates something about bearing the idea of one’s culture, into the United States and into the traditions and innovations of abstract painting.

“Abstraction today is no longer that of the map...It is the generation by models of a real without origin in reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it.”⁹ If, on the one side, this supposedly lev-eled, globalized economy is disrupted with overwhelming evidence of uneven power relations, and, on the other side, emerging artists of non-western origin are pressured to perform their heritage as ‘otherness’ within the art system, there may be no verification of the absolute veracity of the cultural forms that are circulated and exchanged for the delight of audiences trained to appre-ciate ‘diversity.’ I can neither prove that the places from which touchstones of tradition hearken are not simulations of older empires for which popular taste is nostalgic, nor can I fully embrace a worldview in which differences are obliterated, because to do so would be to forget our colonial pasts and erase recognition of current day oppression. There is a slice of space amidst these conceptual paradoxes where, however impossible, myths persist as real, sensual belief. Gods do handstands; spices simmer; painting bursts with new entry points; the self is a radical alterity with no need for identity cards with which to validate it. In this big world, I can only see (bear to see) this space of possibility on occasion. Mostly recently, it is held between Kaveri Raina’s patterns and puddles, as a philosophical escape strategy. As a tempting island where the marginalized reimagine the world.

Cover image: *Forgotten Pleasures* (detail) | Acrylic, dye, burlap | 70" x 40" | 2016