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Speakers Series : Shanay Jhaveri
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00:00:00:09 **SABRINA MALTESE:** Thank you all for joining us here tonight at the Center for Curatorial Studies. It is my pleasure to introduce our final speaker of the year, as part of the series, Shanay Jhaveri. Shanay Jhaveri joins us from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where he is assistant curator of South Asian art, within the museum's department of modern and contemporary art. Shanay's innovative exhibitions pay attention to histories of cross-cultural exchange and encounters, entwining interests in cosmopolitanism, travel, and movement of the transnational. Through cross-disciplinary combinations of art, music, design, poetry, and film, his practice keenly address, in his words, "the transmission, appropriation, and rejection of ideas and art forms between India and the West, to consider how transnational networks of association impact and shape artistic practices.

00:00:56:10 His recent exhibitions include "Everything We Do Is Music", at the Drawing Room London, in 2017, which is currently on view at Pasquart in Biel. Also in 2017, he co-curated "William Gedney in India", at CSMVS in Mumbai, which will travel to Duke University this summer. "Companionable Silences", at Palais de Tokyo in Paris, in 2013; and "India: Visions From the Outside", at Cultural Centre Bruges, in 2012. Shanay has all curated film programs for Light Industry, the LUX, ICA Biennial of Moving Images, the East London Gay Film Festival, Tate Modern, and the third edition of the Dhaka Art Summit.

00:01:42:12 Jhaveri is also a prolific writer and has edited and authored books, including *Western Artists in India, Creative Inspirations in Art and Design, Outsider Films on India: 1950-1990*, and *Chandigarh is in India*. Currently at the Met's Fifth Avenue location, you can see two exhibitions curated by Shanay. The first is a new site-specific commission by Huma Bhabha, titled "We Come in Peace", located in the Met's rooftop garden, on view until October 28th; and a comprehensive installation of work by Ranjani Shettar, titled "Seven Pawns and a Few Raindrops," on view until August 12th of this year. Please join me in welcoming Shanay.

[APPLAUSE]

00:02:44:25 **SHANAY JHAVERI:** Good evening, everyone. I want to first thank Lauren, CCS, Amanda, for having me here, anticipating my needs, and taking very good care of me. I could get very used to this. But over the next forty-five minutes to an hour, I'm just going to walk us through some of my initial projects that I was involved with, and then my role at the museum, and periodically interrupt with a sound and light show, so that everybody doesn't get too bored of my talking. But so I'm going to begin with a clip from a film called *Phantom India*, which Louis Malle made in 1969. It's a seven-part work that he made for French television. And I will explicate a bit more after we see the clip.

[CLIP PLAYS]

00:05:05:24 So my first project after my undergraduate was a book called *Outsider Films on India: 1950-1990*. And when assembling this presentation, I realized that I actually didn't curate an exhibition with actual objects till 2012. Up until that point, I was working in various other contexts and with various other kinds of platforms, books and film programming being the primary mode in which I managed to get my research out or share research, share my research with others. So *Outsider Films on India: 1950-1990* was a project that I initiated just after graduating. And it

looks at a group of European filmmakers who had made films in or on India post-independence till the early nineties. So just before the Indian economy opens up in 1991. For me, it was quite— I arrived at this material through discovering that a number of major Western filmmakers had spent time in India. And the way they were engaging with the country proposed something very interesting, not only within their own respective oeuvres, but within a larger consideration of cross-cultural filmmaking or artistic practices that are somehow distributed across two different types of geographies. And the book was not meant to be encyclopedic, nor was it exhaustive; but it was just really walking through a certain groups of film and how each one takes a different kind of formal strategy, and they can be rethought or reevaluated within present-day circumstances. So it included filmmakers like Jean Renoir's film *The River*, Fritz Lang's *Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Indian Tomb*, Marguerite Duras' *India Song*, Louis Malle's *Phantom India,* Roberto Rossellini's film *Matri Bhumi India*, Merchant Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah*, *Une ville à Chandigarh* by Alain Tanner, and John Berger are just some of the films that the book took up. And the book then became a film program at the Tate Modern in 2010. And that was the time when I was able to slightly expand on the timeframe and I paired some of the historic films with more recent works by contemporary artists like The Otolith Group or who'd been making work in or on India, as well.

00:08:05:12 So I think what happened for me at a kind of formal level from doing a book that was quite academic—each chapter was authored by one person and looked at a particular film—to examining it within a very specific temporal framework, moving, you know, registers into programming those films allowed for one to think across now media and modes of filmmaking. So you were essentially, in the context of the cinema, now showing work that was either made for television or it was a documentary or notes towards a film, along with work that was being made contemporaneously for the gallery space. So how do you bring those two kinds of temporalities and visualities together within a film program, and have them sit alongside one another? What do they say? So as a curatorial proposition, that was one to work through.

00:09:02:23 This was further expanded upon when the city of Bruges invited me to take the film program and make it into an exhibition. And that proved to be even more of a challenge to me because essentially, you're now taking material that was very well organized by time, and people are sitting in seats and watching it, to now spatializing it. And how do you spatialize a film program, and with various kinds of constraints or difficulties? So technology being one. Some of the films only exist in 35mm or 16mm; you can't show them constantly. So what kind of strategies could a curator kind of come up with to think about presenting this work in an exhibition format. And I was given three spaces across the city of Bruges. One was this container in a public square, where only one work could be shown. Then in the church behind it, which is a UNESCO Heritage Site, I was given a hall to show work in. And then a kind of more abandoned space, where one could create walls and whatnot. And I think across the run of the exhibition, I sort of alighted on various kinds of strategies, where certain work was on all the time; other work was rotated; and we had special film screenings. So really, it was also engaging my audience in a certain way by demanding of them that they interact with the program, beyond it just being a one-time visit. So having to really be engaged with what the program was. But essentially, what the project, for me, contains, or what has kind of persisted after that, is this question of cultural dialogue, and to talk about art objects within that framework. So when you have a filmmaker or an artist going from the West to India or conversely, Indian or non-Western artists coming to the West, how do you start thinking about the work that they produce? Do you think about the work in just the specificity of what the work is, so it's formal properties? Or then do you start locating it within a broader history of geopolitical exchange? What were the conditions that facilitated the production of this work? How did this artist go there? Was it on a scholarship? What were the kind of strategies that allowed for the— What were the kind of modalities—not strategies—

modalities that allowed for the artist to go and produce that work? And across "Outsider Films on India," some of the work was made independently; others were made on grants or through diplomatic channels, and reflecting kind of the geopolitics of a historical moment that predates our own. And coming into the present, those conditions really have shifted and changed with the circulation of neoliberal capital, but also India's economy changing and— The facilitation to make work has changed, and how that impacts, actually, the content of the work.

00:12:23:17 The other question to take up is of the ethics of making work in another cultural context, and whether— you know, if the artists are employing labor or local artisans, how do you credit them? How do you engage with that? So those were some of the concerns that came up in the investigation of the films, but also in the next book that I did, which is a continuation of the same idea; but the scope and scale of it was much more ambitious and granular. And it's basically looking at Western artists who came to India and— Do I have? No. Okay, no more images from the book. But basically, what the book is that it breaks away from the format that "Outsider Films on India" had set up, which was just looking at individual works of art, but to think of exhibition histories. So there's an entire essay on traveling exhibitions of Western art that came to India during the 1950s to the 1990s. It included first-person interviews with artists who are still living. So kind of complicating and bringing in a whole set of multiple perspectives into a reading of this art history and, you know, allowing for an interactivity amongst several experiences, both private and public, and how they kind of weight down on some of our received own art history.

00:13:52:11 And at this point, I want to quote the Indian anthropologist Ashis Nandy, who's written very eloquently about this issue of how influence from another cultural context impacts writers, filmmakers, artists. And so I quote. And he says, "Perhaps sometimes other people's art becomes not a target of scholarly examination, but a source of unorganized, informal challenge to one's creative self. All dialogs of culture are, at their best, simultaneously monologues in self-confrontation. Whether such dialogs refashion others or not, they reprioritizes elements within one's own self. Cultural dialogs are a form of dialogs with the self, too." End quote. So I think through both these books, what I was taught was to think— or I arrived at trying to think more bifocally. So having a specific international art history taught to me and being aware of a regional art history or a national art history. How do you breed those two together? And because they have not existed in isolation, it's never been the case. And it's just about the way these art histories have been written. And you know, undoing with some of this Eurocentric discourse or Anglo-Saxon discourse, and conversely, readings of Indian art history that have been very parochial and very nationalistic, and not even taking a consideration of the region, which is something that I come to a little bit later in my practice.

00:15:32:05 But by the time I did this book in 2013, I had, again, as I mentioned, really been working across a variety of platforms to kind of get a sense of how my research was evolving. And film programming, because my background is actually in film studies, was kind of crucial to articulating some of my ideas. And so while the previous two projects that I discussed very much had to do with looking at the physical movement of an artist to an other cultural space or geography and making work either there or when they come back, I wanted to think of this idea more speculatively, creatively, and expansively. And so when I received this invitation by the LUX/ICA Biennial to put together a propositional film program, I latched onto this idea of thinking about the transmission of ideas and cultures through objects and through visuality, and maybe not so literally, in terms of the movement of one person from one geography to another. And the program was called "Questions of Travel," after a poem by Elizabeth Bishop. And I'm going to read the poem, which inspired and which I read before every screening of the film program. And I quote. "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? Where should we

be today? Is it right to be watching strangers in a play in the strangest of theaters? Or must we dream our dreams and have them too? And we have room for one more folded sunset, still quite warm? Continent, city, country, society. The choice is never wide and never free. And here or there. No, should we have stayed at home, wherever that may be?"

00:17:31:01 So the travel images and objects across cultural contexts was really a crucial inquiry that opened up for me after this biennial and this film program, and which sits alongside the more empirical research of looking at particular art objects or investigating people's private experiences. So this all kind of came together and led to a show that I did at the Palais de Tokyo in the summer of 2019 — 2013. Projecting into the future, clearly. Which was called "Companionable Silences," and it was part of a season called The Nouvelles Vagues, where the Palais de Tokyo its spaces to, I think, eight or ten—I forget—curators to come in and make exhibitions of their own choice. Now, for me, I really— You know, when the invitation came my way, there were a couple of things that I really wanted to address. And having had some sense of the Palais de Tokyo as a space and the kind of work that is shown there, the scale of it, it was really a receptacle, and continues to be one, which prioritizes the presentation of contemporary artistic practice, with a strong moving image arm to it. And I wanted my exhibition to be a foil to that. So to do a kind of more classic museum-style presentation within the confines of what is a very contemporary institution, what were the challenges that would emerge from that? The institution, for example, did not have climate control. So at a very practical level, that posed an issue in terms of what kind of objects could be seen. Then in terms of the handling of objects, in terms of insurance as well, bringing in certain works which the museum did not have the physical means or capacities to engage with. And so us all learning together in that process. So the exhibition really hinged around one work. Or actually, came to being from this one work by Amrita Sher-Gil, which is called *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, from 1934, Amrita Sher-Gil is an Indo-Hungarian artist. She was born in Paris and then lived in Budapest and India throughout her life. She passed away very tragically in 1941, so had a very short life, at the age of twenty-eight. And she painted this painting while she was in Paris, just before she returned to India. And not to get too much into a kind of reading of the painting, but I think it's very clear stylistically, what she's responding to and kind of the conversation that she's setting up, in terms of her own place as a woman within a contemporary artistic context of the 1930s in Paris, but also investigating ideas of Modernist style, a coopting of style, but then also imagining a kind of self-exotifying— I mean self-exotifying herself, in a way, and being conscious of how she's understood and positioned within her artistic milieu of the time.

00:20:58:25 So the show really radiated out of this painting, that was painted in Paris but had not been seen in Paris since it was painted. And so for me, it became almost crucial. And it was the centennial year of her birth, as well. So it became crucial to take this object back to Paris and build the exhibition around that. And so the exhibition essentially became an investigation of the lives and practices of other non-Western women artists who had spent time in Paris from the 1920s up to the 1960s. So really looking at subsequent generations of women artists who had come through Paris and returned to their home countries. So not artists who settled down in Paris, but those who passed through Paris. And so while doing that investigating, a couple of things. One is shifting the primacy of Paris as a center at that historical moment; that it wasn't that everybody came to Paris and Paris was the be all and end all of their careers, but they passed through Paris and took something from there with them, and how that manifests in their national and other cultural contexts. The other was bringing together the practices of a number of these women artists who were working, you know, at the same time, but had never been seen alongside one another and didn't know one another. So it wasn't about imaging, oh, this community, this happy community of all of these women artists who have been written out of art history, but really investigating the different strategies that they all took to being in Paris at that time.

00:22:45:28 And then the last was looking at different ways of representing practice. So with the Sher-Gil, for example, I had the actual painting in the exhibition, which was made in Paris. But with someone like Tarsila do Amaral, who has a retrospective at the MoMA right now, I didn't really include any work made by her, but I only included archival material of invitations and pamphlets and photographs of her in Paris at that time. Now, with the Lebanese artist Saloua Raouda Choucair, what I chose to do was include a painting which she painted in Paris, but then also examples of sculptural works she made later, to gesture towards the shift in the practice or what the practice took from when it was there, here. So really thinking about different strategies to represent practice and the duration of her practice, rather than fixing it in that one moment.

00:23:41:26 The other thing I was very conscious of doing was that I didn't want it to be a completely archival show, but to think about more contemporaneous lived conditions who occupied maybe the same concerns that these women had at that time. And so I had a moving image work by The Otolith Group in the exhibition, which filmed Etel Adnan, artist and writer and poet, in her apartment in Paris. So to bring into the exhibition a living, breathing, physical presence who actually still lives and out of Paris and in a state of kind of migrant itinerancy. And also include work by Camille Henrot, a series called *Tropics of Cancer*, which was interrogating issues of exoticism and self-Orientalizing. But I want to read a quote by Etel Adnan, which I think crystalizes some more of these issues that I was thinking through in that exhibition. So it's a quote from her 1993 book called *Paris When It's Naked*. And I begin. "Why am I living in Paris? Because I speak French? That could be a major reason, but it's not. If I had the choice, I would have loved to be Cavafy, living in Alexandria in his times. But why Paris? Many reasons would keep me rather away from it. Paris is also—I wish I could forget it—a colonial capital. The capital of a colonial empire. The coffees we drink, the rubber we roll on, the precious wood we by are suspicious products. We don't know if they're paid a fair price for or extorted by diplomatic means. When does trade become moral or immoral? Why do I love this somber city, give my life to its streets, spend it in its restaurant, break it under its melancholy? Why? Should I get to know myself in order to know why Paris is so central to my life? Or should I know this city even more than I do to find out at least a few essential things about myself? These questions could also be mere traps. But then what should I do?" End quote.

00:25:57:01 So really, what the show threw together, was this investigation of global modernism, different types of practices within that larger rubric, but thinking about not, you know, looking for formal pseudomorphic readings between the work, but thinking about trajectories, networks of friendships, or other ways in fleshing out our understanding of this work alongside a more rigorous particularized reading of the work, because I think those social histories, those networks of affiliation and association play a lot in terms of determining how certain works come to be made or how we can read them and understand them from a retrospective position.

00:26:17:04 The other thing that was really important for me was this idea of the comingling of cosmopolitan realities and what constituted the term— who constituted the presence to occupy the position of a cosmopolitan individual at that time, and how can we rethink that terminology? And that's really what my PhD, which I was doing alongside it, really takes on, which is thinking about the cosmopolitan imagination as distinct from a person who is attributed, in the Western sense, to being cosmopolitan. So who is wealthy, privileged, speaks multiple languages, and can inhabit numerous different types of geographies? A number of those women who are in the exhibition fall close to that category. But what was interesting to understand was that they were either daughters of diplomats or businessmen, or wives, or there were other facilities that got them there, rather than themselves, in a way. A lot of these conditions do change in the postwar period; but in the early twentieth century, that became something that was more a thread line or more of a revelation to me than I had expected.

00:27:31:10 So pursuing this idea of bringing together individuals based on their biographies, but not biographies that reflect one another, but are somehow consonant with one another, I took that strategy back with me to the first show I did in India, which was again, taking the figure of Amrita Sher-Gil, but pairing her with the Sri Lankan photographer Lionel Wendt. Lionel Wendt, like Sher-Gil, was of mixed race. He too, died in 1944, quite suddenly. Was working in a medium— was working in photography and was exploring a number of Modernist tropes. I don't have time to get into his practice particularly, but there are resonances because they both are educated in Europe, but choose to go back to the region as young adults and really commit themselves to the modern movement in each country, but in very different ways. There is a preoccupation with the native bodies of their countries and the way they kind of engage with them. Sher-Gil, for her[?], projects a kind of sense of dislocation and melancholy onto her subjects that she paints, and looks at Indian miniature tradition, also. But Wendt is a much more complicated— is also complicated, in a way, where he has a homoerotic gaze, which is complicated with his mixed race, and also is working out more Surrealistic tropes or more avant-garde tropes of photography. He's working them out in Ceylon at that time, looking at magazine reproductions of what Man Ray was doing. So they were confluent practices, but they were not practices that mirrored one another. And what it did was that it allowed me to think about a history of Modernism within the region. Because no one was talking about modernity practices in India, Sri Lanka, and then parts of Pakistan after the country gets divided. And so to think about a regional Modernism and how these two figures kind of sit within it. Again, not necessarily being mirrors or, you know, complements to one another, but as, you know, participants within a larger discourse.

00:30:07:27 This book, which came out last year, kind of takes me back to the initial two projects that I was doing, which was looking at, you know, histories of cross-cultural working. And it takes the city of Chandigarh, which was built by Le Corbusier on the invitation of Jawaharlal Nehru, in post-independent India. And what the book does is that rather than fixate on the city itself, it looks at the history of artistic responses that the city has engendered. So it takes you away from the physicality of the actual buildings and makes you think about it as a site of inspiration, projection, and what manifests out of that. I also did a film— And in fact, it was the film program that I did at Light Industry that led to the subsequent publication. So again, moving between different registers of presenting material and thinking through research, which has been quite crucial and critical. This idea of, you know, again, programming film and within a film program, bringing together different types of work manifested in the program I put together for the Dhaka Art Summit. And I had— You know, when I got the invitation, I was actually slightly antagonistic to the invitation, because I was like, "You have a number of exhibitions in the gallery spaces, and they have a lot of moving image work in it. So what is the need of your film program? Because you've given me an open brief and said, `Just put together a film program.'" And I'm like, "What's the need for it?"

00:31:59:23 And so I kind of said that I think that the film program should not just be in the education space, where it's shown at a programmed time and people will go in and come out, as any regular film program would. But what I wanted was to have it also be located in the exhibition space, alongside all the other exhibitions that were happening. And so what I did was I built the film program around one film, which was called *Autobiography of an Unknown Man*, which was made by Merchant Ivory, about the Indian writer Nirad Chaudhuri, who had emigrated to England. And the film was a commissioned piece for BBC, and it's about his life in London and in Oxford. But Nirad Chaudhuri is most known for dedicating his nonfiction autobiography, the Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, to the British Empire, and that kind of controversy. So in him, you embody someone who is engaging with a colonial reality, but also— And embracing it, but then at the same time, being critical of it. So having him and this film be the kind of lynchpin for the whole

program, I could radiate out into various different types of thematics that are articulated here. And again, I chose not to spotlight, which I think maybe might've been a more controversial choice, work made in the region at that time, because the art side was really positioning itself as something that was like, "Oh, people are coming and they're looking at the amazing work that's been made in the region." And I was like, "Well, I think of the film program as a way for our audiences to think of or connect with work that they've not seen, but also work that deals with issues that Bangladesh or the region is facing; and that they could have, perhaps, a recognition of that material at an affective level."

00:33:53:20 And so hence, there's a lot of work from Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and very little work from South Asia. And a lot of the work also, it doesn't route itself through the West. So even the work that is made in the West is looking at the non-West in a somewhat reflective or critical way. I now, at this point, want to show a two-minute film by the filmmaker Jodie Mack, which is called Persian Pickles. And it's— Yeah, I'm just going to play it and then we can talk about it.

[CLIP PLAYS]

00:37:20:14 So well, what the film, in one line, does is it basically traces through the history of the motif of the paisley from Persia through Irish quilting to its use in American countercultural patterning. But so that was the kind of film which for me, very much encapsulated this idea of motifs and objects traveling across cultures and time periods, and taking on different types of cultural manifestations and— Yeah, okay. And this brings us to the Met and what I do there. So this needs no explanation. So South Asia— My official title is curator of modern and contemporary South Asian art— assistant curator of modern and contemporary South Asian art at the Met, sited in the department of modern and contemporary art. The Met has historically collected work from the region. So it's not that with my arrival, did the region open up to the museum. Premodern and historical work have been collected by over ten departments of the museum from, you know, Asian art to Islamic art to arms and armor, musical instruments, whatnot. But modern and contemporary continued to be a blind spot. And particularly modern and contemporary work from South Asia. This all started to change when Sheena Wagstaff, who is the current chairperson of the modern and contemporary department, was appointed in 2012. And she reformatted the department itself, and also added in a number of curatorial positions that had regional specialties attached to them. So that was Latin America, North Africa, the Middle East and Turkey, and South Asia. And the curators for these roles, their responsibilities would be twin. One is collection building and the other is contributing to the exhibition program for the department, which would be spread over now two buildings—the Met Breuer and Fifth Avenue. I hope all of you, or at least some of you, have had a chance to visit the Breuer over its two-year period of being in existence, and had a sense of what our program is.

00:39:45:03 Which is to highlight work by international artists who've been overlooked. Women artists, but also American artists whose practices have— So essentially, actively rethinking our received art history through an exhibition program, which is sited here. And a gesture that Sheena made was to open the building with a retrospective of the, at that point, perhaps, not very widely known Indian female artist Nasreen Mohamedi, who worked in a very bare and minimal vocabulary, creating these incredibly intricate graphic black and white grid drawings, which were inspired by Islamic architecture, but also more Western architecture, as well. That was the opening show, and it really set the pace for the exhibition program. But for me as the curator of South Asian modern and contemporary art, it set up certain kinds of points or nodes to consider, involving what our collection strategy would be and what the future exhibition program would look like, as well. So these are just some installation views from the show. We also had Vijay Iyer as the

artist in residence at the same time, who is a musician. And he composed a work with Wadada Leo Smith, in response to Mohamedi's drawings.

00:41:13:22 Now, what happens now when I arrive and this is what is on view, is you're to write a collection strategy and think of an exhibition program for something that essentially doesn't exist. How does one go about doing that? And within the context of a museum like the Met, which has a very clear, established idea of art history, it has its own chronology and way of displaying and understanding objects, do you intervene or do you— What is the strategy a curator can take at this point? Is it interventionist? Or are you just going to go in and buy a few things that will seem to plug holes, and feel like you're playing catch up? And you know, it all kind of pseudomorphically looks the same. How do we go about it? Other practical concerns: raising support for the kind of work that you want to add, finding work that is available to you, thinking about work that cannot leave the country, leave the region. So you know, my colleague Clare, who works for Middle East, has a whole different set of other issues to tackle. I have to think of work that was made in the early part of the twentieth century by Indian modern artists like Sher-Gill, who've been declared as national treasures. So the work cannot be taken out of India and sold. So it can be on loan to various places, but it cannot be bought or acquired by the museum. So as a result, the Met would never have an encyclopedic or comprehensive modern and contemporary South Asian art collection, because she is one of the lynchpins of that art history. So thinking about those kind of practical and pragmatic concerns when evolving a collection strategy.

00:42:55:162 As I said, availability of work. You know, things have changed in India. I mean, the imperial power relations that defines the collecting strategies of the museum historically do not exist anymore. India has a very robust, and South Asia has a very robust, set of private collectors, private museums, galleries, who are acquiring works, as well. So essentially, what the Met and many other Western institutions who are now employing curators to look at particular regions, are asking to be invited to a conversation that is not sustained by themselves, at least the way I see it. The Indian or the South Asian modern and contemporary art market, nor art production is sustained, determined, or guided by Western institutions, Western institutional interests, or by the West broadly. So keeping all of this in mind, writing the collection strategy was actually challenging, but also very creatively stimulating. Because what it allowed me to do is that it positioned me at a point where I could look at a global art history, an institutional art history, and a regional art history, and think of ways of interweaving all of them in some way, and finding moments to reconsider them and how do I go about articulating those moments. And I think something that I settled on are a couple of thematics or concerns that are allowing me to do that.

00:44:24:22 One is to look at generations of artists, questions of pedagogy, and friendship. So collecting artists not just because they were all working in an idiom that was minimal or that was figurative, but actually looking at artists who were friends with one another. So Zarina Hashmi was very good friends with Nasreen Mohamedi and Tyeb Mehta, and they all lived in Delhi in the early 1960s. Their working styles, methodologies, and biographies diverge; but you could bring them together and gesture to a particularly productive moment that was happening at a space in a city in India. Similarly, if you think of, say, someone like Rasheed Araeen, who has a transnational practice, goes from Pakistan to Britain. And he's working there at the same time as Amwar Jalal Shemza, but Shemza's working a mode of calligraphic abstraction. This is looking at, or predating, a kind of Minimalist aesthetic. Or not predating, but in conversation with it as it's happening here.

00:45:31:08 So they are transnational figures cutting across geographies, living in diasporic condition. How

do you integrate them within a strategy? This is Nasreen. And just a little story about this, is that we didn't have a Mohamedi in the collection when I joined. And you know, I knew that Zarina had a work, and she gifted the work because she got the work as a gift from Nasreen when Nasreen visited her in New York and stayed with her. And she didn't want to kind of monetize what was the gift from a friend. So finding works which also carry affective stories of that nature, which can animate friendships and relationships. Looking at overworked figures, like Mohan Somant, who was another Indian figure who went to Rome and Egypt. And his set of inspirations were looking at, you know, work from the South, eventually arriving in New York, looking at historic traditional painting as a reference point. K. G. Subramanyan, who was a very important pedagogue who straddled two important educational institutions in India. He was at Santiniketan, the school established by Tagore, and then went to Baroda and became the dean of the fine arts faculty over there. The way he's interrogating kind of paradigms of the studio, of kind of history painting, in a way, here. This is a drawing of his. And then he was a pedagogue to Behari Mukherjee, who is [part of] a subsequent generation of artists who worked with fiber. And you know, so breeding that kind of connection. Because what he basically said, that Indian is full of living traditions of artistic production. So you braid that, or you find a way of articulating that, with Modernist practice. And that's something that she would continue to do.

00:47:21:02 So finding these different ways of bringing this work together. And of course, I'm only articulating the relationships between them to you very cursorily, amongst artists from South Asia. But then also thinking about how do we locate them in relation to artists from the West or the Middle East at the same time? Any collection that now wants to be built about a region has to take in the political exigency of what's happening in the region at this particular moment. So adding work that is being made now, which is addressing serious issues of human rights, violence against women, you know, are works that we also need to have. So Nalini Malani's *In Search of Vanished Blood*, 2012, has recently joined the collection, which she showed in Documenta. So looking at politicized work that is happening today. So again, our investigation and investment in a collection is not only historic, but is also contemporaneous at the same time.

00:48:24:24 Which brings us to the two projects that I have ongoing right now. One is by Ranjani Shettar, and it's called *Seven Ponds and a Few Raindrops*, and it's in our modern and contemporary art galleries. It's the first work by a living Indian artist to be shown in our galleries. So for the last two years, while I've been at the museum trying to kind of galvanize interest in support and everybody's like, "So what can we see?" I'm like, "There's nothing to see besides the Pollocks, the Kiefers, the Kelly." You know, all the white men. There is no work from the region on view here; it's all at Breuer. So to kind of address that imbalance was to find a way of emphatically deciding to get work into the galleries. And we're going to see more of that as we rehang them next year. Now, Ranjani's work— Ranjani's a sculptor working in India today. She lives outside of Bangalore in a small town. Her work is inspired by nature. She works with natural and manmade materials and comes to these very interesting syntheses of them. And so the work now that we have, which is a gift from the Tia Collection— And the Tia Collection is going to support the acquisition of other women artists from the region for the Met, and this is the first of that. So the work is called *Seven Ponds and a Few Raindrops*. The forms that you see are made out of stainless steel that the artist welds and makes herself, and then are covered with muslin that is stained with natural dyes and bound to the stainless steel with tamarind paste, which is a local tradition that she absorbed in a small town in Karnataka. And through abstraction, allows people to want to kind of dwell on issues of threatened ecology, and also engaging with histories of more Minimalist and Modernist sculpture. So connecting back to, say, someone like Mohamedi or Zarina, who both use traditions of line and animate them in different ways in their practice. So again, braiding the contemporary with the historical.

00:50:28:17 Which brings me to the roof commission, which opened two weeks ago. We invited Huma Bhabha to conceive of a project for the Met's roof, which has been— The commission has been in place since the late eighties, but with the coming of Sheena, we started to invite artists to make works that were site-specific. And so that began with Imran Qureshi. We had Dan Graham, Cornelia Parker, Adrián Villar Rojas, and now this year it's Huma. Now, what we have on view, or what I have on screen, are two drawings are amongst the suite of drawings that Huma presented Sheena and myself when we went up to her studio in Poughkeepsie in July, 2017. And what was most compelling to us about this was the kind of precision, simplicity, and restraint that Huma presented in a schema that would eventually actualize itself on the room. And hence, we invited her and moved forward with the commission. Huma works with ephemeral and found materials. She works by herself in her studio, and makes her objects to scale. The works at the Met are of a size and scale that she had never worked with before, but a lot of her previous practice had figurative sculpture or sculpture which deals with figuration, which was about life-size. So here you have some images of Huma working in her studio as she was making the two sculptures that would comprise the roof commission over a period of six to eight months. They were then required to be cast in bronzes to, of course, weather the six months that they need to be on the room. But the idea of casting them in bronze is also a critical component, I feel, to the project, which I'll discuss a little bit later. But here are some working images of the works being cast at the foundry in Kingston.

00:52:34:13 And then we arrive here, with the two of them on the roof. The installation is titled *We Come in Peace*. And what we have here is what I see, and what Huma has also articulated, is a dramatic kind of mise-en-scène that she has choreographed of two figures that have somehow arrived or landed on the Met's roof, treating the Met's roof as a kind of platform or pedestal for a kind of more— of setting the scene, really, and leading to allusions of a first-contact narrative between humans or aliens. How am I doing on time? Okay, I should wrap up soon. So the allusions to a first-contact narrative, of course, being further bolstered by the title of the installation, called We Come in Peace. So We Come in Peace is comprised of two sculptures. The twelve-foot, five-headed, ambiguously-gendered figure, We Come in Peace, which shares the title of the installation; and the supplicant or prostrate form, Benaam. Now, I will address each of them individually. Benaam is a form that Huma has evolved over a series of subsequent iterations, the first being in 2002, and then following that, in '05 and '06. The way the form that we have on the roof now differs from those previous iterations is that it is being a title. The previous works were untitled. And this work is called *Benaam*, which is a Urdu word, the language spoken in Pakistan, that means without name, or nameless. It is supersized than the other editions. The other iterations, sorry. And the other iterations were presented on a pedestal. But I think the gesture of removing the work and putting it on the floor of the roof is quite crucial.

00:54:44:12 Now, when you look at this form, it is a garbage bag, and the hands and the tail, which is at the back of it, are made out of clay, but they've all been cast in bronze. The questions, I think, that have arrised[sic] is, what lurks beneath the garbage bag? What is that? What is the garbage bag symbolic of? Is it a body bag? Is it a burka? Is the form alive? Is the form dead? What is the position it occupies? Is it praying? Is it in a position of prostration? Has it made abject? And then the tail—I don't have an image of the tail, but as we go further along, you'll see—what is that tail? Is this the tail of a creature? Is it fecal matter? Is it broken rubble? So the work, in a way, is an abstraction. And it goes to what Rosalind Krause has said of thinking about the monument as abstraction. And that's one of the things that I think is extremely crucial and critical to this installation being at the Met, which is rethinking— They're not monumental forms; they're actually monuments. And rethinking or participating in a much broader discussion around the idea of what constitutes a monument? A monument in other cultures is different from what is a

00:50:28:17 monument in America or in the West. And the installation took on a topical and timely relevance that none of us could have anticipated when Confederate statutes were being taken down as Huma was making the work. So adding another kind of layer to a conversation that was ongoing. So this idea of the monument and the monument in relation to art history, but a particular social climate, really became crucial as we went on. The idea of also taking ephemeral materials and casting them in bronze and giving them a kind of permanence. They're not marble; they're not the kind of conventional materials that are used to replicate a certain kind of body, as well.

00:56:44:15 And that brings us to We Come in Peace, which is a five-headed figure— Well, there's a sixth somewhere in there, but I'm not going to reveal to you where; you have to go find it for yourself. But it's a figure that has a body in extremis, which seems to have come through or survived a whole set of very violent or painful experiences, as can be gleaned from the scars, the rasping on the surface of the figure. But also the faces. The five faces shift and change as you walk around the installation. And the expressions change, as well. So is it bellowing in pain? Or is it calling out for peace? One doesn't know. There's a kind of productive ambiguity. And I think what's essential—I'll come to that in a minute—what's essential again, and another crucial feature of this installation, is that Huma has always spoken about giving her figures features, because the minute you give the sculpture a certain feature or eyes, you create an engagement. And that goes back to this notion that even Judith Butler talks about, which is in terms of humanizing, who gets self-representation and gets humanized? When you see someone's face, you automatically start to feel inclined or empathetic to them. But in our contemporary moment, where it's over-mediated, the face of a person can also be used to dehumanize at the same time. And what this installation does is it doesn't give you a face with Benaam. You don't know what the figure is. And with We Come in Peace, you have multiple faces. So you're kind of straddling between various conditions that these forms could occupy. And that kind of ambiguity is productive in how you read them or narrativize them in relation to one another, but also to contemporary society at large.

00:58:50:02 Now, Huma has always been inspired by science fiction and horror, horror film. And that's something we really wanted to bring to the fore in our presentation of the installation. And so here I have two examples, which— So this idea or this connection to science fiction is borne out in a text by Ed Halter, who's a film scholar, a scholar of moving image practice and also teaches at Bard, where he talks about the root or the etymology of the phrase "we come in peace," and the productive ambiguity that rests in it, starting from Robert Wise's 1951 film, The Day the Earth Stood Still to in his discussions through whom[?] our understanding and realizing that during the 1980s and when Huma was in school, she was quite intrigued by pre-digital creature effects in films from the time, like The Thing and Zardoz and others, where impossible forms were made out of material, different kinds of very real materials—plastic, latex, and whatnot—and how that impacts her own visual aesthetic as it evolves. So there are these direct allusions to science fiction and horror in the piece; but also, the work has connections to various traditions of art history, going back to African sculpture. So here, a reference to something from southern Mali, if you think of the conical breasts. Or the five-headed Hindu god Vishnu. But then also Rodin, and thinking of the hands of Benaam in relation to Rodin. And then the tail, in terms of entropic temporally-based sculpture—Smithson, for example. So in the form of Benaam, you go from figuration to, you know, Smithson. Or temporally disjunctive sculpture. So again, the monument as an abstraction.

01:00:51:19 So what the objects do is that they exist at these different registers. One that you could enter through an interest in science fiction or through art history; but also, they have a deep political resonance with our present moment and they are responsive to various kinds of social concerns. We installed the work early enough to include images of the work in our catalog that

accompanies the commission. But also, we got to take advantage of global warming and totally unseasonal spring weather. So here we have it in snow. And then you have it with, like, a thunder storm, but on a sunny day. And so here we are. They've arrived. And Huma's in the audience with us. And I think on that note, I might end and take any questions. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]