

# SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE ANNUAL REPORT 2021



*Front Cover:  
Abid Aslam, Highly Noticable,  
Mixed Media, Courtesy of the Hundal Collection*



Dear Friends and Patrons,

The year 2021 has been a challenging year for everyone around the world and specially for arts related organizations like South Asia Institute. With the widespread accessibility to COVID vaccinations in the last few months, the future looks more positive and hopeful, despite the persistence of vaccine hesitancy and the appearance of newer variants. Each art and culture organization has slowly pivoted to a cautious, careful, and calculated new normal in their own unique ways. We hope that the time is not far away, when we can return to good old days.

At least we can see the light at the end of the dark and difficult tunnel of the recent past.

Despite all the trials and tribulations, with the help of our sponsors, donors and contributors, we were able to continue to connect with our patrons through quality exhibitions, varied and exceptional online and in-person programs. During this time, we have also strived to reach out to our various community partners to develop mutually beneficial programing.

With the dawn of 2022, we hope that our live in-person programming will continue to gain momentum so we can bring you even more diverse and exciting programs and exhibitions. We also plan to continue to connect remotely with our online audiences. We value the artistic excellence and innovation of our South Asian artists and performers and will continue to support and showcase them for your enjoyment. As we continue to foster community collaboration and recognizing the humanity in each one of us, we will continue our commitment to sharing the South Asian stories and narratives to create a better and just world for all of us.

Your support for all our community efforts matters more than ever and we appreciate it immensely.

Best Regards,

Team SAI

# EXHIBITIONS

## **OLD TRADITIONS, NEW NARRATIVES: SOUTH ASIAN MINIATURES**

September 2020 - April 2021

This exhibition followed the trajectory of South Asian miniature art through more than five centuries beginning with the Mughal period and tracing it through to contemporary practice. Reintroduced and transformed initially at the National College of Art in Lahore, Pakistan, and later in India, the UK and the USA, the practice of miniature art evolved from the strict traditional format to an unconstrained representation of contemporary themes. This comprehensive exhibition featured works by significant artists who comprise an international movement of contemporary miniature painting.

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## **DIASPORIC RHIZOME: A VIRTUAL EXHIBITION**

March - May 2021

Diasporic Rhizome was a virtual exhibition that explored how the future of our present - derived from our past - manifests itself through a South Asian lens. 21 participating artists were selected from an open call by a 3- member jury comprised of Faisal Anwar, Ambika Trasi and Brendan Fernandes.

The artists in Diasporic Rhizome reexamined history, commented on current social issues and dreamed of new realities. Their works used innovation and imagination as change agents where the digital space became the apparatus for community building, challenging the world to transform and address our growing needs.



# DIASPORIC RHIZOME

A VIRTUAL EXHIBITION

MARCH 15 - MAY 15, 2021



## **THE SINDHU PROJECT: ENIGMA OF ROOTS**

June - August 2021

The Sindhu Project: Enigma of Roots was a multi-site exhibition that debuted at the South Asia Institute. After the end of the exhibition it was reconfigured for exhibition in New Delhi, India at Exhibit 320 and in Lahore, Pakistan at the National College of Arts' Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Gallery.

The Sindhu Project was curated by Lise McKean, Ph.D. and embodied responses of artists Mahwish Chishty and Gunjan Kumar to their explorations of the archaeological sites and artifacts in the expansive Sindhu (Indus) watershed, a geographical region stretching across northwest India and much of Pakistan. Through parallel journeys involving familial roots and enigmas of inhabited places across time, Chishty and Kumar brought contemporary art-making into dialogue with excavated forms that contributed to imagining the ancient riverine landscape.

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## **CONTEMPORARY CHRONICLES**

September - October 2021

This exhibition included a convergence of evocative sociopolitical imagery that allowed room for a multiplicity of interpretations. It featured 15 contemporary South Asian artists, and represented reflections on the environment, language and identity. Artists trained in traditional techniques expanded their practices, utilizing new tools and media to investigate their global, national and individual identities.

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## **RAVI SHANKAR: RAGAMALA TO ROCKSTAR A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE MAESTRO'S LIFE IN MUSIC**

November 2021 - March 2022

The exhibition, curated by music and performing arts producer, Brian Keigher and Ravi Shankar disciple, Gaurav Mazumdar, was an opportunity to experience the legendary musician's eventful life and groundbreaking career in music through an unprecedented collection of rare concert art posters by noted artists, psychedelic art prints, flyers, portraits by famed photographers, videos and films, record covers and personal artifacts assembled by Keigher over 30+ years.

# PROGRAMS

## Spotlight on Chitra Ganesh January 2021

The internationally recognized artist, Chitra Ganesh often takes inspiration from historical or mythic texts to engage with issues of femininity, sexuality and power. In this online discussion with Dr. Natasha Bissonauth, she discussed her work, representation, narratives and agency. The spotlight was accompanied by an exhibition of Ganesh's digital animations hosted on the SAI website.



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## Immigrants & Identity February 2021

South Asia Institute partnered with the producers to bring

The premier online screening of the film I'LL MEET YOU THERE and the Live Panel Discussion that followed was made available for audiences in the United States through partnership with the producers of the film. Filmmaker Iram Parveen Bilal's thoughtful writing and directing yielded enlightening performances in a story that defied storytelling conventions and stereotypes in favor of multi-dimensional characters who displayed their humanity at every turn. The discussion focused on universal issues related to transitional identities due to immigration, racial and religious interaction in new societies and cultures.

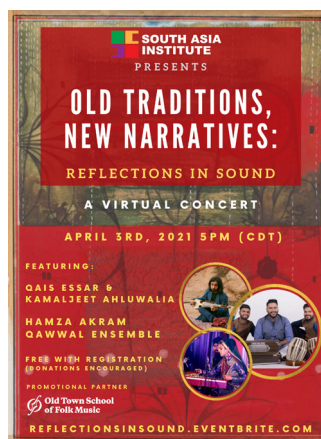




## Old Traditions, New Narratives: Reflections in Sound

April 2021

This virtual concert hosted by Meera Dugal, celebrated and reflected on the exhibition, Old Traditions, New Narratives. It featured a collaboration between Qais Essar (rabab) and Kamaljeet Ahluwalia (santoor) that was followed by a performance by Hamza Akram Qawwal Ensemble.



## Virtual Studio Visit with Gunjan Kumar, Mahwish Chishty + Asad Ali Jafri

April 2021

Artists Gunjan Kumar and Mahwish Chishty discussed their collaboration in producing works for their exhibition titled 'The Sindhu Project: Enigma of Roots,' with SAI Executive Director Asad Ali Jafri. The exhibition reflected their parallel explorations of the archaeological sites in the expansive Sindhu (Indus) watershed, a geographical region stretching across northwest India and much of Pakistan.



## Seeing Double: Mughal Reflections in South Asian art

April 2021

A unique collaboration with the Courtauld Institute of Art in London resulted in an intensive cross-cultural study event that, provided both historical and current perspectives on South Asia's Imperial past. With speakers that included artists, curators, collectors and art historians operating from differing contexts and continents, the discussion revolved around the works in the exhibition at South Asia Institute titled Old Traditions, New Narratives: South Asian Miniatures.



## Artist Talk with Sofia Karim April 2021

Artist Sofia Karim talked about her work titled Turbine Bagh that started as an artists' movement against fascism and authoritarianism and continues to be a global form of protest. She had worked with artists, writers, poets, musicians and thinkers internationally to create samosa packets that she planned to exhibit in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Museum in London.



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## The Sindhu Project: Enigma of Roots Opening Reception June 2020

The exhibition was officially inaugurated by Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White. The special opening event included a private tour of the exhibition and a conversation with artists Mahwish Chishty & Gunjan Kumar, and curator Lise McKean, Ph.D.



## The Sindhu Project Symposium July 2021

Professor J. Mark Kenoyer, renowned authority on Indus Valley Civilization, along with Sindhu Project artists Mahwish Chishti and Gunjan Kumar discussed the role of modern potters and artists who continue to expand and elaborate on the traditions of the Indus. They explored the important developments in artistic styles and motifs that emerged in the northwestern regions of the South Asian sub-continent during the emergence of the first cities in the greater Indus Valley region, circa 2600-1900 BCE. The iconic aspects of Gandharan art such as sculpture and architecture circa 300 BCE to 400 CE were also presented, but with a new perspective based on scientific research and analysis.



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## Two Leading Young Performers: Arun Ramamurthy & Rohan Krishnamurthy September 2021

Two acclaimed classical musicians thrilled the audience at this event. ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY, who played the mridangam, is a distinguished performer, composer and educator and is one of the most prominent Indian classical and cross-over artists in the South Asian diaspora. ARUN RAMAMURTHY is a multifaceted classical violinist, composer and educator who has performed internationally with several well-known luminaries.

This event was in collaboration with the South Asian Classical Music Society.



## **Opening Reception: Ravi Shankar: Ragamala to Rockstar A Retrospective of The Maestro's Life in Music**

November 2021

The exhibition was officially inaugurated by Sukanya Shankar, the wife of Ravi Shankar who made a special trip to Chicago for the event, that also included a curators tour and a sitar performance by Grammy nominated Gaurav Mazumdar, the co-curator and Ravi Shankar disciple. The exhibition provided a rare glimpse into the legendary music icon's eventful life and his overwhelming impact on the music world and pop culture.



## **Married to the Maestro**

November 2021

In a candid conversation with the co-curators and her close friends Gaurav Mazumdar and Brian Keigher, Sukanya Shankar reminisced about her life with the maestro Ravi Shankar. She also took questions from the audience and spoke personally to many who had met her on her prior visits to Chicago with the maestro.



## **Ragamala: A Celebration of Indian Classical Music**

November 2021

The eighth annual, highly celebrated Indian classical music concert, Ragamala, was brought about through a collaboration with People of Rhythm and the South Asian Classical Music Society. It was a shorter (4 hour) version of the all-night event and took place in the historic Second Presbyterian Church. It featured four ensembles and guest artists, many of whom were students of Ravi Shankar and paid tribute to him by performing his compositions. The event was attended by Shankar's wife, Sukanya and drew over 400 attendees.



# Raga: A Journey into the Soul of India: Film & Discussion

November 2021

Directed by Howard Worth and narrated by Ravi Shankar himself, this film is one of the great music documentaries of the 1970s. The film follows Shankar on a journey to India to visit his aging musical Guru Allauddin Khan and documents Shankar's life and his journey as a musician and teacher in the U.S., Europe, and India. Raga was originally released on film by The Beatles' Apple Films and re-released by Shankar's own label East Meets West Music in 2010. The film features appearances by Shankar with Yehudi Menuhin, George Harrison, Alla Rakha, Shiv Kumar Sharma, Allauddin Khan. The film was preceded by a curated tour of the exhibition and followed by a discussion with exhibition co-curators Brian Keigher and Gaurav Mazumdar.



# Sangeet Ratna and Ravi Shankar's Music Festival from India: Double Feature & Chicago Film Premieres

November 2021

The film Sangeet Ratna is a tribute to Ravi Shankar created on his passing in 2012. Directed by award-winning visual artist, filmmaker and GRAMMY-nominated music producer. Alan Kozlowski. Kozlowski met Shankar in 1978 and began 35 years of study, friendship and collaboration, with them going on to perform together in venues around the world.



Ravi Shankar's Music Festival from India is a concert film directed by Stuart Cooper, filmed at the Royal Albert Hall, London. Shankar gathered an all-star Indian classical music ensemble of sixteen superb musicians for the project, with himself as lead sitarist and composer. The commentary is by ex-Beatle George Harrison, a long-time champion of Indian music.

The films were preceded by a curated tour of the exhibition and followed by a discussion with exhibition co-curator Brian Keigher

## Faisal Anwar

Faisal Anwar is a new media artist working between Canada and Pakistan. In this session he discussed his work as a contemporary artist working in the digital space, responding to spatial surroundings to encourage interaction and curiosity while raising potent questions. He discussed his interactive works that often utilize public data, community engagement, social media and questioned how rights of access blur lines between private and public spaces to form new territories representing time, movement, memory and hope.



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## Ambika Trasi

Ambika Trasi is an artist, arts organizer and writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Her multidisciplinary, research-based practice considers the coloniality of power within images and sites. She is interested in the role that memory, language and technology play in identity-making, community-building, and decolonizing in the diaspora. In this interview she discussed her curatorial practice and shared a conversation she had with the artists Salman Toor and Chitra Ganesh.



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## Brendan Fernandes

Brendan Fernandes is a multidisciplinary artist who examines issues of cultural displacement, migration, labor and queer subjectivity through installation, video, sculpture, and dance. Born in Nairobi, Kenya to a Goan, Indian family, Fernandes was a dancer whose experience leaving dance due to an injury informs his current performance practice. He discussed his experiences working in the intersection of dance and visual art and his pieces that open up questions about the hybridity of media and seek to problematize the notion of a fixed, essential or authentic identity.



## Ruby Chishti

Ruby Chishti is an installation artist who graduated from the National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Using unconventional mediums, her sculptures talk about the fragility of human existence, migration, Islamic myths, gender politics, memory and the universal theme of love, loss and of being human. Her installations, sculptures, and site specific works have been exhibited nationally and internationally.



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## Gaurav Mazumdar

Gaurav Mazumdar is a versatile composer, performer and educator who has been a champion for the preservation of classical Indian music. He is from a family of musicians of Allahabad, India. His early career began in vocal music followed by the violin, until he was discovered by Ravi Shankar, who inspired him to learn the sitar under his tutelage. Like his teacher, Ravi Shankar, he is committed to cross-cultural collaborations and has earned a reputation as the foremost musician of his generation for his contributions in making Indian music accessible and truly global, both in appreciation and understanding. He has collaborated with numerous western musicians to create compositions and perform. He is the only Indian artiste to have performed at the Vatican. Mazumdar won a Grammy Nomination in 2004 for his recording 'East Meets West' with Daniel Hope on the violin. When he is not performing he spends his time teaching students worldwide.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

South Asia Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The mission and vision of South Asia Institute and its programs are supported by the generosity of individuals, groups, families, foundations and corporations.

These gifts and donations allow visitors, school children and other groups to enjoy access to our exhibitions, performances, seminars, talks, film screenings and other programs free of charge.

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