

PRESS RELEASE

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Press Contact

Rachel Eggers

Associate Director of Public Relations

rachele@seattleartmuseum.org

206.654.3151

SEATTLE ASIAN ART MUSEUM PRESENTS INAUGURAL SHOW BY NEW CURATOR OF SOUTH ASIAN ART

Embodied Change features work of art exploring the human form from SAM's collection and local loans

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1300 First Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

206.625.8900

seattleartmuseum.org



SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Asian Art Museum presents *Embodied Change: South Asian Art Across Time* (January 14–July 10, 2022), the first show curated by Natalia Di Pietrantonio, SAM's Assistant Curator of South Asian Art. Featuring works from SAM's collection and local loans, the installation features work from the third millennium BCE to present day in a range of diverse material including terracotta, wood, metal, painting, photography, and video. They all depict the human body and its possibilities for transformation.

Di Pietrantonio joined SAM in July 2020 as the museum's first-ever curator specializing in South Asian art; the position was created following the reopening of the reimagined Asian Art Museum as part of the institution's vision of increasing its focus on acquiring and exhibiting works of art from the South Asian diaspora, particularly contemporary works.

"For this, my first show at SAM, I wanted to introduce myself to Seattle audiences by exploring ideas that I've been fascinated with in my own scholarship—how the body is a site of both personal intimacy and possibility for change," says Di Pietrantonio. "During the planning for the show, I realized that these themes were also incredibly relevant to the turbulent times we are living in. I hope that visitors come away with a sense of how these artists are boldly imagining personal, political, and social change."



The first gallery in *Embodied Change* features *Before the War* (2022), a video work by Chitra Ganesh (American, born 1975), which imagines a future of regenerating bodies that float in outer space. In collaboration with Di Pietrantonio, Ganesh chose to include in the space five ancient goddess votives from the Indus Valley from SAM's collection; the artist makes a connection

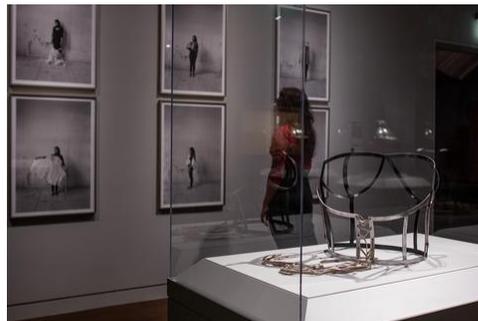


between these historical objects and her futuristic visions, all of which offer ways to challenge everyday norms of conceiving and perceiving bodies.



Visitors next enter a gallery with works exploring bodies in urban spaces. Black-and-white photographs by Brendan Fernandes (born in Kenya, 1979) were staged at the Seattle Art Museum in 2017 and feature dancers from Pacific Northwest Ballet posing near masks from SAM's African art collection. The masks seem to be dancers' heads, forging a bridge between the inanimate and animate.

Kali (I'm A Mess) (2020), an exuberant neon work by Chila Kumari Burman (British, born 1957), is one of six inaugural acquisitions by the museum from the new Richard E. Lang and Jane Lang Davis Acquisition for Global and Contemporary Art. Originally installed on the façade of the Tate Britain, the work uses Kali as an interventionist symbol that challenges stereotypes of Black and Asian communities across the diaspora.



This gallery also features several new acquisitions and promised gifts by Naiza Khan (Pakistani, born 1968); these are the first works by a contemporary Pakistani artist to enter SAM's collection. Khan's multiple photographs *New Clothes for the Emperor* are from her *Heavenly Ornaments* series, for which Khan fabricated metal lingerie, skirts, and corsets for a model to pose in. These pieces, one of which is also on view

alongside the photographs, embody the ideas of confinement found in the socio-religious Urdu text *Bahishti Zewar*, which contains advice on morals and behavior for young Muslim women.

Also on view is *Sacred Games* (2020), a wood sculpture of an open suitcase by Seattle-based artist Humaira Abid (Pakistani, born 1977) that also contains clothes, a holy book, a cap, and prayer beads, all the possessions of a religious practitioner who is undertaking a spiritual journey.



The final gallery features works of portraiture that challenge body ideals and the role of the female body in the arts, by artists including Mithu Sen (Indian, born 1971) and Rekha Rodwittiya (Indian, born 1958). Other works explore the idea of the goddess through a feminist lens, including works by Mithila artists as well as the photographs of Pushpamala N. (Indian, born 1956) that feature the artist depicted as Mother India. This gallery also

features delicate historical paintings depicting Devi mythologies, in which the worship of the female form became key within the Hindu pantheon.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Embodied Change: South Asian Art Across Time is curated by the Seattle Art Museum (SAM). It is made possible by:

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Photo credits: Natalia Di Pietrantonio, photo: Natali Wiseman, Installation view of *Embodied Change: South Asian Art Across Time* at Seattle Asian Art Museum, 2021, photo: Natali Wiseman.

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020 following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.