

**SOUTH ASIA
INSTITUTE**

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



*Front Cover:
Maqbool Fida Hussain
Untitled (Horses)
Oil on Canvas
Courtesy of the Hundal Collection*



After years of meticulous planning, community engagement, extensive deliberation between stakeholders and a lot of hard work, South Asia Institute opened its doors to the public in October 2019 in a completely renovated landmark building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

South Asia Institute cultivates the art and culture of South Asia and its diaspora through curated exhibitions, innovative programs and educational initiatives. We collaborate locally and globally to engage diverse communities in enriching creative experiences, support artistic production by emerging and established artists and foster cultural appreciation for the South Asian diaspora.

We aim to amplify South Asian voices and explore their complexities while staying connected to our larger human family. We work towards a world in which differences are celebrated, cultures are appreciated and people are uplifted through the power of the arts

We value community and inclusion, creativity and artistic excellence, collaboration and innovation. We believe in telling our own stories through our own lens.

As we celebrate our first year in existence, we are pleased to present to you South Asia Institute's first annual report. We are proud of our accomplishments in spite of some very unusual and trying circumstances created by lockdown, closures and social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We hope you can reminisce with us over the accomplishments we have made over the past year with our art exhibitions, in-person programs and online offerings. We thank you for your continued support of SAI in ensuring that we continue to thrive for many more years to come.

EXHIBITIONS

SOUTH ASIAN MODERN MASTERS

October 2019 - May 2020

Our inaugural exhibition featured the work of formative South Asian modern masters from the Hundal Collection of Chicago. In the years before independence and the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, native citizens were galvanized by swaraj, an intense desire for self-rule. Swadeshi, the movement to boycott British goods and replace them by domestic products, was a driving force toward the goal of freedom from foreign domination. Gandhi's acts of civil disobedience in the 1920s and 1930s was intimately linked with the philosophy and methodology of swadeshi. All of these factors played a role, albeit often subtle, in individual and group identities and the expression of art in the subcontinent. This exhibition included work from artists who made critical contributions to the aesthetics of the region from the 1920s through the 1980s.

OLD TRADITIONS, NEW NARRATIVES: SOUTH ASIAN MINIATURES

September 2020 - February 2021

This exhibition follows 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 has evolved from the strict traditional format to an unconstrained representation of contemporary themes. This comprehensive exhibition features works by significant artists who comprise an international movement of contemporary miniature painting.



PROGRAMS

The Community Archive Collaborative Mixer November 2019

Archivists, students, and members of several cultural heritage organizations gathered at South Asia Institute for a meet-and-greet and an opportunity to share their work. This event was jointly hosted by South Asia Institute, South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, Texas After Violence Project, and the Interference Archive.



Art and Architecture of South Asia December 2019

This half day seminar was conducted by a panel of prominent experts in the field of religious art and architecture from South Asia. Featured speakers included Susan Huntington (Professor Emeritus, Ohio State University), Dr. Kimberly Masteller (Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art), Dr. Ankur Desai (Visiting Professor, Kansas City Art Institute), Dr. Marcella Sirhandi (Professor Emeritus, Oklahoma State University) and Prof. Rob Linrothe (Associate Professor, Northwestern University).



Curator Conversation: Dr. Marcella Sirhandi

February 2020

Curator Dr. Marcella Sirhandi spoke with Zafar Malik (Dean of Student Affairs, East-West University, Chicago) about the historical significance of the artwork featured in our exhibition, *South Asian Modern Masters*.



Reading with Dr. Azra Raza

February 2020

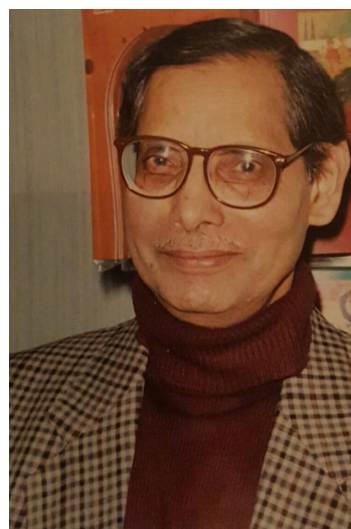
Renowned leukemia researcher, professor, and director of the MDS Center at Columbia University, Dr. Azra Raza read selected excerpts from her book, *The First Cell and the Human Costs of Pursuing Cancer to the Last*, which was followed by a conversation with Dr. Seema Singhal (Professor, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine).



Jalal Uddin Ahmed: In Memoriam

July 2020

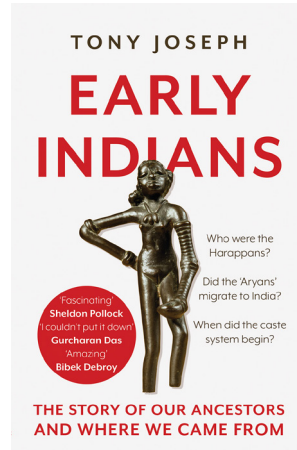
Jalal Uddin Ahmed (Lucknow 1925 - Lahore 2020) spent 70 years breathing, living and thinking of art. A true pioneer, with his relentless and humble industriousness, he was able to establish institutions in the face of the prevailing disinterest in art-related projects. On July 12th, 2020, South Asia Institute and Zafar Malik gathered several friends and admirers of Jalal Uddin Ahmed together virtually to honor a life that had global reach.



Early Indians: A Conversation with Author Tony Joseph

September 2020

Author Tony Joseph shared the new research in his book, *Early Indians*, to highlight how ancient DNA can help answer where the early Indians originated and who they were. This virtual conversation was moderated by Dr. Mridu Sehkar (Director, Kalapriya) and presented in partnership by South Asia Institute and Kalapriya.



CreativeMornings Virtual Field Trip: South Asian Contemporary Miniatures

September 2020

Creative professionals from around the world tuned in for a virtual tour of our exhibition, *Old Traditions, New Narratives: South Asian Miniatures*. This live event, hosted by SAI's Executive Director Asad Ali Jafri with tours led by SAI co-founders, Drs. Shireen and Afzal Ahmad, was described as the "best Zoom session ever" and "like actually being in a museum" by participants.



#SAIatHOME: Staying Connected

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, we were forced to temporarily close our doors to visitors. Like all museums and cultural institutions around the world, we had to rethink how we could best serve our audience with the new limitations imposed by lockdowns and social distancing.

We wanted to help our audience stay connected with artists during this time while also giving artists the opportunity to share their work.

The #SAIatHome series, which we launched in March of this year, gives our audience an opportunity to discover emerging and established South Asian artists and creatives. This collection of interviews, conversations, and videos offers an intimate look at the way artists' work and lives have been affected by COVID-19.

The following is a list of artists, creatives, and scholars that were featured in our #SAIatHome series. The full interviews and videos can be found on our website at saichicago.org



Mumtaz Mahal at a balcony window
Gouache and gold on paper
Courtesy of the Hundal Collection

Zeshan B

Virtuoso vocalist, Zeshan B, blends the hard-driving rhythms and horn heavy sounds of 60s and 70s soul with the angsty scats and vocal stylings of early Indo-Pakistani film/folk music and has created an entirely new genre that is his very own. In our interview, Zeshan discussed his latest album, "Melismatic," featuring the singles "Brown Power" and "Nausheen."



In Memoriam: Zarina Hashmi

Zarina Hashmi, the iconic minimalist printmaker who had made New York her home, passed away in London on April 25, 2020. Zarina's work explored the themes of home, migration and dislocation.



Salima Hashmi

Salima Hashmi is a pioneering artist and arts educator, accomplished writer and fearless women's rights activist. She joined SAI co-founder, Dr. Shireen Ahmad, for a virtual interview.

Thattu - Margaret Pak & Vinod Kalathil

Thattu is an Indian street food concept featuring cuisine from the coastal state of Kerala. Founded by co-owners and couple Margaret Pak and Vinod Kalathil, Thattu launched officially in 2019 and earned recognition from the James Beard and Jean Blanchet awards. Unfortunately, Thattu was forced to close their physical locations earlier this year due to the pandemic, but quickly reinvented as a takeout pop-up collaborating with other local chefs and restaurants.



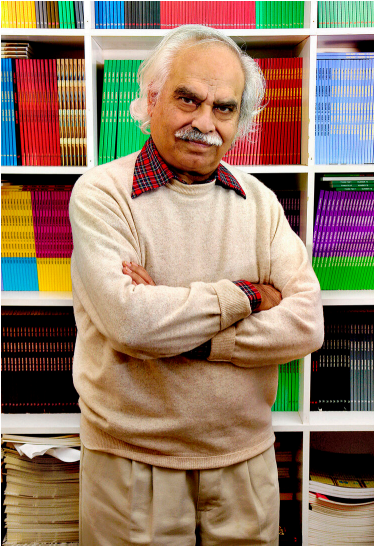
“Our goal has been to educate our customers about the diversity of Indian cuisine and specifically showcase the unique and authentic flavors of Kerala.”

-Margaret Pak & Vinod Kalathil



Rajmohan Gandhi

Rajmohan Gandhi is a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari - the second Governor General of India. In an interview with SAI co-founder Dr. Afzal Ahmad, Gandhi discussed his writing career and recent book, *Punjab - a History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten*.



Rasheed Araeen

Rasheed Araeen is an internationally acclaimed, London-based artist, curator, writer, activist and inventor. Active for over six decades, Rasheed's body of work includes his own conceptual and performance art, sculpture as well as significant written and curatorial contributions to the art world. Rasheed was the force behind the pioneering art magazine, *Third Text*. His recent work, *Rhapsody in Four Colors*, is a critically acclaimed, 25 meter installation at the Agha Khan Center in London.

Sonia Sabri

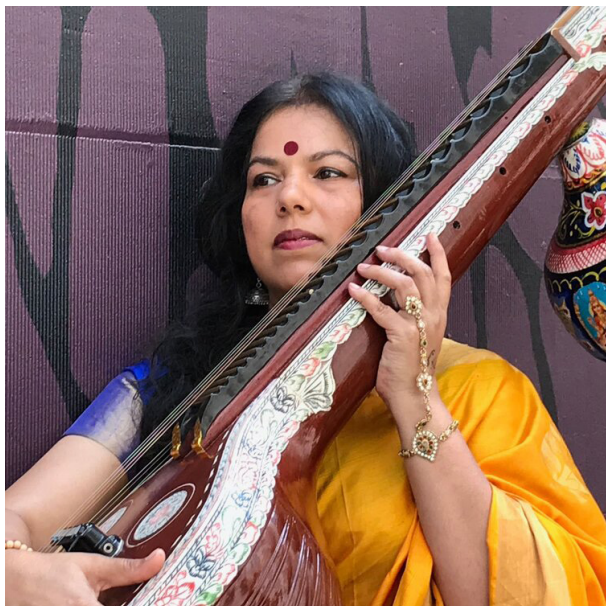
Sonia Sabri is a Kathak artist, choreographer, educator and artistic director based in Birmingham, UK. Sonia leads the Sonia Sabri Company (SSCo) and has performed globally as well as collaborated extensively with artists across disciplines. Sonia discussed her work and shared videos explaining and showcasing her practice from home.



Neelanjana Banerjee and Robin Sukhadia

Asad Ali Jafri, South Asia Institute's Executive Director, interviewed creative power couple, Neelanjana Banerjee and Robin Sukhadia. Neela is a writer with a long background in journalism, as well as Managing Editor at Kaya Press. Robin is a musician, student and teacher of tabla. In their individual interviews, they describe their inspirations, practice and life with family in this era.





Sarsawathi Ranganathan

Sarsawathi Ranganathan is a Chicago-based musician, composer, teacher and Veena artist. She is the founder of Surabhai Ensemble, a cross cultural music and dance ensemble. Saraswathi is the first South Asian woman to win a Chicago Music Award.

“To me personally, the more aware the audience is of diverse cultures, the less fear there is and consequently less and less hate – and what can be better than sharing music and dance deriving from multiple traditions to weave our story.”

–Sarsawathi Ranganathan

Faiza Butt

Faiza Butt studied at National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan, prior to obtaining her MFA from Slade School of Art in London. She currently lives and works in London. Faiza sits down with SAI to tell us about her unique hybrid technique that combines the par dokht (pointillist) miniature technique and pixel structure of photographs. The current exhibition features her works created on polyester film.



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.

We very sincerely want to thank the donors listed below for their generosity and thoughtfulness.

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