

independent thoughts

A series
of artists'
commissions
in response to
the **50th**
Anniversary
of Indian &
Pakistani
Independence



"Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves.

If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies.

If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings."

BEN OKRI

INTRODUCTION

AUGUST 1997 marks the **50th Anniversary of Indian Independence and the creation of Pakistan as a**

separate Nation State.

Under the umbrella title

'Independent Thoughts',

a group of visual arts organisations in the North and Midlands of England has commissioned contemporary

independent
thoughts

artists to respond to the event through a series of interrelated exhibitions taking place between Summer 1997 and Spring 1998.

The commissions comprise a critical interrogation of the issues surrounding Independence and its implications today for people on the Sub-Continent, in Britain and globally. The artists have also used the opportunity for a wider exploration of overlapping concerns about nationhood, cultural identity, and the legacies of colonialism, against a backdrop of increasing global homogenisation, hybridity, and cultural interpolation and mobility.

With a generational range taking in artists from Rasheed Araeen to Surjit Simplay, using a variety of media including painting, sculpture, photography, video and installation, the project will present a diversity of perspectives on the theme. Collectively the series will make a significant contribution to debates surrounding the issue of Independence over the coming months, and will be enhanced by coordinated educational initiatives throughout the period.

Independent Thoughts is curated by a consortium of venues, whose individual exhibitions are introduced on the following pages.

The Drum

The Custard Factory, Birmingham

Gibb Street
Digbeth
Birmingham
B9 4AA

Tel 0121-693 3616
Fax 0121-693 3613

Mon-Sat 11am-5pm
Thurs 12pm-7pm
Sun 12pm-5pm
Admission Free

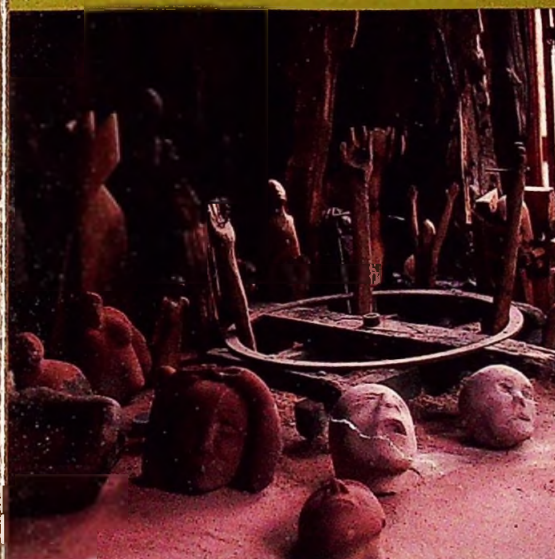
15 August – 28 September 1997

sunil janah

juginder lamba

[RAISING THE FLAG]

surjit simplay



Juginder Lamba

Raising The Flag

1997

Work in progress

Lamba's installation focuses on the rapidly changing status of our past, within the context of current demands to homogenise and contain everything within a narrow framework of existence – the now – where that which does not directly relate to contemporary values and aspirations is denied a platform. This central idea is juxtaposed with explorations of a personal journey through the diverse cultures of the artist's upbringing in search of an identity.

Utilising Neolithic and other ancient timbers, relics from a bygone agrarian and industrial age, stone, metal and sand, the installation operates at a multiplicity of levels, creating an archaeological and historical

resonance. From a ten feet high structure, suggesting both a gallow and a lifting platform, is suspended a cage-like structure. Contained within it, and around it, emerging from a mound of sand, are echoes of our ancestry, drawing reference to civilisations as far back as the Indus Valley. Are we witnesses to a burial or a resurrection through excavation?

Photographer **Sunil Janah** became Art Editor of *The People's War* during the early 1940s and produced unrivalled images of India's struggle for Independence. A selection of these is on show.

Surjit Simplay (see opposite page).

Juginder Lamba's installation will be exhibited at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV4 6EP
4 October – 16 November 1997 Tel: 01203-832381

Light House Media Centre

Wolverhampton

The Chubb Building
Fryer Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 1HT

Tel 01902-716055

Fax 01902-717143

Open

Mon-Sun 12pm-8.30pm

Admission Free

15 September – 30 October 1997

surjit simplay



Surjit Simplay

1996

Surjit Simplay has been commissioned to produce work by both The Drum and the Light House.

The Drum | Birmingham artist Surjit Simplay stretches the visual codes of modern advertising to make saturated, vibrant, digitally crafted photographic visions; snapshots of vivid dreamlike journeys. They are products of mental leaps – juxtapositions – which begin with personal references but ultimately have social, cultural, and subversive aspects. Some images, almost life size, draw on diverse cultural and historical iconography; while others use famous monuments and landmarks from the Sub-Continent to raise questions of beauty, geography and ownership.

Light House Media Centre | One of the themes that Simplay works with again and again concerns women and the celebration of women's sexuality. She humorously and incisively cuts through the stereotype of Western beauty, replacing it with a strong, powerful and controversial view of British Asian women.

It is indeed the sheer visual impact of these images that gives Simplay's work a new, exciting and exhilarating edge. This work is at once visual flirtation but on a deeper level it signals the coming to power and coming of age of a new generation.

Bluecoat Gallery

Liverpool

School Lane
Liverpool
L1 3BX

Tel 0151-709 5689

Fax 0151-708 0015

Open

Tues-Sat 10.30am-5pm

Admission Free

11 October – 15 November 1997

mohini chandra

[TRAVELS IN A NEW WORLD 2]



Mohini Chandra

Travels in a New World 2

1997

This commission builds on the themes of the diaspora of Indian peoples. It focuses on the Indian community of Fiji brought by the British as indentured labour to its former colony around the turn of the century. Due to more recent political, cultural and economic pressures, this community has experienced a secondary diaspora around the Pacific Rim through Australasia, the USA and Canada. In researching this new work, Chandra traced family members, filming them as they recounted their experiences of migration and memories of Fiji. Significantly each of those interviewed – of whom only two now live on

the island – was filmed in front of the Pacific Ocean in his or her respective country. By presenting this material as simultaneous video projections in a walk-in installation in the gallery, Chandra intends to create an artificial family reunion, in which the figures speak to each other as well as to us, as patterns of overlapping storytelling emerge. In exploring ideas of home and exile, the commission is a reminder that diaspora is an ongoing and continuous process of engagement with and negotiation between cultures, themes which are further developed through other installations and photographic work in the exhibition.

Middlesbrough Art Gallery

320 Linthorpe Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 4AW

Tel/Fax
01642-247445

Open
Tues-Sat 10am-5.30pm
Admission Free

1 November 1997 – 10 January 1998

rasheed araeen

freda rana



Rasheed Araeen
Green Painting IV
1992-94

Two artists from different generations whose work explores exclusion from the mainstream art world.

Araeen is a professional artist who has lived in Britain for over thirty years, but his work is not institutionally recognised.

Essentially conceptual, Araeen recycles his own past work to give it new meaning and to maintain a continuity. The use of such formal systems connects the new work with minimalism of the 1960s and also allows him to express the contradictions of the socio-political environment of the time.

For the Middlesbrough commission, Araeen will show a sculptural work

which refers to Tipu Sultan, who bravely fought against the British Imperial Army in India at the end of the 18th Century and was nicknamed 'Tiger'; a metaphor for the independence struggle in the Indian Sub-Continent and what has become of it after fifty years.

Freda Rana has developed a language that is specific to making art in order to highlight the theoretical framework that surrounds the practice. Her work questions certain 'conventions' associated with making art in a socio-historical context, raising issues related to truth and knowledge. The political implications of the work arise through questions associated with ethics and aesthetics.

Gallery II

Visual Arts Campus, University of Bradford

Chesham Building
(off Great Horton Road)
Bradford BD7 1DP

Tel 01274-383365
Fax 01274-305340

Open Daily 10am-6pm
Admission Free

3 November – 12 December 1997

nudrat afza

[MIDNIGHT HOUR]

tim brennan

[A BRADFORD ATLAS]



Nudrat Afza
Family Album
1958

Gallery II will host two different projects which will examine the ways in which we understand as a nation, the significance of Indian Independence and the creation of Pakistan, in contemporary Britain. Bradford based photographer, **Nudrat Afza**, will be producing a new series of colour photographs whose subject will range from family and friends to the use of photographs from family albums. Afza's photographs will reveal a personal and public representation of life in nineties Bradford drawing on collective and personal histories.

London based artist **Tim Brennan** will be staging a series of guided walks (open to the public) in and around Bradford. The walks will explore layers of history and lived experience with specific reference to the 50th Anniversary of Indian Independence and the creation of Pakistan. Each tour will combine official and unofficial 'evidence' and will involve factual and fictional narratives, to uncover the complex and at times contradictory nature of everyday life.

For more information on the guided walks please contact the gallery.

Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery

Nottingham
NG1 6EL

Tel 0115-915 3700
Fax 0115-915 3653

Open Daily 10am-5pm

Admission Free weekdays.
Small charge weekends and
Bank Holidays.

27 March - 24 May 1998

permindar kaur



Perminder Kaur
Untitled
1995

Born in Nottingham, Perminder Kaur has been commissioned to produce a new work for the Nottingham Castle Museum collection. Faced with the question of Independence, her initial thoughts turned to the struggle of the Sikhs for independence from the rest of India. Next to the Golden Temple at Amritsar, this cause is documented in a museum, which Kaur sees as a constant reminder of the desire to separate, and of the differences that exist. Her sculptural installation, made from a variety of materials including copper and polar fleece, will comprise toy like figures, "an army that looks as if it has been completely defeated... These are

the trophies that remain. It is suggestive of a particular army but it is not clear whose army and for what cause they have been fighting. Nor does the piece make a clear statement for or against warfare. It is a reminder of a continual struggle for an unknown cause which could be more personal than political"

Most of the
exhibitions are

accompanied by
education programmes
offering a range of

EDUCATION opportunities to participate
in workshops or learn more
about the art on display
through discussions, artist's
talks and guided tours. Further
details available from the venues.

A symposium drawing together
the different themes explored by
Independent Thoughts and extended
SYMPOSIUM to encompass a broader discussion of
issues around Independence in the
postcolonial world will be staged in 1998,
provisionally in April at Light House
Media Centre, Wolverhampton.

It is proposed to include selected papers
from this event alongside other invited
PUBLICATION essays and documentation of the commissions,
in an *Independent Thoughts* publication
available thereafter.

Further information from
Independent Thoughts
coordinator Juginder Lamba,
Tel: 01939-260861,
or from Bluecoat Gallery,
Tel: 0151-709-5689.

CREDITS
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University Gallery
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Front cover image
© Sunil Janah
Peasants' Rally in North Bengal, 1944

Design
Immigrant

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Moluni Chandra's research funded by Autograph.
Gallery II supported by University of Bradford.



Henry Moore
Foundation



Oldham Art Gallery

Union Street
Oldham OL1 1DN

Tel 0161-911 4657
Fax 0161-911 4669

Tues 10am-1pm
Wed-Sat 10am-5pm
Sun & Mon Closed all day
Admission Free

15 November 1997 – 31 January 1998

balraj khanna iftikhar dadi nalini malani

[NEW BEGINNINGS/NEW COLLABORATIONS]



Balraj Khanna
Nursery Rhymes
for Pmtr
1997

Khanna's autobiographical reflections on the violent repercussions following Partition are expressed through a commemorative project of newly constructed sculptural reliefs. The work is monumental and celebratory, focusing on the idea of hope and 'new beginnings'. Khanna writes: "I decided to make my work somewhat three dimensional with light and shadows playing a significant role. I began to cut out of card and plywood individual shapes that habitually populate my paintings – floating and levitating... and arranged them in lines like words in a poem across a blank page."

Also presented is a video animation by **Dadi** (Pakistan) and **Malani** (India) exploring themes of a story by Manto on Partition, and focusing on the difficulties of cultural collaboration between the two countries who have similar histories and yet live in hostility with each other.

Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery

Woodhouse Lane
Leeds LS1 3HE

Exhibition Information
Tel 0113-283 3130
Fax 0113-283 5999
Education Information
Tel 0113-283 3499

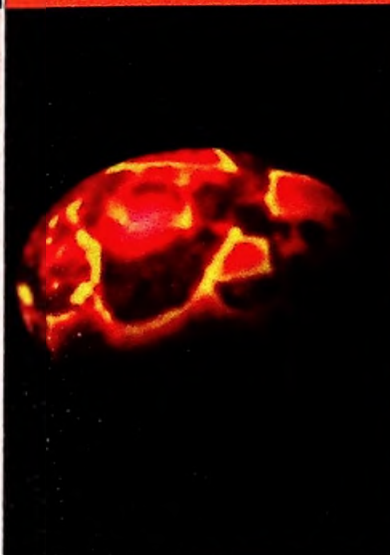
Mon-Fri 11am-5pm
Sat 11am-4pm
Wed 11am-9pm
Admission Free

27 February – 4 April 1998

pervaiz khan felix de rooy

[IN-DEPENDENCE]

A multimedia installation on Partition



Pervaiz Khan
Felix de Rooy
1997

"Now that we were free, had
subjection ceased to exist?"
SADAT HASSAN MANTO 1947

For more than a thousand years separation from one's beloved had been an aesthetic metaphor in all Indian arts forms, from visual to musical, folk to high classical culture. Yet no one could have imagined that at the moment of liberation from British rule India would be physically separated and effectively dismembered.

During Partition half a million people were slaughtered in communal violence and ten million uprooted and displaced. The aftershocks still affect the lives of those in the Sub-Continent and those who are part of its diaspora.

In-dependence is an installation which uses computer manipulated projections, archive footage, movies, texts and digital animations to explore questions of memory, power and displacement. Soundscapes have been created by Trevor Mathieson with additional photographs by Bindi Kalsi.

There is an interrelated web site *Azadi* (meaning freedom), designed by Gary Stewart, which brings together a diverse range of artists from the Sub-Continent and the diaspora. The site features work made around the time of Partition, and work produced by artists today. It provides the opportunity for visitors to respond with comments and views.

Web Site: www.lmu.ac.uk/arts/azadi.htm

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April 1998 Dates to be confirmed

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Wolverhampton
sunil janah