

Art in Review

'Her Stories'

Fifteen Years of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective

Queens Museum of Art, New York City Building
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park
Through Oct. 7

The South Asian Women's Creative Collective was founded by the artist Jaireshi Abichandani in New York City in 1997, when identity politics was in the air, but artists from much of the Asian diaspora were still being given the cold shoulder by the art world here. By providing strength-in-numbers support and access to resources, the collective helped move a generation of artists ahead, as this small-power generator of an anniversary survey demonstrates.

Ingenuously packed, floor to ceiling, into the Queens Museum of Art's lobby gallery, the show is made up of work by dozens of artists, some of them original collective members, others recent arrivals. Shared features include a feminist perspective, an activist spirit and a resistance to melting pot assimilation. Beyond that, though, formal variety is what's most striking.

Ethnic stereotypes are deftly parodied in Jayna Minz's strenuously exotic fashion photos and in Meenakshi Thirukode's film in progress of art world striving. Chitra Ganesh's mesmerizing warrior-goddess self-portraits (Saraswati, Kali) and Ms. Abichandani's photographic self-image as an exonerated sari all give the concept of "undocumented alien" a new meaning.

The definition of South Asia is stretched, too — Ms. Abichandani was born in Iran, Ms. Minz in South Africa — as are formal categories. Sculpture means tiny creatures woven from dryer lint by Marcy Chermak, but also Ruby Chandra's life-size figure of a water buffalo with a plumbing fixture for a head.

In Shabaz K. Palani's paintings, female houses look like shrines; in Yamini Nayar's photographs, tabletop tableaux look monumental.



JAIRESHI ABICHANDANI/QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART



QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART

Above, an installation view of "Her Stories: Fifteen Years of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective," at the Queens Museum of Art; left, "The Awakening," by Chitra Ganesh.

tal. Craft, quality and precision are alternately respected and dismissed. Ideas are everywhere.

The South Asian Women's Creative Collective has made common cause with similar groups devoted to music, dance and liter-

ature. These disciplines have been integrated into the show — organized by Ms. Abichandani and Joanne Oberoi — in videos of performances (by Arroj Añah, Parijat Desai, Sonia Kumar, Melita, Parul Shah and Sarika Shaha), and in a mini-library of recently

published books for browsing.

At 15, the collective is still growing, attracting new members. The need for it has not significantly diminished. Only, it seems, within the increasingly isolationist and hermetic New York art establishment are certain questions — about who we are, where we came from and where we're going — out of style. In the rest of the world these continue to be vital inquiries, as suggested by this cosmopolitan celebration.

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