

Monitor Reruns

Curatorial Note

Since its inception in 2004, the Monitor series has highlighted the shifting nature of South Asian culture, politics, and economies with particular attention to how these issues are shaped by the “diasporic condition”. Recognized for its sophisticated programming, and for the important role it has played in problematising stereotypical notions of the South Asian ‘diaspora’, this series, has over the years, constructed an ongoing discourse around identity-based art production. *Monitor Reruns* is a celebration of 20 years of SAVAC, and 10 years of Monitor.

Monitor Reruns focuses on the particular context of South Asian experimental film and video art in Canada, and revisits issues of subjectivity, migration, and racism that continue to stay relevant today. In an attempt at historicizing this context of practice, *Monitor Reruns* locates at its core the documentation of ‘East-West Intersect’, a radical happening organized by local Toronto artist Panchal Mansaram in 1967 at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto. As a new migrant to Toronto, Panchal Mansaram began a long engagement with media theorist Marshall McLuhan, and even collaborated with him on a number of artworks. Mansaram made experimental films including *Intersect* and *Devi Stuffed Goat with Pink Cloth* (1967) to explore the gaze of an Indian artist in Canada looking back at his nation of origin. While commenting on Mansaram’s work Marshall McLuhan remarked, “Mansaram is a kind of two-way mirror, living simultaneously in the divided and distinguished worlds of the East and West.”

While looking back at Mansaram’s process of investigating the “diasporic condition” 45 years ago, we are urged to consider the socio-political and aesthetic shifts within the discourse of new generations of contemporary South Asian artists, through the works of Nurjahan Akhlaq, Vivek Shraya, Ayesha Hameed and the Torontonians. Having previously screened in the Monitor series, each of these artists have been invited to write a reflective text

that reengages with, and responds to, their works from our present social and political moment, towards provoking new critical interpretations.

From Ayesha Hameed's *Fire, Fences and Flight* (2007) which sets up a theoretical framework from which to consider "the relationship between migration, flight and borders" to the intensely personal "dream-like meditation on tragedy" in Nurjahan Akhlaq's *Flight* (2003); And from Vivek Shraya's negotiation of the complexities of being a racialised queer man in *Seeking Single White Male* (2010) to the playful examination of racial stereotyping in *How to Be a Brown Teen* (2010) by the Torontonians, these experimental works range stylistically across genres from moving image essay to documentary, youtube to performance video.

Monitor Reruns emerges as a curatorial response to reviewing the archive of SAVAC's monitor series and poses a series of critically urgent questions. What are the legacies of Panchal Mansaram and McLuhan's collaboration? How has this collaboration impacted the context of experimental South Asian film and video in Toronto today, with respect to political and aesthetic shifts in these practices? What do the recurring themes of identity, migration, and race tell us about the concerns of experimental film and video artists within the South Asian community in Canada? What is the relationship between experimentation of form and a negotiation of such themes and content? In our hyper globalized world, how do artists feel about locating their work within a "South Asian" frame? Are geographical boundaries a location, a philosophy, an identity, or something else entirely?

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