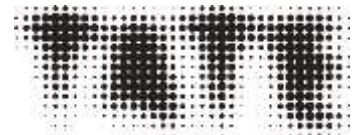


You Can't Eat Prestige: Women, Reinvention and the Archival Trace

A conversation between Janice Cheddie,
Simone Alexander and Symrath Patti

10 December 2021



Janice

Welcome to 'You Can't Eat Prestige: Women, Reinvention and the Archival Trace', a conversation between two women artists featured in the Panchayat Collection, Simone Alexander and Symrath Patti. I would like to pay tribute to both Simone and Symrath for their courage and honesty in what at times has been a difficult conversation.

All of us were born to migrant parents. Symrath and I were born outside the UK, spent part of our childhood in our home countries and came to London as children. Symrath was born in Kenya and came to Britain in 1967. She grew up in London and studied fine art at Leeds Polytechnic between 1981 and 1984. She was a founding member of the Panchayat archive, has exhibited widely and is a featured artist in the Women of Colour Index at the **Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths College**.¹ Her wide-ranging curatorial work includes *Jagrati*, an exhibition featuring thirteen women artists at Citizens Gallery in Greenwich, London, in 1986.² Symrath also curated the work of the contingent of politically Black artists for the Havana Biennial in 1991 including artists Mona Hatoum, Keith Piper, Chila Burman, Said Adrus, Rasheed Araeen and herself. Her work explores themes of femininity and the codification of gendered bodies, desire and purification. She explores how the personal and political emerge in dialogues of and about post-coloniality.

Simone Alexander is a painter. She was born in London and studied at Camberwell School of Art, Byam Shaw School of Art and the Slade School of Fine Art. Her exhibitions include *Dorothea Tanning: Works 1942–1992* [at Camden Arts Centre], where she was the artist in residence; *Open Futures* at Ikon Art Gallery [Birmingham] in 1988; *Dislocations* at Kettles Yard, Cambridge in 1988; *Influences* at the South London Gallery in 1998; *The Image Employed* at Manchester Cornerhouse in 1987; and *Unrecorded Truths* [1986].³

I have worked in the Panchayat collection for a number of years. When the collection moved from the University of Westminster to Tate in 2015, Shaheen Merali and I spent a lot of time working through the collection, tidying it up, looking at artist slides. There were so many artists that we remembered, had been friends with, gone to exhibitions with. We knew that they were still working but they were not present in the archive. Over the last decade, I have been thinking about how women have had to reinvent themselves. How does one maintain the creative self? How do caring responsibilities or having to find opportunities in different fields necessitate reinvention? I wanted to highlight the contribution of the women we found in the archive, to this really expansive creative ecology that existed around what we now understand as the Black Arts movement, which obviously now would be understood as a politically Black movement, which included a whole range of artists of colour.

One of the criticisms of *The Other Story* [a major group exhibition of British African, Caribbean and Asian modernism in Britain, curated by Rasheed Araeen in 1989] was the lack of women within the exhibition.

He chose not to engage with a wider ecology of younger women artists, and their tremendous creative energy.⁴ I wanted to try to trace those women and look at what happened to them, how we understand their creative practice today. I knew these women were still working and I want to **unpack the question of 'what is a creative self'**. I am particularly interested in those who come from migrant, working-class families who **don't necessarily understand what it means to maintain a creative professional career**.

Recently, I have been working with the feminist art historian Flick (Felicity) Allen, who explores how art historical institutions and narratives look at the oeuvre. While changes within practice can be accounted for, the **consideration of an artist's practice by art historical institutions hinges on a notion of continuity**. Allen is part of a generation of women who graduated art school in the 1970s. She claims that this notion of continuity is near impossible in structures which have been openly hostile **to women artists and artists of colour**. Her idea of the 'Disoeuvre' addresses the work of artists, in whose trajectories there is discontinuity, there are interruptions, there are breaks.⁵ Part of understanding the work of women artists and artists of colour is understanding how interruptions shaped their practice. Although their trace in the archive may be broken – it may seem as though these artists have disappeared – **they're actually practising in different ways, with different collaborations, continuing to work on developing the creative self**.

I wanted to think about the 'Disoeuvre' through lived experience, rather than in an abstract theoretical way. It is important to make visible what **art historical narratives don't see as art practice**. How do we address interruptions, ruptures and breaks? What does it mean to hold on to creativity? This is the centre of our conversation today. This conversation **raises important questions about how we engage with women artists' work in the eighties, but also across a number of archives, including the Women's Art Library, AAVAA [African and Asian Visual Artists' Archive], the collection at Chelsea [College of Art] and others**.

Symrath: As a marginalised artist, you adapt your practice so that you can carry on making. The challenge was always to survive. There are gaps in my trajectory, but my artistic spirit stayed with me, it never blew out. The circumstances that surrounded me domestically and culturally were restrictive, but I never lost belief in needing or wanting to work. My creativity was kept alive in my sketchbooks. I was always sketching and writing. When I first graduated from Leeds Polytechnic there was no place or gallery for me as an Asian woman artist to exhibit and expand my practice. As artists of colour, we had to create space to exhibit and grow our practice. My work as a campaigner also influenced me greatly. I was **working with Asian women's resource centres, and with groups like the Southall Monitoring group**. I meet Suresh Grover and Ravi Jain during the Bradford 12 trail and campaign in Leeds.⁶ All of those political campaigns against racism influenced my work. Networking and critical conversations

around practice were an important part of the creative ecology of Black Arts and Black women artists were at the forefront of organising these discussions.

For *Mining the Gap*, held at Tate Britain in 2017, we were asked to reflect on how we have come to our practices, where we were in the eighties and nineties and what it was like being an art student.⁷ I was an arts development worker at the Asian Women's Arts Group and was working on policy to include 'Black' as a political form and diversity in education. *Jagrati* was one of the exhibitions put together at that time in 1986.⁸ The main theme of *Jagrati* was domestic violence.⁹ **That's how it started out.** I commissioned a mural by artist Dushka Ahmed, and the exhibition grew. Twelve other artists were brought into the frame.¹⁰ **There hadn't yet been** an exhibition of young Asian women artists on such a large scale.¹¹ I wanted to look at domestic violence and honour killings, cases such as **that of Balwant Kaur, who was murdered in a London women's refuge by her husband.**¹² I wanted to address the 'virginity testing' scandal at Heathrow Airport.¹³ It was shocking to think the Home Office allowed immigration officers to carry out this abusive act. Questions were raised at the UN about this practice and it only stopped around 1981 with compensation and apology from the then Home Secretary. These deeply political moments fed into my work.

While making *Sketches for a Memorial-Yaadgari*, I was exploring ideas of love, sacrifice, and the role of women. I was reading the feminist journal *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society*, through which I explored feminism through the work of writers and thinkers from the subcontinent.¹⁴ It was important for me to experience feminism as it was being framed by feminists in the subcontinent, in ways that were not addressed in mainstream British feminism.

Chercher la Femme was a video installation for Birmingham Museum, put **together in 1993 (fig.1).** 'Chercher la Femme' or looking for the woman, searching for the woman, is the name of a card game. Based on Asian Ranis, the work engaged with men exploring notions of gender, queerness, femininity, beauty and desire. Together, we grappled with these ideas within the context of the museum. The men were filmed observing a collection of images and objects that were already in the museum.

I was interested in femininity within Asian culture as well as mainstream culture. In one shot from *Chercher la Femme*, we see men dressing up as Krishna, the God of love, and playing on the theme of desire. The installation was made up of three monitors in a living room, where people could sit, with kitsch wallpaper from the 1970s (fig.2). Also in the room was a bowl of mangoes and a sewing machine rattling on. These were references to Gauguin and the notion of desire. The sewing machine referenced a surrealist work, *Umbrella and the Sewing Machine* by Dali. I put the mangoes and the sewing machine together. Torsos of Queen

Victoria and references to Rabindranath Tagore by British American sculptor Jacob Epstein were also left in the room.¹⁵ I actually found out during the exhibition, that the models he sculpted and drew from were Asian.



Fig.1
Symrath Patti
Chercher La Femme 1993-4 (film stills)
© Symrath Patti



Fig.2
Installation view of Symrath Patti, *Chercher La Femme* 1993–4,
in *Transition of Riches*, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1993
© Symrath Patti

This next slide is from the 1991 Havana Biennial. I went to Cuba three or four times during the late 1980s, early 1990s. Our work as Black and Asian artists was always politicised in Britain, but never assessed as art. **There wasn't an international context** for it. So, I worked closely with Lillian Llanes, Director of the Centro Wifredo Lam (1985–99), to put together a show, talked to artist and curator Rasheed Araeen and curated artists to exhibit in Cuba. Funding was brought together through the British Council. I wrote a proposal arguing for Black and Asian artists from the UK to be represented in an international context.

This was the first time many of these artists had exhibited within an international context or in some cases, in the Global South. I had discussions with Lillian Llanes on the importance of including artists of colour from Britain as part of the biennial. I argued that although we were based, and in some cases educated in Britain, we remained on the periphery of British art. Our practices drew upon and spoke to our experiences as diaspora artists maintaining links with our home countries and cultures. We had to negotiate to be included within a wider international framework which centred the Global South and not the western art world.

The Complete Promise 1991 was in the form of sixteen panels of photomontages (fig.3). These images explored how the promise in some ways, is always deferred, and may never be fulfilled. I wanted to explore the line between renunciation and sacrifice within marriage, which is always blurred for women. I created a montage of images signalling, representing and critiquing the promises held by marriage. The forms reference the female body and widowhood, being estranged from the

norms of society, really. When you walk through the piece, through the sixteen panels, you know you're looking at reflections of yourself through those images.



Fig.3
Slides of two photomontages from Symrath Patti, *The Complete Promise* 1991
Original photomontages are 914 x 1828 mm panels on Perspex
© Symrath Patti

Using the symbol of the widow as a metaphor, and my own family history, the work also grappled with feelings of exile, specifically from the Indian subcontinent. My experience with marriage and separation made me aware that within patriarchal societies, there is little to no space for a

woman on her own. I also wanted to respond to societal perception of the female body, widowhood, and notions of colour and caste. I grew up listening to my parents' stories about partition and their journey to East Africa from India. As an Indian woman born in East Africa, my experience of exile was tripled. At this time, my work existed on the boundaries – I was outside the mainstream but also outside the Asian community. My approach and positionality were multi-sited, but at the same time, I was situated firmly on the periphery, never fitting in. This image from the panel (fig.3 on the right) questions who observes, whose gaze we actually perform for.

Simone Even though I've seen your presentation already and I've heard many of the things you said, Symrath, there is still much to draw from. Listening to you talk is really exciting. Janice said I had an artist statement. The trouble with artist statements is that they only work for about three seconds and after that I'm already somewhere else. I was thinking about the idea of the oeuvre, because Janice sent me *The Disoeuvre* by Felicity Allen.¹⁶ It brought to mind Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) and Ntozake Shange's *Betsy Brown* (2004), a coming of age novel about Shange's childhood and the noise and creativity she grew up with.¹⁷ I was thinking mainly about those things when I was trying to put together something describing my work. I will loosely read it.

I was born in the maternity hospital in Balham into a household of two elder sisters, a third sister coming along later. It was a huge house. There were just so many rooms that we could play in. When a house has seven bedrooms you can hide and you can make things up. It was a Victorian house filled with hidden magical places, where a little patch of wall might hide a secret. There were no limits to our imagination. In Jamaica my daddy was a tailor by trade, but in England he held a factory job. Until my grandmother came to England, he worked nights and helped look after us by day. He was a quiet man and I have a memory of hearing the shipping forecast and the cracking of dominoes coming from his room. I say his room (once my mother's disability meant she could not access the main bedroom, they had separate rooms). My mother, who cussed and laughed and dreamed of other lives, talking about living in the wilderness in Canada. She crocheted and made curtains and cushions. Her disability never stopped her doing anything. She worked. She learned to drive. I became her travelling companion in a little blue invacar the council gave out. Crouched down beside her, we explored the countryside. In her retirement she took to sewing again. She made dolls and clothes for us. She even made clothes for my first child. We had a big garden with tons of potted plants growing out of them and planted tall pines so she could see them from her bedroom window. Not content with a garden, she joined a ceramics class and she started to learn Spanish, because she always wanted to learn the language. It was only upon clearing out that house did I see all that creativity, all that colour.

What do I do? At this moment I'm making scribbles or notes using pictures or words as a way of centring myself. With these markings, I can examine the world. They're part of a conversation I'm trying to have about who we are, why we are, and where we might be going. I reserve the right to take material from anywhere and weave together something for me, to ask those questions that I once asked as a child. Why? What if? I revisit those moments from my childhood in that noisy space of art and music and creativity and secrets. I use those questions. This combination of past and present realisation is a point of power from where I can define and redefine the ways in which we navigate through life now. What you see here in front of you are paintings where there are specific narratives to each story, but they all ask the same questions. What happens when one 'thing' is given more importance than another? What if I tore back beneath a level of dust or leaves or history and found another one? The piece here – *A Children's Book of Fairy Tales* 1987 (fig.4) – poses the questions: what if I were four little girls who were in a church in Alabama? What if I were one of those two twins locked up in a maximum-security prison for being misunderstood in that time and space?¹⁸ What if I were Rapunzel? Those are some of the types of questions the paintings are asking.



Fig.4
Simone Alexander
A Children's Book of Fairy Tales 1987
Oil paint on canvas
1828 x 1828 mm
© Simone Alexander

The more recent paintings have gone back to that space. Some are set in the bedroom of that house, where my father used to play dominoes and listen to the radio. In this room, still covered with flock wallpaper, is his beautiful gramophone, a table and chairs, one for him and the others for us to join him playing dominoes or cards. After the house was sold, my sisters and I went to clear it out on a beautiful summer's day. Our four little girls were all dressed in patterned summer frocks and matching shoes and I followed them around the house taking photographs while they pulled up lino, peeped into cupboards and played games in every room. That house was my life. It was where I was formed. It was a really important space for my development. As I paint it's a space I go back to frequently. It was Home.



Fig.5
Simone Alexander
1 Little Girl 00:00:00 2020
Water-based oil paint on canvas board
240 x 300 mm
© Simone Alexander

Symrath was talking about sexuality and beauty. All of those ideas exist in my head when I'm making these paintings. The painting on the left, *1 Little Girl 00:00:00 2020* (fig.5), was submitted to an online exhibition dedicated to Asifa Bano, a six-year girl who was the victim of sexual violence and murder in Kashmir, India.¹⁹ There's an interesting thing that

happens when you use beautiful colours to talk about very dark things and the vulnerability of childhood. There is also a painting (fig.6) inspired by Jamaican poet Jean Binta Breeze's *Riddym Ravings* (1987), a poem about madness, cacophony, the attempt to be functional in this world with more than one reality. I have a multitude of ideas, colours, light and sound in my head.²⁰ It is madness. I'm trying to play with all these ideas all the time. I don't know that I understand the idea of a 'break in the work', because it feels like when I wasn't painting, I was doing something else creative. I was sewing, I was making other pieces of work. My mother was an artist but nobody would identify her as such. She made and created, as is the theme of *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*. I kind of understand that form of artistry.



Fig.6
Simone Alexander
Ravings – house ah bun down (in memory of Jean Binta Breeze) 2022
Water-based oil paint on canvas
800 x 600 mm
© Simone Alexander

Symrath

Wow.

Janice

What came up in our conversation Simone, is the real need to centre yourself. Symrath, that comes through with your practice too. What it was like to be a woman of colour at Leeds Polytechnic which was a very white,

male, modernist institution? There has been a lot of interest around Leeds in the 1970s and 1980s. How was that sense of self affirmed?

Symrath

I completed my art foundation at East Ham College of Technology London from 1979 to 1980, which was an amazing experience. I chose to go to Winchester School of Art in 1980, thinking I was going to be a painter but found it really miserable and moved to Leeds Polytechnic in my second term from 1981 to 1984. I applied and was accepted to number of programmes, but chose Leeds because there were other students of colour and it was a really interesting course. I could do film, performance and photography.²¹ I could also experiment and bring new material to the course and my practice. I thought that was it. This was my place. Over the next three years, I witnessed and experienced an appalling amount of racism and sexism on the course. In the third year, when it was time to be awarded the degree, all three students of colour, who had no indication otherwise, and expected to have a degree, were failed by the institution. There was no indication given over the three years that we had failed in any way. I have no doubt that we were failed because we were dealing with and addressing Asian or Black issues and engaging with Black and Asian art and artists.

Roland Miller one of my tutors and was very helpful, but Leeds Polytechnic was a white masculine cabal. There were hardly any women tutors. If there were, they were part-time. Most tutors proudly presented themselves as working-class Marxists, but failed to recognise the importance of examining issues of race and gender. If students of colour tried to discuss issues of Marxism in relation to race and colonialism, our questions and challenges were met with hostility. Drawing on our knowledge of struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America, we felt that a socialist change was already underway as part of the non-aligned movement, yet our conversations with tutors, even about social justice, remained whitewashed and western-centric.

We were constantly asked to explain our work outside the curriculum. During my second year in Leeds, with little instruction or grounding in Black or Asian aesthetics, I was asked to contribute a 10,000-word theoretical discussion on the concept of a Black aesthetics, a level of work that was not expected from other students. Crucially, there was no dialogue around or real consideration of our work. There was a lack of willingness to engage with the aesthetics we were working with or challenging. One of the key points of contention around my studio practice was how I used colour to symbolise cultural practices. There was certainly no discussion about the historical relevance of our work as students of colour within an emerging multi-cultural Britain.

Experiences of overt bias and discrimination were frequent and normalised, from tutorials titled 'how to cook a curry' to the head of department making statements such as 'I am working with lazy Pakis'. It was a nightmare. As for my work, I remember reading Frantz Fanon's

work *Black Skin, White Masks* and creating performance work in response.²² I remember going to the Black Art Convention in Wolverhampton in October 1982 convened by the Blk Art Group – Eddie Chambers, Claudette Johnson, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney and Marlene Smith.²³ I remember one of the lecturers actually encouraging the work. At that time, I was working with images from the Indian subcontinent and **Asians in Britain. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Amrit Wilson's *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*** became important references for me.²⁴ I went to India during the summer break to create images and turned them into multi-photomontages. While this work was never marked down, it was never really accepted as art. I actually remember being asked whether I considered my work to be art! So, my experience in art education between 1981 and 1984 was really difficult. The notion of the personal and the political was very alive for me.

Simone I'm also thinking about all this, especially hearing Symrath talk. I went on a painting course and I was tutored by Sargy Mann, who suggested that I apply to Camberwell for my Foundation.²⁵ There was a lot of life drawing there. It was a good time. After that I went on to Byam Shaw School of Art and things changed. Maybe I was naïve – **I don't know that naïve is the right word** – but I thought I could just be. I was aware of race, but in my home and **with my friends it just wasn't a question.** Toni Morrison speaks about white people needing race in the conversation.²⁶ I was doing a lot of reading and I was discovering myself and making paintings; that is what the Image department at Byam Shaw was all about. However, it became difficult because those tutors could not deal with all of me. They **inserted race into the narrative.** Very often I find that I'm frequently in a place where I'm 'the only'. In fact, to this day my children very often find themselves in that place. They know to be who they are – **they don't apologise.** The issue is never with them.

This objectification worsened when I was at the Slade. Sutapa Biswas was in my year and Zarina Bhimji was in the year above. I was constantly pulled into conversations as the opposition, asked to answer on any race issue that they wanted to bring up. Why am I put in this position? Race is **not my issue.** Obviously, I'm not trying to claim that race or colour doesn't exist. **I am making work; you've seen the work.** I'm discussing myself, my sister, my relationship with the people that I love. I did not realise the extent to which those tutors wanted the conversation to be about themselves – defining themselves – and I was being used as their backdrop. I think that both Symrath and Janice you will understand this.

It broke me. I survived because I had external support. However, the conversation at the time made me ask questions about my work. 'Can I do this?' The answer was 'No. You have to discuss race'. And I would say 'But I don't want to'. So, it was not good for me. **That's what happens.** My final piece at the Slade was only seen by a few people (intentionally), because it maybe worked too well. It was a very small room in the basement, easy to miss, and was painted black. I built a coffin out of

things I had collected and used – pieces of me – that I had worked with **throughout my time at the Slade, including newspapers that I'd been reading.** There were lots of leaves – autumn leaves and flower petals – and some of them had become dust. This is what the Slade had made of me. I was buried there. It buried my creativity. It's a bit dramatic of me [laughing].

This happened because I was not shouting political things, because I was **not joining in their agenda. I didn't want to talk about race in the way that they wanted to talk about it. I had no interest.** If I didn't want to engage with their approach and agenda, then I was shut down. That was and is my experience. There are other forums and institutions where this is often an issue. By the time I left the Slade, my desire to be in those kinds of institutions was destroyed as was my desire and ability to be part of their conversations.

Symrath Sounds like you had to really define yourself and what you wanted to do for yourself, which is what I felt we had to do at Leeds. We had to find our own language and our own way of making our work visible. There was no proper critique of our work, and that continues today because everything is politically framed now within the framework of political Blackness, but it is not necessarily talked about as art within an historical art practice. And I think that has always been challenging. My experience of Leeds was really an eye-opener as to the amount of racism that existed in art institutions. Leeds Polytechnic was supposed to be one of the foremost colleges in terms of being ahead of some of these things, I **would've thought.** The whole course did come out and there was a campaign, there was an investigation. All the evidence that came out was so heavy that it was all shredded. That shaped my practice for a long time, but it also denied me and prevented me from going into further education for a very long time. It did that effectively to all three of the students of colour that were on the course.

Simone At Byam Shaw, one of the things that I did reject was being taught to look at certain kinds of art. I remember the pieces of work that I made from old wax crayons. I was determined not to use very precious materials – **the oils and linen of the 'Masters'.** I rejected them. I was reading tons of Toni Morrison. I was reading loads of Shange. All of those women were in my head. At some point in the middle of my time at Byam Shaw, Lubaina Himid arrived as a visiting tutor and came to see me. That was great because it put me in touch with Sonia Boyce, Marlene Smith and other artists, writers, filmmakers with whom I had so much in common, and we all became great friends. That was a really supportive environment. Somebody asked me recently if I shared a studio with Sonia, **but we didn't. We were together though.** Sonia was doing the show at Whitechapel and I wrote an essay titled 'Round Midnight' about that time in the evening when you come together for a drink and a laugh and talk about who you are. Among that group of artists, we met and hung out a lot. There was Black Audio Film Collective, Martina Attille and all of those

wonderful people that are still around making work now.²⁷ I loved being in London at that time. Those were my formative years and that time was really powerful for me. A wonderful time to make work. Because there, in those spaces, you just are. The same feeling as being at Home.²⁸ You just are. **Nobody's trying to define themselves using me [laughing].**

Symrath I had to be in London most of the time from Leeds in order to keep the networks of meeting artists and thinkers, going to bookshops, going to talks which about *Black Phoenix*, you know, talking about and to Black artists.²⁹ Darcus Howe, Farrukh Dhondy, all these people were around, these conversations were taking place.³⁰ I was going to a bookshop in Southall called Shakti Book House at the time.³¹ It was an amazingly energising time full of promise and change. I remember CLR James reading there with Mulk Raj Anand along with so many other Black writers from all over the world. **I thought that would've actually been really exciting for somewhere like Leeds to take on. But it's really sad what happened.** And I really feel very sad that I spent three years in an institution that was actually not able to see the kind of work that was so amazing, that was coming out of the three students of colour at the time.

Simone That doesn't surprise me. When people put up blinkers and don't want to see, they don't see and they can't come to you with anything but their own issues before they see the work. I mean I have children now in universities. My daughter is on a design engineering course happily working on a project on smart watches for deaf and hard-of-hearing communities and is asked 'Why didn't you do something around combs and hair'? And she's surprised and responded 'What? How's that relevant to anything I've been talking to you about'? Someone else's agenda imposed on you. Those are the things that happen in institutions.

Janice We talked about Black women's work and I think your work, it's almost autobiographical in lots of ways, Simone. This idea that particularly **women's work was seen as, I use the term 'invitational'** – it was more poetic, it was more narrative. And there were people like Keith Piper or Eddie Chambers whose work was seen as not political in that they were looking at exterior, more historical narratives and the sense of self, of the artist, wasn't present. Whereas in the women's work, **not all women's work, of course, there was this idea of the self being present.** And what's really interesting to me is that your works are huge, Simone, at that time, **we're talking about massive paintings.** And there's a sense of presence, that centring of the self. And it's interesting because the work doesn't speak to that. I think with you, Symrath, we only found out recently that **you're colour blind, being used to the colour palette as referential to the domestic and the tactile.** It's quite interesting because it comes out, **what's read from the work is very different from what you're speaking to.**

Symrath The colour in my work is very much about celebration because colour is such a powerful thing in Indian art, and in our lives and culture. It gives us a sense of belonging. I sense colour, **it's grounding in the work, the**

energy and rhythm is drawn from the personal and historical. This is what I play with, I think with colour and the image is instinctively drawn by the senses. There is always an instability and questions to address regarding context and the philosophical journey that you draw from. I just use whatever is around me and I work with sensing the colour or I let it all just come to me as gradation of warm and cold tones. It's this idea of light and darkness within space, in between which senses which accesses an alchemical process, in turn play a part in what I produce from the imagination. The ideas may start from a positioning, a story or poem but grow organically.



Fig.7
Simone Alexander
Saving This World for Whom 2022
Water-based oil paint on canvas
800 x 600 mm
© Simone Alexander

Simone

At Camberwell drawing was important. We're talking Euan Uglow and those other painters who were about a specific type of painting.³² I've come from that place. In fact, I remember at that time being told how badly I used colour. That it was almost as though I didn't care what was on my brush. Maybe that was true and that was because the drawing was all important. Those are considerations that I never get to talk about. There's nothing wrong with the conversations about Frantz Fanon's philosophy and race, but I'm not really allowed to talk about the paint, the actual material. I think symbolically as a female I want to talk about the colour red and about blood. I want to make more work about that. More recently I'm drawn to the idea of light – the ethereal quality of light.

I'm drawn to the idea of climate change; the burning, the heat, the colours from that. I keep seeing videos about parched parts of the world where there is no water and people are dying. There are two paintings, both of which are works in progress – I keep titling them and untitling them – where I'm definitely thinking about light, I'm definitely thinking about climate change (fig.7).

In my head is the question 'For who and what am I supposed to be working to preserve this world?' Because there's a point at which it may as well just burn. What are my daughters going to get out of a world that marginalises them and is not interested in their existence? In my painting there are children in an arid burning landscape with phones, devices that give off light and drain resources, children who don't really think about where the precious metals that make those phones come from. They are not connecting the dots.

Janice Part of making any kind of work, whether it's writing, painting or sewing is being vulnerable within the work. Failure is part of the process of working. Whether it's a piece of writing or sewing or anything, there's an element that is unfinished. How does that experience of firefighting within an institution affect vulnerability?

Simone The scale of my work changed at the end of the 1980s. I used to make six-foot-by-six-foot paintings. *Pieces of a Dream* 1986 and *A Children's Book of Fairy Tales* 1987 are that size. They're big paintings that came before the Slade. I felt emboldened. I was being supported by a group of other Black artists, and I had a studio, an audience and I assumed that I could continue to make work that size. I know now that beyond that place of comfort it is not possible to continue making work that size. The confines of the space that I'm working in, and the limitations of time, mean that I have changed from oils to water-based oils. It means that I'm working in sketchbook size, which is A4. I'm much more tentative about sharing my work. I'm very scared. I am going on because I need to say something using the painting and feel better about what I'm making. I don't know if that's the same for you, Symrath.

Symrath I was thinking about what Janice said about how to survive as an artist. I am thinking about a labour of love. The vulnerability of working comes from making it. You're driven to make work, it pours out like an extension of the body. It never finishes, it's ongoing. The failure is in how it's received perhaps, or in the emptiness that you are left with till you are replenished again. Then you're back at play. It's ongoing. But there's failure every time because there is no critique of the work and there is no market for it till it becomes fashionable. There is a form of transformation in the making, but failure in its distribution, in critique. We have to wait until an economically viable tag is attached to it otherwise the work becomes redundant.

Janice You are in your home, doing whatever you are doing, you walk out into the world and suddenly you are othered. In making work, whatever medium it is, there has to be a sense of being vulnerable. The work inherently has an element of failure. Because some things work, some **things don't. Some things get re-purposed.** There is always an element of **being vulnerable, exposing yourself.** Particularly if you're going to show work to others. When the structure which instructs or tells you on how to be creative is basically breaking you, how does that affect the process? **You can't make work without being vulnerable, you can't make work without failure.** How do you even get to the point of making, if the institution that you're in is seeking to break you, and being vulnerable opens you up to more damage? **That's the balance I'm trying to work out.**

Symrath When I'm in the process of making working, everything is a failure once it moves from an idea to an expression or concept. The material expression of an idea is never what I originally imagine it to be. It evolves and changes as I engage the material. Part of the process is to erase and rearrange the idea and it slowly becomes something else. What happens to this process when the space you are working in, the art school or gallery, is not a safe or nurturing space? You start doubting your abilities since there is no constructive feedback. I started working from home not only because of financial constraints but because I needed a nurturing environment.

To produce work within the environment of Leeds, I had to block out the negativity I felt towards me from the students and staff. Instead of using facilities on campus, I remember processing photographs in the bathroom which became a darkroom during the night. You just got on with work by any means necessary. I had to find and make a supportive network and environment outside the institution that fed the creativity. The personal cost of always having to be in fight mode with an institution or an art world is immense. It stops you exploring the full potential of your practice because you are always processing the negativity. It stops you evolving.

There was a time when I was struggling to make self-portraits seeking to move from a negative space that was deconstructing the female body and found I could not move out of the negative space. There was a period when everything was about deconstructing the colonial legacy. I felt overwhelmed by the weight of theory disconnected from the processes of making. If I was making work at all I was destroying it. The connection between theory, practice, and my wellbeing became apparent to me. Having a poetic, non-linear narrative space is most important to me. Further, being an Asian woman in the arts, faced with a lack of visibility and contextualisation within British art history and institutions of art, you were seen as a failure. Despite my circumstances at Leeds, I was making work throughout. This stays with me. If I'm not producing something, if I'm not writing something, if I'm not keeping a schedule, I don't feel whole. And in some ways, you don't have control over it, you are simply compelled by working. It's this spirit in me that keeps the practice alive.

- Janice Right.
- Symrath Whatever Leeds may have done, there are other institutions, people and artists I worked with who lifted the weight of my experience at Leeds off me. I came to London after 1984 and worked at the Asian Women's Group. I was in networks with artists. I was already working with people. So, the work just grew. I never stopped working after I left Leeds. There's something inside us artists. Creativity never leaves us.
- Simone I completely agree with that. During the period when I moved away from art, I purposely chose not to look for work within the arts because I couldn't bear to watch other people creating art when I wasn't. I wanted to be a producer of artwork. But I also needed to work; I needed to eat. So I got a job. Then if you have children, you have to think of them. You now have to be more practical. I am my mother's daughter so raising daughters and being creative was seamless, like in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. You raise children and the very little things you do are made creative. Maybe the photographs – I mean we all take photographs – but how you take them, how you look at them and what you do with them is important. I was growing with my children. I could be creative with them at any point. I mean we all do that as mothers but this was something different. I lived with the ideas that always existed within my work; they continued while I was raising them and being otherwise domestic. I realised quite recently that the best way for me to have that continual dialogue is to make visual things that can be out there, that can create conversation.
- Symrath That is really important.
- Simone It's what you say about having to do. I always wrote things. I have exercise books that go back to when I was twelve, with huge ideas about how I was looking at the world. My opinions have changed now from those of a twelve-year-old girl, but I still want to speak about the world.
- Janice Simone, there was a point when you decided as opportunities were closing that you didn't want to watch other people making work. That was around the mid-nineties, wasn't it?
- Simone Yes.
- Janice Symrath, did you have the same experience? Was there a point where opportunities were breaking down and your creativity was going somewhere else? Or was it just that the opportunity to present work was limited? Was there a formal withdrawal in the way the Simone talks about it?
- Symrath I didn't have children. I was a surrogate mother for my nieces and nephews in every way but I haven't had children.

- Janice But you've had other caring responsibilities?
- Symrath Yes. I continued regardless of those, I still carried on working. But there was a massive shift in the late 1980s, early 1990s in the way that the Arts Council framed artists. The breakdown of networks like the Greater London Council and the Greater London Authority and all those networks had a huge impact. Publications like *Spare Rib*, *Mukti*, *Bazaar*, *Artrage*, *Ghazal* and *Beat*, were halted in their tracks.³³ Funding streams for Black artists ceased. This had a major impact on women artists. And then YBAs came in. A few people were picked up, but a majority of the artists of colour were completely dropped. There was nowhere to go for funding. No galleries were picking us up. It was hand-to-mouth survival. There was a major shift. I continued working at that time but I did ask myself some questions: Who was I doing this for? What was the purpose of working so hard to maintain a creative practice when artists and our work was not supported or valued?
- Janice Even in that period, your creative practice was present **wouldn't you say?** You were still working in policy work and with community groups. You **have also always kept sketchbooks, haven't you?** You've always written.
- Symrath There were gaps when I didn't do a lot, but I did continue keeping a practice. I worked with Farrukh Dhondy and Darcus Howe. They were with Channel Four and I became part of a workshop agreement.³⁴ I was trying to find different avenues to keep my practice going. I was looking for funding, I was looking for a way to earn a living within the art world. There were a very large number of proposals and projects that I wrote that were never commissioned.
- Janice Simone, you have formally started making work and the works can be seen, but the scale of your work has changed. It no longer consists of those massive paintings that I knew. I am also really interested your colour palette, which is distinctive. I would like to ask you about the **reasons for returning to a public practice, even though there's obviously been a creative self throughout.** I'm just fascinated your consistency in how you use colour. Could you also talk a little bit about that?
- Simone That has a lot to do with space. When you're a student, you have the space. You don't ever have to put anything away. You don't have to clean up your oil paints. You can make whatever mess you want. At the Slade, my studio floor was covered with leaves, dead flowers and powdered pigment. It all became beautiful, coloured dust. As a mother, I don't have that studio space. I don't have that luxury. You're raising children not to draw on the wall, sadly. What the slides don't show, because everything looks the same size, is that some of those pictures are A4, which is tiny in comparison to my six-foot paintings. This change was technically difficult for me. When I started going back to the Royal Drawing School and I was being told to curb my drawings, it was difficult.

I have been told by other artists that size is everything. I know this from major painting exhibitions. I have a love of Anselm Kiefer's work. You are made small standing in a gallery with his work. You get the feeling that nobody wants itsy-bitsy little paintings, that they're women's work and therefore not as important. But that work is important for me. I have missed more than anything, especially when the children were younger, the ability to have this dialogue that we're having now. With those changes in the 1990s, the pressures of responsibility as we grew up. We needed to eat, we needed to live. We needed work. Our priorities changed, and all those things had an impact. I make what I can and I put it out there because I want to have the conversations that I once did. I think they're important. I have young girls who are experiencing the same issues I did, which shouldn't be the case. There's still work to do.

Janice Symrath, I suppose they would call you an installation multi-media artist because your work includes drawings, paintings, video, installation, and curation. Are you putting work out there in ways that you hadn't done previously? Do you see this as a formal return in the way Simone does? Is it just that the practice is getting more recognition now?

Symrath The practice is getting recognition and I think it had recognition in the 1980s, which stopped in the early 1990s. My work is multi-media. Right now, I am working on video and installation pieces for a solo show at The Muse gallery in London for July 2023. Also, after forty years, I finally found a nourishing place of formal study, which has been magical for my imagination and practice. The new work is exciting, it's different. Although I want to work with video, I still want to work with installation, and am limited due to a lack of funding yet again. I am picking up the threads about femininity, gender and desire, but in a different way. I am using interviews to unpack notions of gendering, otherness, and codification.

Janice Simone, you talk about having to change your practice because your space changed, because you no longer have a studio, and the amount of time you have available to spend creating work has changed. Has both your work been forced to change in its materiality?

Symrath I can only afford certain materials. So, drawing, video and writing has more recently been the process. I work at home, I can make pieces in my hallway, kitchen and bedroom, which has become my studio. A studio in London is so expensive. When it comes to video, I work with an editor and sometimes with a cameraperson. It all depends on the project. Sometimes I use an iPad or my phone.

Simone I've returned to making this work because there is a need, because I want to have a conversation about my daughters and about the world. I've talked about the issues that I think are relevant and I am wary about all those things I've said, because I'm not having a dialogue that is necessarily very publicly interesting. I'm talking about one of the *Dangerous Games* works where there are three children who have their

backs to the viewer (fig.8). They are not in conversation with anyone viewing the work, but with themselves. The engagement between these three young girls is theirs. If I'm having conversations with just you, Symrath, and you, Janice, the likelihood is that I may never get to exhibit outside my bedroom [laughs]. Because unless I'm talking to what is called 'the centre', as opposed to spending time centring myself, the conversations may never be of interest outside of us.



Fig.8
Simone Alexander
Dangerous Games 2 2020
Water-based oil paint on canvas
610 x 760 mm
© Simone Alexander

Making small work may make my practice sustainable. Occasionally I think about making a book, because it's something that is accessible and a child can own. I love collecting illustrated children's books or just illustrated books, because it's something that you can hold tight. It's something that you can have and engage with intimately. Exhibiting in a huge space like the Hayward Gallery may never be for me, and so I need a practice that will sustain me. We talked about vulnerabilities. There are some subjects about which I would not be able to make public work. Ideas like death are constant. Losing the big people has made me want to talk about my own mortality.

Janice

That brings us to the archive, because the reality is that many people in the archive, myself included, are approaching our sixties. Many of us will not be here in the next ten, fifteen years. Given that we have reached this point in our lives, I have recently been doing some archiving, finding stuff that I had completely forgotten about. Because I never felt that I was part of the Black arts movement. I just knew these people. They were making

work, they were interesting. I would go to exhibitions; it wasn't that you felt that you'd joined a club. Everybody was just around. But obviously it's historicised in a particular way. And I was just wondering how we relate to our presence within that work. For other people it will be the visit to Women's Art Library or Panchayat or to Chelsea. How you relate to your archival presence?

It's about finding the existence of this thing; a creative self that looks like you. And we are part of this trace. What work do historians need to do to actually recognise the different strategies of creative practice that artists of colour have had to engage with in order to maintain a sense of a creative self? We didn't come from upper middle-class backgrounds where being an artist was a possibility. For us, if you were bright, 'what are you doing with the arts? You should go and do something proper'. What is that? It's almost a burden of representation. What do you think that relationship to the archive, the trace might be? Symrath? Because obviously you're a founder of Panchayat and one of the things Panchayat was doing or continued to do was to document existence, literally.

Symrath

I remember having meetings at my flat in the early days with the artists Al-An deSouza and Shaheen Merali, co-founders of Panchayat, discussing the importance of needing visibility and education for Asian Arts and setting up of an organisation that brought visual artists together. At the time I was working in Southall at the Dominion Centre and exhibiting in London.³⁵ Education was the primary concern at the beginning and it grew from that. It was really important to create space for artists to talk about their work, but also for an archive that could be used by educators, creatives, thinkers generally, so that the work of artists of colour could be considered in the context of British art history. We wanted Panchayat to be accessible to as many people as possible and function as a living archive. We also wanted it to be linked to arts institutions and schools. All of this is still important today.

Simone

I don't know that I can speak to the archive, but my response would be to bring up *Free, White and 21* (fig.9). For me, this painting raises the idea of 'free, white and 21' and how the idea imposes itself on lives.³⁶ It's a magical thing. It's something that any child has to deal with, the burden of what that phrase means. I make work hoping to relieve that burden. The painting asks: what is free? Which of us is free, of any colour? What is this thing about being 'free, white and 21'? What liberties does that give you? What is the burden that it places on my daughters? So yes, the archive is important. I wasn't thinking of archives or of being in an archive. I guess it's a kind of archiving for them to have pieces of work made for them [my daughters] that liberates. Does that make sense?



Fig.9
Simone Alexander
Free, White and 21 2021
Water-based oil paint on canvas
720 x 520 mm
© Simone Alexander

Symrath

Yes, and we have archives that do that liberation work. Places like the **Women's Art Library** at Goldsmiths have so much material from such a diverse range of artists from all around the world. We live in such a global world and with so many different cultures. I think the archive represents that and much more for us as women artists.

Janice

When you go through any of those archives, you witness a real diversity of practices. When you actually start talking to artists of colour about their work and careers, a whole range of concerns emerge, from the inspiration behind their work, size, colour and material, to their working conditions

and life experience. Yet, in mainstream conversations with artists of colour, due to a particular focus on race that is often imposed, we miss the opportunity to truly consider important, constitutive aspects of their work and practice.

How should we think of the creative lives of women of colour in the late twentieth century? This generation of artists who slipped in and out of **public practice, not only claimed that label of 'the artist', but creatively maintained it by living this idea of a creative artistic self.** We therefore need to rethink our presence in the archive, what we consider to be art, and how we understand the gendered and racialised politics of visibility. We need to understand how difficult it has been for artists of colour and women in particular, to maintain this impossible notion of an oeuvre, this idea of identifiable practice which can be traced. To find these artists in the archive, we need to consider their collaborators, be they children, mothers, or organisations. We need to pay attention and think really carefully with gaps and absences in archives.

Thank you Symrath and Simone for this conversation. It has been really fascinating. It is the culmination of a series of conversations we have had over months, and I hope they will continue.

NOTES

- ¹ Exhibitions featuring Symrath Patti include *Transitions of Riches* 1993 at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.
- ² Citizen's Gallery in Greenwich was set up in collaboration with the local council and *Jagrati* was the inaugural exhibition.
- ³ *Dorothea Tanning: Works 1942–1992*, Camden Arts Centre, London, 1993, <https://camdenartcentre.org/whats-on/works-1942-1992>, accessed 4 September 2022.
- ⁴ 'Among the more analytic exhibition reviews, the poor representation of women artists drew the most criticism, not ameliorated by Araeen's apologia regarding his inability to locate Black and Asian women artists from the earlier generations and the refusal of several women to participate in what they possibly feared was a ghettoising context.' Jean Fisher, 'The Other Story and the Past Imperfect', *Tate Papers*, no.12, Autumn 2009. See also David A. Bailey, Sonia Boyce and Ian Baucom (eds.), *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, Duke University Press, in collaboration with Iniva and AAVAA, 2005.
- ⁵ 'The word "Disoeuvre" is a play on the "oeuvre" – which either means a single work but more usually describes the life-long work of an artist. I also suggest that girls of my generation were trained principally to be domestically supportive and thus adaptable, in contrast to boys who were trained to develop linear careers. Thus, we were unlikely to be perceived as pursuing the single-minded Picasso-esque career we were taught was the correct way to be an artist and, hence, produce a simple progressive oeuvre which would gain increasing acclaim. Instead, we are more likely to produce a Disoeuvre which has profound continuities of artistic attention and thought, but whose individual works superficially seem disparate and interrupted.' Felicity Allen, 'The Disoeuvre', <https://felicityallen.co.uk/the-disoeuvre/>, accessed 27 October 2022.
- ⁶ 'The Bradford 12 were members/supporters of the recently formed United Black Youth League who had marched during the day through Manningham to defend their community from attack by the extreme right National Front. The people of Bradford and justice loving people from across the country, refused to accept the criminalisation of the youth who had stood up to defend the city and following a strong national and international campaign the Bradford 12 were acquitted and the principle of the right to organised self-defense, including the use of weapons for this purpose was established.' See 'The Bradford 12, 30 years on...', <https://thebradford12.wordpress.com/about/>, accessed 6 February 2023.
- ⁷ *Mining the Gap* was an event, mapping the histories of artists' collectives from the 1970s, curated by Michèle Fuirer and Anna Murray and co-hosted by Althea Greenan, Women's Art Library, Tate Britain, London 2017.
- ⁸ *Jagrati: An Exhibition by Asian Women Artists*, Greenwich Citizens Gallery, London, 14 October – 22 November 1986, <https://archive.org/details/jagrati1986/mode/2up>, accessed 17 October 2022.
- ⁹ See Southall Monitoring Group website, <https://tmg-uk.org/>, accessed 4 November 2022.
- ¹⁰ *Numaish*, Peoples Gallery, London, 5–28 March 1986, including works by Dushka Ahmed, Vinodini Ebdon, Nina Edge, Bhajan Hunjan, and Naomi Iny, https://archive.org/stream/numaish/Numaish_djvu.txt, accessed 6 February 2023.
- ¹¹ The thirteen artists who participated in *Jagrati* included: Zarina Bhimji, Chila Burman, Shanti Thomas, Shamina Khanour, Symrath Patti, Nina Edge, Dushka Ahmed, Sukhwinder Saund, Bhajan Hunjan, Mumtaz Karimji, Sutapa Biswas, Ranjana Sharda and Naomi Iny.
- ¹² The Balwant Kaur Campaign took place in 1985. Kaur was murdered by her husband in Brent Asian Women's Refuge. See 'Southall Black Sisters Timeline', <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/about/southall-black-sisters-timeline/>, accessed 6 February 2023.
- ¹³ Huma Qureshi, 'Passport, visa, virginity? A mother's tale of immigration in the 1970s', *Guardian*, 13 May 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/may/13/virginity-tests-uk-immigrants-1970s>, accessed 4 November 2022. See also 'Gynaecological examinations of women seeking admission into the UK: "virginity test" incident at Heathrow Airport, 24 January 1979; Commission for Racial Equality consideration of investigation into the Immigration Service; Home Office objections and HO Summons served on CRE', National Archives HO 418/30, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11398846>, accessed 4 November 2022.
- ¹⁴ See 'Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society', <http://feministarchives.isiswomen.org/86-books/women-and-media-analysis-alternatives-and-action/1195-manushi-a-journal-about-women-and-society>, accessed 16 February 2023.

¹⁵ 'Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861 – 7 August 1941) was a Bengali polymath who worked as a poet, writer, playwright, composer, philosopher, social reformer and painter. He reshaped Bengali literature and music as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1913, he became the first non-European and the first lyricist to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore, accessed 14 October 2022.

¹⁶ Felicity Allen, *The Disoeuvre: An Argument in 4 Voices (WASLT Table); 6:27*, Berlin 2019.

¹⁷ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, San Diego 1983; Ntozake Shange, *Betsy Brown*, New York 1985; and Ntozake Shange, *For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, Alexandria 2004.

¹⁸ Marjorie Wallace, *The Silent Twins*, London 1986. See also Simone Alexander, artist's page in *Image Employed*, exhibition catalogue, Cornerhouse, Manchester 1987, p.22, https://issuu.com/keithpiper88/docs/image_employed_catalogue, accessed 27 April 2023.

¹⁹ See 'Kathua Rape Case,' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathua_rape_case, accessed 8 March 2023.

²⁰ See <https://writersmosaic.org.uk/content/riddym-ravings-jean-binta-breeze/>, accessed 8 March 2023.

²¹ Gavin Butt, *No Machos or Pop Stars: When the Leeds Art Experiment Went Punk*, Durham North Carolina 2022.

²² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, New York 1967. See Also Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* London, 2018.

²³ See the original conference programme, October 1982, Blk Art Group Archive, <http://www.blkartgroup.info/82conference.html>, accessed 10 February 2023.

²⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, New York 1982 and Amrit Wilson *Finding a Voice: Asian women in Britain*, London 1978.

²⁵ 'Sargy Mann', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargy_Mann, accessed 8 March 2023.

²⁶ See Toni Morrison interview with Charlie Rose, 'Toni Morrison Beautifully Answers an "Illegitimate" Question on Race (Jan. 19, 1998) | Charlie Rose', <https://youtu.be/-KqQ3F8wbYA>, accessed 7 February 2023.

²⁷ 'Black Audio Film Collective', Tate Website – Art Terms, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/black-audio-film-collective>, accessed 8 March 2023. See also 'Martina Atille', LUX website, <https://lux.org.uk/artist/judah-attile/>, accessed 8 March 2023.

²⁸ See Toni Morrison, 'Race Matters', *The Source of Self Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*, New York 2019.

²⁹ *Black Phoenix* was a journal published by Rasheed Araeen and Mahmood Jamal between 1978 and 1979. Rasheed Araeen and Mahmood Jamal (eds.), *Black Phoenix: Third World Perspective on Contemporary Art and Culture*, London 2022.

³⁰ Farrukh Dhondy was Commissioning Editor at Channel Four television from 1984 to 1997. Darcus Howe was a founding member of Race Today Collective.

³¹ Shakti Book House was located at 46 High Street Southall, Middlesex. It was part of the National Association of Asian Youth. It was really exciting space, a starting point for many projects and organisations that emerged in the late 1970 and 1980's such as Tara Arts and Southall Monitoring Group. See also Anandi Ramamurti, 'The politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', *Race and Class*, volume 48, issue 2, 30 June 2016. See also 'National Association of Youth' National Archives HCA/ALBANY TRUST/16/58, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/d69b455b-e485-4428-a124-8ee86ce72d1c>, accessed 13 February 2023. See also 'National Association for Asian Youth (NAAAY), 1977-1979,' George Padmore Institute JLR/3/1/22, <https://catalogue.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/records/JLR/3/1/22>, accessed 13 February 2023.

³² For works by Euan Uglow (1932–2000) see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/euan-uglow-2084>, accessed 8 March 2023.

³³ Laurel Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms, and Media Form, "Our Culture is a Racist Society": Mukti*, London 2015, pp.111–146. See also <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/whats-on/forthcoming/bazaar-south-asian-arts-magazine>, accessed 8 March 2023.

³⁴ For information about the ACTT Workshop Declaration, see 'Organisational - Four Corners ACCTT Workshop Declaration', June 1984, Four Corners Archive,

<https://www.fourcornersarchive.org/archive/view/0002692>, accessed 10 February 2023. This agreement led to the establishment of a number of politically Black film workshops: Retake Film and Video Collective, Black Audio Film Collective and Ceddo Film and Video Workshop.

³⁵ The Dominion Centre was important to the history of Southall in the 1970s and 1980s. See Jasbinder S. Nijjar, 'Southall Resists 40: History Speaking to the Now,' Institute of Race Relations website, 18

February 2019, <https://irr.org.uk/article/southall-resists-40-history-speaking-to-the-now/>, accessed 13 February 2023.

³⁶ See Janet Upadhye, "'I'm free, white and 21": Check out this supercut of the catchphrase that classic Hollywood wholly embraced', *Salon*, 7 April 2016, https://www.salon.com/2016/04/07/im_free_white_and_21_check_out_this_supercut_of_the_catchphrase_that_classic_hollywood_wholly_embraced, accessed 8 March 2023.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MG70kKrg7d0>

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