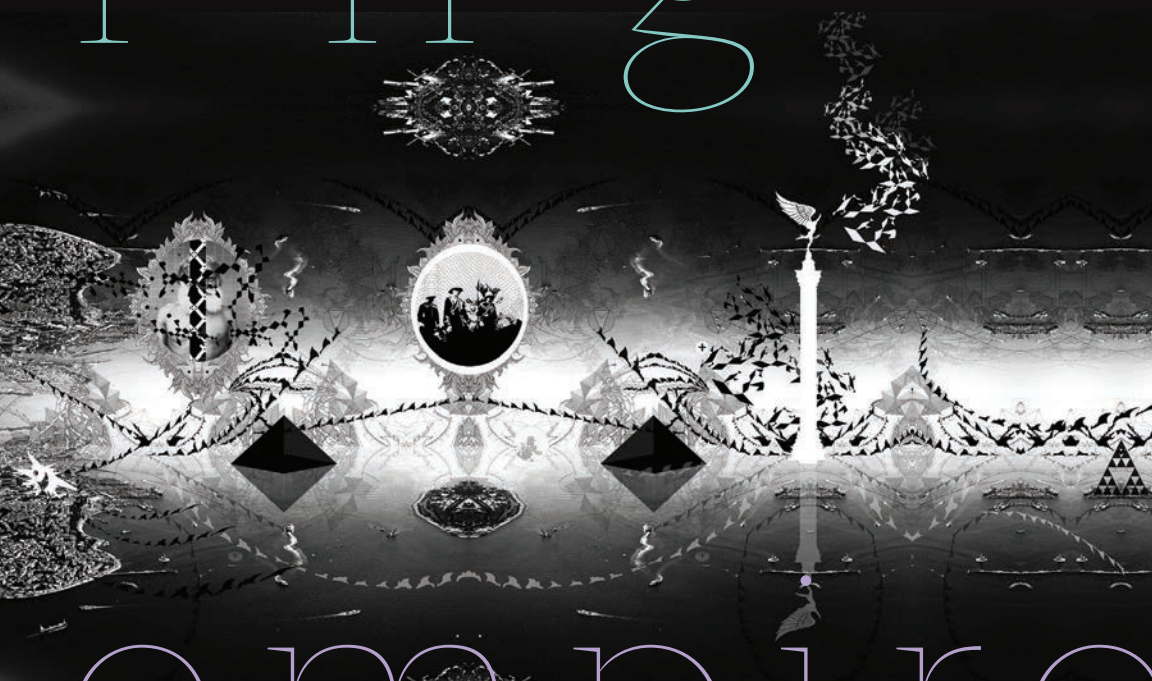
# unseeing empire

BAKIRATHI MANI

PHOTOGRAPHY, REPRESENTATION, SOUTH ASIAN AMERICA



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# ing empire

BAKIRATHI MANI

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FOR MARIO,
AND FOR THE INFINITE LOVE
WE SHARE WITH OUR SON,
AMAR

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began in 2009 with a series of visual art exhibitions that prompted me to think about the relationship between race, representation, and formations of diasporic community. In the decade since, Gauri Gill, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, and Seher Shah have been generous beyond words in sharing their creative work and process with me. I'm privileged to know all three as artists, and even more to know them as friends.

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I have been nourished by the women who joined me from preschool through high school at the International School of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, and I want to acknowledge two in particular here. While writing and revisiting the events of chapter 1, I could not forget the irrepressible energy and laughter of my classmate Rahma Salie, who died on September 11, 2001. In all our years together, Marlisa Okamoto Butler lifted me up with her strength, intelligence, and poise. Her death on August 16, 2018, came just as I finished a draft of this book. I cherish and deeply mourn the forty years of friendship that Marlisa and I shared.

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Because this is also a project about archives, I record here the lives of my grandmothers, both named Bhagheerathy. Both of my grandmothers had an elementary school education; both were married as young girls, my maternal grandmother at age nine and my paternal grandmother at sixteen; and both my grandmothers lived their entire lives in rural Kerala, raising nine children each in the decades before and after independence. Neither of them left behind an archive of any kind, save for a few photographs that are held close by my extended family. Though I knew

one grandmother for just a few months and the other for twenty years, I miss them both. It is a deep and abiding privilege to be their namesake. I honor as well my mother-in-law, Rojelia Ruiz, whose formal schooling ended in fourth grade but whose compassion runs so vast that it is truly an education to learn from her. My mother and father, Pushkala and A. P. S. Mani, have modeled ways of being that I could not otherwise conceive of. My father's enthusiasm for being photographed resulted in thousands of family photos, taken in cities and studios across Asia. My mother worked with these images to create an extraordinary collection of bound albums, numbering over one hundred. These photographs are the only documented archive of our family's life in Tokyo between 1976 and 2010. My parents' joint investment in photography is how I came to understand the ways in which we create narratives of identity, memory, and history through images. The photos and videos of my sweet niece, Amita Ohyabu, are the latest addition to this family story. To my mother, I owe everything. Her unshakable belief in me is why I have been able to live three continents apart from her; her deep faith in the value of the work I do is what love looks like.

This book is for two people whom I love. Mario Martín Ruiz is my partner in this life and in the next. He has seen this book through with his passion, his grace, and his intellect. In his unflinching commitment to seeing the world with truth and empathy, he has shared with me his extraordinary vision. Our son Amar Mani Ruiz is my heart. To watch him create his own understanding of the world is my biggest pleasure. I don't get to photograph Mario or Amar often enough, but the life that the three of us create together each day is a thing of great beauty and fills me with joy.

# INTRODUCTION

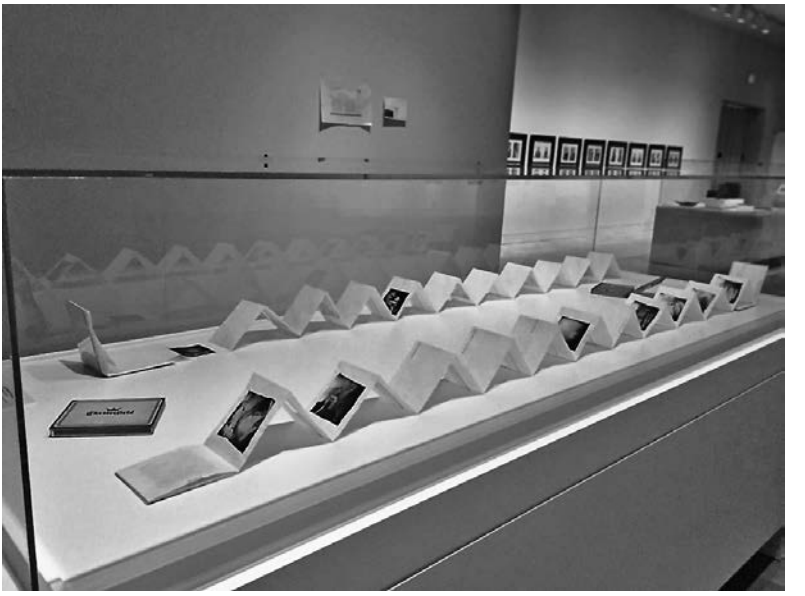
## The Work of Seeing: Photography and Representation in Diaspora

In the spring of 2005, I walked down the worn wooden off-ramp of a subway station in Queens, New York, through the leafy boulevards of a public park, to reach *Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now*, an exhibition on view at the Queens Museum. In a sunlit space on the mezzanine floor, I came across a low tabletop encased in glass. Within that rectangular vitrine was a series of faded snapshot photographs, featuring a cherubic little girl standing in a verdant garden; a husband and wife facing the camera wearing stylish sunglasses; the girl wrapped in the arms of her father, ensconced in a carousel ride. Opened out as an accordion-folded book, the images were embedded in a pile of loose tobacco that, despite the glass case, gave off a powerfully smoky scent in the hallway (figure I.1). This was my first encounter with *Fabricated Memories*, by the artist Annu Palakunnathu Matthew. Glancing at her birth date and birthplace, I assumed the installation was autobiographical, a narrative of her family's experience as Indian immigrants in England in the 1960s. The photographs took on the quality of snapshots that filled my own family albums: faded, in parts overexposed, each image depicting a cherished child and a loving family. I hovered over the glass box trying to make out the words inscribed alongside the photos, but the glare of sunlight obscured much of the text. Distracted by the profusion of artworks within the gallery space, I turned away from the

I.1 Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, *Fabricated Memories*. Installation at *Fatal Love*, Queens Museum of Art, 2005. © ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW, COURTESY SEPIAEYE. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF QUEENS MUSEUM.

installation to see life-size portrait photographs of South Asian immigrants that hung from the ceilings; digital animations of Muslim and Hindu mythology; figurative and landscape paintings; and plastic *lotas* that created soundscapes by the bathroom. Standing on the scuffed hardwood floors, I was captivated by the visuality of each of these aesthetic forms, which in turn made real and visible my own experience as a diasporic subject.

A decade later, in the fall of 2015, I once again came across Matthew's photo-based art, this time at a solo exhibition of her work at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada (figure I.2). Within this elegant and spacious setting, inhaling the scent of tobacco leaves demurely collected in a separate vitrine, I realized with a start that the images were not autobiographical but generated entirely through Matthew's digital assemblage. As I moved alongside the glass case, following the stream of text that threaded across the creased pages, I saw how *Fabricated Memories*



I.2 Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, *Fabricated Memories*. Installation at *Generations*, Royal Ontario Museum, 2015. © ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW, COURTESY SEPIAEYE. PHOTOGRAPH © DAVID H. WELLS.



narrated a story of grief and loss, detailing the departure of Matthew's family from England to Bangalore eleven years after her birth, as well as the rupture caused by the sudden death of her father from smoking-related illnesses a year later. Creating new photographs through reproducing and splicing portrait and landscape images from personal albums, Matthew's installation was not about the charming, middle-class immigrant family I initially assumed it to be. Instead, as I contemplated the gossamer-thin pages of this album, I saw how the color photographs increasingly became obscured by sunspots; peered at another image of the little girl, who appeared to eerily jump into her father's reflection; and recognized her elegant mother, whose visage fades away from this family story (see plate 1). Surrounded by schoolchildren who breezed in and out of the gallery, on their way to find a dinosaur skeleton on the main floor, I was suddenly disoriented by what I saw. No longer did *Fabricated Memories* produce a visual narrative of immigration that mapped onto and affirmed my childhood memories. Instead, the installation demanded to be read as a narrative of mourning rather than of celebration, as a representation of loss rather than as a documentation of arrival.

I was unmoored when I saw these images a second time, compelled to double back on what I had seen ten years earlier: a set of photographs that had appeared to reflect the diasporic trajectories of my own life in fact belied the promise of such representation. At my initial viewing at the Queens Museum, I had approached Matthew's art as if these photographs were a record of my immigrant experience. In the absence of public documentation of my family's history as Indian immigrants in Japan over thirty-five years, I had taken this series of snapshots of a South Asian family in rural England as a mirror of my childhood in Tokyo. Her digital production of family photos—worn and frayed at the edges, serially organized like old Polaroids that tumble out of shoeboxes—re-created the sensory experience of seeing images in a long-forgotten album. I cathected my identity as a South Asian diasporic subject to the photographic representations produced by the artist, so much so that even as the album explicitly narrated Matthew's profound grief over losing her father, I had taken this series of images as a reflection of my own life. The intensity of my attachment to the installation—an identification coupled with misrecognition, which had persisted without my knowing during the intervening years—meant that the very act of seeing these photographs was haunted by the possibility of loss: that no matter how much I kept looking at these images, I would never be able to see myself.



In this book I examine how and why South Asian Americans desire to identify with photographic representations of diaspora. Aligning myself with viewers who see themselves as racialized diasporic subjects in relation to the photographic image, I consider how we establish a mimetic relation of identity to the visual object in order to claim the image as an affirmation of ourselves. We commonly understand our desire for visual affirmation through our invisibility in U.S. public culture, an absence that (we assume) can be rectified by the greater visibility of minoritized subjects. I propose instead that our orientation toward visual representation is rooted in the uses of photography as a form of documentation and surveillance. Photography's own mimetic qualities here serve a double purpose: first, as a record of the real, that is, its function as visual documentation of the lived experience of racialized subjects; and second, as an aesthetic form that has historically captured the discipline and display of racialized subjects. We enact our claims to the photograph as proof of our belonging even as we know these histories, and we do so in tandem with diasporic artists whose creative processes refashion the same histories. Working across public and personal archives, the artists whom I dis-

cuss reimagine the uses of photography to produce contemporary representations of racialized subjectivity and community, representations that affirm, contest, or deny the image of ourselves that we are looking for.

I define the visual and affective relation forged between diasporic viewers, artists, and photographic representations of immigrant subjects as diasporic mimesis. If mimesis is "the faculty to copy, imitate, make models," diasporic mimesis binds together images that appear to represent the lived experience of racialized subjects, with the viewer's desire to be represented in the public sphere as a racialized immigrant.[1] As artists incorporate and disseminate images from national and personal archives through their depictions of immigrant subjects, the viewer sees the work on display and recalls other image archives that surface under the photographic object. Like my encounters with Matthew's *Fabricated Memories*, these alternate image archives can be real or imagined, emerging from times and places far removed from the exhibition context. When viewers establish a likeness or association between their own archival memories and the artist's creation, they are racialized through their identification with the artwork. The experience of seeing in diaspora is centered on this dynamic exchange between viewer, image, and artist. As a strategy of aesthetic production, as a method of viewing, and as a practice of consumption, diasporic mimesis is how we claim visual images as representative of our racialized selves.

The intimate relations of identification that South Asian viewing subjects establish with visual representations of diaspora are produced through the circulation of archival photographs in the work of South Asian diasporic artists, as well as through the consumption of such photographic representations in specific exhibition sites. When I initially encountered *Fabricated Memories* at *Fatal Love*, my desire to identify with this repertoire of photographic images was amplified by the curatorial premise of the exhibition. Bringing together twenty-eight South Asian American artists practicing in a wide range of media forms, who themselves represented diverse experiences of gender, religion, class, and sexuality, *Fatal Love* was lauded for making visible the long-established presence of South Asian Americans in New York City.[2] The display and consumption of visual art, in other words, stood in for the visibility of a heterogeneous immigrant group.[3] The stakes of South Asian American visibility were particularly high given that *Fatal Love* aimed to counter dominant media representations of South Asian and Muslim Americans after September 11, 2001.[4] To see and identify with Matthew's artwork

at *Fatal Love*, therefore, was not only an affirmation of my own belonging. As I walked through an exhibition space that was populated with a handful of younger and older South Asian American viewers, all of us exchanging brief smiles, nods, and snatches of conversation, *Fatal Love* enabled me to produce and inhabit a lived sense of racialized community. We were named South Asian American through the visual and thematic narrative of the exhibition, and it was through our navigation of the artworks on display in this exhibition space that we could enact the conditions of our own visibility as South Asian Americans. Whereas this inaugural viewing of *Fabricated Memories* evoked an intensely personal feeling of belonging to the experience of diaspora, a decade later at the Royal Ontario Museum my experience of the same installation was disoriented by the fact that the images I saw were situated just a few floors away from replicas of skeletons and fossils. There, instead of identifying with the racially diverse group of viewers who filtered through the museum space, I experienced the exhibition as one in a series of displays of world cultures within a natural history museum, an institution whose extensive collection includes the display of human beings as objects. Even when South Asian American art is displayed as part of curatorial projects that promise greater visibility in the public sphere, the institutional histories of the museum shape how much of ourselves we can see.



Framing artworks within the social life of the exhibition, I locate my readings of South Asian diasporic photography within spaces of display that range from upscale commercial galleries in New Delhi that hang prints without titles or prices to public institutions like the Smithsonian museums in Washington, DC.[5] Across these diverse exhibition sites, artworks evoke particular embodied sensations of viewing and invite the participation of different groups of viewers: those who identify as South Asian Americans as well as those who do not; connoisseurs of contemporary art as well as tourists and students; middle-class as well as upper-middle-class viewers.

Weaving together visual analysis of fine art photography with ethnographic and experiential studies of museum cultures, I examine how diasporic viewers engage with photograph-based works by three South Asian women artists: Gauri Gill, Seher Shah, and Annu Palakunnathu Matthew. From Shah's incorporation of landscape photography commemorating British imperial rule in India, to Gill's references to the seminal photographs of Black and white Americans by the artist Robert Frank, to Matthew's uses of photographic documentation of Native

peoples in the Americas, these artists intervene in a range of colonial, settler colonial, and imperial archives. Their photograph-based works, which take the form of drawings, diptychs, and self-portraits, rely on generating likenesses between the archival image and contemporary representations of racialized subjects and communities. Through the dissemination and reconfiguration of these images, each artwork in turn provokes us, as diasporic viewing subjects, to remember alternate image archives that are generated by our acts of seeing. These include online photographic and video footage of the decimation of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001; nineteenth-century ethnographic portraiture of "natives" on the subcontinent; and biometric surveillance images of immigrants in the early twenty-first century.[6] Read together, I contend that this body of fine art photography runs counter to demands for the greater visibility of immigrant subjects. Instead, these photo-based drawings, diptychs, and installations urge the viewer to look elsewhere, at objects other than the immigrant subjects we want to see. Refusing to provide the solace of identification, such artworks question our desire to be represented.

Across the book, I mobilize a collective viewing position, aligning my own engagement with the artworks on display with those of other South Asian diasporic viewers who encounter these works alongside me: inside and outside the gallery space, as well as through the pages of this book. Naming my orientation toward the artworks in relation to a heterogeneous group of viewers, I denote a collaborative practice of seeing through the use of plural pronouns including "we," "us," and "our." My use of such shared terms of identification is both contingent and partial. I do not assume that South Asian diasporic viewers and readers—differentiated by class and gender, race and sexuality, and national origin—share an identical affective relation to the photographic image, or indeed that we consume the aesthetic and archival elements of artworks in the same way. There can be no singular diasporic viewing position, nor can there be stability or coherence across what, as racialized immigrants, we see and desire in the images that we encounter. And yet I insist on demarcating the act of seeing visual representations of racialized subjects as a form of collective social work, produced through the intimate relations of identification embodied by viewers in relation to specific artworks and artists, as well as by the unexpected forms of racialized community that emerge through the curatorial projects of exhibition sites. It is in relation to other viewers (including Asian American, Black, Latinx, and

white viewers) within the framework of the exhibition that we create and sustain our identifications as racialized subjects. By marking multiple, overlapping acts of seeing—my own viewing experiences and those of other South Asian American viewers, as well as the responses of racialized viewers more broadly—I explore how diasporic mimesis is central to the ways in which racialized immigrants see themselves. In claiming my affinity to viewers both visible and not, I build on what Kandice Chuh insightfully defines as "the relationality of the felt, often wordless connectivity that occurs among minoritarian subjects because of misrecognition, and precipitates the sociality of being with, of entanglement; it is that commonality necessary to persist, to thrive."[7] With an eye to these deeply felt forms of "connectivity," I consistently use the term "South Asian" to denote photographic subjects within artworks and exhibitions that claim to represent a single national, religious, or ethnic group (such as Indian Americans, Sikhs, or Malayalees), even as that term engenders broader questions about identity and representation that encompass a wide range of racialized subjects, including but not limited to immigrants from across the subcontinent and its diasporas. As the experiences of seeing that I gather under the pronoun "we" shift, move, and disaggregate across exhibition sites, I also maintain an unfixed "we" that is authorized by the ways in which racialized subjects are haunted by imperial archives that circulate through the production and consumption of visual art.



Avery Gordon writes that haunting is "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known."[8] In my view, haunting is a way of seeing inhabited by racialized subjects that is saturated by the unresolved violence of empire, including empires not of our own time. This has at least three implications. First, the aesthetic forms and modalities of display that shape photographic representations of South Asians in diaspora are deeply tied to archives of empire in the United States, South Asia, and Europe. Such histories of the taxonomic documentation and exhibition of racialized and gendered subjects, from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries, are central to how we understand the form and content of contemporary diasporic visual culture. Second, for racialized immigrant viewers who want to see more fulfilling, authentic, and restorative forms of aesthetic representation, our very desire for such artworks emerges out of our intimate familiarity with another set of images: those that debase, degrade, and dehumanize racialized subjects. In this context, what we want to see is deeply forged by

what we already know as images of ourselves. Third, attending to viewers' complex affective responses, I demonstrate how viewer experiences are structured by the exhibition of these works, and specifically by curatorial narratives and institutional frameworks that emphasize the visibility and authenticity of racialized subjects. In museum settings across North America, such curatorial projects frequently come at the cost of representing other minoritized subjects, including indigenous peoples and communities.

The ways in which we see South Asian diasporic visual cultures are also haunted by the rising prominence of contemporary art from South Asia, artworks that reflect and contest nationalist narratives of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The years that frame this book, 2005–2018, are marked by the profuse production and circulation of fine art by South Asian diasporic artists, but also by the mobilization of South Asian fine art as a currency of global exchange by the Indian and Pakistani states. Since the late 1980s, several South Asian diasporic artist/activist collectives in the U.S. have organized film festivals, conferences, and exhibitions: first as a progressive expression of queer diasporic identity and community and then, after September 11, 2001, as a means of resisting public narratives of South Asians and Muslim Americans as terrorists and as noncitizens. As I have argued previously, these art/activist festivals were integral to establishing a South Asian diasporic public culture in North America, and became sites where first- and second-generation immigrants embodied transnational forms of locality as South Asians.[9] At the same time, such exhibitions of diasporic art have been supplanted in the past decade by the rapid growth of commercial galleries, biennales, and major museum shows dedicated to contemporary art from South Asia.[10] In these latter contexts, fine art—including painting, sculpture, and video installations, but most specifically photography for its relatively low cost and its aesthetic of mimetic reproduction—indexed the rising cultural and capital value of South Asia and its citizen-subjects.[11]

For example, at the Queens Museum in 2005, *Fatal Love* ran concurrently with another exhibition titled *Edge of Desire: Recent Art from India*. While *Fatal Love* was framed as a local exhibition showcasing artwork by and about South Asian immigrants, *Edge of Desire*, in partnership with the prestigious Asia Society Museum in Manhattan, featured sculpture, painting, and photography by India's most prominent modern and contemporary artists, using art to display the expansive reach of a global India at the turn of the twenty-first century.[12] For South Asian Ameri-

can viewers who came to the Queens Museum to see *Fatal Love*, their prospective engagement with diasporic visual culture came belatedly, as seeing those artworks required first walking through the sprawling visual display of *Edge of Desire* that dominated the museum space. Our representation as a heterogeneous group of immigrants in the former show thus meant contending with our erasure—as diasporic artists and as diasporic viewers—from the nationalist narrative of the latter. But by 2017, Jaishri Abichandani, who had curated *Fatal Love*, curated a major exhibition of South Asian diasporic art titled *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions*, this time at the Asia Society Museum, precisely where *Edge of Desire* had originated.[13] At an opening weekend conference sponsored by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, South Asian American artists and academics were invited to reflect on the relationship between *Fatal Love* and *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions*.[14] In the intervening years, many of the artists had achieved global prominence; the Queens Museum, once viewed as a remote outer-borough museum, had undergone a striking $69 million renovation, doubling in size; and several of the original participants in *Fatal Love* had gone on to establish careers as cultural critics, queer theorists, and art historians.[15] In many ways, the last decade has seen the arrival of South Asian diasporic art and artists, as well as a vibrant body of scholarship on South Asian diasporic visual cultures. Yet the question of representation in diaspora—what it means to create an aesthetic object that captures who we are as racialized immigrants and, equally, what it means to see ourselves reflected in these objects—remains unresolved, for the very ways in which diasporic visual cultures are curated and exhibited continue to be in relation to nationalist frameworks of collecting, displaying, and consuming art.



As a South Asian diasporic viewer whose own subjectivity is forged in relation to aesthetic representations of racialized and gendered subjects, I take seriously the desire for visual representation of and by minoritized subjects in the public sphere. But I also work with the knowledge that representation is not enough. Even as diasporic viewers, curators, and artists approach the photographic image as if it makes visible the reality of their lived experience, we already know that the image itself cannot substitute for the absence of public documentation and acknowledgment of our lives. Our sense of loss, which anticipates our desire to see ourselves made whole through the image, is generated by the necessarily incomplete fact of representation. Even as the photograph promises mimetic reflection, it is also an aesthetic object that can betray our desire to

be represented. Whether it is the archival histories that are resurrected by the photographic image, or the curatorial narratives that frame the photographic object, or the exhibition spaces that shape its display, the photograph can fail to represent us.

Such a failure to see ourselves is particularly acute when the photograph on display evokes archival images that are far removed from the viewers' own experience. Matthew's digital fabrication of archival snapshots, for instance, initially appeared to model the contents of my own family albums. Yet when I was finally able to see the same photographs in relation to the narrative imprinted onto the work itself, I realized that the installation could no longer accommodate or affirm my desire to be represented within its images. Each of my encounters with *Fabricated Memories*, first at the Queens Museum and then at the Royal Ontario Museum, produced a relation with the photograph that grew further and further estranged, such that a photographic image that initially appeared to offer a documentation of the self eventually became a visual object that abjured my desire for representation. My repeated attempts to see myself in the visual object refracted against the surface of the photograph, which no longer remained a mirror object—instead, the photograph rejected and evaded my desire for identification.

To encounter a partial, fragmentary, and incomplete visual document of the racialized self means that we must also be able to inhabit another way of seeing, what I call a nonmimetic identification with the photographic image.[16] Creating archives of diaspora not out of images from the past but through alternate frameworks of exhibition and affective engagement, nonmimetic identification takes many forms. It includes creating curatorial narratives that reject encyclopedic displays of racialized communities; displaying and consuming photograph-based works that foreground material objects rather than immigrant subjects; and developing practices of seeing that look elsewhere, outside the colonial archives that shape our very desire to see ourselves. Such nonmimetic ways of seeing can produce narratives of diasporic selfhood and community that are unexpected, even dissatisfying. But the practice of moving away from a desire for mimetic identification acknowledges that the problem of representation cannot be resolved through the greater visibility of the racialized subject, whether in the context of an art exhibition or in the public sphere at large. Instead, we come to recognize how representation itself is constituted by colonial histories of documentation and surveillance, which inflect the aesthetic practices of those artists who create

photograph-based images of South Asians in America, as well as the ways in which South Asian diasporic viewers see and claim such representations. For the diasporic viewer who comes close to the photograph to see her own reflection, our nonmimetic identification with the image redirects us, instead, to confront the limits of representation.

## SEEING BEYOND THE NATION

The photograph, as Lisa Lowe presciently notes, is "an object of cathexis that is born out of displacement and hardship."[17] But as a visual text, photography is not simply one of many available forms of representation for diasporic subjects. Instead, the photograph is what queer theorist David Eng calls the "privileged archival document of the modern era," an aesthetic form that comes to stand in for the material fact of representation.[18] The historical and contemporary photograph can be used to constitute an archive of the self, especially when other forms of legal and visual documentation (such as administrative records, paintings, and artifacts) are unavailable or inaccessible. For diasporic viewers like myself, photographic images become our archival texts, even as our response to such images is informed by past experience with other taxonomic collections of photography. These other image archives, from the nineteenth century to the present, document histories of racial oppression, such that the very presence of a racialized subject within the archival image becomes a measure of human viability. Black visual studies scholar Leigh Raiford suggests that photography is a dominant cultural form in diaspora: "Photography's capacity to build or envision community across geographical location, its capacity to engage its viewers on both critical and expressive or emotional registers, would seem well-suited to just this sort of mobilization. . . . We can begin to uncover how photography can shape diasporic imaginings of the individual and collective self, to trace 'the relationship between visual affect and transnational effect.'"[19] Photography thus becomes a genealogical document of diasporic community, one that displays how the racialized subject—and, by extension, the self who identifies with this visual subject—is enumerated and codified within and outside the nation.

The promise of representation offered by photography means that it is through the visuality of the image that we can begin to think of ourselves as full citizen-subjects: that is, the aesthetics of visuality is how we consider the possibility that our subjugation as racialized, gendered, and

sexualized subjects can be lifted. As such, photography is not just a form of racial representation but also a mode of racial restitution. In *Unruly Visions*, Gayatri Gopinath contends that visual representations of race, gender, and sexuality are how diasporic subjects make sense of our place in the world, or how we come to know ourselves. When Gopinath encounters an archival image of a young Lebanese person from the 1950s at an art exhibition, she immediately sutures the subject of that photograph to her own moving recollection of the "femme aesthetic of the young queers of color I remember seeing . . . during my young adulthood in New York City," a memory that sharply diverges, in terms of both place and time, from the archival context where the image was first found.[20] Such intimate acts of affective identification with the photograph, despite the visible differences between the viewer and the photographic subject that are indexed within the image itself, demonstrate how keenly diasporic subjects turn toward the photograph as an archive of our own lives. Photography is the aesthetic object that, precisely for its mimetic qualities, we produce and consume to see ourselves represented: in better and less painful ways, in forms and styles that authenticate our lived experience.[21] As racialized immigrants who desire to see ourselves represented in the public sphere, the photograph becomes the object of our desire and demand.



Here I am indebted to the expansive imagination of Black feminist visual cultural theorists, whose scholarship on a range of photographic matter—portraits of enslaved and free subjects, family albums, discarded studio prints, contemporary fine art, and photojournalism—has shaped the material, archival, and affective configurations of how we see the relation between race and representation. Scholars including Tina Campt, Kimberly Juanita Brown, and Nicole Fleetwood have traced the shifting configurations of Blackness as a lived and representational experience from the late nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries, via the production and consumption of photographic texts.[22] The photograph, in their hands, becomes the material object through which we understand how race is embodied, performed, refracted, and contested. I expand on their work by examining how and why photography matters to South Asian Americans, whose different experiences of racialization—as postcolonial and as immigrant subjects—reconfigure forms of diasporic visuality. What Campt defines as the "shifting sensory and affective relations that structure the dynamics of viewing and being viewed" is central to how I understand the intimate social and political relations of iden-

tity that are forged between immigrant viewers and photographic images that document the visual and material density of race.[23] Instead of recuperating documentary and fine art photography as texts that make visible the lived experience of racialized subjects, however, I suggest that the act of excavating photographic material from colonial archives, and seeing contemporary re-presentations of these imperial images, exhumes something more disconcerting: the fact that we are haunted by the images we gather to affirm ourselves.

Seeing photographs of those who are racially codified as South Asian engenders a complex set of affective responses. On the one hand, such images elicit my desire to produce an affirmative correlation between the image that I see and the person I am, as if photographs of South Asians that are distant from my own specific experience of immigration are part of a family album. My consumption of these photographic images becomes akin to an expression of kinship, as with my responses to Matthew's installation of *Fabricated Memories* at the Queens Museum. Such "affective correspondences," Eng notes, "provide the means of (re)connecting disconnected words and things through unexpected pairings, unconscious links through which identity and history might come to be refined in psychic and social life."[24] These "unexpected pairings" include what I describe as the intimacy produced between viewer and artist, both of whom identify as diasporic subjects in relation to the artwork. On the other hand, concurrent to such affirmations of racial identity and community runs a feeling of deep shame, a shame that emerges out of sighting the racialized self (inside/outside the photographic print), and an embarrassing sense that I have claimed this photograph out of a paucity of archival images through which I can render my own history. That sense of shame, in turn, prompts me to search for an alternate genealogy of representation, one that does not hinge on the subjection of my body and of bodies like mine but recuperates, instead, photographic documentation of self-actualization. This was my experience in the Royal Ontario Museum, where I saw the distance between my imagined memories of childhood and Matthew's, and where I also recognized to my horror that I had claimed Matthew's fabricated photographs as my own in the absence of historical narratives and images that documented my family's trajectory of migration. And yet to search for another image of representation is to confront failure, to come to terms with the knowledge that there is no other set of images that can adequately capture my desire to be something or someone else.

What as minoritized viewers we consistently confront, despite our attempts to procure different and better representations, is the failure of the visual image to restore a sense of selfhood to ourselves. Images of racialized subjects, whether in photography or other forms of visual media such as film and television, fail to provide more than a partial, fleeting glimpse of affective kinship, and so we tend to look at such images constantly, even obsessively. In our desire to make representation matter, we take the accumulated fact of racial representation as "a sign of success and progress," even when the affective relations we craft to such images leave us feeling lacking, or wanting more.[25] In critiquing the visual image for its inability to produce a constant vision of the racialized subject, we locate the site of failure within the image (the limits of the photographer's gaze, the visible objectification of the racialized subject), or in the modes of production and consumption that shape how these images circulate (in mainstream media or in commercial galleries, online or underground).[26]

But what we think is the failure of the image is in fact an indictment of the very apparatus of representation itself. As Jack Halberstam has proposed, failure is more than the mark of being unsuccessful. Instead, it is "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique."[27] To contend with the failure of the image, therefore, is to come to terms with the breakdown of the technology, modes, and purpose of representation itself. Indeed, it is the very fact that we must be represented (in this form, in this framework, through this visual rhetoric) that is the problem. Even as we already know this, as racialized subjects we continue to participate in the production of visual culture that makes ourselves matter—as a figurative body and as a material presence—again and again. We look for images that either grant us a sense of subjectivity or allow us to read existing visual archives differently, to route through our collective consumption of the image a different narrative of the self. Yet it is also worth dwelling on images that fail to do so, that produce affective encounters that are uneasy, uncomfortable, or difficult to forget. For failure—along with its accomplices, "losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing"—offers us what Halberstam calls "more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."[28]

By emphasizing the failure of the image, and by extension the failure of the project of representation, in no way do I want to deny the need for representation in diasporic communities. Stuart Hall reminds us that "it

is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are. There is no escape from the politics of representation."[29] Representation is vital to minoritized subjects who imagine themselves, through the production, consumption, and dissemination of visual culture, as full human beings. What I am emphasizing is Hall's critique of our desire for new, better, or more authentic forms of representation. For racialized immigrants, representation is an obsessive desire, one that we cannot do without. It is through representation in state and national archives that we can see ourselves as a people with a past, and it is also through visual representation that we respond to the state's demand to identify ourselves. For South Asian Americans in particular, representation is how we come to terms with the fragmentary evidence of our past in the British colonial archive, and it is how we craft who we are within the racial logic of the U.S. state. But what happens when representation begins to break down, erode, or haunt? How might our attraction to visual representations of race be subverted, challenged, or rejected?

Building on the work of transnational feminist and queer scholars, I demonstrate how our acts of nonmimetic identification with the visual image, our ability to court a failure of representation, is one way that, as racialized and gendered immigrant subjects, we can refuse to inhabit the dominant modes of identification that are demanded of us by the neoliberal state.[30] I argue for ways of seeing visual representations of diaspora that build on what Chuh describes as "social formations characterized by neither identity nor consensus, and instead by not only shared recognition and apprehension of the damage resulting from such potent fictions, but also a fundamental refusal to be defined or disciplined by them."[31] The acts of nonmimetic identification that I delineate are one way in which we can embody ways of seeing that refuse to be "defined or disciplined" by dominant social formations of race and by the fiction of identity.



## WORKING IN THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE

I argue in this book that the very desire for representation in our contemporary moment is haunted by imperial ways of seeing. Such haunting is directly evoked by the colonial and settler colonial photography that is incorporated within the artworks that I discuss, which includes late nineteenth-century photography of indigenous peoples on the subconti-

nent, early twentieth-century portraits of Native peoples, and landscape photography commemorating British rule in South Asia. Encompassing a range of aesthetic styles, these images are sourced from national as well as familial archives and are shaped by what Mary Louise Pratt called "the imperial eye."[32] Yet the colonial gaze that structures these photographic images is neither identical, nor total, nor static. What distinguishes, for example, nineteenth-century British photographs of indigenous subjects in South Asia from twentieth-century settler colonial portraiture of indigenous peoples across the Americas are the disparate contexts of empire that shape histories of photographic production and consumption. Photography was a critical tool for the formalization of British administrative rule on the subcontinent in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as military, government, and commercial photographers documented populations that were always in excess, always beyond the camera's grasp. By contrast, the privately funded endeavors of photographers like Curtis were central to the expansion of U.S. empire in the early twentieth century. Curtis's documentation of Native peoples in elegiac prints rendered entire populations out of time, as if their very presence in the photograph constituted the fact of their demise in the archive. Even as the camera, in the hands of colonial and settler colonial photographers, documented the presence of "native" lives, in India these lives were in excess of the state's control, and in the United States indigenous subjects were violently eliminated from representative portraits of modern citizens.



As Lowe shows us, reading across diverse imperial archives "unsettles the discretely bounded objects, methods, and temporal frameworks canonized by a national history."[33] For viewers of South Asian diasporic visual culture, the very means by which we can see ourselves in representations of racialized immigrants is through our consumption of multiple image archives: in South Asia, the U.S., and Europe, across the nineteenth century and into the present. Yet instead of operating "as a site of recovery and legitimacy," the colonial archive itself is an epistemological formation of empire, a repository as well as a site for the display of photographic images that remain volatile for the artist and for the viewer.[34] Reflecting on the accumulation of written documents held in the metropolitan archives of former imperial powers, Ann Laura Stoler notes that archives "are records of uncertainty and doubt in how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond with a changing imperial world."[35] To think of the archive not as a collection of im-

ages and documents that hold certain power, but rather as a corpus with a "pulse," belies the facticity of the image.[36] More important, it helps us to understand in what ways archival images work to shape which photographs appear to visually document racial difference; why we remember certain forms of visual representation; and how we carry forward elements from our experience with the archival image—a certain look, an arrangement of objects—as we identify with contemporary visual representations of ourselves. The imperial archive, in other words, is never singular, nor can it contain the images and documents that compose it.[37] Instead, through the act of seeing, images from the archive reverberate through their circulation and accumulation, producing meanings that shift, move, and always remain unstable.

Framed by the diverse uses of photographic technology in colonial and settler colonial states, archival photographic images carry an acute burden of representation for viewers who themselves identify as racialized subjects. Viewed as an ethnographic document or a family portrait, collected as a souvenir, or held as an image on a postcard, the colonial photograph occupies multiple registers of representation.[38] Once singularly denounced as a manifestation of imperialist ideology, the colonial archival photograph has become, through the work of feminist visual studies scholars, a representation of anticolonial nationalism and feminist agency; and a means of rethinking visualizations of race, gender, and sexuality.[39] Writing on early twentieth-century tourist photographs in the Caribbean, Krista Thompson has argued that the legacy of colonial photographs is central to "how local audiences imagine, represent, and define as representative their contemporary societies and histories."[40] Thompson's emphasis on how British imperial photography continues to shape the ways in which "local audiences" view their own histories importantly draws attention to acts of consumption. I expand upon this body of work by delineating how images from the imperial archive circulate and are consumed transnationally, through the production of contemporary fine art by diasporic artists, as well as through the viewing practices of diasporic subjects.

That the archive is an affective as well as epistemological formation of empire is manifest in the works of the artists I discuss, each of whom deploys and disrupts photographs from a wide variety of national, familial, colonial, and settler colonial archival repositories. Instead of being deployed as images of historical reference or creative inspiration, archival prints surface in their work as reproductions: as duplications, as forgery,

and as alterations. Using landscape and portrait images to create representations of South Asian Americans, Matthew, Shah, and Gill create image effects that are at times illegible: spectral negatives, ghostly marks, uncanny reproductions. In these artists' hands, the archival photograph is never an intact object with an undisturbed history. Instead, through their work, photography's mimetic relation to the past is already revealed as a fiction.

In her large-scale architectural drawings (chapter 1), the artist Seher Shah inverts and reconfigures early twentieth-century photography of imperial monuments to British rule on the subcontinent to evoke the landscape of U.S. empire after September 11, 2001. The uses of photography as a tool of empire also emerges through my readings of Matthew's work (chapter 2), which demonstrates how settler colonial photography of Native peoples is bound to colonial survey photography of "tribes" and "natives" on the subcontinent; and how, in turn, the colonial visual documentation of Indians in India becomes a palimpsest for the racial profiling of South Asians in America today. I emphasize that colonial and settler colonial photographic imagery filters into the act of producing representations of South Asian Americans not simply as a referential picture archive but as a method of documenting racial difference and racial presence. The circulation of archival images across these and other artworks generates alternate modes of looking at and identifying with visual representations of South Asian diasporas, ways of seeing that rupture dominant readings of photography as a representative text of the nation.



The imperial archive also surfaces at museum sites and through curatorial narratives that structure how viewers consume photographic prints. At *Beyond Bollywood*, an exhibition held at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC (chapter 3), I demonstrate how family photographs and personal objects were crowdsourced and displayed alongside objects from the Smithsonian's own collection to create a visual narrative of South Asian America. These images, in turn, were exhibited inside a natural history museum that itself functioned as an archive for the display of colonized peoples, animals, flora, and fauna. In contrast to artists like Fred Wilson who have practiced "mining the museum" as a means to excavate histories of race and racism within the museum and its collection of objects, here the curators located the representational project of a single immigrant community within the representational system of the imperial museum.[41] In this

way, the archival project of *Beyond Bollywood* determined not only which South Asian Americans were represented, but also how these representations were displayed and consumed as objects.

In addition to identifying how the archive becomes visible through practices of photographic circulation and consumption, I am also drawn to the archive as a site of feeling. Building on the work of queer scholars who have argued for feeling in the archive, I narrate my own affective encounter with each artwork, as a viewer who is racialized in relation to the images she sees.[42] In my reading of the artist Gauri Gill's photographic series *The Americans* (chapter 4), I delineate the intimate sense of community that South Asian diasporic viewers forge in relation to the prints, with each other, and with the artist at exhibition sites across South Asia and North America. For racialized subjects who encounter these prints and see themselves named as Americans, viewing Gill's work is a powerful act of identification: a means of memorializing "the minor histories (personal, familial, collective, regional) that stand outside of official nation-centered narratives."[43] However, it is precisely through the feelings of proximity that the series generates—via the intimate connection between the viewer and the image, between the artist and the archive, between one photograph of South Asians in America and another—that *The Americans* comes to stand in for the very community it aspires to represent.



For South Asian American artists as well as viewers, diasporic mimesis is central to how we make sense of our experience in and with the imperial archive. For artists, their work in the archives produces associative linkages between colonial epistemologies that define the representation of archival photographic subjects, and our current political moment that generates its own desires for representation on the part of racialized subjects. As viewers, our immersion in the photographic images produced by diasporic artists binds together a diverse set of temporalities as well as spatialities. These include the time of seeing the photographic image within the artwork, the time recalled by the alternate image archives that we remember when we see the artwork, and the institutional and social histories of the museum sites where we encounter the work. Diasporic mimesis is how artists and viewers construct relational identities to the archival image, but such identifications are haunted by visual histories of empire across three continents. We cannot make our way toward creating or consuming new forms of representation unless we contend with the multiplicity of imperial frameworks that haunt what we see, and how we desire what we see.

As a scholar of Asian American studies and postcolonial studies, the intimacy of feeling that ties me to South Asian American art is central to my understanding of how visual histories of empire map onto our present experience of racialization. The problem lies in making these imperial genealogies visible through the aesthetic object, especially when that object is recuperated as a figurative representation of South Asian immigrants in the United States. For Asian Americanists, the work of representation is tied up with a politics of racial visibility: an epistemological orientation toward the revelation of minoritized subjects in the public sphere. Exhibitions of Asian American art from the 1990s to the present have consistently been framed by curatorial arguments about aesthetic form and value, but also contend with popular and scholarly views on the utility of Asian American art as a form of visible representation: of an immigrant group, of a minoritized subject, of the artists themselves.[44] That is, even as we critique particular aesthetic modes of representation as failures, as Asian Americanists we continue to be invested in each of these representational forms as a means of creating a vision of ourselves. The persistence of visibility as rhetoric for the political objective of securing equal rights and representation inflects the arguments made for, against, and in relation to Asian American visual culture.[45] As Elaine Kim has presciently argued, "The questions of who can make art and what can be seen remain as important as ever in an American art world where whiteness remains unmarked and Asian American artists are still seen as not American."[46] Such questions of identity gave rise to local exhibitions like *Fatal Love* at the Queens Museum, and, over a decade later, the same questions—who makes art, whose art is exhibited, who comes to see it, and what such exhibitions mean—continue to shape public dialogue around contemporary South Asian American art, as was evident at *Lucid Dreams, Distant Visions* at the Asia Society. But even as the demand for racial representation and visibility in the art world remains pressing for South Asian Americans, among other racialized groups, I am curious about histories of representation that remain outside domestic exhibition frameworks, ways of seeing South Asian diasporic art that move away from the United States as the primary site of aesthetic production and racial meaning. What happens when the artworks that we look at tell us to look elsewhere, to other places and other times? Joining U.S. race and ethnic studies with postcolonial studies of South

Asia, I create a more expansive geographic and historical framework for seeing diasporic visual cultures, one that foregrounds the visual, historical, and political ties that bind the subcontinent to the United States.

As I see it, there are two major frameworks through which scholars of Asian American visual culture locate the aesthetic object in relation to narratives of nationhood and empire. On the one hand, Asian American art has consistently been read as symptomatic of the changing racial formation of the United States. Here the visuality of art forms (painting and sculpture, as well as installation and photography) becomes conflated with the visibility of minoritized subjects, such that Asian American visual culture comes to represent the diverse racial, gender, sexual, and class experiences of Asian American immigrant groups, often in direct relation to the artists' own background.[47] Likewise, historians have mobilized Asian American art and artists as an index for the political emergence of Asian American communities, creating teleological narratives that move from the marginalization of early Asian immigrant artists to the global circulation of Asian American visual cultures today.[48] By identifying and creating archives of Asian American racial presence in a range of different visual media, these scholars produce narratives of racial visibility for minoritized subjects. Yet in this framework, Asian American visual culture is consistently posited in relation to the national body of the United States; that is, the representative capacities of the aesthetic object to produce narratives of race, gender, sexuality, and class are ultimately consolidated into forms of American citizenship. By contrast, my objective is not to accumulate a better or more diverse series of visual objects that clearly produce immigrant visibility. Instead, it is to unbind visual cultural representations of diaspora from a single national framework of racial representation.



On the other hand, cultural studies theorists have argued for the diasporic localities of Asian American visual culture, with particular attention to the expansive parameters of U.S. empire. Linking contemporary narratives of racialization to histories of militarization, conquest, and war in Asia, these scholars draw our attention to aesthetic form (as well as thematic content), and to the experience of consuming visual art (alongside the singular act of producing artwork). For example, Celine Parreñas Shimizu has emphasized the phenomenological experience of race as constituted between viewer and moving image, delineating transnational formations of Asian American subjectivity through mov-

ing images of sex and gender that index U.S. militarism in Southeast and East Asia.[49] In the different context of psychoanalysis, David Eng's readings of Asian American photography and film demonstrate how racial identification is forged through acts of memory, forgetting, and reembodiment that are routed through histories of the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Japanese American internment that shape Asian immigrant lives.[50] Shifting our gaze from East and Southeast Asia westward toward the Middle East, Ronak Kapadia argues for viewing artworks by diasporic artists—particularly South Asian, Muslim, and Arab American artists—as "a transnational constellation of visual art and aesthetics that together have animated new ways to think, feel, sense and map the world."[51] Moving between Asian American artworks and the exhibitions that frame them, Sarita See elucidates what she calls the "mimetic aesthetic" of contemporary Filipino American art, foregrounding how a focus on artists' aesthetic processes challenges "the singularity of both the artist-genius and the art object, and thus reflects on and potentially reshapes the imperial art museum."[52] See's emphasis on the abstraction practiced by Filipino American artists productively captures the disintegration of U.S. empire and redirects our attention to exhibitionary forms that deny the identification and recuperation of racialized bodies.[53] The curator and critic Susette Min attends to the project of creating Asian American art exhibitions by challenging "the idea of recruiting Asian American artists as agents of representation."[54] Instead, Min delineates modes of reading Asian American art that unbind artists and their works from what she describes as "neoliberal multiculturalism's deleterious promise of representational visibility."[55]



I build on the capacity of Asian American fine art to produce and represent transnational experiences of racialization among Asian Americans, and I am equally compelled by the sociality of the exhibition site, where racialized viewers create horizontal ties of affinity to each other, alongside the vertical relation that viewers craft with artworks on display. But I depart significantly from existing scholarship in Asian American visual cultural studies via my orientation toward South Asia, with its distinct history of colonialism and empire that remains unattached to the United States. Each of the scholarly approaches that I have described, whether narratives of Asian American representation that move from racial invisibility to visibility, or narratives of Asian American visual production and consumption, is anchored in the continental United States and its empires in Southeast and East Asia and the Middle East. In my

view, reconstituting the global parameters of U.S. empire as the proper site for the production and consumption of Asian American art limits what we can see and how we can make meaning out of what we see. Existing frameworks of looking at Asian American art reinforce a narrative of visual exceptionalism, where the U.S. becomes the primary place from which we view artworks, and also the place where these artworks make the most sense. Despite the powerful anticolonial orientations of many scholars, taking the United States as the geographic locus of Asian American art constrains both the methods of analysis for Asian American visual cultural studies and the potential for new narrative forms to emerge out of visual texts. Our work, then, must be to begin elsewhere, to divest the United States of the kind of exceptionalism that Asian Americanist scholars otherwise consistently dismantle.

As I construct an alternative genealogy of empire for South Asian American visual culture, I turn to postcolonial visual studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia. Historians such as Sumathi Ramaswamy and art historians including Saloni Mathur and Kajri Jain show us how a range of visual cultural texts—from national maps to cabinet cards, tourist postcards to chromolithographic prints of religious deities—are central to the political and social formation of the Indian and Pakistani states.[56] As these scholars, among others, have argued, photographs do not simply represent the state; as a technology of representation, photographs produce and circulate colonial ideologies of nationhood, anticolonial imaginations of the national body, and postcolonial ideologies of modern selfhood.[57] Moving from the project of colonial documentation ("picture-taking") to acts of "picture-making" by subaltern subjects who remake and transform photographic images into representations of their own desires, the anthropologist Christopher Pinney highlights the transformation of photography as a "technical practice," foregrounding both "the acts of *making* the photograph and of *viewing* the image which ensues."[58] In his attention to processes of consumption, Pinney outlines the liberatory possibilities of photography for postcolonial Indians who use the camera to fashion representations of themselves as modern subjects and as national citizens.[59] In contrast, Zahid Chaudhary has demonstrated how the representational apparatus of photography itself is saturated with imperial ways of seeing. Chaudhary's reading of nineteenth-century British landscape photography in India demonstrates how by "enframing colonial space as versions of metropolitan spaces," such forms of photographic documentation "become

part and parcel of a colonial will to power and of its missions of improvement that render the colony in the metropole's image."[60] Returning to many of the portrait and landscape photographic archives that Pinney discusses, Chaudhary narrates instead an anticolonial phenomenology of visual consumption.

I take up these readings of South Asian visual culture in order to trace the diverse geographic and political networks through which photography comes to function as a dominant form of representation for South Asian Americans today. We recognize our own likeness in images that draw upon the uses of photography for colonial projects of ethnographic documentation in South Asia, and as a technology of visual surveillance in the United States. As racialized immigrants, our deep familiarity with these disparate regimes of visual documentation means that it is through fine art photography which conjures a likeness to being surveilled that we claim to be represented. I emphasize that what appears to be a mimetic relation between two distinct histories of photography, in South Asia and in the United States, is in fact generated through the aesthetic processes of diasporic artists, as well as through the viewing acts of diasporic subjects: for the experiences of being racialized in colonial South Asia and in the contemporary U.S. are resolutely nonidentical. For diasporic artists, photography's relation to race and empire in nineteenth-century South Asia filters into portraits of South Asian Americans through the postures, gestures, and styles embodied by immigrant subjects. For diasporic viewers, their acute recognition that what it means to be a racialized subject exceeds the veracity of the photographic document links together histories of photography on the subcontinent and in the United States.



To be clear, as I align my readings of South Asian diasporic visual culture in relation to the scholarly interventions produced by art historians, curators, and cultural theorists of South Asia, my interest is not in securing South Asia as the proper site of origin for South Asian diasporic visual culture. Nor do I suggest that South Asian diasporic visual culture is derivative of the formal innovations, thematic concerns, and global circulation of contemporary South Asian art. Instead, I suture the act of seeing diasporic visual culture with the ways in which race is linked to empire and nation in Asian American studies and in South Asian studies. Indeed, if Asian American cultural studies is organized by its concern with representations of diasporic subjectivity within the nation, in South Asian studies the location of diaspora is rendered absent through

the expansive domain of the state. We see this in the fact that over the past decade, while South Asian diasporic artists have been celebrated in Asian American art exhibitions devoted to making immigrants public and visible, many of the same artists are excluded from or rendered invisible in major museum shows of contemporary South Asian art, even as South Asian Americans act as funders, donors, reviewers, and museum board members for the same shows.[61]

The difference that diaspora makes, as an analytic construct for Asian American and South Asian visual cultural studies, is to alert us to the material experience of race and the aesthetic reach of empire across geographic and temporal boundaries. The colonial and settler colonial histories mobilized within fine art works by South Asian diasporic artists—as well as the affective sensation of recalling other, dissimilar imperial image archives on the part of South Asian diasporic viewers—means that representation itself cannot be contained in a single national framework for racial formation. Instead, our vocabularies for representation—what it means to be made visible in a work of art, what it means to see ourselves in the artwork, and how it feels to claim a work of art as our own—must expand to account for the multiple, overlapping imperial histories that shape how South Asian diasporic subjects are racialized. As I consider my own experience with the artworks and exhibition sites that frame this book, I develop a transhistorical reading of South Asian diasporic visual cultures, one that is necessarily triangulated between the legacy of British colonialism, decolonization movements on the subcontinent, and the consolidation of the U.S. as a settler colonial global power. These are the imperial histories that haunt us as South Asian Americans in the early decades of the twenty-first century, and these are the legacies of representation that shape how we produce, circulate, and consume South Asian diasporic art.



## CURATING *UNSEEING EMPIRE*

In the years since *Fatal Love*, I have participated as a viewer and critic at over 130 displays of art by South Asian diasporic artists, in cities including New Delhi, New York, Mumbai, Toronto, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Kochi, and Washington, DC. I engaged with solo and group exhibitions specifically focused on South Asian American art, as well as with major survey shows of Asian American art and large-scale exhibitions of modern and contemporary Indian and Pakistani art. The sites of

my research encompassed commercial and nonprofit galleries; local and national museums; biennales; artist talks; curator lectures; studio visits; community forums; educational programming associated with large museum shows; fine art auctions; and conversations with gallery owners, dealers, collectors, and art advisors. As my field of ethnographic research broadened, I increasingly became compelled by curation as a scholarly and pedagogical practice. In 2010 I trained in curatorial theory and practice with Independent Curators International, a nonprofit organization based in New York, and in 2015 I curated my own show of contemporary South Asian photography at a gallery in Philadelphia, an experience that I discuss in the epilogue.[62]

Curation—which I understand as a material practice (the organized display of visual cultural works) and as a theory of experience (the experience of viewing and interacting with objects in space)—is essential to how viewers, paraphrasing feminist scholars Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, "feel photography," in addition to seeing photography.[63] Curation mediates the relation between the art object and the viewer, both as a regime of organized spatial experience within the museum and as a narrative framework that shapes public interpretation of works of art. Curation structures the display of artworks and the viewer's proximity to the image, and determines the order, number, and kind of images that the viewer sees. However, viewers also intervene in carefully planned curatorial experiences by entering and exiting the gallery at will; walking through other sections of the museum and making unexpected cross connections; and by uploading images, commenting on and critiquing their own experiences in print and over social media. As racialized immigrant viewers incorporate art objects into their worldview, their feelings toward the aesthetic object exceed, disrupt, and shift the representational framework of the exhibition.



In this sense, *Unseeing Empire* is also a curatorial enterprise. I discuss a series of artworks by a select number of South Asian women artists, but these artists do not stand in for the field of South Asian diasporic visual culture as a whole. Likewise, while I read the artists' archival interventions as feminist practice and highlight how their works represent South Asian diasporic subjectivities and communities, the artists themselves do not always self-identify as South Asian, or as diasporic subjects, or as feminists. Because I also situate my readings of artworks in relation to archival image collections that are far removed from those that the artists themselves work in, I generate ways of seeing that are distinct from

artists' statements about their work, and that are centered in my experience as a viewer. In my orientation toward curation as a way of seeing and writing about South Asian diasporic visual culture, I take seriously what Min describes as "the ethicopolitical task of the curator and the scholar," namely, "the ability to learn how to hear the call of the other in and through one's encounter with art—to be attentive and present to the ways these artists create otherly worlds that enable us to see our world differently."[64] Across the diverse photographic texts and archives I bring into view, my objective as a scholar is to curate an experience of seeing that moves between readings of aesthetic form and artistic technique, historical analyses of contemporary and archival images, and an ethnographic study of the display and consumption of art. But as a curator of these artists, my own investment in the project of seeing South Asian diasporic visual culture occurs on another register, perhaps a more personal one. It is because I take seriously our desire, as racialized diasporic subjects, to see ourselves represented that I bring together the artworks in this book. The work of the curator, in my view, is also to produce through the artworks on display a sense of community. Community emerges in the glances that viewers direct toward the artworks, toward the galleries where these works are shown, and toward viewers who share the space of seeing with them. However fleeting or fragile that sense of community may be, the feeling of belonging to works of art that represent one's own subjectivity—and to those who may be sharing that experience in the same space—is real and powerful. Curatorial practice becomes central to understanding why we insist on identifying with artworks as a mimetic reflection of our lives, and why our desire for visual representation and visible communities persists, even when the work of developing nonmimetic modes of seeing remains vital and necessary.



I begin in chapter 1 by delineating how, as racialized immigrant subjects, we are haunted by empire through our desire to identify with the photographic image. Theorizing diasporic mimesis as a relational practice enacted between artist and viewer in relation to the artwork, I focus on a single large-scale drawing, Seher Shah's *Geometric Landscapes and the Spectacle of Force*. In this work Shah reproduces early twentieth-century photographs depicting the elaborate ceremonies held to commemorate the formalization of British imperial rule on the subcontinent. Nesting these photographs of palatial monuments and vast military parade grounds within a hand-drawn landscape of her own creation, Shah creates skyscrapers and monuments to war that mirror the architecture

of the European and American cities in which she has lived. In my first encounter with this drawing in New Delhi, I grasped the archival photographic reproductions as a representation of colonial South Asia, a recognition that enabled me to identify in turn as South Asian. Yet months later, encountering *Geometric Landscapes* in New York City, I was overcome by the uncanny feeling that the drawing evoked another archive of images: the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and the ongoing decimation of human lives by the U.S. military in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the aftermath of that event. As I recall this alternate set of image archives, the temporal scope of empire becomes unmoored from a set of duplicated archival images and extends, instead, into the time and place that we inhabit now.

Such archives of empire are also a primary space for diasporic self-representation, as I argue in chapter 2. Moving from landscape to portrait images, I examine Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's series, *An Indian from India*. Reproducing Edward Curtis's elegiac photographs of Native peoples alongside her own self-portraits, which duplicate the costumes, postures, and captions of the archival images, Matthew's diptychs initially appear to replace the indigenous with the immigrant subject. I contend instead that the series makes visible the contentious relation between two imperial projects of representation: nineteenth-century British photographic documentation of Indians in India, and a U.S. settler colonial project on what Curtis called a "vanishing race." Seeing Matthew's and Curtis's works alongside each other recalls earlier colonial photographic publications such as *The People of India* (1868), which sought to enumerate and classify indigenous tribes as well as caste and religious groups for the British imperial administration. Such imperial projects of photographic surveillance in South Asia are uncannily similar to Curtis's project of documenting indigenous communities and peoples: not simply in terms of aesthetic form or style, but more precisely in terms of administrative scope and scale. In turn, colonial and settler colonial photographic technologies precede and precipitate the mass biometric surveillance of South Asians and Muslim Americans in the United States today. As I name these mimetic convergences across a transnational set of imperial photographic archives, I demonstrate how empire continues to haunt how we see Matthew's work on display. At the Royal Ontario Museum, *An Indian from India* was exhibited in close proximity to original photographic prints from Curtis's collection, but kept at a spatial and narrative remove from the museum's long-standing representation

of First Nations peoples as images and as objects in its permanent collection. As much as I desired to identify with Matthew's representations of what it means to be South Asian American, within the museum such acts of racial identification are made impossible by curatorial projects that attempt to define who and what we know as an "Indian," and that effectively displace those indigenous subjects whose visual representations occupied the same name.

In chapter 3 I expand upon the effect of seeing colonial technologies of representation in the contemporary museum. *Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation*, an exhibition held at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, was the first national exhibition about a single Asian immigrant community to be staged at the Smithsonian Institution, and was curated as well as funded primarily by South Asian Americans. Bringing together family photos and archival documentary images, as well as photo-based artworks, *Beyond Bollywood* created a sweeping visual narrative of immigration from the subcontinent to the United States. Foregrounding our investments as racialized immigrant subjects and as viewers in museological narratives of representation and display, I argue for the limits of visibility as a representational form of Asian American politics. Through site-specific ethnography and close readings of installations, I reflect on what it means for South Asian Americans to see representations of ourselves as agents of our own history and as objects on view. What I describe as the abject feelings that result from these acts of diasporic mimesis are amplified by the institutional legacies of the natural history museum, which functions as a repository for the display of racialized bodies in the nation's capital. As we encounter photographic images of ourselves at the Smithsonian, our subjection to colonial histories of representation is redoubled, for the museum itself operates as an imperial space of display. Seeing photographs of South Asian Americans, we feel not only exuberance and pride at the upwardly mobile immigrant narrative mapped by the photographs, but also shame, anxiety, and loss—feelings that lend themselves to new ways of thinking through the relation between visuality and racial identity.



In chapter 4, I create a pathway out of archives of empire by delineating nonmimetic forms of identifying with the photographic image. In her photographic series *The Americans*, the artist Gauri Gill trains her camera on South Asian Americans ranging from engineers in Silicon Valley and lobbyists on Capitol Hill to shift workers in restaurant kitchens

and factory sites, creating a heterogeneous portrait of South Asian immigrants in the early twenty-first century. Circulating through galleries in Mumbai, New Delhi, Chicago, and New York, for large numbers of South Asian diasporic viewers *The Americans* is an aspirational collection, one that reflects their own desire to belong. At first glance, the collection appears to mimetically reference the scale and scope of the photographer Robert Frank's iconic 1958 series, also titled *The Americans*. Yet rather than reproduce thematic or formal elements from Frank's series, which documents changing domestic configurations of race and class at a time when the U.S. was expanding its imperialist ambitions abroad, Gill's diptychs and triptychs refract our gaze. In photographic compositions that are fragmented and mirrored, that obscure the photographer as much as the immigrant subjects she photographs, I see Gill's *The Americans* as a series of images that refuse to grant us representation. In this refusal, I link Gill's collection with that of photographers Sunil Gupta and Pablo Bartholomew to create what I call an archive of diaspora, a partial and incomplete documentation of what it means to be living, working, and feeling in diaspora today. Such archives of diaspora compel us to develop nonmimetic ways of seeing that shift our gaze from immigrant subjects to material objects within the prints, and that circumvent exhibitionary narratives that rely on the ethnographic display of South Asian immigrants. To identify as Americans, in this instance, is to loosen our claims to representation.



For South Asian diasporic viewers and artists, our desire to see ourselves is central to how we make sense of who we are. As racialized immigrants, our collective experiences have been eroded from the visual domain of the state, and so we take it upon ourselves to rehabilitate our own image. As we craft and lay claim to photographic representations of diaspora, the practice of diasporic mimesis enables us to feel affirmed in relation to the image, resolving the conditions of visibility within the aesthetic parameters of the photograph and the exhibition. But the very experience of being made visible, however complete it may make us feel, is structured through colonial and postcolonial regimes of surveillance. Working toward nonmimetic ways of seeing, on the other hand, means that we turn away from feelings of belonging and contend, instead, with the failure of representation. As we come to terms with the possibility that there is no single image that can capture who we are, we remain in the time and space of haunting.

# NOTES

## Introduction: The Work of Seeing

1 Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xiii.

2 An archival copy of the Queens Museum of Art exhibition catalogue for *Fatal Love*, with curatorial essays and a full description of artists and their works, is available online at *Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now: February 27–June 5, 2005*, accessed April 9, 2020, http://www.queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Fatal%20Love.pdf.

3 Holland Cotter, "Taking a Magical Flight through Modern India," *New York Times*, March 4, 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/04/arts/design/taking-a-magical-flight-through-modern-india.html.

4 The exhibition's website states, "Before September 11 most of the artists in the community were concerned to reconstruct a diasporic identity and challenge an imposed politics of representation. Since September 11 many artists have been concerned to confront, challenge and undermine the distorted and limited presentations of South Asian communities that are too often presented by the media and the government. It is a move from an art that seeks to define an identity for the community to an art that seeks to resist a false, imposed identity." *Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now: February 27–June 5, 2005*, accessed April 9, 2020, http://www.queensmuseum.org/2015/11/fatal-love-south-asian-american-art-now.

5 My definition of visual art as a commodity that acquires a social life through circulation and consumption builds on Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

6 I use the term "native" in reference to nineteenth-century South Asia, in distinction from the term "Native American." While indigenous subjects in the Americas may self-identify as Native, in South Asia the term "native" emerges out of colonial regimes of race and power, as British administrators identified entire populations as "native," even when these populations did not include indigenous subjects. I discuss the relation between colonial and settler colonial paradigms of indigeneity further in chapter 2.

7 Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities "After Man"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 95.

8 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

9 Bakirathi Mani, *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). Art/activist festivals that were central to queer and transnational forms of South Asian diasporic public cultures in the 1990s and 2000s include Desh Pardesh, Diasporadics, and Artwallah.

10 The global circulation of South Asian art mirrors the rapid rise in the value and display of contemporary art from mainland China during the same period. See Melissa Chiu, *Breakout: Chinese Art outside China* (Milan: Charta, 2006).

11 Major exhibitions of contemporary South Asian art in the early 2000s include *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, curated by Salima Hashmi (Asia Society, 2009–2010); *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, curated by Sunil Gupta (Whitechapel Gallery, 2010); *The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India*, curated by Betti-Sue Hertz (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 2012–2013); *After Midnight: Indian Modernism to Contemporary India 1947/1997*, curated by Arshiya Lokhandwala (Queens Museum, 2015); and *Postdate: Photography and Inherited History in India*, curated by Jodi Throckmorton (San Jose Museum of Art, 2015).

12 *Edge of Desire: Recent Art from India*, curated by Chaitanya Sambrani (Asia Society Museum, March 1–June 5, 2005; and Queens Museum of Art, February 27–June 5, 2005).



13 "Asia Society Presents 'Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions: South Asian Art in the Diaspora,'" Asia Society, April 26, 2017, https://asiasociety.org/media/asia-society-museum-presents-lucid-dreams-and-distant-visions-south-asian-art-diaspora.

14 "Fatal Love: Where Are We Now?," Queens Museum, July 1, 2017, http://www.queensmuseum.org/events/fatal-love.

15 Holland Cotter, "A Local Place for a Global Neighborhood," *New York Times*, November 7, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/08/arts/design/the-expanded-queens-museum-reopens.html.

16 My definition of nonmimetic identification draws in spirit upon José Esteban Muñoz's seminal *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

17 Lisa Lowe, "The State of the Archives," faculty seminar held at Swarthmore College, March 23, 2017.

18 David Eng, "The Feeling of Photography, the Feeling of Kinship," in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 328.

19 Leigh Raiford, "Notes toward a Photographic Practice of Diaspora," *English Language Notes* 44, no. 2 (2006): 213.

20 Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diasporas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

21 For a critical perspective on photography and film as mimetic forms of representation, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 180.

22 Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Visions: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); and Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

23 Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 74.

24 Eng, "The Feeling of Photography," 343.

25 Kristen J. Warner, "In the Time of Plastic Representation," *Film Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (winter 2017): 33. See also Kristen J. Warner, "They Gon' Think You Loud Regardless: Rachetness, Reality Television, and Black Womanhood," *Camera Obscura* 30, no. 1 (2015): 129–153.

26 On the ethical and affective consequences of the failed photographic image, see Kimberly Juanita Brown, "Regarding the Pain of the Other: Photography, Famine, and the Transference of Affect," in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 181–203.

27 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

28 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 2–3.

29 Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," *Social Justice* 20, nos. 1–2 (spring 1993): 111.

30 On the relation between surveillance, citizenship, and the neoliberal state, see Inderpal Grewal, *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); on the racial and economic geographies produced by neoliberalism, see David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996); and on the refusal to inhabit heteronormative modes of living within the neoliberal state, see Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

31 Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*, xii.

32 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

33 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

34 Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 7.

35 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4.

36 Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 17–53.

37 As Anjali Arondekar writes, "There is, of course, no self-evident or singular colonial archive. . . . What has remained stable . . . is a narrative of the colonial archive as a secret archive, a space precariously hinged between a language of loss and recovery, absence and presence." Arondekar, *For the Record*, 13.

38 On the colonial photograph as postcard, see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); on the photograph as ethnographic document, see Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion, 2011).

39 See in particular Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

40 Krista Thompson, "'I Am Rendered Speechless by Your Idea of Beauty': The Picturesque in History and Art in the Postcolony," in *Empires of Vision*, ed. Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 474.

41 Fred Wilson and Howard Halle, "Mining the Museum," *Grand Street*, no. 44 (1993): 151–172, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25007622.



42 See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Gayatri Gopinath, "Archive, Affect, and the Everyday: Queer Diasporic Revisions," in *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 165–192.

43 Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*, 11.

44 A seminal instance of Asian American art as a public representation of Asian American lives was the exhibition *Asia America*, curated by Margo Machida (Asia Society Museum, 1996).

45 On the legacy of representational politics in contemporary Asian American art, see Melissa Chiu, Karin Higa, and Susette Min, eds., *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 26–33.

46 Elaine Kim, "Interstitial Subjects: Asian American Visual Art as a Site for New Cultural Conversations," in *Fresh Talk, Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elaine Kim, Margo Machida, and Sharon Mizota (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 32.

47 See Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). While Machida's method of "oral hermeneutics" argues for examining art

in dialogic relation to the artist and the subject of the artwork, it also insists on a stable construct of Asian American identity.

48 Daniell Cornell and Mark Dean Johnson, eds., *Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900–1970* (Berkeley: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and University of California Press, 2009).

49 Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian American Women on Scene and Screen* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

50 David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

51 Ronak Kapadia, *Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of the Forever War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 10.

52 Sarita See, *The Filipino Primitive: Accumulation and Resistance in the Imperial Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 143–144.

53 Sarita See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

54 Susette Min, *Unnamable: The Ends of Asian American Art* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 83.

55 Min, *Unnamable*, 28.

56 Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Mathur, *India by Design*; Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

57 On photography and its centrality to colonial practices of representation, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Compulsions of Visual Representation in Colonial India," in *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. Maria Antonella Pelizzari (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 108–139. On photography and its relation to modern and postmodern forms of South Asian subjectivity, see Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism?* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000); and Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). On photography and its anticipation of a modern India, see Rebecca Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); and Beth Citron, "Rethinking the Figure in Early Photography from South Asia," in *Allegory and Illusion: Early Portrait Photography from South Asia*, ed. Beth Citron and Rahaab Allana (Ahmedabad: The Alkazi Collection of Photography and Mapin, 2013), 30–45. On the visual and the secular in colonial and postcolonial art, see Patricia Uberoi, "'Unity in Diversity'? Dilemmas of Nationhood in Indian Calendar Art," in *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, ed. Sumathi Ramaswamy (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), 191–232.

58 Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Christopher Pinney, *The Com-*

*ing of Photography in India* (London: British Library, 2008), 3, emphasis in original.

59 Christopher Pinney, "Some Indian 'Views of India': The Ethics of Representation," in *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. Maria Antonella Pelizzari (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 262–275.

60 Zahid Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 130–131.

61 On the relation between Indian American viewers and exhibitions of Indian art, see Vidya Dehejia, "Identity and Visibility: Reflections on Museum Displays of South Asian Art," in *New Cosmopolitanisms: South Asians in the U.S.*, ed. Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 71–90.

62 *Ruins and Fabrications*, curated by Bakirathi Mani, Twelve Gates Arts, Philadelphia, November 6–December 15, 2015, http://www.twelvegatesarts.org/exhibitions/2016/11/6/ruins-and-fabrications.

63 Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu, "Introduction," in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

64 Min, *Unnamable*, 30.

## One. Uncanny Feelings



A preliminary version of chapter 1 was published as "Archives of Empire: Seher Shah's *Geometric Landscapes and the Spectacle of Force*," in *Social Text* 29, no. 3 (2011): 127–138.

1 The Delhi Durbars were held three times over a fifty-year period to establish British rule over the subcontinent in the aftermath of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, in 1877, 1903, and 1911. The Durbars successively commemorated the coronations of Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, and King George V as empress and emperors of India.

2 "Paper to Monument: Seher Shah," Nature Morte, December 8, 2009–January 9, 2010, http://naturemorte.com/exhibitions/papertomonument/. In 2009, Nature Morte was affiliated with Bose Pacia Gallery, New York, an exhibition site I discuss in chapter 4.

3 Though Shah is now based in New Delhi, her drawings and sculptures are globally exhibited in venues as diverse as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Basel, Switzerland; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Green Art Gallery, Dubai; and the Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, among others.

4 Peter Nagy, "Deep in the Heart of the Brain," and "Jihad Pop: An Interview with Seher Shah and Tom Finkelpearl," both in Seher Shah, *Seher Shah: Jihad Pop* (New York: Bose Pacia Gallery, 2008), 4, 72.

5 Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 21.