

# **Shivanjani Lal: Beta, ek story bathao**

17 January – 14 March 2020

Shivanjani Lal is a twice-removed Fijian Indian Australian artist who works with archival images, found materials, video, performance and ritual. Her work explores the indentured labour diaspora of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the histories that brought her family from India to Fiji and now to Australia. By unpacking experiences of intergenerational trauma, grief and healing in her work, Lal preserves, creates and redefines the history of the Indo-Fijian community away from the current political climate in both Fiji and India.

This exhibition brings together new photography and video documenting Lal's return to Fiji after a prolonged absence and a visit to see her grandmother's house, alongside map works that evoke her family's history shaped by the *kālā pānī* ('black waters'). In Hindu culture, *kālā pānī* refers to a past proscription of crossing the seas to foreign lands that led to a loss of caste and social exclusion.

The title, from the writing of Manisha Anjali, invites the recounting of a story: Beta, ek story bathao. Child, tell me a story.

## **Expanded Artwork Labels**

### **Shivanjani Lal**

4 Lines Across a Horizon, 2019

Hand-stitched prints on recycled paper with kite thread

Courtesy of the artist

This photograph of a horizon in Fiji was taken in 2004 and later printed on recycled paper in India. Across each image are four lines, hand-stitched to represent each generation of Shivanjani Lal's family in Fiji. The use of red thread references both the artist's surname in Fijian Hindi and the idea of bloodlines.

## **Shivanjani Lal**

यहाँ से देखें (yahaan se dekhien), 2020

Three-channel HD video

6:18 minutes, 12:16 minutes and 4:09 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

‘यहाँ से देखें [yahaan se dekhien]’ documents Shivanjani

Lal’s return to her Aaji’s (paternal grandmother’s)

farmhouse in Fiji after an absence of 11 years, 13 years

after her passing. This new three-channel presentation

documents the landscape of the countryside, and her

Aaji’s house, slowly moving inwards to reveal her

unchanged room. The phrase ‘yahaan se dekhien’

means to see from here and is used to suggest the

blending of memories and the passing of time.

## **Shivanjani Lal**

Yaad Karo (1879–1920), 2019

Hand-stitched prints on recycled paper with kite thread

Courtesy of the artist

‘Yaad Karo (1879–1920)’ records histories of migration that link Shivanjani Lal to the Girmitya (indentured labour) communities of India and the Pacific. From shipping documents recording the experiences of Indo-Fijian Girmitya, Lal hand-stitches a series of imagined journeys with two types of thread, indicating both Girmitya and free ships that traversed these routes. The map from a 1980s school atlas centres Australia within these oceans, acknowledging Australia’s role as a colonial partner within these histories.

## **Shivanjani Lal**

में यहाँ नहीं हूँ (I am not here) (Fiji), 2017

HD video, 6:35 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

In the video and performance series 'में यहाँ नहीं हूँ (I am not here)', Shivanjani Lal erases locations that inform her identity: her home country Australia, her birthplace Fiji, and her ancestral place of origin, India. No longer constrained by the boundaries of geography, Lal's gesture creates new spaces of possibility. In this single video, we witness Lal erasing Viti Levu, the largest island in Fiji as a gesture of renewal.

## **Shivanjani Lal**

ek story bathao (tell me a story), 2020

Five-channel HD video, 10 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

'ek story bathao (tell me a story)' continues Shivanjani Lal's exploration of filial histories connected to the Girmitya. At the centre of the work is a conversation between Lal and her mother about her great grandmother who worked in Fiji's sugarcane fields for CSR Australia. They discuss a particular photograph from 1958 that documents her bure (hut) and funeral pyre. Lal's hands move across the image, seeking to feel out her relationship with this unknown relation. Bracketing the sequence are recordings of haldi (turmeric) burning in both Fiji and Australia, and a view of the countryside taken during landing and take-off from Nadi.

## **Shivanjani Lal**

Chhaapaa, 2020

Fuji Instax prints

Courtesy of the artist

‘Chhaapaa’ (meaning photograph) includes seventeen instant prints taken during a recent visit to Fiji. Thirteen landscapes and four portraits denote the number of people in Shivanjani Lal’s immediate family and the generations born in Fiji. The series is part of an ongoing archival project, with Lal taking 100 photographs on each return visit to Fiji and shooting additional footage for the video ‘यहाँ से देखें [yahaan se dekhen]’.