



PRESS RELEASE

Date: September 20, 2010

Asian American Arts Centre and Asian Arts Initiative presents..

Of Filmi Love And Other Demons

October 1 – November 24, 2010

Gallery reception: Friday, October 29, 6 p.m.

Artists: Jaishri Abichandani, Shelly Bahl, Siona Benjamin, Swati Khurana, Nitin Mukul, Pratima Naithani.

Curated by Shell Bahl.

“Dear viewers, here we present to you our often explicit and sometimes secret celluloid obsessions. Oh, how to explain our joyful passions and guilty pleasures in reenacting these choreographed gestures of love, longing, betrayal and loss!

Do not fear this charmed world of ours. Some may mock it as a place of artifice and stylized emotions, set to song and dance sequences. Ah, but these are not merely empty gestures, but rather, a doorway into a magical realm where epic narratives gain strength through consistent repetition.

Filmi love... the traces of sticky sweet smudges from glittery kisses upon our fingertips, as we dance through the florid gardens of our imaginations. Join us, and we'll spin you right round, baby, right round.”

—

The six artists in the exhibition are all currently based in New York City and vicinity. Their works in this exhibition comprising of painting, mixed media, photography, video and installation, reflect on the omnipresent influence of Bollywood cinema within contemporary popular culture in South Asia, the Diaspora and beyond.

A collaboration between Asian American Arts Centre and Asian Arts Initiative.

The reception is co-sponsored by Twelve Gates Art Gallery. _

Asian Arts Initiative's visual arts programming is supported in part by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Asian Arts Initiative

1219 Vine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Gallery Hours 10am to 6pm Tuesday-Friday

215.557.0455. www.asianartsinitiative.org

ARTISTS:

Jaishri Abichandani's video "Bijli: Heart of a Drag Queen" (2006), highlights a performer who is best known for her ecstatic public appearances as a nautch (dance) girl or disco dancer, inspired by the iconic soundtrack and choreography of Indian cinema. But in this melancholy and intimate blue-hued video recital, we see the ornately costumed singer performing a traditional folk song of love and longing. Folk songs have a long history of being utilized within Indian cinema. Also, over the years, playback music originally composed for films has crossed over into the public realm of popular folk songs.

Bahl's 3-channel video, "3 Operettas: Pas De Deux (Dance For Two) / Run Leela Run / Virahagni (Letter From a Lover)" (2005-07), is a series of 3 short video-operas influenced by her pastiche memories of female characters in Bollywood film classics. In this project she focuses on heightened moments of iconic melodrama (a romantic dance sequence, a woman pursued by an unseen assailant, and a woman weeping while reading a love letter), which begin to veer into camp parody. These are all well recognized leitmotifs found in Indian cinema, dance, music, literature and painting.

In **Siona Benjamin's** series "Finding Home, Lilith" (2005-09), the work of pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, the drama of the Indian Amar Chitra Katha comic books and Bollywood film posters serve as inspiration for her paintings and mixed-media works. Based on Jewish Midrashic literature and legends, the character of Lilith is an iconic feminist symbol representing the oppressed, as a goddess and as an example of female strength and mystery. The artist was raised Jewish in predominantly Hindu and Muslim India, and after immigrated to the United States, she (and the ethereal blue-skinned women in her narratives) have always had to reflect upon the cultural boundary zones within which they reside.

Swati Khurana declares, as a child, she learned everything she ever needed to know about love from Bollywood cinema: modesty, choreography and the virtuosity in crossing time, space and costume continuums. In her photographic series, "Love in the Time of Silsila (2006-07), she manipulates film stills, and revisits a well-known romantic scene set in a tulip field in Holland where the film star couple sing, dance and gaze lovingly at each other. In other works from this series, these figures are also placed in similar dream-like landscapes amplified by glittery, fragile and illusory chandeliers.

In **Nitin Mukul's** installation, "Savage Jukebox" (2010), vintage and contemporary album covers are utilized as an exploration of identity. The overall montage of covers play off each other along a wall grid, and reveals how popular imagery has evolved over decades, and across continents, from blatantly exoticized portrayals to empowered pronouncements of individuality. A dialogue between the images is created, where themes of gender and ethnic stereotypes emerge in a sometimes humorous and sometimes grotesque fashion. Mukul has also mixed music from each of the 81 records to form a series of 9 mash-up audio tracks corresponding with the images and their arrangement within the wall grid.

Pratima Naithani's photographic works are inspired by film stills from Indian cinema of the 1940's to 1950's. Her series, "Still Lives (2005-2007), disrupts the standard linear construction of the film narrative. Each of the isolated images is stripped to its most minimal. Manipulating and distorting production and publicity snapshots in the darkroom, she re-contextualizes the traditional song and dance musicals of the period. Divisions between film genres blur, as comedies become dramas, revealing a darker, more subversive critique of the over-the-top, popular entertainment.