



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DEC 18, 2021

CONTACT

Emma Jacobson-Sive
emma@ejs-media.com

Suzanne Isken

suzanne@craftcontemporary.org

323 937 4230 x 27

Jaishri Abichandani: Flower-Headed Children
January 30 – May 8, 2022



Kamala's Inheritance, 2020. Wire, foil, epoxy, MDF, polymer clay, fabric, stone, paint, 48 x 108 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

LOS ANGELES — Enter a space where earthly matriarchs and glamorous goddesses invite your admiration and respect. Here, a painted constellation of South Asian women and femmes is a monument to the change agents who are transforming fields from the law to music to voter organizing. Walk through sculptures adorned with jewels that reward prolonged looking with large and small visual delights. Whether biographical or fantastical, these figures are invested with generosity and power. They are not religious deities, with gender, race, and sexual orientation clearly defined by tradition. They are wonderfully diverse tributes to visionaries who were born different. Artist and curator Jaishri Abichandani's celebratory visions of feminist and queer liberation take their forms from Indian classical art and their subjects from contemporary South Asian diaspora culture and activism. ***Flower-Headed Children*** is the first comprehensive museum survey of the artist's varied creative production on view at Craft Contemporary from January 30 – May 8, 2022.

Over her 25-year career, Abichandani has utilized folk and vernacular aesthetics and craft-based materials to create intricate figurative sculptures and painted portraits that open traditional devotional iconography and narratives to contemporary anti-racist, feminist, queer, and politically radical possibilities. The exhibition is curated by writer, curator, and educator Anuradha Vikram, who previously curated *Social Fabric*, an exhibition about the material and philosophical influence



of craft on contemporary social practice art, as illustrated by the use of textiles in socially and politically engaged textile-based work, for the museum in 2013.

Abichandani's artistic practice is rooted in cultural narratives from India, where she was born, but anchored in the United States, where she emigrated as a teen. Her practice includes exquisite sculptures and paintings, community organizing, and political protest. The exhibition will include two new bodies of work. Commissioned for the Asian Art Initiative's 25th Anniversary exhibition in 2018, Abichandani has more than doubled the size of her portrait series, *Jasmine Blooms at Night* (2018-), portraying South Asian feminist activists working in the United States, since it was last shown at Brooklyn's BRIC House in 2019. For this iteration, Abichandani created over 35 additional portraits of South Asian feminists, including a number of artists and activists from Los Angeles.

Devotional art, some of it erotic in nature, provides the aesthetic framework for a new series of large sculptures in epoxy clay and mixed media that reference Hindu and pre-Vedic imagery. These works are colorfully adorned in sari fabrics, costume jewels, and garlands, incorporating material culture from South Asian festivals and celebrations as well as bindis, wigs, and acrylic nails. Abichandani exults in the textures of South Asian fabrics embedded with gold *zari* thread embroidery and mirror work. Her material sensibility and her love of the human form unite the painting and sculpture bodies of work.

Coinciding with the election of Kamala Harris to the Vice Presidency and the election of progressive South Asians to local and national office, South Asians are newly visible in US politics. Abichandani has responded to these events in works responding to Harris' election (*Kamala's Inheritance*, 2020) and honoring Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (*Mama's Heaven*, 2020), a progressive who represents the state of Washington. Still, South Asians struggle to find a political voice, being internally divided by national, regional, religious, and caste differences, and externally marginalized by a national discourse on race that casts the community as perpetually foreign. Abichandani has found representation in anti-racist movements led by Black Americans and in the Me Too movement. Abichandani has organized performance actions at the Met Breuer (2017) and the Indian Consulate in New York (2013) to speak out about sexual violence in the Indian art community, including her own experiences.

Indian art historian Partha Mitter has written that the first Europeans to write about Indian classical art were horrified by the distance between their own aesthetic standards and what they perceived, leading to South Asian devotional forms being deemed monstrous or ugly by Western standards. Abichandani's sculptures embrace the complexity of Western audiences' responses to her work, which aligns with mainstream reactions to queer cultural expression in which an excess of visual pleasure can be experienced as grotesque. South Asian aesthetics inform Abichandani's work, not just in appearance, but in its grounding in Rasa theory—a philosophy originating in medieval Sanskrit texts and re-popularized by Satyajit Ray and other Indian modernists—which posits that all art is an act of psychic and emotional transference between maker and audience. Abichandani's artistic practice explores the global, feminist ramifications of Rasa theory to



broaden American art audiences' relationship to artworks that represent an unfamiliar cultural experience.

About the artist: Jaishri Abichandani (she/her; b. 1969, Bombay, India) immigrated to New York City in 1984. She received her MFA from Goldsmiths College, University of London and has continued to intertwine studio and social practice, art and activism in her career, founding the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC) in New York (1997) and London (2004). Abichandani has exhibited internationally including at P.S.1/MoMA, the Queens Museum of Art, and Asia Society in New York, 798 Beijing Biennial and Guangzhou Triennial in China, IVAM in Valencia, Spain, and the House of World Cultures in Berlin. She served as the founding Director of Public Events and Projects from 2003-06 at the Queens Museum of Art, where she organized *Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now*, *Queens International 2006: Everything All at Once*, and curated *Her Stories: Fifteen Years of SAWCC*. In 2017, Abichandani engineered a collaboration between the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, Asia Society and the Queens Museum to organize a three-day national convening of South Asian American artists, academics and curators; along with the exhibition *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions*, in which she was a co-curator and a participating artist. In 2019, Abichandani organized a trilogy of exhibitions to inaugurate the Ford Foundation Gallery: *Perilous Bodies*, *Radical Love*, and *Utopian Imagination* centered the visions of BIPOC artists. Abichandani's work is in the Burger Collection, Asia Art Archive Collection, and Saatchi Collection. She has been a resident of LMCC's Process Space residency and an honoree of the Brooklyn Arts Council and ASHA for Women.

About the curator: Anuradha Vikram (she/they; b. 1976, New York, NY) is a Los Angeles-based curator, writer, and educator who has held curatorial positions at 18th Street Arts Center, UC Berkeley Department of Art Practice, Headlands Center for the Arts, Aicon Gallery, Richmond Art Center, and in the studio of artists Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, and guest-curated exhibitions for Craft Contemporary, Mills College Art Museum, and the DeYoung Museum Artist Studio. They are co-curator of the UCLA Art Sci Center exhibition *Atmosphere of Sound: Sonic Art in Times of Climate Disruption*, scheduled to open in 2024 with the support of the Getty Pacific Standard Time Art x Science x LA initiative, and are collaborating with LA Freewaves and LACE on projects slated for 2022 and 2023. Vikram is the author of *Decolonizing Culture*, a collection of seventeen essays that address questions of race and gender parity in contemporary art spaces (Art Practical/Sming Sming Books, 2017). They hold teaching appointments at UCLA, USC, and CalArts, and serve in editorial roles for online, book, and magazine publishers including MhZ Curationist, X Artists' Books, and X-TRA. They received an MA in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts and a BS in Studio Art from New York University.

CREDITS:

This exhibition is supported in part by the Antonia and Vladimer Kulaev Cultural Heritage Foundation, the Bernard Kester Trust in Memory of Edith Wyle, and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture.



PROGRAMS:

Opening Reception

The museum will host an opening reception for Members and VIPs on Saturday, January 29, 2022 from 6 – 9 PM. The artist and curator will be present.

\$12 Admission | Free for Members

Press & Museum Member Event: Behind the Scenes Exhibition Preview with Jaishri Abichandani & Anuradha Vikram

Thursday, January 27 at 1:30 PM

Located on Los Angeles' historic Miracle Mile since 1965, Craft Contemporary reveals the potential of craft to educate, captivate, provoke, and empower. With a focus on contemporary art made from craft media and processes, Craft Contemporary presents dynamic exhibitions by established and emerging artists and designers who are often underrepresented in larger art institutions. Through a robust roster of regular programs and events, Craft Contemporary offers creative opportunities for the public to participate in hands-on workshops led by professional artists. Craft Contemporary cultivates an environment for people in Los Angeles to deepen their relationship to art, creativity, and one another. For more information, visit www.craftcontemporary.org.