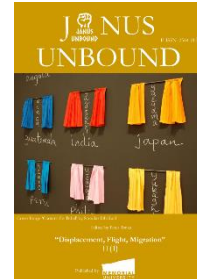


Title: Sarindar Dhaliwal On Her Installation: *Curtains For Babel*

Author(s): Sarindar Dhaliwal

Source: *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, vol. II, no. 1
(Winter 2022), pp. 9-11

Published by: *Memorial University of Newfoundland*



Disclaimer

The views, opinions, conclusions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are strictly those of the respective author(s) and are not necessarily the views of *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, its editors, its editorial team, and Memorial University of Newfoundland (collectively, the “Publishers”). Authors are responsible for all content of their article(s) including accuracy of facts, statements, citations, and so on. The University gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility or liability for the accuracy or completeness of any information or materials contained herein. Under no circumstances will the Publishers, including Memorial University of Newfoundland, be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs, or liabilities whatsoever resulting or arising directly or indirectly from any use of or inability to use the contents of this publication or from any reliance on any information or material contained herein.

Message from the Editors

The editors welcome letters on all subjects, especially if they discuss or comment on the works published in *Janus Unbound*. Please read our Guidelines for Authors prior to submitting your manuscript.



*Janus Unbound: Journal
of Critical Studies*
E-ISSN: 2564-2154
2(1) 9-11
© Sarindar Dhaliwal,
2022

Artist Statement

Sarindar Dhaliwal on her Installation: *Curtains For Babel*

Sarindar Dhaliwal

Like a lot of my work, the idea just comes from maybe a small line I've read in a book, and in this case, I think I read that 6000 languages were dying daily, and I found that intriguing (even though the number might not be accurate). And there was talk about if only three people spoke that language in 1972, then it would die. So that was the only thing that was there at the beginning. Then I went to India on a residency, and I decided to have these little curtains made. Before I left, I had been asked to do a piece in Kingston, in a porch, and the porch had lots of tiny windows so I had an idea that I could propose for that site, and so I had the curtains made for the size of those little panes. Anyway, I got to India, and I ordered these curtains, and I bought material. It was the same material that's used for turbans, so it comes in many colours. I had a studio in Delhi, and then because the wall wasn't that big, I decided to do something with just 28 curtains. In the meantime, I was researching different languages and because there were so many, I decided that they should all begin with the languages that were being lost, and should begin with X, Y, and Z. But whenever I give myself rules like that, I just break them, if my brain goes somewhere else.

The thing about this studio in Delhi is that there was a ladder made of little bits of wood that were tied to the vertical bits of the ladder that were also like bamboo poles which were just tied with string. I was too scared to go up to the top panel of curtains, so I decided to leave them closed and only put in names of countries or places that I had always wanted to visit, but never had. So they didn't require a lost language. Anyway, but then I liked this idea of these curtains being closed, so those countries were places like Australia, Botswana, Key West, Udaipur, and Dublin—over the years I managed to go to them, but I don't know if or when this piece might be reinstalled.

When I got back to Canada from Delhi, I did the piece for the porch but instead of languages underneath the curtains was a name with a date—so for example, "Hazel" 1954. This came from also reading a book about storms. They used to call typhoons and hurricanes by female names, and now that's not the case. So that piece on the porch was called *Call The Wind Virago* and it somehow connected to this book about storms. My idea was if you say to some-

body “Hazel” or “Katrina,” everyone in Canada of a certain age will know exactly what you’re talking about, because Hazel was a hurricane that was in Ontario in 1954. I never got good images of that piece.

Over the years installing *Curtains for Babel*, people had reactions to the colours of the curtains. I think I was telling you about these Japanese girls who said, “how did you know my favourite colour was yellow?” because where the Japanese language was the curtains were yellow. Dublin ended up with a light green curtain and people commented on that, talking about the Irish troubles. And then, instead of just X, Y, and Z, I would sometimes use W. So one language I had was Welsh, and the piece was going to be installed in Wales. When I got there, it was clear to me that Welsh was no longer a dying language, but the people in the gallery wanted me to still include Welsh. But I couldn’t call it Welsh, I had to call it *Cymraeg*, which begins with C, that’s the word for Welsh in Welsh. I didn’t want to put a C in (I didn’t mind every now and then adding a W or something, but C went too far in a way I didn’t want to go). I was thinking I had to find another language that’s not Welsh and I used Walloon, which is a language from Belgium. I was thinking, oh that will be safe, there’s no one here who speaks Walloon, but then in the hotel I was staying in the receptionist spoke Walloon, so that was kind of funny. I think I kept Walloon.

And then another language came from Congo, but when I was installing this piece at Canada House in London (which you could say is a diplomatic venue), I learned that Congo had changed its name to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that was just too long. But the Canada House people insisted because they said, “what if a diplomat from the Congo comes to Canada House, and then sees that I haven’t used Democratic Republic of the Congo—they’ll complain.” So it was interesting, there were all of these things I had to contend with. The way I work is sometimes I just have an image in my head of how the work will end up looking—and then I don’t really care about the truth. I care more about my imagination.

And also, really important for me is the aesthetic. I find—and I noticed this when I was in Venice—if I look at work and I don’t like it, and I don’t want to look at that work because I don’t find it visually interesting, I’m not really interested in the ideas of the artist or the ideas the artist had. I saw lots of really bad work in Venice, and I decided that it was political—and I don’t mean by that activist politics, but more like, um, Israel. I found their pavilion kind of horrible, I found lots of the pavilions horrible, but I thought, OK, some bureaucrat makes a decision about contemporary art, not knowing anything about contemporary art, and then they pick a curator who they know in terms of being connected to, then that curator picks a mediocre artist. I think that’s why I found so much of the work really meaningless.

Biography

Sarindar Dhaliwal is a Toronto-based artist, born in the Punjab and raised in London, England, and has lived in Canada since 1968. Dhaliwal received her BFA at University College Falmouth, UK, and her MFA from York University. She graduated with a doctorate from the Cultural Studies Program at Queen’s

University in 2019. Dhaliwal has an upcoming solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2023, a selection of works from 1984 to 2022. Her most recent exposition in 2019, *Across Terrains: a Floral and Chromatic Study* at the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, brought together older works in conversation with four new pieces created that summer at the Medalta Ceramics residency. Dhaliwal's work has also been included in *Vision Exchange: Perspectives from India to Canada* which toured to three venues: Art Gallery of Alberta, U of T Art Museum, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery during 2018-2020. Dhaliwal has participated in the following shows: *India Contemporary Photographic and New Media Art*, FotoFest Biennial, Asia Society Texas Center, Houston, Texas in 2018, *Yonder*, Koffler Gallery, Toronto, *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto*, Art Museum at the University of Toronto in 2016, and *Traversive Territories*, Varley Art Gallery, Markham in 2015. A survey exhibition, entitled *the Radcliffe Line and other Geographies*, curated by Marcie Bronson (Rodman Hall, Brock University in St. Catherines), was presented at Rodman Hall, the Reach in Abbotsford, BC, and the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa in 2015-16.

Notes

November 2022. This transcript has been lightly edited by Deborah Root.