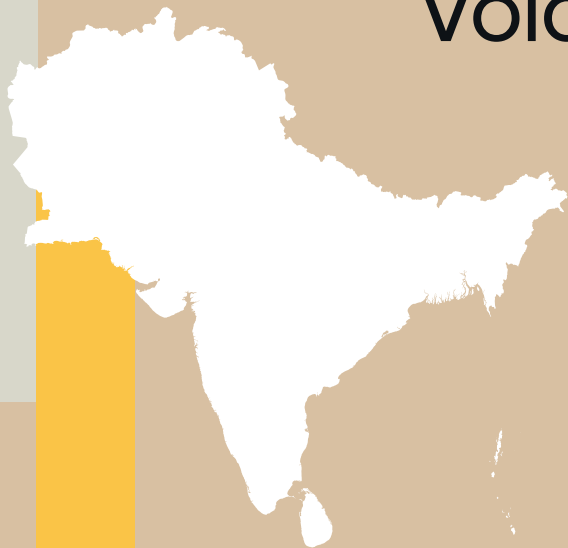


(Un)Layering
the Future Past
of South Asia:
Young Artists'
Voices



The vibrant, hybrid and paradoxical region of South Asia, home to one-fourth of the world's population, has birthed a new generation of artists. Sharing centuries of overlapping civilisations and an abundance of common cultural formations, they bring a fresh perspective to art-making that defies national state boundaries. This is a selection of twelve artists' voices from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

These artworks link to common concerns - ecological stress, depletion of indigenous resources and loss of habitat, forced migration, socio-economic issues, political imbalance, gender disparity and historical ties based on the relations of the Empire to its territories and the remnants of legacies of conflict and dominance. By inventing fresh ways of artistic expression and creative resistance, they make their voices heard in a world which continues to be invested in narratives of dominance.

This is a new iteration of the exhibition first hosted at SOAS Gallery, London from April to June 2025. Curated by Salima Hashmi and Manmeet K. Walia.

Artists: Moonis Ahmad, Aisha Abid Hussain, Maheen Kazim, Kubra Khademi, Ghulam Mohammad, Hadi Rahnward, Purvai Rai, Ashfika Rahman, Varunika Saraf, Hema Shironi, Rinoshan Susiman, T. Vinoja.

With special thanks to: All the original patrons, stakeholders, supporters of the exhibition, Asad Haye, Shireen Gandhi, Eric Mouchet, Valerie Bazin, Priyanka and Prateek Raja, Saskia Fernando, and Mira Hashmi.



Varunika Saraf (born 1981)

The Longest Revolution (2025)

Embroidery on Cotton Textile

Born in Nagpur, the artist's practice is rooted in a city marked by cosmopolitan histories and a quiet permission to be oneself. Apart from her years at Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi), she has lived in Hyderabad all her life. This sustained proximity to a multicultural environment forms the backdrop against which her work unfolds.

Her current series draws on Juliet Mitchell's seminal essay *Women: The Longest Revolution*, tracing a lineage of women's movements in India. The works honour the many generations of women whose struggles, intellect, and solidarities continue to shape feminist thought today. Her practice becomes a way of reaffirming women's histories and contributing to a feminist tradition of thinking, making, and doing.

While time itself is not her central concern, history, and the ways in which it is constructed, inherited, and lived, remains crucial. Much of her work reflects on South Asia's entangled pasts and their exchanges with the wider world, resonating deeply within diasporic contexts such as Bradford.

Embroidery, a medium she returns to, carries personal and political weight. Taught secretly by her grandmother and resisted by her mother, it embodies generational disagreements about women's work and feminist agency. What once appeared contradictory now provides the ground on which she builds a deliberate feminist practice, honouring the handmade while challenging hierarchical distinctions between art and craft.

Her work stands apart for its insistence on shared lived experience. Through stories of struggle, resilience, and quiet defiance, she invites viewers to encounter the tenderness, humour, and complexity that shape feminist histories across South Asia.

On loan from the artist, supported by the gallery
Chemould Prescott Road





Moonis Ahmad (born 1992)

Echographies of the Invisible (2023)

Digital film, 12 minutes

Born in Kashmir, Moonis Ahmad lives and works between Kashmir and Melbourne. Moving between these two geographies, one shaped by militarisation and intense surveillance, the other by settler-colonial histories, has profoundly influenced how he understands time, memory, and being at the margins. Distance produces a double vision in his work - looking at Kashmir from elsewhere, while also looking elsewhere from Kashmir. These overlapping perspectives allow disparate histories, such as the disappeared in Kashmir and silenced elders in Australia, to gather and converse within his practice.

His work is concerned with lives that refuse closure. The dead and the disappeared return not as metaphors, but as persistent presences that unsettle linear time and territorial boundaries. He approaches time as layered, interrupted, and recursive, shaped by curfews, shut downs, delays, and erasures. Loops, glitches, silences, and incomplete sequences become formal strategies, allowing unresolved histories to continue acting in the present.

Living in South Asia informs his sensitivity to what he describes as infrastructures of erasure - missing records, fractured communications, delayed messages, and absent bodies. These conditions are not abstract, but lived realities that shape everyday experience. At the same time, his work reflects a culture of improvisation and adaptation, where systems are constantly negotiated and reworked.

The video work in the exhibition is not purely imaginary; built from photogrammetric scans of real places. Visitors are invited to engage slowly with another dimension or time, where rocks fall silently, landscapes flicker, and meaning appears only in fragments or distant reflections.

On loan from the artist

Ashfika Rahman (born 1988)

Redeem (2016)

Stitching on 'Shital pati' (Local handmade fabric made by indigenous community (Oraon))

Stitching on digital photograph, printed on archival paper

Born in North Bengal, Ashfika Rahman's practice is shaped by the social and political realities of the region. She is currently based in Amsterdam, yet her work remains closely anchored to Bangladesh, its histories, and its lived conditions. Growing up there formed her political consciousness and continues to inform how she understands power, oppression, and resistance across different contexts.

Her practice responds to systemic socio-political violence faced by marginalised communities in Bangladesh, particularly indigenous and minority groups. Over time, she has addressed questions of cultural colonisation, displacement, and structural violence. For this exhibition, Rahman focuses on the Oraon community, examining religious conversion and its political, social, and spiritual implications. The work considers how belief systems, governance, and survival intersect to shape everyday life.



Rahman understands time as both collective and lived. She describes her approach as a form of archivism: preserving moments of suppression, resistance, and endurance so that they are not erased. Her practice is deeply informed by lived experience. The communities she works with are often people and places encountered early in her life, and her work evolves from intimate, personal encounters that expand into broader social and political reflection. Her journey is also shaped by her mother, an activist whose documentation of violence against marginalised communities left a lasting imprint. Through her art, Rahman revisits and re-archives these histories, sustaining a practice of witnessing, care, and resistance that resonates beyond its immediate context.

On loan from the artist and private collection



Hema Shironi (born 1991)

My Family is Not on the List - 10 Kg #2 (2025)

Embroidery on rice bag

Born in Kandy and now living in Colombo, Hema Shironi's practice is shaped by the landscapes, memories, and everyday realities that have formed her.

She works with materials that carry the weight of lived experience, using them to retell stories held in the body, the home, and the objects that move with us. Her work explores memory, displacement, and the quiet labour involved in holding on to what is slipping away. By returning to familiar materials and domestic gestures, she traces the intersections of personal and collective histories.

Shironi considers the past remains present - embedded in cloth, in rituals, and in the body itself. As she weaves, stitches, or gathers fragments, she brings together moments of memory, loss, repetition, and repair. Her works become spaces in which these temporal layers meet, revealing a dignity found in simple materials and in the act of tending to what is fragile.

Although rooted in South Asian experiences, the themes she articulates are universal - living with memory, navigating loss, and holding close the rituals or objects that sustain a sense of home. Observing her work, the textures, the careful stitching, the traces of time, allows viewers to enter through feeling rather than cultural familiarity. The work invites reflection, offering space for one's own memories and associations.

On loan from the artist, supported by gallery
Saskia Fernando

Kubra Khademi (born 1989)

La fille et le dragon

#089, #226 and #357 (2023)

Gouache on paper

Born in Ghor and belonging to the Hazara community, Kubra Khademi now lives and works in France, following years of forced displacement. Exile is not simply a condition of distance in her practice, but a structuring force that shapes how she understands memory, belonging, and resistance. Her work draws from personal experience while remaining firmly rooted in collective histories, particularly those of women negotiating survival within deeply patriarchal and conflict-ridden societies.

Women's lives, their bodies, and their capacity to resist are central to her practice. She works with the idea of transmission, a mode of knowledge passed between women across generations through gesture, story, endurance, and care. This inheritance is palpable in her work, where individual narratives unfold into shared testimonies. Time, for Khademi, is inseparable from politics. To make art is to be conscious of one's moment, to respond to the conditions shaping one's body, community, and country.

In this sense, her practice is an act of resistance formed within, and against, the urgencies of its time.

Afghanistan's history of prolonged war and instability forms the backdrop of her work, yet her engagement extends beyond national borders. Her participation in this exhibition reflects an expanded understanding of South Asia as a space of shared struggles and solidarities rather than fixed geopolitical boundaries.

Her work affirms the connective power of art. Where war fractures, art opens dialogue. Where borders divide, it offers a language of resilience, compassion, and collective endurance.

On loan from the artist, supported by gallery Eric Mouchet



Aisha Abid Hussain (born 1980)

Lived Realities Series I, II and III (2023)

Collage, watercolour and ink on wasli (handmade paper)

Born in Peshawar, Aisha Abid Hussain's early years in the historic city grounded her sense of identity and belonging. Moving to Lahore at the age of six opened a different world to her, sparking a curiosity and impulse for exploration that continues to shape her practice. Research and archival inquiry form the core of her work. Drawn to histories (personal, familial, and wider cultural) she works through documents, scripts, photographs, and fragments of text, searching for narratives that sit beneath the surface of the recorded past.

For this exhibition, she engages with the nikah-nama (marriage contract), placing this archival document alongside new imagery. Through this juxtaposition, she questions its sanctity and interprets it through a feminist lens, while acknowledging the intricacies and emotional weight carried by the institution of marriage.

Working from Pakistan shapes her perspective deeply. The region's layered histories, polyphonic languages, political entanglements, and everyday contradictions feed the conceptual ground of her art.



She holds that the personal is always political, and that the emotional turbulence encoded in language, memory, and belonging resonates far beyond the South Asian context.

She invites viewers to meet the work emotionally, to inhabit its ambiguity, and to find their own narratives within it. Her practice, built from shared histories and a profound regard for language, seeks to open a space where subjective interpretation becomes part of the work itself.

On loan from artist, supported by Rohtas Gallery



Rinoshan Susiman (born 1993)

When I was 16 (2024)

Single channel four part video,
2 minutes and 44 seconds

Born in Pankudaveli, Chenkalady in Batticaloa, Rhinoshan Susiman's work emerges from the disquieting proximity of conflict and protection that shaped his early life. Growing up amid checkpoints, barbed wire, and militarised terrain, and later living within the sheltered confines of a seminary, he inhabited two worlds that sat in stark tension with one another. This oscillation between exposure and refuge continues to inform his visual language.

His video work *When I Was 16* reflects on isolation, displacement, memory, and the quiet emotional weight of growing up in a landscape marked by unspoken wounds. The work moves between the remembered violence of a childhood in a conflict zone, the cocooned years in the seminary, and the complex return to a society rebuilt over its scars. Even without direct experience of conflict, many may recognise the sensations of disconnection, distance, or the struggle to reconcile one's inner life with the world outside.

His practice gestures towards the quieter, often unspoken realities of South Asia, where political violence and its residues are woven into the fabric of everyday life. By translating internal dilemmas into a visual form, he opens a space in which private memory and collective histories meet, revealing the emotional traces that endure long after the events themselves have passed. Susiman lives and works in Jafna.

On loan from the artist

Hadi Rahnaward (born 1986)

Tilatilaa (2019)

Video projection, 4 minutes and 49 seconds

Hadi Rahnaward was born in Wardak and grew up in Kabul. Now based in France, his practice is shaped by living within, and in distance from, histories formed through power, displacement, and political construction. His work examines how narratives are produced and controlled, and how authority leaves traces through propaganda, ideological cycles, and the erosion or displacement of social values. For Rahnaward, time is not neutral; it operates as a surface onto which power inscribes ambition, desire, and erasure, shaping both individual lives and collective memory.

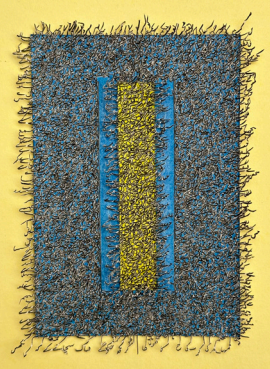
These concerns come sharply into focus in *Tilatilaa*. It is an oral Persian word that means the act of pushing in a disordered, unregulated way. Drawing from Afghanistan's recent political history and its contested encounters with democracy, *Tilatilaa* reflects on the fragile boundary between order and chaos. The work becomes a metaphor for systems designed to serve the collective that are instead overtaken by spectacle, self-interest, and instability.

The muted, looped video unfolds within a fixed frame, presenting a seemingly simple action that gradually reveals itself as a tightly staged theatre. A group of men compete to occupy the centre of a false gilded frame, a symbol of manufactured power, visibility, and prestige. Their gestures suggest an unseen orchestration, pointing to forces operating beyond the visible scene. The repetition of the loop traps the figures in a continuous struggle, exposing the absurdity, futility, and inevitability of their actions.

Through restraint and quiet irony, Rahnaward reveals how such conditions are produced, sustained, and normalised, inviting viewers to consider the subtle forces that shape societies from within.

On loan from the artist

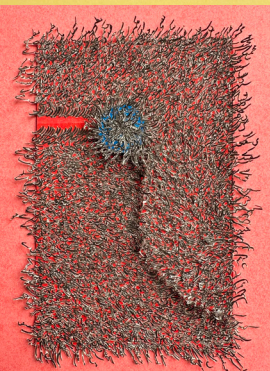




Ghulam Mohammad (born 1987)

Bazm (Assembly) (2024)

Paper collage and
Iranian Ink on Wasli
(handmade paper)



Hisaar (Garrison) (2024)

Paper collage and
Iranian Ink on Wasli
(handmade paper)



Zavia (Angle) (2024)

Pen and Ink on
Arches paper

Born in Kachhi in Balochistan, Ghulam Mohammad works with the life of language, tracing how it circulates, fragments, and regathers itself. His collages are formed through the careful cutting and reorganisation of scraps of Urdu and other local scripts. Through this process he reflects on translation, erasure, and the mutable edges between text and image.

The slow, repetitive actions that shape each work allow him to dwell within the surface. Layer by layer, the collages and ink drawings carry the imprint of labour and contemplation. They become quiet records of time, thought, and the gradual building of meaning. His practice brings into focus multilingual realities, informal archives, and an intimate relationship with text that understands language as fluid rather than fixed. The delicacy of his cuts, the density of the layers, and the reconstructed forms offer a sense of the emotional and intellectual work embedded in each piece, even for viewers who may not read the script.

While his concerns speak to universal experiences of memory, identity, and social histories, the context of South Asia shapes a distinct sensitivity to script as more than communication. It is a material that carries worlds. Mohammad now lives and works in Lahore.

On loan from artist, supported by Rohtas Gallery

Purvai Rai (born 1994)

Grain by Grain (2024)

Wool embroidery, acrylic, on jute fabric (burlap) and basmati rice

Embroidery by Rajni Bala

Born in New Delhi, the artist grew up amidst public debate, protest, and the everyday presence of the state. While her early life was shaped by the rhythms of a city attuned to policy and power, her familial roots lie in Punjab. This distance has become central to her practice. Her work reflects on belonging after migration, and on how ancestral ties persist even when lived experience is partial or interrupted.

Now working between Delhi, Punjab, and New York, her practice has expanded to consider agriculture, architecture, and land as deeply entangled systems. Time spent with farmers and residents of her ancestral village informs an intimate understanding of local histories, while her distance reveals how these landscapes are bound to global processes of capital, policy, and extraction. She examines how fields and buildings evolve together, how irrigation patterns shape walls and granaries, and how thresholds mark both spatial and social change.



Across three embroidered panels, the word 'more' is repeated in blue thread, dense at first and gradually thinning. This visual recession mirrors the depletion of Punjab's aquifers, drained through tube-well irrigation and subsidised electricity. The works are framed with actual rice, allowing the crop to exist not only as image but as matter. Rice becomes both subject and structure, binding ecology, labour, and history into a single surface.

On loan from the artist

Maheen Kazim (born 1990)

ۛے وت ی ۛ ماش رگم

Magar Shaam Hi To Hai

But it is only evening (2026)

Handwoven cotton (8/1 × 8-ply), loose warp knots, carded wool/cotton

Born in Faisalabad, Maheen Kazim comes from a city shaped by a long and intricate textile tradition. This environment has informed her understanding of material, texture, and process, grounding her practice in the rhythms of handwork and the quiet precision of craft. Working closely with local weavers, she creates handwoven pieces that reflect on time, memory, and labour. The collaboration itself becomes a way of staying connected to living craft traditions, regional materials, and the communities that sustain them.

The pace of daily life, seasonal cycles, and the tactile knowledge embedded in making subtly guide her work. These influences shape not only her methods but also the emotional register of the final pieces. She invites viewers to slow down, to attend to the surface: the textures, slight irregularities, and layered structures that reveal the care and repetition behind each work.

To look closely is to sense the passage of time held within the fabric. Her practice sits at the meeting point of traditional weaving and contemporary art, where process is inseparable from outcome.

The slowness of making, the gestures of the hand, and the labour shared between artist and artisan are woven into the cloth itself, giving each work a presence that extends beyond its visual form. Kazim now lives and works between Lahore and Kasur.

On loan from the artist





T. Vinoja (born 1991)

Sea and Land (2025)

Felt work and thread

Born in Kilinochchi, T. Vinoja's practice is shaped by growing up in the long aftermath of the Sri Lankan Civil War. Her work emerges from a sustained engagement with land as both a physical terrain and an emotional register. Although the war officially ended in 2009,

its traces remain embedded in the soil, in memory, and in the everyday rhythms of life. These residues continue to inform how she understands landscape, belonging, and survival.

Working primarily with textiles, T. Vinoja's work *Sea and Land* reflects on the idea of home through the form of the bunker, spaces once marked as dangerous and inaccessible, now heavy with memory and loss. Entering such sites evokes sensory fragments - smells, textures, and flashes of recollection that transform geography into an intimate, affective space. For her, land is never static. It shifts with time, conflict, and natural forces, much like the human body, which carries its own imprints of movement, trauma, and change.

Living and working in South Asia informs her sensitivity to how histories of displacement, borders, and nationalism continue to shape everyday life across the region. While rooted in specific places and communities, her work speaks to shared global experiences of conflict, loss, and resilience. Viewers are invited to approach the work with care, attending to its textures and gestures, and to bring their own memories into dialogue with the landscape she traces. T. Vinoja now lives and works in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

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