



CAMERA SOUTH ASIA

SPEAKERS

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

Bakirathi Mani

Chitra Ganesh

Iftikhar Dadi

Noam M Elcott

Sudhir Mahadevan

Closing remarks by Mira Nair

MODERATORS/Book Editors

Debashree Mukherjee

Rahaab Allana

CAMERA SOUTH ASIA

THURSDAY APRIL 27, 2023 | 4-7 PM
LEHMAN AUDITORIUM, 202 ALTSCHUL HALL, BARNARD COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

4:00 - 4:15 PM

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

4:15 - 5:30 PM

PANEL 1 | UNFRAMED

MODERATED BY RAHAAB ALLANA
PRESENTATIONS BY ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW,
BAKIRATHI MANI, IFTIKHAR DADI
FOLLOWED BY Q&A

5:30 - 5:45 PM

COFFEE BREAK

5:45 - 7:00 PM

PANEL 2 | BOMBAY TALKIES

MODERATED BY DEBASHREE MUKHERJEE
PRESENTATIONS BY CHITRA GANESH, NOAM M ELCOTT,
SUDHIR MAHADEVAN

CLOSING REMARKS BY MIRA NAIR

FOLLOWED BY Q&A

7:00 - 8:00 PM

RECEPTION

Co-organisers



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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MESAAS

Co-publishers



Camera South Asia

DEBASHREE MUKHERJEE AND RAHAAB ALLANA

This symposium celebrates the launch of two new anthologies on South Asian photography and cinema, namely *Unframed: Discovering Image Practices in South Asia* (Alkazi Foundation for the Arts and HarperCollins Publishers India) and *Bombay Talkies: An Unseen History of Indian Cinema* (Alkazi Collection of Photography and Mapin Publishing) which together provoke a new look at questions of artistic practice and its relations to collaborative world-making, knowledge production and archival memory. With reputed specialists from art production, pedagogy, curation and publishing, this symposium broadly questions what it might mean to identify as “South Asian,” through revisiting and re-envisioning our art historical contexts, re-suturing our frayed common genealogies, and affirming our allied arts practices that at times converge across aesthetic platforms.

Bombay Talkies, launched previously at the Jaipur Literature Festival in Jan 2023, presents rare behind-the-scenes photographs from the personal archive of the cinematographer Josef Wirsching who moved from Munich to Bombay during the Nazi takeover of film studios in Germany. Most of these photographs were taken in the 1930s and '40s when Wirsching was employed at the legendary film studio, Bombay Talkies Ltd. Shot across film sets and outdoor locations they convey a world of meaning that ran parallel to the world of the silver screen. As a specific genre, the “behind-the-scenes” photo expands the limits of the film frame by showing us that which lay just outside, adjacent to, and beyond the movie camera. Shot primarily on a Leica camera, and lovingly preserved by Wirsching’s grandsons, Georg and Josef (Jr.), these images not only unsettle the boundaries between film and photography, Indian and foreign, but also give us rare access to the aesthetic decisions, creative communities, and cross-cultural exchanges that were vital to filmmaking in late colonial South Asia.

The publication/reader, *Unframed*, on the other hand, hopes to present the challenges of South Asian knowledge production drawn from images, and how they continually intensify, given the extent to which images may be productively and ethically produced in an era of volatile “post-truth” mass media/social media ethos. With an array of essays and interviews, the reader presents traditional and experimental practice/production, through deliberation, as well as through established and innovative scholarship, in order to reassess readings and understandings of “South Asia,” regardless of physical location. As co-chairs, we therefore imagine ways in which the symposium may profoundly connect the symbiotic colonial-postcolonial tensions that have seared their imprint into subcontinental consciousness.

4:15 - 5:30 PM

Panel 1 | Unframed: Discovering Image Practices in South Asia

The history of South Asian lens-based practices is the result of piecing together complex spatial ties and varied cultural exchanges that have been taking place in the region since the birth of photography in the early nineteenth century. These meta-histories cumulatively present us with significant, interdependent shifts in ways of *seeing* and in ways of *being seen*; and while camera output in terms of volume may have been similar across the globe, from place to place profound differences of every kind (including race, status, identity, other privileges, accessibility and intention), have radically altered the meaning of “documentary”, “evidentiary” and “art practice” in relation to photography.

In this panel, scholars of literature and art history, as well as an artist build critique around image-making, viewing and exhibitionary practices and the contemporary validation through micro-narratives of representation that draw on personal archives, community, family memorabilia and everyday objects as pervasive forms of public culture. Such potent content reminds us, as “South Asians,” of our need to empathetically deploy cultural narratives in order to freely move into and out of one another’s imaginaries – an act of creative solidarity all the more crucial since it is often difficult, or even impossible, to make actual journeys.

MODERATOR / BOOK EDITOR: RAHAAB ALLANA

PRESENTATIONS BY: ANNU PALAKUNNATHU MATTHEW, BAKIRATHI MANI, IFTIKHAR DADI

5:45 - 7:00 PM

Panel 2 | Bombay Talkies: An Unseen History of Indian Cinema

One of the most exciting gifts of the Wirsching photo archive is to witness a group of itinerant filmmakers immersed in the work of making movies, attempting to build a new local industry, and shape an emerging art form. The photographs in this book chronicle the interaction of individuals, objects and environments, framed by a vision that captures the beauty and drama hovering on the surface of the laborious work of film production. We are also confronted with the fact that the “pioneers” of Indian cinema belonged to many different classes, religions, castes, genders, even nationalities, and it would be false to demand a superficial authenticity from the past.

The speakers on this panel help us explore the historical and speculative value of the photographs in the Wirsching archive. What is the artistic and cinematic status of a still image taken during filming? Can we fix a medium that moves between architecture, photography, and embodiment? How might images from the fragmented archives of Indian cinemas animate new artistic practices today? And how is it that a German cinematographer was central to the emergence of a film style that we claim as “Indian” today? As our panelists suggest, the past continues to surprise us as new sources emerge, showing us that history, and cinema itself, is a vital ongoing project.

MODERATOR / BOOK EDITOR: DEBASHREE MUKHERJEE

PRESENTATIONS BY: CHITRA GANESH, NOAM M ELCOTT, SUDHIR MAHADEVAN

CLOSING REMARKS BY MIRA NAIR

Moderators/Book Editors



Debashree Mukherjee is an Associate Professor of film and media at Columbia University in New York. Her first book, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (Columbia University Press, 2020) tells the story of Bombay cinema's transition from silent cinema to the talkie era. *Bombay Hustle* narrates this early

history of Indian cinema as a history of material practice and centers the laboring body of the cine-worker. In this, Debashree was inspired by her own experience as a cameraperson and AD in Bombay in the early 2000s. Debashree has published several journal articles on film history, labor, gender, and ecocriticism, including the award-winning essay, "Somewhere Between Human, Nonhuman, and Woman: Shanta Apte's Theory of Exhaustion" (*Feminist Media Histories*, 2020). Her next book, *Camera Obscura: Media at the Dawn of Planetary Extraction*, presents a media history of indentured labor and plantation capitalism, looking at the Andamans, Mauritius, and Fiji. Debashree is an editor of the peer-reviewed journal *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*.



Rahaab Allana is Curator/Publisher, Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, New Delhi. A Charles Wallace awardee and Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society (UK), he received his MA in Art History from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London and was Honorary Research Associate in the Department of Visual Anthropology at University

College, London. He is Founding Editor of PIX, a themed digital publication that focuses on South Asian lens-based practices and production, and Founder of ASAP|Art (Alternative South Asia Photography|Art), the region's first app for presentation and discussion of contemporary creative work. Allana works nationally and internationally with museums, archives, cultural initiatives and institutions, universities and festivals. He recently served as Guest Editor for a Delhi-themed issue of *Aperture* (Summer 2021). He is on the editorial board of *Trans-Asia Photography*, the advisory committees of the India-Europe Foundation for New Dialogues (Rome), and the Arts and Culture committee, Asia Society (India Chapter). His forthcoming edited volume with Tulika Books (Delhi) and West Heavens (Shanghai) is based on photography in India since the 90s.

Speakers



Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's photo-based work draws on old photographs to re-examine historical narratives in both the US and South Asia. Her work is a blend of still and moving imagery that shifts the viewer's perspective to question established and marginalized histories.

Matthew's recent solo exhibitions include the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, Nuit Blanche Toronto, the Newport Art Museum and sepiaEYE, NYC. She has also exhibited her work at the RISD Museum, Newark Art Museum, MFA Boston, MFA Houston (TX), Victoria & Albert Museum, 2018 Kochi-Muziris Biennale, 2018 FotoFest Biennial, 2009 Guangzhou Photo Biennial as well as at the Smithsonian. Her essay on the unremembered Indian soldiers of World War II was recently included in *Ars Orientalis*, the journal from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art. Matthew is Professor of Art at the University of Rhode Island and is represented by sepiaEYE, NYC. Minor Matters Books and sepiaEYE published her monograph, *The Answers Take Time* in December 2022.



Bakirathi Mani is Professor of English and Co-Director of the Tri-College Asian American Studies Program at Swarthmore College. She is the author of *Unseeing Empire: Photography, Representation, South Asian America* (Duke University Press, 2020), and *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America* (Stanford University

Press, 2012). A scholar of Asian American studies and postcolonial studies, she works across visual, historical, ethnographic and literary archives to examine how South Asian diasporic identities and communities are created and embodied. Mani's research has been published in *American Quarterly*, *Social Text*, *Journal of Asian American Studies*, *Diaspora*, *PIX*, *Verge*, and *Positions*, among other venues. She earned her PhD at Stanford University; her MA at Jawaharlal Nehru University, and her BSFS from Georgetown University. As of Fall 2023, Mani will be the Presidential Penn Compact Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania.



Chitra Ganesh is a Brooklyn-based visual artist whose work encompasses drawing, painting, comics, installation, video art, and animation. Through studies in literature, semiotics, social theory, science fiction, and historical and mythic texts, Ganesh attempts to reconcile representations of femininity, sexuality, and power

absent from the artistic and literary canons. She often draws on Hindu and Buddhist iconography and South Asian forms such as Kalighat and Madhubani, and is currently negotiating her relationship to these images with the rise of right-wing fundamentalism in India. Ganesh holds a BA in Art-Semiotics and Comparative Literature from Brown University, and an MFA from Columbia University. She has exhibited widely across the US, Europe, and South Asia and her work is held in prominent public collections such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, San Jose Museum of Art, Baltimore Museum, the Whitney Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art.



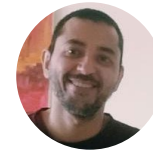
Iftikhar Dadi is John H. Burris Professor and Chair of the Department of History of Art and Director of the South Asia Program at Cornell University. He researches modern and contemporary art from a transnational perspective, with an emphasis on methodology and intellectual history, and a focus on South and West Asia. Another research

interest examines the film, media, and popular cultures of South Asia. He has authored *The Lahore Effect: Cinema Between Realism and Fable* (2022), *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (2010) and edited *The Lahore Biennale Reader 01* (2022) and *Anwar Jalal Shemza* (2015). He has co-edited *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space* (2012); *Tarjama/ Translation* (2009); and *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading* (2001). As an artist, Iftikhar Dadi collaborates with Elizabeth Dadi to make work that explores questions of identity and borders, and the capacities of the informal urban realm in the Global South.



Noam M Elcott is Associate Professor for the history of modern art and Director of the Center for Comparative Media at Columbia University. He is also an editor of the journal *Grey Room*. Elcott is the author of the award-winning book, *Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media* (University of Chicago

Press, 2016; paperback 2018), as well as essays on art, film, and media published in leading journals, anthologies, and exhibition catalogs. His current book projects are *Art™: A History of Modern Art, Authenticity, and Trademark and Status*, *Photography, Modernity: August Sander's People of the Twentieth Century*.



Sudhir Mahadevan is Associate Professor in the Department of Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, as well as Adjunct Professor in the South Asia Center at the university's Jackson School of International Studies. A graduate of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, he received his MA and PhD in Cinema

Studies from New York University. He is the author of *A Very Old Machine: The Many Origins of the Cinema in India* (SUNY Press, 2015; Permanent Black, 2018), an innovative study of the interface between Indian colonial/postcolonial modernity and cinema as a developing technology/creative practice that profoundly shaped and expanded Indian popular culture. He is a contributor to *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies, Framework, Trans Asia Photography, South Asian Popular Culture*, and *Screen*. His research interests include photography, film and new media in South Asia, with an emphasis on media-archaeological, comparative and transnational approaches. He teaches courses on film theory and history, and South Asian cinema.

Closing Remarks by



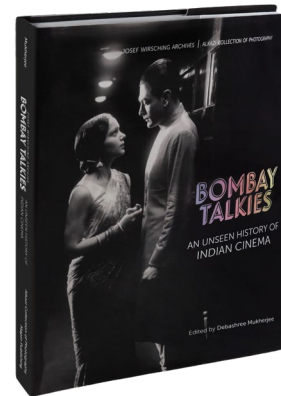
Mira Nair is an Academy-Award nominated director best known for her visually dense films that pulsate with life. Her debut feature, *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) won the Caméra d'Or at Cannes, followed by the groundbreaking *Mississippi Masala* (1991), the Golden Globe & Emmy-winning *Hysterical Blindness* (2001) and the international

hit *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), for which she was the first woman to win Venice Film Festival's coveted Golden Lion. A fiercely independent filmmaker, she then made *Vanity Fair* (2004), *The Namesake* (2006), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), *Queen of Katwe* (2016), and *A Suitable Boy* (2020).

In 2022, Nair directed the pilot of *National Treasure* for DisneyPlus, and produced & directed the stage musical of *Monsoon Wedding* in Doha, Qatar during the FIFA World Cup. Future projects include *The Jungle Prince of Delhi*, and *Monsoon Wedding the Musical*, heading to Off-Broadway at St. Ann's Warehouse this spring. Her next feature film is an experimental portrait of the artist Amrita Sher-Gil. An activist by nature, Nair founded Salaam Baalak Trust for street children in 1989, and the Maisha Film Lab in East Africa to train filmmakers on the continent in 2004. In 2012, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian honor.

Bombay Talkies: An Unseen History of Indian Cinema

Pub. The Alkazi Collection of Photography in association with Mapin Publishing, 2023



Ever since cinema became a popular medium of mass entertainment, audiences have been intensely curious about life and work on a film set. How are films made, we have wondered, hoping that first-hand knowledge of a film set will explain and subdue the hold that cinema has on us. Drawn from the personal archive of pioneering cinematographer Josef Wirsching, this book includes photographs of cast and crew, production stills, and publicity images that visualize the very making of early films, the star image as well as the on and off-screen lives of major actors. Most of the photographs were taken in the 1930s and '40s by Wirsching on his

pocket-size Leica camera, when he was employed at the legendary film studio, Bombay Talkies Ltd.

Bombay Talkies was founded in 1934 by the husband and wife team of Himansu Rai and Devika Rani, who had previously worked in Germany. After the Nazis' rise to power, the largest German film studios of the day were taken over for propaganda purposes, restricting the creative freedoms of filmmakers. At the same time, new sound technologies made it possible to make Indian films in Indian languages for Indian audiences. Himansu Rai and Devika Rani decided to start their own film studio in Bombay and invited their German colleagues to join them in this new artistic enterprise. Some of the biggest hits of Bombay Talkies were made by a multilingual and transnational collective including Franz Osten (director), Josef Wirsching (cinematographer), Devika Rani (actress), Niranjan Pal (writer), and Ashok Kumar (actor). The studio played a foundational role in defining India's commercial film form, producing some of the most iconic musical films of the era.

Edited by Debashree Mukherjee

Foreword by Georg Wirsching

With contributions by Debashree Mukherjee, Sudhir Mahadevan, Priya Jaikumar, Rachel Dwyer, Kaushik Bhaumik, Virchand Dharamsey, and Eleanor Halsall.

Co-Publishers (Bombay Talkies)

The Alkazi Collection of Photography

The Alkazi Collection of Photography (ACP) is an archive consisting of an array of photographic material in varying formats, primarily shot between 1850 and 1950. The core of the collection comprises works in the form of photographic albums, single prints, paper negatives and glass-plate negatives, painted photographs and photo-postcards from South and Southeast Asia. These vintage prints illustrate the progression of socio-political life in the Indian subcontinent through the interdisciplinary fields of archaeology, architectural history, anthropology, landscape art, topography and military studies. alkazifoundation.org

Mapin Publishing

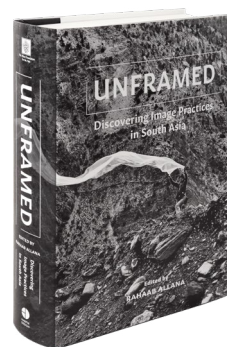
Mapin Publishing is internationally reputed for producing high-quality illustrated books for nearly 40 years. Its publishing program covers a broad spectrum: fine art, architecture, archaeology, crafts, design, exhibition catalogs, museum collections, performing arts, photography, and children's books that bring Indian narratives and art-forms closer to young readers. Mapin has had long-term collaborations with renowned art book publishers and museums to produce books and exhibition catalogs. It has also produced for, and co-published with well-known university presses across the world, and, in India, successfully partnered with museums and government agencies to produce books for them. mapinpub.com

About the Josef Wirsching Archive

The Josef Wirsching Archive is managed by his family in Goa, meticulously preserved by his late son, Wolfgang Peter Wirsching, and currently maintained by his grandsons, Georg and Josef Wirsching. The photographs in this book are mainly from the Josef Wirsching Archive / Alkazi Collection of Photography, and include reproductions from largely 35 mm negatives shot on a Leica camera. The archive also includes lobby cards, vintage and contact prints, and other ephemera such as diaries, newspaper and magazine cuttings as well as personal letters to and from Josef Wirsching. Limited edition photographs from the Wirsching collection are available through Art Heritage, New Delhi (artheritagegallery.com).

Unframed: Discovering Image Practices in South Asia

Pub. The Alkazi Foundation for the Arts and HarperCollins Publishers India, 2023



Unframed presents some of the complex dimensions of South Asia-oriented lens-based media, specifically tracing the evolution of photography in the subcontinent from the nineteenth century to the present. Through intersecting trajectories, thirty-one texts, arranged in five distinct yet interdependent sections, examine the general history/particular meta-histories of the medium in our region, reflecting the depth of image practices in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar.

Drawing upon the broader arc of South Asian visual cultures, this compendium analyzes emergent themes, testimonies and socio-cultural shifts through key discussions around the invention, application and consequent proliferation of lens-based work. Seminal analyses revised for this volume, as well as new commissioned essays and a set of interviews with practitioners/curators, collectively explore the subtle entanglements of memory and space; notions of selfhood; the blurring of geographic taxonomies; the edicts of the gaze; the rupture of identity; varied dimensions of mirroring/othering; and the unstable politics of etching moments in time.

Contributors:

Anoli Perera, Aparna Kumar, Ashmina Ranjit, Aveek Sen, Bakirathi Mani, Christopher Pinney, David Odo, Dechen Roder, Geeta Kapur, Gopesa Paquette, Hammad Nasar, Ismeth Raheem, Mrinalini Venkateswaran, Nancy Adajania, NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati, Nathalie Johnston, Omar Khan, Premjish Achari, Rahaab Allana, Rahul Roy, Raqs Media Collective, Sabeena Gadihoke, Sabih Ahmed, Sai Htin Linn Htet, Saloni Mathur, Savitri Sawhney, Shahidul Alam, Sudhir Mahadevan, Sukanya Baskar, Tanzim Wahab, Yu Yu Myint Than

Edited by Rahaab Allana

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Co-Publishers (Unframed)

The Alkazi Foundation for the Arts

The Alkazi Foundation for the Arts (AFA) is a Registered Charitable Trust based in New Delhi, India. Over the years, AFA has been committed to sharing research on the arts with a focus on photography and theatre.

Through a series of scholarly publications, exhibitions, seminars, conferences, workshops, blogs and archive visits, AFA has focused extensively on the interlinked subjects of the 'metropole' and the 'colony' via anthropology, social history as well as art history, thereby exploring cultural histories of South Asia in the post-Independence period.

alkazifoundation.org

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Vasant Nayak
Bill Carrick
Anupama Rao

Image Credits

Front Cover

Josef Wirsching / *Jawani ki Hawa* (1935)

Bombay Talkies, d. Franz Osten

Josef Wirsching Archive / The Alkazi Collection of Photography

Image featured in *Bombay Talkies: An Unseen History of Indian Cinema*

Back Cover

Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury

The Place Where the Sun Has Another Name, 2019

Installation view, *Look, Stranger!*, Serendipity Arts Festival, 2019

Photograph: Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar

Image featured in *Unframed: Discovering Image Practices in South Asia*

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