

Friends of South Asia

Fall 2024

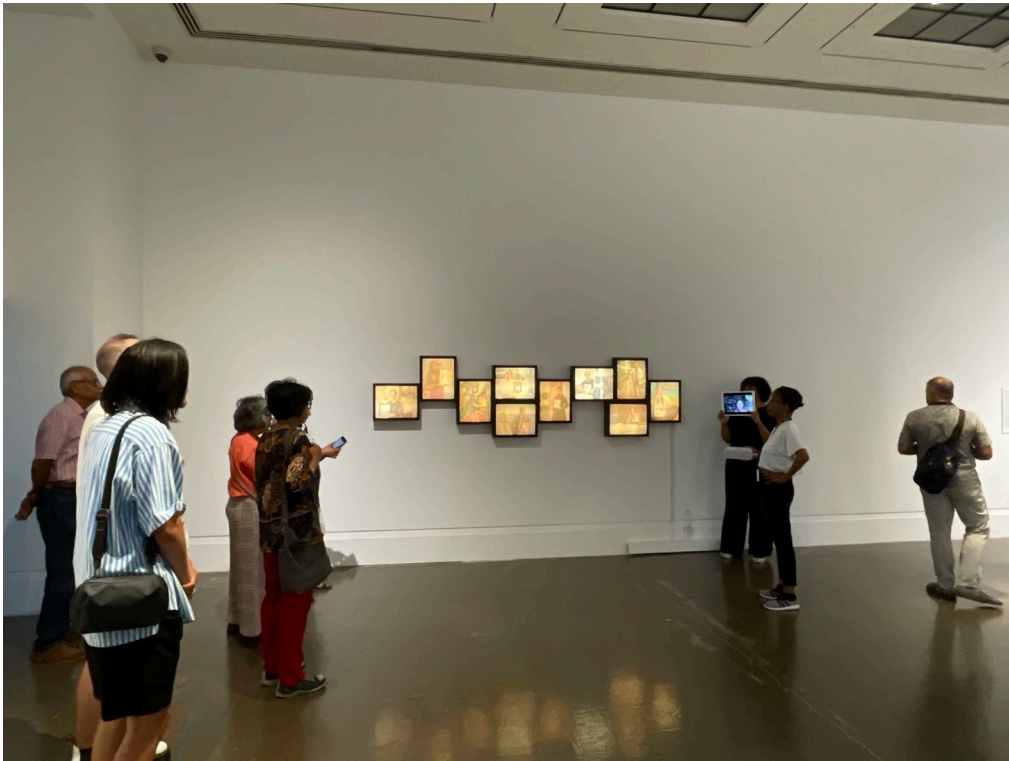


Figure 1: FSA members enjoy the work of Heidi McKenzie at the Art Gallery on Mississauga © Vishwa Patel.

Message from the Chair

Members of the Friends of South Asia (FSA) have been fortunate enough to attend a number of private tours at ROM, including a look at the ROM's historic saris with the new donation from Jayshree Khimasia's personal collection as well as trip into the vault with curator Dr. Deepali Dewan. The committee was able to see the work of an FSA intern who also spoke at our Annual General Meeting with the Chopra Family Intern of the Arts of the Indian Ocean. We also went to the Art Gallery of Mississauga and the Toronto Biennial of Art. Make sure you are following us on [Instagram](#) to see highlights of our various tours! – Piali Roy, Chair.

South Asian Voices in the Creative Landscape



Figure 2: Banner for South Asian Voices in the Creative Landscape.

On May 8, 2024, in recognition of Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month, FSA collaborated with the National Association of Asian American Professionals (NAAAP) to stage a virtual dialogue entitled, “South Asian Voices in the Creative Landscape.” Moderated by FSA executive member Nitin Deckha, the dialogue featured South Asian artists based in the Toronto area: [Heidi McKenzie](#), [Meera Margaret Singh](#), and [Tazeen Qayyum](#), along with New York-based [Shelly Bahl](#).

The theme of the discussion was community visioning and the value of a creative mindset featuring prominent South Asian Canadian and American artists. The panelists shared their various artistic journeys, reflecting on their insights, successes, and challenges while navigating and responding to uncertainty and change.

The panel opened with each artist offering an introduction to their recent and ongoing work to address two questions: (1) What does a South Asian voice in North America mean to you? and (2) How can artists offer insight into navigating our times of uncertainty and change?

Interestingly, the artists invoked similar yet interweaving themes of ancestry, migration, identity, family, voice, and community. As the discussion became more fluid, Qayyum introduced the visual thematic of the cockroach that appears across a range of work,

describing it as a symbol of resilience and ubiquity that is also despised, a striking parallel to our ongoing treatment of newcomers, refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants. McKenzie and Singh showed works that explored their family histories of mixed racial and cultural heritage and efforts to locate themselves and uncover invisibility within representation.

McKenzie discussed her recent work to recover the stories and voices of her female Indo-Caribbean ancestors, brought as indentured labourers from India to the Caribbean in the mid-19th century. The interconnected themes of digging through the archives, reimagining the past, and giving voice were echoed by Bahl, who described her curatorial work in narrating the emergence and evolution of South Asian culture and art in Chicago and its cultural institutions.

As the session drew to a close, the panelists took questions from the audience, including delving into politics and creative processes of representing South Asian identities in Canadian and American contexts. Panelists also referenced the evolution of South Asian cultural politics in Toronto while the audience appreciated the attention to mixed-race ancestries and identities shown in the dialogue. The FSA-NAAAP collaboration was the first of its kind and was supported by NAAAP's corporate sponsor, Sun Life. – Nitin Deckha

Behind-the-Scenes with ROM Saris



Figure 3: Curator Sarah Fee showcases saris from the ROM's collection. © Piali Roy.

This spring, Dr. Sarah Fee, Senior Curator of Global Fashion and Textiles (Asia and Africa), and ROM donor Jayshree Khimasia gave the Friends of South Asia and the Friends of Textiles and Costume a behind-the-scenes look at saris from ROM's historic collection and Jayshree's recent donation of family heirlooms. Dr. Fee showcased a wide range of woven and embroidered fabrics, followed by an insightful presentation on these iconic garments' history, weaves, fabrics, designs, and draping styles.

Known also as a saree or sadi, the sari dates to ancient South Asia and is referenced as 'a piece of cloth' in the ancient Hindu text, the Rigveda. Each region has its own distinct weaving technique, design, and color scheme, with over one hundred ways to drape these long, flowing fabrics, which can range from six to nine yards in length. A sari can range from simple to exquisitely embellished, and historically, heirloom pieces were woven with gold or silver threads – a virtually impossible feat today. When woven on looms, each sari is a unique piece with its own design.

The construction, threadwork, and draping styles vary by region. Notable varieties include the Patola from western India, known for its distinctive warp and weft; brightly colored Paithanis from Central India; Baluchari from West Bengal; colorful Benarasi brocades with metallic weaves from Varanasi; Ikats with blurred designs; heavy bordered silks typical of South India; and handmade tie-dye Bandhanis from Gujarat, which influenced the bandanas popular in the West.



Figure 4: Behind-the-scenes with curator Dr. Sarah Fee. © Piali Roy.

Curator Dr. Sarah Fee and Jayashree Khimasia brought the stories behind these elegant saris to life, showcasing their regional diversity and cultural significance. Each sari was a testament to the craftsmanship and heritage of its origin. The event not only celebrated the beauty and versatility of the sari but also highlighted its continued relevance and adaptation in modern times. The tour was a vivid reminder of how this traditional attire remains an enduring symbol of grace and identity for women across South Asia and beyond. – Archana Dalmia

Checking in with FSA Intern Navjot Dhanoa



Figure 5: FSA intern Navjot Dhanoa in the ROM vault. © Piali Roy

On Tuesday, August 27, the FSA committee had the privilege of an exclusive vault tour led by Navjot Dhanoa, recipient of the FSA Summer Internship 2024 at ROM.

Dhanoa worked closely with Deepali Dewan, the Dan Mishra Curator of South Asian Art and Culture, contributing significantly to the curation of works by Panchal Mansaram, a key figure in the South Asian diaspora.

As part of his internship, Dhanoa spent the summer meticulously organizing, categorizing, and preserving Mansaram's collection, ensuring its long-term accessibility. Dewan and Dhanoa shared valuable insights into the artist's life and works, highlighting Mansaram's integral role in bridging Indian modernism with Canadian art history.

Highlights of the tour included Mansaram's iconic 'Maharaja', which juxtaposes Indian and Canadian imagery by drawing visual parallels between Jaipur maharaja Ram Singh and former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

This work exemplifies Mansaram's talent for commenting on contemporary issues through cultural identity. – Vishwa Patel, [Instagram](#) .

FSA Goes into the Vault



Figure 6: Curator Dr Deepali Dewan showcases a scroll from ROM's collection. © Piali Roy.

On October 2nd, FSA members participated in an exclusive vault tour at the ROM, led by Dr. Deepali Dewan, Dan Mishra Curator of Global South Asia.

Dr. Dewan selected a diverse range of paintings from various time frames, including some that haven't been displayed in years. Highlights included folk and contemporary scroll paintings, such as a contemporary scroll showcasing the story of the Titanic.

Attendees also explored Rajput and Mughal-style artworks, with the opportunity to examine inscriptions on the back of one piece. – Vishwa Patel, [Instagram](#).



FSA Membership

Membership in Friends groups at ROM is a fantastic way to financially support the Global South Asian collection at the Museum. A long history of generous benefactors led to the creation of the gallery, an endowed curatorship, innovative programming, and ongoing education about South Asian art, culture, and history.

Friends of South Asia

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Friends of South Asia is organized by ROM's Department of Museum Volunteers to provide support for the Museum. ROM is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

Alternate accessible formats are available upon request.

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