

**THE SUBALTERN CAN PAINT | SHWARGA BHATTACHARJEE, NANDINI CHIRIMAR,  
AMEEN KHALEEL, K. L. LEON, SANGRAM MAJUMDAR, MUSTAFA MOHSIN, AL-QAWI  
NANAVATI, KULDEEP SINGH, MONICA SRIVASTAVA, HEMALI VADALIA, ALEAH  
ZERANCE**

**DECEMBER 19 - JANUARY 25, 2025**

**Reception: Thursday, December 19, 6:00pm – 8:00pm**

35 Great Jones St., New York, NY 10012

Aicon Contemporary presents: *The Subaltern Can Paint*, a playful response to Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's seminal work and provocative question *Can the Subaltern Speak?* This new wave of artistic expression enables previously overlooked voices to emerge and articulate their stories through art. By reclaiming traditional narrative forms, artists from South Asian backgrounds are not only asserting their identities but also challenging dominant cultural narratives.

Contemporary South Asian art has witnessed a dynamic evolution, characterized by a blend of traditional techniques and modern themes. This resurgence of narrative art, rooted in historical practices, reflects a renewed interest in storytelling as a means of conveying complex social issues, personal identities, and collective histories. Through vibrant colors, intricate details, and diverse materials, contemporary artists are breathing new life into this age-old form, transforming it into a medium for contemporary expression.

The revival of narrative art also serves as a bridge between generations, specifically in the diaspora, connecting cultural heritage and current politics. By addressing themes such as migration, gender, and environmental concerns, these artists not only celebrate rich artistic legacies but also engage with pressing societal challenges.

South Asian art today not only pays homage to and draws inspiration from the past, but it also reimagines and transforms the way we chronicle the present. This fusion of the old and new invites viewers to reflect on their own narratives, fostering a dialogue that transcends cultural boundaries and reaffirms the significance of storytelling in the visual arts.

The artists in *The Subaltern Can Paint* embrace storytelling as a means to embolden personal and political narratives.

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Shwarga Bhattacharjee (b. 1987, Bangladesh) draws inspiration from Indian mythology, which is an integral part of the artist's identity. Through his painting practice, Bhattacharjee reconstitutes religious characters from his childhood and displaces them in a setting of his own creation. His compositions juxtapose these characters with trivial everyday objects in order to demystify the iconographic idols and force a reinterpretation of the everyday objects. Bhattacharjee received a BFA in Drawing and Painting

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from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka, and later an MFA in Drawing and Painting from Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University. The artist is currently based in Pennsylvania.

Nandini Chirimar's (b. 1967, India) work explores themes of identity, memory, and globalization through deeply personal and autobiographical lenses. Drawing from her lived experiences, she incorporates everyday objects, maps, architectural details, and personal ephemera into intricate mixed-media compositions. Her multifaceted—and often experimental—practice blends multiple techniques, frequently utilizing Japanese Kozo paper for its delicate translucency. After completing her BFA at Cornell University, Chirimar earned her MFA in Painting with Grace Hartigan at the Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute College of Art. In 2016, she was awarded the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. The artist lives and works in New York.

Ameen Khaleel's (b. 1975, India) visualization of art has been driven by his personal experiences and thought processes—he believes in marking significant life experiences through his body of work. Khaleel explores human beings from a perspective that extends beyond their existence as living organisms, exploring instead their political and social transformations in the contemporary space. His work has been exhibited worldwide, including in India, Italy, Finland, France, and Norway. Khaleel lives and works in Kerala, India.

K. L. Leon (b. 1974, India) combines natural and man-made objects in his still-life paintings, blending tradition with his unique perspective. His work evokes a sense of memory, capturing culturally specific scenes while inviting viewers to interpret their own truths. Leon's painterly technique creates a dialogue between the objects he portrays, infusing them with life and narrative. He holds a BFA from the College of Fine Arts Thiruvananthapuram (2001), an MFA in Painting from SN School, Hyderabad Central University (2003), and a degree in Botany from Calicut University, Kerala. Leon has held solo exhibitions at Kashi Art Gallery (2007) and Durbar Hall Art Centre (2000). He lives and works in Kerala, India.

Sangram Majumdar's (b. 1976, India) work is rooted in perception and explores how sense is derived from the visible world. His work proposes a participatory connection between the viewer and the subject, opening the door for narrative, memories, and direct sensory encounters. Majumdar has an MFA from Indiana University and a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. In 2019 he was inducted into the National Academy of Design. In addition to his practice, Majumdar is an Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at The University of Washington in Seattle, where he currently lives and works.

Mustafa Mohsin's (b. 1994, Pakistan) work bridges observational painting with deeply personal and reflective narratives, exploring the interplay between memory, perception, and the human experience. He draws on his mastery of light and color to document the nuances of everyday life, transforming mundane, fleeting moments into poignant reflections on connection and presence. Equally, his imaginative compositions delve into autobiographical themes, blending memories with social and political commentary. Mohsin earned his MFA from the New York Academy of Art in 2024, with his focus on Painting. The artist lives and works in New York.

Al-Qawi Nanavati's (b. 1995, India) art practice is an amalgamation of printmaking, painting, and textiles. She is heavily influenced by meditation, prayer, and repetition, frequently ruminating upon aftermath of

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loss and its manifestation in one's own life. She completed her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2017, earned a Postgraduate Certification in Indian Aesthetics from Jnanapravaha, Mumbai in 2022, and received her Master's in Printmaking from the University of Iowa. The artist lives and works in Iowa.

Monica Srivastava (b. 1997, United States) is an oil painter exploring themes of identity, family and relationships, and diaspora. She references Indian architecture as a way of questioning spaces of belonging. By making this work, she is staking her own territory and carving out a space for her existence within a South Asian, Indian-American experience. She received her BFA in painting from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2019 and received her MFA from Pratt Institute in 2023. She was the recipient of the Beverly Hallum Fellowship, the Pratt Circle award, and the Excellence in Academic Achievement Award from Pratt Institute. Her work has been shown at Abigail Ogilvy gallery, dodomu gallery, and the Brooklyn Museum. The artist lives and works in New York.

Kuldeep Singh (b. 1984, India) is visual artist with his practice anchored in oil painting, along with a decade-long rigorous training in the Indian classical dance of Odissi. The rich narrative story telling of Odissi is the backbone of Singh's visual and kinetic operation. His interlaced practice brings together issues pertaining to queerness through a sacred lens, and entwines ecology through an ecofeminist perspective. Singh completed his BFA in Applied Arts from Delhi University in 2007, simultaneously studying Indian Classical Dance under Madhavi Mudgal until 2012. He then he received his MFA in Painting and Intermedia from the University of Iowa with full scholarship in 2015. The artist lives and works in New York.

Hemali Vadalia (b. 1984, India) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work emphasizes the charm and sensitivity of traditional handmade techniques, drawing inspiration from classical masters and the beauty of everyday life. With a background in computer engineering, she transitioned into the arts after completing a Masters in Animation and Film Design from IIT Bombay. As a painter, her influences are classical and her subject matter is contemporary. Vadalia has contributed to notable projects, including painting scenes for the Academy Award-nominated film *Loving Vincent* in 2016. The artist lives and works in India.

Aleah Zerance (b. 2001, United States) is a painter known for her reminiscent depictions of everyday life. Her work delves into the quiet poetry of landscapes and interior spaces, exploring themes of memory, nostalgia, and impermanence. With a sensitivity to light and atmosphere, Zerance captures the ephemeral beauty of moments that linger in the mind but remain just out of reach—a delicate interplay of presence and absence that defines the human experience. She has been represented by the Erie Art museum in their 100th Annual Spring Show and has completed residencies in Galway, Ireland and Naples, Italy. The artist lives and works in New Jersey.