

JAGDEEP

RATNA

everything
left

unsaïd

Cover image courtesy of Jagdeep Raina.

**LIBBY
LESHGOLD
GALLERY**
AT EMILY CARR

everything left unsaid

Jagdeep Raina

January 13 - February 26, 2023

Libby Leshgold Gallery
520 East 1st Avenue
Vancouver, BC Canada
V5T 0H2

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All images courtesy of the artist and
Cooper Cole, Toronto.

Printed by Moniker Press

The Libby Leshgold Gallery respectfully acknowledges that we are located on the unceded, traditional and ancestral x̱məθḵ'əy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and sə́lilwətaʔ/səlilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) territories.

The Libby Leshgold Gallery is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts.
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JAGDEEP

RAINA

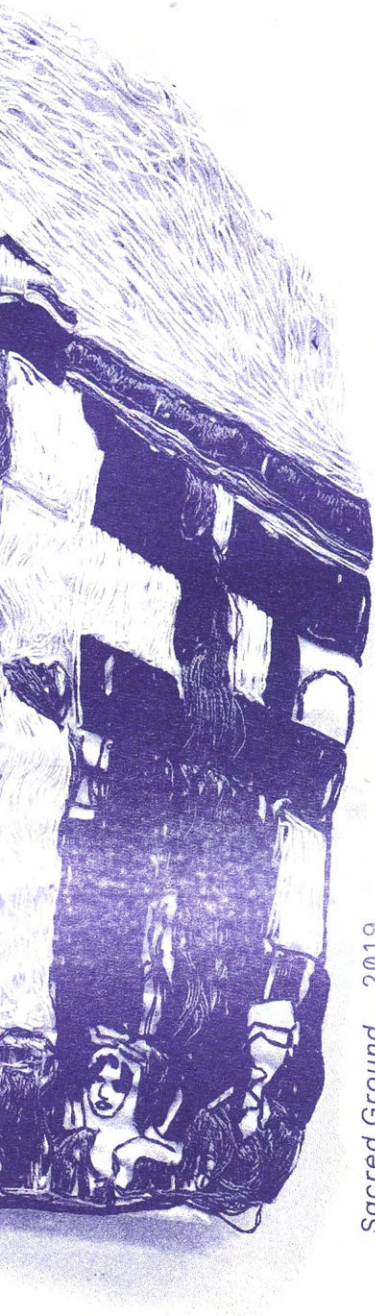
everything
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**Troy
Johnson**





Sacred Ground, 2019

I first met Jagdeep in 2018 while working as a docent at Rennie Museum, leading a tour of their Kerry James Marshall retrospective. We discussed a common appreciation for the resolute way in which Marshall worked, determined to rectify an art historical canon that had long ignored people who looked like us.

When I next encountered Jagdeep, it was 2021. We sat cross-legged in Mount Pleasant Park as he carefully retrieved rolled tapestries from his knapsack, laying them out one on top of another. We sat on the grass—threaded scenes between us—as he hurriedly but thoughtfully explained each one. I quickly came to realize that Jagdeep was in the process of carving his own path to representation in much the same way Marshall had done.

My hope is that the work in this exhibition raises questions about the idea of the archive. Who can own one? What can be in one? What purpose does one serve? I don't have answers to these questions, and I don't think Jagdeep does either, but his work probes at them, obfuscating what previously seemed clear. The subjects of his work are real and their stories—mined

from institutional archives, oral histories, personal photo albums, and even the artist's own imagination—are living. To experience Jagdeep's work is to bear witness to the lives and histories that he has been entrusted with remembering. In the threaded shapes, the pastel and graphite markings, a material history is formed.

The featured work spans a period of roughly seven years, during which time Jagdeep's drawing and painting practice has grown to include embroidered textile work and, most recently, stop-motion animation. Moving through the exhibition, one can see the artist aptly shift between these mediums, employing a range of tools and techniques to examine his subjects from every angle.

Jagdeep's work refuses to see time and memory as fixed concepts. Instead, he hopes to identify the residues left behind by human touch, and their restorative potential.

There are generations of Punjabi families without objects. Without pictures. Without textiles, hand-me-down clothes, battered utensils, love letters, heirlooms, wedding jewelry, old suitcases, primary school books, faded drawings, greeting cards, steel thalis, threadbare embroidered dupattas, cotton turbans, faded flowers between books of Punjabi poetry, books of holy scriptures passed through hands marked with the same deep lines. Lost geometries, geographies, stories, colours. Narratives fading with time.

You may ask, "Why are there generations of families without objects?" The contemporary history of Sikh communities has been a fractured one. The Partition of India into present-day India and present-day Pakistan in 1947 saw one of the largest forced migrations in history. Estimates vary, but approximately twenty million Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus were forced to migrate based on arbitrary lines created by the British imperial administration. Between seventy-five thousand and one hundred thousand women were kidnapped and sexually

assaulted. Families were forced to leave their homes, their businesses, their loved ones, their objects. They made a perilous journey to newly created nation-states and began new lives, lives with few objects from the past.

Not everyone survived this journey. The maternal and paternal sides of my own family were forced to migrate during Partition. In the decades to come, they were then affected by the political upheaval and turmoil of the following decades, particularly the volatile 1980s including the turbulent year of 1984 when Operation Blue Star, the assassination of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the Delhi Massacre against Sikhs all took place.

Sikh stories of these historical events have largely been missing and marginalized, not only in the canon of literature surrounding Partition, a key area of examination because of its wide-ranging sociopolitical effects that heavily affected millions of Sikhs as well as other ethno-religious groups, but also in other forms of meaning-making

such as artistic creation. The silencing of memories has led to intergenerational trauma for second, third and fourth generation Sikh diaspora. What we are often left with are fractured retellings. Many elders have already left us, taking their silent narratives with them back to the earth.

Acts of remembrance, whether experienced firsthand or experientially, have created a transnational discursive network which have had long-term impacts on the creation of a pan-Sikh social, religious, and political diasporic identity. While many Canadian Sikh diasporic retellings of the Partition and the violence of the 1984 Delhi massacre often unwittingly or unintentionally breach into necromantic territory and singular focus on these two events, what sets Jagdeep Singh's work apart is the deep ethical entanglements with which he creates not only art, but an archive where an archive did not previously exist.

This creation of archive affected me in a very personal way. In 2015, a few years after my father died, we sold our family home. While clearing out



Arora Archive, 2015

Families
without
objects,
and

*everything left
unsaid*

**Kamal
Arora**

boxes of our family's things, I came across a cardboard box filled with old VHS tapes and audio tapes—Bollywood movies and bhangra music cassette tapes from the 1990s. Since VCRs and cassette players were defunct at that point, we got rid of the tapes. I felt a deep sense of loss at letting go of this material history: letting go of these objects when we had such few objects of the past. I sent a photograph of this box to Jagdeep, and lo and behold, a few months later he had sent me a beautiful artistic rendering of this box of objects and called it "Arora Archive."

Engaging with Jagdeep's work over the years, I have found missing and new narratives

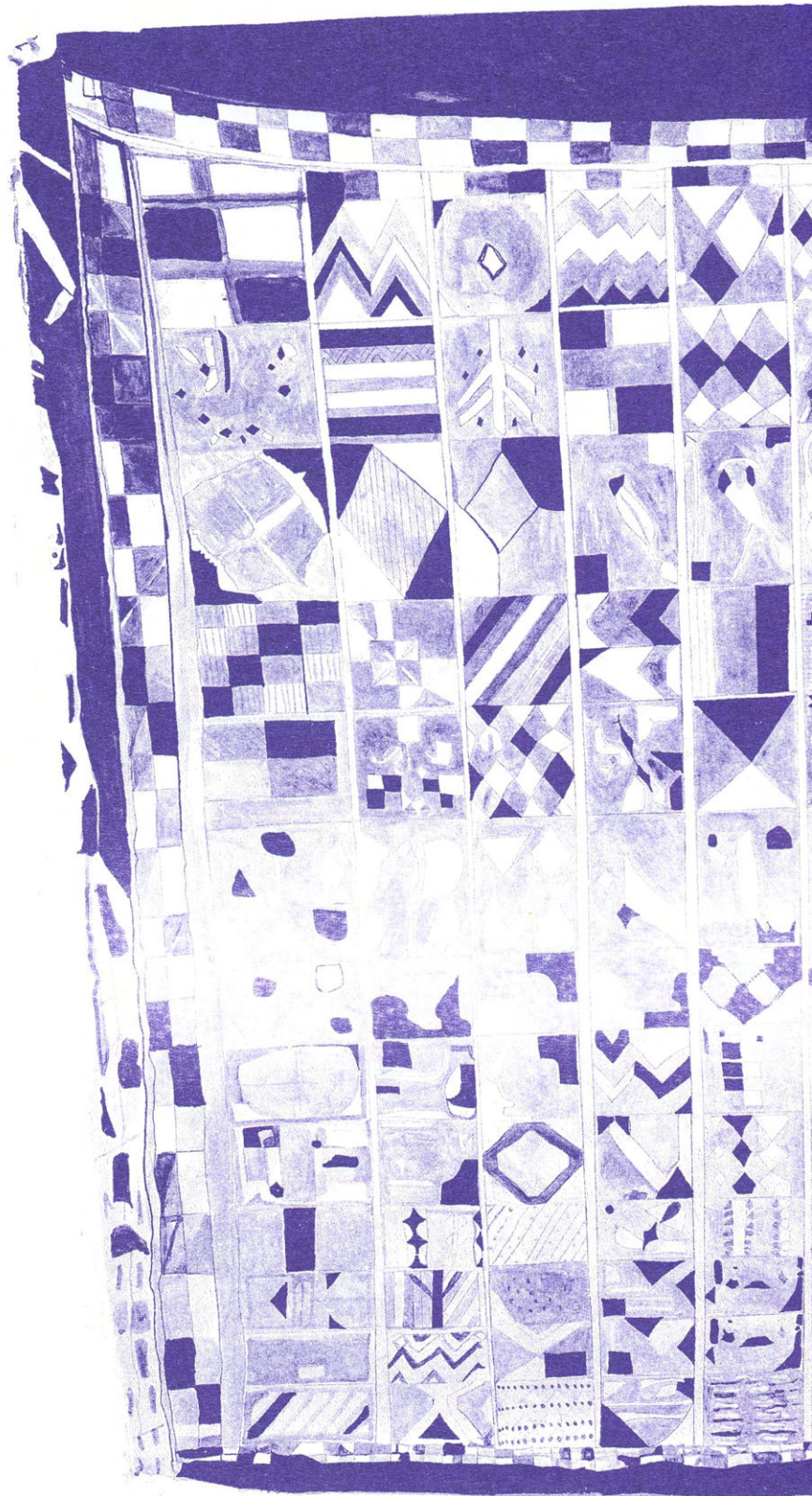
woven between the threads of his vibrant phulkari and tapestries—moments of joy, so rarely depicted otherwise, between pencil lines, renderings of quotidian life that seem to say, "We were here. We are here. Here are our stories. Here are our objects." His works hum with life, vibrancy, emotion, history. Things that are left unsaid are given new life. The archive is coming into being, from Kashmir to Punjab to Southall to Vancouver, and beyond. I can think of no greater gift to our transnational communities than what Jagdeep has created with his two hands.





Coming Over Part II, 2017

Writer
**Manjot
Baïns**





Hold Me Strong, 2022

Every now and then, when we're gathered in the family room at the back of my parent's home, Mom and Dad will share a story from their past—their childhood, their parents and grandparents, of college football matches or riding cycles to school with sisters, or about early days in Canada—and every now and then I record their stories in secret, tapping the record button on my phone. These form my own informal archive of recordings, organized by numbers and dates, but nothing else to indicate the stories embedded within these electronic time signatures. Their storytelling is happy, sometimes infused with longing and nostalgia, but there is almost always a smile or laughter in their recollection.

I listen (and record) their stories now with a deepening sense of urgency and fear. If I don't record their/my memories and stories, if I don't have family artifacts, do my family-my ancestors—exist?

There is no official archive that collects and values the stories of farmers or labourers or immigrant workers doing shift work. If we're no longer tethered to plots of land in an ancestral home, if we can't touch or smell or walk along those places, do our pasts still exist?

For children of a diaspora, home is most often not a physical space, but something more intangible, a place that can't be touched, that can only be called upon from our memories,

or the stories shared by our elders. I crave old textiles with family stories attached (there are none), or spoons or trophies or pots—something physical that I can touch, that I know they touched, that connects us across generations, this something that can reassure me that my ancestors existed, my families existed, I exist. It's a romanticization of history and heritage, a disconnect perhaps from what was and what we wish. And the ancestral objects we do have are required to do a lot of work. They have to be our land, our materials, our stories. And when you don't have them, these objects, you have to make them.

So, I record their stories, these small, seemingly impermanent connections to my ancestors, in secret.

With Jagdeep Raina's works in everything left unsaid, the tapestries and drawings are like a call and answer to his ancestors in Kashmir, telling a story of what was and what could be, of endangered crafts being re-spun and given new lives through Jagdeep's careful research and creation process—"The leftovers of this inheritance," to quote from one of the works in this exhibition. It is an immersion into the lasting effects of colonialism, of heritage, history, community, love, and loss. It is sad and hopeful, where inheritance is delivered through generational memory, craft, art, and story sharing.

Two Rivers

**Jagdeep
Raina**

When did you first see them?
Those long lost sisters—on the choppy waters.
One from the mountain, one from the fields.
In the heart of my continent that will bleed.

See them hold hands—
Their soft bodies intertwined
With tweed and silk coats,
Rowing on those little boats.
Residues of homes and dreams wasted away
on lakes and streams.

The sisters with their craftsmanship, their wit, their
charm, Gone for good.



When did you first see them?
Those long lost sisters- on the choppy waters.
One from the mountain, one from the fields.
In the heart of my continent that will bleed.
See them hold hands-
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Remnants of homes and dreams wasted away
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The sisters with their craftsmanship their wit,
their charm, gone for good.

Two Rivers, 2022

Dr. Kamal Arora holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from UBC, with a research focus on gender and Sikhism, and an MA in Gender and Development from the Institute of Development Studies. She served as Co-Director of the South Asian Studies Institute at UFV from 2017 - 2018 and has taught as a sessional instructor in Anthropology and Asian Studies at UFV, UBC, and KPU. Dr. Arora is an anti-racism and equity, diversity and inclusion advocate and now works in public health.

Manjot Bains is a writer and communications consultant at Digital Handloom, an interdisciplinary creative studio. Her practice is informed by her ancestral memories and the intergenerational stories of Punjab.

Troy Johnson is an emerging curator and occasional writer with a Bachelor of Arts in Art History from the University of British Columbia. She has held positions at Rennie Museum and West Vancouver Art Museum. She currently works at Libby Leshgold Gallery as Curatorial Assistant.

Jagdeep Raina is an interdisciplinary artist and writer from Guelph, Ontario. He holds an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and was a 2021 Paul Mellon Fellow at Yale University. Raina currently lives and works in Houston, Texas.

