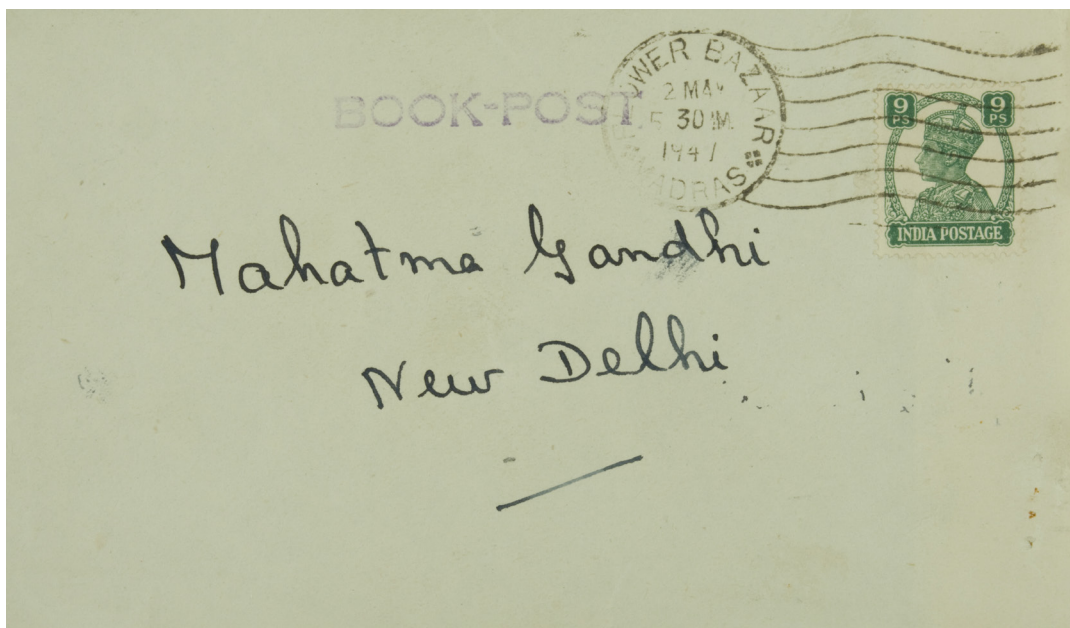


Tangled Hierarchy

Curated by Jitish Kallat

2 June – 10 September 2022



#JHGKallat

**Including contributions by:
Kader Attia, Kim Beom,
Henri Cartier-Bresson,
Mahatma Gandhi, Zarina,
Mona Hatoum, Partition
Museum, Sir Roger Penrose,
Paul Pfeiffer, Vilayanur
Ramachandran, Roger
Shephard, Homai Vyarawalla,
Alexa Wright**

John Hansard Gallery, part of the University of Southampton, is pleased to present *Tangled Hierarchy*, an exhibition that centres on a collection of five humble yet remarkable used envelopes. Each envelope is addressed to Mahatma Gandhi and all are carefully conserved within the Mountbatten Archive at the University of Southampton.

On Monday 2nd June 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten met with Mahatma Gandhi to discuss the imminent partition of the Indian subcontinent, a proposition strongly opposed by Gandhi. As a consequence of Gandhi undertaking a vow of silence on Mondays, the meeting took an unusual turn. Instead of conversing, Gandhi communicated with Mountbatten via handwritten notes on the backs of used envelopes, which are now the only surviving record of their exchange. *Tangled Hierarchy* opens on 2nd June 2022, marking 75 years to the day since this momentous meeting.

John Hansard Gallery invited the artist Jitish Kallat to curate an exhibition which considers the Mountbatten Archive and the “Gandhi envelopes” as a reference point for a series of artistic conversations and correspondences. Combining archival and scientific artefacts, alongside works by contemporary artists, *Tangled Hierarchy* explores the various relationships between silence and speech, visibility and invisibility, partitioned land, bodies, and phantom pain. Themes of maps, borders, causal loops and unsettling displacement are woven throughout the exhibition.

“The Phantom Limb” as a metaphor for rupture and psychological displacement recurs throughout the exhibition. Taking the eminent neuro-scientist **Vilayanur Ramachandran’s** *Mirror Box* as a starting point (a device he invented during his development of Mirror Therapy for phantom limb pain), **Alexa Wright’s** *After Image* series and the film *Reflecting Memory* by **Kader Attia** present ideas around the psychological experience of loss and recurrent phantom pain.

Displacement, especially in relation to partitioned land and borders, is examined in the works of **Mona Hatoum** and **Zarina**. In Hatoum’s installation *Map (mobile)*, precariously suspended fragments of breakable glass form a gigantic map of the world, while in *Untitled (coat hanger)* a cut-up map mutates into a bag. Zarina’s *Atlas of My World* explores personal recollections and feelings of dislocation through the cartographic form.

The imposition of borders, along with the enforced displacement of vast populations, lie at the core of Partition. Archival material loaned from important collections, such as **Partition Museum** in Amritsar includes two refugee luggage trunks from 1947 which convey incredible poignancy and power as symbols of displacement and belonging. A photograph by **Homai Vyarawalla**, India’s pioneering first female photojournalist, shows the vote by which Partition was ratified in 1947. Alongside French photographer **Henri Cartier-Bresson’s** *Games in a refugee camp at Kurukshetra, Punjab*, shows a group of men playing at a 1947 Partition camp. They appear bunched closely together, launching themselves forwards, arms raised, bodies entangled.

The action of repeatedly falling is formally echoed in the film *Caryatids* by **Paul Pfeiffer**. Edited sports footage shows footballers tumbling onto the pitch, their fellow players erased from the screen, and a remaining lone player is repeatedly brought to the ground by an invisible force. This endless cycle is echoed in the single-channel video *Spectacle* by **Kim Beom** wherein a cheetah and an antelope repeatedly chase each other, swapping roles of hunter and hunted, and signalling ever-shifting impermanence.

This endless cycle is further signalled through the work of **Sir Roger Penrose** and **Prof Roger Shepherd**. The *Penrose Stairs* depicts a staircase in a continuous loop – a person may climb them forever, always returning to where they began. The *Shepard Scale* offers a parallel auditory experience, its sound creating the illusion of a scale continually ascending or descending in pitch but ultimately getting no higher or lower.

The cyclical nature of history echoes throughout *Tangled Hierarchy*. Ukrainian artist **Mykola Ridnyi’s** *Seacoast*, filmed in 2008, responds to a conflict between Georgia and Russia preceding the annexation of Crimea, while also drawing parallels with the current war in Ukraine. As we reflect on the historic Gandhi notes we find ourselves once again in a tangled hierarchy - a world caught in a strange loop - where tragic human displacement of a scale similar to that of the Indian Partition is currently unraveling in Ukraine.

Jitish Kallat: Covering Letter 2012



Alongside *Tangled Hierarchy*, John Hansard Gallery is proud to present the first UK showing of Jitish Kallat's immersive installation *Covering Letter* (2012). Taking the form of words projected onto a traversable curtain of cascading fog, the piece presents an historical letter by Mahatma Gandhi to Adolf Hitler, written just weeks before the start of World War II. In the spirit of his principle of universal friendship, Gandhi begins the letter with the greeting "*Dear friend.*" Mist diffuses Gandhi's projected words, echoing the fate of his message, which went unheeded. Kallat describes this correspondence as a plea from a great advocate of peace to one of the most violent individuals who ever lived. It is equally an open invitation for self-reflection, as its scrolling words speak to the extreme violence in the world today.

Through the twinned exhibitions, *Tangled Hierarchy* and *Covering Letter*, Jitish Kallat revisits potent historical documents, drawing attention to the possibilities of peace and tolerance in a world plagued by aggression, control, and surveillance. Themes of violence, displacement, trauma and rupture are echoed throughout the exhibitions, demonstrating the cyclical nature of human history and how calls for peace repeatedly go unheeded.

John Hansard Gallery would like to extend particular thanks to Archives and Special Collections at the University of Southampton Library, and Prof Sunil Manghani at Winchester School of Art for their invaluable help and contributions in making this exhibition possible.

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Notes to Editors

Jitish Kallat was born in 1974 in Mumbai, the city where he continues to live and work. Kallat's works reveal his continued engagement with the ideas of time, sustenance, recursion and historical recall, often interlacing the dense cosmopolis and the distant cosmos. Using abstract, schematic, notational and representational languages, he engages with different modes of address, seamlessly interlacing the immediate and the cosmic, the telescopic and the microscopic, the past and present.

Solo exhibitions include: Art Institute of Chicago, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum (Mumbai), the Ian Potter Museum of Art (Melbourne), Frist Art Museum (Nashville), Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney) and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In 2017, the National Gallery of Modern Art (New Delhi) presented a survey of his work, *Here After Here 1992–2017*, curated by Catherine David.

He has exhibited widely at museums and institutions including Tate Modern (London), MartinGropius-Bau (Berlin), Gallery of Modern Art (Brisbane), Kunstmuseum (Bern), Serpentine Galleries (London), Mori Art Museum (Tokyo), BOZAR: Centre For Fine Arts (Brussels), and Pirelli Hangar Bicocca (Milan), as well as the Havana Biennale, Gwangju Biennale, Asia Pacific Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Curitiba Biennale, Guangzhou Triennale and the Kyiv Biennale. Kallat was the artistic director of Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2014, and curated the inaugural curatorial project *I draw, therefore I think* for the South South Platform in 2021.

www.jitishkallat.com

John Hansard Gallery

John Hansard Gallery is a locally engaged and internationally recognised contemporary art gallery in Southampton. Being part of the University of Southampton, the Gallery aims to create extraordinary encounters with the rich diversity of contemporary art that inspire people and communities to change the world for the better. To realise this, the Gallery creates innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary art exhibitions, events, engagement and research projects that excite, challenge, represent and reach the widest possible public audience. Learning and engagement are at the heart of the Gallery and underpin all its activities. The innovative education and public programme

is accompanied by special community-focused projects, including activities for all ages and levels of experience. John Hansard Gallery was established in 1979 and is a National Portfolio Organisation supported by Arts Council England. www.jhg.art

Image credits

Page 1: University of Southampton Library MS62 MB1/E193

Page 3: Jitish Kallat, *Covering Letter* (2012), FogScreen Projection, display dimensions variable. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

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