

Large Print Guide

Nalini Malani: Can You Hear Me?

Sep 2020 - Sept 2021



Gallery 2

This document includes large print of the interpretation panel found within **Nalini Malani: Can You Hear Me?** as well as references and quotations within installation.

The document begins with the interpretation panel at the front of Gallery 2, before moving on to the references and quotations included in the work.

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Nalini Malani: Can You Hear Me?

23 September 2020 – 6 June 2021

Gallery 2

'The Animation Chamber contains the voices in my head and my heart, simulating how the mind works, as ordered chaos. The making of these individual works often starts with a quote as a reaction to what has sparked or irritated my mind, from writers or images which give me a kind of graffiti, such as Brecht, Orwell, or artists such as Goya or Grosz, that would form a collage/montage.'

Nalini Malani

The work of Nalini Malani (b.1946, Karachi, Undivided India) gives voice to the marginalised through visual stories which often take the form of immersive installations that explore themes of violence, feminism, politics, racial tensions and post-colonial legacies.

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A pioneer of video art in India, Malani's 50-year practice includes film, photography, painting, drawing, performance, theatre, animation and Video/Shadow Play. Her work and social activism have been celebrated in museum surveys and biennales around the world.

Can You Hear Me?, Nalini Malani's first UK commission, comprises 88 projected animations made between 2017 and 2020, featuring overlapping hand-drawn images, texts and sounds. In this installation, the violent death of a child in India triggers a flow of images and ideas that transcend national trauma to address global social injustices. In Malani's universe the voiceless share centre stage with mythic characters, intellectuals and poets. Moral outrage blends with satire and absurdity.

Malani fills with books the former central reading room of the Whitechapel Public Library, transcribing quotes by influential writers such as Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, Bertolt Brecht, Veena Das, Faiz Ahmad Faiz,
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Milan Kundera, George Orwell and Wislawa Szymborska. This 21st century form of the artist's notebook is projected onto the gallery's brick walls with text and image becoming moving graffiti.

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A fully illustrated catalogue is available in the bookshop.

Please enquire at the front desk for details of the artist's limited edition.

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References and quotes

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The triggers behind Malani's creations might be a personal thought, a news story or a quote. For example:

Personal thoughts

- 'I am not bored': reactions by Malani to the effects of confinement during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 while reading Marcel Proust *In Search of Lost Time* (1913).

News stories

- 'Can you hear me?': the rape and murder case of an 8 year-old girl from a nomadic Muslim community in a Hindu temple in 2018 in the Indian region of Jammu and Kashmir.
- 'Blinding': the use of pellet guns on Kashmiri civilians since 2010 ('blinded by pellets')
- 'The Pain of Others': The report of a Dalit lower-caste youth being 'beaten to death for sitting on a chair and eating' at a wedding in 2019 in Dehradun in northern India.

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Quotes

Quotes are drawn from the fields of literature and political philosophy, by authors whom she has been reading for decades, such as: Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, Italo Calvino, Veera Das, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Mahatma Gandhi, Langston Hughes, Milan Kundera, Saadat Hasan Manto, Heiner Müller and Adrienne Rich. The figure of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (1865) appears repeatedly. Examples include:

- 'The worst illiterate is the political illiterate' (Bertolt Brecht)
- 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better.' (Samuel Beckett)
- 'If there was an observer from Mars, they would probably be amazed we have survived this long' (Noam Chomsky)
- 'Pity the nation whose sages are silenced and whose bigots haunt the air waves.' (Lawrence Ferlinghetti)
- 'Taking the line for a walk' (Paul Klee).
- 'Either we all live in a decent world, or nobody does' (George Orwell).

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- 'If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure is not to dream less, but to dream more, to dream all the time.'
(Marcel Proust)

- 'Nothing can ever happen twice ... we arrive here improvised and leave without the chance to practice.'
(Wisława Szymborska)

Malani also references other artists and visual cultural histories such as Francisco Goya, Japanese woodblock prints, Kalighat West Bengal painting and the American sign language alphabet. She re-animates ancient stories drawn from Eastern and Western mythology in her work, including from the Greek tragedies of Medea and Cassandra, to explore their intertextuality.

The titles of Malani's animations can be found in the interpretation space at the back of Gallery 2. Further information is available in the catalogue in the bookshop.

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