

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Artist: Nalini Malani (pronounced *Nar – lee – nee Mar – lar – nee*)

Title: *Remembering Toba Tek Singh*

Date: 1998–99

Medium: Video installation comprising 17 VCDs, 4 data projections, 12 television monitors, 12 tin trunks, quilts, sound

Duration: 20 minutes

This work refers to two events that have had an enormous impact on world history. The explosion of atom bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 brought World War Two to an end, and also heralded an era of military and political strategies, alliances and dynamics that determined the balance of world power for the remainder of the twentieth century. The explosion of those atom bombs is known primarily through film footage of the events, in which the image of the 'mushroom cloud' has taken on a powerful presence in our collective memory. Malani uses video projections to recall this dramatic image, as well as animated video footage of the artist's 'mutant' drawings and a spoken narrative. The other event referred to in this work is the partition of India and Pakistan, which took place in 1948. This event created two nations, one primarily Muslim and the other mainly Hindu. Many hundreds of thousands of people were killed or displaced as a result of this division.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Malani was born in Karachi in 1946 and lives in Mumbai, India. Her installations often merge drawing and painting with electronic media such as video and film. She is committed to the role of the artist as social activist, where she can address social and cultural issues that are often overlooked or ignored. Malani's practice has been described as a 'site for playing out the utopias and anxieties of all that is seen as being "outside" the given agendas, programs and reassurances that shape our present'.¹ Using texts that have been generated through the memories of those who are often ignored or sidelined by history, Malani draws attention to 'other' stories.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Discuss the nature of nuclear capability and 'weapons of mass destruction'. Are these issues critical in the world today?
- Suggest some stories and events in Australia that have been ignored by the mainstream of history.
- Can you think of other images (like the nuclear 'mushroom cloud') that have a powerful presence in today's media?

References:

Kapoor, Kamala. 'Nalini Malani: missives from the streets'. *Art AsiaPacific*, vol.2, no.1, January, 1995, pp.40–51.

Kidd, Courteney. 'Voiceovers'. *Art AsiaPacific*, no.27, 2000, pp.93–4.

McEvilley, Thomas. 'Picturing India'. *Art in America*, vol.87, no.11, November 1999, pp.49–55.

Raffel, Suhanya. 'Nalini Malani: Undertow'. In *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 2002* [exhibition catalogue]. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2002, pp.74–7.

Bombing of Hiroshima

A-Bomb WWW Museum.

<www.csi.ad.jp/ABOMB/index.html>

Hiroshima Archive.

<www.lclark.edu/~history/HIROSHIMA>

Partition of India and Pakistan

Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2000.

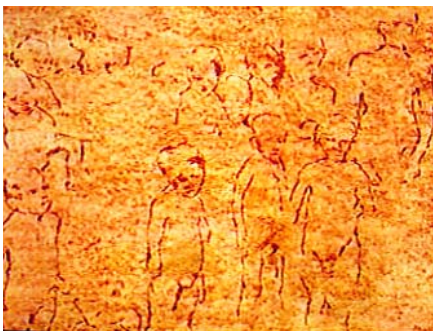
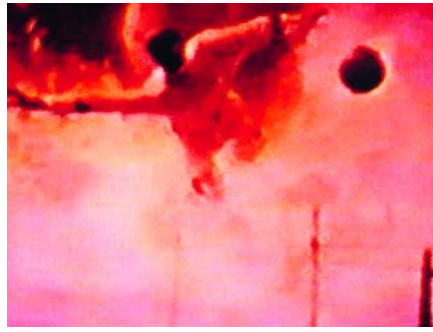
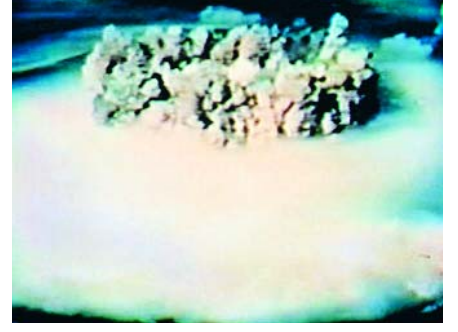
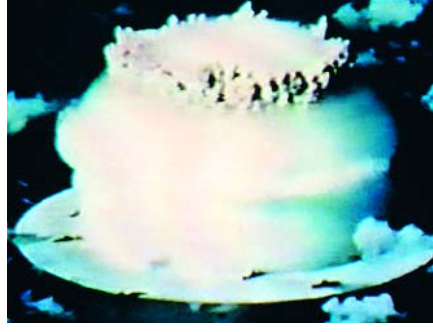
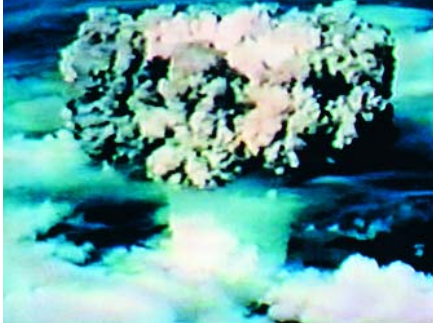
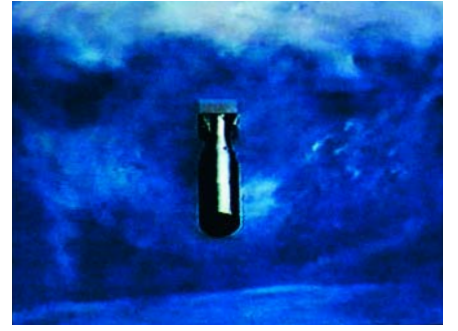
CNN Interactive: India & Pakistan: Fifty Years of Independence.

<www.cnn.com/WORLD/9708/India97>

Endnote

1 Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The mutants', in *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1996, p. 90.

Over: Nalini Malani India b.1946 *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* 1998–99 12 stills from 20 min. video installation comprising 17 VCDs, 4 data projections, 12 television monitors, 12 tin trunks, quilts, sound
Dimensions variable Purchased 2000 Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



Nalini Malani is an Indian artist who combines the practices of drawing and painting with video, film and installation art. The work that is featured in the APT tells the story of the partition of India and Pakistan. This partitioning was done primarily on the grounds of religion, with Pakistan being Muslim and India being Hindu.

Websites

<http://www.muenster.de/~dedeke/Nalini1.htm>
<http://www.glenbarra.com/collection/NaliniMalani/>
<http://images.google.com/> (search for 'Nalini Malani')

ACTIVITY

Research the history of the partitioning and try to identify key parts of the story of this event that are captured in Malani's work. Malani's origins as an artist stemmed from the Indian tradition of painting grand narratives or stories. How has this tradition been incorporated into Malani's new media and installation work? Think about the tools that are used now to tell the story.

Asian art was seen by some Western artists as being novel and exotic. There was a fascination in the foreign nature of the art. Asian art was seen to be the 'other'.

ACTIVITY

Discuss the role the arts have to play in redefining cultural domination and power relationships. How has this been achieved through Malani's work? Think about her chosen forms of artistic communication. How do these work to further the communication of her ideas?

Indian art has a long and proud tradition that captures the influence of Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic visual culture.

ACTIVITY

Investigate these traditions in examples of contemporary Indian art (see <http://www.saffronart.com/>). You may wish to research the history of the movement of these different religions through India as you can trace the impact of these ideas on the resulting artworks of various times and places.

Nalini Malani's work has many layers. She combines video, computer-generated images, objects and sound in her work. Malani believes that technology enables an artist to grapple with many images and ideas at the one time. She is interested in aspects of time, light and motion that are more easily explored through interactive media.

ACTIVITY

Malani argues that technology has given people more time for leisure and pleasure, but questions the way technology has served to progress the human mind. Discuss this question in relation to film, video and interactive works you have studied.

Malani believes strongly that it is the role of an artist to be a social activist. Through her work, she presents controversial issues, often challenging authority. She is particularly interested in presenting the stories of those who have been oppressed and whose histories are not always fully told. Through this process she hopes to present the stories of the 'other'.

ACTIVITY

How does a postmodernist view challenge ideas of a dominant power and the 'other'? How does Malani's work question the division of East and West and ideas of 'otherness'?

ACTIVITY

Think about an issue in Australian life where a minority group has limited power to present their side of a story to the broader community. For example, consider the stories of refugees, Indigenous groups, prisoners, women, children or some other group. Research a particular aspect of their story. You can use books, magazines, newspapers and Internet resources to explore the issue.

Once you have an understanding of the issue, think about the sorts of visual imagery that you could use to present their story. Record these ideas in your visual arts process diaries (VAPD) or art journal. Use this information as the basis for developing an artwork that has social activism as one of its goals.