

firstdraft

Gallery 4

9 February - 24 March

Residues

Vedika Rampal

@vedika_rampal

Residues is a material inquiry into the complex relationship between communal violence and communal rape in post-Partition South Asia.¹ To be post-Partition, is simultaneously to be post-colonial. Yet the wounds of Empire still infiltrate and seep through folds of diasporic and intergenerational memory today. Rampal's installation thus can be perceived as a site, an image of the aftermath of riot and upheaval, conscious of the weight of silence. Whether that be the silence of the archive or of history, its physical residue imprints itself upon everything it touches, violating both the subject and object, the perceptual and recollective gaze.

Like all landscapes inflicted by colonial violence, this site too is in a state of constant becoming as the wet fabric panels suspended over bale-filled hessian bags, fade and harden over time. The red pigment filled clay pots too are certain to dry. Yet residues of all that has been touched by violence remain suggesting how the dual temporality and permanence of conflict, separation, dispossession and mutilation are embedded into the consciousness of people possessing the burden of colonial history.

¹The Partition refers to the historical event of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan which resulted in the creation of two separate nation states in the departure of the British Empire.

Gallery 1
Charles Levi
Luddite/Sodomite

firstdraft
gadigal land
13-17 riley street
woolloomooloo
nsw 2011
+61 2 8970 2999
firstdraft.org.au

Gallery 2
Corey Black
You Won't Believe The Snap In Your
Throat

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Gallery 3
Amanda Bennetts
I feel the weight of the minute as I
bend my body towards the clock



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Recently graduated with BA/BFA Honours in Fine Arts from UNSW Art and Design, Vedika Rampal is an Indian-born Australian emerging artist practicing on the land of the Darug and GuriNgai peoples. Using a post-disciplinary poetics within an expansive installation practice, Rampal's work seeks to excavate histories, objects and sites from her cultural past within her diasporic present. Particularly, Rampal interrogates the colonial violences shrouding the South Asian consciousness in the aftermath of the Empire, by drawing upon inherited memories, fictive imaginings and archival research and documents. In exploring the dual trauma and yearning, plunder and resistance, inscription and reinscription within museological and gendered colonial contexts, Rampal's practice suggests the simultaneity of counternarratives to imperial histories.

Rampal's work has been shown in solo and group shows across Sydney and Melbourne such as at Dominik Mersch Gallery, Brunswick Street Gallery, VCA Artspace, and Goodspace gallery. She has also been awarded the TWT Excellence Award in Fine Arts (2023), highly commended for the Olive Cotton Award (2023), finalist in the Fisher Ghost Prize (2023) and awarded the winner of the Jenny Birt Award (2022) and the Kudos Emerging Artist Award (2021).

Artwork

Vedika Rampal

Residues, 2024

acrylic, cotton, muslin, metal, yarn, hessian, bale, jute, clay, wood
dimensions variable

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Vedika Rampal, Residues

Nikita Holcombe

Residues of colonial violence and upheaval can pool and seep through for generations. These colonial narratives slip through the cracks and are often concealed from the dominant western discourse to conceal or absolve colonial power's responsibility. Residues (2024) created by Vedika Rampal, presented at Firstdraft, forces us to bear witness to both the history and the lingering residues of violent 'The Great Divide' in 1947.

Following Indian independence and the departure of the British Colonial Empire, 'The Great Divide' tore through the land seemingly overnight. The violent division of Hindu and Muslim nations, which became India and Pakistan, resulted in violent massacres, ongoing sexual violence, and the displacement of millions of people forced to find refuge.

Rampal's own familial history of 'The Great Divide' is held softly within the installation, introduced by an earthy scent mixed with hessian and hay. A bed of bodily hessian sacks envelop the gallery floor and cradle terracotta vessels and cups filled with thick, red lacquer. Suspended from the ceiling, hovering above the hessian sacks, are a series of textile sheets with floral patterns, which have been partially stained deep blood red and fixed to rods with red string. The sculptural sheets hang high above the sightline and adopt a dominating figurative stance.

The narrative of Rampal's great-grandmother's departure from Pakistan to India during 'The Great Division' has held significant weight for Rampal, evolving from culturally integral to investigating its position within history and the archive. As a Hindu in a majority Muslim country, her great-grandmother fled with her three young children in search of refuge. They travelled by foot for weeks to Delhi from Rawalpindi. Upon arrival at a train station, she was told by a Muslim police officer that it was predicted there would be a massacre there soon. Trusting this man, she and her children left with him to safety. When they returned, they were greeted by bodies and fabrics strewn across the station, broken pots, and women's corpses in terrible conditions. Her great-uncle describes the scene as being "so much red that it looked like paint rather than blood."

The installation saturates the gallery space, preventing any freedom of movement between the hessian sacks or hanging sheets. The constriction of movement in conjunction with the highly hung sheets withholds momentary reprieve. It is invocative of a feeling of witnessing or helplessness, implicating you as the observer, or helpless bystander.

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Conversely, the soft lighting casts gentle shadows across the walls, suggesting a temporary memorial for those who were, and continue to be implicated by these untold stories. Strands of green grass can be seen sprouting in between the hessian sacks. This organic and undeliberate occurrence signifies new life and hope amongst the tragic violence, one of memory, empathy and understanding.

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