

BE(COMING) THE MUSEUM

SHELLY BAHL

VISITING ARTIST

Journey To the Muses

Site-specific intervention in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Galleries, 2023



The intervention includes two artworks by Shelly Bahl placed between various art objects on museum display stands:

- Takeaway, Ink on wallpaper, 2000.
- Songs of Lament: Ceremonial-Trinity (1994), Melted wax female figurines on a ceramic plate, 2022-23.

Curated by Asma Mahmood

This project began with a selection of two early and recent artworks by Shelly Bahl that are inspired by the artistic traditions of South Asia, and that are well represented in the collection of the Lahore Museum. For over 25 years, many of her artworks have taken inspiration from Hindu and Buddhist sculptures of female dancers, nature spirits and celestial figures.

Much of Bahl's work examines the fate of religious and culturally specific iconographies in our contemporary post-colonial and capitalist cultures. These works also reference the commodification and depersonalisation of the female body through multiple cultural contents. She is interested in the transmission and transmutation of visual culture, and the surreal experiences of women who lead trans-cultural lives. These narratives are based in facts and fictions rooted in specific cultural histories, which she then re-contextualizes and re-imagines.

Here, Bahl's wallpaper scrolls are re-shaped into two decorative carpet-like forms, as if lying on an altar. A trio of wax female figurine candles are burnt down and fused together in pools of red and white. and placed in the middle of this make-shift altar in some sort of mysterious ritual. At first glance, these contemporary artworks seem to be out-of-place, and yet, they seem to be perfectly at home within this random collection of ancient art objects. Art objects that were once created at sites of devotion and imbued with ritual significance, but which are now also imbued with narratives of colonial plunder and post-colonial neglect. On this new alter these objects of art still have stories to tell.

About the artist:

Shelly Bahl is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, educator and decolonizing art trailblazer. She has been leading and participating in BIPOC and feminist artist-run culture in Toronto and NYC for over 25 years.

Bahl was born in Benares, India, and is currently based in New York City. Bahl received her BFA (Visual Art and Art History) from York University, Toronto and her MA (Studio Art) from New York University. Her interdisciplinary work in drawing, painting, sculpture/installation, performance, photography and video has appeared in many solo and group exhibitions in North America and internationally.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE ARTIST AND THE BE(COMING) THE MUSEUM PROJECT CAN BE FOUND HERE:

