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Gautam is Leaving Tomorrow

by Natasha Baruah

"Don't Hurry, Don't Worry"

Shrine Empire Gallery

7, Friends Colony (West), 110 065 New Delhi, India

March 12, 2010 - April 7, 2010



Gautam Kansara's latest videos from the "Don't Hurry, Don't Worry" show at the Shrine Empire Gallery are bound to leave the viewer emotionally stirred. This might not be an unusual response towards a series of works that are premised to a great extent on the emotional ties within a family. What is unusual, however, is that the work itself does not explicitly seek to elicit any hearty or emotional responses; all the shots are candid footage sensitively structured so that viewers are led to feel emotions rather than watch them play out in plain terms. Captured in a series of candid and spontaneous recordings of Kansara's family, the works address questions of "memory and aging, familial hierarchies, emotional availability and cultural displacement." Many of the videos are set in his maternal grandparents' flat in west London, and portray Kansara's warm and intimate relationship with them. The artist's grandparents were born in India and moved to London in 1947; his parents were educated in Britain and moved to the US when he was very young. Two of the most poignant works in the show were the ones titled "I'm Leaving" and "Health, Wealth, Name, and Fame," a multipart project including sound installation, photography, multi-channel videos, and an edition of books with sound.



In "I'm Leaving," Kansara reminds his grandparents over dinner that he is due to leave tomorrow. Both his grandparents react in opposing ways. Grandmother mumbles under her breath and continues eating in silent resignation, while the grandfather, whose reaction is particularly heart-wrenching to watch, is reduced to helpless shock and bafflement. He ends up repeating the phrase, "leaving tomorrow?" in a quizzical and disbelieving manner, finally declaring that he has lost his appetite. The video powerfully portrays the loneliness and sense of being adrift that the older generation feels in particular with the onslaught of an unfriendly old age.

In one of the videos from Health, Wealth, Name, and Fame, Kansara's feeble-voiced grandmother reminisces over her freedom-fighting father, her girlhood and the early days of her wedding. Gradually, a picture of her as a woman emerges- strong, resilient, and talkative, as she goes about finishing her chores around the house. In another particularly lovely video from the same project, Kansara draws from his archive

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of footage of familial interactions to project the old film onto the spaces where they were originally recorded. To see those now empty spaces after his grandparents' death in 2008 reverberating with the memories of the past proves just how lifeless a space can be without the people who inhabited it.



Almost all the material for this show has been sourced from the artist's archive of familial videos shot over a period of six years. The members of Kansara's family seem oblivious to the presence of the camera, while Kansara, who features in a few of the videos, and seems to be guiding the conversation towards the desired direction, is clearly playing a part. This creates a somewhat disconcerting experience for the viewer, putting one at a loss as to how best to approach this quasi-documentary, quasi-video installation format.

But intentional confusions notwithstanding, the works powerfully articulate what they set out to do in the first place. By giving us a window into his grandmother's nostalgia for her girlhood days and his grandfather's longing to go back to his village in India, Kanasara conveys the nostalgia, sense of longing, and anxiety that a diasporic community can embody long after it has left its country of origin behind.

-- Natasha Baruah

(Images, from top to bottom: *Grandma*, *Gautam*, and *Ghalib*; *I'm Leaving*; *Health*, *Wealth*, *Name*, *Fame (Rangpur)*. All images courtesy of Shrine Empire Gallery and the artist.)

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