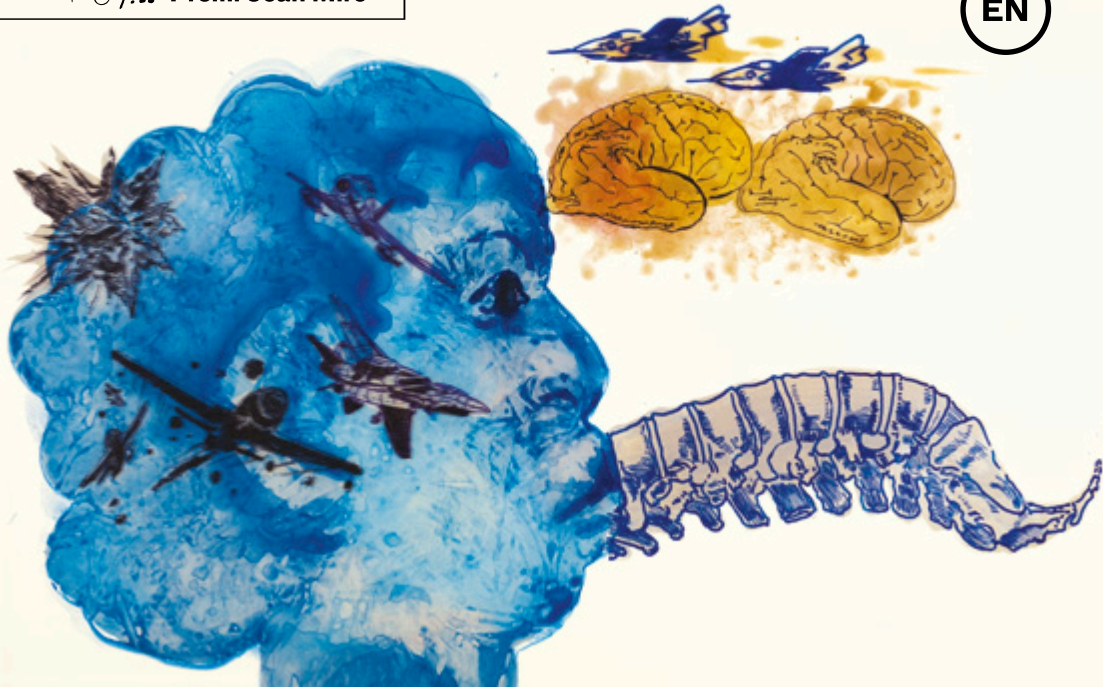


\* F... Premi Joan Miró

EN



**Nalini Malani**

You Don't  
Hear Me

20/03—27/09/2020

**Fundació Joan Miró**

\* F... Barcelona

\* laCaixa

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# Nalini Malani

## *You Don't Hear Me*

*You Don't Hear Me* is the first solo exhibition of Indian artist Nalini Malani (b. 1946, Karachi, present-day Pakistan) in Spain. It is the result of her having won the seventh edition of the Joan Miró Prize in 2019, which is jointly organized by Fundació Joan Miró and "la Caixa". Although not a retrospective exhibition, *You Don't Hear Me* explores a fifty-year career, and provides an opportunity to watch Malani's earliest film works from the late 1960s, paintings series and shadow plays from the last fifteen years, as well as a site-specific 'wall drawing/erasure performance' made for the galleries of the Fundació Joan Miró.

Nalini Malani won the Joan Miró Prize for her long-standing commitment to the values of radical imagination and sociopolitical awareness. Over an extended career, Malani has been an unremitting voice for the silenced and the dispossessed, most particularly women globally, and that is the focus of the exhibition. By alluding to myriad cultural references, from both East and West, her body of work engages viewers through immersive installations that present a richly textured vision of the complex, battered world in which we live. Her interest in ancient mythology, both Greek and Indian, as well as in modern symbols and image-making, has allowed her to develop a very personal, cosmopolitan iconographic mingling that boldly denounces contemporary violence and injustice as well as their effects on planetary life.

In *You Don't Hear Me*, Malani's explorative investigation of female subjectivity and her outspoken condemnation of violence is a reminder of the vulnerabilities and precariousness of life and human existence. In the works selected for the exhibition, the artist puts inherited iconographies and cherished cultural stereotypes under pressure. At the same time, her point of view is unwaveringly urban and

internationalist, and unsparing in its condemnation of cynical forms of exclusionary nationalism that exploit the beliefs of the masses.

Malani's works are also the result of a constant search for interdisciplinary forms to best investigate and communicate personal and political issues. Her work is based on a temporal and corporeal confrontation with the past, present and future which produces a dynamic synthesis of memory, fable, truth, myth, trauma and resistance strategies. In this way, the artist has constructed her own remarkable language of imagination and form, of sensory phenomena and complex meaning.

The works included in the exhibition are not presented chronologically and are open to more than one thematic angle, but they do reflect the main strands underlying Malani's oeuvre: utopia versus dystopia, a cosmopolitan vision of recent as well as ancient history and, more specifically, the tragic history and misunderstood role of women in the world.



Photo: Tànit Plans © Fundació Joan Miró

**Nalini Malani** was born in Karachi in 1946, a year before British India was partitioned into two different countries – India and Pakistan – which saw her family find refuge in Calcutta before moving to Bombay, a forced exile that would mark her practice as an artist. She was the winner of the Joan Miró Prize in 2019, which is jointly organized by Fundació Joan Miró and "la Caixa".

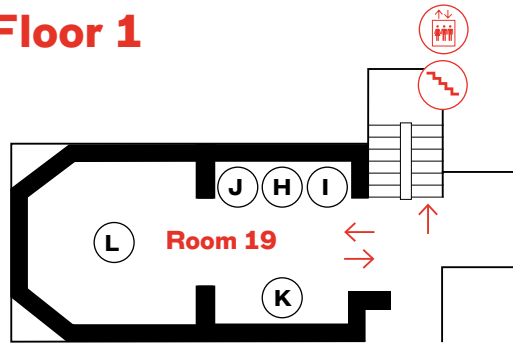
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# Map

- A *You Don't Hear Me*, 2020
- B *The Tables Have Turned*, 2008
- C *Listening to the Shades*, 2007
- D *Utopia*, 1969–76
- E *Still Life*, 1969
- F *Onanism*, 1969
- G *Taboo*, 1973
- H *Sita II*, 2006
- I *Sita I*, 2006
- J *Radha*, 2006
- K *Part Object*, 2008
- L *All We Imagine as Light*, 2017
- M *Can You Hear Me?*, 2019
- N Participatory space

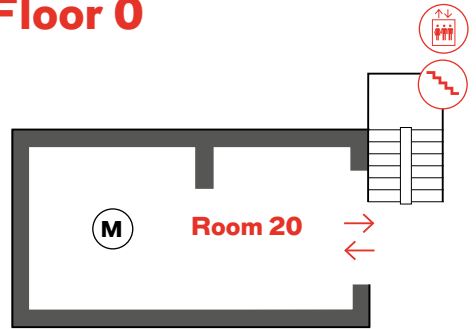
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## Floor 1



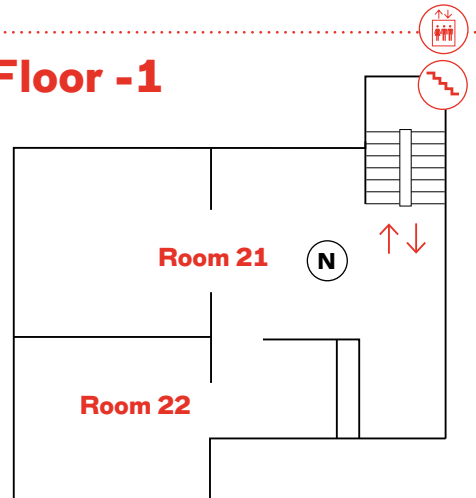
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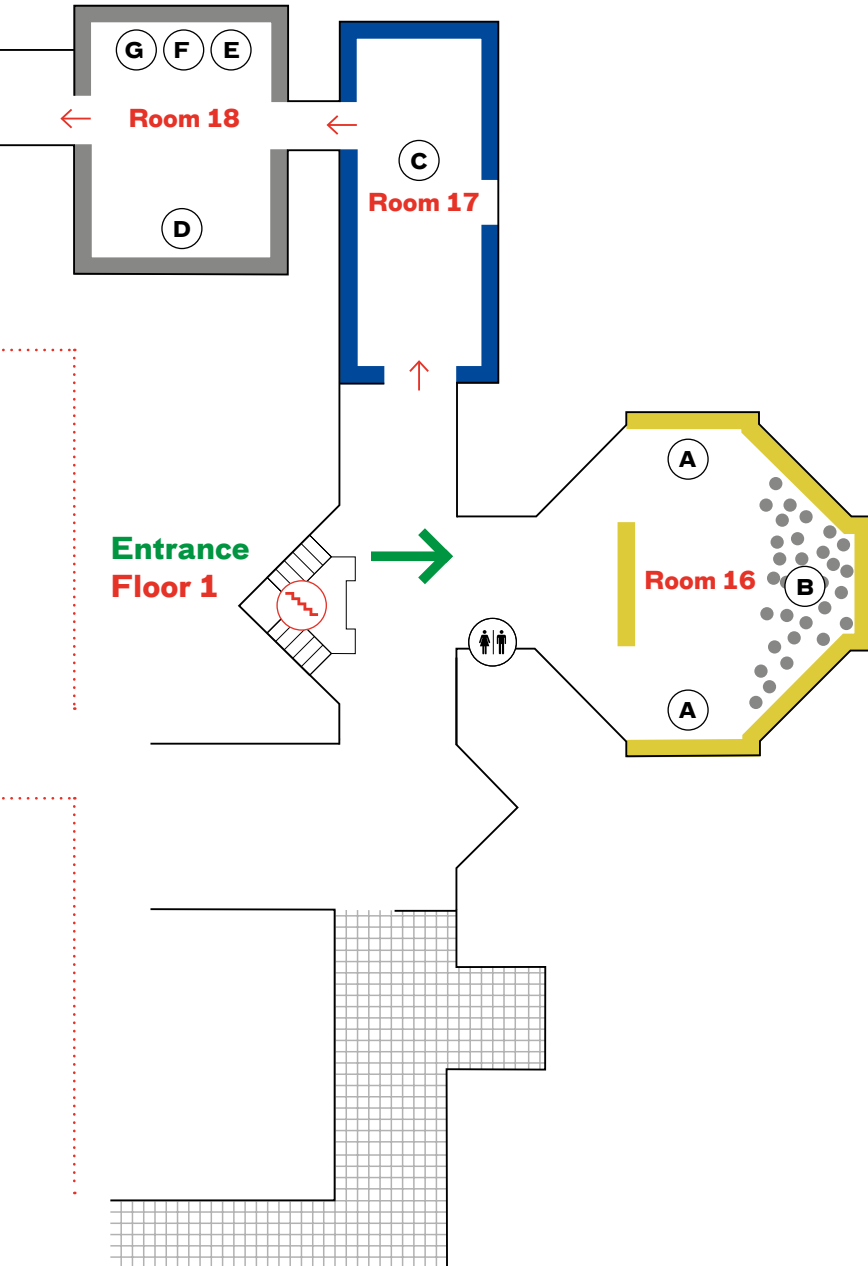
## Floor 0



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## Floor -1





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## Room 16

The exhibition starts with two of Nalini Malani's signature artworks: a wall drawing that concludes with an erasure performance and a shadow play.

*You Don't Hear Me* is a site-specific wall drawing series that spans most of the exhibition rooms and concludes with an erasure performance at the end of the exhibition in early September. Wall drawings that are later erased have been an essential part of Malani's practice. Each wall drawing/erasure performance resembles a theatrical event which remains only as a memory. This working method, where studio and exhibition walls collapse, began in 1992 with her exhibition *City of Desires* at Gallery Chemould, Bombay.<sup>1</sup> That project was a protest against the growing influence of right-wing Hindu nationalists in the Indian context. It was also a tribute to the Jaipur mural artists from the Krishna temple in Nathdwara whose works were being destroyed at the time due to grave negligence on the part of the authorities. Just as the subject matter of the wall drawings changes with the exhibition location, the corresponding erasure performance changes as well. The audience is not informed about its nature, and even the exhibition curator is only told at the very last moment, right before the performance is to take place.

The second work in the room is a shadow play installation titled *The Tables Have Turned* (2008). It consists of thirty-two reverse-painted cylinders standing on simulated, long-playing turntables that rotate at four revolutions per minute. The images from the paintings revolve, repeat and mingle in a shadow play that speaks of the dystopia of city life: a Byzantine angel, skulls, fleeing dogs in the style of Eadweard Muybridge's photographic sequences, fratricidal

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<sup>1</sup> Despite accepted use of new toponyms for the main cities in India, Malani still speaks of Bombay, and not Mumbai, for various cultural reasons. This is why the old name is still used in this exhibition.



violence between Cain and Abel as a quote from Albrecht Dürer's woodcuts – all engage in a visual dance as the consorts of Indian gods painted in the Kalighat style look on helplessly. The title *The Tables Have Turned* is inspired by Christa Wolf's book *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* (1983). For Nalini Malani, in our times the Trojan princess Cassandra represents the profound insights individuals have that are not paid heed to, as humanity continues its path in a direction further away from a non-violent, progressive society. The voice-over in this shadow play is an adaptation from Wolf's *Cassandra*, recited by actor Alaknanda Samarth.

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Nalini Malani, *The Tables Have Turned*, 2008  
Shadow play with 32 turntables,  
and reverse-painted cylinders, sound  
Exhibition view: *Nalini Malani: The Rebellion  
of the Dead – Part II*, Castello di Rivoli –  
Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin, 2018  
Photo: Payal Kapadia.







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## Room 17

The second room of the exhibition, with walls painted in an intense blue colour, features *Listening to the Shades* (2007), an all-encompassing painting installation that spans the entire perimeter of the room. The forty-two reverse paintings read as a sequential narrative. Together they form an extensive, almost thirty-metre-long storyboard for a film script. Like the shadow play in the opening room of the exhibition, this series delves into the contemporary relevance of Cassandra's ancient plight. It tells the story of Cassandra's prophecies, of the way her inner instinctive voice and her warnings were systematically ignored. In the key image or leitmotif of the storyboard, the lower part of a spinal column comes out of Cassandra's mouth, while war jets battle and explode in her head. Although apocalyptic in approach, in this sequence Malani ends the tragic story on a more hopeful note, as she finds a space for – in her words – gendered thought. For Malani, Cassandra symbolizes the unfinished business of the women's revolution: women's thoughts and premonitions are still not understood nor taken into consideration.

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Nalini Malani, *Listening to the Shades*, 2007  
42-panel reverse painting (detail)  
Burger Collection, Hong Kong  
Photo: Anil Rane



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Nalini Malani, *Utopia*, 1969–76  
2-channel film installation  
8mm film (still)

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## Room 18

The sound of film projectors precedes your entry into the next room of the exhibition. As a female visual artist working with experimental film in the late 1960s, Malani was a true pioneer. To create her early films, she became a film crew unto herself. She did the script writing and took care of set design, lighting, camerawork, splicing as well as editing. Made at the legendary Vision Exchange Workshop (VIEW) in Bombay, her first film animation was ***Dream Houses*** (1969). It was made at the height of the modernization drive sparked under Jawaharlal Nehru. It was a time of hope for a new India that was to give rights and dignity to the toiling masses and work towards abolishing the prevailing caste system. *Dream Houses* became a scintillating colour fantasy of a utopian urban landscape inspired by the colour theories of Bauhaus teacher Johannes Itten. It also reflected Malani's engagement and enthusiasm for building a new, modern India along with other artists of her generation.

In 1976 she made a second film, to function as a pair to *Dream Houses* in a diptych titled ***Utopia***. In the later film, one sees a young disillusioned woman looking down over Bombay. *Utopia* was Malani's first multiple-screen installation, meant to be exhibited with two film projectors. Here she juxtaposed two different moments: one full of the idealism and hope that modernism brought for the Indian middle class as well as the poor in the Nehruvian period of the 1960s; the other, in contrast, of the dystopian urbanism of the 1970s. Malani's critical perception of those decades reached a new level when the disillusioned dreamer and her dream merged into a single experience.

In that same period, Malani made three 16mm black-and-white films. They are reflections on the exclusion and discrimination suffered by women in India, a concern that the artist would further explore in all her later work. Despite the apparent wave of sexual liberation that reached India in the 1960s, female sexuality was still closeted and restricted by traditional mores. ***Still Life*** (1969) is a subjective



camera stroll through an apartment interior. Emotions are created without actors, as everyday objects in their natural setting take on a sensuous character. The viewer's position is that of the camera, a voyeur to the intimacy between two characters. *Onanism* (1969), like *Still Life*, was Malani's open revolt against such orthodoxy. Beyond the intention to simply shock, Malani at this young age already deeply believed in an engaged artistic practice that could establish a more humane and liberal understanding of the position of women. Lastly, *Taboo* (1973) was shot in a community of weavers in Rajasthan. The low-end jobs, such as spinning, were done by the women, but under no circumstances were they allowed to touch the loom, which was the domain of male weavers. Thus women were excluded from the most important and creative part of the process, where male supremacy ruled.

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Nalini Malani, *Taboo*, 1973  
16mm film (still)

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## Room 19

After the early films, the exhibition continues ahead with a large room whose walls have been painted black. It is divided in two sections, both filled with reverse paintings from the early 2000s. This room takes us back again to ancient times, to South Asian foundational narratives that, like the ancient Greek myths and legends Malani revisits at the beginning of the exhibition, are at the origin of pervasive female archetypes.

The first part of this section features three vertical paintings facing, across the room, a eleven-panel painting, all based on ancient Indian epics: the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, which are full of myths. While some Western ur-narratives present good and evil as a clear divide, in the Indian tales the gods can also engage in negative actions and the demons can achieve godlike powers through meditation and good deeds. With the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India in the 1980s, the very quality of the imagery of the Hindu gods and goddesses in the visual arts and literature were mutated and transformed. Fundamentalists have wanted to sanitize Indian culture of all that is playful, sensuous and pluralistic. Conversely, in *Sita I* and *Sita II* (2006) Malani reworks the story of the Indian goddess Sita, an alchemist born from the earth, who bears similarities to the Greek priestess Medea. Both of them were betrayed by their men; they were degendered and deprived of their mothering status. The other female character Malani has reworked is seen in the painting *Radha* (2006). An older, married woman who was in love with the divine lover Krishna, she had secret trysts with her lover in the forest, thus defying the limitations of her social status.

Facing these paintings is *Part Object* (2008), a polyptych consisting of twelve paintings where the depicted human figures in each of the panels can only see part of the large figure that swirls over the whole. The title refers to a term from the object relations theory developed by child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882–1960). At this

developmental stage, infants identify parts of a person and extrapolate them to represent the whole, while experience can only be perceived as all good or all bad.

In the second section of the room, the painting installation ***All We Imagine as Light*** (2017) is presented as an enveloping panorama. This eleven-panel reverse painting captures the pain of parting and the deep human feelings of affinity and affection which bind people together. The title references the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949–2001). In his poems, which combine his Hindu, Muslim and Western heritage, his reflections about death and memory are profoundly conveyed in verse form. Malani's painting is based on a longing for those from whom one cannot bear to be parted. The narrative is built through a number of figures that connect to each other in an undefined space, floating as if in a dream-state galaxy. Off-centre three children bend over a sphere, which appears as a hole in the earth, showing them the damaged landscape of Kashmir, one of the regions that has suffered most from the traumatic partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The children in the painting are surrounded by colour graphs, as if humankind could be reduced to mere numbers and statistics. On the right side of the sphere, a boy, who has suddenly grown old, stands holding a gigantic balloon in his hand, like a thought bubble that contains a fantasy of modernist promises.

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Nalini Malani, *All We Imagine as Light*, 2017

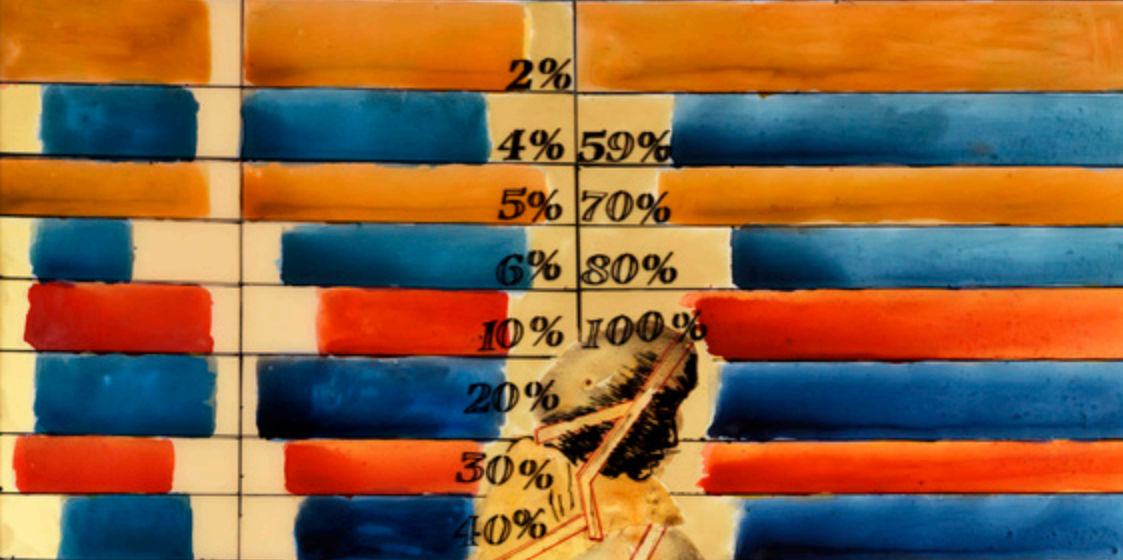
11-panel reverse painting (detail)

Burger Collection, Hong Kong

Photo: Anil Rane



YOU YOU CAN'T CAN'T FOOR RGGIUVVEE MMEME



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## Room 20

Downstairs, the last exhibition room is turned into what Malani calls an 'animation chamber'. This seven-channel video work titled ***Can You Hear Me?*** (2019) consists of a black box featuring a series of fifty-six short animations. As the pioneer of video art in India in the early 1990s, Malani continues to experiment with technology to this day. In 2017 she taught herself to make animations on a tablet, to which she also added soundtracks of her own making. These are works that she regularly exhibits as 'free artworks' on her Instagram account: @nalinimalani

*Can You Hear Me?* takes up the theme the exhibition started with through the myth of Cassandra: the fact that women's views, foresight and opinions continue not being heard. In the list of titles of the recently made animations this work has two connotations. The titles may be similar but, in fact, they address two different types of concerns. *Can You Hear Me?*, with a question mark, is the scream of a minor girl who is being violently raped but nobody hears her cry. *Can You Hear Me*, without the question mark, is a strident command, and has to do with exerting 'power', with demanding that one be heard.

These animations are like 'thought bubbles' in their character and function. When Malani sees or reads something that captures her imagination, she has a need to react with a drawing, to respond and question, to show a different angle, to laugh or to protest – not exactly on its own terms, but more as a 'memory emotion'. Each of these voices in her head come from different ideas and need therefore a different penmanship. For this she has developed a language that can be either comic, sad, modest, energetic, hysterical or piercing.

In her reaction to whatever has engaged or irritated her at any given moment, Malani often starts out with a quote from a wide range of writers whose texts she has been reading for decades, including Hannah Arendt, Veena Das, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Saadat Hasan Manto,



Heiner Müller and Wisława Szymborska. Similarly, in the spirit of a graffiti artist, she culls images from a number of different sources: from Francisco Goya or George Grosz, Japanese prints of the floating world or Kalighat paintings, to her own early paintings.

The combination of these sources is quite automatic and the making of the animations flows as if by itself and can go in any direction, with different levels of transparency and opacity. In these phantasmagoric illusions, there is room for the satirical, the comic and the absurd, but the main trigger for Malani are the following questions: Where has the idea of Utopia left us? How did we start out and what are we heading towards now? With the death of modernism and the progressive socialist state, what is our current excuse to maintain the present state of affairs and to not confront the future? Our avoidance to be made accountable for the current situation reminds her of a verse from the poem 'Nothing Twice' by the Polish poet Wisława Szymborska: *We come improvised / There is no time to rehearse life, / and nothing can be redone.*

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Nalini Malani, *Can You Hear Me?*, 2019  
11-channel animation chamber (detail). Exhibition view:  
*Can You Hear Me?*, Goethe Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan,  
Bombay, 2019. Photo: Ranabir Das

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# Participatory Space



**The Participatory Space, located at the end of the exhibition itinerary, presents two activities related to Nalini Malani:**

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In the first, a quote from the artist invites visitors to write the names of known or anonymous women on a large blackboard – women who have had significant roles in the development of the visitors' thoughts or in their actual lives.

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In the second activity, visitors retell the biographies of five women who have actively contributed to raising awareness of issues relevant to society.

Texts by Francisco Llorca, based on the *Pequeños Grandes Gestos* (Small Great Gestures) collection published by Alba Editorial.

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# Activities



**Saturday 28/03**  
**Small Stories, Great Women: Museums with Women's Eyes**

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We will learn about Nalini Malani's life and work through a storytelling and performance session led by Meritxell Yanes.

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Free activity with prior reservation

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Ages 5 and up

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**5 pm**

**Tuesday 21/04**  
***La hora de los hornos***

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The documentary *La hora de los hornos*, by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, will be shown as part of the *Per amor a les Arts* film series.

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Presentation by Martina Millà, curator of the exhibition

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Filmoteca de Catalunya

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Price: €4

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For all ages

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**5 pm**



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## Guided Tours

**Third Saturday of the month:**  
**18 April, 16 May, 20 June,**  
**18 July, 15 August,**  
**19 September 2020**

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\*On Saturday, 18 April, a sign language interpreter will join the tour

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General: 7 €

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Reduced: 5 €

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Children under 15: 0 €

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(includes entrance fee for the exhibition)

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**5 pm**

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**Thursday 16/04**

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Part of the *Totes incloses* program led by Apropa Cultura. Guided tour for professionals in the art world led by Martina Millà.

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Prior registration at [www.apropacultura.cat](http://www.apropacultura.cat)

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**6 pm**

Nalini Malani, *Endgame*, animation chamber *Can You Hear Me?*, 2019 (stills)



Saturday 16/05

## **A Day with Karishma Chugani**

A variety of activities led by Karishma Chugani, an artist of Sindhi origin who describes herself as an artisan, paper engineer, writer, illustrator and designer.

### **Telling and Telling Oneself**

A workshop for teachers, illustrators and students about developing creative intelligence. Free activity with prior reservation

**10 am – 1 pm**

### **Collective Memory Tree**

In her book *Las visitas de Nani*, Karishma Chugani gathers family memories, experiences and recipes, and uses her pencil to re-create her grandmother's story. With the help of the artist, workshop participants will create a tree of memories to pay tribute to the people who have had an influence on their cultural heritage.

Workshop for families

Ages 5 and up

Please reserve in advance

€7 General admission

€6 Family Card

€4 Friends of the Fundació

**5 – 6:30 pm**

### **Book Presentation** *Las visitas de Nani*, by Karishma Chugani (Editorial Ekaré)

Activity organized jointly with Editorial Ekaré, with the author and the editors.

**6:30 pm**



Saturday 13/06

### **A Long Story**

Artist's book workshop with Julia Pelletier

Animation workshop with Laura Ginés

Nalini Malani's production spans a broad range of techniques.

Through books and audio-visual animation, we will share an afternoon of activities full of voices that rise up together through experimentation.

For all ages

Free activity

**4 – 7:30 pm**

## **Collaborative Projects**



### **Listening to Nalini Malani**

This project with students from the Fashion Department at the IED Barcelona Escola Superior de Disseny promotes a reflection on ethical design (working and production conditions, environment, sustainability) in the fashion industry.

### **My World**

We will create an artist's sketchbook inspired by Nalini Malani's references and based on the personal experiences of students aged 10 to 12 from the Escola Poble-sec. We will be working with support from both the school staff and the students' families.

### **Latent Voices**

A project aimed at giving a voice to women with images as tools for making art.

A project designed by ClICME with the participation of the Associació Intercultural Diàlegs de Dona





A project curated by Martina Millà, Head of Exhibitions at Fundació Joan Miró.

*Nalini Malani: You Don't Hear Me* will be on show at the Fundació Joan Miró from 20 March to 27 September.

Entrance tickets to the temporary exhibition can be used for two separate visits. The ticket should be activated at the museum reception.

Fundació Joan Miró would like to thank Burger Collection, Castello di Rivoli and Galerie Lelong for their help and collaboration.

Front cover: Nalini Malani, *Listening to the Shades*, 2007. Back cover: Nalini Malani, *Can You Hear Me?*, 2019

All images are courtesy and copyright of the artist.

Design: Estudio Diego Feijóo

D. L. B 5781-2020

100% recycled paper

With the support of:

Burger COLLECTION

As per request of the artist, this exhibition only includes artworks from museums and private collections in Western Europe, in line with her long-term commitment to more sustainable exhibitions.

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**Fundació Joan Miró**

\* J... Barcelona

 **la Caixa**

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[www.fmirobcn.org/nalinimalani\\_en](http://www.fmirobcn.org/nalinimalani_en)  
#NaliniMalaniFJM