

Large Text Guide

P. Mansaram: The Medium is the Medium is the Medium

February 2 – March 23, 2019

Curated by
Indu Vashist and Toleen Touq

Co-presented with SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Centre), a non-profit, artist-run centre in Canada dedicated to developing and supporting the work and visibility of culturally diverse artists.

SAVAC

**Art
Museum**

Art Museum
University of Toronto

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Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
University of Toronto Art Centre

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Introduction

He chose to create disruption to create continuity. Disruption became his medium.

The exhibition *P. Mansaram: The Medium is the Medium* is the Medium thinks through the artist's decades-long practice of repetition. Strategically using recurrence and reproduction through a variety of media including drawing, painting, collage, text, sculpture, xerox, silkscreen printmaking, and film, P. Mansaram invokes unending feelings of travel: through time, dimension, and territory.

P. Mansaram was born in 1934 in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India, and attended the Sir J. J. School of Art. Shortly after studying at the Rijks Academie in Amsterdam, he migrated to Canada in 1966. In 2016, the ROM acquired over 700 pieces from the artist's archive reflecting over 50 years of his work.

Selected works included in this exhibition highlight both material and spiritual elements from the artist's surroundings and everyday life—including characters, symbols and spaces—to convey the artist's meditative and transcendent processes in both form and content. In that regard, the ways in which P. Mansaram assembles different media and creates a sense of place present the viewer with a nuanced narrative of the diasporic experience.

P. Mansaram: The Medium is the Medium is the Medium

Repetition is practice.

Repetition is tedium. Repetition is love.

Repetition is mastery. Repetition is play.

Repetition is memory. Repetition is cleansing.

Repetition is purposeful.

Repetition is control. Repetition is transcendence.

Repetition is meditation. Repetition is work.

Repetition is concentration. Repetition is contemplation.

Repetition is disruptive.

Repetition is building. Repetition is starting over.

Repetition is futile. Repetition is insistence.

Repetition is boring. Repetition is god.

Repetition is practice, again.

Looking, repeatedly, at P. Mansaram's sizeable body of work, one can slowly start to discern trends, commonalities, and intangible narratives between artworks across time. Over the course of his five-decade career, he has produced paintings, prints, sculptures, photographs, videos, and textile-based works. From one work to another, colours and images—human figures, animals, buildings, geographies—take on new meanings, changing over time and in different contexts. In his work, he has found ways for the ancient and modern to coexist, building on each other to create unexpected temporalities.

P. Mansaram's oeuvre defies simplified categorization. In his reimagining of time, historical ruptures—whether in his personal life, his home country of India, or his adopted home in Canada—do not create amnesia; rather, they add more ingredients to his creative process. They complicate metaphors and symbols. They appear, for instance, as a hand-drawn invocation of a lustful sun god framed in lace in *Machine and Khajuraho*, an homage to the 1,000-year-old erotic carvings of Khajuraho. To make the *Delwara Columns*, he spent hours playing around in photocopy shops in the '70s to create three-dimensional collages of the ancient carvings on the pillars of the temple in Delwara, near his hometown in India, layering the original images to create a fantasy sculpture. Throughout

P. Mansaram's work, we find figures morphed, redrawn, repeated, and mirrored, conjuring unending feelings of travel through time, dimension, and territory.

During a long studio visit at P. Mansaram's house in Burlington, we mention that his technique—the fluidity, repetition, and dream-like imagery—reminds us of a daily yoga practice. In response, he recounts a half-hour-long story that begins in 1934, with his birth in Mount Abu, and ends in Bombay in 1955, when he first encountered yoga practice and incorporated it into his life. Taru, his love, admonishes him, “not all stories need to start in Mount Abu.” But for him, all stories do start there—with his birth, and the birth of the nation.

During the Indian independence movement, hand-woven Indian textiles became symbols of protest. The practice of weaving was an essential way to rebel against British economic control—which is why still today, by law the Indian flag must be made of khadi, a hand-spun cloth. P. Mansaram's first position after art school was at the Weaver's Service Centre in Calcutta. He took the opportunity to experiment with traditional weaving practices in the creation of cutting-edge textile works—one of which was used to decorate the room where Jackie Kennedy stayed as Jawaharlal Nehru's guest in 1962. The piece still hangs there today. P. Mansaram's life has been marked by a kind of kismet that was characteristic of the post-independence period. When Mansaram was in his twenties and thirties, Nehruvian socialism ignited experimentation in India. It was time to create a new nation, new societies, and new art forms.

Buzzing with the vibrancy of millennia of arts and culture, P. Mansaram carried this energy over to Canada in the late 1960s. At that time, Canada was a younger, more confident settler-colonial state that proclaimed history began sometime in the late 1800s—no matter that Indigenous life had, and has, continued to refuse the state's attempted rewriting of history. Today, we still ask, how do the ancient and the contemporary co-exist here? How can an art practice like P. Mansaram's, with its reimaginings of time and place, help us to reclaim, reconcile, or break constructed linearities between past and present, east and west?

Serendipity followed P. Mansaram to Canada, and he quickly established his art practice in his new home. He began teaching, and would go on to train generations of art students. He experimented with new technologies, and created happenings and exhibitions with cultural theorists like Marshall McLuhan and gallerists like Av Isaacs. He was able to think through form, theory, and artistic strategies. Within his practice, he unburdened images laden with meaning and freed his work from cultural constructions of a binary between east and west. Rather than falling back on nostalgia and loss, P. Mansaram used strategies that gave space for his practice to expand playfully, for his images to develop new connotations in a global context. He chose to create disruption to create continuity. Disruption became his medium.

In *The Medium is the Medium is the Medium*, a medium is means for communication, messaging, or poetry.

A medium is a middle or halfway state or ground.

A medium is a person, animal, or object through which disembodied spirits communicate with embodied spirits.

A medium is the singular of media.

A medium is a message.

A medium is a medium.

The medium became his strategy.

In a number of P. Mansaram's pieces, we find a horse. On a green pasture of paint, its plastic figure dashes along, facing both a miniature Maharaja horse and a crudely hand-drawn replica of that same horse. In a video, a horse is pissing on the streets of Bombay. On paper, a regal horse's leg has been replaced by that of a man.

This hallucinatory repetition is both intentional and spontaneous, both rigorous and playful, both personal and public. It creates a thread of lineage between Mansaram's works, much like other artists' use of technique or subject matter to create their own continuities. As Mansaram once gently explained, seeing an image in multiple places is akin to being in love—the image of your lover appearing to you everywhere. Insistently imprinting its image seems to be his way of enacting love.

Opening Events

Reception

Saturday, February 2, 2019, 5–7pm

Opening remarks at 6pm

University of Toronto Art Centre

Extended exhibition hours until 12am

Night of Ideas

Saturday, February 2, 2019, 7pm–2am

Hart House

A night of thinking through the urgencies of our time, with screenings, talks and performances

Public Programs

Yoga Nidra with Taryn Diamond

Monday, February 11, 2019, 6pm

* Register at artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Curatorial Tour with Indu Vashist and Toleen

Touq

Wednesday, March 6, 2019, 6:30pm

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Artist Talk with P. Mansaram

Saturday, March 16, 2019, 1pm

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Drop-In Tours

Every Tuesday, 2pm

List of Works

Maharana Pratap, 1967

Mixed Media

Magic Game, 1967

Construction, acrylic, marker on hardboard

Machine & Khajuraho, 1971

Mixed media on canvas

Squares, Circles, & Khajuraho Sculptures, 1971

Serigraph on cloth

Mystic Image, 1966

Mixed media on plywood

Scattered People, 1993

Ink on fabric

Private Conversation, 1982

Ink on fabric

Moon Trip, 1966

Mixed Media

Rear View Mirror #56, 1967

Mixed media on plywood

Rear View Mirror #31a, 1969

Mixed media on plywood

Untitled 1, 1970

Screen print and paint on sheet metal

The Message Man, 1969

Rear View Mirror #3, 1969

Serigraph on paper

Rear View Mirror #54, 1969

Mixed media on plywood

It's Hard to Give, 1969

Mixed media on plywood

Rear View Mirror #51, 1970

Rear View Mirror #32, 1970

Rear View Mirror #33, 1970

Mixed media on canvas

Rear View Mirror #31, 1970

Mixed media on canvas

Left:

Rear View Mirror #26, 1970

Rear View Mirror #24, 1970

Centre:

Rear View Mirror #31, 1970

Right

Rear View Mirror #19, 1970

Mixed media on canvas

Rear View Mirror #726
Mixed media on canvas

Rear View Mirror #725
Rear View Mirror #727
Mixed media on board

Delwara Column 1, c. 1980
Delwara Column 2, c. 1980
Mixed media

Rear View Mirror, 1966-2011
16mm film transferred to video, 13m

Devi Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth, 1979
16mm film transferred to video, 16m

Staff

Art Museum

Barbara Fischer, Executive Director/ Chief Curator

Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Curator

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Seika Boye, Adjunct Curator

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Sajdeep Soomal, Communications and Outreach Coordinator

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Visiting the Art Museum

Locations

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
7 Hart House Circle
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University of Toronto Art Centre
15 King's College Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7
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Please note: The wheelchair access to the University of Toronto Art Centre is temporarily closed due to University College Building Revitalization construction. If you plan to visit the University of Toronto Art Centre and need accessibility assistance, please contact Art Museum Staff to arrange an escort through the construction zone. The Justina M. Barnicke Gallery location in Hart House is wheelchair accessible.

Admission is always free.

Hours

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|-----------|---------------|
| Monday | Closed |
| Tuesday | 12:00–5:00 PM |
| Wednesday | 12:00–8:00 PM |
| Thursday | 12:00–5:00 PM |
| Friday | 12:00–5:00 PM |
| Saturday | 12:00–5:00 PM |
| Sunday | Closed |

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