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ARTIST'S PROJECT: *A city will share her secrets if you know how to ask* (2020)

by Chitra Ganesh and curated by Riya Lerner

A city will share her secrets if you know how to ask (2020), digital prints on laminated vinyl, site-specific QUEERPOWER facade installation by Chitra Ganesh, was originally created for the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art's annual site-specific QUEERPOWER commission. The project is an abundant and temporally layered love letter to New York City. Incorporating both historical and speculative imagery, this public artwork decentralizes New York City's settler-colonial history to celebrate the narratives of those queer, transgender, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (QTBIPOC) alongside flora and fauna native to the region.

The project was guided by the concept of accessibility, both physically—the installation was a street-facing public work of art on view 24/7—and moreover, *accessibility* in the sense that it reveals those narratives that have been deliberately excluded and erased. Importantly, reiterating this project in print form releases it from its static geographic bindings and extends Ganesh's rigorous research and powerful representation of QTBIPOC histories for an audience beyond New York City. In this way, *A city*, through the distinct type of public space of a circulating, printed journal, becomes a mobile and expansive love letter, one that collectively reimagines queer space and futurity through the eyes of each new viewer. Additionally, it is important that this project transcends its original site because although it is contextualized through the specificity of New York City's history, it speaks to common narratives and histories that have been marginalized everywhere.

Images for this project are courtesy of the artist and the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art.

Riya Lerner

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Chitra Ganesh (b. 1975) is a Brooklyn-based artist whose drawing-based practice brings to light narrative representations of femininity, sexuality, and power typically absent from canons of literature and art. Her wall installations, comics, charcoal drawings, and mixed media works on paper often take historical and mythic texts as inspiration and points of departure to complicate received ideas of iconic female forms. Ganesh's studies in literature, semiotics, and social theory have been critical to a steady engagement with narrative and deconstruction that animates her work. Her visual vocabulary draws from surrealism, expressionism, Hindu and Buddhist iconography, and South-Asian pictorial forms, such as Kalighat and Madhubani painting, connecting these with contemporary mass-mediated visual languages of comics, science fiction, news photography, and illustration. Since 2004, Ganesh has maintained a long-term collaboration with Mariam Ghani as *Index of the Disappeared*, an experimental archive of detentions, deportations, and human erasures, as well as a public platform for dialogue on related issues.

Ganesh graduated from Brown University with a BA in Comparative Literature and Art-Semiotics and received her MFA from Columbia University. Ganesh's work is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art; The Brooklyn Museum; The Art Institute of Chicago; The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; The Ford Foundation; the Devi Art Foundation; Kiran Nadar Museum; the Saatchi Collection; BurgerCollection; Deutsche Bank, among others. She is the fourth artist commissioned for the annual Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art's QUEERPOWER façade installation.

Riya Lerner (b. 1982) is a New York-based artist and curator. She is the creative content manager at Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art and the curator of the Museum's annual QUEERPOWER façade commission. Lerner is part of an ongoing collaboration with artist Gwen Shockey that investigates lesbian space and memory in New York City, called *The Addresses Project* (Addressesproject.com).



















