

Curated by Pakistani **curator** Aziz Sohail and the gallery's Head of Exhibitions, Deborah Robinson, the show has been in development since the **pandemic** in 2020. Sohail was invited to guest curate following a British Council-supported curatorial residency in 2015 at the New Art Gallery Walsall. Sohail's research focused on networks of friendship, making and community in the South Asian diasporas of the **UK, USA** and **Canada**, and the exhibition was developed by following these traces and grounding it in the Midlands, with a strong focus on queer artists. It relies heavily upon the multiple identities of diasporic communities propounded by the late theorist Stuart Hall. The show contends that **art** can contribute to community growth forming, what Sohail and Robinson describe as "a means of resistance and survival".



Exhibition view of *The World that Belongs to Us*, The New Art Gallery Walsall, UK, Works by Chitra Ganesh
Image: Courtesy of Jonathan Shaw

The exhibition emphasises the relationship between the intergenerational artists to showcase lineages and threads of support across generations. For many in the **South Asian art** world, the way to learn and be inspired is to witness the past and honour these histories. In an interview with STIR, Sohail mentions, "Chitra taught Jagdeep Raina and there is testimony to her influence and impact on Jagdeep's development in the **textile** work *Club Kali* which contains a poem in honour of Chitra. Sunil Gupta has been hugely important for younger queer artists due to his trailblazing scholarship. How can we think of his **photographs** from the 1980s in relation to Salman Toor's paintings today, is a thread that could be explored for example." Another connector is a cultural and political organisation, for instance: Sunil Gupta and Roshini Kempadoo who worked together a lot in the '80s and '90s were responsible, along with others, for the formation of Autograph, an organisation that supports photographers and filmmakers working with issues of race and representation. Around this time Chila Burman Kumari Singh, who was also part of the Black Arts Movement was organising exhibitions and projects with other artists and was part of publishing cultures. The work done by these artists in the 1980s onwards has allowed emerging practitioners to flourish.



British Sikh Soldier series (detail), 2012, Hardeep Pandhal
 Image: Courtesy of Jonathan Shaw

The animated film *Before the War* (2021) by **Brooklyn**-based artist Chitra Ganesh with **music** by Music by Saul Williams, along with the rest of her works including the lightjet prints *How We Do at the End of the World* (2011) and *She the Question* series (2012); and the ongoing site-specific floor installation *Kolam* (2004) draws influence from a rich repository of **feminist mythology** and **science fiction**, literature, **graphic novels** and **video games**, the **animation** talks about resilience and survival in the face of a global pandemic. A series of women who are adorned like fantastical figures, fly and ride with an equal flair, in a blooming world populated by nature. The bright colours and animations destabilise gender identities, especially concerning South Asian stereotypes such as being coy, reclusive and timid.



Arrival series, 2022, archival inkjet prints, Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh; (left to right) Nick, Uganda; Golam, Bangladesh; Williams, Nigeria; Eric, Venezuela; Ngwah Grace, Cameroon
 Image: Jonathan Shaw; Courtesy the artists; Commissioned by Fierce on the occasion of the Commonwealth Games, Birmingham, 2022

Elsewhere, stereotypes associated with Sikhism are explored. "Today, Sikhs make up a large percentage of the South Asian diaspora in the UK, US and Canada and have been important within the recent history of these countries, such as with the Komagata Maru incident in 1914 in Canada, which is addressed by the artist Pamila Matharu also in the exhibition," explains Sohail. *The Sikh Soldiers* (2012), an early series of **multimedia** paintings by Hardeep Pandhal, subverts the archetypal representation of the Sikh Soldier or warrior in British colonial history. His character is brought together with both real and fictional figures from science fiction, video games and films, challenging ideas around masculinity, inclusion and representation. Continuing to draw on themes of play and gaming, the artist has invented the character *Sepoy Man*, based on soldiers who fought for the British army, for a new series of ink-on-paper works.

The **photographer** Sunil Gupta has consistently channelled his artistic and curatorial endeavours towards social and political discourse, with a specific focus on issues related to queer identity and race. Two distinctive bodies of work, namely *The Black Experience* (1986) and the recent portrait-series *Arrival* (2022), collaboratively produced with his partner Charan Singh, delve into the enduring effects of British **colonialism** and the persistence of discriminatory penal codes across numerous Commonwealth nations. Commissioned as a significant component of the cultural program aligned with the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, the compelling series of photographic works illuminates the consequences of these historic laws, with a particular focus on **LGBTQ+** refugees and asylum seekers. The protagonists of the portraits, who have sought refuge in the West Midlands to avoid persecution, underline the diversity of the population inhabiting the Midlands.

The title of the exhibition *The World that Belongs to Us* is borrowed from a book of poetry edited by Aditi Angiras and Akhil Katyal. There is a level of accessibility across the works that has an immediate sensory impact and there are many complex conversations and dialogues between works to be unravelled. The exhibition is both celebratory but also poignant, touching upon the multiple experiences of diasporic and queer identity and community building.

Read on: [Animation](#) | [Art Exhibition](#) | [art gallery](#) | [Brooklyn](#) | [Curator](#) | [Feminist](#) | [Music](#) | [Photographer](#) | [Photographs](#) | [Science Fiction](#) | [South Asia](#) | [South Asian Art](#) | [United Kingdom](#) | [United States](#) | [Video Game](#)