

WALLACH ART GALLERY

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK



Gauri Gill, *Indian grocery store in Queens, New York 2004* from *The Americans, 2000-2007*, archival pigment print, 27 x 40 in.

New York, NY—Columbia University’s Wallach Art Gallery is excited to welcome Americans of all backgrounds to [*Looking for Ourselves: Gauri Gill’s The Americans, 2000–2007*](#), the institution’s first solo exhibition of a contemporary artist based in South Asia, Prix Pictet-winning photographer **Gauri Gill** (b. 1970). Opening on March 22 and running through April 7, the exhibition focuses on an early body of work from the photographer’s oeuvre, *The Americans, 2000–2007*. It will be the first time this series has been exhibited in America since its inaugural tour from galleries and museums in India to the US exactly 16 years ago. *Looking for Ourselves* looks beyond commonplace rhetoric and imaginings of immigrant life in America. Grappling with the family album as a site for collective histories, personal memories, and dreams, the exhibition invites visitors to consider their own evolving narratives as Americans.

Throughout her practice, Gauri Gill has followed individuals on the margins of society—indigenous people, subordinate castes, nomads, small farmers, and laborers. Her work has focused on uncovering the intricacies of their daily lives, particularly the ways they rise above the precarious nature of their situation. The photographer has been committed to what she calls “active listening,” as she works both with and through the communities she depicts.

In the mid-'90s, Gill began to photograph her South Asian family and friends in New York, recognizing their community’s absence in classrooms and museum spaces. Taken before and after 9/11, *The Americans, 2000–2007* reflects Gill’s consideration of diasporic existence during a period in which immigrant belonging was increasingly questioned by the American media and the state. The series reveals the discoveries of Gill’s seven-year journey from rural towns to metropolitan cities around the United States. Despite taking the name of Swiss American photographer Robert Frank’s iconic 1958 photo documentary project, Gill’s work entirely breaks from his quick shots of strangers across America. She drew on the lived histories of her own family, friends, and acquaintances to cultivate deeply personal portraits.

The title of this exhibition comes from the powerful act of looking for ourselves within the family album. Evoking the commemorative and happenstance moments found in family albums, Gill's work engages with family photographs as sites for "articulation and aspiration," a framework proposed by visual studies scholar Tina Campt. In the thirty-four works from the extensive series on view in this exhibition, Gill encourages viewers "to enter the frame" and actively engage in a dialogue with her subjects. In the privacy of their own homes, at funerals, and in front of the cash register at work, they appear contemplative, questioning their own place within America. As we look at the photographs, we see parts of ourselves—curiously murky and unfamiliar. The work provokes the pondering of the paradoxes of immigrant existence riddled with poverty, success, xenophobia, and acceptance. Simultaneously, it prompts the consideration of the constant mining and renegotiation of dreams and realities of American life. In what Gill calls "a kind of family album," she sparks thoughtful questioning of what it means to be South Asian in America as well as what immigrant claims to Americanness entail.

With the rise in anti-immigrant political discourse and ongoing surveillance, racial profiling, and hypervisibility of AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) communities, this exhibition is urgent and fundamental to our understanding of ourselves in a nation built upon difference. "I was profoundly influenced by conversations surrounding the deaths of Indian international student, Jaahnavi Kandula in Seattle in early 2023, and more recently, the death of Sikh taxi driver Jasmer Singh in New York" says **curator Roma Patel**. "These instances of hate crime are heartbreaking yet common headlines in America today. As our community mourns these individuals, we grapple with how such stories are tied to immigrants' histories and reflect our own ongoing questioning, examining, and reassessment of our existence as Americans. In this exhibition, I hope to complicate understandings of what being American looks and feels like for immigrant communities, recognizing our constant metamorphosis in imagining our American identity and experience."

Coinciding with this exhibition, the curator invites the broader South Asian American community to share photographs from their family albums. [The South Asian Americans](#), an independent Instagram-based archive-in-the-making. Inspired by Gauri Gill's belief that "every person's story is equally valid," Patel's project invites individuals who identify as South Asian American to share the stories that emerge from their family albums. In the context of this exhibition, visitors are invited to look at Gill's pseudo-family album of the South Asian community created 16 years ago alongside one constructed by the community itself today.

Looking for Ourselves is presented as part of the Wallach Art Gallery's MODA Curates series. MODA Curates is an annual opportunity offered by the Gallery and Columbia University's MA in Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies Program for outstanding curatorial proposals related to students' theses.

Free Public Programming

Wallach Webinar: Collaborative Partnership and Active Listening in Gauri Gill's Practice

Thursday, April 4, 10:30 AM EST/8:00 PM IST Online

In this conversation, artist Gauri Gill joins curator Roma Patel to explore her embrace of collaborative partnership—an active relationship between subject, spectator, and photographer.

Throughout her practice, Gauri Gill has worked with her subjects in the documentation of their experiences. Documenting Adivasi people in coastal Maharashtra, farmers in Punjab, and migrants in America, Gill uses photography as a powerful tool to give a platform to those rendered voiceless by the state, media, and society. She believes in working with and within her community, using a methodology she calls “active listening.”

Wallach Workshop | Reading Family Photography: Memory Work & Storytelling Workshop

Saturday, April 6, 2:00 PM EST at the Wallach Art Gallery

This workshop invites visitors to *Looking for Ourselves: Gauri Gill's The Americans, 2000-2007* to engage with photographs from their family albums in conjunction with the Instagram-based archive-in-the-making, *The South Asian Americans*. Following cultural theorist Annette Kuhn's notion of 'memory work,' which involves the active restaging of memories, participants will be invited to mine their photographs for new meanings and possibilities through collective reading and storytelling.

Note: Participants are asked to bring one photograph of their choosing from their family album to the workshop.

Special programming will be held for local students from the [BKLYN Combine](#), a non-profit organization that works to provide critical education, leadership, and social support programs to youth and young adults in low-income and underserved communities.

About the Artist

Gauri Gill's work has been shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2023), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk (2023), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2022), the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), MoMA PS1, New York (2018), Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel (2017), 7th Moscow Biennale (2017), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017), Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2016), among other institutions. She has consistently exhibited at locations outside of the art world, including public libraries, rural schools, and non-profit institutions. Her work is in the collections of prominent institutions worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Museum, London; Smithsonian Institution, Washington and Fotomuseum, Winterthur.

Support/Special Thanks

Looking for Ourselves would not have been possible without the enormous support of **Gauri Gill**, **Sanjana Jain**, James Cohan Gallery Director, Special Projects, **Audrée Anid**, the Wallach Art Gallery's team, especially Director and Chief Curator **Betti-Sue Hertz** and Exhibition Coordinator and Registrar **Nathaly Berrio-Diaz**, as well as exhibition advisors **Professor Noam Elcott** and **Professor Debashree Mukherjee**.

About the Curator

Roma Patel is a 2024 Moda Curates Fellow. Based in New York, she is an emerging curator of modern and contemporary South Asian art. Her work engages with postcolonial and diasporic discourses, as she

explores modes of seeing, collective memories and dreams, and the visibility and visuality of self in the Global South. She received her BA from Boston University, and she has previously held positions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Phillips.

Visiting the Exhibition

Opening: March 22, 2024, 6:00 - 8:00 PM

On View: March 23–April 7, 2024

Address:

Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery
Lenfest Center for the Arts
615 West 129th Street
6th Floor · New York, NY 10027

Hours:

Wednesday – Sunday
12:00 – 6:00 PM