

# TAKE

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**Nihaal Faizal's intervention on cover page:**

Apart from TAKE's very first issue (Volume 1 Issue 1: Black), the magazine's mastheads have always appeared on the top left corner of the cover page. For TAKE's 28th issue on memory, the artist Nihaal Faizal returns the cover page masthead to the top right—a position it fleetingly and briefly occupied just once before, in its initial launch issue.

**Cover Image:**

One of the envelopes on which Mahatma Gandhi wrote notes at his meeting with Lord Mountbatten, 2 June 1947. Displayed as a part of the exhibition *Tangled Hierarchy* curated by Jitish Kallat at John Hansard Gallery, part of the University of Southampton, the UK. With the kind permission of the University of Southampton.

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Soledad Gutiérrez Rodríguez in conversation with Himali Singh Soin and David Soin Tappeser

# The Memory of Ice



**Soledad Gutiérrez Rodríguez** is Chief Curator at TBA21 and Executive Producer of TBA21 on stage. She has been working in the arts for the last twenty years, occupying different positions in various institutions from the Guggenheim Bilbao, to the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), and the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Her research deals with collective practices and the immaterial potential of art realized through performance with a focus on environmental and social justice. Soledad Gutiérrez Rodríguez is Chief Curator at TBA21 and Executive Producer of TBA21 on stage. She has been working in the arts for the last twenty years, occupying different positions in various institutions from the Guggenheim Bilbao, to the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), and the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Her research deals with collective practices and the immaterial potential of art realized through performance with a focus on environmental and social justice.

Left: Himali Singh Soin, *Caribbean Futurism*, 2021. Image Courtesy: Himali Singh Soin.

**Soledad Gutiérrez Rodríguez (SGR):** We just opened your exhibition 'The Third Pole' at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza organized by TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. The exhibition is a space where everyone is invited to search for their own adventure and with this you challenge the basic notion of the museum as a truth provider. Also, you radically alter the idea of memory, detaching it from its only-human condition and opening it to other beings, human and nonhuman alike. In fact, if we look at the series *we are opposite like that*, the main character is ice, which stores the memory of time. How did you start working with ice?

**Himali Singh Soin (HSS):** The book *we are opposite like that* is dedicated to ice. It begins: 'To Ice. Our elder, our sage, our astrologer, our shaman, our timekeeper, our politician, our philosopher, our teacher, our protector, our folly. We tell your story.'

Ice is literally a chronicle, a preserver of everything. When I reached the very fragile landscape of the Arctic and realized that this vast—and deep—archive would soon lose all its stories, I felt the imperative to become a kind of librarian and recover what I could. I embarked on this journey with my magical tool for navigating the world: language. Philosopher and magician David Abram says we are not only restoring the land, but re-storying the land. I love that.

**SGR:** Restoring as a form of storytelling, like the way music plays a central role in the exhibition. How do you work with the memory of ice as a musical form?

**David Soin Tappeser (DST):** I think a lot about landscapes and what they sound like, how a landscape embodies a particular musicality. How do I evoke a memory through the music that transports the listener to that landscape—even if they may have never physically been there? It is a challenging, multi-staged process rooted in my personal experiences with nature, research and—in the case of *we are opposite like that*—Himali's memories, descriptions, and recordings of the landscape. I transformed these various impressions into sound—not as a literal transcription but as a transcription of mood, of coded memory. For instance, I took the first recorded temperature measurements in the Arctic and mapped these against the temperature measurements from Himali's fieldwork. The differences reflect a rhythm of climate change and I let this govern the tempo of the different segments of the music.

**SGR:** These works operate in the frame of deep time and therefore the main characters inhabit multiple temporalities. Doing so, they relate to the ghosts of a prejudiced past while dreaming up heterotopic futures. How does the series live within this tension?



Left and Right: Himali Singh Soin and David Soin Tappeser.

**HSS:** The book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, edited by Anna Tsing and others, was a pivotal influence on *we are opposite like that*. It's titled ghosts on one side and monsters on the other. Implying that ghosts come from the past and monsters from the future, but in fact, perhaps we are already living in the haunting of the ghosts of the future and the monsters of our pasts. *we are opposite like that* uses this tension and keeps turning it on its head. It becomes like a tarot deck, changing your fortune depending on the way you look at it. In fact, the word catastrophe comes from disaster, which is rooted in "astro," an unfavourable star. The individual suddenly becomes a planetary being, or the planet itself is thrown off course by the relatively micro scale of human time.

**DST:** Those ghosts from the past are very much related to the unconscious, epigenetic memory we carry with us. Memory is not necessarily related to something we have personally experienced, but to something that our predecessors might have witnessed. Many of these memories are inscribed in a landscape or a body that we can access at different moments, in different states of mind. Visual language, music, and poetry offer portals to these memories, to these ghosts of the past, which cannot be reached through the rational

intellectual pathways we normally use to talk about history.

**SGR:** This calls up two terms: sensing—as a way of acknowledging other ways of perception, being in connection with the earth—and the idea of healing through rituals. In *As Grand As What* you are looking into contemporary modern rituals that can heal the earth, that can heal ourselves, and that can create a communion, a natural path coming from sensing those ghosts and monsters, feeling the cracks in time. How does temporal tension speak to those rituals?

**HSS:** That answer requires us to return to the manifesto "Subcontinentment," which traces the beginnings of finding these geo-poetic links between the poles and India, which felt like they had absolutely nothing to do with a tropical landscape as in the subcontinent. "Subcontinentment" is the first time that—amid the changing climate, the transparent poverty and the systems of suffering that come with living in the Global South—we posit a particular kind of rest and a very specific joy. We insist that we can afford pleasure too. And this tautness is called "Subcontinentment." Which then connects to the healing powers of *As Grand As What*. It is not a Western concept of healing in which transformation is an end. It is, just like the volcanos, a constant rejuvenation of ritual-



Above: Installation view, *The Third Pole*, Himali Singh Soin with music by David Soin Tappeser, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain, 2022. Image Courtesy: Roberto Ruiz | TBA21.

making, transformation as a process, such that the video is not a static work of art; it is meant to act upon you.

**SGR:** The exhibition considers "the third" as a way of challenging the idea of duality as well as becoming an entangled collectivity, of togetherness and how that could transform the whole world.

**HSS:** A polyphony of voices, disciplines, ways of being, both as content within the work as well as a form of collective labor. And then it feels like art can begin to embody some of those infrastructures of care that it loves to theorize. If we can support other communities through our commissions, such as our collaboration with Live to Love, who are raising funds for the empowerment and happiness of communities across the Himalayas, then the work feels like it can become more than us.

About more-than-humans: sometimes I wonder if the birds are our audience, or the ice itself is witnessing us back. *Ancestors of the Blue Moon* is a collection of deities, but hardly any of them are human. They are meteorites, serpents, mountains, or beams of energy. And they have things to say, and they don't protest too much for us to listen back to them.

**SGR:** The exhibition design works with the materials to fulfill the ambition to make it as welcoming and as sustainable as possible, through the textures, through the supplements—to create a space of beauty, but also of hope.

**HSS:** This was the idea for the walls covered in clay—that instead of introducing toxicity into a space, you could absorb contamination from it. Gardens can do that and people can do that. It sort of just comes down to how we choose to exist. Maybe exhibition-making can help us understand how to be better? What if we made shows that not only humans would encounter, but birds, fish, gods, ghosts and monsters too?