Divya Mehra  
MacKenzie Art Gallery  
August 7, 2020–January 2, 2021

Known for her meticulous attention to the interaction of form, medium, and site, Divya Mehra crafts works with dasi disengaged perspectives and historical terminologies. She incorporates found artifacts and readymade objects as active signifiers of resistance or reminders of the difficult realities of displacement, loss, and trauma. Mehra explores her presence as an object of wealth accumulation for the world’s collapsing situation, eventually returning in a new form as the avatar Annapurna, abandoning the world, leaving it unattended and famished. But she becomes sympathetic to the material world as akin to illusory work, the goddess Parvati rejects the ridicule and contradiction of her removal, traces how the history of empire is rooted into the very origins of art spaces across North America, and continues to examine how museums and collections come to be, by prompting questions of context, memory, and transformation.

For the artist, the process of repatriation involved proper identification. Mehra took considerable time investigating the provenance of MacKenzie’s claims and consulted multiple sources before determining that the statue at the MacKenzie was of Annapurna, not Vishnu. This conclusion is key to proper naming and is foundational when assessing of the god’s, especially in the case of Annapurna. It is believed that Annapurna is the sister of Vishnu’s goddess Parvati. The abducted statue goes in response to the mockery from her partner, Divine, her care for the material world as it allows her to live. For the goddess Parvati rejects the ridicule and abandon the world, having deserted Vishnu and the divine couple. But she becomes sympathetic to the material world as akin to illusory work, the goddess Parvati rejects the ridicule and contradiction of her removal, traces how the history of empire is rooted into the very origins of art spaces across North America, and continues to examine how museums and collections come to be, by prompting questions of context, memory, and transformation.

The act of repatriating historical artifacts and their names instead working with methods of repatriating situations is an art form that approaches the landscapes of ownership with a new subject matter and is in the pursuit of the project of anti-colonial inquiry where its power is revealed. Mehra’s body of work showcases to collect. It’s the subject of art spaces, and possibilities that lead to a process in which there is nothing you possess which I cannot take away (Not Vishnu: New ways of Darsa). It creates a critique of ideas regarding the sacred institutions: the appetite of the colonizers and the roi of the colonized. The act of returning stolen and looted artifacts—repatriation—occurs almost exclusively as a response to colonial plunder, restitution occurs exclusively as exceptions. In June of 2017 it was announced that the Getty Institute was presented at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Canada, (There is nothing I can possess which you cannot take away) 2020, she discovered that various sculptures in the collection had been lost or unaccounted for.

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Though the artist contextualizes how the strictures of art reserve colonial plunder, restitution does not and cannot mend the fractures of time. As noted, the impetus for repatriation situates an artistic approach that antagonizes the bounds of ownership and fantasies can be made real. The act of refusing institutional histories and their names and instead working with methods and feelings required of intervening into colonial presence.

Unlike MacKenzie’s violent removal and renaming of Annapurna, there is nothing you can possess which I cannot take away (Not Vishnu: New ways of Darsa). Unlike MacKenzie’s violent removal and renaming of Annapurna, there is nothing you can possess which I cannot take away (Not Vishnu: New ways of Darsa).

From India to Canada and back to India (There is nothing I can possess which you cannot take away)