

A Manifesto, A Strategy

1. The white curator working in a predominantly South Asian suburb, wants you to bring more traffic into the gallery by somehow featuring brown bodies on the side of her building. You are concerned about what putting these bodies on display for the public means for you. Why have *you* been tasked with this responsibility? You consider asking people from the community to participate in your project. But it immediately becomes clear that this would merely be extending the gallery's exploitation of you to a community of people you don't know. The conclusion is that making work about yourself and your family is the simplest and most ethical way to deal with the situation.
2. You are concerned about constantly using your family's archived experience in the work. You are worried this makes you seem obsessed with your own migration story and history. You have worked hard to move away

from this and try new things, but people keep responding to your older work which prominently displays your family's stories and bodies. You are worried these projects seem too nostalgic. People keep responding to the nostalgia. The white curator has asked you to make work that is more like what you made before. You think about an honest way to do this.

3. You realize that trying new things and constantly reinventing yourself in every new project is bad for your personal economy. People respond well to repetition—they like knowing what you have done and what you will do. There is no shame in having an aesthetic and working a certain way. In fact, it is profitable. It is actually a recipe for success, even though for some reason, you always feel guilty about doing similar things.
4. Rather than constantly repeating yourself and doing what you have done before, you decide to search for a strategy to subvert the gaze. You realize using your family archive is really akin to using any public archive, like that of a library or museum. The difference is that you have unlimited access to it and a sense of ownership over it. You feel entitled to this archive because you know who is in it and who took the photos, even if you yourself are not in them. You are not worried that a relative might someday find themselves on the side of a building, because you know who they are. Your migration story is no more unique than someone else's story, other than the fact that you have access to it. White artists use found footage and archives all the time, and they

don't feel bad about it. You should not feel bad about using your own.

5. Now, how to subvert this gaze? How to give the white curator what she wants so that she will happily pay you, while also working to critically subvert her ignorant premise? This is the hard part. So far the way to do this seems to be by using theory and symbolism and metaphors. Making visual puns. You thought composing still lives that are political in content and yet visually playful and intriguing might be the best way to do this. Humour is always a successful strategy for being critical while making it palatable for the white curator and audience.²⁷

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27 This project began as a site-specific installation for a regional gallery in Ontario. Working with this gallery was one of the worst experiences I have had in the art world. While I did my best to maintain distance between the experience from the work itself, the outcome of the project was undeniably influenced by it. I started writing this manifesto when I was first approached by the gallery, and I have completed it as a reminder to myself going forward.