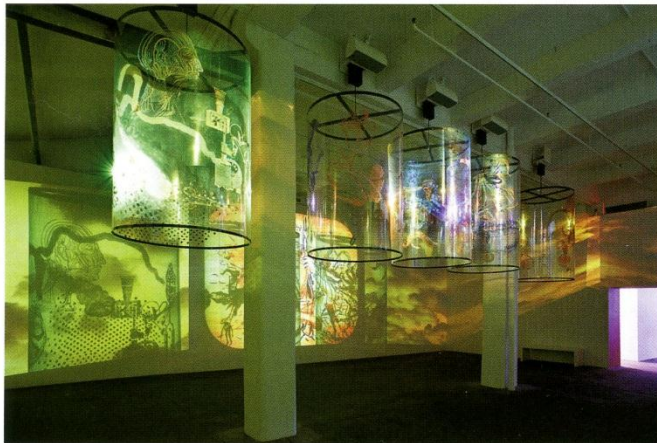


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Exhibition Reviews

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by Lilly Wei



View of Nalini Malani's installation *In Search of Vanished Blood*, 2012, six-channel video with five rotating, reverse-painted Mylar cylinders, 11 minutes; at Lelong.

NALINI MALANI Lelong

Nalini Malani's installation *In Search of Vanished Blood* (2012), titled after a poem by the revolutionary Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, was the spellbinding centerpiece of her first solo exhibition at Lelong's New York branch. The Mumbai-based Malani, a pioneer of Indian video art and a committed activist and women's advocate, creates work centered on the violent postcolonial history of India since its partition in 1947. With *In Search of Vanished Blood*, she attempts to give voice to the marginalized in India, denouncing the country's caste system, its religious wars and in particular the fierce abuse inflicted on women. Also on view, and featuring imagery and themes similar to those of the installation, was a series of reverse paintings on clear acrylic sheets backed by bamboo paper.

Commissioned for Documenta 13, *In Search of Vanished Blood* consists of six 11-minute video projections streamed around the room through five clear Mylar cylinders hanging at the center of the space. The installation brings together a diverse, cross-cultural assortment of source material, with references to works such as Homer's *Iliad* and Euripides's *Medea*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and Christa Wolf's 1984 novel *Cassandra*. A colorful, quickly changing video landscape surrounds the viewer with still and moving images of faces (and, disturbingly, a head wrapped in a gauzelike material with the title poem projected onto it), skyscrapers, prints from Goya's "Disasters of War" series, Muybridge's running dogs and artwork portraying mutilations, executions, rapes and other atrocities. Motorized so as to rotate, and suggesting Buddhist prayer wheels, the Mylar cylinders feature reverse-painted and drawn images (miscellaneous objects, figures from Indian and Greek mythology, abstract patterns) that produce a slow play of shadows over the rapid footage projected on the walls. Overall, the work has a seductive

beauty that some might consider compromising; ultimately, however, that beauty serves as a persuasive, poetic vehicle to convey resistance and revolt.

At Documenta, the projections and cylinders were high in the gallery, at a remove from the viewer. Here, however, the cylinders rotated just overhead and the moving procession of video images and shadows were nearer eye level. While this latter installation style might have been less majestic, it also made the experience more intimate and the imagery easier to read (though the shifting, blending visuals are designed to be somewhat illegible). In addition, this more immersive presentation incorporated viewers into the installation, serving to intermix their shadows with the pictures on the walls.

Reinforcing the mood of the imagery is a soundtrack composed of foreboding music and sequences of Malani reading passages of works by writers including Heiner Müller, Samuel Beckett and Mahasweta Devi. At one point, Malani intones lines from Müller's 1977 play *Hamletmachine* that invoke the mythological figure of Cassandra. Perhaps this prophetess, whose visions of Troy's future misfortunes were not heeded—and who thus became a witness to the city's annihilation—serves here as a surrogate for the artist.

—Lilly Wei