

# ARTBeat

ART HISTORY & VISUAL STUDIES GRADUATE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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*Participants engage in legacy artwork activity, Decolonizing Learning and Teaching Practices Workshop, April 2023. Photograph by Ambreen S. Hussaini.*

## A Word From the AHVS Graduate Advisor: Dr. Harding

Another academic year laid to rest: where did the time go between September 2022 and today? It feels as if everything has flown by. I can confidently say that our graduate students are simply the best; they are so amazing!

We start with a warm welcome during orientation in the Fall, and suddenly, a new community has formed. I'm always amazed at how each new cohort bonds and becomes a tight unit that moves into action as research projects are formulated. The Visual Impetus conference appears in January; as Spring flowers brighten our days, we receive final proposals and polished Master's Research Essays. We had a series of great oral defenses this year. In the Fall, we had the oral defense for Dr. Seyedhamed (Hamed) Yeganehfarzand – a huge celebration for this doctorate! Now, for April and May 2023, heartfelt congratulations go out to Jessica Ziakin-Cook, Megan Austin, Rashana Youtzy, and Sophie Ladd.

Of course, many wonderful things also happen during the Summer. Students head off on individual professional adventures, researching, travelling, or finding jobs to pay the bills. I want to extend a deep note of gratitude to Dr. Allan Antliff, the key organizing force behind the *Rubinoff Company of Ideas Forum* each Summer; thank you for your hard work on behalf of the students. The Department wishes all students attending in 2023 the very best for a meaningful experience.

The Department also wishes to thank everyone who has worked diligently as Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants this year. We could not fulfill our teaching mandate without your precious skills and dedication to the students. Thanks also to Ambreen Hussaini for her commitment as the TAC for this past academic year. You are all a vital part of what makes our Department such an excellent place for our academic programming.

Everyone in the Department wishes you all the best for a restful, rewarding, and exciting summer. Wherever you are headed, may your time be filled with loving connections, inspiring ideas, and artwork to lift your spirits.

Best wishes, Catherine

Dr. Catherine Harding | email: [arthistorygradadvisor@uvic.ca](mailto:arthistorygradadvisor@uvic.ca)



## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

*The AHVSGA are always happy to hear news and updates from our student and alumni community.*

*If you have an idea or pitch for the newsletter, or would like to be part of the editorial team.*

*Email us at: [ahvsga@uvic.ca](mailto:ahvsga@uvic.ca)*

# In Conversation: Dr. India Rael Young

By McKaila Ferguson | MA Candidate

**MF:** What does a day as the Curator of Art and Images look like?

**IY:** Always so much emailing! I often get to host researchers who look at our collections. When you have 10,000 artworks and over 5 million photographs in your care, it's very challenging to figure out how to learn about all of these objects effectively.

Hosting researchers where they get to share their knowledge and experience with us is one of my favourite things to do. I integrate this research back into our database as well as showcase it to the public because many people don't know that we have these wonderful collections of artworks. I also work on exhibitions, develop research papers, and take deep dives into our database.

**MF:** Nothing brings me more joy than loading up a database with information. Whenever I pull up an empty record, I am ready to fill it with metadata and research.

**IY:** It is so satisfying!

**MF:** This next question is a big one. What is the role of museums in the 21st century, and should museums be seen as sites of dialogue for social change and activism? I chose this question because I was inspired by the keynote that you gave back in January at the Visual Impetus graduate conference, *Patterns of Resistance: Art as Revelation*.

**IY:** Wow, that is a big question. It is certainly true that museums are tasked with communicating outward about social change and are sites of activism. In that sense, museums are responsible for finding ways to host actions and then to be recorders of those histories. Those are very important roles for museums that the public is asking for. Museums and libraries, too, are forums for the public to gather to have these discussions.

**MF:** Why do you think galleries and museums worldwide are sites for climate protests? Usually, it is artwork that's targeted. However, a few weeks ago here at the Royal BC Museum, Woolly the Mammoth was attacked with pink paint. In my research so far, I think this was the first incident where an object, not an artwork, was targeted.

**IY:** Poor Woolly! On the one hand, it's kind of amazing that Woolly was the first object targeted. To me, Woolly makes a lot more sense to target in a climate protest since Woolly went extinct due to climate change. It is a very powerful statement to protest in front of Woolly. The folks who have targeted artwork around the world have stated to the media that their goal was to gain attention and shine a light on their cause.



*Dr India Rael Young outside the Royal BC Museum, 2022. Victoria, BC.  
Photograph courtesy of Dr India Rael Young.*

The underlying value here is that the public sees museums as sites of history and of carrying knowledge forward. Every time a person is protesting in an art museum, they invite public dialogue and that institution to think about their role in climate change and in recording the history of these protests.

**MF: How do you see the future of curating evolving, and how are you adapting to these changes?**

IY: I think something really interesting is happening right now: museums are being requested to be more accessible and inclusive spaces where communities want to gather. We need to create space and make people feel welcome. One of the things that I work on personally is how to be a good host as a curator. What are communities asking for from the museum as a host? Is it gathering space, financial support, better-catalogued records, ensuring that the future of collecting changes? These are all ways that curators are responding to requests from the community.

**MF: Which museums/galleries/curators/artists inspire you and your work as a curator?**

IY: I am super nerdy about cataloguing. I use Pinterest to keep track of things in themes: art, exhibition design, and art books. When I am in the presence of something that I think is amazing, I pin it! I love everything that the Peabody Essex Museum does. Two curators I admire there are Karen Kramer, Curator of Native American and Oceanic Art and Culture, and Siddhartha Shah, Curator of Indian and South Asian Art. I love their exhibitions, specifically, the ways in which they use exhibition design to tell compelling narratives. I also enjoy the Museum of Vancouver for the same reason. Viviane Gosselin, Director of Collections & Exhibitions, Curator of Contemporary Culture, is just brilliant. Their exhibition, *That Which Sustains Us*, is about people's interactions with forests and their natural environment in Vancouver. The entire exhibit is very visibly designed with different kinds of wood products to tell the complex history of the land in Vancouver through resource extraction and through Indigenous communities — so beautifully done. The teams at both of these institutions do storytelling exceptionally well.

**MF: What should everyone be reading right now?**

IY: *The Fruits of Empire: Art, Food, and the Politics of Race in the Age of American Expansion* by Shana Klein (2020).



"Woolly", 1979, scale recreation of Woolly Mammoth, fur: musk ox hair, Royal BC Museum Natural History Gallery, Victoria, BC. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

India Rael Young, Art Historian and Curator, specializes in Indigenous and media arts. Her curatorship and writing negotiates feminist, decolonial, and critical race frameworks to map the cultural geography of the North American art world. Young graduated in 2017 with a doctorate in Art History from the University of New Mexico. She went on to Princeton University Art Museum as the Andrew W. Mellon Research Specialist in Native American Art. Today, she is the Curator of Art and Images at the Royal BC Museum and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria.

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# Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Melia Belli Bose

By Pascale Ricard | MA Candidate



*Dr. Belli Bose on a research visit to Banaras, India. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Melia Belli Bose.*



*Dr. Belli Bose with Replica Statue of Mayawati, Lucknow, India. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Melia Belli Bose.*

## **You have such a vibrant personality and are so passionate about what you do, what propels you?**

I would say the secret is espresso, and just loving what I do. I feel so fortunate to have a niche that has embraced me as much as I have embraced it. I have such wonderfully enthusiastic, receptive students. The students I teach at UVic in the AHVS department regularly thank me after classes and I don't think that has ever happened before. It is so delightful and makes me feel so appreciated, it spurs me on!

It's also doing my research in South Asia that is so exciting. In some cases, I find myself in the middle of nowhere and it takes a turn that I never expected. When I was doing research for my dissertation and first book in rural Rajasthan, I would be riding on top of a bus in the desert, get to some remote village where there was an incredible funerary memorial. That is a spectacular experience.

## **I love the way you describe your interest : "the arts of death and memorialization" Can you share your experience researching this subject?**

I came to the gender angle through these monuments that are called Chhatri, which literally means umbrella. Chhatris are royal Hindu funerary memorials, often architectural and richly carved with narrative sculptures and commemorative memorial stones.

Umbrellas in Asian art, or specifically India, are part of what I call the "Indic Iconography of Extraordinariness". Whatever is under the umbrella is extraordinary, divine or royal. These monuments look like they're domed kiosks. In many cases, they have figural frieze work on them, or a memorial stone. I became intrigued by the very heteronormative gendered depictions of men and women and their status on them. For example, I wanted to understand more about how Chhatris for memorialized kings depict the Queens who performed sati for him, and the differences in that depiction if they were a primary wife or if they were serving women. There are such different depictions in every culture of ideal gender norms. That led me to my second project, which was on the memorials of a low caste female politician in India's largest state, Kumari Mayawati. She is no longer in power, but she commissioned hundreds of millions of dollars of these monumental memorials to her male political predecessor. Along the way she did this big gender transformation and desexed herself. It was just fascinating because it's contemporary, over a period of about 20 years, and you can see this transformation as she gains power.

## **How did you come to this topic and area of study?**

I really think that our projects choose us. There's something about whatever your project is, or something within you that resonates with the subject.

For example, I don't do well in the heat. My favorite place in the world is the Himalayan foothills. I'm a big hiker, I have spent a lot of time trekking in the Himalayan Foothills going to pilgrimage sites, and I so wanted to do a topic that was rooted in that part of India. And yet, Rajasthan, is in the desert and most of my research took place during the insufferably

hot months! Even in Bangladesh, I remember looking at maps of South Asia before I was familiar with it. West Bengal, the Indian state right next to Bangladesh was always calling me. Similarly, they're hot and humid! But my research called to me and wouldn't let me go.

**You have written multiple books and published articles. I noticed the title *Threads of Globalization*, is very similar to *Gendered Threads of Globalization*, which was your spectacular conference, what is the connection there?**

Typically, when one organizes a conference, an end deliverable will be a book, like an edited volume, everyone that presented a paper will contribute a chapter. The difference this time was that the book came before the conference!

I received a SSHRC grant to support everyone flying from Asia. The conference was all set, tickets were bought, and hotel rooms booked for the end of March 2020. Two weeks before the conference was supposed to go ahead, the world stopped spinning- because of COVID 19. I reached out to everyone requesting that they get to work on their chapters in advance of the conference. I wanted to keep the same name: *Gendered Threads of Globalization*. Manchester University loved the book but wanted to massage the title. In the end I'm happy!

**Gendered Threads of Globalization was a fantastic three-day conference showcasing interdisciplinary presentations and performance art, what were some of the highlights for you?**

My first and foremost goal of a conference is that everyone has fun and they learn from each other and make connections that hopefully continue past the conference. Gendered Threads of Globalization is the second conference that I have organized at UVic, and my rule is to include scholars at different stages of their careers.

When it comes to organizing conferences, I really want everyone to connect and have conversations over dinners. Even though Gendered Threads of Globalization was postponed because of COVID 19, I think we achieved that here this year. A big highlight for me was seeing my two MA students, Chloe and Roopa give fabulous papers that were so well received by audience members and senior scholars!

Another highlight of the conference was the interdisciplinary nature. It was not Art Historians alone, it included anthropologists and specialists in the field of textiles. Also, it was Pan Asian! I think it is rich when we bring these different parts of Asia into conversation. There are a lot of gendered aspects that are different or similar in terms of heteronormative divisions of labor. For example, in South Asia, women have not commonly been weavers, men have been the primary weavers until very recently with revival efforts. In comparison: East Asia sericulture is very feminine gendered.

Melia Belli Bose is a specialist in the visual cultures of early modern and contemporary South Asia. She received her PhD in 2009 from the University of California, Los Angeles and her undergraduate and master's degrees from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her current edited book project, *Threads of Globalization: Fashion, Textiles, and Gender in twentieth-century Asia* (contracted with Manchester University Press), examines women's textile/ garment production and consumption throughout Asia over the long 20th century.

## Dear Fellow TAs,

The year 2022-2023 is special to me.

I was honoured to facilitate TA Fundamentals workshops, to observe TAs, and to provide constructive feedback. Thank you, for all of your support. As a TAC legacy project for this year, it was my pleasure to host our final celebration of learning workshop *Decolonizing Learning and Teaching Practices in Higher Education* on Tuesday April 18th.

We collaboratively created a legacy artwork based on decolonization and learned about Indigenous ways of learning and teaching.

As we conclude this academic year, my word of wisdom for you is CELEBRATE. It's the end of the school year and YOU made it. Let me share with you what this word means to me:

**C** – Celebrate the completion of your TA responsibilities and the end of term with a special treat.

**E** – Engage in a fun activity with your friends and/or family.

**L** – Lighten up your life with and commit to a self-care activity for the next term.

**E** – Experience the joy of being in the present moment.

**B** – Breathe deeply and exhale all your tensions.

**R** – Reflect on the learnings of this past term.

**A** – Attack and confront your worries before they attack you.

**T** – Transform your problems into opportunities of growth

**E** – Encourage one person today and feel the eternal happiness.

Congratulations! It is a time to CELEBRATE!

By Ambreen Shehzad Hussaini.  
Teaching Assistant Co-ordinator

# Reflections on learning

By Jessica Ziakin-Cook | MA Art History Visual Studies | CSRS Fellow



Jessica Ziakin-Cook, *Untitled (Chintz Fugues series)*, 2022, watercolour, ink and graphite on paper, 9x12".

Jessica Ziakin-Cook was awarded the Heather J. Lindstedt & Brian A. Pollick Graduate Student

Fellowship at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society for 2022-2023. She recently successfully defended her Master's research project, entitled "Post-Industrial Modernism: Jazz-Age Anglo-Catholics and the Golden Cockerel Gospels".

Jessica Ziakin-Cook is an instructor at the Vancouver Island School of Art.

[www.vancouverislandschoolart.com/faculty-and-board/jessica-ziakin](http://www.vancouverislandschoolart.com/faculty-and-board/jessica-ziakin)



As a first-generation university student, earning a degree was always a romantic goal for me. Now, to be closing in on my Master of Arts is to discover two things: 1) a degree is the beginning of something, not the completion. It's a doorway to further pursuits, not the pinnacle; 2) that rather than filling my head with knowledge and procedure, the master's program reshaped my soul. Beginning my post-graduate degree, it quickly became clear that it was imperative to define a vision, my vision, for the meaning I want to uplift within my life.

I found this difficult as a mom and someone who is so community-oriented. I am used to prioritizing others and filling needs. My vision for myself and my life had become diffused in the 14 years between my undergraduate and my Master's. Yet, I was sure when I started that this was the next step for me.

Nevertheless, it is a challenge to navigate the push and pull between external and internal drives. My vision of myself had to be balanced with input from others. Some people saw a lot of potential in me and, in turn, expected a lot. Others emphasized centering myself in my research. "Be sure not to lose your voice," they advised. But what was my voice? How was my project reflecting who I am and the impact I wished to make on the world? Would it have any impact at all? I floundered and "circled a lot of drains" before I finally settled on something that satisfied the various pressures and impulses.

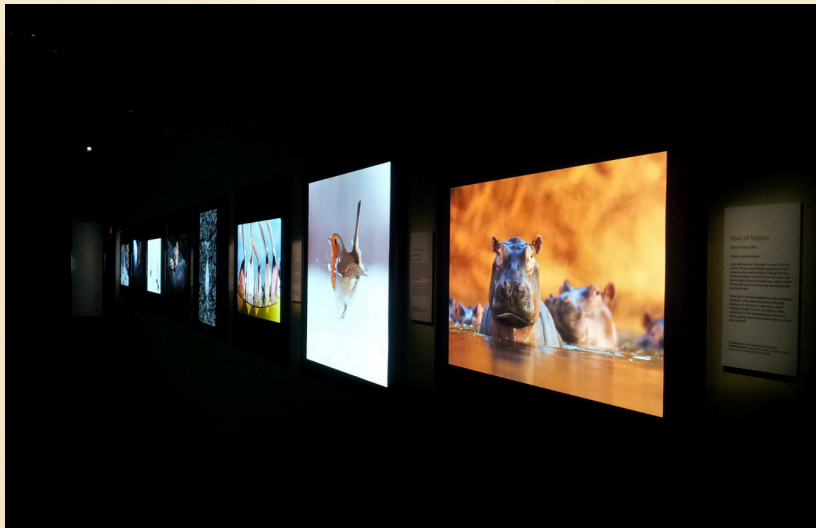
Now that I've completed the writing and the defense. I realize that it wasn't about finding the key to unlock cultural change, it was about learning that I am enough. That my topic is "meritorious" in its own right. I don't have to hitch myself to any activist or apologist wagon. All I needed to do was be clear. Clear about my interests, my sources, and my position.

That's where I've found the true impact on the world: I've become a clear communicator, committed to decolonization and self-awareness of my position. I am assured that my interests in the yield of art and its histories matter. Not because they will change the world, but because they are mine. Whatever prestige, impact or recognition that may follow is secondary to this journey. My posture is one of a woman who can now take herself seriously, who is free to do my work without excuse or apology.

# In Review: Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2022 at the Royal BC Museum

By Miranda Carroll | MA Candidate

“Bill, we really need to spend less time indoors,” I overheard someone say to their partner, during my visit to the Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2022 exhibition at the Royal BC Museum. This call to the natural world is among messages, both explicit and abstract, that can be gathered from viewing the Natural History Museum of London’s travelling show. Thousands of works of photojournalism are submitted each year to the annual competition, whose goal is to explore the relationship between science, photography, and art. Of these, one hundred winning images travel from London’s Natural History Museum around the world.



G. Letham, *Wildlife Photographer of the Year at RBCM*, Digital Photograph. Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC. Photograph courtesy of YYJ Pictures (Facebook).

The photographs are displayed horizontally, on backlit transparencies along specially built walls. These walls create a snaking flow through the gallery, directing visitors through corridors and around bends. Viewers are then led through to the back of the gallery where they can watch a short looping video of the competition’s judges speaking into the camera about the photographs and their merits. Every element of this yearly exhibition—from the video recording, the photographer and judge’s quotations and text panels that accompany each image draws viewers’ attention to its central focus: the need for the conservation of natural environments and their animal inhabitants.

This exhibition is itself part of the long tradition of wildlife photography which can be traced back to hunter, naturalist, and conservationist George Shiras. In the late 1880s Shiras traded his gun for a camera. Photographs became his trophies, and viewers were presented with images of animals rather than their specimens. The tradition of natural history museums would be to preserve animal life through these specimens, but now exhibitions like Wildlife Photographer of the Year shifts towards an artistic representation rather than one that is literal and scientific.

As visitors walk through the maze of gallery walls, they are met with photography demonstrating pattern, attention to form and great complexity. To illustrate, bootlace seaweed is transformed into uniform vertical stripes that streak the frame, and a hairy deutzia plant shot with a macro lens and UV light reveal microscopic blue star-shaped hairs that dot the leaf and contrast against its natural chlorophyll. Furthermore, in many of the images, formal elements of photography, such as scale, are central. For example, in “Spore Spell”, an image of a puffball mushroom releasing its spores into the night bears strong resemblance to the Milky Way. With the power of micro lenses and drone photography, photographers can create images that appear so abstract that the nature of the original subject can be obscured.



Brandon Guell, *Tree Frog Party*, 2023, Digital Photograph. Natural History Museum, London. Photograph courtesy of NHM.

*“The images show our world as one full of majesty, profundity, and mystery. Photographers use their cameras to surpass the limits of human vision and show worlds beyond the scope of the human eye.”*

However, while this exhibition claims to present its images as examples of an intersection between art, science, and technology, the strong messaging present in all textual aspects of the exhibition pushes interpretive readings of images aside. Instead, using the works to support the scientific thesis of the show. This forces a didactic simplicity upon these fantastical works of photography, which could potentially diminish the argument the curators aim to make.

Issues of climate change and environmental degradation are central in our contemporary context, and Wildlife Photographer of the Year expertly responds to, and supports, these necessary calls to action. In viewing the 100 winning photographs, viewers are invited into subterranean, aquatic, and arctic landscapes. If viewers were given the opportunity to view these photographs without commentary, it would be difficult not to conclude, photograph by photograph: that nature is magnificent, at risk, and, more than anything, worth protecting.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### **Walking Thru My Fires: Francis Dick | Legacy Gallery Downtown.**

April 22 -September 9, 2023. Wednesday-Sunday 10am-4pm.

*This deeply personal exhibition explores Indian Residential School legacies, urban Indigeneity, reconciliation, and the healing power of art through Francis Dick’s prints, paintings, carvings, and music.*

Legacy Gallery Downtown, 630 Yates St, V8W 1K9. Email: [legacy@uvic.ca](mailto:legacy@uvic.ca) |

### **Summer Arts Series | Division of Continuing Studies (with Faculty of Fine Arts and Alumni Relations)**

July 4-6 2023.

*A series of workshops and seminars that explore how current artists use technology in their practice.*

Prices from \$15-195. Registration and schedule online. <https://continuingstudies.uvic.ca/arts/series/summer-arts-series/>. Email: Tyler Reeves (Program Assistant) [lacadmin@uvic.ca](mailto:lacadmin@uvic.ca)

### **The 34th Annual TD Art Gallery Paint-in | Art Gallery Of Greater Victoria.**

July 15 2023, 11am-4pm.

*Celebrate up to 150 local artists on Moss St. and at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria with a showcase of art and entertainment.* Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1040 Moss Street, V8V 4P1. Email: [paint-in@aggv.ca](mailto:paint-in@aggv.ca)

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**EDITORIAL TEAM** Thank you to our team of editors and contributors for your hard work.

Sarah Roberts, Jessica Ziakin-Cook, McKaila Ferguson, Miranda Carroll, Rashana Youtzy, Pascale Ricard, Ambreen Hussaini, Lewis Nicholson.

