Art Exhibit Explores How Understanding of History is Shaped by Myths of Culture

Referring to his novel, Midnight’s Children, Salman Rushdie writes: “This is why I made my narrator Saleem suspect in his narration: he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments are irretrievably lost. But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be more valuable than the one which is supposedly flawed.” Like Rushdie’s essay “Imaginary Homelands,” this exhibition, curated by Chitra Ganesh (SOA’02), is on display in the LeRoy Neiman Gallery through April 5.

Kamrooz Aram’s Beyond Borders II, above, combines Persian carpet and military camouflage patterns to reflect on cultural oppression, freedom, war and longing.

Manuel Ocampo’s large scale narrative paintings are fraught with violence and disintegration. Irreverently cutting apart high and low visual icons from a variety of cultures, Ocampo creates a scathing critique of the social and sexual violence that are part of the country’s colonial legacy.

Convening to form a deconstructive device, Pair of the rigorous miniature technique with gestures of abstraction, Skander invents a form that questions boundaries of nation, art history and mythologies.

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Midnight’s Children Humanities Festival

Post-Colonial Writers Embrace Their Own Subjective Histories

BY COLIN MORRIS

Truth and history are almost always issues of deceptively simple. What sense of a reader take the, when these subjects are addressed through the medium of the novel?

A lauded group of international writers questioned canonical history and discussed their duties and their position about the subject in Miller Theatre. Novelists discussed with respect to their own writing, the limits of thinking about history, time and life cycles in a linear fashion in such an act fast-paced, post-colonizing world during the turbulent midlist of globalization and development.

Convening to form a diverse cross-section of cultural and historical backgrounds, world-class writers, sat down for the roundtable discussion addressing several transcendent themes heavily featured in Salman Rushdie’s epic novel Midnight’s Children. As part of Columbia’s month-long Humanities Festival, commemorating the dramatization of Midnight’s Children, performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Apollo Theatre, the roundtable featured literary heavyweights Vikram Chandra, Neil Bissoondath, Farzana Moon and Michael Cunningham.

This practice is heavily featured in the narratives of Red Earth and Pouring Rain, as well as Midnight’s Children. “[Traditional] history cuts away possibilities,” said Chandra, who finds truth and a narrative tool through the transmigration of history more than its formal content.

Conjuring, author of The Hours—the cinematic adaptation of which was nominated for several Academy Awards this year—expressed that as a writer, he did not possess a feeling of duty towards a standard notion of history in his work. Cunningham recalled the adage that history is told by winers, wily noting that historians and novelists could be trusted in this regard, in that they are rarely described as winers themselves.

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Bissoondath illustrated the manner by which fiction can create poignant cultural and historical dialogue, through the reading of the short story, Sanctuary. In his piece, Bissoondath juggled themes of displacement, post-colonial homelands, family ties, and economic disparity with intimate precision.

In the story, two separated brothers sit down for a tense discussion of their relationship and the political unrest of their homeland that has found the two on opposite ends of the globe and political spectrum. As the dialogue advanced, two wholly separate “truths” of events are painfully dredged.