PRESS RELEASE -- for immediate release
February 2019

BILLBOARD COMMISSION #2
Jasleen Kaur: Women Hold Up Half The Sky
14 March – 22 September 2019

Spit & Sawdust are pleased to announce their forthcoming Billboard Commission, *Women Hold Up Half The Sky* by Jasleen Kaur, which launches on March 14 2019. Sited in the outdoor yard space of Spit & Sawdust, the Billboard Commission provides a large-scale, site-specific platform for artists to develop new work within this multi-aspect venue. The first two Billboard Commissions are supported by The Arts Council of Wales and curated by Freya Dooley.

Jasleen Kaur (b.1986, Glasgow) is an artist currently living and working in London. Her work is an ongoing exploration into the malleability of culture and the layering of social histories within the material and immaterial things that surround us. Her practice examines the hierarchy of histories and labour using a range of mediums and methods including sculpture, video, conversation and cooking.

For her Billboard Commission, Jasleen uses a 1936 image of a gymnastics display by members of the 2nd Royal Battalion (Ludhiana Sikhs), 11th Sikh Regiment in Waziristan, courtesy of the National Army Museum. She came across the photograph during her research into Punjabi and Sikh colonial histories, specifically related to The World Wars and the overlooked contribution from the colonies.
More than this, she discovered the enlisting strategies found in recruitment handbooks for specific ‘races’ categorised under the convenient ‘martial race theory’ (under which the Sikhs were categorised), that revealed a more truthful and insidious side to the machine of empire and the consumption of colonial bodies. Out of many images, this one stuck — tamed men, precariously balancing on each others necks. The accompanying blurb to this image on the National Army Museum website reads: “Gymnastics helped develop soldierly qualities such as strength, leadership, fitness, initiative, endurance, esprit de corps, teamwork and independence”. It is this conditioning of masculinity (in this case though the camaraderie of war) that interests Jasleen; what the writer Mrinalini Sinha describes as ‘colonial masculinity’ that continues to shape postcolonial identities of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ today.

Much of Jasleen’s research draws upon feminist writing and the testimonies of lived experiences of women. As part of her project, she has selected a reading list of key books and reference texts which have informed her project and will be available to read at Spit & Sawdust for the duration of the commission.

In the book Finding A Voice: Asian Women in Britain, a key reference text for Jasleen, Amrit Wilson gives another example of how colonialism and capitalism affected gender roles. Wilson describes how changes to laws on land inheritance and land revenue introduced by the British intensified financial hardships for farming communities, “therefore to trap [women] even further in their role as producers of labour power” i.e, giving birth to sons. Through her work, Jasleen has been trying to unearth and confront some of these narratives as a way of making sense of her inherited past but also her present experience of being an Asian woman in the diaspora. In Women Hold Up Half The Sky, a title borrowed from the introduction of Wilson’s book, Jasleen uses collage to doctor the image of the military display with a repeated motif of her mother’s hand, which now props up the gymnast’s bodies: a gesture to visualise her ongoing research into the invisibility of women’s voices and discovering non-masculine forms of resistance.

Artist website www.jasleenkaur.co.uk // Instagram @_jasleen.kaur // Twitter @_jasleenkaur

EVENTS

Public Launch Event
Thursday 14 March, 6- 8pm
Spit & Sawdust are pleased to invite you to the public launch of our next Billboard Commission by artist Jasleen Kaur. Everyone is welcome to come and celebrate the unveiling with us, which will include free delicious food from our outside wood oven and a bar.

Group Read
Thursday 14 March, 3-5pm
As part of her project, Jasleen has selected a reading list of key books and reference texts which have informed her project and will be available to read at Spit & Sawdust for the duration of her commission. Ahead of the public launch, Jasleen will host an intimate and informal reading group around a text from her list. Jasleen invites all who identify as women, and especially women of colour, to join her for a non-stop group read which is influenced by her research around women’s narratives and feminist writing, with space for discussion afterwards. The text will be provided, so no prior reading or knowledge of the book is necessary.

The event is free but booking is essential. Hot drinks and cake will be provided for participants and a creche will be available if anyone who wishes to come needs it—please let us know by Thursday 7 March if this applies to you. Spit & Sawdust is wheelchair accessible. We will be closed to the public during the event. BOOK HERE
Notes to editors:

Contact for press enquiries and high res images: Freya Dooley, Spit & Sawdust. freyadooley@gmail.com / hello@spitandsawdust.co.uk / 07733 085826

Billboard Commission:

Women Hold Up Half The Sky by Jasleen Kaur will run from 14 March – 22 September 2019. The first two Billboard Commissions are curated by Freya Dooley and supported by project funding from The Arts Council of Wales.

Artist biography:

Jasleen Kaur employs the cobbled together as an artistic approach, another way to understand the already-made. Her refashioned objects are based on instinct and resourcefulness, reflecting a hybridity of national custom and reconsidering the realities of materiality, usage and everyday routine. Creating associations between past and present, high and low culture, mass produced and singular, she flattens hierarchies and acknowledges the less visible. A practice centring on tending her relationships with people and her understanding of materials, makes the processes employed as important as the outcomes.

In a current film commission with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Kaur continues to investigate the slipperiness of cultural inheritance and forming of identities, working with 2nd and 3rd generation Sikhs who use music, rap and the voice as a political tool. They will co-produce a new song and music video that considers how waves of migration, inherited trauma and imported cultural identity affects and constructs powerful notions of nationhood and patriotism in the diaspora, for a 'homeland' that individuals themselves, or their parents have migrated from. Other recent commissions include Glasgow Women’s Library, Market Gallery, Eastside Projects and Hollybush Gardens. Her work is part of the permanent collection of the Royal College of Art and Crafts Council. www.jasleenkaur.co.uk / @jasleen.kaur

Curator biography:

Freya Dooley is an artist based in Cardiff. Her practice encompasses writing, sound, moving image and performance, often working collaboratively with other artists. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Somewhere in the crowd there’s you, Eastside Projects, Birmingham (2019) and The song settles inside of the body it borrows, Chapter Gallery, Cardiff (2019). Freya also shares a collaborative practice with artist Cinzia Mutigli, making performance, broadcast and publication works since 2013.

Freya is a freelance project manager and has previously worked for a number of arts organisations in Wales including Wales in Venice, Artes Mundi, g39 and Made in Roath. From 2017-18 she was a member of Syllabus III, an alternative peer-led learning programme jointly delivered by Wysing Arts Centre, Eastside Projects, Spike Island, New Contemporaries, Iniva, Studio Voltaire and S1 Artspace. She is a member of Yellow Back Books, a platform for artists who publish, with Becca Thomas, Clare Charles and Louise Hobson. Freya was awarded a Jerwood Visual Arts Bursary in 2018 and is shortlisted for the Kleinwort Hambro emerging artist prize. Freya has been a studio member at Spit & Sawdust since 2014. www.freyadooley.com / @freyadooley
Spit & Sawdust is an artist-led space in Cardiff which opened in April 2014, comprising of an 11,000sq ft indoor skatepark, café, artist studios and large outdoor yard, the space at Spit & Sawdust offers artists an interesting and challenging environment in which to make work. Located in a warehouse on the industrial outskirts of the city, visitors come from all ages and backgrounds. They are a not-for-profit social enterprise.

Website: www.spitandsawdust.co.uk
Twitter: @SpitnSawdust
Instagram:@spitandsawdustskatepark
Facebook: www.facebook.com/spitandsawdust

Address: Rhymney River Bridge Road, Cardiff, CF23 9AF
Opening times: Wed, Thur, Fri 5pm - 10pm // Sat, Sun 10am - 7pm

The Billboard Commission and Spit & Sawdust are wheelchair accessible