

**LIST OF WORKS**

*You Made Me*

2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed

*Doomsday (Collective Failure) OR Death may be your dessert*

2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed

*We don't stand in line, borrowed shoes hurt your feet*

*OR To India and back: Why we must not give up*

2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed

*The Bitch Blues (where does the Divide begin?)*

2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed

*Striving toward enhanced linguistic tolerance*

*(an Opening of opportunity)*

2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed

*Rebranding YOURSELF as SOMEONE*

*(who could definitively do something else)*

2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed

*Contemporary South Asian Art*

*(Conflicts of Perceptions/Oh hey she's just too mainstream!)*

2014, offset B&W printing on paper, 36" x 3600"

*Neutral Ethnicity (I guess the money should've changed him,*

*I guess I should've forgot where I came from)*

2014/2017, Performance Knit (88% Polyester, 12% Spandex),

US Womens Yoga Pant and Sport Bra XS,S,M,L,XL

*Neutral Ethnicity (Repetition as a kind of Mockery) wall detail*

2014, printed acrylic wall vinyl, dimensions variable

*A Brown Woman Drowned*

2014, neon sculpture and black paint, 26" x 44" x 5.5"

*There are Greater Tragedies*

2014, 70 denier high tenacity nylon, 36" x 72"

*Lead from darkness into darkest*

2014, acrylic vinyl and acrylic latex deep base paint, dimensions variable

*fake political art (You're good at making slogans)*

2014, acrylic vinyl and acrylic deep base paint, dimensions variable

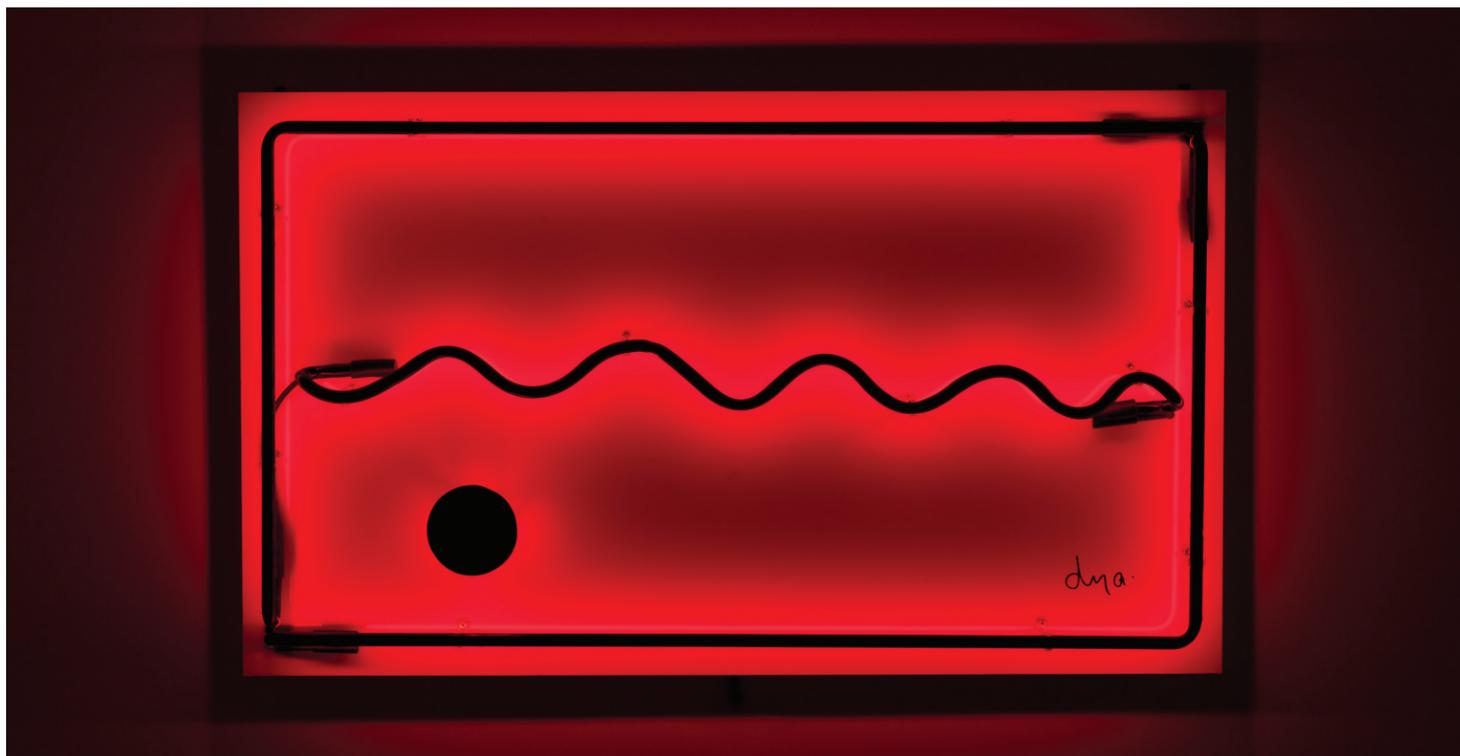
Exhibition sponsor

Vinyl sponsor

**Accent Stripping and Lettering Co.**



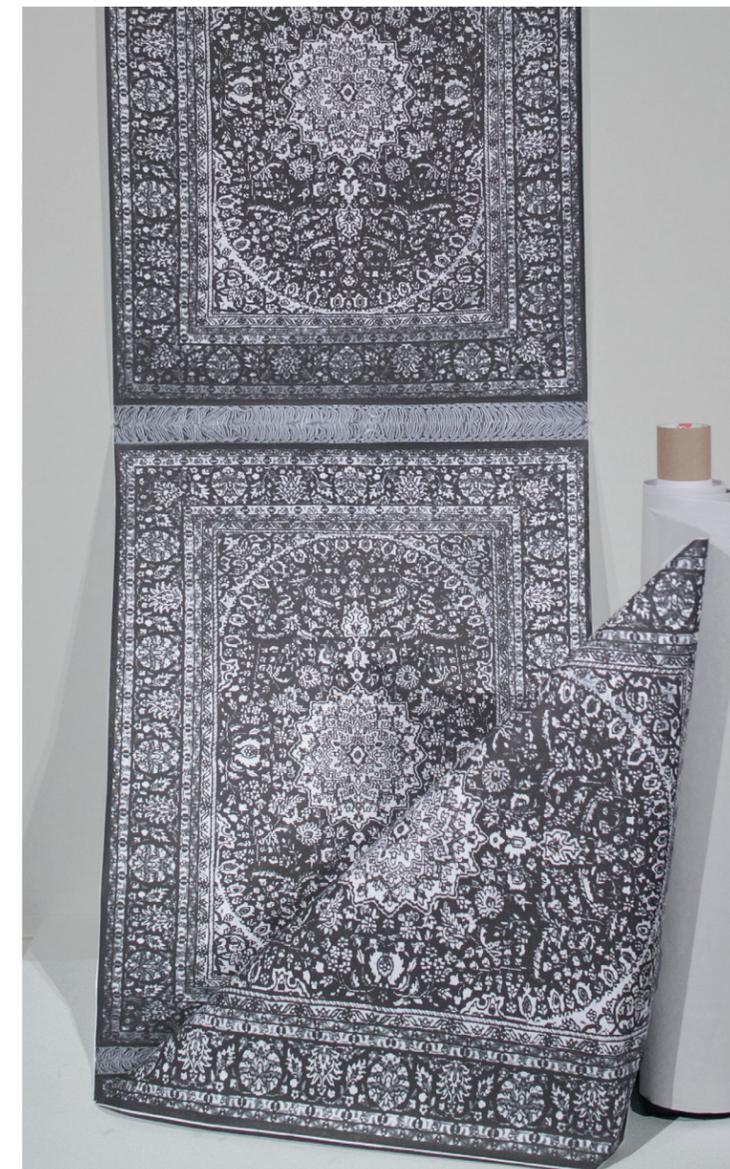
How to do things with words (Culture and Captivity) Install, 2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, folio of 6 silkscreen prints



A Brown Woman Drowned, 2014, neon sculpture and black paint, 26" x 44" x 5.5"



fake political art (You're good at making slogans), 2014, acrylic vinyl and acrylic deep base paint, dimensions variable



Contemporary South Asian Art (Conflicts of Perceptions/Oh hey she's just too mainstream!), 2014, 36" X 3600", offset B&W printing on paper

**POURING WATER ON A DROWNING MAN**  
**DIVYA MEHRA**

SEPTEMBER 28 - NOVEMBER 18, 2017  
Lunch & Look artist-led tour September 29, 12:00PM

**ART GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA**  
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BRANDON, MANITOBA. R7A 0K9

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**We Do Not Know What We Think We Know  
(and should assume nothing)**

By Yaniya Lee

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Historically, appropriation has been a tactic in the arsenal of colonialism. What happens when Other Canadians claim it as a strategy? In some instances the original weight and violence of appropriation can yield unforeseen results, or alter the way we understand a situation. Throughout Divya Mehra’s exhibition “Pouring Water on a Drowning Man,” the national presumption of racial homogeneity is destabilized. In these works, Mehra makes light of the unease that causes, and is caused by, our commonplace attitudes towards Other Canadians.

I am an Other Canadian. I was born here. And as long as I can remember, people have been asking me where I’m from (seriously). There’s an assumption that Canada is white. It’s based on a simplified founding narrative of European paths of discovery and the stubborn presence of Natives in a terra nullius imaginary. Only when the federal government introduced “multiculturalism” did the nation officially become “white + Others.”

Otherness happens in relation. In the words of theorist Sara Ahmed, “Whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as the absent centre against which others appear only as deviants, or points of deviation.” European-looking bodies are made to feel naturally at ease. Their ethnicity is unmarked, and thus unremarkable. In white spaces, it is Other Canadians that are remarked upon. Mostly, our natural unbelonging is assumed to be traced on our skin. I say this because in most places, our arrival is duly noted. “Yes, we do notice such arrivals,” Ahmed writes. “The fact that we notice such arrivals tells us more about what is already in place than it does about ‘who’ arrives.”

There is a direct correlation between a Canadian’s comfort and an Other Canadian’s discomfort. Because we have suffered the brunt of whiteness’ lack of self-awareness, Other Canadians are careful, on guard. Recently in Surrey, BC, two armed, white RCMP officers tackled a young girl to the ground and handcuffed her. She was an Other Canadian. Though she explained their mistaken identity, they felt certain she was the Other Canadian they were looking for.

Things do seem to be changing. Take currency, for example. The Bank of Canada has a plan to put an Other Canadian on a bank note: the social justice advocate Viola Desmond, a Black Canadian woman. (Until now there have only ever been white men on our bills, with the exception of one white lady: the Queen of England). Just a couple of years ago putting a non-white person on a bank note was unthinkable. At the time, an “Asian-looking” woman scientist was set to be included on the illustrated front of a new bill. A focus group saw the prototype and expressed profound concern. The Bank of Canada had the scientist redrawn to a more “neutral ethnicity.” In fact, the new version of the scientist looked white.

Cultural assumptions of white neutrality are uncomfortable for Other Canadians because they rearrange the configuration of social space. These assumptions dictate who belongs and who does not. In these works the use of language and appropriation provoke the tensions, antagonisms, and denials that have long

displaced Other Canadians. They create a space for us to enter. They declare our refusal to exist in unbelonging.

A black flag with the words “My arrival is your undoing” on it says different things to different communities simultaneously. Flags indicate ‘arrival,’ ‘property,’ ‘nation-state.’ They represent heritage and conquest. On this flag, the wording allows room for many unsettling reversals. Who is arriving, European settlers or racialized others? Who poses a threat, and who is threatened? When we face the same situation, perhaps reading a text, or visiting a gallery, what Canadians and Other Canadians understand from the exact same artworks might be completely different.

Appropriation, too, has many forms. As in the Sizzurp prints, the words of others appear throughout these works. Made with a drink of codeine cough syrup, promethazine and cola specific to a certain Black American community, the prints use conceptual word play to set up little scenes. Not only is there a doubling between titles and subjects, but in the works themselves tensions are shaped through grammar and concision. They draw attention to, disrupt and dismantle common expectations of whiteness.

The multiplicity in “Pouring Water on a Drowning Man” is a layering of culture signifiers that undoes a single fixed meaning. Language wrenches assumptions free of their common sense logic, a tactic makes very clear that we do not know what we think we know, and should assume nothing.

Take, for example, a 2013 interview from Divya Mehra’s book *Quit, India*. In it, critic Amy Fung compiles quotes from the artist’s e-mails and juxtaposed them with the words of Tupac Shakur, Ice Cube, and Mahatma Gandhi to form a single fluid text. In Fung’s concoction Divya says things like “I’m attracted to gestures of power through posturing, because I deal with reality,” and “I am a revolutionary, a non-violent revolutionary. My weapon is non-cooperation.”

What we Other Canadians need, and what the works in this exhibition do, is map the boundaries of propriety that delimit racial tension. They expose patient cultural faultlines in which we, Other Canadians, congregate. In this space we can relax, laugh, and eventually reclaim a sense of comfort.

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*Neutral Ethnicity (I guess the money should've changed him, I guess I should've forgot where I came from), 2014, Performance Knit (88% Polyester, 12% Spandex), US Mens Tracksuit XS,S,M,L,XL*



*Doomsday (Collective Failure) OR Death may be your dessert, 2014, sizzurp, acrylic ink on watercolour paper, 21.5" x 28" framed*



*There are Greater Tragedies, 2014, 70 denier high tenacity nylon, 36" x 72"*

**DIVYA MEHRA**

Working in sculpture, print, drawing, artist books, installation, advertising, video, and most recently film, Divya Mehra is known for her meticulous attention to the interaction of form, medium, and site. Through an acerbic tone, she addresses the long-term effects of colonization and institutional racism. Re-contextualizing references found in music, literature, and current affairs, she contends with contemporary expressions of societies continuously formed by their colonial roots. Mehra holds an MFA from Columbia University and is represented in Toronto by Georgia Scherman Projects.

**YANIYA LEE**

Yaniya Lee is the associate editor at Canadian Art Magazine. She is a founding collective member of MICE Magazine and a new member of the EMILIA-AMALIA working group. This summer, Lee participated in the Banff Research in Culture: Year 2067 residency and she will be the 2017-2018 writer-in-residence at Gallery 44.