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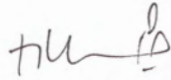
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NIKHIL CHOPRA

Nikhil Chopra (born 1974) is The Met's 2019-2020 artist in residence. For the first part of his residency, he lived at The Met Fifth Avenue for nine continuous days in September. He immersed himself in The Met's collection and its physical layout, observing how audiences moved through the galleries. He then designed a specific itinerary: he travelled from the Egyptian Temple of Dendur to the threshold between the Modern and Contemporary galleries and the space holding The Met's African, Oceanic and Ancient Americas collections, and then completed his journey in the Lehman Wing. His path inevitably traversed extraordinary spans of time and geography, represented by the objects at The Met. His reflections on the histories of these objects and the stories of their acquisition by The Met was communicated through actions, songs and the making of a monumental landscape. At each site, Chopra transformed a large canvas into some form of shelter. On the canvas itself, he drew an imagined landscape – sky, earth, water – an amalgam of places he has seen, remembered or invented.

*Edited excerpt from Shanay Jhaveri's curatorial note*



*The artist on his work 'Lands, Waters and Skies':* "My body, like yours, is a 'museum' that holds a collection of memories. These images and experiences are in a constant state of flux; they move from New York to Kashmir, where my family comes from, and from all my past homes to where I live now, in the Indian state of Goa. I cannot ignore that I am at The Met, amid objects that have travelled in ways that lead to questions about ownership and how meaning is constructed from display. Our point of view within that context is equally important. I come from contemporary India and I carry the subcontinent's colonial past with me."





"I am awestruck by one of the public's perennial favourites, The Temple of Dendur in the Sackler Wing. The audacious human ambition of 'saving' this extraordinary monument from drowning under the waters of the Aswan Dam, dismantling and reconstructing it, piece by piece, in this enormous wing, inside the Museum, is baffling. For me this act epitomizes what has long been perceived as the role of the Western museum or rather how it positions itself as a steward of cultural heritage."





"The drawing I created in front of you over these nine days reflected my interest in animating and embodying our micro-histories—stories as opposed to histories. In doing so, I resist existing linear narratives in favour of complexity. The writer John Berger once asked: 'Where are we when we draw?' The question seems to be expecting a spatial answer, but mightn't it be a temporal one? Isn't the act of drawing, as well as the drawing itself, about becoming rather than being?"



"I am deeply moved by [a] mid-20th-century body mask from the Asmat tribe in Papua New Guinea. The mask stares back at me through the glass case, and I can almost hear its voice and see it move. Its gaping eyes and mouth are as horrific as the beheading of the enemy tribesman. In my research into the Asmat and their way of living, I was saddened to see the end of the last of the non-industrialized frontier of human culture."



"I don't view The Met as a neutral space. As an artist, I try to hold a mirror up to the world and capture what is being reflected. I am not a historian. My eyes, ears, nose, mouth, stomach, legs, and hands are the filters through which I experience the history embedded in the objects and spaces in the physical world and the narratives around them. Memory is ultimately of the body, for me and for you."