

Press release July 2021
For immediate release

John
Hansard
Gallery

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Hetaim Patel

Trinity

John Hansard Gallery
3 August to 30 October 2021

#JHGPatel

John Hansard Gallery in partnership with New Art Exchange is pleased to present **Trinity**, the largest solo exhibition to date by artist Hetaim Patel.

I really want visitors to the exhibition to feel they are stepping into the kind of 'at the movies' experience that I feel is still missing from mainstream society: the experience of being taken away by a trilogy of epic cinematic films, featuring complex culturally marginalised characters. Then I invite you to go behind the scenes, in a 'making of' experience usually only afforded by big budgets films. Here you can get up close to the intricate costumes and hear from the collaborators, before finally 'exiting through the gift shop', where the marginalised worlds of the films unapologetically occupy the mainstream cultural space they are typically excluded from, intentionally taking physical, economic and political space via film posters, action figures and other merchandise. In a world where we as marginalised people, are typically given the soap drama, Eastenders treatment, rather than the big movie Batman treatment, we have to create our own. – Hetain Patel

Trinity is also the title for an ambitious new film by Patel, the final part of a film trilogy that will be premiered at John Hansard Gallery in August 2021 and presented at New Art Exchange in January 2022. Working with dance, martial arts and sign language collaborators, and with a specially composed score, *Trinity* represents Patel's most significant and developed film work so far.

Alongside Patel's new moving image work, *Trinity* (2021), John Hansard Gallery and New Art Exchange will also show the first two acclaimed films from the trilogy: *Don't Look at the Finger* (2017) and *The Jump* (2015) bringing together the different facets of the rich filmic world the artist has been creating over the past five years. The exhibition will additionally feature a number of related new sculptural works, which incorporate costumes and action figures of characters from the films, as well as a film merchandise 'Gift Shop'.

Patel's new film *Trinity*, continues his exploration of language and physical communication, centering on the discovery of a martial language that once united humanity. Interspersed with visual references from his life – both his artistic practice and his Indian cultural heritage, the film features two women – a young British Indian woman (played by Vidya Patel) and a young Deaf garage worker (played by Raffie Julien) – engaging in a fight, creating a unique physical language weaving together martial arts and sign language, created with ongoing collaborators, the fight choreographer Chirag Lukha and Deaf artist and writer Louise

Stern. A coming of age story intermingled with supernatural references, *Trinity* transforms traditional Indian practices with a recognisably Hollywood approach, employing an epic soundtrack and fight choreography. The film explores the representation of the British Indian experience on screen, emphasising the female voice, intergenerational conflict and the truth that our bodies hold beyond language, foregrounding a strong sense of hope.

The Jump (2015) connects the widely recognised fantasy of Hollywood action and superhero films with the domestic setting of Patel's own British Indian family in the UK. Featuring Patel's homemade movie replica Spider-Man costume, this two sided video installation shows two different perspectives of the same super slow motion jumping action, so much so that it is almost like a moving photograph. Featuring 17 of Patel's family members, *The Jump* is shot in Patel's grandmother's home, the house where he and his immigrant relatives lived at various points since 1967, and where his late grandmother stayed until she died in 2017.

Utilising the characteristic humour that Patel is known for, perfectly showcasing the struggle between responsibility and identity, the semi-autobiographical film installation creates an immersive cinematic experience that is both playful and sinister. Shot in a similar way to the production of a big budget action movie, it features an original orchestral soundtrack by long term collaborator, composer and multi-instrumentalist, Amy May whose work NME once described as being 'like Arcade Fire playing in an English country garden'.

Don't Look at the Finger (2017) is an exploration of the highly-styled genre conventions of Hong Kong martial arts films and how they have permeated mainstream films via the directors of Quentin Tarantino and Ang Lee, and blockbuster films like *The Matrix* (1999, The Wachowskis). It is also a reminder of how some of the highly specific signature symbols of historical cultural traditions and languages can become interestingly blurred and entangled in today's hybrid and eclectic visual landscape. The work is deeply influenced by Kung Fu master Bruce Lee, who in a memorable scene from *Enter the Dragon* (1973, dir. Robert Clouse), warns the viewer to never be distracted by a finger that is pointing at something, just in case we miss what it is actually pointing at.

In *Don't Look at the Finger*, two young Black protagonists and their families dressed in brightly patterned West African robes, all gathered in a church for what seems like a wedding ceremony. Bruce Lee's assertion rings particularly true during this work. Whilst Patel is seemingly begging us to look in one direction, the movements of the couple show us that the real action is going on elsewhere. As bodies physically utter their truths, it is clear that through rituals, combat and sign language, real human communication is being eagerly sought. Each movement enhances the significance of the union at hand – which brings with it a series of intimate moments and power struggle, remarkably without the use of spoken language throughout.

All of the protagonists within *Don't Look at the Finger* are either people of colour or marginalised identities, encompassing the UK, North America, South and East Asia, and West Africa, the confluence of culturally specific reference points informs the fluid relationship between reality and fiction in the film. The result of numerous collaborations with skilled specialists in a wide range of fields, Patel's works feature specially made costumes by seasoned costume designer Holly Waddington (*Lady Macbeth*, dir. William Oldroyd, *Ginger & Rosa*, dir. Sally Potter), choreography, language and music that each question their own origins, blurring the concept of cultural authenticity.

Heta Patel's exhibition is presented in partnership with New Art Exchange, Nottingham, and will be shown there from 29 January to 24 April 2022. *Trinity* has been financially supported by Arts Council England, John Hansard Gallery, New Art Exchange, Sadler's Wells, Gulbenkian, Motwani Jadeja Family Foundation, British Art Show 9, and produced by Tilt Films.

Don't Look at the Finger was originally commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella with Manchester Art Gallery, QUAD and supported by the Jerwood Choreographic Research Fund. *The Jump* was originally commissioned by Wood Street Galleries, Pittsburgh, USA.

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Notes to Editors

Heta Patel

Heta Patel is a visual artist and performance maker. He is interested in connecting marginalised identities with the mainstream in an effort to destabilise notions of authenticity and promote personal freedom. Working collaboratively with artists across disciplines, and with family members and non-professionals, Patel enjoys working across multiple languages, culturally and artistically.

Patel has done Bruce Lee impersonations on stage at the Royal Opera House, completed commissions for Tate Modern and Sadler's Wells, London, made a working class Transformer robot from an old Ford Fiesta (with his dad), designed part of a mini golf course for the Venice Biennale, toured his live performances, internationally (in English and French), made his first dance company work for Candoco Dance Company, and was invited to do a TED talk which has since had over 2.9 million hits. His works are in public and private collections in the UK and internationally, including Tate Modern, the British Council collection and Fondazione In Between Art Film, Italy.

Patel is represented by Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, is a New Wave Associate at Sadler's Wells, London, is a Patron of QUAD, Derby, Patron of Film London's Jarman Award, sits on the Artist Council for a-n, and is a trustee of Liverpool Biennial. He is the winner of the Film London Jarman Award, 2019, Kino Der Kunst Festival's Best International Film 2020, and has been selected to participate in British Art Show 9, touring through 2021–22.

John Hansard Gallery

John Hansard Gallery is a locally engaged and internationally recognised contemporary art gallery in Southampton. Being part of the University of Southampton, the Gallery aims to change the world for the better through great art. To realise this, the Gallery creates innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary art exhibitions, events, engagement and research projects that excite, challenge, represent and reach the widest possible public audience. Since being established in 1979, the Gallery has been located on the University's Highfield Campus. In 2018 the Gallery relocated to the new purpose-built arts complex Studio 144 in Southampton's city centre, significantly increasing the space available for exhibitions, events and integrated programming. Learning and engagement are at the heart of the Gallery and underpin all its activities. The innovative education and public programme is accompanied by special community-focused projects, including activities for all ages and levels of experience. John Hansard Gallery is supported using public funding as a National Portfolio Organisation by Arts Council England.

www.jhg.art

New Art Exchange

New Art Exchange (NAE) is a groundbreaking creative space in the heart of Hyson Green, Nottingham, dedicated to promoting excellence in culturally diverse contemporary arts. They present a changing exhibition and event programme for local communities, produce the Nottingham Mela and support emerging artists and creative practitioners through a range of talent development initiatives.

They work with a range of artists from the internationally acclaimed to the local and emerging. The programme to date has included: John Akomfrah, Zarina Bhimji, Larissa Sansour, Hardeep Pandhal, Shiraz Bayjoo, Sarah Maple, Phoebe Boswell, Larry Achiampong, Ima-Abasi Okon, Zineb Sedira, Mahtab Hussain, Hetain Patel, Sonia Boyce, Hassan Hajjaj, Rashid Rana, Sethembile Msezane, Zanele Muholi, and Christine Sun Kim. They are an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation and are supported by Nottingham City Council.

www.nae.org.uk

University of Southampton

The University of Southampton is one of the UK's leading teaching and research institutions, with a global reputation for research and scholarship across a wide range of subjects. The University combines academic excellence with an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to research, supporting a culture that engages and challenges students and staff in their pursuit of learning.

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