

# JHAVERI CONTEMPORARY

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## **Shambhavi Kaul: Silver Bird**

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Shambhavi Kaul's work, science fictive in its approach, examines notions of site and place, and how cinematic narratives have defined the two. To this end, her films employ both documentary and fictional frameworks, incorporating analog, digital, and archival media. Kaul's practice has expanded over the years to include moving-image installations. And while early work was made for the movie theatre, installations such as *Fallen Objects* (2015) and *Modes of Faltering* (2016) question the very idea and relevance of the theatre space, especially in light of cinema's dispersion into multiple screens and spaces.

A defining characteristic of Shambhavi's work to date, across films, videos, and installations, has been the absence of human players. This strategy has enabled Kaul to interrupt cinema's most pervasive narrative trope: that of self-determined individuals inside seamless spaces and times. 'Protagonism' is offered up, instead, as an expanded field for identification that includes backdrops, objects, and animals – the very *mise-en-scène* of cinema.

*Silver Bird*, the artist's second solo show at Jhaveri Contemporary, complicates several of these ideas further. The exhibition is made up of four parts: a single-channel film, a series of photographs, a 40-page booklet, and a two-channel video installation. Each of these elements approaches the site of 'airplane space' in a distinct (and defining) way. In this cosmos, Kaul casts her subjects, human and otherwise, as meager pawns; ghostly material markers upon whom the abstract forces that govern this site are exerted.

At the centre of the exhibition is a 15-minute, single-channel film called *Hijacked*. This is the first project by Kaul to employ human actors, however in this instance, it is the backdrop that is conspicuously absent. As the actors play out their parts, with a minimum of props inside a darkened void of a soundstage, wide views of a decommissioned aircraft, made to look as though it is flying, serve as the exterior view that completes the narrative contrivance.

If the exterior view of the decommissioned aircraft in *Hijacked* is the corresponding documentary view to the more fictional one of the soundstage, in a series of seven photographs called *Silver Bird*, the same decommissioned aircraft takes on narrative dimensions. This time, it is the aircraft that is pictured against the dark void, projecting it as part detritus and part futuristic space shuttle.

*In-flight* offers another airplane narrative. Edited and designed by the artist, this 40-

page booklet contains images and texts appropriated from various in-flight magazines. Here, and indeed across the exhibition, Kaul asks that we question the promise of escape offered by travel and tourism. This elusive promise is further elaborated in the dual-channel video installation *Safe Travels*, where a hyperrealist aerial view of a tropical island is seen through the gap between billowing curtains. Played in a seamless loop, this hypnotic work cleverly invokes various airplane presences – from dividing curtains and multiple screens to the distanced view of our planet from an airplane window.

**Shambhavi Kaul** has exhibited her work worldwide at venues such as the Toronto International Film Festival, the Berlinale, The New York Film Festival, the London Film Festival, the International Film Festival Rotterdam, The Edinburgh International Film Festival, Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, the Ann Arbor Film Festival, Experimenta Bangalore and the Shanghai Biennale. She presented her first solo show at Jhaveri Contemporary in 2015. *Silver Bird* is her second solo show with the gallery. Shambhavi Kaul was born in Jodhpur India, and lives in the United States where she teaches at Duke University.