

TEMPLON



JITISH KALLAT

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Tangled Hierarchy 2

By **Vivian Li**



Installation view of *Tangled Hierarchy 2* at Tkm Warehouse, 2022-2023.

Maintaining his weekly vow of silence, Mahatma Gandhi exchanged handwritten notes at his meeting in June 1947 with Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last viceroy of British India, to discuss the notion of partitioning postcolonial India to avert a civil war. A staunch opponent of partition, Gandhi's fragmentary responses offer an incomplete record of their conversation. Rather, they stand as object witnesses to the everyday humanity of both the powerful and the

ON VIEW

Tkm Warehouse

Tangled Hierarchy 2

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powerless in the face of history. The next day the partitioning of India was announced. Five of these notes, now reproduced and standing curiously in a row in the central case, serve as the anchor for the exhibition *Tangled Hierarchy 2*, a gathering of both art and archival objects thoughtfully assembled and curated by the artist Jitish Kallat. Acting like readymade objects, the artifacts together with the artworks accumulate an extraordinary density of public and private meanings around the show's themes of colonialism, postcolonialism, trauma, and rehabilitation.

Tangled Hierarchy 2 aspires to transcend linear narratives of cause and effect or hierarchical roles. Kim Beom's video *Spectacle* (2010) shows *National Geographic* footage of a cheetah chasing an antelope. The brevity of the one-minute video continuously looped, though, allows for the antelope to momentarily chase the cheetah and swap roles. The show, like the video, remains ambiguous—there are no clear winners and losers in these narratives. Instead, individual and collective loss resonate poignantly with each other in some outstanding groupings. Homai Vyarawalla's 1947 photograph of Jawaharlal Nehru depicts the resigned politician voting for the inevitable partition, surrounded by more energetic fellow congress members. The power of his raised, stiff hand affirming self and sovereignty is juxtaposed with Alexa Wright's *After Image: RD1, RD2, and RD Portrait* (1997), which consists of three large photographed portraits of a male post-amputee. In scenes with and without his prosthetic, the figure is accompanied by text describing his tragic story and experience of the phantom limb. While the amputation of the body, or by extension the body politic, is obviously the focus, its capacity to adapt is also implied.

Nearby sits *Mirror Box*, a simple wooden device conceived by noted neuroscientist Dr. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran. Since its design in the 1990s, the box has been used to relieve post-amputees of their phantom limb pain. Visitors are invited to place a hand in the box where a mirror reflects it to present the image of two healthy hands, yet this momentary trick also reaffirms their precarity. Art and science intersect more directly in Kader Attia's 2016 video *Reflecting Memory*, which features interviews with surgeons, historians, psychoanalysts, and patients offering multiple perspectives on how people live with a phantom limb caused by trauma.

Underscoring the countless ways to manage pain and healing, *Tangled Hierarchy 2* creates a highly uncanny experience marked not by nostalgia for bygone days but by the very inability to go back.

The sense of time and memory itself as a phantom is explored in the odd pairing of the sketches by mathematician Sir Roger Penrose's mid-20th century impossible staircase with Mykola Ridnyi's 2008 video *Seacoast*. No matter how much one climbs the continuous Penrose staircase they will never get any higher. *Seacoast* portrays a sunny day at the beach on the Black Sea with a pair of fishermen, though punctuated by random sounds of unseen jet planes and bombs dropping. Instead of bombs though, jellyfish from the sea, sometimes in pairs, facetiously land loudly in the foreground.

Made in response to the 2008 Moscow-backed separatist movement in Georgia—now seen as the precursor to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and its new era of colonialism—the video and impossible staircase's recurring loop imply humanity will remain trapped, never fated to reach any higher. But rather than giving up out of despair the pairing also suggests we can choose to go forward in hopes that we can rise, and realize that the Penrose impossible staircase indeed does not possibly exist. The more challenging task *Tangled Hierarchy 2* poses in moving forward though is not in escaping or healing from our trauma, but in how to do so transformed along with all the accumulated scar tissue and memory.