

MONTREAL  
GALERIE D'ESTE

## SARINDAR DHALIWAL

by Cameron Skene

India-born and London-raised, the Toronto-based artist Sarindar Dhaliwal employs the aesthetic stratagems of many diasporic creators, assembling a language of familiar idioms and imagery in tension with the materials and means of a Western visual canon. In her exhibition at Galerie D'Este, Dhaliwal's intensely personal language was coupled with an adaptive breadth of application that allowed viewers to meet the artist on her own turf.

Instead of predictable references to identity politics, the exhibition featured richly referenced, ethnographic considerations of colour: think of Holi celebrations where celebrants shower each other with pigment, or rangoli floor designs. In her work, Dhaliwal adapts an experiential language that, as she says, "cobble together a past" through a refreshing, intuitive process.

In her large etching *Powdered Pigments: Mysore & Venice* (2000–10), piled cones of pigments found in a typical Indian market are juxtaposed with a Western presentation of neat, enclosed squares. From the etched, shaped image, the artist fills in the colours by hand. She completes the work as a paint-by-numbers-like effort in which shape comes across as a contrast of ethnic organizational preference, and colour is the only constant.

The German painter Anselm Kiefer once claimed that "memory is my only homeland." Memory is home for Dhaliwal, too. Using family photos, children's books and images of old cars, she focuses on the stuff of childhood. Culture and

childhood are inseparable—as with us all. Colour, language and Occidental organization are Dhaliwal's mechanical actors. Her toolbox is filled with disparate means of art production: from printmaking, photography and video on through to bookbinding. She crosses borders of media as well as geography.

*Southall: Childplay* (2009) is a long, 34-foot, horizontal digital print that shows pencil crayons standing side by side. Carefully arranged by colour, the pencils differ in length and are in various states of use, from freshly sharpened to worn and blunt. The image tells the story of what remains following a hand-coloured process of image-making; it is a documentation. Lined up across the spectrum, with their printed names facing the viewer, the pencils reference messy experience in a rigour of color, composition and differentiation by language. The names of the individual colours—"Holiday Red," "Seaside Turquoise"—are prominent, highlighting an organizational tension that is shared between language and colour. It echoes the tension between intuition and organization, stranger and homeland.

ABOVE: SARINDAR DHALIWAL  
*Southall - Childplay* (detail)  
2009. Digital chromia print  
86.5 cm x 10.46 m

LEFT: *Powdered Pigments - Mysore and Venice* 2000–10  
Hand-printed etching on paper  
1.57 x 1.19 m

