

Jasleen Kaur

Alter Altar

31st Mar – 8th Oct 2023

Jasleen Kaur (b.1986) was born in Pollokshields, Glasgow, not far from Tramway. In *Alter Altar*, she fills the gallery with sound and makes a temporary space to gather. The exhibition presents a new body of sculptural and sonic works exploring improvisation and political mysticism as tools to reimagine tradition and inherited myths.

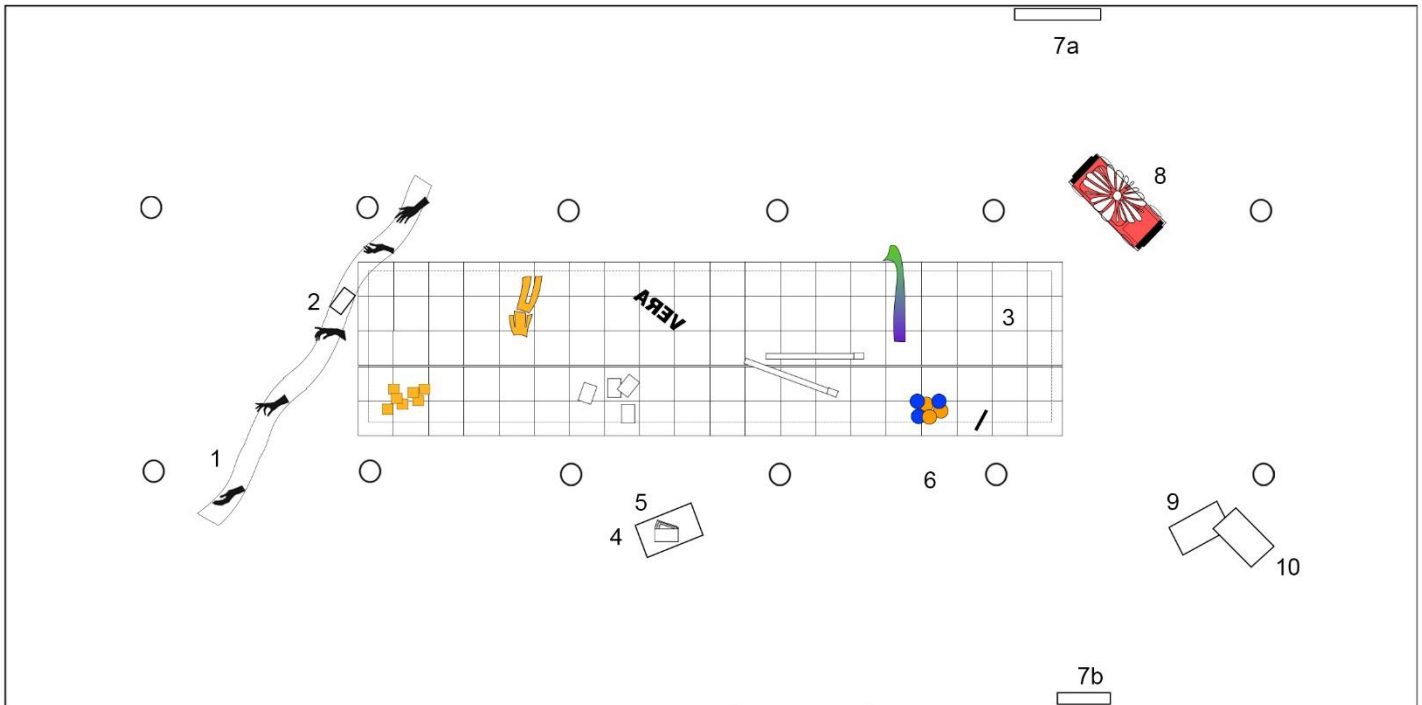
Through a series of installations and kinetic, musical sculptures Kaur explores ideas of sonic memory and the cultural resonances of everyday materials and objects – Axminster carpet, bottles of blessed Irn Bru, football fan scarf, political flyers and salvaged family photographs are re-worked by Kaur to evoke new cultural readings. In Jasleen Kaur's work, the everyday finds new and alternative meaning and thinks about the ways in which cultures and customs are perpetuated.

Throughout the exhibition music is used to reflect the slipperiness of fixed identities. Overlooked, pre-colonial Muslim-Sikh cultural heritage is echoed through her use of voice, sampled Sufi Islamic devotional music and images of cross-cultural solidarity. Together the works trace a broader narrative thread across the exhibition which explores the continuing geo-political and cultural ramifications of colonial histories and State power.

A series of sonic installations weave together the soundtrack of Kaur's upbringing in Pollokshields. This sonic and psychic landscape includes an immersive sound work featuring Kaur's own vocals, improvising with inherited practices from her Sikh upbringing as well as pop music and colonial instruments re-imagined as sonic sculptures. Playing independently and in unison the space emits a polyphony of sound and identities, reflecting the slipperiness of grasping a singular cultural identity that history often imposes.

The space itself is a re-imagined hybrid of various spaces of devotional worship, the carpet and ceiling panels echoing temples, waiting rooms and makeshift contexts, whilst also creating new inclusive architectures for an imagined community. Echoing a communal chant or call and response, Kaur evokes choric formations as a metaphor for the chorus she carries. For Kaur improvising tradition and transmuting inheritance are tools not only for making but for reclamation, grieving and envisioning possible futures.

ALTER ALTAR MAP



1. **The Chorus, hands** , Jasleen Kaur, wood, brass jingles, brass rod DMX motors, 2023
2. **Untitled (Land restitution for the construction of a mosque, between the Muslim and Sikh community in Moga, Punjab, 2021)**, Jasleen Kaur, digital photo on archive paper.
3. **Begampur, sky**, Jasleen Kaur, perspex, transparent vinyl aluminum frame, various objects, see sky map for more detail, 2023.
4. **Untitled (Land restitution for the construction of a mosque, between the Muslim and Sikh community in Moga, Punjab, 2021)**, Jasleen Kaur, digital photo on archive paper.
5. **(untitled) Harmonium**, Jasleen Kaur, Bina harmonium, automated motor, 2023
6. **Yearnings, sound**, Jasleen Kaur, 6:1 surround sound, 2023
- 7a/b. **(Untitled), resin works**, Jasleen Kaur, resin, homemade roti, photo on archive paper, 2023
8. **'Sociomobile', car**, Jasleen Kaur, Red Ford Mk3 Escort Cabriolet XR3i, cotton doily, sound system, 2023
9. **Untitled (Sikhs stand in solidarity with Muslims offering Namaz at Farmers Protest, 2020)**, Jasleen Kaur, digital photo on archive paper.
10. **Untitled (Protesters block an immigration enforcement van on Kenmure Street, Glasgow)**, Jasleen Kaur, digital photo on archive paper.

Begampur, sky

The title *Begampur* takes its name from a utopian vision of a casteless, classless and stateless society or ‘a place with no pain’, envisioned by poet Guru Ravidas. Imagining a version of this idealistic, possible future, Kaur’s *Begumpur* appropriates vernacular suspended ceiling structures. An expansive printed sky features photos taken of the blue skies above Pollock Park is suspended from the gallery ceiling. Tapping into ideas of religious imagery, the heavens, angelic realms, and places of liberation, *Begampur* acts as a repository of personal memory — a heady mix of individual, political, social and religious histories and iconographies. Strewn among the clouds are various objects and detritus that cling to memory; political leaflets, newspaper clippings, commodified images of saints and sinners, twisted bottles of blessed Irn Bru, fake nails stained with turmeric, and hair. The words ‘LOOOOONGING’ and ‘CAN’T DO IT’ feature on a fan scarf and tracksuit, symbols and logos on clothing that ask us to consider how bodies enact, perform and wear their ideologies and personhoods. A large Axminster style carpet creates a space beneath the sky to gather communally and gaze upwards. Evoking a worship space or living room, materially it embodies complex histories of appropriation, assimilation, orientalism and class.

Yearnings, sound

Yearnings is an immersive sound work positioned beneath the sky, featuring Kaur’s own vocals that improvise with inherited practices from her Sikh upbringing and ongoing singing practice. Learning compositions from the Muslim Rababi tradition, an overlooked part of Sikh music history, she understands this practice as devotional but also decolonial. For six months, Kaur worked closely with vocal teacher Marged Siôn exploring ideas of embodied voice, resourcing sound from different parts of the body as well as improvising with traditional and inherited singing practices. Echoing a communal chant or call and response, Kaur describes the work as a metaphor for the chorus she carries, addressing ideas of polyvocality, and the concept of the chorus as the performative space between the individual and the communal.

The Chorus, hands

On a long ribbon-like stage dressed in satin, a series of kinetic sculptures resembling gesturing hands ring with worship bells, seemingly both keeping rhythm and setting it. Once made from rose wood, Indian worship bells have a long history in both religious and social communal rites and rituals. ‘The Chorus’ hands are rendered in brightly coloured veneers echoing the prevalence of faux and facades in migrant aesthetics. These large scale, musical sculptures tap automatically in syncopated rhythms, the bells holding a pulse for the space, moving to faster paced, ecstatic rhythms. They also signal and point to nearby images of cross-cultural solidarity and resistance.

(Untitled) Harmonium

Kaur's research considers the impact on shared Muslim-Sikh cultural heritage following the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent under British colonial rule, particularly the subsequent degradation of the Muslim Rababi musical heritage which is inextricably linked to Sikh music heritage, but largely unacknowledged. These themes are echoed through the inclusion of the popular Indian harmonium, a colonial instrument which Kaur learned devotional singing from her father on. In the exhibition the harmonium has been automated and accompanies other sonic works in the exhibition with a haunting, dissonant hum. Across the exhibition sound sits in relation to images asking, *what are we devoted to?* This breathing object sits upon an image of land restitution in Moga, Punjab where foundations are being ceremonially laid for a mosque to be reconstructed. This image, along with the others laid around the space act as symbols of cross-cultural cohesion and solidarity which has a potency at a time of growing nationalism and populism in India and the UK.

'Sociomobile', car

A major work in the exhibition features a Red Ford Mk3 Escort Cabriolet XR3i which Kaur describes the car as a *'representation of my dad's first car and his migrant desires'*. An enormous 4m hand crocheted doily covers the car linking materially to legacies of Empire, cotton and migration from ex-colonies to British mills after the second world war. Sonically the car is also an institution of Kaur's musical memory — it was one of the few places music was played and listened to as a family — Bob Marley and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan being the political soundtrack to Kaur's childhood. Short snippets play occasionally in the space, sounding as if a car is driving past you in the street, booming bass plays from a subwoofer in the boot — a reference to Kaur's older brother's handmade speakers.

(Untitled), resin works

Hung directly opposite one another are two wall works with salvaged family photographs, enlarged and encased in an Iru-like tinted resin. In Kaur's childhood home, old roti would be tossed, torn up on the driveway for birds to eat, but here they are carefully positioned to obscure the faces of individuals, except for the artists. In the images, there is a gesture of being held by hands or amongst bodies and a sense of nostalgia or longing amped up by the orangey, sepia glow. These images are a nod to origins but also disidentifications and the family structure as a place of her political and feminist education, albeit inadvertently. Throughout the exhibition, the act of concealing and revealing — through resituated mass produced images or the crop of a photograph — is utilised as a tactic to direct our attention or withhold information.

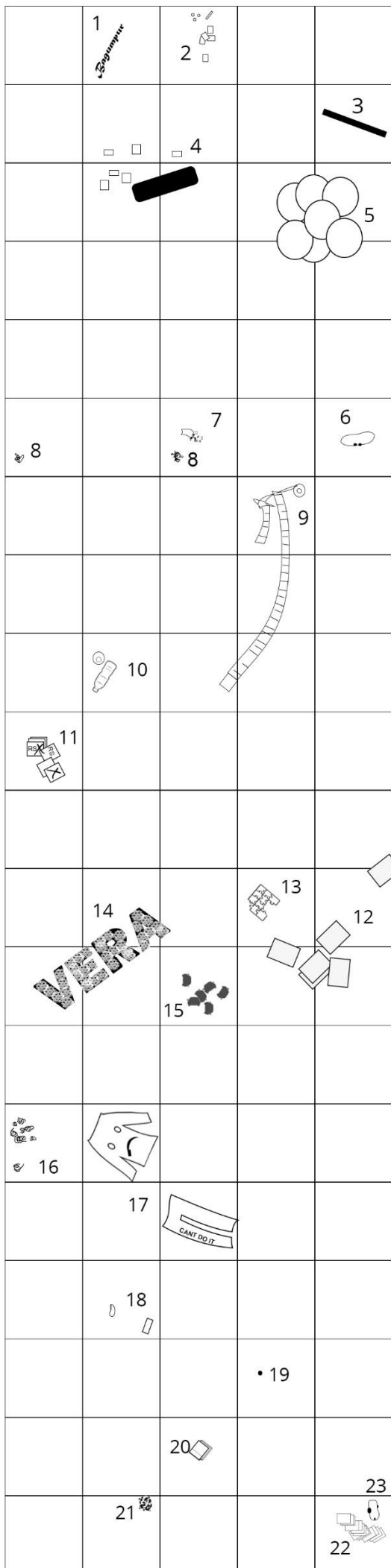
Credits:

Vocal teacher, Marged Siôn

Sound editor, Joe Howe

Programmer, Jennifer Sykes

Fabricators, Elka Studios, Billy Teasdale, Ellie Sweeney Textiles, Wendy Wood, Jamie Greer.



Sky Map

1. Begampur bumper sticker
2. Lottery tickets and an opened packet of softmints
3. Bhindranwale poster
4. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan CD's, cassette tapes and ghetto blaster
5. Balloons and sacrum weight
6. Glow in the dark prayer beads
7. Turmeric stained fake nails in a polythene bag
8. Balls of hair
9. Toilet roll printed with mass procured images of mughals
10. Blessed Iron Bru
11. Anti RSS flyers
12. Newspaper cutting of Sikh police officer
13. Unmade jigsaw of Bhagat Singh
14. Funeral flowers
15. Nanak and Mardana car air freshener
16. Ceremonial red thread bracelets
17. Tracksuit
18. Gucci Rush and Fake Tongue
19. Fruit pastel
20. (Book) Diagnose, Treat, and Cure All Dis-ease with Traditional Indian Holistic Therapies by Vera Kaur
21. Fake vomit
22. Indian Workers Union, Glasgow, Flyers
23. Necklace featuring 5K's