



**Janhavi Khemka**

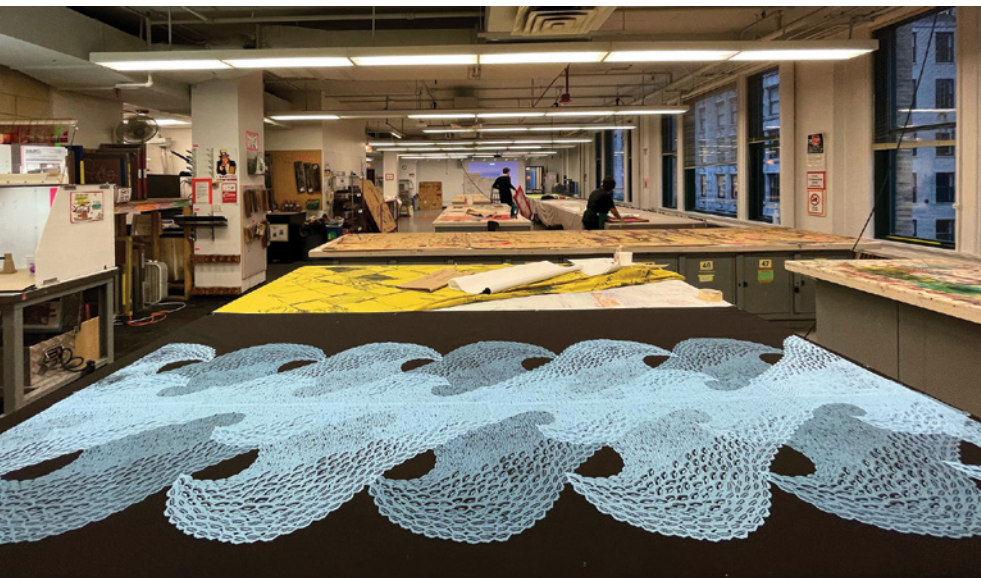
# Janhavi Khemka



*Warning: It is time*  
Detail

Born in Varanasi, India, currently based between Chicago and India, artist Janhavi Khemka approaches acoustics through woodcut printmaking and experimental installations composed of animation, sound, performance, and vibratory material.

Growing up, Khemka's late mother encouraged her to speak in Hindi, resulting in an emphasis on lipreading in a hearing-speaking world. Shortly after she lost her mother to cancer, Khemka searched for ways to imprint her experience of the 'real' world. Activating her sensory capacities through touch, taste, smell, and the visual, Khemka attended Santiniketan (2015-2017), interjecting a lineage of largely male master printmakers with conceptual wit and an astute awareness of the limits of printmaking. Khemka moved to Chicago to complete her master's at the School of the Art Institute, finding herself gravitating toward animation, sound design, and performance, activating works on paper through sound and bodily intervention. Developing immersive works that splice together the two and three-dimensional, she invites her viewers to locate their inner assumptions and aural subjectivities within the strange and otherness.



Printing studio  
Chicago

Slipping between imposed identities like 'disabled,' 'marginalized,' 'immigrant,' Khemka transcends ineffectual terms, attuning herself instead to the possibility of listening to materials she works within. For her, it becomes a fictional necessity to ensure her politics are not foreclosed nor erased, theoretically and conceptually.

Janhavi Khemka's *Sapna* is a feverish account of the artist's experience of fear and the anxiety, navigating the world as an Indian woman with a hearing-speech impediment. Born to a hearing-speaking family in Banaras, Janhavi developed an ear infection at the tender age of 9 months. Compounded by typhoid, she lost her hearing which brought her mother to teach her how to lip-read, in order for Janhavi to communicate in a speaking hearing environment. Janhavi recalls sitting beside her mother, watching her lips move in a mirror placed before both of them. By the age of 15, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, succumbing to the illness by the time the artist was 18. Recalling her mother's 'imprint' on her, she navigates the aural through light, touch, experimental sound and tactile media, something she shares to be comforting while situating herself in an able-bodied world.

Being brought up as 'normal' in a society that to some degree still believes in impairment as 'hereditary,' 'handicap' or 'defect', Janhavi defies convention by situating herself in both the hearing and non-hearing worlds. She considers herself 'privileged' for her education, and prides herself in defying socio-cultural stigma. Janhavi's dexterity in woodcut printmaking, animation and experimental vibrational media amalgamates, allowing her to 'imprint' upon the viewer. Placing them directly into a tactile-aural experience, she conjures environmental record through charcoal rubbings and relief prints, imagining what it would be like "to see and feel a storm and not hear it". Her fear of being in danger and not being able to discern its arrival, her exhaustion from her dependence on her 'visual' faculty, and glints of the artists desires for intimacy and affection create an immersive video installation for Janhavi to confide in her viewer.



Installation view *UnMute*  
Solo exhibition 2022, Chicago,  
USA

Janhavi's adeptness with woodcut print points to her schooling at Santiniketan, West Bengal. Home to lithography and printmaking virtuosos Chittaprosad Bhattacharya and Somnath Hore, who paid tribute to the suffering of the Indian common man, specifically during the Bengal famine, Janhavi objectively employs the craft to expose the social and political evils of her time. Disrupting a 'normative' social order, she masterfully shifts the face of the paper beneath each woodcut, disturbing the surface of the print, intentionally employing misplacement as a technique to render visible her day-to-day experience of mistranslation.

Indian Disability scholar, Prof. Shilpa Das speaks on the linkages between gender, disability, and Indian 'normative' social order, positing the impaired female Indian body as the 'Other of the Other'. Coming from a place where impairment is attributed to fate or '*karma*', Janhavi subverts social assumptions by commanding her *karmic* narrative, continually learning to understand sound through touch, taste, and feeling. 'Sapna' in this sense is not only a rendering of an interior landscape, it is also a woman-led revolt against a normative system that is ignorant of its own perceptual limitations.

### Pia Singh

(Pia Singh is an independent curator and arts writer based between Chicago, IL. and Bombay, IN. Singh's research lies at the intersection of community-engaged arts practices and design thinking, challenging structural and pedagogical hierarchies within and outside of which artists work towards creating systemic change.)



#1621  
Charcoal rubbings on paper  
Life-size doors (series with six units)  
2022  
Rebuilding Exchange Chicago

Installation view *UnMute*  
Solo exhibition 2022, Chicago USA



'I cannot help to think about the idea of a door.  
**What is on the other side?**  
**Who is knocking?**  
**Is there a danger that I am not aware of?**



*Warning: It is time*  
Installation view  
Comfort Station  
USA, 2023



**‘I will not have that  
second of realization  
or warning that a  
hearing person has.  
There is a part of  
me that feels I will  
be blind-sided in my  
meeting with death.**

**I will not hear death  
whisper in my ear...  
it is time!’**



*Warning: It is time*  
18 colour woodcut print on  
rives BFK paper  
88 x 42 inches  
2023



चटाई (Chatai)  
6 colour woodcut print and  
plywood platform  
72 x 48 inches  
2021





चटाई (Chatai)  
Detail

'Suspended from the ceiling, vibrantly pink, large-format prints fill Janhavi Khemka's studio. The ornamental design is constructed by mouth in motion, a motif repeated in the waves of mouths on the opposite wall. As a deaf woman, Khemka's desire to sleep peacefully is postponed by the "warring" of thoughts such as: "Did you close your door? Otherwise, someone will kill you" and "Maybe you forget to close the taps of water in your bathroom? Otherwise, you will drop on the sea." Khemka wants impatient people to see her "visual voice," the crashing of muted mouths. Since the pandemic, masks have haunted and frustrated Khemka as her ability to lip-read is cut off. Her mother taught her how to lip read in Hindi, and Khemka recalls a memory of learning the technique: "We were sitting on the mat and touching our throats to each other for the vibration." Khemka's patience is apparent in her craft and communication.'

Michaela Chan  
*F Newsmagazine*



Installation view  
Comfort Station

*Sleeping*  
65 - 85 colour woodcut print  
4 panels of 96 x 24 inches  
small panel 14 x 11 inches  
2022



Overleaf  
Detail





*For My Regret Lover*  
27 colour woodcut print  
on rives BFK paper  
44 x 30 inches each  
Diptych  
2021



*Of Roots and Branches*  
 Site specific multimedia installation  
 (Woodcut, Paper and Stop-motion)  
 Size variable  
 1 Shanthi Road, Bangalore  
 2018



Scan to  
 see video #1



Scan to  
 see video #2

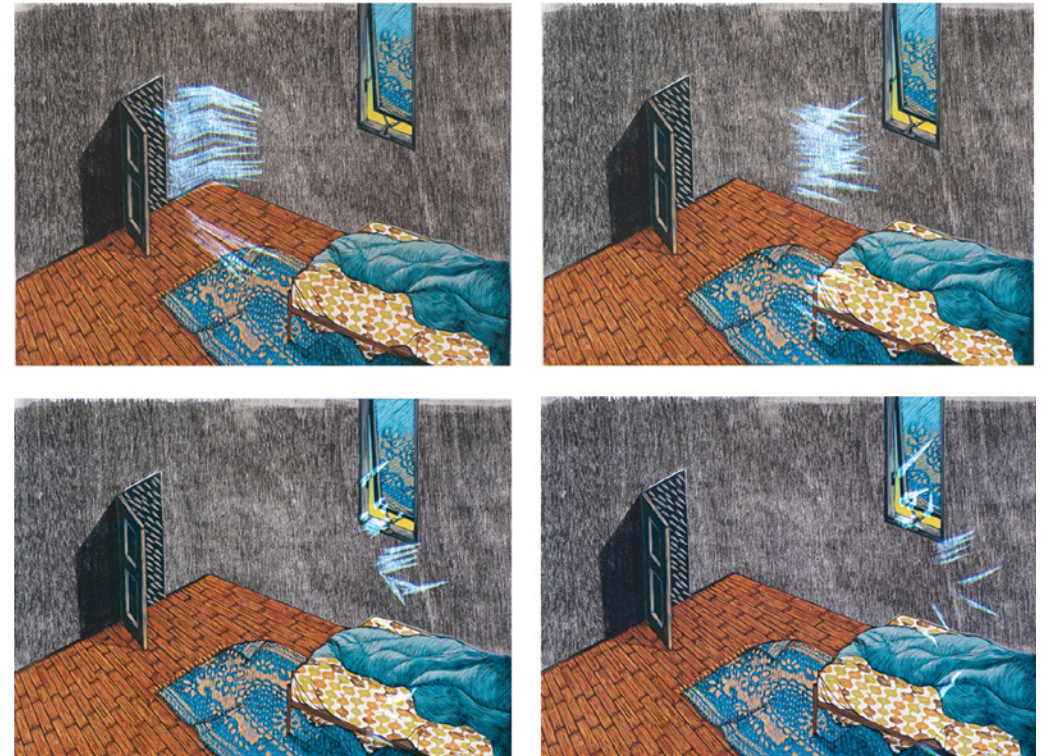


*Ma*  
6 colour woodcut print and projection  
on print using  
stop-motion animation  
60 x 48 inches  
2018

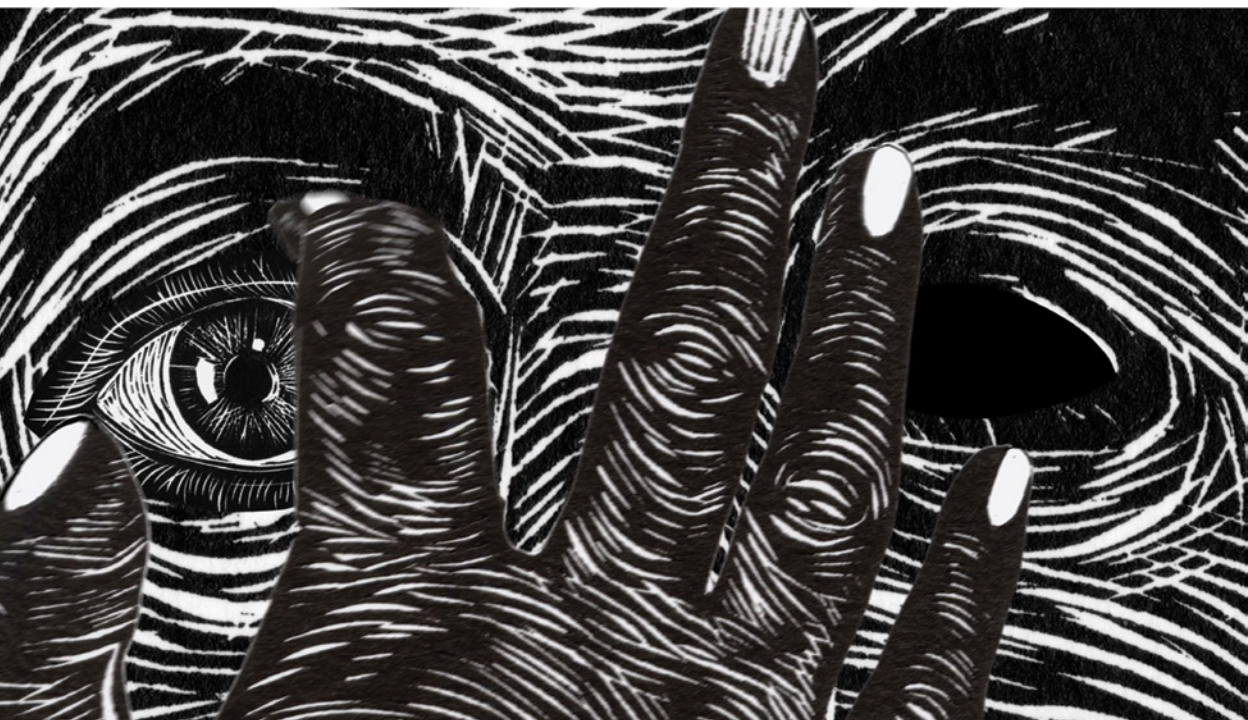


Scan to  
see the video

‘I have no warning  
and I’m caught in the  
bliss of my sleep, as  
a tidal wave drowns  
me and my house  
slowly falls around  
me.’



*My Room as Hell*  
Sequential detail of woodcut with  
stop-motion animation and projection  
mapping  
33 x 22 inches  
2023



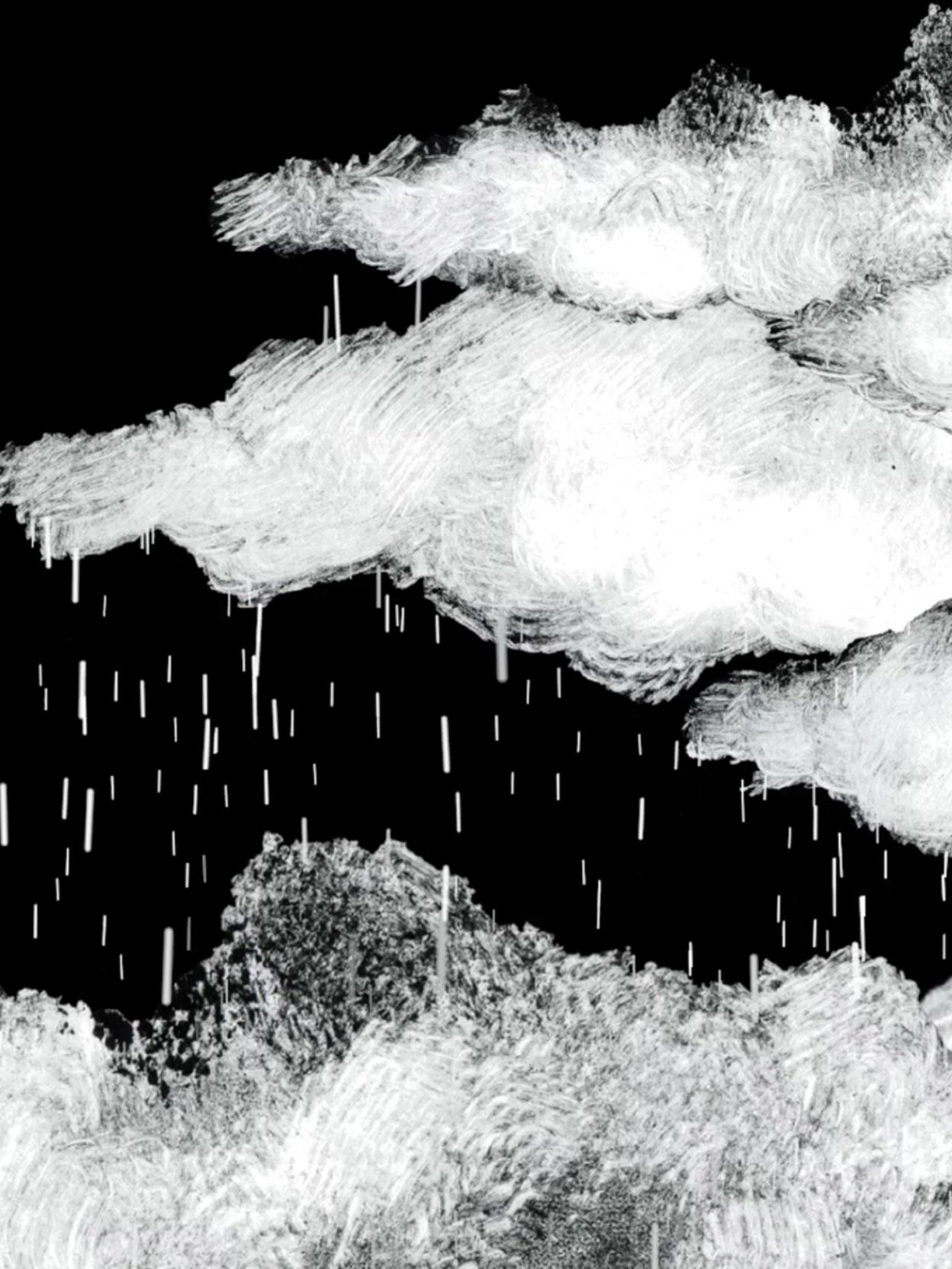
Detail

Janhavi Khemka received the 63rd National Award 2023 from Lalit Kala Academi, Government of India in printmaking for her stop-motion animation *Sapna*

*Sapna*  
Mix media Installation:  
Woodcut print, stop-motion animation  
using woodcut prints, plywood platform  
with vibration, charcoal rubbing of door  
and plywood panel.  
Size variable  
3.48 minutes loop  
2022







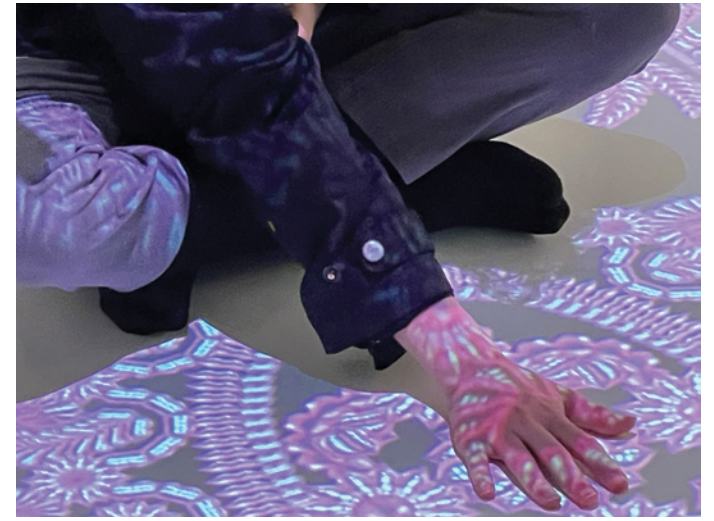
*Letter to my Mother*  
Mix media installation:  
Stop motion animation  
from 5 colour woodcut print,  
video projection, sound and vibration in  
plywood platform.  
72 x 48 x 3 inches  
3.32 minutes loop  
2023



Scan to see the video of  
performance and installation



Letter to my Mother  
Installation view



**‘Facing each other, we hold a coin together with our hands, which vibrates as the participant speaks to me, it helps me understand the words they are saying through the vibrations.’**

**We repeat this action again and again. They remain seated with me till I say their name correctly.’**



Scan to see  
the video

2/5/2022

RE: Violation Notice; Noise Complaints

Janhavi Khemka, or/and any other  
occupant  
Unit # 1621

Dear Janhavi

We are reaching out to you as we have continued to receive several noise complaints from your neighbors as coming from your apartment. Our building staff was dispatched couple of times and confirmed noise within your apartment home as the source.

Please accept this correspondence as a formal violation notice. We hope for you to acknowledge the noise complaints which are preventing your neighbors from resting at hours past 8PM through 6AM. Management has the right to terminate any lease agreement for such violation. Failure to comply will result in a legal 10-day notice to vacate the apartment at the cost of the lease holder.

If you believe you have received this formal request in error. We appreciate your immediate attention to this important matter.



#1505  
Performance  
Utensils, plywood  
platform, mics and AMP  
Variable  
23:33 minutes  
2023

“While residing in my apartment, I received an email regarding noise complaints. As a person who cannot hear, I was unaware of the volume of my activities within my living space.

In response to this email, I started to move around my apartment more cautiously, handling utensils with deliberate slowness to minimize any potential noise. I devised a performance art piece where I sit on a platform, creating vibrations through the sounds produced by the utensils' movements.”



Scan to see  
the video

Overleaf  
#1505  
Performance View

**“I feel so scared and  
anxious when I wash  
utensils.”**



# I am deaf, but I am not mute

“Siri is like my world. I would like to talk to Siri and would inform them that *I am deaf, but I am not mute.*

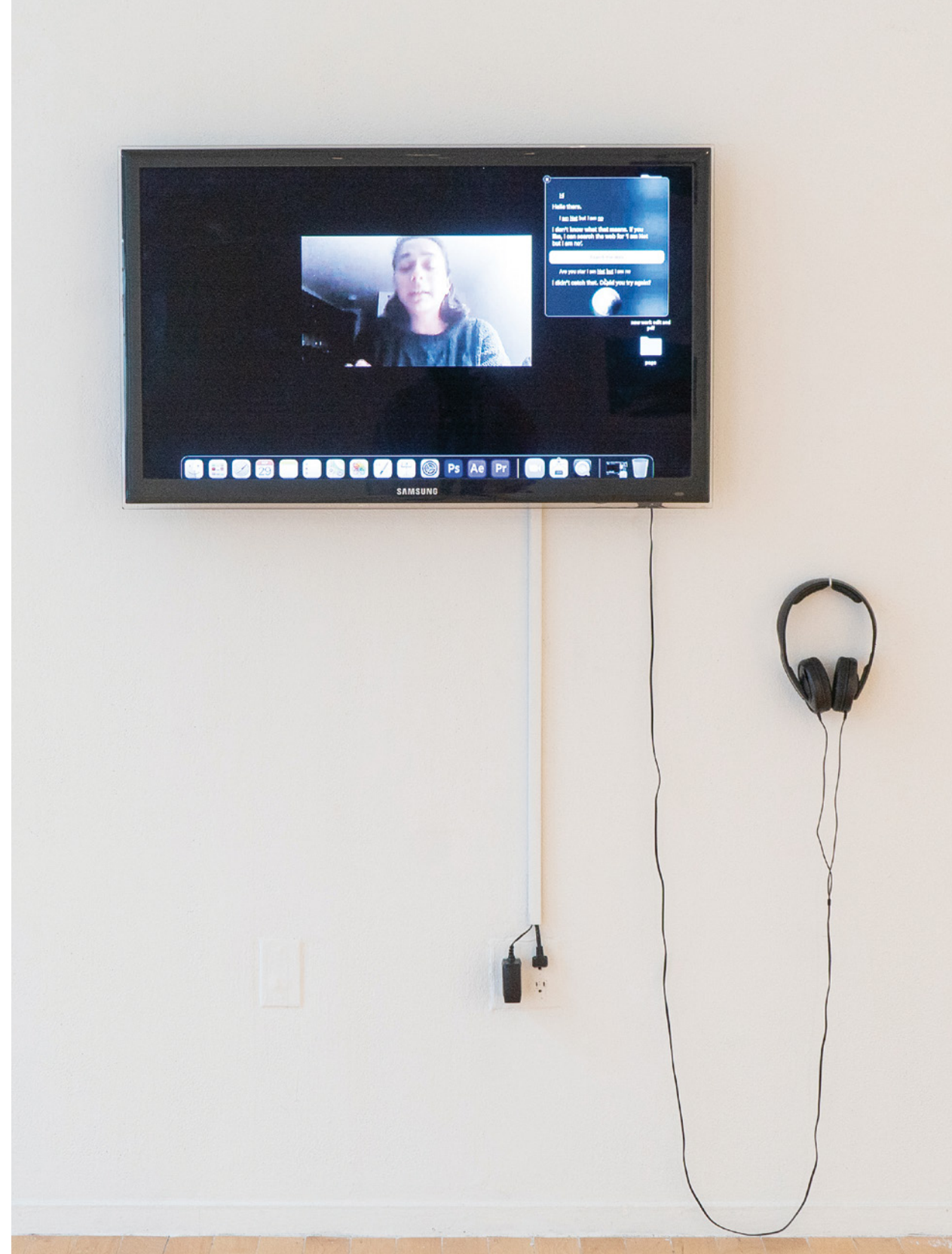
But Siri never understands me.

So, I repeat myself over and over.

It combines my seriousness, irritation, and persistence with the idiotic good-naturedness of Siri.

It has no resolution.”

*Siri's here to help*  
Installation view  
*UnMute*  
Solo Show





Born in 1993 in Varanasi, India, **Janhavi Khemka** is an interdisciplinary artist who graduated with a B.F.A. in Painting from the Faculty of Visual Art, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in 2015, and an M.F.A. in Graphics from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan in 2017. She earned a second Masters in Studio Arts at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA in 2023.

Khemka has participated in many major exhibitions in India and internationally, including two recent solo shows - 'Unit #1505', Comfort Station, Chicago, 2023; 'UnMute', SITE Sharp Gallery, Chicago, 2022. She has participated in numerous group shows including 'What We Inherit' at University Art Gallery, Truman State University, MO, USA, 2023; 'Coalesce' at CSI Project Space, 1912 North Damen, Chicago, 2023; 'Neighbors' 2023, Purple Window Gallery, at Mana Contemporary, Chicago, 2023; 'Open Water: Permeating Territories', Chicago, 2023; 'Where She Comes From', NEIU Fine Arts Gallery, Chicago, USA, 2022; 'A Photographic Image as Text Part I', Jolly Art Adda, Mumbai, India, 'Press Forward' at Box 13 Art Space, Texas, 2021; 'Embodied Histories: Reconstructing the Present' at Gallery SAIC, Chicago, 2021; 'Aroh' at Emami Art, Kolkata, 2021; 'Print Exposition' at Rashid Chowdhury Art Gallery, Chittagong, 2017; 'The Shape of Things' at Ganges Art Gallery, Kolkata, 2017.

Khemka has been a part of numerous workshops and art camps including one on Japanese Woodblock Printmaking with artist Paul Furneaux at Edinburgh, UK in 2018; National Printmaking Camp at Karnataka Chithrakala Parishad, College of Arts, Bengaluru, India, 2018 and International Graphic Arts Festival, Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh, India, 2018.

She has been selected for several international residencies such as Wisconsin School for the Deaf, Delavan, WI, US, 2023, 'Visualizing Language', Piramal Art Residency, Mumbai, India, 2020 and The International Art Residency Program at The Institute of Fine Art, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2017 among others.

Khemka is a recipient of many awards and fellowships, including the 63rd National Award 2023, Lalit Kala Akademi, in printmaking for her recent stop-motion animation (video installation), "Sapna"; Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation Award for Printmaking (2021, 2018); and the First Printmaking Prize Gate44 (Milan, 2019). Her works are a part of several important collections, including the KNMA, New Delhi, India and the Alkazi Foundation, India.

Janhavi Khemka works between Santiniketan, Varanasi and Chicago.



Emami Art is a leading Indian contemporary art gallery and a platform for cultural production. Established in 2017 in Kolkata, Emami Art represents emerging, mid-career and established artists and organises a dynamic programme of exhibitions and public seminars. Since its inception, the gallery has curated and hosted intimate and large-scale exhibitions and regularly participates in national and international art fairs and conferences.

With a focus on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach that echoes South Asian history, the programme explores socio-cultural and geo-political narratives in relation to visual art practices today. As part of its knowledge-sharing and archiving activities, Emami Art regularly hosts talks, seminars, panel discussions and conversations between artists, curators and audiences to create a safe space for critical engagement.

Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, the gallery places emphasis on knowledge production and socially conscious themes. Emami Art aspires to be a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity and welcomes all sections of society.

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