

Gayatri Gopinath, (2018) *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 248 pages, 72 illustrations, incl. 16pp. colour insert, \$94.95 (hbk) ISBN: 9781478000280; \$25.95 (pbk) ISBN: 9781478000358.

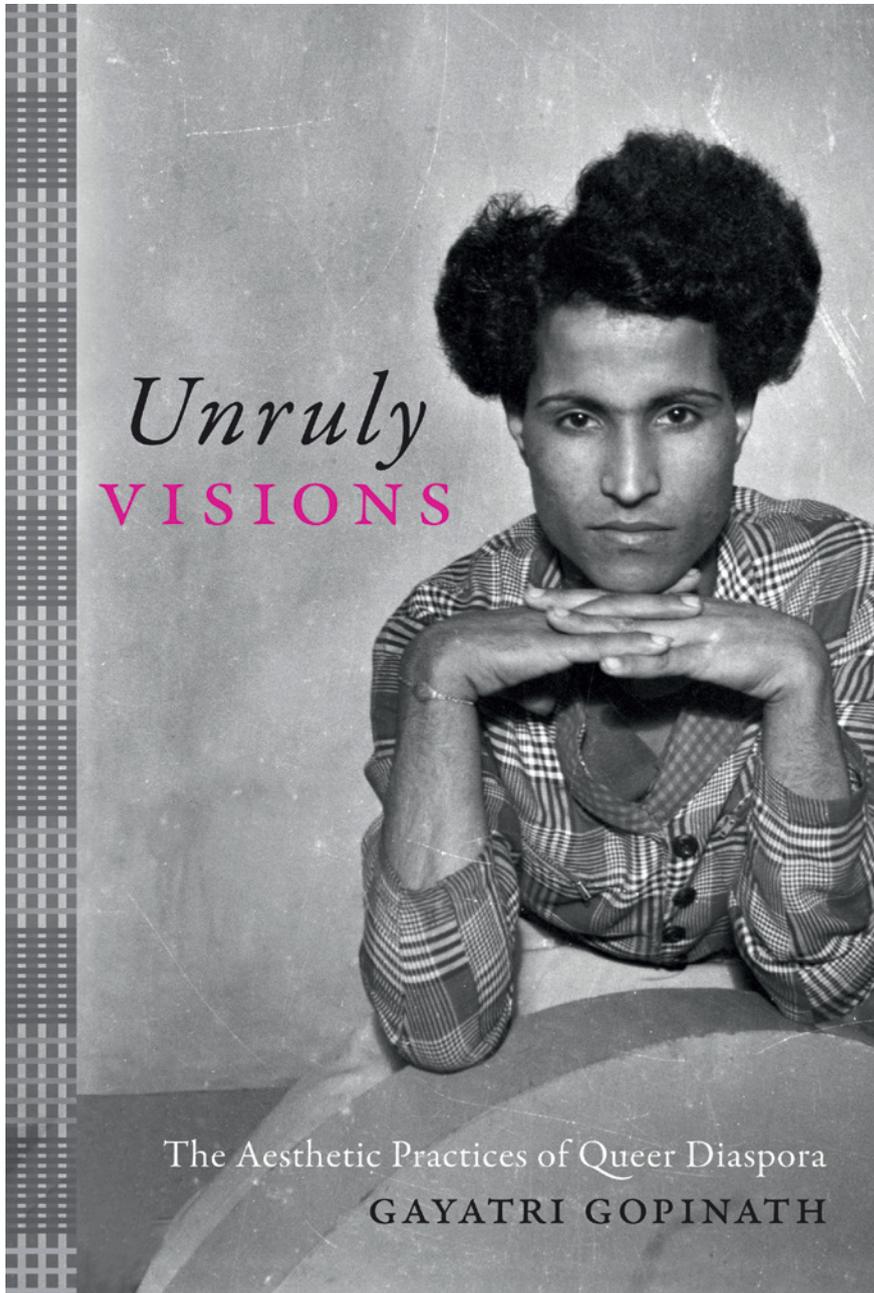


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Gayatri Gopinath's highly anticipated follow-up to her seminal and path-breaking book *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Culture* (Duke University Press, 2005) is a series of four powerful and elegantly written case studies, two of which are updates of previously published essays. She continues her deft exploration of artistic practices, sexuality, and transnational South Asia that began in *Impossible Desires*, providing links to works examining other diasporas and regions as well as works that may not deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) issues.

Gopinath brings together a broad variety of aesthetic practices, including photography, watercolours, web-based projects, installations, and narrative film. In a particularly refreshing mode, the author does not ignore written language—such as poetry and literary non-fiction—or consider it as outside of the visual realm. She points out that *Unruly Visions* can be seen as an act of queer curation, drawing on the root definition of curating (“to care for”) to argue convincingly that in her practice this takes “the form of carefully attending to aesthetic practices through writing” (4). The clarity of Gopinath's prose might suggest that such an approach is easy, but it requires both critical looking and an ability to synthesize different knowledges.

The book's first chapter explores Kerala, India as a region envisioned through Ligy Pullappally's independent feature film *Sancharram* [“The Journey” in Malayalam] (2004) as well as the artworks of David Dasharath Kalal and Sheba Chhachhi. The region—both in its subnational (such as Kerala) and supranational (for example, the Middle East or Asia) iterations—is one of the core concerns of the book as a whole. In this way Gopinath rethinks area studies and diaspora studies, as well as pushes queer studies to look outside of a Euro-American frame. Gopinath self-reflexively writes that while her first book troubled the nation/diaspora binary, it eschewed the region as a productive optic through which to explore the artistic practices of various queer diasporas. Another core concern of Gopinath's is attention to the personal and autobiographical. Like the region, these are often considered “minor forms of knowledge” working against “developmental and assimilationist narratives of both gay and national formation” (26). To avoid this diminution, Gopinath often makes transparent her own genealogy, personal friendships, and networks in connection to the artworks or subjects she explores. In this way, she implicitly works against the normative mode of writing art histories in which scholars veil their interest under the guise of producing supposedly objective knowledge (which tends to be Euro-American, white, male, and heteronormative).

Through her dual attentiveness to the personal and the regional, Gopinath provides a multi-layered account of Pullappally's film—the second film about

lesbian identity in India since Deepa Mehta's 1996 *Fire*—through a global human rights framework, the general developmentalist discourse of Kerala, transnational viewership, a queer diasporic lens, and in the context of both Malayan regional cinema and South Asian diasporic films. In one close analysis of a scene, Gopinath illustrates how the soundtrack and visuals gesture towards alternative desires that cannot be contained under the scrutinizing gaze of developmentalist national, gay, feminist narratives. I would have enjoyed reading more visual analysis of the *mise-en-scène* of this and other films Gopinath examines.

In the second chapter Gopinath brings together the work of visual artist Chitra Ganesh, poet Agha Shahid Ali, and filmmaker Aurora Guerrero to extend her focus on the region specifically in order to show how disorientation and placelessness can provide routes to envisioning more hospitable futures. The visual analysis of Ganesh's work is particularly astute. When writing about artworks, the discourse can often overwhelm the forms of the work itself. The opposite is the case here and, in this way, she fulfills her interest in caring for the works with which she sincerely engages.

Chapter Three is particularly audacious in its troubling of Indigenous and diaspora studies. Through careful readings of works by artists as diverse as Tracey Moffatt, Seher Shah, and Allan deSouza, Gopinath explores ideas of "diasporic rootedness" and "dwelling in displacement." Here, she brings together "lines of connection between various sites of biopolitical regulation (...) the Aboriginal settlement, imperial amphitheater, the low-income housing project Native reservation, internment camp, prison" (124). In this chapter Gopinath fully realizes the possibilities of her queer curatorial approach to suggest a "radical relationality" between disparate histories. Unlike the first two chapters, this one does not deal in an obvious way with artworks expressing same-sex desire, but seen in relation to the others, it is certainly a part of a larger whole. In this way, her book presents a queer palimpsestic landscape—something that a monograph rather than an article is more convincingly able to execute.

Her final case study considers British colonialism, slavery, a post-9/11 US, and post-war Lebanon while bringing together the works of artists she has already explored—such as Ganesh, deSouza and Akram Zaatari—alongside Saidiya Hartman's memoir *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Slave Route* (2007). It can be dizzying at times, perhaps inducing the same vertigo that the author says the works themselves produce. Most importantly, Gopinath describes the importance of "queer affiliation"—a particularly generative concept of connection through difference that provides the possibility of "placing together

different diasporic formations, and their attendant longings, losses, aspirations (...) within a common frame" (167). This message could not be more important during a time of toxic white nationalism across the world.

In the epilogue, Gopinath notes that curating also connotes "healing" and that the unruly visions instantiated by the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora metaphorically fulfill this by allowing for new ways of sensing and seeing the world. Gopinath does very much the same in weaving together diverse discourses and close readings of the visual.

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