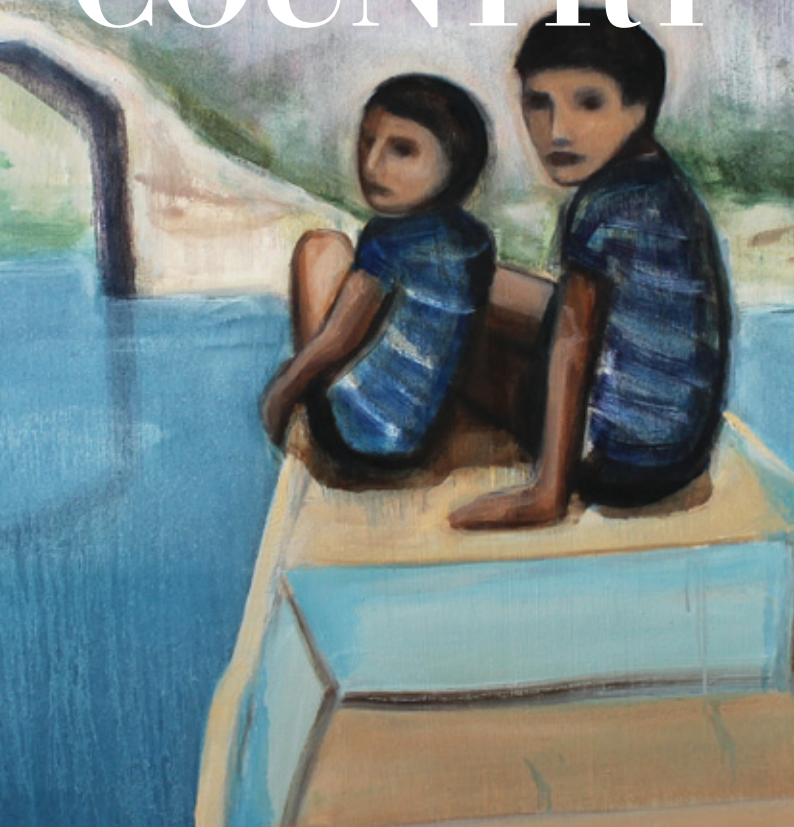


ANOTHER COUNTRY



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Matthew Krishanu and Cara Nahaul
Words: Skye Sherwin

Cover image:
Kashmir, Matthew Krishanu
Oil on Canvas, 125x175cm, 2014

Family photographs are a peculiar kind of aide memoire. From the posed studio shots of bygone decades to amateur snaps capturing days out, their obligatory grins and carefully framed setting only tell the merest fragment of our stories. Whatever personal triumphs or struggles circled the moment frozen by the camera's click, are at the mercy of porous memory and imagination.

In rather different ways, artists Matthew Krishanu and Cara Nahaul use old handed down photos to create paintings addressing a world far removed in space and time. Whether, as in Krishanu's case, it's the uniquely vivid memory of a boyhood romping in the swampy fields around Mymensingh or holidaying on Kashmir's waters, or for Nahaul, born and raised in the UK, abstracted tokens from an ancestral homeland she's never visited, both artists explore an Asia of the mind.

Krishanu has likened his work's desired effect to the pools-come-portals that transport characters in the *Wood Between Worlds*, from CS Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*: for him painting is no window looking out, but a liquid state that consumes you. Plunging into his imagery is to encounter childhood, not as a nostalgic place looked back to with a sentimental smile, but in all its raw, unsettling energy.



Matthew Krishanu, *Limbs*, 2014
Oil on Canvas, 180x140cm



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The boys who recur throughout the paintings in *Another Country* are shades from the artist's past, based on his brother and his younger self and conjured from a mix of photos and sense memories. These figures though stand independent of their origins, and any grown-up's rules. Their dark eyes stare, as mysterious and disquieting as the lushly suggestive landscapes they inhabit.

In *Skeleton*, the duo dressed in flip flops and shorts, confront death, having discovered the carcass of a cow in a field whose dank, marshy green is built up in dreamy layers of watery pigment. Elsewhere they go about their business with bows and arrows, or gaze down at us, discovered in the branches of a high tree, a conquered kingdom, all their own.

At times the paint has the precise line and dazzling brightness of a sudden recollection or epiphany. Or else it has a feverish, hallucinogenic quality, as in *Kashmir*, where the kids perch on a boat prow, above a lake of dizzying blue drips, beneath mountains that run with purple. It's as if the whole canvas might melt away.

▲ Matthew Krishanu, *Skeleton*, 2014
Oil on Canvas, 150x200cm

◆ Matthew Krishanu, *Golly*, 2013
Oil on Canvas, 55x70cm

While Krishanu's paintings build on the past, layering recollections while hinting at tantalising stories, Nahaul creates new worlds by peeling things back to essentials. A palm tree, a chair and a patterned floor are the repeated motifs isolated from photos to take on an alternative life in paintings and mono prints that move from ghostly pale to bright, geometric abstraction.

These are the props from the photographer's studio or domestic setting where her grandparents posed for commemorative portraits – a tropical backdrop that aped the real landscape beyond the door or seating glimpsed beneath the subject's body. They subtly point to the illusory nature of the original images: an everyday exercise in careful self-presentation and stage management that veils the past they initially seem to offer forth.

Stripped free of context by Nahaul, the palm tree becomes a black silhouette, set against pallid planes of pink and cream that create the barest suggestion of interior space, be that architectural or psychic. Chairs recur, first with the universally recognisable four legs, seat and back, positioned in the most essentialist depiction of a room, a peachy corner against a buttermilk hue.



Cara Nahaul, Proposition for a Backdrop, 2013
Oil on Canvas, 91x106cm



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Nahaul's experiments with the motif though also push towards the purely abstract, as with her paintings split between flattened checker-board or striped patterns and planes of cloudy, layered colour. Against these, the 'chair' becomes a mysterious object, be that the white rectangle that floats like a portal in one painting, or what might be an eccentric letter-box with its mouth of impenetrable black in another. (The latter began as the just-visible arm of a photographer's studio couch.)

For both these artists their medium is a conduit, less to the irretrievable past perhaps, than into fresh, painterly territory.

▲ Cara Nahaul, Untitled, 2013
Oil on Canvas, 121x162cm

◆ Cara Nahaul, Sit and Pry, 2013
Oil on Canvas, 132x162cm

Matthew Krishanu:~

(b. 1980)

Lives in London. He completed an MA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in 2009.

Recent exhibitions include: The Marmite Prize for Painting (2011 & 2013); Mission (solo), Contemporary British Painting series, St Marylebone Crypt, London, 2013; We Were Trying to Make Sense, 1Shanthiroad Gallery, Bangalore, 2013, In Residence (solo), Parfitt Gallery, London, 2010.

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***Cara Nahaul:~***

*(b. 1987)*

Lives in New York. She is currently a Fulbright Scholar studying an MFA at Parsons The New School of Design and completed her BA at Goldsmiths, University of London, 2009.

Recent exhibitions include: Tracing Erasure, 25 East Gallery, New York, 2013; Jerwood Painting Fellowships, Jerwood Gallery, London, 2011; John Moores Painting Prize, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 2010.

***Exhibition Dates:~***

23 Jan ~ 6 Apr 2014

***Private View:~***

22 Jan, 6 ~ 9pm

***Artists' Talk:~***

25 Jan, 2 ~ 3pm

***Gallery Address:~***

The Nunnery

181 Bow Road

London E3 2SJ

[www.bowarts.org](http://www.bowarts.org)

***Opening Hours:~***

Tues ~ Sun, 10am ~ 5pm

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