

## **Panel 13**

### **Intermedial Interventions in Contemporary Fiction**

#### **The (Male) Artist in the Fictions of Rachel Cusk: Reading *A Second Place* and *Parade***

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In 1932, Mabel Dodge Luhan wrote *Lorenzo in Taos*, a memoir about the time D. H. Lawrence came to stay with her in Taos, New Mexico. Luhan's work provides the inspiration for Rachel Cusk's 2021 novel, *A Second Place*. The novel's narrator, a woman who goes by M, invites the moody and arrogant male painter L to stay in a comfortable cabin attached to the property that she shares with her husband. Like *Lorenzo in Taos*, which tells its readers more about Luhan than Lawrence, *A Second Place* mostly records M's actions, thoughts, and feelings as she interacts with L and his abrasive girlfriend, Brett. In other words, Cusk's novel reads Luhan's memoir for the tense dynamic that existed between Lawrence and Luhan to present M as a woman struggling to find space in the world that idolises male creativity and genius.

M's struggle resembles the difficulties faced by the women in Cusk's novel *Parade* (2024), which is set in a world of artists, painters and sculptors. The wife of the famous male artist G, who paints his subjects upside-down, feels diminished, for example, when he draws her portrait. Similarly, when one of the novel's narrators, another woman, is violently assaulted by a deranged woman on the street, and people gather around her, she feels that she has become a work of art, a public spectacle. *Parade*, in this way, expands the world of *A Second Place*: it is not just a novel in which a male artist interacts with a woman. Rather, it presents a world in which women survive the reality of being constantly viewed, studied, and commented upon by men. This presentation will discuss the ethical, aesthetic, and political implications of the ways Cusk configures the male artist in *A Second Place* and *Parade*.

#### **Biography**

Chinmaya Lal Thakur is Assistant Professor in English at Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi/NCR, India. He has several publications in the areas of postcolonial literatures and cultures, the contemporary novel, modernism and its afterlives, and deconstruction. He is currently revising his doctoral thesis on David Malouf's novels for publication as a monograph.