

## **Panel 1**

### **Art in the Wake of Violence**

#### **The Line: On Partition and the Aesthetics of Division**

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What is a border, but a line? A line—harsh in its sterility, its minimalism cold and unfeeling, its apparent arbitrariness cruel—like a knife that violently presses against bare flesh to sever apart a whole into two. Fragmenting not just the physical, but slicing through the spatio-temporal. It is in its simplicity that its violence resides: the bureaucratic neatness of a border imposed upon the intimate mess of human lives. Despite its mechanical imposition, the line drawn during the 1947 Partition of India left behind repercussions on the South Asian continent that continue to defy the border's attempt at containment.

This paper explores how South Asian artists Amar Kanwar and Zarina meditate on and reimagine the India-Pakistan border's linearity to grapple with its fractured legacy. Kanwar's videopoem *A Season Outside* (1997) focuses specifically on the Wagah border that sits between Amritsar (India) and Lahore (Pakistan), capturing the daily ritualised aggression that is its border ceremony. Zarina overlays handwritten letters from her sister with architectural diagrams in her print series *Letters from Home* (2004), that appear to represent the internal, external and interstitial devastation of dislocation. It is through a subversion of this linear form that a linear retelling of history is refused—the border is not only a site of political violence, but a terrain where memory, absence, and longing are inscribed. Through the intermedial, the linear becomes a space of aesthetic rumination on a past that continues to haunt the present.

#### **Biography**

Rhea Chalak is an English Literature and Art History undergraduate at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her interests lie in cinema, photography, and modern and contemporary art. She is drawn to questions of memory, temporality, spirituality and affect, and is especially interested in articulating personal and collective histories through the visual.