

THE MMFA ACQUIRES A SHILPA GUPTA
The first work by the celebrated Indian artist
in a Canadian museum



Montreal, July 24, 2019 – The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) has acquired a major work by **Shilpa Gupta**, an artist currently featured in the Venice Biennale, where she is appearing in the exhibition *May You Live in Interesting Times* curated by Ralph Rugoff. The installation *For, in your tongue, I cannot fit: 100 jailed poets* is the first work by this internationally famous Indian artist to enter a public collection in Canada. Gupta's multi-disciplinary oeuvre could not be more cutting-edge: she is preoccupied with the political social space, most notably with notions of boundaries and censorship, and the power of walls, including walls of words. This acquisition was made possible thanks to funding raised by the first edition of W. Bruce C. Bailey's *Fête Champêtre* in 2018.

For, in your tongue, I cannot fit: 100 jailed poets

This impressive and touching work is the first piece by a contemporary artist from India to be acquired by the MMFA. The power of language and words, their poetry and their potential for violence, are at the heart of Gupta's discourse. *For, in your tongue, I cannot fit: 100 jailed poets* is a perfect illustration of this strong attachment to words and names. It is composed of 100 collections of poetry written by poets from different lands and different eras: what they have in common is that all of them were imprisoned for their writing. Each book has been cast in gun metal and laid out on an immense 12 metre long table so that the visitor can read



the title and a few words of the work. Brought together in this manner, their lines evoke the power of words and their potential for uniting or dividing us.

Among the 100 poets whose work is immortalized here in gun metal, Gupta chose texts that are very personal for her, written by authors from some forty countries including Khushhal Khattak (1613-1689) from Afghanistan, Jean Richepin (1849-1926) and Auguste Marseille Barthélemy (1796-1867) from France, Asrar Hussain Khan (1919-2000) from India, Alan Ginsberg (1926-1997) from the United States, Habib Jalib (1928-1993) from Pakistan, Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995, father of the artist Zina Saro-Wiwa, creator of a diptych recently acquired by the Museum) from Nigeria, Ashraf Fayadh (1980-) from Saudi Arabia and Talal-Mallouhi (1991-) from Syria. The texts are inscribed or translated into English.

Extract:

*A son who has seen a number of jail terms
Causing tears to flow in streams on Mother's cheeks.
Sitting next to her, I find myself so small
Next to the great vast love of my mother.*
– Nguyen Chi Thien (1939-2012)

Short biography of Shilpa Gupta

Born in Mumbai in 1976, Shilpa Gupta graduated from the Sir J.J. School of Fine Arts in that city. She is one of the best known and most prolific contemporary Indian artists in the world. Her approach focuses on nationalism, identity, boundaries, religion and the human condition and on the role of art across all aspects of society. Her works have a critical element and are especially concerned with establishing a dialogue with the public.



Her art has been honoured by numerous awards all over the world. In 2004 she won the prize as international artist of the year from the South Asian Visual Artists Collective of Canada, in addition to receiving the Sanskriti Prathisthan Award in New Delhi and the Transmediale Award in Berlin. She received the Biennial Award at the Biennale of Cuenca, Ecuador in 2011 and the YFLO Titan Young Women Achievers Award for 2012-2013, in New Delhi.

As well as being exhibited in the 2019 edition of the Venice Biennale, her works have been presented in a number of other international biennales, including those in Kochi Muziris in India (2018, 2019), Goteborg, Sweden (2017, 2015), Havana, Cuba (2015, 2006), the 8th Biennale in Berlin, Germany (2014), Sharjah 13 in the United Arab Emirates (2013), the New Museum Triennial, New York (2009), Lyon, France (2009), Vancouver (2009), Kwangju, South Korea (2008) Liverpool, England (2006) and the triennial in Yokohama, Japon (2008).

Her works have been exhibited in major institutions across the globe, including the Tate Modern and the Serpentine Gallery in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Daimler Chrysler Contemporary in Berlin, the Mori Museum in Tokyo, the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the New Museum and the Queens Museum in New York, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in Porto and the Devi Art Foundation in Gurgaon.

Her works can be found in the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Asia Society of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Louisiana Museum, the Deutsche Bank, Daimler Chrysler, the Bristol Art Museum, the Louis Vuitton Foundation, the Astrup Fearnley Museum, the Fonds

National d'Art Contemporain - France, the Kiran Nadar Museum, the M+ Museum and the Devi Art Foundation, among others.

Acknowledgments

The Museum and its Foundation offers its heartfelt thanks to W. Bruce C. Bailey and the participants in the Fête champêtre.

Photos: 1), 2) and 3) Shilpa Gupta (born in 1976), *For, in Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit: 100 Jailed Poets*, 2017-2018, 100 books cast in gun metal, table. MMFA, purchase, W. Bruce C. Bailey Fête-champêtre Fund. Installation view at YARAT Contemporary Art Space, Baku – solo show by Shilpa Gupta *For, in Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit*, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Havana. Photo: Pat Verbruggen. 4) Shilpa Gupta. Photo: Shrutti Garg.

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About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Drawing over 1 million visitors annually, the MMFA is one of the most visited museum in Canada and North America. Its highly original temporary exhibitions combine various artistic disciplines – fine arts, music, film, fashion and design – and are exported to the four corners of the world. Its rich encyclopedic collection, displayed in its five pavilions, includes international art, world cultures, decorative arts and design, and Quebec and Canadian art. The Museum has seen exceptional growth in recent years with the addition of two new pavilions: the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion, in 2011, and the Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace, in 2016. The MMFA complex also includes Bourgie Hall, a 460-seat concert hall, as well as an auditorium and a movie theatre. The MMFA is one of Canada's leading publishers of art books in French and English, which are distributed internationally. The Museum also houses the Michel de la Chenelière International Atelier for Education and Art Therapy, the largest educational complex in a North American art museum, enabling the MMFA to offer innovative educational, wellness and art therapy programmes. mbam.qc.ca