



**A response to Abhishek Chaudhary's
*Sorry, not in print***

Flux Gallery, 1-9 February, 2019

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In early February, during Abhishek Chaudhary's exhibition, *Sorry, not in print*, every inch of Flux Gallery was occupied by the aroma of Pakora. The smell of the fried Pakistani food is comforting and familiar. The dim lighting in the space and the carefully placed lamps illuminating the different works soften the viewers' visual perceptions, allowing them to approach a thought or memory provided by the space and smell of the dish. These reactions can also be a deviation from the experience of entering rooms where information is displayed, and disrupt the focus of those rooms by offering something different. In an exhibit that alters the intention of archival texts by removing them from their drawers and exhibiting them, the atmosphere provides new information grounded in each viewer's take on the smell and how it influences documents.

In each of the works there are examples of archival texts reprinted and exposed in ways that elicit disruption. Chaudhary recalls "envisioning a destroyed library, an archival information centre or something serious of that accord."¹ In this vision, the deviation from documentation and the archive creates a contradiction in how information is understood. Chaudhary constructs a space where the exhibit begins to challenge the legitimacy of reliability. By taking an article that suggests objectivity and altering the motive of them, reliability is questioned. Chaudhary creates authorship out of clerical documents that provokes profound interest from the viewer. The unseen places in which spaces house information is exposed through the destruction and repurposing of both text and the orientations of those rooms themselves.

Reprints of passports and collected historical documents make up the different pieces in the exhibit, but are displayed rather than stored. This distortion reframes the accepted purpose of them as shelved items. *Sorry, not in print* exposes 'reliable' texts as nothing but old words and illegible text by shining a light on them and drawing immediate attention to what ordinarily would have only a handful of eyes laid upon them between border officers, customs, and the passport office. The repurposing of these items alter the relationship between viewer and subject, which emulates 'found object' art, but differs by not destroying the original intention of the objects, but rather showcasing them in a new environment that reimagines the intention.

The largest work in the collection is a piece where the Pakora sit on top of a table that is flipped onto its surface. Integrated into the pile of food are the printed covers of the passports in which Chaudhary describes an experience from his past: "I heard about gold earrings being kneaded into dough and hidden between rotis."² This story from his grandmother is an example of the many tales circulating around the transport of valuable items across the Pakistan border during the partition era in 1947. The Pakora and copied passports integrated within one another on top of the flipped table is a complex arrangement. These items are fixed in place, as though remnants of an altercation, at any moment spilling onto the floor; there is a hesitation to the work that challenges the viewer to think about reliability.

At the back of the gallery documents are laid out, again with light shone upon them. One image is placed on the wall, as though it had been stuck there, copied distorted photos lining the wall lying flat on the floor. A bench also sits in the space where copies of text and the same distorted photos are laid out. They are placed in an orderly fashion, as though they were rifled through, but arranged neatly so that each piece could be seen. By stepping away from each

¹ Abhishek Chaudhary, email exchange with author, March 1, 2019

² Chaudhary, email exchange with author, March 1, 2019.

individual piece, the gallery is in dismay. However, the disruption becomes the cohesion — the distraction of the smell of oil in the room, the void space unaccompanied by light — they become a point in which the viewer can refer back to while observing the work, similar to how informational text in an archive office might function.

When asked about space between the different pieces in this exhibit, Chaudhary reminded me, “this entire show was coordinated via Skype and WhatsApp calls back and forth between me in Prague and Hassaan Ashraf [member of Flux Gallery].”³ The online correspondence between Chaudhary and I helped me place myself in the work by understanding mobility and movement of information across borders. While I had originally asked about the space between the works, the answer reminded me of barriers faced in the exhibit; There is not secrecy in information that moves, only what is observed or meant to. Our conversation created a record similar to Chaudhary’s communications with Ashraf. The use of records in the show inspired a new documentation exchanged between participants outside of the exhibit that held no intention of hiding any information. Instead, the exchanges act only create alternative perceptions of the subjects in the show.

While the Pakora exists ephemerally, the documents among them showcase the distrust in how we perceive permanence. In Chaudhary’s artist statement he states, “After all, old passports are good for nothing but perhaps, scribbling”⁴ suggesting that information is only valid depending on time and place for function. Treating documents as objects of focus was something I had not initially lingered on, but the aroma and the darkness that hid nothing had me questioning the places I have moved through in the past. Transit bodies and information create subjective truths in artifacts. These truths speak to personal memory and cultural difference. Documents carry information that are useful only to those who are named in them and the people that hold the stamp. They function momentarily in a life, but are filed and fixed as a record for existence. Their permanence is a promise of truth, but meaning is lost once the people named in them disappear, and all that remains are stories of Pakora and the truths we choose to take from them.

³ Chaudhary, email exchange with author, March 1, 2019.

⁴ Abhishek Chaudhary, “Sorry, not in print”, artist statement in exhibition pamphlet, (Flux Gallery/aceartinc, February 2019), 1.

Bibliography

Chaudhary, Abhishek. Email exchange with B. Bhoy Gali, March 1, 2019

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