

Passages

Priya Suresh Kambli

Vivian Poey

Silver Eye

Education Guide
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About the Artists

Priya Suresh Kambli received her BFA at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette and an MFA from the University of Houston. She is currently Professor of Art at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri.

Kambli's work inadvertently examines the question asked by her son Kavi at age three; did she belong to two different worlds, since she spoke two different languages? The essence of his question continues to be a driving force in her art making. In her work, Kambli has always strived to understand the formation and erasure of identity that is an inevitable part of the migrant experience, exploring the resulting fragmentation of family, identity, and culture.

Kambli's artwork has been exhibited, published, collected and reviewed in the national and international photographic community. The success of Kambli's work underlines the fact that she is engaged in an important dialogue and reinforces her intent to make work driven by a growing awareness of the importance of many voices from diverse perspectives and the political relevance of our private struggles.

Vivian Poey is an artist and educator in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work examines a number of issues ranging from migration and cultural assimilation to the passing of time. She is a US citizen, born in Mexico of Cuban parents and lived in Guatemala and Colombia before moving to the U.S. This complicated trajectory informs all of her work, which serves as a method of investigation, and includes photography, installation and performance. Her work focuses on personal and historical narratives, especially those dealing with cultural identities, memory and displacement.

Vivian's work has been exhibited widely in both group and solo exhibitions and has been featured in publications such as *Fraction Magazine*. In addition to her art practice, she has

served as a juror and curator for several exhibitions, including *Crossing Borders: personal narratives of immigration* at the Sandra and Phillip Gordon Gallery at the Boston Arts Academy and the Parker Gallery at Lesley University. Vivian has also worked extensively at the intersection of arts and education, has co-authored and co-edited books including the most recent *Art as a Way of Listening: Centering Student and Community Voices in Language Learning and Cultural Revitalization*. She is the recipient of the 2017 Massachusetts Art Education Association Higher-Educator of the Year Award.

Vivian Poey teaches Photography and Integrated Studies at the Lesley College of Art + Design.

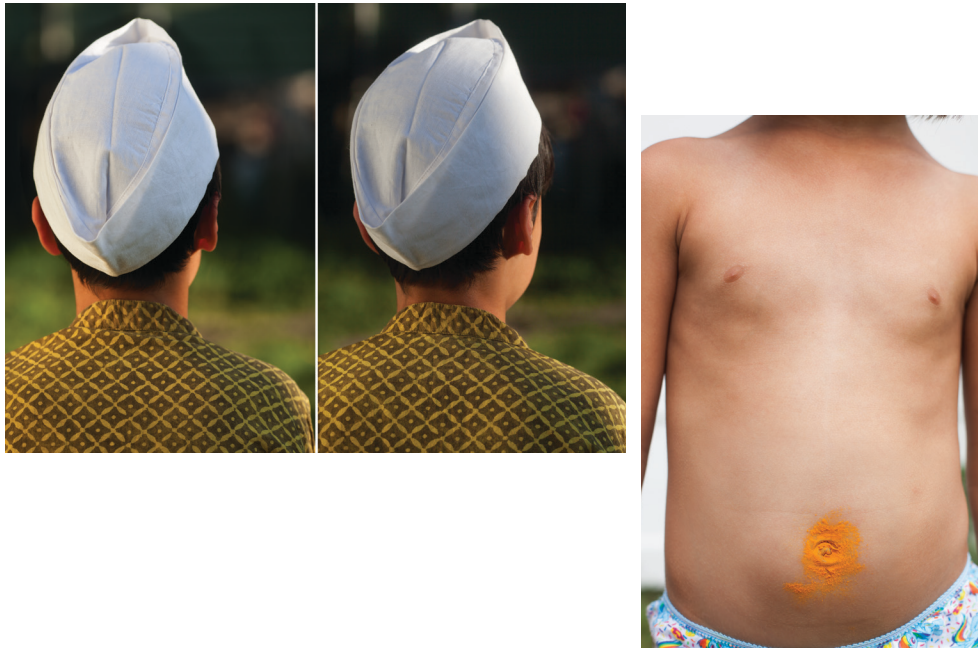


I. Introduction

Artists Priya Suresh Kambli and Vivian Poey consider personal and political histories of migration and their continuing aftermath in memory. They share a focus on how maternal lineages inherit these complex legacies. In *Passages*, Kambli and Poey respond to their family photographic archives to traverse between the past and new self-made narratives.

For instance, Vivian Poey layers family photographs with tracing paper, meticulously cut by hand to expose representations of the sea. This technique invites reflection on her family's history and the profound human impact of migration. Priya Suresh Kambli experiments with mark-marking to transform the surfaces of original photographs. Through cycles of repetition and variation, she conveys fragmentation and essential questions about representation.

Both artists' practices of recontextualization illuminate the ever-shifting relationships between history, memory, and photography. Significantly, their contemporary reassessments of the past are not nostalgic or romantic. Instead, Kambli and Poey reshape historical imagery to challenge our present and envision reimagined futures.



II. Representing the Family Album

The role of family albums has changed continuously since the invention of photography. Since the nineteenth century, family albums have reflected personal relationships while often demonstrating economic and social status, especially when photography was primarily an elite pursuit. As photographic technologies became more affordable and accessible in the twentieth century, family photo albums became a universal pastime for recording significant loved ones and events. Today, contemporary artists frequently respond to the family album to assert personal **representation** on their own terms. As a result, creative interventions with the family album can be acts of memory and self-expression that respond to the socio-political conditions of our contemporary moment.

Questions for Looking:

→ Priya Suresh Kambli frequently complicates the surface information of family photographs by introducing patterns and mark-making. This simultaneously obscures and reveals meaning. For example, this can be seen in the photograph *Eye, Earring and Flowers*. How do the artistic decisions in creating this artwork accentuate gesture and why might this be?

→ In addition to responding to archival family images, Priya Suresh Kambli creates contemporary portraits of herself and her children. Consider photographs such as *Kavi (Topi)* and *Soha Bellybutton (Turmeric)*. How does the composition or cropping of these photographs connect with meaningful conversations around the gaze?

→ Vivian Poey uses family photographs from the 1930s to the present day, alongside passport photos and immigration documents. By repeatedly exposing details of the sea, how does her work suggest intersections of the personal and the political?



III. Forming Time

The medium of photography is intertwined with concepts of time. The making of a photograph is indelibly linked to the **temporal** moment of its creation and the human desire to fix a moment or memory. However, the meaning of a photograph remains fluid and unpredictable as time passes, shaped by each viewer's subjective interpretations and the social and political motivations that influence perception. Artists Priya Suresh Kambli and Vivian Poey explore complex ideas around **ephemeral** aspects of image-making. Their material interventions result in photographs that carry history and present feelings while exploring and collapsing notions of time.

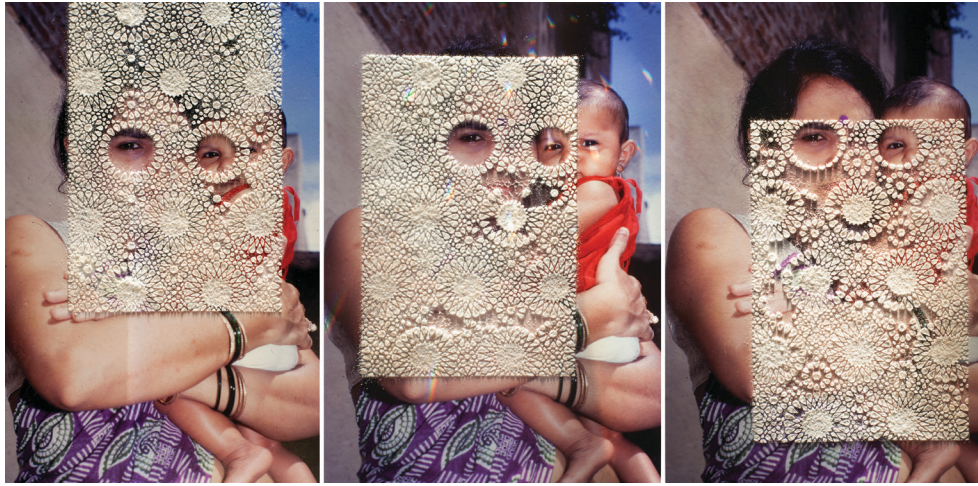
Questions for Looking

→ Vivian Poey frequently uses layering between materials to evoke layers of time and her own intervention as an artist. How do you respond when this approach is applied to historical imagery from newspaper archives, such as in *Haitian Boatlift*, 1981, or *Florida Keys, Migrant Boats left Behind*, 2023? How might this use of layering complicate ideas around photography and history?

→ In the series *Devhara*, Kambli makes cyanotypes by placing her mother's objects of worship on paper and exposing them to light in her garden, moving each object gradually during the day, sometimes sixty-seventy times. Consequently, these objects are linked to a specific time, place, and process, even as these objects also explore more elusive notions of time. What else does the role of abstraction here represent for you?

→ Our relationship with archives of family photographs often outlasts our relationship with the people depicted within them due to mortality or other forms of loss. Consider your family photographs; which have been the most enduring to you and why? Which photographs bring back presence, even though they may now also symbolize absence?





IV. Maternal Lineages

Priya Suresh Kambli and Vivian Poey explore personal and political histories of migration, including their relation to **maternal lineages**. Both artists create visual sequences and installations that span generations and consider the overlapping roles between mother, grandmother, and daughter. On arrival to America at age eighteen, Kambli brought two archives with her, a set of photographs predominantly created by her father and a set of heirloom objects of worship that belonged to her mother. A central thread throughout Poey's installation are photographs that chart the intersections of her maternal line and journeys to US citizenship. Importantly, Kambli and Poey are not passive recipients of archival images and objects. They use these familial inheritances as vocabularies to build new artworks and form new ongoing relationships with the past and potential futures.

Questions for Looking

→ Priya Suresh Kambli uses light or materials such as flour or rice to create patterns that recall traditional Indian rangoli drawings. These drawings are used during festivals or printed on textiles. Importantly they symbolize a form of art, ritual, and knowledge that is passed down through generations of women, typically from mother to daughter. Consider *Muma (Pregnant)*, 2017. What does the intersection of this visual language with photography suggest to you?

→ In addition to incorporating patterns, Priya Suresh Kambli further experiments with repetition and sequencing, as with *Muma and Sona*, 2018. What do these additional techniques make possible?

→ In Vivian Poey's installation, we are invited to witness several generations of a family unfold in once-private photographs that are now shared publicly in a gallery space. For example, consider the passport photos. What might the artist have intended by reclaiming such pictures from their origins as government documents?



V. Community Perspectives

Community Perspectives is an ongoing series where people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds respond freely to images in our exhibitions.

Sandra Bacchi reflects on Vivian Poey's *Abue*, 2023

Vivian Poey's photograph feels like a passage through time, a portal inviting us into her family's history while holding back the full story. The use of glassine, much like in old photo albums, creates a delicate barrier—not just protecting the image but symbolizing the fragility of memory. It shields us from the full truth of that moment when the photographer captured the scene, reminding us that memories shift depending on how much we are allowed—or willing—to uncover.

As an immigrant and photographer myself, I resonate deeply with this sense of searching for something beyond the visible, for a connection to different worlds or dimensions of experience. Poey's decision to cut a small rectangle just where the path meets the horizon feels like an invitation to explore what lies beyond, to navigate the unseen forces shaping our understanding of place and identity.

The empty space surrounding the black-and-white photograph, also veiled by glassine, suggests more of the story remains untold. This visual space creates a sense of isolation within memory, as though a central fragment is preserved while the surrounding details remain hidden or forgotten.

Poey's intriguing composition feels both intimate and poetic, echoing how personal and family histories are often remembered—fragments standing out while others fade into the background, always leaving room for reflection.

*Sandra Bacchi is a Brazilian-American visual artist working with photography, video, and glass. Her work weaves together layers of fiction and truth to tell open-ended stories on how human beings find common ground. In 2022, her *Watermelons Are Not Strawberries* series was published as a photobook by Yoffy Press and exhibited at Concept Gallery in Pittsburgh.*

Fran (Ledonio) Flaherty reflects on Priya Suresh Kampli's *Muma's*, 2014

A mother within a mother
A child within a child
A Love within the love
The tame within the wild

The start of a beginning
Bearing to be born
The heart within the heartache
The smiles within the mourn

The light within the shadows
The petals in the light
The photos in the photo
Who is that on the right?

The sari around her shoulder
The adornment in her hair
The confident stance
But ambiguous stare

Staring into the future?
Contemplating the past?
Do not blink!
It will be over, fast

The patterns repeat
Like generations before
Wrapped around the body
Writing future lore

The glass within the mirror
The cracks we cannot see
The thread that holds together
Between you and me

A mother within a child
A child within a mother
A story of endless time
Yours and mine.

~FF

Fran (Ledonio) Flaherty is the creator and co-curator of Anthropology of Motherhood and is Assistant Professor of Digital Art and Emerging Media and Director of Fablab at Carlow university. As a first-generation immigrant mother from the Philippines and a deaf artist, her work is centered on issues surrounding migrant family relations and assimilation, maternal feminism, disability aesthetics, and social work. Internationally known, Pittsburgh based practice, Anthropology of Motherhood, is an ongoing project which elevates the act of caregiving through fine art by transforming mundane objects of caregiving into valuable art pieces such as paintings, sculpture, and mixed media pieces. Flaherty's latest exhibit was at Yolia Art Space in Denver, CO with fellow members of the #notwhite collective. Her second solo exhibition is scheduled to open in February, 2025 at Sleeth Gallery in Buckhannon, WV.



Glossary

Ephemeral

In relation to photography refers to the shifting values and/or meanings that defy a photograph's singular fixed interpretation over time.

Maternal Lineage

Traces lineage through the mother's line of a family and her direct female descendants. In the context of this exhibition, it also refers to the matrilineal transmission of history, memory, ideas and values.

Representation

Photography has long been used to construct or express identities, both with and without agency. Representation in photography can have negative and harmful impacts. Yet representation can also refer to how contemporary artists like Priya Suresh Kambli and Vivian Poey use photography to empower themselves and others.

Temporal

Refers to time itself, or worldly, rather than spiritual contexts.

Reading List

Patrick Bixby, *License to Travel: A Cultural History of the Passport* (University of California Press, 2022)

Richard Blanco, *How to Love a Country* (Beacon Press: Boston MA, 2019)

Prof. Amitava Kumar, 'An Artist's Collages about Memory and Migration' in *Being & Becoming Asian in America*, *Aperture #251* (Summer 2023)

Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders: the expansion of the U.S. Border Around the World*. (Verso: London, 2019)

Tanvi Mishra, 'Archive as Companion' in *PIX Vol. 18 Passages*; 2022

Christopher Pinney, Beth Cirton, Rahaab Allana, *Allegory and Illusion: Early Portrait Photography from South Asia* (Alkazi Collection of Photography, 2014)

Roosevelt, E. et al. *The Declaration of Human Rights*. Applewood Books: Bedford, MA

Dayanita Singh, *A Photographer's Daughter*, accessed October 16, 2024
<https://dayanitasingh.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PrivacypdfDayanitaSinghDt.-engl..pdf>

Virgil Suarez, *90 Miles: Selected and New Poems* (University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, PA, 2005)

Jodi Throckmorton, 'Hereafter: Priya Kambli's Kitchen Gods' in *Exposure*, *Journal for Society for Photographic Education* (Spring 2017/Volume 50.1)

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This guide serves as an education supplement to our exhibitions and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion as well as room for student responses. To schedule a tour of this exhibition for students, go to: silvereye.org

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