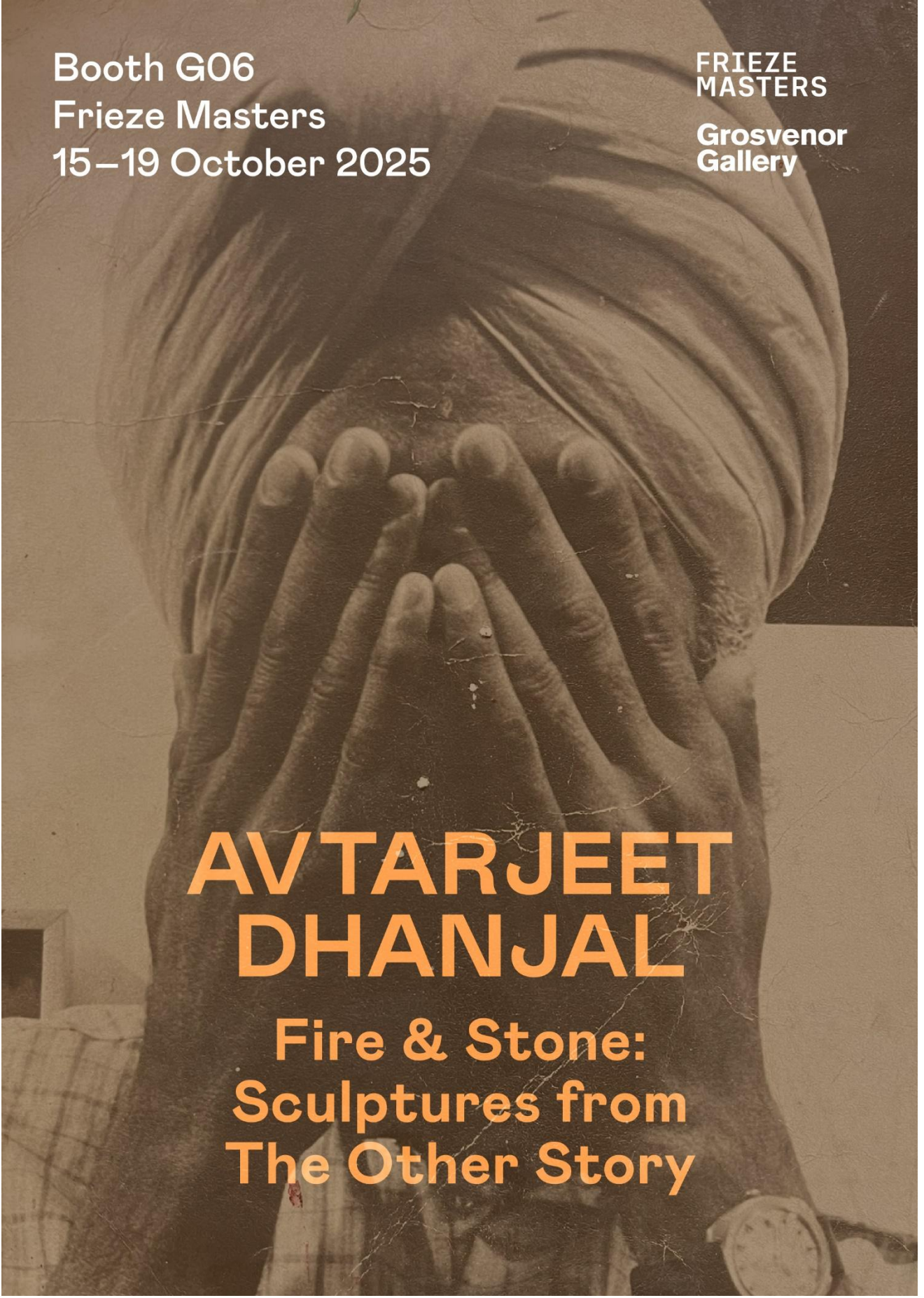




Booth G06
Frieze Masters
15–19 October 2025

FRIEZE
MASTERS

Grosvenor
Gallery

AVTARJEET DHANJAL

Fire & Stone:
Sculptures from
The Other Story

Avtarjeet Singh Dhanjal (1940-2025) was a British/Indian sculptor and multimedia artist, born on April 10, 1940, in Dalla, a small village in the Punjab, into a crafts-oriented family. Dhanjal's early experiences as a carpenter, blacksmith, and signwriter deeply influenced his artistic sensibilities.

Underpinning Dhanjal's work is the confrontation and resolution of cultural difference through the formal and conceptual framework of his practice. A major concern of his work was to explore the tensions between industrial materials and processes and those of the natural world. The materials and processes have a wider, metaphorical resonance and also address cultural and historical tensions, in part derived from Dhanjal's own experience of India and Britain.

The series of slate sculptures produced from 1983 onwards are in Dhanjal's own words, perhaps his most monumental pieces of sculpture. In these works, Dhanjal condenses previous material and symbolic tensions into slate blocks in which chained or stepped sequences of small niches have been cut for candles.

Here, the darkness of the slate is reconciled with the light; polarities are brought together and shades and textures revealed. By using candles in this way Dhanjal confers upon the works a functional identity that is integral to Indian devotional and ritual sculpture. These works, more than any produced in his career, express his cultural presence, combining his practice as a sculptor in the west and his affinity with Indian culture, its philosophy and artistic traditions.

There is also a strong link between these sculptures, and his recollection of the darkness of night growing up in the rural Punjab:

“In the village where I lived, there was no electricity, Dark nights became pitch black. The darkness became solid... In the village, any light burning becomes magical.”





The sculptures are fabricated from Welsh slate, a material Dhanjal encountered for the first time in the early 1980s. It was around this time that he started incorporating fire into his practice, a material that would become an important part of his work:

“Fire, one of the basic elements of life on this planet, has been used throughout history for more than just cooking, heating, especially in the East and South America. It has a magical and enchanting quality, that made it part of rituals in many cultures. No other material gives that quality for a sculptor.”

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Avtarjeet Dhanjal, pictured with *Open Circa*, *Needle* and *Valley of Lights*, in Horizon Gallery, London, spring 1987

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Open Circle, 1984-85



Slate, wax and fire
48 x 135 x 95 cm
18 7/8 x 53 1/8 x 37 3/8 in

Provenance

The Estate of the Artist

Exhibitions

London, Horizon Gallery, 23 February - 14 March 1987

London, Hayward Gallery, *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, 29 Nov. 1989 - 4 Feb. 1990

Wolverhampton Art Gallery, *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, 10 March - 22 April 1990

London, Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, 8 August - 20 September 1997

Publications

Araeen, Rasheed, *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, London, 1989, pg. 47

Cross, Peter & Tawdross, Gilane (eds.), *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, inIVA, London, 1997, pg. 77

Cork, Richard, *Breaking Down the Barriers, Art in the 1990s*, Yale University Press, London, 2003, no. 125, pg. 408

Dhanjal, Avtarjeet, *Fire, Water, Stone and Silence*, unpaginated

"You could say that they are abstracted constellations in the night sky, but they are equally mandalas, pictograms or maps of the universe of the gods."

Brian MacAvera, 1997

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Needle, 1984-85



Slate, wax and fire
25 x 32 x 242 cm
9 7/8 x 12 5/8 x 95 1/4 in

Provenance

The Estate of the Artist

Exhibitions

London, Horizon Gallery, 23 February - 14 March 1987

London, Hayward Gallery, *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, 29 Nov. 1989 - 4 Feb. 1990

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Araeen, Rasheed, *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, London, 1989, pg. 47

Cross, Peter & Tawdross, Gilane (eds.), *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, inIVA, London, 1997, pg.

Dhanjal, Avtarjeet, *Fire, Water, Stone and Silence*, unpaginated

Dhanjal, Avtarjeet, *Light over the Horizon*, EU-MAN, Helsinki, 2012, pg. 82



Dhanjal's slate sculptures and photographs installed at *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, The Hayward Gallery, 1989

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Valley of Lights, 1984-85



Slate, wax and fire
60 x 140 x 55 cm
23 5/8 x 55 1/8 x 21 5/8 in

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Exhibitions

London, Horizon Gallery, 23 February - 14 March 1987

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Araeen, Rasheed, *The Other Story, Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain*, London, 1989, pg. 47

Cross, Peter & Tawdross, Gilane (eds.), *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, inIVA, London, 1997, pg. 80

Bailey, David A., Baucom, Ian & Boyce, Sonia (eds.), *Shades of Black, Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, Duke University Press, 2005, pg. 239

Dhanjal, Avtarjeet, *Light over the Horizon*, EU-MAN, Helsinki, 2012, pg. 83

Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh, International Art Conclave, January 2015, unpaginated

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
The Candle, 1984-1985



Slate, wax, steel and fire
70 x 45 x 105 cm
27 1/2 x 17 3/4 x 41 3/8 in

Provenance

The Estate of the Artist

Exhibitions

Helsinki, Finland, *Participation*, European Union Migrant Artists' Network (EU-MAN), 2000

Publications

Cross, Peter & Tawdross, Gilane (eds.), *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, inIVA, London, 1997, pg. 82

Participation, European Union Migrant Artists' Network (EU-MAN), Helsinki, 2000, pl. 25, pg. 48





The 1970s aluminium sculptures develop Dhanjal's interest in utilising the high elasticity and low specific gravity of aluminium for pieces of kinetic sculpture. Dhanjal's concern in these works was not to create mechanical movement or animation for its own sake but to make structures and forms that were responsive to air, able to bend and vibrate like trees and leaves:

“My work is very much nearer nature and has life like a tree or plant. My pieces respond to atmosphere like natural vegetation... They grow under the sun, breathe open air, swing like trees and vibrate like leaves.”

A tension between the industrial material and its form and function is implied, but these works are a resolution of these tensions, developing from research and experimentation into the inherent properties and possibilities of the material during the artist's residency at Alcan Ltd. in the early 1970s. The artist's concern with kinetic art first developed during his time in Chandigarh in the 1960s and would continue to be an important part of his practice throughout his career.

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Untitled (Double Spiral), 1974



Aluminium
24 x 49 x 49 cm
9 1/2 x 19 1/4 x 19 1/4 in

Provenance

The Estate of the Artist

Exhibitions

London, Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, 8 August – 20 September 1997

Publications

Cross, Peter & Tawdross, Gilane (eds.), *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, inIVA, London, 1997, pg. 31

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Untitled (Low Spiral), 1974



Aluminium
15 x 90 x 90 cm
5 7/8 x 35 3/8 x 35 3/8 in

Provenance

The Estate of the Artist

Exhibitions

London, Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, 8 August – 20 September 1997 (image below)



Dhanjal's kinetic aluminium work installed at Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, 1997

Avtarjeet Dhanjal
Untitled (Low Spiral), 1974



Aluminium
13 x 60 x 60 cm
5 1/8 x 23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in

Provenance

The Estate of the Artist

Exhibitions

London, Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, *Avtarjeet Dhanjal*, 8 August – 20 September 1997

Avtarjeet Singh Dhanjal (1940-2025) was a British sculptor and multimedia artist from India, born on April 10, 1940, in Dalla, a small village in the Punjab, into a crafts-oriented family. Dhanjal's early experiences as a carpenter, blacksmith, and signwriter deeply influenced his artistic sensibilities.

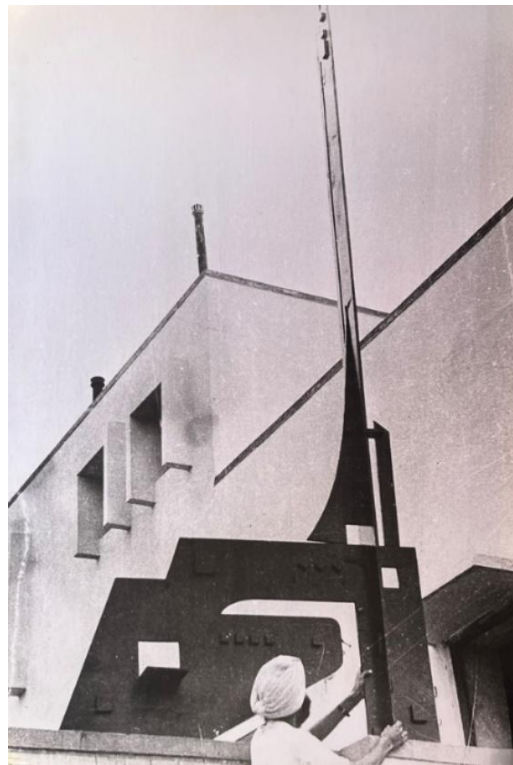
A major concern of his work was to explore the tensions between industrial materials and processes and those of the natural world. The materials and processes have a wider, metaphorical resonance and also address tensions in culture and history, in part derived from his own experience of India and Britain.

Early life:

In 1965, Dhanjal pursued formal art education at the Government College of Arts in Chandigarh, a city renowned for its architectural design by Le Corbusier. During his studies he moved from figurative to abstract works in wood, stone and metal, and began experimentations with kinetic work.



After Bath (1966)
Collection of Chandigarh Museum

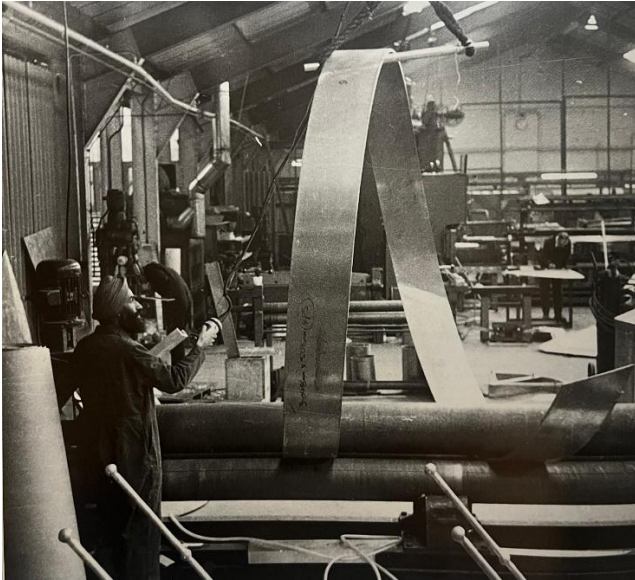


Dhanjal with a ply-wood sculpture, Chandigarh, circa 1967

After graduating in 1970, he travelled to East Africa, 'sketching and selling' his way through Ethiopia, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Kenya, before securing a teaching post at Kenyatta University College in Nairobi.

Coming to Britain:

In 1974 he moved to London to take up a post-graduate course in sculpture at Saint Martin's School of Art under William Tucker. His innovative work with aluminium caught the attention of the Alcan Aluminium Company, leading to a year-long project at their Tipton factory, where he created dynamic spiral sculptures utilizing the material's flexibility and responsiveness to wind, drawing on concepts from his time in India and Africa.



Dhanjal at work at Alcan Aluminium, 1975



The Artist with *Open Spiral*, London, 1975

Dhanjal's artistic philosophy centered on creating works that fostered silence, stillness, and contemplation. He believed that true creativity required disengagement from the distractions of contemporary society, aiming instead to attune to inner silence. His sculptures often combined materials like wood, aluminium, and stone, reflecting a harmonious blend of Eastern and Western artistic traditions.

In 1978 he organised a trip to study the folk arts and crafts of the Punjab and a sculpture symposium in 1980. This research was to have a profound effect on his ideas, his affinities with Indian artistic traditions and culture and on his subsequent approach to sculpture.

Public commissions:

From this point onwards Dhanjal's practice evolved into large-scale public commissions and projects in Britain, India, Europe and the USA. Notable works from this period include *Grown in the Field* (1977) at the University of Warwick, symbolising the stages of a tree's growth; *The Grip, Technology*, Punjab University, Patiala (1980); *Contribution* in Banbury, Oxfordshire (1981); *Dunstall Henge*, Wolverhampton (1986) and *Remains of a Pyramid* (circa 1990) in Birmingham's Senneleys Park.



The Grip, Technology, Punjab University, Patiala (1980)



Contribution, Banbury, Oxfordshire (1981)



Dunstall Henge, Wolverhampton (1986)



Peacemaker, St. Louis, USA (1985)

He founded the Punjabi Institute exchange programme for students and teachers in Punjab and Shropshire and served as a trustee of the South Asian Visual Arts Festival, *Sampad*, and as a member of the West Midlands Arts Council.

His work was featured in significant exhibitions, including '*Between Two Cultures*' at the Barbican Centre in 1982, '*Third World Within*' at Brixton Art Gallery in 1986, and '*The Other Story*' at the Hayward Gallery from 1989 to 1990. In 1997, inIVA staged a retrospective of his work at Pitshanger Manor and Gallery in London, accompanied by a monograph authored by Brian McAvera.



Dhanjal's retrospective at Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, 1997

From the mid-1980s onwards Dhanjal lived in Ironbridge, Shropshire, where he continued to explore creativity beyond traditional sculpture, including photography, installation art, and writing until his death in 2025.

His Estate is represented by Grosvenor Gallery. This is the first in a series of exhibitions exploring the work of an artist who holds significance for both Britain and India.

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