

**Avtarjeet Dhanjal**

**Fire & Stone  
Sculptures from *The Other Story***

Frieze Masters  
Grosvenor Gallery, booth G06



Slate, wax and fire sculptures (1984-85)

**PRESS RELEASE**

At Frieze Masters 2025 Grosvenor Gallery will show a solo presentation of work by the British/Indian sculptor and multimedia artist **Avtarjeet Dhanjal** (1940-2025). A major concern of his work was to explore the tensions between industrial materials and processes and those of the natural world. These 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.

We will be showing Dhanjal's slate and fire sculptures that were exhibited in the seminal 1989 exhibition '*The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in post-war Britain*', curated by Rasheed Araeen, and staged to challenge the Eurocentric narrative of modernism and post-war British art by highlighting the works of suppressed African, Asian, and Caribbean artists living in Britain.

The sculptures are large blocks of slate into which Dhanjal cut sequences of small niches to hold candles, the colour of the stone referencing the endless darkness of night in the small, rural village in which he grew up:

***"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 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 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.

***"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

Fire is a key feature of the artist's practice, first appearing in the early 1980s: ***"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."***

The sculptures were last exhibited in 1997 at Dhanjal's retrospective exhibition at Pitshanger Manor in West London, organised by the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA). See below for an expanded biography.

## Slate and fire works exhibited in *The Other Story*



Installation shot of Dhanjal's slate and fire sculptures at *The Other Story*, Hayward Gallery, 1989



*Open Circle*, 1984-85, slate, wax and fire



*Upper Level I*, 1984-85, Slate, wax and fire

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**Biography:**

Avtarjeet Singh Dhanjal was born Dalla, Punjab, into a craft-oriented family. As a young man he worked as a carpenter, blacksmith, and signwriter - experiences that deeply influenced his artistic sensibilities. From 1965-1970, Dhanjal studied at the College of Arts in Chandigarh and in 1969 held a solo exhibition at the Government Museum and Art Gallery, and work from this exhibition was acquired by the Chandigarh Museum.

He moved to East Africa in 1971 and taught sculpture at Kenyatta University College in Nairobi. He participated in exhibitions in Ethiopia, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Kenya, producing kinetic sculptures responsive to air, which were able to bend and vibrate like trees and leaves.

In 1974 he moved to London to study postgraduate sculpture at Saint Martin's School of Art under William Tucker and began to produce kinetic aluminium sculptures and public-installations.

In 1978 he embarked on a trip to study the folk arts and crafts of the Punjab. This research was to have a profound effect on his ideas, his affinities with Indian artistic traditions and culture and his subsequent approach to sculpture. From this point onwards Dhanjal's practice evolved into large-scale public commissions and projects in Britain, India, Europe and the USA.

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.

*“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.”*

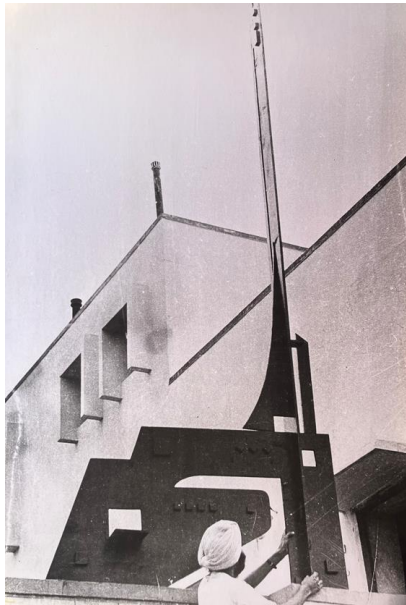
Several decades of exhibitions and commissions led to a retrospective at Pitshanger Manor and Gallery in London in 1997, curated by the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA).

From the 1980s onwards, Dhanjal lived and worked in Ironbridge, Shropshire until his death in 2025. His estate is represented by Grosvenor Gallery.

## Early sculpture – ‘Chandigarh period’



*After Bath* (1966)  
Collection of Chandigarh Museum

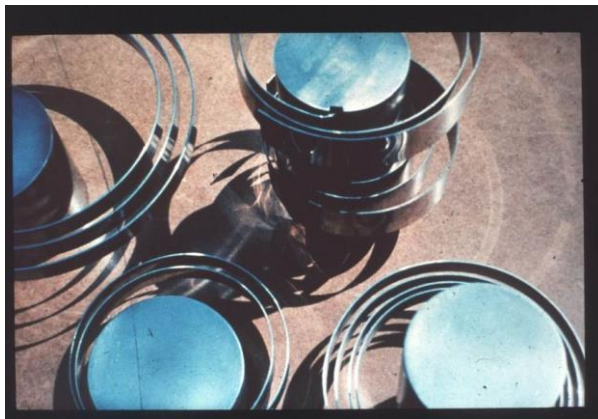


Dhanjal with a sculpture, Chandigarh, circa 1967

## Aluminium sculptures executed in Britain (1970s)

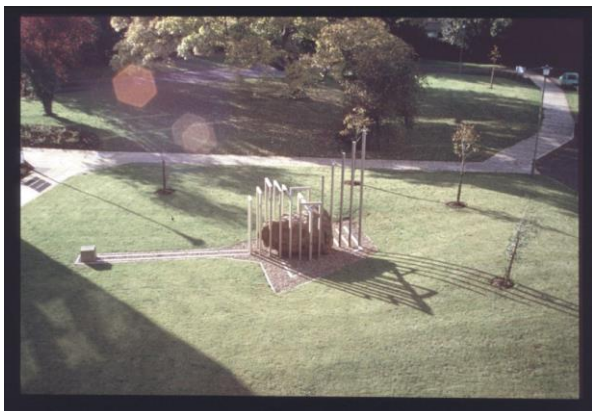


The Artist with a large aluminum work  
Circa 1976



Kinetic aluminum sculptures  
Circa 1976

## Public commissions



Contribution, Banbury, Oxfordshire (1981)



Dunstall Henge, Wolverhampton (1986)



Peacemaker, St. Louis, USA (1985)

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