

**vqueeram and Vishal Jugdeo:** *Does Your House Have Lions*

August 13—28, 2021



*Does Your House Have Lions*, 2021  
Single-channel HD video, color, sound, 49 min  
Edition of 5, 2 AP  
#VJ1.01.01



*Crescent Room*, 2021  
Foam, plaster, paint, metal, LED light, electrical wire  
Approx. 33.5 x 18 x 16.5 in (85 x 46 x 42 cm)  
#VJ1.03



*Cloud Stage*, 2021  
Foam, plaster, paint, metal, LED light, electrical wire  
Approx. 22.5 x 26 x 9.5 in (57 x 66 x 24 cm)  
#VJ1.02

Commonwealth and Council presents *Does Your House Have Lions* (2021), an experimental documentary by the Delhi-based poet vqueeram and Los Angeles-based artist Vishal Jugdeo, the latest iteration of their ongoing, transoceanic collaborative practice and friendship. Shot in Delhi, Bombay, and Goa, the film follows vqueeram and their housemates Dhiren Borisa, Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Andre Ling—friends, lovers, and co-conspirators in activism and survival—against a four-year backdrop of turbulent political developments throughout India.

Within the film, households and friendships run coarse against the world from which they seek shelter. Jugdeo's camera trails vqueeram through a women's sit-in protesting the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act. It bobs in the waters of a pool in which Dhiren splashes and mimes a Bollywood disco song with abandon. Throughout, movements and collectives reckon with a persistent and intractable loneliness. The film's subjects do not strive to eliminate or evade this loneliness, but to elevate it to a new register thereby making it livable. In one scene, the lens focuses on the hands of Natasha and Devangana peeling garlic for a house dinner; months later they would be arrested and jailed for political dissidence.

These moments in which the subjects carve spaces for themselves situate a collective experience that otherwise has no place; practicing mutual care where the state has failed to provide adequately, if at all. These mundane moments carry a political thrust, a subversive streak. Community is exigent, a matter of survival in the face of the structural forces of caste, gender, and religion. Queer history, especially throughout the AIDS crisis, resounds with this same communal urgency. Nightlife, fleeting incandescent moments of cruising communion too, are imbricated with survival in a world that does not hold them.

On a winter afternoon in their shared Delhi apartment, vqueeram asks Dhiren: "Is it possible for queerness and anti-caste politics to come together?" The question seems rhetorical as the intersectionality is inevitable for Dhiren, a queer Dalit person. Still, the query cuts to the deeper fragmentation inflicted by the social order. How to move past these entrenched divisions—kinship, caste, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, religion—towards a life that gathers freely out-of-place; to form a new way of belonging together, without belonging?

A visit to Delhi's 'selfie bridge' at sunset and a casual rooftop discussion of Rahul Roy's film *When Four Friends Meet* (1999) reveal the necessary banality of everyday friendship, little more than an adjunct to traditionally sanctioned "primary" kinships, rooted in family and marriage. Set against the soft oppressions of the commonplace, the film and its subjects cultivate a more vital and necessary vision of friendship, capable of relieving the traumas of social exclusion and fostering a new potential for political coalition among its cohort.

The work is also a document of the filmmaker's own relationship with his collaborators, as the camera perhaps cannot help performing both a surveilling and a coveting gaze. Its guiding hand remains palpable as it lingers on the fringes of its subjects' relationships. Sometimes the filmmaker risks voyeurism, lingering longer than consent can be sure, its threat to the relationships it documents hovering just outside of frame. As the artists write: "This video document is an archive of friendship—near, far, and displaced; interrupted by sex, politics, and abandonment. These scenes hold unlikely alliances and wayward relations in the middle of fear and hesitant futures. As love manifests its totalitarian tendencies and loss is capacious, we imagine a practice of freedom."

**vqueeram** is a writer, researcher, and teacher. They are interested in sex, feeling, and living/dying in their relations with forms of sociality, law, and politics. At the Center for Law and Policy Research, Bengaluru, vqueeram teaches a course on intersectionality for various law schools in the country, and participates in research and policy work on the rights and concerns of the trans community in India. In their writing, vqueeram pays attention to the practices of imagination and freedom of queer/trans persons; whether building a life in a cemetery in Delhi, or in life writing—cinematic, authorial, and political.

vqueeram completed bachelors and masters degrees in political science at Delhi University. They have taught, given talks, seminars, and workshops extensively, and their writing has been featured in *The Shortline Review*, *The White Review*, *Frieze*, *Huffington Post India*, *Akademi Magazine*, and *The Wire* among other publications and contexts.

They live and love in Delhi, and when not in Khan Market, they can be found on insta @vqueer.

**Vishal Jugdeo** is an interdisciplinary artist who works with video, installation, performance, and sculpture to construct experimental approaches to narrative. His work examines how nuances of power, intimacy, and meaning-making are expressed between people. Jugdeo received an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2007 and a BFA from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, in 2003. Solo exhibitions have been held at 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica (2016); ICA Philadelphia (2014); LA><ART (2008); and Western Front, Vancouver (2005). Selected group exhibitions have been held at ICA Philadelphia (2014); Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (2014); Performa 13,

New York (2014); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2012); and Witte De With Center for Contemporary Arts, Rotterdam (2011). Jugdeo is the recipient of the Artadia Los Angeles Award (2013), Canada Council for the Arts Visual Arts Project Grant (2013, 2011), California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Arts (2013), Art Matters Foundation Grant (2012), and Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant (2011), and has participated in residencies at 18th Street Art Center, Santa Monica (2016); BOFFO, Fire Island (2016); and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME (2005). Current projects include a collaboration with vqueeram and 2021 Booker Prize finalist Anuk Arudpragasam, the first iteration of which is a commission for *post*, MoMA's international research journal. Jugdeo is assistant professor in the UCLA Department of Art.

## CREDITS

Featuring: vqueeram  
Dhiren Borisa  
Vishal Jugdeo  
Natasha Narwal  
Devangana Kalita

Director: Vishal Jugdeo

Editor: Chelsea Knight

Camera: Nitasha Kapahi  
Amshu Chukki  
Vishal Jugdeo  
vqueeram  
Dhiren Borisa  
Sandip Kuriakose  
Wenceslaus Mendes

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Sound Mix: Mathew Jinks

Colorist: Candace Nycz

Associate Producers: Amshu Chukki (Bombay, Goa)  
Sandip Kuriakose (Delhi)  
Lekha Jandhyala (Los Angeles)

Translations/Transliterations: Dhiren Borisa