

# THE FRONT

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SUVI BAINS

*KESH*, 2015. Photographs, each 44 x 64 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

**K***ESH*, by artist Suvi Bains, is a body of work that includes six portraits and a video of three Sikh men exploring an aspect of their faith that is both intensely private and public-facing: unshorn hair or *kesb*. The portraits capture the intimate process of untying, grooming, retying, and wrapping of their *kesb*. This process, documented in the subjects' bedrooms, is highly intimate as uncovered *kesb* is not typically photographed or shown outside the home.

*KESH* explores how Canadian Sikh men, a distinct and visible community, navigate their faith within a dominant Eurocentric society. Sikh men, the subject of Bains's portraiture, are hyper visible and so experience these boundaries in a unique way. Bains describes this as a "double consciousness," a conflict that she recognizes within her own identity as the Canadian-born child of immigrants. With *KESH*, which debuted at The Reach Gallery Museum in October 2015, Bains's goal was to inspire dialogue around these dualities and challenge ideas about the Sikh community in Abbotsford: "There is a stigma about what a Sikh man embodies and my hope is that this exhibit will challenge those falsehoods."

An exhibition about Abbotsford's South Asian communities is currently in development at The Reach Gallery Museum which seeks to build upon Bains's identification of themes such as generational differences and the navigation of minority faiths in Abbotsford. Titled *South Asian in the Valley*, this 2023 exhibition will explore the history, culture, and contemporary character of Sikh and other religious communities. The research for *South Asian in the Valley* is being conducted through semi-structured interviews with community members and through the production of research videos created with content and knowledge drawn from interviews around topics such as faith and discrimination.



Portrait of Jasdeep Singh Basra, part of the *KESH* series by Suvi Bains, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

Suvi Bains works as a curatorial assistant at Surrey Art Gallery and is a photographer and expressive art therapist. She holds a BFA from the University of the Fraser Valley and majored in photography at the University of South Wales. Bains follows her passion as a photographer, and as an expressive art therapist with a keen interest in exploring personal narratives that reflect on the impact of stereotypes and ensuing stigmas in marginalized communities. Bains has explored Sikhi in other works, specifically through a feminist lens in the 2015 exhibition (*Mis*) *Interpretation: Sikh Feminisms in representations, texts and lived realities*. This exhibition, curated by UFV's South Asian Studies Institute, looked at recentring feminist thought in a male-dominated religious discourse. Her work provokes empathy, cultural appreciation and understanding, and cross-cultural reconciliations.

*Alysha Mahil*