

*An Impossible Address* is the first institutional solo exhibition in Canada by Suneil Sanzgiri.

*An Impossible Address* (2025) is commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto; and EMPAC—Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, New York.

*An Impossible Address* is made possible with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts through the Arts Abroad Program. The exhibition is presented in partnership with CONTACT Photography Festival, and Images Festival, Toronto.



*An Impossible Address* is presented as part of *Artist First*, a Mercer Union commissioning platform. *Artist First* commissions are made possible with the generous support of Femi & Aminat Adeyinka, Kaye & Paul Beeston, Rebecca Carbin, Anouchka Freybe & Scott Connell, Joanna & Meric Gertler, Miles Gertler, Popsy Johnstone, Christie Kirchner, Margaret McNee, Matt Meagher, David & Erica Neligan, Frances & Tim Price, Lauren Charyk Silverberg, and Carlos Yep. Learn more [mercerunion.org/support](https://mercerunion.org/support)

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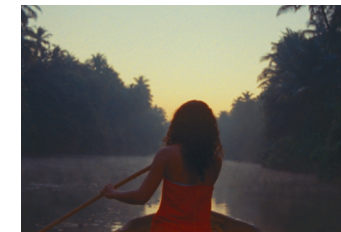
**FORUM: Suneil Sanzgiri**  
7 April 2025, 6:30 PM EDT

Main Hall  
1 Spadina Crescent  
John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture,  
Landscape and Design  
University of Toronto

Suneil Sanzgiri leads an artist talk about the methods and material histories that inform his experimental filmmaking practice alongside his ongoing research into the anti-colonial liberation movements that brought an end to Portuguese occupation across Asia and Africa.

FORUM is Mercer Union's ongoing series of talks, lectures, interviews, screenings, and performances.

This lecture is presented in partnership with the MVS Proseminar at the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture Landscape and Design at the University of Toronto.



**Infinite Returns** curated by Suneil Sanzgiri  
9 April 2025, 6:30 PM EDT

TIFF Lightbox Cinema  
350 King St W, Toronto

Suneil Sanzgiri curates *Infinite Returns*, a selection of films by artists and filmmakers who use a diversity of tactics to stage return through an examination of artifacts of the past, re-creations, rehearsals, repetitions, reincarnations, speculative fictions, and spectro-poems. The program proposes film as a possible site for exhibiting and envisioning an infinite number of returns of people, land, resources, kinships, and insurgencies.

*Infinite Returns* curated by Suneil Sanzgiri is co-presented by TIFF Wavelengths, Images Festival, and Mercer Union.

**Image:** Suneil Sanzgiri, still from *Two Refusals (Would We Recognize Ourselves Unbroken?)*, 2023. Courtesy the artist.

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### BIOGRAPHIES

Suneil Sanzgiri's research-driven practice considers questions of inheritance in relation to histories of anti-colonial struggle. His experimental film and video projects explore image-making, collective memory, and testimony and are often in dialogue with the works of filmmakers, historians, poets, and activists.

In 2023, Mercer Union invited Suneil to develop a new film installation for his first institutional solo exhibition in Canada. His project culminates over four years of research around the bonds of mutual struggle for freedom that developed between India and Africa against the Portuguese empire. Titled, *An Impossible Address* (2025) the work is the final in a series of two films that trace the connections between various liberatory figures in India, Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau. The film is conceived as a letter to Sita Valles, an Angolan-born doctor and revolutionary of Goan origin who joined the liberation movement against the Portuguese in Angola and was subsequently disappeared there.

Mercer Union's collaboration with Suneil emerges from our long-held commitment to commissioning new work, and creating milestone opportunities for artists to bring their visions to fruition in Toronto. Through our commissioning platform *Artist First*, we invest in the lifecycle of a project from conception to realization, cultivating discovery, risk-taking, and artistic development through long-term support and dialogue. To learn more, visit [mercerunion.org/support](https://mercerunion.org/support)



Suneil Sanzgiri is an artist, researcher, and filmmaker. His first institutional solo exhibition *Here the Earth Grows Gold* opened at the Brooklyn Museum in October 2023. His award-winning films have circulated widely at film festivals and art institutions across the world including Mass MoCA, Massachusetts (2024); Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio (2024); de Appel, Amsterdam (2024); Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh (2024); Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai (2024); BFI London Film Festival (2024); Blackstar Film Festival, Philadelphia (2020–2024); e-Flux, New York (2023); moCa Cleveland (2022); The Menil Collection, Houston (2022); International Film Festival Rotterdam (2020–2022); Viennale, Vienna (2021); Open City Docs, London (2021); New York Film Festival (2020); and many more.

**Image:** Suneil Sanzgiri, still from *Golden Jubilee*, 2021. Courtesy the artist.



Suneil Sanzgiri:  
*An Impossible Address*

12 April – 14 June 2025

## ***Hearing and Unhearing the Voices of the Dead***

by Muhannad Ayyash

Artist Suneil Sanzgiri's film *An Impossible Address* (2025) offers a window into the long struggle against the European empire in Goa, Angola, and Mozambique, who fought for centuries against Portuguese colonialism. The work engages with this history at a critical juncture following World War II, during which scores of colonized nations in the Global South identified within their mutual struggles for self-determination the possibilities for solidarity and a reinvention of existing legal, political, and cultural orders. Sanzgiri locates within that moment a world-making project that spans generations and geographies, and endeavours to follow its material remnants and embodied reverberations.

For those who think of the age of colonial modernity (now five hundred years in the making) as something of the past, the ongoing Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people, which is made possible by U.S. imperialism, shows that far from being relegated to the dustbin of history, settler colonialism and imperialism have a stranglehold over political life in the present. Today, millions around the world are witnessing in real time the mass dispossession, starvation, and butchering of the Palestinian people. Such carnage often gets rendered “indescribable” through horrors that leave us “speechless” with “no words” to adequately comprehend the violence. It is perhaps precisely against such paralysis of language that Sanzgiri's film finds us in this moment. During the decolonization movements of the mid-twentieth century, the Palestinian people too were actively engaged in the joint anti-colonial struggles across Africa and Asia. In many ways, Palestine was left behind as the epitome of that unfinished struggle. Not only has Palestine not achieved the sort of independence that many others have achieved, but it continuously shows the limits of those achievements; that much like Palestinians, many in the postcolonial world are also not yet truly liberated and free, and therefore the global struggle remains both urgent and unfinished.

Sanzgiri navigates the complexities of these historical entanglements by posing a difficult question: How do we narrate a violence that has not ended and whose injustice has not yet been fully addressed? Through a collage of archival audio and images, primary documentation and interviews, and an array of sonic and visual



textures, the film chases after an elusive element that is difficult, if not impossible, to represent—that which concerns the voices of those killed by this brutal colonial machinery. By voices of the dead, I refer to the living's interaction with an element of unknowability that arises directly from colonial violence. That is to say, there is something about the story and voice of those killed by the violence of empire—be it the violence of the colonial state, or the violence of the postcolonial state that tragically ended up being its cheap and brutal replica—that cannot quite be put into words and fully comprehended. We cannot fully hear the voices of the dead with our senses or our tools of representation. Yet we cannot turn away from and unhear this voice either. We seek to grasp it in some way, limited as it may be, in order to place its significance upon our understanding of how to continue their work today. While we cannot know if these voices intended to speak to us in the future, we are nonetheless left asking: if they were to see their afterlives on this still colonized earth today, would they be satisfied that their speech only reached the future, but did not transform their world? Could they have only spoken to people in the future when their world was so violent against them, so ready to rip apart and destroy their aspirations for freedom and liberation?

The impossibility of hearing *and* unhearing this voice lies at the centre of *An Impossible Address*. In the film, we learn about Sita Valles, an Angola-born Goan revolutionary, doctor, and member of the Portuguese Communist Party, who fought for the anti-colonial liberation of the Angolan people all her short adult life, and was killed

by the post-independence Angolan government in 1977. We learn about Sita in the film without ever hearing directly from her words or, for that matter, her voice during her life. Rather, constructed as a letter to Sita, the film progresses through the artist's reflections that pull in the memories, testimonies, and speech acts of others in order to connect the viewer with Sita's life story within a continuation of struggles today. In addition to posing an ontological question about death and death's implications on life, Sanzgiri's attempt to speak to Sita considers the obligations left for the living by the dead.

While Sita's disappearance was at the hands of the Angolan government, we must not narrowly absolve the empire nor lose sight of the flow of violence that emanates in its wake, otherwise we risk fracturing these events into discrete abstractions. In *A Hermeneutics of Violence* (2019), I argue that violence raises a series of questions that do not necessarily have definitive answers, but which allow us to trace the incessant movement of violence. It is important not to shy away from these questions, and instead of searching for definitive answers, scholars and artists should seek to follow the movement itself in order to better understand violence and how we may break its propagation. Critically, the very structure of Sanzgiri's film invites us to engage the dilemma of how to bear witness to the afterlives of political violence: how do we honour stories in a way that does not glorify death, as if death is the celebrated end of struggle? But also, how do we honour and communicate their colossal commitment and fidelity to the cause, that they were *willing* to die for something greater than themselves?



Powerful states and empires can kill, imprison, torture, eliminate, censor, and unleash unfathomable death and destruction, but there isn't a single power on earth that can eliminate the voices of the dead. To that end, *An Impossible Address* takes us on a journey of questions that are difficult to answer because they emanate from the death of those who were killed so that their speech would die with them. It invites the viewer to encounter the limit of language and to dwell at the limit. The film's insistence to continue its address, impossible as that task is, pushes at this limit to show that the very killing of those whose voices challenged the great power structures of their time, itself opens up a different kind of speech. A speech that only emerges when we take care to cultivate our capacity to hear and register the voices of the dead, despite the impossibility of connecting with them directly. The film is, in this way, an invitation, a burden, a challenge, and a duty placed upon us, the living, to learn to hear the dead and to carry their voices for as many generations as is needed to achieve true decolonial liberation for all.

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**Muhannad Ayyash** was born and raised in Silwan, Al-Quds, before immigrating to Canada where he is a Professor of Sociology at Mount Royal University. He is also a policy analyst at Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. He is the author of *Lordship and Liberation in Palestine-Israel* (Columbia University Press, 2025) and *A Hermeneutics of Violence* (University of Toronto Press, 2019), has co-edited two books, and is the author of over twenty journal articles and book chapters, and over fifty commentaries and opinion pieces.

Cover and interior images: Suneil Sanzgiri, still from *An Impossible Address*, 2025. Courtesy the artist.