

**Pavitra Wickramasinghe - Refusing to Made a Scene  
Galerie B-312, 2009**

**1. The Curtain**

The curtains open.  
The lights go down, and the movie begins.

The curtains open.  
The actors are already in their places. The play begins.

Opening the curtain is a cue. Hush, be quiet. It is about to begin. A piece of fabric, the curtain, signals the beginning and the end. But once the curtains open they do not disappear. They remain visible as a kind of ornate frame. This frame marks an invisible plane, one that divides the audience from the spectacle. The real from the imagined.<sup>1</sup>

And what of the space beyond the curtain? In live theatre this space is a box, delineated in the back by the backdrop, and to the sides by the wings. Perspective is created through skillfully painted backdrops.

With a film, the space beyond the curtain is another piece of fabric: the screen. Projected light on its flat surface creates the illusion of depth. The curtains frame a window. We peer through the window at a scene that stretches off into the distance.

In theatre and film, sound pushes the boundaries of the visible. A voice calling from the wings, or an off-screen explosion enables the audience to imagine a world that exists outside the set or the screen. Imagined space spills out to the sides and beyond the visible image.

But it rarely, if ever, enters the space *in front* of the curtain.

**2. Warp, Weft and Memory**

Fabric is made up of hundreds of tiny threads. The warp, are the lengthwise threads. The weft, are the threads that interlace the warp at right angles. Remove the weft and the warp threads lose their structure.

They begin to drift.

The most efficient screen is one that is impermeable. Warp and weft tightly woven together. – *But imagine the screen as a net. Some particles of light are caught up in it, while others pass through.*

The image travels from the projector to the screen on a beam of light. The screen is positioned at the exact spot where the image is in focus. Everything before and everything after is a blur. If there were nothing in its path, we would see a cone beginning at the projector and continuing to expand – becoming larger and larger, as the strength of the light grew dimmer and dimmer.

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<sup>1</sup> In the early days of cinema, films were often projected in theatres, the curtain already part of the decor. But when movie palaces began to be built solely for screening films, the curtain remained. It eventually began to disappear in the 1980's with the arrival of the multiplex. I'm fascinated, however, by the recent popularity of elaborate picture frames made to house plasma screens. I'm not sure if adding a wooden frame to a flat-screen TV, is part of an overall obsession with home decor, or if there is something larger in our desire to frame moving images.

Don't look at the film straight on. Instead watch it from the side. Light becomes dark and the image gradually fades to nothingness.

### **3. Stage Fright**

*The curtains open. The play is about to begin, but the actors are missing.*

*The set is empty.*

*There is an uncomfortable silence. People shift in their seats. A cough. Someone laughs.*

*In the absence of actors it is the stage itself that becomes frightened. The floors creak, the set moves, the lights flicker on and off.*

**Refusing to make a scene**, the title of the exhibition by Pavitra Wickramasinghe hovers between its literal and figurative meanings. There is no "scene" here in a narrative sense. The empty, miniature sets contain no dramatic action. Nor does the large projection, which is simply a blown-up image of the same empty sets.

Taken as a figurative expression, "*refusing to make a scene*", suggests a refusal to embarrass oneself. The phrase does not indicate a refusal to *be embarrassed*, but instead the possibility of avoiding embarrassment or perhaps failure by refusing action.

**Refusing to make a scene** is the moment before it begins. A moment suspended in time. Lights shifting from red to blue, waves endlessly rolling, a floorboard wobbling back and forth. Refusing to move forward. Refusing to proceed.

*The curtains open. The play is about to begin.*

*The audience waits. Nothing happens.*