CEREAL

In this volume, we delve into the subject of **legacy**. We explore the architecture of **Gio Ponti** and **Carlo Scarpa**, the art of **Joan Miró**, and the photography of **Fan Ho**. We spend the day with **Rupi Kaur**, discuss design with **Jonathan Anderson**, and present an autumn style edit at **Kettle's Yard**.

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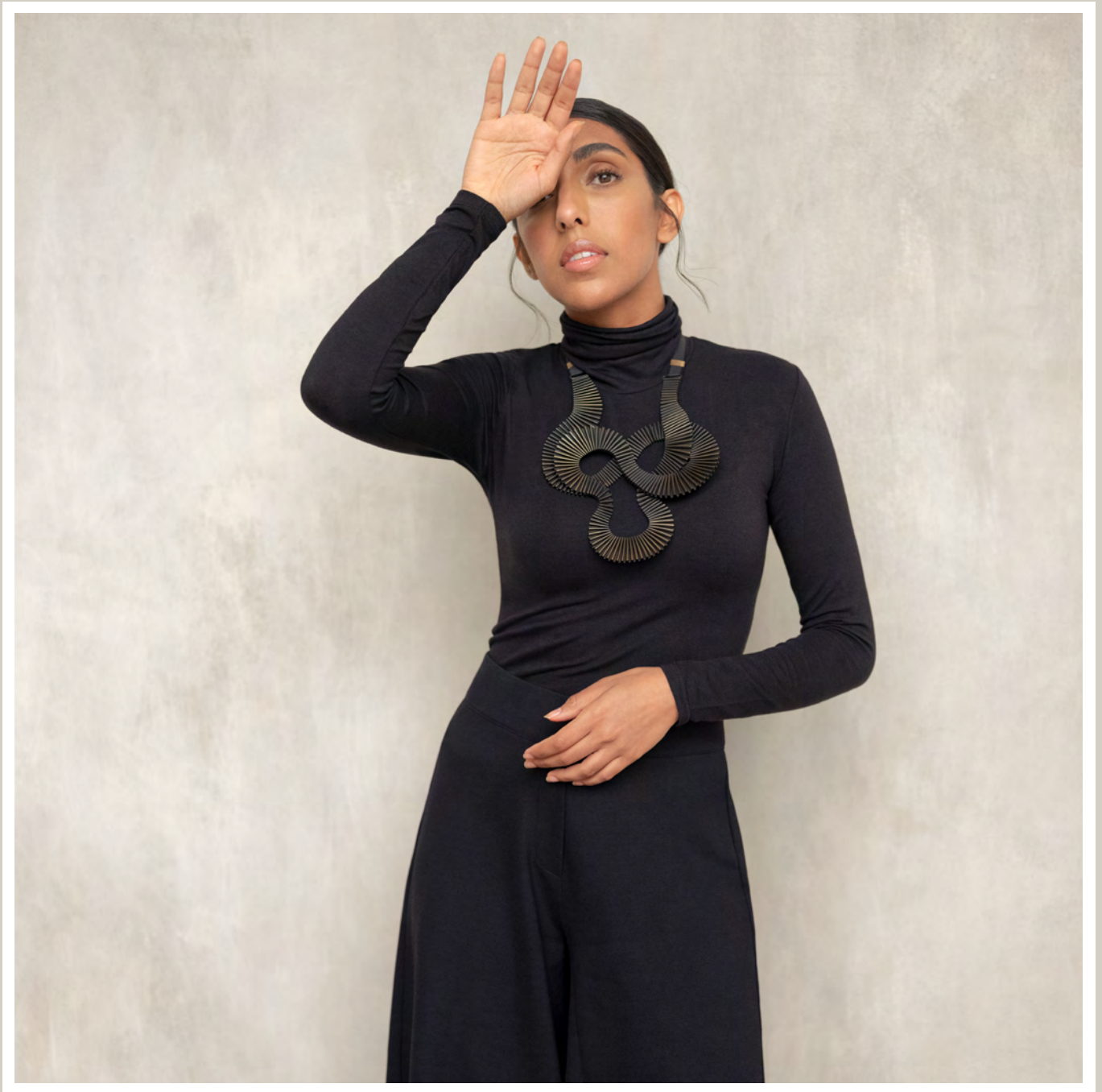

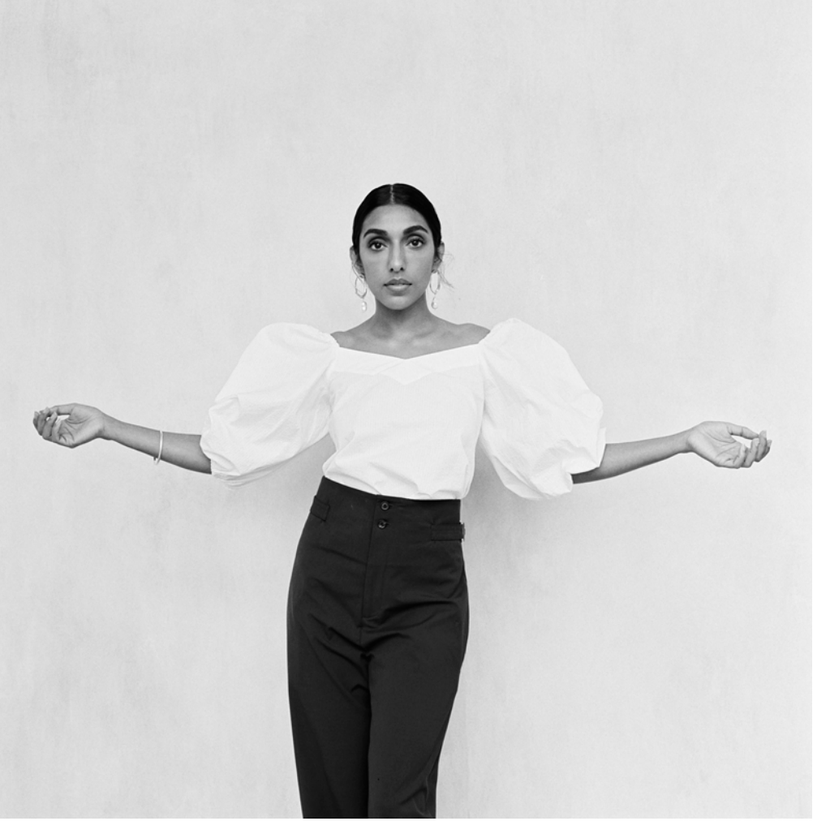

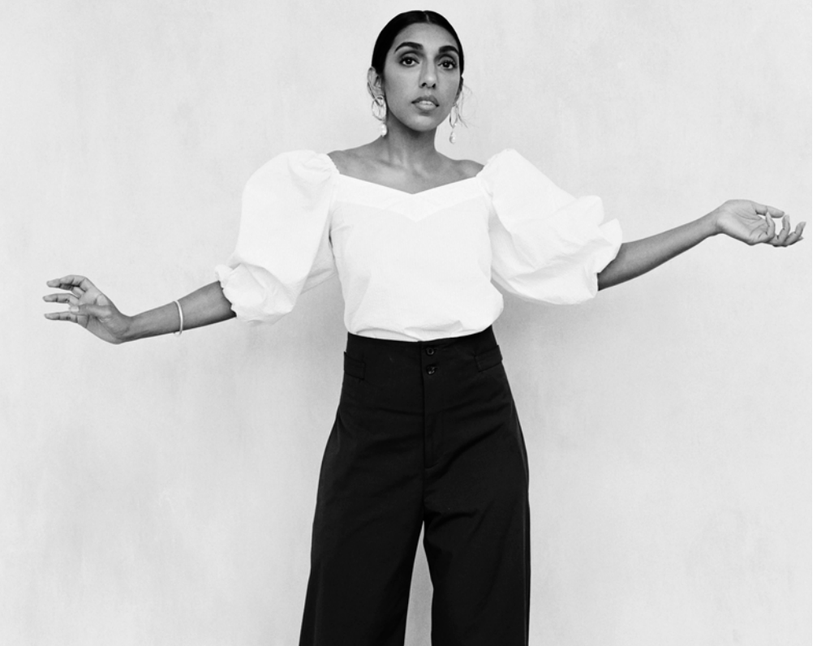

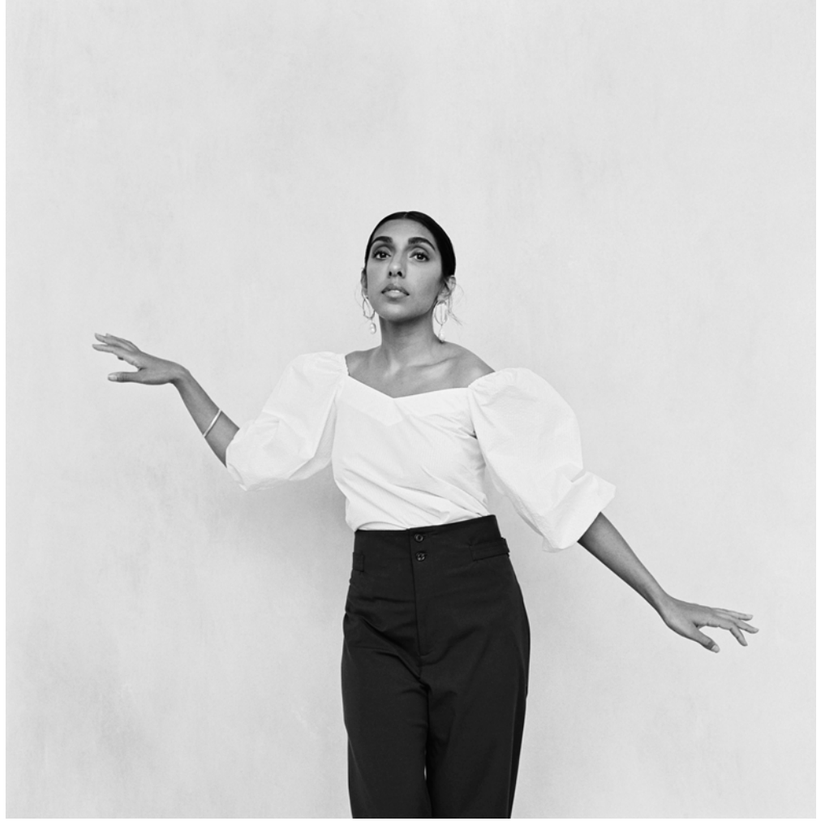

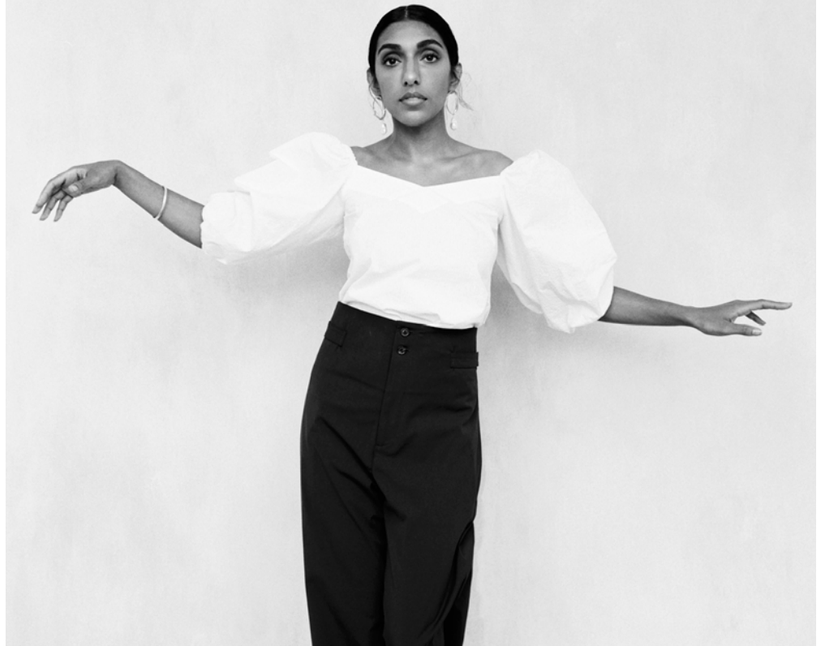

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RUPI KAUR

Poetry as Necessity

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&
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CUYANA: AN ANECDOTE

CUYANA is a San Francisco-based brand founded by Shilpa Shah and Karla Gallardo, guided by an ethos of *Fewer, Better Things* that values simplicity, sustainability, and functionality — though never at beauty's expense. Who better, then, to dress Kaur, a woman known for her poignant distillations and eye for the essential.

"I had been a fan of Rupi's for a long time," recounts Shah. "And then I finally reached out." Kaur responded right away, not only to express her affinity for the CUYANA brand, but to share an anecdote: "Rupi told me that when she was writing her second book, *The Sun and Her Flowers*, she would print her working drafts at my uncle's copy store in Berkeley. After a few weeks, during which he consistently teased her about wasting paper ('Why so few words per page? Can't you put more than one poem on each sheet?'), he told Rupi the founding story of Cuyana. I love my uncle dearly and couldn't help but feel Rupi and I were meant to meet."

For our shoot, Shah incorporated movement, an integral part of Kaur's live performances, and gave special consideration to her selection of accessories. "Indian women have a unique connection to jewellery. It represents family and heritage," explains Shah, whose family, like Kaur's, is Punjabi. "All of the jewellery is from my personal collection. Some belonged to my mom and grandmother. A few pieces are my own." On set in Toronto, Shah imagined what it would have been like for her grandmother to see Kaur, dressed in clothes by her granddaughter's brand, and wearing the same jewellery she once wore in Punjab: "I think the sight of it would have blown her mind."

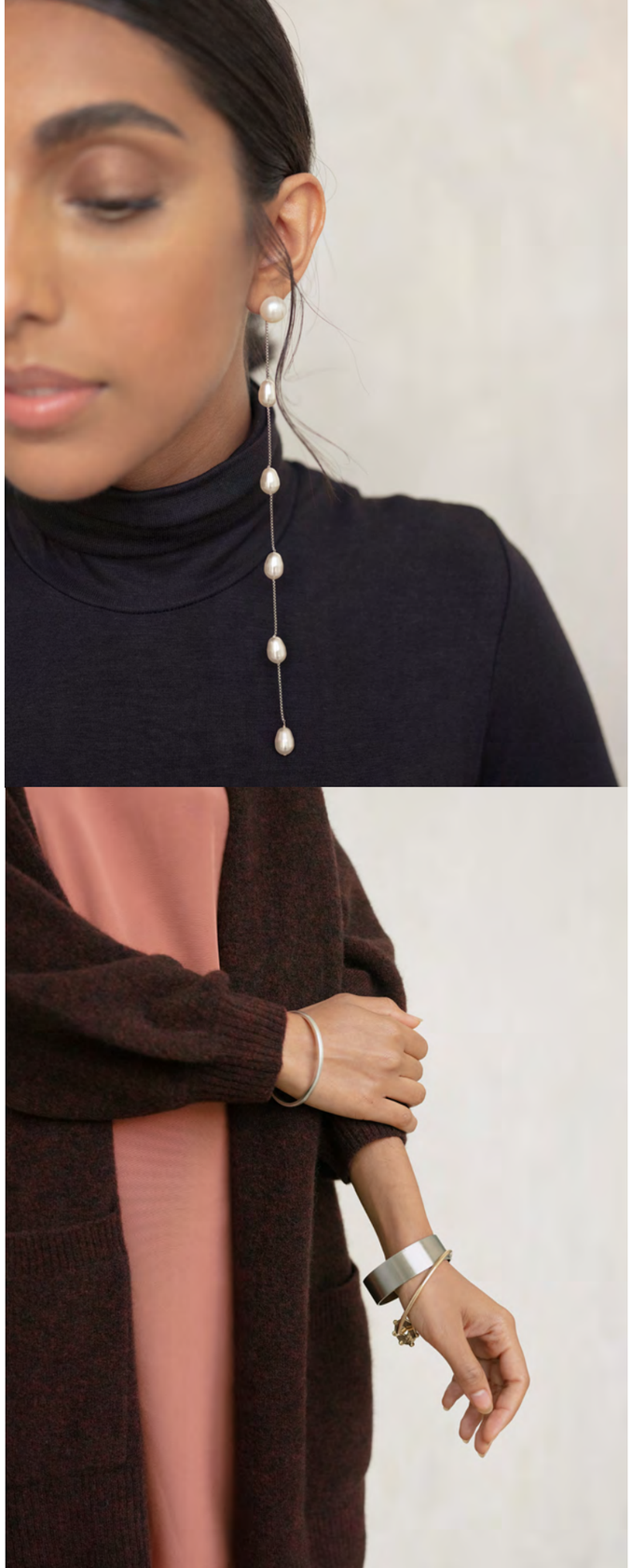
←

Balloon sleeve top CUYANA
Trousers CONNOLLY
Bracelet RUPI KAUR'S OWN
Earrings ALIGHIERI

→

Top
Black turtle neck CUYANA
Earrings SOPHIE BUHAI

Bottom
Cashmere cardigan CUYANA
Silk slip dress CUYANA
RH bracelet RUPI KAUR'S OWN
LH gold bracelet PERMANENT COLLECTION
LH stainless steel bracelet CUYANA



Rupi Kaur sits across from me in a glass-panelled conference room in the middle of a co-working space. Around us, a perimeter of disinterested strangers hunch towards their computers in the half dark. The room's complete lack of privacy leaves me feeling self-conscious, and the office atmosphere has me coming up short on details that might provide deeper insight into Kaur's life and process: there are no papers, no books, no well-worn pieces of furniture; we are in a box that does not afford context. Kaur, however, seems unconcerned by the people glancing at us as they pass, and as I watch her speaking, the iron bars of the glass wall behind her come into sharper relief. They recall the perfect squares of an Instagram grid, transparent and exposing.

Kaur's apparent contentment, here in our little crystal cage, is indicative of her broader relationship with the spotlight and its attendant thrills. Her desire to offer herself to the eyes and ears of others feels final — necessary, even. Fortunately for the Punjabi-Canadian poet, Kaur is widely received. Nearly four million people follow her on Instagram. Her 2014 book, *Milk and Honey*, is a No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller; *The Sun and Her Flowers*, published in 2017, had a similar debut. Thousands attend her spoken word performances, which she puts on all over the world. Her audience, whatever the medium, is predominantly young women, and her themes touch upon sisterhood, femininity, oppression and abuse. The work's sometimes heavy content is nonetheless compact and digestible, composed of straightforward language and accompanied by her own line drawings. Kaur's approachability as a poet is praised by fans and derided by critics. Whatever the case, people are reading.

To more fully understand the creative well from which Kaur draws, one must look back, past her childhood, to the circumstances that led her family away from their Sikh community in Punjab to the comparative isolation of a Canadian suburb. In the 1980s, before Kaur was born, tensions erupted between militant Sikh nationalists seeking independence and the Indian government that refused them. The turmoil reached a fever pitch in 1984 when Indira Gandhi, India's prime minister at the time, was assassinated by two of her own bodyguards, both Sikh. In the days that followed, thousands of Sikhs, nationalist and non-nationalist alike, were murdered in retaliation. "If you had a turban and a beard," Kaur says, "they came for you." Sikh militantism continued through the 1990s, and with it, violence, terrorism, and an anti-Sikh sentiment that extended far beyond the perpetrators. Kaur's father, a Sikh, was eventually picked up and taken in by police. His brother knew someone who knew someone, and he was soon released. As Kaur tells it, he was luckier than others. "Sons and fathers," she explains. "Men were just disappearing." Staying in Punjab was a risk, and, when Kaur was just a newborn, her father left India for good. He began leapfrogging through countries until he arrived, finally, in Canada.

Kaur's early years in Punjab were fatherless but well-supported. She recalls the constant company of aunts and cousins, deep-fried sweets, and rides on her grandfather's motorbike. "I was spoiled there," she says, adding with a wink, "*supposedly*." In 1995, the time came for the family to reunite with her father in Canada. Kaur started crying at the airport and continued once she was on the plane. She wailed for candy the flight attendant did not have, and was pacified only when given a plastic water bottle. She had never seen one before. The calm was not to last. She was unsettled anew when they disembarked and were greeted by a strange man whom her mother introduced as Kaur's father: "I was like, 'No.'"

The relationship between Kaur and her father did not get smoother as the years went on. She inherited a parent altered by the politics and circumstances of his homeland. The impact of this inevitably trickled down to his family. His trauma became, in a way, their own. "The person he was before all this happened was very different from the person I got to know," Kaur remarks. "With him, there was very little fun, very little laughter. He was jaded and cold and hurt." Kaur's father was not open about his past or his emotions. What little she learned about him she learned through an uncle when on the occasional trip back to India. "It took me a very long time to forgive my father," she admits. "But going through certain things changes you and that's OK." Nevertheless, as a child, it caused her to dive inward.

As a young immigrant, Kaur felt as estranged from her new home as she did from her father. Montréal lacked the lush abundance of green she was used to. Brown bodies were replaced by white ones. Her parents didn't speak English and, for two years, neither did she. "There were so many times I just went to the bathroom where I was sitting in class because I didn't know how to ask," she says. In

time, Kaur picked up the language, and she became a voracious reader. “Even though we didn’t have a lot of money, my parents always took us to thrift stores, and we’d buy books. Those were really the only toys I had.” She found comfort in paper, companionship in words.

The poetry came practically of necessity. “I used to write poems for my friends and boys I had crushes on,” Kaur divulges. “Writing was the best way for me to communicate because I was always so scared to have a conversation.” That silence defined most of her early schooling: “I barely spoke out loud until the fifth grade.” Two years after quite literally finding her voice, she became involved in speech writing competitions. This sparked her love of performance. “It was so electrifying,” she recalls. “I was a shy kid who was comfortable being invisible — it forced me to be very, very visible.” A turn playing classical Indian music introduced her to the stage. There, she was home.

It was in the twelfth grade when Kaur attempted her first spoken word performance. “It was a terrible poem,” she remembers. After she finished her reading, Kaur was greeted by a crowd 10 years her senior, mostly men. “It was the first time in my life that I had males give me a sense of warmth, love and support in the way that I needed it. Of course my father was always there to give that to me, but he had his own way.” That first performance led to Kaur’s years-long involvement with a group of Sikh activists concerned with problems facing the Sikh community in India, some of them the very same issues that led her father to flee Punjab so many years before.

Kaur’s work as a volunteer and community organiser kept her in sporadic contact with the stage. One day, a fellow activist encouraged her to make her work more accessible: “She said, ‘You know, you perform your poems and you write for these events, then you put the piece away and nobody hears it again. More people could relate to this. More people should hear it.’” So Kaur tried YouTube, Tumblr, Facebook, MP3 recordings and blogs. She couldn’t find her audience. What came to life on stage was not coming to life on the internet. But then came Instagram. Kaur was studying rhetoric at university, and began to ask herself how she could better get her message across. She began to scale down her longer poems, considering how they looked graphically: “I would extract these little gems and refine them until they started to make my stomach turn. That’s when I knew: this is what I want to put out.” With the right length and the right look, Kaur’s readership blossomed.

Kaur is undoubtedly an artist built by the internet, and the media has labelled her as such. True to her generation, she doesn’t seem to mind. Social media is media. The term ‘Instapoet’ only bothers her when it is used dismissively by certain people, mostly, according to Kaur, in the literary world. “I think the industry has a problem with Instagram poets because we’re mostly young and mostly women. I mean, what industry likes that?” She sees those protecting the formal traditions of poetry as gatekeepers keen on keeping the disenfranchised out of the proverbial ivory tower. “My poetry gets criticised a lot for being too accessible,” she laments, “which I never understood. Accessibility is such a great thing.”

So-called Instapoets like Kaur have opened up a whole new demographic to the cathartic possibilities of the form. Kaur is not interested in pandering to the old guard. “I am writing for the 15-year-old girl who has nobody and has absolutely no support, because I was that girl. I’m not writing for some highbrow dude who is super fancy and well-connected and has all these awards. I don’t even know what that room looks like. Poetry on Instagram has allowed us to connect with so many people. And I think that’s really important. How else would a young brown girl or a young black girl or some kid in the middle of nowhere be able to make their dreams come true if they’re not in that room, you know? I think that’s really exciting.”

The advantage of being alive and creating at this moment in time is not lost on Kaur. “I could not have done this 20 years ago,” she states plainly. She recognises that a window has opened for others like her — unwilling heirs to the damage of countries, of cultures, of parents. Kaur wants not just to become a voice for these people, but for them to become voices themselves. “I always tell young women we’re so lucky to be here right now. Take this opportunity and run with it. Figure out what you want to do and do it. Try something. Make mistakes.” Kaur’s very presence in this world offers encouragement. In the end, her legacy will be more than the words she has left on the page. It will be the doors she has held open for others. •