

TimeOut
New York

February 19-26, 2004
Issue 438

Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*
Peter Blum, through
Mar 20
(see Soho).

The most idle criticism of 2002's Documenta 11 exhibition in Kassel, Germany, was the complaint of too many films. Luckily for New York viewers, some of that surfeit has migrated here, and Amar Kanwar's excellent film *A Season Outside* is currently on view at Peter Blum.

Kanwar's 30-minute projection is a meditation on the seemingly inexorable pattern of violence in the Kashmir territories disputed by India and Pakistan. As Kanwar demonstrates in the first moments of the film, the cyclical nature of this hostility is now so historic and routinized that each day it is reenacted in ceremonies of military bluster at the border. Plumed soldiers partner with their adversaries in a dramatic display of acrobatic pomp, performing a synchronized war dance that ends in an aggressive standoff. Sadly, the form and outcome of the ritual mimic the tense political reality.

Kanwar's haunting voiceover addresses particular nationalist animosities as well as the motivations behind



Amar Kanwar, film still from *A Season Outside*, 1998

violence at large. His footage of the polarized antagonisms aroused by a blood sport like ram fighting reveals that the conflict runs as deep between the trash-talking bettors as it does between the animals. More generally, *A Season Outside* tackles the forced separation of families and communities; the institutionalized poverty and disenfranchisement of long-term refugees like the Tibetans; and the physically and psychologically crippling consequences of brutal abuses by state police. Kanwar's film conveys the inertia that arises in the face of atrocity, and the subsequent erosion of human dignity. As Gandhi (whom Kanwar invokes) fiercely believed and the film itself eloquently suggests, nonviolence is a greater force for change than the mightiest weapon of mass destruction.—*Eva Diaz*