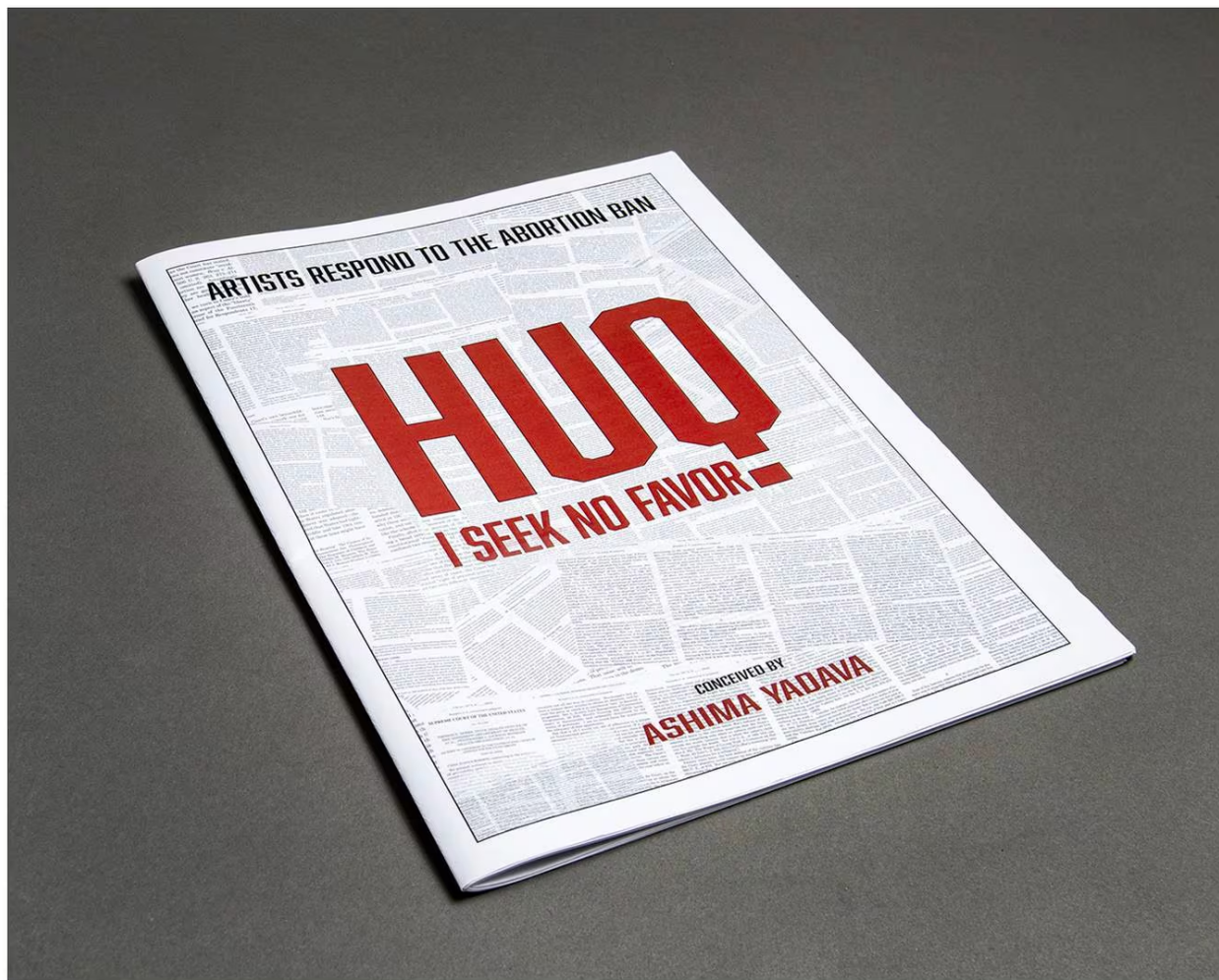


## How one activist turned her fury over the Dobbs decision into art



Huq: I Seek No Favor (ASHIMA YADAVA)

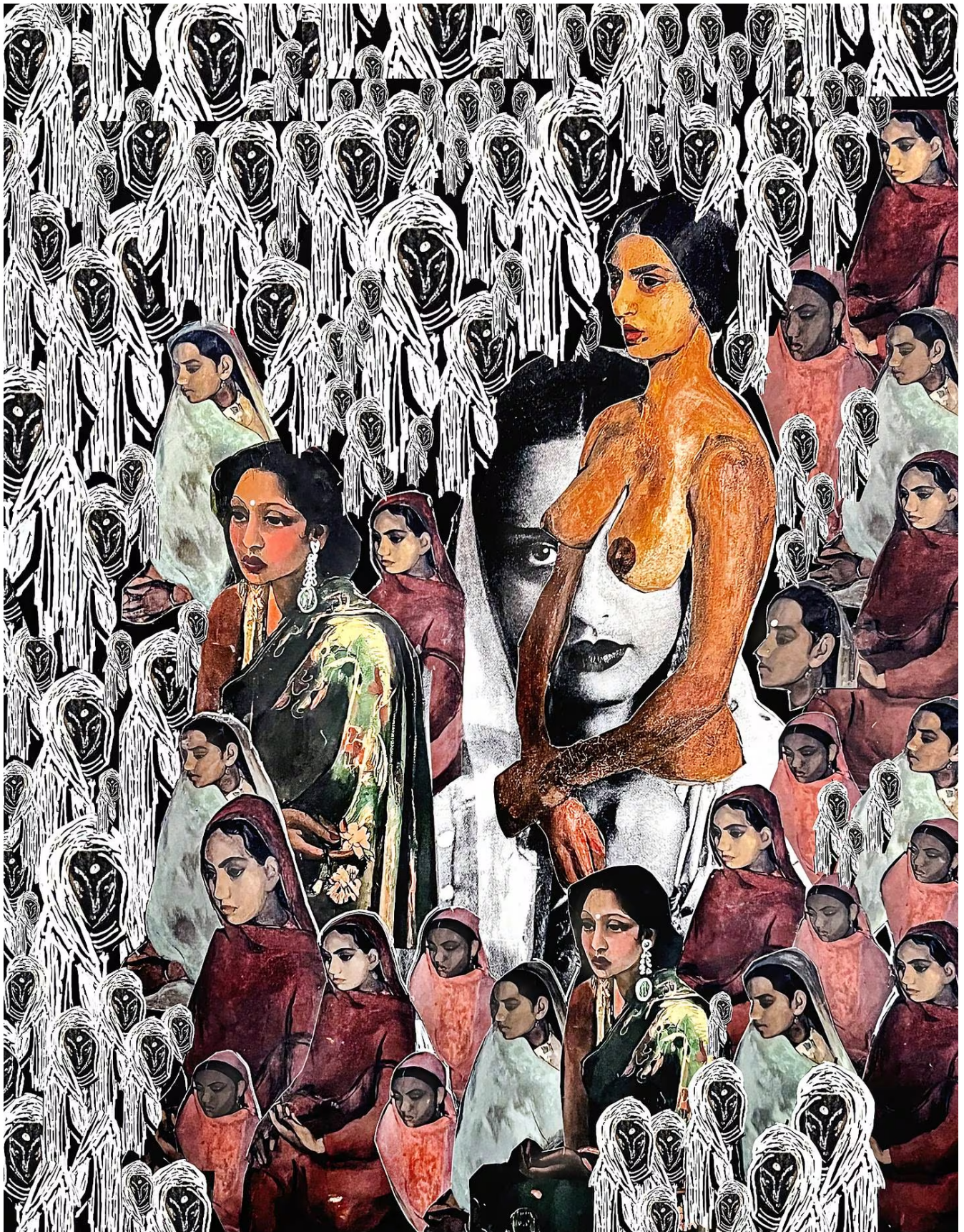
When Justice Samuel Alito's draft decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case leaked, Bay Area artist and activist Ashima Yadava was, like so many others, devastated. But by the time the official decision came down, she had resolved to find a meaningful way to respond. Thus, with the help of a collective of artists, [Huq: I Seek No Favor](#) was born. I called Yadava to talk about her stunning project and how her personal history informs her powerful work.

### **I know you and I have talked about this, but I wonder if you can tell folks a little bit about your project?**

Last year when the Supreme Court draft was leaked in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, part of me...I guess I didn't want to believe it was happening. And so I downloaded it, and I started reading through it to make sense of what was going on. And the more pages I read, the angrier I got, and the more unsettled I was. At some point, I started marking words to make haikus of what I was reading. I would shred some pages, make pulp and paper out of it,

just using different forms to try and make sense of it. Then in June, the final decision came out, and it was a 213-page document. I realized that this year would be the 50th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, and I thought it was important to mark that date and point out that we're being taken back all of these years. Everything that women have fought for, everything that nonbinary people have fought for, everything that anyone who cares about equality and equity in the workforce was being overturned. And the number 50 really stuck with me.

I decided to reach out to 50 people for their reactions. I divided the 213 pages by 50, which came out to 4.2, and I reached out to artists to see if they wanted to use this as a way to process the rage that we were all feeling.



Amrita Sher-Gil, a pioneer of modern Indian art, died of complications after a botched abortion at 28. This mixed media collage is a part of the series, *Huq: I Seek No Favor*, and pays an homage to her and millions of women who died due to lack access to safe abortion. (ASHIMA YADAVA)

**How did your personal history growing up female in India inform the project?**

Everything that I ever do stems from having grown up in India. There's a line in a poem by the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti that says, "The fish, even in the fisherman's net, still carries the smell of the sea." My sensibilities you know, as an

artist, as who I am, everything that I do is colored with that lens of having grown up in India. When I moved to the United States, it was to put distance between myself and the circumstances that said I had to live a certain way because I'm a woman. I remember my father hated if I wore a sleeveless dress, I remember him getting me out of the car and sending me back home to change because he didn't think what I was wearing was appropriate. It's so in your face every single day of your life that you're a woman, you're a girl, you can't do all these things that men can. And I'm not talking 1900 or whatever. This is all relevant now.

I think that's why it feels even harder to accept what is happening in the United States, because I was promised a better future in this country. America stood for certain things, and that is changing.

**What's the inspiration behind the project's title?**

"Huq" is the Hindustani word for "rights"—I think it has origins in Arabic. I always heard this word growing up, like, this is my right, this is my huq. I thought it was important to have a bilingual title because I think it pointed to the fact that this ruling is affecting a very diverse group of people. "I seek no favor" comes from an Audre Lorde poem, "[A Woman Speaks.](#)" The whole point is basically talking about not being defined by our circumstances, and fighting for your rights and seeking our tribe. With this project, I wanted to bring a tribe together and get a community of people to react to this. And so Huq: I Seek No Favor became the name. Reproductive autonomy is my right, I'm not seeking a favor.

**I think there's a lot of power in reacting directly to a Supreme Court decision, too, in this way, given that legal language is so lofty and inaccessible. Was that part of your intent?**

I think the act of taking a bite, in the way I had to process the decision, Becca—making haikus and tearing those pages, there was some sort of a relief or an outlet in that and it was very empowering. As I spoke to more and more collaborators, I would send them the four pages, they would read, and we would brainstorm, we would talk. In those conversations, we would discuss form, we would mark words, we would try to process the meaning within those four pages. I have friends who are lawyers who are part of this project, and they pointed out to me that this language and process is deliberately complex. It's meant to confuse people. This is done to keep you embroiled in these conversations about language and stuff. It doesn't mean shit.

To take all of that apart felt empowering in a time of helplessness and rage.



**Becca Andrews**

Becca Andrews is a reporter at Reckon News and the author of "No Choice: The Destruction of Roe v. Wade and the Fight to Protect a Fundamental American Right."