

« During an era when, in India, self-consciously “classical” musicians were expected to democratize their idiom and adhere to purificatory standards set by a rigidly hierarchical system of statesponsorship, Pandit Pran Nath forged an alternative, cosmopolitan model for the future of South Asian traditional music, one focused on advanced sound technologies, spiritualized sensibilities, and a circle of elite connoisseurs, neo-nawabs, and princesses of the underground, holding strange court in a new world. He was a nomadic innovator, an idiosyncratic original, and the godfather of drone; and he’s been written out of the history of Indian contemporary art and music, first by nationalist historians and critics who didn’t know where to place him, and now, by a contemporary commercial scene that scarcely knows his name. But the South Asian art world is changing quickly these days, increasingly focused on new media and electronic arts, on unpredictable collisions between national and global cultural flows, and on manipulations of identity. Perhaps the time is right to sift through the archives again and look harder for the Pran Nath hidden there, lost or hidden lineaments of the avant-garde and the Outside. *Pran Nath* means “Lord of the life-breath” in Sanskrit — his destiny, and a promise. »

Lord of the Drone: Pandit Pran Nath and the American Underground

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