

# A Glimpse of New York From a Magic Carpet

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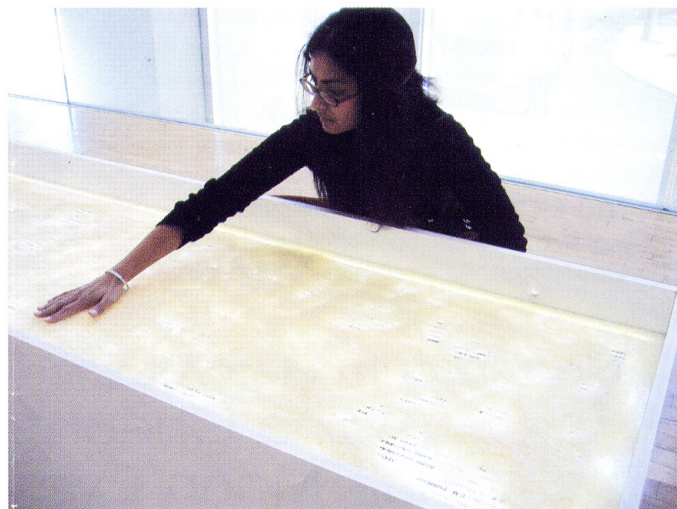
In *Panorama of the City of New York. Magic Carpet, 2005*, the artists Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi invite the visitor to look at New York from the point of view of “Orientals” and Muslims. Their installation is included in the exhibition “Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now,” on view at the Queens Museum of Art through June 5. The 27 artists participating in the show are from New York and New Jersey; they trace their roots to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Some of the artists are established gallery figures such as Shahzia Sikander, Rina Banerjee and Chitra Ganesh while others are emerging artists and new voices. The exhibition lifted its name from an essay, “A Fatal Love,” which was written by Suketu Mehta and dealt with the relationship between India and Pakistan. The young and enthusiastic curators of “Fatal Love” are two South Asian American women, Jaishri Abichandani and Prerana Reddy. Both are artists themselves.

“Fatal Love” is presented as both a complement to and in juxtaposition with “Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India,” on view at both the Queens Museum of Art and the Asia Society through June 5. The main difference



between the two shows is that while the artists participating in “Fatal Love” live and work in America, the artists participating in “Edge of Desire” live and work in India. The curator of “Edge of Desire,” Chaitanya Sambrani, described the exhibit as expressing the two strong desires shaping contemporary India, the desire to preserve purity, which leads to fundamentalism, and the desire for prosperity, which leads to globalization. The artists participating in “Fatal Love” respond to events that take place in America, and explore issues such as searching for an identity as an immigrant or as the child of one.

“Fatal Love” is most compelling when it introduces the ways in which American Muslim artists are dealing with issues of finding a personal identity, responding to Post 9/11 American policy and reassessing the definition and treatment of “others.” One way is by escaping to a playful fantasy. The magic carpet created by Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi is illuminated by hundreds of light bulbs and hovers over a section of the museum’s *Panorama of the City*—a miniature New York created for the World’s Fair of 1965. The iconic image of a magic carpet is a reminder of childhood and fairytales. “It represents a fantasy of many Oriental and Muslim immigrants who came to New York,” says Prerana Reddy, the exhibition’s co-curator, “an object that can fly magically over borders.”



Mareena Waheeda Daredia, who was born in Pakistan, aims to “re-humanize Muslims.” Her photographs invite the viewer to see the inside of a Muslim home; they document her family and friends going about their daily activities, not suspecting that someone is watching them. Daredia shows us the ways they hold on to Islamic and Eastern traditions while living a Westernized, contemporary life. “She uncovers identities that have been misrepresented and misunderstood,” says Prerana Reddy. In one of Daredia’s photographs, an elegant woman in a traditional sari is sitting on a Laura Ashley bed spread, holding a cell phone; Daredia doesn’t show us the woman’s face. Another picture introduces a mother and a child during their afternoon prayers; the woman’s identity is erased as if she was invisible.

“Disappeared in America” is a walk-through installation created by a collective of artists; it uses a film trilogy, soundscapes, photos, objects, and the audience’s interactions to commemorate the 3,000 Muslim men in America detained under the Patriot Act since 9/11. The majority of those detained were from the invisible underclass of cities like New York. “They are the recent immigrants who drive our taxis, deliver our food, clean our restaurant tables, and sell fruit, coffee, and newspapers,” says the artists who wish to make them visible. The installation includes silk-screened photographic images of detainees mounted against the exterior walls of the museum, viewable in full from outside the building and partially from the second floor. It wasn’t easy to get these photographs. The collective’s director Naeem Mohaiemen told me that he spoke to 70 people before he found the six who agreed to be photographed.

Some of the pieces in the show are exhibited in surprising places. An unexpected confrontation with art can trigger unguarded responses in the viewer. Farheen HaQ, who works with digital video and photography, shows her installation in the museum’s elevator. An elevator is a place where we are likely to feel threatened, or at least closed in by strangers and therefore it is an interesting place to explore our fear of “others.” Upon entering the museum’s elevator, the viewer is confronted with a darkened space illuminated by lightboxes containing images of a Muslim woman praying in distinctively North American public spaces.

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Left - Right: *Detainee*, Photo Triptych, from “Disappeared in America” / A visitor plays with a lightbox. All images courtesy of [www.disappearedinamerica.org](http://www.disappearedinamerica.org)