

Urban Myths & Modern Fables

Curated by Haema Sivanesan

25 September – 26 October 2007

Opening Tuesday 25 September 6-8pm

Image: Alia Toor, *99 Names of Amman*, 2004, dust masks with cotton embroidery.
Courtesy of the artist.

UTS Gallery: Level 4, 702 Harris St, Ultimo | PO Box 123 Broadway NSW 2007

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Urban Myths & Modern Fables is an exhibition of new work by contemporary artists of Indian and Pakistani background, working in Australia and the international diaspora.

Drawing on the notion of myth, a perpetuating narrative featuring heroic or supernatural characters and events, or the idea of a fable, an aphoristic or instructive story, these artists employ fictive strategies to comment on the contemporary world. Working with conceptual techniques of visual puns, quotation and metaphor the works in this exhibition re-invent and challenge master narratives informing perceptions of culture. The work of these artists speaks of culture as operating between the past and the present, the real and the imagined, as an ongoing process of myth-making and story-telling. The artists included in this exhibition work in a variety of media and techniques – in painting, collage, paper cut-outs, digital print-making and computer generated animation. Their works reference the visual traditions of the sub-continent through the use of distinctive, culturally specific images and techniques drawn from traditional or historical sources. However, these artists re-fashion this imagery in order to undertake a critical exploration of the language of contemporary art.

In "Battle Scenes" 2006, Hamra Abbas (Pakistan/Germany) draws on her sophisticated knowledge of miniature painting to produce a computer generated animation which reflects on the relationship between historical and contemporary events. Her work is a contemporary reconstruction of two paintings from the 16th century Mughal epic, the "Akbarname" held in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Naeem Rana (Australia) produces digital prints that reference his interest in the conventionally Islamic art forms of calligraphy and geometric patterning. Juxtaposing Urdu calligraphy alongside pop-culture images drawn from B-grade movies and tabloid media, Rana is engaged in a provocative critique of both Western and Islamic propaganda.

Canadian born, Alia Toor's installation, "99 Names of Amman" consists of a series of dust masks embroidered in Arabic with the 99 names of God. The work reflects on notions of security and insecurity and considers how what provides reassurance in one culture can be the source of fear in another. This exhibition situates the work of some key emerging Australian artists of Indian/Pakistani background alongside their peers in the international milieu. An exhibition brochure with curatorial essay will be available.

Participating artists:

Hamra Abbas (Pakistan/Germany), Khadim Ali (Pakistan), Henna Nadeem (UK), Hitesh Natalwala (Australia), Tazeen Qayyum (Canada), Nusra Qureshi (Australia), Sabeen

Raja (Pakistan/USA),
Naeem Rana (Australia), Amin Rehman (Canada), Sangeeta Sandrasegar (Australia),
Alia Toor (Canada)