

VITRINE



Ashfika Rahman, Redeem (detail), 2020. Stitching on 'Shital pat' (a local handmade fabric made by indigenous community Oreni), Wool and recycled saree, 103 x 183 cm.

Press Release

The typology of wounds, the mapping of healing Ashfika Rahman

21 September – 19 December 2021

Preview: TBC

VITRINE, Basel. Daily 24/7.

'The typology of wounds, the mapping of healing' is Bangladeshi artist Ashfika Rahman's first solo show in Europe. The exhibition presents new and existing photographic and textile works produced in Bangladesh in collaboration with marginalised indigenous communities in her home country.

Rahman's practice originates from photography, a medium that she utilises to research and document marginalised and oppressed groups in her homeland. Evolving beyond documentation, the artist activates collaborations within specifically chosen villages to share their often sad and horrific experiences as a largely disenfranchised populous; communities whose histories and cultures are being erased by the harsh and violent policies and ideologies of the state and social elite of the country. The artist spends considerable periods of time with these people, producing bodies of work which bring these issues to the attention of her country as well as raising awareness about these alarming threats on humanity.

The body of work titled 'Redeem' was begun in 2020 and is produced as part of a collaborative project engaging with the social issues surrounding mass religious conversion among indigenous communities in Bangladesh. To produce these works, Rahman spends time with individuals within the villages, creating portraits and collaboratively sewing woven textiles from material sourced within the villages where they live, including disused saree. The work presented in 'The typology of wounds, the mapping of healing' is the second and third in the series produced with Santal and Dalit communities. The Santals are one of the most ancient indigenous groups in Bangladesh but have historically been deprived of stately rights and privileges because of their isolated existence. The Dalit – translated as 'deprived' and academically applied to all low castes – is a group of religiously and socio-economically marginalised people who are deprived and forced to work under abominable conditions with the lowest return of their labour. 'Redeem' captures their customs, livelihood and cultural features to not only preserve and share, but to celebrate their ways of life through documentative visual material.

The first version in the series, which was exhibited at the Dhaka Art Summit 2020, was produced with the Oraon community and presented as one portrait and one textile made from 35 components. The two new works grow in scale, incorporating a larger textile coupled with a series of 6 framed portraits each.

Exhibited concurrently are previously unseen photographs from Rahman's 'The Power Box' series. 'The Power Box' is a photographic typological survey of televisions in the villages of communities in Chalan Bill, Bangladesh's largest wetlands. With no electricity, the inhabitants' televisions are operated by battery. Without satellite channels, they have access to only state-run channels, allowing for a significant amount of propaganda, and therefore political influence, to reach them. Rahman's series portrays each television as a character, with an individual personality adorned with vibrant fabrics, rather than an object. The photographs are displayed over a wallpaper imitating their patterns.

Additionally, the artist has produced a new work with the stitching of a poem written in the native language of the Santal, into a landscape photograph of the village Nator in Northern Bangladesh where a group live. The poem is a form of prayer which is read or sung in church to praise God, ask for mercy and request to have food regularly. The artist finds irony in the poems as they are not written by them, but instead written by the father of the local church who provides food, financial aid and hospitality in exchange for their religious conversion. The poem could then be seen as a sinister form of propaganda perpetuated through praise, justifying conversion with charity.

This exhibition is generously supported by SüdKulturFonds, Atelier Mondial and the Samdani Art Foundation.

Ashfika Rahman (b. 1988. Dhaka, BD) lives and works in Dhaka, BD. She has a Professional Diploma in Professional Photography from Pathshala, Dhaka, BD (2016) and a Professional Diploma in Photography from Hochschule Hannover, DE (2017). In 2018 she was selected for the Joop Swart Master Class by World Press Photo Foundation. Awards include Samdani Art Award (Finalist 2018 & 2020); New York Portfolio Review (2020); IPA Award (Finalist 2018); Leica Oskar Barnack Award (Nominated 2018).

Rahman has exhibited in festivals and museums internationally including: Dhaka Art Summit (2018 & 2020), Dhaka, BD; Lumix Festival (2018 & 2020), Hannover, DE; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR; Chobi Mela X, Dhaka, BD; Jimei x Arles international photo festival, China; F3 - Freiraum for Fotografie, Berlin, DE; FORMAT International Photography Festival, Derby, UK; Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, UAE; Objectifs, Singapore; Indian Photo Festival, Hyderabad, IN; Muslin Festival, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, BD; Bangladesh Art Week 2021, Dhaka, BD.

She has a forthcoming project with X Museum, Beijing, CN. Rahman was recently awarded the Stitching Screens grant by FICA and The Samdani Art Foundation, as well as the Format Festival Open Call Award.

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Notes to Editor

1. Installation views of the show will be released on Friday 17 September 2021.
2. VITRINE is focused on artistic experimentation and emerging interdisciplinary practices. The gallery was founded in London in 2010, with a second space in Basel opened in 2016 and a third digital space launched in 2020. Over this decade, we have established a reputation as a selector and nurturer of new talent and our continued aim is to support artists' careers and the growth of their ideas.

Our programme is focused on interdisciplinary approaches in a variety of media, concentrating on artists working in installation, sculpture and performance. We are committed to support experimental practices that flourish site-responsively, in alternative environments to the traditional white cube, and are often underrepresented in the art market.

Our spaces are transparent: In London, glass windows cover the entire 16-metre-long, panoramic space; In Basel, our space – custom designed by Swiss architects PanteraPantera - offers a 360 degree 'in-the-round' viewing experience. This transparent architecture allows all exhibitions to be viewable 24/7 from the surrounding public squares. Both VITRINE London and Basel are wheelchair accessible. Our office and viewing spaces are hidden inside, allowing for an incredibly flexible contemporary exhibiting and working space.

Our business model is a hybrid. We operate an expanding commercial gallery; representing a core group of artists and advising international clients. Our work in the public realm and commitment to supporting artists with ambitious experimental exhibitions has allowed us access to public funding, which we have carefully used over our 10-year history for specific large-scale non-profit projects.