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Picasso painted *Le Demoiselle d Avignon* after seeing an exhibit of African Masks and sculptures at the MOMA. Paul Gauguin's life's works come from Tahiti, where he retreated to after his giving up his profession as a stockbroker. Cultures outside their own have often inspired artists to push the boundaries of their work.

It is equally engaging see a culture that is known and familiar (by heritage, or place of birth) to artists, re-interpreted, contended with, and assimilated into new contexts. Nostalgia, yearnings for that elusive place called home and the immigrant experience in itself becomes the basis for their art.

This is the nerve that the curators at the Queens Museum have touched with their phenomenal exhibition called "Fatal Love- South Asian American Art Now." The exhibition follows "Crossing the lines" (also featured at the Queens Museum) in 2001, in which artists were asked to create pieces that focused on their particular communities. The museum takes its responsibility to represent the ethnically diverse community that inhabits New York seriously. It makes a fitting venue, therefore, for "Fatal Love," which is dedicated solely to the creative and cultural engagements of first and second generation American artists of South-Asian descent.

The "Fatal Love" exhibit has been installed in conjunction with the Asia Society's "Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India." "Fatal Love", stands with and apart from its Indian counterpart at the Asia Society. It speaks directly to the question of what it is to be a part of a diaspora. In particular, the diaspora's reaction to 9/11 and the treatment of immigrants in New York is raw and deeply felt. A multi-media installation by Naeem Mohaiemen and Ibrahim Quarishi called "Disappeared in America" documents the ugly and often brutal repercussions of 9/11 on Muslims through a series of banners, stickers, video pieces and sound bites. Specifically, it speaks to the victims whose absences went almost unnoticed- taxi drivers, small business owners - the very immigrants struggling the most to build a life in America.

It would be unfair to limit this vast exhibition to one that is only about the immigrant experience. The artists take their first tentative step (not quite off the boat, but off the margins) into mainstream contemporary American art. Pieces convey the efforts to bridge two realities: two sets of homes, inter-continental upbringings and personal struggles to connect the culture inherited and the surrounding American one.

Identity questions are debated and resolved with empowered voices that enjoy the the privilege of a mixed cultural background. Here, there are no dismal, embittered lost souls trying to find themselves in the miasma of multiple identities. Mareena Waheeda Daredia's tender photographs of her family and friends, for instance, explore the delicate balance between Islamic religious practices and life in a westernized society. Many of the works fall into such explorations of cultural dialogues.

There are exceptions, however. Yamini Nayar's photographs record constructed dioramas by placing isolated figures or objects in large fields. They may be parts of a story yet unfinished, leaving the viewer to create the before and after. Mala Iqbal's painted scapes are concerned with colour, space, and composition. The works of these artists are less obviously about the questions of identity and cross-pollination of cultures.

Other notable subjects include the city's MTA map hand painted and labeled in detail in Urdu, a flying carpet going to or away from New York City, 'Lotahs' hung in the bathrooms of the museum, a Muslim woman praying in her New Jersey home flanked by Ikea furniture and Krishna's Gopi's tresses morphing into bat-like forms. Each of these pieces are visually powerful and intellectually stimulating. Some artists have taken tokens of their colonial and cultural past and subverted them, making them hooks on which their narratives hang. Others have remodeled the old symbols in a new light and in doing so, commented on practices from both the East and the West.

The curators of the show, Jaishri Abhichandani and Perna Reddy, wanted to create a cultural portal into the South Asian community. Thus, the exhibition includes a series of music and dance performances over the weekends that the exhibit is on display, along with the multi-media pieces themselves. In addition, the exhibit stars both critically acclaimed and successful artists, such as Shazia Sikandar, Rina Banerjee and Chitra Ganesh, and younger and up and coming artists, some whom do not have even a formal education in art. Despite the varying range in what could sometimes be perceived as a cacophony of artistic voices, the curators have managed to bring the works under a unified banner. The common thread that runs through each of the works is the exploration of what comprises the South Asian-American artist today.