



NEWS

ARTISTS

CURATORS

COLLECTORS

AUCTIONS



Interview: Maria Qamar's Big Reveal

Desi-Pop artist bridges the gap between analog and digital and brings fresh voice to feminism

By Heather Zises

August 22, 2019



Maria Qamar posing with her artworks. Photo courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York. Photo: Shark Senesac Photography

Currently disrupting the white walls at Richard Taittinger Gallery is Fraaaaandship!, Desi-Pop artist Maria Qamar's inaugural solo show in New York City. Playful and bright, the exhibition (which runs from August 1 to September 2), features colorful works that examine Indian culture, patriarchy and feminism with a fresh voice.



Maria Qamar, *Fraaaandship* exhibition installation view. Photo courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York. Photo: Shark Senesac Photography

Influenced by Pop artists like Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, Qamar renders raven-haired, purple-skinned women with graphic novel-style speech bubbles set against red or yellow backgrounds. Laced with “Hinglish”, contemporary female figures espouse defiant messages that push back against normative white western hegemonic culture. Offbeat soft sculptures such as a giant lota (a pitcher South Asians use as a bidet) with “Shit Happens” plastered in bold lettering, samosa bean bags chairs and shiny gold Maggi noodle balloons each embody candy-colored themes of sexism, cultural stereotypes, racism and trauma.



Maria Qamar, *Fraaaaandship* exhibition installation view. Photo courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York. Photo: Shark Senesac Photography.

Bolstered by a large (180k!) group of Instagram followers, which includes art critic Roberta Smith, Mindy Kaling and The New York Times, Qamar has steadily created a new world of online art with the handle @hatecopy. In an effort to bring the artist's online Instagram community to the physical artworld, Richard Taittinger Gallery provides a platform in which art lovers can experience works IRL while bridging the gap between analog and digital.



Maria Qamar, Fraaaaandship exhibition installation view. Photo courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York

Photo: Shark Senesac Photography.

Qamar's current series addresses the realities of online interaction from a strong feminist perspective. Looking to social media, online communication and personal branding, the artist questions the concept of friendship and how much of its authenticity remains intact as it is displayed through the lens of Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp and more. It is exactly within this slippage that the namesake of the show was born and how this term—"fraaaaandship"—has developed coarse connotations in the Desi community. Further nagging this theme is Qamar's deliberate resistance to translate her works. As the maker, it is up to the viewer to learn Qamar's perspective, and not the other way around.



Maria Qamar, *Fraaaaandship!* exhibition installation view. Photo courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York.

Photo: Shark Senesac Photography.

Despite these distortions, the idea of reaching out for genuine friendship and connection is important to Qamar. Having combatted a lifelong sense of cultural isolation, the artist looks to her online community for a sense of representation and belonging. In turn, this form of expression has created a more open and accessible space within herself.

Maria Qamar was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1991. A first-generation Canadian she moved to Mississauga, Ontario at the age of nine and endured bullying and racism in post 9-11 Toronto. She found her voice through Instagram, where her illustrations resonated with the Desi community. Qamar currently lives and works in Toronto. Below are edited excerpts from a conversation with Qamar right before her opening night:

FINE ART GLOBE: Your journey into the artworld was faced with lots of resistance and a bit unorthodox. Can you tell us about your path?

Maria Qamar: For our family, art was considered childish, shameful and not something a grown woman should be proud in pursuing. I felt the opposite way.

How did you come up with your online handle, HateCopy?

In my early 20s I began working as a copywriter for numerous advertising agencies. It was a career I wasn't too fond of, but something I had to do to prove to my family that I was able to provide a stable income for myself. I hated it.

You shared with me your sense of cultural isolation and placelessness growing up; could you elaborate upon that?

Growing up being shamed for art at home, my skin color in school and the erasure of brown bodies from the media I felt generally alone in my experiences as a Desi girl. I had no outlet for my frustration and used art as therapy to reflect how I was being treated day to day.

Your paintings are crisp and bright with no trace of the artist's hand. Can you explain your process?

Coffee. Tons of coffee. I've been practicing my linework almost obsessively for years. I'm hoping it'll only get better with time.

Instagram has proven to be a powerful tool for you. Through it, you have offered a sense of representation to a cultural community that was forbidden in your world before. How do you think this has affected you and your practice?

It has enabled me to pursue my life's work. I would not have had the courage or confidence to put anything up if it weren't for the community being there for me every step of the way. I'd like to think that we are all growing and learning this process together.

The painting Mera Jism, which translates to "my body, my weapon," packs a punch. Between the nudity and the battle cry, you offered that the work represents to you "Women that I have been, women I have witnessed and women that I want to be." Do you think this sentiment is broadly shared amongst your Instagram followers?

I'm still not sure what is the common response to my work but I can only guess that the people they tag in the comment section are the women that reflect these characters.



Maria Qamar discusses Fraaaaandship! with Fine Art Globe. Courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York. Photo: Shark Senesac Photography

You come from a very large family which makes you feel comfortable with large crowds. How does this compare to your very large online family of followers?

Having a large following of men and women just like me makes me feel as if we are part of a found family. It helps to create a welcoming environment when we move into a gallery space.



Maria Qamar, Didi from Another Bibi, 2019, Acrylic and ink on canvas, 74×51 inches. Photo courtesy of Richard Tattinger Gallery, New York. Photo: Shark Senesac Photography.

[f Like](#)[t Tweet](#)[s Submit](#)[p Pin It](#)[in LinkedIn](#)[Digg](#)



HEATHER ZISES

Heather Zises is an independent curator who specializes in feminist and identity-based practices. She is editor of the multi-award winning book *50 Contemporary Women Artists* (Schiffer 2018) and is a contributing writer and art editor for diverse publications, including *Quiet Lunch*, *Fjords Review*, and *Pregame Magazine*. Heather is also a founding member of Ninth Street Collective, a group of art administrators who focus on professional development for artists.



YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE

Prominent Art Dealer Endures Ordeal En Route to Dallas

News / December 29, 2019

Fashionably Attended ArtBerlin Showcases Solid but Unadventurous Works

Artists , Exhibitions , Fairs , News / September 20, 2019

Warhol opening at SFMOMA signals coming of age for tech mecca

Exhibitions , Museums , Uncategorized / May 20, 2019

0 COMMENTS

LEAVE A COMMENT

Comment