

Press release

Zurich, 27 November 2008

The Kunsthaus Zürich shows films by artist Runa Islam

From 28 November 2008 to 8 February 2009, the Kunsthaus Zürich presents 'Runa Islam. Restless Subject', Switzerland's first solo exhibition of the work of Runa Islam. Born in 1970 in Dhaka (Bangladesh) and now living in London, Islam subjects filmic illusions to critical scrutiny while drawing a bead on the act of seeing, which she understands as both sight and recognition. In addition to four recent films by the artist, the Kunsthaus also features a work created especially for the exhibition.

AN ARTISTIC DECELERATION OF THE QUOTIDIAN

Runa Islam's poetic films are visually powerful documents, interlacing analysis with sensibility on multiple levels. The film 'First Day of Spring' (2005) is a group portrait of rickshaw drivers in Dhaka. There are some 500,000 such drivers in the artist's hometown, most of them drawn from the countryside to try their luck at earning their family's daily bread in the big city. The government blames the rickshaws for Dhaka's endless traffic jams and is forever banning them from the streets. But 'First Day of Spring' betrays none of this hectic atmosphere. The rickshaw drivers sit comfortably astride their bicycles, apparently content to enjoy the eponymous occasion in peace. And it's true, they can: because Islam has paid them to skive, and pose for her camera instead. As a work of art, too, the piece challenges traditional cinematic technique. Islam's takes are long, almost static, and her camera approaches the group of rickshaw drivers from a range of perspectives, pausing every now and again to record the gentle spring breeze blowing through the foliage, then zooming in to capture individual faces before the drivers take off into the evening sunlight. With its subtle intensity and visual power, 'First Day of Spring' is an enthralling work of art, both a critique of cinematic legerdemain and an exposé of socio-political phenomena.

POLITICAL ISSUES TREATED WITH FORMAL RESEARCH

In 'The house belongs to those who inhabit it', a 16mm-film she made for this year's Manifesta7 at an industrial wasteland in the South Tyrol, Islam takes a similar approach. The organizers of M7 had originally planned to use the location themselves for the exhibition, but the area was too unsafe and the grounds too polluted by their erstwhile occupants. The only inhabitants now were squatters, who had moved into the empty buildings and left some graffiti on the walls. And yet, despite this political context, Islam deliberately avoids insisting on any particular interpretation of her work, preferring instead to leave

it open to various possible readings. She attempts to enter into dialogue with her viewers, and thus help them to orient themselves.

'The house belongs to those who inhabit it' is in addition a piece of formal research, in which Islam continues her investigations of 'camera movement' and 'film as language'.

EXHIBITION TITLE AND NEW FILM WORK

The issue of movement, of the relationship between a still and a moving picture, is also central to the other films shown in the cabinet. The title of the exhibition, 'Restless Subject', gestures both at the contingent significance of the moving picture to the cinematic project as well as at today's society, which is constantly in motion, and deeply individualized.

Runa Islam has created a new film (Untitled, 2008) for the exhibition curated by Mirjam Varadinis. The work will be shown in an installation specially designed for the cabinet by Islam in collaboration with the Slovenian artist Tobias Putrih (born 1972).

The exhibition in the Kunsthaus Zürich, Islam's first one-woman show in Switzerland, is a collaboration with the Museum Folkwang, Essen, which is showing works by Islam in parallel with the Swiss exhibition. A catalogue in English and German (167 pages with approx. 260 colour illustrations) is on sale at the Kunsthaus shop for CHF 42.-.

Supported by ART MENTOR FOUNDATION LUCERNE.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, www.kunsthaus.ch

Open Sat, Sun, Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thurs, Fri 10 a.m.–8 p.m.

Admission incl. collection: CHF 12 / red. and groups CHF 8

Christmas: 24 and 26 December 10 a.m.–6 p.m., 25 December closed

New Year's: 1 and 2 January 2009 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Advance Sales: RailAway/SBB Kombi-Ticket, with reduction on rail travel and entrance to the museum. Available at local stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19 per min.), group rates possible.

Magasins Fnac, tel. +33 1 4157 3212, www.fnac.ch

For further information and visual material, please contact
Kunsthaus Zürich, Press and Communication, Kristin Steiner
kristin.steiner@kunsthaus.ch, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 13