

# LAUNCH F18

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## MEENA HASAN MANGIFERIN CHINTZ

September 10 – October 16, 2021

*"The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical processes to date, which have deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory...therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory." - Edward Said in Orientalism quoting Antonio Gramsci*

LAUNCH F18 is pleased to present *Mangiferin Chintz*, Meena Hasan's first solo exhibition with the gallery. For *Mangiferin Chintz*, Hasan engages the process of tracing the "inventory" of her South Asian American diasporic consciousness. The paintings within the exhibition honor and observe specific forms and patterns from Hasan's past that continue to linger and evolve in her mind, both haunting and nurturing her present awareness. The forms are sourced from personal memories, photographs and also historic images and artworks that signify South Asia and live within the collective public as given preconceptions in need of relearning. Hasan's

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process takes her inventory and collapses a sense of nostalgia with a non-linear decadent futurism that is fluid and unanchored. The artist takes the viewer on a journey through these relearned images to offer us a fantasy of possibilities.

Pattern and decoration are used metaphorically as the vehicle for Hasan's visual time-travelling. The artist researches the histories of specific patterns and textiles, like Chintz, observing and identifying with their evolution over time and across the globe. Through this deep and idiosyncratic research practice, Hasan considers textiles as laden with historical context, inherently linked to global geopolitics, capitalist impulses, and cultural desires as well as colonial pasts and diasporic futures. The use of textiles becomes the building blocks for Hasan's paintings which present her research as an experience. The work explores the potential for pattern and ornament to transcend the decorative as living organisms of spiritual contact. The point of entry exists beyond times and places as Hasan holds this conversation within the surface of the painting.

Included in this show are eleven paintings on handmade Bangladeshi Jute paper that present close-cropped views of an old mango tree that lives in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Through the study of personal photographs and her own memory of living with this tree, Hasan presents an abundance of form layered with saturated color, where a sense of environment collapses into healing animated touch. The repeating compositions acknowledge how Hasan engages with memory as a process of the mind, that remembers and imagines simultaneously, where the past is constructed within the present and future.

By referencing photographs, Hasan acknowledges how gatekeepers to knowledge such as technology impact the formation, accuracy and permanence of our memories. Hasan complicates, collapses and unfolds these images to make spaces of slippage that narrative spirits can enter and speak through. In *Mango Trees*, the leaves are caressing, licking and tasting the limits of their shaped boundaries. The edges reveal layers of incremental growth and color and crack open to show peering almond-shaped eyes looking back at you, like the family of predatory, socially sophisticated crows who have made this tree their fortress. These leaves are witnesses to time, heavy with dust, audible and sentient. They push to the edge, caressing their frames, while pressing beyond and into our imaginations as freedom.

The exhibition's central piece, *The Empress (from Drouais' Madame de Pompadour at her Tambour Frame, 1764)*, is part of a larger series of hanging paper paintings, where Hasan examines and re-presents European portrait paintings from the 18<sup>th</sup> c. colonial era. In the portrait paintings that Hasan is drawn to, the person being pictured is adorned with textiles that, to Hasan look to be of South Asian origin. The artist aims to share the way she sees these European paintings, where the textile has equal if not more agency than the person pictured. Hasan centers the textiles as the main characters, reimagining and liberating their voices and

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bodies beyond the confines of their European representation. The artist draws attention to South Asian textiles to reveal the pervasiveness of colonial impact, as well as the incredibly far-reaching influence of South Asian aesthetics and forms of beauty that are deeply ingrained in all global cultures, perpetually cycling in and out of contemporary fashion.

*The Empress* is a two-sided, hanging painting that seeks to present itself transparently, as simultaneously present, sometimes immersive, and sometimes as thin as a sheet of paper. Hasan's two-sided paintings have a presentational front and a revealing back that shows their insides: their highly intelligent and all-knowing guts, and the elements that went into their growth. The pieces within this exhibition exist socially and physically in our reality. *The Empress's* back includes two photo-transfers, one of a cutout of the knees in Drouais's portrait of Pompadour, placed instead at her heart, and an early map of a textile town named Mahua Dabar that was destroyed by the British Raj during the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

The works themselves challenge our instinct towards name-ability, identification and classification. The artist's painterly approach sees the strange within the familiar and plays between knowability and unknowability. Hasan's compositions move in cyclical orientations like an ant on a Möbius-strip, disorienting to both reinforce and dissolve a sense of self. Engaging material with reverence and love, Hasan seeks to discover the immaterial – the emotional, the unspoken and the spiritual. Through this haptic process she invites chaos and chance to complicate the orderly knowing of representational imagery. The artist moves around the surface topologically often physically on top of the works while making them. In doing so, what is developed are layered and pieced together skin-like surfaces that both come together as constellations and fall apart into cellular marks of reactive touch. The artist asks us to feel, celebrate and open our expectations of the act of looking. In this way, Hasan's works both state and question her own historical perspective, while allowing the viewer to participate and enter in order to reimagine their own.

## **Biography**

Meena Hasan received her B.A. in Studio Art from Oberlin College in 2009 and her MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art in 2013 where she won the Carol Schlosberg Memorial Prize for Painting. In 2010, she was awarded the Terna Prize Affiliated Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. Hasan has participated in numerous group exhibitions at museums and galleries including The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2013); Bruce High Quality Foundation, New York (2014); Anahita Art Gallery, Tehran (2015); 0.0 Gallery, Los Angeles (2019); Vacation, New York (2019); LAUNCH F18, New York (2019); RISD Museum, Providence (2019), and Jeffrey Deitch, New York (2020). The artist will also be participating in

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the 2022 New England Triennial, taking place at the deCordova Museum in Lincoln, MA. Hasan lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.



Meena Hasan in her studio, Brooklyn, New York, 2021. Photography by Christin Graham

For more information and a preview of this exhibition please email us at: [info@launchf18.com](mailto:info@launchf18.com)