

excited by the space when her then tutor, the artist Mary Kelly, showed images of her own exhibition here in 1985. Bhimji's is work for now, its balance of instinct and intuition with keenly observed, carefully crafted, beautifully composed imagery clearing a space for us to think about what it is to live in the world now.



# Zarina Bhimji

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Zarina Bhimji came to prominence in the late 1980s, very soon after graduating from art school in London. Her early work, included in several important touring group exhibitions, took the form of photographs and photo-text installations. *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* (1987) is a prime example. The work combines photographs of everyday objects– some jewellery, an embroidered slipper, a migratory songbird dead in a garden – with sentences taken from a variety of literary sources, an enlarged immigration stamp from the UK Home Office and some surgical gloves, much degraded from when they were first wedged between the sheets of Perspex that hold the photographs. The photographs are suspended over a field of scattered turmeric and chilli, everyday spices in the cookery Bhimji grew up with. The work lays the ground for much of her later photographs, films and installations. The images slip in and out of focus and the sentences move towards and away from narrative coherence, giving the piece an allusiveness that allows it to take a sidelong yet nonetheless piercing look at ways in which people can be misunderstood and overlooked. The gloves suggest invasive procedures, a sense of the unclean or contaminated (among other references, the illegal practice of virginity testing South Asian women at Heathrow Airport to determine the legitimacy of immigration applications made on the grounds of marriage is pertinent here).

We are showing this early work next to the most recent, the film *Blind Spot* (2023), made for the exhibition and completed in the months and weeks immediately preceding it. A work inspired by similar concerns, the film looks at homelessness through the details of one young girl's situation. The girl is fictional – emblematic – and her story of family breakdown, institutional inadequacy, individual kindness and resilience is told in fragments. Like *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence*, and all Bhimji's work, the film is evocative rather than descriptive or documentary. The tracking shots the camera makes through the rooms; the dancing light and shadows; the warmth of the colour; the sounds of the sea and the wind; the improvising of the double bass, are all characters in the storytelling as important as the man whose voice we hear.

Our exhibition continues upstairs, with Bhimji's first film, *Out of Blue* (2002), and *Untitled (A Sketch)* (1999), three child's dresses made from maps of India, East Africa and the United Kingdom that Bhimji made as part of the research for *Out of Blue*. She was thinking through identity and how its instability and subjectivity may be expressed through cartography; through maps that, though they seem authoritative, are political as much as geographical, and ever-changing. *Out of Blue* was researched and shot in Uganda, and Bhimji has spoken about how she was inspired to make it by 'listening to the land, to the sounds in the air'. The film layers shots of landscape, empty or provisionally inhabited buildings, sounds of singing, insects humming, fragments of radio and newspaper reports. It is a sensitive evocation of one place that stands for many places, for anywhere there has been elimination and erasure, whether before the time of the film's making, or now, or in the future.

The photograph *Shadows and Disturbances* (2007) was taken in a crumbling palace in Kutch in India, as Bhimji was researching another film, *Yellow Patch* (2011). It shares much of the mood and tone of Bhimji's films; the way that light takes on an almost tangible presence as it works to find as much beauty in the exposed plaster of the wrecked walls as in the painted flowers and the shimmering mother of pearl inlay.

The exhibition ends with *Waiting* (2007), the film Bhimji made when she was shortlisted for the Turner Prize 'in recognition of work engaging with universal human emotions such as grief, pleasure, love and betrayal using non-narrative photography and film-making'. In the film, Bhimji's camera takes a walk through an atmospheric, emptied Kenyan sisal factory. Moving slowly, it lingers on almost unbearably beautiful details of the dusty factory, the sisal turning and spinning like blonde hair in the warm light.

We are proud to make this exhibition with Zarina Bhimji. She has a history with the Fruitmarket: two exhibitions in which her work was included toured here in the 1980s; and she remembers being