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*Archives of American Art*

## **Zarina Hashmi Papers, Clippings and Press, 2000-2013**

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[[image]]  
 Zarina Hashmi, Untitled I, 2009,  
 paper, gold leaf, 16 1/2 x 13".

apart of secular India, a process that for most Indians was driven home by the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1992 and 2002. Urdu, once the language of the Mughal court, and Hashmi's mother tongue, is today in decline within India; the high-minded Sufi Islam that Hashmi grew up with is despised by fundamentalist Muslims and Hindus alike. Perhaps this is why Hashmi wants to remind us of why Hashmi wants to remind us of the raided treasures of a lost civilization. Coin, 1979-2009, is a large misshapen square, its corners blunted and its dark gold surfaces scratched and scarred as if by time. It is ironic that Hashmi has been selected for the Indian Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale: With her beautifully packaged paens to homelessness, she questions national boundaries, and this is what has made her a role model for a younger generation of South Asian artists in London and New York. Hashmi, who was born in 1937, witnessed the traumas of Partition in 1947. Later, she married a diplomat and led a nomadic existence, living in New Delhi (the former Mughal headquarters) and Bangkok (where she learned about Buddhism), traveling through Japan (where she studied printmaking), and eventually settling in New York in 1975. *Cities I Called Home*, 2010, charts her travels, its weblike maps becoming ways of abstract pattern-making as well as delineating identity. Buried in the maze of black lines that represents Bangkok, the silhouette of a meditating Buddha can be glimpsed. The diptych *Travels with Rami*, 2008, revisits the places Hashmi went with her sister. In these prints, maps melt into abstract shapes, recalling the spidery contours of Urdu calligraphy. Abstraction thus becomes interlaced with politics: Hashmi's tracery plays fast and loose with national borders, suggesting their arbitrariness.

At times, Hashmi's simple forms echo the Minimalist, monochrome lines drawings of Nasreen Mohamedi (also a "child of Partition," born the same year). Like Mohamedi, Hashmi probes the confluence between Zen Buddhism, Sufism, and modernist architecture—all of which evince an interest in the spiritual potential of geometric structures. In Hashmi's *Untitled 1*, 2009, gold-leaf squares glimmer against a cream background, seeming to vibrate like the tiered staircases leading to Buddhist temples. Yet these glowing shapes are mutable: some have tiny triangles attached to them, so that they resemble mini-temples or domed mosques. Unlike Mohamedi's spare drawing, however, Hashmi's gold-flecked bulbs and beads flirt with the decorative and the nostalgic. In *Tasbih*, 2008, prayer beads, smothered with flaking gold foil, nestle in a corner; viewed in this light, the show evoked more than just a romantic vision of a past that can never be rescued from gilded memories. —Zehra Jumabhoj

Kyoto  
 LG Williams/Estate of LG Williams  
 Super Window Project

LG Williams's caustic commentary on the state of contemporary art is as poignant as it is funny, and his latest show at the Super Window Project gallery in Kyoto was bound to make one do a double take. Yet there was nothing declamatory or political in what he did or how he did it. In the buildup to the "aha!" moment when his ideas finally revealed themselves, one could simply enjoy the pieces on view—fifteen



meticulously produced ink-jet museum labels bearing the titles of missing artworks. The labels themselves are perfect, formally speaking; they could thrive purely on their aesthetic merit, but it is Williams's edifying gonzo attacks on the vulgarity permeating art and culture all around us that brought his work to a whole different level.

Aptly titled "In Absentia," the recent exhibition by the Japan-based American artist was about the absence of the artwork, both physical and metaphysical. Each label, mounted to emphasize the conspicuously empty expanse of the spotlight-illuminated wall, at once embodied the work and announced its absence. But unlike Joseph Kosuth's probing of the relationship between words, concepts, and objects, the labels in Williams's show went beyond semiotics; they confabulated their own (for the most part undecipherable) narratives just as they unpacked public-domain slogans and catchphrases. Angelina Jolie Was Here!/ The Museum of Contemporary Art/ Los Angeles CA. No. 6, 2010, is a clever, if not too surprising, expose of the burgeoning institution of art-loving celebrities who are bridging the gap between high and low culture. The auxiliary message of this work is the import of the logos and brands: The star's name on the wall is art enough.

The series, "More-of-the-same but Better," 2010-, addresses another predicament of contemporary art, one broached by both critics and artists (Lawrence Weiner and Dave Hickey are just two names that come to mind). With the art world becoming increasingly globalized, one cannot help but notice the proliferation of works that, despite varying geographical and cultural provenance, conform to what is known in fashion history as a "modal type." No matter the origin, the dominant feature of these works is that they are variations on some generic idea of an artwork. Imagine Picasso but better, No. 39, 2010, evokes the name of one of the biggest "art stars" of the twentieth century with the dual purpose of branding and recalling the benchmark of greatness. Of course, in the absence of the actual artwork we have to come up with our own idea of what could be better than Picasso.

"In Absentia" was closely related to "Closed," the immediately preceding exhibition, also by Williams, which comprised a selection of carefully crafted supporting closure of Super Window Project. There were posted on the gallery website while the space was under lock and key for the duration of the show. Among the materials was a piece in the style of the promotional videos familiar from blockbuster museum shows. Such a double-entendre approach, in which the imaginary supplants the real with the purpose of exposing the fallacies of the system as a whole, is Williams's trademark (even the artist's moniker is a binary: LG Williams/Estate of LG Williams). His method is hard to grasp because his process is, essentially, a series of magic tricks-and with Williams, as with any magic act, it is best not to try and follow the sleight of hand but to sit back, watch, and enjoy.

-Julia Friedman

LG Williams  
of LG Williams  
Imagine  
but Better  
2010, di  
print mo  
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Installation  
[[image]]

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