

Exhibition – Descriptions of works:

i(match) + ii(encounter) + iii(meeting) is the episodic, inaugural exhibition of **MILAAP**: semi-public exhibition platform of Khurram Jamil's The Jamil Collection. Seeing global spheres of culture as more similar than distinct, the collection puts together artists with ties to the Global South and North, searching for commonalities and meeting points rather than enforcing difference.

The space takes its name from a 1968 sculpture by Rasheed Araeen (1935, PK) in the collection: two wooden geometric frames, one red, one yellow, meeting at their corners. *Milaap* is found in Hindi and Urdu, with a definition not simply translated into English; *meeting* and *encounter* are close, yet *match* is also viable, though less common, along with a multiplicity of other meanings such as *reconciliation* and *unity*. In a Western context, the term evades capture through translation, and hints at a sense of understanding beyond narrow definition. In a sense, the term *lost in translation* is turned on its head. *For there is nothing lost that may be found if sought*, they say, and the trickiness of translating *milaap* into Western languages is here mobilized as an object of inquiry, a search: *what might be found in those places where we are lost?* You're lost *somewhere*, so there must be *something else* in that strange land of translation you've found yourself in. And for this first exhibition, the translation we land on is the word **match**.

They were a perfect match for each other. Are they dating? Playing the tennis match of the decade? Or just the *exact* same shade of green? Another term of tricky, almost ironic multiplicity, both noun and verb, the word *match* only ramps up the dizziness of translation. But we still find something: a match as *complement*, like common traits between different parts; or a match as *companionship*, like lovers, friends or other forms of affinity; or as *competition*, the measuring of this or that attribute. Across these distinct variations of a single word, their overlaps allow us to play even further with how we look at the works in the exhibition, finding more than we might lose when we move across language. There is across these terms - *complement*, *companionship*, *competition* - always the Latin prefix *com-*, "with" or "together." No matter how we put it, that which is matched is never alone. So for this exhibition, no work is isolated; instead they all grasp towards their possible complements, companions or competitions - their *matches*.

The space that is now MILAAP is a repurposed garage on the grounds of the Jamil family residence. Outside, one of Jeppe Hein's (1974, DK), *Modified Street Lights* swoops its yellow steel base in a circular, elastic motion towards the heavens, while the industrially tube-like, orange construction of SUPERFLEX's (1993, DK) *One Two Three Swing!* installation juts from the ground and in all directions, including the newborn exhibition space and the street outside. This interplay of two major institutions of Danish art, both repurposing infrastructure into playful sites and basked in vibrant chromatics, is further complicated by the objects' opposing histories of purpose; the street light originally an instrument of urban crime prevention; the swing an almost archetypal symbol of childhood and play. With their contrasting formal languages and historical purposes - the crime deterrent rendered in playful circularity, the childhood memory in an industrial robustness - a strange interplay of complementarity, or perhaps even competition, might be found, both coming from the ground, one soaring upwards, the other establishing the foundation for our own, pendular soaring - and of course, since there's space for three on the swing, always with friends. Or should we say *companions*?

Entering the middle hall of the space, two works by Walid Raad (1967, LB), hang on the wall. The two set up a tension between the oft-Eurocentric narratives of art history and the consequences of the Lebanese civil war (1975-91) on the construction of collective memory. Both utilize Lebanese art-related paraphernalia from the period, with Raad extracting and recombining elements from them for the final work, finding the shapes and colors he thought relegated to art in those "lesser" objects. On the left work, a collage-like dissolution of art-historical texts, their authority eclipsed into abstract arrangements of implied meaning, becomes less of a document of grand history and more akin to an unsaying documentation of *something*; on the right, a monochromatic green field is centered by the words *Lebanese Art* in Arabic, contrasting the other in its clean expression. The works complement each other back and forth, the left almost illustrating a working program for the right, the right a distillate or extract of the method.

Following Raad, Mona Hatoum's (1952, LB) work initiates another, materially based rewriting as its complement. *Set In Stone* consists of an oak shelf, upon which two Carrara marble cups stand connected with a hemp string. The cups bear calligraphic renditions of the words *East* and *West* in Arabic. Carrara marble is the most extracted marble source on Earth, and prominent in Western art history due to its massive utilization in Roman and Renaissance art. By merging the calligraphy that, to many in the West, is almost synonymous with Arabic art, with the material used in canonized "masterpieces" such as the Pantheon or Caravaggio's *Pietà*, Hatoum sets up a companionship of historical technique and material that unites in its own, irreducible expression.

The notion of companionship also takes center stage in Shirin Neshat's (1957, IR) *Collective Love*, a digital animation from her NFT series *A Loss for Words*. Here, two hands unite and unfold in a gesture of prayer, the words of the titular poem by Ahmad Shamlou (1925-2000, IR) drizzling from a heart-shaped unity into jumbled disintegration. Shamlou's poem speaks in the voice of the "Common Pain" - that common language of tenderness and struggle that is shared by all things, and declares all - tears, smiles and love - a *mystery*. The pulsating unfolding of the hands might remind us of the beats of a heart; an ever-repeating unfolding of the tender, painful rhythm of being in which we all accompany, compete and complement each other.

Next to the middle hall is the archive and tea kitchen of MILAAP. Besides from a rotating selection of relevant publications available to guests, we find Saira Wasim's (1975, PK) *72 Virgins to Die For*, her contribution to the Iranian Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale, and Jens Haaning's (1965, DK) notorious framed passport. Wasim, who now lives in the United States due to persecution in her home country, mobilizes the traditional Mughal miniature painting style into a vehicle for political satire. Often combining epic, jam-packed cinematics and a ruthless sense of humor with her historical technique and miniature scale, Wasim's work is a scathing parody of the titular promised reward for religious extremism. By juxtaposing an extremist narrative with the omnipresent, officially forbidden, yet hyper-erotized fantasy that characterizes it, Wasim illustrates the competing urges that run across a both male-chauvinist and repressive value-set, deconstructing its foundation through its constituent parts, and arguing that they, in fact, serve more as companions than competitors in the battle of control over those they manipulate.

In a similar vein, Haaning's framed passport, like the rest of his practice of humorous conceptual works, engages with a fixture of (Western) art history: the portrait. By framing his own passport, Haaning speaks to the gap between the official document that, to many, is arguably even more important to their life than that of their face or body. The passport serves as a singular document of someone's identity, yet it also inscribes all who hold it in, when it comes to Danish passports, a uniform pamphlet of beetroot-colored, gold-inlaid authority. All passports *match* in their uniform look, yet none of the individuals who hold them (supposedly) do. The portrait genre's historical role as proof of identity is both reinforced - through the obligatory head shot in the passport - and overruled - through the uniformity of passports - setting up further complication when the *closed* passport is framed. *What version matches - what fits?*

To the right of the middle room, we find the titular sculpture by Rasheed Araeen. It has found its matches, in another of Araeen's works, and those of partners in life and art, Sonja Ferlov Mancoba (1911-1984, DK) and Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002, ZA). And a pipe from the SUPERFLEX swing going from roof to floor. Araeen, an artist originally trained as engineer as well as a prolific writer of art theory, under-recognized in the UK where he has lived since the 60's, has in recent years been the subject of renewed interest, hailed in several places as one of the most important minimalist sculptors of the 20th century, his practice both foreseeing and further developing the insights of the New York Minimalists. Araeen's writings on postcoloniality, especially in his seminal publication *Third Text*, is also what introduced Khurram Jamil to the works of the Mancoba couple. Oft-forgotten members of CoBrA, one of the most hailed avant-garde artist groups, the Mancobas spent their shared lives marginalized from the histories of modernist art due to their minority backgrounds; one a woman, the other a Black South African, in a mid-century artistic landscape that left little to no space for either. Only in recent years have they begun to receive the institutional recognition they deserve, like Araeen.

The biomorphic sculptures of Sonja Ferlov Mancoba derive from a synthesis of modernist ideals with Ubuntu philosophy, centered around a feeling of common humanity. "No one creates alone," Ferlov said, and her works embrace especially African artistic traditions with an understanding quite different from the exoticizing primitivism of many of her contemporary male colleagues, often talking about her sculptures with a level of empathy that sees them as alive. Rather than treating these rich traditions as a "standing reserve" of traits to freely utilize for her own ends, Ferlov saw them as, ultimately, ways to locate the universal experience of being that all things share. Blurring the Western distinction between face and body in what some call her *maskbodies*, Ferlov's works don't depict a *thing* as much as a *sense*, a feeling, zooming in on what we might call *the shapes of being itself*, which, to her, was always communal.

Ernest Mancoba came to Paris from South Africa on a scholarship, originally a sculptor trained in a religiously saturated mission style. Finding much of the African art he saw in Paris as presented with "primitive" and tragical attitudes, he turned against his training, establishing a painting practice that increasingly tended towards abstraction, yet also rendered a kind of movement and vitality that evades the figure/abstraction-dichotomy through his intense engagement with traditional African art, and the depictions of serenity and strength that he found therein. The formation of lines we see is a common element in Mancoba's practice, a sort of diagrammatic interplay between mask- and figure-structures that render his abstract approach with a textural, vibrant non-organic life. Approaching a field of creation that resists pigeonholing into easily-definable categories, Mancoba's practice stands, along with that of Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, as entirely unique and unparalleled bodies of work of massive importance from that period.

Rasheed Araeen's *Anything Goes in Post Modernity*, also known as *Les Condition Postmodern*, was part of his "cruciform" series of works, a disillusioned wrestling with the supposed purity of Minimalism after the pervasive (and now refuted) *posthistoire* narratives of the time, as well as his disappointment in the state of postcolonial efforts facing globalized neoliberalism. The cruciform cuts up the classical monochrome canvas of Minimalism into a cross shape, filled with photographs and news articles, deliberately disturbing a tradition in which Araeen has been in dialog with for almost the entirety of his *oeuvre*. Contrasting the postmodern free association of elements are the monochrome panels of green, a prominent color in the Islamic art with which Araeen has been much associated with, but only quite recently concluded that he is, in fact, indebted to for its advanced, "proto-minimalist" utilization of geometry.

From here, we come to *Milaap*. Its almost skeletal interplay of intricately geometric panes of colorful wood frames, a *leitmotif* in Araeen's practice, takes form as a fragile yet intense meeting on the corners of the sculpture's parts. The frames are both identical in shape, yet relegated to each primary color, red and yellow, in a sense where they both might look ready to phase into each other or stand suspended in this *literal* meeting on the edge. They match in shape, yet not in color - though the red and yellow might recombine into an orange akin to that used by SUPERFLEX's swing. It points

at the dynamics of a match in all its different meanings, initiating a dialogue with the similarly vital line formations of Mancoba and the sense-concepts of being found in Ferlov, and their shared complicated relationship to the institutions of art history. What is found when we are lost? Maybe something akin to *Milaap*, the convergence of differences into a cohesive unity, a meeting on the edges that might turn to complementarity, companionship or competition.

In truth, no one creates alone.