

Shape Shifting in the Outer Boroughs and Its Effects on the Traveler's Perception of the Midnight Sky

Mala Iqbal

September 11th - October 9th 2022

Opening: September 11th 6-8PM



Mala Iqbal, *New York Time Warp*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 48 x 84 inches

The man in the maroon sweater, he is my oldest cousin. He has no face. His buttons and thumbs peer at our family gathered around the table. A disembodied specter jailed behind the slat backs of a chair. The man in the corduroy brown suit, he could be my father. He has my father's dark hair and mustache, but he looks more like Uncle Idrees. Fluorescents disfigure the face of a woman; a toothy deer in headlights donning heart shaped coke bottles; Degas' ballerinas with an Ensor twist. The man under the tree, he is imaginary. He is many men that I have drawn but I do not know him. He has my father's floppy hair. He sits on a dish towel with a red stripe. Have you ever tried to draw someone from memory who you have already drawn many times? The woman who looks like Gracie wears a bathing cap with the same red stripe. My favorite thing about commuter drawings is the distortion. A head can be elongated. The man under the tree reads an orange book on neuro chemistry. His purple soles are from the 1950s. She's a sports fan. They both wear green scarves.

Mala Iqbal is an observer. For years she painted fantastical landscapes, but more recently she has turned to mining personal narrative in oil. Sublimated archetypal figures, memory, family stories, and an amalgamation of city living scenes both observed and imagined, make up her paintings that are descriptive as much as constructed. Rooted in gestural subway and bus sketches, made from life and on the fly, drawing has always been central to her practice.

Iqbal faces issues of representation straight on. In *Frustrated Painter* a female artist stares down the colossus of a painted male head veiled in emerald green. The weight of history looms large. Behind the blue curtain, the ghostly embrace of a lover, mother, or self is *Unwelcome Attention*. The bustling intensity of city living cultivates a specific complex interiority. Iqbal protects the subjectivity of the people she paints. The paintings generously deny a definitive naming of their subjects. We can try to read body language and coded clothing, but their internal worlds belong to them. Perception is porous and never concrete. We imagine the gaps. Iqbal's local knowledge perceives the patterns present as such.

Soloway is pleased to present *Shape Shifting in the Outer Boroughs and Its Effects on the Traveler's Perception of the Midnight Sky*, a solo show of new paintings by Mala Iqbal curated by Wells Chandler. *One to One*, an almost identically scaled zine of a 2019 sketchbook, will be available for purchase. *Shape Shifting in the Outer Boroughs and Its Effects on the Traveler's Perception of the Midnight Sky* opens Sunday September 11th from 6-8pm and runs through October 9th.

-Text by Wells Chandler

Born in the Bronx in 1973, Iqbal grew up in a household where three cultures and four languages intersected. She now lives and works in Brooklyn.

Her most recent solo show was at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana in 2018. Other solo shows include Ulterior Gallery, Bellwether Gallery and PPOW in New York, Twelve Gates Arts in Philadelphia, and Richard Heller Gallery in Los Angeles. Her work has been exhibited in group shows throughout the United States as well as in Australia, China, Europe and India. Her work has been reviewed in various publications including The New York Times, The Village Voice and The New Yorker. Iqbal has participated in residencies at MacDowell, Yaddo, The Fine Arts Work Center and the Hermitage Artist Retreat. She received a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in Painting in 2008. *Where I End, We Begin*, a collaborative two person show with Angela Dufresne, curated by Wells Chandler at SUNY Purchase in 2021 will travel to LSU in 2023.