

Simon Says

Transcript Export

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Maryam Mir: Artist Reflection for American Muslim Futures

TRANSCRIPT (without timecode)

Thank you so much for taking the time to view my work. Before I share a bit more about it, I just want to say it wouldn't have been possible without my incredibly supportive and patient cast and crew. So huge thank you first and foremost to them for their work on this project.

I'm Maryam Mir and I grew up in Saar, Bahrain but now live in Brooklyn in New York. Growing up in Bahrain I used to love playing outside every day after school. My brother and I would jump out of her uniforms and run to the communal tennis court that we shared with other residents in our compound.

Here our neighbors of all ages and backgrounds would join us and we'd make up games concocting our own rules. Cricket, high toss, handball, soccer, united in our pursuit of pleasure and play. Tiring our bodies along this dense slab of hot concrete till the sun set. And we heard the Maghrib adhaan in the distance and our mother's voice calling us inside.

I think about the space a lot now and why it feels so important and I think it was this combination of feeling both extremely safe and also incredibly free. Although, I know and see this now as a privilege not afforded to everyone. As a child the tennis court really was my haven and as I draw on this feeling from my past, it also helps me to imagine what a just future could look like. Maybe it's a space where there is both motion and safety, access and freedom, imagination and expression. Where ideas can be born and lived into and voices can be heard and held.

My submission for this exhibit is from one of my first projects in graduate school. Where I was tasked with writing and directing a four minute short film that was shot all outside without any dialogue music or sound except for that which was natural to the environment. As I reflected on silent moments I found visually compelling, I kept coming back to this one image of food cart vendor I had seen praying beside his shuttered truck, head to the ground, a moment of silence, in one of the most public places on the planet, a New York City street.

Growing up in Bahrain, a Muslim majority country, public prayer is considered a regular element of everyday life. When I arrived in the US, I noticed that it could be seen as a visible and vulnerable othering. Exposing someone to potential disturbance, interruption, and occasionally harm. This is also further complicated for a street cart vendor, where it may also mean compromising potential customers and exposing their truck to theft.

Yet still many choose to do it. Whether as a form of reclamation, obligation or simply habit. I was struck by this act and what it symbolized in the context of their larger day and lives. Through this short, I wanted to center this ritual and moment and explore some of the obstacles that may be encountered along the way with both lightness and deep respect.

I wanted to inspire in the viewer a feeling of connection and situate them in a New York City soundscape; filled with noise, chaos, movement, and in an attempt to find stillness amid it all. At the same time I didn't want this piece to be rife with conflict or overdramatize and its preaching of transcendence.

In some ways I wanted the act to feel repetitious. It's still essential, a habit made normal and I wanted to capture the persistence to move through it, continue on, and do it all over again.

This exhibit is really important because I think it expands and complicates what it means to be Muslim in the U.S. and beyond.

It allows and creates space for all the nuance and celebrates and centers expression. One of the greatest gifts we have, and for me personally an embodiment where I feel the greatest connection to a larger force. More than creating a platform I think this exhibit also uplifts and seeks and is rooted in a spirit of imagination. Seeing what is and also looking beyond to what could be and I feel so honored to be a part of it.