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<http://bpigs.com/diaries/interviews/interview-nadira-husain>

## Interview Nadira Husain



**Can you walk us through the process of your art making? What inspires you and how does the work take shape from the initial idea to the finished work?**

I work with associations of signs and symbols as well as with color vibrations. Layering is important in my method of work. Let's say that the cognitive structure of my painting approach is close to linguistics structures - how language works. In my work I am dealing with various source materials or field of interests. My inputs can be very heterogenous. For example, in my current show 'Rider, Path, and Vehicle' a video on the internet about girls hobbyhorse riding inspired me, and parallel to that I read a lot of Sufi literature. My interest in Sufism, as well as in how certain social groups express their relationship to metaphysics, come to the expression in my work. I am fascinated with the Native Americans' spiritual relation to nature and how they brought this relation into rituals and holy objects. These elements of culture - for example, the culture of the Hopi's - I interpret in my work.



Installation view: Nadira Husain, Rider, Path and Vehicle, PSM, 2017

To me, painting is a process. When I paint, I start to link colors, forms, signs, and symbolism with each other. I am interested in their relationship, which might sometimes be harmonious, tensed, kinky, or - why not - boring. I see the canvas as a surface of many voices, as I wish our society could be, a space where diversity can coexist. The surface of a canvas also allows me to deploy a certain idea of time and space. In that sense my paintings are sometimes noisy, polyphonic, ambiguous or equivocal. They do not necessarily deal with just one idea. My works appear to be more digressive-based than straight rational.

I believe that several conventions and codes of different cultural systems, I am acquainted to, are intertwined into my work. Those of Western culture, and how the idea of a strong subject has developed. I also often use the symbolic of ornaments introduced by Islamic art. My main reflection through painting is to think how cultural and economical globalization conditions our response to images.

In my current exhibition, 'Riders, Path and Vehicle', I introduced in my paintings so called 'in-between beings', humans and horses hybrids. Some of those therianthrope beings directly come from pop internet culture like the hobby horse riders, while others referred to mythological beings or the Furry subculture. Those beings are somehow human projections. They are transported by culture throughout human history and inherit elements from myths and reality. I am interested to pull links from the past to the contemporary, to embrace history together with the present.





Installation view: Nadira Husain. Rider, Path and Vehicle, PSM, 2017

**Can you tell us more about your current exhibition, how did you choose to use the new space of PSM Gallery?**

I already started to work on the exhibition with the previous gallery space in mind, which is more a white cube. There you would see everything immediately when entering the room. It's like a box, you open it and it's there. Then Sabine (Sabine Schmidt - gallery owner of PSM) contacted me about the situation of moving the gallery and she asked me if I wanted to do the show here. I always react to the space within my works, this is how I build up a show, so I did not mind at all. My work pretty much functions as an installation. It is about the space in between the canvas, objects, and viewer. The new space is more dynamic and gave me a lot of possibilities to show my work.

**Was there a certain starting point for the exhibition 'Rider, Path, and Vehicle'? Which themes would you like to address in this exhibition?**

It is always a bit hard to find a starting point. I remember reading a text of Edward Saïd (founder of the postcolonial academic field), he said that there is not a concept such as a point of origin, when one starts a research, one should subtract something from the mass and start to think about this certain subtract. It is very much how I work.

I have used several inputs for this exhibition. One of them is the video 'hobbyhorse revolution', I mentioned before. It is about Finnish teenage girls that are riding wooden stick horses. They do real competitions with jumping or dressage. I am interested in the hybridization fact of it. The top part of the girls are the riders and their legs the bottom of the horse. This video caught my attention because of several aspects. For example the period puberty as a path of transformation. The teenagers are living in a moment of transition in the cycle of a human life. It is a period where emotions and desires are strong and at the same time very fragile. Second, how social media somehow institutionalized this game into a highly developed sport. I doubt that hobbyhorse riding could have developed into such a high level of competition if those girls didn't run blogs, or post their exploits on Facebook or Instagram. This is a very contemporary phenomenon - how images or ideas circulate through those media and what influence it has on the society. The third aspect that caught my attention is the relationship between human and horses through centuries. It has been very symbiotic until industrialisation. After that, horses or horse riding became a sport for the elite. A hobbyhorse in that sense, is accessible to anyone and doesn't require a lot of money or years of training. The fourth aspect that interests me is how the subject of this activity is treated. The horse is gone but everything else remains: the projection and the belief in it. It is almost like living a real life experience of the virtual.

In this show, I continued to develop further the relationship between humans and horses, or used this relationship to deal with certain topics such as diversity or the celebration of diversity.



Installation view: Nadira Husain. Rider, Path and Vehicle, PSM, 2017

**Where do you see a link between reality and fiction in your work?**

The way I paint is more graphic than illusionistic, I am already in a space of projection. How I compose a painting is closer to linguistic structures, my forms are somehow like signs and symbols. I am not generating hierarchies among them and there is an explosion of information on the surface of a painting. Some of my paintings, even if they carry figurative elements, can sometimes be seen as abstract, because I try to dissolve the idea of a central subject.

The figuration is not realistic, when there are beings, they are often hybrids. When they have 'a human face', it is often more a mask than a face. There are a lot of comics and manga elements and references in my works, I guess that already leads us to a very translated environment. This projected world, one can of course associate to fiction, still allows to express and discuss issues about our reality and our world. I think the decisions I am taking in the fictional world of my paintings are decisions I am taking in real life and therefore show how I want to relate to the society and planet.

**You got awarded for the Arbeitsstipendium for Bildende Kunst 2017, what does this mean to you?**

It means I can work for one year in peace! It gives me free space and time to experiment and I hope to realize the project I have in mind, which would have been difficult to achieve without the grant. I am practicing art and showing my work in Germany for more than 10 years now, I take this award as a recognition of the presence of my work in the German art scene.

**Which direction would you like to see your work take? Do you have any specific projects you've been wanting to pursue?**

I would like to continue working on larger scale paintings and to pursue my associations of painting with textile. I can't tell more about it now but I am trying to integrate stitching parts in my paintings. For this I am collaborating with a tailor from Afghanistan.

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Nadira Husain, "Rider, Path, and Vehicle"  
September 9 – October 21  
PSM Gallery