



Promotesh Das Pulak, *ENCAPSULATED*

## READYMADE AT AICON GALLERY

Aicon Gallery / New York

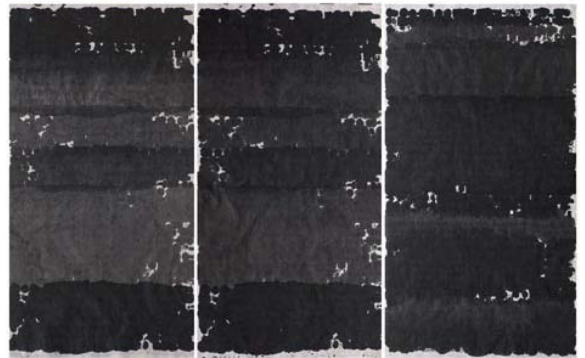
by Bansie Vasvani

August 13, 2014 · In Reviews

Aicon Gallery's first solo exhibition in New York of contemporary art from Bangladesh is off to a good start. Titled "Readymade," which consists of work by established and emerging artists compressed into a relatively short time frame that began after Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, displays an art scene edgy for its political content, talent and imagination.

Dhali Al Mamoon's work in the foyer is an adequate litmus test of how to evaluate work from a new region. Mamoon is based in Chittagong, the northern region of Bangladesh, and is considered one of the pioneers of performance and installation art, in addition to being an established painter. His series of lead pencil drawings on paper, titled *Lost Memory*, is compelling for its rudimentary subject matter. Reminiscent of prehistoric birds, these spare

rust-tinted skeletal figures reference mass killings during Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan and become symbolic of a country and culture in its nascent stages. Sure-handed images of nature, beaks and reptilian remains echo the early phases of evolution from which all of humanity, regardless of caste or creed, emerged. Viewed in this context, human violence seems particularly savage-like, and Mamoon's deft conception of abstract figuration makes the work all the more effective.



Wakilur Rahman, *GENOCIDE*, 2009

Genocide as an endemic part of Bangladesh history is the subject of Wakilur Rahman's large ink on paper triptych, *Genocide* (2009). Uneven blotches of shaded black ink are interspersed with small white patches, making abstraction a powerful tool to pay homage to scores of forgotten people reduced to mere specks of memory. Rahman navigates contemporary connections such as displacement and community formation by way of a complex route between the past and the present.

Younger artists like Imran Hossain Piplu and Promotesh Das Pulak use weapons to reference history and denote the power of military rule long after independence. Piplu's paintings that were a part of the first Bangladesh Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2013—depict skeletal guns and weapons of war as excavated fossils—while Pulak's sculptural representations present war masks, hand grenades and Kalashnikovs (rifles) studded with white Shola paper flowers. Akin to much contemporary art from the Middle East, revolutionary art is pivotal to a country in the throes of cultural, economical and political change. Objection to bloodshed and the need to compel reformation are repeatedly manifested through Piplu's reference to the deep-rootedness of violence and Pulak's ironic consecration of its weapons through his sculpture.



Dhali Al Mamoon, LOST MEMORY 2, 2014

For Khaled Hassan and Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed Bangladeshi, identity is addressed through trying current situations. Hassan's digital prints portray unacknowledged, powerless immigrant workers surviving abroad in overcrowded living quarters. And Ahmed's series of colorful geometric paintings of newspaper on canvas, titled Sheer Chaos, consists of abstract renderings of the rapidly changing cityscape as industrialization transforms the country forever.

In "Readymade," the notion of establishing identity through history and current events is pivotal to their practice. Coming more than two decades after modernism took shape in the Indian Subcontinent, a variety of art forms express and authenticate the artists' commitment to making art. Although distinctive in its look, be it Yasmin Jahan Nupur's woven words of dreams or Mohammad Wahiduzzaman's resin castings of exportable shirts, art from the region is evocative of larger emotions and a transcultural sensibility. Poised at the juncture of postcolonial expression, contemporary art from Bangladesh shows promise of heading in the right direction.

"Readymade" ends Sept. 6, 2014  
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# Readymade: 9 Bangladeshi artists to know

**Michele Chan**

Posted on **29/08/2014** by **Art Radar**

**Art Radar profiles 9 exciting artists from Bangladesh.**

Aicon Gallery presents the first ever extensive survey of contemporary Bangladeshi art to be held in New York. *Art Radar* looks more closely at the nine artists in the exhibition.

The Bangladeshi contemporary art scene began to grow in the 1990s, twenty years after the country gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. Today, Dhaka burgeons with young talent, with new art venues sprouting up alongside established art spaces.

The exhibition **"Readymade"** features nine exciting Bangladeshi artists who explore diverse social, political and economic issues in their country. On show at the **Aicon Gallery** in New York, the exhibition runs until 6 September 2014.

## **Imran Hossain Piplu**

Imran Hossain Piplu (b. 1970, Dhaka, Bangladesh) melds the visual and the conceptual into thought-provoking mixed media pieces. The artist specialises in alternative materials, mainly recycled, to produce extraordinary creations out of everyday objects. The artist received an MFA in Sculpture in 1998 and has been an artist-in-residence in Brazil, Scotland, Taiwan and India.

In *The Utopian Museum*, Piplu investigates the Warrasic Period (c. 1600 to 2000 AD), during which dangerous animals became extinct and human beings learned to live more peacefully amongst one another. Weapons gradually fell out of use and Piplu's 'museum' features weapons existing only as fossils. The work references the history and power of military rule long after independence.

## **Mohammad Wahiduzzaman**

Mohammad Wahiduzzaman, 'Readmade II', 2014, resin castings with artificial hair and iron, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

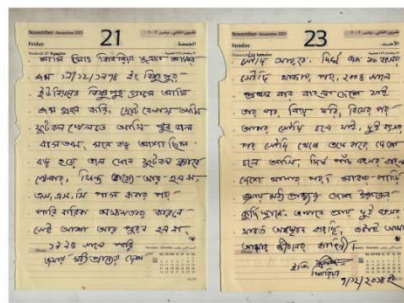
Mohammad Wahiduzzaman (b. 1978, Dhaka, Bangladesh) works in the genre of pop art. The winner of the Grand Prize of the 14th **Asian Art Biennial**, Bangladesh (2012), the artist says he is fascinated by how societies transform and how traditions fade away, finding both inspiration and despair in the throes of change. The artist often receives artistic stimulation from the streets, and *Readmade II* is a tribute to street art as well as a reference to the politically fraught Bangladeshi garment industry. Wahiduzzaman received his Diploma in Fine Arts from Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts and a Diploma in Engineer in Printing Technology from the Institute of Graphic Arts in Bangladesh.



Mohammad Wahiduzzaman, 'Readmade II', 2014, resin castings with artificial hair and iron, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.



Imran Hossain Piplu, 'The Utopian Museum (1)', 2011, digital print on archival paper, 55 x 36 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.



Khaled Hassan, 'Born To Be Migrant (Positive or Negative) (detail)', 2013-14, film and digital process installation with digital prints, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

### **Khaled Hassan**

Imran Hossain Piplu, 'The Utopoian Museum (1)', 2011, digital print on archival paper, 55 x 36 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

Khaled Hassan (b. 1981, Dhaka, Bangladesh) is one of Bangladesh's most notable photographers. His works are about unequal balance of power, rights, discrimination and standing up against justice. "I may not be able to make the change," he states in his exhibition biography, "but it is my duty to show where change is needed."

Khaled Hassan, 'Born To Be Migrant (Positive or Negative) (detail)', 2013-14, film and digital process installation with digital prints, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

Hassan's photography also tracks change and social progress, telling heartwarming stories of healing and survival. The artist graduated with a BFA from the South Asian Media Academy in 2001 and has been awarded several accolades, including the Humanity Photo Documentary Award organised by UNESCO in

2009.

### **Promotes Das Pulak**

Promotes Das Pulak (b. 1980, Sylhet, Bangladesh) creates art as a response to the "pollution, war, social crisis, and the political unrest of Bangladesh and the rest of the world." One of his signature motifs is the mask, which represents not only environmental pollution but also corruption – a form of social pollution.

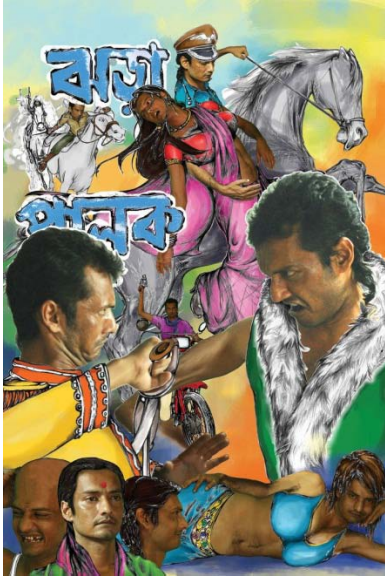
Promotes Das Pulak, 'Encapsulated – 9 (Ed. of 3)', 2014, shola flowers, resin and plastic, 9.5 x 7 x 4.5 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

The artist completed his MFA in 2004 from the Department of Drawing and Painting of the University of Dhaka Faculty of Fine Art. Apart from drawing and painting, Pulak experiments widely and successfully with different media. His works have been shown in Bangladesh, Nepal, Japan, Italy and Canada.



Promotes Das Pulak, 'Encapsulated – 9 (Ed. of 3)', 2014, shola flowers, resin and plastic, 9.5 x 7 x 4.5 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.





Masum Chisty, 'The Acting' (still), 2014, single channel animation projection, 0 min. 30 sec. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

### Masum Chisty

Masum Chisty (b. 1976, Narayanganj, Bangladesh) experiments with diverse modes of expression and various media, most notably at the intersection of fine art and animation. The artist crosses boundaries to challenge the ideals and processes of contemporary art, using his work as a dialogue and voice against the injustices and wrongs of present times.

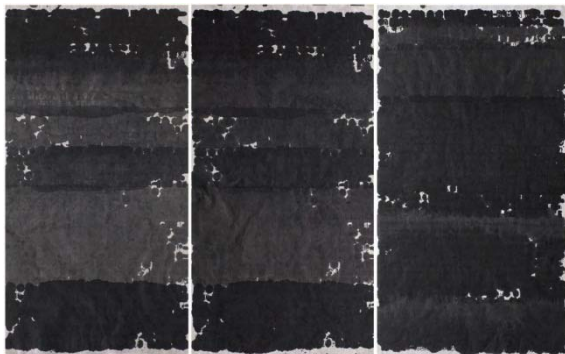
Masum Chisty, 'The Acting' (still), 2014, single channel animation projection, 0 min. 30 sec. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

With increasing exposure to animation, Chisty combines fictive elements with peaceful ideals to bring a fresh perspective to the condition of humanity. The artist received his MFA in Sculpture from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and in 2005 received an award for Best Short Film in the Bangladesh International Short & Individual Film Festival.

### Wakilur Rahman

Simultaneously a painter and a printmaker, Wakilur Rahman (b. 1961, Bangladesh) is widely known as an experimental artist with novel ideas and exciting aesthetic outlooks. The artist addresses social issues through his paintings and installations and has earned widespread acclaim for his work. In the paper triptych *Genocide* (2009), uneven blotches of black ink are interspersed with grainy white patches that pay homage to forgotten people killed during war.

Rahman completed his BFA in 1981 from Dhaka Art College (presently the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka) and went on to acquire an MFA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing, China. He says he is drawn to contemporary art because it involves viewers in the artistic process.



Wakilur Rahman, 'Genocide', 2009, ink on paper, 70 x 110 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

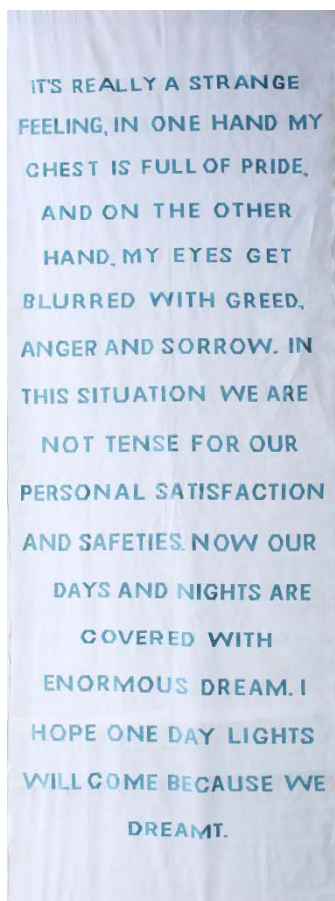


Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed, 'Sheer Chaos 26', 2012, acrylic and newspaper on canvas, 65 x 55 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

### Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed

Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed (b. 1963, Dhaka, Bangladesh) is a self-taught artist with no academic background in art. After completing an MSS in Public Relations, he developed his artistic talents by practicing on his own, going to exhibitions and talking to artists.

*Sheer Chaos* is a series of collages echoing urban chaos seen from above. The artist paints on large canvases with bold, sweeping brushstrokes, displaying powerful engagement with form, texture and illusion. The artist says that he believes that old Dhaka has much to offer and that his work attempts to reinvent the old city.



### Yasmin Jahan Nupur

Yasmin Jahan Nupur (b. 1979, Chittagong, Bangladesh) is inspired by urgent ecological and social problems of her region, often working closely with people in her community. Her work spans across drawing, installation, performance, text and video, engaging dynamically and inventively with the issues close to her heart.

Nupur's work was featured in the Bangladeshi Pavilion in the **55th Venice Biennale**. She also recently received an Honourable Mention Award at the 15th **Asian Art Biennial**, Bangladesh.

Yasmin Jahan Nupur, 'In the Weave of Dream (1)', 2013, woven jamdani, 156 x 50 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.



Dhali Al Mamoon, 'Lost Memory 2', 2014, lead pencil, tea and acrylic on paper, 42 x 30 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery

### Dhali Al Mamoon

Dhali Al Mamoon (b. 1958, Chandpur, Bangladesh) is a painter, printmaker, performance and installation artist with a passion for Bangladeshi myths and traditions. The mythical character Behula is a source of inspiration for him, used by the artist to bridge allegory, history and memory with the present context.

*Lost Memory*, a series of lead pencil drawings on paper, depicts abstract skeletal figures that are a reference to the mass killings during the 1971 war of independence. As [artillerymag.com](http://artillerymag.com) **states**: Wakilur Rahman, 'Genocide', 2009, ink on paper, 70 x 110 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.

*Sure-handed images of nature, beaks and reptilian remains echo the early phases of evolution from which all of humanity, regardless of caste or creed, emerged. Viewed in this context, human violence seems particularly savage-like, and Mamoon's deft conception of abstract figuration makes the work all the more effective. Ultimately, Mamoon believes in the power of the artist to "redress the damage of the society through his or her artistic venture[s]." The artist graduated with an MFA in Fine Arts in 1984 from the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh.*



## Making Art from Politics in Bangladesh

by FAHEEM HAIDER on September 3, 2014



Khaled Hassan, "Born to Be Migrant (Positive or Negative)" (2013–14), film and digital process installation with digital prints, *dims var* (all images courtesy Aicon Gallery)

Aicon Gallery in downtown Manhattan currently has an excellent exhibition up, *Readymade: Contemporary Art from Bangladesh*. It's the obscure object of my art desire: a summer show offering a take on materials and craft that ranges from the familiar to the utopian-exotic. That the show seems to stand in for real politics with an indignant view of the use and abuse of labor, activism, and the status of women in Bangladesh — and that it does all this while hinting that it's just the tip of the sinking iceberg — make *Readymade* a must-see.

The show features the work of nine artists from Bangladesh swinging at the political economy of their country, and at the readymade apparel industry in particular — an industry that makes up the largest share of the country's export-led service economy. Crucially, the art succeeds in implicating its audience, you, into the narrative and blame. This is identity-politics work on stilts, 15 years after the moment when just being shown in New York meant that Bangladeshi artists and their careers were "made." The late arrival to the scene feels like a good thing.



Imran Hossain Piplu, 'The Utopoian Museum (1)', 2011, digital print on archival paper, 55 x 36 in. Image courtesy the artist and Aicon Gallery.



The exhibition invites viewers to stand witness to Bangladesh. So, the history of oppositional accounts of the country's founding, its public narratives of war, independence, and genocide, are addressed in work by Imran Hussain Piplu and Promotesh Das Pulak. Piplu, in a digital print series called *The Utopian Museum* (2011), offers the hope that modern weapons and artillery might one day be seen as nothing more than the fossilized remains of a dinosaur culture. Das Pulak casts weapons in resin and fleshes them out with flowers, which are traditional to commerce and craft in Bangladesh, displaying the intricate and unsettled contest between art and craft, war and its manufacture, that we in the West take for granted.

Khaled Hassan's film and photo piece on Bangladeshi migrant workers documents labor exploitation in the oil-rich art magnate of the UAE (stories of which have featured prominently in *Hyperallergic*.) Masum Chisty takes the opposite tack and digitally figures himself into a short film that nearly all Bangladeshis (hell, all South Asians) would recognize: the hero cop with a mustache fights the villain — no doubt a smuggler, a robber capitalist — with a bigger, bushier mustache. The animated poster for this imagined movie works like every poster in Bangladeshi cinema has ever worked: with loud, flashy colors. Dhali Al Mamoon's captivating large fish and fauna drawings in pen, ink, and charcoal are wonderfully rendered, but they also point to the dead and detritus of the 1971 War of Independence against Pakistan. Exploitation, murder, and genocide are their undercurrents.

Art historical play aside, contemporary art in Bangladesh pulses with the urgency of a late-to-the game documentary ethic: it's interested not only in form, but in form to tell a story that you already know, though you might have missed the moral view embedded in it. So, the work on display is installed to focus attention on the twin tragedies that stand behind the failures of contemporary capitalism in Bangladesh: the Tazreen factory fire from a couple winters ago, which killed 117 workers, and the Rana Plaza collapse last year, which killed nearly 1,200 innocent people and permanently injured thousands more.



Masum Chisty, "The Acting," single-channel animation, 0:40 min.

That last horror captured the imagination of the worldwide Left and reverberated throughout the clothing manufacturing and retail industry in America and the UK. Yet you'd think a tragedy that implicates major international corporations and highlights their exploitive labor practices would finally shape up rights and protections for workers. Instead, on the backs of the many thousands of casualties, Walmart, Gap, and other major firms turned away from the twin tragedies. They did so because they knew we Americans love our \$7.99 T-shirts, and no amount of moral outrage can countenance our demand for a pair of cheap jeans that fit well.

In Bangladesh the Left fumed and protested, and the International Labor Organization charged the government in tandem with other agencies for construction of shoddy, failing buildings. But little changed on the ground: as soon as it could, the Left-leaning government sided with the apparel manufacturing industry and let many buildings deemed unfit to house working factories stand. The government sided against her people, and few seemed to mind.

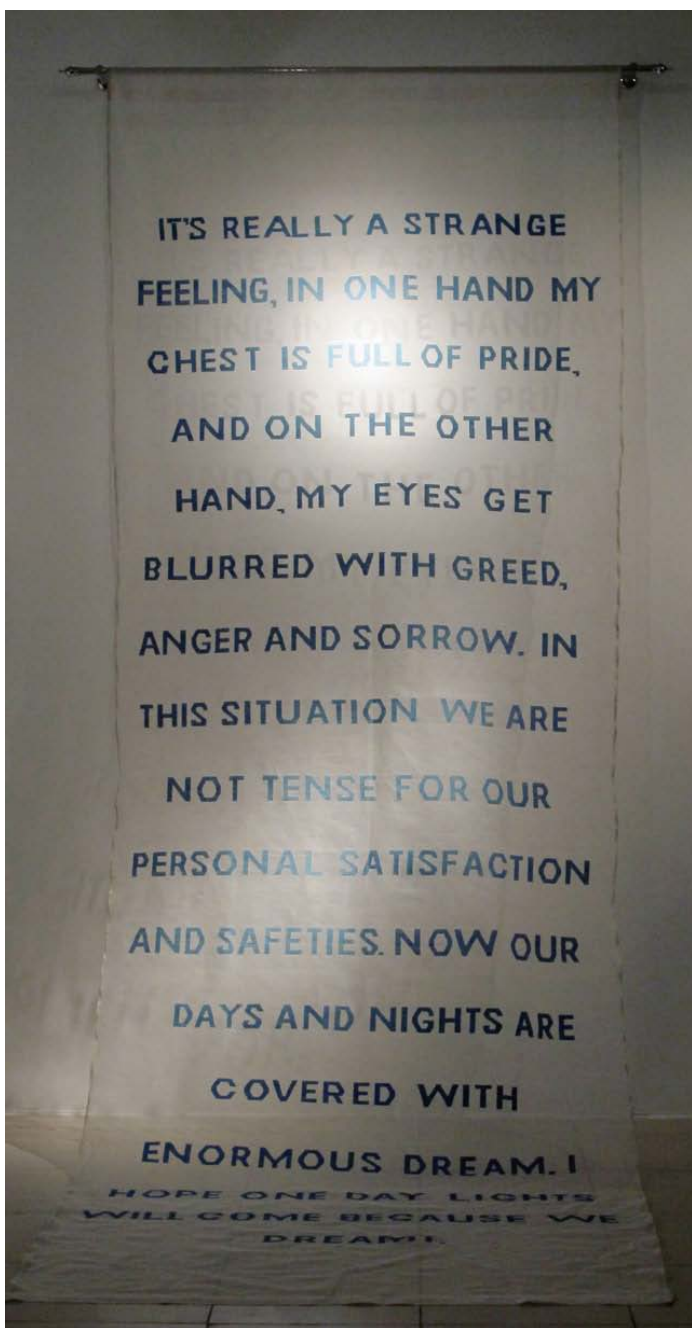


*Mohammed Wahiduzzaman, "Readymade" (installation & detail view) (2014), resin castings with artificial hair, iron, and shirts, dims var.*

Aicon has long showed South Asian art, mainly Indian and Pakistani. *Readymade* is the gallery's turn at the recent run on Bangladeshi work. Just last year artist Tayeba Begum Lipi showed her 2012 piece "Love Bed" at the Guggenheim's Global Arts Initiative show sponsored by UBS, and this past spring a group of Bangladeshi and American photographers and writers put together the *Eyes on Bangladesh* photography show. (Full disclosure: I wrote and had a piece performed for that show.) Bangladeshi work is also getting international fair attention, mostly from the Dhaka Art Summit based in the country's capital city.

*Readymade* speaks to those unaddressed injustices. Mohammad Wahiduzzaman's titular installation features resin casts of shirts that look like those neatly installed in your closet and mine, and they point directly to the Rana Plaza collapse. Both that piece and "Readymade II" (2014) include strands of women's hair, traditionally braided, hanging like lacerated tails. Twisted lines of artificial iron protrude from the walls and become the hangers from which shirts and casting dangle, straight, silent, and without agency.

Yasmin Jahan Nupur's installation, three works titled "In the Weave of Dream" (2013 and '14), is at first unassuming but gets a bit closer to the lives touched and lost in Bangladesh's service and export economy. And fittingly, craft stands behind her installation and reveals her righteous anger. Nupur's long pieces of hanging fabric suggest Muslim burial cloths, but walk up to them and you realize they're see-through saris, with the texts of dreams woven into them. The dignity of women in Bangladesh is clothed in their saris; Nupur's work suggests that so are their dreams. This installation is the star of the show.



Yasmin Jahan Nupur, "In the Weave of Dream" (2013),  
handwoven Jamdani, 156 x 50 in.

All that success is hard-won, but it feels scatter-shot and under-appraised. This exhibition feels like a corrective project. It's the first group show of Bangladeshi artists in a notable downtown gallery. It's the first show that seems to set its sights on a new generation of collectors, both mainstream American and members of the Bangladeshi diaspora. This is just the start, in that art world way, but I hope the concerned quality of the work doesn't fall by the wayside. When so much of this summer has been about what we've done, or failed to do, "over there" (Iraq and Syria most prominently) as well as what we've failed to do at home (the murders of several young American men at the hands of police), this is a show that crucially reminds us: what we've done over there easily blows back home to us.

Readymade: Contemporary Art from Bangladesh continues at Aicon Gallery (35 Great Jones St, Nolita, Manhattan) through September 6, with a closing reception on September 4, 6–8pm.