

# SAMEER FAROOQ

Behind the Eyes  
Visiting Artist Residency Exhibition

October 20 –  
November 18, 2017

Artist Talk and  
Opening Reception  
Friday, October 20  
6:00-9:00pm



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# SAMEER FAROOQ: BEHIND THE EYES

BY BETH STUART

A thing can sometimes happen, after prolonged meditation. Well, many things can happen, but this one: you lie down to sleep, close your eyes, and it will seem as bright as midday behind your lids. As if the space inside your head contained nothing but an illuminated light bulb. If at that moment, you pass the simple wonder, and dip into fancy, you might imagine opening your eyelids into the darkened room and the light streaming out like two projector beams.

These beams would be clear, but bearing all the potential of the unconscious imaginary; the images that lie many layers beneath the cyclic thoughts, the gossip, the buzzing hum of your internal hard drive, the film reel of memory. BUT! Peril to ye who try to will these transparencies to the lens. Even a slight twitch toward control is wont to extinguish. Toot sweet.

~

Meditation instruction varies, but at the risk of gross reduction, the meditator is taught to focus on some object of meditation, be it the breath, a sentence of words, or a scan of the body. This object is used as a place to gently re-focus when thoughts bloom, as they naturally do. An evolution of observation occurs quite naturally, wherein the meditator will begin to distinguish thoughts from each other: this is minor, this completely pulls me away; this is future, this is past; this is uncomfortable, this is satisfying; this is expansive, this is contractive. Zooming in further, this is language, this is image. Further still, this thought connects to a certain feeling in the body—a swell at the throat, a tingle in the hands, a clench in the gut. Over time the connecting narrative between thoughts becomes translucent, and can melt away.

The images that might strike out through those streaming beams of luminous present are not to be mistaken for the discursive mind's screen captures. The latter are born of consciousness—faces, events past, future projections. Rather, I might suggest that the subconscious visual is a manifestation of the event in which the thinking mind and the feeling body connect, like two polar currents. Sparking, the immediate sensory data gets charged into a textural, emergently dimensional form. What does this thought feel like? What is the texture of this emotion?

~

Sameer and Pamela made these prints together in response to Sameer's real-time recordings describing forms surfacing while meditating. There was also, informing the compositions, an esoteric theosophy book from 1901 called *Thought Forms*, which provides illustrations for some emotions. For example:

Self-Renunciation  
The Intention to Know  
Grasping Animal Affection  
High Ambition  
Watchful and Angry Jealousy  
Vague Sympathy  
At a Shipwreck  
On Meeting a Friend  
The Appreciation of a Picture.

These illustrations all show a luminous form emerging from darkness.

Also in Sameer's reference folder for the project is a link to an interview about Kandinsky's relationship to the spiritual.

~

I know Sameer's work as being quite different from its recent incarnations. If asked for a précis I would have said it was an analytic (if playfully so), deeply critical view of the material manifestations of ethnographic cultural hierarchies. The stuff we value, who values it, the ways in which we recognize value in cultural material. His brown hands didn't authoritatively interfere. They might have engaged a shutter, designed a catalogue page, or idiosyncratically categorized found materials, but material autonomy and the sacrosanct art object were not, evidently, his bag.

Something has shifted.

The two people in the reference interview talk about Kandinsky's drive being predominantly spiritual, that his paintings were intended to be sacred spaces that would open contemplation in the viewer. They suggest that this is in direct reaction to materialism. Not only greed, but materialism in the sense of the occupation with the external world as the primary driving force for change, as opposed to change growing from within. His paintings were "...creating a space or a pause to consider what is it that we

are in relationship to? The world around us is swirling with relationships that we seem to be moving so quickly past.”

~

I have felt recently, each time I walk into an art world social event, a claustrophobic, urgently welling desire to scream. Seemingly, in there, nothing is really changing. Outside, reality is hard to ignore. Well, maybe one thing has changed. Here too the light has become relentlessly bright! It feels a poor version of Antoinette’s castle on the eve of revolution. Poor because it is poor, the privilege here is a homegrown outfit worn in case the fabled real deal graces. Paris is burning, yet we dance in our silly uniforms, dumber still because we ought to be outside with the pitchforks. We might awake to the impossibility of biting the hand that feeds when that hand never appears, and never really has. Instead, in our weakened starvation, we gum each other mildly, dribbling drink from sloppy mouths. No matter! The suit is black. It will never show.

I don’t ever see Sameer here.

~

Two weeks ago, on a languid summer afternoon, I sat with Sameer in a coffee shop close to the building where we both live. We talked about personal change and growth, about feelings of urgency and radicalization growing inside. It struck me later that this urgency is manifesting most immediately in the drive to connect to other people in luminous, open ways. We talked about the very real difficulty of introducing the subject of spirituality into our concentric professional circles. We talked about the universal and mundane nature of pain. We talked about meditation through trauma as a radical opening to the Other. We talked about his right now brown body projecting itself into the narrative of a European modern master. We talked about why the mute illuminative power of physical intelligence is still so difficult to bring to the academic table, to the social change table, to the identity politics table, to the table of the Head, and so present as a polar current that could be met to generate a charge. We laughed and carried his laundry home and said that we will keep talking.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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#### Artist Bio

#### SAMEER FAROOQ

Sameer Farooq (b. 1978) completed an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (2014) and a BFA from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (2005). His interdisciplinary practice investigates tactics of representation and enlists the tools of installation, photography, documentary filmmaking, writing and the methods of anthropology to explore various forms of collecting, interpreting, and display. Recent projects include an ambitious public installation at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto and an upcoming exhibition inaugurating the University of Reno's new arts centre. He has exhibited internationally and nationally at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver), the Art Gallery of York University, Maquis Projects (Izmir), Blackwood Gallery (Mississauga), Trankat (Tétouan, Morocco), Sol Koffler Gallery (Providence), Artellewa (Cairo), and Sanat Limani (Istanbul). Farooq has been awarded several grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, and the Europe Media Fund, as well the President's Scholarship at the Rhode Island School of Design. He also appeared on the 2017 Sobey Art Award long list. He is currently working as a visual artist, designer, educator, and is a member of the documentary film collective Smoke Signal Projects as director. His artist book/print editions have been distributed through Art Metropole.

Sameer Farooq would like to acknowledge the support of the Ontario Arts Council, and would like to thank Pamela Dodds, Loree Ovens, Beth Stuart, Lawrence Switzky and Suzanne Carte.

#### Author Bio

#### BETH STUART

Beth Stuart is just another artist and a long-time friend of Sameer Farooq.

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