

**Bhavna Kakar**

Presents

**Zahra Yazdani's Solo**

## **Scripted Selves: Sutures of Signs and Symbols**

**Curated by Manan Shah**

**Preview:** 24th January, 2024 | Wednesday

**Timing:** 6 - 9 PM

**Exhibition Open till :** 29th February, 2024 | Wednesday

**Timings:** Monday to Saturday, 11 AM – 7 PM

**Venue:** Gallery LATITUDE 28, F - 208, F/F, Lado Sarai, New Delhi



Zahra Yazdani, *The Black Room*, Silver gelation on fibre-based paper, 8 x 9.5 in, ed. 2

### **Exhibition Text by Dilpreet Bhullar**

The body permeable to human touch anchors its corporeal existence, not far to implicit its emblematic value. The dichotomies – mortal/ divine, essentialism/abstract, pure/profane and deceit /probity – scripted onto the body make it a wealthy repository worth curiosity. Plato in the treatise 'Forms' sees man as split into a mortal body and an eternal Soul. Later, René Descartes' 'Meditations on First Philosophy' reformulated this mysticism in the modern form – as a tension between body and mind. Sifting through the pages of human history and human nature, the triad – theologians, philosophers and cultural practitioners – have read the body as an inquiry into signs of heightened morality, elevated aesthetic capacity and linguistic sophistication. To embrace the body, as an epitome of nuanced rawness and complexities is what the photographer Zahra Yazdani attempts in her photography practice, which is rooted in the analogue world.

The finesse of skin and contortion, when combined, gesture at the political reality of the body and Yazdani's representation of its vulnerability and, paradoxically, its inherent invincibility. To reach to this point, Yazdani transmutes private space into

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an orchestrated setting. As the frozen frame transcends being just the episodic recorder of a temporal existence, and underlines the event of a performative body, it conflates the double worlds of reality and fiction. This reality is built on the nomenclature of dominance: the body becomes as a site to showcase objectification; while the fiction is founded on circuits of imagination, creating the body as an embodiment of non-othering. Yet, for Yazdani, the art of continuing blurring does not push it into the realm of concealment. The sutures visible across the lineage of signs and symbols presented on the performative body bear the traces of scripts imbricated on the scales of skin.

Akin to the subtle textures of linen, the body in the photographs seems to move and sway, as though exercising its agency in the form of (un) folding, (dis) entangling and (mis) appropriating. Invoking distorted points of view and utilizing grainy textures, analogue photography, in the hands of Yazdani, serves as a metaphor to extend the layers of the body. In other words, it is a method to destabilise the conventional idea of a photograph as a truthful representation of a sliver of reality. The monochromatic effect of the photograph, expounded by the hypnotic play of light and shadow, undermines the political exigency that establishes a point of ontology vis-à-vis the body. The immateriality of the body, in terms of the deft economy of imperceptibility, is antithetical to the supremacist claims on material reality of the body.

The intimacy shared between the subject of photograph and camera eye does not confine itself to relative oblivion of the private space. Private spaces, typically shielded from the public eye, take on a new dimension when subjected to the lens of 'staged authenticity' (a term coined by Dean MacCannell). The photographer features both as an observer and a director, orchestrating scenes that mimic reality but are persistently constructed. The manipulation prompts contemplation about the authenticity of emotions and actions within the private sphere, only to probe it as the field of conformity and theatrics. The proximity of the private room is a witness to the dynamic brilliance of an equal arrival and departure of the photographer in the frame. Even with the non-discernable faces of the protagonist, the presence of Yazdani overrides the inherent ambiguity of photography. The authorship illuminates the tension-laden identity game of anonymity and confirmation. The dependence and emancipation enacted on this playfield accentuate the role of the photograph as a mirror and window. The reflection upon and overview of the performance are attentive to our modes of perception and cognitive patterns.

Through photography, operating as a form of power, the photographer and the subject are pushed to narrate a production of the knowledge systems about their preferences and adherences. These enactments spearhead an alternative history, which is another form of knowledge: one that counters what is seen as given and accepted a history without contestation. If the crafting of these photographs lends a visual language to the noise of the private room, then Yazdani's art metamorphosis them into a moment of self-revelation only to initiate a dialogue around politics of scripts. The introspection fraught within the sutures of signs and symbols envisions a

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scope of solidarity and justice through the act of remembering. In the current times determined by a constant urge for visual stimulation, the camera, as the observant eye of Yazdani, addresses the streams of fragmented memory. The uniqueness of the photographs rests with the desire of Yazdani to revisit the events of the body as a site of history and injustice in a visual taxonomy that creates the journey of articulating a constant struggle for resilience. *Scripted Selves: Sutures of Signs and Symbols* opens the possibility of an avenue removed from the logic of systematic order to draw on the agency of body in the face of past (in) actions and a contemporary effort to blur the dichotomy of us versus them.

### **Curatorial Interjections and Intervention**

Under the orchestrated settings of the private spaces, the photographic works by Zahra Yazdani in the exhibition probes the human body through the effect of distortion and layers. The asymmetry reimagines the points of location and registration of the dominant scripts to let the human body have its agency. The curatorial approach takes into account the scale of the photographs in order to cajole the viewer to pause and ponder: remap the body as through the eye of an active assimilator and associate. To break the monotony of the space, an eclectic visual appeal anchored by the encases and organic drapes, accentuates a porous experience to see the set of photographs in its entirety and individually. The curatorial approach strategically attempts to divide the space through drapes – evoking a psychological bifurcation or an in-between space – synonymous with the traces of lamina of a body. Towards this end, the exhibition succinctly takes references from a book produced by the artist. Yet is attentive to avoid a similar iteration through the display.

- Manan Shah

“Over the years, despite visa and bureaucratic restrictions, we have navigated a successful partnership with Zahra, culminating in insightful projects exploring access to autonomy in times of authoritative control. Her new solo exhibition, 'Scripted Selves: Sutures of Signs and Symbols' is a testimony to this perseverance. Even through lockdown, with Zahra being stranded here, we worked together closely albeit with the aid of digital tools. Managing our continuous collaboration fighting the odds, aligns with our commitment to support emerging artists from South Asia and beyond. As an Iranian artist, Zahra bends the norms defining the production of art in her native landscape, boldly experimenting with her subject matter. Our aim has been to extend crucially needed encouragement in overcoming censorship promoting an open environment that questions the status quo. Blending reality and fiction, she unveils the body as a tapestry of history, vulnerability, and resilience.”

- **Bhavna Kakar, Founder-Director, LATITUDE 28**

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## **Zahra Yazdani**

Zahra Yazdani (b. 1986) is a visual artist based in Iran. Her practice is an excavation of spaces and performing bodies through processes of photo shooting, archive building and collaboration with performers. She is engaged in the practice of experimental photography, videos and book making. Her work represents an exploration of uncertainty by deliberately blurring the lines between documentary and fiction. Her artistic approach involves a profound connection between the body and with the surrounding environment. Yazdani actively collects and captures moments from her daily life. The creation of her art involves a dynamic process of choosing, cutting and pasting, allowing a visual surface to organically evolve. Central to her artistic fascination is the expressive capacity of the human body to convey myriad feelings and states of mind. The core of her body of work materializes in the act of photographing individuals in both private and public spaces.

Zahra completed her BFA from Soore Art University of Tehran. Her solo exhibitions include 'Forbidden Lands', Homa Art Gallery, Tehran (2018); 'Realm', Aran Plus Art Gallery, Tehran (2014); 'Black Chaos', Idea Art Gallery, Tehran (2012). Group exhibitions include 'Persian Sucker' presented by 31927\_2, ArtTo, Canada Art Fair (2020); 'Glo' Art Open Studio at Lanaken, Belgium (2019); 'Cartography of Narratives', LATITUDE 28, New Delhi (2019); 'Babur Ki Gai', curated by Adwait Singh and Bhavna Kakar at LATITUDE 28, New Delhi (2018); among others. She is a recipient of the GENERATOR co-operative production fund for Project Blink in collaboration with Ashish Sahoo (2021).

## **Manan Shah**

Manan Shah (b. 1999) is a museologist, curator, and writer. Born and brought up in Kasheer (Kashmir), he holds a degree in Archaeology - Ancient History and Museology from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. He has published widely in magazines and journals including Inverse Journal, History is Now Magazine, World History Encyclopedia, TAKE on Art, Free Press Kashmir, among others. His writings and curatorial practices are attentive to the knowledge systems of antiquity that have informed the current-day cultural and political identity of Kashmir. Shah is also a recipient of the Kochi Students Biennale Curatorial Fellowship and has been part of India Art Fair's Young Collectors Programme as an assistant curator. His curatorial venture Which Sky do Birds Fly was a part of LATITUDE 28 exhibition programme. Shah also curated a research-based photo project, A Home in the Constant Flux: A Call to the Verb Memory, Simurgh Centre, Goethe Institute, New Delhi. He was the programme assistant to the curatorial symposium Horizon and Perspective: Curatorial Gaze to Gauge Promise of Art, part of TAKE on Writing series. Currently, based in New Delhi, Shah is working as an assistant editorial and programme coordinator at TAKE on Art. He is also part of the curatorial team at the contemporary art gallery LATITUDE 28, New Delhi.

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# LATITUDE 28

## About LATITUDE 28

Since 2010, LATITUDE 28 has probed into a gallery practice that is lateral, disruptive and avant-garde. Mentoring and nurturing emerging artists from South Asia, the gallery focuses on experimentation with medium and material fostering critical dialogue, perspective and practices by writers, critics and researchers alike. These maker-market relationships amongst collectors, art enthusiasts and art practitioners have grown through the gallery's interactive incubation space, where ideas have been generated through innovative curatorial projects located on the cusp of art history and socio-political context through site-specific artworks and artist talks. The gallery makes art accessible and inclusive with exhibitions located at the intersection of artists, institutions and art education. LATITUDE 28's vision is shaped by its Founder/Director, Bhavna Kakar, who is also the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of TAKE on Art - South Asia's leading contemporary art publication.

## SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES

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Instagram: @latitude\_28 @bhavz15 @takeonart

## RELEVANT TAGS

#Scriptedsselvessuturesofsignsandsymbols #newexhibition #exhibition  
#contemporaryart #contemporaryartists #artindelhi #latitude28 #takeonart  
#artdelhi #delhiart #zahrayajdani #iran #analog #photography #humanbody  
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