

RISD MFA PAINTING

August 3 – August 18, 2017

Opening reception: Thursday, August 3, 6 – 8 pm

Featuring work by:

Marisa Adesman, Christian Berman, Sanie Bokhari, Ada Goldfeld, Molly Kaderka, Arghavan Khosravi, Rebecca Levitan, Saif Mhaisen, Gina Palacios, Ohad Sarfaty

Curated by Hrag Vartanian

Home has emerged as a powerful symbol during our present period of uncertainty. It's a universal yet nebulous ideal that can migrate and adapt with us across continents. I couldn't help but think about that unique but enigmatic sense of belonging that's at the core of human relationships while looking at the work by these young artists, all of whom have infused their work with a notion of home.

In the art of **Ada Goldfeld**, **Gina Palacios**, and **Marisa Adesman**, we see glimpses of lives permeated with an undercurrent of unease; these are familiar visions of domesticity manipulated to open up new possibilities and meanings. Goldfeld's self-portrait is intimate yet confrontational, with the marks of her body suggesting a reality that exists beyond the frame, while Palacios's rendering of a dress on a clothesline evokes a mundane household task blown up to give the image a more psychological and monumental scale. Adesman's work, by contrast, offers a closely cropped subject centered on the traces of the body in space.

These artists, like most in this exhibition, avoid clear narratives in favor of poetic moments of discovery and exploration. While many have an inward looking preoccupation with home, others are clearly looking to global power structures and their impact on people's sense of security and safety.

In **Arghavan Khosravi's** dream-like images, she illuminates a world where most people have limited mobility across national boundaries. Weaving this contemporary reality with the language of graphic novels and manuscript illumination, she suggests a lineage of migration that presents a shifting space where the public and private are interlocked and indivisible. With the same sensitivity to personal lives, **Ohad Sarfaty's** paintings are jewel-colored scenes distorted to feel extra pensive. Figures overlap in a way that suggests the composite nature of a memory, endowing the work with the feeling of time's passage.

Sanie Bokhari's installation creates a conceptual bridge between many of the strands of work here. Considering the migration of workers from the developing world to global hubs of finance and real estate, like Dubai, she leaves us with rows of precarious airplane seats that feel unsettled, like the lives of migrants themselves.

Saif Mhaisen's "Portrait of Saddam Hussein" looks back at recent history to suggest turning points in the 21st century, but even after the overthrow of the dictator, his presence still looms over the ruins of the nation he professed to build. With his ominous image, Mhaisen suggests that an autocrat's cult of personality never fully dissipates.

Christian Berman shares this interest in historical figures, but he focuses on the personal sacrifices of notable individuals working towards a greater good. He has constructed elaborate shrines to two prominent environmentalists, Dian Fossey and Jairo Mora Sandoval, whose murders continue to be shrouded in mystery. It's as if he's trying to house them in these wondrous objects in order to offer their legacies an artistic home.

In the case of **Rebecca Levitan**, her art combines the languages of representation and the decorative arts. In the process, her hybrid forms heighten our understanding of the fiction that's deeply embedded in the images themselves.

The work of **Molly Kaderka** is a departure from that of her classmates in that it emphasizes a type of scientific observation that removes some of the subjectivity of the artist and suggests a more objective perspective within the Western artistic tradition. But she grounds her drawings in a stark realism that reveals a more emotional process the closer you observe them.

In her essay "In a Word," Lucy Lippard writes, "In the absence of shared past experience in a multicentered society, storytelling and old photographs take on a heightened intensity." In a similar way, our sense of home is formed through our ability to share our experiences of it, articulating what it means to feel like you belong. Ultimately we understand that we can belong to a place but find home anywhere.

—Hrag Vartanian