

# A.I.R.

## *Still I Rise* Qinza Najm

September 6 - October 6, 2019

Opening Reception: Friday, September 6, 6-8pm

"You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise."  
— Maya Angelou



Negin Sharifzadeh, *Veil of Bullets*, 2018  
Metal print, 66 x 44 inches

A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to announce *Still I Rise*, an exhibition by Qinza Najm, a New York-based, Pakistani-American artist who works across multiple disciplines. Najm, who holds a PhD in Psychology, creates art that is informed by both Eastern and Western philosophies based on compassion, as well as feminist theories concerned with gendered violence and female subjectivity. Her fluid movement between different disciplines is illustrated in this exhibition, which features a selection from four bodies of work that resonate with one another. The imagery centers on a woman's body (represented, for the most part, by the artist's own body) situated within a physically, socially, or mentally constraining space. The body is repeatedly represented sitting, reclining, kneeling, or stretching, either wearing a hijab or else exposed.

The central image that serves as a point of departure for this exhibition is *Veil of Bullets* (2018). This work is based on an earlier performance in which the artist wore a 40-pound veil laden with 1,102 empty bullet casings representing the number of gun victims from shootings that occurred in American schools during the previous year. The image of the artist kneeling and wrapped in fishing net was subsequently cut out and used as a silhouette, or negative, in two series of carpet and oil paintings which include appropriated images of women's bodies as they have been represented throughout the history of Western art.

Another body of work consists of five black-and-white prints which include closely cropped portraits of Rashida, a woman who worked as a cleaner in the home of the artist's parents in Lahore, Pakistan. Reimagining Martha Rosler's iconic video, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), Najm asked 27 women from different underprivileged communities to collect quotidian household objects that represented, for them, gendered violence and oppression. For example, Rashida models a selection of items, holding them up close to the camera: a hammer, scissors, a grater, a hijab coiled like a snake, and a lota, a cleaning vessel associated with conventions of bodily purity.

The idea of covering and concealing, as well as the rejection of the male gaze, recurs in Najm's work. Carpets play a central role in the exhibition and Lahore, in particular, boasts a centuries-old tradition of Pakistani carpet weaving. Historically, European painters used carpets from the East as an exotic motif, assimilating them into their paintings to represent colonial control, aristocratic status, and global power. Najm references the stereotypes that became fixed over time in Western art — the affinity between carpets, women, and the East — and re-appropriates these Orientalist attributes. In some cases, for example, the carpet becomes a hijab that covers her body and defines its limits. Whether the body in Najm's work is painted, woven, or photographed, it always responds to oppression and violence against women on a global scale.

Born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan, **Qinza Najm** pursued her fine arts studies at Bath University and The Art Students League of New York. She has exhibited internationally, including at the Queens Museum (NY), Christie's Art (Dubai), Art|Basel (Miami, FL), and the Museum of the Moving Image (NY). Her work has been featured in *ArtNet News*, *The Huffington Post*, *NY Daily News*, *International Business Week*, *Buzzfeed*, and *Upworthy*. She lives and works in New York.

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains are the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two blocks away at 100 Jay St. No ID necessary for entry. Please contact [info@airgallery.org](mailto:info@airgallery.org) for more information.

