

SURFACE

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Land Developer

Shamim M. Momin expands her burgeoning nonprofit's horizons with a Paris exhibition.

BY MARINA CASHDAN
PORTRAIT BY PETER BOHLER

Before Shamim M. Momin escaped New York City for sunny Los Angeles, she was a sought-after curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where she co-curated two editions of the Whitney Biennial, a recognized barometer of art-world coolness and market success. Instead of continuing up the ranks within the museum world, Momin decided to start her own nonprofit, which she named Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND).

The roving organization has no brick-and-mortar home. Since its birth in 2009, LAND has mounted exhibitions and developed programming across the United States. Now Momin is taking her efforts outside of the U.S. for the first time—to Paris—with a group show she curated entitled “Wasteland,” in partnership with Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac and the Mona Bismarck American Center. “Part of our five-year plan was to see more international collaborations happen, and this is a perfect start,” Momin says. “Partnering with two very different venues to create a dialogue that spans the city of Paris, as well as that of America/L.A. with Europe.”

The title, inspired by T.S. Eliot’s 1922 poem “The Waste Land,” feels like a misnomer for an exhibition that includes 14 of the most exciting

ART



artists working today, all based in or influenced by Los Angeles—including Sam Falls, Amanda Ross-Ho, Mark Bradford, and Math Bass. But Momin uses the title as connective tissue between the state of the world of Eliot’s time and that of today: “The original text was written at a moment of disturbing parallel to the present, one of great disillusionment with the state of the world politically and culturally and individually,” she says, adding that the title had other references as well: “... of Los Angeles as a ‘cultural wasteland,’ a more literal reading of the word applied to the physical geography of both the city and the natural landscape of Southern California, ... [or] resonant images of the post-apocalyptic, the post-human, the potential future, largely created through the image magic of Los Angeles’s greatest export: Hollywood.”

The exhibition, which comprises mostly newly commissioned works, was planned in the midst of the recent Paris attacks. “Quite a number of the works have threads—more or less present—of social and political thinking within, but even the more abstract relationship to the theme has a different gravitas, to my mind,” Momin says. “We didn’t change any of the works in the show [when the

tragedy occurred], but I think art is always understood differently in its contexts, and it resonates differently even for me, from afar.”

While LAND’s presence in Paris marks the organization’s international debut, this doesn’t deter further programming in the U.S. This year, LAND will organize initiatives in Downtown Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Detroit, as well as inaugurate the LANDxAIR residency program in Tucson, Arizona. “One of LAND’s most unique aspects is that it aims to be truly nomadic in its programming, and that’s an advantage we can embrace in a way one cannot with a brick-and-mortar entity,” Momin says. “Why would we limit that in any way?”

LAND founder and director Shamim M. Momin in Los Angeles.