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culture

Talent Scout

A new face on the L.A. art scene is pushing public works into the forefront **BY NANCY MARKS**

Shamim M. Momin, adjunct curator of the Whitney Museum of American Art and cofounder/director of LAND (Los Angeles Nomadic Division), has moved from New York to Los Angeles—but not really. Momin is nothing if not a perpetual huntress whose search for emerging contemporary artists takes her all over the globe. Coming from more than a decade of museum-affiliated curatorial work, she realized the need for a nonprofit, public art organization in L.A. whose mission would be to present unconventional, contemporary works outdoors.

Momin began by having salon discussions with artists, critics and academics regarding public projects that might excite people about contemporary art. Los Angeles, with its famous sprawl and reputation for nurturing the new and different, provided the perfect cityscape. As a visual, think “museum at large” or “Venice Biennale goes L.A.” and you will understand the core of her vision: public exhibitions blossoming in and around the city without the institutional or architectural restrictions that might come within an established museum community.

It may sound like a daunting task, but that’s what drives Momin. Born to a French mother and Indian father in Warwick, New York, from the age of six Momin commuted to school, leaving home at 6:30 a.m., returning at 6 p.m. In the ninth grade she entered the elite Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut, where she fell in love with art history during her junior year. “The essence of art history includes everything I love about learning, which is ultimately all about the human experience, who we are and how we function as people.”

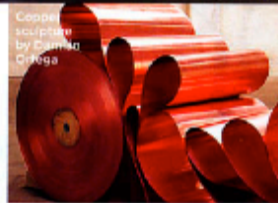
In person, Momin is clearly her own woman: adjectives such as introspective, creative, intellectual and individualistic come to mind. She wears tons of silver jewelry and cutting-



Shamim Momin



Installation by José Dávila



Copper sculpture by Daming Ortega

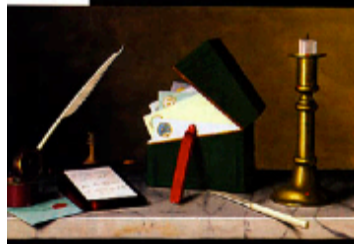
edge clothes, has exquisite manners and a well-honed professional rigor. She cares deeply about artists and feels a responsibility to help them bring their innovative work to the public arena so new ideas can give people “a slightly shifted lens on how they see the world.”

Although downtime is not in her lexicon, Momin finds peace in the outdoors, jogs daily no matter where she is and wouldn’t necessarily say “no” to bungee jumping or skydiving. She has an L.A. “Wild West” side to her personality that encourages her to dream dreams and make them happen, as well as a more hard-core New York edge that has her churning out accomplishments with urgency and speed. She stands ready to showcase potential new stars with her signature enthusiasm and, it seems, may be well on the road to becoming one herself.

LAND’s first exhibition, slated for January 2010, coincides with Art Month in Los Angeles; nomadicdivision.org •

CALIFORNIA’S *Hidden* MASTERPIECES

Originally a silver engraver, William Michael Hammett applied exacting precision to his trompe l’oeil paintings. Among his favorite illusions were desks and writing implements, such as those featured in the Santa Barbara Museum of Art’s *The Secretary’s Table*.



William Michael Hammett, *The Secretary’s Table*, 1870, oil on canvas.

Replete with inkwell and sealing wax, the painting invites its viewer to grasp at the handle of a white letter opener. The trickery continues in the hand-written note, commanding its reader to “meet Mr. Clarke at St. George Hotel.” Short of a meeting with the mysterious Mr. Clarke, a trip to Santa Barbara promises an afternoon’s rendezvous with the fascinating Mr. Hammett. 1130 State St., Santa Barbara, 805-963-4364; sbmuseart.org; VICTORIA SANCHO LOBIS