

About the Artist

Runa Islam

Born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1970; lives and works in London. Studied at Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom and Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom from 1990 to 1995, and participated in a studio program at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, The Netherlands in 1997-98.

Islam's work has been shown in numerous galleries and museums. Recent solo exhibitions include *Screen Test/Unscript*, Fig-1, London, United Kingdom (2001), *Director's Cut (Fool for Love)*, White Cube, London, United Kingdom (2001), and *One day a day will come when a day will not come anymore*, Cologne, Germany (2001). Group exhibitions include *EAST International*, Norwich, United Kingdom (1999); *Dis.locations*, hARTware, Projekte, Dortmund, Germany (1999); Stimuli, Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (1999-2000); *if there were no stories*, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2000); *50 projects, 50 weeks, fig-1 project*, Soho, London, United Kingdom (2000); *In/SITE/out. Inquiries into Social Space*, Apex Art, New York (2001); *Century City*, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2001); *VideoDrome*, New Museum, New York (2002); and *tele-journeys*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA (2002). The film, *Rapid Eye Movement*, was shown at the 2002 Taipei Biennial, *Great Theatre of the World* at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2002-2003).

Public Programs

ARTIST'S TALK:

Runa Islam
Saturday, February 8, 3 PM

CURATOR'S TALK:

Jane Farver
Wednesday, March 19, 12 PM

GALLERY TALKS:

Bill Arning, Curator
Friday, February 21, 6 PM; Friday, March 14, 6 PM

Hiroko Kikuchi, Education/Outreach Coordinator:

Wednesdays, 12 PM; Sundays (February 9 and 23; March 9; and April 6), 2 PM

GROUP TOURS

Group tours are available by appointment. Please call 617-452-3586 for inquiries.

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MIT List Visual Arts Center
Bakalar Gallery

A short film:

Rapid Eye Movement

Runa Islam

February 6 - April 6, 2003

Organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center

by Bill Arning
Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center

Rapid Eye Movement, a New Film Project by Runa Islam

Runa Islam, a London-based artist, makes short films and filmic installations to excavate and reveal aspects of film's language that the seductive qualities of film ordinarily occlude. In her newest work, *Rapid Eye Movement*, Islam takes the understanding of film as a form of collective dreaming as a starting point for a luscious cinematic adventure. Six strangers on an extended train trip doze and dream, and we witness the interweaving plots of their imaginings. With the convoluted logic of dreams, their stories overlap and each passenger is a dream protagonist as well as a guest character in the other passengers' subconscious fantasies. Islam employs two celebrated tropes of filmmaking: strangers brought together in a controlled space (Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* or Edmund Goulding's *Grand Hotel*), and the forced confusion of faux cinematic reality with the dream-within-a-film motif (Cameron Crowe's *Vanilla Sky* or M. Night Shyamalan's *Sixth Sense*). Thus, she can lovingly deconstruct the intoxicating imagery, mainstream and counter-cultural history, and physical mechanisms of cinema culture. Islam subtly alludes to great directors in her work, such as Luis Buñuel, Jean Cocteau, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who, in terms of the lineage of visual art today, should be considered as great originators along with Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp. In cinema, Islam finds a densely-loaded site of culture that requires her unique and substantial unpacking and rereading of its forms to better celebrate and enjoy its most powerful resonance.

A statement from the artist:

Considering the cinematic experience to be a collective dream, the film project *Rapid Eye Movement* attempts to place the dream back into the film process as a self-reflexive exercise to explore visual narrative structures. In appearance, the film emulates a lucid dream, perfectly remembered and artistically presented. Employing an innately fluid technique that warrants the disjunctive and disassociative narrative leaps often found in experimental films, this style is proposed as a "dream narrative." The method transcends the traditional beginning-middle-and-end structure of

storytelling, and conveys streams of "unconsciousness" as a means of creating stories with open endings and readings.

Based around the journey of six strangers traveling together in a train cabin, the film focuses upon the details of the cabin interiors, the carriage, and the relationships between the actors. Threading these seemingly banal instances with the vivid imagery witnessed within each character's subsequent dream, an abstracted storyline is assembled. Objects, incidents, dialogues, and the characters are shuffled around from the real spaces to the dream spaces. The actors appear in interchangeable roles and guises, acting out many fictions within the fictional. A single protagonist of the film is confounded through the multiplicity of subjectivities presented within these structural idiosyncrasies and trajectories that splinter spatial and temporal logic. Together, these elements conjure a place within the subconscious realm of the characters and impel the viewer to piece together the unfolding narratives, which remain on the shifting borderline of the real and the imaginary. The frequent, incontrollable REM encountered by the characters during each of their dreams is the main subject. The motif of the intense eye movement portrayed in close up becomes the bridge between the real and surreal.

This subtle style encourages the work's intention to blur the symbolism of imagery and remove distinctions commonly cited as conscious/real, subconscious/surreal, and unconscious/unreal. These dialectics will be linked by the layered repetition of pictorial and visual representations which will be relayed throughout the storylines. These often easily exchanged attributes will address the mutability of film and dream as one.

Structurally, the work implicates film's ability to materialize reality at 24 frames-per-second as a mechanical reproduction of the human cognitive process of seeing. As a metaphor, the characters' inner eyelids become akin to projector screens, with their eyes acting as the projectors that, in turn, engage the viewer as witness to these private cinemas. The REM phenomena (usually 12 hz per second) allude to the shutter of the film mechanism. The auditory elements play an important role in the

film, interplaying sound within the carriage and sound within the dream. The spinning of a shutter, the whirr of a fan and the repetitive sounds of the moving carriage, become the commentative soundtrack to the film, and punctuate a rhythm, like a resounding heartbeat. The images slow down, stop, and speed up, as does the tempo of the sound. The private dream is inversed and returns to the collective dream of cinema.

Runa Islam, London, 2002