

Exhibition Guide

Shilpa Gupta

*I did not tell you
what I saw, but only
what I dreamt*

**October 21, 2023 –
April 28, 2024**

Amant

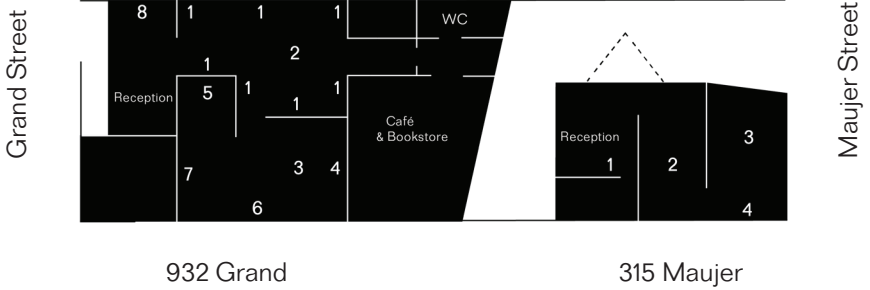
315 Maujer St., Brooklyn, NY 11206
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I did not tell you what I saw, but only what I dreamt centers on an underlying pursuit within Shilpa Gupta's practice: the invisible structures of control affecting both the individual and the collective. She juxtaposes mechanisms orchestrated by the state, or even societal forces, with narratives of mobility, persistence, and risks. This exhibition explores how abstract cartographic representations shape our everyday behaviors, and prompts its viewers to ask: What kind of maps surround us? Are they only physical or also personal? What defines us as people and what informs the collective imagination?

Borrowing the final verse, "I did not tell you what I saw, but only what I dreamt," from "A Dream" (1845) by Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), the exhibition engages with questions related to the body and speech, presenting new works alongside other projects from the past decade. Shilpa's journey has been profoundly shaped by her upbringing in Mumbai, India, a dynamic metropolis characterized by constantly shifting boundaries. Her works, which have been exhibited both within galleries and in public spaces, encourage viewers to assume the subject position of the "other," thereby challenging us to acknowledge our potential complicity with power apparatuses.

This exhibition consists of two bodies of work spanning across our two main galleries. 932 Grand centers on narratives of subversion, social affinities, and economic imperatives. The works on view reveal how authority, and individuals who represent the state, fragment in the face of personal desire. In Shilpa's projects, the concept of the border emerges as a constantly evolving reality that resists labeling, classifying, or limiting mobility. The second body of work exhibited in 315 Maujer, delves deeper into the artist's practice, illustrating how power mechanisms seep beyond the confines of maps and infiltrate the realm of language by using (and abusing) the tools of communication. Through her sound installations, sculptures, and drawings, Shilpa foregrounds how language shapes subjective imagination and she explores what happens when speech is suppressed and words, texts, and bodies are rendered silent and invisible.

Informed by Shilpa's interest in research and pedagogy, the exhibition also includes works associated with learning activities that form an integral part of this project. These activities inform our public programs that unfold alongside the exhibition.



Works in the exhibition:

932 Grand

- 1**
Altered Inheritances - 100 (Last Name) Stories, 2012-2014
- 2**
100 Hand-drawn Maps of USA, 2008/2023
- 3**
Stars on Flags of the World, 2012/2023
- 4**
Untitled, 2020
- 5**
Speaking Wall, 2009-2010
- 6**
1:7690, 2023
- 7**
Untitled, 2017
- 8**
Untitled (Flags of the World), 2012/2023

315 Maujer

- 1**
A Liquid, the Mouth Froze, 2018
- 2**
Untitled, 2023
- 3**
For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit, 2017/2023
- 4**
Untitled, 2016

On
view at
315
Maujer

1. *A Liquid, the Mouth Froze*, 2018

Cast of an open mouth in gun metal, etched brass plate

A Liquid, the Mouth Froze, shows the inside of a mouth cast in gun metal, as if it is frozen in time and unable to speak. The text that hangs beside the cast reads: "I was walking on the street. A car stopped, a few men stepped out, and pushed into my mouth, a liquid. The mouth froze." This arresting sculptural gesture evokes visceral narratives of censorship and erasure.

2. *Untitled*, 2023

Microphone, light bulb, print on paper, wood, speaker, sound, 17 min 48 sec

This new commission is part of a series of works with reverse-wired microphones. Instead of focusing on active speaking, Shilpa's sound installations with mics require her viewers to listen to voices which speak notes about turbulent histories into the present. In this work, one lone voice recites the names of 100 poets from different times and countries, as well as the year the poet was detained and incarcerated by their respective state. The 100 books included in another work in this gallery, *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit*, were written by these same 100 poets and mark their continued presence and perseverance.

3. *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit*, 2017/2023

Casts of 100 books in gun metal, wooden and glass vitrines with light bulbs

"Poets, like writers and artists, are dreamers who speak of the nightmares of the living world. This work is about the persistence of beliefs, of dreams, which make us into what we are as individuals" (SG)

This installation is part of the ongoing body of works on censorship that has taken several forms over the past years. *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit* reflects on the monitoring systems that penetrate, control, and exile voices and bodies. The work is devoted to 100 poets who, across many places and periods in time (from the 8th to the 21st century) and because of their convictions, beliefs, and writings, were imprisoned. The title of the work is inspired by the 14th century poet Imadaddin Nasimi, who was sentenced to death by the authorities because his ideas were considered blasphemous.

This edition of the work includes several wooden bookshelves with lamps that illuminate a selection of 100 books made from gun metal. On the covers of the books, you can read the name of the poet, the title, and the date of publication. Turned into metal monoliths impossible to open and read, the books remind of a shameful history of censorship that continues to this day.

4. *Untitled*, 2016

6 tracings, pencil on paper

These drawings are tracings of moments in the Israeli parliament when members of the parliament have been forcefully removed upon questioning the acts of the state. Normally a symbol of speech and democracy, the microphone is depicted as out of reach of the expelled body.

On
view at
932
Grand

1. *Altered Inheritances - 100 (Last Name) Stories, 2012-2014*

Pigmented inkjet prints in split frames with texts. Selection from a series of 100 frames.

"When you fill in a form, the first thing that you are asked for is your surname." (SG)

A person's last name defines in part how they are seen as an individual. *Altered Inheritances* features the stories of 100 individuals who have changed their names. The series, of which a selection is on view here, interweaves narratives of prejudice and persecution with stories of desires, aspiration, and escape.

For this work, Shilpa takes photos with testimonial texts and splices them in half, re-sequencing top and bottom parts. Although the split halves are placed close enough to reconstruct the whole photograph, they function as disjointed fragments alluding to the pieces, instead of the wholes, that make up an individual's life.

2. *100 Hand-drawn Maps of USA, 2008/2023*

Table, fan, and book

These hand-drawn maps are part of an ongoing series in which Shilpa Gupta asks 100 people to make a map of the country by memory.

On this occasion, she asked people to draw an outline map of the United States purely based on memory. In the months leading up to this exhibition, Amant's team invited people of all ages and backgrounds to draw this contour. There is no single drawing that is "accurate," nor are there two that are the same. States are forgotten, misshaped, or incorporated into others highlighting the disparity between the private and the public, between the singular state-sanctioned cartography and the informal image of one's country that one carries in the mind.

3. *Stars on Flags of the World, 2012/2023*

Stars cast in wax in proportion to the volume of artist's body

Viewers are invited to take one each.

"How can we define ourselves with something so young as the nation state, when communities have preceded its formation, for far longer?" (SG)

This work consists of a variety of stars that have been carefully traced and placed on the gallery floor. These are stars which appear on flags of recognized and unrecognized countries.

Shilpa started this series of works in 2012, in the context of rising, radical nationalist agendas all over the world. Many national flags are fairly recent symbols, yet they elicit a form of immediate and emotional identification that annuls the recognition of other groups that have lived in, and cared for, the territory for a much longer period of time.

The stars on this work have been cast from wax that matches Shilpa's body volume—as if her body had been divided into stars. As they lay scattered on the gallery floor, the stars mirror what happens up above in the night sky, where constellations are not symbolic, but function as wayfinding and tools to place ourselves in a more boundless space.

4. *Untitled, 2020*

Borderland river stone, light bulb, motor

Untitled (2020) features a borderland river stone and a light bulb, interacting as if in a dance or conversation. As one object rises, the other falls, and as they pass each other the light briefly illuminates the grey, sparkling surface of the stone. The two objects almost touch, but not quite—their dialogue is tangibly fragile and vulnerable, underpinned by the potential for destruction should the rock collide at any point with the fragile bulb.

5. *Speaking Wall, 2009-2010*

Interactive sensor-based sound installation, LCD screen, bricks, headphone
Approximately 8 min.

"Step a bit closer, closer..." (SG)

In *Speaking Wall* (2009-2010), you are invited to wear a set of headphones while standing on a narrow row of bricks that abuts a gallery wall. The work can only be experienced by one person at a time. Shilpa's recorded voice directs your movement in a journey along psychological, political, natural, and personal boundaries and places.

6. *1:7690, 2023*

Smuggled everyday garment, wood, etched brass

"The very act of continuous winding into a single whole, where a ball is held and turned around again and again embodies a range of emotions—hysteria, anxiety, and hope, which vanish to reappear when lines drawn through neighborhoods and sometimes literally through homes continue to simmer." (SG)

The work is composed of a hand-wound ball, made from shredded strips of an everyday garment hand-carried to India from Bangladesh, that forms part of the informal and subversive economy that persists despite the border fencing. The garment is no longer recognizable, a tactic often used in contraband as well. This conscious abstraction is further manifested in the artwork's title, which serves to underscore the arbitrary nature of state-sanctioned cartography.

When multiplied by the ratio indicated in the title, the length of the fabric strips corresponds to the measurement of the fenced border between the two nations. She juxtaposes ideas of empirical measurement used to construct border lines against ground reality.

7. *Untitled, 2017*

Drawings made from banned marijuana growing in the vicinity of a check post along the India-Bangladesh border.

"With the existence of a vibrant subversive economy, be it informal, driven by age old connections and habits, or those, now controlled by syndicates—which transpire invisibly in the open—the State stands rescaled in the face of individual affiliations, even by its own representatives." (SG)

These selections of drawings are part of Shilpa's *Drawing in the Dark* series where she traces clandestine routes and flows, which persist in the Bengal borderlands (eastern India) despite the near completion of world's longest border fence by India, nearly encircling its neighbor, Bangladesh.

Using pigments extracted from banned marijuana cultivated in the vicinity of a border checkpoint, the artist depicts the elaborate security apparatuses that operate in an opaque manner. These range from metal fences to binoculars, radios, and uniform jacket collars to which Shilpa has had direct exposure. The drawings' almost transparent lines on white paper stand in for the partially invisible smuggling activities, unraveling stories of desire, mobility, and ethics.

8. *Untitled (Flags of the World), 2012/2023*

Hand-painted and cut wooden blocks on shelves

"What gives these forms so much power over our lives and longings?" (SG)

Shilpa disassembles national flags into discrete symbols and blocks of shapes, several of which bear uncanny resemblance to one another. Like a set of wooden blocks that reminds of a Jenga game, the pieces are grouped together to create new configurations that blur or reimagine the original geopolitical relations.

While flags are closed systems that are codified (you are not allowed to be creative with them), Shilpa brings an element of open-endedness into this work, suggesting that they could be fluid and interchangeable.

This work is activated through multiple age-specific workshops designed by the artist and the Amant learning team.

Shilpa Gupta lives and works in Mumbai where she studied sculpture at the Sir J. J. School of Art.

In 2021, MuHKA in Antwerp organized a comprehensive survey show of Shilpa's work. She has had solo shows at several international venues, most notably: Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2009); Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati (2010); Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Arnhem (2011); Arnolfini, Bristol (2012); Kiosk, Ghent (2017); Kunstverein Bielefeld (2017); Barbican, London (2021); the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (2021); Dallas Contemporary (2022).

Shilpa's work has also been featured in group exhibitions at museums such as: Tate Modern, MoMA, Louisiana Museum, Centre Pompidou, Serpentine Gallery, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Mori Museum, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, ZKM, Ishara Art Foundation, Kiran Nadar Museum, and Devi Art Foundation. Shilpa has participated in several biennials, such as: 58th Venice Biennale (2019), Kochi Muziris Biennale (2018), Gothenburg Biennial (2017), Berlin Biennale (2014), New Museum Triennial (2009); Sharjah Biennial (2013), Lyon Biennale (2009), Gwangju Biennale (2008), Yokohama Triennale (2008), and Liverpool Biennial (2006).

Together with Salil Tripathi, Shilpa edited *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit* (2022), a poetry anthology which speaks truth to power. Shilpa has also co-facilitated *Crossovers & Rewrites: Borders over Asia* at World Social Forum in 2005 and *Aar Paar*, a public art exchange project between India and Pakistan (2002-2006).

This exhibition is curated by Ruth Estévez. Organized by Amant and co-produced with the Madison Museum of Contemporary Arts.

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All the works courtesy the artist, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; Galleria Continua; Frith Street Gallery, London.

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non-collecting institution,
which gives us the freedom
to focus on experimentation,
process, and dialogue through
exhibitions, public programs,
and artist residencies.

Galleries

Thursday–Sunday
12pm–6pm

Café & Bookstore

Monday–Wednesday,
9am–2pm
Thursday–Sunday,
9am–6pm

Free for all

