

# RYAN LEE

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**Mariam Ghani**

*The City & The City*

September 10 - November 5, 2016

Opening: Saturday, September 10, 4-6PM

RYAN LEE is pleased to present *The City & The City* by Brooklyn-based artist Mariam Ghani. Shot in St. Louis in 2014-15, primarily during the month of protests known as “Ferguson October,” *The City & The City*, which premiered at the St. Louis Art Museum in 2015, comprises a 29-minute film based loosely on China Miéville’s 2009 sci-fi noir novel of the same name, a series of photographs shot in locations significant to the urban development of St. Louis, a multichannel sound piece developed with residents of the city and county, and an online project published by Triple Canopy.

Miéville’s novel describes a city so divided that it has become two separate countries. This is an extreme version of a familiar condition: many of us live in cities within cities, only occasionally crossing into each other’s territories. The city-states of *The City & The City* are, however, still geographically cross-hatched together, so the citizens maintain their separation by *unseeing* everything and everyone that belongs to the other city: a fiction that becomes a fact. In Ghani’s film, this conceptual framework is mapped onto real places and histories of St. Louis, which allows her to both textually underline and visually collapse the actual divisions between City and County, North and South. The film, like the book, begins with a murder, and uses the investigation into that murder to reveal, question, and eventually unravel the systems and structures that made both the murder and the city’s divisions possible. Unlike the book, the film is narrated by the dead man, who appears onscreen only as a series of shattered mirrors, a reference to the mirrored coffin carried by protesters that October. The film is haunted throughout not only by his absence, but by the absence of anyone who could even stand in for him.

The photographs presented alongside the video show sites used in the film, but while the film folds them into its fictional framework, here they are given their real names, which are associated with specific histories of displacement, abandonment, failures of justice, and failed urban development and urban renewal projects, including the highway that bypassed the South Side to cut through the North Side, the site of the demolished Pruitt-Igoe housing project (now an urban forest), the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood (demolished to build St. Louis University), and the Lambert Airport flight path over the remnants of Kinloch, the oldest incorporated African American settlement in Missouri.

*The City & The City* was commissioned by the St. Louis Art Museum and produced during Ghani’s 2014-15 Freund Fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis. The film is choreographed by Ghani’s longtime collaborator Erin Ellen Kelly, a St. Louis native, and features local performers Shirin Rastin, Jin Soo Park, Naomi Merrihue, and Chaim Duffe-Holmes, along with Kelly. The

film is narrated by St. Louis actor and activist Derek Laney, and features motion effects by Mores McWreath and a score by Qasim Naqvi, performed by the NYU Contemporary Music Ensemble under the direction of Jonathan Haas (released separately by NNA Tapes as the album “Preamble”). The sound piece, which can be played here (<http://www.mariamghani.com/work/364>) invites St. Louis residents to complete an open-ended script about their relationships to public space in the city, and was produced in collaboration with the Saint Louis Story Stitchers Collective, the Community CollabARTive at Red Chair on Cherokee, the Pink House in Pagedale, the NORC, and Covenant House in South County. The online version, which combines material from the film with restitched and reimagined city maps, was commissioned by Triple Canopy and produced in collaboration with St. Louis-based designer Jonathan Hanahan, and can be accessed via [canopycanopycanopy.com](http://canopycanopycanopy.com) or [mariamghani.com](http://mariamghani.com).

This will be the New York premiere of *The City & The City*. The film is currently being shown at the Indianapolis Museum of Art as part of *Mariam Ghani & Erin Ellen Kelly: Water, Land, City* (December 4th, 2015-October 30th, 2016), and has been acquired by the St. Louis Art Museum for its permanent collection. This is the gallery's second show with Ghani, following on the heels of her recent site-specific commission for the Queens Museum's Large Wall Series, *The Garden of Forked Tongues*, and her inclusion in the Guggenheim Museum's *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*.

Mariam Ghani (b. 1978, New York, US) received her BA from New York University in 2000 and her MFA from the School of Visual Arts in 2002. Her work has been exhibited and screened widely, including at the Rotterdam, Berlinale, and CPH:DOX film festivals; dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, DE and Kabul, AF; Sharjah Biennials 9 and 10, Sharjah, UAE; 2004 Liverpool Biennial, UK; Tate Modern, London, UK; CCCB, Barcelona, ES; Secession, Vienna, AT; National Gallery, Washington, DC, US; Anchorage Museum, US; Bronx Museum, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, US; Museum of Modern Art, New York, US; and Metropolitan Museum, New York, US.

On view concurrently is Andrew Raftery: *Autobiography of a Garden on Twelve Engraved Plates*, September 10 - November 5. Forthcoming exhibitions include new paintings by Donald Sultan, November 10 - December 23.