

RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC
515 WEST 26TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
212 397 0742
RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

Mariam Ghani

Counting, Accounting, Recounting

January 9 – February 15, 2025

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 9, 6:00-8:00pm

RYAN LEE Gallery is pleased to announce *Counting, Accounting, Recounting*, an exhibition by the artist, writer, and filmmaker Mariam Ghani (b. 1978). Centering around Ghani's short film *There's a Hole in the World Where You Used to Be* (2024) with accompanying sculptures, the works in this exhibition translate the process of mourning people and places into tangible form as the artist seeks to account for loss and reckon with impermanence. By weaving together personal artifacts with cultural iconography, Ghani's work engages with the ways in which grief, absence, and the passage of time inform our perceptions of the world around us. Ghani says, "*There's a Hole in the World Where You Used to Be* is concerned with the way grief can feel simultaneously personal and political, individual and collective; each absence felt as both a wound in the heart and a hole in the world."

Ghani's fifteen-minute film visualizes this idea through the premise that both grief and black holes are so dense and intense that they bend space and time around their specific gravity. The film begins in the uncertain, shifting terrain of memory, which is invoked here through a mix of family archives, the artist's own photos from New York, Italy, and Lebanon in the 1990s, scenes from Istanbul and Kabul, and more recent videos that ghost through the earlier stills. The second chapter juxtaposes public satellite imagery with texts adapted from first-hand accounts of aerial bombardment, to convey the disjunction of experiencing war at a distance. NASA images and animated simulations of black holes, manipulated by the artist, recur through the next three chapters. In the final chapter, which opens with the question "How do we mourn without occasions, without the appointed places and times?," the black holes are juxtaposed with quotidian moments from the artist's filmic diary of the past four years, a series of punctures through which grief seeps into everyday life. With a score composed by Qasim Naqvi and sound design by Ghani and Panos Chountoulidis, the film transports viewers through space and time.

There's a Hole in the World Where You Used to Be is installed in a dedicated screening room, accompanied by textile-based artworks. These wood and fabric panels are constructed from the artist's discarded and torn garments and possessions, each tied to a specific personal memory: a scarf worn at a funeral, costumes from past films, and blackout curtains from a previous studio. Small pinpricks of light shine through holes in the panels, playing on the theme of black holes – whereas black holes are so dense that even light cannot escape them, these are concentrated points of light. However, one way that a black hole is born is through the collapse of a massive star, and most galaxies spin around supermassive black holes. These objects also play off the Rumi quote referenced in the film, "The wound is where the light enters." These installations act as a bridge between the film and the objects on view throughout the rest of the gallery, serving as a reference point for the interconnected relationships between memory and value, between the fleeting and the permanent.

Ghani's sculptural works occupy the remainder of the gallery space. Suspended from the ceiling are a set of four *hamsa* hands made out of coins – this palm-shaped icon represents protection, power, and strength and is typically worn as an amulet or hanging near the doorway of a house, to ward off the evil eye. Nearby is a series of two-sided artworks composed primarily from images cut out of paper money, arranged between glass panels. Both of these works utilize defunct currency that has either

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been officially removed from circulation (demonetized) or has been rendered useless due to extreme inflation. By using devalued objects as material for talismans and enshrining deprecated symbols in fragile glass coverings, Ghani asks us to consider what counts, who does the accounting, what stories we tell through the things we value, and which images of the past remain available to the present.

Mariam Ghani (b. 1978 New York, NY) is an artist, writer and filmmaker whose work operates at the intersections of language, loss, landscape, migration, memory, and history. Ghani's research-based practice spans video, sound, installation, photography, performance, text and data. Working across documentary, archival, narrative and database forms, Ghani traces both individual narratives and the larger systems or structures that condition or enclose them.

Ghani's work has been exhibited and screened widely, including at the Tate Modern, UK (2024); Smithsonian American Art Museum, DC (2023); Schneider Museum of Art, OR (2022); M+ Museum, Hong Kong (2021); Speed Museum, KY (2020); Blaffer Museum of Art, TX (2020); Lahore Biennale (2020); Berlinale (2019); Yinchuan Biennale (2018); Asia Society, NY (2017); Queens Museum of Art, NY (2016); Dhaka Art Summit (2016); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY (2016); St. Louis Art Museum, MO (2015); New Museum, NY (2014); CCCB, Spain (2014); Rotterdam Film Festival (2013); Gatchina Museum, Russia (2013); Documenta 13, Germany (2012); CPH:DOX (2012, 2004); Museum of Modern Art (2011); Sharjah Biennial (2011, 2009); National Gallery of Art, DC (2008); Rubin Museum of Art, NY (2006); Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY (2004); and Liverpool Biennial, UK (2004), among others.

Her work is in the public collections of the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Germany; Arab American National Museum, MI; CB Richard Ellis, NY; Devi Art Foundation, India; Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, NY; Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN; Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, MA; Sharjah Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates; Smithsonian American Art Museum, DC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY; and the St. Louis Art Museum, MO.

About RYAN LEE

Celebrating emerging and established artists and estates, RYAN LEE takes a multi-generational approach to its programming, presenting innovative and scholarly exhibitions across all spectrums of art practices, including painting, photography, video, sculpture, and performance. The gallery takes chances on a wide variety of boundary-pushing artists; their work consistently transcends political, cultural, material, or technical boundaries. In addition, RYAN LEE has, throughout its history, demonstrated its long-standing interest and dedication to feminist, Black and Asian American, as well as queer narratives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Founded in 2013 by Mary Ryan and Jeffrey Lee, the gallery is led by partners of different generations and backgrounds with over six decades of combined experiences informing its unique approach.