

Zarina Bhimji at the Whitechapel Gallery, London

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The Whitechapel Gallery is exhibiting the work of the British artist Zarina Bhimji. The exhibition is mainly comprised of photography and film and also of other medias created by the artist over the last 25 years.

The artist was born in Uganda in 1963 of Indian parentage. She went to the UK in 1974, two years after the Asian Community was expelled from the country by the then military leader Idi Amin. Zarina Bhimji refuses to associate her personal history with her work and although the films and photographs are shot in two countries from which she comes, she tells that her work is about erasure of the past and abandonment in general.

In the Whitechapel Gallery downstairs are recent photographs and films taken and shot in Uganda and in India. She photographs buildings without people. Nonetheless their presence is felt via the objects that they left behind. Details such as shoes on the wall, clothes hanging on a wire outside or piles of office paper tied with ribbon show that individuals have been there but are no longer there, either for a long time or for a short while. Walls such as ornate window shutters or cracked plaster are very present in her photographs often in a derelict state. The walls evoke both a rich architectural past that could not be kept up and abandoned houses that people departed from.

Formally, she pays a lot of attention to noises in her film, to the textures of the materials that she depicts such as wood, paper, fabrics or plaster and especially to light. Nuances of colours and of shadows contribute to this feeling of loss and abandonment of the places she depicts.



Zarina Bhimji, *Shadows and Disturbances* 2007 Ilfochrome Ciba classic print, 127 x 160 cm. Courtesy the artist and DACS, London



Zarina Bhimji, *Your Sadness is Drunk* 2001-2006 Ilfochrome Ciba classic print, 121.9 x 154.4 cm. Courtesy the artist and DACS,

London

Upstairs are less recent works. *She loved to Breathe - Pure Silence* (1987) refers to Asian immigrant women who had to undergo virginity tests to enter the UK in the 1970s. Images sandwiched in plexi-glass show their personal objects such as jewellery and elegant slippers. *Cleaning the Garden* (1998) is a multi media installation depicting the garden in the Alhambra (Spain) and of Harewood House (England). Once more colonisation is alluded to. The Alhambra was built by North African conquerors in Grenada. Harewood House's gardens designed by Capability Brown belonged to the British owner of a sugar plantation. *Red and Wet* is a series of photographs that depicts mosquitoes which carry malaria.

These previous works help to understand her later works and recurrent subjects of her work: former colonies, immigration and the sense of injustice related to it. An important issue is how the camera translates this concern with natural effects such as light, colours and textures.

Zarina Bhimji is exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery until the 9th March 2012

Victoria Mendrzyk is the founder of CATIL- Contemporary Art Tours in London (www.catil.co.uk) (<http://www.catil.co.uk/>)

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