

NOTES FROM THE MOTHERLAND

Haffendi Anuar, Marina Cruz, Richie Htet, Ruth Marbun,
Padma Rajendran, Nadia Waheed



December 16, 2021 - January 22, 2022

aicon CONTEMPORARY



NOTES FROM THE MOTHERLAND | HAFFENDI ANUAR, MARINA CRUZ,
RICHIE HTET, RUTH MARBUN, PADMA RAJENDRAN, NADIA WAHEED

“Much as I have no wish to hurt anyone’s feelings, my first obligation has not been to be nice but to be true to my perhaps peculiar memories, experiences and feelings.”

– Edward W. *Said, Out of Place*

Living in a globalized and connected world, many of us find ourselves drifting further away from our cultures and histories. These feelings are typically experienced by immigrants in a new country, but also by those finding their contemporary lives at conflict with the traditions of the past. We are perpetually negotiating between the elements of our culture to carry on and those to be left behind. The homeland becomes somewhat idealized, a fantasy characterized by projected desires, nostalgia -disappointment, and shame. The artists in the exhibition interrogate the histories and traditions that make us who we are, drawing from external elements present around us and looking inward.

The motherland is an improbable place; each individual’s perception of the homeland is personal and specific. It is not a static, concrete notion, but rather, it possesses an ever-evolving fluidity. Migration, the movement of people and their cultures, has persisted throughout history. Globalization, however, has interconnected geographic regions despite disparities in time and space. Ideas flow more freely between people around the globe, and boundaries are constantly shifting.

The continuation and embodiment of our heritage in an increasingly homogenized world is a theme considered by each artist. Through roots in South and Southeast Asia, the one unifying current is understanding and coming to terms with the postcolonial present. In the Global South, much of our self-understanding is derived from colonial sentiment. By exploring history through personal identity, these artists gain agency over the telling of these histories.

Each artist has taken a different approach to critique and interrogate the histories and traditions that make us who we are. For these artists, there are not overtly political statements to be made, but an emotional exploration that the self-representational tension is parsed out. Through grappling with clashing notions of sexuality, gender expression, religious practice, or a reconciliation of our contemporary lifestyles with those of previous generations, these artists carve out a home for themselves through their art.

Notes From The Motherland will be on view in the gallery from December 16th, 2021 - January 22nd, 2022, and online at AiconContemporary.com.

aicon CONTEMPORARY

Haffendi Anuar (Malaysian, b. 1985) explores the body through the kain pelikat, a sarong typically worn by men in Malaysia and also present through parts of Southeast and South Asia. The Kain Pelikat forms the basis of his work, solidifying ideas of memories and histories that characterize his work. His works present an amalgamation of themes of technology, regionality, progress, modernity, and nature.

Marina Cruz (Filipino, b. 1982) focuses on emotional vulnerabilities through metaphors of stains, folds, creases, and tears. She thinks of clothing as the nearest thing to the body and paints clothing as a way of remembering family narratives.

Richie Htet (Burmese, b. 1995) investigates themes related to identity, sexuality, and eroticism, drawing from his own experiences growing up in a conservative society. His figures draw from Burmese folklore and mythology, reimagining these characters to create a narrative about LGBTQ identity.

Ruth Marbun (Indonesian b. 1985) depicts highly emotive, deconstructed forms, through printmaking, painting, and sewing, to show her interest in human behavior in connection to the inner self and society. Her art draws from her memories and childhood, rooted in community.

Padma Rajendran (Malaysian b. 1985) delves into the after-effects of migration on interior and domestic life. Themes of prosperity and homecoming spring out from her works thus reflecting on the identity of immigrant women. Her incorporation of the decorative tie-dye technique of Batik, a technique popular in Malaysia, is also linked to this idea of performance- creating a home away from home.

Nadia Waheed (Pakistani American b. 1992) reflects on her role as a woman of color. Her works showcase colorful backgrounds of landscapes (representing the multidimensionality of womanhood), counterposed by the depiction of nude females, thus celebrating the female identity. Her paintings are semi-autobiographical and allegorical- exploring female selfhood, vulnerability, and cultural trauma.