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## RESIDENCY AT DE ATELIER'S IN AMSTERDAM

Young Indian artist Sarah Naqvi talks about the limitations of labels, her exploration of media and her current work at the De Ateliers Residency in the Netherlands.

by [Shraddha Najr](#) | Published on : Jul 07, 2020



"As a child, I was very restless, and if I could not go play with my friends in the building compound, I was given tasks at home to keep occupied, which led me to make things. Everything I could find I would make something out of but always by destroying it, that is something my parents always recall. The starting point would always be destruction". Sarah Naqvi's creative practice is a living, breathing reflection of the not-so-underlying rebellion of my generation. As a writer I have had the privilege of interviewing a number of artists from across the globe, at varying levels of seniority in their career. To examine and express my perspective on an artist who is a peer, a contemporary, a fellow fighter, is a different feeling altogether. Naqvi is an artist whose practice, not unlike others, develops beyond her canvas and is interlinked with sociopolitical currents. As a generation enabled by technological advantages, Naqvi's voice goes beyond performative virtue signaling on social media and flows into her art and actions.

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A peek into the studio of the young artist

*Image Credit: Sarah Naqvi*

Originally from Aligarh, Naqvi was raised in the suburbs of **Mumbai, India**. The self-taught artist studied design at the National Institute of Design and graduated in textile design. She shares, "Towards the end of my second year of design school, I started making work that was considered 'textile art' because it was harder to see the production value of it, or it being mass-produced, it was seen as art. There really wasn't space to do that kind of work within the framework of the course, because it was focused on all the elements to consider before things go into the market. It was then that I realised, maybe this (design) is not where I am meant to be because I had a strong feeling to create but not for markets but for people. I think that is where the turn happened towards art". Naqvi's first series, *A Woman's Work*, made waves when it found a place at Conflitorium, a museum in **Ahmedabad** a few years ago. The series of textile-based installations explored conversations around otherwise taboo themes such as menstruation, sex, and female sexuality.



Naqvi's handmade puppets and other paraphernalia at her studio

*Image Credit: Sarah Naqvi*

Embroidery and sewing are a skill she absorbed from her home environment, a habit her mother, grandmother and aunts shared. She says, "I recall them talking about their problems, or someone else's house while doing this because it was just muscle memory, you did not really have to focus and at the same time it was soothing to do. As a kid, I hated it but as I grew up, I found myself being drawn to it more and more. I did learn most of it from my mother and a lot on my own". Although the roots of her practice grew from textile, Naqvi's practice has bloomed in the recent years to explore various media including performance, **installation** and video. She elaborates, "Textiles and embroidery became the very first steps that I took to find my own language, and I think tactility is something that I have retained even as I explore

different mediums. I need to be able to feel, touch and communicate without words but also by those textures. Even in performance, videos and songs, I have tried to retain that element of touch. Also, right now, I find myself swaying into these different forms is also me just trying to break from the narratives I am used to. This is mainly because I do not feel comfortable being recognised as only a textile artist; even though it is my primary medium, I don't want to be limited by it. I think it is easy for people to label things for people to understand them better, but it can be suffocating to be labeled. As a person and an artist, I find it very detrimental to my growth and I see myself exploring these mediums

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as a scope to widen my reach and understand others and myself much better. Each medium helps me to explore my own boundaries and allows me to collaborate with others”.



Work in progress currently at De Ateliers, Amsterdam

*Image Credit: Sarah Naqvi*

While her creative process is rooted in the familiar narrative of personal experience, Naqvi recognises these oppressive cultural biases as pieces of a larger construct, a problem which pervades the lives of people everywhere. Most interesting to me is the concept of erasure as a recurring role in her work. Naqvi further discusses this overtone saying, “For me, ‘erasure’ is almost synonymous to reflection and reflecting on the histories we are taught and the experiences that we live. We are taught history in an almost one-dimensional manner because there are so many histories that have not seen the light of day. We are not being taught history in a just manner and many stories have been erased, especially the femme-narratives that we do not see in our day to day lives. There is a very biased sort of representation of femme and queer narratives. To be raised without access to this is very unjust because it deprives a young child of confidence and aspirational characters and leaders to look up to in both religious and political history. Hence, ‘erasure’ becomes an important key word that really helps me navigate myself, my own experience in this world and at the same time helps me empathise and understand others better”.



A textile-based installation part of *Shrine of Memories*, a series by Naqvi  
Image Credit: Sarah Naqvi

Naqvi is currently living and working at the De Ateliers Residency, [Amsterdam](#), for the period 2019-21. "At the residency, I feel really privileged and grateful to have so much space and be surrounded by so many different practitioners. Not only am I able to expand my practice in terms of medium and scale, but also my interactions with my fellow artists have helped me explore these different elements and spaces," says the young artist. "I am currently working in collaboration with Sophie Soobramanien and Hibotep, on a video work that is almost in a musical format. It explores the narratives I have encountered, while reading this book titled *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* by Fatima Mernissi. Here, we are trying to create a dream landscape in this video work, which explores these different femme-narratives and roles these women played: of leadership, political power, strategies used to come to power at a time when it was extremely rare to have actual political power. I am writing songs about female leadership within Islamic history and simultaneously creating masks and costumes that celebrate that side of history. It is the one we don't come across or encounter growing up and cannot seek inspiration from because it is not very accessible. Hopefully, it should be ready by October, in time to be shown at the biennale in [Bangkok](#)".



*Shrine of Memories* was part of *Inherited Memory*, an online exhibition curated by Tarq  
Image Credit: Sarah Naqvi

Sarah Naqvi's series *Shrine of Memories* was recently on display as part of an online exhibition titled *Inherited Memory*, curated by Mumbai-based gallery **Tarq**, which ended on June 26, 2020.



A portrait of the artist  
Image Credit: Sarah Naqvi

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### About Author



### Shraddha Nair

Nair is a writer and curator based in Bengaluru, India. Her curatorial practice is a method by which she negotiates with and navigates the complexities of human behaviour, an interest which flows into her writing as well. She believes that art and collective experience hold immense capacity in the cultivation and development of action and emotion.

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