

ARTFORUM

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Critic's Pick: Kanishka Raja

GREENBERG VAN DOREN GALLERY
730 Fifth Avenue
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The recent debate over whether a mosque should be built near Ground Zero and the plans of a Florida church to burn the Koran on the anniversary of 9/11 became global media events. In this context, Kanishka Raja's latest exhibition of a site-specific mural and new paintings that blend signifiers and artistic forms connected to the West and South Asia, and that are partially based on images culled from newspapers, is certainly topical. Drawing as much on Indian miniature painting and early pre-Renaissance notions of collapsing and compressing perspective, in this show the artist creates a geographic and temporal palimpsest, wherein what is "here" or "there" and "now" or "then" becomes confused. Instead of the airport—a staple of the artist's iconography—Raja opts for another signifier of liminality: water.

The triptych KR11, 2010, depicts a flooded domestic space that is not as uncanny as one might expect, given the deluge of media images in connection to Hurricane Katrina, the 2004 tsunami in South Asia, and the more recent flooding in Pakistan. Islamic geometric forms seamlessly morph into wires connected to stock-market trading machinery in the multipanel painting KR20, 2010, and into the foundational beams of a destroyed building in the triptych KR19, 2010. The latter is part of a larger scene of the aftermath of an unknown cataclysmic event that also appears in the stunning diptych KR9, 2009–10. Here, the optimism projected by soaring office buildings—one of which dematerializes into thin bands of primary color that appear to speed off the panel—is deflated by the barely discernible scenes of destruction the artist positions at the two vanishing points to which the perspectival lines of the central building lead the viewer's eye. One suspects, though, that the title of Raja's exhibition, "Against Integration," seems to indicate less a wholesale rejection of narratives of globalization than the perils of romanticizing a postidentity era in which the politics of difference is effectively relegated tout court to the past.

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