

Maryam Jafri
Matteo Cantarella (DK) | Booth 30

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For the past twenty years Maryam Jafri has worked across varied media including video, sculpture and photography, with a specific interest in questioning the cultural and visual representations of history and political economy and their impact on our quotidian experience. Her practice draws upon diverse traditions from literature and theater to pop and conceptual art.

The sculptural installation *Home Office ft. Angola, Iraq, Vietnam, Vicodin* (2021) consists of a computer workstation playing a video featuring in large part a televisual collage of ads from countries in the Global South. The video investigates consumer culture through a transnational lens, witnessing how it both shapes and is shaped by local conditions and local desires. As an example, one can find an Iraqi ad for an air conditioner by LG, a multi-national and South Korean-owned electronics brand. The computer is flanked by pharmaceutically-branded office supplies featuring logos of bestselling medications used to treat “diseases of affluence” such as diabetes, depression, heart disease, dementia etc. - conditions that are now epidemic worldwide. Unlike infectious diseases that affect the global poor, diseases of affluence are associated with increased wealth in a society.

Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (2025) is an ongoing series of works made from vintage computer keys and cardboard, where from afar the work spells one word but up close, another word comes into view. The series is named after the 1976 publication by Raymond Williams’ “Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society”, which mapped the evolution and meaning of over 100 words in the English language, highlighting their often complex and contested histories. As Williams made clear, language is not static but continues to evolve, a tendency turbocharged by social media. Taking her cue from Williams’ seminal work, Jafri posits language as a cultural material that reflects dominant values of society but which is also capable of transcending them and able to narrate those political, social and economic struggles that are genealogically validated and inscribed in our cultural imaginary. Like post-war concrete poetry, which emerged in part as a political and poetic response to the degradation of language under fascism, this series comes during a similar moment when language is under attack once again by online (and offline) reactionary forces, the aim being to render language meaningless, incapable of clarifying, explaining or illuminating, untethering language to any shared sense of reality or human agency.

The *Everyday Model* (2021) is a photo/text work centering on the phenomenon of “ordinary-looking” people who model for everyday consumer items. Arranged in clusters of framed images and texts, each cluster brings together different ads featuring the same model, often for competing or complementary products. By tracking the same individual across different ad campaigns, the disparate images compile a surreal visual archive of the self—one overlaid with corporate logos and advertising text. In their anticipation of emerging forms of subjectivity, one that is no longer solely performative but also branded, these images both point back to the era of mass media and forward to the rise of social media. Now everyone is an entrepreneur of their self, everyone has something to confess and someone to target, at least potentially.

Maryam Jafri’s work has been widely exhibited, including in solo exhibitions at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (US); Blaffer Museum of Art, Houston (US); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (NL); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (CH); Bétonsalon, Paris (FR); Gasworks, London (UK); Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus (DK); Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde (DK); Malmö Konstmuseum, Malmö (SE); Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (AU); Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (CA) and elsewhere. Recent biennials include Front International (Cleveland Triennial), São Paulo Biennial, Venice Biennale (Belgian Pavilion), Manifesta 9, and the biennials of Shanghai, Taipei, Bucharest, Thessaloniki, and Québec City, among others.