

Naeem Mohaiemen

The Young Man Was (contd.)

August 9 – September 27

Since 2006, Naeem Mohaiemen has worked on a history of the 1970s radical left, through the prism of Bangladesh's particular experience of these movements, while also spilling out into related movements in Germany, Japan, and the Middle East. The project has been described as "engagements with a revolutionary past meaningful in the sudden eruption of a revolutionary present" (Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Bidoun*). Some chapters were shown as *The Young Man Was (a few chapters)* at Experimenter in 2011. In that installment, the 1975 assassination of Sheikh Mujib (*I Have Killed...*) and the 1977 hijack of Japan Airlines to Dhaka (*United Red Army*), served as bookends for the many ruptures of that era.

Several new chapters, on view in this show, move further backward in time, starting with the rumored CIA links to the 1975 assassination (*Red Ant Motherchod, Meet Starfish Nation*, photographs), moving to the 1974 anti-Maoist manhunts (*Afsan's Long Day*, film, 40'), and then a global compact for military-led "stability" in response to left uprisings (*The Year 1973 Created Many Problems for Imperialists*, photographs). The final segment of this exhibition winds the chronology back to 1971, recreating of a site-specific installation *We The Living, We The Dead*, which looks at the targeting of Hindu intellectuals during the war. The project draws from Humayun Azad, one of several post-1971 anti-establishment writers whom Naeem refers to repeatedly in his work. Azad's angry challenge, "*Amra Ki Ey Bangladesh Cheyechilam?*", is an anchor for many of Naeem's political sentiments.

Each chapter on display here first appeared in smaller forms at other venues. In pulling them together to form a larger whole, *The Young Man Was* builds new connections that were not initially visible, even to Naeem himself. For example, the meaning of *Red Ant's* insistence on the "must" of CIA rumors had one significance in 2009 when it was exhibited at Dhaka's Asiatic Society (curated by Prof. Nisar Hossain of Dhaka University). At a distance of five years, and after the schism of 2013's "Shahbag Movement," an insistence on verifiability within Bangladesh history are now received with a much more skeptical eye. Similarly, the photographs of *The Year 1973* acquire a different shade when paired with a viewing of Mel Chin's animated film *9-11/9-11* (<http://bit.ly/1safJeg>), which reminds us of other anniversaries, other times.

The set of chapters that make up *The Young Man Was*, as well as other work that looks at the years 1947-1970, were brought together for a survey show, *Prisoners of Shothik Itihash*, at Kunsthalle Basel this summer. The phrase "shothik itihash (correct history)" was used by Naeem ironically in a newspaper editorial, to indicate and indict the relentless, suffocating pressure to produce a state-sanctioned, power-pleasing, official history.

Naeem Mohaiemen works in Dhaka and New York, using combinations of essays, photography, film, and mixed media to research borders, wars, and belonging. Vijay Prashad described the projects as "not yet disillusioned fully with the capacity of human society" (*Take on Art*). Projects have shown at venues in Bangladesh, including Gallery Chitrak, Shilpakala Academy, Chittagong Film Center, and Dhaka Art Summit. Works have also shown at Museum of Modern Art (New York), Sharjah Biennial, Kiran Nadar Museum (Noida), etc. Mohaiemen's work is in the permanent collections of the British Museum and the Tate Modern. Essays have been published in *Sun Never Sets: South Asian Migrants in an Age of US Global Power* (NYU), *Lines of Control: Partition as Productive Space* (Johnson Museum), *Visual Culture Reader, 3rd ed.* (Routledge), *Sound Unbound* (MIT Press), *Granta* (Pakistan Issue), *Rethinking Marxism*, etc. Naeem is also a Ph.D. student in Historical Anthropology at Columbia University.