

MASS MoCA

Osman Khan: *Road to Hybridabad* brings fantastical encounters with technology in a contemporary context of *The Thousand and One Nights* to MASS MoCA

Osman Khan: Road to Hybridabad is on view August 24, 2024 - March 2025

North Adams, January 17, 2024 – Opening on August 24, 2024, MASS MoCA presents Osman Khan: *Road to Hybridabad*, the first solo museum exhibition by the Detroit-based artist of a new body of multimedia works. The show will be on view in Building 4, first floor, through March 2025.

In *Road to Hybridabad*, Khan re-reads the magical and fantastical figures found in folktales and lore, with a particular focus on those from South Asia, the Middle East, and other Muslim and immigrant traditions. Khan interprets these figures through contemporary technologies through a new body of work that includes a ten foot tall animatronic djinn head, a forest of telephone poles with djinns atop them, drone-powered flying carpets, a boundary wall-destroying sound system, a fountain of endlessly flowing honey, and a robot-like sculpture that is in fact a storytelling “Scheherazade AI.” This last work references a legendary young woman who told stories to a king for a thousand and one nights, ending each tale on a cliffhanger until the following evening in order to delay her execution.

The sprawling exhibition invites visitors on a journey across borders, through time, and between legend and history, encouraging reconsideration and rewriting of narratives around identity, difference, and power reflected in the tales we tell ourselves. It draws in part on tales that make up *The Thousand and One Nights* (often known in English as the *Arabian Nights*) which have many authors, and have shifted with each retelling as they are adapted to new historical and cultural contexts. Khan encourages a re-reading of the fantastical elements of such folk narratives not as superstitious and fanciful, but as aspirational applied technologies.

“*Road to Hybridabad* reflects Khan’s own particular experience of identity formation, which, like *The Thousand and One Nights*, has been influenced by many histories and cultures—blending American, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim lores and visual references,” notes MASS MoCA Curator Alexandra Foradas. “His work brilliantly layers legend, history, and contemporary technologies, employing what he calls ‘active hybridity’ to disrupt the aesthetics and logics that support and reproduce dominant power systems. Khan has built on these themes over the course of his years-long relationship with MASS MoCA – from his 2018 residency at The Studios at MASS MoCA (managed by Assets for Artists), to his commissioned installation in the

2020 group exhibition *Kissing through a Curtain*, to now a solo exhibition with *Road to Hybridabad*.”

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors are invited to answer a riddle asked by the immense animatronic djinn in order to gain access to its inner sanctum: an allegory for the possibility that learning and knowledge are still the keys to accessing coveted information. In the adjacent “Re-Reading Room,” audiences can hear stories from the robot-like form of Khan’s Scheherezade, an AI trained on contemporary immigrant narratives and traditional folktales. Through these interactive, immersive installations, *Road to Hybridabad* posits a connection between legendary tales and technology as opportunities for delight, and as conversational partners through which histories and identities can be re-read and even re-written as we migrate through the world.

About the Artist:

Osman Khan (b. 1973, Pakistan, Detroit-based) is currently a Professor at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan. Khan’s work has been shown at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA); the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MoCAD); the Cuenca Biennale, Ecuador; the Chicago Architecture Biennale, USA; the Shanghai Biennale, China; the Zero1 Festival, San Jose; Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; Ars Electronica Center, Linz; Socrates Sculpture Park, NYC; Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids; Centro Internazionale per l’Arte Contemporanea, Rome; among others. He is a recipient of a 2020 Guggenheim Fellowship, an Art Matters grant, Ars Electronica’s Prix Ars Award of Distinction, and an Arctic Circle 2009 Residency. In addition to his artistic practice, Khan is also Co-Director of the Indus Detroit Artist Residency + Culture Lab, co-curator of Halal Metropolis, a series of exhibitions and programs exploring Muslim identity in southeast Michigan, and a member of the cosmic jazz group the Astro Mystic Sama Ensemble.

About MASS MoCA

In May 2024, MASS MoCA will celebrate its 25th anniversary under its new Director, Kristy Edmunds, not only as a contemporary art museum and performing arts venue, but also as a creative campus with a regional, national and global impact. MASS MoCA is one of the world’s liveliest centers for making and enjoying today’s most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. From its beginnings as the major textile mill Arnold Print Works in the mid-19th century, to its days as the Sprague Electric Company in the mid-20th century, to its current iteration as a globally renowned contemporary art museum and fabrication center, the 16-acre MASS MoCA campus has a rich history of serving as the economic engine of the city of North Adams and the surrounding region. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit www.massmoca.org or follow us on Instagram at @massmoca.

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