

Zarina Bhimji

‘My work is not about the actual facts but about the echo they create, the marks, the gestures and the sound. This is what excites me.’

Zarina Bhimji

Landscapes and buildings bearing the traces of time are the protagonists in British artist **Zarina Bhimji**’s poetic photographs and large-scale film installations. Devoid of any human presence they are intentionally open-ended and ambiguous.

This first major survey exhibition traces 25 years of Bhimji’s career. It opens with two seascapes taken in Zanzibar and a selection of images from the *Love* series (1998–2007), which were shot in Uganda. The photographs are grounded in meticulous research but, like much of Bhimji’s work, are distanced from historic and political specificity. The premiere of *Yellow Patch* (2011), Bhimji’s ambitious new film shot on location in India, takes centre stage in Gallery 1.

This is complemented by the artist’s debut film *Out of Blue* (2002), an arresting visual journey across Uganda, which is on view in Gallery 8 upstairs. Two early commissions are presented together here for the first time: *She Loved to Breathe - Pure Silence* (1987), an installation of photographs suspended from the ceiling above a field of spices, and *Cleaning the Garden* (1998) which is made up from photographs, light boxes and mirrors.

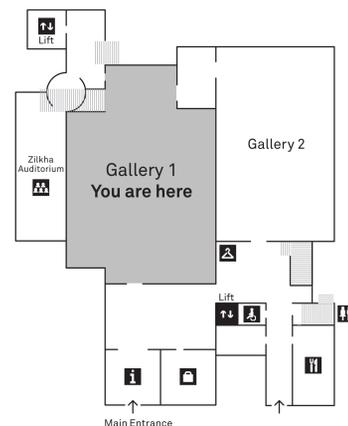
Zarina Bhimji was born in Mbarara, Uganda in 1963 to Indian parents, and moved to Britain in 1974, two years after the expulsion of Uganda’s Asian community under the dictatorship of Idi Amin. She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2007.

A fully illustrated catalogue including an interview with the artist and an essay by art historian T.J. Demos is available from the bookshop at a special exhibition price of £19.95.

A limited edition photographic print by the artist on is available from the Information Desk.

Find out more about talks and events at whitechapelgallery.org.

Zarina Bhimji is organised by the Whitechapel Gallery, London in collaboration with Kunstmuseum Bern.



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Having been in development for several years, this is the world premiere of Bhimji's new film, *Yellow Patch* (2011).

The history of trade and migration between India and Africa provides the starting point for Bhimji's most recent project. *Yellow Patch* is filmed in four main locations across the Indian sub-continent: the old Victorian offices in the Port Trust of Mumbai, the desert landscape of the Great Rann of Kutch on the border between India and Pakistan, the Indian Ocean near the port of Mandvi, and various houses and structures in the North-Western region of Gujarat.

The film is the result of prolonged and extensive research. However, Bhimji addresses her various locations with a purposefully painterly approach. Common objects, for instance, are treated like still lifes with colour a primary concern. The artist relinquishes precise information and factual presentation in favour of highlighting the aesthetic qualities and poetic potential of each image. As much as for the traces of history it carries, each location was chosen for its distinct quality of light, the details of its architecture and the particular character of the landscape.

Sumptuous images of buildings, sea and landscapes are accompanied by an independently developed soundtrack that evokes impressions of dread, loss, passion, love and tenderness. Like all of Bhimji's films, *Yellow Patch* is preceded by a lengthy process of research including reconnaissance trips to identify suitable locations for filming. Photographic storyboards and other research materials on display here provide a rare insight into this part of Bhimji's working method.

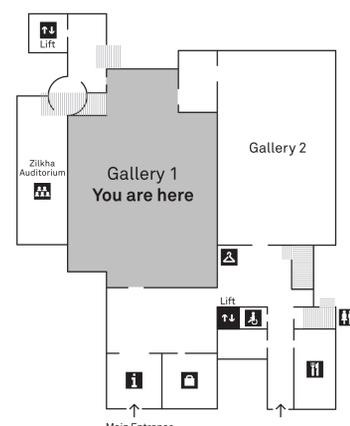
Yellow Patch was co-funded by Outset Contemporary Art Fund, de Appel arts centre and The New Art Gallery Walsall with executive producers Artsadmin. Additional support was provided from Arts Council England, Framestore and individual donors.

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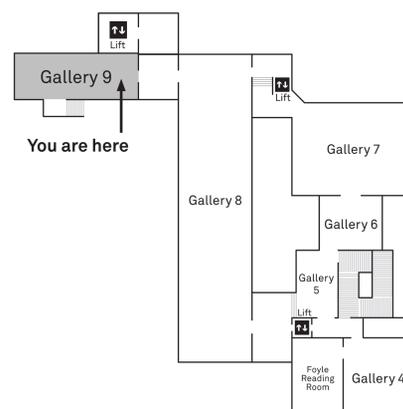
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This gallery is dedicated to one of Bhimji's earlier installations, *Cleaning the Garden* (1998), which focuses on formal garden traditions in Britain and Spain.

This installation of lightboxes, photographic prints and mirrors engraved with historic texts considers the hidden politics at play within two different types of gardens.

The first shows the grounds of Harewood House, an opulent 18th century stately home near Leeds with gardens designed by renowned landscape architect Capability Brown. The house was commissioned by the Lascelles family, who owned West Indian sugar plantations that were worked to great profit with the forced labour of slaves. A series of mirrors etched with the wording of 18th century newspaper advertisements for servants and run-aways reflects this history.

These images from Harewood House are contrasted with others from the Islamic gardens of the Alhambra in Spain, a palace and fortress built in the 14th century by the North African rulers of what was then the Emirate of Granada. The images capture various landscapes from both sites honing in on details such as pomegranates, pollen, furniture, saffron, chiffon and pubic hair. The resulting series is a dual investigation of the ways in which systems of power imprint themselves on nature as well as the relationship between sexuality and power.



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The installation *She Loved to Breathe - Pure Silence* (1987) and a group of photographs from 1989 are the earliest works in the exhibition.

She Loved to Breathe - Pure Silence refers to the Home Office's controversial practice of forcing South Asian women arriving at Heathrow airport in the 1970s to submit to virginity tests. These tests were to determine whether the women were allowed to enter the UK on grounds of marriage. Following a legal challenge by an Indian woman, it was established that such tests were unlawful.

For the installation, Bhimji combines photographs with texts printed on muslin and a field of chilli and turmeric, two spices widely used in cooking. Turning flat photographs into a three-dimensional installation, the spice field adds a moment of performance.

Untitled (1989) is the outcome of a two-day residency at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Using a rare Polaroid Corporation large-format camera, the images focus on the museum's high Victorian architecture including the lavish Gamble Room, in which ornate mirrors extol the values of Truth and marble statues embody late 19th century ideals of Beauty.

The more recent series *Red and Wet* (2000–11) is rooted in research into the spread of malaria. Bhimji follows the link between laboratory work conducted in London and fieldwork in Africa to evoke notions of fever, passion and love as well alluding to the cultural and political ramifications of the disease.

