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Project Title: Beyond the Nation: Rasheed Araeen, Bani Abidi, Hamra Abbas, and the Art of Migration

When London-based Pakistani artist Rasheed Araeen erected a series of billboards across London, the United States, and Germany in 1990, the work was met with violent results. In Cleveland, it was burned down; in London, the National Front vandalized it, writing: "What's It All About, Bongo?"; and in Germany, it was attacked by neo-Nazis and defaced with a swastika. In still other places, it was attacked with metal instruments and grafitted in Urdu saying 'white peoples are bastards.' Each identical billboard consisted of an Oriental rug with Urdu script across the center. When translated it read: "White people are very good people. They have very white and soft skin. Their hair is golden and their eyes are blue. Their civilization is the best civilization. In their countries they live life with love and affection. And there is no racial discrimination whatsoever. White people are very good people." It is my contention that Araeen's billboards, by acting as a provocation, helped to expose the very limits of national identity. Araeen's western viewers were caught in a liminal space of dis-location and called upon to identify with the displaced and marginalized other. Meanwhile, the very discourse that served to create this marginalized other was reified. Araeen plays with stereotypes of identity and culture that have pervaded colonial thought for centuries, ultimately confronting their illusory nature and questioning the implications of these assumed social hierarchies. In this dissertation, I argue that the figure of the migrant facilitates a reconsideration of traditional art historical boundaries. Rasheed Araeen, among the first generation of post-independent Pakistan migrant artists, opens up a space for successive Pakistani artists. By focusing on the work of Araeen, Bani Abidi, and Hamra Abbas, I investigate art that intervenes in a number of critical contexts. These artists work together to perform a number of interventions that address inequalities felt politically, socially, and art historically. Their work serves to question the nation, the role of the migrant in the global world, and the Eurocentric "production" of art history. The artists of this dissertation work to disrupt hegemonic narratives and expose

the fallacy behind neoliberal ideas of globalization.