

**Victory over Tyranny**  
**Mariah Lookman**  
**An Exhibition with a Shift and Partial Substitutions**  
**Curated by Daniel Kurjaković****INDEX:**

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Mariah Lookman, *Freedom by God's blessing restored* (still), 2015, video collage, colour, sound, 10:05, loop

**Exhibition: March 5, – May 12, 2016**

**Artist talk: March 9, 2016, 6pm**

**Part 1:**

**Opening: Friday, March 4, 2016, 6:30pm**

**March 5 – April 2, 2016**

**Part 2:**

**Opening: Thursday, April 7, 2016, 6:30pm**

**April 8 – May 12, 2016**

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## Press text

For the exhibition *Victory over Tyranny* Pakistani artist Mariah Lookman delves into iconographies of violence. Her exhibition – featuring entirely new works made, for instance, of video collages, disused bank notes, an artist book or an embroidered shawl – examines historical and current representations of war and violence as well as forms of resistance. The works touch upon seemingly divergent aspects and topics such as ‘The Great Seal of England, 1648,’ American President Harry Truman’s announcement of the Bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, or contemporary video games. While immersive and at times confrontational, the exhibition also encompasses poetic and analytical facets, enabling viewers to explore ethical questions related for example, to states of exception in warfare as discussed in the works of Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, or Carl Schmitt.

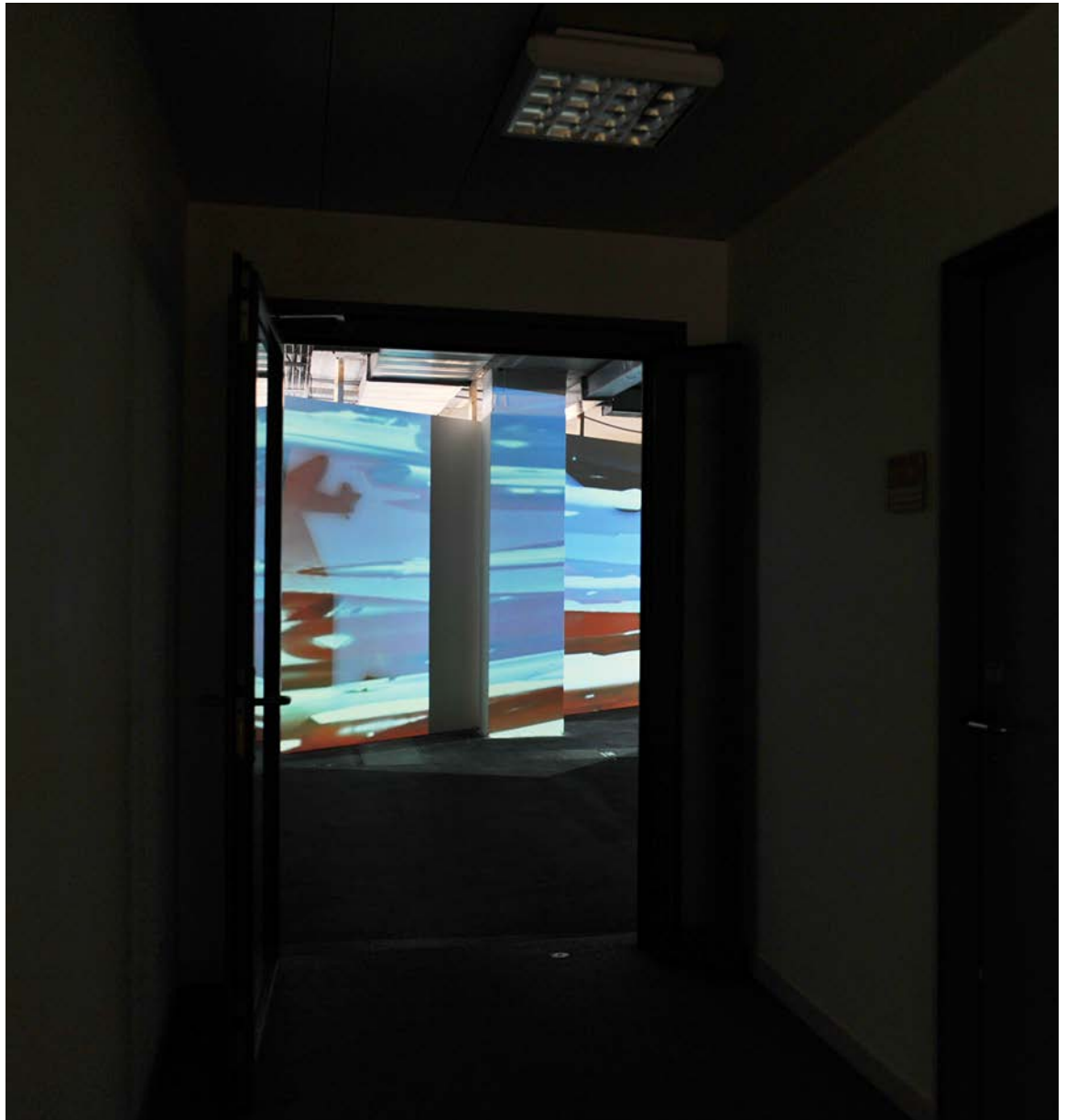
In conceiving the works Mariah Lookman has activated a wide ensemble of references, ranging from military documents, vernacular materials on war, conflict, and violence, or historical works of other artists and poets. She has gathered thematically relevant audio and video footage from the Web to create collages of sound and moving images. These allow the viewer to examine the different aspects of the representation of power, military and the other that all share in common some aspect of the timeless theme of the virtuous versus the evil. A central question concerns how media transmit, reproduce, and alter the imagery of violence, and the kinds of information and effects implied by it. In her work, the artist rearranges and re-contextualizes the various materials at the base of her research in order to recalibrate seemingly unrelated materials within a field of simultaneous politico-ethical relevancy. Lookman herself has stated: “When we gaze at these images [of war, weapons and violence] with an often unacknowledged sense of wonder, does the distance created by the media continually shift the violence that accompanies technological accomplishment into the distant realm of sublime? What kind of geometries and spaces do these images create? And why can’t I stop watching?”

The overall, two-part exhibition includes three video works, objects, collages, prints, and an artist book. The exhibition will be shifted by early April entailing the partial substitution of works with new ones. This shift will reconfigure the works’ relationships, create alternative aesthetic constellations and reorient the visitor’s experiences in space. The artist will also present a new twin-set of editions entitled *Lale/Lori*: “Lale”, meaning ‘poppy’ or ‘red’ in Urdu, or ‘wild-lily-of-the-mountains’ in Persian, and “Lori” designating a lullaby both in Urdu and Persian. For the second part Lookman will present a new edition entitled *Red Eagle*.

Text by Daniel Kurjaković

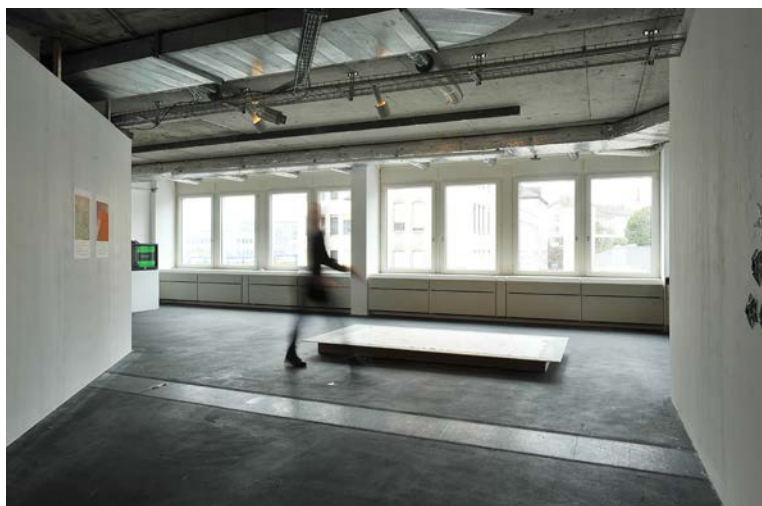
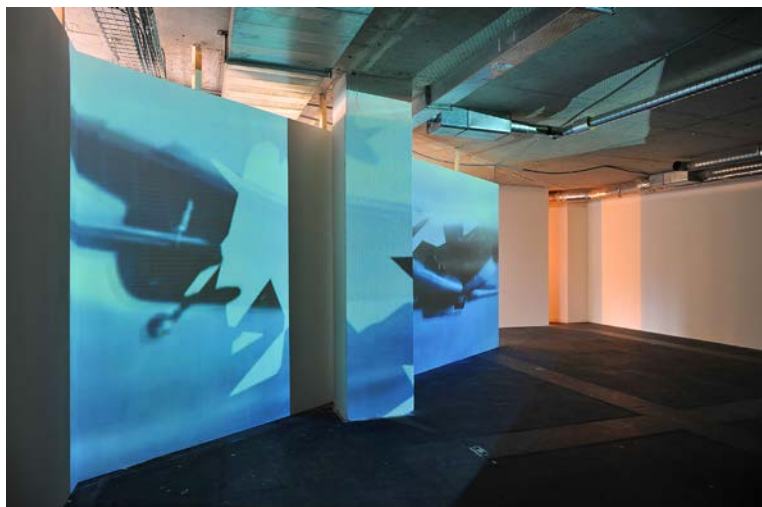
**Images: Part 1**

Image credits for all exhibition shots: Exhibition "Mariah Lookman - Victory over Tyranny (An Exhibition with a Shift and Partial Substitutions)", curated by Daniel Kurjaković, Counter Space Zurich, 2016. Photo: Kurt Daetwyler © 2016, post-production: Tashi Brauen. Credit for stills and details: Courtesy of Mariah Lookman, Copyright © 2016



Mariah Lookman, *Freedom by God's blessing restored*, 2015, installation view, video collage, colour, sound, 10:05, loop

**Images: Part 1**



**Images: Part 1**



*Freedom by God's blessing restored*, 2015, video collage, colour, sound, 10:05, loop



Left: *Freedom by God's blessing restored*, 2015, video collage, colour, sound, 10:05, loop  
Right: *Riaet, Sand*, 2016, disused (demonetized) Pakistani bank notes, folded, installation dimension variable

**Images: Part 1**



*Riaet, Sand, 2016, disused (demonetized) Pakistani bank notes, folded, installation dimension variable*



*Riaet, Sand (detail), 2016*

**Images: Part 1**



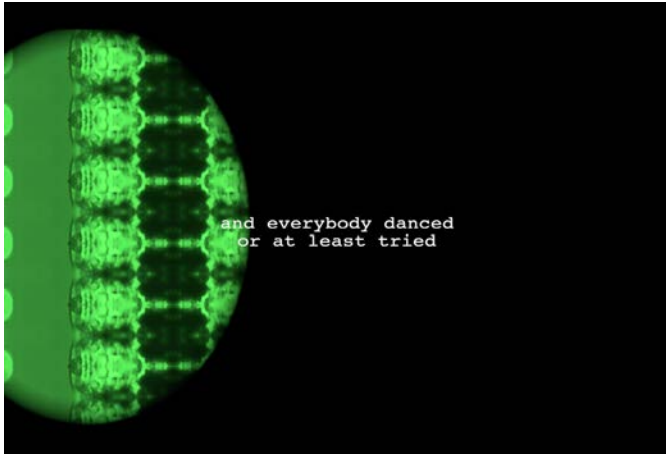
Front: *Cover*, 2016, textile drawing on woolen shawl with embroidery, 130 cm x 257 cm  
Left: *Riaet, Sand*, 2016  
Right: *Lale/Lori*, 2016, Fine Art inkjet on Awagami Mitsumata 45gsm, 42 x 60 cm each



*Lale/Lori*, 2016



*Night Song*, 2015, video and sound collage, colour, 09:15, loop



*Night Song* (still), 2015



*Night Song* (still), 2015



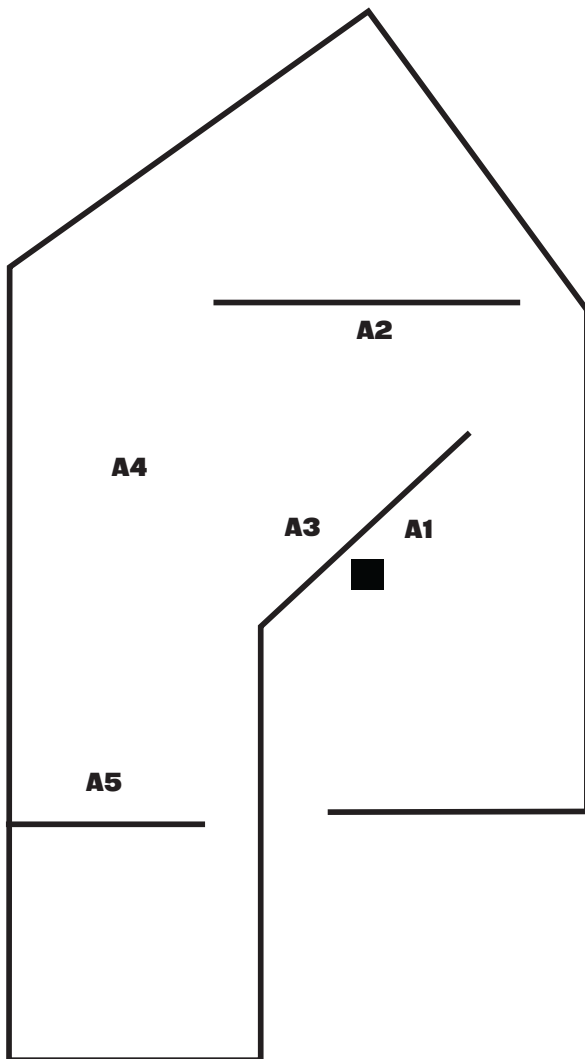
*Cover*, 2016, textile drawing on woolen shawl with embroidery (at the workshop)



*Cover* (detail), 2016



Exhibition map: Part 1, March 5 – April 2, 2016



**A1**

[Freedom by God's blessing restored](#), 2015

Video collage, colour, sound, 10:05, loop

Found World War II vintage film footage gathered from online open platform sources, with Harry Truman's August 6th 1945 speech\*.

**A2**

[Riaet, Sand](#), 2016

Disused (demonetized) Pakistani bank notes, folded, installation dimension variable, 36 pieces + 1 pieces

**A3**

[Lale/Lori](#), 2016

Artist edition, double edition set, Fine Art inkjet on Awagami Mitsumata 45gsm, 42 x 60 cm each

**A4**

[Cover](#), 2016

Textile drawing on woolen shawl with silk embroidery, 130 cm x 257 cm

**A5**

[Night Song](#), 2015

Video and sound collage, colour, 09:15, loop

**\*Harry Truman's August 6th 1945 speech (on board the USS Augusta, mid-Atlantic):**

"A short-time ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima and destroyed its usefulness to the enemy. That bomb has more power than 20 thousand tons of TNT. The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid manifold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb, we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form, these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development. It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the Universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.

We are now prepared to destroy more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have

in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories and their communications. Let there be no mistake we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war.

It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July the 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms, they may expect a rain of ruin from the air the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen. And with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware.

We have spent more than 2 billion dollars on the greatest scientific gamble in history and we have won. But the greatest marvel is not the size of the enterprise its secrecy or its cost. But the achievement of the scientific brains in making it work. And hardly less marvelous has been the capacity of industry to design and of labor to operate the machines and methods to do things never done before. Both science and industry work together under the direction of the United States army which achieved a unique success in an amazingly short time. It is doubtful if such another combination could be got together in the world. But has been is the greatest achievement of organized science in history."

## Notes on works

(texts by Daniel Kurjaković based on conversations with the artist)

### *Freedom by God's Blessing Restored*, 2015

Video collage, colour, sound, 10:05, loop

What takes center stage in this immersive video collage is a confrontational look at how 'hitting', 'smashing', or 'breaking' are made visually attractive. By using both fast-cut montage style editing of heterogeneous visual materials as well as a layered sound track, the work builds upon the fact that war operations are increasingly mediatized through diverging sets of 'production contexts', all of which are involved in the many kinds of representations of war. Stealth bombers are fitted with cameras and soldiers upload video footage that routinely enters the web via sites such as LiveLeak. Similarly, material declassified by military makes its way to the web via military library sources for example that then is shared widely via uploads onto popular video sharing sites such as YouTube.

However, despite the ability of the image 'to bring war closer', the very nature of the image (film, photo, video, newspaper, radio) does less so bring a "reality" of war home, and rather feeds into the political manipulation of peoples through – visually informed – techniques of fear and paranoia, thereby 'looping back' into the 'war/military/arms manufacturing-complex'.

In this work, the artist has specifically used archival footage from WWII to question if indeed wars can be won; a central reference being Harry Truman's announcement of the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. (See page 8)

\*

### *Riaet, Sand*, 2016

Disused (demonetized) Pakistani bank notes, folded, installation dimension variable, 36 + 1 pieces

In this 2-part work, the 500, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 2 rupee Pakistani bank notes have been reconfigured to link the association of monetary spending, and the army. Ironically, 3.4% of Pakistan's GDP is spent on "Defense", and in most instances what is acquired are forms of obsolete technology, and roughly only 0.34% is spent on education. At the same time, Pakistan is also a country with steadily declining living standards. Moreover, just as conventional warfare is fast becoming obsolete, the Government of Pakistan routinely prints "new" money to flush out counterfeit money allegedly used for funding "terrorism" locally.

On a conceptual level, even as the form of the stars refer to the badges and insignia on military uniforms and flags, it is used by the artist as a provocation to think about the unstable network of relations masked by grand nationalist narratives mixed in the imaginings with glories of warfare. The works – here arranged in the form of a polyhedron or 'pyramid' – allow for reconfigurations of their geometric shapes.

\*

### *Cover*, 2016

Textile drawing

Woolen shawl with silk embroidery, 130 cm x 257 cm

The particular shawl in this textile drawing is an ordinary model, used both by men and women. It can typically serve multiple purposes: it is worn as a cover or a wrap, or as a scarf for protection against heat and cold weather depending on the material used. Its

cultural significations can vary and straddle a diverse range of meanings such as; shield, a mark of honour, designation of a caste or tribe, and symbolically attributed to pride, dignity, and wealth. In the tradition and spirit of War Carpets, the artist thinks of this work as her resistance piece. The making is collaboration between the artist and a master embroiderer; wool with silk thread and the airplane motifs are derived from AirFix Magazine editions 1969-1975.

\*

*Night Song, 2015*

Video installation, 2 Sony PVM monitors

Video and sound collage, colour, 09:15, loop

The video, double-screened on two iconic monitors, echo each other in a slightly a-synchronic manner. Inspired by war films, and by Hannah Arendt's observation that the justification of acts of aggression during war are less to do with binary divisions – such as good and evil, good guys versus bad guys – being mere diversions commonly used to rationalize military atrocities. They are but to do with the condition of military training; to blindly follow orders kindled by notions of loyalty or duty are in fact a condition of “not thinking” that is explored in this work as an insight into otherwise mindless perpetuation of war related violence into the twenty-first century. The found footage has been doctored using mirroring techniques, the sound has been composed using sound samples from Freesound.org and the artist has written the text for the ‘narrative’ of this work.

\*

*Lale'/Lori, 2016*

Artist edition

Double edition set, Inkjet Fine Art on Awagami Mitsumata 45gsm, 42 x 60 cm each

Screens and text developed out of video collage *Lale'/Lori, 2015* and gaming session Squad.

## Bios

**Mariah Lookman** is a Pakistani artist and researcher. Her works cover a range of media rooted in drawing and painting. Her participation in museum shows include the group exhibitions In-Site at the Ashmolean Museum (2012) and Ruskin Shorts (2013 at Modern Art Oxford). Her research interests are art and the history of ideas with special focus on scientific ideas/inventions and the political. Mariah Lookman has a B.F.A. from the National College of Arts, Lahore, a M.A. from the Slade School of Fine Art, and a D.Phil. from the Ruskin School of Art. She lives and works between Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Current work in progress involves setting up an artist's residency with an interdisciplinary and multi-format publication called "Art South Asia" (ASA). With residency locations in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India, the first ASA project (2016-18) looks east towards China, along the Silk route (land and sea) as vital to the exchange of ideas that have had a forming influence on the syncretic philosophies and cultures of both South and East Asia. Mariah Lookman is the Independent Researcher for Pakistan Projects, Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.

For the first time, Counter Space invites a guest curator, **Daniel Kurjaković**, based in Paris and Zurich, to realize an exhibition. Recent projects by Kurjaković include the transnational film program Cinéphémère for FIAC 2015, or the third issue of *Torrent* – Magazine for Source Material by Artists, which Kurjaković also founded. Concurrently with the exhibition by Mariah Lookman, Kurjaković presently is working on the inter-institutional project De-Neutralize – Global Stories from Zurich, with the publication due to be released in late May 2016. It unites newly commissioned contributions by some thirty artists, writers and historians. The project, initiated by Kurjaković, is a cooperation between the Chair for History of the Modern World/ETH Zurich, the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich, and both the Fine Arts Department (VBK) and the Institute for Contemporary Arts Research (IFCAR) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Kurjaković is a researcher, critic and longtime lecturer at the Zurich University of the Arts. In 2015-16 he has lectured at Bibliothèque Kandinsky Paris, École supérieure d'art de Grenoble, Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich as well as the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts Paris (upcoming).

**Counter Space** is an independent exhibition space in Zurich publicly supported by Stadt Zürich Kultur, Fachstelle Kultur Kanton Zürich and Migros Kulturprozent.

It aims to present the use of temporary and process-like methods in artistic work. The programme is curated by Angelo Romano, Linda Jensen and Tashi Brauen; Yasmin Kiss (Research and text); Vicenta Rodrigo-Jiménez (Administration).



Kanton Zürich  
 Fachstelle Kultur

Mathis Tinner

MIGROS  
 kulturprozent

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