

UC Berkeley

Section II: Women in Academic Disciplines - Humanities

Title

Professor Azma Kazmi, World's Reality through Art

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3288h3bv>

Authors

Kazmi, Azma

Shaad, Manaal

Publication Date

2025-01-13

Spring 2021

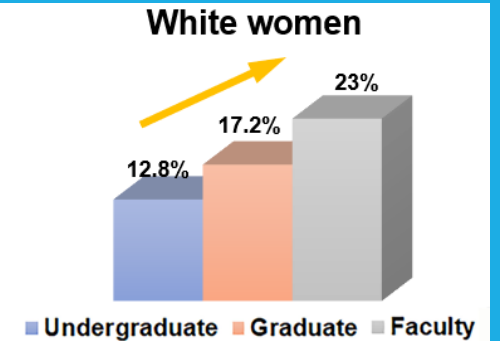
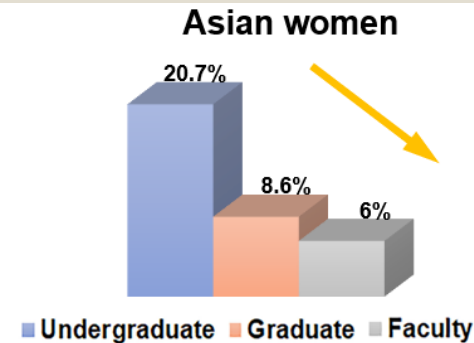
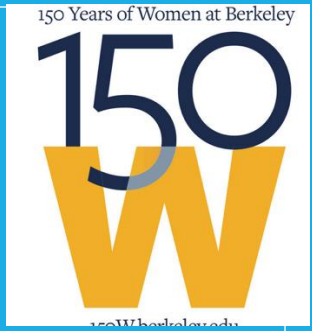
WORLD'S REALITY BY ASMA KAZMI THROUGH ART

PROJECT: HISTORY OF ASIAN WOMEN AT BERKELEY

BY: Manaal Shaad
3rd year Molecular Environmental Biology major

Project Description

- Interviews have been conducted to understand the phenomena of decreasing representation of Asian American Women in the Academia field compared to other demographic groups i.e., White women and Asian men.



Introduction and Background

Professor Kazmi was born in a middle-class family in Karachi, Pakistan, Both her parents pursued career in Medicine, she felt obliged to do the same, but her passion and joy lies in seeing the world through art. She moved to America when she was 19 years old to pursue her Bachelors' degree in Arts in Boston, and later received her graduate degree from School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

She practices art across media, as well as teaches Arts at UC Berkeley. She also has a joint appointment with Berkeley Center for New Media. Her artwork is not limited to just human form, but it covers vast variety of important sociopolitical topics, i.e., Religion: Islam, Race, Gender and much more.

While initially concerned about the conflict between Islamic teachings and her career choice, her parents have become her biggest support and understands her passion and joy after her 30 years engagement in the field of Arts



Asma Kazmi
Assistant Professor
since 2016

Website:
<https://asmakazmi.com/home.html>



Arts and Academia go hand-in-hand



While pursuing an academic career, she work on her own art projects.

She said, “ Teaching becomes an extension of my intellectual curiosity”. She gains inspiration in creating art when working with her students inside and outside of classroom setting. Being in the academia field allows her to share her experience and knowledge to her students in a fun way. She at times bases her course around new materials which allows her to share her perspective.

“Art is central to who we are.” Visual arts are Professor Kazmi’s creative center and often requires assistance . This creates an opportunity for Professor Kazmi’s Graduate and Undergraduate students to learn from her outside of the classroom setting that creates an inclusive environment.



The picture has been taken from “Pollinated City at the Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture, Shenzhen, China” Project

Biases and Stereotyping in Arts and Academia

“This video triptych offers moments of devotional interaction between two bodies: human and fruit. Shot in Mecca and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia at the confluence of the Red Sea, the work asks questions about trade routes, global flows of migrant laborers, memorialization of demolished structures, and the visual aesthetics of growth and decay in urban environments.”- Kazmi



To create different art projects, Professor Kazmi has travelled around the world, including Pakistan, India, China, Saudi Arabia and many more.

“ I have seen different sets of issues at play all over the world.”

In China her “description”, her message for her projects got changed to fit in an apolitical point of view.

In Saudi Arabia, there is “prejudice towards Asian Women”. Prof. Kazmi doesn’t usually reveal her Pakistani identity. When she does, she has felt a change in behavior. “It comes as a surprise to people to find that I am Pakistani”.

*I have no rights to the following pictures. Source:
<https://asmakazmi.com/home.html>

Xenophobia and Arts

United States has also shown censorship issues despite being a multicultural country. Professor Kazmi said that

Islamophobia and Xenophobia has been a huge part of American Culture. Currently, hate crimes can be seen, especially rampant towards Asian Americans due to false relations between Chinese and COVID-19.

Professor Kazmi covers sociopolitical, including but not limited to religion, gender, socio-economic related issues, and much more. She covered Islam by displaying pictures of “Qurbani”, a holy sacrifice of an herbivore. She also whitewashed and drew Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) as a teacher, a preacher. Major art venues returned her artwork, even though they knew that her work covered paintings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in different leadership roles. When her art was sent back to her from the venues, she had to produce a quick plan B for her display.

She said, “...it was as if they were trying to save the Muslim community from me”. They told her that pictures of Prophet Muhammad doesn’t exist, but it is not true. There have been multiple locations and events where Prophet Muhammad was displayed in murals, paintings, drawing, and other art works in Iran and other Muslim counties for educational purposes.

*I have no rights to the following pictures. Source: <https://asmakazmi.com/home.html>

Academia, a source of coping



Things usually get lost in translation and sometimes censored to attract a broader audience. Professor Kazmi has faced the challenges and her work in academia field seems to be her coping strategy. Her interaction with different sets of people, lecturing, conducting seminars, and other activities that allows her voice her perspectives on different issues. Creating a series and basing her lectures around her experience allowed her to get her perspectives out in the public.

“This took time, I have learned it over the years. But I am not the only one facing these issues. Contextualizing my work, lecturing, writing about my work helps [her with her art and perception]”

“ I would love to say to keep pushing and keep following your dreams and don't get disenchanted in the face of difficulty but that comes from a place of privilege. Rather, my advice would be to find joy in what you are able to do. I found a lot of joy learning in learning but that does not mean to get an advanced degree from a foreign country. You can find

joy in picking up a new book, doing poetry or just cultivating some kind of interest.

We live in a time when it's very easy to get pulled into popular media and other kinds of activities. And my advice would be to cultivate something and learn about the world through a passion, which could be anything like cooking, reading, art. “

Advice