



**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PUBLISHES AND EXHIBITS LAYLAH ALI'S FIRST ARTIST BOOK**

***Projects 75: Laylah Ali***  
**March 12—May 21, 2002**

NEW YORK, MARCH 2002—The Museum of Modern Art's Projects series has commissioned and published artist Laylah Ali's first book, a 36-page color illustrated work composed entirely of her trademark green-headed, brown-bodied figures engaged in acts of violence. Stock characters such as security officers, sports figures, victims, and oppressors that have been the subjects of Ali's singular gouache pieces in the past, now play out their aggressions in an extended, nonlinear narrative designed by the artist to be a visual novelette devoid of any words or dialogue. The cover and four spreads of the book will be displayed inside a vitrine in the exhibition ***Projects 75: Laylah Ali*** from March 12 through May 21, 2002, in the Museum's Second Floor Garden Hall. The limited edition publication will be available for \$2.00 at the Museum stores and the exhibition kiosk on the second floor. ***Projects 75: Laylah Ali*** was organized by Kristin Helmick-Brunet, Assistant Curator, Department of Drawings.

Laylah Ali belongs to the tradition of modern and contemporary artists who were particularly inspired by the comics and who have capitalized on the tension created by juxtaposing innocent comic form against serious contemporary issues. Like many other artists, Ali exploits the pictorial language of the comics in order to confront major sociocultural questions. Her substantial themes—individual and group identity, politics and power, race and class—are served up as disarmingly naive fare, the effect of which is to replace the viewer's initial amusement with shock as the scene is slowly digested.

Laylah Ali's work may borrow heavily from the traditional comic book in form, but her book departs completely from the genre in content. Her images are precisely rendered in highly saturated hues and are organized into the comic strip structure of separated panels that normally permit an orderly progression of story. However, as the viewer moves from frame to frame, it becomes apparent that Ali has actively undermined the narrative.

Furthermore, because words and dialogue are nonexistent in Ali's story, each frame is akin to a pictogram, requiring the viewer to decipher each scene for himself. The viewer, therefore, plays a central role in bringing life and meaning to these ambiguous images.

Ali's unique realm is peopled by attenuated figures, colored in multiple shades of brown, absent of definable characteristics of age, class, race, and gender. Instead, characters are distinguishable by the clothes on their backs—costumes, which by necessity become signifiers of identity. The sharp austerity of the drawings and their lack of artifice may entice the viewer into drawing easy conclusions about the content and nature of the work, but these images are deceptively simple. Upon closer examination of each scene, minute details emerge: manacles around necks, wrists, and legs; tiny Band-Aids; apparent gunshot wounds, expressed by minuscule red dots; and Xs carved into bodies—all evidence of past acts, as well as of future threats, of violence and torture.

Laylah Ali was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1968. She received a MFA from Washington University (1994) and lives and works in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Created in 1971 as a forum for emerging artists and new art, the Projects series has played a vital part in MoMA's contemporary art programs. Initiated by representatives from all of the Museum's curatorial departments, the series has presented the work of close to 200 artists to date. The Projects series is coordinated by Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator, Department of Film and Media.

**The Projects series is sponsored by Peter Norton.**

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**No. 21**