

Pamela Singh

FAIYUM HEADS

Pamela Singh's *Faiyum Heads* (2004) series is a continuation of her exploration of self-portraiture, manipulating historical references, and processes within photography and painting. As in her earlier series, *Tantric Self-Portraits* (2000-2001), Singh experiments with her own identity: mixing and melding her own features with men and women, young and old, resulting in a fictitious array of Egyptian nobles.

The resulting eight, large-scale (36 x 47") archival digital photographs are unique, framed in 2" thick black frames giving them a regal, luminous quality. Singh has superimposed her own eyes, nose, and lips with those from the famous painted caskets found in the Egyptian oasis of Faiyum. Dating from approximately 100 AD, these "mummy" portraits follow a naturalistic portrait tradition painted directly on wooden boards as witnessed in many of the works.

The Faiyum region consists of a large fertile depression covering 12,000 square kilometers in the Libyan Desert, located about 60 kilometers southwest of Cairo. The region incorporates archaeological sites dating from the late Paleolithic to the late Roman and Christian periods (c. 8000 BCD – CD 641). The region flourished from the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650) onwards, but most of the surviving archaeological remains date to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

I first stumbled across the Faiyum Heads in a second hand book store in New York in the 90s. The paintings resonated with me on so many levels. Not just visually butthviscerally. The sitters in the portraits felt familiar. There was energy in their expressions. They were accessible in the sense that they resembled friends and acquaintances — relatable with hairstyles, clothing, and jewelry. It is then that I started to research them in depth and gradually I found a way to make the self portraits.

— Pamela Singh

Singh begins with a color self-portrait then using computer software, she fuses her own face with known Faiyum portraits. She then makes a large scale color print of this combined face and adorns the photograph with acrylic paint, pastels, collage, and gold leaf. The resulting works confuse the status of painting or photography. In all of the works, the eyes of the faces are Pamela's own — peering out to the viewer fusing the Classical world with the present.

In writing about Singh's work, Curator Karin Oen reflects in the exhibition catalog "Divine Bodies: Sacred Imagery in Asian Art" (Asian Art Museum San Francisco, 2018), "With a simple series of compositional shifts, she removes herself — or key aspects of herself—in from what she considers self-portraits. The work re-configures self-portraiture as a component of environmental portraiture, with the artist's own image included as an incomplete or ghostly presence rather than as the primary subject of the composition."

ABOUT THE ARTIST

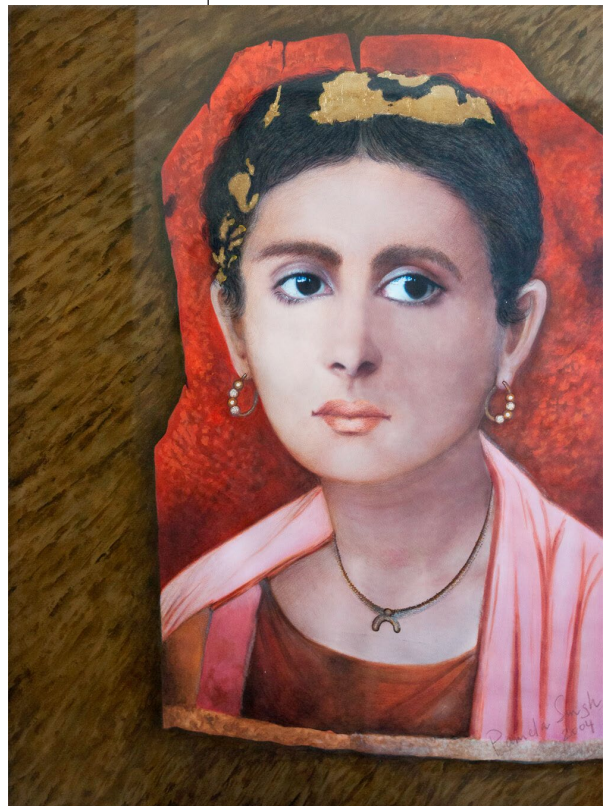
In the early 1990s, Singh began her photographic career by honing her documentary skills. After attending Parsons School of Design, New York she attended the American College in Paris and later ICP, New York. Her photojournalistic work has been included in the pages of publications such as The Washington Post, Newsweek, The Sunday

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EXHIBITION ONLINE
sepiaeye.com

EXHIBITION DATES
September 1, 2020 –
December 1, 2020

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Pamela Singh
Faiyum Head #8, 2004
36 x 47 inches / 34 x 45 inches.
Archival Inkjet Print with Mixed
Media (Acrylic & Gold Leaf).



Times of London, and Paris Match. Her strong social depictions of Indian women in the military gained her international acclaim in the worldwide-traveling exhibition, *India: A Celebration of Independence 1947-1997*, (Aperture, 1997)

Singh's work has been shown internationally, most recently in *Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance* (Nottingham Contemporary, De La Warr Pavilion & Arnolfini, 2019), *Divine Bodies* (San Francisco Asian Art Museum, 2018), *Photography & Memory* (2019, Philadelphia Museum of Art) *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London and at the Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2010) and in *Embellished Reality*, Royal Ontario Museum of Art, Toronto, Canada (2012). Her work is held in the permanent collections of San Jose Museum of Art, The Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Royal Ontario Museum Toronto, The Art Complex Museum of Duxbury, The Daimler Contemporary in Germany, The University of North Carolina, Ackland Museum of Art as well as many private collections worldwide.

ABOUT sepiaEYE

sepiaEYE is dedicated to showing a spectrum of modern and contemporary photography and video work. Established in September 2009 by Esa Epstein, sepiaEYE will continue to foster artist development through exhibitions, publications, trade fairs, and festivals. We are honored to represent the Estate of Bhupendra Karia. sepiaEYE is interested in the rediscovery of lesser known artists and significant periods within the history of photography and in the support of emerging artists. Esa Epstein has published eight titles on modern and contemporary photography including: *Atul Bhalla: Yamuna Walk* (sepiaEYE & UW Press, 2011), *Jungjin Lee: Wind*, essays by Eugenia Parry and Vicki Goldberg (Aperture/SEPIA, 2009); *Ketaki Sheth: Bombay Mix*, preface by Suketu Mehta (Dewi Lewis/SEPIA, 2007); and *Vivan Sundaram: Re-take of Amrita*, essays by Vivan Sundaram and Wu Hung (SEPIA, 2006). SEPIA exhibitions have been reviewed in numerous publications, most notably, *The New York Times*, *ARTFORUM*, *The New Yorker*, *Hyperallergic*, *ARTnews*, and *Art in America*. Gallery artists have gained critical acclaim and international recognition, and their works are included in the collections of major European and US museums and private collections. In her former position, Esa Epstein has helped build an impressive collection of Indian photography and, along the way, has offered her expertise to both private and public collections. Esa Epstein continues to offer institutional planning and arts management through sepiaEYE.

