

Superlatives

PEOPLE, CULTURE, STYLE

VIEW FROM THE TOP

land of opportunity

WITH SEVERAL NEW EXHIBITIONS AND SOCIETY-FUELED EVENTS, LAND'S SHAMIM MOMIN IS PUTTING LA'S ALT ART SCENE ON THE GLOBAL MAP. BY ANDREW MYERS

Shamim Momin is LA's empress-sorceress of what might be dubbed "flash art." The appellation has nothing to do with an installation of naughty old men in trench coats, and more to do with a flash mob—if its purpose were artful and rigorously executed; if its participants were up-and-coming and established artists; and if locations included a mountain in Malibu, an empty strip mall in West Hollywood, and Videotrons on Sunset Boulevard.

As with all magic, ephemerality is the through line at Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND), the nonprofit public art organization the 39-year-old Momin cofounded in 2009 along with Christine Y. Kim, and which she has helmed since inception, honing its mandate to cultivate and curate site- and situation-specific contemporary art projects in Los Angeles and beyond. Current and upcoming projects include a performance and exhibition of Katie Grinnan's *Astrology Orchestra*, as well as a project with Cole Sternberg as part of the *Nomadic Nights* series. LAND's high-profile patrons—including Salma Hayek and hubbie François-Henri Pinault, James Franco, John Baldessari, Eugenio Lopez, and Catharine and Jeffrey Soros, who hosted LAND's annual gala earlier this fall—are apparently bewitched.

"Christine gets absolute credit for the name, which also forms the perfect acronym," says Momin of Kim (now an associate curator of contemporary art at

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A successful curator in New York City, Shamim Momin moved west to found LAND.

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LACMA), explaining how it offers a flexible bit of fun, while also indicating multilayered meaning. "Nomadic" evokes the unfixed and traveling; "division" implies the opposite with a bureaucratic-militaristic tenor; whereas "land" is both a noun conveying solidity and specificity of place, as well as a verb, implying temporary siting and change of condition.

"It captures our entire mission; it's flexible and specific and also its own entity," says Momin. It also replicates the disparate, noncentric nature of Los Angeles and addresses LAND's commitment to produce exhibitions and events in other domestic and international locales, such as Miami in 2010 and most recently in Marfa, Texas, in 2011 and '12.

Momin defines a curator as "someone who looks at the whole world and asks, 'What's about to be?'"

Momin, who's been named one of Oprah's "Women on the Rise," comes by such cerebral sleight of hand naturally. Of Indian and French descent, she grew up in Warwick, New York, a 45-minute commute from Manhattan. Like her late father, a surgeon, and her mother, a nurse, Momin's early penchant was for the sciences, physics, and biology specifically. But her passion?

That she discovered her senior year in high school, when she took a class in art history. "I knew immediately I'd never be bored [looking at art]," she remembers.

Next came Williams College and focused art study, followed by a summer working for the director of the college's art museum. Then, post-graduation, came the "Big Job"—at the Whitney Museum of American Art—where she cocurated the 2004 and 2008 Whitney Biennials, and where she served as associate curator of contemporary art and director/curator of the Whitney's erstwhile Midtown Altria branch, which saw upward of 100,000 visitors per year and where "everything was under my purview. It also served as a perfect training ground for running an art organization of her own, "in addition to the usual responsibilities of being a curator, which I love."

Momin defines a curator as "someone who looks at the whole world and asks, 'What's about to be?'" It was Momin's response to this question that compelled her to leave the Whitney and move cross-country to Los Angeles, where unique attributes included a paucity of public art initiatives (hence a need as well as an opportunity), a multitude of art schools forming a creative bedrock, and what Momin calls a cross-generational orientation of many artists that creates an exceptional exchange. "LA was, of course, an important creative center, but in 2007 and '08 it was just in advance of all its subsequent attention," she explains. "There was readiness for more attention." nomadicdivision.org **LAC**

In Momin's home, a photograph by Rob Pruitt from 2009 hangs above some coveted books.



Artist Yinka Shonibare's limited-edition model of his 1872 Victorian townhouse, 2002.



LAND's annual gala at the home of producer Jeffrey Soros and his wife Catharine is a bewitching affair attended by LA's top art patrons.



ON MY MIND

"I'm currently inspired by:

"It changes mercurially, but at the moment: astrology, orchestras, trout fishing in Missouri, wildflower cultivation, socks with high heels, Diana the Huntress's crescent-moon tiara, Atwater Village Farmers' Market, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and my cats—Sunday and Tiny."

"deceased artist i'd most like to meet:

"The one who made *The Venus of Willendorf*."

"fantasy LAND exhibition:

"Bob Gober and I cocurate a Cady Noland exhibition in the derelict historical train station in Detroit that I broke into with a coworker when I last visited."

"a word that describes myself:

"This is a trick question."

"a virtue i wish i had:

"Patience? Or musical talent—I actually consider that a virtue."