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Faisal Mohyuddin: Artist Reflection for American Muslim Futures

FULL TRANSCRIPT (without timecode)

As salaam walaikum. Peace be upon you and yours. Thank you for visiting my piece. A poem drawing called “Dua for America.” My name is Faisal Mohyuddin and I'm from the Chicago area where I teach high school English, write poetry, and make art.

A just future is one where every human being's life is seen and treated as worthy, as endowed with dignity and grace with God's love, and is worth protecting from every kind of oppression. A just future is one where all people not only have a voice, but also the ability and opportunity to use that voice to safely speak their truth, to make positive change, to add beauty to the world around them. Where others care to listen and engage in in-depth dialogue for the sake of mutual understanding and respect.

A just future is one where all people can feel a sense of hope and possibility, can have decent housing, and enough healthy food, and access to affordable quality medical care. To the best education marked by big hearted, talented, well-trained, and very well compensated educators at schools that have enough resources to allow every student to not only dream the tallest of dreams. But, to make those dreams a reality. An education that also helps them undo the damaging impacts of poverty, and inequity of racism, and hate, and histories of injustice.

A just future is one where we care for all living beings: human, animal, plant, and care for the earth. Honor the land, and the water, and the air of the natural world. Honor as well our ancestors and predecessors and all those who will come after us because every life lived, being lived, not yet lived, every molecule, an era is important is interconnected and our survival depends upon cooperation, on care, on trust, and faith on the belief that we can be better to and for one another.

I was taught that no human being is any better or worse than any other except in their intentions and actions. But I've also learned that every human being has the capacity to be forgiven, to learn from their mistakes. To transform into a better, more compassionate, more generous person. So a just future is also one where every individual has the opportunity and the wherewithal to be a better person and to help others become better too.

My poem drawing “Dua for America” envisions a just future by turning its attention to prayer. Specifically, to dua, to supplication, to asking God for guidance, help, and wisdom. As you can imagine duas are most intense when times are most difficult. The current moment in America, in the world, is unlike any other I've ever experienced.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died in this global pandemic and countless others continue to die from ongoing war and violence. Climate change is causing some of the worst natural disasters that we've ever experienced. Worse and worse it seems every year. And on top of that all kinds of hate. Racism, Islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia these all seem to be proliferating around the world instead of diminishing.

So it's no wonder that many find it hard if not impossible to feel optimistic about the future. Yet as a person of faith my trust remains in God, and in the innate goodness of human beings, and in the power of prayer. Just as I continue to make dua that our country and our world becomes a more just, more respectful, safer, more inclusive, more anti-racist place. I invite you also to join me in this dua for America. This dua for humanity. A dua that has three main purposes.

One, it seeks God's assistance, humility. Two, it plants seeds of hope within ourselves and within our power to make positive change, empowerment, recognition. Three, it asks us to do something to activate this capacity for change, action. In its design, the visual layout reinforces this message.

There's a light bulb there, it symbolizes light. It hangs down to show that this light, this divine light, comes from above from the heavens, from God. In fact the filament spells out Allah. Because from Allah comes everything, and then each section of the light bulb is a section, a different stanza of the dua. After each one, in between them, is the word Ameen and you see the word Ameen Ameen repeated.

It's a way of saying yes, yes, yes. So be it, so be it. And I want people to join me and pray and make the supplication and say yes and say Ameen. If you look at the design the words are all empty spaces carved out by ink.

That approach symbolizes how even in the absence of hope, possibility, justice, whatever, there are things present there, maybe even the things that we don't see are actually there. So this drawing says as you make a prayer, as you seek the light, also see what is there that is invisible but can be made visible.

The American Muslim Futures exhibit is so important to me as a poet, artist, and educator. My life is rooted in the creative constructive process by writing poems, making drawings, designing lesson plans, by helping others tell their stories. I'm always involved in more fully engaging with the world and making sense of it and inviting others to do the same.

That the American Muslim Futures exhibit pulls together a vast array of artists from all types of backgrounds, all connected to Muslim American identity. All of whom hold a shared belief in the rescuing and transformative power of art.

With that collective power here, I feel an even greater sense of hope and optimism that our future as Americans and as citizens of the world can and will be better. I wrote and drew "Dua for America" because I believe my words. The words of this dua the way they play with light and dark, with absence and presence invite all of you. Everyone who visits this exhibit to participate in the supplication in that vocalized desire for a more just future.

By connecting with fellow Muslims and our allies, I feel that our particular set of concerns, hopes and needs, our particular range of identities and voices, all will amplify one another. So that our collective voice is louder, and richer, and more inspired, and more beautiful, and more compelling.

Thank you