

ARTFORUM

Oliver Husain

ART GALLERY OF YORK UNIVERSITY (AGYU)
Accolade East Building, 4700 Keele Street
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View of “Oliver Husain,” 2010.

Occupying two adjacent galleries separated by a transparent vinyl curtain, Oliver Husain’s multivalent exhibition “Hovering Proxies” mischievously refigures the boundary between subject and object. Surrounded by a tropical suburban panorama depicted in fourteen framed photographs, *The Dupe’s Garden*, 2010, dominates the first room. It is an open architecture delineated by sheer fabric panels, handpainted silk scarves, and a beaded curtain suspended from commercial light stands. Materially, Husain’s sensitive yet lush approach echoes the porousness of this liminal space. At the structure’s center, a pile of linked block letters cut from newspapers points to additional encrypted texts—a tangible “garden of forking paths” in the Borgesian sense—that when fully unraveled reads as a lyric poem set in an exotic locale.

Beyond the curtain, in the nearly empty second gallery, a three-and-a-half-minute silent film is projected on the narrow band of wall space above this permeable membrane. In it, the camera voyeuristically follows a number of helium balloons as they bump, meander, and hobnob around the diaphanous planes of the *Garden*.

Husain’s double framing of the first gallery viewed through the curtain, and the same space depicted on film but populated with his latex “proxies,” delivers a clever disjuncture. By separating the two spaces with this proverbial “fourth wall,” he stages a theatrical setup that on one level brings to mind Dan Graham’s two-way-mirror or time-delay installations, except replete with delightful indulgences, like ostrich-feather finials and the proxies’ gossipy banter recorded in snappy, interjecting subtitles. This playfulness extends to the film’s end, when Husain engages a simple parlor trick to disrupt a static portrait of the proxies huddled in the gallery. A sudden swift breeze that whips the balloons into a frenzy on-screen is simultaneously felt as two electric fans in the room are triggered on cue, thus returning us to the present but vividly inserting us in the garden, too.

— Jen Hutton

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