

Tasneem Sarkez
'White-Knuckle'
17 Jan – 1 Mar 2025

Rose Easton

Text by Ruba Al-Sweel

A cursed Elon Musk tweet from June 2023 says: “The most entertaining outcome (as if we were in a movie) is the most likely” – a statement that is increasingly resonant considering the string of events that led to his acquisition of Twitter (now X.com) in 2022, and the spectacle of his widely mythologised “cage fight” with Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive of Meta. Not to mention the 2024 US elections, the exaltation of Gypsy Rose to TikTok influencer status and artist Amalia Ulman’s great 90k-follower Instagram hoax-turned-performance-art of 2014 in which she performed the life of a wannabe it-girl. Everything is a Netflix docu-series, reality TV or an Only Fans bonanza. We have always been addicted to entertainment.

In *White-Knuckle*, Tasneem Sarkez’s first solo exhibition in the UK, she paints a lurid picture of the central role amusement plays in politics and public discourse. She looks at the way absurd scenarios congeal into metanarratives and canonical images that organise society. The adjective ‘white-knuckle’ references the effect caused by interrupting blood flow when gripping tightly to steady oneself on fairground rides as a result of extreme excitement. The thrill of speed – whether through movement of a vehicle or the whiplash of the news cycle – is ever present through her paintings; from rigid motorcycles boasting emblems of nationalism in Turkey ((C)OEXIST, 2024), and a set of dangling star-spangled keys (*The Real Superhero Key*, 2024), to a pair of high-gloss women’s pumps emblazoned with the Mercedes-Benz three-point star (*G-Class*

dancing with the Shah, 2024). Each work on canvas appears uncanny in its imaginary, almost as if they could only be AI generated. Sarkez uses as her source material urban legend and anecdote, recontextualised and layered with viral images, found footage from her everyday and elements of improvisation, appearing as still lifes in the age of platform algorithm. In her case, form subsumes content – painting as a medium is a generative model responding to a dense history of collective text, images and stories.

In *G-Class dancing with the Shah*, Sarkez retells the story of how one of humanity's greatest inventions – the automobile – is intimately entangled with the atrocious institution of war. The Mercedes-Benz G-Class was developed in 1972 at the whim of one of the company's largest shareholders, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi i.e. the Shah of Iran, who wanted a military car that could camouflage as civilian in the city. In *First Lady*, 2024, Sarkez brings to the fore assassinated Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi's savvy awareness of his image by employing a bevy of done-up, all-female bodyguards, or what western journalists dubbed "Amazonian Guards". Gaddafi also always brought colour and eccentric panache to the drab circuit of world politics with a remarkable wardrobe. Elsewhere in the gallery space, Sarkez stacks up bottles of perfume modelled after the beauty shops of Brooklyn. Each bottle is tagged with a label: "White Women Dancing", "A Lady's First Time", "Gucci Guilty Love", "Beyoncé Heat" among others. These labels, while

untethered from any real referent, serve as evocative signification for a certain quality and image imparted on the perfume wearer.

Sarkez's images are fascinating because they exist in a world where it's hard to tell if they are based on real events or hallucinated by machine learning. If Lana Del Rey in fact was spotted working at a Waffle House in Alabama, and president-elect Donald Trump was pictured handing out fries at McDonald's as part of his campaign, then surely the reproduction of reality via painting can use the medium as a complex node of fact, fiction and hyperstition. Deepfake, deep state or deepweb – that's besides the point because, as the meme goes: "my life is like a movie fr" anyway.

Tasneem Sarkez (b. 2002, Portland, USA), lives and works in New York. She received her BFA from NYU in 2024. *White-Knuckle* is Sarkez's debut solo exhibition with her first US solo exhibition opening at Romance in Pittsburgh, USA later this year. Selected group exhibitions include: *we know nothing about people who don't cry*, Romance, Pittsburgh (forthcoming); *SL x RE*, Silke Lindner, New York (2024); *WANAWAL Archives*, curated by Evar Hussayni, FORMA Arts, London (forthcoming); *Dirt in the Eye*, Gnosserie Gallery, London (2024); *Saccharine Symbols*, Rose Easton, London (2023); *Me and you and me and*, SADE Gallery, Los Angeles, US (2023); *Printing the Future*, Diefirma Gallery, New York (2022) and Liminal Space, curated by Annabelle Park, 42 Rivington Street, New York (2021). In 2023, Sarkez received the Martin Wong Award from the Martin Wong Foundation. Her work is in the collection of the Thomas J. Watson Library in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

List of works, clockwise from entrance

Tasneem Sarkez
First Lady, 2024
Oil on canvas
53.3 × 35.6 × 3.8 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
(C)OEXIST, 2024
Oil on canvas
101.6 × 76.2 × 3.8 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
The Real
Superhero Key, 2024
Oil on canvas
22.9 × 53.3 × 4.4 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
Heart Notes no.2, 2024
Perfume oil, Boston
bottles, acrylic shelves,
tape, inkjet print
91 × 60 × 24 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
G-Class dancing
with the Shah, 2024
Oil on canvas
76.2 × 76.2 × 4 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
High Tea, 2024
Oil on canvas
55.9 × 35.6 × 3.6 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
Heart Notes no.1, 2024
Perfume oil, Boston
bottles, acrylic shelves,
tape, inkjet print
91 × 60 × 24 cm

Tasneem Sarkez
Good Evening, 2024
Oil on canvas
76.2 × 76.2 × 3.8 cm

Opening, Thursday 16 January, 6 – 8pm
Open, Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm

For general and sales enquiries,
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Events Programme

Wednesday 29 January, 7pm

White-Knuckle screening curated by Ruba Al-Sweel and Tasneem Sarkez, featuring films by: Zein Majali, POSTPOSTPOST, Zarina Nares, Daniel Felstead, Ruba Al-Sweel, Emariamhe Obemeata, Silv-o

Saturday 1 March, 7pm

I Love Candy a performance by Ana Viktoria Dzinic and Antoin Sharkey

Both events are free to attend but spaces are limited, please email info@roseeaston.com to reserve

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