



PRESS RELEASE 22/12/2015

***New photography exhibition reveals powerful stories of UK immigration***

New Art Exchange (NAE), Nottingham, will reveal an exceptional new body of work by award-winning British social commentary artist Mahtab Hussain. Examining international migration in modern-day Britain, *The Commonality of Strangers*, runs from 31 January - 12 April 2015.

An ambitious project commissioned by NAE, *The Commonality of Strangers* combines photography and text to explore important relationships between identity, heritage and displacement resulting from migration - the truths of which are rarely revealed in the public realm.

Visitors to the exhibition will have a unique opportunity to discover personal stories of leaving home, family and friends behind, in search of a better life for their future generations. In stark contrast to the opportunistic and welfare-grabbing image of the migrant painted by right wing politicians, *The Commonality of Strangers* serves to contextualise and humanise the migrant story, urging viewers to move beyond widely held stereotypes and assumptions.

Hussain has developed the themes of his work through long-term photographic research and has articulated this into a visual language that challenges the prevailing concepts of multiculturalism. Immersing himself in local communities during a five month research residency, the artist spent his time walking and exploring the streets of Hyson Green, Radford and Forest Fields in Nottingham. During this period he connected with people from all walks of life and from across the globe, including those who consider themselves to be wholly British. The results of these encounters will be seen for the first time in the Main Gallery at NAE.

*“My practice is led by researching and mapping the field; I didn’t make a conscious decision to make work about the migrant. However, I felt compelled to focus on this very topical subject whilst listening to the stories that people were prepared to share with me. I heard many speak of violence, prosecution and personal tragedy. I walked away from my encounters with these people, angered by what I was being told. We often hear about asylum seekers or immigrants taking over, taking our jobs, our homes, filling our schools*

*and hospitals, exploiting our benefit system and ruining our country. The migrant has no face, no name and is stripped of colour, race and gender, they have become the new other, an alien race not welcomed here. I discovered something quite different, and I hope this series begins to challenge the standard narrative about immigration, and open up a new dialogue for these fragile communities who are vilified and live under constant scrutiny and hostility;”* Mahtab Hussain.

Placing the artist in an urban locality with a diverse mix of different ethnicities and cultures provided Hussain with the opportunity to explore the effects and difficulties of multiculturalism in the broadest context. Moving beyond the Pakistani diaspora community, which has been a significant focus in his work-to-date, he has now engaged with both established and new migrant populations in the UK. The people, or sitters as Hussain refers to them, who feature in *The Commonality of Strangers*, have moved to the UK from a multitude of locations including Algeria, Ghana, Iraq, Jamaica, Kurdistan, Malawi, Poland, Romania, South Africa and Sudan.

The narratives that accompany each sitter’s portrait are often deeply shocking; the magnitude of each journey is further heightened in contrast to the ‘everyday’ quality of the portrait itself. By presenting everyday scenarios one can easily relate to, Hussain asks the viewer to consider the commonality of mankind’s wants and needs whilst emphasising that the veneer of everyday life can easily veil the immense struggles and the deeper, hidden contexts in which people live and have lived.

The work presents realities of war in countries such as Iraq, and the impact it can have on people’s lives – not just in the present, but for years to come. The role of Britain as a nation is directly referred to by sitters who have grown up with a belief that moving to the UK will improve their lives in many ways. However, it is evident that the reality of British culture and its lack of community cohesion are starting to take effect, leaving many migrants lacking a sense of identity and belonging.

*The Commonality of Strangers* will be open to the public for ten weeks, 31 January – 12 April 2015.

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**Exhibition:** *The Commonality of Strangers*

**Artist:** Mahtab Hussain - <http://www.mahtabhussain.com/>

**Dates:** 31 January – 12 April 2015

**Admission: Free**

**Opening Times:**

Monday: 10:30 – 15:30

Tuesday to Friday: 10:30 – 18:00

Saturday: 9:30 – 17:00

Sunday: 11:30 – 17:00

**New Art Exchange, 39 - 41 Gregory Blvd, Nottingham NG7 6BE**

[www.nae.org.uk](http://www.nae.org.uk)

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**About Mahtab Hussain**

Mahtab Hussain is a British social commentary artist, born 1981, best known for his documentary project *You Get Me?*, which addresses the changing identity of young, British, working class Asian men in Birmingham, England. While seeing his practice as an exchange between the artist and sitter, Hussain believes in placing considerable emphasis on the empowerment of the sitter, and in doing so, creates portraits that force a vital interaction between sitter and viewer.

Hussain has been recipient of numerous awards and commissions including, Arts Council England; Arts Humanities Research Council (AHRC); he was winner of the Curators Choice Award, Culture Cloud at New Art Exchange, Nottingham and of Format 13 Portfolio Review Award for most significant review. He has been selected as the 2015 Light Work + Autograph ABP Artist-in-Residence.

**About New Art Exchange**

New Art Exchange is a contemporary art gallery committed to stimulating new perspectives on the value of diversity within art and society. A RIBA award winning building, New Art Exchange is the largest space in the UK outside of London dedicated to culturally diverse contemporary visual arts, and is rooted in the community with a strong history of working with minority communities.

NAE presents major international exhibitions, launching the British Art Show in 2010, and every season presents work from the highest quality, world-renowned artists. NAE partners locally, nationally and internationally, connecting audiences and artists from all over the world with new and innovative collaborations and opportunities. Past exhibitors have included: John Akomfrah, Rashid Rana, Zineb Sedira, Hurvin Anderson, Nari Ward, Christian Marclay and Elizabeth Price (as part of British Art Show 7), Leo Asemota, Raghu Rai, Tanya Habjouqa, Okhai Ojeikere and Hetain Patel.

NAE's mission is to raise the impact, profile and development of culturally diverse contemporary visual arts and artists in a global context by:

- Nurturing and promoting creative talent locally and world-wide
- Creating thriving creative businesses

- Engaging minority ethnic communities as audiences and patrons of art