

# The Silenced Voices

Shahzaad Raja



*Shahzaad Raja is a Chicago-based Pakistani-American collage artist. Inspired by artisans in 2018, he creates his collages entirely from hand-cut magazines and newspapers and spends hours tediously finding the right source material to convey his complex messages. Raja's work holds a mirror to society as a whole: the good and the ugly, the mainstream and the hidden, the social and the political.*

### **What pushed you to be so political and use art as your voice?**

There wasn't just one specific instance; it was the amount of injustice and corruption that was going on in the world that pushed me. Mainstream news will cover stories that follow their narrative, so a lot of important things that are going on in the world get left in the dark — and this is especially true in situations where Muslims are the victims.

Each one of my pieces highlights some social or political issue that we are faced with. I want to bring awareness around certain things, which is always the first step towards change. I think art does have the power to spark social change — I want people to really think about the issues that are presented to them and hopefully turn that thinking into doing, and taking action toward a certain cause.

### **What is the context of your work?**

For years, the ones in power were the ones telling us the story.

All of the injustice, mistreatment, and systemic racism of black people has come up to the surface and it is staring us right in the face. The police are a reflection of our society, where the oppression of black people is woven into the system at every level.

African Americans have been crying out for centuries and it seems like we are just now hearing them. But are you listening?

**How should people support these voices?**

This isn't a situation where you can be neutral — either you can accept all of this injustice going on or you can fight against it. Normal was never working, so now it's time for us to disrupt the norm.

No major social change was caused by people staying quiet — all of them were caused by people rallying together and fighting for their cause. If protesting isn't your thing, there are other ways to get involved: donating, lobbying, or joining an activist organization that is already working toward a specific cause.

Certain things will always be out of our control, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't stand up for what we believe in — stand up for the silenced voices of the world.