

Nihaal Faizal

The Magic Pencil

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44 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3PA

In “The Magic Pencil,” Nihaal Faizal revives the premise of the popular Indian children’s fantasy adventure series, *Shaka Laka Boom Boom* (2002-04). The show follows the adventures of a young boy, Sanju, who comes into possession of a pencil with the power to bring anything he sketches to life, however, this magic is not exclusive to creation. When the objects Sanju draws have fulfilled their intended purpose, they vanish without residue — the so-called magic pencil allows for consumption without consequence or accumulation.

For the titular installation, *The Magic Pencil* (2020/2025), Faizal reproduced stills from *Shaka Laka Boom Boom* — showing the act of drawing, the moment of apparition, and Sanju’s creations atop his notebook — across 24 reclaimed TOMY® Megasketcher Classics.

According to TOMY, “the magnetic Megasketcher drawing board has a unique special screen that allows budding artists to draw clear, crisp pictures [which] disappear with one sweep of the eraser, ready to start again.” Unlike drawing on paper, the Megasketcher allows images to appear, perform, and then vanish with a single swipe. Here, however, Faizal has modified the Megasketchers so that the image cannot be erased.

The restorative promise of erasure is further explored in *Toi-Toys* (2019), an editioned readymade of a pair of pink and white erasers printed with an officially licensed image of the Apple iPhone OS 2, originally produced by a Dutch toy manufacturer. The once groundbreaking technology of the iPhone OS 2 (which introduced the App Store in 2008) is now outdated and is reduced here to a playful visual signifier. In parallel, as Faizal invokes *Toi-Toys* as a decorative art object, it becomes obsolete as an erasing tool and is rendered an artefact of the transition from an analogue material world to a digital immaterial realm. Just like the TOMY® Megasketchers, *Toi-Toys* have lost their capacity to erase — they no longer exist to remove images, but have become images themselves.

Importantly, *Shaka Laka Boom Boom* was preceded by a period of major sociopolitical upheaval in Indian society. In the early 1990s, in response to a crippling financial crisis, the Indian government received a multi-billion-dollar bailout accompanied by World Bank-backed structural reforms, marking a shift from socialist democracy toward neoliberal capitalist values. For the first time, unbridled consumption became an aspiration.

Through children’s toys, unofficial merchandise, and an expanded inventory of magical objects, Faizal critiques the geopolitical transformations that shaped Indian popular culture at the turn of the twenty-first century, framing them within broader economies of desire, consumption, and erasure.

Curated by Ben Broome and Olamiju Fajemisin