

THE GOOD FIGHT

Dressed in the new Gucci X Dapper Dan capsule collection—statement leather, ostentatious embroidery and oversized silhouettes—eight South Asian artistes discuss creative expression in turbulent times and the importance of staying true to yourself, with Neville Bhandara

PHOTOGRAPHS **COLSTON JULIAN**
STYLING **MALINI BANERJI**



SAMYUKTA MADHU

Brooklyn-based Parsons School Of Design graduate Samyukta Madhu moved from Chennai to New York when she was only 17. "While NYC really influenced my work, I also have a very deep foothold in India, which is why my work juxtaposes itself in a way that mixes eastern and western influences," she says. One look at her muse, Kali, and you can see what she means. The Indian goddess is the star of Madhu's Instagram account, often rocking an Adidas tracksuit. "Bringing in Kali is a way to reach out to other women and let them know that this is who they really are on the inside."



Cotton jersey T-shirt,
nylon pants and jacket,
lurex socks, leather heels,
crystal hat; all **Gucci**

MARIA QAMAR

The work of Toronto-based Pakistani pop artist Maria Qamar is a direct nod to Roy Lichtenstein. Qamar, who goes by the moniker HateCopy, draws heavily from the American artist's distinctive style, but the topics she covers are closer to home: our obsession with unrealistic beauty standards, for instance. Her satirical sketches tackle everything from 'fair skin syndrome' to nosy aunties—all with a heavy hand of humour directed squarely at her South Asian roots. Does she get trolled a lot? "I don't have very many [Internet trolls], just a bunch of guys hollering at me for my phone number," she says.

Cotton jersey T-shirt,
leather jacket; both
Gucci. Metal nose
ring, Qamar's own



Leather jacket, silk skirt, lurex socks, leather heels; all **Gucci**



HIBA SCHAHBAZ

The Pakistan-born visual artist trained in traditional Indo-Persian miniature painting at Lahore's National College Of Arts. "I depict women's bodies while referencing self-portraiture, creating a space for myself and other women to tell their stories and reclaim their histories," she says. "So, at 15, I began painting self-portraits in my bedroom—and I've continued ever since." A few years ago, she swapped miniature works for life-sized ones, all made using black tea as paint: "Black tea is a part of my culture and my process."




Suede sweatshirt, jeans, leather boots, metal necklace; all **Gucci**. Metal necklaces, cuffs and rings, leather-strap watch; all Jogia's own



AVAN JOGIA

Half-Indian and half-Irish Canadian actor Avan Jogia is also a poet and activist. At 17, he started Straight But Not Narrow, an organisation that works towards amassing straight allies for the LGBTQ community. "There are a lot of queer icons talking about the struggle involved with embracing your sexuality, like the It Gets Better campaign. I wanted to engage straight people in the conversation too, and have them stand by their queer friends," he says. For his book of poetry, *Mixed Feelings* (out in March next year), Jogia is interviewing mixed-race people about their families and multicultural upbringing, and turning the transcripts into poetry—all accompanied by artwork. "The world is very polarised in terms of race. A lot of folks are confused about where they stand. I want to tell their stories."

Colston Julian/Sony Alpha



Cotton jersey T-shirt,
Kondabolu's own.
Leather jacket, **Gucci**

HARI KONDABOLU

Brooklyn-based stand-up comedian, actor and writer Hari Kondabolu stormed our collective consciousness last year when he made the documentary, *The Problem With Apu*. The critique of *The Simpsons*'s stereotypical portrait of the east-Indian character Apu was all that everyone was talking about. Fast-forward a few months and Kondabolu has a new Netflix special: *Warn Your Relatives*, a sharp, witty take on relevant topics in his characteristically questioning style. "The great thing about comedy is that it evolves just as you do. When I was starting out, I didn't talk politics. I didn't have a point of view. But as I grew and developed a sense of the world, I started addressing things that frustrated me. That's the good part about humour: it lets you take pain and repurpose it."

SHANAY JHAVERI

As assistant curator of South Asian modern and contemporary art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Shanay Jhaveri has had a busy year. Two of the museum's most talked-about recent shows have been mounted on his watch—Pakistan-born artist Huma Bhabha's rooftop sci-fi- and horror-inspired installation *We Come In Peace*, and Indian visual artist Ranjani Shettar's natural and industrial installation, *Seven Ponds And A Few Raindrops*. "Modern and contemporary works should not only tell the narrative of what's happening in the region from the last century to the present moment, but also create a connection between ages," he says.

Wool turtleneck,
jeans; both **Gucci**



Cotton shirt, jeans;
both Suri's own.
Leather jacket,
Gucci

HIMANSHU SURI

Growing up in Queens, New York, there were two things that Himanshu Suri obsessed over: basketball and rap music. "I just observed and absorbed it all," he says. As a schoolkid in Manhattan, Suri saw the carnage of 9/11 first-hand, and the communal fallout left a mark, one that would years later go on to define the music he would make. "I was surrounded by a lot of South Asian Americans. Regardless of whether you were Hindu or Muslim or Guyanese or Trinidadian or Bangladeshi, we all had to unite under a banner of survival."



Nylon jacket and pants,
leather heels; all **Gucci**

**HAIR: TONY KELLEY/
KRAMER+KRAMER;
MAKE-UP: STEFFEN ZOLL;
PRODUCTION: ISABEL
SCHARENBERG; ASSISTED
BY: DIVYA GURSAHANI AND
RIYA KHANNA (STYLING),
HECTOR ADALID (LIGHTING),
SHANE ROONEY (DIGITAL);
LOCATION: RUBY BIRD
STUDIO; STAY COURTESY: THE
KNICKERBOCKER HOTEL (A
MEMBER OF LEADING HOTELS
OF THE WORLD), NEW YORK**

ALL PRICES ON REQUEST



PREETMA SINGH

Seattle-based Preetma Singh is Nordstrom's fashion editor by day, and the drummer for punk rock band Vomitface by night. "Someone once asked, 'What would your band be called?' Vomitface came to mind, and it stuck," she says. Vomitface has been around since 2012, when Singh and Jared Micah (vocals/guitar) were trapped in their apartment during hurricane Sandy. "With nothing better to do, we picked up our instruments and started playing. We didn't plan to form a band; we started jamming and took off from there." Singh has been snapped on many occasions for her style, of which she humbly says, "I like to be comfortable. I think being confident in what you're wearing is important. Once you figure out how to do that, having fun with it comes easy."