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'Art and Soul'
Vince Aletti



*Abshiro Aden Mohammed, Women's Leader,
Somali refugee camp, Dagabaley, Kenya, 2000*

The photographs in Fazal Sheikh's first exhibition, in 1995, were portraits of refugees who'd fled civil unrest in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia and found shelter in Kenya. His most recent works, currently on view at the Princeton University Art Museum, depict Indian widows and girls who have found themselves to be outcasts in a culture where female infanticide still regularly occurs. In between, Sheikh has worked in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Brazil, and the Netherlands, documenting the displaced and the persecuted—people whose basic human rights are at stake. A compact, engrossing survey of this work at Pace/MacGill couldn't look less like photojournalism. Sheikh's subjects are not anonymous victims; all but a few are identified by name. At once descriptive and loving, and warm rather than cool, the photographs are extraordinarily moving portraits in the classic mode (think Julia Margaret Cameron and Irving Penn), whose aesthetic weight is multiplied by the power of their maker's concern.

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