

CULTURE'S LAST STAND

ARTISTS, ZOMBIES AND HINDU GODS ARE ALL INVITED TO SHEZAD DAWOOD'S ALL-AMERICAN HOEDOWN

BRITISH ARTIST SHEZAD Dawood may not have been able to vote in the US election, but with his thoughtful and thought-provoking examination of the country's prevailing cultural myths, he definitely has a point to make. *Feature*, Dawood's new 55-minute film, undercuts the oft-told tale of the Battle of Little Big Horn by introducing fantastical characters and surreal scenarios into the mythologised history of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne's battle with the US Army's Seventh Cavalry. He goes far beyond the historical record by introducing a cast of artists such as Jimmie Durham (as Sioux holy man Sitting Bull) and David Medalla (as Chief Crazy Horse), and adds the Hindu God Krishna – played by the half-Indian, half-Pakistani, London-based artist himself – in the role of a cowboy. Entangled in *Feature*'s zombies, meta-movie film references and frisky mixture of facts and fiction is Dawood's urging of America toward a reckoning with its most deeply held cultural myths. In an interview about *Feature* for Saatchi Online, Dawood discussed his long-standing interest in the Wild West as "go[ing] back to Columbus' mistake, relating my ancestry by proxy to indigenous peoples everywhere; I sometimes wonder if – although used reductively – this is not a positive assertion. There is a radically idealistic universalising basis to my work, which I think gives me the temerity to rewrite and reconcile superficially different cultural elements and ideologies." It is this "idealistic universalising" thread to Dawood's work that motivated curator Nicolas Bourriaud to give the artist his own room at the upcoming Tate triennial. One special event screens *Feature* in a double bill alongside Buster Keaton's *The General*, complete with live bands playing both soundtracks simultaneously, creating a "metatextual experience" with overlapping visual, audio and cultural currents. Ana Finel Honigman

Feature is part of *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud, which runs from February 3-April 26. www.tate.org.uk
Production still from *Feature* (2008). © Shezad Dawood and courtesy Paradise Row, London. Photography by Lewin St Cyr

