

# DAWN

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## ‘Portfolio: Local Yet Global’

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Antagonist- Monster & Protagonist - Mickey

Recently, Aicon Gallery in York exhibited Monomania — the first solo US exhibition of Karachi-based artist Adeel uz Zafar. The title of the exhibition summed up the themes that the works encapsulate. Monomania presents a commentary on the shades of insanity where thoughts focus on a specific cluster of subjects; the excessive enthusiasm for a single thing, or idea. Zafar’s work is quite obsessive to say the least.

The exhibition displayed large scale representations of children’s toys wrapped in bandages. These are everyday toy figures, such as Mickey Mouse, that kids are globally exposed to. Zafar also uses a special technique, whereby he scrapes away at a black latex surface, to create forms that appear to be three-dimensional.

These gigantic drawings provoke viewers. The starkness of the images opens up the possibilities of interpretation, and also a connection with layers of past, that all humans and societies have undergone. Symbols in the artist’s work are global so their resonance is universal.

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## **Adeel uz Zafar presents a commentary on shades of insanity in his first solo US show**

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“I can see the animal toys as an anthropomorphic character and I am also very fascinated with the fictional stories attached with them. These stories are larger than life,” says Zafar. After graduating from Lahore’s National College of Arts, he worked an illustrator of children’s books. The intimate connection between his art practice and kids’ imaginations has inspired the artist to explore and locate the toy in his own “narrations with a context of modern time and real events.” The larger than life images have a meditative quality, in terms of their rendition of lines and the overall presentation. “If we look at the historical practice of Asian art – from Persian paintings to Japanese prints – the meticulous linear quality of line or mark making, the repetition in Islamic geometric patterns”, Zafar adds while explaining his style. There is an evident ritualistic performance, akin to the calligraphic “Mashq”, of mark-making practice of duplication, in his work.

Zafar’s landmark exhibition *Size Does Matter* at the VM Art Gallery, Karachi, in 2009, launched his genre into the mainstream. The obsessive nature of a recurring post-modern subject matter, and the traditional detail of his technique, make him a unique artist. “Working or drawing with a pencil or any other medium is not inspiring compared to obtaining desired impact by using a scarping tool.” Zafar also reminds that “the process of engraving is ‘irreversible’ and I cannot correct any line if I make a mistake.” Interestingly, he calls the engraving process on canvas “tedious and uncomfortable,” but this “pain connects with a visual vocabulary of bandages,” and conveys the broader discourse that his work intends to communicate.

The abandoned, solitary figures also comment on the alienation that many humans undergo in our times. In ‘Protagonist 1’ Mickey is found in a state of aloneness. The single, stark, staring eye of ‘Antagonist 3 / monster’ also remind us of the way humans living in communities can be bereft of support.

Earlier, the artist’s work has been displayed at solo exhibitions in Pakistan and Singapore. His works since 2008 have been part of more than 30 group exhibitions within Pakistan and abroad. One of the key reasons for his success in such a short time has been the usage of a vocabulary with global resonance.

As Zafar says, the figures in his work relate to a “life we are living in the modern times of distraction”. He adds, “Dystopian themes and uncertain futures have given no choice to my characters. They are unable to escape and fully recover from the toxic effect of overlapping histories.” And to highlight the anxiety, his subjects are wrapped in “bandages suggest a strong physical symbol of the healing of wounds.”

The jolting power of a bandaged figure, floating on a canvas with obsessive mark making, conjures a powerful allegory of the inner worlds we inhabit. At the same time, these representations mock globalisation, the idea of monocultures erroneously sold as signs of modernity and self-actualisation. The distinction of Zafar’s art practice therefore lies in his capacity to connect the inner with the outer, the local with the global ,and present injuries of such connections.