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‘INTERVIEW: Saad Qureshi on His Solo at Aicon Gallery’

By Sehba Muhammad



The London-based artist Saad Qureshi shows his latest mixed media works at Manhattan’s South Asian art hotspot, Aicon Gallery, until the end of this month. Although he is trying to adopt a more universal visual language, his work remains, like so many Pakistani artists, rooted in the rich cultural metaphors and latent violence of his country of origin.

The over 15 works include his signature fragmented landscapes, constructed with oil, spray paint, and wax pencil, dotted with meticulously rendered plumes of smoke. Some include faceless figures that seem to have escaped from Mughal miniatures pitching tents next to rainbow rivers reminiscent of gay pride. Others intentionally blur floral borders associated with Quranic folios. The one piece that commands your attention, “In the Remains” (2013) (also the title of the show), is the only sculpture on display. It consists of a collection of 20 hobbled oblong forms, charred and daunting, yet fury and inviting. It is consistent with the artist’s other recent sculptural triumphs like the aerodynamic wooden *Wing* (2013) shown during Artissima, Turin, at the booth of London’s Gazelli Art House.

BLOUIN ARTINFO caught up with Qureshi to get a deeper insight into the exhibition and the artist.

Tell me a bit about your background? When did you decide to practice art professionally?

While growing up in Bradford I had a strong sense of curiosity, but I was unhappy at school and unable to articulate myself through words. My art teacher recognized my frustrated ambition. She persuaded my parents to let me enroll at the Bradford College of Art, where I immediately felt at home. That’s where the journey started. I never really had the option of not becoming an artist since I was so useless at everything else and art is all I’ve known. It’s more of a responsibility than a job. I love it but the insecurities that come with it are not enjoyable.

What are some of the themes that you explore in your show “In the Remains” at Aicon Gallery?

Communication, mankind's failure at it, and what this leads to. I'm aware of the social, religious, and political implications of my work, but this does not mean I am making those particular points. It's about sharing my sensitivity with the world. In general I find myself using words like cultural otherness, belonging, failure of communication, ruins, aftermath, entrapment to describe my work.



"Persistence of Memory (Untitled 1)," Saad Qureshi, Carving on carbon paper, 2013

So many different thoughts come to mind when viewing your fabric, paint and wood sculpture "In the Remains," from hair follicles to a charred lamb legs. Can you explain the meaning and process behind the piece?

At times the impression of an artwork presents itself so powerfully that I have no option but to be dominated by the vision; only when it is complete do I understand what it is saying. Often there is so little time to get to know a work before it leaves my studio that I'm as curious as the next man.

"In the Remains" was one of those that just came to me. I was the passive partner, allowing the work to lead the way. As nerve racking as this is I do like the process and anticipation of reaching for the unknown.

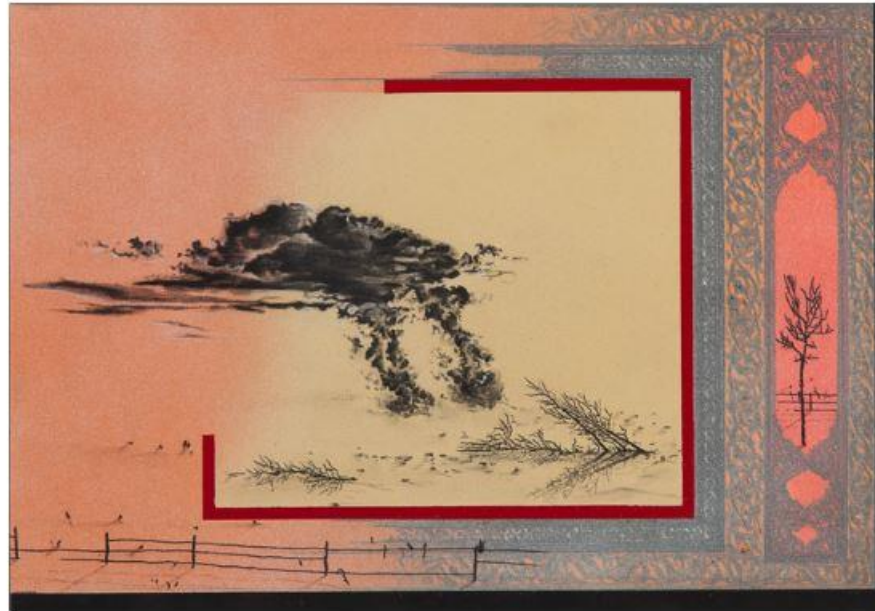
I enjoy the ambiguities of "In the Remains," I enjoy its enigmatic nature, I enjoy its physicality. It assumes a multitude of meanings. Mechanized warfare. Shadowy weapons. A forest incinerated by crossfire.



"In the Remains," Saad Qureshi, 2013

How influenced are you by your Pakistani roots and what you have referred to on your website as “twin identities?”

In my student days I was explicitly exploring my Pakistani roots and cultural belonging, but I feel that this is too personal and alienating. By exploring more universal concepts I feel a healthier balance. I’m interested in how my work is developing a visual bilinguality.



“In Vain,” Saad Qureshi, Oil, spray paint and wax pencil on paper, 2013

What’s next for Saad Qureshi?

When I start planning ahead nothing goes according to plan. So I’m training myself to play it by ear, or rather by eye!