

DAWN

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'Foreign palette: Memory and mutation'

By Salwat Ali



River dies of thirst.

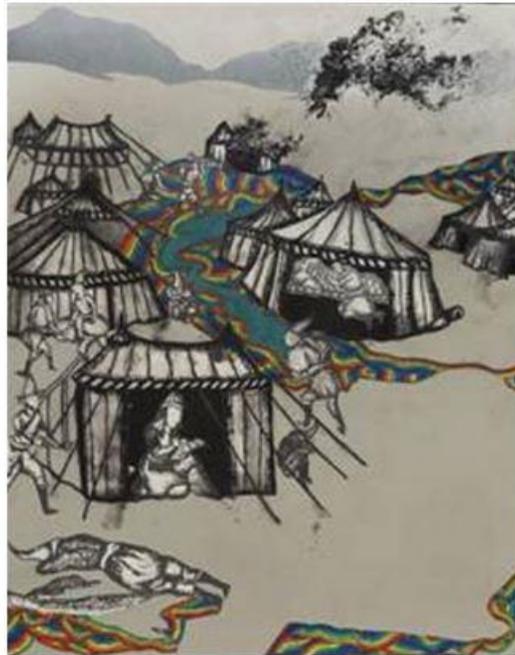
Currently enjoying the spotlight as ‘one of the most promising talents coming out of London these days’, Saad Qureshi is a young British Pakistani who gained international recognition as part of the Moving Museum programme. In 2009, he was among the six unknown artists selected by Charles Saatchi for BBC Two’s School Of Saatchi, Moving Museum programme. With advice from an esteemed panel Saatchi selected these six artists because he felt they had raw talent and creative edge. Attending a unique art school established just for them, these six artists, over a period of 10 weeks, were given the opportunity to develop their work through a series of commissions and with guidance from key figures in the British art world.

Qureshi, then aged 23, was working towards his MFA in fine art painting from Slade School of Art. Today he is garnering attention as “one of the most innovative artistic voices whose works are shaping contemporary art and developing its future” his work has drawn attention from a wide array of curators and collectors and has been picked up by several museums and public collections in Dubai, London and New York, such as MoMA. Aicon Gallery, New York, hosted his first US solo, ‘In the Remains’, recently. A multimedia show comprising drawing, sculpture and installation the works speak of the ‘in-betweenness’ of a bicultural existence and how shared histories prompt the creation of new visual vocabularies.

Varied, layered and open to inquiry, his art probes cultural divides, the collision, collapse, revival and emergence of new outcomes as well as the struggle inherent in such explorations. Consisting of anonymous protagonists and peppered with Islamic and Christian imagery his oil, spray paint and wax pencil painting, ‘Restrain’, is a mix between a jousting contest amongst knights and a battlefield encounter amongst two warriors. The spontaneous

rainbow coloured flashes in the composition remind one of national war flags, ensigns, standards and pennants on the one hand, and a deliberate attempt to camouflage clarity, on the other hand.

Contrary opinions can be accrued by opposing audiences if the art is viewed in the context of holy wars/crusades and contemporary concepts of apartheid. Likewise the painting, 'Edge of tentativeness', built around vaguely familiar opponents reflects an old world battleground and has a multihued river flowing through the camp.



On the edge of tentativeness.

The scenario turns stark in 'River dies of thirst', where the abandoned camp is intersected by a stream of bloody red. Open-ended conversations speak of flexible interpretations or uneasy resolutions and in Qureshi's paintings the deliberate ambiguities, faceless contenders and concealing/revealing gestures voice such uncertainties and opacities.

For a series of works called "Persistence of memory" the artist has created drawings on carbon paper. Fragile and linear, their content is built around incomplete arabesque foliate patterns juxtaposed with images of smokescreens, a pair of wings and blank mirrors. As memory scapes the works attempt to grasp and connect disjointed elements. Here memory is projected as an ineffective tool which reveals fragmented details that create uneasy mixes. The elements do not cohere.

All cultures generate unlimited new cumulative combinations of mixed forms of expressions with no pure states. Here at home our young generation artists are also creating new metaphors to address identity issues amidst social/political upheavals peculiar to our particular histories.

Similarities in approaches and content of this art with parallel situations elsewhere are such that the general resonance of conflict and change, vagueness and clarity, mix of Eastern and Western vocabulary, hybridity and mutation is easily identifiable. New generation artists are flexible and free from the weight of traditional art methodologies. Using renewed methods of thinking and addressing problems to create relevant art, they are creating a vocabulary that global audiences are also able to understand, and relate to.