

Salman Toor / Valet Service

May 8th – June 22nd, 2013

Press Preview & Opening Reception: Thursday, May 8th, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

Aicon Gallery New York is proud to present *Valet Service*, an exhibition of recent works by Salman Toor. Toor's paintings are an eclectic assemblage of the exhausted categories of old and new, where inspiration from Old Master painting melds seamlessly with imagery from South Asian mass-media and popular culture, including graphic paintings from local Lahore cinema billboards and contemporary advertising from Bollywood and fashion magazines. The exhibition features a group of eight paintings exploring the complex and often uncomfortable relationships between servants and masters, in which Toor transforms signs of poverty and commercial products into heroic symbols and absurdly idealized motifs through the metaphysical qualities associated with Renaissance oil painting.



Salman Toor, *Girl with Driver*, 2013 Oil on canvas, XX x YY in.

True to Toor's masterfully whimsical way with paint, these scenes become much more than the literal amalgamation of their commercial sources and instead stage their own private masquerade, cloaking the fantasies and visions of their contemporary subjects with a veneer of museum-worthy Old Master virtuosity. The works, however, are not simply an exercise in technical skill, but rather the result of a complicated personal relationship with Western art history through which the artist has re-interpreted his own place in his native social fabric. For Toor, aspiring towards the vivid scenes and technical perfection of the Renaissance and Baroque masters remains both a feasible and contemporary impulse, capable of yielding uniquely odd interpretations of the entrenched tenets of South Asian culture and advertising, thus setting the work apart in an age of exhausted irony and innumerable iterations of commercial imagery.



Salman Toor, *Rickshaw Driver's Dream*, 2013, Oil on linen, XX x YY in.

In *Girl with Driver*, a salmon-colored Honda Civic becomes as luxurious as a silk cravat in an Ingres painting, while the artist transforms this common sight in urban Pakistan – a woman in the backseat with a male driver up front – from its practical origins into a shameless allegory of rags and riches, simultaneously beautiful and grotesque. However, Toor's realism is selective, as can be seen in the fantastical luminosity of the colors, along with the stylized anatomy of the figures, while visual clichés – the woman smelling a flower from the car side – provide a running commentary of the absurd social subtexts of such a scene. The composition and type-cast figures in this and other works are culled from the ubiquitous advertisements for jewelry, beauty products ('Fairness Creams'), new shopping malls and cell phone providers dominating Pakistan's urban media landscape.

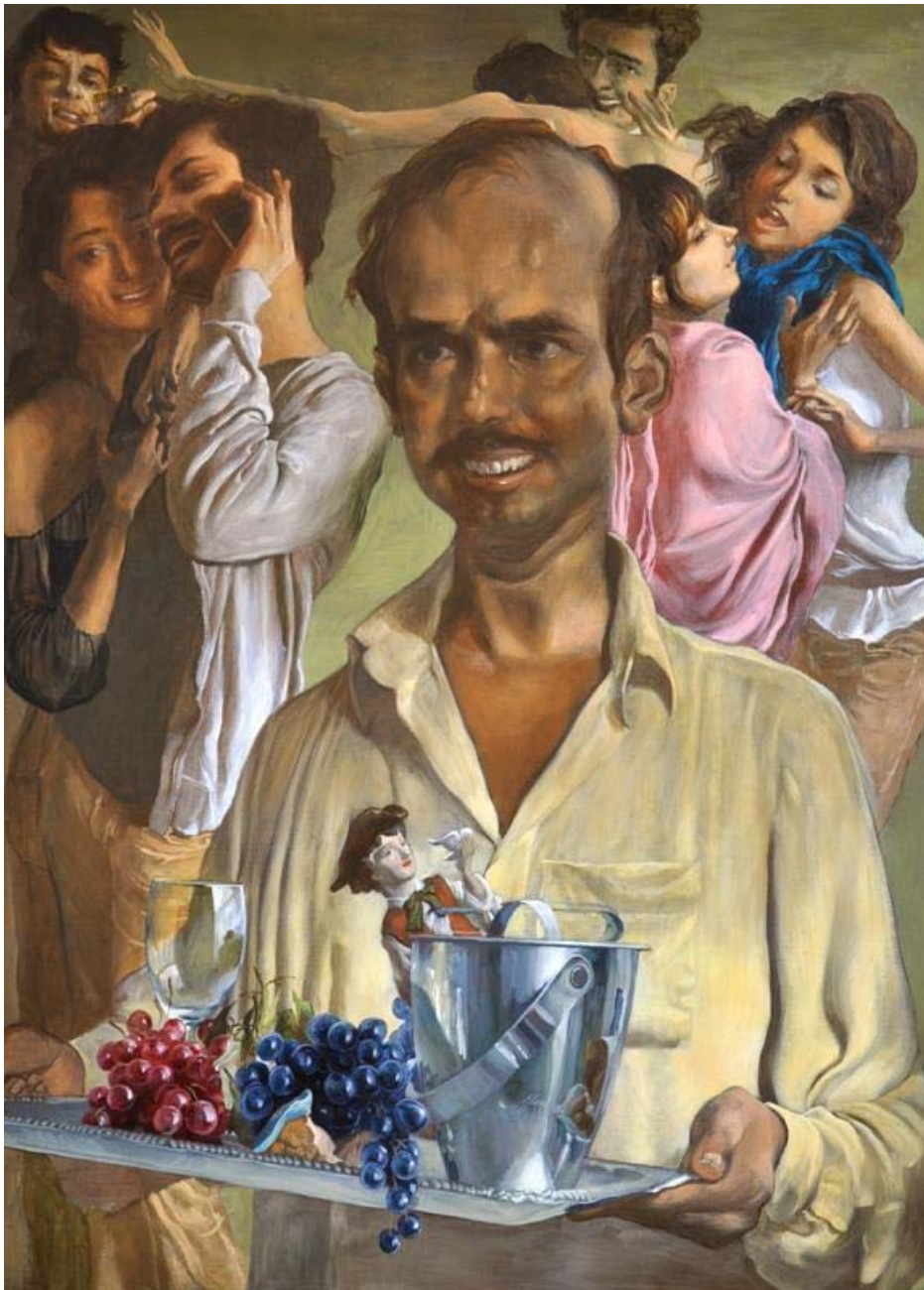
Both *The Rickshaw Driver's Dream* and *Driver and Maid* depict fantastic scenes of personal and collective wish-fulfilment through an impossible amalgamation of visual references and cultural stereotypes, including the famous group dances of Bollywood musicals and the painted covers for Mills and Boon romance novels from the 1970s. *The Rickshaw Driver* borrows its composition from Titian's *Three Ages of Man* (circa 16th century Venice), which itself was most likely influenced by Giorgioni's themes and motifs of landscapes and nude figures. In Toor's work, this familiar scene of idyllic romance is pushed over the edge into Bollywood pathos by the presence of ever-ready backup dancers, who have spontaneously broken into their routine in support of the "leading couple." This cinematic trope, in which the class differences that typically dominate South Asian society are instantaneously dissolved and cooks, gardeners, landlords and drivers all rejoice in choreographed triumph for a singular imaginary couple, highlights the comedically absurd nature of mass-marketed culture and advertising in modern-day India and Pakistan that often serves to mask a much darker social reality.



Salman Toor, *The Happy Sweeper*, 2013, Oil on linen, Dia: 48 in.

Similarly, poverty oscillates between caricature and reverence in *The Happy Servant*, while *The Happy Sweeper* brushes away in a sentimental disneyland of daisies and four-leaf clovers. In both works, one senses the inherent isolation of the central figure in an otherwise carelessly jubilant gathering or classically-inspired milieu, while their frozen smiles have a foreboding quality suggesting that the social fantasy in which they've immersed themselves must at some point inevitably crumble. Throughout all these works, Toor deftly presents a subtle melding of the consumer and social fantasies perpetuated by the mass-media of urban India and Pakistan with a Renaissance-era spirit of light, technique and idealism to present a unique vision of the complexities and exchanges between South Asian popular culture and the art historical traditions of Western idealization. Salman Toor (b. 1983) lives and works between New York and Karachi, Pakistan. This is his first solo exhibition in New York.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Amy@Aicongallery.com) for more information.



Salman Toor
The Happy Servant
2013
Oil on linen
45 x 33 in.



Salman Toor

Rickshaw Driver's Dream

2013

Oil on linen

48 x 59 in.



Salman Toor
The Happy Sweeper
2013
Oil on canvas
Dia: 24 in.



Salman Toor
Girl with Driver
2013
Oil on canvas
56 x 78 in.



Salman Toor
Girl with Beggar
2013
Oil on linen
18 x 24 in.



Salman Toor
Driver and Maid
2013
Oil on canvas
24 x 29 in.



Salman Toor
Girl and Boy with Driver
2013
Oil on canvas
56 x 78 in.



Salman Toor

Girl in Car

2013

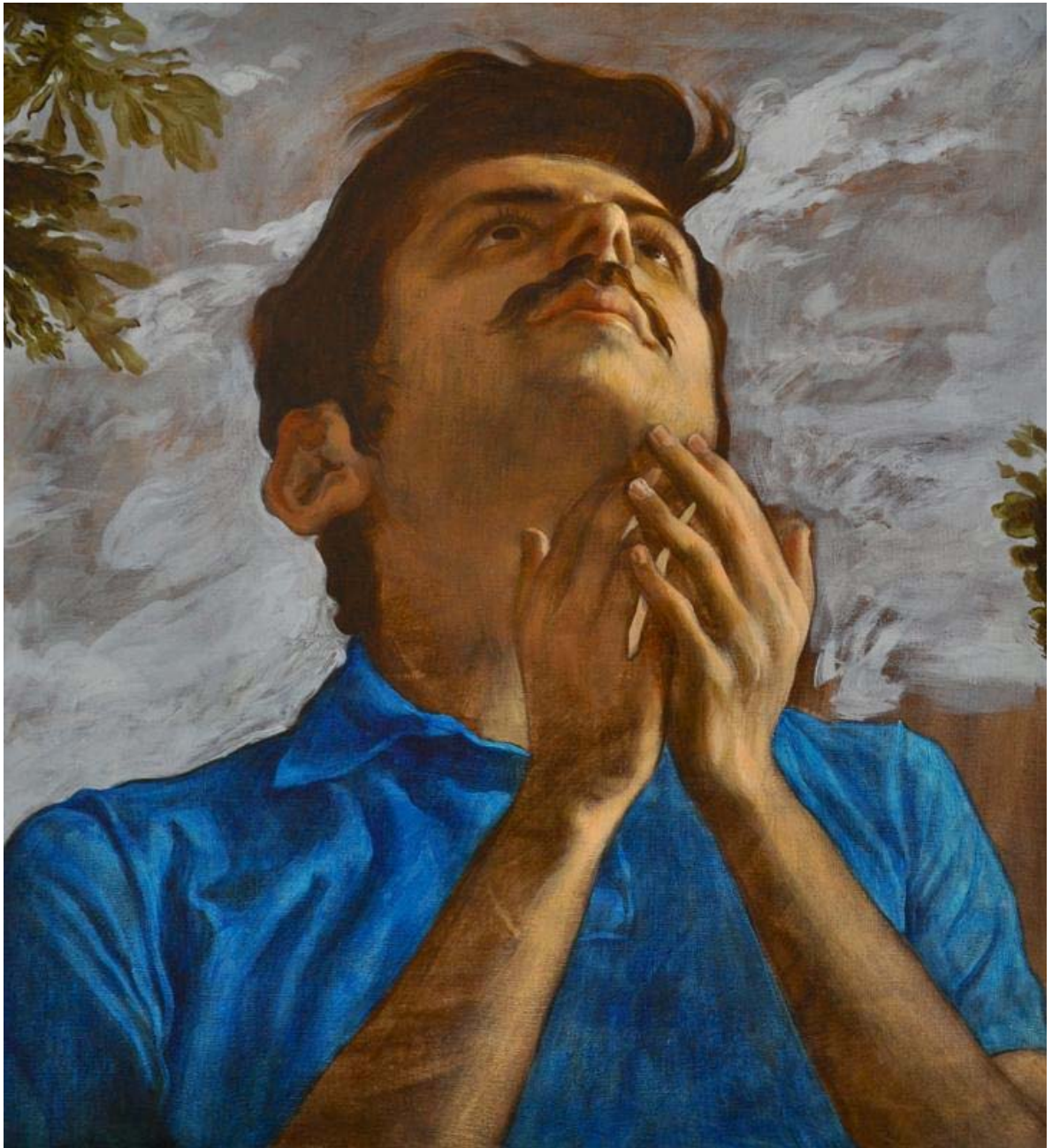
Oil on canvas

18 x 24 in.

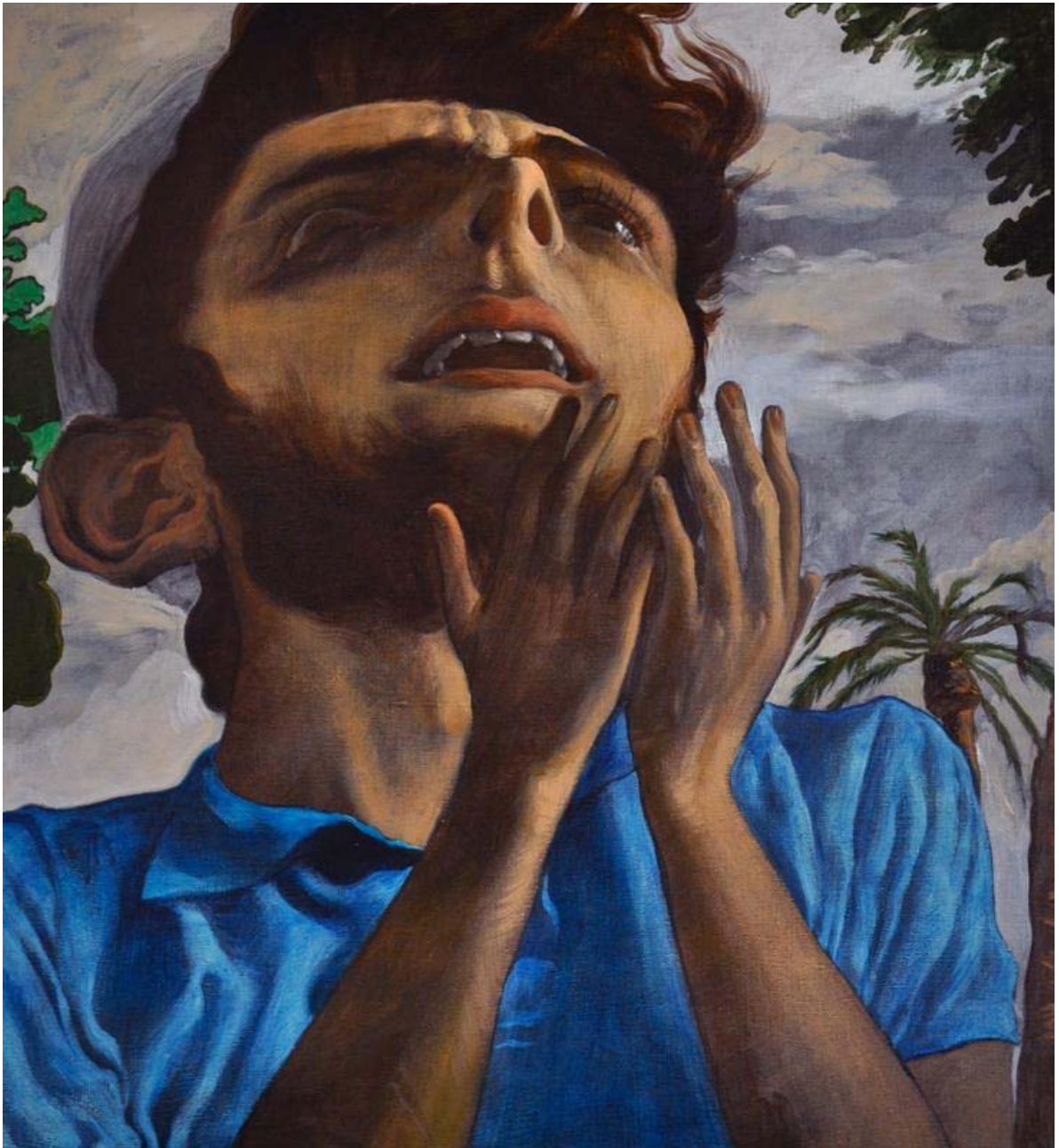
\$2,500



Salman Toor
Believer with Tasbi
2013
Oil on linen
29 x 27 in.



Salman Toor
Believer with Mustache
2013
Oil on linen
29 x 27 in.



Salman Toor
Believer with Cap
2013
Oil on linen
29 x 27 in.

SALMAN TOOR

Born in Lahore, Pakistan, 1983

Masters of Fine Art (Painting), The Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York (2009)

Bachelors of Fine Art (Painting and Drawing), with Honors, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware Ohio (2006)

Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

Select Group Exhibitions

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|------|---|
| 2012 | <i>Stop, Play, Pause, Repeat</i> , Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai |
| 2010 | <i>All about Us</i> , Canvas Gallery, Karachi |
| 2009 | <i>Wounds</i> , Aicon Gallery, London |
| | <i>Purdah: Body Matters</i> , The Halvai Gallery, New York |
| | Exchange Show, Montclair University MFA Gallery, Montclair, New Jersey |
| | Pratt MFA Thesis Show, Stueben Gallery, Brooklyn, New York |
| | <i>I Think The Word Is Dignity</i> , Lumenhouse Gallery, Brooklyn, New York |
| | <i>Skin Deep</i> , Kips Gallery, New York |
| 2008 | <i>Pratt in Lucca</i> , Piazza del Anfiteatro, Lucca, Italy |

Select Solo Exhibitions

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| 2013 | <i>The Happy Servant</i> , Aicon Gallery, New York |
| 2009 | <i>Three Paintings</i> , The Cultural Center, Kahlo Gallery, Hampshire College, Amherst
Massachusetts |
| 2008 | <i>Look See</i> , Studio O, Lahore |
| 2005 | <i>The Return of the Real</i> , Alhambra Arts Council Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan |