

Pale Sentinels: Metaphors for Dialogues

A Tribute to Priya Ravish Mehra

Curated by Salima Hashmi

Aicon Gallery Exhibition, June 28 – July 28, 2018

Press Preview & Opening Reception: Thursday, June 28, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York, NY 10012

Faiza Butt (b. 1973, Pakistan)

Waqas Khan (b. 1982, Pakistan)

Ghulam Mohammad (b. 1979, Pakistan)

Saba Qizilbash (b. 1977, Pakistan)

Shilpa Gupta (b. 1976, India)

Nilima Sheikh (b. 1945, India)

Shehnaz Ismail (b. 1946, Pakistan)

Priya Ravish Mehra (1961 - 2018, India)

Aicon Gallery New York is pleased to present *Pale Sentinels*, a group exhibition curated by Salima Hashmi that reflects upon the faded accounts, mementos, and narratives of loss that came about as a result of the complete demographic transformation during the 1947 India-Pakistan partition. Since then, both nations have attempted to define and redefine themselves many times. Subtle shifts have occurred, layers rearranged, partly unobtrusive and occasionally self-consciously brazen. Histories brim with contradictory chronicles, with paradoxes, with elusive truths. Tantalizing possibilities of reframing materialize. Poets, artists, and filmmakers probe and shift the compass. Seventy years is as good a time as any to muse upon the collective residue.

Curator's Note

The exhibition borrows its title from a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, 'A Prison Morning' (Zindaan ke aik subh), which describes daybreak in prison; the distant sounds of keys piercing open locks, the jangling of chains and the weary guards pale with hunger and sleeplessness. The poet realizes that the prisoners and those who guard them are equally in despair. Over the years, the status quo in the subcontinent has become a desert. No claims are made, no margins set, no ambitions to disturb the sentinels who have guarded swathes of humanity for three generations.

Artists from both sides of the boundary drawn by Radcliffe in 1947 come together in this exhibition located continents away. They are already aware that the sentinels are worn down and weary, rendered ineffective by the technologies that now facilitate such collaborations and conversation. Each artist in this group has,



Priya Ravish Mehra, *I will meet you yet again*, 2018, Hand woven silk darned with cotton and silk fabric and thread, 108 x 45.5 in.

in one way or another, engaged with borders and constraints. **Waqas Khan, Ghulam Mohammad, Saba Qizilbash, Faiza Butt and Shilpa Gupta** represent a generation born decades after the massive separations witnessed in 1947. Directly or obliquely, each of them addresses notions of redressal, of probing leading to healing in the face of continual denial of collective hurt. To sustain hope, artists scrutinize the limits of endurance. The older generation is more collected in its response. **Nilima Sheikh, Shehnaz Ismail and Priya Ravish Mehra**, witness to grave vicissitudes, take to poetic repose.

This exhibition carries deep significance for the art community. It is the first New York showing of the works of Priya Ravish Mehra, a distinguished and celebrated practitioner who passed away in May. Her lifetime association with rafoogari's traditional textile darners is represented in her work as a compelling metaphor. The concept of 'repair' is presented as a healing modality of intimate self-knowledge, and honors the place, significance and act of visible and invisible darning in the fabric of any life, as much as in the life of any fabric.



Saba Qizilbash, *Sialkot to Jammu*, 2018
Graphite and wash on water colour board, 30 x 66 in.

The embodiment of this idea is in two textiles exchanged between Shehnaz Ismail and Priya Ravish Mehra. One originated in Sindh, but at Partition found its way to Delhi and into Priya's care, and was sent back to Shehnaz Ismail last year, for repair. The second shawl, which belonged to Shehnaz in Karachi, crossed borders and arrived in Delhi to be nurtured by Priya. These fragile, much-worn shawls, almost beyond repair, were delicately brought back to life by the rafoogars on either side. They hang side by

side in this exhibition, a testimony to the persistence in nurturing relationships and the power of loving endurance inherent in the people of the subcontinent.

It is an honor to present the work of this distinguished group of artists. Several of the artists' works have been seen in major public collections like The British Museum, London, UK and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (Waqas Khan); Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museum, New York (Shilpa Gupta) and Asia Society, New York (Nilima Sheikh, Faiza Butt). Many of the artists have had prestigious solo exhibitions at the British Council, Delhi, and Commonwealth Institute, London (Priya Ravish Mehra); documenta 14 and The Art Institute of Chicago (Nilima Sheikh) and upcoming at YARAT Contemporary Art Space, Baku (Shilpa Gupta). among the artists are finalists and recipients of notable awards like the V&A's Jameel Prize (Ghulam Mohammad, Faiza Butt), Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong (Saba Qizilbash, Faiza Butt), Government of India Senior Fellowship Award (Nilima Sheikh) and some have even had work commissioned by the Alchemy, Bradford Museums and Galleries, UK, (Shehnaz Ismail)

Please contact Aicon Gallery (jana@aicongallery.com) for more information.