

Affan Baghpati | Anatomy of a Horny Heart

May 1 - May 29, 2021

Aicon Contemporary is pleased to present *Anatomy of a Horny Heart*, a solo exhibition featuring works by Karachi based artist Affan Baghpati. The following is an essay by Arushi Vats.

On “Anatomy of a horny heart” by Arushi Vats

“My cool machines
resting there so familiar
so hard and perfect

I am afraid to touch you
I think you will cry out in pain

I think you will be warm, like skin.”

– *Three Desk Objects*, Margaret Atwood

In Affan Baghpati’s “*objets terrible*”—hybrid assemblages of metal, stone, plastic that stir memories and invite interpretations—the order which governs human sensing is profoundly troubled.

Anatomies are disassembled as the plastic limbs of a doll are affixed to a metal *dani* (container) sprouting the head of a European composer, a small foetus emblem is bezeled on the side. Disparate parts of a constellation of unrelated yet proximate objects connect to make provisional the very notion of a stable whole. These admixtures trick the eye into a search for convention as domestic objects, popular keepsakes and memorabilia are encountered; then swiftly denies it such appeasement. The composite is spliced to reveal divergent energies: a cat figurine looks sideways, quite literally, as its body is angulated, copper plates smoothening its messy innards; elsewhere the comforting figure of a pug is separated in two, connected by a glinting brass pipe. These are found objects, sourced by Baghpati from the local markets and tradespersons of Karachi, Lahore, Hyderabad, Gujrawala, Rawalpindi and



You know I love you, 2021, Assemblage, found objects, cast, brass, polymer resin, epoxy, glass crystals, beads, 9 x 8.7 x 6.7 in.

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Multan which makes these akin as commodities, things holding value, revolving in circuits of exchange. Yet these objects have tread variant paths, and are vehicles for distinct if not distant histories. A *surmedani*, a kohl container and applique, is a common if disused accoutrement in South Asian homes.

In Baghpati's assemblages, you are as likely to encounter the elaborate head of a *suramchi* (the applique stick) carved with intricate patterns and symbols of national identity, as the opulent *dani*, the small pot that stores kohl or *surma*. A brass *sarota* (nutcracker) would rest in the *paan dan* (betel leaf box), often found in the hands of matriarchs such as Mumani in Ismat Chughtai's short story *Kallu*, who is fastidiously cleaning it when a confrontation erupts. Declining in usage and vanishing



Clip, 2020, Assemblage, found objects, brass, polymer resin, 1.2 x 6.5 x 2.4 in.

from material culture, these objects radiate a belated nostalgia, functional enough to not be saved as heirlooms, deeply entwined with the personality of their custodians. Baghpati remembers his grandmothers and their relationship with these objects, that enveloped within them many gestures, *tehzeeb*,

dispositions of these women. It is the nature of traces to urge contact, a *sabundani* (soap box) implores you to bend forward and take a sniff; you can hear a snap in your head as you gaze upon a dog's head attached to a brass clipper. These objects enjoin with mass-produced "readymades" and European memorabilia to create humoredly, a statement on the asymmetrical networks of production, circulation and discarding that shape economies of consumption and waste: a doll manufactured in China is sold in Europe, and disposed to South Asia, where it blends with a "Made in Pakistan" *surmedani*, all this while travelling routes old and new, transforming in meaning and form.

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Baghpati selects his objects with care, in so much that they are not found as they are sighted and sought, everything from volume to material composition grasped in the entirety of its conceptual and contextual breadth. Which makes it impossible to not call these studies in desire, its display and celebration, its symbolic abundance and heteronormative codes. Phallic formations are adjoined to traditional “women’s” objects, juxtapositions which challenge the visual orders of gendering devices—the hourglass curve of a kohl container, the floral motifs are disturbed. These juxtapositions sublimate the notion of desire to sensation caught in a dense entanglement with erosion and atrophy: the surface of skin and metal, a moment in history, a fragment of a culture forgotten, a belief persisting against the tides of change. These hybridities document identity as vivid, dispersed, contingent; proposing an eros of the immanent, of that which is present, which is fluid, which abjures binaries.



Thing, 2020, Assemblage, found objects, brass alloy, 6 x 4.3 x 1.77 in.

Chasm-e-baddoor, an iridescent script on the wall reads. Beauty is, after all, in the *nazar* (eye) of the beholder.

Arushi Vats writes on arts and culture, in the form of reviews of exhibitions and photo books, as well as longform essays on cinema and visual art. Her essays have been published in *Alternative South Asia Photography*, *LSE International History*, *Critical Collective*, *Write | Art | Connect*, *Scroll*, *Mint*, and *The Quint*; additionally she has authored curatorial notes for *Galerie Mirchandani Steinruecke*, Mumbai. She works as editorial manager at an arts foundation and is based out of Delhi.

Affan Baghpati (b.1991) is based out of Karachi, Pakistan. Visual Art and Art Education are his trajectories of practices. He completed his undergraduate studies in Fine Arts from Indus Valley

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School of Art and Architecture, Karachi in 2015; and graduate program in Art and Design Studies from Mariam Dawood School of Visual Art and Design, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore in 2018.

Affan Baghpati's work has been showcased at AAN Gandhara, Canvas gallery, Koel Gallery, and Sanat Initiative in Karachi; Rohtas 2 Gallery, Taseer Art gallery, Faqeer Khana Museum, and The Colony in Lahore; Satrang Gallery, and 12.0 Contemporary in Islamabad; Museo Diocesano Carlo Maria Martini in partnership with Sotheby's in Milan; Aicon Contemporary in New York; Twelve Gates Arts in Philadelphia; and 1x1 Art Gallery in Dubai. His works were also a part of the Sindh Art Festival 2014 in Karachi, Karachi Biennale 2017 (KB17) and Karachi Biennale 2019 (KB19); Lahore Biennale 2018 (LB01) and Lahore Biennale 2020 (LB02); Beirut Art fair 2019; and India Art Fair 2020. Baghpati received a 100% Scholarship Award by UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute for South Asia Regional Cooperation (UMISARC) during 2016-2018. He is also the recipient of the first cycle of the 'Artist Residency in Museum' in Karachi, hosted by the State Bank of Pakistan, Museum and Art Gallery in 2020. He is currently a lecturer at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi.