



Kavita Ramdya

An Alien Artist

Despite his formulaic style, Saad Qureshi is an exceptional conceptual artist. Not only is his work well-crafted and of the highest standard of quality, but its themes and concerns are relevant and timely.



"Another road in the road", pencil and rust on canvas, 2008.

Saad Qureshi is easy to pick out in a crowd. At "Wound," an Aicon Gallery group show, Qureshi sticks out: He wears immaculately white high-top sneakers two sizes too big for his feet. His sneakers are the discerning feature of his "artist costume," an outfit that must have taken him a week of internal to-ing and fro-ing plus phone conversations with friends to pull together. He wears the multiple layers indicative of his current status as an art graduate student at University College London's Slade School of Fine Art, including a white shirt, red tie, purple cardigan and black jacket.

His hair is tussled and he isn't clean shaven, giving him the appearance of looking disoriented from having just left his art studio for the first time in days.

The young Pakistani artist furtively scans the gallery while speaking to friends, family and associates, giving the feeling that he is half present in all his conversations. However, when speaking with him, I have his full attention.

What I quickly realize is that for all his posturing as iconoclast, he is not immune to the guilt young South Asians feel over rejecting more practical vocational choices (such as law, medicine, business) for embarking on a creative career as an artist. Qureshi describes how his parents, although initially unsupportive of his artistic interests, started to come around when his school teacher explained to them he was a "chosen one." Now, he continues, his "parents are 200 percent behind me" and "would do anything to help me in my career." Qureshi's parents surface again and again, so much so that I begin to feel like I am his shrink rather than an arts columnist. Alternatively, and I wouldn't put it past Qureshi whose youth is a powerful cover-up for his shrewdness, he may be planting material on me that he knows a South Asian audience would find endearing.

Qureshi, despite his formulaic style and earnest concern for his parents' approval, is an exceptional conceptual artist. Not only is his work well-crafted and of the highest standard of quality, but its themes and concerns are relevant and timely. When he tells me that he

works constantly and needs to be coerced into leaving the 24-hour art studio to eat and sleep, I am not surprised. His work is the conceptualization of issues of immigration, terrorism, and victimhood, all as current as the daily e-mail alerts I receive from The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Qureshi has two qualities that will stand him in good stead as he moves forward in his career. First, he is prolific. Second, his work is a response to his personal experiences as a young Pakistani growing up in the suburbs. However, these personal themes reverberate on a global scale: the alienation and marginalization he captures in his sculptures and on the canvas also speak to the current political climate with

regard to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the proliferation of racism.

Jagroop Mehta, the gallery's sales associate, explains how a collection of black, life-sized alien figure sculptures symbolizes marginalized societies. On a more personal level, the black sculptures refer to the artist's adolescence while living in the suburbs, where he felt like an outsider.

When I ask Qureshi about his tribe-of-aliens sculptures, he refers to Frantz Fanon, a black, mid-20th-century French post-colonial philosopher whose writing serves as the intellectual backbone in Qureshi's own work. Fanon discusses how the "other" is only a different version of oneself. After learning the intellectual underpinning of

Qureshi's work, I silently applauded his ability to inspire repulsion and intrigue in the viewers of his sculpture collection. He successfully mirrors the viewer's own grotesqueness by drawing his or her attention to the quality of the "other" in his works.

In addition to the alien-like sculptures, a collection of Qureshi's "edge paintings" is in the show. From a distance, the pieces look like fresh, egg-white canvases waiting for the artist's attention. However, upon closer viewing, Qureshi has meticulously painted, drawn, and "scrapbooked" in marginalized figures on the edges, where the canvas bunches up and threatens to be overlooked rather than on the smooth, white, fresh surface. The scrapbook

nature of the canvas' edges is a result of Qureshi's use of multi-media. Along with drawing and painting on the canvas' edges, he also utilizes photographs and currency to convey concepts around "the other."

When asked why he refrained from utilizing the medium of the canvas in a traditional way, Qureshi describes his frustration with painting: "I felt restricted, like painting was a limited medium. ... I discovered the edge of the canvas instead." He goes on to describe his images threaten to "slip off the canvas" and his role as the artist is to "catch these images before they fall into oblivion."

Niru Ratnam, the gallery's curator, describes how despite his age (he is not yet 24), the artist's installation works "are conceptually very well developed." The use of Fanon and Qureshi's ability to discuss his work on a theoretical level are testaments of the thought process he puts into his art.

Ivan, an art student enrolled in the same program Qureshi is finishing, rejects the notion his friend is a painter. Instead, he describes Qureshi as a "designer" who "arranges things," designing canvases like Tom Ford would "designer jeans." Although on the face of it, Ivan's comments might seem unfriendly, in the context of looking at Qureshi's painstakingly detailed work, one quickly realizes how much of his art is based on the conscientious placement of details.

Clearly a workaholic, Qureshi is managing well during a defining moment in his young career. His work is showing in a well-respected gallery while he is still completing the final year of his master's degree. He has just finished filming what I am guessing is a reality television show on BBC2. Throughout the private viewing of "Wound," my ears pricked up when scattered associates referred to a television production of some sort that incorporates various young artists, including Qureshi. The production is not meant to be public, but then artists are not known for their ability to keep secrets.

Artifacts by leprosy patients a hit in New Delhi

—NEW DELHI

From exquisite candles and jewelry to beautifully embroidered shawls and salwar-suits - a range of handicrafts made by leprosy patients is up for sale at the 17th Dastkaar Nature Bazaar in the capital.

Thronged by people, the fair, which started Nov 5 and will culminate Saturday, is organized by the Sasakawa India Leprosy Foundation (SILF) at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA).

Shivani Sharma, secretary of the Nature Bazaar, said: "The work of around 250 artisans from different parts of India like West Bengal, Pondicherry, Uttarakhand and Bihar is being showcased at the Bazaar. Everything from fabric to jewelry is available here at a varied price range".

Amongst some of the items available at the fair are colorfully decorated kites, bangles, lamps, salwar-suits and the



Sasakawa-India Leprosy Foundation, held an exhibition of products made by people once affected by leprosy in the Nature Bazaar in Nov. 2008.

likes. The price ranges from Rs.5 to Rs.90,000.

Ruth Paul, project coordinator of SILF, said: "This is the second time we have been a part of Dastkaar. If we go to markets directly with our wares, we do not get much sales. However, here we get a great platform."

Cultural programs and workshops for students like story telling and basket weaving have also been organized to add a different flavor to the exhibition.

This is the first time in 17 years that the Nature Bazaar

exhibition has been held at a venue other than Delhi Haat.

"This is a new place which has acted in our favor in a lot of ways. The footfalls are much more and we also have added space to showcase more items than we have done in the past," said Priyanka Rao, marketing manager of Dastkaar.

Kavitha Reddy, a home maker who had come to the fair, said: "The place is like a treasure trove. I have bought several things from here and have told my friends to visit it as well."

— IANS

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