

The background of the cover is a solid black. It is overlaid with various white and light gray abstract elements. On the left side, there are vertical, somewhat jagged white shapes that resemble stylized leaves or branches. A thin, curved white line arcs across the upper half of the cover. In the center and lower right, there are large, soft, organic white shapes that look like ink blots or soft-edged figures. In the bottom right corner, there is a faint, white rectangular outline.

POLITICS OF BEING HUMAN

Curated by Samina Iqbal

Khalil Chishtee



Dhobi Ka Kutta (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 91 x 119 cm

Politics of Being Human

"I am not trying to reform anyone or anything. My work is a reflection of my thoughts and experiences. I believe that the demons and shortcomings that we see around us exist within us." – Khalil Chishtee

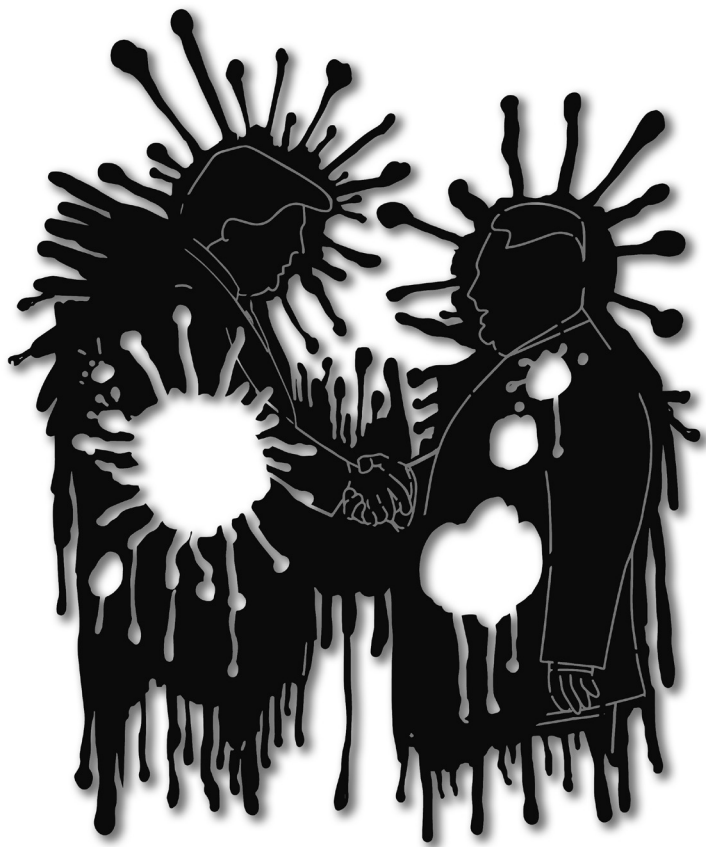
Our lived experiences shape the reflected projections we constantly create of ourselves. Living in the age of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram it seems that our desired projections actually begin to shape our daily experiences. The incessant need to post updates of our lives—be they real or even sometimes fabricated—is due to the sweet rush felt from the applause of our personal audiences. On these social media platforms, one single person can congratulate someone's success, mourn a death, and then crack a joke all within the same second. One cannot help but wonder the implications that these displays of instantaneous and varied ranges of emotions have on the human psyche. What is the need to share personal tragedies, incidents, and moments of bliss on social media? The intention is to garner applause and sympathies for all of our life events, incidents, and achievements—the mundane and the extraordinary. Is this a cry or desire for attention because of the fear of being lost, neglected or becoming invisible?

Khalil Chishtee's show *Politics of Being Human* reflects such desires by juxtaposing images and texts that he selects from social media, popular culture, and other familiar contexts. His laser cut metal relief sculptures projected from the walls are enigmatic and complicated. This is exhibited in his work entitled, *Khub Parda Hai Ke Chilman Se Lagey Baithey Hein Saaf Chhupte Bhi Nahin Samney Aatey Bhi Nahin*. In this piece an outline of a crowned male figure on a throne constructed of the script from Kaleem Usmani's famous patriotic poem: *Yeh Watan Tumhara Hai Tum Ho Pasbaan Is Ke, Yeh Chaman Tumhara Hai Tum Ho Nagma Khwaan Is Ke*. The outline of the crowned male figure marks an empty space. The man is hollowed and filled with blankness. By displaying the crowned figure in gestalt, Chishtee eludes to the idea that the crowned male's role is interchangeable with any man in power, thus, suggesting that democracy doesn't actually exist. The title of this work—a verse by the famous Urdu poet Daagh Dehlvi—translates as *Strange is the concealment in sitting along with the blind! Not even hiding entirely, all the more so, neither revealing!* Daagh Dehlvi's words reiterate Chishtee's depiction of the hollowed crowned figure by explaining the deceptive façade of democracy. This is all to say that all of the visible pomp and circumstance displayed by democratic powers is to obscure the truth of a neglected and lost democracy.

In other works, Chishtee makes direct commentaries on current geopolitical situations, which is shown in his piece, *Yak Na Shud Do Shud*. In this work, a silhouette of an iconic image of Donald Trump shaking hands with Kim Jong-un on Trump's historic visit to North Korea (where Trump became the first serving American President to step over the North Korean border) is displayed. This commonly circulating image is familiar to the masses, but Chishtee morphs the image into blob-like shapes of paint that look like rotten eggs. The image carries the same volatile obscurity of firework celebrations with its strange halos floating behind the two leaders.

Similarly, *Dhobi Ka Kutta*, an Urdu proverb (meaning one's feet in two boats or someone who does not belong to any one place), shows an image of a strange horse-like creature joining the skyline of New York with Lahore. Chishtee placing the iconic Pakistani landmark, *Minar-e-Pakistan*, directly diagonal from the iconic American landmark, the *Statue of Liberty*, is not an aimless choice to make the image recognizable, but instead, the two landmarks work to invoke the nationalism of each country. Chishtee's profound sense of belonging within these two worlds resonates with all those who experience a similar dilemma of neither being here nor there, but rather feel at home in both worlds.

Being one of the few practicing sculptors trained under Maestro Shahid Sajjad, Chishtee's love for the form remains dominant throughout his practice—whether he is working in conventional materials such as wood, clay, and metal or if he is working with unconventional materials like plastic bags and neon lights. In his works displayed in *Politics of Being Human*, Chishtee manually fashions the Urdu text (sometimes English as well) in freestyle calligraphy according to the form of the image and then transfers them into a digital medium. The process starts with charcoal sketches followed by ink drawings that are then scanned into the computer for laser cutting. These black powder coated metal reliefs form layers of shadows that look more like charcoal drawings. His freestyle writings become filigree that resonates as Arabic scripts from a distance. These scripts make compelling shadows when they are projected on the wall—almost as if they are floating through the air. Because the Urdu script bears visible similarity to Arabic, it is usually assumed that they are sacred texts referring to a holy inscription. The text, in fact, is not holy nor is it sacred. However, the near-illegibility of the text challenges even a native Urdu reader, as it is not easily discernible. On closer analysis, a viewer can catch hints and clues of what the artist may be relaying; which can be anything from meaningful poetry or proverbs to trending news but nothing that is sacred. Through this process, Chishtee is again cheekily playing with the idea of false realities by making truth obscured in the presence of visual projection.



Yak Na Shud Do Shud (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 91 x 76 cm

Chishtee's choice of images versus the text creates a dialectical relationship between the two. For Instance, his work titled, *Your love made me dance like a crazy man I*, shows a generic image of a Mughal King holding a book with an Oath of Allegiance that one takes when naturalized as a US citizen on it. The text is again handwritten but this time in English speckled with some Urdu words here and there—acting merely as aesthetic filler. The Mughal King intrinsically refers to the locality of the region (South Asia) whereas the text in hand symbolizes the acquisition of a new life in a foreign land. This work reveals a tension felt in many people balancing between different places of home. This piece makes the audience question these tensions. Does the work suggest a person's true home is grounded in the heart no matter their geographical place? Or is it highlighting feelings of otherness in newly acquired places of life?

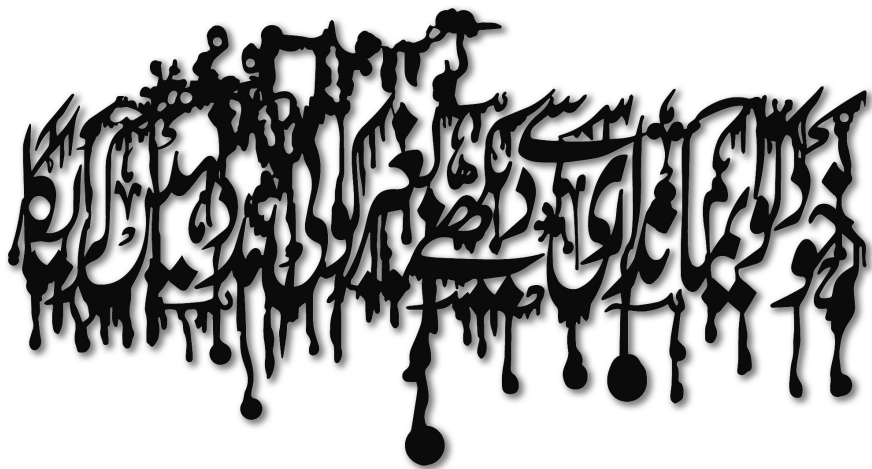
Existing detached from a singular place has allowed Chishtee to reflect on both worlds. He has become a citizen of the world. People's responses and reactions on social media become the charged content that Chishtee uses in his creative practice. He adapts, narrates, and rewrites the social narratives he sees and re-projects them with his own visual vocabulary. Through *Politics of Being Human*, he is ultimately undertaking the task of revealing the truths of the hollow forms that lay behind the projections constantly made of our daily lives.

Samina Iqbal

[illegible]



Mentor's Lesson (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 84 x 84 cm

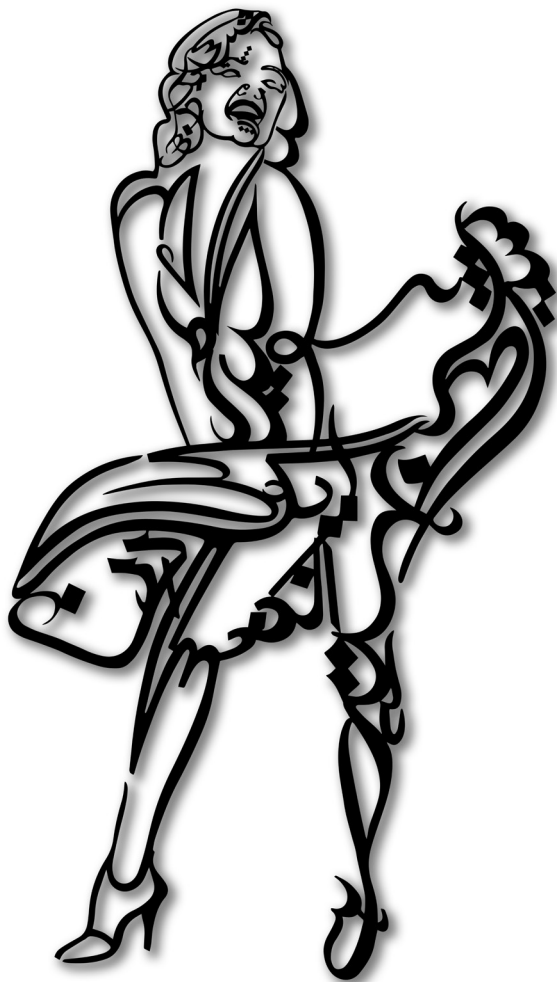


Headline I (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 48 x 91 cm



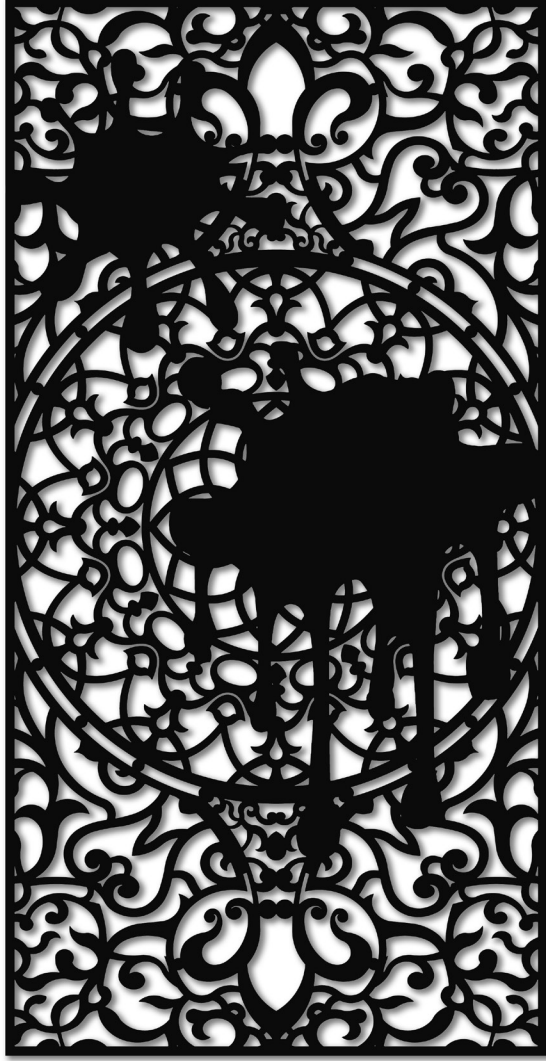
Headline II (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 30 x 58 cm

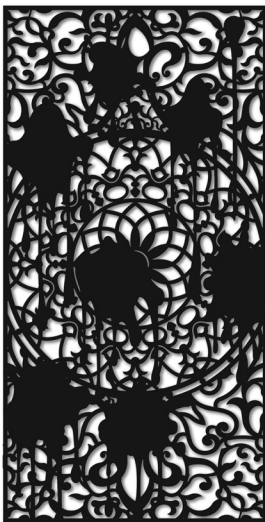
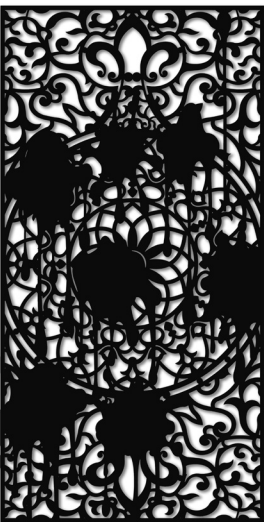
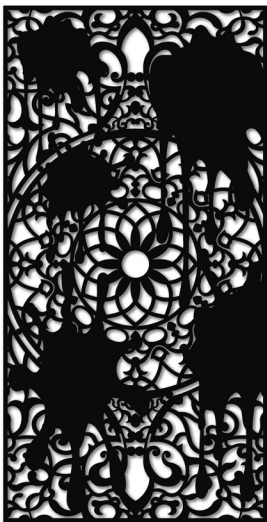
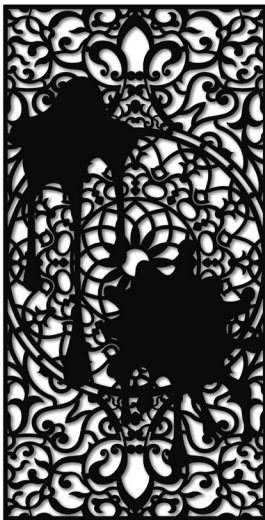
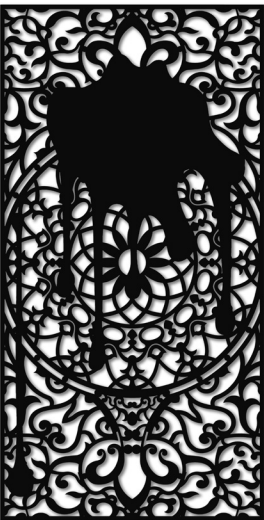
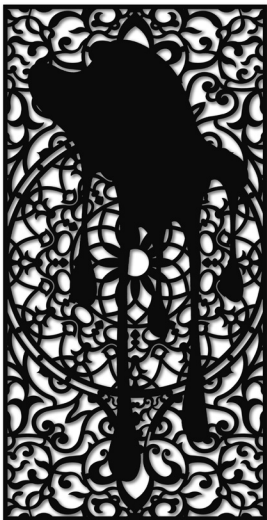
شیر کی ایک دن کی زندگی
گیدڑ کی سو سالہ زندگی سے بہتر ہے



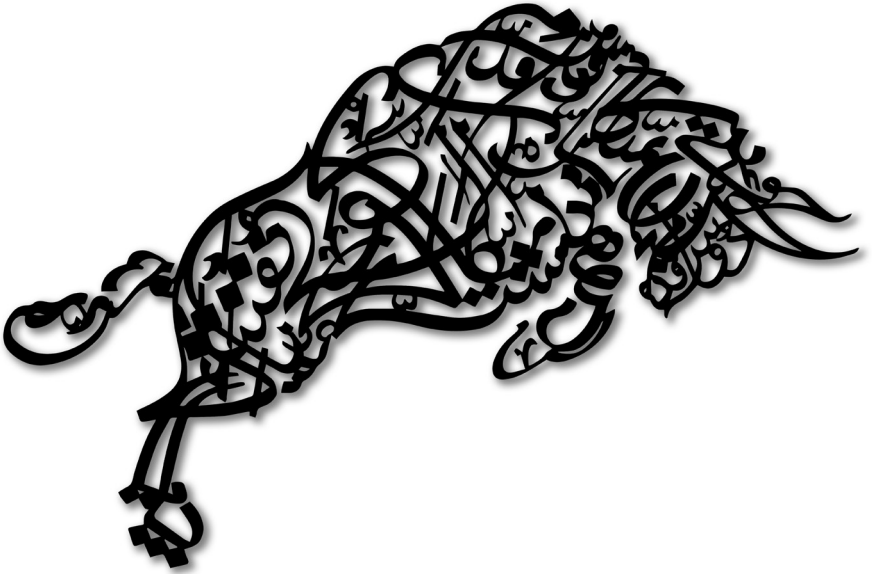
Two Stories (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 91 x 56 cm

Splashes of Paint I - VII (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 76 x 38 cm (each)





ہے کہاں تمنا کا دوسرا قدم یارب
ہم نے تو دشتِ امکاں کو اک نقشِ پا پایا

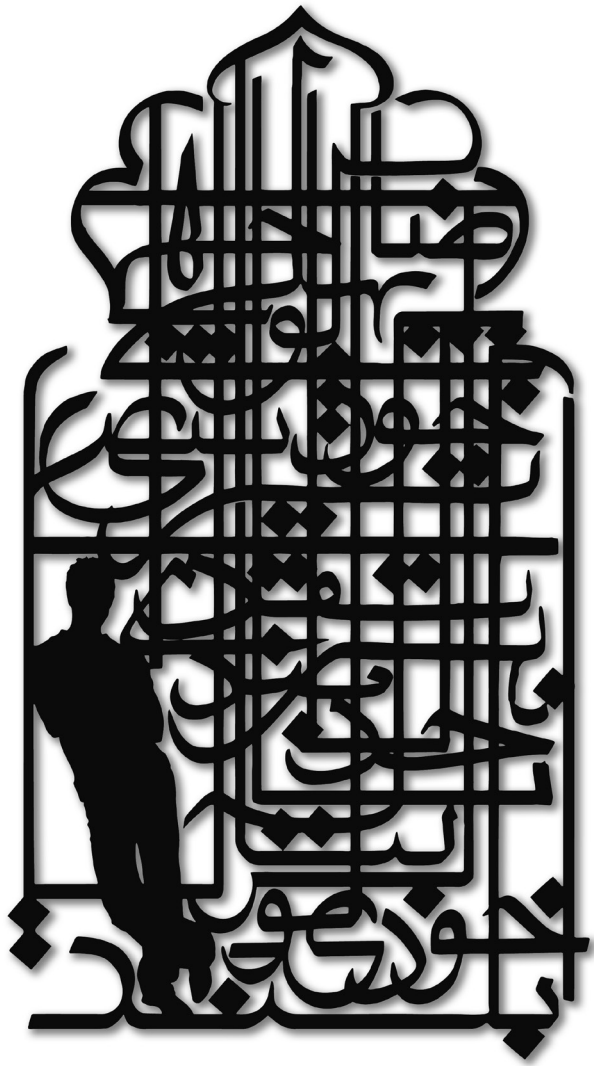


Desire I (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 81 x 91 cm

عشق پر زور نہیں ہے یہ وہ آتش غالب
کہ لگائے نہ لگے اور بجھائے نہ بنے



Desire II (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 114 x 76 cm



Ideal Cage (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 91 x 51 cm

خودی کو کر بُلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے
خُدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے

صبر کا پہل میٹھا
مائی فٹ

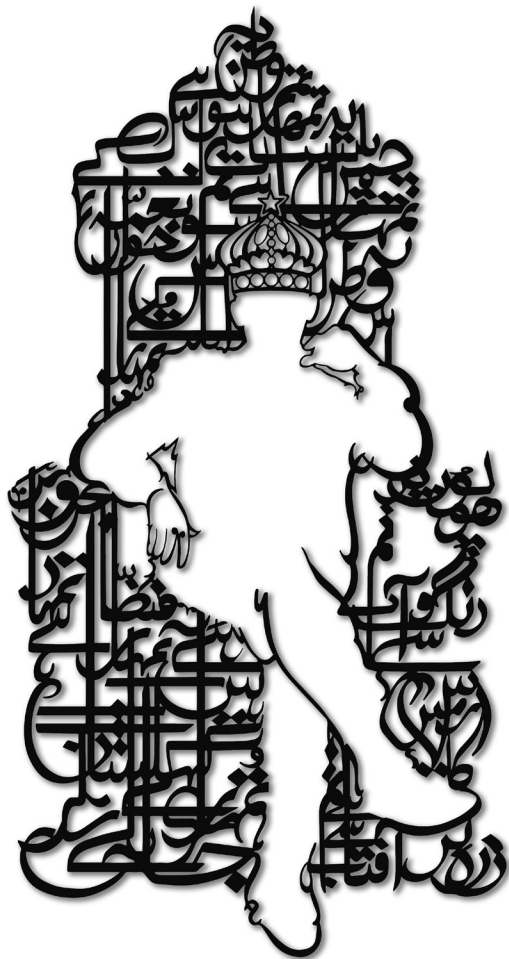


Crow's Mind (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 122 x 56 cm

ابن مریم ہوا کرے کوئی
میرے دُکھ کی دوا کرے کوئی



An apology to Sheikh Ayaz and other regional poets (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 139 x 122 cm



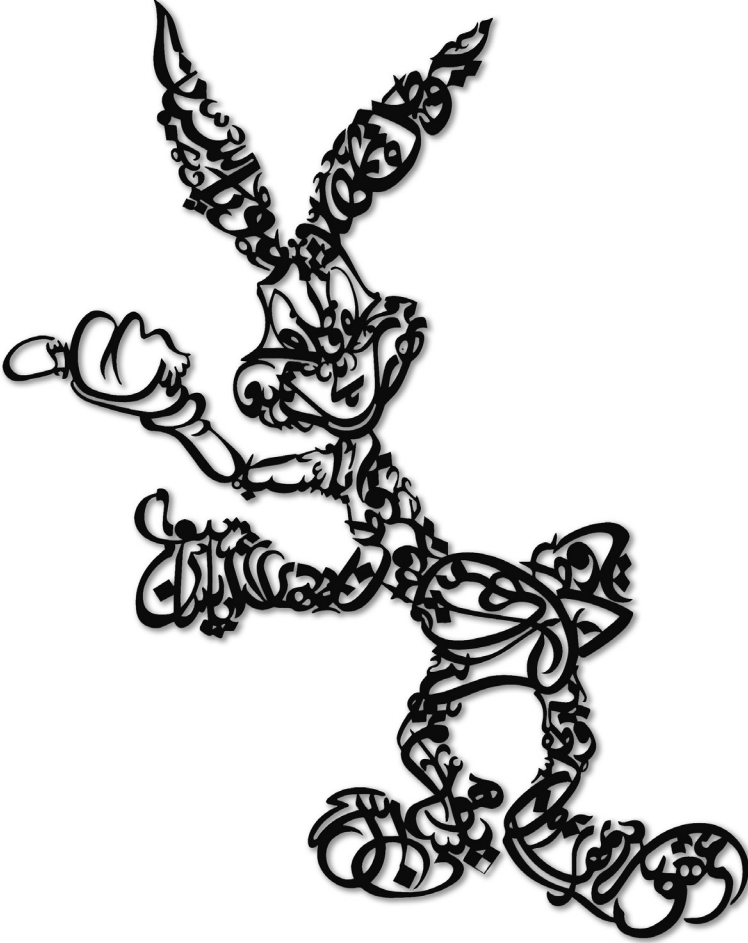
Khub Parda Hai Ke Chilman Se Lagey Baithey Hein
Saaf Chhupte Bhi Nahin Samney Aatey Bhi Nahin (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 174 x 91 cm

یہ چمن تمہارا ہے تُو ہو نغمہ خواں اس کے
اس چمن کے پھولوں پر رنگ و آب تُو سے ہے
اس زمیں کا ہر ذرہ آفتاب تُو سے ہے
یہ فضا تمہاری ہے بحرویر تمہارے ہیں
کھکشاں کے یہ جالے رہگزر تمہارے ہیں

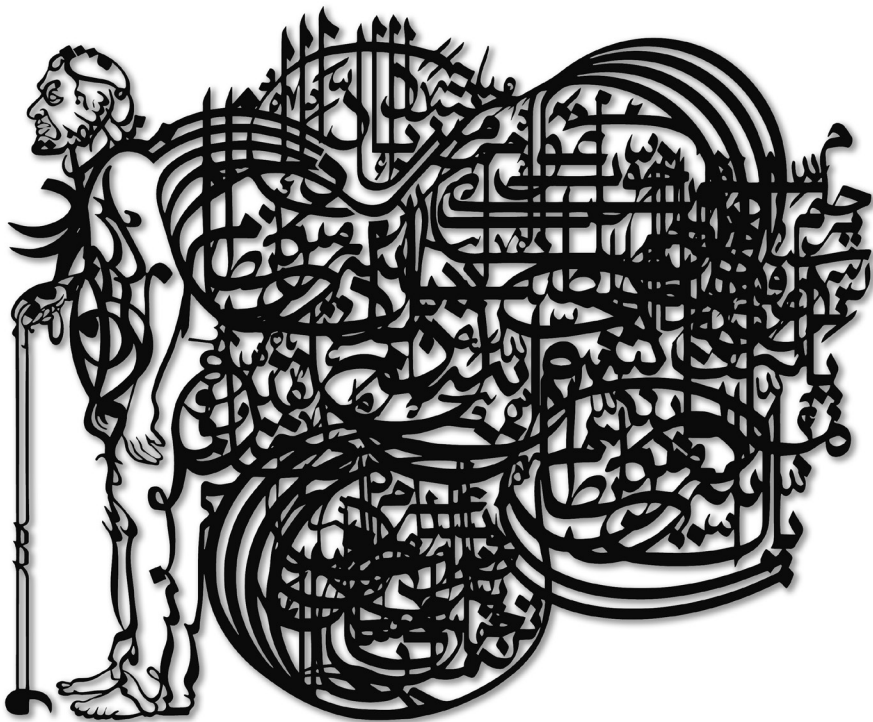
"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."



یہ وطن تمہارا ہے تم ہو پاسبان اس کے



*Your love made me dance like a crazy man I & II (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 149 x 91 cm, 153 x 122 cm*



Old Man's Anthem (Edition of 3 + 1 AP), 2019
5mm steel, powder coating, 100 x 122 cm

1947 – The new state of Pakistan came into being on 14 August.

1949 – Music for the Qaumi Taranah (National Anthem) is composed by the Pakistani musical composer, Ahmad G. Chagla (running time: 80 seconds).

1950 – Anthem, without lyrics, was performed for the first time for a foreign head of state on the state visit of the Shah of Iran to Pakistan in Karachi on 1 March by a Pakistan Navy band.

1952 – Verses written by the Pakistani poet, Hafeez Jullundhri, are selected from amongst 723 entries.

1954 – Officially adopted as the national anthem and broadcast for the first time on Radio Pakistan on 13 August.

1955 – Sung by 11 famous Pakistani singers including Ahmad Rushdi, Shamim Bano, Kokab Jehan, Rasheeda Begum, Najam Ara, Naseema Shaheen, Zwar Hussain, Akhtar Abbas, Ghulam Dastgir, Anwar Zaheer and Akhtar Wassi.

2011 – On 14 August 5,857 people gathered in a stadium in Karachi to sing the Qaumi Taranah and set a new world record for most people gathered to sing a national anthem simultaneously.

2012 – On 20 October 42,813 people gathered in a stadium in Lahore to sing the Qaumi Taranah and set a new world record for most people gathered to sing a national anthem simultaneously, which was certified by Guinness World Records. The record was subsequently broken on 26 March 2014 in Bangladesh.

2019 – On 25 October Khalil Chishtee exhibited his artwork titled “Old Man’s Anthem” in which the Qaumi Taranah was inscribed repeatedly in powder coated 5mm steel.

We live in an exciting time where new information questions the old structures. Smart devices with smart apps have given so much power to their users that within no time, one can have a strong opinion about anything and everything. Photo and video editing apps are used worldwide for various purposes including sabotaging political opponents and spreading false information. This is a result of the reading habit of books being replaced with reading social media posts.

Today social media has turned everyone into a photographer and a writer of their own newspapers. Scrolling down pages and pages of social media, one can see a fascinating combination of a picture with text. In "Politics of Being Human," I am trying to create some new link between familiar images and exciting texts through an informal style of calligraphy. To me, art is just not a display of skill of any sort; it is a way to look inside our own demons and then LOL over it.

Born in 1964 in Lahore, Pakistan, Khalil Chishtee is a visual artist based in New York City. Chishtee holds a MA in studio arts from Sac State, Sacramento, CA. Before moving to USA, he taught for ten years at National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan. Besides exhibiting his work, Chishtee has done public commissions in various cities of Pakistan and now is involved in several art commissions in New York City.

Chishtee intends his art for transformation rather than decoration, diversion or indoctrination. In his view, art is meant to serve for cultivating knowledge of how to be in the world, for going through life and that it can be effective for developing a deeper understanding of ones own experiences.

His installations, sculptures, and site-specific works have been exhibited at the "56th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia" (2015) and in important international art projects as "Outliers" - THE FRANKLIN, Chicago (2019), "Silent Conflict", Visual Art Gallery - India Habitat Centre, New Delhi (2019), "Common Borders Project", Sanat Initiative, Karachi (2019), "India Art Fair" (2018), "Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions: South Asian Art in the Diaspora", Asia Society Museum, NY (2018), "Here Today" - celebrating 50 years of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, London (2014), Art Festival Watou, Belgium (2014), "Brain Drain" - project for Art 14, London (2014). Chishtee's recent solo shows include "Between the Lines" curated by Ashna Singh, India Habitat Center, New Delhi (2019), "Trash to Treasure", Berlin Baku Gallery, Berlin (2015), "Detritus from Exploded Stars" curated by Nafisa Rizvi, Sanat Initiative, Karachi (2015), "I me and mine", Twelve Gates Gallery, Philadelphia (2014) and "Sparkling Truths", Lahore (2011).



This publication accompanies the exhibition

POLITICS OF BEING HUMAN

Curated by Samina Iqbal

Solo presentation by Khalil Chishtee



Sanat Initiative, Commune Artist Colony, Sadiq Godown
Miskeen Gali, off M.T. Khan Road, Karachi

A level of color inaccuracy is to be expected when images are viewed onscreen and in print version in the catalogue.

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