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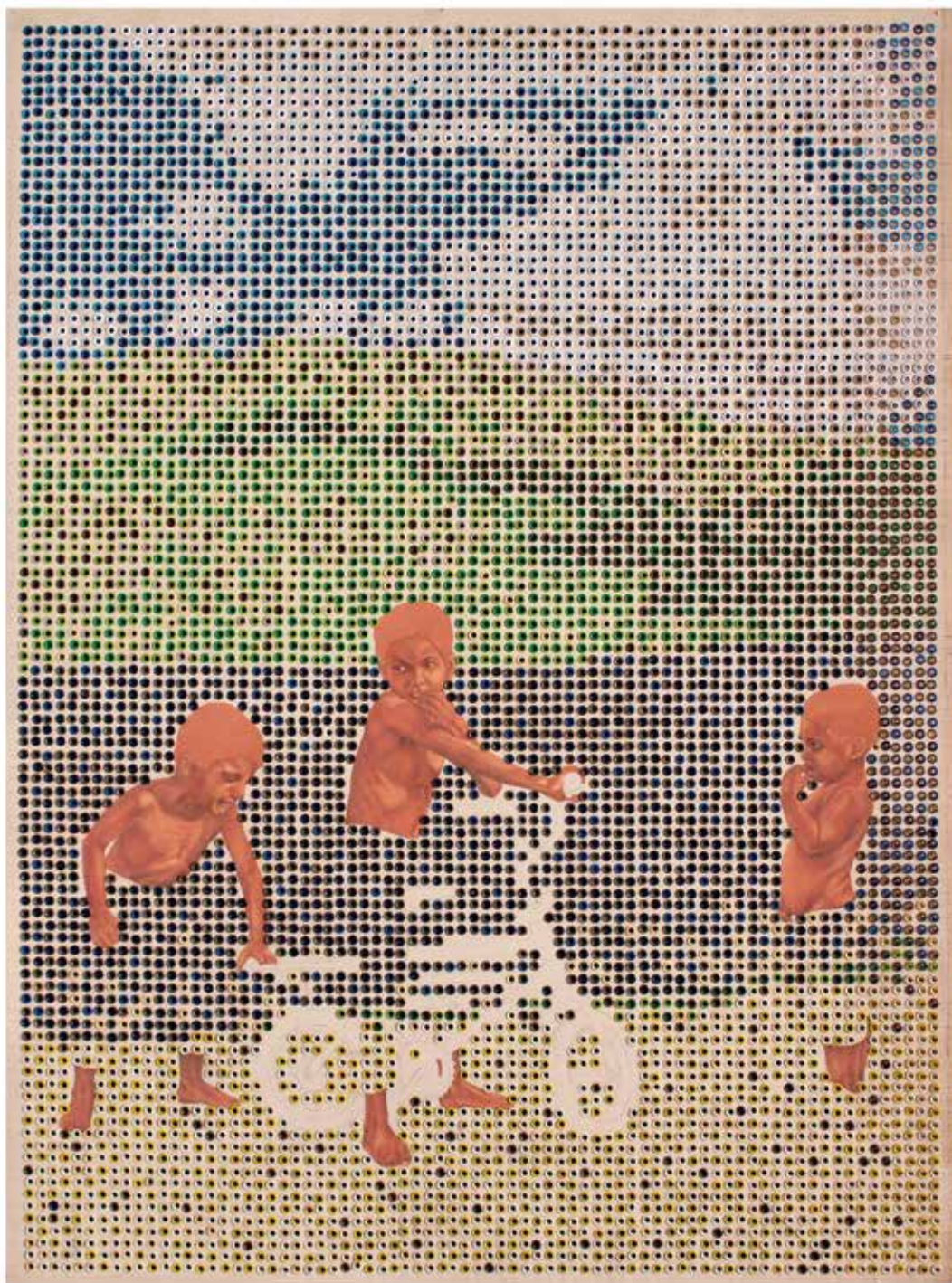
A single, long, light-colored feather with a dark quill, set against a solid red background. The feather is oriented vertically, with the quill at the top and the vane extending downwards. The vane has a fine, textured appearance with some darker streaks. The quill is dark and appears to be made of wood or bone. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

# The human within us

Works by Abid Aslam





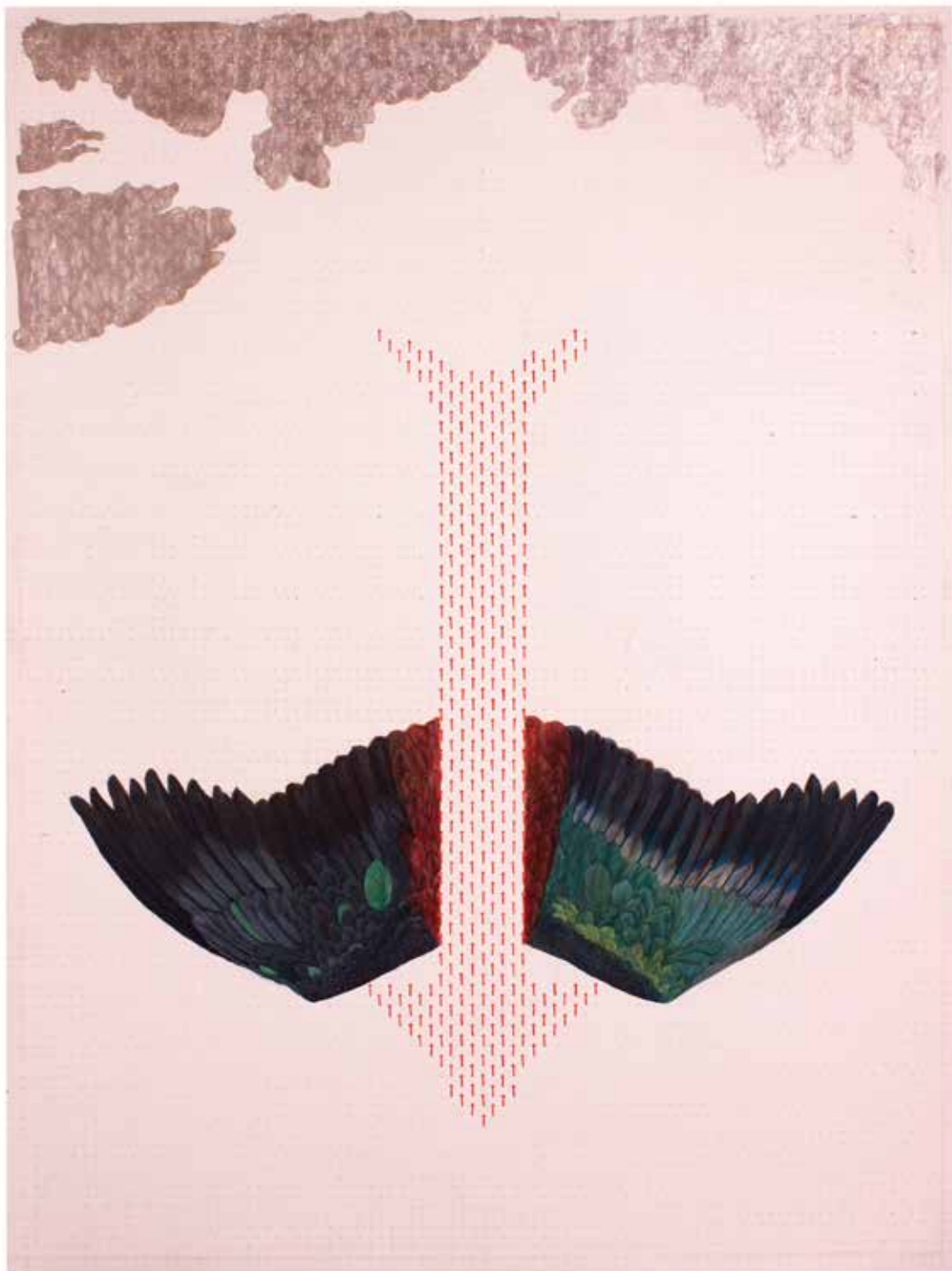


Pehlay Mein, mixed media, 97 x 71 cm

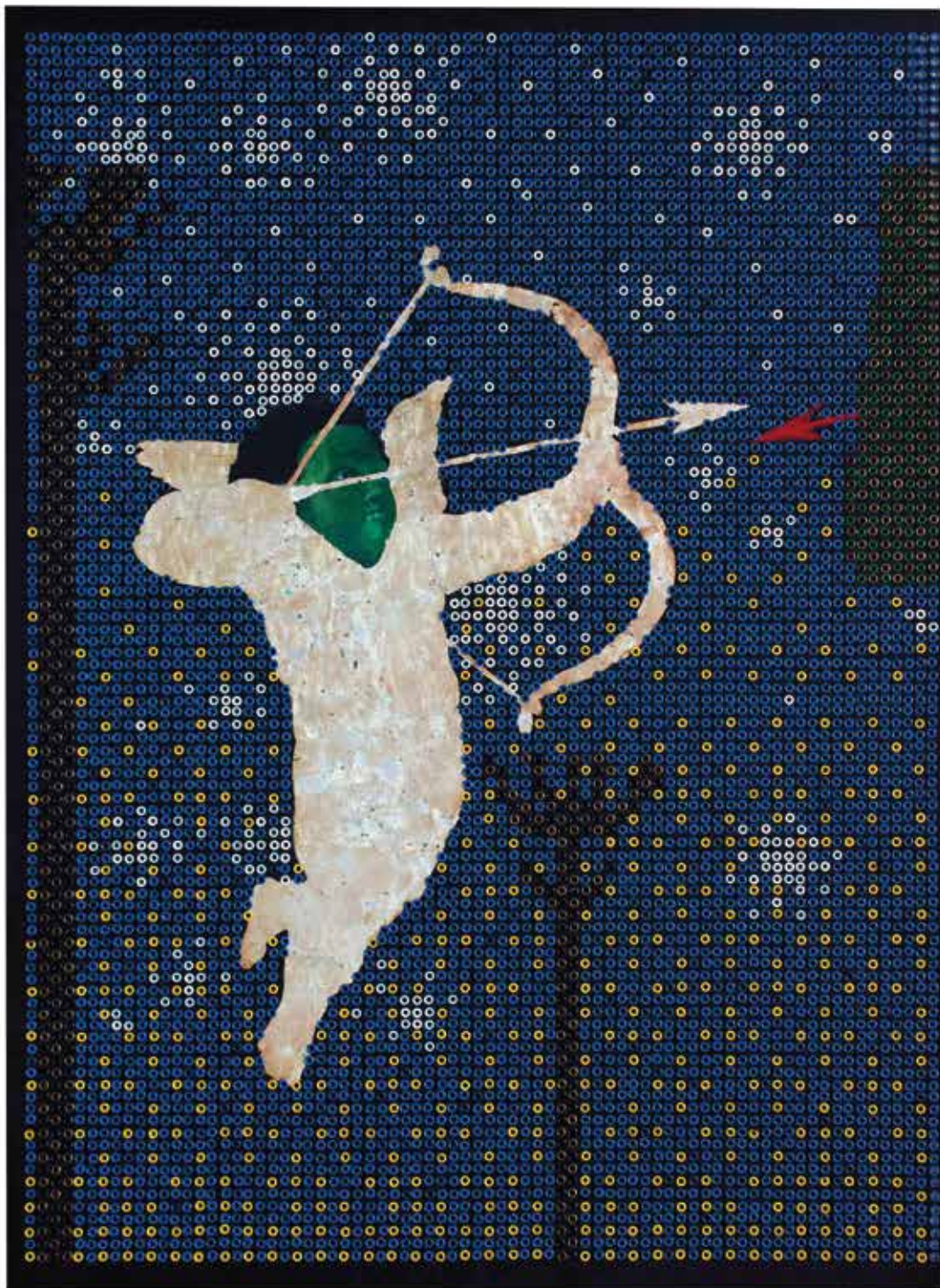
**A**bid Aslam's new body of work titled "The human within us" addresses the vigour of the paradox between love and lust and toys with the idea that the human condition oscillates between the two in graduating shades of subjectivity. The image of raw physicality in the embodiment of a leggy, full-breasted model covered only marginally by a bikini is set against representations of Raphael's cherubs of innocence from his paintings the *Triumph of Galatea* and the *Sistine Madonna*. And while Aslam unfolds the narrative of titillating voyeurism, he adds the source of reprimand and reproach in the stern proselytizing gaze of an elderly couple. Thus Aslam actively represents three parallel metaphors, inherently dichotomous, but working in tandem with one another creating the tensions of an existential drama that is witnessed only too commonly in societal confusion.

Aslam's technique of punching eyelets or grommets into his canvas to create the landscape of his narratives has many nuances as well. There is a physical application of energy here that corresponds with the carnal imagery of the female body in all its sexual references. The eyelets do not add volume or surface texture; they detract from its wholeness. But the circular shapes of the eyelets allude to other traditions of painting. In the Mughal and Persian miniatures, the technique of *Pardakht* or the use of minute dots was utilized to create interesting textures and a delectably shimmery, undulating effect. In the post impressionistic era, Seurat used dots of sometimes opposing colour in order to induce the viewer's eye to mix the colours while viewing them instead of the artist mixing them on the palette. Pointillism as it came to be known, created a vibrant energy field on the canvas. Seurat's attitude towards colour was a quasi-scientific one and he deciphered ways in which the eye was compelled to see as a cogent act and not as a languid, inert inactivity. But Aslam's linkages with the dot don't end there. In the age of commercial printing we know that images are constructed from a host of tiny dots and the acronym 'dpi' or dots per inch is used as commonly as the word resolution when referring to printed matter. Sigmar Polke, the German pop artist used the ben day dots in a messy chaotic way to recreate the sense of frenzy while Lichtenstein, the American artist used them meticulously to mimic print animation in comic books.



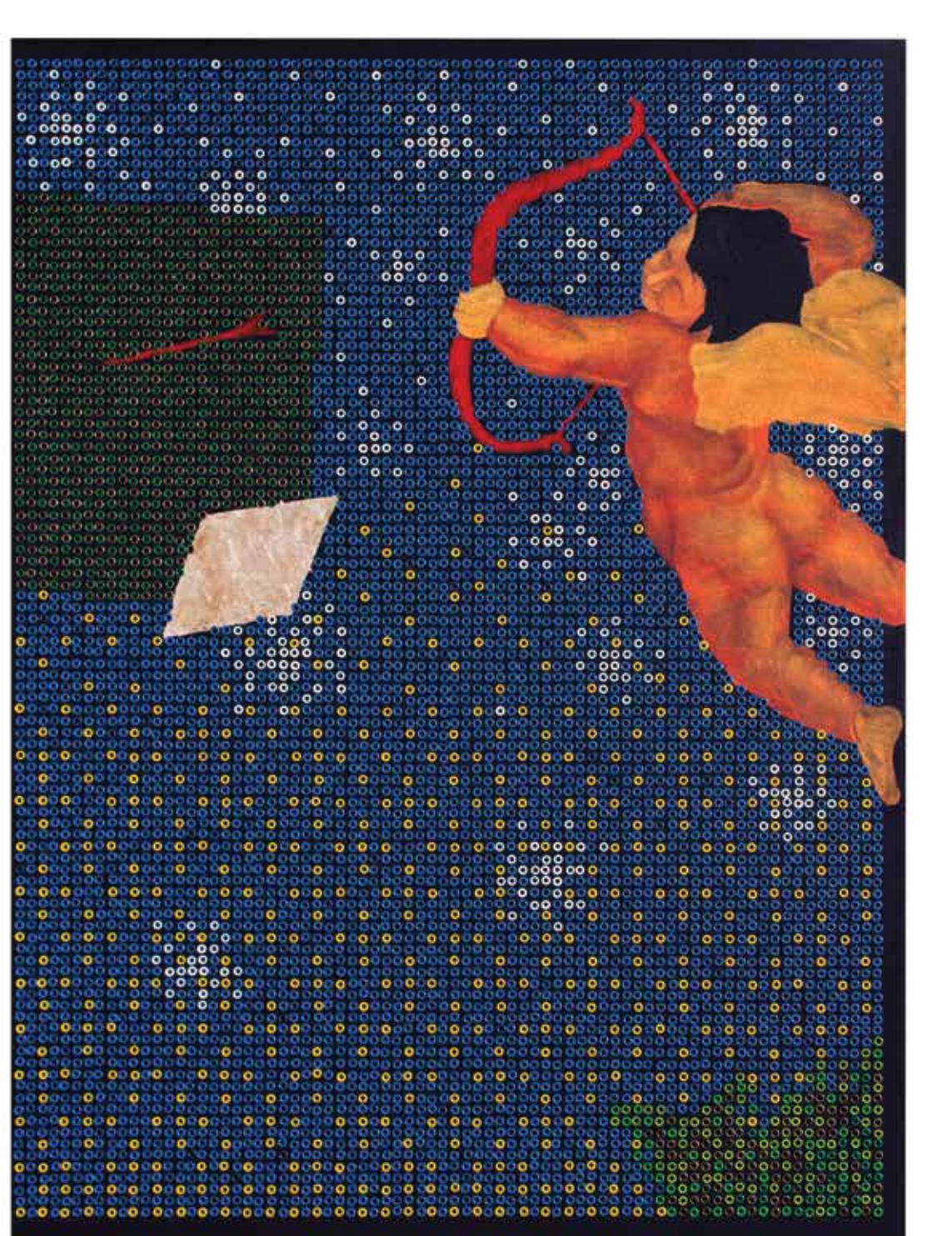


Swing, mixed media, 117 x 86 cm



Fragile (diptych), mixed media, 97 x 142 cm







Aslam thus nuances a host of different sources of dots while maintaining an individual technique that is uniquely his own, creating a staccato effect with the eyelets rather than a smooth one. He then combines his learning as a miniature painter to complete objects or human figures but disrupts the parameters of miniature by painting on a large scale.

The miniature technique is not the only disruption in Aslam's works. Raphael's cherubs are soft, almost cloud-like in their form, with delicate wings as of a butterfly. They gently shoot the arrow of love into willing participants of fidelity, or they look upon Mary and her baby as innocent bystanders to a horror yet to unfold. Aslam's cherubs are dark brown, tanned by the eastern sun with muscular arms that could put force behind the bow and arrow and shoot with the purpose of injury almost. Ironically, some of the cherubs are seen flying between electricity poles and shooting at large airliners, locating them in the present context of hostility and urban warfare. As a continuation of the metaphor, Aslam adds large Gabriel-like wings to his lingerie runway models, trying to infuse them with spirituality – a task too incongruous given their distinctive sensuality. If there is an effort to portray women in a gentler light, it is not achieved. She is the Amazonian caricature with strong limbs not made for reproduction but for purposes of engaging in warfare while simultaneously provoking the male fantasy. What then becomes the voice or rather the image of reason, is the representation of the elderly couple who look as if they have lived their lives in piety and in maintaining the sanctity of God, their country and their family, contrasting sharply with the woman in a state of torrid, primeval nudity.

Abid Aslam's works, which are more akin to installations than painting, are reflections on a universal social landscape that has, even after so many centuries, yet to come to terms with a moral and less violent code by which to exist.

**Nafisa Rizvi**

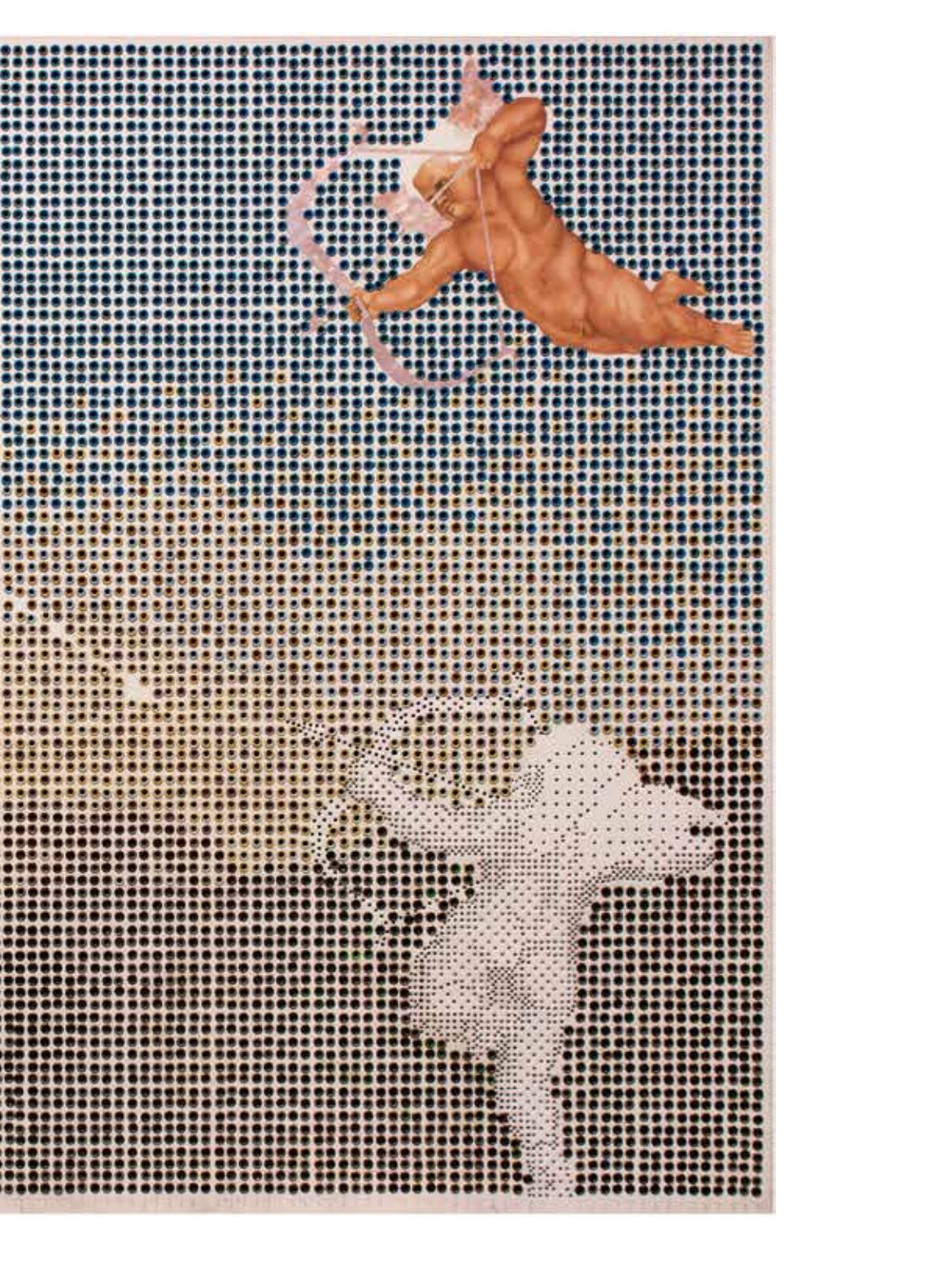
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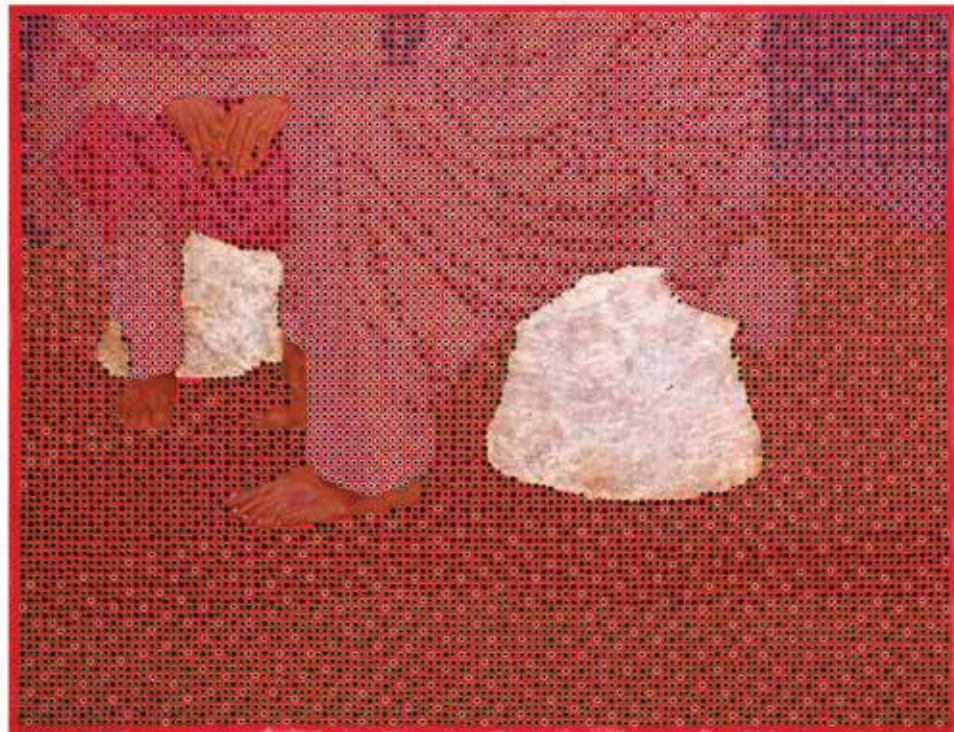


On air, mixed media, 86 x 117 cm









God bless you (diptych), mixed media, 172 x 117 cm

## **Interview with Abid Aslam by Aziz Sohail**

For his current solo, artist Abid Aslam has evolved his practice to grapple with to deal with the universal trope of the hero represented by the male figure. He continues to use his own unique medium – rings – in order to express his ideas. The resulting body of work is a negotiation between a contemporary take on pointillism and a dialogue with miniature rendered on a large scale.

Abid Aslam's works are larger and grander in scope. He has excavated the popular symbol from myth, cupid, and subverted its meaning and reading for his own form and understanding. The cupid interplays with local context to truly create a dichotomy and allow the viewer multiple modes of interpretation in order to uncover this complex work.

My interview with Abid Aslam from June 2015 (reproduced below from the catalogue of Sanat's first anniversary exhibition "Milestone") points to his interests working with multiple themes within the ambit of his unique practice and illustrates this artist's oeuvre so far.

### **Abid, Where are you from?**

I am from Lahore.

### **And how long have you been working as an artist?**

It has been more than 5 years.

### **So how did you become an artist? Tell me more about your journey.**

I always wanted to be an artist but it took me a long time to figure out how, because as a kid I drew all the time. In the beginning drawing people was most interesting to me. Eventually drawing became my main interest.

### **But you were formally trained, yes? Where did you go to university?**

I went to Hunerkada, and graduated from the School of Visual Arts there.

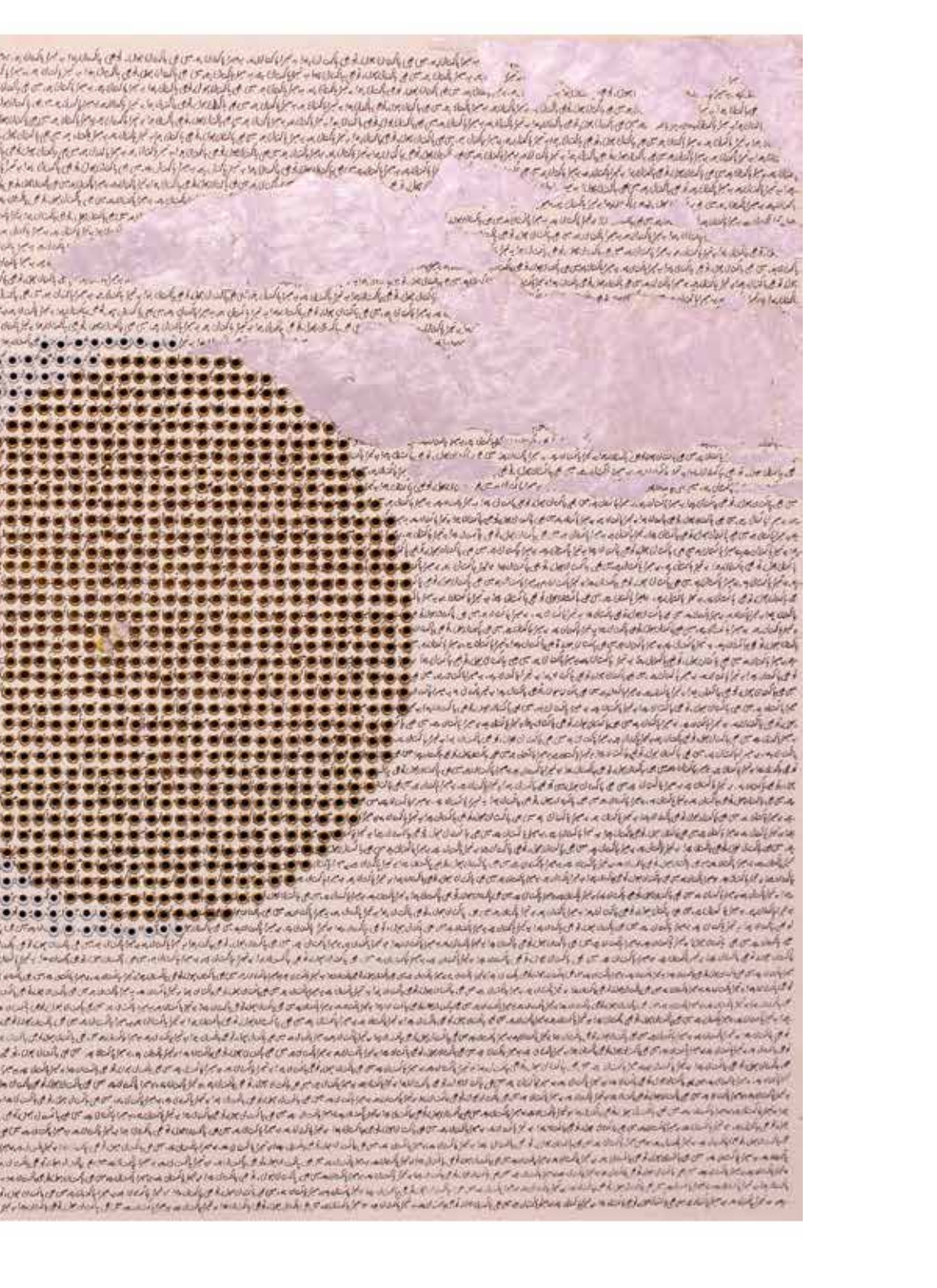
### **And how was that experience?**

It really set my foundation and prepared me for the professional environment I work in today. My jobs taught how to be creative. They also gave me experience in working with others to enhance my artistic skills. And I have learned a great deal from the ongoing dialogue I have with my peers and mentors.













**I think it is also important to mention here, that you haven't gone the traditional route of NCA, BNU or IVS.**

Yes, I am from a family where there was no art. In my family people have never even been to college, and perhaps don't know as much. I think it is important to highlight that I didn't go to the NCA. To really talk about our different backgrounds. People usually are from the same spaces.

Perhaps, it is one of the rare instances that someone from my institution is getting the recognition that I am able to get, and this is important for me.

**So when was your first real show, when did this recognition happen?**

My first real break was the group show "Drawing Mandalas" which was held in Karachi, curated by Muhammad Zeeshan in 2012. It was the first time my work was produced on a large scale and it hit the newsstands.

**And what were you working on at that point?**

Well, as you know I use rings as a medium to create works. It is really the main point for me. During Mandala, it was the first time I took this medium and created it on a large scale. Before I was working on A4 size and now, my work became much more bigger. There was a shift. Even the themes shifted.

**Can you explain to me more about this medium of the ring?**

It is like putting dots on the painting. I was putting dots on the paper. It is like looking at miniature. Miniature is like putting dots on a paper. When you really look closer all you see is a lot of dots set together. In this case, I employed it in a different way. The sense of the work shifts depending on distance.

**So it seems there is also inspiration with pointillism?**

Yes, exactly.

**And what are some of the themes you address in your work?**

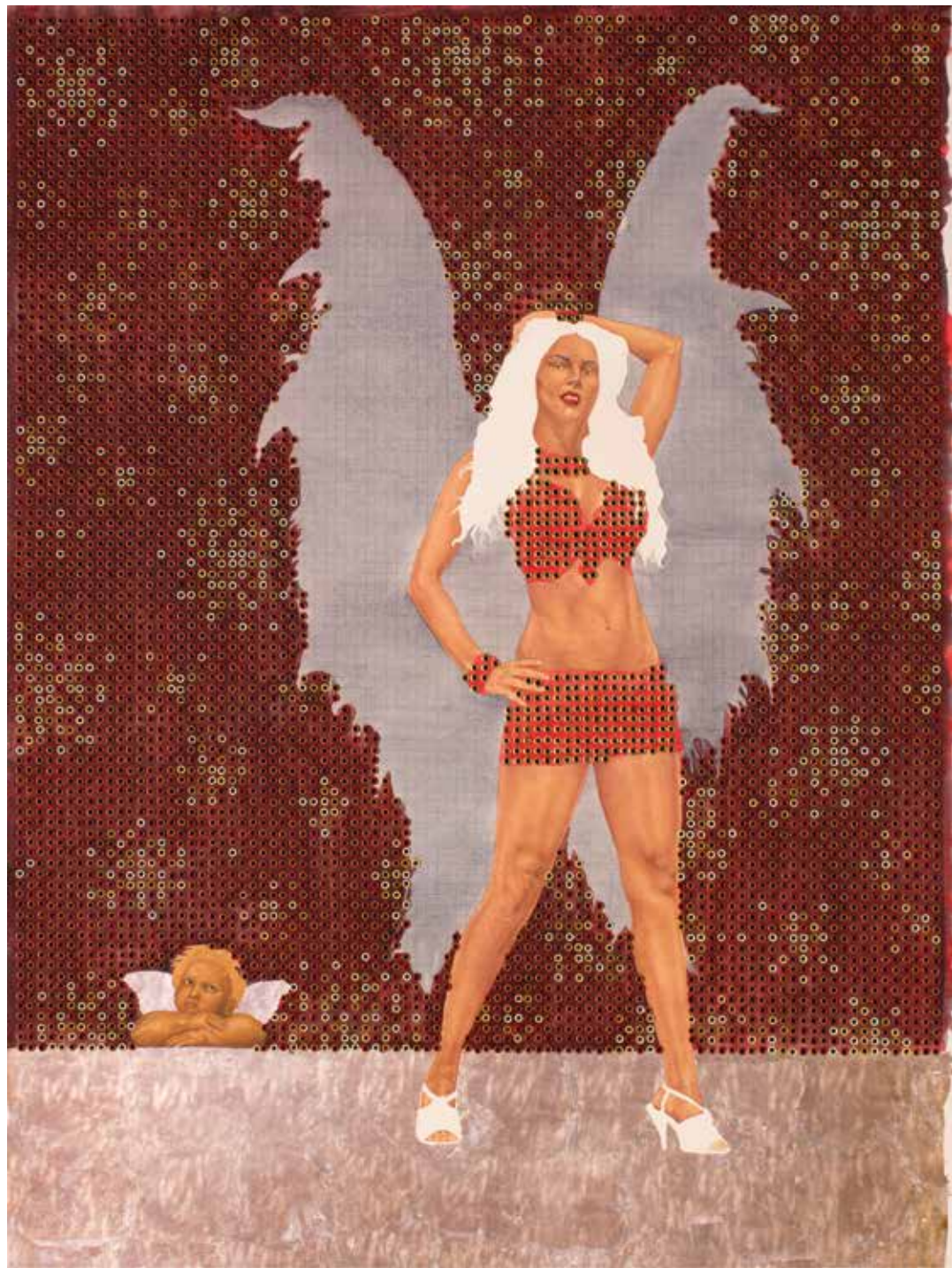
When I started I was really focused on architectural forms. I was very interested in my surroundings. I felt the work and structures around me were aggressive. I really didn't want to go into aggression. So I started creating famous monuments.

**That is interesting, because of course, monuments can also be aggressive?**

Yes indeed, but it is how you create it and what exactly you showcase.

**And now, there is a shift?**

Yes, now figures are coming. I want to stress that there is a shift in my work all the time, and I am always trying to deal with new concerns and questions.



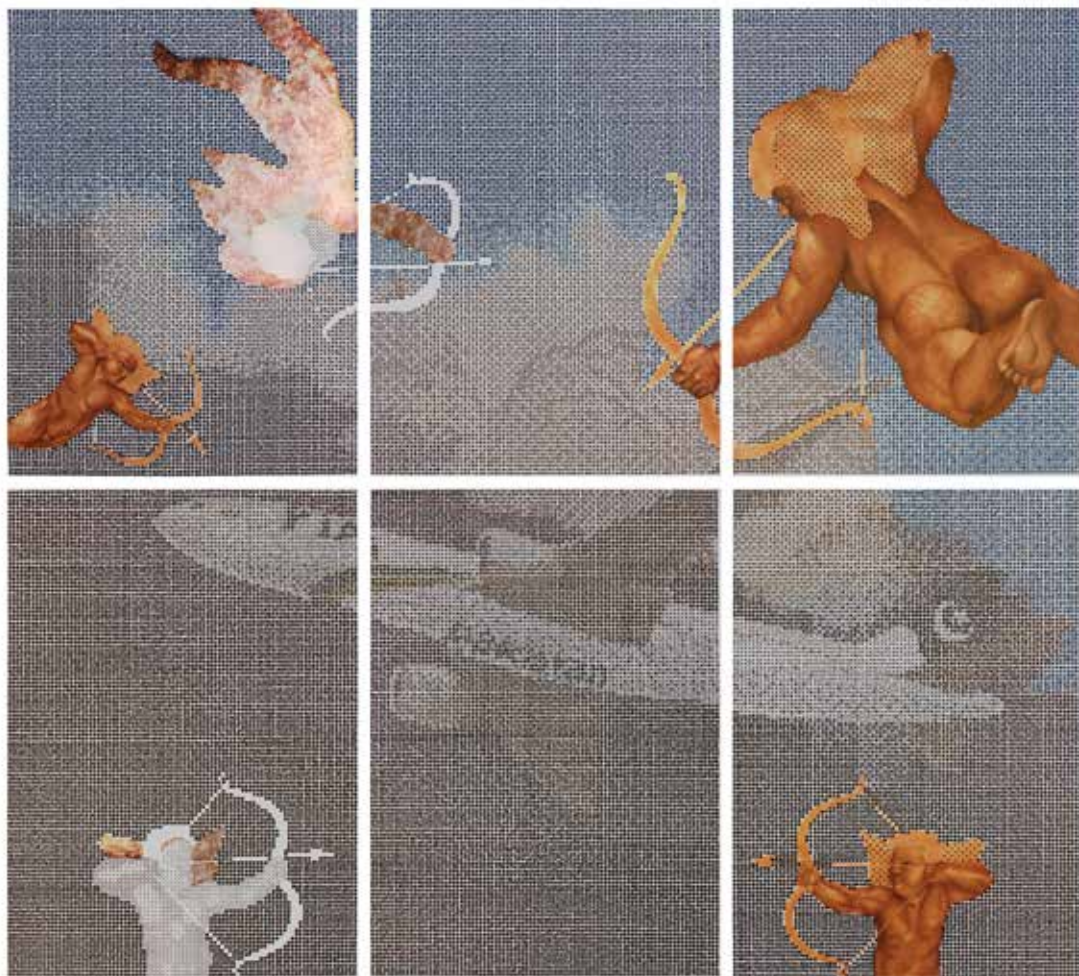
Milk, mixed media, 117 x 86 cm





Honey, mixed media, 117 x 86 cm



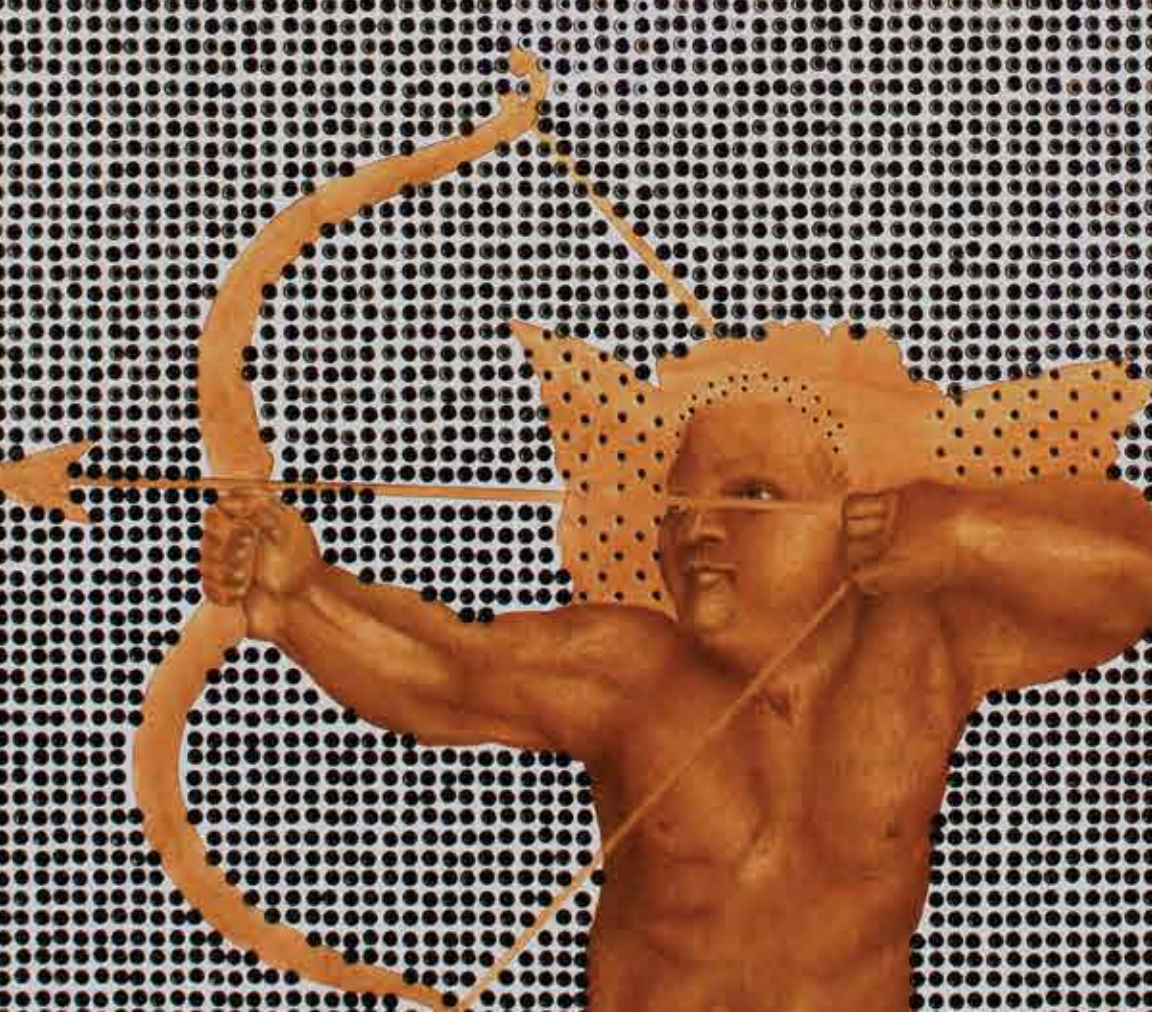


Under control (hexaptych), mixed media, 244 x 259 cm

**Abid, I do remember when you were at Sanat's residency, your work was quite different, than from perhaps what people know you well for, which is these monuments.**

Yes, when I was in the residency. I didn't want to do the work that I did regularly.

I think there is always this idea of shifting. I had indicated on my proposal this desire to work on mini portraits. Before the residency, there was this show at Amin Gulgee's gallery, and I had experimented with the idea and the response had been great, so that is where I wanted to push.



**But your monuments, shall I say, look sexy.**

Yes, but you have to remember that this was trying to depict beauty on a different scale. Also, like before, the viewer's perception shifted, when they came closer. So conceptually there is similar work.

**So what has been the hardest part, in this journey of yours.**

Getting my foot in the door was the hard part but now success, for me, has come as a result of loving what I do.

**Well, I hope that it continues to come, Abid. Thanks so much for your time.**





## **Artist's Statement**

I am interested in the question of human essence and seek to explore those feelings and desire that differentiate us from other spiritual beings, such as angels. My inspiration comes from exploring the paradox of desire and lust, in all its attraction and failings – the quality that make us human.

My current series features seemingly young and heroic objects which are bound with covetousness. All their fears and anxieties – whether danger of failure; a momentous loss; the struggle between heaven and world – those eternal forces that pit man against man, man against nature, man against virtue and indeed man versus self, individually or in a group – all stand for lust, and define us as truly human

## **Biography**

Born in 1986 in Lahore (Pakistan), Abid Aslam is an emerging artist of this generation who grew up in the influence of Lahori culture. He studied at the Hunerkada College of Visual and Performing Arts, Lahore in the informal four years studio class. There, he focused his attention towards miniature painting and photography which led to purification of his own visual and conceptual terminology that emerged through his emphasis on the points of connection between miniature painting and photography. He also served as a lecturer at Hunerkada till 2014. He simultaneously provided his services as an external juror and examiner at Lahore Women University and Government College for Women Samanabad, Lahore. Aslam has received



numerous awards which have motivated him and his passion for art convinced him to pursue a master's program in visual arts from National College of Arts Lahore (NCA) with an aim to develop a strong and independent point of view and a mature grasp of critical debate on contemporary art.

Aslam travels a lot to keep an eye on the daily routine movements and the environment that help him to generate inimitable ideas and concepts which reflect in his art work. As an artist, he is very much focused on finding and creating unique subject matter and has always been successful to astonish the viewers with his creations. Aslam was the recipient of the best young artist award from Alhamra Art Council, Lahore in 2010.

Aslam's formal breakthrough was the group show "Drawing Mandalas" in 2012 in Karachi, curated by the internationally acclaimed visual artist Muhammad Zeeshan. It was for this show that Aslam for the first time produced a work on a large scale. In 2013, Aslam had his first solo exhibition titled "Coding Labels" at Canvas Gallery, Karachi which was again very well received. In 2014, Aslam was selected for Sanat Residency in Karachi, where he produced a series of miniature portraits in Graphite composed inside eyelets on a scale of 9 mm. The minute sized detailed portraits astonished the viewers including the art enthusiasts and critics. Again in 2014, Aslam's work was shown in "The Summer Show - Marjorie's Choice" at Canvas Gallery, Karachi, and by the end of the 2014 he presented his work at Khaas Art Gallery in Islamabad. Aslam's determination and commitment towards his work made him to be a part of the collaborative project of Studio RM & Sanat Initiative titled "SIlsila 2015" which was held at Sanat Gallery, Karachi in 2015. Aslam recently received the "Arjumand Painting Award" of Gallery 6 Islamabad in the emerging artist category. Towards the end of 2015 Aslam showed his new inspirational work imbued with calligraphic impressions in the exhibition "Variations Along the Grid" at Koel Gallery, Karachi.

By looking at Aslam's art, it would be very appropriate to mention here that his use of eyelets in his work reminds of one of the legendary Impressionist painters, Georges Seurat's technique of Pointillism. However, Aslam has not used that dotted technique, but his use of eyelets and their placement is a way of saying that he was inspired by Seurat. Not only Seurat, but Aslam is also inspired by the Post-Impressionist great master Vincent van Gogh which led him to create his own version of "Starry Night", which was a magnified version of a miniature work.

Aslam's experimental art work engages viewers by not only their eye movement but also engages them physically. Observing details in Aslam's works from near or far, coming close to them or viewing them from a distance, in both ways the works are a visual treat for the viewers.

*(Abid Aslam's biography edited by Abdul Rehman Arif)*

## **Exhibitions**

2015

- “Variations Along the Grid” - Koel Gallery, Karachi
- “Silsila 2015” - Sanat Gallery, Karachi
- “Arjumand Award Painting Show” - Gallery 6, Islamabad
- “Milestone” - Sanat Gallery, Karachi

2014

- “Tierce” - Khaas Art Gallery, Islamabad
- “Incubator” - Sanat Gallery, Karachi
- “The Summer Show - Marjorie’s Choice” - Canvas Gallery, Karachi
- “The Artist’s Vision: Seeing is Believing” - Standard Chartered Bank, Lahore
- “Fresh” - Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi
- “Eminent Modern and Contemporary Artists” - Canvas Gallery, Karachi

2013

- “Coding Labels” - solo exhibition - Canvas Gallery, Karachi
- “Memoirs of the Future” - 9th Annual Young Artists’ Exhibition - Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore

2012

- “Group Show” - Nairang Art Gallery, Lahore
- “Jewels of June Impress All” - Gallery 6, Islamabad
- “Drawing Mandalas” - Canvas Gallery, Karachi
- “Day After Tomorrow” - 8th Annual Young Artists’ Exhibition - Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore

2011

- “Group Show” - Gallery 6, Islamabad
- “Red Hot” - 7th Annual Young Artists’ Exhibition - Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore

2010

- “News Item” - 6th Annual Young Artists’ Exhibition - Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore

2009

- “Emerging Talent” - 8th Annual Exhibition, V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi
- “Hunerkada Thesis Show” - Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore
- “Refreshed” - 5th Annual Young Artist’s Exhibition - Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore
- “Line Of Control” - a group show in the UK

2008

- “Fresh Cream” - 4th Annual Young Artists’ Exhibition, Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore
- “Annual All Pakistan Painting, Sketching and Photography Exhibition” - UET, Lahore
- “Creative Encounter with Youth” - British High Commission Calligraphy Exhibition, PNCA, Islamabad



2007

- “Drawing Exhibition” - Oriental College Of Art, Lahore
- “3rd Annual Young Artists’ Exhibition”, Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore
- “Annual All Pakistan Painting, Sketching and Photography Exhibition” - UET Lahore
- “Print Making Exhibition” - GCU Lahore



This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

# **The human within us**

Works by Abid Aslam



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