

Hawa Mein Uda Jaye
Sajid Khan



Untitled II, 2017

Graphite on Arches paper, 15x11.25 cm

The renowned orders of the night

The enormity of a calamity is measured via quantity. It is the tangible aspects which are taken into consideration while calculating the scale of a catastrophe. These tangible numbers are just the immediate aspects of loss, the starting point of a long-lasting tragedy with a wide spread impact which is often overlooked and deemed as collateral damage. This collateral damage is the intangible psychological and emotional trauma which surfaces once the human mind can register the transformation, mostly after long periods of time, sometimes years or even generations later.

Loss is the feeling generated by the permeance of absence. It is not about the one who is absent but rather about those who suffer from this absence. In other words, it is the loss of lives of those still living marred by death and destruction, living through the trauma of the experience and conditions created by it. This is not limited to just those who are closely connected but to the entire society in multiple ways where each individual and resource plays a role and holds value. The wide spread aftermath is most often overlooked and left unaddressed.

Though time immemorial post war aftermaths have been addressed through textual, visual and performative formats in innumerable ways by the intellectuals of society. There are several examples of philosophers, psychiatrists, political theorists, activists, artists, actors, and writers who have helped societies in understanding and addressing their angst, the feeling of loss, and their position in society.

One artist who has been engaged in the exercise of 'coming to terms with the past' is Anselm Kiefer. Born at the end of World War II in 1945, he grew up in post war Germany. Kiefer began his practice taking references from the German history and culture during the Third Reich period. Towards the end of 1980's he adopted a more direct approach, where he was addressing the postwar taboos employing an ironical approach using mockery and humor as tools of expression. He was often met by resistance, though it was directed towards his approach to the subject than rather the subject itself. Using mediums like paint, impasto, lead, broken glass and dried plants and flowers, Kiefer creates large scale sculptural drawings and sculptures which dwarf the viewer and envelops her within, making it impossible to avoid becoming a part of harsh and dark narrative.

Sajid Khan's practice addresses a similar theme but employs a very different approach. Though the two cannot be compared as Khan belongs to the generation of the twenty first century which has witnessed the horrors of war in a time of invasive war paraphernalia. More so, the events are still too fresh in the mind of the artist and the vision has not cleared enough to be objective or even reactive to this new reality. Khan's practice is perhaps a psychological exercise in comprehending the drastic transformations in the social and political landscape of his hometown.



Shallow Sea, 2017

Gold leaf and watercolor on Arches paper, 15x20 cm



Hawa Mein Uda Jaye Mora Laal Dupatta Malmal Ka, 2017
Watercolor on Arches paper, 55x145 cm



Albeit being directly impacted by it, he formally presents it as poetic documentation of everyday skylscapes. The flow and clarity present in the cold and stark forms in later works give an impression that the artist is attempting to distance himself from his subject to address it objectively.

The different stages of acknowledgement in the aftermath of a new reality tinged with pain and trauma are apparent in Khan's practice since the beginning. For a while he illustrated a recurring absence of light through obscure grey skylscapes, shrouds of smoke which bar the vision. Though upon clearing there is a vast expanse of barren landscapes with setting ashes and piles of rubble left behind. Khan depicts a state of disorientation where the enormity of a situation blurs all realities and there is a realization that once the vision clears one would be confronted by the harsh reality of loss.

In the previous body of work presented in his solo show two years ago, there was a shift in his visual vocabulary where the stormy clouds were replaced by stark and contrasting imagery taking the shape of two-dimensional forms of dismembered bodies and war paraphernalia portraying alien catastrophic landscapes. Rendered on a light surface, these flat transparent, shadow-like forms present a stark visibility of the turn of events on ground. There is a quietness which validates this documentation with the permanence and weight of an actual event.

In the new works, Khan appears to reach a level of acceptance where he is amalgamating the shifts and collating his oeuvre to date. There is a probability that this might become the point of departure for him which will grant him entry into another realm of consciousness.

Khan has tackled the formal aspects with much precision. By careful selection and implementation of mediums he breaks the norms and devises new manners of employing them. The decision to create sky and landscapes in watercolors is a critique or rather juxtaposition of historical and classical landscapes capturing scenic moments and the beauty of nature. Replacing it with imagery that explores human intervention and interference with nature or rather the norms of existence is a critical and political commentary addressing formal and contextual elements. The contrast created with the use of greys and dark shades reinforces this juxtaposition. He has invented his own style following the requirements of his context.

With a training in miniature painting and design, Khan displays an understanding of the form and medium when he deviates from the traditional devices of building an image. Starting out by rubbing graphite dust on surfaces appears as a protest towards methodical confinement, perhaps directed towards his subject, where he expresses a will to move with freely defying the form and carving out his own direction. These rubbings are often layered with areas which have been catered via the method of reduction to include elements or to add a hint of color which



Untitled IV, 2017

Tea wash, watercolor and graphite on wasli, 15x10 cm



Aar Paar, 2017

Watercolor and graphite on Arches paper, 30x52.5 cm





Udaan II, 2017

Watercolor and graphite on Arches paper, 15x10 cm

contextualizes an otherwise abstract image. The fluidity of the watercolor washes expresses a certain kind of freedom yet they are often confined within an outline giving shape to a form. These washes create visual ephemerality as of shadows but the flatness holds a subtle aggression and permanence. The traditional rendering of a form in miniature painting using with a plethora of pixels in layers has been replaced by overlapping forms depicting multiple events where each layer remains visible. Khan's decision to forgo detail and three dimensionality to work in flat planes instead, is perhaps a strategy used to portray the entirety of the situation where it resonates with other catastrophic landscapes of the twenty first century.

Hawa Mein Uda Jaye Mora Laal Dupatta Malmal Ka is unique in the new series, captivating one's attention leaving a deep impact behind. Subtly employed with a great control and understanding of image making, this diptych portrays a woman's scarf stained in rusted red, the color of dried blood, floating in a cloudless sky. On closer inspection the scarf sports shapes of fighter planes in different hues of rusted red. Khan here touches upon an extremely sensitive topic with a lot of grace. Women are the least visible yet the most affected victims of war who suffer atrocities in the aftermath and raise generations post war. In most cultures, scarf is a symbol of dignity and honor, representing not just the woman but the entire family connected to her. The portraiture of the scarf in this image presents vulnerability, suffering, and powerlessness in the face of tragic events. Here the artist has played with the connotation of the title of the work, a famous lyric from a Bollywood film song from 1949, a song which celebrates innocence, youth and carefree days. By using it as a title to this painting, Khan reverses the context into the horrific realities of current times.

The skyscapes seen in this series are dominated with overlapping forms of fighter jets in Prussian blue, making it appear as a routine occurrence, yet overladen with a threat of imminent danger and violence looming overhead, the fear dominating the inhabitant's minds. The ground seems to have absorbed the grey mushroom clouds, hinting at an abused barren colorless land with traces of red. A red which is repeated in another work where the traces of red mark the horizon line, marking a violent boundary between the earth and the sky.

What does it mean to live with imminent danger? What does it mean to be haunted by loss? These are the unfortunate questions that mar the horizon of the present.

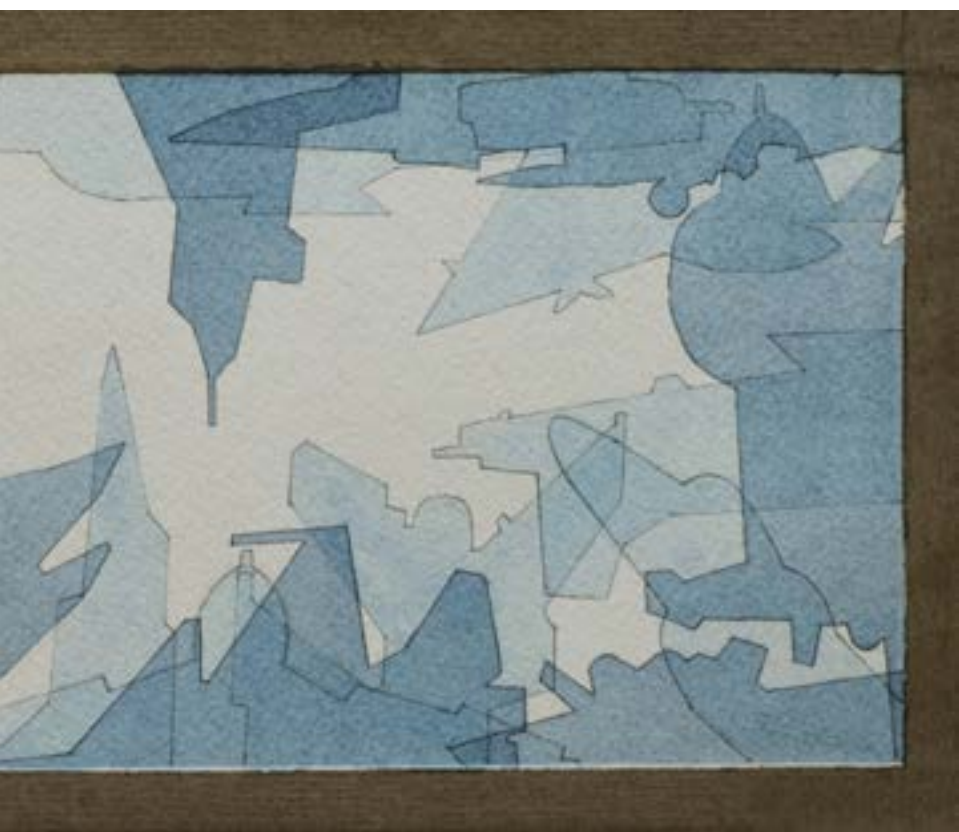
Hajra Haider Karrar, 2017

Based in Karachi, Pakistan. Hajra Haider Karrar is an independent curator with a focus on alternate discourses in contemporary art practice, navigating socio political and urban infrastructures in the transitory landscape of South Asian cities. She is interested in the potentiality and texture of spaces and mediums, employing interdisciplinary modes of knowledge production. She is also a core member of the Tentative Collective, a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds who share resources and create interdisciplinary works of art in everyday urban space.



View, 2017

Watercolor on Arches paper, 12.5x30 cm



Interview by Aziz Sohail with Sajid Khan

Sajid, where are you from and how long have you been active as an artist?

I am from Malakand in KPK and live in Lahore currently. I have been active since I did my FA in 2004-05.

How did you first get interested in artistic production?

In 2005-06 when I got admission in Department of Fine Arts, University of Peshawar.

That is a journey isn't it, because you are coming from a smaller town to Peshawar, and then ultimately you are from Lahore. How was that for you?

To come to Peshawar for me was a new thing. It was the first time I had left home or lived in an urban area or even experienced co-education. So I felt that it was really about getting exposed. You will notice that my work... it is about my village... but also Peshawar. The content is about the town. Visually, Peshawar University is also important for me because of my training [there] as a graphic designer.

Okay and then how does the journey to Lahore help?

There was another shift. It was another type of experience... into a broader more expansive space. In Lahore, I looked at art much more closely, movements, and history. In Peshawar, there wasn't sculpture, printmaking or miniature, so you really come to terms with diversity of artistic expression.

So you were formally trained in two institutes?

Yes, I was trained at both the University of Peshawar and NCA Lahore. Peshawar University was my introduction with art, art materials and artistic skills, but at NCA I came to know about more departments of art like miniature, printmaking, ceramics etc. At NCA I learnt about the ideas and the conceptual side of the work and got more information about art making through discussions with different artists as externals and internals.

What was a breakthrough moment with you in your practice?

After the Sanat residency it was a breakthrough moment with me and my practice because it was a new step and experience in terms of everything.

Why was this an important moment?

It was the first time I went to Karachi for a longer time... and stage by stage you see this growth. In Karachi... the experience... I needed it, as an artist. My practice



Udaan Se Udaan, 2017

Watercolor on Arches paper, 30x22.5 cm



Untitled III, 2017

Graphite and color pencil on Arches paper, 11.25x15 cm





Udaan I, 2017

Graphite on wasli, 157.5x97.5 cm

really came into being there. There the artists are much more active, there seems to be a studio culture. There is much more discourse and discussion happening, amongst the artists, more galleries. Differences between Karachi itself...between Clifton and North Karachi, Mangochir, which I visited, were very important to me... I was shocked to see that some of these spaces looked even more backwards than my village and this was a moment of reckoning for me. In Sanat, of course, I got a lot more exposure, and it was of course a new residency then so there was more hype around it. In terms of career, of course it is a moment of growth.

What are some of the themes, ideas, concepts, and concerns you are dealing with in your artistic practice?

I am dealing with my memories, my experiences, my observations, and current affairs; I am dealing with my past and present, and during making work I always take pleasure from my work.

Can you expand upon this notion of memory and experience?

Even if I don't want it, it is in my work – the idea of violence or what is currently happening. I have spent all this time with my family, the landscape and the beauty, that seems to be missing. There has been a shift in the landscape, where I come from... the elements of the landscape are changing. We are focused on current affairs, and that continues to affect me too.

How do you continue to engage with your topic?

My work is mostly based on physical interaction.

What do you mean by that?

I meant that when you are physically affected by something – in some ways there is a response, a reaction. With the military intervention we have a direct effect, so you cannot remove it.

What are some of the struggles you have been facing in this practice of yours then?

Facing many ups and down in stabilizing myself and the major thing is to stay without the family and home town. Plus to keep my work symbolic, I struggle and make it minimal and effective which is a bit tough job.

So, what's next then?

Of course, I am not planning, my idea of process, pushing through it, the making of it, technique, the training of miniature. My work has shifted from graphite to washes to gadrang, and this is a shift that seemed necessary and I am hoping it can continue to go towards those ways.



Loadscape, 2017

Watercolor on wasli, 11.25x15 cm



On Sajid's practice

Sajid Khan was born in Malakand, Pakistan in 1984 and he currently lives and works in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Sajid graduated from National College of Arts Lahore with a distinction in miniature painting in 2011. His works have been exhibited in Germany, UK and Pakistan. *Hawa Mein Udta Jaye* is Sajid's second solo presentation.

The new body of work by Sajid Khan is a culmination of a sum of subjective experiences and formal development of visuals. Sajid's experiences from his formative years in a village bordering Afghanistan inform the imagery as well as the stylization of imagery. The references from once serene landscape of the artist's village provide the foundational imagery for Sajid's current works. The common reference is the imagery of clouds transformed by aftermaths of air-raids and bombings. The evacuation of native residents gave birth to almost an apocalyptic view of landscape, manifested in Sajid's drawings and paintings in the form of dark clouds and surreal looking forms. The paradox of soft looking clouds painted in dark and monochromatic tonal variations reflects the human ability of causing desolated catastrophes as well as the ability to create and build. These notions with a nature of dichotomy are present in Sajid's works in a fine and subtle manner.

The experiences from his native land led Sajid to explore the themes of peace, war and its aftermaths, through the medium of graphite for preparatory drawings. Those initial drawings later evolved into pictorial surfaces executed using watercolor washes with a graphic quality. The choice of medium and techniques brings a certain monochromatic tone in Sajid's works, carrying a sense of solitude and emptiness caused by collective grief of humans. The thematic structure of these works stems from the experience of the artist as an individual and his relevance within a group of people.

Aamna Hussain, 2017



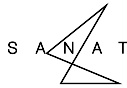
Untitled I, 2017

Watercolor and graphite on Arches paper, 15x11.25 cm

This publication accompanies the exhibition

Hawa Mein Uda Jaye

Sajid Khan



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Detail of "Udaan Se Udaan"

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