

Abdullah M. I. Syed | Nurun 'ala Nur (Light upon Light)

February 6 - March 6, 2021

Aicon Contemporary is proud to present *Nurun 'ala Nur (Light upon Light)*, an exhibition featuring works by Pakistan-born, Sydney-based multidisciplinary artist Abdullah M. I. Syed. This survey exhibition brings together the artist's diverse use of materials and techniques, emphasizing his two predominant interests: the worldly economy and the economy of emotions. Syed describes the polarity between these entities; the worldly economy is outward-looking and encompasses politics, power, identity, conflicts, and capitalism; and the economy of emotions faces inwards and perpetuates intimate, spiritual reflection.

Syed's immersive sculptural installation, *Nurun 'ala Nur (Light upon Light)*, emanates light from within hundreds of prayer caps (taqiyah), woven together and suspended in space to resemble a glowing moon. This installation was first exhibited at the 10th Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, an annual arts festival in Toronto, Canada. This work is the culmination of the artist's fascination with the full moon, its reflection, and the pursuance of historically divine parables, forms, and pure materials. The caps within this work feature arabesque designs that follow Islamic tessellation principles repeated seamlessly, suggesting the remembrance of Divine unity.

As a light sculpture, *Nur 'ala Nur* addresses Islamic consciousness using signs of divine beauty (jamāl) and majesty

(jalāl). The installation reflects a lifelong pursuit of beauty and perfection, two transient epithets presented to the viewer through a physical manifestation of a sublime and abstract concept. Its luminous and meditative nature invites the viewer to engage with the installation and its enveloping atmosphere. The sculpture floating over a reflective circle on the floor expresses the harmonious spiritual dualities of the Islamic ideologies surrounding beauty and majesty in an era when Islam finds itself drawn toward narrative extremes.





Weaving Myths and Realities: 5 US Dollar and 5 Chinese RMB (Portrait, Recto), 2020, Hand-cut and woven uncirculated 5 US Dollar and 5 Chinese RMB and archival tape, 2.60 x 6.10 in.

In his playful works manipulating currencies, Syed calls into question the signs, symbols, present in the currencies we handle and circulate daily. Matt Cox, curator of Asian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia writes, “Folded on themselves the notes, not unlike the flags, bring unlikely and even antagonistic entities into proximity. On either side of a single plain are opposing political figures, structures and scenes from different geographic and time zones.” Syed’s compositions created with meticulously hand cut sheets of bank notes highlight society’s foundational value systems that often go unacknowledged.

Abdullah M. I. Syed (b. 1974) is an artist, designer, and independent curator living and working between Sydney, Karachi and New York. Trained in diverse disciplines, Syed utilizes a variety of mediums and techniques including sculpture, video installations, drawing, performance and texts to investigate collisions between art, religion, economy and politics.

Please contact Aicon Contemporary (lena@aicongallery.com) with any questions.