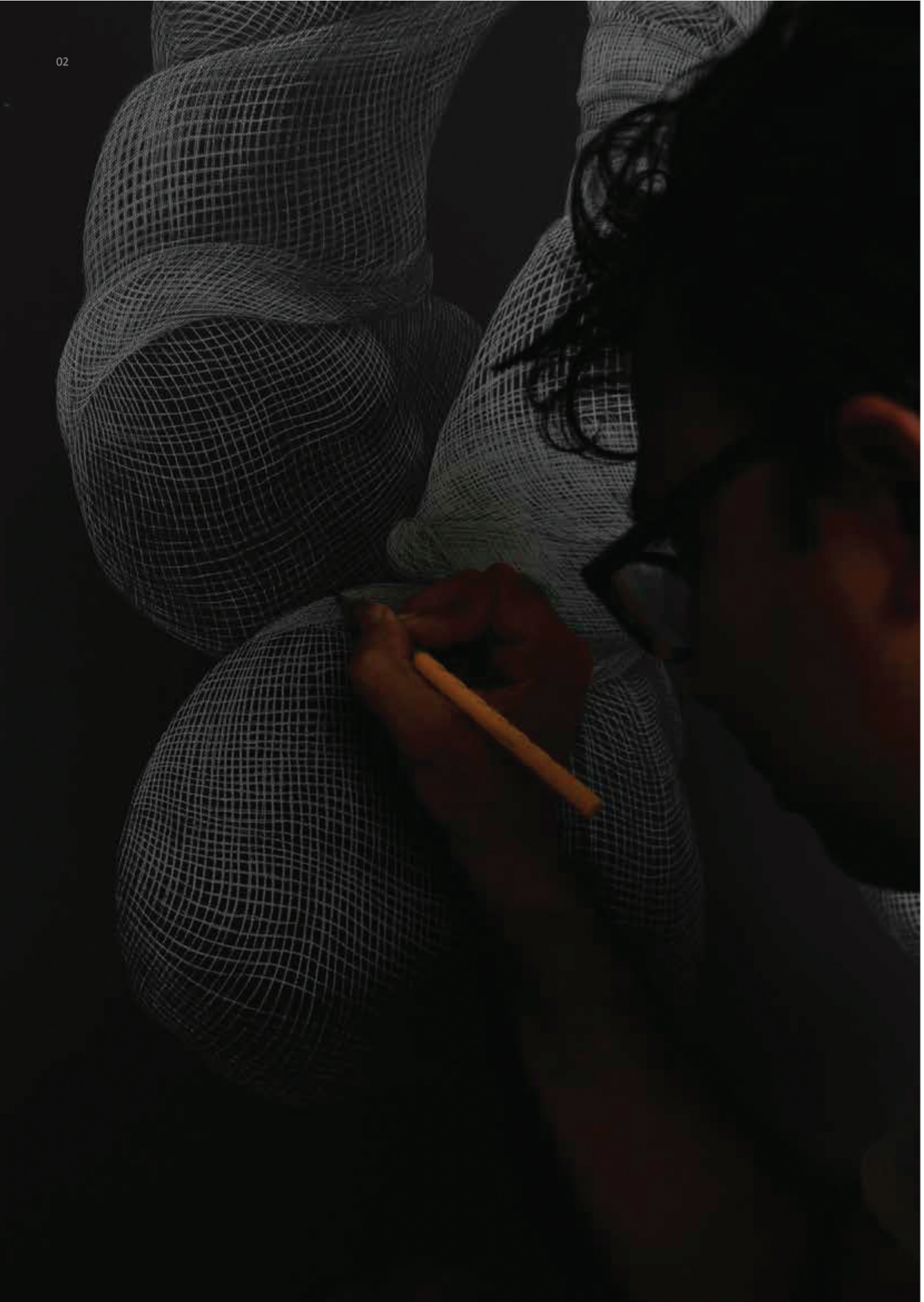

MONOMANA

A solo exhibition of

ADEEL UZ ZAFAR

MONOMANIA (mŏn′ə-mā′nē-ə, -mān′yə)
A partial insanity in which psychotic thinking is confined to one subject or group of subjects.
An excessive interest in or enthusiasm for a single thing, idea, or the like; obsession.



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Foreword

Andrew Shea

Director/Curator, Aicon Gallery, New York

The term monomania can be defined as “an excessive interest or enthusiasm for a single thing or idea; obsession.” In this sense, the term relates to the work of Adeel uz Zafar both in terms of his consistently recurring subject matter (children’s toys eerily wrapped in gauze or bandages) and his now-signature reductive technique of scraping away at a black latex surface line by line to give rise to seemingly three-dimensional figures. This technique, central to Zafar’s practice, allows him to build up intricately textured forms through a simple action of mark-making repeated thousands of times. The resulting figures, whatever deeper meaning they may hold, immediately strike the viewer as the product of obsession.

Often times, individuals who find themselves fixated on a single subject, be it a concept, a thing, or a person, are capable of creating vastly intricate systems of symbolism and mythology around it that are only justifiable unto themselves. Imagine entering the hermetic apartment of a chronically obsessed celebrity-stalker and what one might find inside. In a similar way, through his obsessions both in terms of theme and technique, Zafar is building a world. It is a world populated with good guys and bad guys, characters both familiar and alien, and a host of mutated creatures existing somewhere in between. And slowly but surely these monomaniacal tendencies are giving rise to a universe with deeply complex implications for both its inhabitants and their viewers.

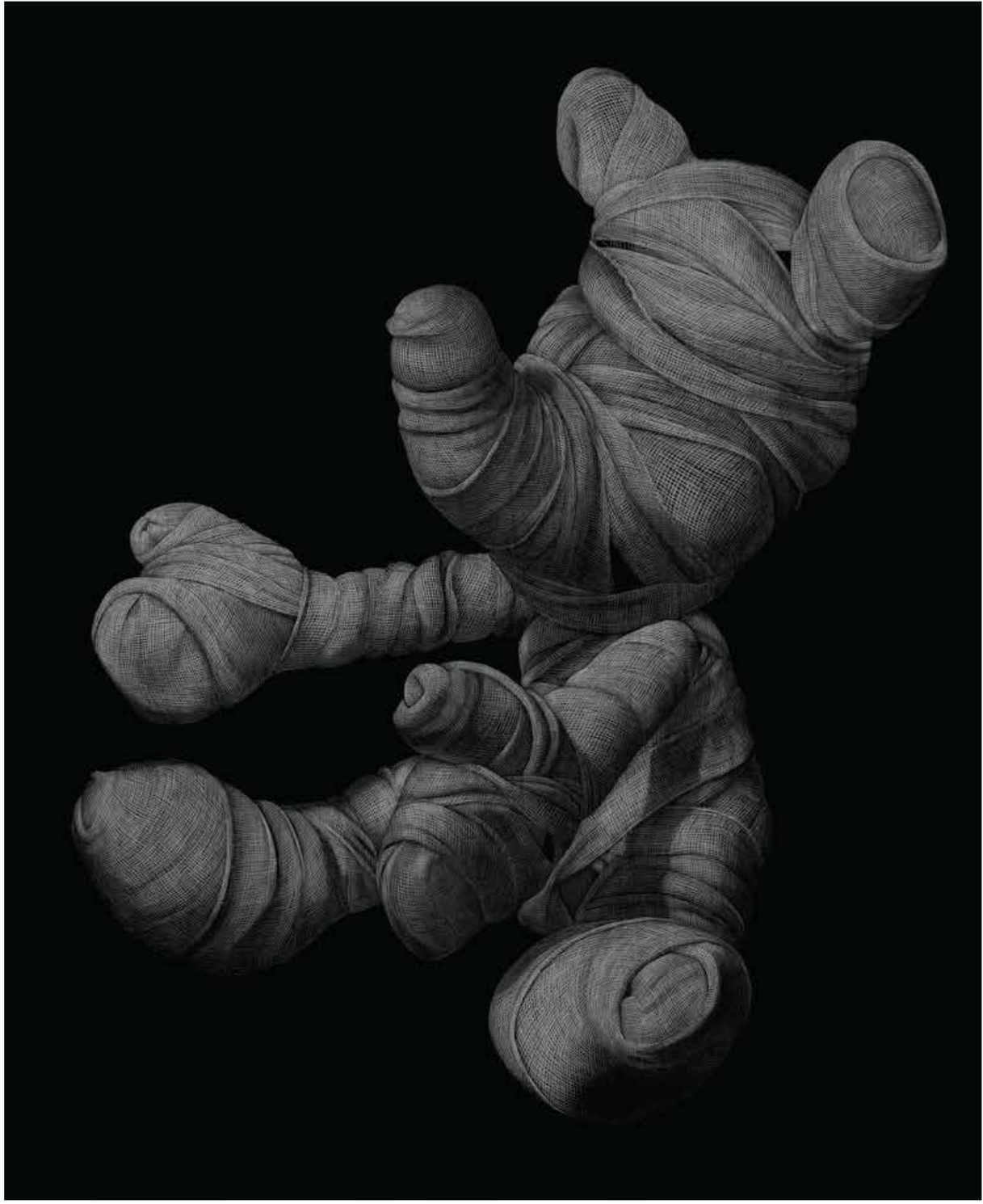
Others, including the artist himself, have hinted at this same conclusion; that a kind of cosmos is being created as each new work is brought into the world. But even a cosmos must have an origin. Or at least most believe it must. In this sense, Zafar’s ‘scratch and reveal’ technique, stumbled upon while working with photographic paper and limited tools in the isolated regions of Northern Pakistan, can be taken as a ‘big bang’ in terms of method and medium; the sudden opening of a new gateway to creation. However, the substance and subjects of Zafar’s new world would be the products not of the spectacular chaos following the astronomical Big Bang, but rather the product of a slow, meditative, obsessive persistence to create life. Ironically, neither path seems to have resulted in its respective universe fully making sense or imparting meaning to its inhabitants more readily than the other. Both worlds have frequently ended up populated with desperate individuals who often find themselves psychologically, historically, or, in the case of Zafar’s characters, literally adrift.

Zafar’s subjects, usually modeled on familiar childhood toys and popular characters, float through their lonely universe. They seem completely oblivious to one another due either to the bandages covering their eyes or the black voids in which they find themselves. Thus, although these characters evidently exist in the same mythological pantheon of our collective memories, they appear doomed to never meet one another; to never enact the dramatic battles, alliances and tragedies for which they’ve been created. Not only do the conflicts between the perceived good actors and bad actors in this world go perpetually unresolved, they are never even given a true chance at understanding each other or themselves. Here Zafar’s world seems a heightened metaphor for our now global ideological, cultural, and sociopolitical conflicts and the potential consequences of giving in to the pessimism it can sometimes breed.

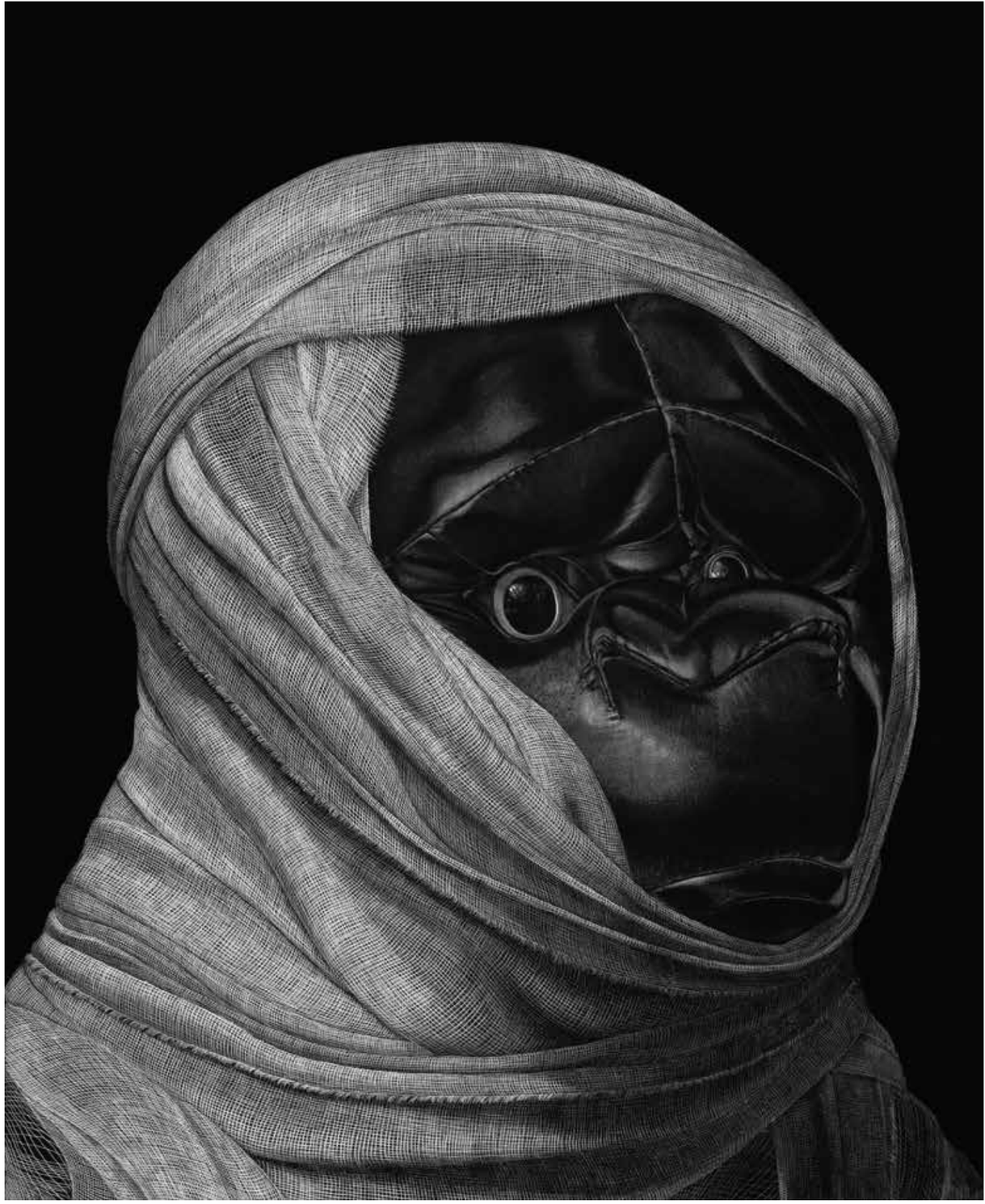
A further pictorial and conceptual analogy can be drawn between Zafar’s practice and our own cosmos if one steps back and seeks an explanation of these bizarre creatures by viewing them for a moment as constellation-like. In doing so, one can quickly realize that the stargazers we might envision discerning such manic and mutated forms in the night sky are not capable of stopping after imagining a simple outline of a familiar living creature, as our ancestors have since antiquity. Instead, we can imagine them possessed by a need to connect every other discernable point of light contained within that outline, through thousands upon thousands of interwoven lines. These constellations are the obsessive compulsive products of individuals enmeshed in both increasingly fragmented and increasingly globalized societies, frantically attempting to understand their inner and outer worlds by connecting every dot they come across; by desperately trying to force every complex and conflicting bit of information thrown at them into some kind of cohesive recognizable form. But once they’ve given birth to these new heavenly bodies, they are monstrous, mutated, wounded, or trapped, and all the other lights in the universe have gone out.

Zafar’s creations now sit alone, although most seem unaware of this due to the bandages covering their eyes. However, the postures of many of these figures seem clearly ready and excited for interaction. In *Antagonist 1 / Dragon*, the creature stands with its bandaged fists in the air, like a boxer ready to face an opponent who will never enter the ring, while *Antagonist 2 / Demon* crouches, ready to pounce into a melee that is not to be. Meanwhile on the side of the ‘good guys’, *Protagonist 1 / Mickey* floats hopefully through his empty universe, arms perpetually outstretched for a hug he’ll never give or receive. It is a desperate and lonely world we’re peering into, reflective of the all too increasingly common feeling of isolation many of us can sense, even as we continue to be informed that the world is becoming ever more connected. Indeed, even when Adeel’s characters occasionally manage to get a peek through their bandages at the world around them, they likely wish they hadn’t. There is a sort of existential horror expressed in the single giant staring eye of *Antagonist 3 / Monster*, while *Protagonist 2 / Kong* seems quite positively on the verge of tears upon getting a glimpse of the emptiness that surrounds him.

At the end of such a reading, these drifting creatures seem to have been created to either perpetually ponder the purpose of their existence in a world they cannot clearly see or understand, or be cursed with the sight and knowledge of the true void in which they exist. Born out of an obsession with a revelatory yet single artistic technique, the once familiar inhabitants of Zafar’s strange and lonely universe are ultimately left with nothing to contemplate or understand outside of themselves. They have become the trapped subjects of their own monomania.

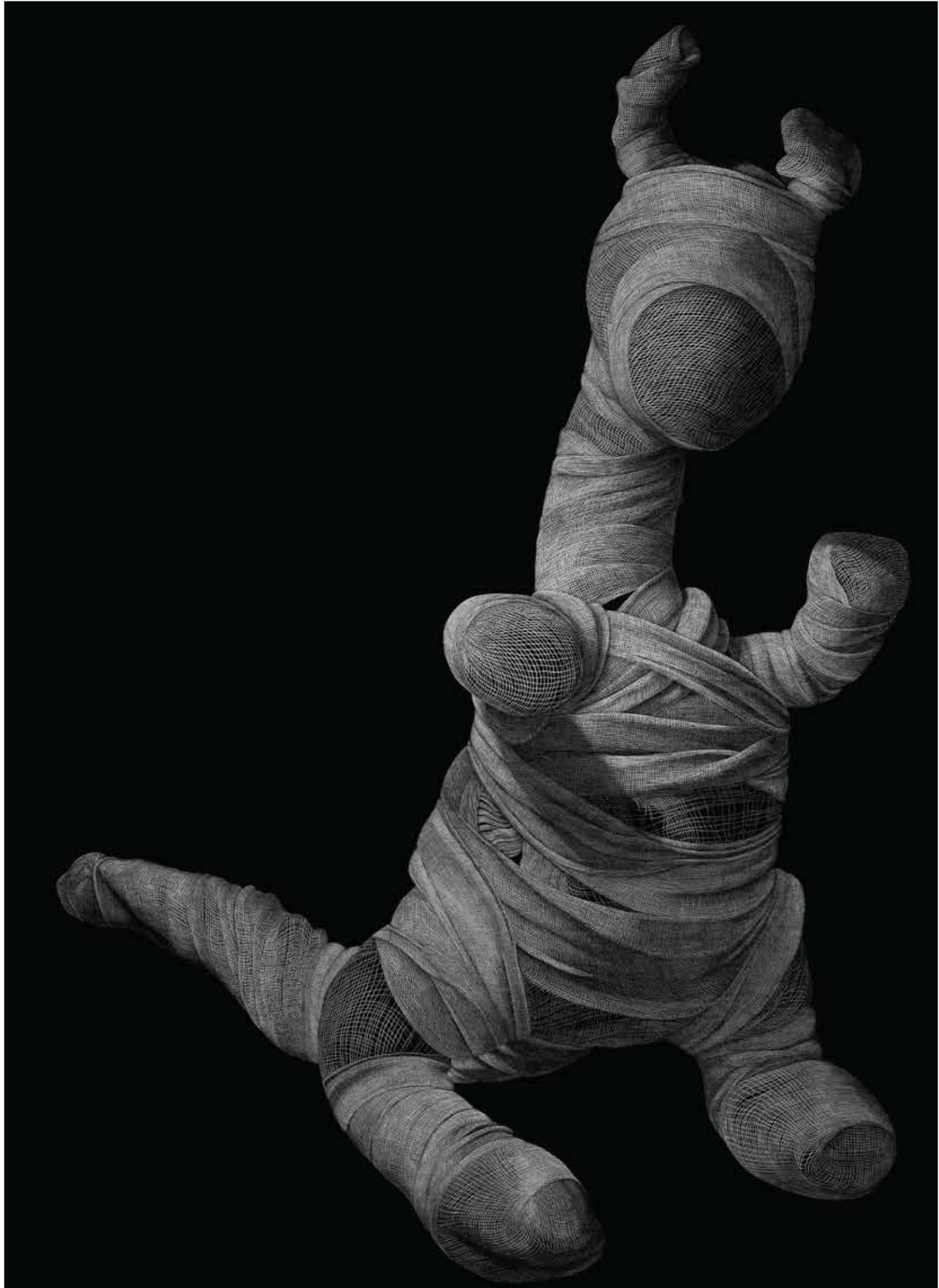


Protagonist 1 / Mickey
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
36 x 30 Inches / 91.44 x 76.2 cm
2015



Protagonist 2 / Kong
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
36 x 30 Inches / 91.44 x 76.2 cm
2015

Antagonist 1 / Dragon
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
49 x 60 Inches / 124.46 x 152.4 cm
2015



Antagonist/Demon

Gemma Sharpe

Appraisals of Adeel Uz Zafar's work generally draw parallels to miniature painting in Pakistan and its precise procedural quality, or to the pain of the country, perpetually wrapped in metaphorical and literal bandages alike to those that wrap Zafar's mischievous forms. Other readings attend to Zafar's early-career practice as an illustrator, or to the global ubiquity of his referents (cartoon characters and toys). However, his work's obvious parallel with Pop Art (along with the fact that he shares an early career trajectory with a number of Pop artists), have been less discussed, though assessments and reassessments of Pop Art are very much on the horizon as I write these words, with two 'Global Pop' exhibitions on display at the Tate Modern in London and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis expanding its canon beyond the usual suspects.

Perhaps an understanding of Zafar's work after the legacy of Pop has seemed too obvious to be undertaken. Or perhaps Pop Art is too far past, held back to the 1960s and the high (or low) point of the American Century, American exceptionalism and its capitalist roar. Pop seemed to offer so much, and so clearly. As Susan Sontag put it in her 1966 essay 'Against Interpretation', Pop Art used a content so blatant and "what it is" that in the end it becomes uninterpretable, with nothing *to* interpret. Pop Art has been openly and tacitly denigrated for this character, far more than its historical partner in Minimalism, which was similarly against interpretation, albeit through a deficit of content rather than Pop Art's excess of it.

Yet Pop was a slippery movement, (or series of movements). Its darker corners were quickly buried and easily absorbed by its bright, slick, trivial and occasionally chauvinist forms, and to think of Pop Art as merely Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenberg and the New York cohort represents a narrow cut of its canon, as recent exhibitions – more or less successfully – have tried to argue. If we expand that canon to include its international peers – from Britain and France to Brazil and Japan – the 'movement' begins to surpass comic strips, beef burgers, and Marylyn portraits. And just as artists outside North America frequently used the Pop aesthetic to subvert American icons and commercial excesses, so too were the artists that we associate with its inner 'core'. To take two examples: Lichtenstein was deploying the comic book format thirty years *after* its Golden Age, and Warhol's famous Marilyn prints were begun in response to Monroe's untimely death. Nostalgia, belatedness, critique and even mortality are values that we often forget to see in even the most iconic moments of Pop.

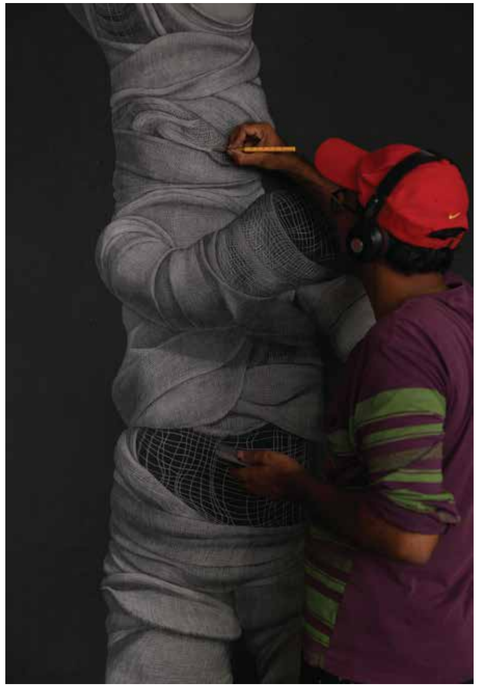
To concentrate on one piece among Zafar's recent works, a similar play between clarity and withdrawal can be found. The work 'Antagonist/Demon', for example, shows us a much-enlarged toy figure, wrapped in bandages. He (we are assuming he is a he) is at once a tormentor and the tormented. He makes for a sad, but also an absurd image. Executed with Adeel uz Zafar's particular economy of means, this little demon sums up the multiple forms of withdrawal that operate in his practice and that he partly shares with Pop: all of the work's values slip away from us as we ask them to help us respond. The bandages imply injury, decrepitude, and shadows of tragedy, for example. But Zafar's characters remain very much alive and energetic, occasionally even humorous. Zafar's gray-scale palate is supremely simple, but it therefore offers us no emotive clues: neither the passion of red, nor the sun of yellow, or the fertility of green. And while Zafar's formidably arduous technique is so evident, on examination it has a surgical imperviousness: line upon line upon line, executed meditatively and diligently, but without visible sentiment. Finally, in looking for a clear 'meaning' for the work, we might hope to make the image into an allegory of the artist's home: a young country that is already battered into a kind of elderly disrepair, and yet (for better or worse) still baring its teeth and up for a fight. But the popular nature of the toy and the universality of the bandage entails that this figure is too ubiquitous to be firmly 'about' Pakistan.

Antagonist 2 / Demon
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
60 x 60 Inches / 152.4 x 152.4 cm
2013

Thus, in looking at this little demon we are offered only partial clues as to his ‘meaning’, preventing us from attaching him to a particular place, emotion, or event. Here we see the slipperiness of Pop Art and its legacy: an apparent ease of content and yet a defiance of interpretation. These withdrawals and refusals are a strategy, maintaining the fact that there is no easy exit, and no grand opus or message that we can bundle up in our minds and walk away with. Unlike much Pop Art, however, which stills and silences its subjects – from Marilyn, to cartoon characters and beef burgers, which remain quietly in their moment – there is an animism to Zafar’s little demon, which brings him a poignancy rarely seen in Pop. Slippery though he might be to the eye that wants to interpret him and to pin him down to a particular meaning, he is not silent and he is not still. In fact, he seems to be alive. And this little demon is trying – he really is trying – to cast a threatening look, a terrible snarl, a terrifying stance. But his problem is that his eyes are covered and his mouth is wrapped closed. His arms and feet are rendered stiff and inflexible. We can see his effort, but it is thwarted.

And hidden under its wrappings, his little body seems juvenile and unready for grown-up games, fights, and torments. He is young, and he is old. He cannot see, and he has seen too much.

Gemma Sharpe is a writer, occasional curator and PhD candidate in Art History at the Graduate Center, CUNY, New York. Previously she has worked for Afterall, Gasworks, and the Triangle Network in London. She has an MFA in Art Writing from Goldsmiths, University of London and has published articles, catalogue essays and reviews internationally. Between 2011 and 2014 she was based in Karachi, Pakistan, where she taught in the Liberal Arts Department at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and worked as a Coordinator at Vasl Artists’ Collective.



Antagonist 3 / Monster
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
98 x 60 Inches / 248.92 x 152.4 cm
2015

HYBRID COMPANIONS

Aasim Akhtar

Mankind has been trying to dominate the animal kingdom for millennia and this ongoing endeavour has eventually resulted in ‘the perfect pet’. A pet that can be adjusted to the wishes and desires of its owner. A pet that will be the perfect accessory in daily social life. The object, one that many have found too disturbing, combines the tradition of the reversible fashion item with the playful convenience typical of the old fashioned doubleface stuffed animal toy which allows children to play with two toys in one. In Greek mythology, the chimerical combination of human and animal is also a persistent presence: the Minotaur, the Gorgon and the Sphinx are only a few among many examples. The transformation of humans into animals, most notably by Zeus in order to fulfill his lustful desires, have become a staple of classical mischievousness. The history of human-animal relationships can indeed be read as a quest for control over the strange, the exotic and the unknown, a phenomenon that historically resurfaces in different forms and media through the spectacle of game hunting, the performative ritual of the corrida, the assembling of dioramas in natural history museums, and the opening of zoos through the appropriations of imperialist Europe.

Drawing animals would then constitute a tool towards the understanding of them. But what other reason brought man to paint animals? Assumptions are all we can draw, and it is difficult to admit that there is something rather dramatic about the amnesia that erased from our minds the original relational mode we entertained with animals. It has been claimed that cave paintings may have served a divinatory role, whereby the drawing of animals would have resulted in fruitful hunting. Others have claimed that the images were instead part of shamanic rituals, in which the animals painted do not refer to animals in flesh and bone but to spirit-animals, mediating and reconciling human experiences in nature.

Anthropomorphism is an innate way of establishing an engagement with the animal. In modern times, and especially in popular culture, the attribution of distinctively human attributes to animals not only serves as a strategy that facilitates the selling of animal bodies as cultural objects, but is seemingly an inescapable behavioural reflex that we all fall into at some one point or another.

Adeel uz Zafar’s art project captures the ambiguities of anthropomorphism through the creation of unsettling imagery in which animal bodies are altered. Here, the stuffed toys carefully and snugly wrapped in a gauze bandage comment on the objectification of animals and the inescapable drowning of these in the capitalist system that simultaneously kills them and sells off their bodies. The elephant, the panda, the polar bear, the guerilla, the rabbit, they all belong to the cliché of the ‘animals to save’; the animals containing an anthropomorphic other, or in the understanding of Deleuze and Guattari, the ‘Oedipal animals’, those which invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation and are the only kind of animals psychoanalysis understands.

In Zafar’s ‘drawings’, anthropomorphism has been channeled through different mutational paths. The most visible is a morphological alteration of the animal body in order to incorporate some human-like qualities. These newly formed human-animal hybrids are omnipresent in children’s entertainment. Hanna- Barbera have since the 1940s created a multitude of much-loved, hybrid animal characters: Tom and Jerry, Top Cat and Yogi Bear, to name a few. Warner Brothers animated cartoon series also produced some memorable characters, like Bugs Bunny and Road Runner. A large part of the characterisation of these animals depends on the balance between the animal’s stereotypical representation of idiosyncrasies and the careful overlaying of human behavioural traits.

In the light of the fact that anthropomorphism shapes our relational approaches to animals from an early age, we may then assume that as such it plays a defining role in our adult encounters with animals too. Does it essentially perpetrate a romanticized, distortive and emotionally driven one-directional mode? It can indeed function as a form of control over the animal, as animality is attenuated through an imposed similarity with humans. In this representational mode, we are the central entity, the one animals emulate. Animals therefore become mirrors for humans, flattened reflective surfaces onto which we project our impulses, vices and virtues.

It is in the pseudo-realism presented by the filmic language Disney produced between 1948 and 1960 that the threat presented by anthropomorphic frameworks can be discussed. The new genre, at least in principle, presupposed a level of veracity in the portrayal of facts it presented. Today’s audiences are aware that through filmic syntax and editing everything can be recontextualised in a steep departure from the originally filmed footage. In the light of what we have seen, however, it is worth considering that the representation of truth may constitute an oxymoron. Even though there are elements of truth, at least of factual evidence, involved in representation, these too are entangled in the flux of narrative structures, framing and cropping, which automatically affect the nature of these elements. From this perspective, Walt Disney’s ‘documentaries’ removed the credible premise and turned the genre into an anthropomorphic tale in which narrations and scene-staging drastically reinvent the lives of animals. Reactions to the films suggested that nature did not really appear on its own terms. Instead it was a kind of cultural canvas upon which Disney and the American audience painted an array of concerns and values. In other words, the genre shifted from a framework in which the animal appears as object of human action (and in which the animal is targeted as game), to an anthropomorphic framework, in which human characteristics are mapped onto animal subjects, to a zoomorphic framework, in which knowledge about animals is used to explain the human species. We look at animals to learn about them, but we also look through animals for ourselves.

A roll of cotton gauze or bandage, an archetypal material recurring obsessively in Zafar’s work, one linked to personal experience of trauma, allows the artist to conceal the animal body, transforming it into an unidentified mass. This performance continuously shifts between the contingent and the purely symbolic. Through its multi-layered historical and psychoanalytical contextual trail, the animal becomes an unstable being, a creature of mediation. Its presence is extremely tangled in a historical and cultural signifying web – it is anything but free. Ultimately, these significations are reinforced by the title of the piece, where *Monster*, for instance, anchors the presence of the stuffed toy animal to an effective metaphorical embodiment of post-colonial times, more than to a fellow animal defined by its own animality. The piece offers readings charged with political provocation and historical referentialism that threaten to overshadow the value of the metaphysical encounter between human and animal.

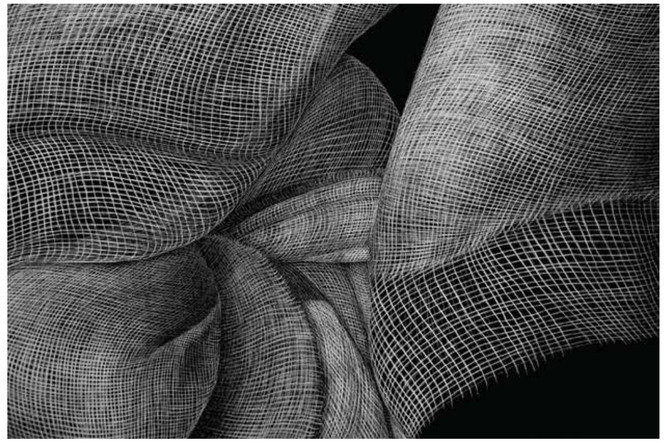
The concept of pain has historically functioned as one of the main discriminatory tools employed, through its articulation of difference and similitude between animals and humans. What effectively is pain? How do we measure other beings’ pain? How do we know if other animals feel pain, and whether their pain is comparable to our own? In ‘The Animal that therefore I am’, Derrida asks ‘Can they suffer?’ and, reaching for a plausible answer, he explains, ‘No one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness’. Are all the others forever destined to a world of passive cultural existence?

Aasim Akhtar is an independent artist, art critica and curator. His writing is published in magazines, catalogues, and books both nationally and internationally, and his art work has been widely exhibited, more recently at Whitechapel Gallery, London, as part of a commemorative show entitled, Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (2010). He was a curator-in-residence at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan in 2002. He is the author of two published books, Regards Croises (Alliance Francaise, Islamabad, 1996) and The Distant Steppe (Alliance Francaise, Islamabad, 1997), and has just finished writing his third, Dialogues with Threads: Traditions of Embroidery in Hazara. He teaches Art Appreciation and Studio Practice at The National College of Arts, Rawalpindi

Drawing Appendage 1
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
98 x 120 Inches / 248.92 x 387.1 cm (diptych)
2015

Drawing Appendage 2
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
60 x 60 Inches / 152.4 x 152.4 cm
2015

Drawing Appendage 3
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
48 x 120 Inches / 121.92 x 304.8 cm (diptych)
2015



An interview with Adeel-uz-Zafar (2015)

Abdullah M. I. Syed

In 1998, after graduating from the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, Pakistan, Adeel-uz-Zafar worked as an illustrator, special effects and 3D modeling artist. A decade later in 2009, he exhibited 'The Lion At Rest', a large scale engraved drawing on plastic vinyl for the exhibition *Size Does Matter* at VM Art gallery, Karachi. With this work, he achieved immediate notoriety and recognition as a brilliant draftsman and subsequently became one of the most sought-after artists in Pakistan. In recent years, Zafar has been exploring other mediums including sculpture, sound and installation. These new modes of working are not, however, abbreviations or pauses in his work but a continuity in his practice, which hovers between drawing and painting.

This interview with Zafar is an outcome of our many conversations and my observations of his art practice since we first met back in 2010. As part of my ongoing research on Pakistani art and artists, the details of this five year exchange are many, and it is difficult for me to recall each and every meeting and conversation. However, key occasions include our trip to Dubai in 2012 for a group exhibition at Lawrie Shabibi and his visit to Sydney, Australia for the Parramatta Artists Studios and Cicada Press residency in 2013. In Sydney, Zafar shared my studio, which gave me the opportunity to see the full development of his work 'Drawing Appendages', a series of etchings made for my curatorial project *Semblance of Order* (2013-2015). Conversations also took place in his Karachi studio between 2014 and 2015 and finally in my Karachi studio in October 2015.

Adeel-uz-Zafar is an artist exquisitely passionate about his practice and about art history and Pop culture. He has a particular moral bent toward bringing Pakistani art to a broader international audience. When speaking of his own practice, he addressed numerous misconceptions, such as ideas about concept and image making. In this interview I have focused upon such subjects. I hope this brings to light new insights into Zafar's art practice, his aspirations, anxieties and growth as an artist and a thinker.

Abdullah M.I. Syed: Can you please explain your exhibition title *Monomania*? It's an interesting title given that this body of work evokes such a strong sense of multiplicity and perhaps even polysemy, both in its images, making and conceptual framework.

Adeel-uz-Zafar: Well, that is a tricky question to begin the conversation. Monomania is defined as a partial insanity or fixation upon one subject or group of subjects. Somehow I feel that this idea is evident in this body of work. This fixation, for me, is a two-way creative process between the artist and the viewer; both gradually lose contact with their own individual reality, fixating on one line or one thought, twisting and turning and intersecting other lines and thoughts. Of course, in this process, the mind encounters multiplicity both in front of and behind every image. However, for me, there is always a strong monomaniacal imperative, whether it is a use of a single colour such as black or a constant repetition of the lines of bandages, which are so orderly and meaningful. Such interests and obsessions converge on a single idea of perfection, which I consider to be the driving force of my monomaniacal art practice.

AMIS: You are notorious for resisting 'rapid healing' or 'transformation' of the characters within your works, or shall I say, removing the gauze bandages to unveil your subjects' true forms. Rather, in your decade long art practice, you have chosen to adopt subtle changes and have not been pressured to quickly evolve or outgrow your obsession with the engraved line and your use of bandaged plush toys. In this exhibition, you bring the viewer's gaze to an extreme close-up, unusual angles and vantage points. In some cases, you almost obscure the view of your subject to a point of absurdity. In this way, are you suggesting a future direction toward abstraction? Will we ever see your unwrapped monstrous creations or will abstraction hide them forever?

AZ: There are many possibilities. I could move forward endlessly with my monomaniacal plans. With my skills and obsessive traits, I believe that I could achieve something special. I find myself in a group of contemporary artists which belongs to the time honoured tradition of art-making: a slow simmering of ideas, perfecting of craft, a continuous growth and pushing of creative limits. I am enjoying this phase of my career and I feel that only time and history will decide the fanatical indulgence of my content.

AMIS: It seems that achieving perfection is one the main driving force in your work. This is also recognised by arts writers such as Nafisa Rizvi and Sue Acret who refer to your practice as 'art without margin for error'. I believe this reading to be simplistic and with a finality that somewhat contradicts your working methodology. You masterfully hide mistakes but never obliterate them and they are visible upon close inspection. What do errors mean to you in your quest for perfection or perhaps a semblance of it?

AZ: No matter how careful you are, some comments do come back and confront you, so it seems. The absolute assessment that my work is flawless or that I work without any room for error is problematic. I find such finality uninteresting. Unfortunately, such ideas stem from comments I made some years ago when I proudly explained that the process of line engraving on a painted vinyl surface is irreversible and that drawn lines cannot be erased, redrawn or painted over. The truth is, there are ways to mask or correct flaws, for example, the drawing of additional lines, cross hatching or in some cases modification of the shape of the drawn area itself. When viewed closely, such added details are visible yet cloaked by an overwhelming experience of the maze of lines that one has to get past to actually see them. My process is not perfect and there is room for playful mistakes. This playful masking or multiplication is an organic process, both in terms of technical mastery and conceptual rigor, which I think stems from my quest for a semblance of perfection.

AMIS: So in a sense, you know how to create an entrapment for your audience?

AZ: [Laughs] I cannot say that I do, but perhaps my works do. I think this entrapment is an interesting point and my work illustrates this through obsessively engraved bandages. A bandage is associated with many ideas such as healing, regeneration and transformation, but the overall drawn effect is of its wrapped form. Upon close inspection, my drawn bandages are more like nets, traps for beauty. This trap fascinates the viewer, drawing them in closer to inspect the details and the making of the work.

And coming back to your earlier question, I think that through this entrapment, the viewer potentially not only dismisses errors but also forgets to recognise where a line ends and where a form begins.

AMIS: Is fuelling the audience's fascination with your extraordinary command over technique a deliberate act on your behalf?

AZ: To an extent, yes. I see my art making process and the viewer's interaction with it as intertwined in a playful yet complex process, almost performative.

AIMS. Coming back to your technique of engraved lines, this is classic appropriation from other masters' work. For example, there is a similarity between your work and that of figures like renowned Indian artist Rameshwar Broota and a few others. One can distinguish your refined technique from Broota, but such comparisons remain persistent. How do you claim your technique as your own and unique?

AZ: The technique that I have developed and that I am continually mastering is an age-old engraving technique. My first encounter with engraving was through Albrecht Dürer, the German Renaissance artist. He was a great engraver and I find his work inspirational. The appropriation of this technique is no different than using perspective, chiaroscuro or even the *sihya qalam* (black pen) or *gud–rang (opaque watercolour)* drawing and painting techniques of miniature painting. My exploration of engraving techniques with materials such as vinyl, which is a very difficult material to work with, requires extensive research and practice to master. I am now moving on to other materials as well. I feel that my recent exposure to etching has brought me closer to Dürer's techniques and has brought further refinement to my skills. It is not purely the technique but also an exploration of new tools, materials and subjects appropriate to a contemporary context that sets an artist apart.

AMIS: How do you see scribing and engraving as an act?

AZ: Cathartic and meditative and never violent. To me, the engraving process is more of a ritual performance, in which the reparative act pays homage to the Islamic art of calligraphic *mashq*. This is a mark making practice of duplication and imitation, carried out in order to perfect skills and to understand the imaginative potential of each mark.

AMIS: Out of the three - context, audience and culture - which matters to you the most?

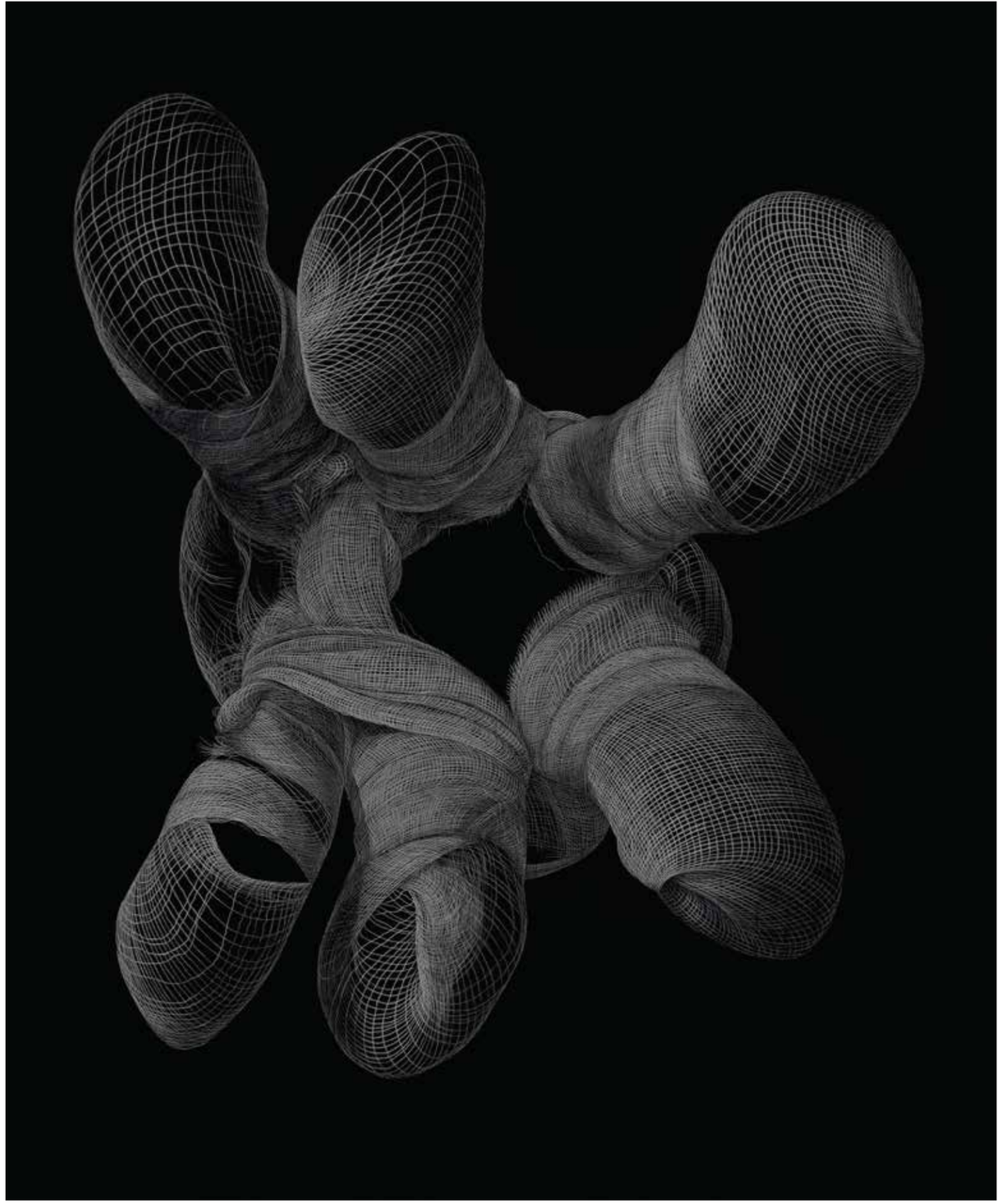
AZ: In the beginning of my career, all three to some extent but never explicitly one more than the other. Now, I feel that this burden has been lifted to some degree, however I do give consideration to context and cultural sensibilities such as Pakistan and Middle East, but not to an extent where such considerations hinder my creativity. And due to my labour intensive and time consuming process, it is difficult for me to make works for a specific show under a tight deadline and even harder to predict an audience. I rarely know in advance where a certain work will be shown or who its audience will be. For example, the body of work I am exhibiting at Aicon gallery began two years ago when New York was not on my radar for a solo exhibition. Once the exhibition was locked in, ongoing discussions with the curator prompted me to make some adjustments, yielding new ideas and potential new works. For this show, even the title, aptly suggested by the curator Andrew Shea, came out of such a discussion. On the whole, when I am in my studio, I am my own tough critic and my own audience.

AMIS: This show is your first solo in New York. Do you feel that your identity as a Muslim Pakistani male artist will be scrutinized under various notions of identity politics? And in this way, do you think your identity will be marginalized, potentially filtering into your conceptual matrix?

AZ: There is a certain charm and fascination about having a solo show in New York. Ironically, New York is the only location at this point in my exhibiting itinerary that does not have Colonial baggage attached to it, although its Imperial history and harbouring of post 9/11 anxieties and wounds of the war on terror pose challenges for Muslim identities. If one chose to apply such perspectives, which I find limiting and unfortunate, then the bandages in my work would take on a certain poetic duality – a sign of mutability, a protest, but also a strong physical symbol of the mending of wounds. I grew up in Pakistan during the dark era of General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship when Colonial and Imperial histories

preceding page

Mutation 1
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
36 x 30 Inches / 91.44 x 76.2 cm (each)
2015



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Mutation 2
Engraved drawing on plastic vinyl
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2015

were plastered over by the Islamization of Pakistan. Such overlapping histories have had a strong influence on my generation of artists.

AMIS: Do you think that Pakistan's toxic political system overexposed your characters, transforming them into mutants?

AZ: That is a novel idea that needs further investigation. Today, I do recognise the discrepancy between what I was told growing up in Pakistan and what I have since learned and discovered. I feel that I am unable to escape and fully recover from the toxic effects of that era. I think my characters are a reflection of my own mutation. Let's leave it at that.

AMIS: There is a general perception that your soft animals are damaged or injured, that you are a saviour and that they are recovering, which is clearly symbolized through your use of bandages. However, I wonder if this is cleverly masking your true desire to play God? Are you playing God here? Are you creating these monsters, heroes and villains?

AZ: [Smile] Let's say I am giving life beyond life.

AMIS: Oh, so you are playing the role of the architect, similar to Victor Frankenstein?
AZ: Frankenstein's characters are alive, they have the ability to move and interact. Mine are mummified, more in a state of suspension.

AMIS: I ask again, any plans to bring them out from their mummified suspension soon?

AZ: [Pause] I see this as a historical mummification and only the progression of art history has the power to bring them back and to unveil them in their appropriate timelines.

AMIS: Another myth surrounding your mummified characters (or monsters) is that they are drawn from mythical creatures of light and purity and harmless. I find this fascinating as the figures are empowered by their black background, the darkness surrounds them. Please clarify the nature of your monsters? I suspect the reading and the narratives of your creations are not as black and white as they seem.

AZ: I believe that everything in this world is based on polarities: light and dark, truth and lies, pure and impure and so on. Mythical narratives are no different, their reading also oscillates between such polarities. I believe it is impossible to erase the darkness, it provides the evidence or absence of light itself. My characters are bright and cheerful, bringing pleasure, but my narrative is fictional, hidden and perhaps somewhat dark in nature. You will never know for sure what fictional story is behind each character. It requires the audience's imagination and speculation to unfold. It is like looking into a mirror and finding yourself on the other side – dark or light it is all hidden in that gaze. A child's gaze may reflect their fear of the unknown and as such they tend to think of these characters as injured or in pain, whereas an adult's experience swings between pain and pure pleasure.

AMIS: Is there a commentary on capitalism in your work?

AZ: Yes, there is a strong underlying critique of the globalization and Americanization of local societies, which manifests itself in a various forms such as TV, film, advertising and most importantly the fast-food industry. I have a particular interest in Neo-Pop culture, a culture that is now everywhere and one that every person experiences it in a similar way. I find America's most enduring capitalist symbols, such as Mickey Mouse and Coca-Cola, to be mascots of this culture and key players on the global stage of Western capitalism. Today, from Pakistan to China and beyond, Western capitalism has been embraced like a monomania. On one hand it captures the imagination of young minds, while on the other hand it is eroding local cultural values and erasing cultural icons and identity.

AMIS: Despite your deep interest in creating large-scale work, your 'Drawing Appendages' etchings series, made for the exhibition *Semblance of Order* (which travelled to Aicon gallery, New York in 2014), consists of smaller scale works. The series shows a glimpse of the next step in your conceptual and technical evolution. You mentioned that this change was a result of your engagement with and experience of working and living in Sydney, your first visit to a western city. Can you elaborate on this further and do your recent large-scale 'Appendages' works in *Monomania* provide evidence of this change?

AZ: Yes, I can see the works in *Monomania* as a result of an outcome of my residency in Sydney, Australia and its subsequent exhibition *Semblance of Order*. The residency experience, working at Cicada Press and my visits to many museums and studios of other artists in Sydney, added diversity to my conceptual discourse and visual vocabulary, and new dimensions to the formal language of my art making (techniques and materials). It was the first time that I had a chance to live, experience, engage with and analyze the western side of the world. During my stay in Parramatta City, a part of Sydney that is densely populated with Middle Eastern people and many different Asian communities, including South East Asians, Chinese, Indians and Pakistanis, I began to notice signs and symbols that suggest efforts to curtail the racial divide and bring about reconciliation between various ethnic and religious groups in Australia. I also became aware of a political movement or cultural shift that came about after Australia's apology to Indigenous people in 2008, attempting to bring Australia together and heal its Colonial wounds, but simultaneously seeming to create new fissures and ruptures. This gave me the idea of using the appendages in the works I was making, as these bandage-wrapped characters are not only a paradox of subjectivity in art and aesthetics across cultural borders, but also suggest social, religious and political paradoxes. How they are read, differs specifically between the East and the West. The engraving process further enhances the concept of appendages, repetition and reproduction. I see the work in *Monomania* as a result of this analysis, filled with aesthetic delight, anxiety and fear of the unknown.

Abdullah M. I. Syed is an artist, designer, curator and scholar working between Sydney, Karachi and New York. Syed holds a PhD in Art, Design and Media from USNW, Sydney, Australia. Syed has curated many exhibitions in Pakistan and internationally for which he has contributed catalogue essays, notably: the survey of drawings of Australian artist Michael Kempson (2010), *Remarking | Remaking: The Australian Drawing Connections* (2012) and most recently *Drawn to From: The Matter in Hand* (2015). Syed has also contributed text to *Print Australia*. His honors and awards include the Blacktown Art Prize, Australia (2010), the UNSW Postgraduate Research Scholarship (2009) and the IAO Installation Award, USA (2003).

	1975-1980	1980's	1990's	2000's	2010-2015
World Politics & Global Events	End of Vietnam War Soviet–Afghan War begins Iranian Revolution	Iran-Iraq War Stock market crash of 1987 Fall of the Berlin Wall End of Soviet- Afghan War End of Cold War era	World Wide Web invented Gulf War Dissolution of the Soviet Union Bosnian War The Taliban government takes control of Afghanistan	September 11th attacks & War on Terror declared Afghan War & Iraq War Mumbai attacks Great Recession The War on Terror escalates	European economies challenged Arab Spring & uprising Occupy movement inspires worldwide protests Osama Bin Laden assassinated
World Art	The Age of Postmodernist Art	Postmodernism invigorated	Charles Saatchi created a new ideology and had a considerable impact on the fortunes of individual artists Contemporary Art explodes with a spotlight on Chinese Contemporary Art	Growth of digital art, such as Giclee Prints. General expansion of computer art A coming of age for Contemporary Indian Art A new globalized scenario of art fairs and Biennales thrives	Emergence of regional Biennales Art in Asia Pacific escalates
Pakistani Politics & Events	General Zia-ul-Haq imposes Martial Law. Political parties dissolved, press censorship imposed	Benazir Bhutto returns to Pakistan President General Zia promulgates Shariat Ordinance making Sharia supreme law of the land General Zia-ul-Haq is killed in a plane crash near Bahawalpur Benazir Bhutto becomes first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan	A spate of consecutive dismissals of democratic governments in Pakistan Fourth Indo-Pakistani War	Gen. Pervez Musharraf returns the nation to Martial Law and later won a vote of confidence in the Senate, National Assembly, and provincial assemblies Government of Pakistan launches country-wide crackdown against extremist elements. Post 9-11 Assassination of Benazir Bhutto Democracy restored	Floods in Pakistan Democratic government complete a full term in parliament - a first for Pakistan Military forces launched successful counter-insurgency operations in modern age
Pakistani Art	Modern Art influences & dominates Pakistani Art	Zahoor ul Ahklaq introduces Postmodernism & transition from Modern to Contemporary begins	The post- Zia years foster a new complexity of form & content in the work of younger artists -Miniature movement evolves and receives international attention Art schools and colleges established Younger artists show their presence in the international arena due to globalization	The arrival of internet and new media provides inspiration and new perspective Commercial art galleries mushroom Diaspora artists invigorated National Art Gallery is inaugurated in Islamabad 2007	Contemporary Art from Pakistan cultivates international following. Works shown in major Art fairs and Biennales including dOCUMENTA (13) Major Euro- American museums start collecting Pakistani Art High profile international prizes and awards won by the Contemporary Pakistani artists
Adeel uz Zafar Born 1975			Enrolls at the National College of Arts in Lahore, as a student of Fine Art Graduates with distinction 1998 Return to Karachi and begins teaching at Karachi School of Art Marked his early identification as an illustrator	Gained considerable experience of working with the reputable publishing houses in Pakistan Joined Karachi Grammar School 2004 & Indus Valley School of Art 2008 as an Art instructor *Size Does Matter:* Group Show 2009 is a career turning point. Introduces the engraving with bandages on Vinyl	*On the brink:* Group Show 2010 at FOST Gallery, Singapore *R.M Studio Residency:* 2010 at Lahore *The Rising Tide – New directions in Art from Pakistan:* 2010 work was selected in a major group exhibition at Mohatta Palace, Karachi showcased a decade of a new wave of Pakistani artists *Protagonist* – First international solo show at FOST Gallery, Singapore: 2013 features 17 works *Stranger Than Fiction* – First solo show in Pakistan at Gandhara-Art, Karachi: 2014 features a selection of seminal anthropomorphic characters known around the world for their incredible feats and heroic actions *Semblance of Order* – A Travelling show: 2014 The works have marked a new direction where characters have started transforming them into creatures with appendages *The Eye Still Seeks* – Pakistani Contemporary Art: 2015 edited by Salima Hashmi and published by Penguin Books India, aims to bring together a wide selection of work produced over the course of the last 20 years by Contemporary art practitioners from Pakistan All together the artist has participated in 31 group exhibitions and 4 solo shows to date

BIOGRAPHY

Adeel Uz Zafar was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1975, where he lives and works. Adeel received a BFA from National College of Arts, Lahore in 1998.

Solo Exhibitions

2015 *Monomania*, Aicon Gallery, New York, United States
2015 *Being / Becoming* , Khaas Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan
2014 *Stranger than Fiction*, Gandhara-Art, Karachi, Pakistan
2013 *Protagonists*, Fost Gallery – Gillman Barracks, Singapore

Selected Group Exhibitions / Projects

2014 *Semblance of Order*, Koel Gallery, Karachi
2013 *Semblance of Order*, Parramatta Artists Studios, Sydney
2013 *Are you in Character?* Gandhara-Art, Karachi
2012 *Stop Play Pause Repeat*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai
2012 *Let's not talk about Politics*, Gandhara-Art, Karachi
2012 *Letters to Taseer II*, The Drawing Room, Lahore, Pakistan
2011 Two Person Show- Adeel uz Zafar & Ayaz Jokhio, Canvas Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2010 *The Rising Tide*- New directions in Art from Pakistan 1990 -2010, The Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, Pakistan
2010 *The Drawing Room at Slick Paris*, The Palais de Tokyo and the Musée d'Art moderne de la Villa de Paris, Paris, France
2010 *On the Brink,* Fost Gallery, Singapore (4 person show)
2010 *RM Studio Residency International Show*, Ejaz Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan (group exhibition)
2010 *One Square Mile*, Arts Council, Karachi, Pakistan (group exhibition)
2009 *Being a Man in Pakistan*, Art Chowk- The Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan (group exhibition)
2009 *Size Does Matter*, VM Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan (group exhibition)
2009 *Redo Pakistan*, Other Asias (in collaboration with Shanaakht Festival), Arts Council, Karachi, Pakistan
1998 *Degree Show*, National College of Arts, Zahoor ul Ikhlaq Gallery, Pakistan (group exhibition)

Booth/Art Fair

2014 Gandhara-art at Art / Basel Hong Kong (15-18 May), Booth 1D07
2013 Gandhara-art at Art / Basel Hong Kong (23-26 May), Booth 1D07
2012 2nd Kathmandu International Art Festival (KIAF), 'Earth/Body/Mind' (25 November -21 December)
2012 VIP Art Fair
2012 Lawrie Shabibi at PULSE New York, Booth B6

Residency Programmes

2015 Gandhara-art at Art / Basel Hong Kong (15-17 March), Booth 1D29
2015 FOST Gallery at Art Stage Singapore (22-25 January), Booth B7
2014 Creative Fusion International Artists Residency, Cleveland Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio, USA
2013 Parramatta Artists studios, in collaboration with Cicada Press (COFA, UNSW), Sydney, Australia
2010 RM Studio Residency International, Lahore, Pakistan

Teaching

2004-present Karachi Grammar School, Karachi
2008-2011 Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture, Karachi
1998-2006 Karachi School of Art, Karachi

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Rizvi, Nafisa. *'Heroes, Villains & Humans*, Protagonists, FOST Gallery- Gillman Barracks, Singapore 2013
Khan, Sumbul. *'Between Strife & Mirth'*, Stop Play Pause Repeat, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai 2012
Akhtar, Aasim. '*The Rising Tide - New directions in Art from Pakistan 1990 -2010'*, p.167, The Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, 2010
Akhtar, Aasim. *'Encore'*, R.M Studio Residency Exhibition, p.3, Ejaz Gallery, Lahore, 2010
Hussain, Marjorie. '*What does it mean to be a man in modern society'*, p.2, Art Chowk- The Gallery, Karachi, 2009
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'In Defiance & Solidarity', Newsweek [Pakistan], p.50, March 16 2012
Nabi, Zehra. *'Collective Introspective'*, Newsline [Pakistan], p.94, March 2012
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Akhtar, Aasim. '*Celebrating the Drift'*, Libas International, p.306-312, 2010
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Harianawala, Hawra. '*Size Does Matter'*, MAG Magazine [Pakistan], p.16, November, 2009

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Online Videos

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZImBdswGy4&hd=1

Semblance of order
http://vimeo.com/105625897

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Aicon Gallery's curatorial vision begins in South Asia but reaches outwards internationally from there. The New York gallery provides a vital platform for Modern and Contemporary South Asian artists to exhibit in the United States. Alongside in – depth, focused solo shows, the gallery presents a program of curated group exhibitions that are international in their scope and ambition. In short, Aicon Gallery aims to bring new and challenging art from South Asia to the widest possible international audience.

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