

“Ruins”
SAAD QURESHI

ARTECO
19TH of April - 18th of May

An unavoidable dichotomy inhabits the term *ruins*. Ruins capture our imaginations through their inescapable structural disintegration, but it is their seductive, transformative power that lies at the heart of our fascination. Ruins present the possibility of reimagining an alternate, sanctified space of re-emergence; at once redemptive and alluring, was there ever such powerful cultural currency as that of the phoenix and the flame?

These ideas are explored in Saad Qureshi’s work who masterfully consider the transformative power of ruins through drawing, painting and sculpture. Working in starkly different ways, Qureshi makes a compelling exhibition that successfully presents a comprehensive revision of its chosen theme.

A central tenet of Qureshi’s practice is cultural otherness and how the duality embodied in this concept corresponds to the psychology of visual perception and the possibility for more panoptic notions of belonging. The fragmentary feel of Qureshi’s drawn, painted and sculptural pieces provides much of their impact. One often feels as though his works exist with the express intention of capturing the reaction from the periphery, highlighting the centre through its deliberate absence.

There is an inherently narrative quality to Qureshi’s works, maybe owing to the strong influence of both Christian and Islamic symbolism and the importance of storytelling in these traditions. These influences are clear in works such as *Beyond Oracle and Doubt* (2013). This piece, intensely re-worked, featuring a rectangular border, beautiful roundels and ornate decorative devices, strongly recalls both Islamic and traditional Christian book arts. Within the confines of the border, where one might expect to find beautiful flowing versus of holy text, we are instead confronted by what appears to be an aftermath – a thick, rising cloud of smoke and undulating flame. The source is somewhere outside of the frame, happening in a place that we are not privy to. Through the artist’s visual confirmation we know that somewhere, something has been ruined – a process has taken place that has altered what was and put into motion a re-emergence. The heavily blurred treatment of the border and roundels creates a distorted visual affect, further reducing our ability to clearly see where the lines have been drawn and where we stand in the process that is unfolding before us.

The artist’s decision to continually reprint the lines of the piece, almost to the point of abstraction, suggests a kind of compromise; it provides an opportunity for meanings to be layered and shared rather than firmly situated in one perspective. This idea and the use of frames and abstraction to impress the point, reflects on the artists understanding of museum and gallery spaces as conduits for sacred experience and agents of reorientation. The evolution of these once purely secular spaces into representatives for a new form of

religiosity encourages us to consider the forced separation of artistic icons from their previous incarnations as non sacred objects, just as *Beyond Oracle and Doubt* encourages us to consider the power of the heavy frame that separates us from the unseen eruption. Qureshi's art is a study in liminality; an opportunity to stand at the threshold between previous modes of understanding and new ways of seeing.

The works of Qureshi consider the importance of context and its fluidity when confronted by the unstoppable inaction of time. Ruins, as a metaphor for life, reminds us that no matter how desperately we feel that the significance of an item, place or practice must endure, ultimately the shifting parameters through which these things are given significance will fall victim to renewed understandings and contemporary obsessions. All we can do is look at the beauty of these works and understand that though the lens through which we look may be shifting, multiple sources from which to draw significance remain inherent within the context of the ruins.

Written by Michelle M Davis

'Ruins' runs from 19th of April – 18th of May at ArtEco Gallery, London, UK.

Saad Qureshi

Qureshi received his MFA in Painting from The Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 2010. However, for the almost a decade his work has been exhibited all over the world and gained international recognition. The most important exhibitions in his prolific career include a solo show '*Other Crescents, Other Moons*' at the Gazelli Art House, London (2012), '*Creative Cities Collection London in 2012*' at the Barbican Exhibition Hall, London (2012), and '*Don't Raise the Bridge, Lower the River*' at the Saatchi Gallery, London (2009). Qureshi has amassed a numerous amount of prestigious awards and publications, including being shortlisted for sculpture at the Celeste Prize Show, Centrale Montemartini, Rome (2012), the Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award (2012), and a recent review with Art Review Magazine. He has held two residencies at the BBC 2 show, School of Saatchi, London and The International Art Zone, Beijing, both in 2009. For more information, visit www.saadqureshi.com.