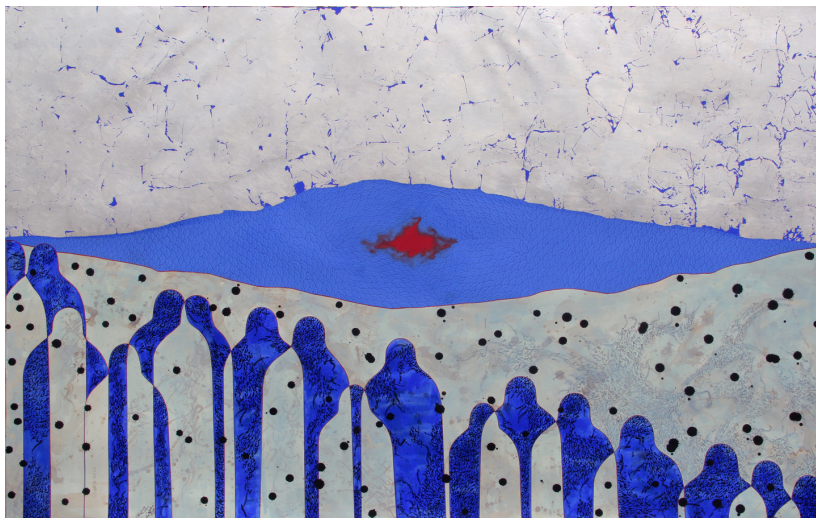


# GOWEN CONTEMPORARY

GENEVA, Switzerland

**Waseem Ahmed** (b. 1976, Pakistan) - *Pious Fear*, 3 September - 18 October 2013



*Untitled*, 2013, pigment color on wasli paper, 48 x 72 in. (121,9 x 182,9 cm)



*Untitled*, 2013, pigment color on wasli paper, 37,3 x 17,8 cm

Gowen Contemporary is pleased to announce the first individual exhibition in Switzerland by the Pakistani artist Waseem Ahmed. The exhibition, entitled *Pious Fear*, presents the artist's most recent works. Ahmed had been exhibited at Gowen Contemporary in its 2010 group show *Have I Ever Opposed You? New Art from India and Pakistan*.

Waseem Ahmed is considered among the finest of Pakistani's miniaturists. His extraordinary series of miniatures executed in the traditional miniature technique, touch upon both contemporary and highly topical issues. Ahmed's world is populated by Mullah figures delicately painted like saints or princes, their features refined, their expressions filled with inner peace, surrounded by visions of paradise symbolized by the Garden, and sometimes enriched by delicate calligraphy. Burka-clad female figures appear everywhere. It is a world of desire and fulfillment within the transient reality of life on earth, which is made up of mud and blood. Waseem Ahmed succeeds beautifully in presenting the collision of these two contradicting worlds.

In *Pious Fear*, «(...) Waseem Ahmed has (.....) extended himself. Both in scale and scope. In the works included in this exhibition, Ahmed's confidence and skill embrace an unprecedented scale for miniatures. Wasli, the specially prepared and burnished layered-paper for miniatures, is here seen in two large sizes. One miniature is 42 x 48 in. [106,7 x 121,9 cm] and the largest is 48 x 72 in. [121,9 x 182,9 x cm]. Nothing in the traditional Mughal or contemporary miniatures quite matches these sizes. Such large sizes are a statement, exploring, challenging, technical aspects of creativity.

Ahmed's earlier works were interpretations of myths and legends, provocative renderings of popular icons and suggestive abstractions. Here he has expanded his scope. He has chosen to address a burning current issue: female existence in a stultifying environment generated by bigotry and intolerance.

All Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- preach that fear of the Divine shapes the pious. This underlying belief permeates Ahmed's latest body of work. But the title of the exhibition is not without ambiguity: what factors constitute "fear"? What aspects of the "pious" prompt "fear"? Can "fear" ever be "pious"? Do the "pious" always "fear"? Should the "other" always "fear" the "pious"? The irony is that this quandary spills into tragedy. And so by its very absence, one is obliged to question: what about "love"?

In the two large works, such questions are expressed in bold visual statements which are echoed in the smaller works. In the largest miniature, female repression acquires a haunting image. But it is laced with ambiguity. The work is divided into three visual areas which lend to one another. The foreground has seventeen burka-clad figures representative of all women. They make an overlapping pattern pocked with many bullet marks. On the right the females are small, diminished. On the left they are larger, imposing. The painting if "read" from left to right, can be construed to show how violence against women has gradually led to their diminishing identity. But if "read" from right to left, there is hope.

(...) Ahmed's repertoire consists of elements which continue, over the last several years, to combine in thought-provoking permutations. The animal shape, bearded man, blood splattered surface, chador-wrapped or burka-clad female, chubby putto that will transport the "pious" to heaven, black area indicating man's dark design, letters from the Arabic-Farsi-Urdu alphabet suggesting the "religious" rhetoric, striped mat, figures from the Hindu pantheon, red rose, revolver and pistol in relief under silver-leaf or sketched, rosary, skull-cap, suicide-bomber, suicide-jacket, verdant vegetation of promised paradise, all form Ahmed's visual vocabulary. From these particulars Ahmad generates the universal concern about oppression of the weak by the powerful, of the East or the West, whether they are individuals, groups or countries.» (Athar Tahir, 2013) (\*)

**Waseem Ahmed was born in 1976 in Hyderabad, Pakistan. He lives and works in Lahore. He studied at the National College of Arts in Lahore. Since 1993 Waseem Ahmed has been extensively exhibited in museums and galleries in Australia, Pakistan, India, Japan, UK, Greece, France, Nepal, Turkey. His works can be found in important private and public collections, such as the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the British Museum London, the Virginia Whiles Collections, UK, the Anupam Podar Collections, India, the Salima Hashmi, Pakistan, the Naazish Ataullah Collection, Pakistan and the Sajida Vandal Collection, Pakistan.**

(\*) (Integral text available on our web site). Athar Tahir was the Rhodes Scholar for Pakistan at Oriel College, Oxford, and has a Masters from the University of Oxford, United Kingdom. He is the author of several prize-winning books on Art, Calligraphy and Calligraph-art. His books have been published by the Oxford University Press (OUP) and UNESCO. He is the Editor of the forthcoming Oxford Companion to Pakistani Art to be published by OUP.

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