

GOWEN CONTEMPORARY

GENEVA Switzerland

artgenève 2018, February 1 - 4 - Booth D41 *Homeland* - Waseem Ahmed (Pakistan, 1976), Yifat Bezalel (Israel, 1975)

Opening in the presence of the artists: Thursday January 31, from 2 pm to 9 pm

Public days: February 1-4, from 12 am to 8 pm

Gowen Contemporary is pleased to present *Homeland*, a selection of works by Pakistani artist Waseem Ahmed and Israeli artist Yifat Bezalel. The project was born from the dialogue and telephone conversations between the two artists, who have never met in person so far, although they have long expressed the desire to work on a common project.

He is Muslim, she is Jewish; both pose, directly or through metaphors and referrals, a critical and distressing look on their own country plagued by violence, profound contrasts and border restrictions (access to Pakistan is forbidden to Israelis). Borders are often represented as wounds or obstacles. Maps and wandering characters reflect personal stories of exodus or diasporas but also refer to the current tragedy of migrants; scenes of struggle inspired by classical mythology are oblique references to the contemporary plague of religious extremism. Some of the works that the two artists specifically produced for *Homeland* resulted in a true exchange of points of view with the appropriation of each other's stories and visual language.

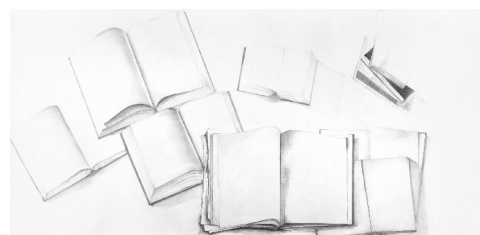


Waseem Ahmed, *Untitled*, 2017, pigment color, gold leaf on archival wasli paper, 120 X 76 cm

Born in 1976 in Hyderabad Sindh, **Waseem Ahmed** grew up in a family who had migrated from India after Partition in 1947 to settle in the newly independent state of Pakistan. Today, the artist is a key player on the scene of contemporary miniature painting and joins thus a number of South Asian artists that use tradition as a means towards innovation. Ahmed's works reveal their complexity through their multiple reading levels and, beyond their esthetic, they tackle social and political issues faced by the Islamic world. Crossing cultural borders, Ahmed's repertoire consists of elements which stimulate the semantic reading, playing with metaphors and analogies. The animal shape, bearded men, blood splattered surfaces, burkas, black areas referring to man's dark side, letters from the Arabic-Farsi-Urdu alphabet suggesting religious rhetoric, guns, rosaries, suicide-bombers, suicide-jackets, verdant vegetation of promised paradise, all form Ahmed's visual vocabulary. More recently, subjects derived from Western classical mythology have appeared in the vocabulary of the artist, occasionally by reinterpreting and decontextualizing forms of prominent ancient sculptures. While combining these diverse elements, all of Ahmed's works are rooted in the same universal concern: the oppression of the weak by the powerful, as it manifests in both Eastern and Western cultures, be it enforced by either individuals, groups or entire countries.

Waseem Ahmed was born in 1976, lives and works in Lahore. He attended the National College of Arts in Lahore. Gowen Contemporary, who is the only representative gallery of the artist in Europe since 2010, held exhibitions by Ahmed in 2010, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (upcoming). Ahmed's work is in the permanent collection of the Asian Art Museum Berlin; The British Museum London; The Virginia Whiles Collection, UK; The Anupam Podar Collection, India; The Salima Hashmi, Pakistan; Naazish Atallah Collection, Pakistan; Sajida Vandal Collection, Pakistan and The D. Daskalopoulos Collection, Switzerland, among others. Ahmed was the first artist in residency at the Asian Art Museum Berlin participating in the Humboldt Lab project in 2014-2015. The latter included a solo show by Ahmed curated by Martina Stoye at the end of his residency. Ahmed was a finalist for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize in 2012 and 2013 and he was nominated for the Jameel Prize in 2011 and 2012. His work was recently included in the Katmandu Triennale (2017) and was exhibited at the Jason McCoy Gallery, New York (2017).

Yifat Bezalel's work is composed of pencil and ink drawings on paper or wood, installations, sculptures and videos. Bezalel's delicate works tackle the questions and notions of time, space, existence. Her research covers political, religious and philosophical aspects. Children's book had a great influence on the work of Bezalel. The artist remembers being fascinated as a child by stories where heroines died or fell into deep or magical sleep and after a lengthy period of time awoke or were resurrected. *Alice in Wonderland* particularly attracted Bezalel's attention and became a recurring theme that the artist has developed in a series of drawings since 2002, featuring reworkings of Tenniel's Alice, disconnected from the stories and placed in alternative landscapes. Her interest in Alice is focused on the fall down the rabbit hole leading to a parallel world, a place of limbo where 'nothing' has an almost tangible form. Geographical maps, especially of unknown lands, also populate Bezalel's drawings. «I have often asked myself what keeps attracting me to those places of death, limboes and 'other worlds' and my tentative answer would be that I grew up and still live in a place where death is always present» (Bezalel, 2011).



Yifat Bezalel, *The Empty Holy Books*, 2017, pencil on paper, 67 x 148.5 cm

Yifat Bezalel was born in 1975 in Tel Aviv and studied at the Betzalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem. She currently lives and works in Tel Aviv. Bezalel has extensively exhibited in Israel and, since 2011, in Europe. Past solo exhibitions include: Tel Aviv Museum, Israel (2017-18); Lexus Gallery, London (2017); Uziel Family Gallery, London (2014); VIDA Museum Borgholm, Sweden (2012). Past group exhibitions include: The Negev Museum of Art, Israel (2015); Biennale di Venezia, Palazzo Bembo, Venice (2013); travelling exhibition at the Tate Liverpool, the MART Rovereto and the Kunsthalle Hamburg (2011-2012). Bezalel was the recipient of numerous prizes including the Rappaport Prize for Young Israeli Artist in 2016. Since 2010, Yifat Bezalel is represented by Gowen Contemporary, that exhibited her work in 2011, 2013 and 2014.

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