

# GOWEN CONTEMPORARY

GENEVA, Switzerland

**Waseem Ahmed** (b. 1976, Pakistan)

The Taliban and other fundamentalist groups are not often the central subject of works of art. The extraordinary series of miniatures of Waseem Ahmed turn this traditional taboo upside-down. Ahmed's work is uncompromising, yet his treatment of his subject is particularly nuanced. Mullah figures are delicately painted like saints or princes, their features refined, their expressions filled with inner peace. Around them, a spiritual world of the anticipated paradise is symbolised by the Garden, enriched by delicate calligraphy. Figures of covered women are 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. He presents the current compost of atrocities as a parallel psychological landscape to the Paradise that is so violently desired. This is a landscape of desolation and sublimation. The burqa becomes a camouflage for the suicide bomber; individual figures are turned into bullets, personifying fear.

The most recent works show an increased interest in the classic western iconography. The images of the masterpieces of western art history, whose profound knowledge Ahmed acquired early in his art studies, become part of the vocabulary that the artist uses to create his own visual language.

In the series of miniatures *Folding Unfolding*, 2011, the paintings are composed by two or more superimposed layers. At times, a pattern reminiscent of Matisse partly covers an old master's painting overlaid on one Ahmed's typical miniature. The first layer is like a gift wrapping paper that one tears when opening a present to discover what is inside. The viewer is driven through the genesis of the creative process into a disturbed dialogue in which the spoken and unspoken can coexist and be expressed.

Ahmed's controversial language, making use of the main themes of the western iconography in the pure miniature style and subverting the relationship between style and theme, speaks about his effort to appropriate his own history as well as the freedom of telling it.

**Since 1993 Waseem Ahmed has been included in group exhibitions in museums and galleries in Australia, Pakistan, India, Japan, UK, Greece, France, Nepal, Turkey.**