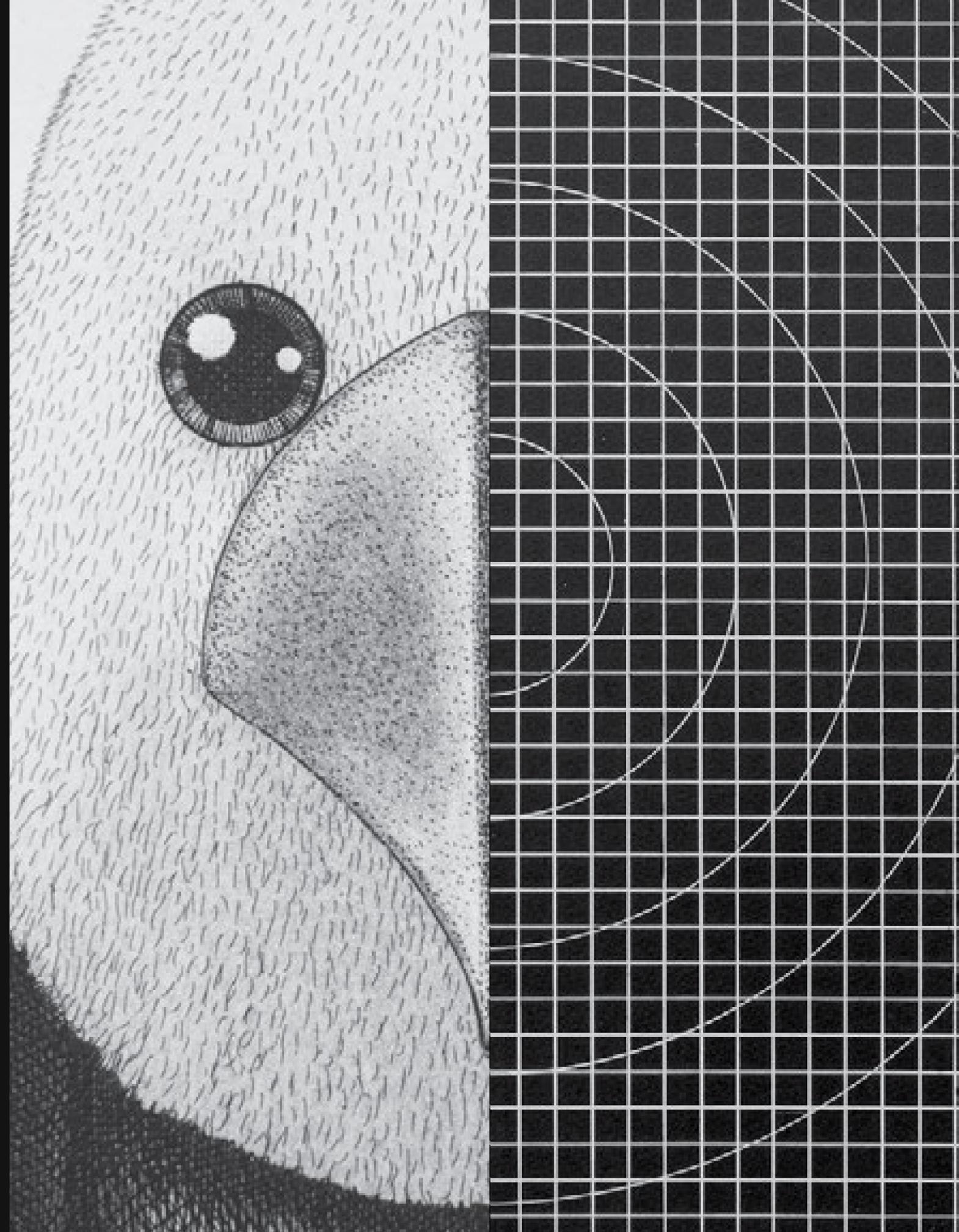


SEMBLANCE OF ORDER

WITH CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION AS ITS CORE, *SEMBLANCE OF ORDER* IS A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROMOTING AUSTRALIAN AND PAKISTANI ART AND ARTISTS ACROSS BORDERS AND PLATFORMS.

IT IS THE RESULT OF AN INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS' RESIDENCY PROGRAM DELIVERED IN PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARRAMATTA ARTISTS STUDIOS AND CICADA PRESS, COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY AUSTRALIA.



# SEMBLANCE OF ORDER

ROOHI SHAFIQ AHMED  
MICHAEL KEMPSON  
BEN RAK  
ABDULLAH M. I. SYED  
ADEEL-UZ-ZAFAR

FRONT COVER CLOCKWISE: Details from Adeel-uz-Zafar, **Untitled**;  
Michael Kempson, **Friends and Acquaintances**; Abdullah M. I. Syed,  
**Squaring The Circle**; Roohi S. Ahmed, **Seemingly Quiet II**; and Ben Rak,  
**Japanese Traditional Kokeshi Bobble**.

Page 1: Michael Kempson, **Friends and Acquaintances** (detail of  
bald eagle soft toy, USA); Abdullah M. I. Syed, **Enmeshed Black** (detail).

PARRAMATTA ARTISTS STUDIOS  
2013

# CURATOR'S NOTES

"Everything beautiful in art can be ascribed to the realm of beautiful semblance ... [which works to] define the nature and limit of art, as well as to establish a hierarchy of its modes" – Walter Benjamin (1)

In the summer of 2012 I spoke with Sophia Kouyoumdjian, Coordinator of Parramatta Artists Studios, on the possibility of an international residency for Pakistani and Australian artists, culminating in a travelling exhibition. We discussed the potential for cultural transfer and how this might impact the artists' practices. Discussion soon swelled to include collaboration with Michael Kempson, Director of Cicada Press at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. Kempson agreed to participate both as master printer and artist. In addition to myself, Ben Rak from Australia and Roohi S. Ahmed and Adeel-uz-Zafar from Pakistan were invited. For a period of seven weeks, Parramatta Artists Studios became host to an Australia-Pakistan print residency in partnership with Cicada Press.

Combined with the Aboriginal heritage of the Darug people and a growing population of migrants, initiatives such as Parramatta Artists Studios help Parramatta become a nexus for evolving cross-cultural communications in Sydney. As an artist of diaspora, this project extends my ongoing promotion of dialogue between the art of Australia and Pakistan (2), investigating its role in recoding evolving cultures. It views artworks as memes, or "units of cultural data ... replicating, spreading, and mutating, culminating in the form of cultural evolution" (3). This is contextualised within printmaking's role in the age of mechanical reproduction. Reproductive technologies revolutionised the dissemination of knowledge, arguably defining the modern western world. The dissemination of art through media like printmaking contentiously recast art's representation and definition. Over time, the mechanical and labour-intensive printmaking medium became its own creative genus. Retaining its communal and process-oriented characteristics, it allowed significant cultural transference between artists and their practices.

Semblance, or the intelligible given sensible form, is labelled by Benjamin as the most stable frame of art – an "inexhaustible reservoir" of creative action (4). For this exhibition semblance and play are combined in a creative printmaking studio, where editions (memes) hover between order and disorder. An evolving process emerged, allowing the artists to create, negotiate and edit in a space for intervention and becoming.

In the autumn of 2013 the five artists began work at Cicada Press, mediating the order and disorder between sites, each other, and even their own practices. They negotiated the potentially chaotic environment of a communal print studio under the timely order of the master printer. For Australian artists such controlled disorder is common, heightened when the artist travels to countries like Pakistan or China, where unpredictability is the only certainty. For Pakistani artists the need for order in shared creative space is a primary concern. As one of the artists in residence at Parramatta Artists Studios I find myself obsessing to keep my studio organised, but only able to create a semblance of (dis)order, reminding me of what Friedrich Hebbel said: "not everything is possible, but the semblance of everything is."

Many Pakistani artists, including Roohi S. Ahmed and Adeel-uz-Zafar, share my desire for order. It results, I think, from the constant battle for personal space in densely populated public areas, and the everyday chaos and deteriorating law and order in Pakistan.

Observing the artists at work, I realised the desire for order and the resulting semblance of order as a larger shared experience. For Ben Rak, an artist of diaspora, the cultural branding of his Jewish identity requires constant negotiation. Similarly, Michael Kempson masterfully balances his taxing personal and professional lives through an artistic inquiry into banality. Shared experiences of semblance are evident in the making and breaking of grids and patterns in all five artists' works, further suggesting that the perception of artists as creating order out of chaos is a myth. In essence, as the artists settled into their new environment at Parramatta and Cicada Press, order manifested in shared cultural signs of identity in which semblance is marked as the "intuition of the thing as a life motif – a pattern of varied repetitions" (5).

*Semblance of Order* presents an array of etchings and silkscreen prints that demonstrate the artists' desire to extend beyond replication and explore the creative possibilities of their practices. The artworks mediate notions of cultural translation: subject/object, original/translation, centre/margin, personal/communal, textual/visual, and artist/printer. Through mark making, erasure, repetition, layering, labour, doubling, and deconstruction, the artists push the conceptual and technical discourse of printmaking. The results are technically challenging and conceptually rich, underlined with humour and irony: a visual poetry of disorder and order.

## Abdullah M. I. Syed

Artist, Designer, Independent Curator  
Winter 2013, Sydney

### NOTES:

1. Walter Benjamin, 1996. "On Semblance," *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, The Belknap Press, p. 224.
2. Leading to exhibitions of Australian art in Pakistan: *Michael Kempson: Survey of Prints* and *Michael Esson: Survey of Drawings* at V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi 2010 (Co-curator Roohi Ahmed); *Aboriginal Dreams: Painting and Prints from Papunya Tjupi* at Indus Valley School of Art, Karachi 2010 (Co-curators Roohi S. Ahmed, Michael Kempson and Kasumi Ejiri).
3. Richard Dawkins, 1989. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford University Press.
4. Walter Benjamin, 1922, "The Task of the Translator", p. 254.
5. Brian Massumi, 2013. *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. MIT Press, p. 50.

# ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

## ROOHI SHAFIQ AHMED

Born in Karachi, Pakistan (1966) Roohi S. Ahmed is a multi-disciplinary artist who lives and works in Karachi, Pakistan. She holds a MFA from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales (COFA UNSW) and a Fine Arts diploma with gold medal from Karachi School of Art (1990). She also studied Drawing at the School of Visual Arts, New York. Ahmed is an Associate Professor at the Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture, Karachi, and lectured at the University of Karachi's Visual Studies Department and COFA UNSW. She was invited to Vasl International Artists' Workshop (2001), Britto International Artists' Workshop (2003), Coast International Artists' Workshop, and SAARC Artists' Camp (2007). Ahmed was also artist in residence at Vasl (Pakistan 2003), Coast (UK 2007) and Cicada Press, UNSW (Australia 2008 and 2013). She has exhibited widely internationally and curated the exhibition *Simply Paper!* in Karachi (2008). Her co-curating credits include *Michael Esson: A Survey of Drawings* (2010), *Michael Kempson: A Survey of Prints* (2010), *Aboriginal Dreams* (2010), *Let's Draw the Line* (2008) and *6/6: The Labyrinth* (2006), all in Karachi. Ahmed was the recipient of the UNSW's International Postgraduate Research Scholarship in 2011.

## MICHAEL KEMPSON

Michael Kempson is currently Head of Printmaking and Director of Cicada Press, a research based custom printing workshop, at COFA UNSW, Sydney, Australia. As an artist Kempson has had a total of 27 solo exhibitions and numerous international group exhibitions, with representation in the National Gallery of Australia and many state, regional, university and corporate collections. Recent international solo exhibitions include *First Among Equals* at Bowen Galleries in Wellington, New Zealand (2013) and *Seen/Unseen – Michael Kempson: A Survey of Prints* at VM Art Gallery in Karachi, Pakistan (2010). Kempson has collaborated in diverse projects with over 125 Australian and international artists with his curatorial experience comprising 26 exhibitions in the Asia/Pacific region. These include *Personal Space: Contemporary Chinese and Australian Prints* at Manly Art Gallery and Museum, which toured Australia and China (2011/13) and recently *Kaouwi Kaouwi: Contemporary Aboriginal Printmaking from Australia*, with Tess Allas at Kahnawake, Mohawk Territory Cultural Centre, Montreal, Canada (2013). Kempson also curated an Australian component representing COFA UNSW, the first international art school invited to the 11th Annual Printmaking Exhibition and Conference for Chinese Academies and Colleges at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art (2012).

Michael Kempson is represented by Flinders Street Gallery, Sydney.

## BEN RAK

Born in California, USA (1978) and raised in Israel, Ben Rak is an artist, educator and independent curator. He presently works and lives in Sydney, Australia, where he lectures at COFA UNSW. Rak holds a BFA in printmaking with first class honors (2009) and an MFA (2013), UNSW. His artworks have been featured in four solo exhibitions and several local and international group exhibitions. His curatorial credits include *Addiction: A Print Portfolio of Sydney and New York Artists* (2009), *Mind &*





*Reality: A Print Portfolio of Chicago and Sydney Artists* (2011) and *Mirror, Mirror: Throwdown Press* (2013) in Sydney. Rak has won several awards including the Australian Postgraduate Award (2010), National Tertiary Art Prize people's choice (2009), The COFA Art Scene Award (2008), Blacktown City Art Prize for works on paper (2008), and the Newtown Community Art Prize for works on paper (2007). Ben Rak's works are in the collections of several national and international institutions.

Ben Rak is represented by Flinders Street Gallery, Sydney.

#### **ABDULLAH M. I. SYED**

An artist, freelance designer, and independent curator, Abdullah M. I. Syed was born in Karachi, Pakistan (1974). Presently he is completing a PhD in Fine Arts practice and lecturing at COFA UNSW. Syed holds a BArt in Design (1999) and MEd (2001) from the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), USA, and MFA (2009) from UNSW. Syed has coordinated the Design Department at the Karachi University, Pakistan, and lectured at UCO. His artworks have been featured in six solo and several local and international group exhibitions. Syed attended the Britto Artists' workshop (2005) and has been artist in residence at Cicada Press, Sydney (2009 and 2013), Blacktown Arts Centre (2011–2012) and currently at Parramatta Artists Studios (2013). His notable co-curating credits include *Michael Esson: A Survey of Drawings* (2010), *Michael Kempson: A Survey of Prints* (2010), *Aboriginal Dreams* (2010), *Let's Draw the Line* (2008), and *6/6: The Labyrinth* (2006), all in Karachi, and *Remarking|Remaking: Contemporary Australian Drawing Connections* (2012) in Sydney. Syed has won awards including the Blacktown City Art Prize for works on paper (2010), the UNSW Postgraduate Research Scholarship (2009), the COFA Senior Artist from Asia Scholarship (2006), and the Individual Artist of Oklahoma Award for Installation (2003).

Syed lives and works between Karachi and Sydney.

Abdullah M. I. Syed is represented in the USA and UK by Aicon Gallery, New York.

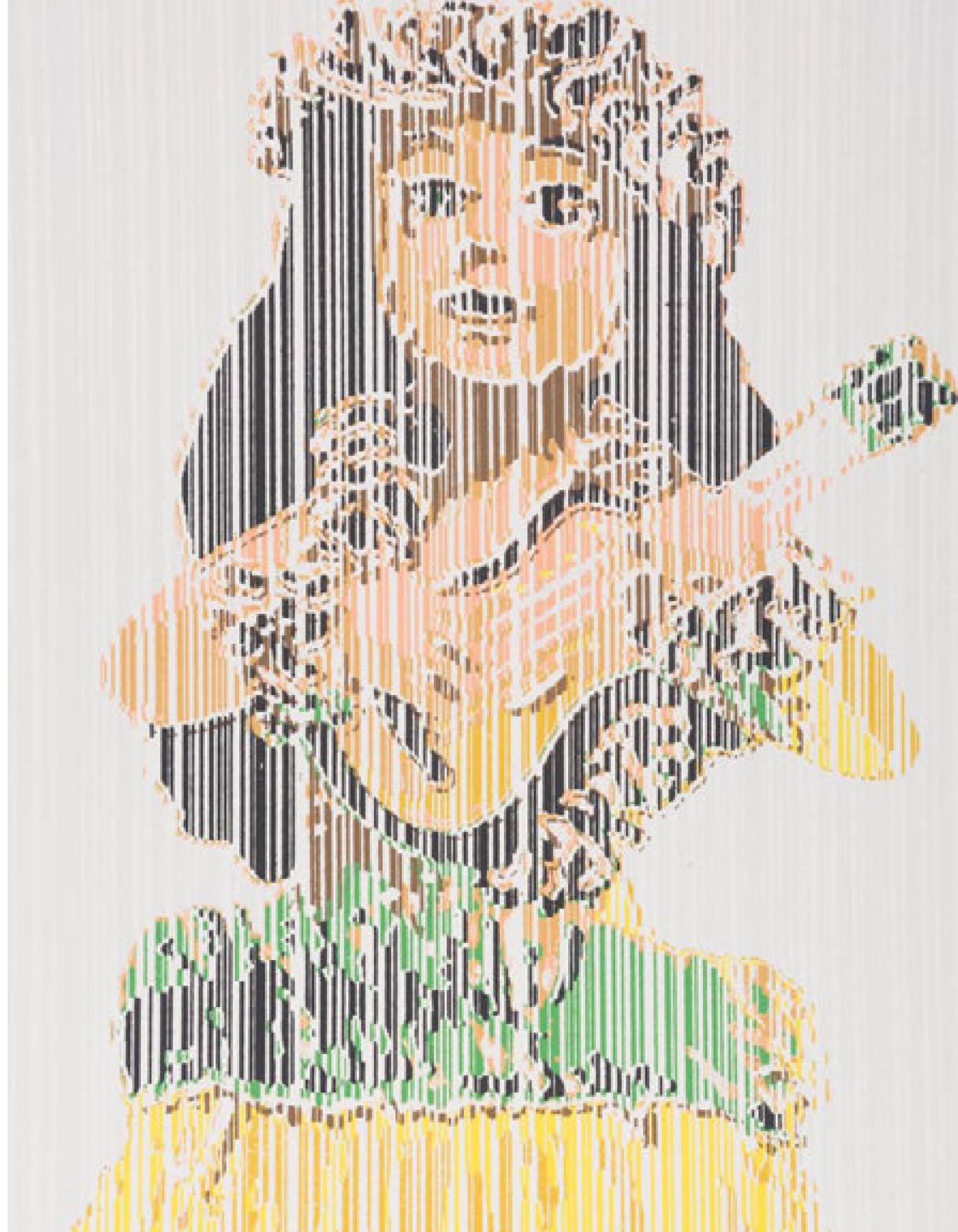
#### **ADEEL-UZ-ZAFAR**

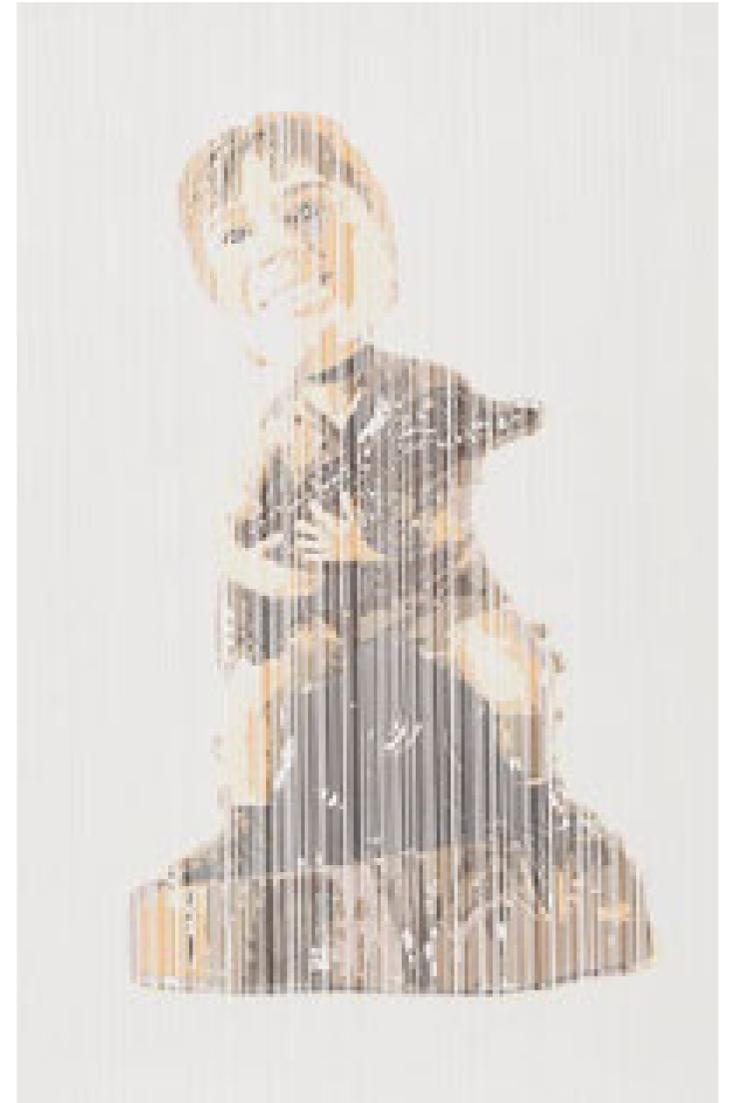
Adeel-uz-Zafar, born in 1975, Karachi, Pakistan, is an artist, illustrator and art educator. Zafar holds a BFA (with distinction) from the National College of Arts, Lahore (1998). His works have been featured in several international group exhibitions, *Let's Not Talk About Politics* (2012) at Gandhara Art, Karachi, *Stop Play/Pause/Repeat* (2012) at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, *The Rising Tide: New Directions in Art from Pakistan 1990-2010* (2010), Karachi, and *Size Does Matter* (2008) at V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi. He has also presented works in international art fairs such as Art Basel Hong Kong (2013), Pulse Art Fair New York (2012) and the 2nd Kathmandu International Art Festival, Kathmandu (2012). In 2013, Zafar held his first international solo exhibition *Protagonists* at Fost Gallery, Singapore. He has participated in both national and international artist residencies including the Studio R. M. Residency, Lahore 2011, and most recently at Parramatta Artists Studios and Cicada Press (COFA UNSW) (2013). Adeel-uz-Zafar currently works and resides with his wife Nehdia and two daughters in Karachi.

Adeel-uz-Zafar is represented by Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, and FOST Gallery, Singapore.

## BEN RAK

As an artist of the diaspora, living, working and negotiating the plural and hybridised Australian culture, I forge previously untenable links with cultures other than my own, such as China, Pakistan and Japan, through collaborations and friendships. My art practice has reached a point where global narratives, identities and connections are woven into my own, and vice versa. Printed in silkscreen, the juxtaposition of bobbleheads and barcodes creates an imagery derived from advertisements and media narratives. All to imply that in an all-encompassing consumer culture we become stereotypes of what once could be considered 'authentic' identities.





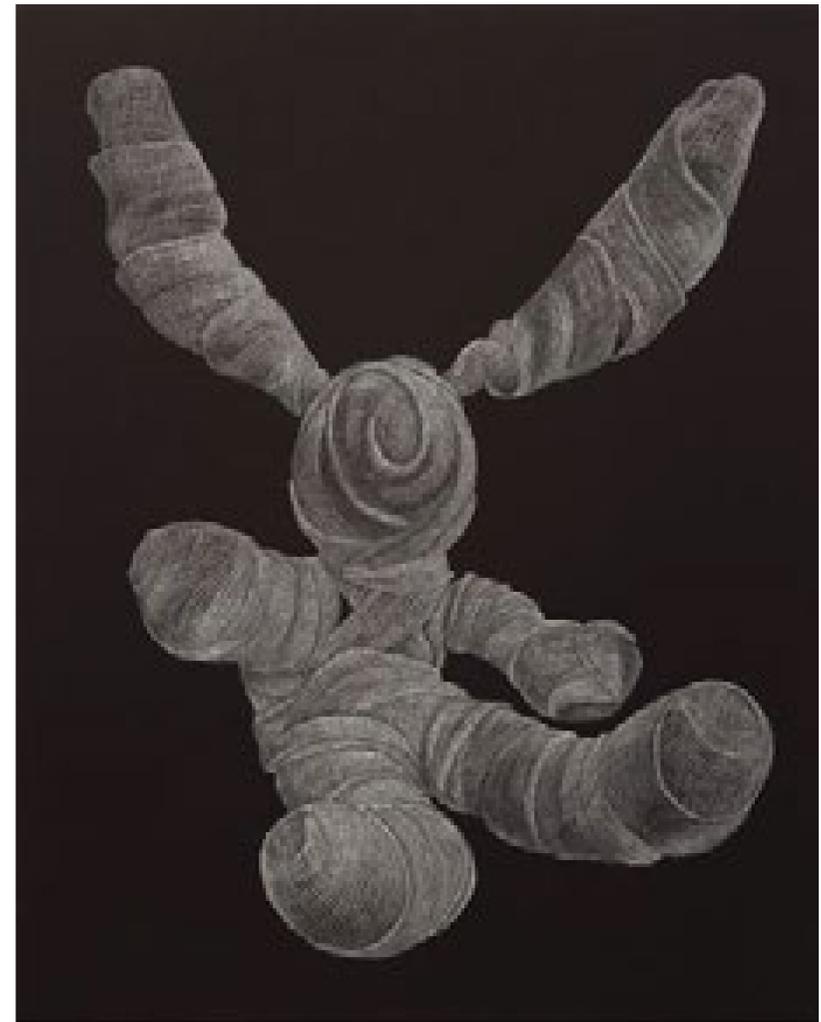
## ADEEL-UZ-ZAFAR

Wrapped in gauze, soft toys of baby animals act as still life. The characters are mutating, along a mythical evolutionary path that might transform them into creatures with added appendages. Although hidden under gauze, occasional arguments often erupt between the mutated heads and appendages, leading to attacks, wounds and even attempts to swallow each other. This 'swallowing of the arguments' suggests social, religious, political and even aesthetic paradoxes, which differ in reading between East and West. It was only after travelling and working in Australia that I experienced and analysed this paradox. *Drawing Appendages* is filled with anxiety for the unknown and the possibility for aesthetic delight. In this, the printmaking process enhances the concepts of line, repetition and reproduction.





LEFT: **Flyer With Conjoined Joey's**  
Drawing Appendages series, 2013  
Etching on Velin Arches 300gsm paper  
50.8 x 39.3 cm (20 x 15.5 in), edition of 25



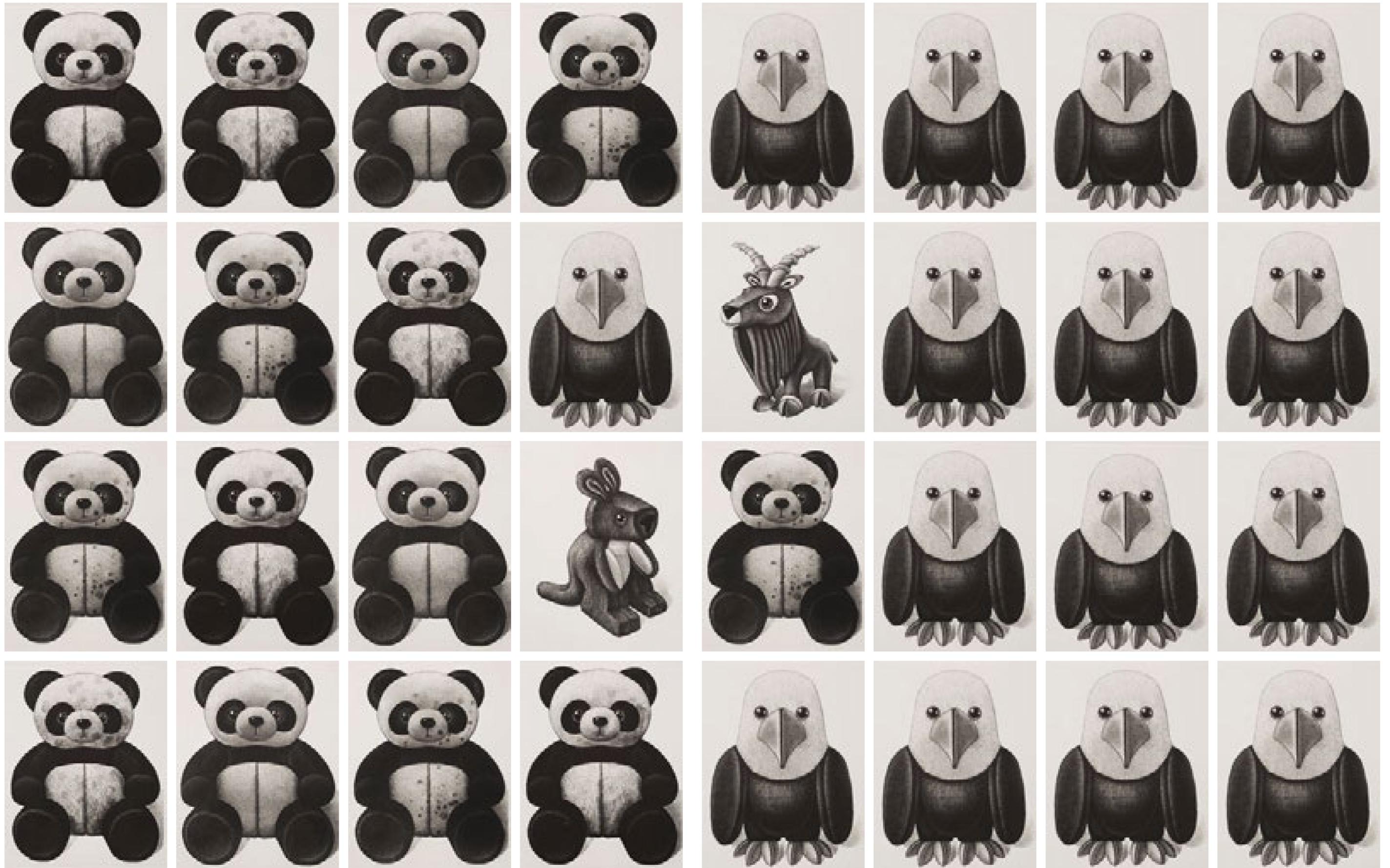
ABOVE: **Monster III**  
2013, Etching on Velin Arches 300gsm paper  
50.8 x 39.3 cm (20 x 15.5 in), edition of 25



## MICHAEL KEMPSON

At this point in my life, as a new grandfather, I'm thinking much more about the world our young will inherit. On visiting Pakistan and China with Cicada Press projects, I encountered the obviously confronting cultural differences, but a more informed perspective was established through time spent with meaningful personal and then familial contact. In my recent etching installations, such experiences have coalesced into soft toy arrangements. Manufactured in China, these prim gatherings of trinkets playfully explore the complex dynamics of geopolitics, conscious of the not so cute reality of Australia's past engagement in the Asia/Pacific region. In this the 'Asian century' my installation asks: With the rise of China and possible decline of the USA, will Australians foster new relationships based on mutual respect rather than blatant self-interest? Will we facilitate open dialogue, independent of our treaty obligations, so to best comprehend the actions of nations like Pakistan, whose complex religious and secular systems generate domestic tensions we often fail to comprehend? Mindful of the stark reality of our middle power status, can friendships be forged with dialogue and deference or will we hark back to the pompous fear driven priggishness of our past?





## ROOHI SHAFIQ AHMED

My works in *Semblance of Order* contain ruptured marks generated through unsaid thoughts and feelings that began to surface during my extended stay in Australia. The marks are not what they seem to be and cannot be read, making the work encrypted invitations, where one must dip into their own cache of signs and symbols to decode them. The stitches, repetitively performed, allude to the printmaking process where every edition pulled through the press is like a stitch in time. Such marks cross temporal and spatial boundaries, reconfiguring narratives and creating new meanings.





LEFT: **Seamless (Blue)**  
2013, Silkscreen on roll of Japanese Kongo white rice paper  
25 x 1100 cm (9.8 in x 36 ft), installation dimensions variable

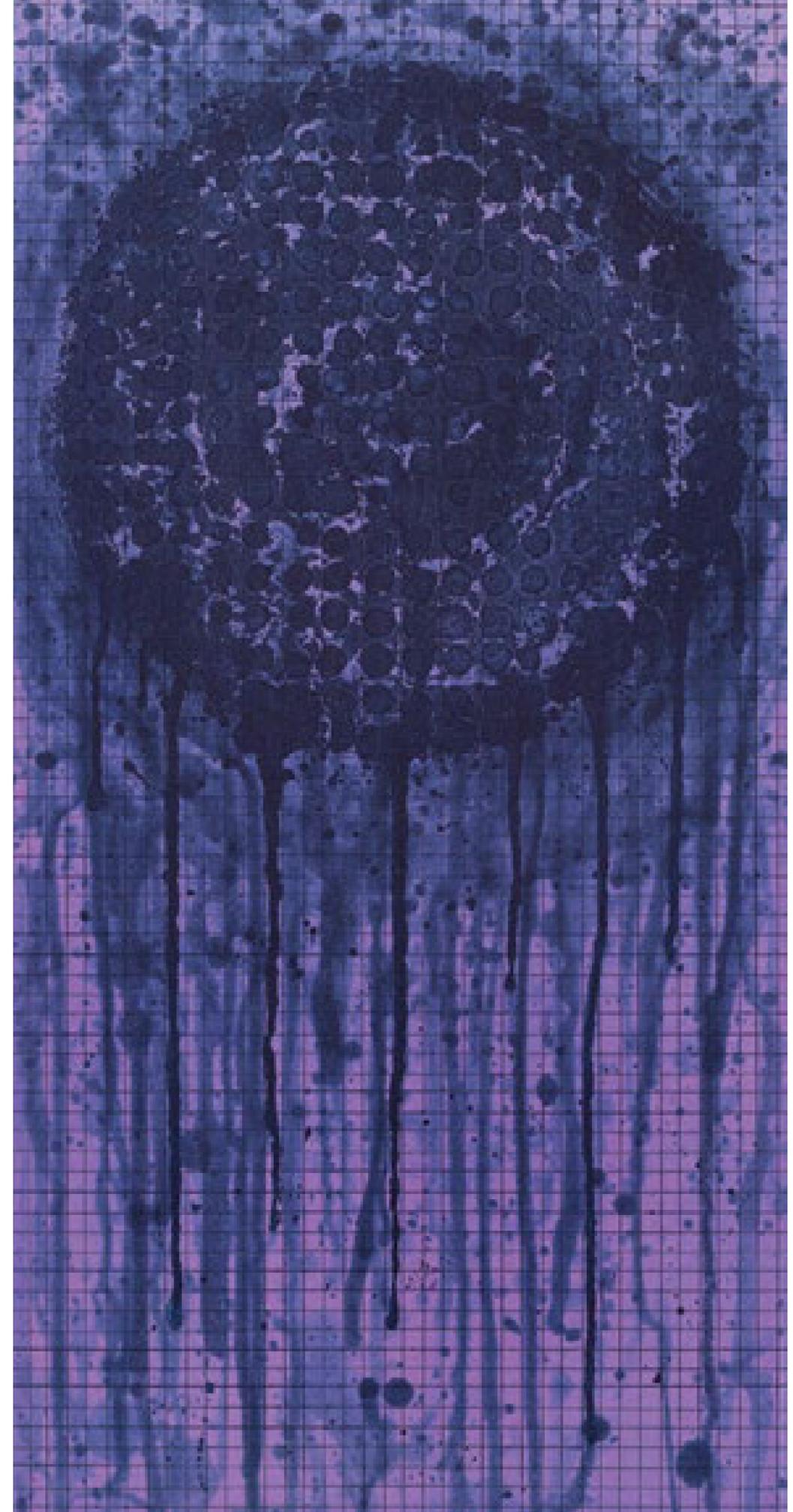
ABOVE: **Seemingly Quiet I**  
2013, Etching on Velin Arches 300gsm paper  
25.5 x 37 cm (10 x 14.5 in), edition of 12

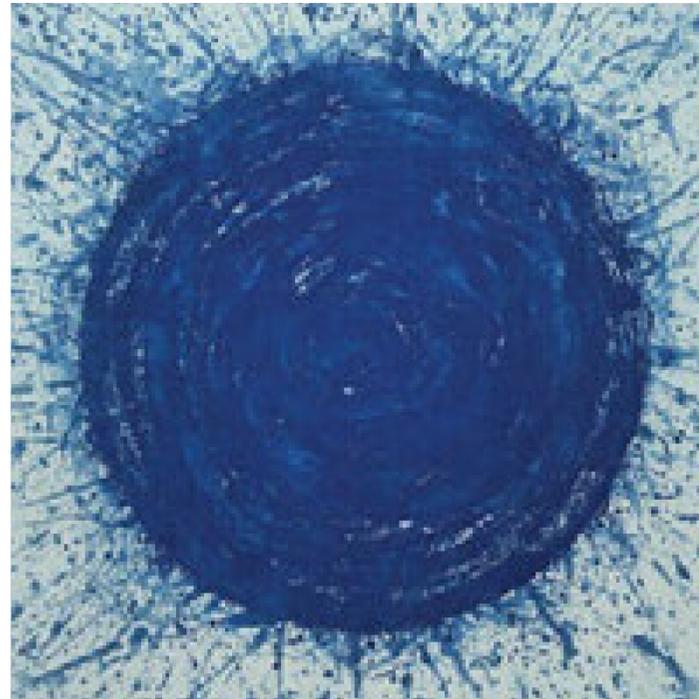
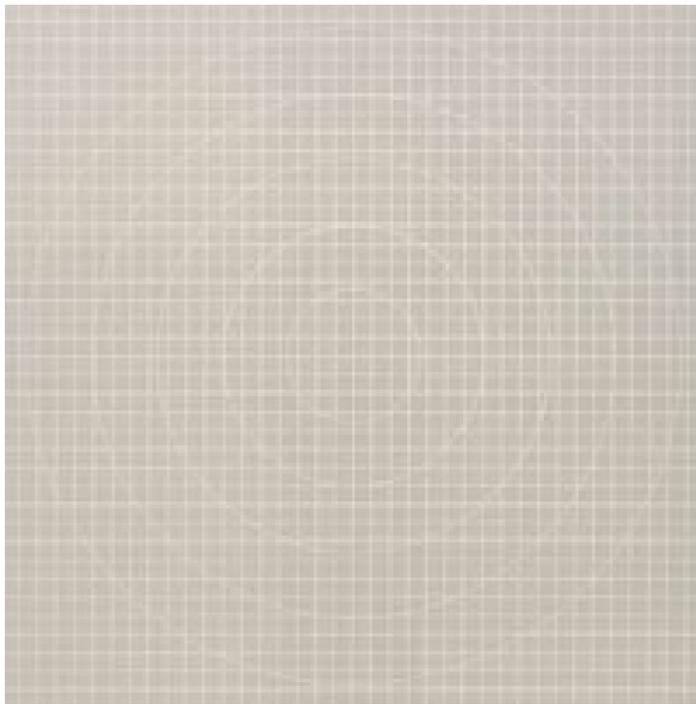
## ABDULLAH M. I. SYED

*As the geometer his mind applies,  
To square the circle, nor for all his wit,  
Finds the right formula,  
Howe'er he tries*

— Dante, *Paradise*, Canto XXXIII

At the core of my trials and errors in art, itinerant life and diasporic identity, is the impossible task of squaring the circle. Through an ongoing process of appropriating and deconstructing objects and symbols (the skull cap, the target, solar and lunar halos) these works explore this enmeshing task of squaring the circle, indirectly transferring its marks, first to an etching plate then onto paper. The outcome of images of light and dark is essentially unknowable: it is like halos in the sky, the floating dots that form in my eye after a long glare at the sun and moon, the blank spaces that define a pattern, or the punctured holes on a target surface. They have pure potential, appearing only when we give them our full concentration. A circle can be squared, and in this process of composition and discovery we are all inextricably enmeshed in its centre.





# CONVERSATIONS WITH NAFISA RIZVI



*There is something to be said for the notion that the artist unravels the knots of chaos prevalent in the universal praxes of aesthetics and brings an order of his/her own machinations to articulate the ruptures of the world. But the artist's role is not as simple as the arbitrary articulation of chaos into order. In every decade, during the political and social turmoil of the day, artists have stood at the heart of the vicissitudes as players in the field rather than onlookers. Today, more than ever the role of the artist is highlighted due to the fractal nature of contemporary society.*

*Semblance of Order presents a set of ideas defined by the diversity and multiplicity of five artists working together during a residency supported by Parramatta Artists Studios in collaboration with Cicada Press (COFA UNSW), Australia.*



**MICHAEL KEMPSON** is currently Head of Printmaking and Director of Cicada Press. As an artist, Kempson's oeuvre has evolved over the decades in a manner consistent with an inquiring approach, highlighted by an element of inclusivity of the 'other'. His previous works consisted of large cosmic narratives but recently his interest has focused towards issues that dominate the global rather than the local.

**NR:** Your works engage with people and places you visit and the images of say the panda alludes to China and the Pakola bottle (a soft drink brand manufactured only in Pakistan) as a Pakistani symbol. Why the use of stuffed toy animals such as the kiwi, and markhoor (Pakistan's national animal). What is the larger picture here?

**MK:** A result of a number of residencies and art projects, including one at Sydney's magnificent Taronga Zoo, was that I noticed the availability of the plush, take-home versions of animals in the souvenir shops and was accosted by the irony of the replication of the creatures found in the natural habitat of Australia, but made in China. The regional geopolitical imbalance due to the presence of this monolithic country particularly in relation to Australia has been and continues to be a source of trade and diplomacy but also much speculative consideration and unease. The difference in size between the panda and the kiwi in *Presents with Presence* (2013) for instance begins to take on deeper allusions to inequality in size and might between the two countries. In addition, the assembly-line production of these soft toys are suggestive of the consumerist trends of the 21st century in which globalisation has become the most common reference within the capitalist framework, another ironic twist to China's internal and external politics of power and greed.

**NR: Do residencies transform or even affect your established practice?**

**MK:** I have attended several residencies in China and forged lasting relationships with artists there. I take any opportunity that comes my way to meet and cultivate relationships with artists from other countries and this Parramatta/Cicada residency has been exciting and productive. The prints in this exhibition hint at the responsibility we as artists have in recognising that the future depends on how we choose to educate and influence our children about the world, implying that intolerance and racism are characteristics of human behavior that are not innate but learnt.

**ADEEL-UZ-ZAFAR's** meticulously rendered representational works are images of children's stuffed toys wrapped in bandages. He uses an unusual technique: large vinyl surfaces, sometimes 6 to 9 feet in width, which he preps with a deep black colour and then proceeds to scratch, score, nick and abrade to render the fine warp and weft of the gauze or bandage material. Zafar's toys are thus swathed yet distinguishable.

**NR: You display a kind of 'seek-and-you-shall-find' mystery in your work. Why are the forms swathed and hidden? And why have your works taken on a darker aspect?**

**AZ:** I represent rabbits, puppies, deer, mice, bears, iguanas and other ubiquitous animals, but they are soft cuddly and non-threatening, bereft of any innate ferocity or savagery. In that sense I spin a zoomorphic fairy tale depicting primaevial innocence and animals defanged by man's efforts to gain supremacy over nature. On the other hand, man's altruistic nature has rescued and salvaged the animals from violence by bandaging them with his healing powers. The duality of human nature is stated in terms of our ambiguous association with animals.

The once innocent animals and rodents have grown extra limbs and mutated in a sinister fashion in the *Drawing Appendages* series (2013). The fawn, symbolising both grace and innocent playfulness, transforms into a two-bodied, seven-legged creature. The posture of the singular head and the push and pull of the two bodies evoke a disturbing presence; a sinister play of fragile innocence and grotesque mutation. Similarly, a three-headed cub, a two-headed pup, and a kangaroo with polycephalic joeys are grotesque in their shape.

**NR: What kind of response did the Parramatta/Cicada residency evoke in you as an artist?**

**AZ:** Working at Cicada was a new and unique experience for me as I witnessed new spaces opening up in my work. Suddenly, there were creases, shadows and clues I hadn't seen before and that I may have otherwise overlooked. It altered my way of looking at and understanding my own practice. In that sense the process compelled self-reflection, which was transformative. The residency also allowed me to confer with the other artists and mull over a myriad of ideas that had been festering in my mind but I hadn't had time to consider or articulate.

**ABDULLAH M. I. SYED's** prolific practice includes a plethora of mediums and concerns that occupy him as an artist and an art activist. Since 2009, he has been using the target sign consisting of concentric circles, grids and patterns to locate himself as an artist in a globally interdependent world.



**NR: In your new work the circle from the target, previously well-defined and stark in its visibility, has collapsed. Why?**

**AS:** In preparation for *Semblance of Order*, I embarked upon a deliberate self-exploratory journey to undo and redo. During the process, I painted a circle on perspex that acted as a mirror surface and when pressed upon a square etching plate, a temporary image of the transferred mark appeared. This temporary image was a flat, ghost-like, dark halo that took me back to my childhood of standing in the courtyard of my home, staring at the sun causing ghost-like spots to float across my field of vision. At night, through a lattice window I would stare at the full moon, hoping to erase its dark spots and perhaps steal it from the panopticon of bright stars. For me, the eclipsed sun and new moon are empty circular vessels – withdrawn, perfect and unreal – whereas the bright full moon and the blazing, bronze sun with their imperfections and flares understand what it means to be human.

The process was an experimental groping in the dark, encouraged only by the master printer Michael Kempson and an intuitive, passionate impetus that I felt was driving me forward. As far as the aesthetics are concerned, I have deconstructed the formal arrangement of the concentric circles of the target in the *Enmeshed* series (2013) and freed them from the bounds of atmospheric compression. Yet, they are pegged by gravity, retaining the basic circle that fascinates me. The orb, reduced to a dot is a symbol of unity and oneness, an Islamic concept in which the universe begins at a central point and everything is inextricably linked to the centre. And no matter how simplified or complex the pattern gets, it all remains as proof that we may travel in whatever direction, yet remain held with certainty.

**BEN RAK** is an eclectic printmaker and multi-media installation artist who assists Michael Kempson in providing technical and printing support for major visiting artists from Australia and around the world and is an indispensable part of Cicada Press.

Born in the US, brought up in Israel, and now a citizen of Australia, Rak has had his share of personal experiential multiplicity, which provides the verve to his work. It is no wonder that he has explored the notion of identity more than any other thematic inference. Yet he maintains an equilibrium usually found in the works of older, experienced artists

**NR: How much of your work addresses the concerns of personal identity and belonging and how much is universal?**

**BR:** My art practice has reached a point where global narratives, identities and connections are woven into my own and vice versa. It's through these connections, either as an insider or outsider, that my ideas of an all-encompassing consumer culture gains traction and crosses the borders between my Israeli, American and Australian identities.

In *Conceive Perceive* (2013), the bobbleheads are reductive stereotypes of cultural identities, identifiable by the traditional clothing worn by the dolls. The mass-produced figurines are conceived as caricatures that do not promote awareness of true cultural meaning. In that sense, they avow to my own response to the search for identity but they are much more about the universal need for homogenisation in a world that is increasingly becoming hybridised. This conflict of globalisation lies at the core of the world's issues: financial, cultural, social and political.

Also, the element of the barcode, a metaphor for the ubiquitous but insidious consumerism that ensnares contemporary society, alludes to the

practice of skewing cultural narratives by means of media and advertising. It translates a complex cultural system into a simplified version that others can digest.

**ROOHI S. AHMED's** early visual trajectory consisted of the theme of cartography, which symbolised the mapping and mark making of her physical commute through the violence-ravaged city of her hometown Karachi. But through the years, sewing with thread and needle has become an integral part of Ahmed's practice as she was taught to sew since an early age.

**NR: Much of your practice and research involve the metaphor of sewing. What does it imply in this body of work?**

**RA:** Stitching by hand is a contemplative, peaceful and passive act, and yet it holds the potential for an act of violence that can inflict injury. When stitching is done in a communal setting as it was traditionally when the women of the house would gather to sew together, it creates a social space that brings together personal and cultural stories making important links between people and places.

**NR: Does the concept of sewing signify an interest in feminism?**

**RA:** My stitchery is not a proclamation of feminism as one might assume and in fact debunks the notion of the promotion of feminine craft by its non-ornamental aesthetic and the scarring and scratching on the etching plate to create the work. At one point I noticed that the pencil I was using to make the marks on the plate said "The wonderful world of words", which made me realise that my vocabulary of mark making and semiotics, whether semantic or visual was the essence of my psychological and physical domain, a manifestation of my collective responses. These encryptions and codes are not what they seem to be. They cannot be read no matter how hard one wants to read them. The works invites the onlooker to feel the marks and then dip into their own cache of signs and symbols in order to decode them.

The Parramatta/Cicada residency aptly reflects the critical and aesthetic vocabulary of contemporaneity like multiculturalism, globalisation, hybridity and consumerism, and is a cogent attempt to explore these ideas both holistically and individually. Since socio-political ruptures can only be resolved through discourse, residencies such as these encourage the debate on diversity using the common platform of artistic production, becoming a sort of micro-system for hearty and productive dialogue. Many more such 'hybrid' residences are the order of the day.

**Nafisa Rizvi, is a writer and independent curator, living in Pakistan. She has curated several shows in the last few years, including *Stop Play Pause Repeat* at Lawrie Shabibi Gallery in Dubai. She has recently contributed to the monograph on Naiza Khan published by Art Asia Pacific. She visited Sydney during the course of the residency organised jointly by Parramatta Artists Studios and Cicada Press to observe the process of the artists participating in *Semblance of Order*.**



## SEMBLANCE OF ORDER

September 25 to October 19, 2013  
Parramatta Artists Studios  
Curated by Abdullah M. I. Syed

### Participating Artists:

Roohi Shafiq Ahmed (Pakistan)  
Michael Kempson (Australia)  
Ben Rak (USA/Australia)  
Abdullah M. I. Syed (Pakistan/Australia)  
Adeel-uz-Zafar (Pakistan)

A project of Parramatta Artists Studios in partnership with Cicada Press, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

### Semblance of Order artwork printing credits:

Etching works by Roohi S. Ahmed, Adeel-uz-Zafar and Abdullah M. I. Syed were printed in collaboration with Cicada Press (master printer: Michael Kempson).  
Silkscreen works by Roohi S. Ahmed, Adeel-uz-Zafar and Abdullah M. I. Syed were printed by Ben Rak (Cicada Press).  
Works by Michael Kempson and Ben Rak were printed by the artist.

### Catalogue and documentary credits:

Artwork photography: Simon Hewson  
Artwork photography (p.25): Abdullah M. I. Syed  
Process and studio images: Alex Wisser and Abdullah M. I. Syed  
Documentary production: Remi Luxford, Director, Shoot to Kill  
Documentary composer: Nick Alexander, Cutaway Studios  
Design direction: Jesse O'Neill  
Design assistant: Abdullah M. I. Syed

### Parramatta Artists Studios staff:

Coordinator: Sophia Kouyoumdjian  
Administration Officer: Lorraine Zaher  
Exhibition Installers: Tim Dale and Marius Jastkowiak

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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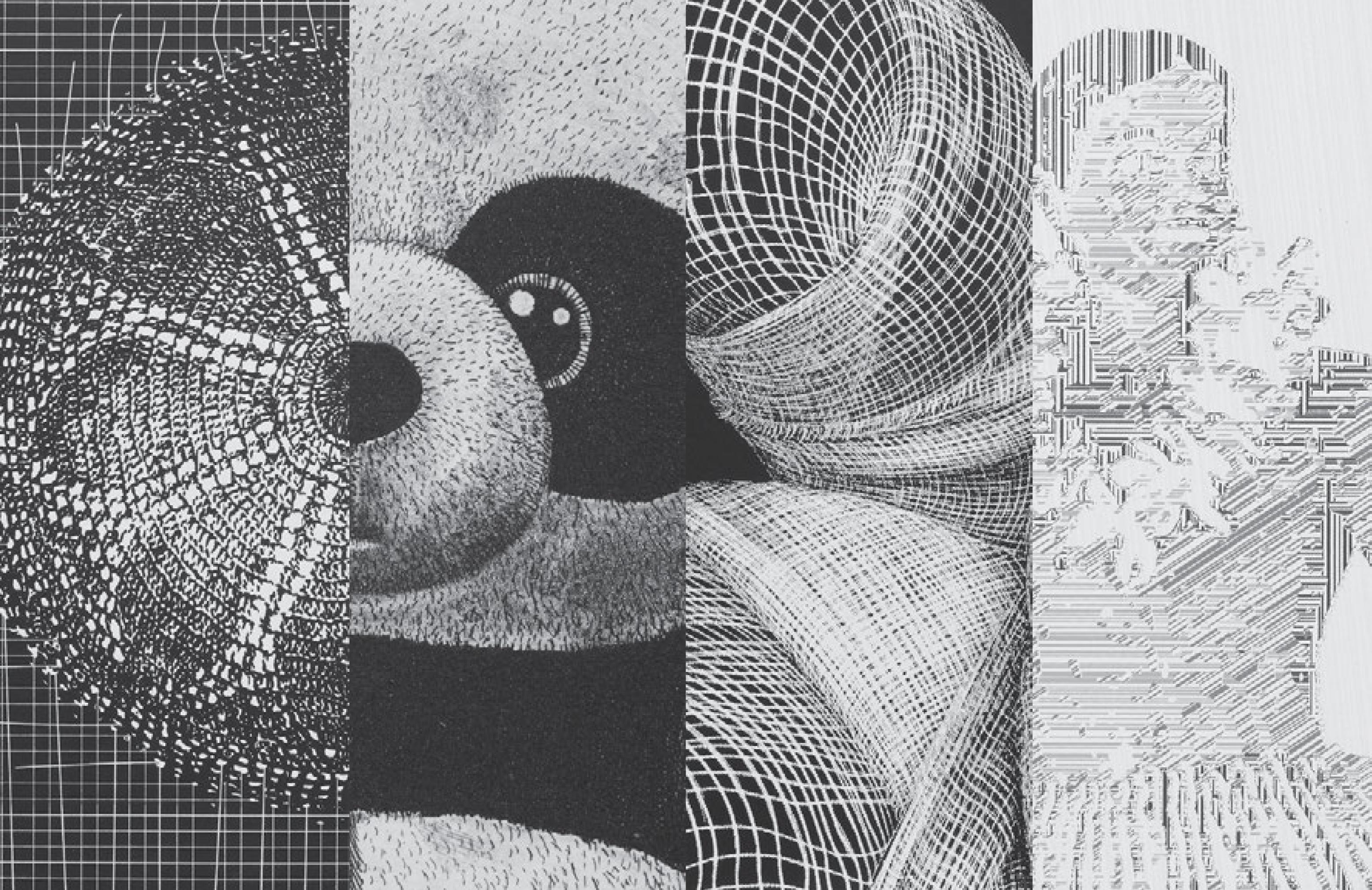
We also acknowledge Koel Gallery, Karachi, for recognising the cross-cultural importance of this project and presenting this exhibition in Pakistan. Thanks to Roohi S. Amed for accepting to liaise as a consultant on the travelling part of this exhibition.

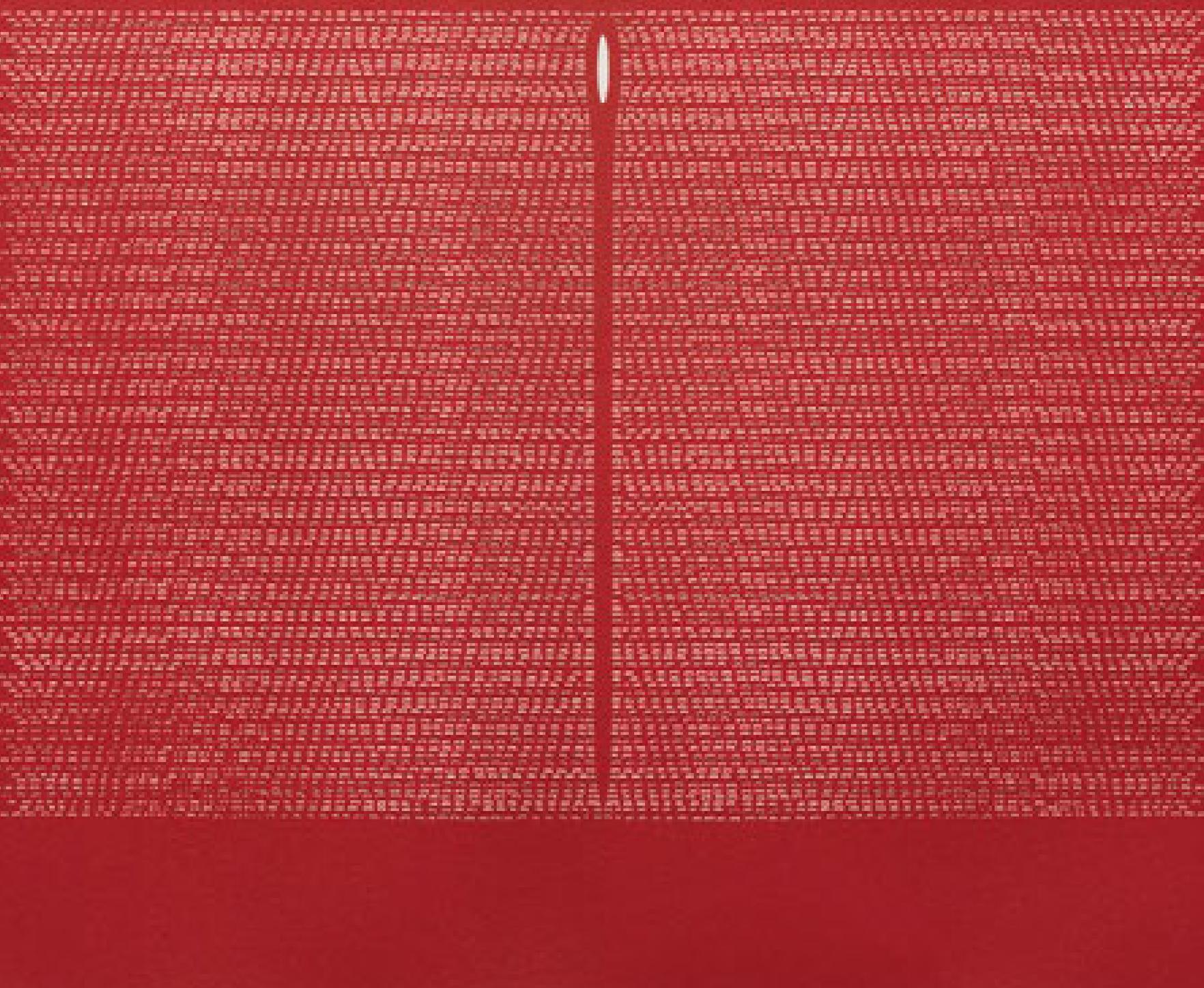
Lastly, we are indebted to the participating artists for their collaboration, enthusiasm, and unyielding commitment to create order from chaos. Bravo.

*Semblance of Order* tours to Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan in 2014



OVER (LEFT TO RIGHT): details from Abdullah M. I. Syed, **Flare I**;  
Michael Kempson, **Friends and Acquaintances** (panda soft toy, China);  
Adeel-uz-Zafar, **Untitled**; and Ben Rak, **Hula Boy Dancing Bobble**.  
BACK COVER: Roohi S. Ahmed, **Seemingly Quiet II** (detail)





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