



ABDULLAH M.I. SYED



BRUT NAMA (THE CHRONICLES OF BRUT)
ABDULLAH M.I. SYED

AICON GALLERY, NEW YORK
JULY 18 - AUGUST 31, 2013



FOREWORD

In 1964, Faberge launched *Brut for Men*, their now immensely popular fragrance, in an attempt to create a new male market within the traditionally feminine realm of perfumes. Using the tag line "The Essence of Man," *Brut* set itself up as a catch-all symbol meant to embody a swarm of conflicting notions of traditional masculinity, strength and character, while its extreme binary, signified by the word *brute*, implied the inherent power to do so by sheer force of will. Half a century later in a starkly different landscape of identity politics, Abdullah M. I. Syed's *Brut-Nama (The Chronicles of Brut)* sets forth a series of complex interlocking visual chapters, portraying the multiple manifestations of Pakistani Muslim masculinity ranging from the brutish, raw and unrestrained, to the cultured, gentle and atypical. The work explores the very essence of the dichotomy inherent in the term *Brut(e)* as read through the contemporary undercurrents of political instability, religious and secular tensions, capitalism, terrorism and diasporic issues. Using a host of recurring symbols, metaphors and imagery across a dizzying array of mediums, Syed has created a labyrinthine self-referential narrative that draws on an obsession with the effects of history and geography on questions of performed identity and the construction of multiple contrasting 'Others'.

Based in Sydney and Karachi, Abdullah M. I. Syed's practice is rooted in the long history of discourse and debate surrounding Colonialism and Orientalism, now forever altered in a post-9/11 political landscape where nearly all Muslim artists find themselves confronting newly complicated issues of both personal and perceived identity. As an artist straddling multiple and often conflicting cultures, Syed bears witness to the perpetual warping and metamorphoses of male Muslim stereotypes both from within Islamic societies and through the myopic preconceptions of the West. The question put forth in this exhibition then is whether our collective notions and assumptions regarding contemporary masculinity have now become perilously and inherently imbalanced and, if so, what can be done about it.

In the work *Blockbuster*, stills from Pakistani action movies featuring absurd acts of machismo are juxtaposed with production shots from Hollywood's *Julius Caesar* (1953). The pairing suggests the scripted and performative nature of set masculine ideals centered in politics and violence celebrated in the popular culture of both the East and the West. The work also speaks to the complex diplomatic relationships between countries like the U.S. and Pakistan, where official policy often gives way to shadowy backroom deals, political intrigue and betrayals – another major theme of Syed's work. These hyper-masculine values are challenged throughout the exhibition in works such as *Aura I & II* where hundreds of black and white Taqiyah (Muslim prayer caps) form a patterned hive covering glowing feminine shaped hemispheric moons. The works are ethereal expressions of the merging of opposites, the pairing and blending of masculine and feminine that evokes the Islamic teaching of Jalal (majesty) and Jamal (beauty), and symbolize the restoration of a more balanced conception of the male ideal historically found in Islamic tradition.

Another fitting cornerstone of this body of work is Syed's interest in Art Brut (Outsider Art), which led him to Pakistani arts-and-craft traditions, such as hand-woven rugs and garlands, and the more recent urban Pakistani fascination of adorning commercial trucks with intricate hand-beaten metal reliefs and hand-cut stickers. Recognized as a masculine domain in Pakistan – the inverse being the case in the West – such crafts are a rich source of imagery and tradition, which have gone largely unexplored and underutilized in the realm of contemporary art. In *Brut-Nama*, all of these outsider elements find their way into Syed's formally meticulous practice. Exuberantly colored out-sized *Brut for Men* medallions are set off by flashing neon signs and balanced by quietly powerful hand-woven and cut works assembled from U.S., Indian and Pakistani currency, while collaborative installations involving craftsmen in Pakistan and the U.S. juxtapose the earnest and the ironic both within and amongst works.

Taking his cues from both Western and Eastern vocabularies of art history and post-colonialist theory, Syed re-contextualizes all these elements in works that celebrate hybridity, pluralism and up-rootedness but question how time and place act as mediators of subjectivity, and come to bear on the work's political and cultural connections to the society that produced it. Taken as a whole, *Brut-Nama* presents a diversity of ideas, techniques and material explorations as a balancing act of creative obsession and traditional craft, resulting in a hybrid space where communal wounds, memories, dreams and joy are shared, new ideas are layered, traditions are reinvented and Pakistani masculinity is restored to its intrinsically 'balanced' vernacular.

Andrew Shea
Director/Curator, Aicon Gallery, New York

ABDULLAH M.I. SYED

In Conversation with Bansie Vasvani

Bansie Vasvani: You live quite an itinerant and geographically diverse life, always on the move. Does this inform your thinking and art practice?

Abdullah M. I. Syed: My father tells me that when I was just a toddler, he would hold the rickshaw so I could have a ride every evening when he came home from work. My mother has also reminded me that I had an innate fascination with round and circular things from early on: from an apple or a cricket ball to the breast and the full moon. Growing up, the rickshaw morphed into a jumbo jet and my world expanded. For thirteen years, we lived between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, where my father was stationed working for an airline. I used to have two of everything: homes, wardrobes and even two sets of friends. It was like exploring two sides of the same coin, passive and active, where each pairing is negotiated, shared and eventually compartmentalized. Sometimes, I think I have a doppelganger, a theme that I have continually explored in my art practice.

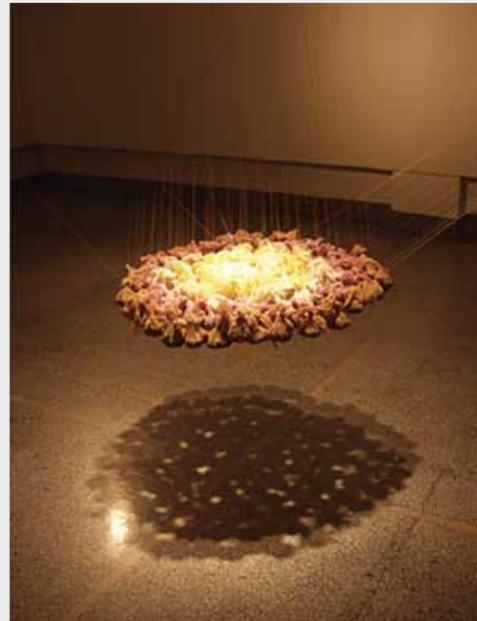
Because of my constant movement, I didn't have the chance to establish a proper studio until recently. In the past, I only required a laptop, typewriter, cutting board and my toolbox – easy to transport or stow away. I was perhaps fortunate in having easy access to working studio spaces in universities where I studied and taught. This is where I used to do all my large works as well as messy processes such as plaster casting, metal fabrication and clay work.

BV: Could you shed light on when you realized you wanted to be an artist?

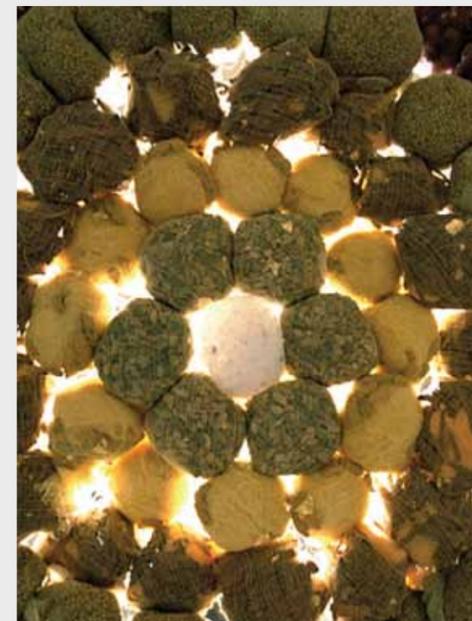
AMIS: As a boy, I loved to imagine *Arabian Nights*, fly kites, and used to draw airplanes, exotic locations from postcards, Disney cartoons, flying superheroes and sometimes portraits of others. I was not forced to choose from the types of professions that others around me had and despite having creative interests and freedom, art as a career was not something I aspired to because of the myth that art does not pay the bills. Initially, I studied science and business and it was only when I came to the U.S. that I developed a serious interest in visual communication. I began visiting museums and exhibitions, took a drawing and art appreciation course that included travel to Europe and was fortunate enough to win an award for my very first exhibited drawing. Upon realizing that words and images, combined in the right way, can bring joy and have the power to change minds and history, art and design became my obsession. Now, I think becoming an artist has made me a happy and satisfied person.

BV: This brings me to the issue of your identity as a Pakistani artist. Since you have studied and lived in Pakistan, the United States and now Australia, do you consider yourself to be an artist of the Pakistani diaspora, or is your practice more of a hybrid of different cultural influences?

AMIS: In my heart, I am a Pakistani. But corporeally and cerebrally, I am not bound to any one location. If I see, or articulate, myself as an artist living in diaspora, then it's usually from pure academic interest. This condition allows me a unique perspective, inward as well as outward, to analyze and evaluate the current visual art practices and peculiarities of Pakistan and the Western world. In many ways, I am an artist with both Eastern and Western (specifically American) sensibilities. Now, I see Australia as a neutral ground where my diverse training, different attitudes and sensibilities are converging, allowing me to have ambitious aspirations for my work. I also recognize the melding and rupturing of cultures that forms my identity as an artist. This recognition is central to my creative practice, which focuses on the ongoing 'displacement' from my place of origin and my identity construct as a Muslim male. Perhaps that is why my artistic marks are continually drawn and erased and redrawn to create new symbolic forms, only to be erased again. My art practice is a repeated re-articulation of memory, myth, and tradition.



Discourse within Discourse: The Circle (Installation & Detail), 2003, 7 spices, spice-dyed cheese cloth, gold thread and gold leaf, Dimensions variable. IAO Gallery, Oklahoma City, U.S.



Artists of today's generations, whether they live in Pakistan or are marked as the diaspora, whether they are taught by the pioneer modernists in Pakistan or by a Western academic/master, have initiated a break from the straitjacket of formalism to deal with the reality of their lived experience.

BV: A lot of your work is highly politicized, and seems charged with a mission. Do you consider yourself an activist?

AMIS: I see art as transformative, and as a cathartic expression. In this light, I don't describe myself as a political activist. Rather, I see myself as an art activist with a gentle 'rebellious' attitude. Despite the fact many of my ideas and works actively inhabit and subvert social, political, cultural, and religious power structures, I see them as an attempt to critique these structures rather than directly influence them.

After my return from the U.S., I saw myself and other Pakistani artists drawn to the political realm and asked: Why? Upon close inspection, I concluded that living in a politically and religiously charged environment such as Pakistan, one couldn't escape from its reality. Negotiation and optimism for change can only bring a modicum of sanity to the day-to-day chaos. Furthermore, I found a sharp disconnect between international perceptions of Pakistan and its lived reality. Despite the fact that serious problems exist, Pakistan has a great deal to offer in terms of cultural, sociological and visual research. I strive to debunk some of the stereotypical myths about Pakistan while also promoting the essence of Pakistani visual culture and fostering and encouraging inter-cultural dialogs. I think I have been able to channel and articulate these realities due to my upbringing in a traditional yet literary and intellectual family environment, where I was allowed to speak my mind. All this must have seeped into my psyche as an artist.

BV: Does it matter to you artistically how your work is perceived by both the Pakistani and the Western audience?

AMIS: Absolutely, yes it does. It first became apparent to me in the U.S. when I won an installation prize for my work, *Discourse within Discourse: The Circle* (2003). I used spices and traditional Pakistani Zardozi embroidery threads to create an immersive installation. Despite the fact that this work was about fragility, the suspension of belief that 'unity in diversity' defines the U.S., and sought to engage the viewer's multiple senses: sight, smell and touch, I encountered questions that clearly bypassed Imperialism and focused on the use of 'exotic' materials and its 'eastern visual vocabulary' under the canons of Colonialism and Post-Colonial identity constructs. I was not fully aware of the motivations behind these readings and was puzzled. I felt like an outsider. Similarly, in Pakistan, I have encountered both criticism and support for being a follower of 'western aesthetics'. A former student once wrote to me, after viewing my work, that he found a particular installation 'very English' and asked why I hadn't taught him how to make such art. Despite such viewpoints, I strive to create informed ambiguities and allow the viewer to bring his or her own subjectivity and experiences to the reading of my work. I feel most comfortable when my work succeeds in speaking to a broader audience and demography. Hence, I no longer try to hinge my work to local realities and aesthetics or to geographical borders defining the U.S., Pakistan, or Australia. Many works in *Brut-Nama* as well as my upcoming works reflect this immediacy and thinking.

BV: So how does the audience, location and context influence your art making and its display?

AMIS: Context, more than the audience and location, matters specifically to my installation work. As an artist who lives between cultures, I feel that I articulate my ideas in a language that allows for multiple entry points to engage with the work, and the construction of various readings. However, I believe that in the end the work speaks with its own

aesthetic language. Editing and refinement is the key to establishing a strong context as way of communication. I want my audience to see, stop, inspect and engage. And in this process, if my work can connect with the local history and sites in some way, nothing is better than that.

BV: Your work is conceptually driven, and to that extent so is the choice of material and medium used to present the works. Is there any specific tradition of art making that influences how your works are conceived and how you define your practice?

AMIS: Re-contextualization and appropriation is central to my art practice. I am interested in Duchamp's ready-mades, Warhol's philosophy that "making money is art...and good business is the best art", Sol LeWitt's conceptual mysticism, Eva Hess' humanized Minimalism, Malevich and Mondrian's infinite grids, Joseph Albers' colored squares, Jasper John's use of text and layering, Beuys' use of organic materials and the social activist equation that Art = Capital, and Matthew Barney's self-imposed resistance aesthetics. Also, I subscribe to the design philosophies of Bauhaus and designers such as Saul Bass, Massimo Vignelli, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Margo Chase to name a few. The elegance of Islamic design and calligraphy and the sensibility of Persian and Mughal miniature painting techniques and its story-telling are essential to my art practice. My continual research on Pakistani craft and Folk Art forms such as currency and flower garland making, rug weaving, embroidery, hand beaten metal work and *Chamak Patti* sticker-work in Truck Art provides me with an incredible technical and visual resource.

BV: Your art practice is, in a way, very personal, intimate and hands-on, however, collaboration also plays an important role. Do you see such collaboration as a community-building effort? (Truck Art Collaboration process Images)

AMIS: I see collaboration as a paradoxical proposition and a very interesting one. I see it as a problem solving activity; a distillation method that has immense potential to bring communities together. It has always been a part of my creative impulse that aligned more with my design and communication training than with art. As an artist, I do not compromise my vision very easily, however when collaborating, I understand that an image may be transformed or re-interpreted through the skill and ability of others. Interesting solutions can be devised through employing experts in various fields and using their craft as a way to art-direct an idea in an efficient and ethical way. I strongly feel that shared experiences of art require and rely upon difference, and as such, can transform communities, enrich the lives of individuals, regenerate neighborhoods and give hope to the next generation.

The opportunity to explore ideas through collaboration with Pakistani craftspeople has not only increased my respect for my culture and heritage but has also exposed me to the rich tradition of Islamic art that reached its highest form in the countries of Persia and the Sub-Continent. In this exhibition, the *Brut for Men* relief sculptures recognize a group of male craftspeople of Truck Art in Pakistan whereas the works *Aura I and II* acknowledge female craftspeople and artists, who contributed to the execution of those works.

BV: In a previous interview you mentioned that your drawing and sculptural works, such as typed drawings, and folded and cut paper, are an obsessive compulsive activity and a way of bringing order to the world. Could you reflect on this comment vis-à-vis your most recent exhibit, in particular the repetition and grid-like formations and the use of squares and circles in many of your works?

AMIS: Yes, cutting, typing and engraving are repeatable activities that help me to negotiate with the anxieties of



Truck Art Collaboration process



The Flying Rug, 2011, Folded U.S. one dollar bills and staple pins, 24 x 38 in.



The Flying Rug (Detail)



The Flying Rug (Detail)

everyday existence. The meticulous structures, scaffolding and grids are most pronounced in my works that require detailed planning and cannot be avoided. Whilst I admit that my striving to achieve a certain type of perfection is one of my main driving forces, the initial idea behind a work always has an intuitive beginning that re-emerges during the process of its making. I use repetition as a way to solve problems. As for the shapes; a circle is a moving point of beginning and end, whereas the square is, as Joseph Albers described, 'a human invention' that has sides that make its rotation honest, logical and sympathetic to my understanding of the world.

To simplify, I would see the *Brut-Nama* works as part of creating a 'spontaneous order' (coined by F. A. Hayek). This identifies complex, evolving, large-scale networks as spontaneous orders such as exist in language, science, money and perhaps art. As an artist I am part of this spontaneous order.

BV: Your iconic works such as *The Flying Rug* series, made of folded U.S. dollar paper planes, and later *The Flying Rug of Drones*, where you made miniature drones from box cutter blades, both dealt with global issues such as violence, terrorism and war. How did these works inform the new currency works in *Brut-Nama*?

AMIS: *The Flying Rug* installation series arose from Orientalist myths and legends, the phantasmagoric Arabian Nights, the history of migration, the menace of war, and our desire for instant gratification. These works are a cross-cultural study of global issues resonating with concerns that are felt across the Colonial and Arab world, both in physical terms as well as psychological modes of discourse.

In a 'masculine space', the paper currency in *Brut-Nama* extends the framework to the politics and consumption of identity. Here the narratives are rooted in the ambiguous relationships between fact and fiction, the personal and the political, and placed in the crosshairs of historical and modern-day mythologies.

The Weaving Myth flying rug series creates narratives that weave together images of national figureheads, simultaneously deconstructing and reconstructing histories, with the underlying desire for power battling the overriding realization that the building of human relationships is imperative to existence. *Assembly III: Blitzkrieg* depicts the psychological 'terror' used to gain access to many nations under the rhetoric of 'protection' and 'promotion of democracy'. Lessons have not been learned, and every time Blitzkrieg happens, the common person has to suffer and pay the price. Similarly, *Assembly II: Innocent Spectacle for Musk* juxtaposes the idea of hunting for the sake of pleasure with economical gain. *Musk* or *muská*, from the Sanskrit word for "testicle", was a name originally given to a substance with a penetrating unique odor obtained from a stomach gland of the male musk deer (now an endangered species in India, Pakistan, China and Middle East). *Assembly IV: Jafar's Final Wish* speaks in a language of loyalty and betrayal. One finds Jafar-like characters throughout the history of the Sub-Continent, Middle East and the Western world. From Judas to Brutus, from Mir Jafar to Osama Bin Laden, such betrayals stem from many different motives, ranging from the altruistic to the totally selfish, resulting in different intended consequences. The menace of suicide bomb attacks in Pakistan performed by young boys and men is the result of such a betrayal, where the attacker is being played, bought, brain-washed and used as a puppet by the traitors from within and without.

BV: Can you share details about the large steel *Brut for Men* sculptures in the exhibition and how they fit into the complex narrative of *Brut-Nama*?

AMIS: While the *Brut for Men* relief sculptures are a celebration of the Pakistani craft of Truck Art, the resulting sculptures evade geographical markers while the symbols, markings and actions take the viewer back and forth

between the East and the West. Hand beaten with hand crafted sticker work (known as *Chamak Patti*), the sculptures combine strength and power with fragility and beauty. They are anthropomorphous; faces/figures are wearing shields or masks. On one hand, the body of work pays homage to the hand crafted tradition of body/face armor in Islamic tradition. On the other hand, it takes its inspiration from the traditionally crafted flower garland called Sehra, a wedding headdress that hangs down over the face of the groom, popular in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Sehra also refers to an Urdu poem, sung or read as a prayer for a groom's future wedded life. When combined, the armor and Sehra allude to the idea of a warrior/poet/groom returning home wearing a flower veil.

BV: Your ongoing representation of masculine identity, its performativity and power relation has now emerged as a balancing act of gender discourse in *Brut-Nama*. What are some of the main underlying premises of *Brut-Nama*?
AMIS: *Brut-Nama* stems from my doctoral research project that investigates masculinity and power structures through various cultural narratives and theoretical canons. The subject of masculinity, both in the East and the West, has been viewed with a myopic vision and is operating on a ruptured scale, tipping the balance towards hyper-masculinities that either continually mask, exploit or even ridicule the more gentle, compassionate, beautiful, forgiving and poetic notions of masculinity. In this exhibition, masculinity is explored through the universal ideals of union, binaries, and balance (Yin/Yang, Jalal/Jamal), countering the many stereotypical ways of seeing and performing masculinity, both in general and, more specifically, in the context of the Muslim male (Pakistani in my case).

The exhibition critiques the historically myopic underpinnings of Western visions of Islamic masculinity that have been potentially charged since 9/11. The rhetoric existing now sees Islamic masculinity as devoid of compassion, humour, logic and gentleness. There is no denying that some groups, under certain political and religious agendas have fueled and sharpened this myopic focus. In contrast, this show argues that such generalizations cannot be applied to a large population and that masculinity, though ruptured in its binaries, can become balanced and holistic once more.

As part of my research, the exhibition presents various facets of masculinity, in both Pakistani and global discourses, in a more personal way. Firstly, it is a celebration of arts and crafts where the masculine idea is never completely without the presence of the feminine in the form of material, shapes and colours. In recent times, the art from Pakistan has garnered more attention for its explosive or political subject matter, while its formal language and craft are often reduced to sub-text. The works in *Brut-Nama* reflect my increasing focus on balancing the formal aspects of art making with a strong conceptual framework without being overtly socio-political and didactic. The works require contemplation and close inspection to unravel their underlying message. The exhibition presents various issues that Pakistani men are negotiating in current times, ranging from economic pressure, identity crisis and betrayal of brotherhood to nationalism and racism. I do think there is a paradigm shift underway. Works such as *The Fragrance of the Moon* installation, where a Brut for Men fragrance bottle projects an image of a halo/black moon, are a reflection of this ideal.

BV: So under the lens of this ideal, do you see masculinity, in its contemporary cultural forms, as being unbalanced or in a kind of crisis?

AMIS: There is a certainly a negative perception about masculinity today that can be seen in the recurring theme of the 'crisis of masculinity' cropping up in widely divergent political and social contexts. Such themes and discourses are underpinned with a familiar, negative narrative about disaffected men who have become hyper-masculine, terrorists, fundamentalists, dictators and religious fanatics. Although such views stem from a particular reality, they are increasingly



The Flying Rug of Drones (Detail)



The Flying Rug of Drones, 2009, Box-cutter knife blades and stainless steel, 48 x 96 in.

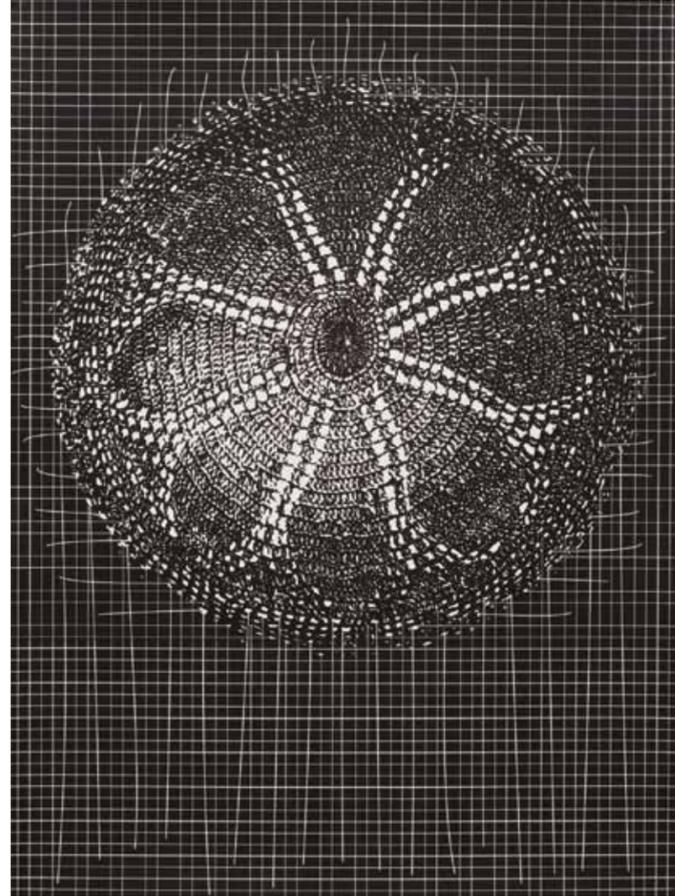
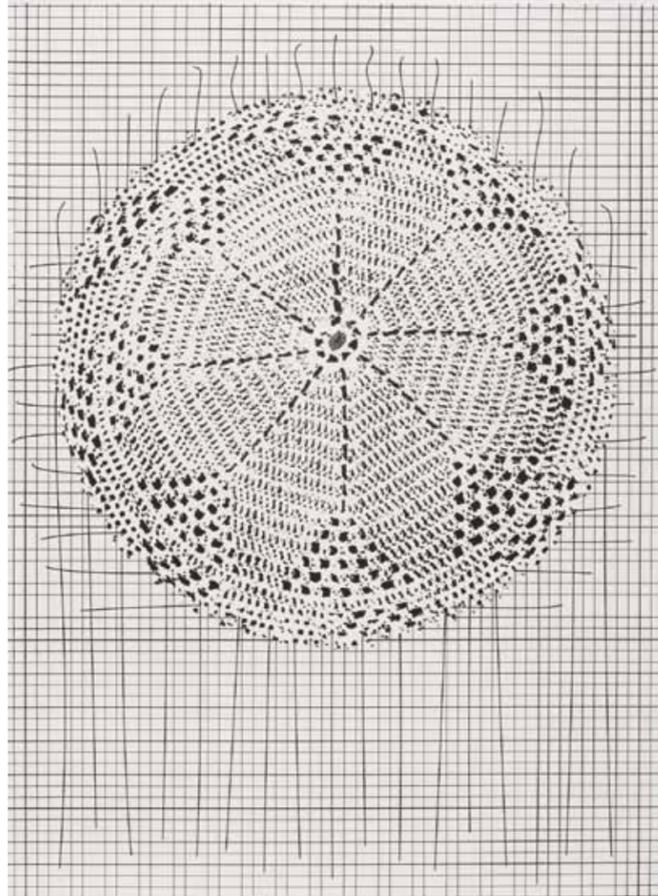


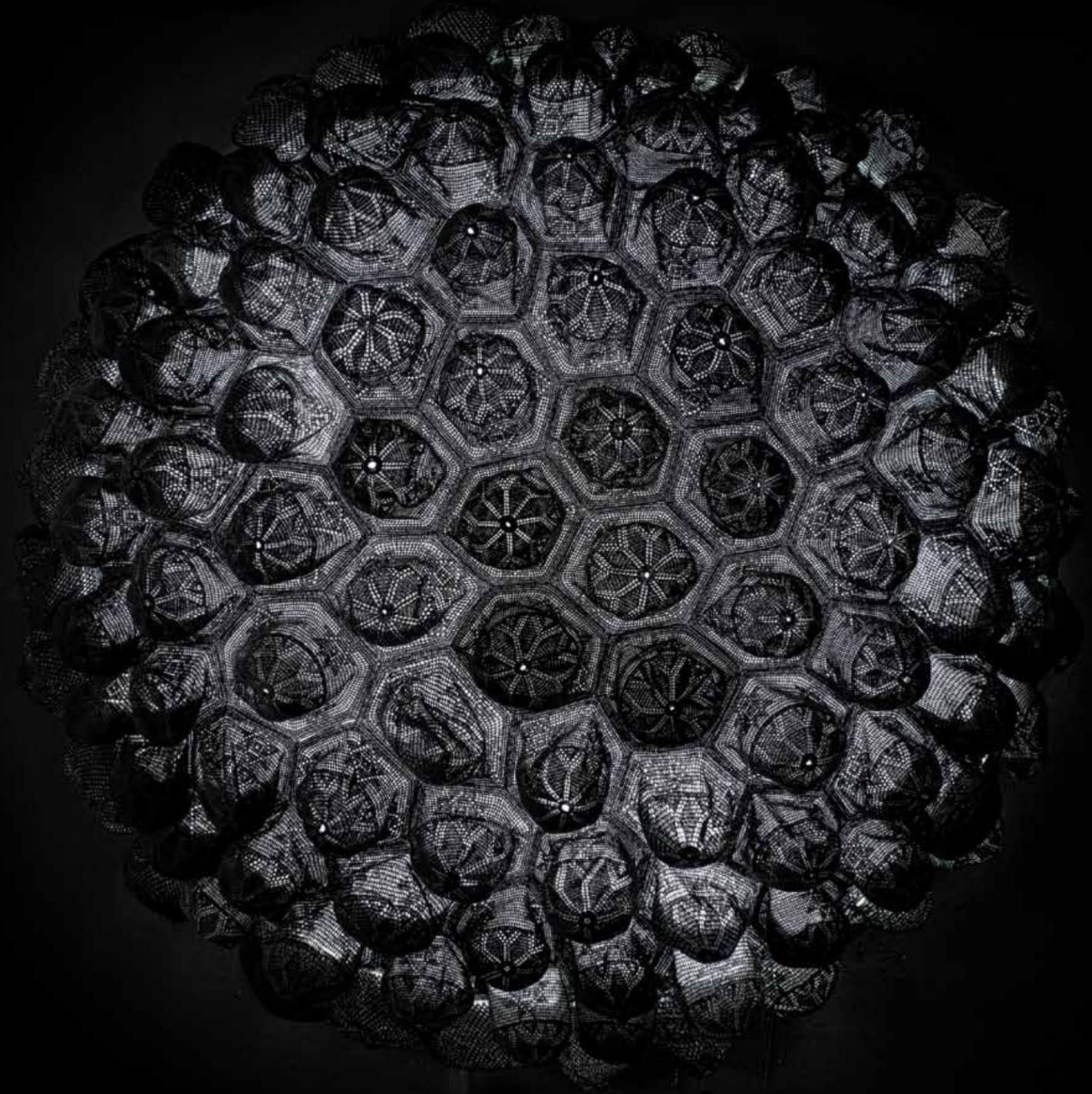
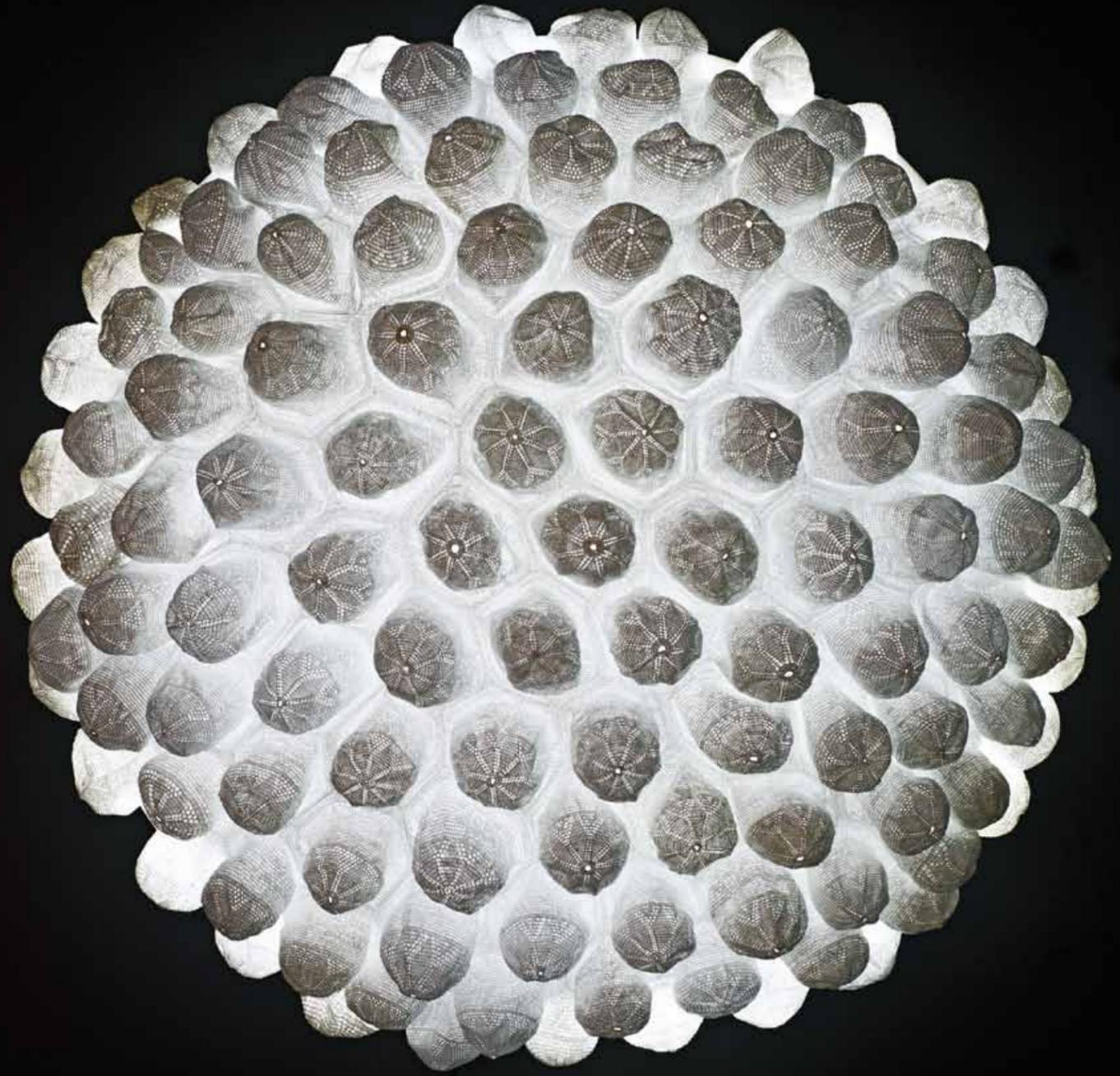
The Flying Rug of Drones (Detail)

becoming part of the stereotypical canon of reading manhood, and in this case, Muslim Pakistani manhood. After the tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath, the concept of Pakistani and Muslim masculinity suddenly found itself being saddled with a past that was perceived as inherently violent and culturally unevolved. In this particular 'crisis of masculinity', men and boys are being both inadvertently and purposely misdirected and made unaware of the true meaning of a balanced manhood. This exhibition is taking these issues into account to create a narrative that nurtures and restores this more balanced view of masculinity with a nuance that brings focus to the reality. I feel this exhibition, in a poetic and cathartic way, adds to the greater diversity of gender viewpoints.

In the end, I am a man and that is how I see, navigate and relate to the world. These works, to an extent, provide new ways of experiencing and visualizing masculinity, whether through the eyes of ordinary everyday men or men who are increasingly longing for superiority and dominance, and hence losing their balance. I think the discourse around men (for me in an artistic way) is similar to how women are tackling issues that are pertinent to them. It is about sharing the gender burden and bringing focus to the balancing act of gender performances. With this exhibition, my desire was to make works that go beyond the familiar discourses of masculine/feminine binaries and borders.

Bansie Vasvani is a New York based art historian and critic with a focus on Asian and other non-western art practices. She investigates contemporary art that mines issues of cultural identity, politics, immigration, and the comingling of varied cultural influences. Her work has appeared in *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Modern Art Asia*, *Art India*, *The Culture Trip*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *New York Arts Magazine*, *amongst other publications*.





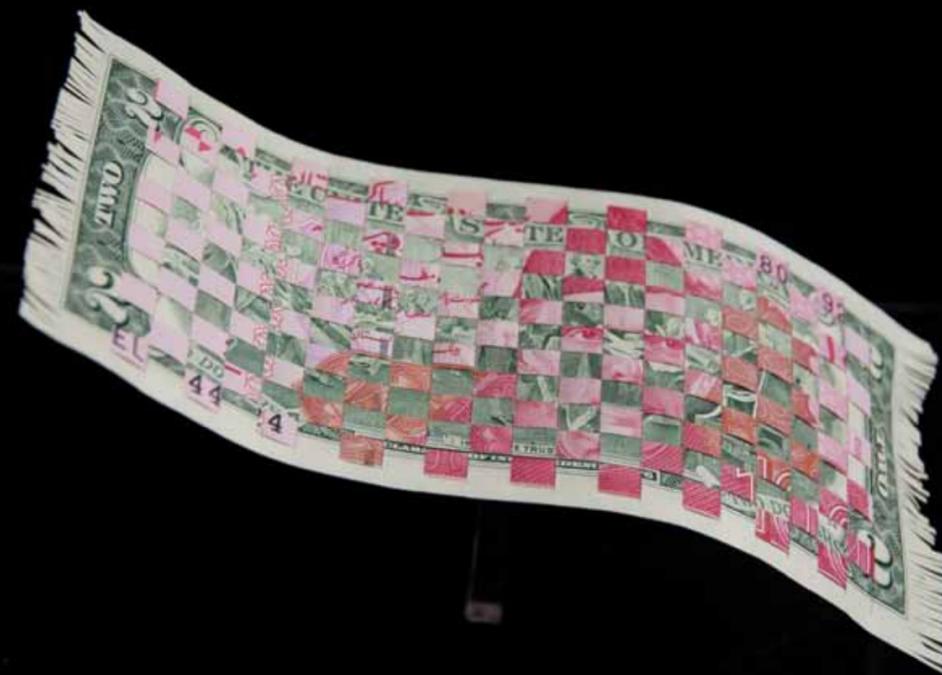
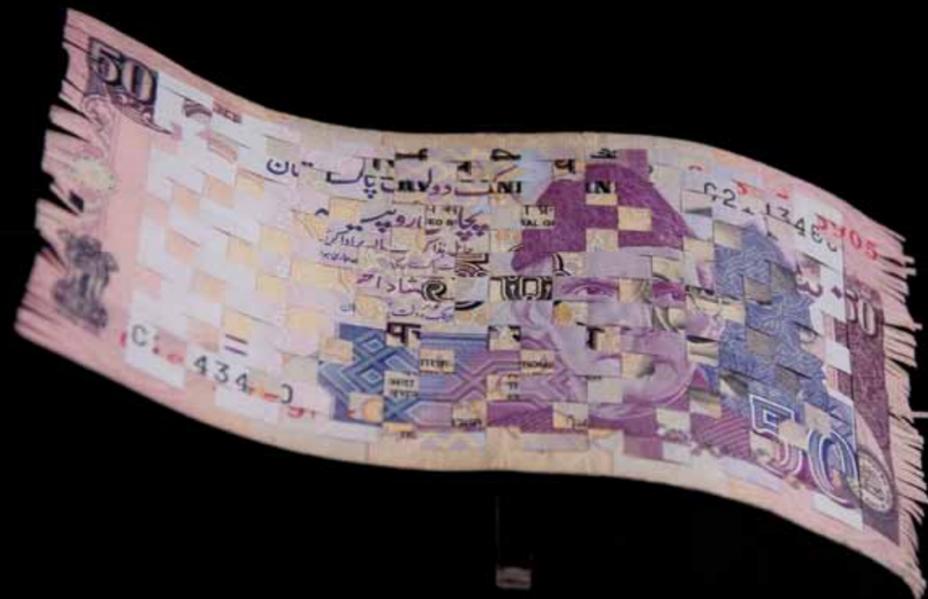


Left: *Assembly IV: Jafar's Final Wish*, 2013, Hand-cut uncirculated U.S. \$1 bills and pins.

Center: *Assembly III: Blitzkrieg*, 2013, Hand-cut and folded uncirculated U.S. \$1 bills, 100 Pakistani Rupee notes and pins.

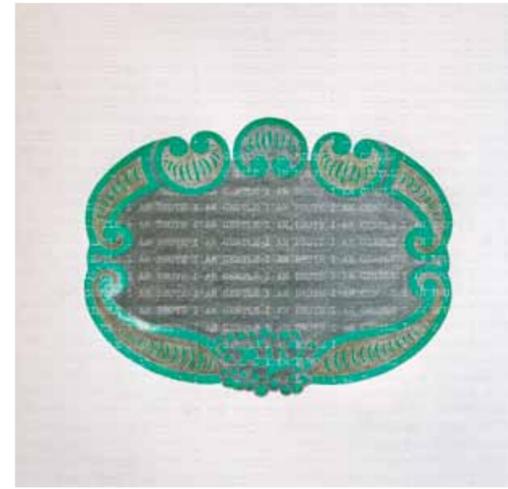
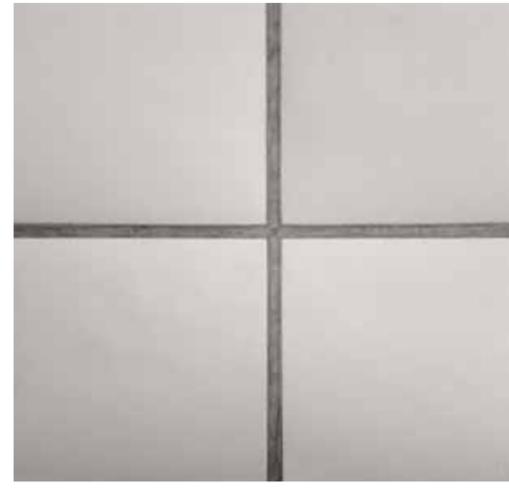
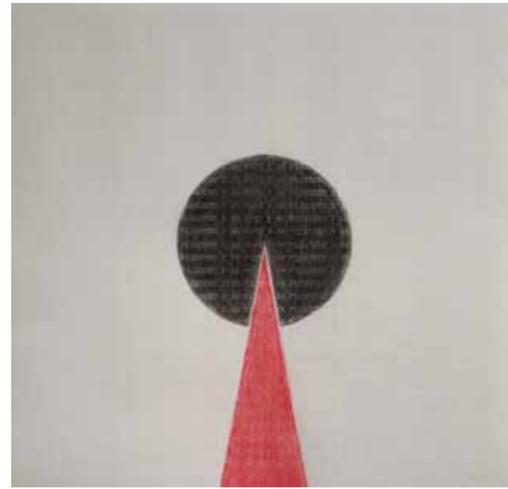
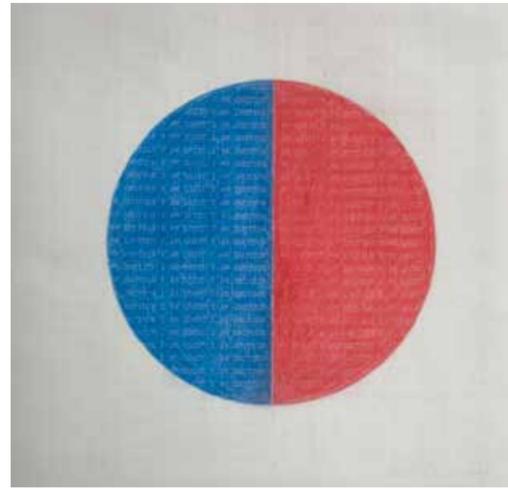
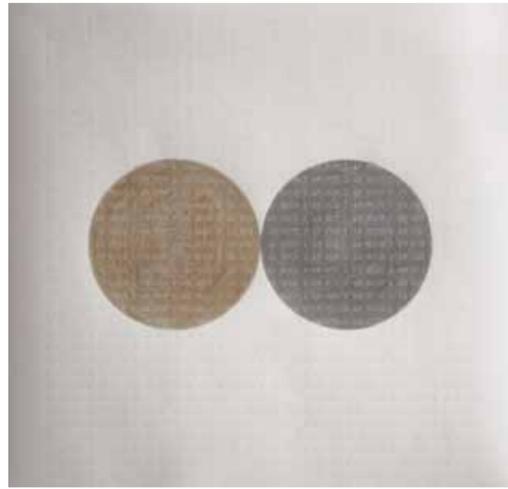
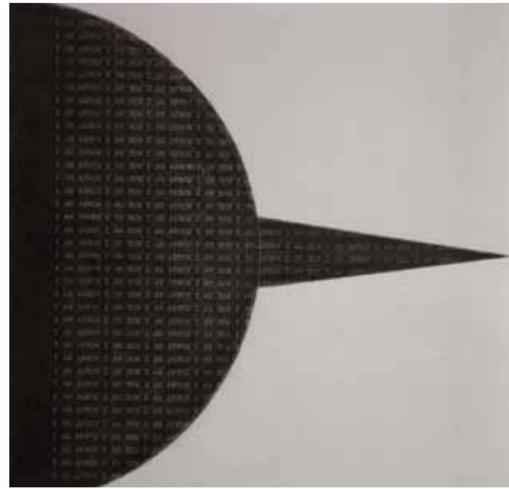
Right: *Assembly II: Innocent Spectacle for Musk*, 2013, Hand-cut uncirculated U.S. \$1 and \$2 bills, 100 Pakistani Rupee notes and pins.

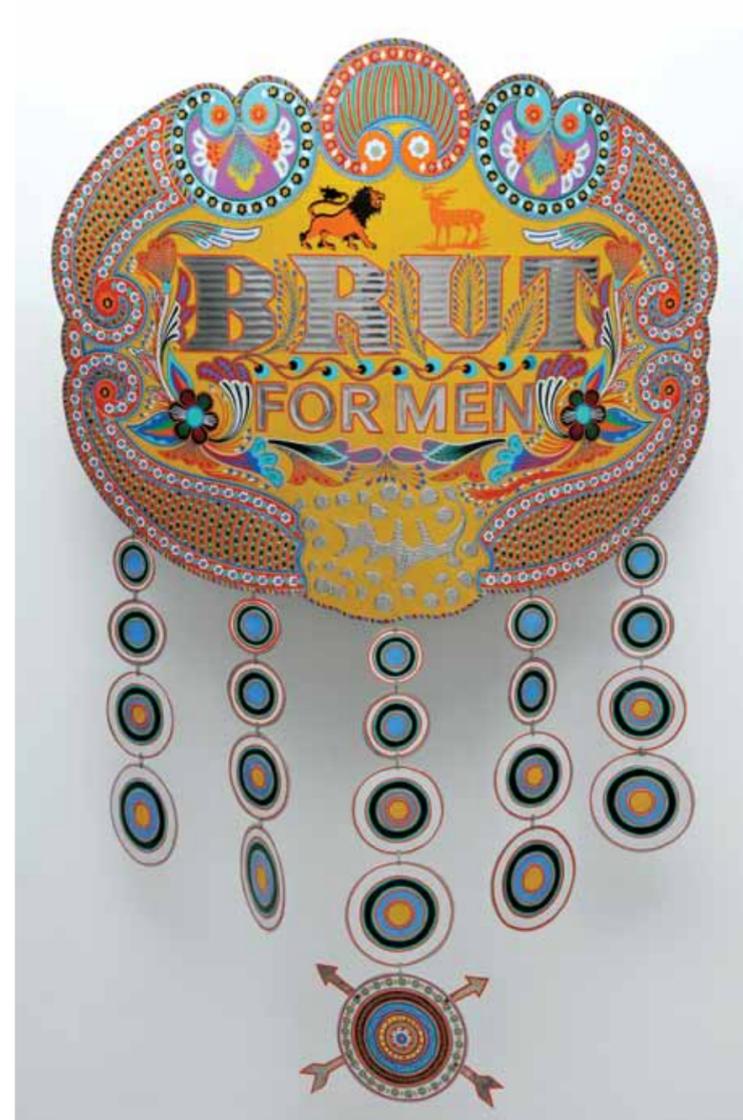
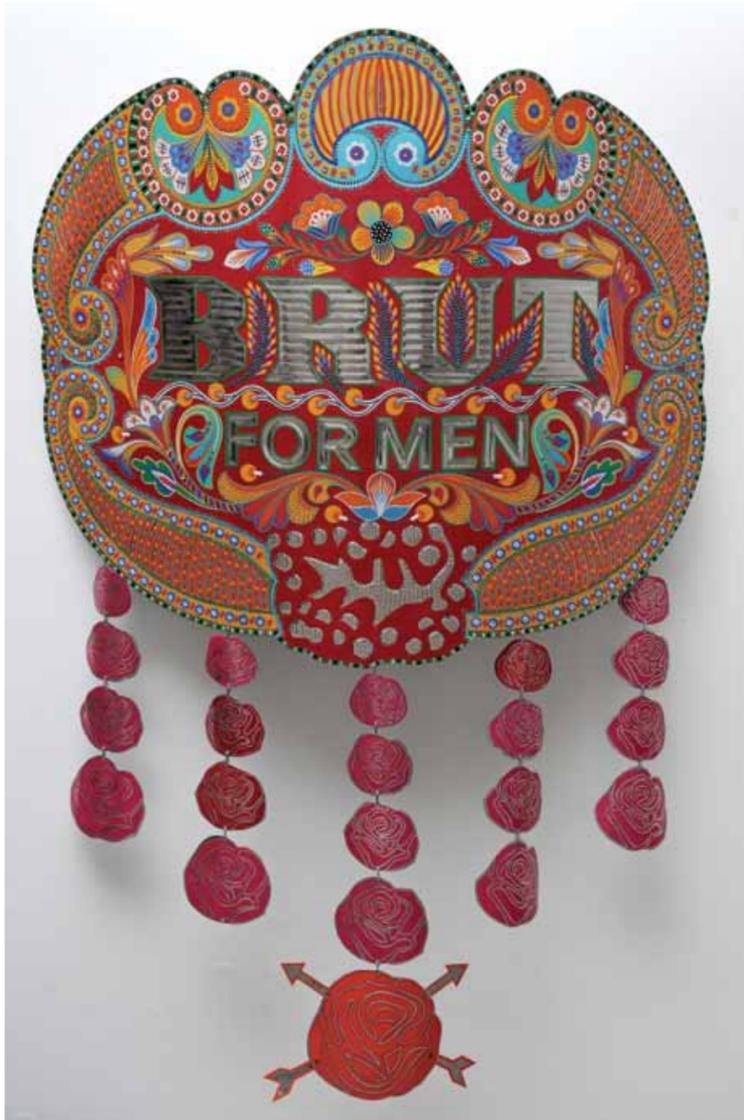


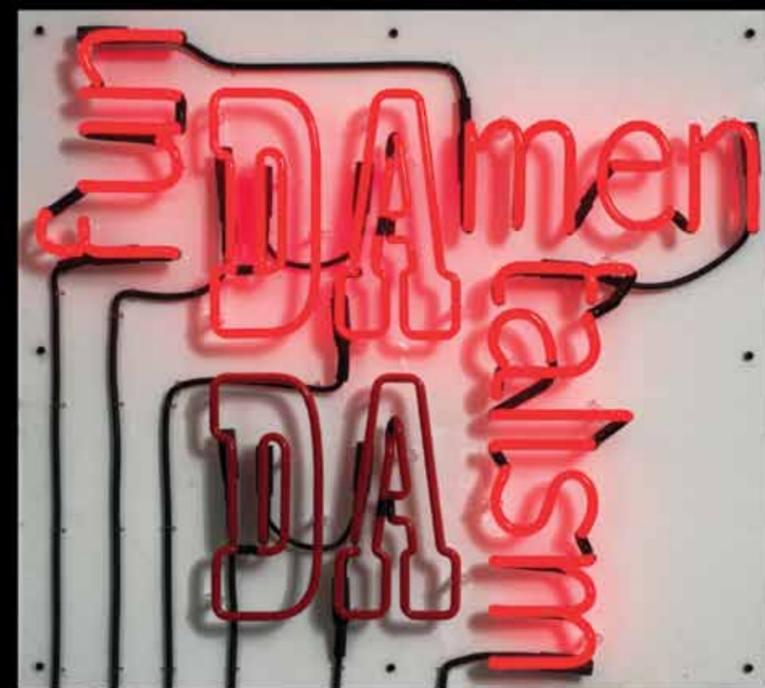


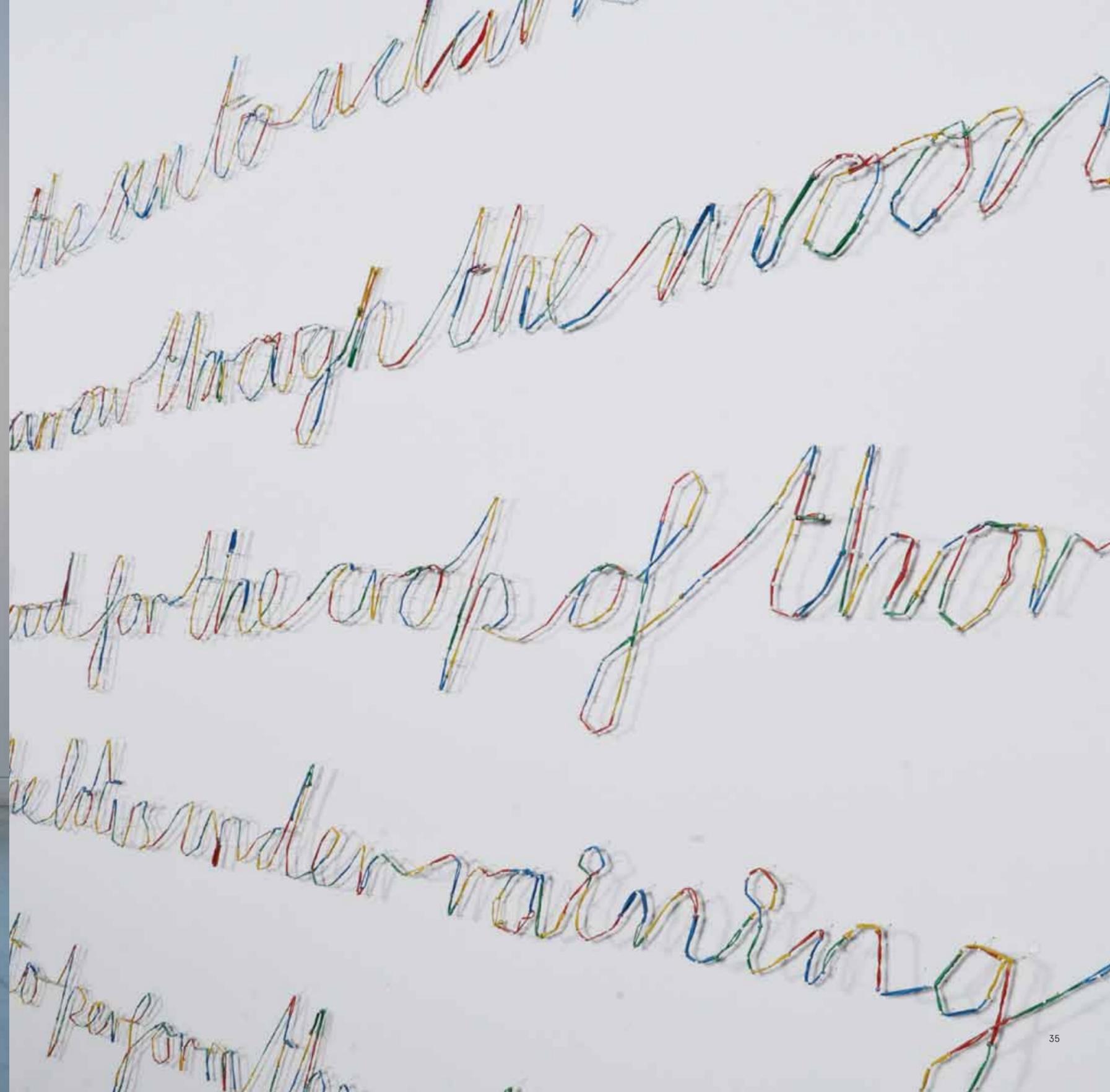
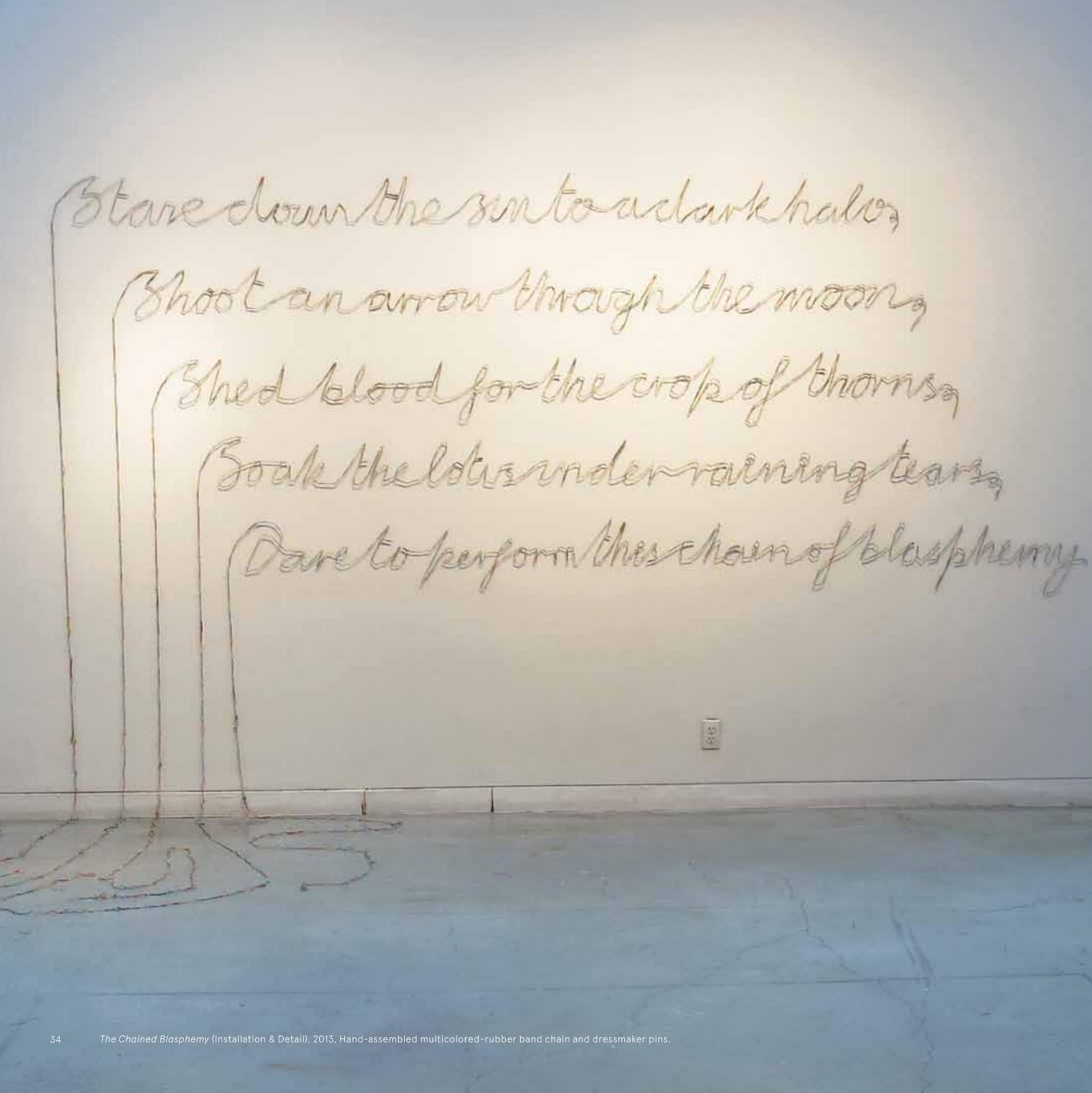
et tu Brute











ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

ABDULLAH M.I. SYED



Photo by Alex Wisser

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 the College of Fine Arts (COFA), UNSW, Sydney.

Syed holds a Bachelor of Art in Design (1999) and M.Ed. (2001) from the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), USA, and Master of Fine Arts (2009) from the College of Fine Arts (COFA), UNSW, Sydney. Syed also holds Bachelor of Commerce (1995) and studied Applied Chemistry (1994–1995) at the University of Karachi.

Syed has coordinated the Department of Design at the Karachi University, Pakistan and lectured at the University of Central Oklahoma. His artworks have been featured in six solo and several local and international group exhibitions, notably; **2013** *Drawing Softly, Thinking Aloud*, Yifu Gallery, Shanghai, *ExtralOrdinary: 37 Do it Yourself Art Ideas for Free*, Canvas Gallery, Karachi, *MiddleHead: 33° 50' S, 151°14' E project*, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, *Some Other Place*, Blacktown Arts Centre, Sydney;

2012 *Play Pause Stop Rewind*, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai, *Death III*, Parramatta Artist Studio, Sydney, *Money Talks*, Pataka Museum, Porirua, *The Rising Tide*, Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi; **2011** *The Sound of Drawing*, Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, Dalian, China, *Mere Humd(ri)am*, AICON Gallery; *Whitewash*, Gandhara Art, Karachi; **2010** *The Rising Tide*, Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi; *Resemble Reassemble*, Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon; **2009** *Figure of Speech*, Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi, *Bushwhacked*, Ivan Doughty Gallery, Sydney, *Place*, Anant Gallery, New Delhi, *How Nations are Made: Lines of Control* project, Cartwright Hall, Bradford; **2008** *Simply Paper*, IVS Gallery, Karachi; *Lets Draw the Line*, Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi; **2007** *Moving Ahead*, National Art Gallery, Islamabad; **2006** *6/6: The Labyrinth*, V M Art Gallery, Karachi, *3rd ASNA International Clay Triennial*, Karachi; **2005** *Something Purple*, Artist Commune, Hong Kong; **2003** *Edge Art Now*, IAO Gallery, Oklahoma City.

Syed has been as artist in residence at Cicada Press, Sydney (2009 and 2013), Blacktown Arts

Centre (2011–2012) and currently at Parramatta Artists Studios (2013). He also attended the Britto Artists' workshop (2005). His notable co-curating credits include *Michael Esson* (2010): *A Survey of Drawings*, *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) and *Semblance of Order* (2013) in Sydney.

Syed has won awards including the *Blacktown Art Prize* for works on paper (2010), the *UNSW's Postgraduate Research Scholarship* (2009), the *COFA Senior Artist from Asia Scholarship* (2006), and the *Individual Artist of Oklahoma Award* (IAO) for Installation (2003), Oklahoma. Syed won runners up in the *Tim Olson Drawing Prize* (2010) and was the finalist for the *International Blake Prize* (2013) and *Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize* (2013).

Syed lives and works between Karachi and Sydney.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

The Rising Tide, Contemporary Pakistan Art from 1990 to 2010, 2010, Mohatta Palace Museum Publications, pg 19 and 40 to 44.
Journeys of the Spirit, Pakistan Art in the New Millennium, 2008, FOMMA and Pakistan National Council of the Arts, Foundation of Museum of Modern Art Publications, pg 18 & 25.
Soul, Draw Your Soul Research Project, 2007, Satellite Arts & Univ. of Sunderland's Reg Vardy Gallery Publications.

MEDIA APPEARANCES

702 ABC AM Radio (Australia), 2013, *Interview with Linda Mottram*. Live Broadcast on MiddleHead site
ABC National Radio (Australia), 2009, *Interview with Debora Susan Macoy*, Potters perspective.

SELECTED MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS

Rajgopal, Ambika, (2013, December), 4 Pakistani artists making art out of violence, *Art Radar Asia: Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond*
<http://artradarjournal.com/2013/12/13/3-pakistani-artists-making-art-out-of-violence>
Chughtai, Alia, (2013, November), Drone art: Death on a canvas: A generation of Pakistani artists focuses on expressing life under daily violence 4 Pakistani artists making art out of violence, *Art Radar Asia: Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond*, *Al Jazeera English*
<http://artradarjournal.com/2013/12/13/3-pakistani-artists-making-art-out-of-violence>
Vasvani, Bansie, (2013, September), Brut Reconsidered: Abdullah Syed Dissects Pakistani Culture, *The Cultural Trip*
Ali, Salwat, (2013, August), Foreign palette: Et tu Brute? *The Dawn*
Fitzgerald, Michael, (2013, September 11), Bullseye as art reveals hidden gems, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Arts, 18
Lipman, Ryan, (2013, September 25), Artists takes note of capitalist culture, *St Mary's-Mt Druitt Standard*
Aquilina, (2013, June 06), Masterpieces on show in New York, *Star St Mary's-Mt Druitt Standard*
Rizvi, Nafisa, (2012, December), Interview, *ArtNow Pakistan* (online), Artist in Diaspora
Ali, Salwat, (2012, March), Beyond Warholian Theatrics, *Gallery, The Dawn*, Cover feature

Banner, Keith, (2011, December 15), Aladdin Sane: "A Whole New World" at Third Party Gallery, *AEQAI*, Cincinnati
<http://aeqai.com/main/2011/12/aladdin-sane-a-whole-new-world-at-third-party-gallery>
Husain, Rumana, (2011, October), Whitewash in September, *Nukta*, Vol 6 (2), 22 & 23
Ahmed, Meena, (2011, February 06), Opening up creative young minds, *The News, Karachi*
Books and Arts, Breath of Violence, Contemporary art that reflects the many-sided violence afflicting Pakistan, *The Economist*, December 16, 2010
Perlez, Jane, (2010, December 17), Pakistan's Palette of Blood and Tears, *The New York Times*, New York
The Nukta Team, (2010, May), The Moving Image (Interview), *Nukta*, Vol 5 (1), 117 & 118
Rajani, Shahana, (2010, May), Figure of Speech, *Nukta*, Vol 5 (1), 13 & 14
Salam, Saima, (2010, February), Artist's Perspective: The Buzz Word, *Gallery, The Dawn*
Dent, Nick, (2009, March), John Pilger launches Bushwhacked, *Time Out Sydney*, Art Section
Ali, Salwat, (2008, October), On the paper trail, *Newsline*, Vol 21 (01), 124–Masood, Tooba, (2008), Let's draw the line, Let's Let Loose. *Daily Times*, (22)
Khan, Sumbul, (2007), Born to be. *Nukta*, (22)
Rizvi, Nafisa, (2007, July), Interview, *Herald*, 130 – 133
Husain, Marjorie, (2007, June), Political statements, *Gallery, The Dawn*, 1 & 2
Farrukh, Nilofur, (2006, June), The angst of inequality, *Gallery, The Dawn*, 3
Ali, Salwat, (2005, May), Breaking new grounds, *Newsline*, Vol 17 (10), 133
Ali, Salwat, (2005, April), Artist's predicament, *Gallery, The Dawn*, Cover feature
Staff, (2004, February), Blurring the Boundaries, Photo Feature: *The Daily Star*, vol 4 (35)

WORKS

Cover: *The Fragrance of the Moon* (Projection Detail), 2013, Brut for Men bottle, Perspex and transparency projector, Dimensions variable.

Inside Cover: *Aura I* (Detail), 2013, Hand-stitched black skull-caps, Perspex dome and LED rope light, 42 (Dia.) x 22 in. (106.5 x 56 cm.)

Pg. 4: *The Fragrance of the Moon*, 2013, Brut for Men bottle, Perspex and transparency projector, Dimensions variable.

Pg. 10 (Left): *Flare II*, 2013, Silkscreen on BFK Rives paper, 29.5 x 21.5 in. (75 x 54.5 cm.)

Pg. 10 (Right): *Flare I*, 2013, Silkscreen on BFK Rives paper, 29.5 x 21.5 in. (75 x 54.5 cm.)

Pg. 11: *Brut Nama (The Chronicles of Brut)*, Installation shot, Aicon Gallery, New York, 2013.

Pg. 12: *Aura II*, 2013, Hand-stitched white skull-caps, Perspex dome and LED rope light, 42 (Dia.) x 22 in. (106.5 x 56 cm.)

Pg. 13: *Aura I*, 2013, Hand-stitched black skull-caps, Perspex dome and LED rope light, 42 (Dia.) x 22 in. (106.5 x 56 cm.)

Pgs. 14-15 (Left): *Assembly IV: Jafar's Final Wish*, 2013, Hand-cut uncirculated U.S. \$1 bills and pins, 14 in. (Dia.) (35.5 cm.)

Pgs. 14-15 (Center): *Assembly III: Blitzkrieg*, 2013, Hand-cut and folded uncirculated U.S. \$1 bills, 100 Pakistani Rupee notes and pins, 42 in. (Dia.) (106.5 cm.)

Pgs. 14-15 (Right): *Assembly II: Innocent Spectacle for Musk*, 2013, Hand-cut uncirculated U.S. \$1 and \$2 bills, 100 Pakistani Rupee notes and pins, 10 in. (Dia.) (25.5 cm.)

Pg. 16: *Assembly I: The Hunting Season* (Detail), 2013, Hand-cut uncirculated U.S. \$1 bills, 100 Pakistani Rupee notes and pins, 28 x 28 in. (71 x 71 cm.)

Pg. 17: *Assembly III: Blitzkrieg* (Detail), 2013, Hand-cut and folded uncirculated U.S. \$1 bills, 100 Pakistani Rupee notes and pins, 42 in. (Dia.) (106.5 cm.)

Pg. 18 (Top): *Weaving Myth I* (Flying Rug Series), 2013, Hand-cut and weaved U.S. \$10 bill and 100 Pakistani Rupee note, 6 x 10 in. (15 x 25.5 cm.)

Pg. 18 (Middle): *Weaving Myth II* (Flying Rug Series), 2013, Hand-cut and weaved 50 Indian Rupee note and 50 Pakistani Rupee note, 6 x 10 in. (15 x 25.5 cm.)

Pg. 18 (Bottom): *Weaving Myth V* (Flying Rug Series), 2013, Hand-cut and weaved U.S. \$10 bill and 100 Pakistani Rupee note, 6 x 10 in. (15 x 25.5 cm.)

Pg. 19 (Top): *Weaving Myth IV* (Flying Rug Series), 2013, Hand-cut and weaved British 10 Pound note and 20 Pakistani Rupee note, 6 x 10 in. (15 x 25.5 cm.)

Pg. 19 (Bottom): *Weaving Myth I* (Flying Rug Series), 2013, Hand-cut and weaved U.S. \$2 bill and 100 Pakistani Rupee note, 6 x 10 in. (15 x 25.5 cm.)

Pg. 20-21: *et tu Brute*, 2013, Black painted green neon, 23 x 60 in. (58.5 x 152.5 cm.)

Pg. 22: *The Essence of Men, Limited Edition on Sale III*, Hand-beaten and galvanized medallion on altered Brut for Men bottle and packaging, 7 x 2.5 x 2.5 in. (18 x 6.5 x 6.5 cm.)

Pg. 23: *Brut Nama (The Chronicles of Brut)*, Installation Shots, Aicon Gallery, New York, 2013.

Pg. 24 (Left): *I am Arrow I am Bow: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Charcoal and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 24 (Center): *I am Sun I am Moon: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Gold and silver pencil and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 24 (Right): *I am Logic I am Emotion: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Chalk pastel, colored pencil and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 25 (Left): *I am Pleasure I am Pain: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Chalk pastel, colored pencil and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 25 (Center): *I am Horizontal I am Vertical: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Charcoal and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 25 (Right): *I am Brute I am Gentle: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Ink stamp, gold and silver pencil and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 26: *I am Center I am Margin: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Charcoal and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 27: *I am Quiet I am Loud: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Graphite, chalk pastel and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

Pg. 28 (Left): *Brut for Men: Rose* (English Version), 2013, Hand-beaten and hand-stickered (Chamak Patti) metal medallion, wood and stainless steel, 59 x 46 in. (150 x 117 cm.)

Pg. 28 (Right): *Brut for Men: Lotus* (Urdu Version), 2013, Hand-beaten and hand-stickered (Chamak Patti) metal medallion, wood and stainless steel, 59 x 46 in. (150 x 117 cm.)

Pg. 29 (Left): *Brut for Men: Target* (English Version), 2013, Hand-beaten and hand-stickered (Chamak Patti) metal medallion, wood and stainless steel, 59 x 46 in. (150 x 117 cm.)

Pg. 29 (Right): *Brut for Men: Heart* (English Version), 2013, Hand-beaten and hand-stickered (Chamak Patti) metal medallion, wood and stainless steel, 59 x 46 in. (150 x 117 cm.)

Pg. 30 *Brut for Men: Heart* (English Version - Detail), 2013, Hand-beaten and hand-stickered (Chamak Patti) metal medallion, wood and stainless steel, 59 x 46 in. (150 x 117 cm.)

Pg. 31: *funDADamentalism*, 2013, Flashing red neon, 30 x 27 in. (76 x 68.5 cm.)

Pg. 32-33: *Blockbusters* (Installation), 2013, Needle tool on found photographs of Lollywood movies and found original studio photo-prints from Julius Caesar (1953) and photographic digital prints, Dimensions variable.

Pg. 34-35: *The Chained Blasphemy* (Installation & Detail), 2013, Hand-assembled multicolored rubber band chain and dressmaker pins, Dimensions variable.

Inside Back Cover: *Aura II* (Detail), 2013, Hand-stitched white skull-caps, Perspex dome and LED rope light, 42 (Dia.) x 22 in. (106.5 x 56 cm.)

Back Cover: *I am Circle I am Square: A Page from Brut Nama*, 2013, Charcoal and type on Canson paper, 11 x 11 in. (28 x 28 cm.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Projjal Dutta, Prajit Dutta, Andrew Shea and the Aicon Gallery team: notably Amy Distler, Rachel Hines, Christine Navin and Harry Hutchison; Roohi S. Ahmed, Fahim Ahmed, Durriya Kazi, Adeela Suleman, Bonita Ely, Michael Esson, Diane Losche, Sophia Kouyoumdjian (Parramatta Artists Studios), Syed Talha and Azra Waseem, Sajid Ali and Fakeha Sajid, Syed Saleh Irshad, Taha Syed, Jim Watson, Ben Rak and Angela Butler; Also the Truck Art craftsmen based in Karachi Pakistan: Iqbal Bahi (Master Craftsman) with Safdar Sabir, Usman Sabir, Waqar Yaqoob, Asif and Fida Khadim Husain, Naeem Babul, Sahid and Zawar Steel Maker and Usama Munir.

CREDITS

Brut-Nama (The Chronicles of Brut)

July 18 – August 31, 2013

Abdullah M. I. Syed

Andrew Shea (Aicon Director and Curatorial Consultant)

Aicon Gallery, New York

Graphic Design: Christine Navin

Printer: Lightning Press, New Jersey

Artwork Photography:

Rachel Hines, Christine Navin, Bill Orcutt, Roohi S. Ahmed,

Mahmood Ahmed and Abdullah M. I. Syed.

Process Photography: Fahim Rao

All images and text reproduced with permission, courtesy of the participating artists and writers.

2013 © Aicon Gallery and Abdullah M. I. Syed

All rights reserved. No part of this catalogue may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the artists, writer and publisher.

Published by Aicon Gallery, New York, 2013.

ISBN: 978-0-9923562-0-0

ABOUT AICON

Aicon Gallery's curatorial vision begins in South Asia but reaches outwards internationally from there. The New York gallery provides a vital platform for Modern and Contemporary South Asian artists to exhibit in the United States. Alongside in-depth, focused solo shows, the gallery presents a program of curated group exhibitions that are international in their scope and ambition. Following recent debates in institutional curating, the program deliberately links together art produced very recently and art made through the latter half of the 20th century. Through this we hope to produce unexpected congruencies, shed light on other modernities, make complex the designation 'contemporary' and signal a shift away from simple survey exhibitions. In short, we aim to bring new and challenging art from South Asia to the widest possible international audience.



Aura II (Detail), 2013, Hand-stitched white skull-caps, Perspex dome and LED rope light.

