

Abdullah M. I. Syed

Divine Economy – Chapter One: Structures

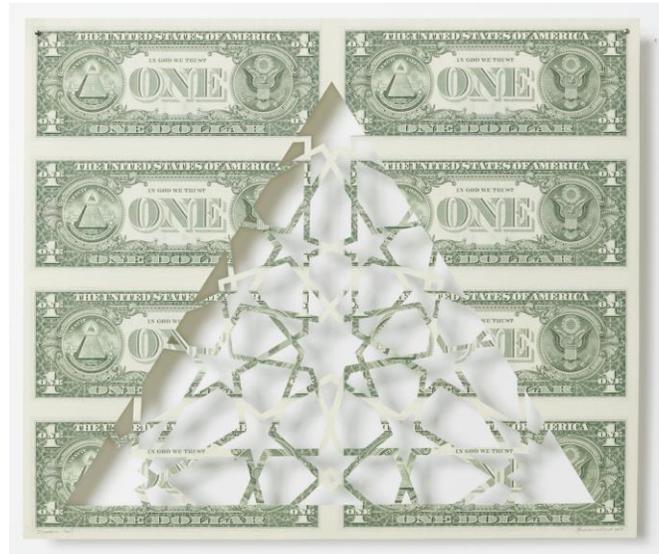
Curated by **Mikala Tai**

November 16th – December 30th, 2017

Press Preview & Opening Reception: Thursday, November 16th, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

Aicon Gallery is pleased to present *Divine Economy – Chapter One: Structures*, the second major U. S. solo exhibition by Pakistan-born Sydney-based artist **Abdullah M. I. Syed**, curated by **Mikala Tai**. The exhibition - four years in the making since his first showing with Aicon Gallery in New York - represents the first of three exhibitions relating to Syed's ongoing research on the (re)presentation of religious, political, and economic systems and how these systems mutually construct and inform one another. The unfolding of this three-part narrative, begins Syed's foray into documenting the state of the world through the structural, conceptual and material languages of the economy. The inspiration for the project arises from Syed's ongoing use of printed banknotes and his fascination with Heaven and Hell, and their currencies of sawab (reward), as eternal pleasure, and gunah (sin), as eternal pain.



Divine Structure: Triangle (Detail), 2017, Mixed media collage and paper banknotes, 10.25 x 24.5 in.

Through both rigorous artistic investigation and playful conceptual satirization, *Divine Economy: Structures* examines the integral interwoven systems that shape our societies. These systems are veiled within the monotony of everyday life, where they exist as invisible lines of control. Central to Syed's practice is the revelation of these complex economies of coercion that implicate the individual. Over the past several years Syed has led this investigation through the medium of uncirculated printed currency. Through artistic interventions, the transactional materiality of the note reveals the convergence of religious, political and economic systems.

Through the gestural act of meticulously and painstakingly drawing and cutting patterns into printed banknotes by hand, Syed directly intervenes with a cornerstone of contemporary societies' value systems. Currency, the very bastion on which our transactional society is built, becomes the site of denouement. Recurring geometric patterns in *Divine Economy: Structures* are triangles, squares and hexagons, as well as symbols such as the 'Eye of Providence', the eye nestled in a triangle on one U.S. dollar bill. The 'Eye of Providence' reverberates in contemporary culture, politics and economies, but is also informed by complex one-eyed figures and symbols found in histories of Islamic eschatology, Judeo-Christian prophecy, Hindu and Egyptian sacred mythologies, and through to the Freemasons and Illuminati. Syed approaches this symbolism through repetitively hand-cutting the eye out of printed banknotes by the hundreds and isolating them in tessellated patterns that highlight the omnipresent monitoring of the all-seeing, all-witnessing eye. The remaining notes appear as stacked bricks inviting the audience to peer through the void, where they themselves become the 'Eye of Providence.'



Moneyscape VI: Temenos (Detail), 2017, Hand-cut and assembled various uncirculated banknotes in custom light-box vitrine, 23 x 23 x 10 in.



Mapping Investment: Pakistan (Detail), 2017, Mixed media collage and paper banknotes, 20.25 x 50.25 in.

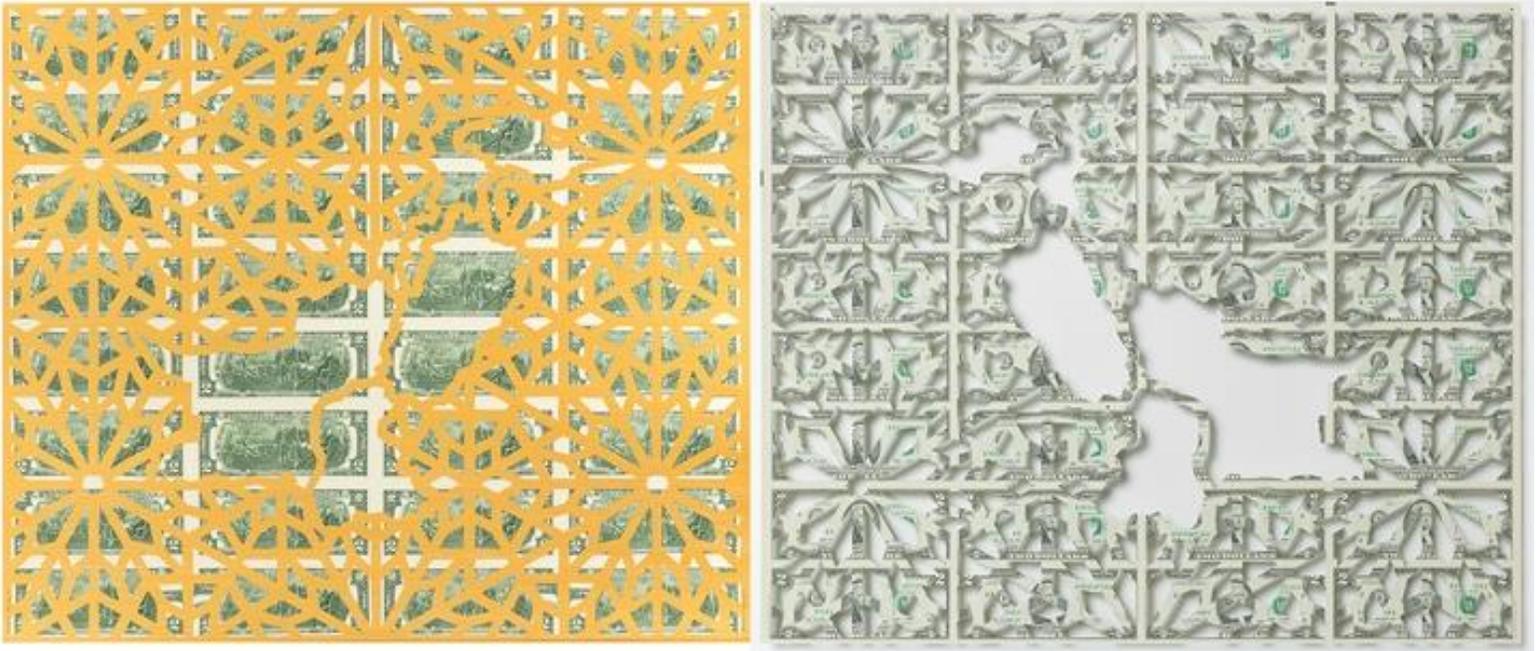
Syed's research-led practice encourages the viewer to look again, to locate the unobserved, and to question the systems of semiotics that surround us. He unpacks this dense investigation through visual mazes of printed currency, constructed alongside his personal explorations of mythologies and historiographies that inform each meticulously hand-cut sheet of paper. This precision enables Syed to transform paper money, specifically U.S. dollar bills, into a critical commentary on the networks and occupations that determine its circulation. In the series *Mapping Investment*, each cut is informed by Islamic geometric patterns, and contemporary politics where sliced sheets of U.S. currency create voids that trace the geographical borders of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, where financial, religious and political control are in constant oscillation. This cutting becomes sculptural in Syed's *Moneyscape* series where he addresses the grand narratives of war, power and control through intricate pop-up dioramas of imagined landscapes. By juxtaposing religious structures, such as Islamic mosques and Christian churches with state monuments and structures, Syed questions the ongoing commodification of theology and how the tranquil experiences of religious sites, such as Mecca, have been tarnished by the commercialization of their divine structures and the surrounding economies to which they've given rise.

Punctuating the opening of the exhibition is a new performance by Syed. Known for durational performative pieces that implicate his body as a site for the convergence of power and control, Syed recently performed *Flesh and Blood* during Asia Contemporary Art Week at New York's Asia Society Museum. At the opening of *Divine Economy: Structures* Syed will premier *Blue Chip*, an interactive performance in which the audience will be invited to witness a physical enactment of the commodification of religion, politics and art.

Abdullah M. I. Syed (b. 1974) is a Pakistani-born contemporary artist living and working between Sydney, Karachi and New York. Trained in diverse disciplines, Syed utilizes a variety of mediums and techniques including sculpture, video installations, drawing, performance and texts to investigate collisions between art, religion, economy and politics. Syed earned a PhD in Art, Media and Design (2015) and a Master of Fine Arts (2009) from University of New South Wales, Sydney. He also holds a Bachelor of Art in Design (1999) and a Master of Education (2001) from University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), Oklahoma, U.S. Syed's work has been featured in nine solo exhibitions and several national and international curated group exhibitions and performance events such as *Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW) Thinking Project*, Asia Society Museum, New York (2017); *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts (AsiaTOPA)*, Melbourne (2017); *Karachi Biennial*, Karachi (2017); *Substitute*, Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, Sydney (2016); *Between Structure and Matter: Other Minimal Futures*, Aicon Gallery, New York (2016); *Creative Accounting*, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Sydney (2016); *WAR*, Newington Armory Gallery, Sydney (2016), and *Future Archaeology*, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney (2015). In 2017, Syed was the recipient of Australia's prestigious 2017 *Carstairs Prize*.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Andrew@Aicongallery.com) for more information.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



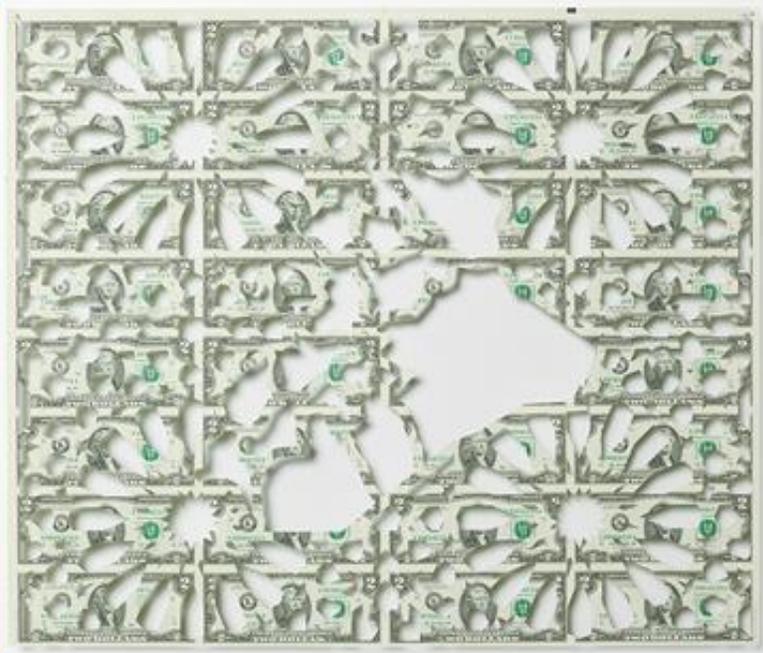
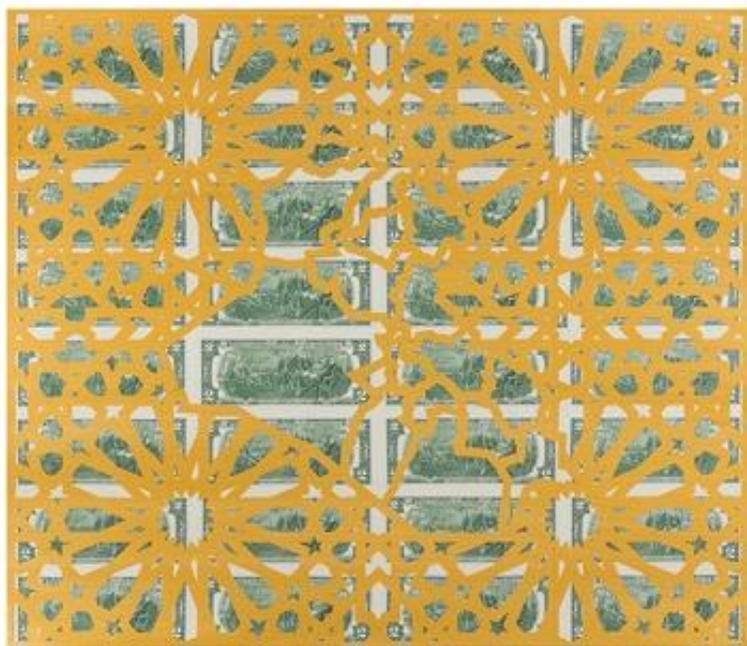
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Mapping Investment: Pakistan* (With Details), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$2 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 20.25 x 50.25 in. (Diptych)

Abdullah M. I. Syed



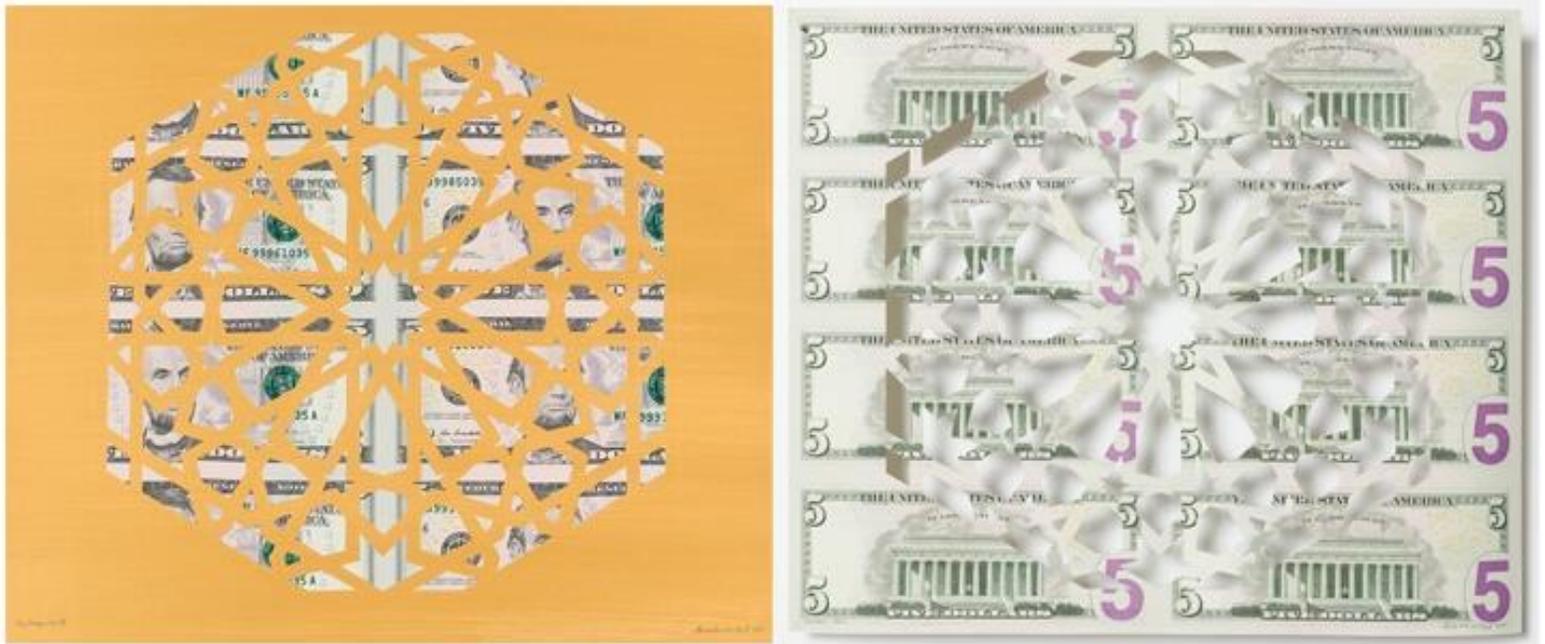
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Divine Structure: Triangle* (Diptych), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$1 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 10.25 x 24.5 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



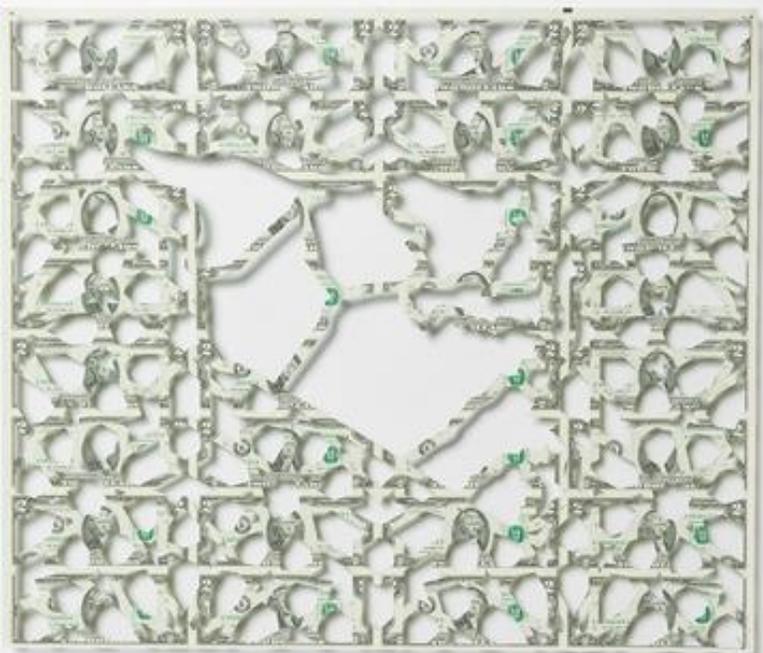
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Mapping Investment: Iraq (With Details)*, 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$2 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 20.25 x 50.25 in. (Diptych)

Abdullah M. I. Syed



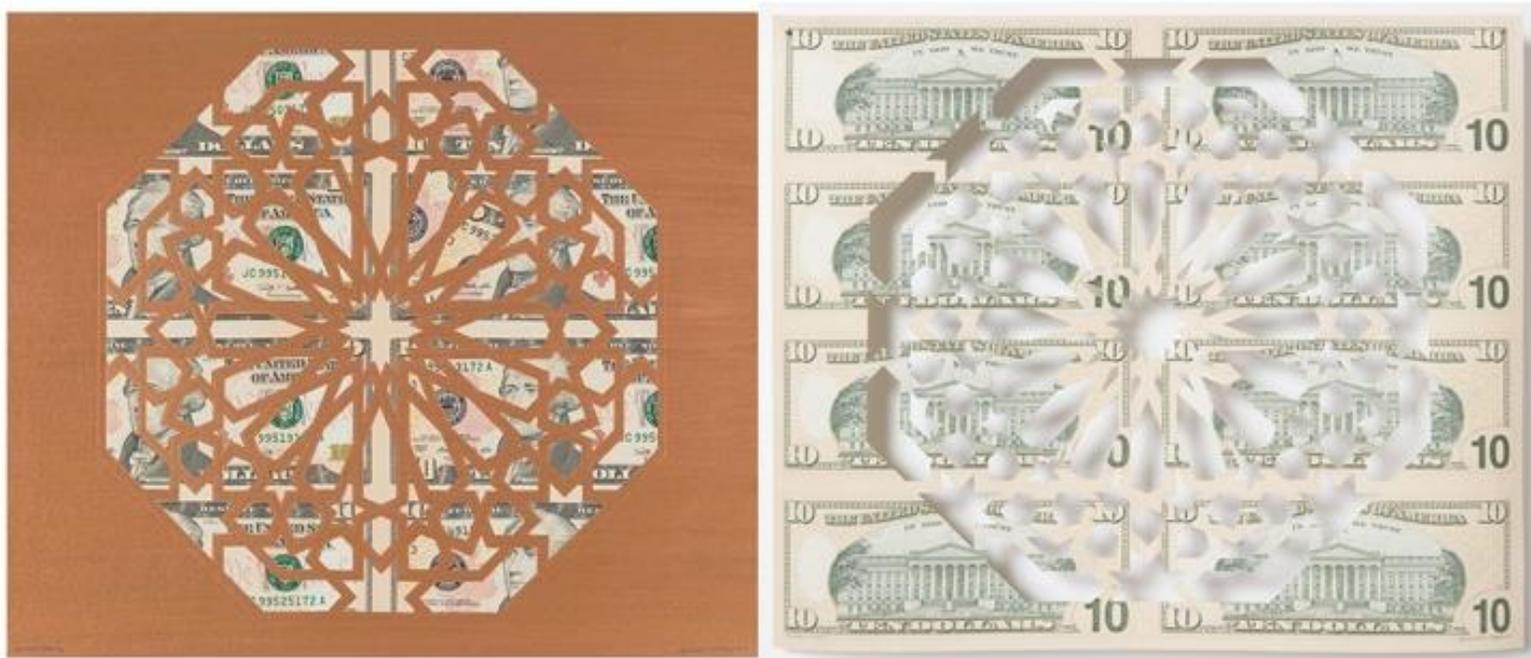
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Divine Structure: Hexagon* (Diptych), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$5 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 10.25 x 24.5 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



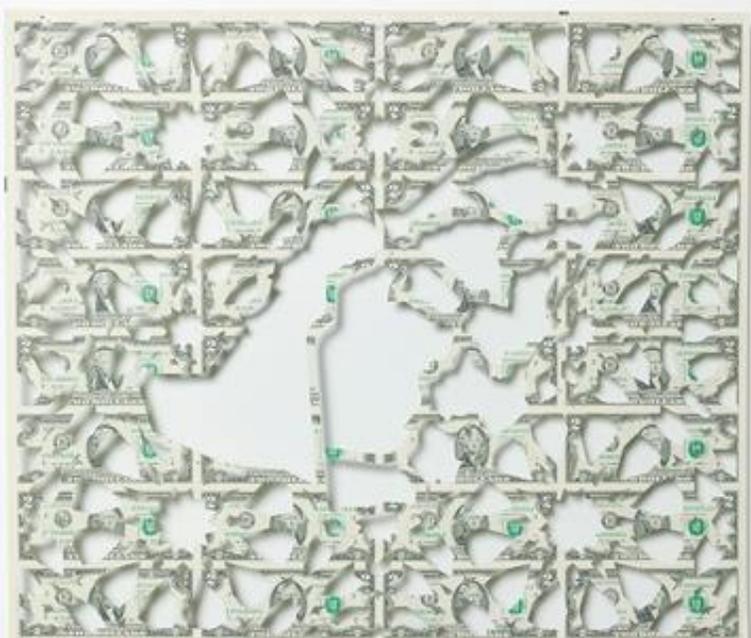
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Mapping Investment: Syria* (With Details), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$2 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 20.25 x 50.25 in. (Diptych)

Abdullah M. I. Syed



Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Divine Structure: Octagon* (Diptych), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$10 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 10.25 x 24.5 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



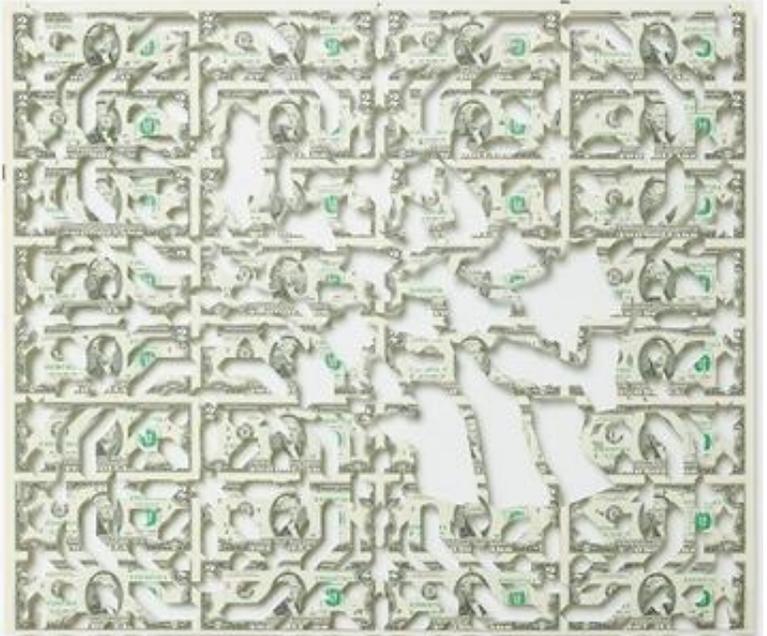
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Mapping Investment: Saudi Arabia (With Details)*, 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$2 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 20.25 x 50.25 in. (Diptych)

Abdullah M. I. Syed



Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Divine Structure: Hexacaideca* (Diptych), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$10 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 10.25 x 24.5 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Mapping Investment: Afghanistan* (With Details), 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$2 banknote sheet and banknote collage with acrylic on wasli, 20.25 x 50.25 in. (Diptych)

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Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Moneyscape V: Temenos*, 2017, Hand-cut and assembled various uncirculated banknotes in custom light-box vitrine, 22 x 22 x 10 in.

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Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Moneyscape V: Temenos* (Details), 2017, Hand-cut and assembled various uncirculated banknotes in custom light-box vitrine, 22 x 22 x 10 in.

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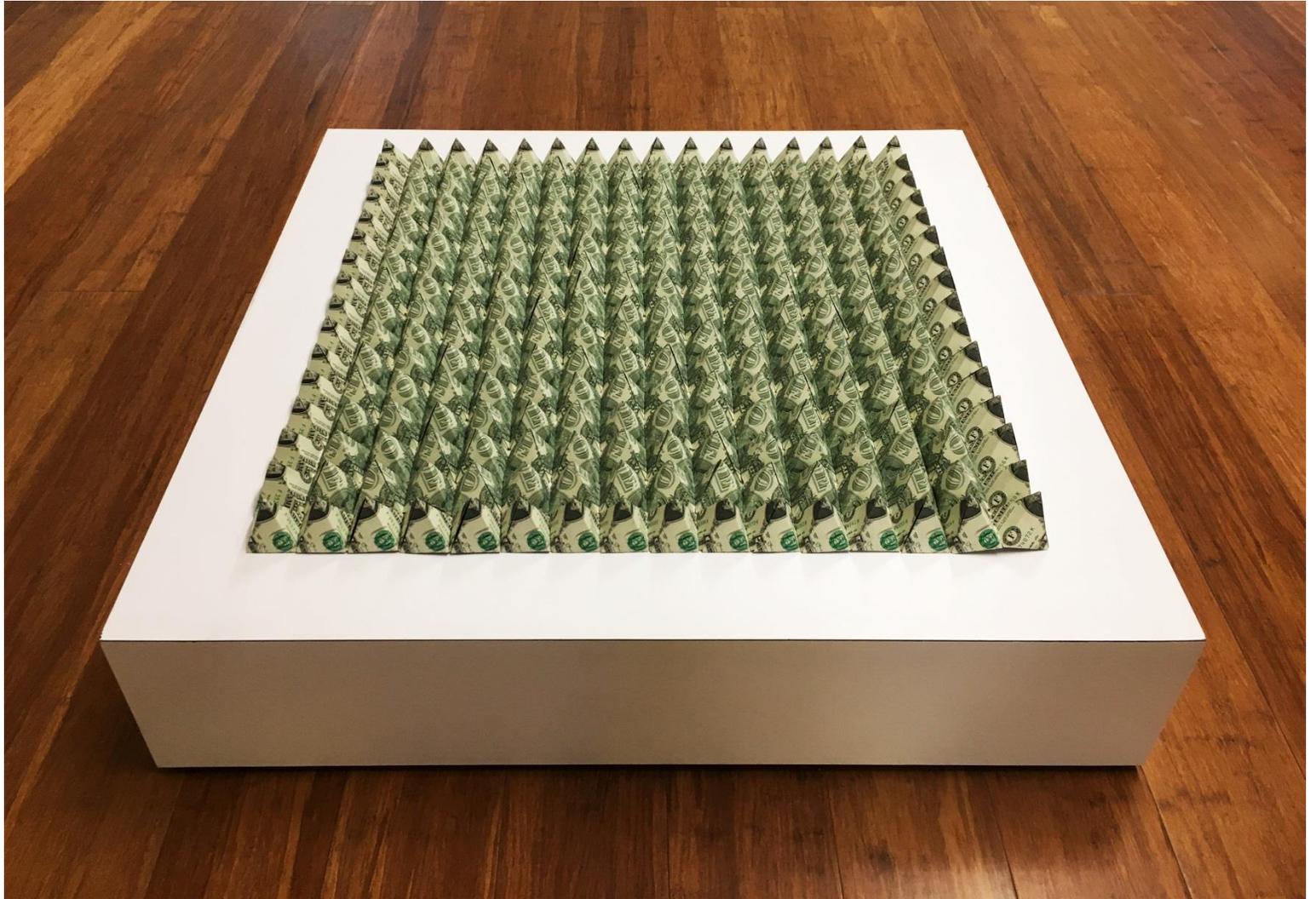
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Moneyscape VI: Playground of Alternative Economies*, 2017, Hand-cut and assembled various uncirculated banknotes in custom light-box vitrine, 22 x 22 x 10 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



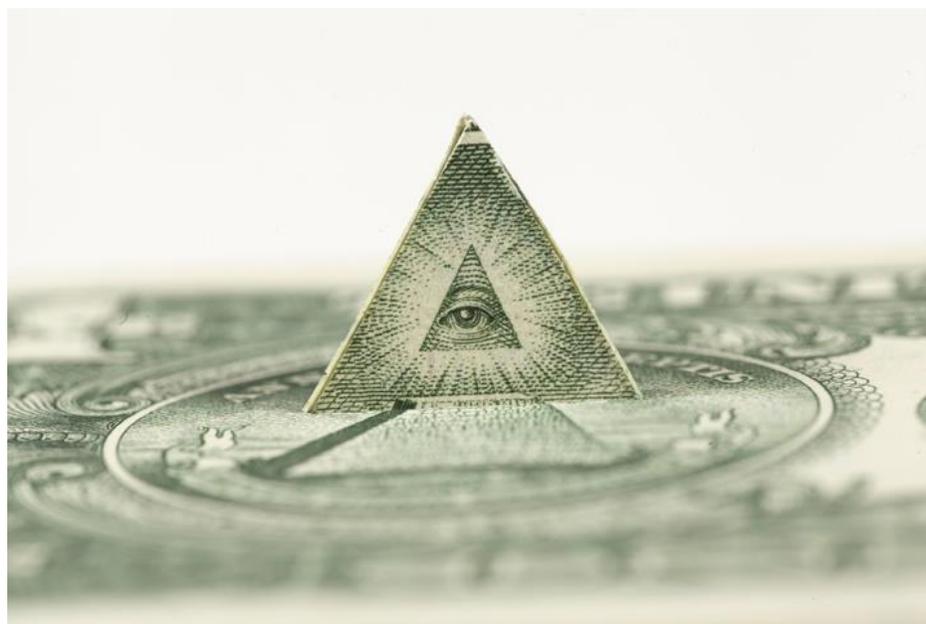
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Moneyscape VI: Playground of Alternative Economies* (Details), 2017, Hand-cut and assembled various uncirculated banknotes in custom light-box vitrine, 22 x 22 x 10 in.

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Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Topography* (Ed. 1 of 5), 2017, Folded U.S. \$1 banknotes and staple pins, 24 x 24 in.

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Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Moneyscape VI: Unfinished Pyramid of Solitude (With Detail)*, 2017, Hand-cut and assembled uncirculated U.S. \$1 banknotes with self-assembled pop-out, 2.5 x 6.25 x .5 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Illuminated Prisms Manuscript I: Pgs. 1 & 2 (With Detail)*, 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$1 banknotes collage and 24k gold on illustration board, 22.75 x 30 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



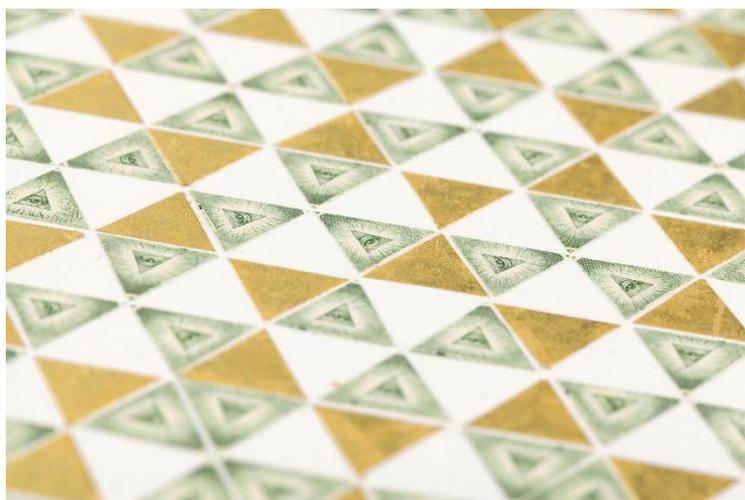
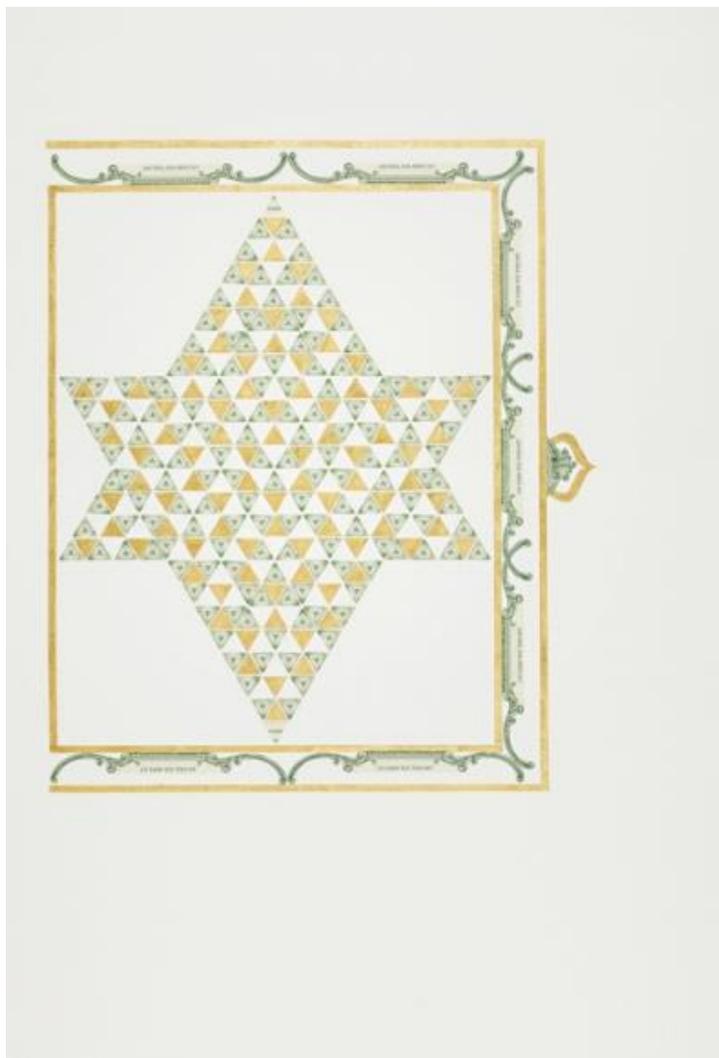
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Illuminated Prisms Manuscript I: Pg. 3*, 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$1 banknotes collage and 24k gold on Illustration board, 22.75 x 15 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



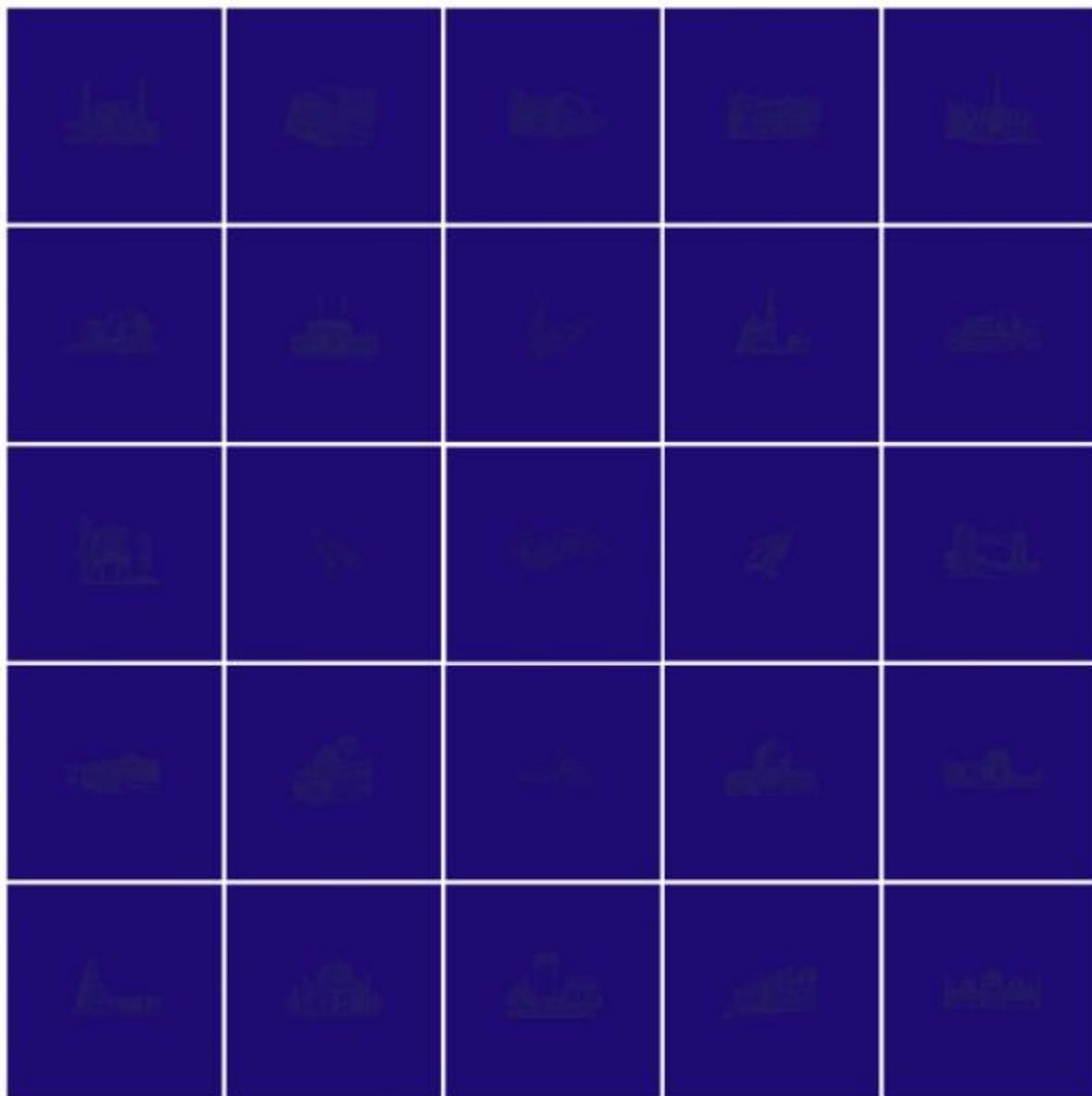
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Illuminated Prisms Manuscript I: Pg. 4 (With Details)*, 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$1 banknotes collage and 24k gold on Illustration board, 22.75 x 15 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



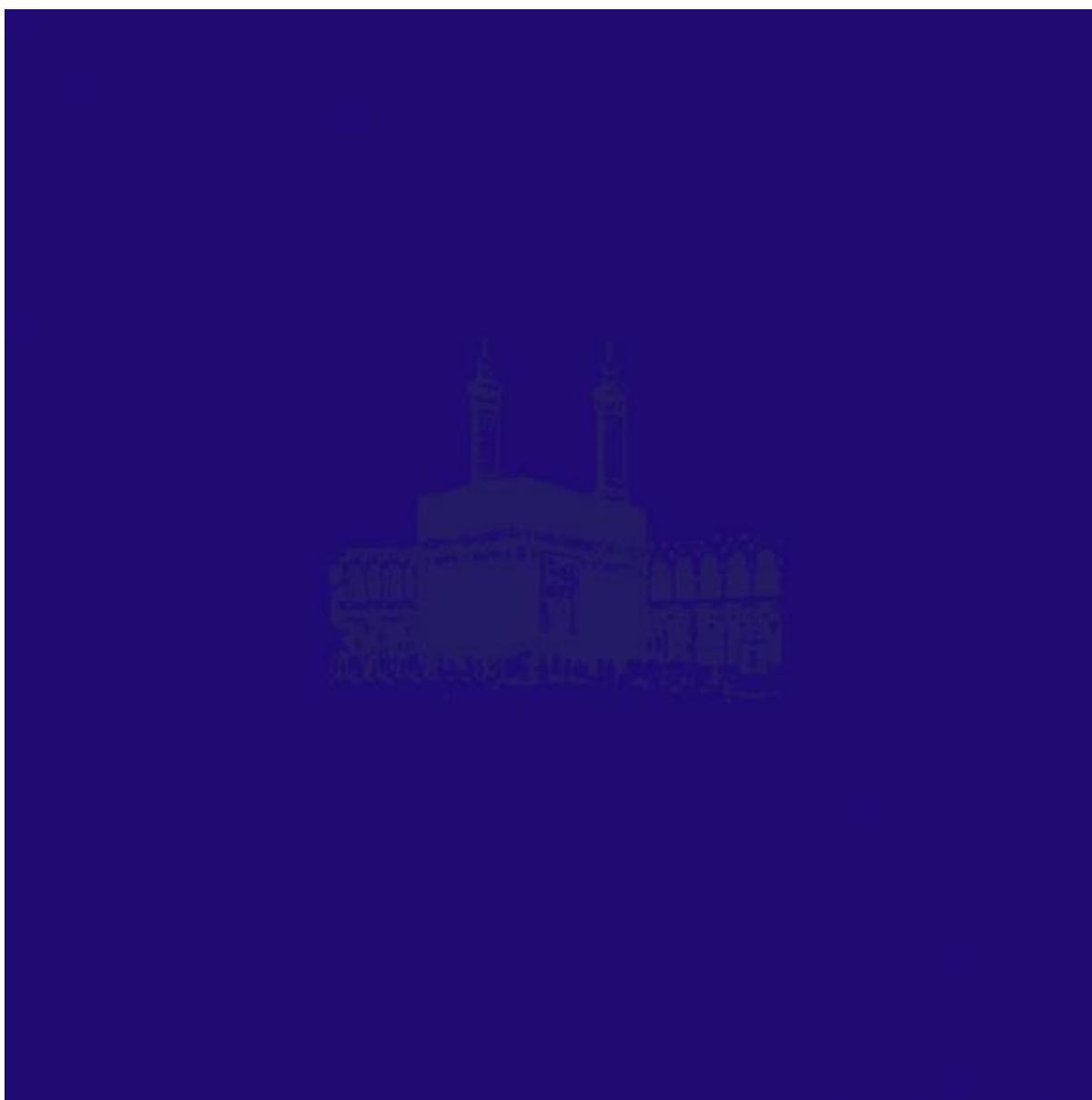
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Illuminated Prisms Manuscript I: Pg. 5 (With Details)*, 2017, Hand-cut U.S. \$1 banknotes collage and 24k gold on Illustration board, 22.75 x 15 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



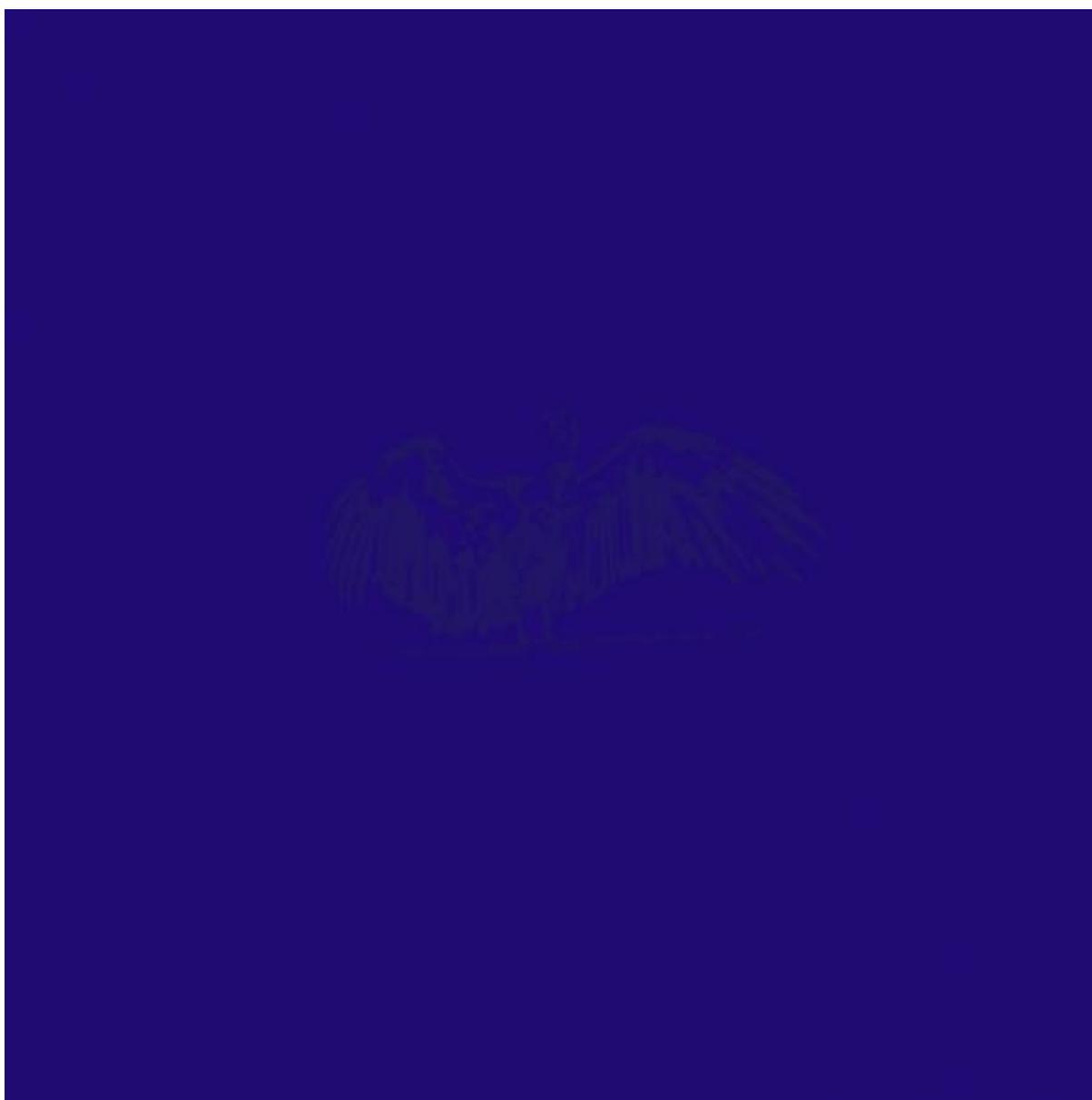
Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Structures of Culture Vultures: Blue*, 2017, Clear spot printing on archival paper in 25 parts, 65 x 65 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Structures of Culture Vultures: Blue* (Detail – From Saudi 500 Riyal Banknote – Mecca), 2017, Clear spot printing on archival paper in 25 parts, 65 x 65 in.

Abdullah M. I. Syed



Abdullah M. I. Syed, *Structures of Culture Vultures: Blue* (Detail – White-Rumped Vulture), 2017, Clear spot printing on archival paper in 25 parts, 65 x 65 in.

ABDULLAH M. I. SYED

Artist Abdullah M. I. Syed was born in Karachi, Pakistan and presently works between Karachi, Sydney, and New York. Syed's art practice weaves together real and fictional narratives of East and West, seamlessly knitting together cultural and art historical references and concerns from each. Trained in diverse disciplines, Syed utilizes a variety of mediums and techniques including sculpture, video installations, drawing, performance and texts to investigate collisions between art, religion, economy and politics.

Education

2015	Doctor of Philosophy (Art, Design and Media), University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
2009	Master of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
2001	Master of Education (Art & Design), University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, U.S.
1999	Bachelor of Art (Graphic Design & 3D Arts), University of Central Oklahoma
1995	Bachelor of Commerce, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

Select Solo Exhibition

2016-17	<i>Substitute: The Untold Narrative of a Mother and Son</i> , Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, Sydney and Canvas gallery, Karachi
2015	<i>The Balancing Act</i> , UNSW Galleries, Sydney
2013	<i>Brut-Nama (The Chronicles of Brut)</i> , Aicon Gallery, New York
2010	<i>Buzzing (Bhin-bhenahut)</i> , V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
2009	<i>Buzzing</i> , Kudos Gallery and COFA Space, Sydney, Australia
2007	<i>Born to Be</i> , V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi
2004	<i>Subliminal Voids</i> , V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi
2001	<i>Threading: Part Known, Part Unknown</i> , Galleria Sadequain, Karachi

Special Projects, Biennial and Triennial

2017	<i>Karachi Biennial</i> , Karachi, (Chief Curator - Amin Gulgee)
2017	<i>Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW) Thinking Project</i> , Asia Society Museum, New York
2017	<i>Asia TOPA (Asia Triennial of Performance Art)</i> , MPavilion, Melbourne
2015	<i>Scotiabank Nuit Blanche (10 for 10th)</i> , TIFF Lightbox, Toronto, (Curator - Che Kothari)
2014	<i>1st Karachi Print Triennial</i> , International, Karachi
2006	<i>3rd ASNA Clay Triennial</i> , International, Karachi

Select Group Exhibitions

2017	<i>We Are All Affected</i> , Peacock Gallery, Sydney, (Curator - Khaled Sabsabi and Nur Shkembri)
2017	<i>Botany of Desire</i> , Koel Gallery, Karachi, (Curator - Roohi Ahmed)
2017	<i>Governance</i> , The Old Government House Parramatta, Sydney, (Curator - Lizzy Marshal)
2017	<i>The Ancestors</i> , Dominik Mersch, Sydney, (Curator - Catherine Benz)
2016	<i>Delicate Bond of Steel</i> , Chatterjee and Lal, Mumbai, (Curator - Projjal Dutta and Andrew Shia)
2016	<i>Between Structure and Matter: Other Minimal Futures</i> , Aicon gallery, New York, (Curators - Murtaza Vali and Prajit Dutta)
2016	<i>Creative Accounting</i> , Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Sydney, (Curator - Holly Williams)
2016	<i>WAR: A Playground Perspective</i> , Newington Armory Gallery, Sydney, (Curators - Nick Vickers and Allan Giddy)

- 2015 *Future Archeology*, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney
Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Tiff Bell Light-box, Toronto
Beyond Measure, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa
Perrhesia II, Koel Gallery, Karachi
Drawn to Form, Blacktown Arts Centre, Sydney
Homelands, Delmar gallery, Sydney
48HR Incident, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney
Semblance of Order, Aicon Gallery, New York
It is a Bird, it is a Plane, Hawkesbury Art gallery, Sydney
SiteLine, Cross Art Project, Sydney
- 2014 *Subject to Ruin*, Causla Powerhosue Arts Centre, Sydney
- 2013 *Drawing Softly, Thinking Aloud*, Yifu gallery, Shanghai
Extra|Ordinary: 37 Do it Yourself Art Ideas for Free, Canvas gallery, Karachi
MiddleHead: 33° 50' S, 151°14' E project, Mosman Art gallery, Sydney
- 2012 *Stop, Play, Pause, Repeat* Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai
Méré Humd(r)um, Aicon Gallery, New York
- 2011 *A Whole New World*, Third Party Gallery, Cincinnati, Ohio
The Sound of Drawing, Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, Dalian, China
MOVIE NIGHT VOL. 4: GLOBAL HOUSE VIDEO SCREENINGS KUNSTHALLE GWANGJU,
Curated by the 3rd Gwangju Biennale International Curator Course, 13 Gwangsan-dong Dong-gu,
Gwangju, Republic of Korea - *Traveling exhibition*
Messages from the South: Contemporary Australian Prints from CICADA Press, COFA UNSW,
International Exhibition Hall, Art Museum of National Taiwan University of Arts, New Taipei
City, Taiwan
And nothing but the truth: The problem with Parrhesia, IVS gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
Whitewash: Site Specific Drawing Project, Gandhara Art, Karachi, Pakistan
Imigi(ni)ng Cities: A South-South Dialogue, Amin Gulgee gallery, Karachi – *Traveling exhibition*
- 2010 *The Rising Tide: Contemporary Art of Pakistan from 1990 to 2010*, Mohatta Palace Museum,
Blacktown Art Prize: Blacktown Art Centre, Sydney, Australia
Tim Olson Drawing Prize, Kudos Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Resemble Reassemble: Contemporary Art from Pakistan, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, India
- 2009 *Moving Images*, Poppy Seed, Karachi, Pakistan
Figure of Speech, Two person Exhibition (Cicada Residency), Chawkandi Art, Karachi, Pakistan
India Art Summit (India's Modern and Contemporary Art Fair), New Delhi, India
How Nations are Made, Cartwright Hall, Bradford, UK
No Honor in Killing: Making Visible Buried Truth, National Art Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan
Lines of Control, V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
Bushwhacked, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Place, Anant Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2008 *Simply Paper*, IVS Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
Let's Draw the Line, Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
- 2007 *Dislocation*, Kudos Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Draw Your Soul Project, Reg Vardy Gallery, Sunderland, UK
Moving Ahead, (Inaugural Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan
Sohni Dharti, Karachi Arts Council, Karachi, Pakistan
- 2006 *3rd ASNA Clay Triennial, International*, Karachi, Pakistan
256 Shades, V M Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
6/6: The Labyrinth, V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
- 2005 *Something Purple: Media Art From Pakistan*, Artist Commune, Hong Kong, China
Two Person Ceramic Sculptures Exhibition, Ripples series, Khaas Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan
1st M A Rangoonwala Visual Arts Award Exhibition, V M Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
- 2003 *Edge Art Now*, IAO Gallery, Oklahoma City, USA
- 2001-02 *UCO Art & Design Faculty Show*, Central Museum Of Art, Edmond, Oklahoma, USA
- 2002 *Momentum: Art Doesn't Stand Still*, Stage Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Awards & Honors

- 2017 *Winner: Carstairs Prize, National Association for the Visual Arts, Australia*
- 2016 *Finalist: Blake Religious Art Prize, Casula Powerhouse, Sydney*
- 2015 *Finalist: The Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award, The Art Centre Gold Coast*
Finalist: Hazelhursts Art Prize, Hazelhursts Art Gallery, Sydney
- 2014 *Semi-Finalist: Doug Moran National Photography Prize - in collaboration with Ben Rak*
- 2013 *Finalist: Blake Religious Art Prize, COFA Galleries, Sydney - in collaboration with Ben Rak*
Highly Commended: Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize, Woollahra Council, Sydney
- 2011 *Celeste Art Prize, (catalogue selection), New York*
- 2010 *Blacktown Art Prize (Winner - Works on Paper), Blacktown Art Centre, Sydney*
Tim Olson Drawing Prize (First Runners Up), Kudos gallery, Sydney
- 2009 *UIPA - UNSW Postgraduate Scholarship (PhD), University of New South Wales, Sydney*
- 2006 *COFA's Senior Artist from Asia Scholarship, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia*
- 2003 *Installation Artist Award, Individual Artists of Oklahoma (IAO), Oklahoma*
- 2002 *New Artist in Mixed Media Award, Individual Artists of Oklahoma (IAO), Oklahoma*
- 1999 *The Kennedy Center/ACTF XXXII, Program & Poster, Award of Excellence, Dallas, Texas*