

Saad Qureshi





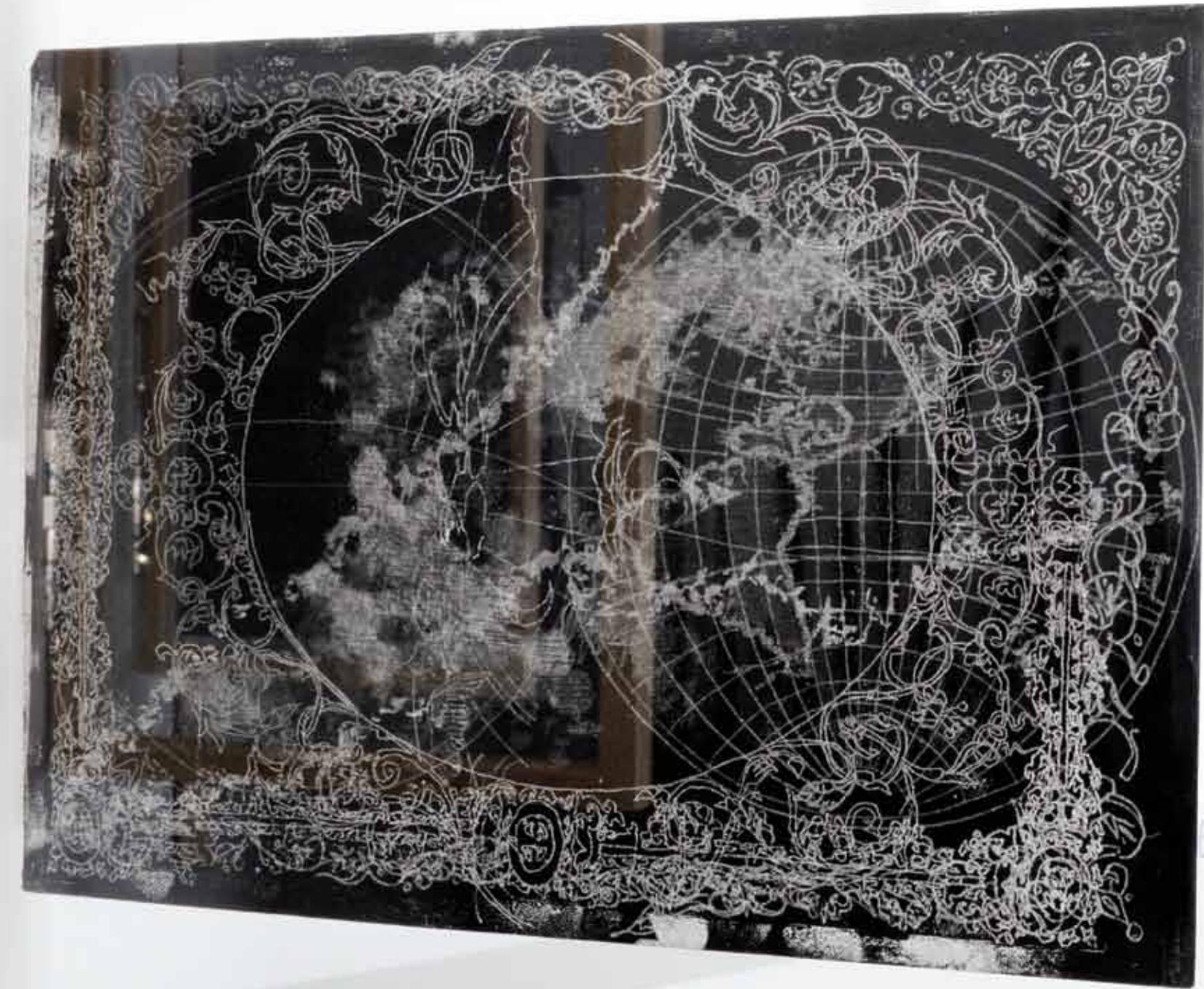
# Saad Qureshi

Interview with Sehba Mohammad

Exhibition dates: October 24 - November 30

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*Smoulder*, 2013, Pencil and charcoal on paper, 58 x 76.5 in.



*In the Remains* (Installation View), 2013, Aicon Gallery, New York, NY.

## Saad Qureshi *In the Remains* by Sebha Mohammad

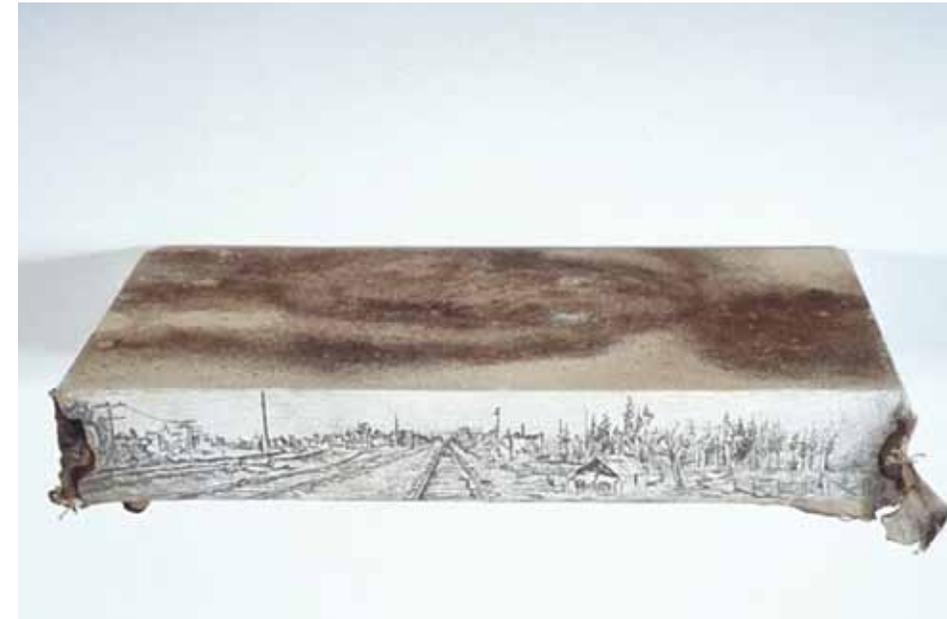
Saad Qureshi's paintings, drawings and sculptures articulate the intangible forces that influence perception. His subject matter traverses fragile memories, afterthoughts and concepts of identity through an array of disconnected imagery—ranging from plumes of smoke and fragmented countryscapes to superimposed floral patterns. Unlike most artworks, they do not depict a moment, but rather present the social and psychological aftermath of a point in time. His first solo exhibition in New York, *In the Remains*, showcases these elusive ideas, which he has been exploring for over five years.

Qureshi's tremendous pencil-and-charcoal drawing on paper *Smoulder* (2013), at first appears to be a study of a luminous cloud. A closer inspection of the immaculately rendered contours reveals a smoke-mass, the result of an explosion ignited from an unknown source. His use of air-like smoke continues his theme of non-materiality, while the larger context exposes his sensitivity towards the violent socio-political situations afflicting certain regions. The sentiment is a pervasive undercurrent in his art, which stems from the upheaval plaguing his country of origin.

The London-based artist was born in a small town in eastern Pakistan. When he was eight he moved to Bradford, a city in the U.K. colloquially called "Bradistan" because of its extensive population of Pakistani immigrants. Once there, he faced language barriers—never having learnt English—and dyslexia, leading him to rely on images instead of words as a means of expression. This resulted in the well-developed visual vocabulary now present throughout his work. For him his art has always been a "bridge between himself and the outer world."

In 2009 he left Bradford for London to study painting at the Slade School of Fine Art. It was there that Qureshi realized his earlier work was too personal. His private and culture-specific iconography was alienating viewers. He thus decided to expand his practice by addressing formal artistic concerns such as materiality and form. The canvas *Another Road in the Road* (2008) was a turning point for him. The detailed pen and ink vista of railway tracks—a symbol of resettlement—is displaced from the main ground of the canvas onto the edge of its frame. Presented horizontally it can be interpreted as a sculpture, questioning the standard use of mediums and forms.

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*Another Road in the Road*, 2008,  
Pencil and rust on canvas,  
2 x 12 x 6 in.

His more recent paintings show a similar balance of formal investigation and personal expression. In the oil, spray-paint and pencil *Nothing but Light* (2013), the picture plane is divided into two halves. An electrical-pole placed in disparate scenery occupies the top half while the lower one houses a smoke cloud. They are both surrounded by a dense floral pattern, similar to those used in Quranic folios. The work defies categorization. It is not an abstract piece using form, color and line to create a composition, neither is it figurative – mimicking objects in the real world. Instead the painting hangs in-between the two, symbolic of the displacement it represents. The loaded imagery illustrates his concepts: The detailed patterns,

superimposed on top of each other until they are almost unrecognizable, represent the breakdown of conventional religious ideals in today's world. The incomplete landscapes touch upon what the artist calls the "theory of becoming," in which the whole universe and everyone in it is in a constant state of evolution. It renders concrete definitions of identity unnecessary—in time labels will transform into something else, letting one be comfortable with whom they are now.

Qureshi's meditations on the subjectivity of time and the unseen are also found in his 2011 series *Persistence of Memory*. For these the artist interviewed people asking them to describe a landscape that played a significant role in their lives. He then recreated the memory using a unique technique of carving on carbon paper—a material usually used for transferring tracings onto paper. The works are composed of white superimposed outlines of scattered scenery, buildings, maps and patterns on the

blackish-gray surface of the carbon paper. They have a sense of mystery and movement, as if we have been given a snapshot of the active process of recollection.

Although his investigation of the nonphysical is consistent, he does not stick to one specific technical formula. This dynamism is most evident in his sculptural work, where his materials run the gamut from railway tracks to stacks of chapattis (flatbread), and more recently wood.

The only sculpture included in his New York debut shares the title of the show. *In the Remains* (2013) consists of 28 oblong structures with protruding bases, covered in black faux fur. They are largely indistinct, leading to countless interpretations of what they could be – wrapped weapons, charred animal limbs or fallen hair follicles. The only common thread being that they are definitely leftovers from some cataclysmic event. Similar to all Qureshi's pieces it focuses on the scars that the ebb and flow of time leave behind, some of them visible others imperceptible.

In the Remains



Saad Qureshi in conversation  
with Sebha Mohammad,  
*Art Info*, 2013



*In The Remains*



*In The Remains* (Detail)

“COMMUNICATION,  
MANKIND’S FAILURE  
AT IT, AND WHAT THIS  
LEADS TO.”

**SEBHA MOHAMMAD: When did you decide to practice art professionally?**

**SAAD QURESHI:** While growing up in Bradford I had a strong sense of curiosity, but I was unhappy at school and unable to articulate myself through words. My art teacher recognized my frustrated ambition. She persuaded my parents to let me enroll at the Bradford College of Art, where I immediately felt at home. That’s where the journey started. I never really had the option of not becoming an artist since I was so useless at everything else and art is all I’ve known. It’s more of a responsibility than a job. I love it but the insecurities that come with it are not enjoyable.

**SM: What are some of the themes that you explore in your show “In the Remains” at Aicon Gallery?**

**SQ:** Communication, mankind’s failure at it, and what this leads to. I’m aware of the social, religious, and political implications of my work, but this does not mean I am making those particular points. It’s about sharing my sensitivity with the world. In general I find myself using words like cultural otherness, belonging, failure of communication, ruins, aftermath, entrapment to describe my work.

**SM: So many different thoughts come to mind when viewing your fabric, paint and wood sculpture “In the Remains,” 2013, from hair follicles to a charred lamb legs. Can you explain the meaning and process behind the piece?**

**SQ:** At times the impression of an artwork presents itself so powerfully that I have no option but to be dominated by the vision; only when it is complete do I understand what it is saying. Often there is so little time to get to know a work before it leaves my studio that I’m as curious as the next man.

“In the Remains” was one of those that just came to me. I was the passive partner, allowing the work to lead the way. As nerve racking as this is I do like the process and anticipation of reaching for the unknown.

I enjoy the ambiguities of “In the Remains,” I enjoy its enigmatic nature, I enjoy its physicality. It assumes a multitude of meanings. Mechanized warfare. Shadowy weapons. A forest incinerated by crossfire.

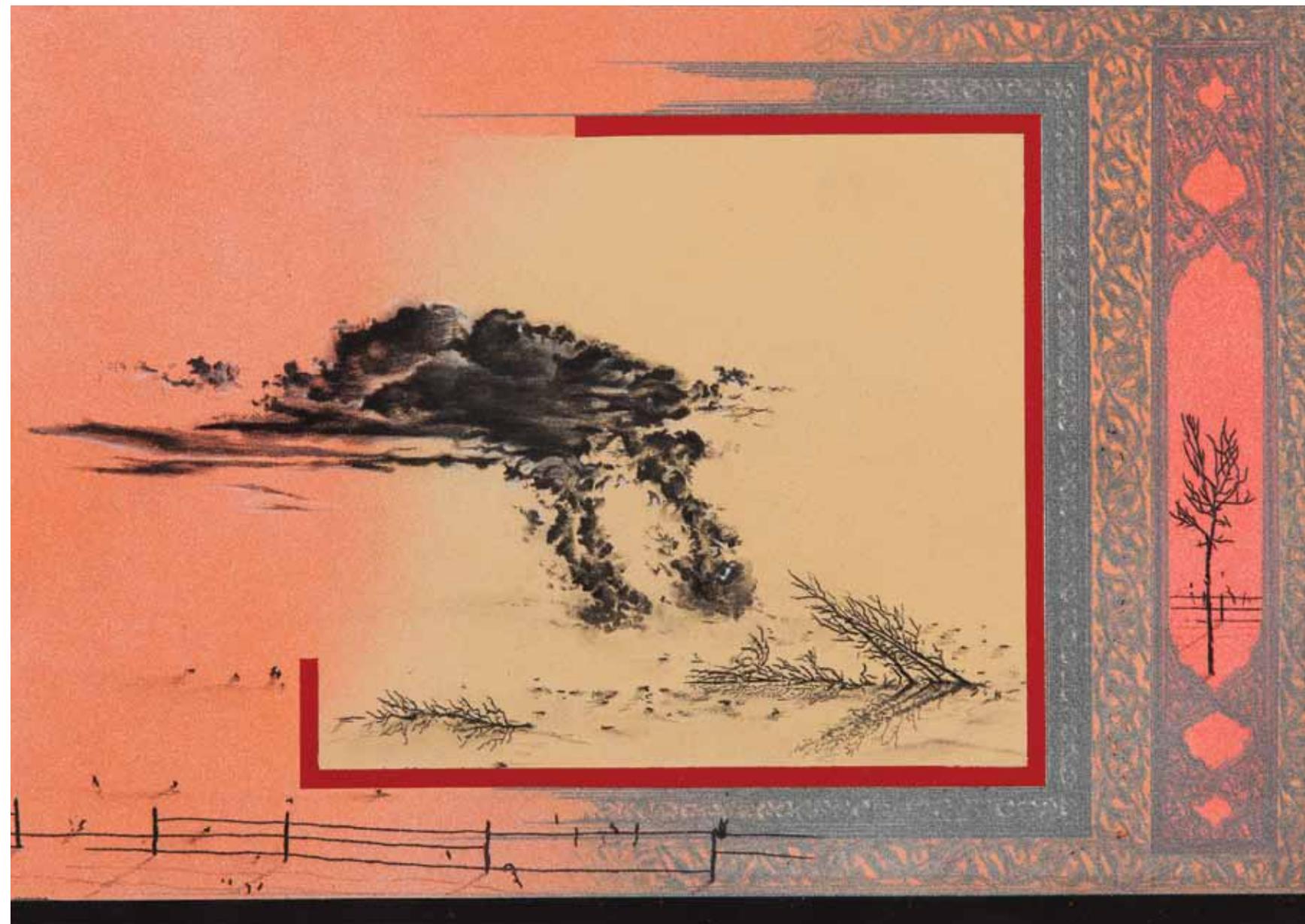
**SM: How influenced are you by your Pakistani roots and what you have referred to on your website as “twin identities?”**

**SQ:** In my student days I was explicitly exploring my Pakistani roots and cultural belonging, but I feel that this is too personal and alienating. By exploring more universal concepts I feel a healthier balance. I’m interested in how my work is developing a visual bilinguality.

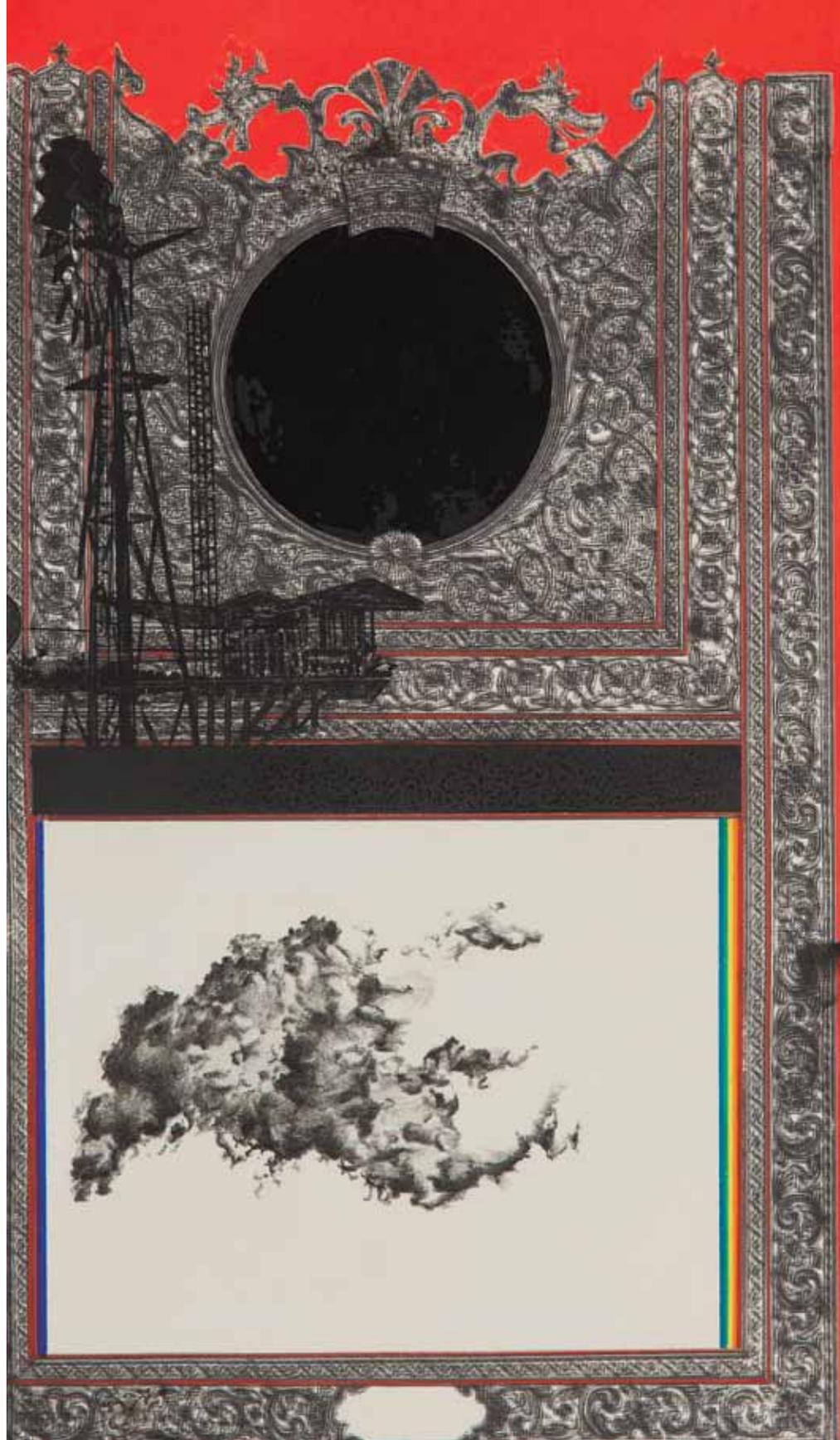
**SM: What’s next for Saad Qureshi?**

**SQ:** When I start planning ahead nothing goes according to plan. So I’m training myself to play it by ear, or rather by eye!

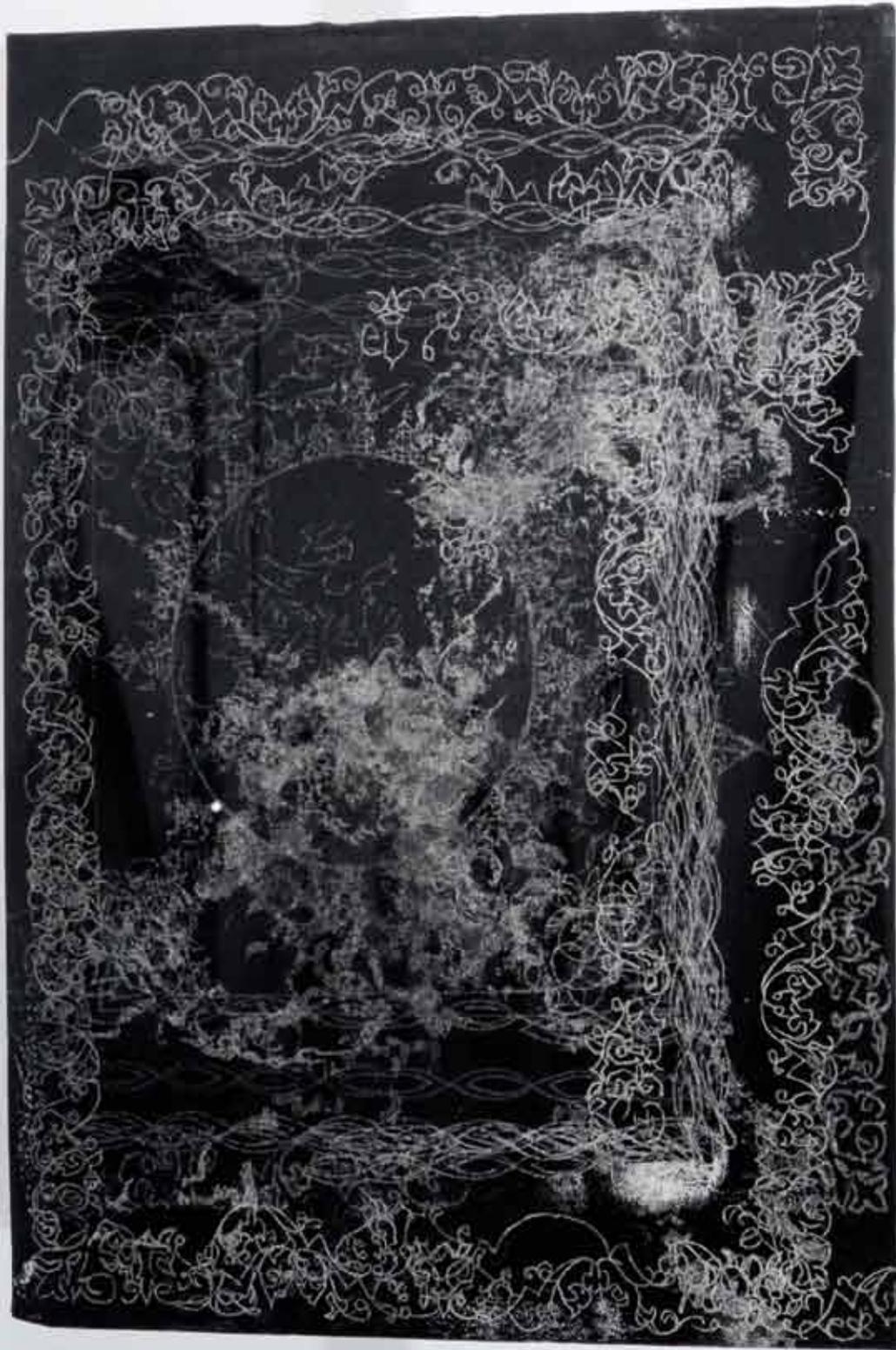
## Other Works



*In Vain*, 2013, Oil, spraypaint and wax pencil on paper, 12.5 x 17.5 in.



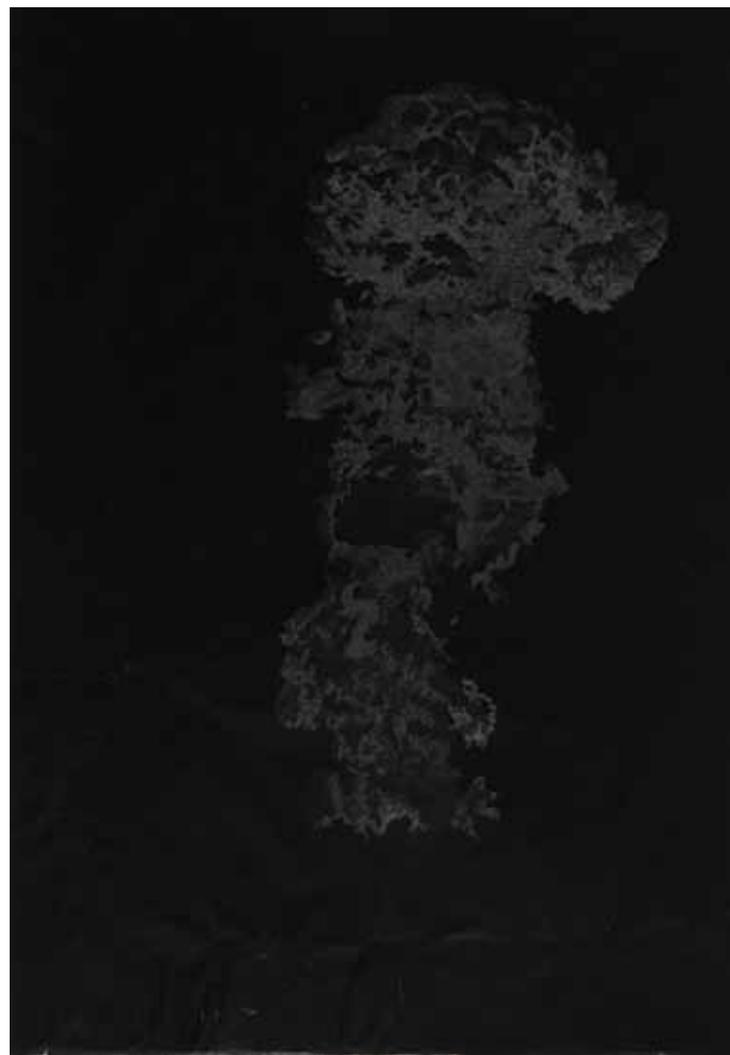
Left: *Nothing but Light*, 2013, Oil, spraypaint and wax pencil on giclee print, 17.5 x 10 in.  
This page: *Ashen*, 2013, Oil, spraypaint and wax pencil on paper, 12.5 x 17.5 in.



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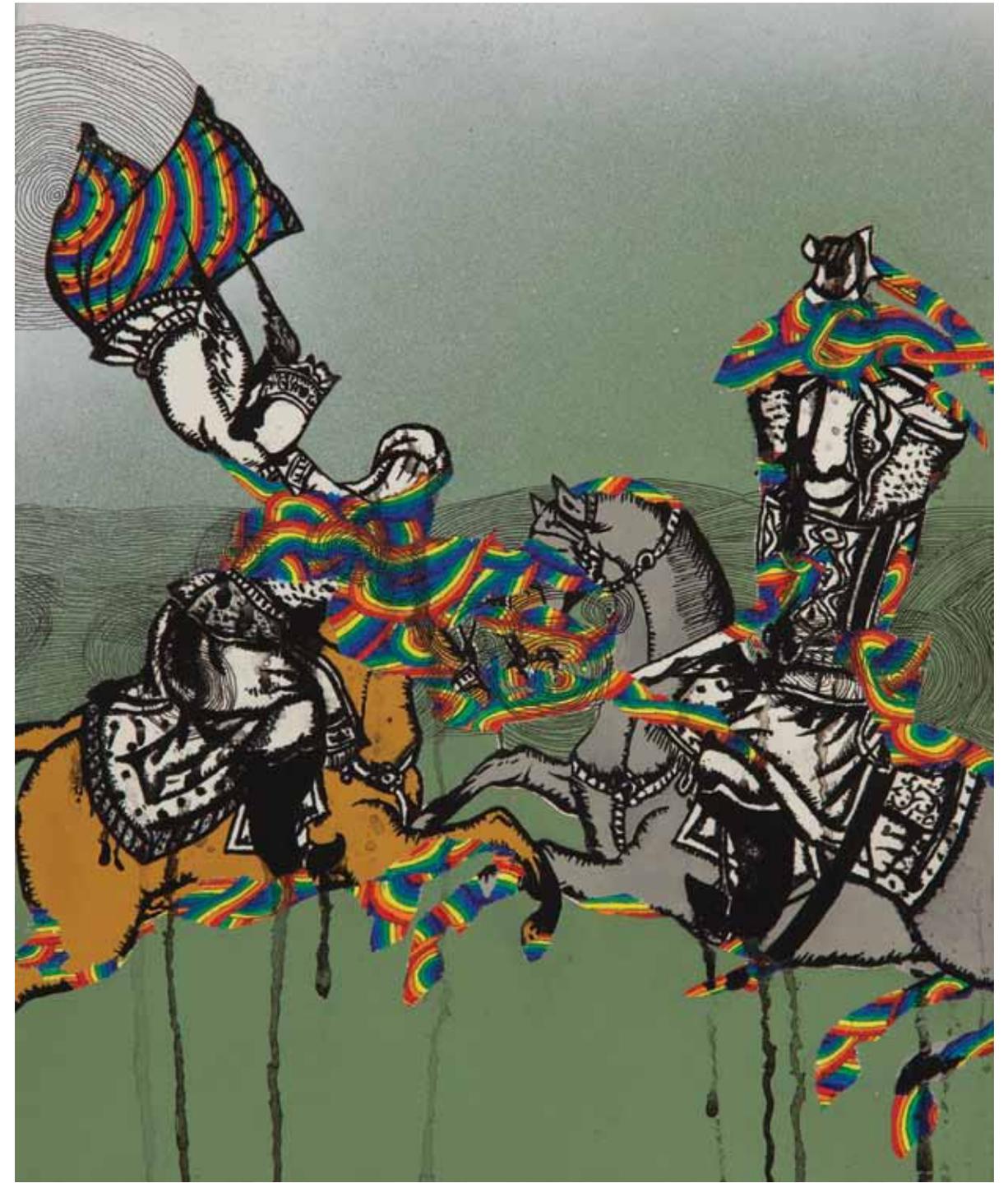
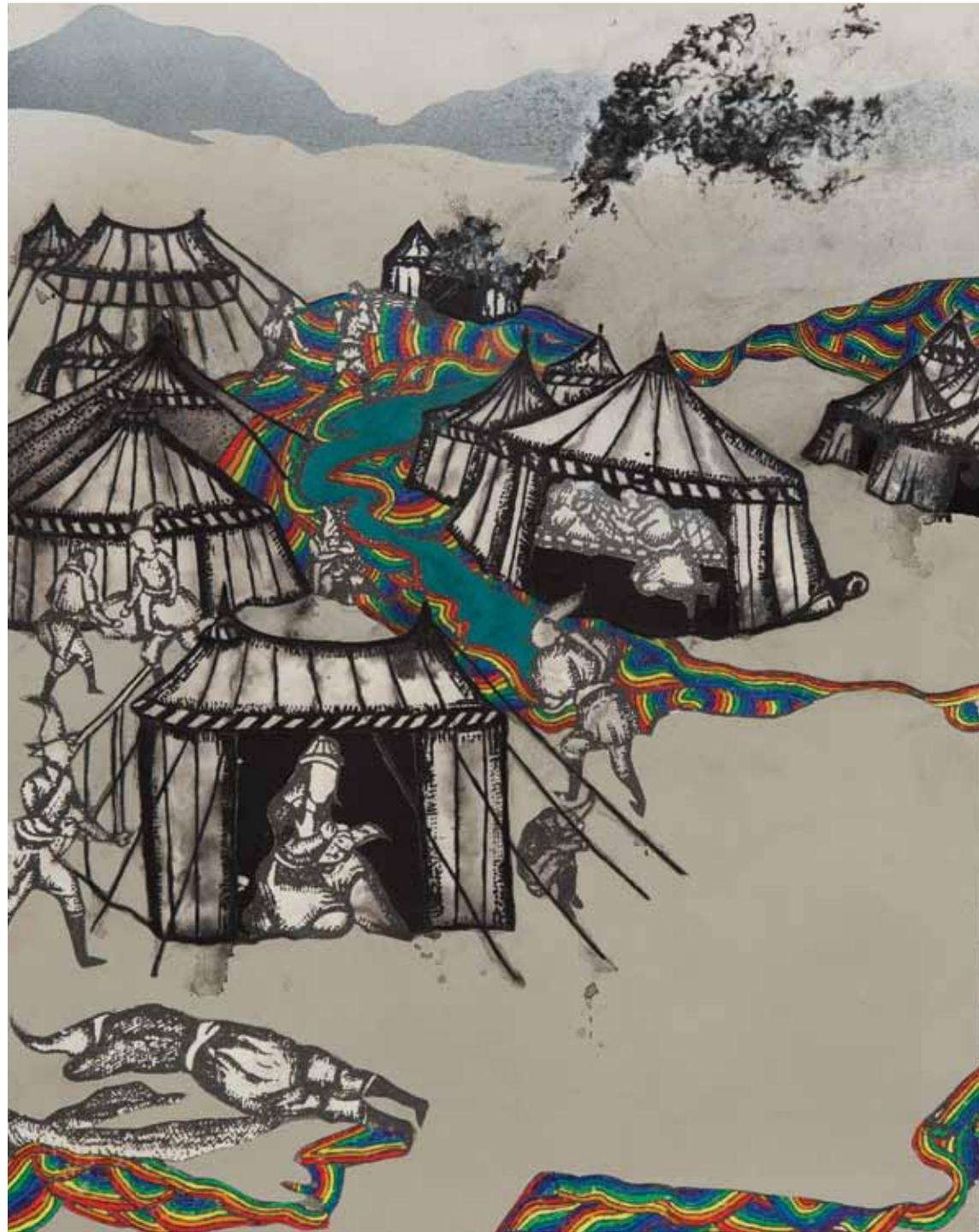


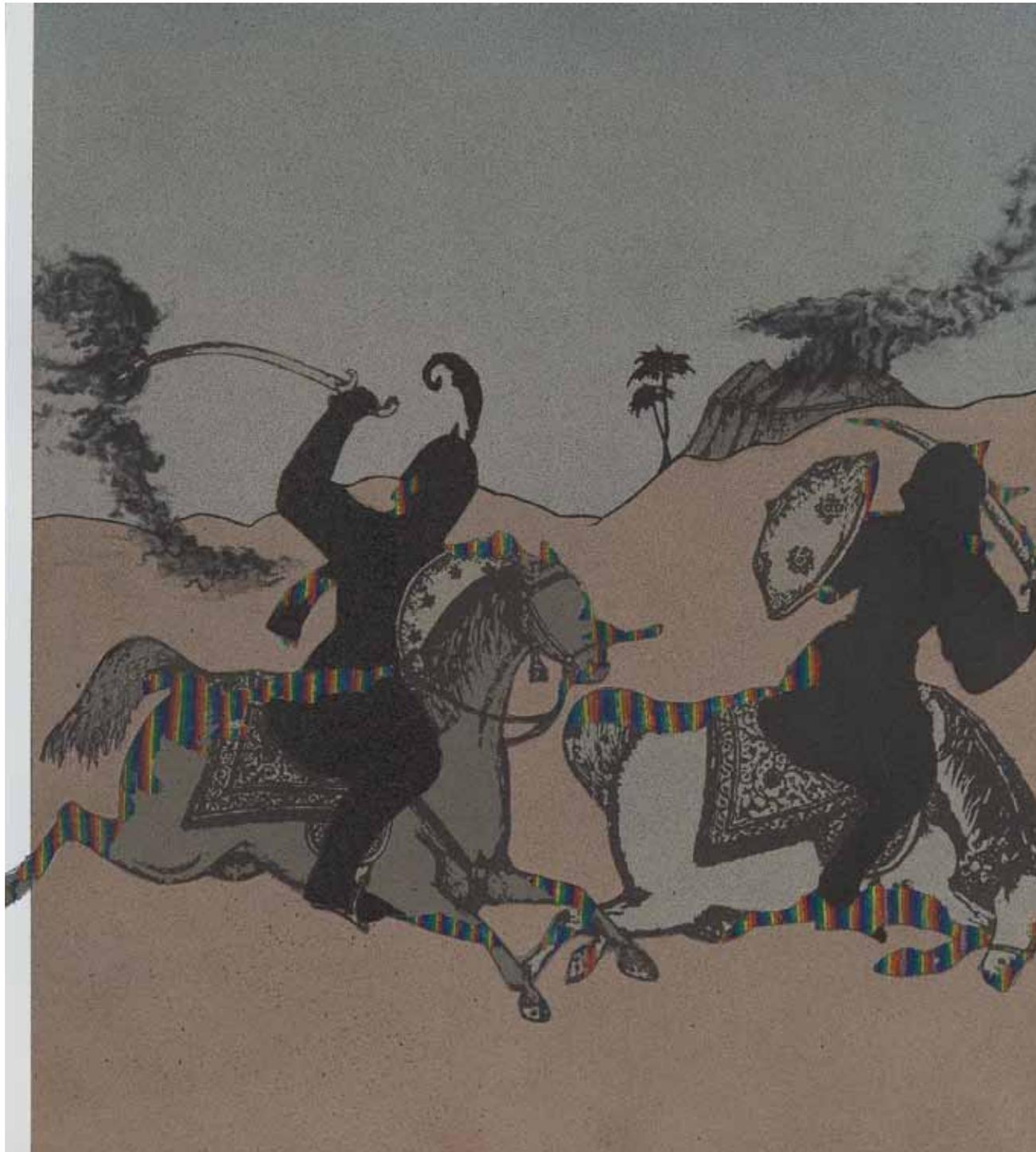
*In the Remains* (Installation View), Aicon Gallery, New York, NY.



Left: *Untitled (Persistence of Memory 4)*, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 18.5 x 15 in.  
Right: *Untitled (Persistence of Memory 3)*, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 15 x 18.5 in.

Left: *Untitled (Persistence of Memory 1)*, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 15 x 18.5 in.  
Right: *Untitled (Persistence of Memory 2)*, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 15 x 18.5 in.









This page: *Surfaces* (Detail), 2013, Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 84 in.  
Right: *Essences* (Detail), Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 78 in.





# Works

Cover: **Essences** (Detail), 2013, Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 78 in.

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Pg. 13: **In Vain**, 2013, Oil, spraypaint and wax pencil on paper, 12.5 x 17.5 in.

Pg. 14: **Nothing but Light**, 2013, Oil, spraypaint and wax pencil on giclee print, 17.5 x 10 in.

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Pg. 18 (Left): **Untitled (Persistence of Memory 4)**, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 18.5 x 15 in.

Pg. 18 (Right): **Untitled (Persistence of Memory 3)**, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 15 x 18.5 in.

Pg. 19 (Left): **Untitled (Persistence of Memory 1)**, 2013, Carving on carbon paper, 15 x 18.5 in.

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Pg. 23: **River Dies of Thirst**, 2013, Oil, spraypaint and wax pencil on paper, 17.5 x 15.5 in.

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Pgs. 28-29: **Essences**, 2013, Mixed media on canvas, 36 x 78 in.

Back Cover: **Surfaces** (Detail), Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 84 in.

# Artist Biography

## Saad Qureshi

Born in 1986

Lives and works in London and Oxford, UK

### EDUCATION

2010 The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL. MFA, Painting

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 Aicon Gallery, New York, 'In The Remains'

2012 Gazelli Art House, London. 'other crescents, other moons'

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013 Moving Museum, Dubai. 'TECTONIC'  
ArtEco Gallery, London. 'Ruins'

2012 Celeste Prize Show, Centrale Montemartini,  
Royal British Society of Sculptors, London.  
Bursary Show  
Patrick Heide Contemporary Art, London. 'Breeder'  
National Trust Lodge Park, Gloucestershire.  
'20/12 London Art Now'

Gazelli Art House, London. 'Viennafair 2012'  
Barbican Exhibition Hall. 'Creative Cities Collection  
London in 2012'  
Shizaru Mayfair. 'This is London'  
Patrick Heide Contemporary Art. HK12 Hong Kong  
Gloucester Cathedral. 'the open west'

2011 Patrick Heide Contemporary Art. 'Landscape and  
Memory'  
Patrick Heide Contemporary Art. Art Amsterdam  
Gazelli Art House London. 'Down to Earth'

2010 10 Vyner Street, London. 'Gift'  
Aicon Gallery, London. 'Disappearing in Yesterday'  
Patrick Heide Contemporary Art, London. 'Between'  
Hackney Wicked Festival, London. 'Deceit'  
Red Mansion Foundation Art Prize Show. London

2009 Aicon Gallery, London. 'Wound'  
Saatchi Gallery, London. 'Don't Raise The Bridge,  
Lower The River!'  
Westbourne Studios, London. 'Systems and Patterns'

2008 Modern Art Oxford. 'OBsessions'

2007 Beldam Gallery, Brunel University, Uxbridge. 'thirst\*'  
Fireplace Gallery, Oxford. 'spark'  
Oxford Brookes University Degree Show

2006 Royal Academy of Arts, London. Summer Exhibition

### AWARDS

2012 Celeste Prize, Rome. Sculpture Shortlist  
Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award

2011 Lecturis Award, Amsterdam. Shortlist

2009 The Red Mansion Foundation Prize

2008 Arts and Humanities Research Council.  
Postgraduate Award

2004 Oxford Brookes University Scholarship  
Spellman Walker Art Prize

### RESIDENCY

2009 BBC 2, School of Saatchi, London  
The International Art Zone, Beijing

### COLLECTIONS

The Farjam Foundation Collection  
Creative Cities Collection, Beijing  
Boston Consulting Group  
Almarkhiya Gallery, Qatar  
Various Private Collections

# Acknowledgements

## ***In the Remains***

October 24 - November 30, 2013

Saad Qureshi

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Andrew Shea (Aicon Director)

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## 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.

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