

Interwoven Dialogues: Contemporary Art from Africa and South Asia
Curated by Awam Amkpa

Exhibition November 30 – January 6, 2018

Press Preview & V.I.P. Reception: Thursday, November 30, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

Peju Alatise (b. 1975, Nigeria)
Rina Banerjee (b. 1963, India)
Omar Victor Diop (b. 1980, Senegal)
Hassan Hajjaj (b. 1961, Morocco)
Aisha Khalid (b. 1972, Pakistan)
Naiza Khan (b. 1968, Pakistan)
Rachid Koraïchi (b. 1947, Algeria)
Anil Revri (b. 1956, India)
Mithu Sen (b. 1971, India)
Rikki Wemega-Kwawu (b. 1959, Ghana)

Aicon Gallery is pleased to present *Interwoven Dialogues: Contemporary Art from Africa and South Asia*, an ambitious group show that pushes the boundaries of conventional media in art, with a set of artists from South Asia and Africa. The exhibition is anchored around two concepts – (1) an exploration of the tactile quality of fabric and other related material and how it affects image-making and, (2) the design elements that infuse African and South Asian art which are in turn informed by a broad-ranging, innovative pattern-making traditions. Textiles, as the physical manifestation of a social fabric, are a fundamental form of expression as evidenced in the works of these artists.

A few of the artists included here are inspired directly by African pattern-making traditions. It is the Yoruba textile – a resist-dyed textile traditionally made by Yoruba women in Nigeria that inspires the work of **Peju Alatise**. Alatise's interdisciplinary approach results in thoughtful pieces that have reached global audiences outside her native Nigeria. The realities of living in contemporary Nigeria juxtaposed within the realms of Yoruba mythos are the connecting threads within her oeuvre. Ghanaian artist **Rikki Wemega-Kwawu** adopts a similar strategy in his invocation of traditional African religious iconography. Through his abstraction of these symbols Wemega-Kwawu attempts to provide “a kind of visual shamanic experience for the (contemporary) viewer.”

These works share a kinship with the works of Algerian born artist **Rachid Koraïchi**. Koraïchi's work is influenced by a heritage in Sufism. Drawing on Arabic semiotics and dwelling on calligraphy as a means of interpretive transcendence, Koraïchi's work utilizes letters and signage to evoke figurative imagery and enumerate universal messages to a global audience. As NYT art critic Holland Cotter put it “Harmony in multiplicity is the message.” **Anil Revri's** work is similarly informed by his own spirituality, Sufi beliefs surrounding consciousness, and arabesque pattern design. Focusing on the exploration of infinite voids, Revri brings a calculated order to his seemingly chaotic mindscapes – a testament to his thematic focus and articulate subjectivity.



Peju Alatise, *Lost*, 18 mixed media panels, dimensions variable.



Aisha Khalid, *You appear in me, I in you*, 2015, gouache and gold leaf on paper board, 12 x 12 x 12 in

Four artists engage with identity politics in their work using textile as a prism. British-Moroccan photographer **Hassan Hajjaj's** practice since the late 80s presents colorful and engaging portraits that combine the visual vocabulary of contemporary fashion photography and pop art, as well as the studio photography tradition. The result is an intelligent commentary on the influences of tradition in the interpretations of high and low branding and the effects of global capitalism. **Omar Victor Diop's** practice as a photographer presents a similarly compelling narrative. In a series titled "Le Studio des Vanités," Diop documents his peers - a generation of young creatives in Dakar, Senegal. Through the use of portraiture, his work tries to balance years of simultaneous exotification and ghettoization of African cities, denying neither reality only presenting one entirely of his choosing.

Drawing from her experience as a Pakistani woman who grew up in a conservative household, **Aisha Khalid** tackles ideas of feminism, domesticity, and contemporary politics employing the miniature painting tradition and traditional Islamic pattern design. Khalid both criticizes and pays homage to the historical style and contemporary realities of everyday Muslims in a globalized, yet insular world. The metal garments that **Naiza Khan** crafts echo these concerns. Delicate or strong, armor or cage, Khan invites the audience to decide. What results is an enquiry into the nature of the personal and social body politic, as it is lived and felt within the artist's cultural context.

Engaging directly with the material aspects of artistic production are **Rina Banerjee's** thoughtfully-titled compositions - grotesque, monstrous and chimeric all at the same time. Known for her use of fabric, feathers, shells, and all manner of organic materials in her ornamental figures, Banerjee relishes in creating feelings of both fantasy and dread in her audiences. In a similar vein, Indian artist **Mithu Sen** delivers a masterclass in the art of playful subversion. Drawing from her own spontaneity and tendency towards free association, Sen groups together seemingly unrelated objects in her paintings, drawings, and collages in an effort to thoughtfully criticize the ways in which western and non-western audiences perceive complex ideas, such as femininity and sexuality.

It is an honor to present the work of this distinguished group of artists. Several of whom have been seen recently in major forums like Venice Biennale 2017 (Peju Alatise and Rina Banerjee), Victoria & Albert Museum Jameel Prize 2013 (Rachid Koraichi), Aga Khan Museum, Toronto solo show 2016 (Aisha Khalid), Broad Museum solos, 2013 and 2014 (Naiza Khan and Mithu Sen), and Somerset House, London solo 2017 (Hassan Hajjaj).

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