

FRAMEWORK

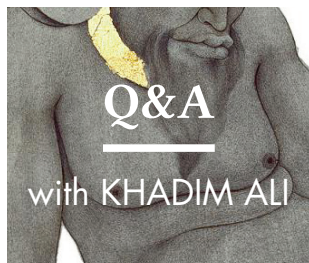
#1 | *the renewal issue*



THE
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ISSUE

1.

ARTIST PROFILE



Q&A

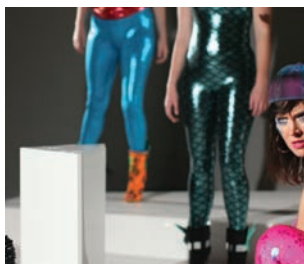
with KHADIM ALI

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REVIEW

innerouter

REVIEW

chicks on speed

FRAMEWORK

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

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Khadim Ali, *The Haunted Lotus*, 2011-12, gouache, ink and gold leaf on wasli paper, 280 x 50cm overall. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

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Q&A WITH

KHADIM ALI



COFA MASTER OF FINE ARTS CANDIDATE KHADIM ALI REVIVES THE CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION OF MINIATURE PAINTING IN HIS INTRICATE WORKS ON DISPLAY IN THE COFASPACE EXHIBITION THE HAUNTED LOTUS. ALI'S WORK REFLECTS A PERSONAL DESIRE TO RECLAIM THE MYTHICAL NARRATIVES OF THE HEROES AND DEMONS OF THE PERSIAN EPIC THE SHAHNAMEH, DEBAUCHED BY THE TALIBAN IN HIS NATIVE PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN. A MEMBER OF THE PERSECUTED HAZARA MINORITY, KHADIM ALI RENEWS THE STORIES WITH HIGHLY CHARGED PERSONAL AND POLITICAL SYMBOLISM. ALI HAS EXHIBITED AT THE 2009 VENICE BIENNALE AND AT DOCUMENTA 13 AND HAS WORK IN COLLECTIONS AROUND THE WORLD INCLUDING THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM AND THE ART GALLERY OF NSW. BEN MESSIH CAUGHT UP WITH KHADIM ALI FOR A Q&A ABOUT HIS HISTORY, INFLUENCES AND PRACTICE.

BM CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF INSIGHT INTO YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY AND HOW YOU CAME TO BE A MFA CANDIDATE AT COFA?

KA When I moved here in 2009 a friend of mine introduced me to Cross Art Projects' Jo Holder. It was Jo who really helped to get me into COFA - she introduced me to Ian Howard and Diane Losche, and it was her suggestion that I apply for a Master of Fine Arts. I received a scholarship and an APA so it was a really good opportunity to continue my studies. I wanted to do my Masters in Pakistan but [couldn't] because the situation in Pakistan is getting worse for the Hazara, so getting a scholarship was kind of a dream come true.

BM YOUR EXHIBITION THE HAUNTED LOTUS OPENS AT COFASPACE ON MARCH 25. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE THE HAUNTED LOTUS?

KA The idea of The Haunted Lotus is not new in my work. I was researching the lotus flowers at the Buddhist site of Bamiyan in Afghanistan where the Taliban destroyed two giant statues of Buddha in 2001. I went there to see the site after the destruction, all of the sculptures were

destroyed and all the paintings on the roof or on the wall were burnt. Curiously, many of the original lotus sculptures, reliefs and paintings remained. It was then that I began to delve deeper into the symbolism of the lotus: what the lotus is and why the lotus had arrived there. I thought 'how haunted they are', these things – these lotuses – are signifying how haunted the history of this place is and how the images got merged into different sects, different dynasties or different schools of thought. The Taliban in Bamiyan, did they leave those lotuses deliberately? Why didn't they destroy the lotuses? So the lotus flowers represent something hidden alive in another environment. It made me feel like I am that lotus and I felt as though I was haunted or being horrified.

BM YOUR WORKS HEAVILY FEATURE THE DEMON MOTIF. ARE THESE DEMONS PURELY EXTERNAL OR IN RESPONSE TO YOUR OWN INTERNAL DEMONS PRESENT IN YOUR INNER WORLD?

KA So when my Hazara great-grandparents fled into what was then India (prior to the partitioning of India and Pakistan in 1947) they had two books with them. Of course because they were Muslim, they had the Koran

and the other book was Shahnameh, or The Book of Kings, which was written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi in 1010 CE. The Shahnameh is a secular epic poem book, the stories and characters are fictional, but the places the author mentions are all real. There are lots of demons in the stories and at the end, the hero, Rustam is betrayed and killed by his own friend, so what survives in this story is the dark side of humanity: the demons. In 2000 I went to Afghanistan, I witnessed the Taliban calling themselves Rustam - I looked around and I found all of these demonic characters and nothing was bringing them closer to the gentleman Rustam, the hero that I had in my mind. It reminded me that this land actually killed these heroes, this land actually betrayed these heroes and now all of these demons are calling themselves Rustam, because Rustam is the symbol of heroism. I went into my own history, we are Hazara Shi'ite, in Pakistan and Afghanistan most of the population are of the belief that the Shi'ite are infidels. They call us 'non-human' and they treat us as though we are exactly that. If we really are what they claim - not human and they are killing us [the Hazara Shi'ites] and they are calling themselves Rustam, ultimately we become the demons. So from that I have this understanding that we are the demons written into the history of Afghanistan - because they were the authorities and an authority's history is his story. So now I'm just dealing with the demons and thinking, maybe, we are those demons and it's a collective self-portrait

BM CAN YOU TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT THE SHAHNAMEH AND WHY IT HAS HAD SUCH A PROFOUND IMPACT ON YOUR PRACTICE?

KA My grandfather was a Shahnameh singer so I remember when I was a kid, in those rural areas we didn't have electricity, we didn't have radio; the only source of entertainment were these stories of the culture in the Shahnameh which was brought by my Grandfather into Quetta, Pakistan. In Afghanistan's very harsh weather my grandparents had only 4 months of summer for agriculture, the other 8 months they were all trying to entertain themselves in the snow and the cold weather. Singing stories from the Shahnameh for those people - for

me - it was, the most motivating subject of my life, it was the only thing I had in my life: the story of heroes, the story of demons. I grew up listening to those stories of demons and Rustam.

BM DO YOU VIEW YOUR USE OF THE RUSTAM NARRATIVE AND THE SHAHNAMEH AS AN EFFORT TO RECLAIM YOUR OWN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE RUSTAM NARRATIVE FROM THE TALIBAN? AND DO YOU FEEL PRESSURE TO REVEAL THESE TRUTHS?

KA I'm retelling the stories, I'm not dealing with the society or with specific people, it's all to do with my history and my own self, it's a kind of counseling between myself and my history. Just trying to trace where or why we turn into demons? I've never thought about the public or other factors of my works like 'what are the impacts of these artworks on the audience of these works' - 'What are the impacts of these works on my own self' is far more important to me.

BM YOU HAVE STUDIED IN MURAL PAINTING AND TRADITIONAL MINIATURE PAINTING, THESE TWO PRACTICES SEEM ALMOST JUXTAPOSED - DO YOU VIEW YOUR PRACTICE AS A SYNTHESIS OF THESE SCHOOLS, OR DO YOU VIEW YOURSELF AS STRICTLY A MINIATURIST WITH A BACKGROUND IN MURAL PAINTING?

KA I wasn't a mural painter by choice. When I was a refugee in Iran I was doing it for my survival. I went to an art class and my teacher found my work stronger than the other student's work, he booked me for his own projects and I studied painting murals with him. The murals were all Islamic propaganda: images of the Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran and a girl praying as the door of heaven opened, along with images of Rustam with verses from the Koran for example. They were really all those things that I didn't want to do but was trapped into doing.



Khadim Ali, *The Haunted Lotus*, 2011-12, gouache, ink and gold leaf on wasli paper, 280 x 50cm overall. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

My first encounter with the art world were the miniature paintings in the Shahnameh, I grew up looking at them, I grew up looking at that character of the hero in the illustrations. When I got back from Iran to Pakistan I got a scholarship at the National College of Arts (Lahore, Pakistan) and I found out they did miniature painting and then I thought, well I'm made for miniature painting so I went into miniature painting there. Mural painting doesn't have anything to complement miniature painting; mural painting was for my survival, I didn't like painting murals, [although] I enjoyed finishing them, looking at the mural from the far distance, it gave me the feeling that my inner world has a projection that is de-scaling other people.

BM WHAT DOES THE REST OF 2013 LOOK LIKE FOR KHADIM ALI?

KA My graduation show, The Haunted Lotus, will be at COFAspace from March 26-30, this is my most important show, and will feature even bigger works than I exhibited at dOCUMENTA 13 (Kassel, Germany, 2012) - The Haunted Lotus is the biggest show of my life. Shortly after, I have work in a show at Casula Powerhouse (Landlock, 30 March – 12 May), and in April I am going to the Guggenheim in New York to conduct a workshop for teachers. I'm going to the Museum of Islamic Art (Doha, Qatar) in May to conduct workshops over two weeks. I'm also returning to Afghanistan to conduct workshops in June and July. I have been invited to San Art in Vietnam to do a one-month residency and I have a shows in Taipei and at Hong Kong Art Centre in November and will also working on a project to show in the Project Space at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in March 2014.

**KHADIM ALI'S EXHIBITION
THE HAUNTED LOTUS WAS AT
COFASPACE BETWEEN MARCH 26
AND MARCH 30, 2013. LANDLOCK
IS ON SHOW UNTIL 12 MAY AT
CASULA POWERHOUSE, 1 CASULA
POWERHOUSE ROAD, CASULA.**



stimulate your system

WORDS by *BOO PATRICKA*

CHICKS ON SPEED INTRODUCE SCREAM WITH A HEARTBEAT; THE INSISTENT THROB OF A BASS DRUM REVERBERATING THROUGHOUT WOOLLOOMOOLOO'S WHARVES. STEPPING PAST THE SMOKING THROGS, I PASS THROUGH THE PARTED LIPS OF A GLOSSY MOUTH, LEGS SCRAPING AGAINST ITS ROUGH CARDBOARD INCISION. BEYOND THIS, THE GALLERY IS A VISTA OF MOLTEN, MOVING VIDEO SCREENS WITH THE ARTISTS LATER TAKING CENTRE STAGE AMIDST A JUMBLE OF UPENDED WHITE BLOCKS, FLUORESCED BY WAVING LIGHT STICKS.

The music pulsates with restless energy; riot-grrrl revolutionary rants punctuated with chanted repetition. The Chicks on Speed duo enter the space as futuristic charlatans, bizarre glitter body paint offsetting their elaborate hairstyles and neon, origami-inspired clothes. They are joined onstage by the plastic-encased Lycra Ladies, whose frenetic and unrepressed dancing complemented the animalism of their songs. Comprised of members Alex Murray-Leslie and Melissa Logan, Chicks on Speed is a band, record label, design team and performance troupe condensed. Their work is an example of internationally realised, multidisciplinary practice.

Despite the 80s club aesthetic, the performance is more akin to a tribal ceremony than a rave. One of the artists presents a politically engaged monologue through a cartoonish, head-mounted voice changing device in a manner more akin to an occult preacher than a singer. The specifics are lost on me - the substantial ambient sound present in the gallery rendering her words indistinct. While this auditory occlusion isn't substantial enough to alter the essence of the performance, it does lessen the political pertinence and apparent relevance.

The exhibition space functions as a true extension of the artists; the folds of their costumes mirrored in the draped, technicolour swathes and painted dashes adorning the gallery. The group's most famous piece, a stiletto strung with guitar strings, a.k.a. the E-Shoe, is presented in a

glass-enclosed plinth, the only example of a professional 'white cube' installation within the gallery. Behind this plinth the group is revealed standing side-by-side with each person holding the ankle to her left, playing the shoes as instruments. Even further beyond stands a darkened room containing a nude Kate Moss modelling the E-Shoe and accompanied by a video of a banana, which peels and unpeels in response to vocal stimulation. It is a bizarre sound visualisation. Several other Warhol-esque bananas appear in the group's collages, presented alongside pixelated imagery, evocative of 80s cybertrash culture.

The group's style is an intriguing hybrid of recycled, playful pop-imagery, combined with surprisingly sophisticated sensory technology. On one wall of the exhibition sits a tapestry woven from glitter thread, forming the image of an eye. Moving your hands over the work triggers various sounds, which are relayed through two speakers, a delightfully tactile method of sound production.

One of the dangers of sensory media is the tendency for it to go unexplored, and for the full experience of works to remain unrealised. If approached with curiosity, SCREAM is an energising experience and an ideal remedy for the 'disinterested' mode of art viewing, endemic to gallery spaces.



01

Chicks On Speed's
exhibition, SCREAM, will
 be at ARTSPACE until the
 21st of April.



02

01 Chicks on Speed, production image for *SCREAM*, courtesy of Chicks on Speed and Kathrin Kroenthaler

02 Chicks on Speed, Lycra Ladies and Billy Lime, *U is for Utopia*, 2013, production still, courtesy of the artists, collaborators and Artspace Sydney

innerouter

WORDS by *GEORGIA HOBBS*

EARLIER THIS MONTH SARAH COTTIER GALLERY RE-OPENED ITS DOORS AT A NEW LOCATION IN PADDINGTON. THIS NEW GALLERY SPACE WAS FETED APPROPRIATELY BY THE OPENING OF A SHOW BY SYDNEY-BASED ARTIST JAMIE NORTH, WHOSE WORK ADDRESSES THE THEMES OF REGENERATION AND REVITALISATION.

A photographer and sculptor, North's practice is concerned with documenting ecological systems and examining the relationship between the organic and the inorganic. An extension of this theme, North's most recent show at Sarah Cottier, entitled *innerouter*, is comprised of five cylindrical concrete sculptures, in which plant species native to the Sydney area are found supported inside (one even houses several fish!)

These 'living sculptures' are best suited to the outdoors, ideally located in a protected area with ample sunlight, and once developed will require little attention. However, in the gallery they survive in a small white room, with plenty of natural light and are tended to daily. The works are grouped together in a pyramidal structure, ascending in order of height, giving them a commanding presence and allowing the ideas implicit in them to resonate.

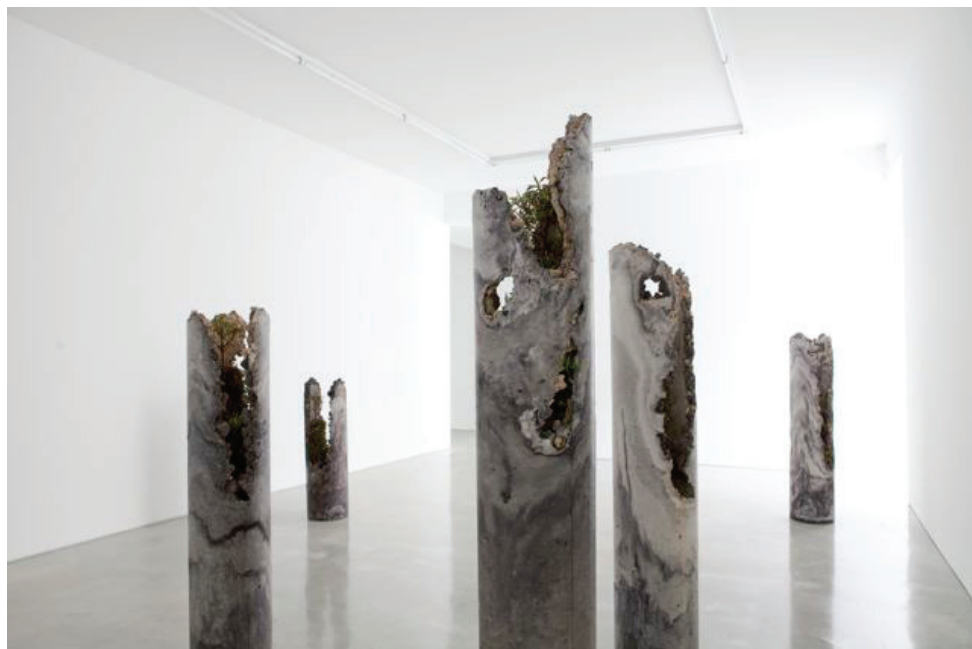
The sculptures explore the dichotomy between the inorganic and the organic; just as the plant species are native to the Sydney area, the concrete too is made up of aggregates of cement, steel slag and coal ash taken from the local industrial sites of Wollongong and Lake Macquarie. By reuniting local plants with these industrial areas, North references the destruction of the environment caused by urbanisation and industrialisation. However, where historically the environment has lost out, this will not be the case here. A tough negotiation between the living and non-living will ensue, but the plants will continue to grow and eventually there will be an assertion of nature over the man-made.

While the work undeniably addresses the ugly issues of environmental destruction, the juxtaposing elements in the sculptures are striking. The pouring technique and oxidation of the concrete has resulted in a stunning marbling effect on the outer shell. This patterned grey is contrasted dramatically by the vibrant greens and textures of the plants in the centre.

Far from the issues of environmental destruction, one leaves with a reassuring impression of beauty and renewal.

01 *flume*, 2013, fibre reinforced concrete (portland cement, coal ash, steel slag, iron oxide), plant species include: *Ficus rubiginosa* (Port Jackson Fig) and *Pyrrosia rupestris* (Rock Felt Fern), *Psilotum nudum* (Fork Fern) 180 x 30 x 30cm

02 *Chicks on Speed, Lycra Ladies and Billy Lime, U is for Utopia*, 2013, production still, courtesy of the artists, collaborators and Artspace Sydney



**innerouter IS ON SHOW
UNTIL 28 MARCH AT
SARAH COTTIER GALLERY,
23 ROYLSTON STREET
PADDINGTON.**



FRAMEWORK