

## *Delusional Perceptions*

Waseem Ahmed

November 30, 2023 - February 3, 2024

Opening reception: November 30 from 17h30 until 20h00 in the presence of the artist.

**Waseem Ahmed** (b. 1976, Hyderabad), one of Pakistan's leading contemporary miniature artists debuts new work this November at GOWEN Geneva. Proudly marking ten years since the artist's first solo presentation at the gallery, this latest exhibition includes never-before-seen paintings as well as previous works which offer an insight into Waseem's unique artistic exploration over the course of the past seven years.



Waseem Ahmed in his studio in Lahore, Pakistan



Raised in an immigrant Muhajir family who, due to their Muslim ethnicity migrated from India after Partition in 1947 to settle in the newly independent state of Pakistan, Waseem's body of work garners deep, personal histories, as well as addressing complex social, political, and cultural contentions. In *Delusional Perceptions*, the artist relates the past, revisiting generational heritage while bringing contemporary topics to the fore. One of several South Asian artists belonging to the neo-miniature movement who use tradition as a means towards innovation, Waseem Ahmed devises genuine, experimental approaches, transcending conventional miniature techniques, such as gouache and gold and silver leaf on wasli paper. Coloured, dry pigment and other alternative materials are incorporated to create finely rendered small- and large-scale works. In the custom of the genre, tea-stained paper gives subtle layers of colour, often applied as spattered patterns.

The artist's rich vocabulary commonly borrows from mythology, theology or Eastern and Western history and the history of art, seeking to bridge the practice of art and the turbulence of the world. Iconographic imagery – of winged or haloed vanquishers brandishing swords, demons, sacred animals, or hybrid figures camouflaged against botanical backgrounds – constructs multiple layers of meaning, extending beyond the constraints of geography, nationality, and identity. His complex visuals, frequently decorated with foliage or calligraphic forms conceptually challenge limits that embody a political, religious, and cultural distance while reflecting on unity and common legacy.

Waseem's latest works from his ongoing *Invisible border* series (2016-2023) outwardly address area boundaries and refer specifically to the plight of refugees. In some works, sanguine fissures cut across the paper's surface, parting generic lands set against opulent colours which coexist with violent events from the past. As with the partitioning of land, lines are forged, south to north, east to west, corner to corner, to which apposite realities of human migration, displacement, identity loss and of the unknown are tethered. Such lines are an apt reminder of global, unabating religious and ethnic divisions in modern times. Other new works shown in the current exhibition depict anonymous protagonists, silhouetted against backgrounds composed of architectural elements or marbled landscapes, and in which a reflection upon human nature in general prompts questions on brutality as an inescapable trait of humanity, the identity of heroes and their proponents.

With originality, and through a singular visual practice, Waseem Ahmed elaborates a centuries-old art form to express the gravity of human predicament and experience.

Around twenty works are included in the exhibition.





Waseem Ahmed (Pakistan, 1976)  
*Invisible border (series)*, 2023  
 Dry pigment colour, gold leaf, tea stain on Archival handmade Wasli paper  
 34.7 x 25.5 cm  
 13.7 x 10 in  
 WA 00224



Waseem Ahmed (Pakistan, 1976)  
*Invisible border (series)*, 2022  
 Dry pigment colour, silver leaf, tea stain on Archival handmade Wasli paper  
 33.3 x 23.7 cm  
 13.1 x 9.3 in  
 WA 00220



Waseem Ahmed (Pakistan, 1976)  
*Untitled*, 2023  
 Dry pigment colour, gold leaf, tea stain on Archival handmade Wasli paper  
 148 x 101 cm  
 58.3 x 39.8 in  
 WA 00222

**Waseem Ahmed** was born in Hyderabad, Pakistan in 1976 and attended the National College of Arts Lahore in Pakistan. He received his bachelors in Fine Arts with Honors from the Department of Miniature Painting in 2000. He has exhibited extensively in Pakistan as well as internationally, including a solo exhibition at the Asian Art Museum, Berlin (2014/2015), the Katmandu Triennale (2017) and the Karachi Biennale (2019). Gowen Contemporary, who is the sole representative gallery of the artist in Europe since 2010, has held exhibitions by Ahmed in 2010, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018-2019 and 2020. Ahmed's work is included in the permanent collections of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin; The British Museum, London; the Virginia Whiles Collection, UK; the Anupam Poddar Collection, India; the D. Daskalopoulos Collection, Switzerland; the Jerome and Ellen Stern Collection, USA, among others. He was the first artist-in-residence at the Asian Art Museum in Berlin, participating in the Humboldt Lab project (2014-2015). The latter included a retrospective curated by Martina Stoye. He was nominated for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2017) and the Jameel Prize (2011-2012). Since 2017, he has been appointed as Nominator for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize. Ahmed lives and works in Lahore.



Waseem Ahmed (Pakistan, 1976)  
*Untitled* (detail), 2023  
Dry pigment colour, silver leaf, tea stain on Archival handmade Wasli paper  
178.5 x 100 cm  
70.3 x 39.4 in  
WA 00223

