

Press release

Imran Qureshi

Homecoming

27 April—31 May 2023
Opening Thursday 27 April 2023, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Imran Qureshi, *Other Side Story*, 2023
Gouache et feuille d'or sur papier wasli. 35.3 x 28.4 cm (13.9 x 11.18 in)

In the exhibition *Homecoming*, Imran Qureshi presents the most recent iteration of his miniature painting practice. Mesmerising landscapes, which sometimes hint at a human presence, will be on view, poised between refined technique and an ever-growing sense of artistic freedom, which is palpable in the new paintings. They will be accompanied by works in which fragments of intricate landscapes in the style and palette of the artist's miniature paintings are woven into map-like compositions,

reworking past motifs in what Imran Qureshi describes as his artistic 'look back at my own journey' through the genre.

Trained in his native Pakistan in the exacting craft of miniature painting, which emerged in the court of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century, Imran Qureshi's pioneering practice constantly confronts the traditional artform with the contemporary contexts. The highly

symbolic scenes he depicts bring out the frail beauty of the natural world in a comment on current environmental and political threats. Exploring the scars left on the landscape by such threats, the artist retraces past motifs throughout the exhibition, including the missile that was emblematic of his miniature paintings from the turn of the 21st century. Disarmed through its incongruous beauty, the weapon is here wrapped in forests of vines and briar as if gradually being reclaimed by nature.

Alongside the more familiar miniature paintings, the exhibition presents deconstructed works in which fragments of landscapes float across the surface of Imran Qureshi's characteristic handmade *wasli* paper, which he leaves partly bare. An uprooted tree fallen on its side represents the changing landscapes of our ecologically fragile world. Dry-transferred dots recall targets as seen on missile guidance systems, which, in the context of 21st-century conflicts, have become an all too familiar lens through which to see the world. Stitch-like lines, meanwhile, resemble geographical partitions on a map, while also evoking surgical sutures, as if the fabric of the landscape had been cut and sewn back together in a metaphor for the unresolved conflicts of our politically and environmentally unstable times.

'When I was making these paintings', says the artist, 'the autumn season was just finishing, and spring was coming.' This sense of endings and beginnings is reflected in the



Imran Qureshi, *Threatened*, 2023
Gouache et feuille d'or sur papier wasli. 29.72 x 22.1 cm (11.7 x 8.7 in)

rich transitional colours that characterise the works in the exhibition. In one miniature painting, a mass of ochre leaves is raked, like at the end of autumn, to the centre of a field of newly blossoming flowers. Elsewhere, the warm yellow of the earth references the colour used in the long tradition of bold-hued miniature painting made in the hills of Basohli, in India. Of his signature perylene maroon, meanwhile, the artist says, 'whenever I was mixing it or washing my brush, if it was on my hand and I was cleaning it off, or when it was draining out of the sink, it looked so real – like blood'. Fine, ribbon-like strips of this evocative red grow from the ground and encircle the tree trunks like veins carrying nature's vital essence. Rooted in the tonal sensibility of traditional miniature painting, Imran Qureshi's placement of these vibrant colours side by side animates the surfaces of the works.

The artist qualifies himself as 'intrigued by accident'. The preciousness of his new miniature paintings is tempered with spontaneity in a delicate balance between intricacy and artistic liberty. Imran Qureshi has always confined his application of gold leaf to the borders of his miniature paintings, but here, for the first time, a turbulent burst of gold dust finds its way into the wind-battered foliage. As dragonflies swarm, dashed lines cover the surfaces of several works like rainstorms. These lines, which miniature painters make around the edges of the paper to test their brush or pen, would typically be covered in the final work, but Imran Qureshi leaves them visible, making the act of painting an essential component of the



Imran Qureshi, *Easy Cutting*, 2023
Gouache et feuille d'or sur papier wasli
35.6 x 27.5 cm (14.02 x 10.83 in)

finished piece. As a final layer in some works, a splattering of deep red tamed with a fine brush into intricate flower forms cements the sense of agitated movement. This unpredictable gesture offsets the precise nature of the works with an element of chance and risk.

Creating a dialogue between the tradition of miniature painting and the contemporary landscape has always been central to Imran Qureshi's practice. Synecdochic shirts and richly-coloured ovals replace the figures often at the centre of Mughal miniature painting. In the artist's distinctive geometric visual language, they are a 'symbolic representation of personalities', which, he says, 'could be me, could be someone else'. In some of the works on view, the artist paints landscapes-within-landscapes, which he refers to as 'patches': a nod to the custom of later 'interventions' to an older Mughal miniature painting that 'can show another side of the same landscape'. The exaggerated crescent of the horizon line at the heart of several of the works, meanwhile, traditionally symbolises the globe seen from afar, bringing together micro- and macroscopic perspectives of the world within the same image.

These far-reaching, compound modes of representation allow the artist to make universal observations within paradoxically small works. As meticulous brushwork and rich materiality meet with gestural mark-making and flowing freehand ornamentation, *Homecoming* unites tradition and freedom, order and disorder, to show the contradicting enchantment and foreboding of a world in which beauty and abundance coexist with conflict and environmental disasters. Yet, as the tumbling wildflowers and half-tamed fields take over, each of these disruptive landscapes is pacified by the hope that, in the end, nature will prevail.



Imran Qureshi

About the artist

Born in Hyderabad, Pakistan, Imran Qureshi lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan. He studied miniature painting at the National College of Arts in Lahore, where he now teaches the discipline. Considered one of Pakistan's most important artists, he has received international recognition for his site-specific installations that respond to architectural space, referencing the historical or political significance of the buildings that contain them. These include *Blessings Upon the Land of My Love*, created in 2011 for the Sharjah Biennial, and *They Shimmer Still*, created for the Biennale of Sydney in 2012.

In 2013, he created a large-scale, site-specific work for The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Roof Garden Commission in New York. The same year he was awarded the Deutsche Bank's Artist of the Year and received his first solo exhibition in Europe at the Deutsche Bank Kunsthalle in Berlin. The artist also participated in the Nuit Blanche in Paris in 2014 with installations at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève and on the Quai d'Austerlitz. His work has since been shown in numerous solo exhibitions, including at the Barbican Centre, London (2016) and Kunsten Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg, Denmark (2016). He has also realised site-specific projects at the Washington National Cathedral, Washington, D.C. (2018) and Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (2018), among others.

Imran Qureshi's work is part of important international collections including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; British Museum, London; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; and National Art Gallery, Islamabad.

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