

OUT OF THE BLUE

My main area of study during my undergraduate was Greek and Roman art history, and my subsequent work has been heavily influenced by a Classical approach to figurative art. But it wasn't until last year that I was able to travel to Greece myself. My time there affected me deeply, and these paintings are a result of that journey.

During my time there I began seeing Greece as the inception site of what we believe to be the beginning of Western Civilization, but also as a country that today is a locational gateway to Europe for the influx of refugees from the East. I like to experiment with the kinds of visual vocabulary that can describe Islam (and Pakistan in particular), so both the historical and contemporary significance of Greece became a profound place of departure for my work.

I haven't seen blue being quite as blue anywhere else in the world, and the color became an obvious access point, as you will see in most of the pieces. I have borrowed the language of Greek religious icons for the Silent Icons against the silver backgrounds, as well as the emphasized the idea of the ideal, classical statuary in my approach to most of the figures in the show (this has as much to do with body-dysmorphia as with classical statuary to be honest.)

The trees paintings were inspired by the technique of mosaic tiles that are the main decorative element in Ancient Grecian sites. A collection of discreet but related color marks were how I thought that technique could be transferred to onto canvas.

In considering concepts as abstract as civilizational divides, I began considering my own Pakistani relationship to civilizational identity, which is when I began making the portraits of Jinnah. I was always interested in the fact that most of our images of the founding father were from his last years, when his health was failing and his body wraith-like. The fact that the image of the Quaid we venerate was of man in a dying body always struck me.

Ancient Greece's presence in the lands that are now Pakistan is not an obscure one. My parents own a collection of maps, and the one I was most fascinated with while growing up was a rather small Ptolemaic map that showed Alexander the Great's route through modern-day Pakistan. It is based on these maps that I made Greek Line #1 and #2, which trace Alexander's route down from the mountains through the plains and finally along the coast of Makran. The gold and silver leaf in this case becomes both an indicator of land/sea and – though the binary is ultimately meaningless- east/west.

The thorns have been a long-standing theme in most of the work, and I use them here for their immediate references to delicacy, protection, religious iconography and their embodiment of beauty and danger.

Thank you for your time.

Komail Aijazuddin, Feb 2017