



# KIRCHIYAAN

MAHA SIDDIQUI-TURNER

CATALOG

the chiaroscuro gallery





Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Kirchiyaan* at The Chiaroscuro Gallery, New York, opening May 24, 2015. Curated by Muhammad Babar Suleman and organized with the support of Ambreen Zia, Alex Tosti, Lucy Matchett, Juno Liu, Gabriela Bonomo, Joe Loper, Chris Prentice and Nicholas Fortugno.

Nastaleeq Calligraphy by Nour Chamoun.

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Artworks titled by Maha-Siddiqui, in Urdu, are noted with their original titles first (in Urdu script as well as phonetic respelling), followed by established English titles.



The Chiaroscuro Gallery is pleased to present Kirchiyaan ('Shards'), a series of new paintings by Pakistani-American artist Maha Siddiqui-Turner in what will be her debut solo exhibition at the gallery. Prior to the exhibition at the gallery, the artist participated in a residency at Mana Contemporary in her hometown, Lahore, during which she created all new works.

Siddiqui-Turner specializes in the portrayal of recognizable figures immersed in abstract compositions. Concentrating on her Pakistani past within the context of her western life, this bi-cultural artist merges traditional subcontinent miniatures with entirely emotional landscapes that are allegorical of her position at the intersection of the East and West.

Predominantly using a darkly rich but versatile color palette, Siddiqui-Turner alternates between painting with vivid detail and intentionally broad strokes to juxtapose the conceptual and visual complexity with more simpler representation, striving to create duality in not only the content but within the relationship that viewers have with the interpretative. As a watercolorist, the artist explores the dynamic nature and dual properties of the medium itself to shape the fluidity in her work.

In this highly narrative new series, Siddiqui-Turner views the tension between the East and West as a metaphor for bigger issues of polarity. Situating the feminine within the religious, the sensory within the strategic or the individual within the systematic, Siddiqui Turner highlights even as she re-frames modern concerns. Celebrations turn dark, snakes lord over triumphs and explosives fly with butterflies in the artist's seamless integration of the macabre with the joyful. This chaotic yet inevitable co-existence brought upon by the imposition of one on the other is what the artist ultimately aims to convey about the state of the individual and the societal today. And yet, the eye wanders to an unassuming self-portrait that erodes the self in question or to the singularly unambiguous cruelty in a depiction of one of Pakistan's deadliest terrorist attacks, monolithic works within a series of contradicting absolutes. Ultimately, the primary narrative in Siddiqui-Turner's work is the, oft-visible but always present, violence that defies a whole and reduces what remains to just shards.



## کھپتلیاں

Kathputliyaan  
Marionettes (2015)  
watercolor on paper

14" X 11"  
USD 200

Women have featured as the subject of paintings for centuries, if perhaps less so in Islamic art. Here, Siddiqui-Turner depicts a diversity of feminine performances and presents them as Marionettes (string puppets) orchestrated by a puppeteer. But, as with most of her subversive works, the obvious meaning of the painting is challenged by a contradiction: the hands of the puppeteer have strings tying them upwards as well suggesting a grander scheme at work.





## رقصِ روشنی

Raqs-e-Roshni  
*Dance of Light* (2015)  
watercolor and spray on paper

10" X 8"  
USD 300

In the past, Siddiqui-Turner has spent multiple summers in Thailand and is well acquainted with light festivals. Families and children are seen participating in festivities here and the mood seems to be one of joy, merriment and celebration. Compared to depictions of Pakistan and New York in her paintings, the tonal and emotional overtones here seem a world away- like those of a fleeting but cherished memory.



# یادیں

*Yaadein*

*Memories (2015)*

watercolor and sharpie on paper

13" X 10"

USD 100

Space and time become critically important in artwork depicting states and change. The geographical binary of two-worlds, while present, is not as apparent here as a time-based landscape of the past and present. Modern skyscrapers and joyous human forms are set on a highway made of Urdu language alphabet. A seemingly anachronistic tree situates the latter as a lasting remnant of the past.



ماں

*Maan*  
*Mother (2015)*  
tempera, glitter, watercolor on paper

13" X 10"  
USD 200

Mothers and, especially the pieta in biblical art, are common subjects for artists. Siddiqui-Turner never knew her own mother (who passed away in childbirth) and does not have children. Flamboyantly childlike in her choice of visual elements here, she creates a lurid nursery room where even the world outside seen in the windows shares the same saccharine sensibility. Perhaps it is an indication of how far behind mothers can leave their own world to completely immerse in that of their children. Perhaps it defiantly reclaims a piece of childhood that never was.



خودی

*Khudi*  
*Ego (2015)*  
watercolor and pen on paper

13" X 10"  
USD 200

Pakistan is a historically community-oriented culture where the self is often considered subservient to both society and religion. In 'Khudi', the artist has created a self-portrait that is anything but. It eschews vanity and yet seems aloof, dolled up yet scratched and bruised. Perhaps most tellingly, it possesses none of the artist's personal features. Maybe it is no one. Maybe it could be anyone.





*Goom*  
*Lost (2015)*  
watercolor and pen on paper

10" X 13"  
USD 100

Parveen Shakir (1952 – 1994) was a prominent Urdu language poet that heavily inspired Siddiqui-Turner in her earlier work. Here, the artist returns to pay a visual tribute to the late poet based on the latter's relatively little-known ode 'Kaf-e-Afsoos' (English: 'the hand wrung in distress'), a reflective poem about not finding a place for one's self in a lover's heart. The house perilously perched in the midst of a lake and surrounded by the thick woods may be read as a metaphor for domestic peril.



نفس

*Nafs*  
*Self (2015)*  
watercolor and pen on paper

14" X 10"  
USD 300

Siddiqui-Turner grew up in a predominantly Muslim society before moving to New York in 2001. This work features recognizable minarets behind locked doors contrasted with the more ambiguously western figure. The visible pen-drawn outlines sharpen the watercolor forms and further suggest the contrast between spirituality and worldly strategy.



# اب بھی ہوں وابسطہ

*Ab Bhi Hoon Wabasta*  
*Yet I Am Related (2015)*  
watercolor on paper

13" X 10"  
USD 200

In college, Siddiqui-Turner dedicated a vast portion of her training to still lifes. The objects seen here- such as the lantern- are commonly found in Pakistani homes and were the subject of many of the artist's early paintings. The female hand- adorned with henna- seems to reinstate the domesticity depicted here whereas the unlatched cage in the background seems to symbolize an escape from such confines.



ملجاگا

*Maljaga*  
*Intermingled (2015)*  
watercolor and pen on paper

14" X 11"  
USD 300

Surrealism never took hold of the imagination of Pakistani artists who have traditionally preferred narrative realism to purely abstract landscapes. Here, Siddiqui-Turner breaks away from lineage to include concrete forms juxtaposed with entire dreamlike cities that spill out on the roads. The toppled artist's table seems to indicate an acute awareness, if not a commentary, of the figurative upending.



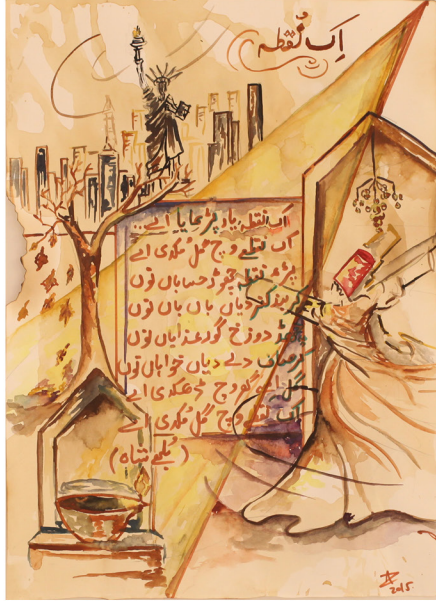


یہ علم

*Yeh Ilm*  
*This Knowledge (2015)*  
watercolor on paper

14" X 11"  
USD 100

Pakistani children are growing up in increasingly violent times where play and disaster are facets of everyday life. Siddiqui-Turner was in Pakistan when terrorists gunned down a school in Peshawar and killed 132 children. In this stark portrait, the bullet holes on the school door seem magnified under the ubiquitous educational slogan seen on the facades of most Pakistani schools: "O God, Increase My Knowledge."



## ایک نقطہ

Ek Nukta

One Point (2015)

watercolor, stain, flame on paper

14" X 11"

USD 100

The unexpected juxtaposition of well-known icons to create a new whole is a longstanding South Asian tradition. Here, The Statue of Liberty and the New York skyline flank the top and a traditional Sufi in a Sema (a form of physically active meditation practiced in the East) whirls at the bottom. The intersection happens around actual text from the namesake poem by the famous Punjabi poet Bulleh Shah that attempts to coincide polarities.



## کوچہ دل

*Koosha-e-Dil*  
*Corner of the Heart (2015)*  
watercolor on paper

14" X 11"  
USD 200

Miniatures depicting urban life are a traditional motif for Pakistani artists. Here, the brick-and-mortar structures are present but no human life is on view. Is this simply a tribute to the art form? Or could it be the individual artist's sense of loneliness though people might still live around her?



خدا کے بغیر

*Khuda Kay Beghair*  
*The God is Absent (2015)*  
watercolor on paper

14" X 11"  
USD 300

Synecdoche- to refer to the whole via the part or vice versa- is a vastly employed artistic technique in Pakistan. Here, a bird's eye view of all that the world offers in absence of divinity is seen inside the underbelly of an animal that vaguely resembles a twisting snake in its patterns- the freedom to follow the gut or a poisonous impulse? The question mark, as here, remains firmly entrenched in the system.





تتلیاں

Titliyaan  
Butterflies (2015)  
tempera on paper

14" X 11"  
USD 400

There are two things that are flying through the air somewhere in the world even as you are reading this: butterflies and bullets. In this composition, the two seemingly different conceptual entities co-exist in visual harmony where it becomes difficult to discern whether one supersedes, diminishes or just elevates the other. Is that blood or a flash of a fresh bloom? It is perhaps one and both.



نور میں

Noor Mein  
In the Light (2015)  
watercolor on paper

10" X 8"  
USD 100

Pakistani art- and Islamic in general- has always had a conflicted relationship with the human form. Siddiqui-Turner here almost pokes fun at the tangential ways artists have evoked bodies while playing with perspective and dimension. Within the recurring theme of women as performers, the ones on the stage in the center are flat figures with clearly visible outlines while being surrounded by a crowd denoted only by heads. Yet, some of the latter seem to glow more brightly than the former, which denies a single beam of spotlight and emphasizes different focus points depending on the angle.



## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Maha Siddiqui-Turner was born in Lahore, Pakistan which is where she began her career as a watercolorist painting the culturally rich urban spaces around her. Her distinct style, apparent from a very early age, led to a Fulbright grant which allowed her to study for an MFA at Parsons in New York City. A series of abstracts for her thesis exhibition, a departure from her usual figurative paintings and miniatures, traveled to art fairs in Mexico City, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, London, Vienna and Moscow. Another exhibition of new work was mounted at the Guggenheim in 2005. Following a long hiatus, this year marks Siddiqui-Turner's first exhibit of new work in a decade.

Maha Siddiqui-Turner played by Gabriela Bonomo  
Aaron Turner played by Joe Loper

Original Artist: Ambreen Zia (b. 1981)

Zia is a multimedia artist born and raised in Pakistan. She studied Fine Arts in college and later pursued a career in design. She now lives in Rawalpindi with her husband and three kids. Zia joined the Four Broken Hearts team in April and created the fifteen paintings in this exhibit specifically for the project over a course of six weeks.

To purchase any artwork in this catalog, please contact the curator at the gallery or via email:

[fourbrokenhearts@gmail.com](mailto:fourbrokenhearts@gmail.com)

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# FOUR BROKEN HEARTS







