

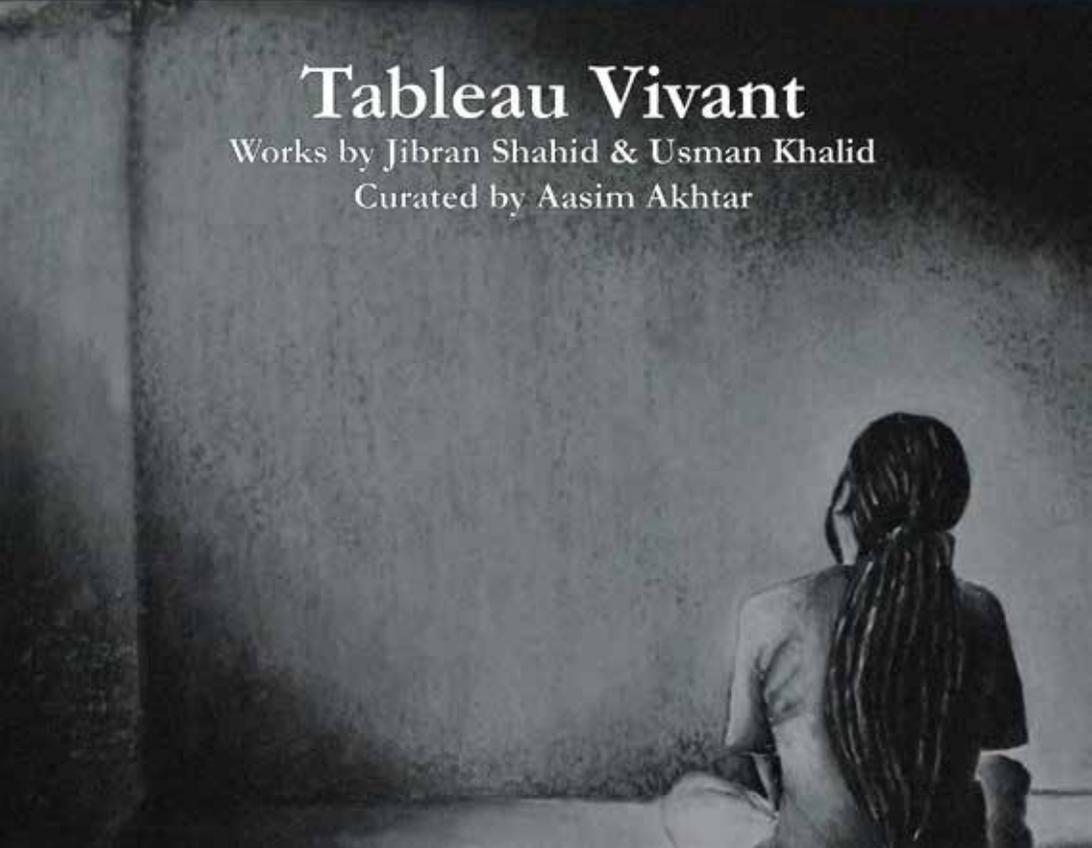




Tableau Vivant

Works by Jibran Shahid & Usman Khalid

Curated by Aasim Akhtar



This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

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Tableau Vivant

Aasim Akhtar

Of all the animals domesticated by man, the horse is the only one to have been a true companion and partner. Through the ages, in warfare, in sport, in transport and in agriculture the horse has given his master the most loyal and devoted personal service. In the more mechanised countries in this contemporary world, the horse may no longer have such a high military or economic value but it still retains its place in ceremonial and it is probably more popular in sport than at any time in history.

The sight of a good horseman on a fine horse is so harmonious that it is sometimes difficult to believe that they are two separate beings. No wonder that the horse commands so much attention in human art; no wonder it shares so many memorials and statues with the famous figures of history. However, it would hardly be fair to the horse or to its so-called master to become too romantic about their relationship. Horses have their own characters and temperaments, and they have never been shy of expressing their opinions of their masters. Not all partnerships are compatible by any means but then the real fascination of horsemanship is the development of trust and confidence between two independent living beings.

In the collection of paintings and sculptures on show at Sanat, Jibran Shahid vividly conveys the special relationship

between man and horse. The horses studied and drawn as individuals with obvious sympathy and care have a wholeness of design that accurately reflects the intimate physical and temperamental relationship between horse and rider.

Just as Jibran interested himself with a study of human proportions, so did he set about a concentrated investigation of the ideal proportions of a horse. Quoting freely from Leonardo da Vinci, he quips: "And first I will begin with the bones, and then will go on to all the muscles which spring from the bones without tendons and end in the bones. To compare the bone structure of the horse with that of the man you should show the man on tiptoe in representing the legs."

While working on the present suite of paintings and sculptures, Jibran found a wealth of symbolic imagery, ranging from heraldry to architectural decoration, book illumination and of course painting and sculpture. Charming and amusing, themselves a symbol of the intellectual splendor of the age, the horses of Jibran's allegories may suddenly become the forbidding custodians of disturbing thoughts. And they languish, filling the air with lamentations. The ones presented show that in spite of all their objectivity and attention to detail – so delightfully expressed in *Flee* and *Emergence* – their message is not to be read but to be experienced. They are the ghosts from his mind.

Jibran's latest studies often refer to the so-called problem of Alhazen which underlies the optical principle of anamorphosis, that is to say, how to distort a form beyond recognition so as



Emergence
Jibran Shahid
Oil on paper
48 x 27 cm
2016

to have it recomposed into an intelligible image. If the subject chosen for his optical trick consists of horses and human torsos in complicated coiling movements, no one can possibly guess what it is until seen in the mirror. It has been Jibran's ultimate game with which to add a new dimension to human perception. The noble and proud animal, the horse, is transformed into a concept of energy that spirals away, like wind or water.

In *The Ride*, horse and rider are visualised in the splendor of idealized, classical forms combined with natural liveliness. Inspiration came from the Czech photographer Jan Saudek, the character of which is even conveyed by the smoothness and translucency of the modelling, which gives consistency and vigour to the evanescent quality of the image. Jibran has switched from the forceful, objective pen and brushwork of his studies (that he conducted in Tokyo, Japan) to the extraordinary dreamlike delicacy of soft twilight tones, which appeal to one's perception of the past as a poetical experience. In *Emergence*, the massive form of the horse is made to suggest balanced energy rather than weight, its coiling movement justifying the acrobatic contortion of the fallen foe who gives the impression of being able to actually push the horse away with his left foot pressed against the horse's belly. The resulting juxtaposition of rider and foe might have been deliberate, as it adds the humorous touch of their feet coming together as in a wrestling game.

The Descent
Usman Khalid
Charcoal, pastel & pen on paper
91 x 30 cm
2016





The Ride
Jibran Shahid
Oil on paper
65 x 50 cm
2016

Out of the Box
Jibran Shahid
Fibreglass, lasani and brass
Variable
2016



The Truth of Things
Usman Khalid
Charcoal, pastel & pen on paper
101 x 76 cm
2016





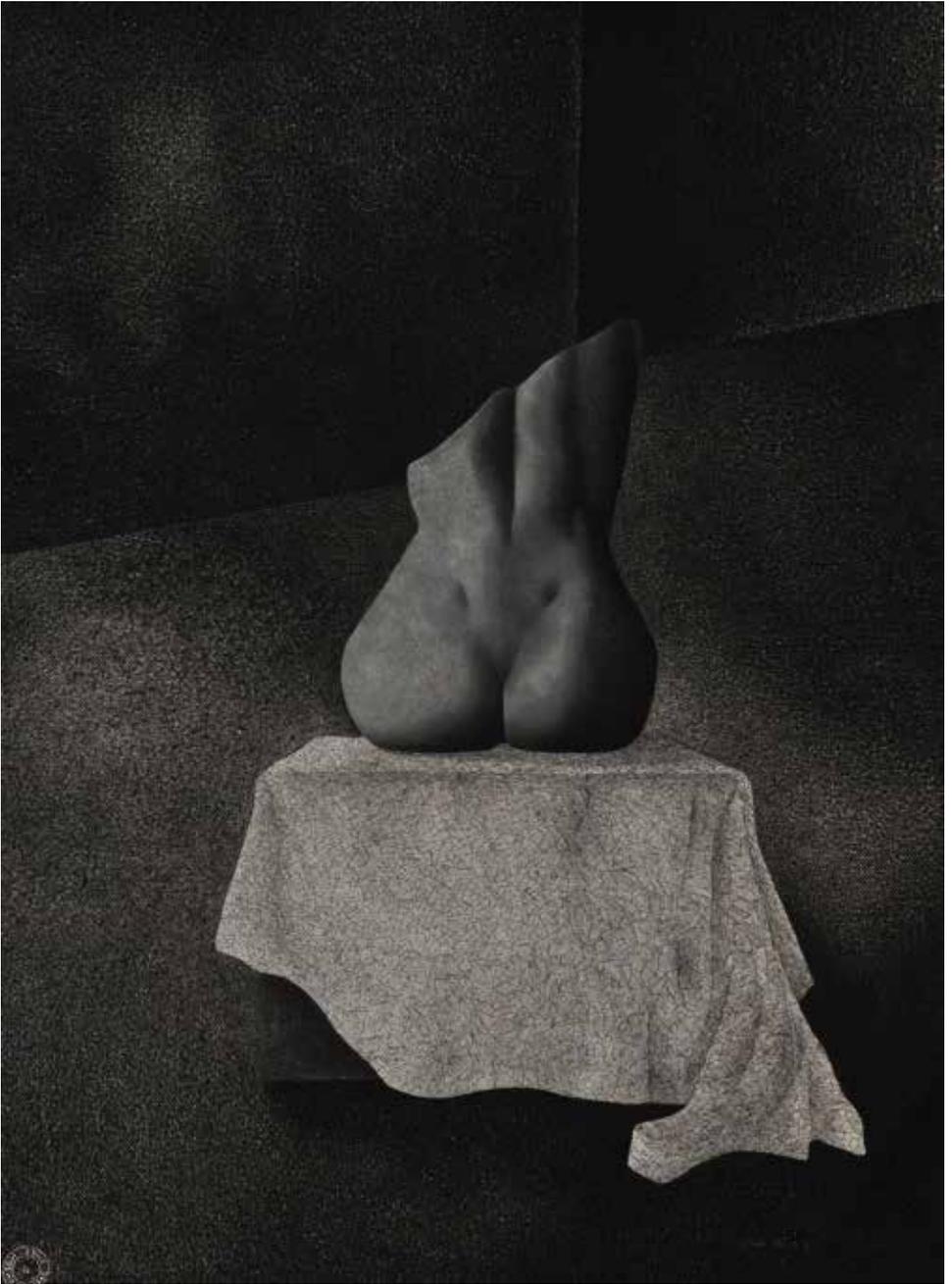
The Bachelor
Jibran Shahid
Oil on canvas
91 x 91 cm
2016

Jibran Shahid's great departure from sculpture's 'fine art' legacy of classical subjects comes with the emphasis on the 'pure' sculptural values of mass, void, tension and materials as end in themselves. Free from making any references, the autonomous abstract work of art

might be enjoyed like music and dance, primarily as a moving composition.

Although Usman Khalid 'draws' slowly and his oeuvre is not exceedingly voluminous, there is little unity in it, even in mode of drawing. His work goes by the

Worship
Usman Khalid
Charcoal & pen on paper
76 x 50 cm
2016





I create to learn, to arrive at novel visual solutions, and, more often than not, to surprise myself. That's why I make 'Art'. While toying with the idea that the horse is an icon of civilization, befriended and exploited by man, I began to develop a hybrid being. Changing cultural perspectives, artistic styles and symbolic interpretations have always hounded the subject of 'man versus animal'.

Taking cue from Renaissance artists, whose interest in horses was as great as that for the human form, I have deliberately exaggerated and fabricated the hybrid form, in parts, to establish the connection with strength and power that has inspired man to produce works of art identifying his feeling for the horse.

How did the hybrid form evolve? If this is the right expression for a creature with such an equivocal relationship with man, then there is an aspect of the animal that has appealed to the more sophisticated requirements of human nature – the need for excitement, for aesthetic satisfaction and as an expression of spiritual aspiration.

Jibran Shahid



The Blind Race
Jibran Shahid
Acrylic on canvas
152 x 91 cm
2016

The Singers
Jibran Shahid
Oil on paper
50 x 65 cm
2016



label of realism, and although there are many ways in which realism can be achieved, including those that establish tensions between it and its alleged counterpoint, characterising Usman as a realist is both undeniably sensible and utterly uninformative. This paradox of realism manifests itself also when a few oeuvres combine a realistic mode of drawing and painting with a more fanciful, imaginative, fictitious approach to reality. Usman paints stories and poems, lyrical outbursts and stark tragedies, dramas and descriptions.

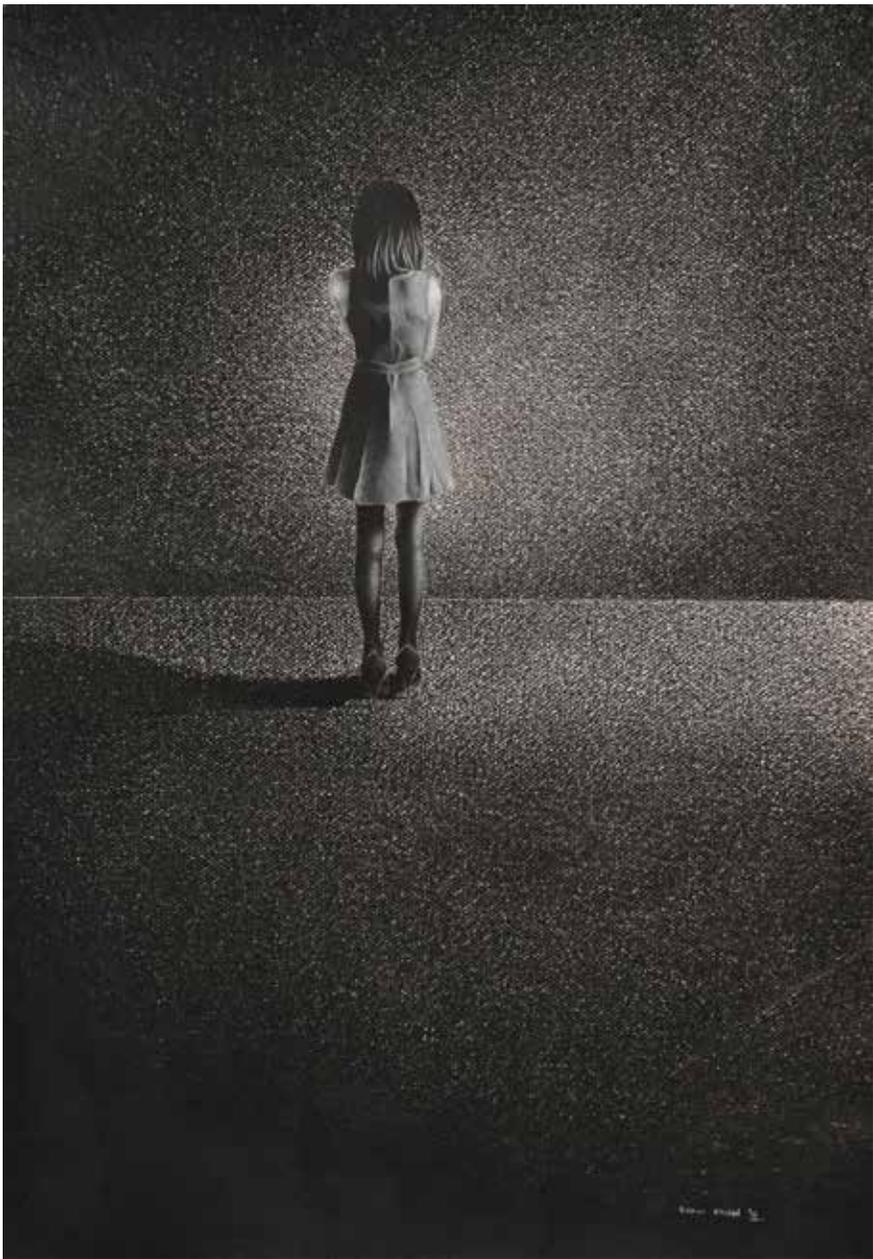
The primary means of this labour – figuration – is indispensable for the effect. Although figurativity is supposedly the royal road to realism, in Usman's case it may not be at all. The drawings draw the viewer into a world we know not to exist. This canny fictionality makes allegations of erotic visual appropriation, in any general sense, naïve and prudish. The general focus is on the eerie sense of very real and very unreal that the drawings emanate. I consider this ambiguous relationship to reality the heart of Usman's work. It both invites viewers in and holds them at bay at the same time. We get access to a world of his own, but without clearly being told what there is to see, think and feel about whatever we think we are seeing. Thus, the works labour against assumptions of representation and appropriation.

The spaces Usman puts before us are willful distortions of the reality we would see when looking at the spaces he depicts. In *The Truth of Things*, we have seen how the opaqueness of the scene makes it impossible to see the natural extension of the space into the outside world. But

the room in which the scene is set also seems distorted. The wide angle of the corner makes the room shallow. It is a pointed act, almost an activism, against the illusory depth of linear perspective. In this sense, it alerts us to the fact that Usman's painterly decisions are not easily dismissed as either arbitrary or simply technical procedures of realism. On the contrary, they often counter the very realism he first sets out to present.

In light of the two manners – monochromatic, substantial hues and distorted, flattened spaces – in which the artist deliberately de-realises the worlds he depicts, the obstinate figurativity of his works becomes an act of defiance. The focus is on the utter lack of communication between the figures and the artist/viewer. Not only is the painter turning his back to the model, while he/she, in turn, looks away from him. Moreover, each figure is emphatically engrossed in a contemplative activity that leaves no space for the other – even in thought. This is what undermines any attempt to read these pictures realistically in a simple way. Thus, Usman seems to tease his viewers with a strategy of concealment. Scenes are emphatically un-dramatic; they foreground neither movement nor events, but stillness and total lack of events. Nothing ever happens. In *Worship* the catalogue of genres appears to be fully deployed in order to stop them all in their tracks, while the total blockage of landscape where we would expect it calls forth that genre in its very invisibility.

The second lack of access to the diegetic world that is so teasingly put forward is foregrounded in the range of traditional

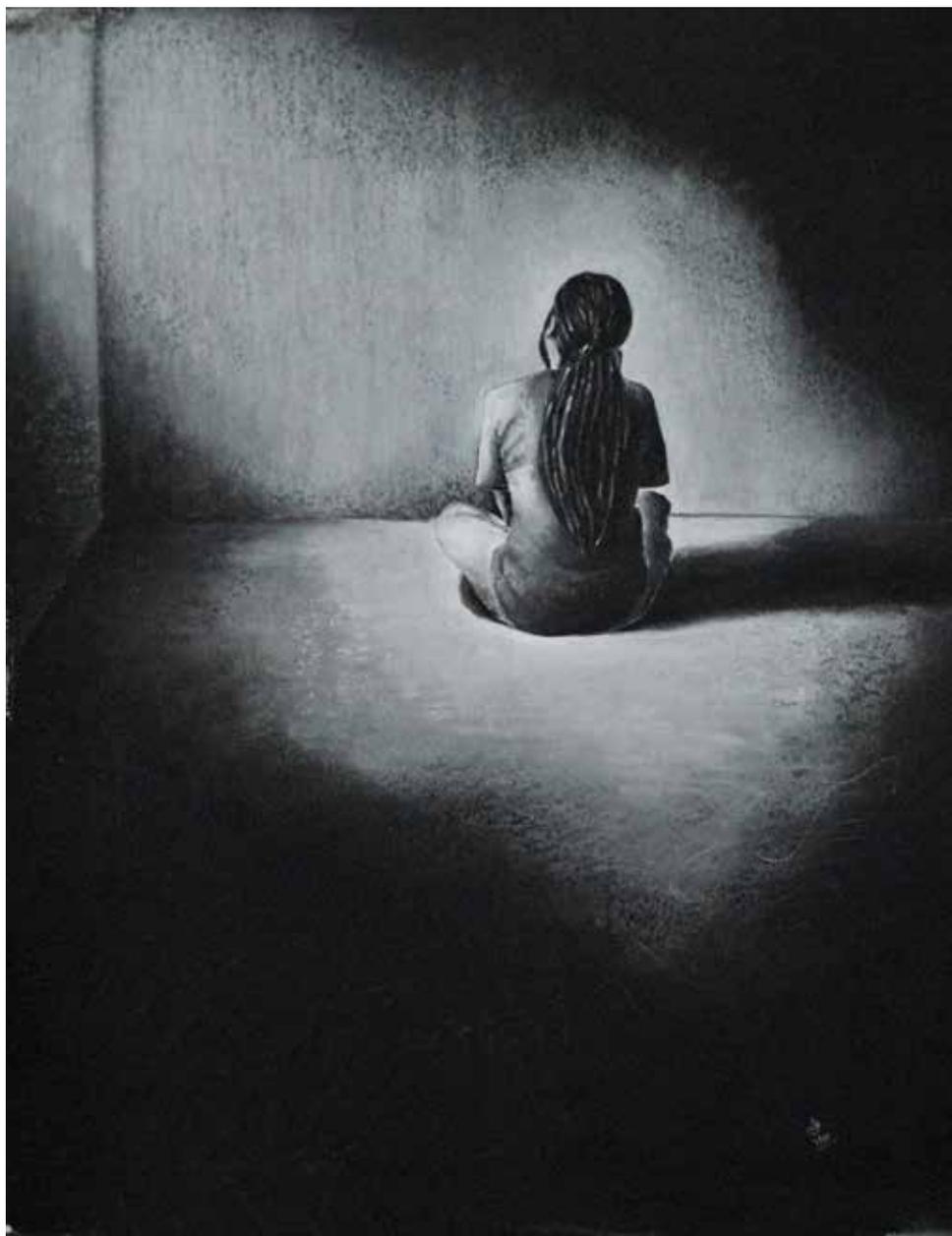


Talk to Me
Usman Khalid
Charcoal on paper
50 x 38 cm
2016



My inspiration behind this series of drawings is music. I have tried to recreate what I have seen in my dreams and while I was awake. I was genuinely interested in the whole process of making these pieces as it allowed me to flow freely and create. Trying to understand the way things are, why they are and why they exist in a dream-like environment, is essential. The being of bodies in a particular space fascinates me. It opens my mind up to a world I know very little of. Hence, I feel a strong force within me that pushes me to look beyond what the normal eye sees or something that truly frightens me.

Usman Khalid



Talk to Me II
Usman Khalid
Charcoal & Pastel on Wasli
76 x 50 cm
2016

pictorial motives, such as the chair. Usman refuses to comply with the traditions he also venerates and emulates.

As a result, the dramaturgy of the paintings is always contrived. Two features characterise the subjects. One is the stillness, the utter lack of movement. Rather than snapshots, the images offer movie stills. The second feature is the untenable, physically impossible poses. The iconography of impossibility is consistent throughout Usman's career.

But if all Usman's skill, imagination, and visual sophistication are deployed to push the viewer out of an assumed represented world, what is there to see instead? I contend that Usman's work, while obsessed with visual depiction, is primarily a long experiment with invisibility, or rather, other-visibility. His project is to depict what defeats depiction, to represent what is vaguely present as an intuition, a feeling, a fleeting emotion, and a fantasy. Dreams are the most obvious instance of the visuality of the invisible.

But dreams can be nightmares, and in Usman's work, there is not much happiness in the dreams. And, if there is, the shadow of a melancholic underside remains visible. The predominant feeling is a sense of estrangement. Sensations of what has been called The Uncanny will be taken to lie at the heart of many of Usman's paintings. *Talk to Me II*, from which we cannot eliminate the shadow of Edgar Allen Poe, stands for the literary imagination in the artist's work. Even the most fairy-tale inspired scenes foreground the less-than-happy sense of not-belonging that infuses this corpus of images.

Through a variety of disparities and mismatches, the art shrouds the magic of childhood so often invoked in relation to art. And if modern psychology is right, the artist himself does not know about it. Instead of speculating why he made the images he made, what they tell us about his personal obsessions, I prefer to speculate on what these images can mean to the very diverse group who see them.

Untitled
Usman Khalid
Charcoal, pastel & pen on paper
25 x 20 cm
2016

