

**STANDARD (OSLO)
PRESS RELEASE**

SULEMAN AQEEL KHILJI

“MARK / نشان“

24.01.2025 - 22.02.2025 / PREVIEW: FRIDAY 24.01.2025 / 19.00-21.00

“The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.”

T.S. Eliot: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, 1915

There is a yellow that keeps on finding its way into the paintings of Suleman Aqeel Khilji. Time and time over again, the colour reappears, built up of layers and layers of semi translucent brushstrokes. It is a yellow like the eerie gloom of the city, like the flickering of flames, or like the beam of a searchlight across a darkened sky. Sometimes it takes on the appearance of a sort of fluorescent yellow, which doesn't seem to belong to this world. Other times it shifts to a warm lemon yellow, which oddly manages to ground the blues, greens and earth tones that make up the mountain landscapes in Aqeel's paintings. And other times, more often than not, it turns into the kind of yellow that marks the fading of photographs - the colour of an irreversible damage and loss.

Similar to photographs, Aqeel's paintings are inherently unstable, although not in a strictly chemical or conservational sense. Rather, that they are marked by an unease and unrest in what they are depicting. In fact, these paintings seem to take a particular interest in that which is faded, weathered and blurred. They start where something has started to dissolve as a surface, as a rendition, or as a memory. The 50 years between 2025 and 1975 - the painting “1975” portraying a young woman. The design of the painting done with a severe sense of restraint. The colours of the painting done slightly inverted. The painting is allowed to come near what was once the photographic negative. Aqeel is loosening the painting from its responsibility to reality, and in the same act also broadening it. It becomes a portrait that is both more open and affirmative: this is not one woman, but rather this could be any woman. This could be a photo of the mother of the artist when she was this young. This could be a photo of the daughter of the artist when she gets this old. Her hair undone. Her hands clutching her bag. Her feet firmly planted, standing tall. The tightly cropped canvas is emphasising her upright pose. The long yellow brushstrokes surrounding her, are making up a interim, shallow space that is anywhere and anytime. It leaves “1975” somewhere between memory and imagination: it is a painting simultaneously envisioning a moment that has taken place and envisioning a moment that one day may take place.

Aqeel's paintings loyally take it upon themselves to negotiate these sorts of disparities and distances - not only between different moments in time, but also between his current surroundings of London and those of his hometown of Quetta in Pakistan. Among the paintings in the exhibition is the large-scale “Mnemonic Spaces (Regent's Park)”. Somewhat similar to an afterimage - where the retinal signals are being adapted as they are being carried from the retina of the eye to the occipital lobe and the rest of the brain - the scene of the London park has yet another scene - that of the artist and his family hunting in the mountains around Quetta - superimposed upon it. Or in the case of the triptych entitled “The Remains of the Day”, in which the artist sourced books from the street markets of Lahore, and made the cover of these the surfaces onto which he would paint. In one you can see a starry evening sky in oil paint moving across the smooth leather binding, while you can also still make out the words of the engraved title: “Fifty Adventures Into The Unknown”. An in one of the neighbouring panels you are presented with a portrait of the artist's uncle as a young student. The gilded decor of the design has been left untouched to now make up the pattern of the young man's scarf. The result evoking the effect of the Japanese ceramic technique of ‘Kintsugi’, where cracks are repaired with gold to reveal rather than to conceal its imperfection.

Aqeels relishes to bring such imperfection to the forefront, or to showcase the endurance of these books. Their sense of solidity balanced against their lasting ability to record their own history - the wear and tear that marks their use and their travel. “Mark / نشان”, is also the title of the exhibition, and both refers to such a buildup of patina, but also refers to the

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accumulation of more considered gestures, the various layers and temperatures that make up Aqeel's paintings. And just as importantly, the word "Mark" - or "Nishaan" as it would be the transcription from both urdu and farsi - is commonly used to suggest a presence. "We can't find his / her mark" is an expression used to let you know that a person is lost. Rather apt and necessary as a term for Aqeel's expansive and mountainous home region of Balochistan. The painting "Back & Forth" is finding its way into this landscape - the artist remembering it and reimagining it - which is marked by vast deserts, high mountains and numerous hillsides that are dotted with caves, such as those of Gondrani. The crumbly and sandy backdrop of the painting is interrupted by jagged, dark brushstrokes, mapping out this manmade complex of the caves, niches and pathways. A group of bathers can be seen in the forefront of the painting, while the attention is drawn to the cave in the back in which a fire has been made. It now serves the purpose of a lantern that lights up the myriad of brushstrokes which are laid out across the large canvas: the blues and greens of the pond, the earth tones of the hillside, the dark brown of the caves, and - there again - that constantly recurring yellow. It is a warm lemon yellow that is intermixed with a brighter hue of sulfur. Commonly found in this mineral rich landscape, sulfur is historically also known as "Brimstone", which translates into "burning stone". The yellow of the painting shining with such force and ferocity that the canvas seems in danger of self-igniting.

Suleman Aqeel Khilji (b.1985 Quetta, Pakistan) lives and works in London, UK. He received his BA from National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan (2011) and is currently in a 3 year artist program at the Royal Academy of Art, London, UK.

Selected solo exhibitions include: "Parallel", The Radley Mews with Jhaveri Contemporary, London, UK; "TURNING INTO...", Weston Studio, Royal Academy of Art, London, UK; "BE-LONGING!", DOMINION Art Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan; "Landswept", Karachi, Pakistan; "See View", Vasl Artist Residency, IVS Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan; "Inayat and Others", Sanat Initiative, Karachi, Pakistan.

His works have been included in group shows at Drawing Room, London, UK; St James's Church, London, UK; No. 9 Cork Street, Jhaveri Contemporary, London, UK; Satrang Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan; Aicon Gallery, New York, USA; Rossi & Rossi, Art Divvy Project, London, UK; Zahoor-ul-Ikhlaq Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan; Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France.

Suleman Aqeel Khilji has been honoured with the prestigious Edna Rose Weiss Award at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and participated in the Vasl Single Artist Residency, Karachi, Pakistan and the Mansion Artist Residency, Lahore, Pakistan.

For further information please visit our webpage: www.standardoslo.no or contact Mary Grace Wright at gracie@standardoslo.no or +47 41 27 95 10 / +47 22 60 13 10. STANDARD (OSLO) is open Wednesday-Friday: 12.00-17.00/ Saturday: 12.00-16.00. Sunday and Monday: Closed. Tuesday by appointment.

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