

EVERY MILESTONE A DESTINATION

WHITE WALL
GALLERY

SHAKIR ALI | ZAHOOR UL AKHLAQ | IMRAN QURESHI

Curated by | Sajid Khan

ABOUT US

WHITE WALL Gallery welcomes you to its exciting inaugural exhibition, offering a glimpse into the evolution of Pakistani art over the past three generations, showcasing the works of three artists who have made, and continue to make, a significant impact in the art scenario of Pakistan and beyond.

Specializing in contemporary art, this new founded gallery comes with a purpose that sets it apart from most art galleries in the city.

White Wall intends to showcase the art practice of some of the most influential artists today and contribute to scholarship by producing catalogues and eventually books to accompany exhibitions. We aim to invite artists with sustained practices, prominent curators, historians and writers to collaborate and promote research and address the wider discourse on art, its prevalence, evolution and role in our lives.

Taking this purpose forward, workshops will be conducted by our exhibiting artists with the purpose of actively contributing to education, connection, inclusion and collaboration with the multiple layers of our communal ecology.

EVERY MILESTONE A DESTINATION

The artists whose works have come together in this exhibition are representatives of three consecutive generations, closely connected by the NCA. Shakir Ali was a renowned painter and teacher of many notable artists including Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq, and Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq was in turn a globally recognized artist and teacher to numerous present day acclaimed artists, including Imran Qureshi. Imran Qureshi continues this tradition of mentorship by nurturing the next generation of artists, inspiring them to develop their own expression and voice.

The influence of the tutor– the teacher, educator, mentor– transcends beyond the boundaries of a class room or studio space, and may be seen most clearly in this triad. These artists address concerns that are social, political and also personal, whilst simultaneously tapping upon wider art-historical discourse.

Shakir Ali gained wide exposure and developed a deep understanding of the arts during his years at J.J School of Arts in India, Slade School of Fine Arts in London, followed by his travels to Paris and Prague. Upon his return to Lahore, Ali brought to the NCA an enriched understanding of the exposure that he had gained and his own artistic practice reflected a more erudite approach, with Modern and Cubist influences of the post-war period. The fragmentation of past conventions of image-making culminated in more abstract art, and the concurrent search for new ways of visual expression resulted in the fostering of experimentation, down to the deconstruction of basic image-building elements of line, shape, color and form.

Observing and absorbing both consciously and unconsciously while working closely with his mentor, his Ustad, Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq's artistic practice developed a tendency to abstraction with an emphasis on material, techniques and processes. Similar to T.S.Eliot's writings, the viewers of Akhlaq's work are drawn into his images and actively participate in interpreting the multiple layers prevalent within his work.

Akhlaq raises questions within his visuals by using fragmentary images, obscure allusions with spaces sectioned into frames with borders, traces of calligraphy, recognizable drawn forms and mark making together draw upon paradoxes and postmodern commentary. Ghost images, underlying layers with references to leaves from old Miniature painting manuscripts and other art historical references become technique, process and metaphors all within one visual.

Akhlaq's practice as an artist combined with his pedagogy during his three decades of teaching and administration at the NCA impacted his students deeply, inspiring them to question, analyze, construct and deconstruct within their own practices. One such student is Imran Qureshi, who specialized in the meticulous aesthetics of Miniature painting, a specialization established and led by a living master of Miniature painting, Ustad Bashir Ahmad.

This specialization in the 16th century art of Mughal Miniature painting equipped Qureshi with the intense skill, discipline, knowledge and inquisitive approach to artmaking. Paradoxical relationships of technique and form, socio-political and personal narratives and contradictory layers of meaning combine in Qureshi's work. His intimate, intricately executed paintings, massive site-specific installations, videos, breathing sculptures and tremendous gestural paintings all echo the aesthetics of traditional Miniature painting. Offering different experiences for viewers, oscillating between the silent and the deafening, invoking the aura of museums and sites of massacre that are tragic yet hopeful, with references to accidents, processes, and intricacy, Qureshi's work is laden with the burden, grandeur and possibilities offered by orthodoxy, art history and the heavy realities of today, underlined with hope and beauty.

Influence, exposure, knowledge and collision of the contemporary and orthodox has seeped down generations of teachers and students. This microcosmic view of Pakistani contemporary art that we have presented at White Wall gallery offers these works as representatives of these artists' practices, becoming an archive of evolution to reflect upon.

Against the backdrop of historical painting traditions of the subcontinent, continuing links between generations of *Ustad-Shagirds* were not uncommon. This has not been usual in more recent times. Artists have often gone to great lengths to avoid being labelled artistic descendants of their teachers. This exhibition reaffirms the traditions of artistic and personal relationships between the *Ustad* and the *Shagird*.

Shakir Ali, known more for his modernist neo-cubist vocabulary is represented by one of the few works he undertook incorporating calligraphy.

Commissioned by an overseas bank for their premises in the Alfalah Building on the Mall, the work not only represents Shakir Ali's interest in tradition, but also his training as a designer in Prague. The stringent demarcation of figure-field relationships are spatially designed to act as independent shapes rather than readable entities. This pioneered a singular approach to the sacred text, i.e. the designer's tools of form and colour take precedence over all else.

His favoured student Zahoor ul Akhlaq's forays into the study of tradition were strengthened during his years as a student in London. He came across the Indian miniature collections in the British Museum as well as the Moghul Royal *Farmans* in the Victoria and Albert museum. These together with his deep study of Muslim architecture across the subcontinent and beyond, generated a highly personal vocabulary, which was utterly new. One is reminded of his Modernist mentor Shakir Ali's intellectual prowess when deliberating Zahoor's Modernist leap into the Contemporary.

Many years later during his stay in the US in the 90's, Zahoor ul Akhlaq's encounter with the legendary 'Emperors Album' of ShahJehan invoked a passionate, lyrical response to the colour palette of the Moghul Masters.

Zahoor ul Akhlaq's impactful presence at NCA seeded many artistic practices among the *Shagirds* under his tutelage. His insight into the creative process and potential of the ideas unfolding in the painting studios made him as influential (and reticent) a mentor as Shakir Ali.

Imran Qureshi's lineage is traceable to this influence which infiltrated the Miniature studios. Qureshi's penchant for going beyond the ordained parameters of the rigorous techniques learnt in the miniature studio slowly became apparent. His strategies for juxtaposing the exquisiteness of traditional practices together with playful explorations of the multiple meanings teased out from images create startling divergences. Technique is no impediment to the visceral nature of paint or the political context in which the artist creates his work. Imran Qureshi like his lineage of *Ustads*, has become a dynamic instigator in the teaching studio. As his own practice broadens, ranging from performance to video, he nurtures the young emergent practitioners at NCA inculcating in them their role as responsible and sensitive voices of their time.

As a *shagird* himself Sajid Khan has been a recipient of the mentorship of Imran Qureshi. He well understands the essence of self discovery, which results from such benedictions.

In his curatorial role, Sajid Khan uncovers these hidden lineages that continue to be tangible in the most subtle of ways, waiting for our discovery and contemplation.

SALIMA HASHMI

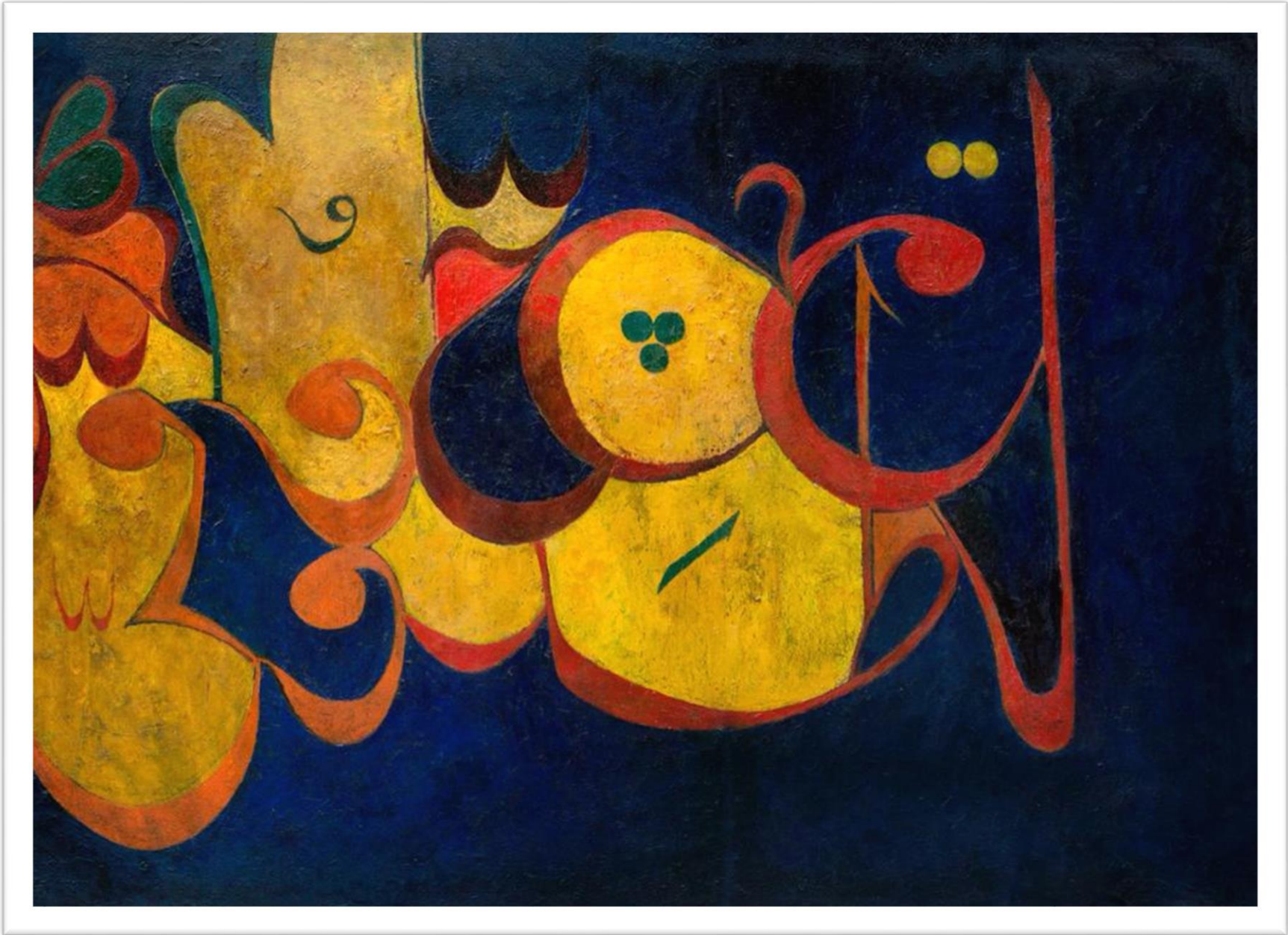
Artist, Curator, Educator,
Contemporary Art Historian

Shakir Ali



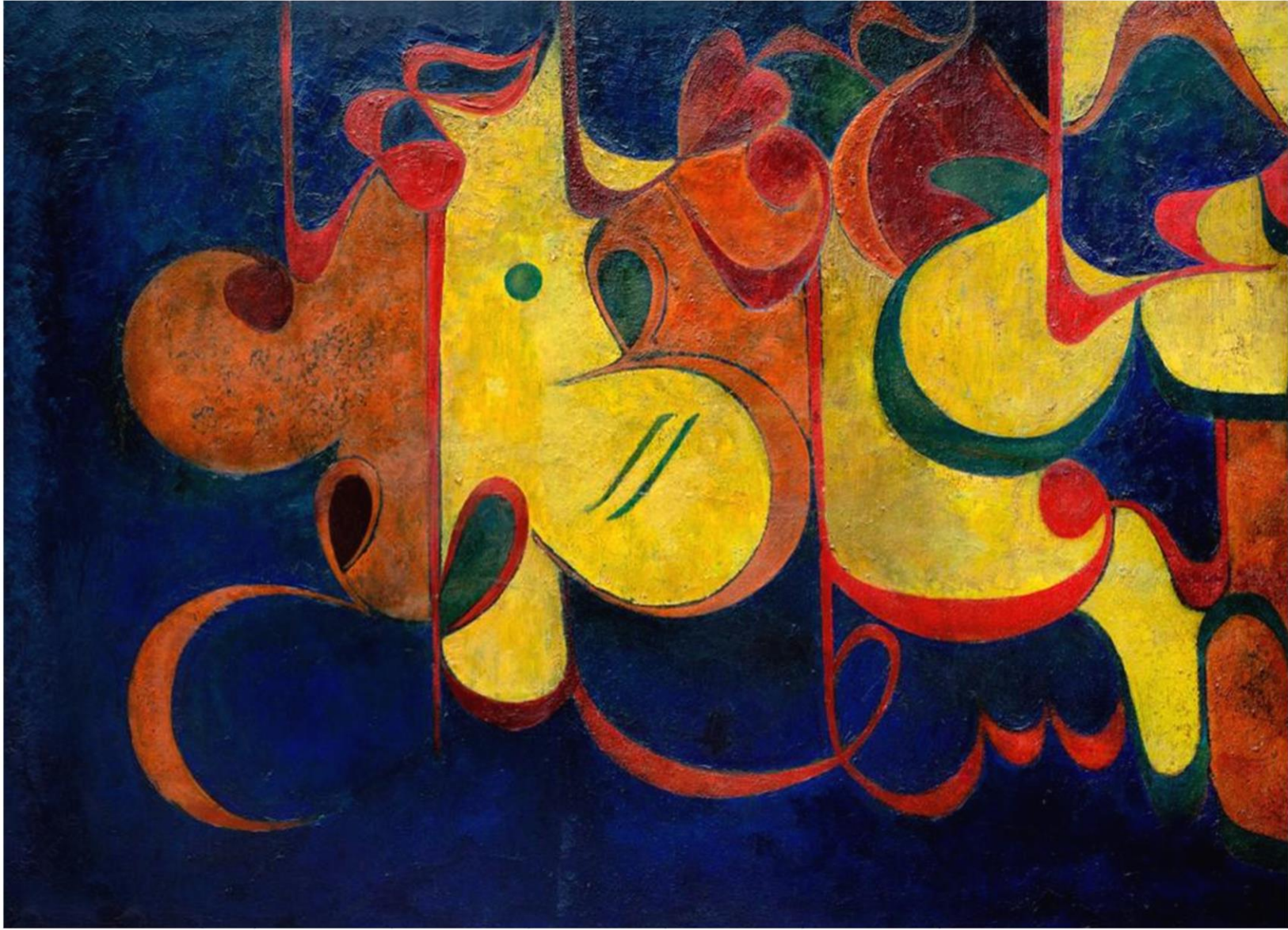
OIL PAINT ON BOARD | 60"x360" (152.4 x 914.4 cm)

04 Panels | Panel 1 (61" x84") Panel 2 (61" x95") Panel 3 (61" x96") Panel 4 (61" x85")

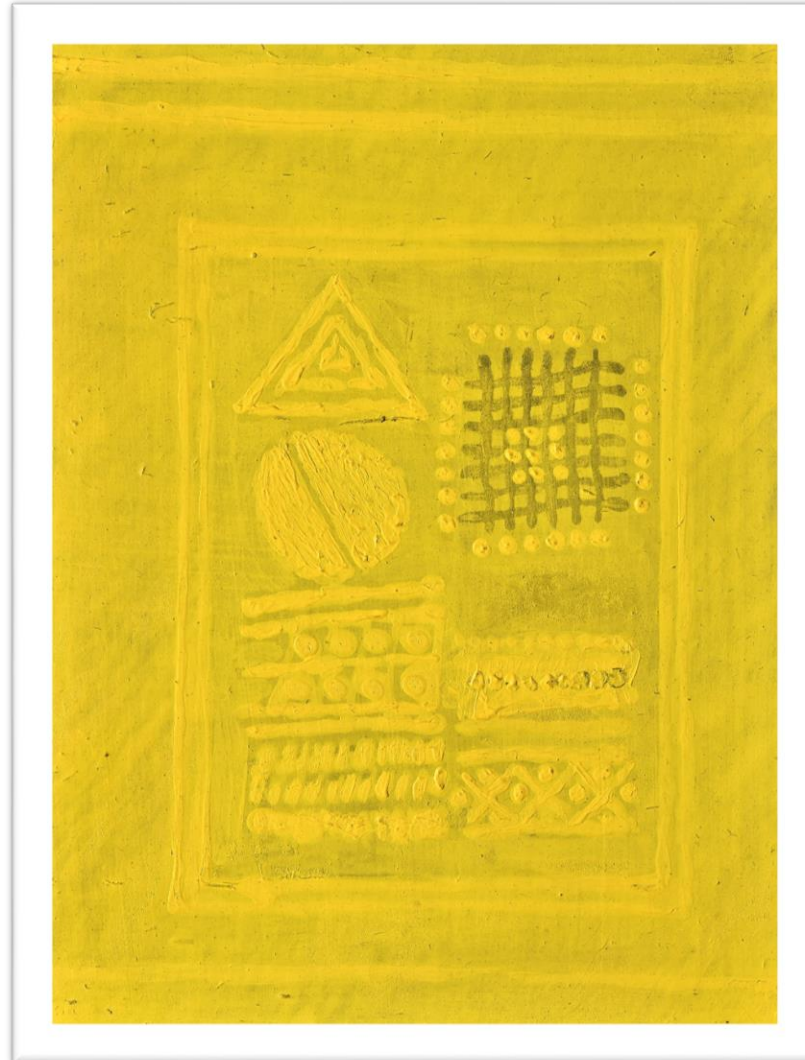








Zahoor ul Akhlaq



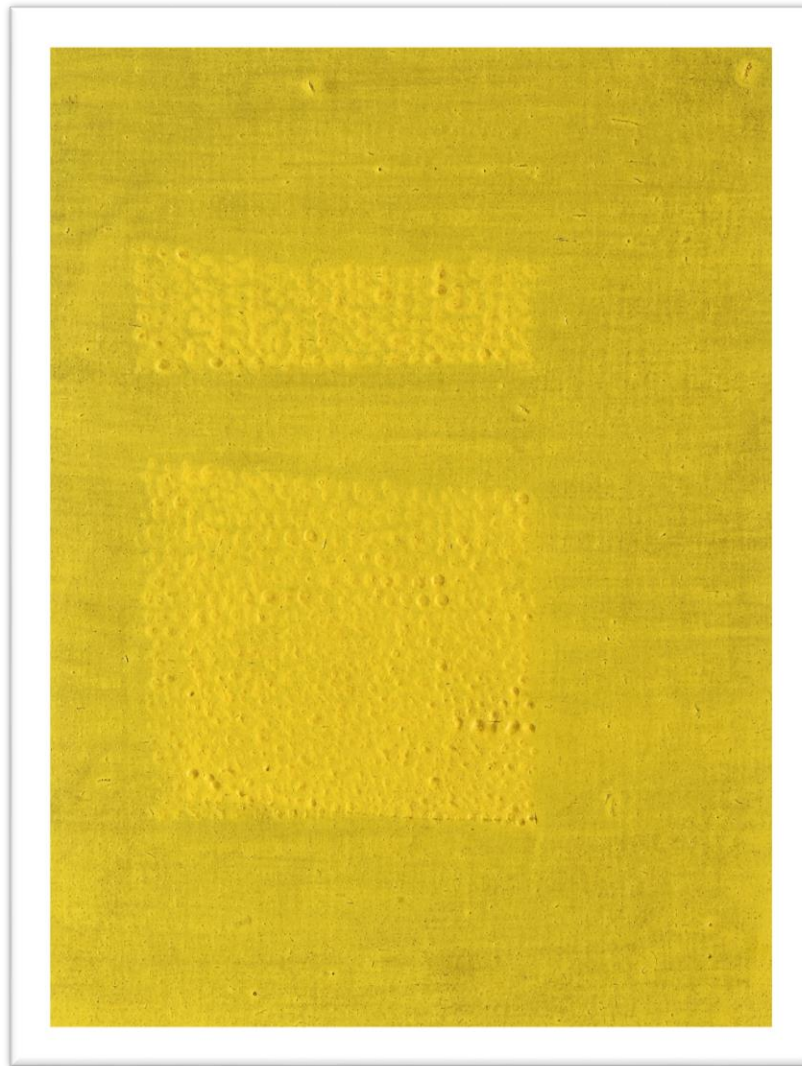
Canvas Stretched on Board | 10"x7.4" (25.4x18.80 cm)

Zahoor ul Akhlaq



Canvas Stretched on Board | 10"x7.4" (25.4x18.80 cm)

Zahoor ul Akhlaq



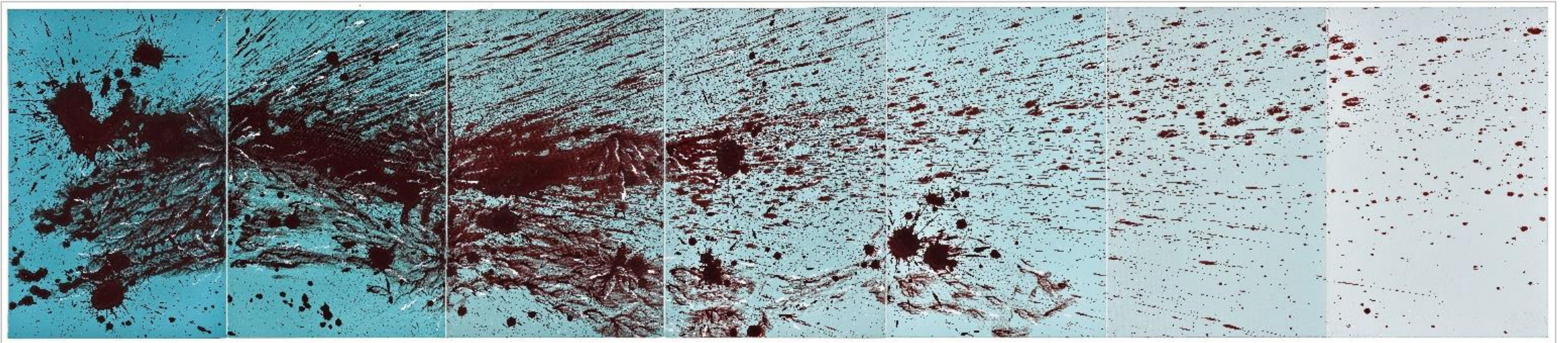
Canvas Stretched on Board | 10"x7.4" (25.4x18.80 cm)

Zahoor ul Akhlaq



Acrylics on Board | 13.2"x9.3" (33.53x23.62 cm)

Imran Qureshi



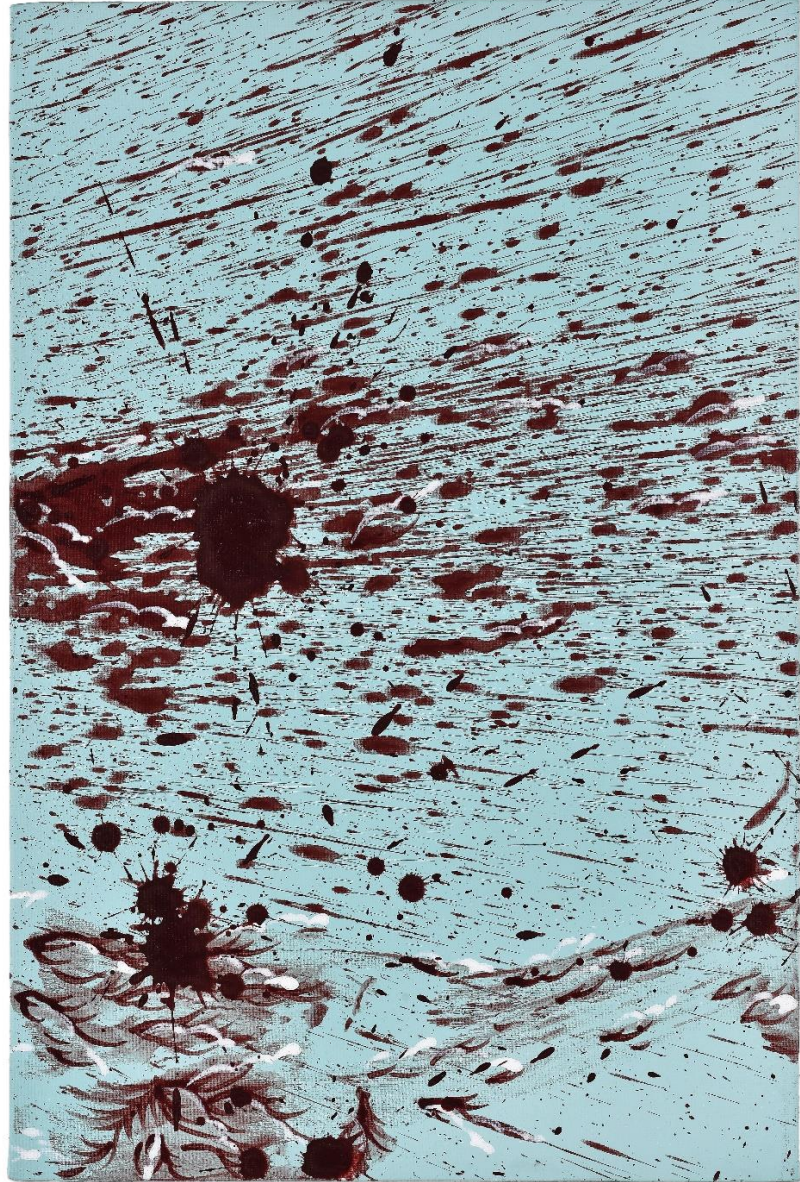
WHEN I THOUGHT OF YOU, YOU WERE NOT THERE | Acrylics & Emulsion Paint on Canvas | 27"x126" (68.58 x 320.04 cm) | 2023

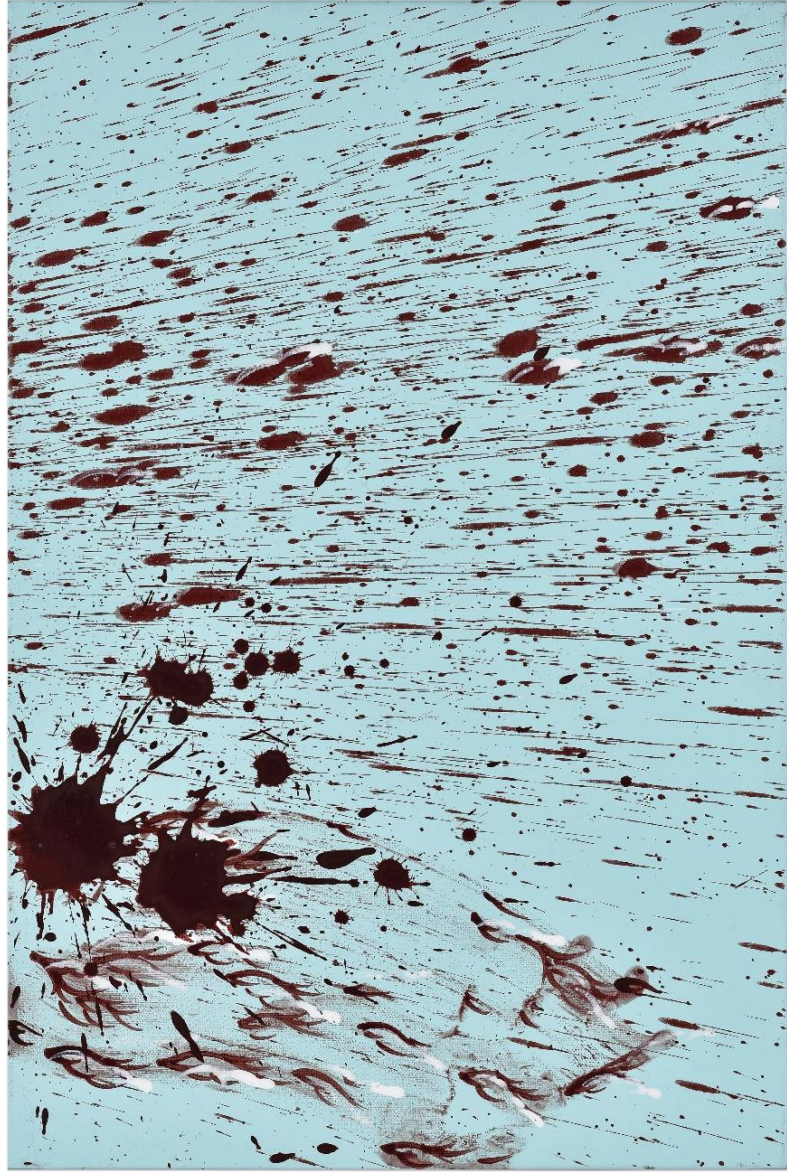
07 Panels, 27 "x 18" each.



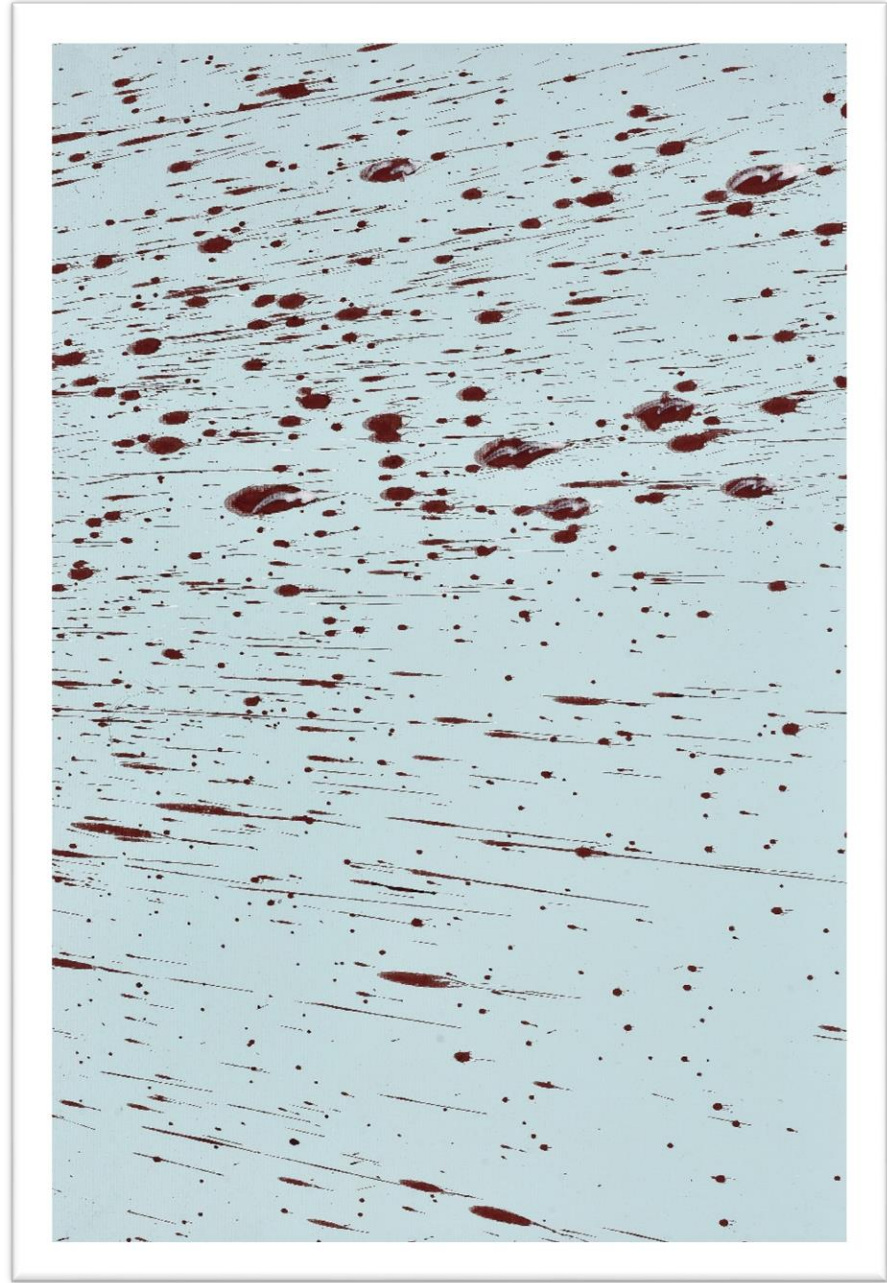




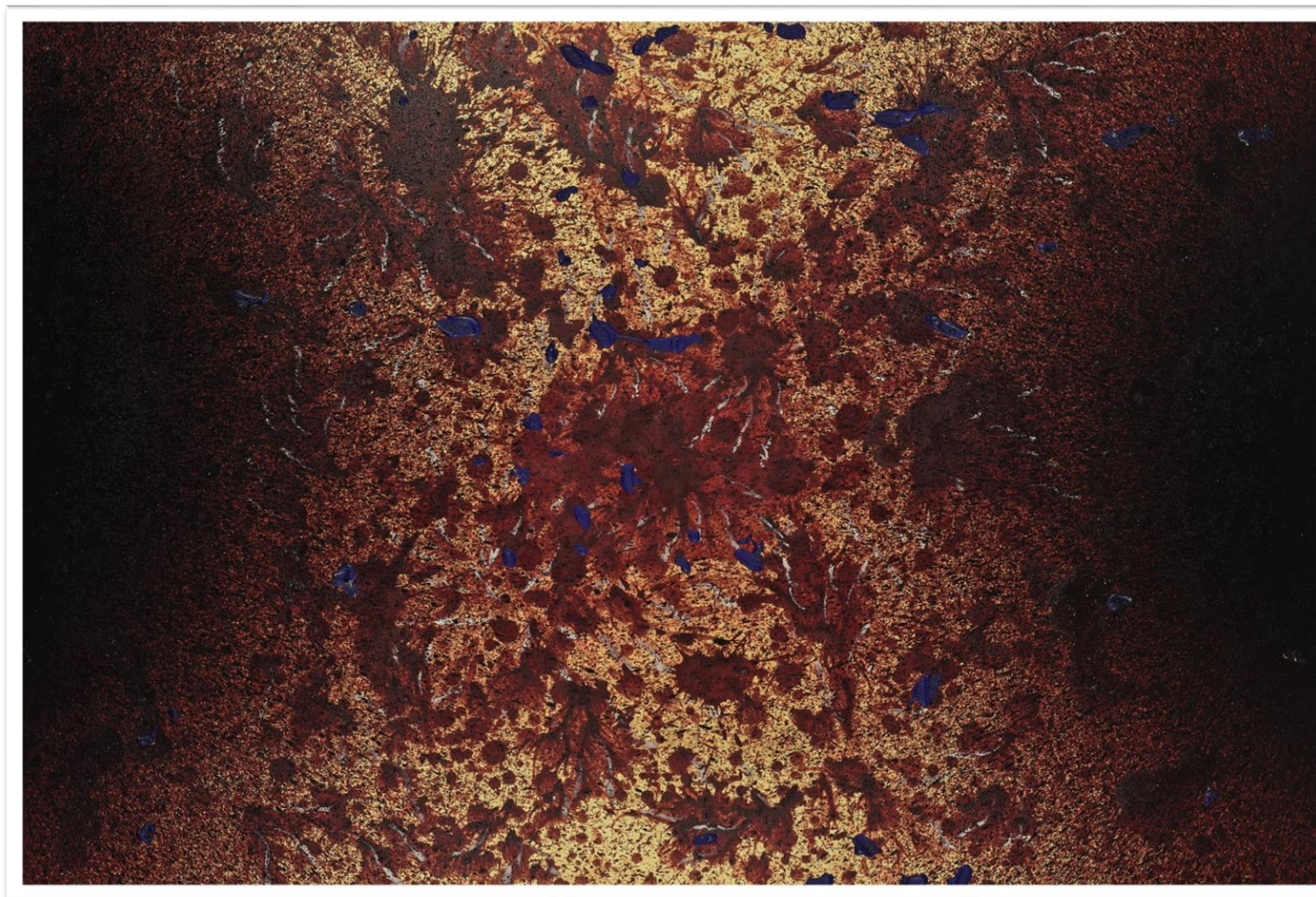






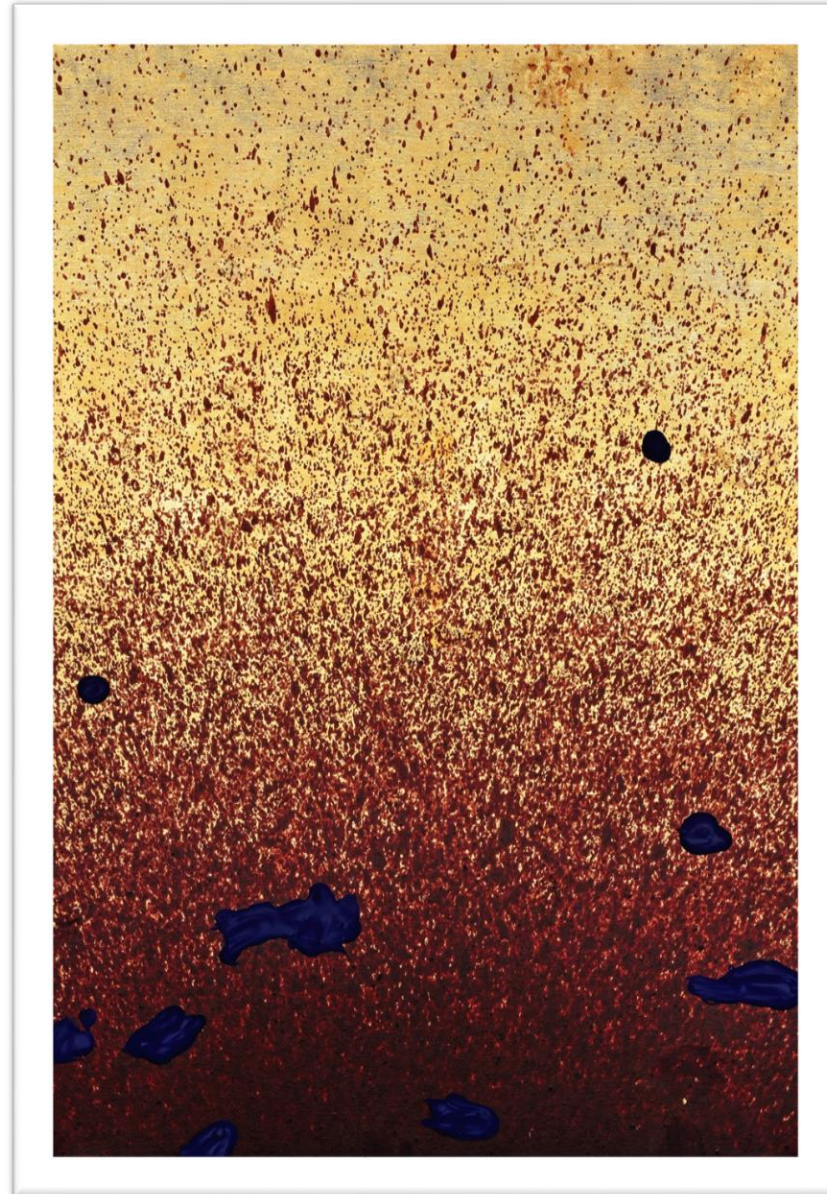


Imran Qureshi



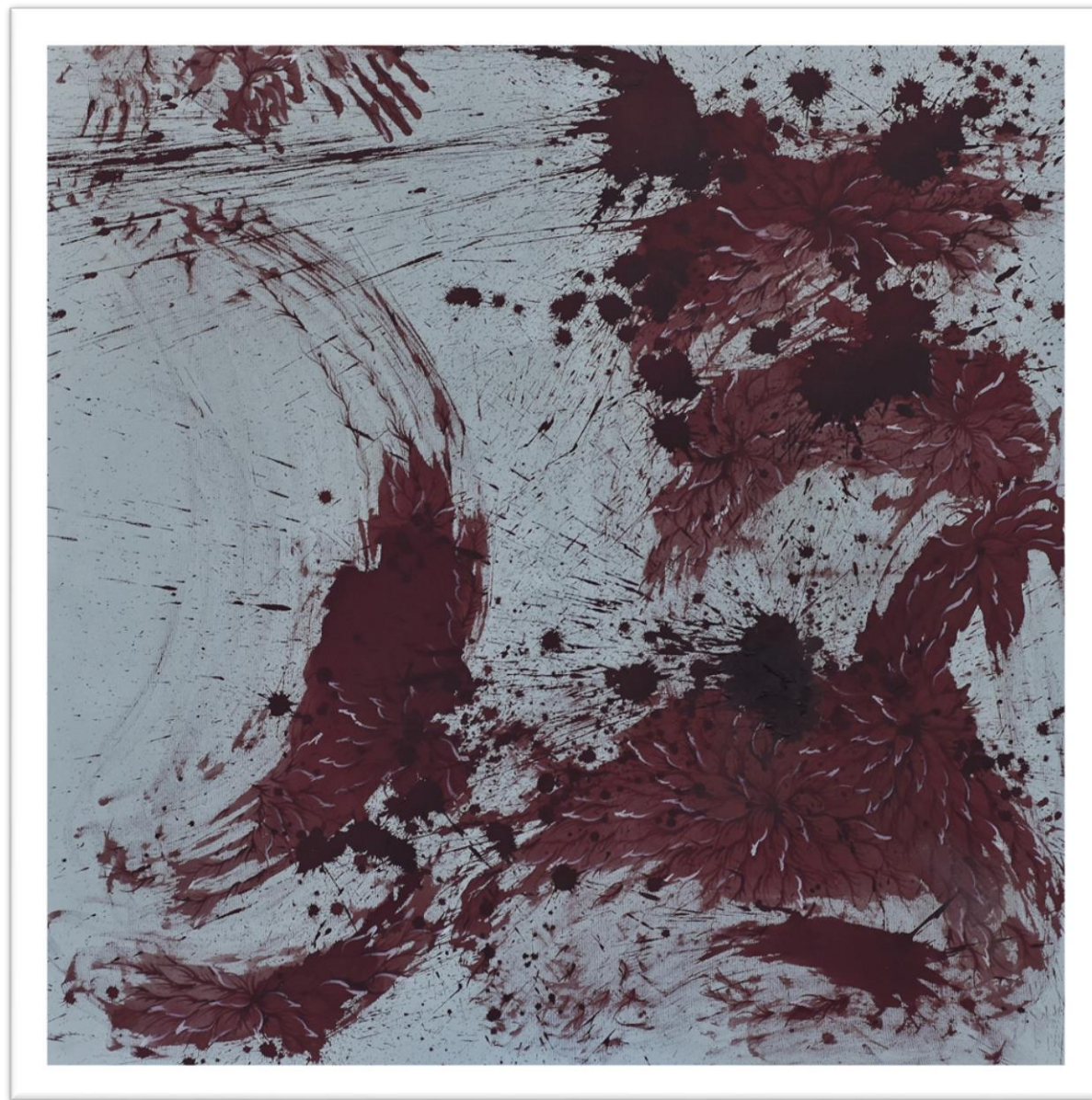
THE DAY IS DONE, AND IT IS THE BRIGHT NIGHT OF LOVE | Gold Leaf & Acrylics on Canvas | 48"x72" (121.92x182.88 cm) | 2023

Imran Qureshi



THIS LEPROUS BRIGHTNESS | Gold Leaf Acrylics on Canvas | 27"x18" (68.58x45.75 cm) | 2024

Imran Qureshi



WHEN I THOUGHT OF YOU, YOU WERE NOT THERE. | Acrylics & Emulsion Paint on Canvas | 60"x60" (152.4x152.4cm) | 2023

SPECIAL THANKS

Salima Hashmi

Naazish Ata-Ullah

Imran Qureshi

Hadia Zahra

Saamia Ahmed Vine

Muhammad Ramzan

WHITE WALL TEAM

Ejaz Saeed

Sajid Khan

Hadia Zahra

Shehrbano

Ali Raza

ARTWORK CREDITS

Muhammad Ramzan

Imran Qureshi

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

Usman Javaid

Tahir Ali Sadiq

Catalogue Design

Ahmed Faraz

WHITE WALL
GALLERY

123P MM Alam Road Gulberg II Lahore. | +92 328 8480242 | Insta: whitewallthegallery
info@whitewallthegallery.com | www.whitewallthegallery.com