



SAIRA WASIM



HOLY MATRIX
2005 (23 X 32.8CM)

Gouache on artist board.



LAMENTATION OF INNOCENCE
2005 (23.4 X 30.6 CM)

Gouache on artist board.
All works courtesy the artist, Chicago.

The meticulous execution of Saira Wasim's paintings draws from the rich tradition of Mughal painting. She was trained in these skills at the National College of Art in Lahore, Pakistan, where she graduated with a major in miniature painting in 1999. The contentious political subject matter of this artist's work has been described by a number of critics as providing the other opposite pole that creates tension in her work. However, there is also a sense in which the political tenor of her work is entirely in keeping with the ongoing tradition of what is more popularly termed 'miniature painting'.

Saira Wasim was born in March 1975 in Lahore, the cultural capital of Pakistan. It is a city dotted with mosques, gardens and historical buildings, many the legacy of a magnificent Mughal past. The country Pakistan was created in 1947, with the partition from India forced on the subcontinent by the British government when they passed control of the territories back after the colonial empire left the country.

Recognition of Saira's work by the US was quick to follow her move to Chicago in 2003, when she was invited to participate in the prestigious Whitney Biennial. A number of invitations for her to lead workshops and participate in residencies have since followed.

Painted in response to the theme of this exhibition, 'Holy Matrix' features a Mullah who carries aloft a brown flag bearing images from the first teaching book of the Urdu Qa-edah – a primary learner in which here the ABC is scattered into

nonsensical drifts. As this image moves from left to right around the central disc a strange and chilling transformation gradually takes place when the blind dogma of ideology gradually works its frightening magic.

The second painting titled 'Lamentation of innocence (genocide)' features figures that lie in a huddled mound; animals intertwined with humans are all caught together in a net of death. Unlike so many of Saira Wasim's earlier work, this image does not depict specific events. Nor does it aim criticism at specific religions, communities or nations. Rather, it offers a simple picture of senseless slaughter; one that manages to elude the category of propaganda in favour of more poetic allusions. This intimation of futility is, in part, what lends this painting its particular poignancy