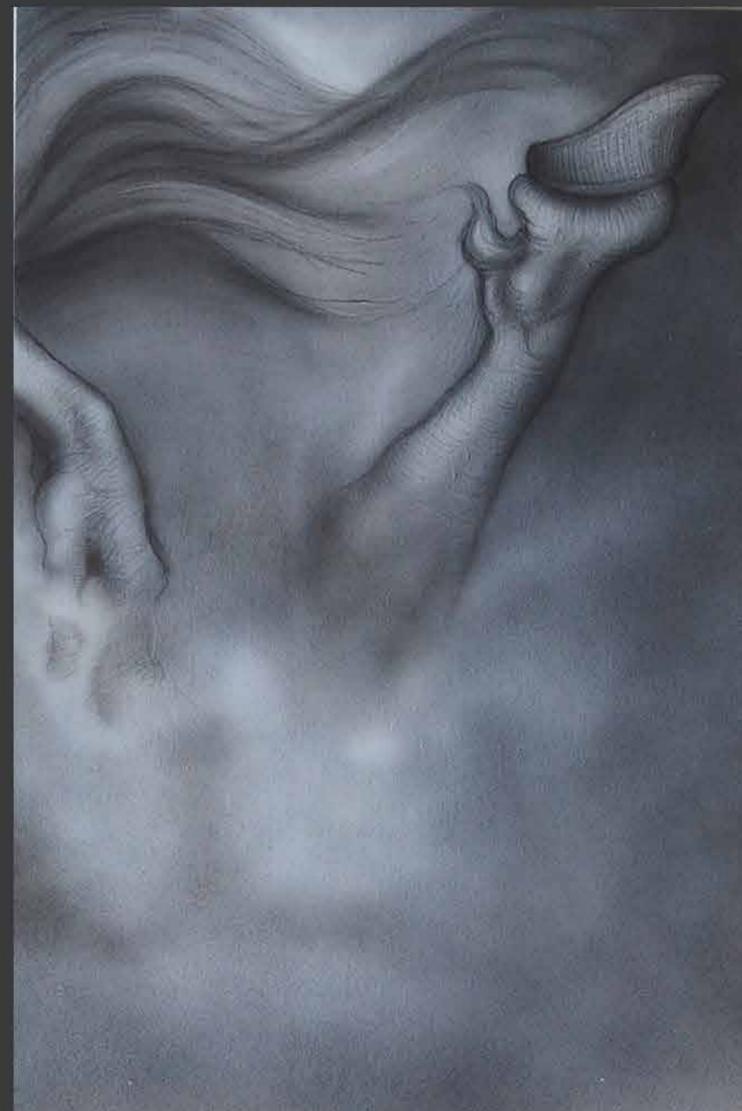


# CHASING THE EQUUS



CURATED BY  
**AASIM AKHTAR**

**JIBRAN SHAHID**

OPENING ON  
**9 OCTOBER, 2018**  
**5 — 8 PM**

## CURATORIAL NOTE

By Aasim Akhtar

For his exhibition *Chasing the Equus*, Jibran Shahid presents drawings from two series, and sculptures, created over the past year. A sense of suspension and disorientation hovers over these works. Clearly, the artist has learned the Surrealists' lessons about the hidden subversive power in the most ordinary things (or beings), and about art's potential to break open even the toughest outer skin of reality. One strategy, which Shahid uses in this body of work, is juxtaposition (read fusion), in which the artist combines the human form with that of the horse in order to create hybrids that seem possible, if not plausible, yet at the same time touched by irony.

Shahid's hybrids, drawn with a gestural quality, are rendered with great realism, although they rarely cast shadows. They make no contact with the ground and seem out of scale. He sources his images from photographs, and the titles often evoke the theme of memory. And although Shahid has limited himself to a single medium – oil-based pencils and oil washes on canvas – his practice has no dearth of references to the history of both painting and photography.

Shahid's affinity with the great masters of sculpture has led the way to his classically inspired sculptures. This is especially true given the abiding proclivities of contemporary practice toward the provisional – the unfinished and the ephemeral. It is also a pleasure to see an artist so fully committed to the art of the past: Time moves faster today than it used to, the modern world being more future oriented, continually bombarding us with the next new medium, style or sensation.

Simply by virtue of their appearance, Shahid's sculptures and his approach are anti-modern, yet they are not without their modern aspects. In fact, they are a peculiar hybrid of the classical and the modern: to my eye a brilliant, uncanny reconciliation of seeming opposites. They bring to mind the absurd, grotesque distortions of Surrealism and, less obviously, the self-dramatising rippling quality of painterliness at its most intensely, randomly, and aggressively expressionist.

With these works, Shahid makes the familiarly human strange, revealing an anti-humanistic, anti-idealistic, anticlassical thrust to his art. This remains true in spite of the humanistic and idealistic implications of classical approach. Fibreglass, known for its luminosity and apparent solidity, is easy to cast, which is one reason it is being used extensively in modern times. Thanks to its low index of refraction, light can penetrate several millimetres beneath its surface; this makes it seem inwardly alive, breathing life into an otherwise dead form. Shahid's work perversely exploits this

contradiction.

Ideas of fragility and impermanence run through the drawings in Shahid's oeuvre; the oil pencils' material characteristics lend themselves perfectly to represent these seemingly ephemeral perceptions. The medium's easy transformability and monochrome create ambiguous figures; these hybrid figures are not always what they seem. The artist says the works try to embody Heraclitus's epigram "Everything flows; nothing stands still." Here, it is difficult to tell the human from the beast – the two become interchangeable. This dynamism and sense of movement hints at the spirit of drawing that Shahid has tried to invoke. Uncertainty and vulnerability are, to him, life's vital forces and central to his approach to drawing as discovery rather than static representation. These works on canvas evoke ambiguous images – unsettling apparitions and pareidolic illusions – of hybrid creatures. The smudges and markings interact to create multivalencies – to appear as images that are not fixed, yet are still there.

The physical act of drawing, which itself is the overarching theme in the artist's work, follows a two-stage process. Shahid first creates marks, allowing chance and accident to intervene; then he reacts to these marks. Slowly, over time, images begin to appear and take shape – neither abstract nor figurative, but rather phantasmagorical, relating to the realm of dreams and imagination. Shahid admits that he was thinking of the term drawing in two senses: that of producing an image from marks and lines, but also that of pulling, extracting something from within, through his memories, nostalgia, and the fluid space of imagination.

The artist had worked with ink on paper before shifting to oil-based pencils. He felt the liquid medium had more of a connection. He wanted to stray from line and also do away with tools, to let his hands feel closeness to the material he was working with. He chose to make his own powder by shaving pencil cores to create grainy and uneven bits, which helped bring about the accidental marks. In the series on view in this exhibition, he says, the texture of canvas is meant to allude to the corporeal. Furthermore, he applies the pencil and washes of oil to the canvas when it is both wet and dry, letting himself achieve a more layered and uneven texture. This practice has intensified the composite nature of the images – releasing them from stillness and imbuing them with a phantom spirit.

In the first series of drawings on view, formally agreeable and subjectively compelling, the human

figure sprawls languidly across the horizontal axis of the canvas – an alluring body in repose, inviting inquiry. Jibrán Shahid has re-purposed this art-historical motif as the locus of his most recent body of work, in which he re-creates fanciful figure drawings. The body of work on show includes five large oil ‘paintings’ delineated by fine marks and presented on highly buffed, oiled grounds. His nude figures are not so much specific people as embodiments of the artist’s childhood alter egos. The morassed grounds of these works are luminous and limpid, as if John Singer Sargent had imbued the recumbent figures’ skins with internal light. But beyond these canvases’ impressive draughtsmanship, what is one to make of them? Does the work succumb to the sordid romance of the hazily rendered supine nude?

Though his canvas is pure white and luminous, he uses it to convey the saturnine, nightmarish, gruesome underside of human existence. The works are a contradiction in terms – a diabolical fusion of unconscious feeling and self-conscious craft.

In the second series of drawings on canvas, a tendency to idealise form becomes apparent, particularly in the horse, which is shown ambling rather than walking normally. Shahid has gradually moved away from the live model seen in a rural or domestic context and comes to stress the heraldic character of the horse as if to record the actions and attitudes established in classical art and revived in the tournaments and pageantry of the day.

For Leonardo, as for other Italian humanists, the horse was considered second only to man as an object worthy of attention. The drawings in this exhibition display an idealisation of form that can only be credited to a classical model, the spirit of which is conveyed by the romantic character of the figure, as of a winged horse. The smooth, delicate shading enhances the slender proportions of the animal.

Horses of the same type are portrayed, and correspond in general proportions and in points of detail, e.g. the small head, ears pointed forward, short body, and pronounced hocks and hoofs. Because of the important place occupied by the horse in Renaissance life, it is not surprising that the equestrian monument, showing the union of man and horse, should have enjoyed a revival in Shahid’s work. On a more peaceable note, the noble recreations of tilting and jousting, with accompanying pageantry, were an essential part of Renaissance courtly life, as reflected in the following words: “I wish our courtier to be an accomplished and versatile horseman.” Among the drawings on show, there is one of an elegantly caparisoned horseman, wearing a feathered cap, and a series of fine clothing, datable to the last years of Renaissance.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

My work takes elements both from the horse and the human figure, and fuses the two to create a hybrid that incorporates their physical traits, and reflects on their relationship with each other.

My association with the horse began at a very young age. I have drawn, painted and sculpted persistently, fragmenting the form, deconstructing it and reassembling time and time again to invent the new configurations it may take while retaining some of its basic characteristics.

The inspiration comes from diverse sources - from the Centaur in Greek Mythology to da Vinci and Marino Marini.



*Afloat*, 4x3', Oils and  
Pencils on Canvas.



***Baptised***, 4x2.5', Oils and  
Pencils on canvas.



*Deep Within*, 5x3', Oils and  
Pencils on canvas,.



*Prisoners of Fate 1,6x4',*  
Oils and Pencils on Canvas.



*Prisoners of Fate 2, 6x4',*  
Oils and Pencils on Canvas.



*Prisoners of Fate 3,6x4'*,  
Oils and Pencils on Canvas.



*Reverie*, 3x3', Oils and Pencils on canvas.



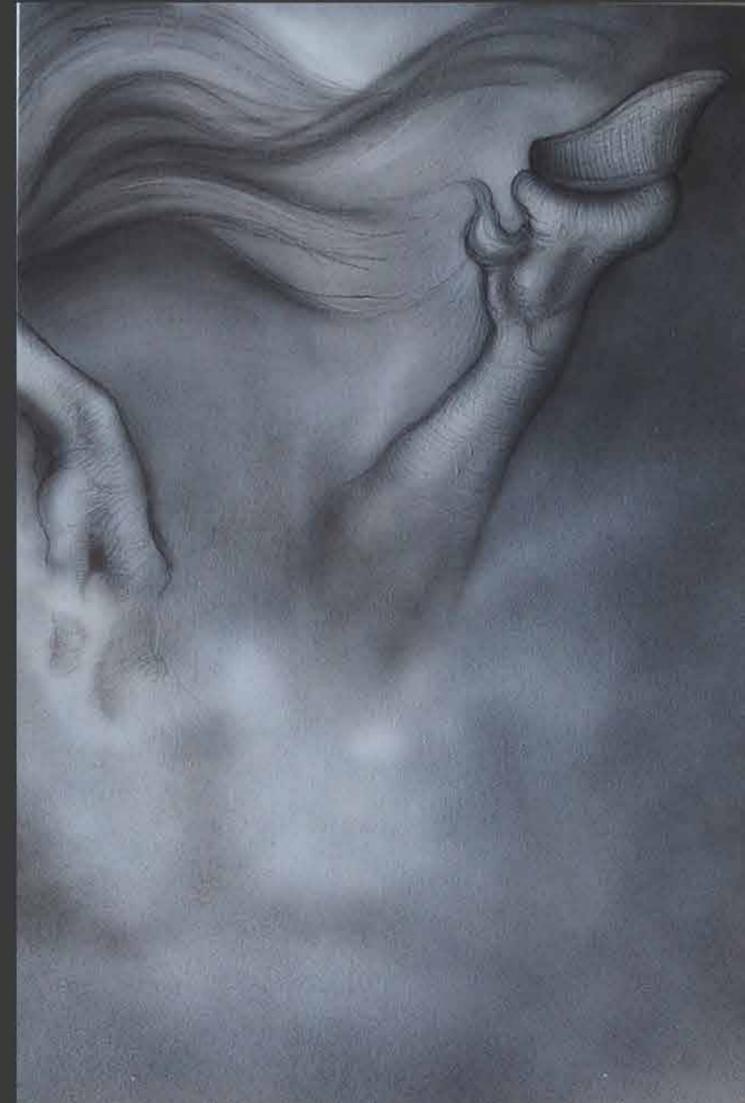
*Rhythm Divine*, 5x3', Oils  
and Pencils on Canvas.



*Kindling Rhythm*, 6x4', Oils  
and Pencils on Canvas.



*The Divine Order*, 5 x 3',  
Oils and Pencils on Canvas.



*The Hunt*, 7x3', Oils and Pencils on Canvas.



*The Quint Crown*, 9x3',  
Oils and Pencils on Canvas.



*Ecstatic,*  
Size Variable, Fiberglass.



*The Somnambulist,*  
Size Variable, Fiberglass,  
MS Steel Stand.



## **Jibrán Shahid**

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### **Education**

2016 BFA (with Distinction) National College of Arts, Rawalpindi  
  
Ordinary and Advance Level Education: Edexcel –UK  
Froebel’s International School, Islamabad

### **Professional Career**

JSK Ateliers

### **Exhibitions**

2017 KB 2017, Karachi  
2016 Redbull Canvas Cooler, Lahore  
2016 Tableau Vivant, Sanat Initiative, Karachi  
2016 ATO Nexus – Tokyo, Pakistan Embassy, Tokyo  
2016 Innovative Spirit, Australian High Commission, Islamabad  
2016 Emerging Artists, VM Gallery, Karachi.  
2016 NCA Annual Degree Show, NCA Gallery, Rawalpindi  
2015 Open Field, Pakistan National Council of the Arts, Islamabad  
2014 Pakistan National Council of the Arts, Islamabad  
2014 Lok Virsa, Islamabad

### **Awards**

2015 8th position in Top 10 Honorable mentions, Florence Academy of Arts, Italy,  
Summer Scholarship Contest

### **Media & Publications**

Dec 2016 Mangobaaz, Redbull Canvas Cooler Pakistan  
2016 Open Field, Contemporary Art from Pakistan  
2016 Newline Magazine, Horseman and the Dreamer, Nusrat Khwajah  
2016 Tableau Vivant, Art Now , Osama Khalid  
Jan 2016 Dawn news, NCA Thesis Show- Portraying Adages Urban Night-life and Red Light Areas  
Mar 2016 Herald Magazine, Degrees of Success, Zarmeene Shah  
Jan 2016 World this morning, pursuing a career in fine arts, PTV world



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