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Lost and found

Peerzada Salman | Published October 19, 2021



Some of the artworks displayed in the exhibition. —Fahim Siddiqi / White Star

KARACHI: Poet and critic T S Eliot in one of his essays describes the relationship between the past and the present in the following words: “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. Throughout the whole career of a poet he must develop or produce the consciousness of the past, so there is conformity between the old and the new.” Reading the title of Imran Channa’s latest exhibition Lost Pages from One Thousand and One Nights, which opened at the Canvas Art Gallery on

Monday, one was immediately struck by how artists love to examine the past in order to make sense of the present.

Perhaps that's not entirely the case with Channa. Perhaps he is trying to deconstruct certain notions of the days of yore. The reason could be the reference to the famous Arabian Nights which for centuries has served as the well spring of ideas for the creative lot all over the world. Channa is narrowing down his quest to 'objects'. Here's how: "The emphasis on romanticising ruins deadens the philosophical discourse, and here I would like to present two models for contemplation. First, the mummy in a museum; a historical object removed from its context and placed inside a new construct. Second, books such as History of the World in 1000 Objects provoke heterogeneity by isolating historical objects and putting them into a blank space that generates a fictional environment. A similar kind of fictionalisation and romanticisation can be seen in popular folktales such as One Thousand and One Nights, where phantom effects are achieved by altering the actual order of reality, which makes it hard to distinguish reality from a dream. The objects presented in this exhibition are my attempt to highlight captive and possessed objects. These are chosen from different periods and unified through shared materiality and mediums. This entire body of work rejects the linearity of history, and the reincarnated objects point towards what Agamben would call 'a double anachronism of time'."

The key aspect of Channa's argument is "hard to distinguish reality from dream". To gauge the verity of this observation, one can see that the artist with his two series 'Lost Pages' (charcoal, eraser on canvas) and 'Sleeping Beauty' (fiberglass, gold pigments) takes the viewer in both realms — reality and dream — by making them feel that the images that he's showing are identifiable and at the same time have an air of intangibility about them.

However, the series 'The Order of Objects' (inkjet print on paper), in a manner of speaking, merges these both real and unreal facets rather seamlessly, as if providing a synthesis of what has passed and what exists as the 'now'. Fascinating!

The exhibition concludes on Oct 28.

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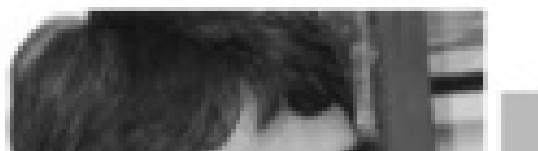
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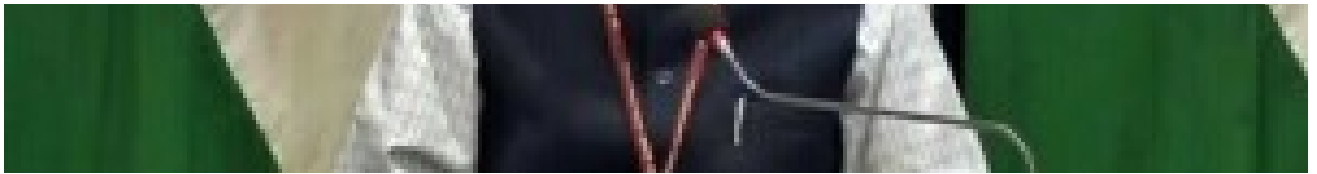
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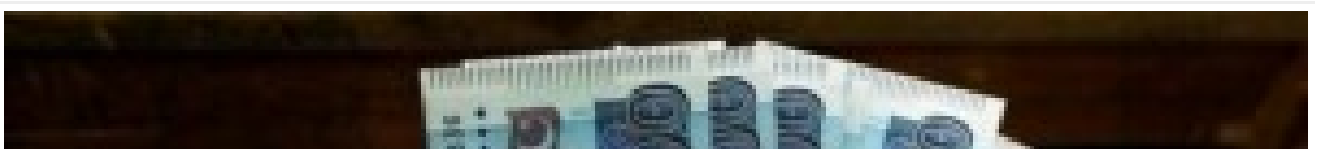
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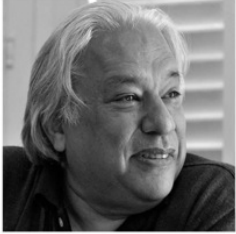
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