

KHAN AND KOWARSKY: A COLLABORATIVE AFFAIR

Intuitive printmakers to the tips of their creative fingers, both Atif Khan and Damon Kowarsky think in terms of velvety Charbonnel ink, acid, etching needles, aquatints and gleaming copper. Their twenty images worked over two continents and over the space of eleven months, have coalesced into a strangely evocative landscape; one that is familiar yet not. The “not” part is the input from Damon Kowarsky, who after many stints in Pakistan is now someone we claim as our own. However his imagery of course hails from his native Australia, so we see unknown skylines of far off cities, often as though sitting on the proverbial flying carpet.

This easy interweaving of elements such as planes or drones, with the Mughal Baadshah, paper windmills, truck art birds, nude figures of men, lush vegetation, guns and urban cityscapes merge and separate in arrangements akin to musical scales; a series of triplets tinkling by. What is striking about these prints is that while both artists firmly maintain their identities, their inclusion of each other's motifs and compositional elements becomes an important rhythm within the confines of the print. Hearts in jungles that are Eastern in flavour, beat a tattoo that is echoed by the garland of guns or in guns metamorphosing into the head of an elephant. The elephant in turn, takes us back to the realm of the Baadshah, when it was highly regarded as a suitable mode of transport for royalty. Ironically though, Khan's Baadshah seems a puppet when seen in the context of Kowarsky's brooding, often supine figures, which through their very stillness exert a pull. Over all of this, cavort the truck art birds. Visually they occupy the same illogical space as the paper windmills and the Dodge pick-up.

Is it the irrationality of these combinations that makes us pause in front of these images? To me, they speak of parables woven by disparate cultures which find an echo in each other through the medium of print. The myth of the Mughal Baashah in Khan's iconography and the nude male in Kowarsky's iconography are used by both artists to create a sense of distance; in Khan's case that would be to do with time and in Kowarsky's it is more to do with the unattainable and unknowable.

The concerns beneath the pulse of this series of collaborative prints are to do with power, the ridiculous and the vastness of the imagination's landscape. This is a journey through the Australian city and outback to the complexities of Lahori roads, the twists and turns that signify life in Pakistan today. The visual language of guns, planes, monsoon rain, the urban jungle and male nude all serve as obedient musical notes to the tune these two artists sing. I find this whimsical foray into another person's mind like being on a roller coaster; you never know when the drop will happen or when you will catch a glimpse of another world.

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