

Going East, Again

15 February 2020–4 April 2020

Rossi & Rossi Hong Kong

Rossi & Rossi is delighted to present *Going East, Again*, a solo exhibition of Rasheed Araeen (b. 1935) – one of the foremost avant-garde artists of our time – from 15 February to 4 April 2020. The exhibition will act as a survey for Araeen's complex practice; exhibiting works from his early portrait drawings to the minimalist sculptures for which he is known.

Trained in Pakistan as a civil engineer, Araeen took up painting and drawing whilst living in Karachi. The strict architectural geometries in the works of his formative years later fused with his early abstract investigations, resulting in what were to become the earliest minimalist sculptures created by an artist living in the United Kingdom.

Araeen has also distinguished himself as a pioneering writer and editor of dissenting and revisionist discourse on art history. Despite being well known for his minimalist geometric sculptures, Araeen's oeuvre extends to performance, photography and painting. From the 1970s to the 1990s, many of his works challenged Eurocentrism within the British art establishment, thus championing the role of minority artists, especially those of Asian, African and Caribbean descent.

Akin in its composition to a cinematic experience, *Christmas Day* (1979) draws the audience into the pathos of its subject. The work is derived from a series of photographic self-portraits the artist took on Christmas Day over the course of several years. The image captures him on a lonely winter's day in London; in the window of a Circle line train, Araeen's face – mostly obscured by his camera – is transformed into a blurred reflection.

In the late 1980s, Araeen extended his practice with a series featuring photographs positioned on canvas in the shape of a Christian cross; the work's green background alludes to the prominent colour in the flag of Pakistan. Representing this aspect of Rasheed's oeuvre is *Green Painting IV* (1985-1986), which shows a young bull that had been given to the artist's sister as a wedding gift that is being prepared for sacrifice. Blue strips of Urdu script accompany the animal, which becomes no more than an exotic decorative detail for the Western viewer, as it oscillates between Western and Eastern ideas of sacrifice. *Green Painting IV* challenges the infrastructure of 'otherness' that exists in both the Eastern and Western viewer, ultimately subverting the religions, perspectives, memories and expressions of both cultures.

For financial reasons, most of Araeen's early structures have only been preserved on paper in the form of drawings. The artist therefore realised a set of sculptures for the present exhibition at Rossi & Rossi based on a 1966 drawing titled *Cube as Sculpture*. The twelve cuboid constructions closely resemble Naum Gabo's *Construction on a Line* (c. 1935–37), which Gabo used to



Green Painting IV, 1985-1986, photographs and acrylic on plywood panels, 175 x 208 cm

demonstrate the fundamental constructive principles stemming from his article, 'Sculpture: Carving and Construction in Space' (1937). The works of both Gabo and Araeen attempt to seek the nonhierarchical relationships of identical and equal elements.

The Greatness of Islamic Civilization (2011-2012), a set of six paintings, is part of a body of work called *Homecoming* (2010-present). The paintings take the names of key members of the Abbasid philosophical movement and turn them into abstracted blocks of colour using complex geometric shapes. *Homecoming* represents a new aspect of Araeen's practice: engagement with geometry as 'Islamic'. Over the last decade, the artist has become increasingly interested in the intellectual and philosophical developments of the classic Islamic world. He has also realised that it is crucial for Muslim societies today to understand their own era of enlightenment in order for them to find the path towards resolution and advancement.

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About the Artist

Rasheed Araeen (b. 1935) is a London-based artist, activist, writer, editor and curator. In 1964, he moved to the United Kingdom from Pakistan, where he had initially trained as a civil engineer. Araeen is recognised as the father of minimalist sculpture in 1960s Britain.

The artist's work in performance, photography, painting and sculpture from the 1970s to the 1990s challenged Eurocentrism within the British art establishment and championed the role of minority artists, especially those of Asian, African and Caribbean descent. In addition to his artistic practice, he took on activist roles with organisations such as the Black Panthers and Artists for Democracy, and founded the critical journals *Black Phoenix*, *Third Text* and *Third Text Asia*. Araeen organised the seminal 1989 exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, which was held at Southbank Centre, London.

In addition to publishing numerous essays and journal articles, Araeen has written two books, *Art Beyond Art: Ecoaesthetics – A Manifesto for the 21st Century* (Third Text Publications, London, 2010) and the autobiographical *Making Myself Visible* (Kala Press, London, 1984).

Araeen's work is held in the collections of various public institutions, including the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE; Tate Modern, London, UK; M+, Hong Kong; the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK; the Arts Council of England; the Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan; the Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru; the Art Institute of Chicago, USA; the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India; the Gwangju Biennale Foundation, South Korea; and the Samdani Art Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

ROSSI & ROSSI

Founded in 1985 in London by Anna Maria Rossi, who was later joined by her son, Fabio, Rossi & Rossi is today amongst the leading representatives of contemporary artists from the Asia-Pacific region. The gallery operates from its headquarters in Hong Kong's South Island Cultural District, as well as a showroom and offices in St. James's, London. A pioneer in the development of contemporary Asian art, Rossi & Rossi attracts major museums and private collectors worldwide. In 2017, Fabio Rossi and Giovanni Martino embarked on a series of exhibitions in Asia with the goal of bringing greater attention to modern and contemporary European artists.

Rossi & Rossi is a member of the Society of London Art Dealers (SLAD), Asian Art in London (AAL), the Hong Kong Art Gallery Association (HKAGA) and the South Island Cultural District (SICD). The gallery also participates in pre-eminent regional and international art fairs, including Art Basel Hong Kong, West Bund Shanghai and TEFAF Maastricht.