



Left: *Opening Word of This New Scripture*. 2015. Acrylic paint and gold leaf on canvas. Overall 152.2 x 182.4 cm. Each panel 152.2 x 91.2 cm

peaceful images in our mind, but here it is something else. It is a different kind of landscape, which is more about the reality of the situation.”

In order to qualify the bodily and bloody appearance of these works, Qureshi recalls a particularly violent incident in the Punjab district of Pakistan in which two boys were lynched by the mob that influenced the principal theme in this series. “As with *All Are The Colour of My Heart* (2015), the body came into my work in this way for the first time in 2010,” he says. “I was moved by the incident of two brothers being killed in a remote part of Punjab. Somebody made a video of the scene

and it was leaked to the media and shown on TV causing a huge reaction. I saw the video but was unable to see it fully because it was so violent. Afterwards, I retained but a few seconds flashback of the event in my mind.” This led to Qureshi colouring his body red and submitting himself to his canvas as if it were a stretcher recreating himself the scene of violence. It proved a turning point for a whole series of paper and panel works that for him were shaped as much by the history of violence in his country as by the thousands of people against such animalistic actions.

Rather than being guilty of inertia, he was doing something. “People were still alive and reacting,” he says. “They are pushing for an unanimous desire for peace. The majority are not like this; there are only a few people acting violently. So that was the reason for combining the body with blood red and for the bloody body depicted with the floral patterns emerging from it. The flowers recall the idea of hope coming out of a dead body.”

And as much as his new works merit our attention, it is just as interesting to survey Qureshi’s sudden and successful rise. The artist fondly describes the turning point of his career as his Sharjah Biennial commission in 2011, in which he decorated the courtyard of the Bait Al Serkal building with the work *Blessings Upon the land of my Love*. And it was that same year that Qureshi was awarded the biennial award for his signature style of layering beauty over violence. Soon after, he was recognised as Deutsche Bank’s Artist of the Year in 2013. Like a monsoon, the winning of such prestigious awards led to a series of high profile shows in less than twelve months. Qureshi’s works at Ropac portray a combination of his creative spirit, reeled in by pockets of miniature details that continue to anchor his work and give it its cultural currency. And for an artist as reluctant as he originally was to take on miniature painting, it is this genre that has proved the making of the artist as well as the merit of his new show. ■  
Idea of a Landscape ran at Thaedus Ropac in Paris through October 17th.

Below: *All Are The Colour of My Heart*. 2015. Gouache and acrylic paint on paper. 152.4 x 274.3 cm



PARIS

# A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

*Reintroducing the body into his works, Imran Qureshi applies paint to the pain of a region under siege. Rajesh Punj scrutinises the grief and grandeur of his inaugural show at Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris*

Imran Qureshi is at a point now where he possibly spends much more of his time hovering just above the clouds than he does rooted to the earth. He greets me in a soft tone when I meet him, surely having just gotten off yet another aircraft. For his inaugural solo show at Ropac, which comes right after two major site-specific commissions — *And They Still Seek the Trace of Blood* at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in 2014, for which Parisians had queue to enter the academic enclave well into the night; and his 2014 work *Two Loves at Quai d’Austerlitz* — Qureshi has drawn together a body of work that for him deals with landscape as a battleground for a new kind of emotional aesthetic. He describes his new works as “either including the human body or those that have the aura of his body present.”

*Idea of Landscape* reads as an entirely two-dimensional show — of sizable canvases and delicate drawings portrayed as painterly explosions throughout the gallery. Autumnal light floods the impressive central space and illuminates his canvases. Beyond acting itself like a spectacle, the light positively pacifies the drama of many of his key works displayed here. Throughout the show one can easily fall prey to an emotional wrestling match between the head and the heart as to whether Qureshi succeeds in recultivating the canon of his original approach or rather creates paintings that are entirely decorative. Tormented by the invasive violence, Qureshi presses home “the idea of how landscape has changed after 9/11. Because the land that is full of life and of nature is in a second transformed into a bloody mass of a landscape,” he explains. “And it’s quite a disturbing thing, because when we think of a landscape painter we have very