

a combination of the language of minimalist art and the spiritual resonance of the Muslim faith, Khan has created a work of tremendous power, presence and gravity.

This process of continual creation and destruction could also be applied to works in which Khan has employed rubber stamps to print words and phrases repeatedly onto a surface, the texts having been taken from key works or from the artist's own poetry. The earliest of these works were born out of grief following the death of the artist's mother and a stillbirth suffered by Khan and his wife, Annie Morris, later the same year. Immense dark and brooding paintings overwhelm the viewer, their inked surfaces enlivened by the shifting light. The stamped words and phrases extend in a radial manner, gradually building up an increasingly dense surface in which the text itself becomes obscured and only those words and phrases that appear on the very edges of the composition give some indication as to their original content. For Khan, these works were cathartic and provided a channel to express his anger, devastation and sorrow.

The most recent works within the exhibition are a pair of layered glass works whose surfaces have been stamped repeatedly. The later works use both black and white ink and seem to reveal a greater optimism.

Similarly, the epic sculptural work *The Beginning* (2016) is shown here for the first time in the UK. The radial compositions of these works evoke forces of energy similar to the idea of the Big Bang: at once a destructive and creative process.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to be able to bring Idris Khan back to Walsall and to share the journey of his practice with family and friends, old and new. We hope that the exhibition will be inspirational to a new generation of artists and thinkers.

Deborah Robinson
Head of Exhibitions

Idris Khan was born in Birmingham in 1978 and his family moved to Walsall that same year. After studying at Walsall College and the University of Derby, he completed his Masters degree at the Royal College of Art, London in 2004. He has exhibited widely, at museums and galleries nationally and internationally, and in 2014, collaborated with renowned choreographer Wayne McGregor to produce the stage design for *Kairos*, which was performed by Ballet Zürich and premiered at Zürich Opernhaus as part of Switzerland's contemporary dance biennale. He has recently completed work on the design and production of a major public monument in Abu Dhabi.

Idris Khan is represented by Victoria Miro, London; Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin; Sean Kelly, New York and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

The New Art Gallery Walsall
Gallery Square Walsall WS2 8LG

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thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk



Events:

In Conversation

Thursday 23 March, 6.30pm
Join the artist in conversation with Oliver Basciano
£3. Booking essential.

Curator's tour

Saturday 1 April, 2pm.
Join Deborah Robinson, Head of Exhibitions for an informal tour of the exhibition.
Free, just drop in.

Publication:

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication with an essay by Oliver Basciano and featuring poetry by the artist. The publication is available to purchase in the Gallery Shop.

Idris Khan
A World Within

3 February — 7 May 2017

Exhibition guide

The New Art Gallery Walsall is delighted to present a major survey exhibition by artist Idris Khan. The exhibition brings together significant bodies of work drawing on a range of interests including classical music, the history of art, literature, philosophy and religion. It provides an overview of the artist's practice, highlighting some of the themes and ideas which have remained prevalent within his work. Whether working with photography, painting, sculpture, moving image or installation, Khan employs a continual process of creation and erasure, adding layers upon layers, concealing and revealing to explore ideas around time, memory, creativity and spirituality.

This exhibition is particularly special for both the artist and the Gallery as Khan grew up in Walsall. He was born in Birmingham in 1978 but moved to Walsall with his family that same year. He attended Park Hall and Barr Beacon Schools and then studied for his Art Foundation Course at Walsall College. This exhibition represents something of a homecoming, enabling the Gallery to celebrate Khan's success and to inspire young people from the region.

The earliest work in the exhibition is *White Court* (2001). Using a 5x4 plate camera to take a photograph of a squash court wall, Khan directs his fascination to the marks made by the impact of rackets and squash balls. The deception here is whether we are looking at reality or a painting, as it resembles a work by Cy Twombly rather than a sports hall in Walsall. It was taken at Khan's former primary school where his late mother used to play. Created whilst the artist was a student in Derby, it demonstrates Khan's early fascination with photography's inherent relationship to painting.

Gallery 1 includes a range of photographic and sculptural works which pay homage to some of the twentieth century's great artists, thinkers and composers. A striking presence is the 10m long sculptural work *Listening to Glenn Gould's version of The Goldberg Variations while thinking about Carl Andre* (2010). Made up of thirty sandblasted oil-sealed blue steel panels, (one for each Variation), the form of the work references the minimalist purity of Carl Andre and in particular, his work, *Fall* (1968). Andre, like other minimalist artists, employed an economy of means to create powerful and commanding abstract works. J S

Bach was originally commissioned to compose *The Goldberg Variations* as a cure for insomnia but Canadian pianist Gould gave this technically demanding work a greater vivacity. Bach, Gould and Andre can each be seen as artists who are dedicated to their medium, highly disciplined and intent on pushing it to its full potential.

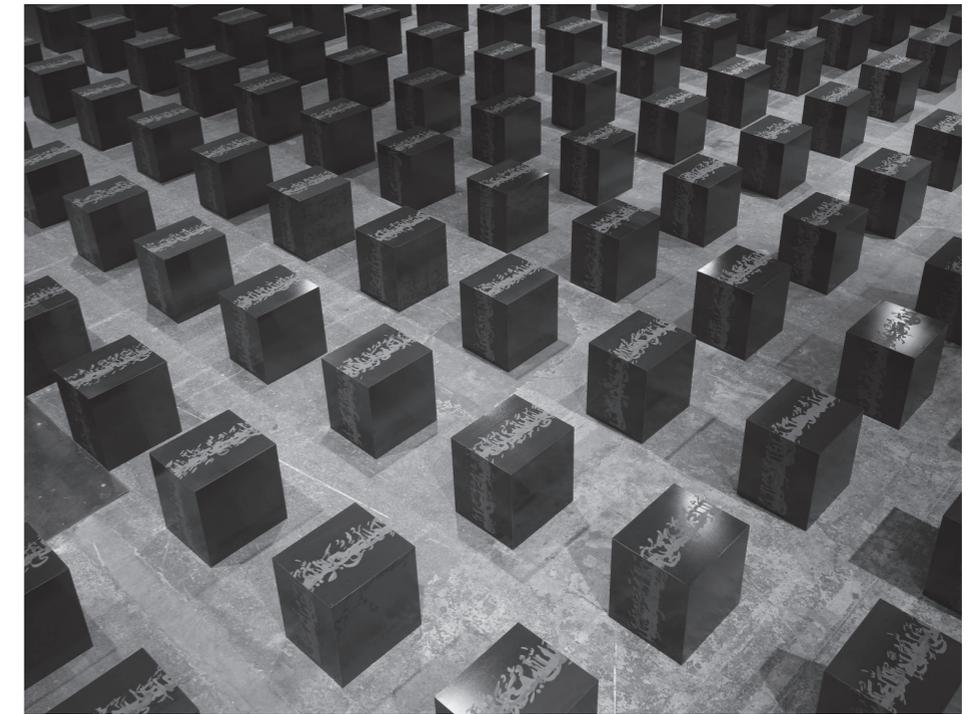
Through the use of digital technologies, Khan has overlaid every single page from key texts such as Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, and the most autobiographical, *The Holy Qur'an* (2004), to create compellingly beautiful multi-layered images that appear both simple and highly complex; both static and fluid. Photography is often regarded as capturing a moment in time but these works seem to encapsulate something more enduring: an essence. Khan has also applied this process to a range of classical music scores. *Black Horizon* (2010), for example, combines *The Bach Melodies*, one of his mother's favourite pieces of music, with the form, scale and title of a Frank Stella painting from 1958.

These works involve multiple repetitive processes and are hugely time consuming to create. When photographing each of the 1,953 pages of the Holy Qur'an, each page had to be handled appropriately

and respectfully. This work alone took two months to complete.

Khan is an artist of dual heritage. His father is a Pakistani surgeon and his mother was a Welsh nurse. Brought up as a Muslim, he attended local mosques and remembers reciting prayers in Arabic. Though he was not aware of the literal meaning of these words, they seemed to convey a spiritual weight and gravity. He was also taught at home to read the Qur'an which requires a ritualistic approach to reading and involves constant repetition. It is believed that spiritual transformation can be achieved through duty and prayer.

Gallery 2 contains a series of works produced for Khan's exhibition *Conflicting Lines* at Victoria Miro Gallery in 2015. Instead of referencing influential works of art, Khan created his own paintings, but only as a vehicle to create photographic works. Using a combination of oil stick and chalk, the artist rapidly writes and draws upon the surface, then erases it, then writes again. This process is constantly repeated again and again and each step is photographed. These are then layered to provide a final photographic work. These works were inspired by Khan's response to the ever increasing images of conflict and trauma that saturate our lives. They also reference Roland Barthes' theory



Idris Khan, *Seven Times*, 2010, Sandblasted oil-sealed blue steel cubes, dimensions variable. Courtesy the Artist and Victoria Miro, London. © Idris Khan

of the *punctum*, where our eyes may be drawn to an otherwise peripheral detail of a traumatic image such as *A Grey Bucket* (2015). The works emerge through a continual process of creation and destruction, any original narratives giving way to purely abstract works of great beauty and presence.

The major sculptural installation *Seven Times* (2010) dominates Gallery 3. Originally created as a larger version comprising 144 steel sculptural components, this piece again references the work of Carl Andre, and in particular, the

work *144 Graphite Silence* (2005). The scale, aesthetic and presence of the sculptural cubes directly reference the Kaaba, the huge black square structure in the heart of Mecca that symbolises a conduit between heaven and earth. During the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca that is made by many Muslims each year, the Kaaba is circled seven times. Inscribed upon the sculptural cubes are Arabic scripts referencing daily prayers. However, these are layered and then sandblasted five times, so that the literal meanings become increasingly obscured. Through