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A MOVEABLE FEAST

WORDS SARAH NH VOGELER | IMAGES COURTESY OF WEI-LING GALLERY & AMIN GULGEE

A look into the sphere of sculptor victorious Amin Gulgee



Since the advent of Modern Man, our genius for creating images has grown exponentially, from decorations on rock surfaces of caves depicting daily lives, to carvings of the female form.

In Asia and Africa, Indian sculptures goes all the way back to its first dynasty, Maurya, and intersects three of the country's religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Janaism. From the first century AD there existed a potent school of Buddhist sculpture in what is currently Northwest Pakistan.

It's intriguing, the arts in this magnificent country. Its rich heritage dates back to five millennia, beginning with in Indus Valley, and prominence on the Islamic

region has resulted in a robust romantic empathy with Islamic culture in Pakistan.

So much talent and diversity, and one, who stands out is sculptor extraordinaire Amin Gulgee. The son of famed calligrapher/ portraitist/ sculptor Ismail Gulgee, Amin has long made a name for himself as a deeply respected art icon. One of the most celebrated artists of Pakistan, he has unveiled works regularly and expansively in the USA, UK, UAE, Portugal, Turkey, China, Japan, Malaysia, India and Singapore. His career took flight in the 90s, his base in Karachi. Inspired by the land's opulent and diverse history, the artist cites Pakistan as points of cogitation, his works deeply rooted in Hindu mythos, Buddhist austerities and



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// Why must art be static?
You look at an abstraction,
sculpted or painted,
an entirely exciting
arrangement of planes,
spheres, nuclei, entirely
without meaning. It would
be perfect, but it is
always still. The next step
in sculpture is motion. //

- **Alexander Calder**



sublime Islamic calligraphy to reconnoiter the causal spiritual of Man.

His creations range from incorporeal sculpture to haute couture type of jewellery, from narrative forms portraying himself and family members to his revolutionary three-dimensional calligraphy. One thing which sets Amin apart from many other artists, he tells you to touch the works, to feel each crevasse, lines and get a sense of each piece; these works in bronze and copper which beguiles and entrances.

The artist says, "Faith is important. Believe in yourself and let the inner singings in your mind take you to places unimaginable. I do not make my work. It makes itself. It demands to be brought into the world to occupy space. In my process, some threads are old and insist on reinventing themselves. Others appear new and fresh and these elements come together to create a woven tapestry of my personal tales. It is contradictory; an old yet new narrative which appropriates, revels, and questions tradition and history."

When asked about the art scene in Pakistan, Amin is quick to reply, "When my late father was working, there may have been only two operating galleries. Now there are almost 40. They might not be all of elite stature but it is blossoming. We however, do need consistent support from the arts community, as these artists need to make a living."

Amin's sculptures are inadvertently, an extended love letter to the world. Represented by Wei-Ling Gallery in Malaysia, his recent show *Walking on the Moon* is wonderfully received. At the recent Art Stage debut in Jakarta, visitors eye his works keenly; they are a lot to take in at first glance, such works of power. Why an extended love letter? Because in the end, these statuaries are only after one thing: the proverbial heart. His intrepid and schematic works are astoundingly thrilling, witty and well, to the untrained eye, are simply beautiful forms. His 2014' copper *Ascension II* for example, are calligraphic-inspired symbols which reaches into the sky and infinity, each

curve and spike deliciously points to what we crave most – love that is eternal.

His Chapati series is just incredible; his form of meditation, to seek 'quiet' from a world spiraling into abject madness. Chapati after all, is bread, sustenance. The Chapati creations are executed one wire at a time with no casting involved. In his way, Amin uses this painstaking method as means of achieving impressions of control in a calm fashion.

And as Michelangelo famously reflected, "Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it", and so it is with Amin's creations, each piece gently unravels, each one infused with facets of his own life; this freeing of beauty that will withstand the painful depredations of time.

His passion for dance, for song, for movement is clearly evident in each work, "Dancing, moving; they are such elemental things which I deeply love." And one can see, feel this 'freedom' in his works *Spider Raga* and *Ascension* – they seem to float, sans gravity, gaily away. +



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1\\ A closer look at the
Chapati Hunger Game

2\\ Ascension
II comprises
calligraphic-inspired
symbols which
reaches into the sky
and infinity.

3\\ Algorithm I

4\\ 4 Quarter Chapatis

5\\ Head I



Born in 1965, Amin Gulgee received a BA in Art History and Economics from Yale University, USA in 1987 and won the Conger B. Goodyear Fine Arts Award for his senior thesis on Moghul gardens.

Gulgee has worked from his studio in Karachi for more than two decades and has exhibited extensively both at home and abroad. His international group shows include "Open: Esposizione Internazionale di Sculture ed Installazioni" in Venice, Italy in 1998; "Pakistan: Another Vision," Brunei Gallery, London, UK in 2000; the Beijing Biennial in 2003; "Beyond Borders," National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, India in 2005; "Paradise Lost," WAH Center, Brooklyn, NY, USA in 2008; "Rites of Passage," Ostrale, Dresden, Germany in 2010 and "New Pathways: Contemporary Art from Pakistan," UN Headquarters, New York, NY, USA in 2016. His work has also been shown at Art Dubai 2009, Art Taipei 2012 and Art Stage Singapore 2016.

An aesthetic patron of Sufism - a unique manifestation of the spiritual side of Islam - his works mirror his individual struggle to perceive himself and to substantiate his essence through an immediate and pure union of the soul with the Divine. The elemental forms and simple scripts in his work, he believes, will help crystallise this connection.