

PRESS RELEASE

Green Cardamom presents *Not Made for Each Other* a solo exhibition of works by Ahmed Ali Manganhar in collaboration with the VM Art Gallery, Karachi.

VM Art Gallery, Karachi. 3 November – 14 November 2009

Daily 10.30 am – 7.30 pm (Sundays, closed)

Inspired by the techniques of film billboard painters, and with a wink to ideas of life imitating art, Ahmed Ali Manganhar's new series of works explores the formal techniques of the film billboard genre. Through witty manipulations of colour and texture he exploits the media to startling effect, critiquing what he calls 'the central myth' in cinema, of romantic love between a man and a woman, and claiming particular moments in film as moments from his own life.

Part formal, painterly exploration and part critique of the myths propagated by commercial cinema, Manganhar's acrylic on canvas works are striking in their use of colour to create a depth of texture. Sporting images of well known film stars – Waheed Murad in drag, *Aurat Raj* (1979); Waheeda Rehman and Guru Dutt reliving their star-crossed encounter, *Kaagaz ke Phool* (1959) – in familiar poses, the works use layered imagery or a hypnotic manipulation of colour combined with Manganhar's singular painting technique, drawing the viewer in.

Speaking about this series of works the artist states:

'As a child, I spent much time watching the craftsmen who came every Thursday to my small town, Tando Allahyar, from neighbouring Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas. They came to paint large film billboards in water colour inside of three hours, the masters asking their students to make graphs to paint in middle tones, in a half finished form that seemed so magical to me. Then the master would take the brush and lay out the finishing touches in fluorescent colours that brought alive the faces of famous actresses but killed the painterly quality of the image. I have tried to go back to that way of painting in middle tones in this series.

I look at these images from Pakistani and Hindustani commercial cinema and paint the moment in them that I recognize as part of the story of my life. I do not know if film imitates life or if life imitates kitsch art, I can not separate the real from the imaginary as stored in memory, but I have painted and recreated these images from films that I feel are made weak by the central myth of romantic love between a man and a woman.

These tales and the billboards that announce them often conflate images of sex with violence. They speak of the love chase, the song and the dance, the fight between rivals, and comic relief but the happy ending of the film where the good hero will vanquish the villain, and win the heroine is foretold. Local cinema and films from across the border tell stories of crime and punishment, full of moral lessons, upholding religion, state and the law.

In my view, the central myth of cinema, its over determined images, can only be dislodged in art and not through the commercial requirements of cinema. I have tried to dislocate these film images from their time and space and tried to tie them in a new narrative so as to find new meaning in them.'

This is Ahmed Ali Manganhar's first solo exhibition in Karachi. Noted as an artist with a fiercely independent point of view, Manganhar has a unique and extensive practice, with an emphasis on painting and drawing. A unique and versatile form of portraiture as well as the popular and the kitsch have been the longstanding cornerstones of his practice. His sources of inspiration range from garish wrapping papers, to historical personalities and film and music stars.

Ahmed Ali Manganhar trained at the National College of Arts, Lahore, where he is now a lecturer. He has had solo exhibitions in Lahore at Rohtas II and the Zahoor ul Akhlaq Gallery and has been part of group exhibitions in galleries in Karachi and Lahore as well as Aicon Gallery in London. Most recently his work was part of Green Cardamom's *Lines of Control* exhibition that took place in Dubai, Karachi and London. His works for that exhibition were also included in the exhibition *How Nations Are Made* at the Cartwright Hall Museum, Bradford and Manor House Ilkley, UK. His work is also included in Green Cardamom's forthcoming exhibition, *Drawn from Life: Drawing Form*.

Note to editors:

This forthcoming exhibition of work by Ahmed Ali Manganhar continues Green Cardamom's curatorial interest in the aesthetics of the moving image on broader streams of the visual arts. Earlier projects that explored similar areas included: *Naeem Azadi (A New Freedom)*, an exhibition held in conjunction with the 6th Kara Film Festival in Karachi in December 2006, that explored the work of artists (Rashid Rana, Shezad Dawood, Muhammad Zeeshan, Saira Wasim and Naeem Rana) inspired by cinema billboard painters; and *Desi Pop*, an exhibition held at Maison Follie Wazemmes in Lille, France in January 2007, that showed work by artists (Hamra Abbas, Faiza Butt, Shezad Dawood, Naeem Rana and Rashid Rana) consciously deploying an international visual language of commercial and cultural exchange.

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