

Said Adrus' Lost Pavilion 2006



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Sites - Sights of memory and mourning  
by Amna Malik

Memory, history and location all come together in a series of photographs, abstract watercolours and a video installation collectively titled *Lost Pavilion* by the British artist Said Adrus. At the centre of this exhibition is a forgotten event, the presence in Britain of Indian soldiers wounded and convalescing in the Royal Pavilion Brighton during the First World War. The archival footage edited by Adrus to a slow pace that marks the melancholic register of the exhibition as a whole, was shot on the occasion of a Royal visit and later used as propaganda to encourage recruitment for the war. It offers an indexical register, giving faces, and bodies to a presence that has been marginalised in British collective memory but in this propaganda film briefly flickered into collective consciousness.

Unlike the European soldiers of the First World War, the contribution of Indian and other colonial officers has rarely been remarked upon. By contrast, the scattered presence of Indian soldiers in Britain, arriving to be hospitalised were imperial subjects and therefore very unlike the immigrants in London, largely eastern Europeans Jews fleeing persecution from pogroms. This exhibition and the project which has been ongoing for some years now, is an invaluable process of excavation that unearths from the layers of time, accumulated between the past and the present, the complex history of Indian participation in the First and Second World Wars. The physical presence of Muslim soldiers' bodies marks the collective presence of their fellow soldiers, Sikhs and Hindus, who were cremated after their deaths but Muslim funeral rites necessitate a burial that allows the deceased to face Mecca, a fortuitous consequence that allows us to mark the Indian contribution to the British effort during the First World War. In Adrus' project

it takes on a particular form, because the burial of these Muslim soldiers on English soil has required the British nation-state to become a custodian of this history and to preserve them from attacks on their graves. It is this sad fact and the subsequent efforts to preserve and safeguard these graves that has marked and shaped Adrus' project.

Initially these deceased Muslims were moved from Brighton and buried in a cemetery near the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking but following numerous desecrations of the graves, they were moved once more to a Commonwealth burial site at Brookwood Cemetery that included the graves of fallen soldiers from Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The photographs that accompany the exhibition mark three of the four different locations in Britain: the Royal Pavilion Brighton the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking and the nearby now empty cemetery in Horsell Common and the graves in their current location that Adrus has mapped out over a number of years in his movement between them. In the process he has fashioned a network of traces that mark the absence of these individuals creating a very particular cartography. Adrus' use of the word 'lost' is evocative here it suggests an attempt to recover something that can only be found in traces giving the sense of a missing presence marked by photography's historic role as witness.

The stark appearance of the grave stones in the Muslim section of the Commonwealth burial site are echoed in the apparently stark forms of the photographic image that dwells in close-up on their regulated arrangement, dividing up the horizon line they reinforce a sense of communal identity between otherwise different individuals. Compare

these graves to those found in Muslim sections across cemeteries in Britain and the contrast between the civilian and the army becomes striking. The elaborate decorative forms of Muslim gravestones in secular cemeteries are rarely an indication of wealth but of custom, photographs might be embedded into gilt framed circles set into the stone, elaborate bronze vases filled with plastic and real flowers will adorn them, at times the differences are also indications of different cultures, Turkish, Pakistani, Somalian, Bangladeshi that mark Muslim Britain today.

None of these differences are evident in the gravestones that we see in these photographs taken by Adrus, their collective identities bring them into alliance with their fellow Christian soldiers. These gravestones mark their inhabitants, not by custom or by appearance, the colour of one's skin or language but by one's moment of death as part of a wider collective will and for a shared ideal of a better future for generations to come. Nor is this shared identity entirely accidental, behind the stark forms there lies an echo of Edwin Luytens' design of the Cenotaph in London that is annually marked as the site of public mourning for the fallen soldiers of the previous wars of the twentieth century. Historian Jay Winter argued that Luytens' design 'says so much because it says so little. It is a form on which anyone could inscribe his or her own thoughts, reveries, and sadness's. It became a place of pilgrimage...' . Luytens' use of Greek architectural forms that were then stripped of 'any hint of celebration' did not meet the approval of Christians because they eschewed any direct religious imagery. They stand in contrast to medieval images of chivalry to be found in English commemorative sites such as Gertrude Alice Meredith Williams' design for the Paisley War memorial, in which a Crusader knight

on horseback was placed amongst Great War infantrymen . This association is part of an English nostalgia for medieval design that is also found in T.H. Lawrence's memorial, though he survived the First World War, the mythic associations that surround his image, argued Jay Winter, are intrinsically tied up with the First World War. They can be found in Eric Kennington's design in which a 'carved effigy of Lawrence, be-robed, and with legs crossed, Crusader-style, for his graves in Dorset.'

If, as Winter argues, most of these First World War commemorative monuments also express a sense of indebtedness, how do we address this history given that there is no such monument to mark Indian soldiers' contributions in England? Moreover, how do we make sense of the Islamic associations of Adrus' photographs of the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking? What connections does this building have to this colonial history, given that Hindus and Sikhs and many different ethnic constituencies were seen as Indians prior to Independence? The shared connection lies in the artistic impact of Islamic art in India that became the dominant artistic model from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, and led to the impact of 'Oriental' patterns and forms in British design in the mid to late nineteenth century. It is a testament to Said Adrus' excavation of the events surrounding the Muslim burial site and the mosque that there is now some information available to the general public about it. The brochure 'The Muslim Burial Ground' published by Woking Galleries (2004) sets out most of the information that follows. According to this brochure the mosque was designed by W.L Chambers after the model of L'Art Arabe by Albert Gayet (1893). This text appears to be a handbook of designs taken from a wide variety of Islamic sources, Persian and Coptic amongst others, that was indicative of the

Orientalist approach to the very diverse cultures of the so-called Near East. According to this brochure the mosque was built to serve the spiritual needs of Indian students who came to study at the Institute for Oriental Learning and Literature Institute established by Dr Gottlieb William Leitner that awarded degrees for the University of Punjab in Lahore. The mosque opened in 1889 and was visited by Queen Victoria's Indian secretary Abdul Karim and the Queen's servants visited it whilst staying at Windsor Castle. As the oldest purpose built mosque in the country it is a curious fixture in what is to all intents and purposes a ubiquitously English environment, the Home Counties are known for their distance from the urban inner city ghettos or the suburbs around major cities where immigrant populations might usually be found. Perhaps it is no surprise that on Leitner's death in 1899 the mosque alongside the Institute was closed and only reopened in 1913 through the efforts of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din and the Woking Commission.

Adrus' evocative watercolours draw on this artistic tradition to offer a more personal reflection, as hand-painted forms, abstract, geometric forms that echo those in the decorative structure of the Shah Jehan Mosque. In Adrus' drawings they are recreated almost as templates of memory fashioned as a flux and flow of shapes and colours in numerous watercolours that dot the exhibition. They seem to be compulsive forms of patterning memory, in their oscillating colours that float and reverberate on the page they seem to suggest a state of mind caught between meditation and melancholy. Meditation because the colours and forms echo and appear to respond to the restful space of the mosque's symmetrical forms that carries the contemplative mind of the worshipper to a higher, divine realm, and yet melancholy because there is a tension of

form, the push and pull of colours on paper that are closer to an expressionist mark. Order and symmetry come close to a state of chaos that seeks to fight the smooth and stark repetition of a single form, proliferating endlessly. In Adrus' watercolours we see abstraction in its' more modernist form than the Islamic designs that draw out the spiritual aspects of European abstract art . They also suggest the residual presence of the artist's earlier work of the 1980s, images in which the modernist dictum of the flatness of painting was transformed into metaphors for the numerous walls of Britain's inner-cities that were 'decorated' with racist graffiti. In these recent watercolours the tension in the painter's gestural marks inflected by the social conflicts of race and racism in the 70s and 80s, become a quieter expressive form, directed by a private melancholic condition. Free of their function as architectural structures these surfaces are spaces in which colour, line and form is always in excess of function, suggesting the effort to contain and suppress the emotive associations of colour and line.

This legacy of the politics of race is also metamorphosed in Adrus' photographs. The frontal form of the images are particularly pronounced in the photographs of the mosque, the familiar green of the patterns on its façade jumps out at the spectator, with only a few details, a pair of trainers resting to the side that wrest the photograph from its' associations with the minarets of mosques in various parts of the Muslim world, suggesting that this building is located in modern life. The rainy wet surfaces of the road and the bleak sky above evoking a more northern climate than the architecture might suggest. The crisp formal lines of the buildings' outlines and the frontal patterns of its appearance as an architectural structure presented in two-dimensional form adopts

a familiarity akin to Hilla Becher's and Bernd Becher's documentary photographs of industrial gasworks and coal bunkers caught briefly just before they were about to be destroyed. This is no accidental association. In response to Thomas Struth's comment that the value of their photographs of industrial buildings lay in their historic value 'which also makes it different from the work of Minimal artists', Bernd Becher stated the following: 'I would put it differently. I would say that we wanted to complete the world of things. When you look, for instance, at objects which were made in medieval times, when you look at a church, you can read many things about the way the people who constructed it thought. There is no comparable archaeology relating to the industrial era, yet you can still learn a lot about the way people in our century have lived and thought...' . If one extends this intense visual attention to the vibrant colours and stark lines of Adrus' images one come close to a sense of the level of optical information of every visual element in the façade of the mosque, that echoes the Bechers' interest in drawing out the latent meanings of objects seen through the lens of straight photography. Such connections may seem far fetched for a British artist who was part of the Black British Arts movement of the 1980s but Adrus like many artists who were part of this era are much more continental than a superficial understanding of their connections with the postcolonial/post-modern aspects of post-war British art might at first suggest. Dislocated from East Africa in 1972, his family moved to Bern in Switzerland but Adrus is as at home in Berlin as he might be in London or Geneva; this cosmopolitanism emerges in his artistic eye. In the artist's photographs of the cemetery, located in Horsell Common, the empty and ruined structure takes on the forms of a classical folly, that were created in the eighteenth century to appear as archaeological

ruins from Ancient Greece. They were deployed in numerous private estates to add to the picturesque fashioning of the English landscape as artfully wild evoking a fake illusion of their remoteness from human presence. The vertical format of the photographs create the sense that the image is a portal to this other location a few miles further north west to their current location in a gallery in Southampton. The position of the camera implies that you or I might be Rousseau's solitary walker, seeking after a state of contemplation that requires our removal from the hustle and bustle of city life, seeking a state of harmony in a place that is filled with 'greenery flowers and birds' with picturesque-far off views of the sea to calm the soul . However, though these photographs stage such a setting here is no such epic grandeur or sublime pleasure of landscapes of the eighteenth century nor is there an allusion to the sublime tortures of the mind that Rousseau embarked on in his *Reveries of A solitary Walker* (1782). Rather these images, at a slight somewhat respectful distance from their subject, are marked by a sense of loss and mourning, of quiet grief. The stillness of their forms; created partly by Adrus' framing of the entrance to the cemetery through the framing of a pair of trees that seem to be metaphorical guards. They appear to be bearing witness to the occasional visitor or perhaps the acts of desecration that occurred within the walls and at the entrance, defaced by white spray paint marking the letters NF that sadly reward duty and sacrifice with hate and ignorance.

In the light of current events and the many lives that have been lost in distant lands, both Muslim and Christian, it seems preposterous to suggest that there is any such thing as a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West, as some intellectuals might have us believe. If we examine the microcosms of life lived by people from day to day

in Britain, we see considerable evidence of connections between people of different religious and ethnic constituencies. One of the enduring legacies of the Black British Arts of the 1980s is the diverse and cosmopolitan nature of those who were part of it. This cosmopolitanism embraced 'black' and white alike in recognition that race and racism was a product of imperial ideology and of power that encouraged conflict and difference by propagating dubious ideas of biological difference. This conflict is now present in a different way, as we are encouraged to adopt a neo-Orientalist view of Islam and the Middle East as imbued in a violent tradition antithetical to the West and yet, as Adrus' project indicates Muslims and Islam have long been a part of European consciousness and vice-versa. In *Lost Pavilion* the collective impulse of the Black Arts movement of the 1980s continues in his attention to the collective contribution of Indian soldiers of diverse ethnic and religious constituencies, marked by the presence of these graves of Muslim soldiers that implies the absence of others who fought alongside them.

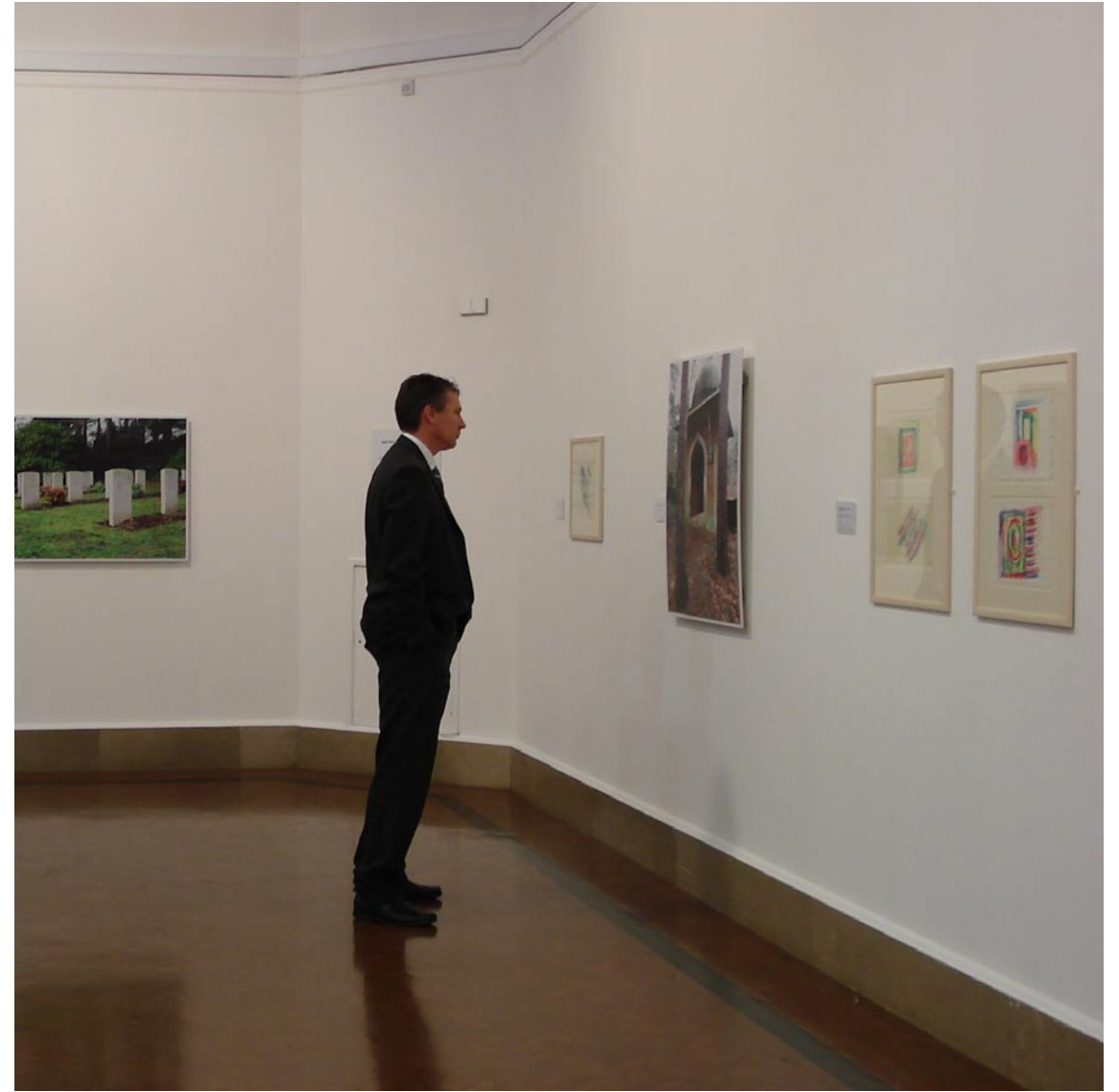
Amna Malik













# Said Adrus CV

1958 Born in Kampala, 'British East Africa'

## EDUCATION

1992-93 Post Graduate Studies, Goldsmiths College, University of London

1980-83 BA (Hons) Fine Art, Nottingham Trent Polytechnic

1978-80 Foundation, Stourbridge College of Technology & Art

## ONE PERSON SHOWS

PAVILION RECAPTURED

Southampton City Art Gallery & Museum 2006

IN-TRANSIT

Installation at Watermans Art Centre, London 2003

KHANA PINA

Installation at Memsaab Restaurant, Nottingham 2001

IT AINT ETHNIC

One Gallery, London 1999

IN- XILE

Bonington Gallery Nottingham Trent University & Tour  
to Chapman Gallery, Salford University, Manchester 1999

SELECTED WORKS

Loeb Gallery, Berne, Switzerland 1995

ON THE SPOT

Bracknell Gallery, South Hill Park Arts Centre 1995

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Forum Etc., Berne, Switzerland 1993

PORTRAIT OF ANOTHER KIND

Metro Cinema Gallery, Derby 1990

SELECTED WORKS

City Gallery & Phoenix Arts, Leicester 1990

PER UN ARTE OLTRE LA FRONTIERA

Museo D'Arte Contemporanea della Valcellina, Claut & at  
Juliets Room, Trieste, Italy

CREATIVITY KNOWLEDGE & FAITH

Horizon Gallery, London 1988

REFLECTIONS

Loeb Gallery Berne, Switzerland

ARTISTS SHOWCASE

Castle Museum, Nottingham

## GROUP SHOWS

INTERVENTIONS IN LIFE, LATE AT TATE,  
Tate Britain, London 2006

THE MUSLIM VERNACULAR & THE BRITISH LANDSCAPE,  
Film Screenings at Tate Britain, London 2005

DIGITAL BRIDGES

Westbeth Gallery, New York, USA 2003

BELONGING

Shedhalle, Zurich, Switzerland 2001

MEETING POINT

City Gallery, Leicester 2001

NAVEL OF THE WORLD

Multimedia Video Diary project, Hof 3 Switzerland 1998

CHANGE DIRECTORY

Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland

BOX PROJECT

Angel Row Gallery & Tour, MOI Installation London

TRANSFORMING THE CROWN

Bronx Museum of Arts, New York

NEK GENERATION

Nottingham Castle Grounds

TRANSCULTURAL GALLERY SHOW

Cartwright Hall, Bradford

## GROUP SHOWS

STEINHOF 96

Burgdorf, Switzerland 1986

PANCHAYAT OPEN STUDIOS

as part of Whitechapel Open, London

FREMDE STOEREN

Landhaus, Solothurn, Switzerland 1995

TRANSITION OF RICHES

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Southampton City Art Gallery & Tour 1993/94

BLACK PEOPLE & THE BRITISH FLAG

Cornerhouse, Manchester & City Gallery, Leicester

CHANGING PLACES

Ikon Gallery Touring Show, Birmingham 1992

CROSSING BLACK WATERS

City Gallery, Leicester, Oldham Art Gallery, South London Art Gallery & Tour 1992

FOURTH HAVANA BIENNALE

Havana, Cuba

IL SUD DEL MONDO

Civic Gallery, Marsala, Sicily, Italy

HISTORY & IDENTITY

Norwich Gallery ( N.I.A.D ) & Tour

FOUR ARTISTS

Alten Braurei , Burgdorf , Switzerland

LET THE CANVAS COME TO LIFE WITH DARK FACES

Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry & Tour

ART FOR EVERYWHERE

Peterborough Museum Art Gallery

30 ARTISTS

Oldknows Factory , Nottingham

ART TRAIL THEATRE ROYAL,  
Nottingham

BLACK ART: PLOTTING THE COURSE

Oldham Art Gallery & Tour

THE ELEMENT WITHIN

Bonington Gallery, Nottingham

THREE ASIAN ARTISTS

Commonwealth Institute, London

EASTERN VIEWS

Leicester Museum & Art Gallery

ARTISTS AGAINST APARTHEID

Royal Festival Hall, London

## GRANTS & AWARDS

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND SOUTH EAST

Southern Arts Research and Development Grant

YEAR OF THE ARTIST East Midlands Arts & Arts Council of England

Southern Arts Research & Development Grant

British Council Travel Grant for exhibitions in Switzerland

EAST MIDLANDS ARTS FINE ART BURSARY

British Council Travel Grant for Havana Biennale, Cuba

East Midlands Arts & Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Bursary for one year in Community Arts

1984/86 East Midlands Starter & Project Grant

## MEDIA COVERAGE

1994 Take 15 Central Television ( Birmingham Museum )

1990 FIRST NIGHT Central T.V. City Gallery , Leicester

1989 NETWORK EAST Profile on BBC2 as part of Horizon Gallery London

## COMMISSIONS

2003/2004 Woking Galleries & SEMLAC for work in progress for Pavilion Video

2002/2003 Reading Borough Council ( with Artist B Hunjan) for outdoor colour concrete panel as part of new Housing development

2000/2001 Khana Pina Video Installation, Apna Arts & East Midlands

Arts , Year of the Artist (YOTA)

CULTURAL MAPPING PUBLIC ART PROJECT Commission by Public Art Leicester for the Neighbourhood project SACRED SPACES with artist Bhajan Hunjan and creation of a Master -plan

1995 Bethnal green City Challenge for the Mural at Atlee Adventure Playground, Bricklane area, East London

South Hill Park Arts centre, Bracknell with additional sponsorship by Panasonic UK for the Installation ON THE SPOT

1993 South Asian Visual Arts Festival (SAVAF) & Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery for the Installation FRAGILE -HANDLE WITH CARE as part of Transition of Riches exhibition

## COLLECTIONS

Valcellina Museum of Contemporary Art, Claut , Italy

Cartwright Hall, Bradford Museum & Art Gallery

Leicester Education Authority, Nottingham County Council

Private Collections in England, Italy, US, Germany and Switzerland

