

Rachel Spence, "Curator Hammad Nasar: 'What If All Turner's Best Paintings Were in Lahore?," *Financial Times*, February 11, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/4f9a1aba-a3b2-4da0-8463-e62d6d604628>.

FINANCIAL TIMES

Visual Arts

Curator Hammad Nasar: 'What if all Turner's best paintings were in Lahore?'

His latest show in Coventry addresses difficult colonial histories with an alternative take on art in the UK

Rachel Spence

February 11, 2023



Detail from 'Bloodlines' (1997) by Iftikhar Dadi and Nalini Malani © Andrew Paterson/Herbert Art Gallery & Museum collection

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Divided Selves is no exception. Showcasing 26 artists who explore how we “make peace with difficult histories and traumatic pasts without being paralysed by them . . . to shape a common future”, it couldn’t have a more fitting home than Coventry, which was devastated during the wartime Blitz.

Nasar has drawn several of his participants from the Herbert’s own “Peace and Reconciliation” collection. But he has also chosen art from the British Council Collection, which, along with the Arts Council Collection, is due to transfer in its entirety to Coventry when it becomes home to the new National Collections Centre in 2024.

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Imaginative dialogues are Nasar’s forte. At the Herbert, our chat unfolds in the company of “Moonstomp”, a skinhead-style mannequin by Rene Matić; “Lost Pavilions”, two photographs of abandoned cemeteries by Said Adrus; and “Bloodlines” by Iftikhar Dadi and Nalini Malani, a pair of maps threaded with a line of blood-red sequins.

Such works prise open Britain’s less-told stories. Matić reclaims the origins of skinhead culture — tainted by its neo-fascist associations — in working-class Caribbean and white British communities. Adrus alludes to the desecration of the graves of Muslim soldiers who gave their lives for Britain in the first world war. The cartographies of Dadi and Malani, the former born in Pakistan, the latter in India, commemorate the millions displaced and killed as a result of the line of partition drawn through India in 1947 by British law lord Cyril Radcliffe and the resulting trauma that fuelled south Asian migration to Britain. “He became chancellor of Warwick university” is Nasar’s dry comment.

For Nasar, such works help remedy Britain’s affliction as an “insufficiently imagined country”. Certainly, at a moment when its government is tightening both geographical and discursive borders, the complex, global weave of *Divided Selves* operates as a welcome corrective.

‘Divided Selves’, February 18-September 24, theherbert.org