



## V&A opens installation marking the 75th anniversary of Pakistan

***What Is Seen and What Is Not - Osman Yousefzada***

**29 July 2022 – 25 September 2022**

**Supported by ZVM Rangoonwala Foundation**

Today the V&A opens *What Is Seen and What Is Not* by inter-disciplinary artist Osman Yousefzada. This series of interventions responds to the 75th anniversary of Pakistan and explores themes of displacement, movement, migration, and the impact of the climate crisis. The interventions across the museum are free to visit and have been commissioned by the British Council in partnership with the V&A and the High Commission of Pakistan as part of the British Council's festival season 'Pakistan/UK: New Perspective'.

Osman's work is a tripartite of site-specific works, and brings together textiles, wrapped objects and a seating installation to showcase the rich variety of traditional and contemporary Pakistani craftsmanship. Together, the works present Osman's unique and highly personal perspective on migratory experience and identity and offers a subtle and contemplative space to engage with objects and craft techniques rooted in the heritages of Pakistani culture. Working collaboratively with local craftsmen, Osman developed new techniques and stitches - working on non-traditional materials, which he complements with painting, producing a body of work reflecting on shrines and ritualised spaces of transcendence.

**Osman Yousefzada** said: *"It's a great honour to be commissioned to reflect on the 75 years of Pakistan's independence. What Is Seen and What Is Not offers a portrait of contemporary Pakistan, through a British diasporic lens as it attempts to reel away from colonial subjugation. However, Pakistan is still a casualty of neo-colonial structures, contributing less than 1% to green gas emissions and in return it is the 5th most vulnerable country to climate change, as rising temperatures result in great floods and an eventual loss of the Himalayan ice reservoirs, causing tremendous displacement and a loss of homeland to its people."*

**Director of the V&A, Tristram Hunt** said: *"We are thrilled to curate these ambitious site-specific works by Osman Yousefzada, in partnership with the British Council and the High*

*Commission of Pakistan, to mark the 75th anniversary of the foundation of Pakistan. What is Seen and What is Not is a commentary on the migratory experience, displacement and the effects of the climate crisis, while showcasing the ingenuity of Pakistani craftsmanship. Interventions such as this offer an opportunity to bring diaspora voices to the heart of the V&A, to be in conversation with the museum's vast South Asia collection."*

**Skinder Hundal MBE, Director Arts, British Council** said: *"The British Council is proud to be working with Osman Yousefzada, the V&A and the High Commission of Pakistan on What Is Seen, What Is Not as part of our Pakistan/ UK New Perspectives Season. This project is an embodiment of what the British Council and the High Commission of Pakistan are setting out to achieve with the New Perspectives Season- creating a bridge between cultures, challenging perceptions, and opening up new narratives and channels of discourse between contemporary societies in Pakistan and the UK. As we mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pakistan, this work both acknowledges the important shared histories of our nations and creates space for new perspectives- I can't wait to experience it!"*

Visitors to the V&A first encounter Osman's work in the Dome in the form of several large-scale textile banners depicting abstracted figures in motion. Handcrafted using different dyeing techniques with woven surface decoration and metallic threads, the figures are suggestive ancient talismanic symbols. The works will invite contemplation on the complex riches of both sacred and secular histories of South Asian culture and Pakistan's identity today.

Moving through the museum and into the sculpture galleries, a wooden structure evoking makeshift shrines found around South Asia, showcase domestic-sized wrapped objects cast in glass, clay and wrapped in richly woven textile. Appearing to contain domestic items such as a pot or vessel, the objects evoke themes of migration and reflect upon how displaced people travel with treasured possessions, making the journey from place to place, country to country, necessitated by social, political, or economic upheaval.

For the final intervention, the John Madejeski Garden is transformed into a space for communal contemplation, with a number of colourful charpai and mora stools, designed to be used, moved and enjoyed by visitors, reflecting themes of displacement. Each charpai (a ubiquitous day bed found across South Asia) is handmade using different weaving techniques to celebrate the diversity of the textile heritage of Pakistan. Finally, at the centre of the Garden installation there is a wooden vessel, typically found in the mangroves of coastal Pakistan. Moored off water, the vessel symbolises the precarity of water-dependent communities and the erosion of natural environments at this moment of global climate crisis as well as colonial histories of exploitation.

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**For further PRESS information about *Osman Yousefzada: What is Seen and What is Not* please contact Shannon Nash on [s.nash@vam.ac.uk](mailto:s.nash@vam.ac.uk) / 020 7942 2502 (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from [pressimages.vam.ac.uk](http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk).**

### **About the V&A**

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A) is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity, spanning 5000 years of human creativity. It was established in 1852 to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, its purpose is to champion creative industry, inspire the next generation, and spark everyone's imagination. [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

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### **About Osman Yousefzada**

Osman Yousefzada (1977) is a London-based, Birmingham-born inter-disciplinary artist, whose practice has expanded since launching his eponymous label in 2008 revolving around modes of storytelling, merging autobiography with fiction and ritual. His work is concerned with the representation and rupture of the migrant experience and references contemporary socio-political issues. These themes are explored through moving image, installations, text works, sculpture, and garment making along with performance. Osman studied at SOAS and Central Saint Martins and went on to do a Masters' at Cambridge University. He is currently undertaking a practice-led PhD at the Royal College of Art, exploring migrant spaces as interdisciplinary research across Sculpture and Spatial Architecture. Yousefzada has exhibited internationally, from the Whitechapel Gallery and Lahore Biennale to Mendes Wood Brussels and the Dhaka Art Summit. He has also exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum, Design Museum London, Ringling Museum in Florida, and Cincinnati Art Museum in Ohio. His solo exhibition, 'Being Somewhere Else', which focused on the experience of migration, took place at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham in 2018. Osman has been creating a Zine since 2013 – he also curates a collaborative journal, The Collective, a cross-disciplinary publication featuring artists, writers and other creatives. He has currently launched a new zine called 'Common' at the RCA, which is based on stories and cultural production of those who identify as working class artists, along with those who are interested in class conversations and whose work explores these themes.

### **About the British Council**

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. In 2019-2020 we reached over 75 million people directly and 758 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive a 14.5 per cent core funding grant from the UK government. [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

### **About the High Commission of Pakistan**

The High Commission of Pakistan is the diplomatic mission of Pakistan in the United Kingdom and is working in partnership with the British Council on elements of the Pakistan-UK New Perspectives 2022 programme to celebrate Pakistan's 75th anniversary in 2022.

