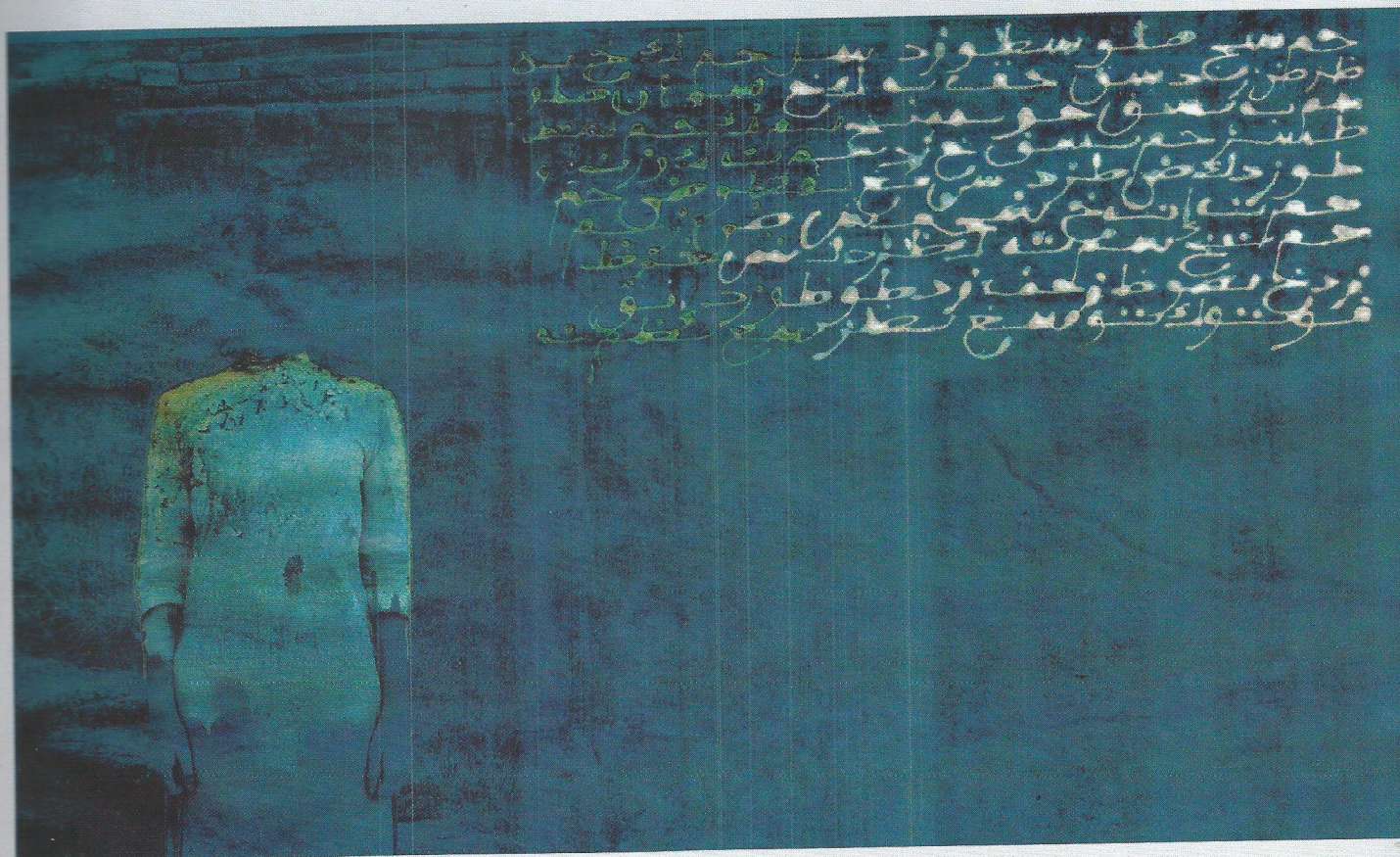


GOODBYE TO LANGUAGE



Saubiya Chasmawala. *Untitled*. Ink, masking fluid and coffee on printed photograph. 22" x 15". 2016.

Three artists focus on the materiality of words instead of their meanings in a show at Tarq, Mumbai, titled *In Letter and Spirit* from the 9th of June to the 2nd of July.

New Hampshire-based, Nepali artist Youdhisthir Maharjan fuses erasure poetics with drawings to create collages. In some works, he uses the technique of whitening out the text; in others, he carves out the words. In *Beneath Her Feet*, for example, he has whited out the entire text on the page except the letter 'o', around which he has made fluffy clouds. In works where he has excised letters, the page becomes a living thing that breathes through word-shaped holes. The overall effect is as if the artist has opened the lids of the tight-fitting bounded vessels in which the words are encaged, and they have flown away like birds, leaving their marks behind. In an act of poetic dismemberment, Maharjan has excised words from a page of Kate Mc Cord's *In the Land of Blue Burqas*, a book about the invisibility of women in Afghanistan. Maharjan has used the cut-up text to make a concave shape – like a shut eyelid in the centre of the page. The 'blinded' page and the shut eye hint at the darkness that seems to have engulfed Afghan society. Do these holes imply annihilation of sense and meaning or do they unfasten the page and rebel against the idea of the textual object as a fixed entity? As is obvious, these works offer a comment on the politics of bans and censorship as well.

Pakistani artist Muzzumil Ruheel, who has earlier used texts from various media like television tickers and radio broadcasts, for making ornamental calligraphic forms, has used space intelligently to mount poetic text. He has used calligraphy on architectural forms like cubes, walls and floors. Language is represented as a place one can inhabit and find shelter in. In one work, he has rendered a typical landscape using calligrams to represent the sky, for instance.

Landscape becomes the site of erasure and incomplete reclamation of text in Indian artist Saubiya Chasmawala's works. Words are untethered without sense and meaning in her works; they are remains from her past and they linger only as the 'exfoliation' of language. Chasmawala spoke Arabic as a child but with time the memory of the language eroded. In her works, Arabic words strung into random sentences are depicted as a spatial feature of misty, effaced landscapes. In these spectralscapes the figures are often swathed and scratched out; words are sutured and appear like bandaged wounds. They come across as lost objects that vibrate with emotional energy. In one untitled photograph stained blue with ink, a headless woman stands in front of a brick wall with Arabic script superimposed on it. The decapitated figure reflects the horror of memory erasure while the hazy landscape suggests a zone conjured by an amnesiac, where the words seem hallucinatory.

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