

## Hortus Nocte (The Dark Garden)

The work of this dark garden alludes to many things, like so many plants curated within the heterotopia of a simple garden their bond exists in the mind of the gardener and in this case it is mine. I have both travelled and dwelled, experiencing the garden through the lens of another culture and it is simultaneously geologic, post-colonial, anthropogenic and aspirational. It is in microcosm our collective environmental crisis and an ever present reminder of the angst of these dark times. However the dark garden is not all negativity, rather it is about balance and change. I see it as an eclipse in the reign of natural fecundity that is this earth, a dimming of the biosphere as the planet heats up and late capitalism eats everything it encounters. In the work Hortus Nocte, 2022 the large Persianate hand-knotted rug has been systematically embroidered, so removing or shrouding all the floral elements with black wool embroidery. They are still there, the carpet is essentially unchanged and their colours peek at the edges of these interventions. It appears as an eclipse of the metaphysical *-Charbagh-* alluded to in the underlying text (and weave) of the carpet below; and there is the implication of this phenomena's temporary nature. The dark garden also draws upon the northern European seasonal garden of my current lived experience so different from the many gardens I have made over several decades in Pakistan. Gardening continues to be my research activity and the balance to my studio time. The *Sambucus nigra* var. black lace (the black Elder) that features in some of these works grows right outside my studio in Bristol, these plants are currently just a few skeletal sticks and it is hard to imagine that spring will bring their return to full form and opulent lacey black foliage.

I suggest there is a *terroir* of art as there is for certain other products of the living earth for as an artist I draw upon the land to understand where I am as much through the natural environment as through the human culture it hosts. Culture, I believe has always grown out from the living ground. As in a garden, I hope to make works of multi-layered complexity that continue to reveal themselves over many seasons. Coal and clay in the installation "Original Sin" 2022, draw upon my experience at the Pioneer Residency in Khushab, 2018 which lies at the beginning of this new mineral trajectory in my thinking. It was the plants and every scale of life (diatomaceous chalks) that sequestered the excess atmospheric carbon in the Carboniferous era and allowed the explosion of biodiversity that followed upon a cooling earth. Coal lies at the beginning of the industrial age, the age of steam-power, but is still a huge contributor to our collective global carbon deficit. Palimpsests in many forms flow through these works, whether they be of archival texts, culturally specific textiles or P. J. Redoute's exquisite botanical illustrations, here undone, so that they may be read again.

These all relate to the garden, for the man-made garden is always a palimpsest of nature and culture of man and place. | recently encountered some of Anwar Shemza's botanical cyanotypes from the 1970's and have alluded to these in my own way, for Shemza is never far from my mind. I continue to collaborate with other artists, something that has always been a significant

part of my practice of the past forty years. Adnan Madani whose positing of *Terra Nullius* in relation to my 'Carless Mapping' textile work of 2020 led to my conception of Hortus Nocte (the textile work of 2022). Adnan has contributed a text here that responds to and extends some of the ideas around these current works and I look forward to our many future collaborations. Malcom Hutchinson has also collaborated and facilitated the short video work we made one freezing April morning this year in Somerset, crossing icy streams and a muddy field to gain access to the evergreen Mistletoe which is such a feature of the culture and mythology of this part of England, as I write this on the Winter solstice of 2022. *Viscum album* (video) revisits my work of the same title in "Extra Ordinary" curated by Rashid Rana at Canvas Gallery in 2013.

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Dec. 21st 2022