

PRESS RELEASE

12 March 2018

The logo for The New Art Gallery Walsall, featuring the text "The New Art Gallery Walsall" in white on a black background.

Mahtab Hussain

Going Back Home To Where I Came From

The New Art Gallery Walsall

25 May – 2 September 2018

Preview: Thursday 24 May, 6-8pm

Floor 3, Gallery 1

In September 2016, Mahtab Hussain travelled to Kashmir in Pakistan; the place his parents had once called home. He met members of his family for the first time, including his great grandmother, and witnessed the kind of life he may have lived, if history had taken a different turn.

I wanted my work to encapsulate this profound feeling of having returned home, to a place where close members of my family lived whom I'd met for the first time, familial strangers who had made me feel so incredibly welcome, people my parents had left behind. Our conversations were long and wonderful. I began to speak my mother tongue and increasingly conversed fluently in Urdu. We discussed my parents, in particular my mother as a child and I seized the chance to wander through the cornfields she would have run through, retracing some of the paths she would have taken, even sitting on the same well she once described to me....I knew I would never be able to claim a part of Kashmir for myself, it would never be my home; a familiar feeling of loss, disorientation and emotional fragmentation was re-released, the same feeling I'd felt for years growing up in England. I was a lost boy, living among lost generations, who are not able to call any place home.

Mahtab Hussain

Born and raised in Glasgow in the 1980s, Mahtab Hussain, like many others, experienced racism and discrimination. He was frequently made to feel like he did not belong in Britain yet he knew no other home. Now living in the British Midlands, Hussain has developed an artistic practice which explores ideas of homeland, race,

identity, hybridity and cultural difference, focusing primarily on the British Muslim community.

This exhibition, *Going Back Home to Where I Came From*, is a powerful and poetic reflection on ideas of home, belonging and displacement. It also represents a deeply emotional personal journey of discovery whilst revealing insight into the people and the landscapes of Kashmir.

The exploration of notions of home and displacement is especially resonant as Hussain's photographs also testify to the enduring consequences of the construction of the Mangla Dam. This is an enormous construction on the Jhelum River in the Mirpur Districts of Jammu and Kashmir which was created in an attempt to deal with issues around water rights following the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Subsequently, the construction and release of the dam in 1967 resulted in the submersion of over 280 towns and villages and the displacement of 110,000 people, who had considered this region to be their home. Many found their way to Britain. Immigrants helped to resolve labour shortages in the steel and textile industries in particular and doctors were recruited by the NHS. In the UK, around 70% of those referred to as "Pakistanis" are from the Dadyal-Mirpuri area of Ashad Kashmir.

Hussain's mother was from Old Mirpur and the artist remembers her telling stories about the many ways in which people had been affected. To this day, the Dam developments continue to force people out of their homes, their land and their community spaces. Around a quarter of a million people have now been affected and the number is still rising.

Whilst Hussain's story is intensely personal, it resonates with notions of both displacement and discovery that many can identify with.

Hussain's exhibition will extend into the Family Gallery where over the next few months, we will build and decorate a traditional Kashmiri mud house and create a wall of tintype portraits of the local community.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication published by Ikon Gallery and supported by the British Council. It includes texts by Jonathan Watkins, Frank Uekötter, Josiah McNeil and Mahtab Hussain. Copies of the publication are available on request.

Mahtab Hussain's *Going Back to Where I Came From* will launch alongside *immortalise*, an exhibition by Walsall-based portrait artist, Andrew Tift.

ENDS

Note to Editors:

Artist Biography

British artist, Mahtab Hussain (b. 1981), explores the important relationship between identity, heritage and displacement. His themes develop through long-term research articulating a visual language that challenges the prevailing concepts of multiculturalism.

He received his BA in History of Art at Goldsmith College specialising in Fine Art Photography (2002); his MA in Museum and Gallery Management, City University, London (2006); he completed a MA in Photography at Nottingham Trent University (2013).

He is perhaps best known for his recent body of work entitled *You Get Me?* which focused on young working class Asian men in contemporary Britain. The exhibition was curated by Mark Sealy and launched at Autograph ABP, London in 2017. It will travel to Impressions Gallery this year. The project has attracted widespread press and media coverage including The Guardian, The Economist, The Independent, Vanity Fair, New York Times, Metro, BuzzFeed and Dazed and Confused.

Hussain has been recipient of numerous awards and commissions including; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; New Art Exchange, Nottingham; Arts Council England; Arts Humanities Research Council; he has also been winner of the Curators Choice Award, Culture Cloud at New Art Exchange and Format 13 Portfolio Review Award for most significant review. Hussain was selected as the 2015 Light Work + Autograph ABP Artist-in-Residence, and chosen from 500 international artists to be 'discovery artist' under the prestigious Discoveries Award in 2016 at Houston FotoFest.

Hussain has published four artist books. His *You Get Me?* published by MACK books with the support of Arts Council England. This book received the Light Work Photobook Award for 2017. *Going Back Home To Where I Came From* is published by Ikon Gallery, supported by Arts Council England and The British Council. *The Quiet Town of Tipton* was published by Dewi Lewis and commissioned by Multistory and *The Commonality of Strangers* was published by New Art Exchange supported by Arts Council England.

Interviews

For further information and press images, please contact Anna-Maria Pfab on 07794 347633 or by email at pfabanna@gmail.com

For images, interview opportunities and further information, please contact Chris Wilkinson, Marketing Officer on 01922 654416 or email Chris.wilkinson@walsall.gov.uk

Open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 5pm, Sunday 12noon – 4pm.
Closed Mondays and Bank Holidays. Free admission.

The New Art Gallery Walsall is funded by revenue support from Walsall Council and the Arts Council England.

For more information visit thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk



Walsall Council



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



IKON

**METRO
IMAGING**