

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Project Art Divvy and Rossi & Rossi present:

## THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN

Sophia Balagamwala | Saud Baloch | Zulfikar Ali Bhutto  
Maria Khan | Abdullah Qureshi

6 December 2018 – 31 January 2018  
Private view: Thursday 6 December, 4–8 p.m.

Project Art Divvy and Rossi & Rossi are delighted to present *The Perfect Gentleman*, an exhibition of artworks by Sophia Balagamwala, Saud Baloch, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Maria Khan and Abdullah Qureshi.

*The Perfect Gentleman*, is the third of a series of collaborative exhibitions held by Project Art Divvy and Rossi & Rossi.

This partnership is geared towards extending support and building interest in a new generation of cutting-edge artists from Pakistan. We are extremely grateful to the Rangoonwala Foundation for their generous support towards this exhibition and the previous instalment in the series.

This exhibition seeks to challenge established archetypes of manliness and, in particular, toxic masculinity. Narratives throughout literature and history have depicted daring, brave men as the ideal: men who have stood up for their beliefs, defended their women, and demanded the respect of their peers and subordinates. These are strong men with an entrenched fear of emotional vulnerability, and who follow the adage, “boys don’t cry”. Similar antiquated references continue to pervade contemporary culture. Through their bold, diverse artworks, the artists in this exhibition respond to the prescribed tenets of manliness, including the behavioural and physical attributes of historically accepted macho bravado.

Set in fictional landscapes, Sophia Balagamwala and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto present the epitome of the celebrated alpha male: men who are symbols of power and strength – army generals, wrestlers and war heroes. In *Golden Opportunist*, Balagamwala’s general wears a suit decked with medals representing his many honours. The artist has chosen to add pops of vivid colour and witty details into her portrayal, perfectly rendering her General’s oversized moustache as he gazes down from his gilded frame. Inspired by archival material, Bhutto illustrates a futuristic narrative, of wrestling men, and specifically selected Urdu words from a children’s storybook about warfare. His images are screen-printed upon embroidered and decorated textiles in an effort to reclaim and recondition the fabric of identity.

Traditionally, men have been schooled to be stoic. They have been discouraged from displaying emotional availability or sensitivity. The society within which they have been raised has compelled them to conform to notions of heteronormative masculinity. Subsequently, Abdullah Qureshi and Saud Baloch explore the fragility of men. Qureshi paints queer men who confide in him and expose themselves, sharing their loves, hopes and fears. Baloch has created delicate sculptures encircling portraits of young men who have suffered great trauma, and have been hunted and persecuted, disappeared and tortured.

Aware of society’s cultural conditioning, which is deeply embedded by early childhood, the artists also point out the viewer’s own predispositions towards judgements. Maria Khan incorporates the physical characteristics of men into the figures she depicts, producing androgynous subjects whose unusual appearances can be jarring, highlighting the viewer’s own prejudice.

**Sophia Balagamwala** (b. 1987) lives and works in Karachi. Balagamwala is an artist, illustrator and curator. She has a BA from the University of Toronto (2010) and an MFA from Cornell University (2014). Her work draws inspiration from archives,



children's books and animated films. She is interested in how stories are constructed, specifically those surrounding national heroes and nation building. Her practice explores the intersectional space in which history, fiction and nonsense converge. Her most recent works investigate the myths and representations in colonial era portraiture and objects.

**Saud Baloch** (b. 1982) lives and works in the UK. Baloch studied Fine Arts at the University of Balochistan in Quetta before moving to Lahore in 2008 to study at National College of Arts, Lahore (2013). Baloch's primarily sculptural and drawing based practice investigates the sufferings inflicted on mostly young, male bodies as a result of having been born into a particular time and place. Baloch has exhibited widely through galleries in Pakistan, and has participated in Arts Council funded projects and exhibited as a solo artist in the UK.

**Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** (b. 1990) lives and works in San Francisco, USA. Bhutto is a visual and performance artist, zombie drag queen – who goes by the Alias Falud Islam – as well as curator of mixed Pakistani, Lebanese and Iranian descent. He received an MFA in Studio Art at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2016. Bhutto's work delves deep into a futurist imagining of South Asia, the Middle East and the larger Muslim world, through a research based process excavating archives from disparate sources. He takes on histories of revolution, resistance and resilience and queers them using his body as a filter through a multi-media practice based primarily in the realm of future story telling.

**Maria Khan** (b. 1986) lives and works in Toronto, CA. She graduated with a major in Painting from College of Art and Design, Lahore, and went on to receive her Masters in Visual Art from National College of Art, Lahore. Drawing inspiration from the likes of Paula Rego and Lucien Freud, Khan's work depicts a range of emotions from love and longing to lust and anger through her fantastically drawn figures.

**Abdullah Qureshi** (b. 1987) lives and works in Helsinki, FI. Qureshi is an artist, educator and cultural producer. His artistic and research interests examine personal histories and traumatic pasts through painting, interrogating ways that queerness and resistance manifest within Muslim contexts. Qureshi's work has been exhibited internationally and he has held numerous positions at cultural and educational institutions including the British Council, and the National college of Arts, Lahore. In 2017, Qureshi received the Art and International Cooperation fellowship at Zurich University of the Arts, and is currently a Doctoral Candidate at Aalto University in Finland and Research Fellow at the Center for Arts, Design and Social Research, Boston.

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**Art Divvy** was established as a platform to present and showcase contemporary art from Pakistan, both within the country and internationally, with a particular spotlight on emerging artists. Through its two arms, Project Art Divvy and Foundation Art Divvy, it is a venture that highlights the unique stories of the extraordinary artists with whom we have worked and continue to build relationships. We are committed to supporting art projects and focussing on arts education in order to foster a greater appreciation of the arts and artisans of Pakistan.

**Rossi & Rossi** was established in 1986 in London by Anna Maria Rossi, who was later joined by her son, Fabio. Operating from Hong Kong and London, the gallery today is amongst the leading representatives of contemporary artists from the Asia-Pacific region. From remote areas of Kazakhstan and Cambodia to the urban epicentres of Hong Kong and Singapore, Rossi & Rossi's artists produce work as diverse as their countries of origin. Yet they remain engaged in the exploration of the visual language of art that comments upon our world and the artist, the individual and wider society.