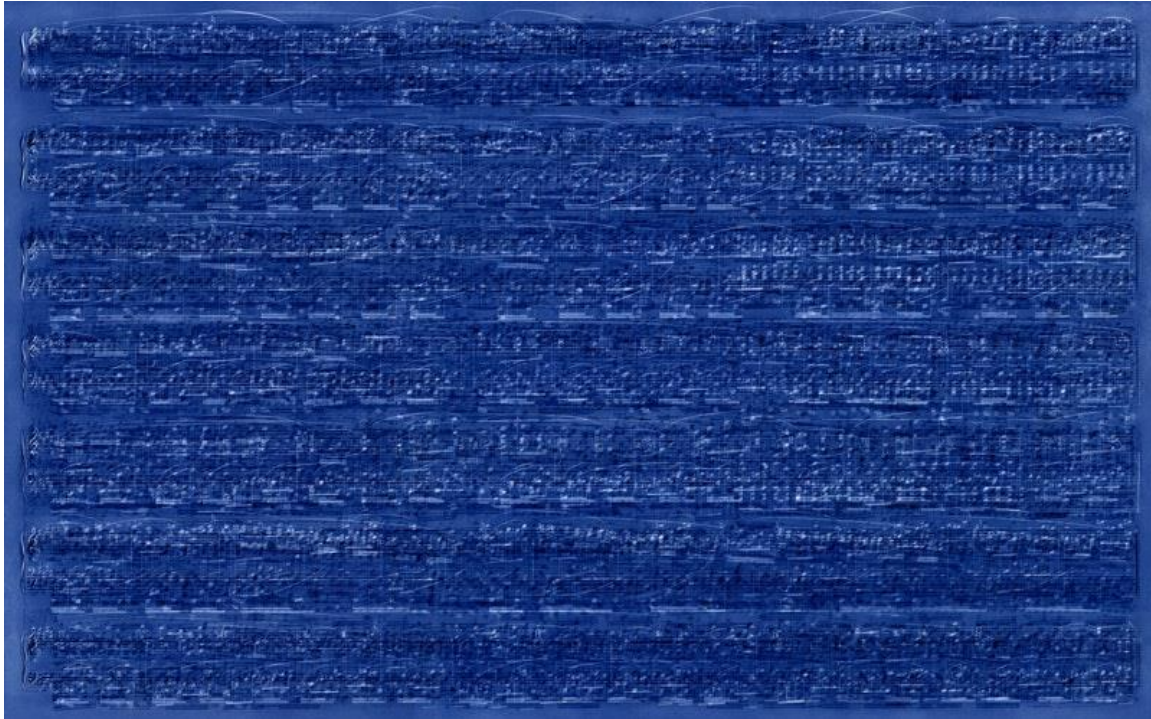


SEANKELLY

McGlynn, Tom. "Idris Khan: *Blue Rhythms*." The Brooklyn Rail. June 21, 2019.

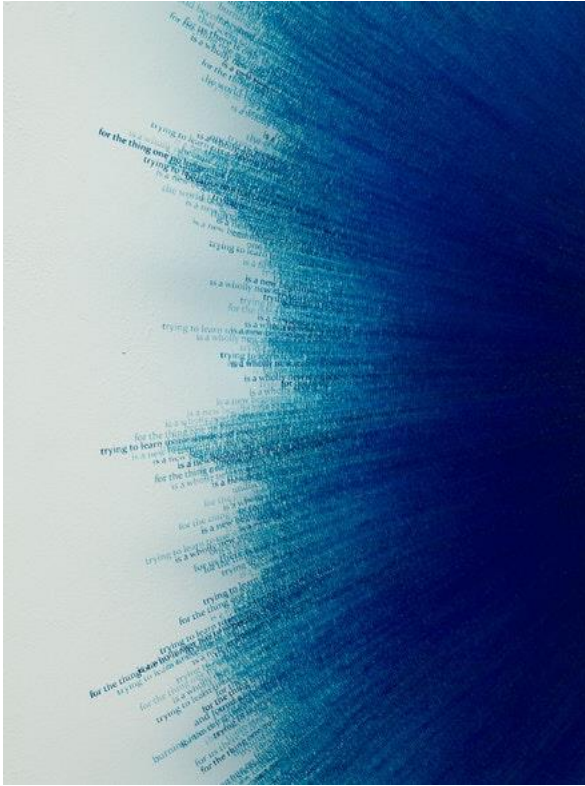
 **BROOKLYN RAIL**



Idris Khan, The calm is but a wall, 2019, digital C print, image/paper: 71 x 113 3/4 inches (180.3 x 288.9 cm), framed: 78 1/2 x 121 1/4 x 2 3/4 inches (199.4 x 308 x 7 cm). Edition of 7 with 2 APs. © Idris Khan. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

Insistent repetition is one way to measure time. In music, depending upon the regularity or irregularity of the intervals between notes, particular types of rhythmic signatures weave what one might describe as a “texture of time.” In a visual array, repetitive gestures can relay the sense of a deliberate filling up of the space of time. And the impulse to fill up time/space in a compulsively deliberate manner paradoxically performs a kind of obliterating erasure of time (or a stubborn arresting of the imperative of time’s own deliberateness). Idris Khan’s work is all about the obstinate objects that can be extracted from time’s signature erased: in his case sculptural scaffolds of freeze-frame overlays. His sculptures, drawings and paintings have in the past deployed appropriated photographic sources (one prior example being his use of the Water Tower series of Bernd and Hilla Becher to print all of those images simultaneously in one image), musical tablature, printed text and written script, each one a different representation or register of the “marking” of time, as one would for instance on a calendar or a prison wall. Obliterating to then reinvest the meaning of these markers of time via repetitive overlay is Khan’s primary medium of expression. The scripted document and the photo-documentary for the artist exist as readymade materials for his layered expressionism.

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Idris Khan, *Imprecision of Feelings* (detail), 2019, 3 glass sheets stamped with turquoise oil-based ink, aluminum and rubber, 64 15/16 x 55 1/8 x 7 1/8 inches (165 x 140 x 18 cm).
© Idris Khan. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

In *Blue Rhythms*, his second solo show at Sean Kelly, Khan presents an array of photographic prints and wall-mounted reliefs of printed graphics dominated by the color blue. The attention paid by Khan to the sleek finish of these works lends the show a whistle-clean, almost science-lab hygiene that insistently offsets the slow-burn expressionism of the artist's repetitive gestures. Each of the works are seamlessly polished and fabricated in varying presentational modes including multi-layered glass reliefs printed in typographic bursts, digital photographic prints of expressionist gestures, and digital C-prints of musical scores. An example of the first is *Imprecision of Feelings* (2019) in which a radial composition of printed texts, emanates from its center in an irregular explosion. This adumbrated burst is deeply compressed by its shallowly-staggered sequencing on multiple

levels of glass panels mounted in close superimposition via a custom-built aluminum frame. The off-register of the layered texts meld into a foggy blue mass, perhaps in illustration of the assimilative feeling of depression or "the blues," or any such irresolute emotions that can nevertheless retain a feeling of overwhelming assimilation when one is in their midst, so that Khan is making a direct correlation between assimilation in color theory and the incommensurability of emotional states. The variety of scales and presentations of works are printed in varying saturations and values of blue so that the color's dominance doesn't overwhelm with its potentially pedantic symbolic over-determination of what are basically very delicate drawings.

Khan also seems acutely aware of artistic tropes of the past, like the abstract symbolism of Adolph Gottlieb's famous bursts which he reiterates in *Imprecision of Feelings*. Perhaps the imprecision of his own feelings extend to the anxiety of expressionist influence. Khan's multilayered strategy of expressionist appropriation is, however, not limited to the literalness with which he portrays it in this piece. As mentioned, the show is unified by the hue of blue which lends the overall grouping of works a mood of contemplation and gravitas, even despite their seamless fabrication..

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Idris Khan, *White Windows*; September 2016 - May 2018, 2019, digital fibre print, image: 50 3/16 x 40 3/16 inches (127.5 x 102.1 cm), paper: 57 5/16 x 47 5/16 inches (145.6 x 120.2 cm), framed: 61 7/16 x 48 7/16 x 2 3/4 inches (156.1 x 123 x 7 cm). Edition of 7 with 2 APs. © Idris Khan. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

One of the real pleasures in viewing the ensemble of works is the sensitivity with which the artist modulates the monochromatic theme of the show with its achromatic tracery. A good example of this is *The Calm is But a Wall* (2019), a very large digital C print (71 x 113") in which a repeated score of musical notation is repeatedly over-printed in white. The repetition and overprinting make the score barely legible and certainly not viable for musical translation. The erasure of the score's time signature therefore needs to be read differently. The title suggests that Khan's version of a "wall of sound" is meant to express, paradoxically, the illusion of quietude and the impasse of measured intervals,

broken and unbound. Khan is making an obstinate abstraction, in other words, out of the otherwise fluid signatures of time. *Infinite Lines* (2019) similarly employs scores of

musical notation but in a vertical format that has an indecipherable code of broken notes running up its left margin. It is poetic touches like these that elevate the work beyond mere empirical accumulation. There is something both frantic and measured in Khan's graphic modulation in these pieces. It's a paradoxically reciprocal tendency throughout the other works too, which functions to meter (interval) the overall show with a complementary beat: a respiratory rhythm.

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Installation view of Idris Khan: Blue Rhythms at Sean Kelly, New York, May 4 - June 22, 2019. Photo: Jason Wyche, New York. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

In the downstairs section of the gallery are assembled a series entitled “White Windows” (all circa 2019). Like the work upstairs these are framed digital photographic prints, but unlike that work these are much more fluidly expressionist. This section of the show also moves toward the fully achromatic and so subsequently Khan’s graphic skills come strongly to the fore. Upon my first impression of the ensemble a colloquial memory of soaped-up windows of abandoned commercial storefronts came to mind. The same will toward an optical obliteration rules here as in the artist’s text based works. The broadly brushed (wiped?) and recursive arabesques of *White Windows September 2016–May 2018* (2019), for example, build in workmanlike yet impetuous folds in which subtle tonalities are achieved in an almost offhand manner. Leonardo Da Vinci’s apocalyptic deluge drawings are obliquely invoked here, as are Jasper Johns’s rich accumulation of visual textures in that artist’s encaustic as well as graphic works. As a whole this series offers a light and welcome respite to the more portentous work upstairs and highlights Khan’s ample capacity for graphic lyricism. And White Windows makes poignantly explicit his quixotic attempt to simultaneously represent and erase the passage of time’s signatures.