

SEAN KELLY

Sargent, "Words Become Monumental Works in the Hands of Idris Khan," *The Creators Project*, October 13, 2015.

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Words Become Monumental Works in the Hands of Idris Khan



Idris Khan, *Overture*, 2015. 7 stamped glass sheets and aluminum structure. 96 x 78 x 156 inches (243.8 x 198.1 x 396.2 cm). Images courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery

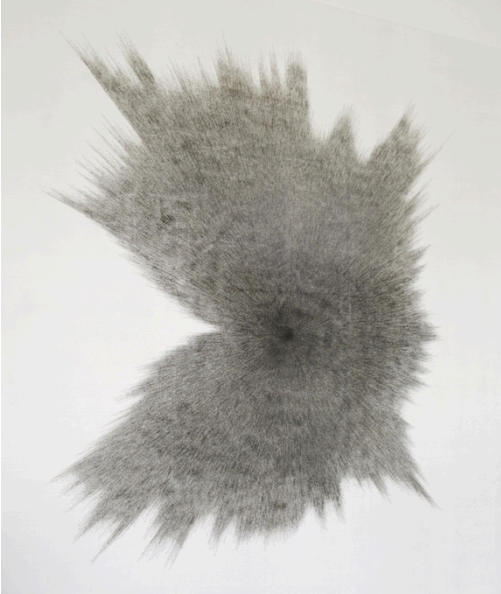
A year ago, the artist Idris Khan came across a photograph of a man sitting on a pile of rubble after a night of heavy shelling in Israel. The photograph stayed with the artist and inspired his latest show *Overture*. For the show, Khan created 25 new works that explore the philosophical and theoretical nature of conflict and displacement.

"He appeared to have nothing left and was surrounded by grey dust," explains Khan of the man in the warzone. "Next to him was a bucket covered in ash. That bucket stayed in my mind and so I started to write about what it represented to me. Roland Barthes wrote a theory on the punctum of a photograph, which describes the point in the picture that grasps your attention and jumps off of the page," he tells *The Creators Project* about the work, *A Grey Bucket*. "With this in mind, I scrolled through news sites online and started to write about the unavoidable barrage of conflict images we witness everyday."

Khan has been concerned with using found imagery as a form of language to represent political realities of everyday life. "My work isn't supposed to send any specific political message, but rather it represents an abstract idea, the idea of trying to comprehend these enormous global issues," he says. The artist also uses musical references in works like 2005's *Struggling to hear...After Ludwig van Beethoven Sonatas* and the film *A Memory...After Bach's Cello Suites*. He says the repetitious nature of stamping words onto canvas and glass for hours—the process he employed across an array of media to make the work exhibited in *Overture*—"can be emotional and rhythmical, like charting music."

Overture also represents the first time the London-based artist has worked with glass. In the sculptural work *Glass Wall Piece #1*, Khan superimposes thousands of words he has written on to the flat surface of glass in a diagonal fashion. The words are stamped in white paint on clear glass, making it hard to gather meaning of the words as they merge at the center of the work. Visible lone words like, "memory" and partial phrases like "I'm here...", appear at the edge of the surface of pieces. Says Khan, "The words begin to feel lost and like they are floating in space. I wanted each word to be representative of displaced people, migrating away from the center point of the composition."

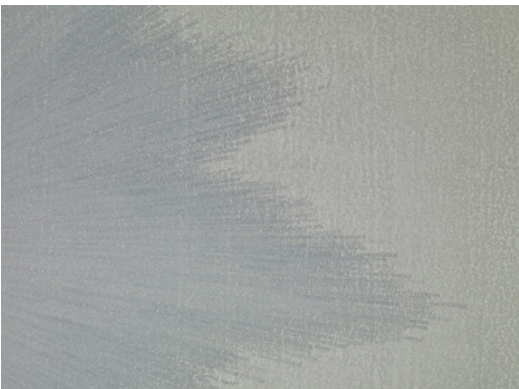
Symbolically the words come to represent a large radial constellation of lost people. In other works, like *Memory* and *Conscious*, thousands of words move away from where they started continuing the feeling of general displacement. "The only thing to grasp is a few words the viewer can read when really investigating the surface. There is a feeling of having nothing to hold onto, a feeling of being lost. That for me describes displacement," adds Khan.



Displacement, 2015. Photography by Jason Wyche. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York



A Grey Bucket (detail), 2015 ink on white gesso and aluminum painting: 90 ½ x 92 1/2 inches (230 x 235 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly, New York. Photography by Stephen White, London



Consciousness, 2015, ink on grey gesso and aluminum painting: 60 x 60 inches (152.4 x 152.4 cm) framed: 61 1/4 x 61 1/4 x 3 inches (155.6 x 155.6 x 7.6 cm). Photography: Stephen White, London. Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York



Idris Khan's *Overture* is on display through October 24 at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York.