

18 Winds

An exhibition by Haseeb Ahmed

Harlan Levey Projects 1080

65 Rue Isidoor Teirlinckstraat,
1080 Brussels, Belgium

Opening: 14/01/2023

Exhibition: 14/01 - 25/03/2023



18 Winds: An exhibition by Haseeb Ahmed

Haseeb Ahmed's art is a reminder that metaphorical thinking is a necessary condition for real aesthetic exploration of any subject, including science, where language is bound to precision rather than poetic forms. Ahmed's work often centres around a single topic, most notably wind. His sculptures, installations, drawings and public programs are conceived like a composition for an orchestra; a main theme is resolved through the interplay of many elements at once, including contemporary technology, historical facts, mythology, tales from labs, and more. Although none of these are fictional (Ahmed is careful in pointing out that he invents nothing in his shows), things are aggregated not to communicate efficiently but to evoke. The modes of impressionism come to mind: a depiction of something real using the language of suggestion. – Piero Bisello, HART Magazine

Haseeb Ahmed (b. 1985) is an American artist who lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. He produces objects, installations, and films. His work is often collaborative and draws from the hard sciences, blending art and aeronautics, myth, and technology to create new narratives. Over the last 10 years Ahmed has structured his research-based artistic practice around fluid dynamics of wind and water. His focus is on what we can learn about our changing climates through the movements of the wind and the waters by what they carry, both physically and in terms of cultural associations throughout history.

A chapter in Ahmed's decade-long project *The Library of the Winds*, the exhibition *18 Winds* explores cultural and historical connotations of the weather, wondering what ecological potential appears when we separate nature from what we make it mean to us. Works in the exhibition speak towards the collaborative attitudes in Ahmed's cross-disciplinary practice, and include projects developed in the framework of recent residencies with the European Commission's S+T+ARTS program (MindSpaces, STARTS4Water, GLUON), the Science Gallery in Venice and Werktank (with the support of the Flemish Community), all of which provided numerous interactions with scientists, new technologies, policy makers, business leaders, and other artists.



HARLAN LEVEY PROJECTS

Works in the exhibition include:

Library of the Winds

Around the world, evening news broadcasts use air-powered lottery machines to blow a select few lives into Mega-Millions. The Library of the Winds has one too and when a winning wind is selected, it is reproduced via DIY aeoliphones informed by actual weather data. Used since the 14th century in theater and opera to produce the sound of the wind, as the aeoliphones (or wind machines) begin to sing, the floor moves in concert while the geometrically patterned and mirrored ceiling counterrotates affecting our sense of orientation. Just as the wind mediates many of our senses, the installation addresses sight, sound, and orientation, bringing together 18 winds, the sounds of which were collected by Ahmed in person or using meteorological data. With this work, the artist contemplates how the wind helps us understand the modern obsession with origins and order, questioning distinctions between sensual and mediatized experience, while wondering what we think of when we think of the wind, be it a cool breeze or catastrophic gust.

Produced by Werkbank VZW with the support of the Flemish Community.

Words on the Wind

For this series of mixed-media paintings, together with Alexander Shivets, Ahmed trained an AI to identify the use of wind as a metaphorical device to convey emotions and created an inventory of sentences for his ongoing project the *Library of the Winds*. Selected sentences (along with the metadata from the AI) are painted or drawn into hand marbled backgrounds based on flow visualizations and wind patterns. This juxtaposition reflects on how we superimpose meaning onto natural phenomena, adding cultural contextualization to the winds brought into the gallery.

Fountains of Eternal Youth

In this series of unique works, water infused with Human Growth hormone (a common anti-aging medication) runs through the sculptures, evoking ancient mythology to understand our contemporary drive to defy aging caused by oxidation. Mirrored surfaces, reminiscent of the myth of Narcissus, invite us to reconsider the valuation of our bodies over the bodies of water and the life it contains. The association between the flow of fluids and the flow of time has been forged since antiquity and the regulation of the flow of water was one of the first ways of measuring the passage of time. Here, the water drops appear suspended in the air as asynchronous clocks create order and disorder, disrupting the mirror's surface. This contradiction in cause-and-effect is analogous to the lifesaving necessity of pharmaceuticals and the imbalances they create in the natural environment. In the largest sculpture, an octagonal base and 8 clocks, refer to the tower of the winds, an ancient Greek building thought to be the world's first weather station which housed a water clock. In another, the basin is a urinal referencing the non-biodegradable characteristics of pharmaceuticals, which linger in our waterways. 90% of Pharmaceutical Pollution is introduced to those waterways through urine.



H A R L A N L E V E Y P R O J E C T S

The Sand Reckoner (Premieres in March, 2023)

This experimental film retraces the full path of the Scirocco wind from Venice to its origin in a remote dried lake bed in the Egyptian Sahara. The Scirocco causes the Acqua Alta flooding that inundates Venice annually while it also transports mineral dust from the Sahara to the Mediterranean and Europe essential to their ecologies. Through the film we come to know wind as a destructive and creative force that has shaped architecture and historical narratives alike over thousands of years. The title of the film is derived from Archimedes' attempt to approximate the size of the universe from a single grain of sand.

Pennemunde Scroll

This scroll depicts a scene that spans a history from WWII to the present, from the most destructive attempts on human life to humanity's greatest endeavor— the moon landing. It is a scene that depicts how highly contingent technology is on desire and the ambivalence we ought to have towards it. The scroll's 4 meter long drawing consists exclusively of a rubbing of the world's first hyper-sonic wind tunnels. Ahmed discovered it at the NATO-von Karman Institute for Fluid Dynamics (VKI), one of Europe's oldest and largest aeronautics research facilities with whom Ahmed has maintained a long-time collaboration. Rubbing is used in archeology to document architectural remains that cannot be transported. Similarly, nothing can be removed from the VKI for reasons of espionage and security. The rubbing allows the otherwise hidden to be seen. It turns the wind tunnel into an anachronism so we can see it and its operational context in a new way.

Photo: Haseeb Ahmed, *Library of the Winds*, 2019-2021, produced by Werktank, with the support of Vlaamse Gemeenschap. Photo credit: Johan Poezevara and Fabien Silvestre Suzor.