
Cristea Roberts Gallery

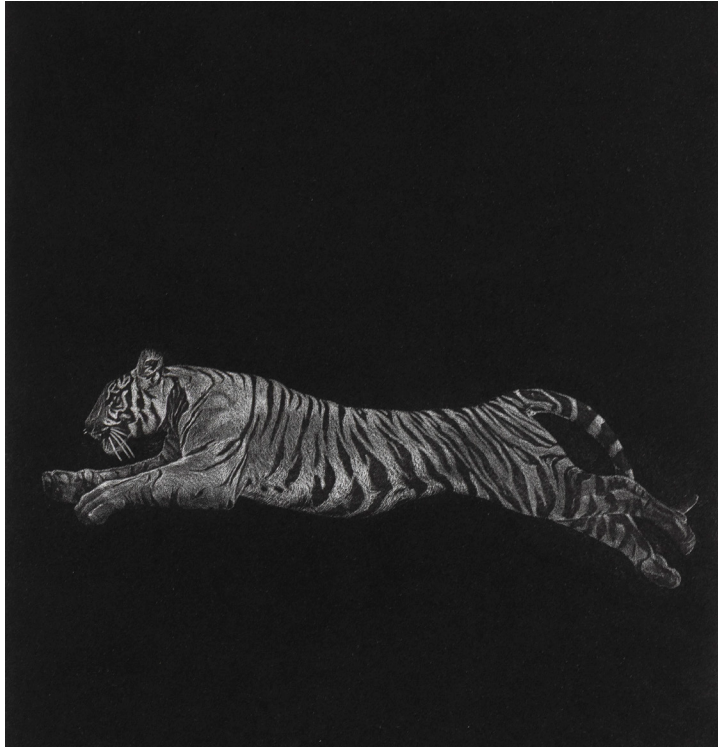
43 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JG
+44 (0)20 7439 1866
info@cristearoberts.com
www.cristearoberts.com

Press Release

Press Contact:
Gemma Colgan
gemma.colgan@cristearoberts.com
+44 (0)20 7439 1866

Ali Kazim: **Alphabets**

4 September - 3 October 2026



Circus ka Sher II, 2025
Etching and aquatint. Paper and Image: 49 x 43.8 cm. Edition of 25.

Cristea Roberts Gallery is delighted to present **Ali Kazim: Alphabets**, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery, that takes its title from a new portfolio of prints. The exhibition of new prints and watercolours will chart and illuminate the diverse and complex history of South Asia through the Urdu language.

Ali Kazim (b. 1979) who lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan, presents his first ever print portfolio, *Alphabets*, 2025, consisting of nineteen etchings and aquatints. Each print in the series illustrates a different letter from the Urdu alphabet, using the language as an axis to delve into the rich expanse of the region, its iconography, culture, flora and fauna.

In the same way that Urdu spans Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh with origins informed by Hindi, Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Punjabi - Kazim's approach is also diverse and varied, encompassing South Asian miniature painting, East Asian wash techniques and most recently, European etching.

The artist's new etchings are strikingly intricate. For a pair of prints, *Circus Ka Sher I* and *Circus Ka Sher II*, the artist has etched a flaming circus hoop, and a tiger suspended mid-leap, captured before jumping through the ring. This scene also plays out in two new colourful watercolours, each depicting the the final scene of the tiger moving through the hoop.

Further watercolours in the exhibition include *Coolie*, 2025, a solitary single figure painted on a background of pure saturated yellow. A stranger Kazim has encountered on the street, the artwork title and the identification number on the figure's arm band, indicates he may be railway porter.

In *Tipu's Tiger*, 2025, Kazim has etched the famed eighteenth-century automaton that shows a British soldier being mauled by a tiger. Commissioned by the Tipu Sultan in the eighteenth-century, this important artefact, in the style of Indian folk art and made by French artisans, represents the imperial conflicts in the region at the time. Kazim reclaims this object, currently housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, relocating it within his graphic oeuvre to highlight different facets of history.

In *Koh-i-Noor*, 2025, Kazim portrays the iconic Indian diamond that became part of the British Crown Jewels, using a faint, forensic outline to address extractive colonial histories. Kazim illustrates the influences of modern history too; *Waraq*, 2025, shows a map of Pakistan and India divided by the book's central binding, conveying the complexities and violence that ensued following the 1947 Partition.

The artist also references multiple faiths and ethnic groups within his work, from Buddhism to Sufi Islam. In *Hudhud*, 2025, a hoopoe bird with an intricate crown of feathers is depicted in flight. In this etching, Kazim highlights the legendary story of the Hudhud in the Qur'an and the hoopoe bird from Sufi poet Farid-ud-Din Attar's seminal twelfth-century work, *Conference of the Birds*.

Kazim's etchings and watercolours also illustrate the beauty in the mundane, from clothes on a washing line to roti flatbreads - all of the artist's subjects are given the same meticulous attention. In *Theekriaan*, 2025, Kazim depicts the shards of a broken tea set. The artist's ancestral village of Pattoki sits near land which previously hosted the Bronze Age Harappan civilisation, with traces of the past becoming visible on the surface, particularly after the monsoon season.

Kazim's practice is concerned with materiality, informed by the landscapes and ancient civilisations of Pakistan and the subcontinent. The artist who began by assisting cinema billboard painters when still at school, later studied nursing while maintaining his drawing practice in the evenings. His slow and contemplative approach responds to the depths of history; his watercolours often take months to complete, made with layers upon layers of thin washes to create an uncanny depth of texture that capture the finest of details.

A graphic masterpiece, Kazim's *Alphabets* documents the entangled histories of Urdu across South Asia and the rest of the world.

Cristea Roberts Gallery

43 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JG
+44 (0)20 7439 1866
info@cristearoberts.com
www.cristearoberts.com

This important exhibition will connect UK audiences with Urdu and the universal possibilities of language.

Hammad Nasar, curator and author of *Ali Kazim: Alphabet Book / Urdu Qaida*, 2025 writes that Kazim: “draws attention to the ability of words to articulate identity, and the consequent urgency of maintaining a connection to our native languages in an era of migration and exile”.

Alphabets, 2025 by Kazim was first exhibited in *Urdu Worlds* at the Ishara Art Foundation, Dubai, in Spring 2026, the UAE's first contemporary art exhibition dedicated to the Urdu language curated by Hammad Nasar.

ENDS

Opening Reception, Talk & Book Launch Thursday 3 September, 6 –7:30pm

The opening reception of the exhibition, also marks the UK launch of *Ali Kazim: Alphabet Book | Urdu Qaida*, a new 144-page book that will accompany the exhibition. Published by Ochre Books, 2026.

The event will include an introductory talk.
Confirm your attendance via rsvp@cristearoberts.com.

About Cristea Roberts Gallery

Cristea Roberts Gallery is a leading international contemporary art gallery with a particular focus on original prints and works on paper. Since its inception, the gallery has commissioned a significant number editions by a wide range of artists, whilst also representing others for their unique works. The underlying ethos of the gallery has always been artist-led.

It was originally founded in 1995 as the Alan Cristea Gallery and changed its name in September 2019 to Cristea Roberts Gallery.

The gallery works closely with international museums on acquisitions and loans, and examples of its editions are held in major public collections around the world including Tate, London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Visitor information

Tuesday - Friday 11am - 5.30pm
Saturday 11am - 2pm
Closed on Mondays, Sundays and public holidays
Free admission
Travel: Piccadilly or Green Park underground station
info@cristearoberts.com
cristearoberts.com
[@cristearoberts](https://www.instagram.com/cristearoberts) [@ali.kazim.ak](https://www.instagram.com/ali.kazim.ak)

Press Release

Press Contact:
Gemma Colgan
gemma.colgan@cristearoberts.com
+44 (0)20 7439 1866

About the artist

Ali Kazim was born in Pattoki, Pakistan in 1979. He received his BFA from the National College of Arts, Lahore, in 2002 and an MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 2011. Kazim had his first solo exhibition in Lahore in 2004, and further solo presentations in London and New York in 2006.

Kazim creates layered, textured watercolours and drawings, primarily of desolate landscapes and solitary figures. Inspired by the art and history of the Indian subcontinent, Kazim's meticulous brushwork draws upon miniature painting techniques, capturing the finest details, for instance individual strands of hair. Kazim treats landscapes and ancient civilisations of Pakistan with the same forensic finesse and considers the ancient civilisations that once flourished in Pakistan. He documents ruins and uses clay to create objects seemingly excavated from long-buried cities.

His work has been exhibited widely in solo and group shows internationally, including Ishara Art Foundation, Dubai (2026, 2023); MK Gallery, Milton Keynes (2024); Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland (2023); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2023); Cristea Roberts Gallery, London (2022); Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Noida (2022); Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2022); The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford (2022); Lahore Biennale 02, Lahore (2020); COMO Museum of Art, Lahore (2019); Karachi Biennale, Karachi (2019); 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2018); Lahore Biennale 01, Lahore (2018); Karachi Biennale, Karachi (2017); Office of Contemporary Art Norway, Oslo (2016); Hinterland Galerie, Vienna (2016); Dhaka Art Summit, Dhaka (2016); Seoul Arts Centre, Hangaram Arts Museum, Seoul (2015); Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2015).

His work is held in public collections including Tate, London; British Museum, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Burger Collection, Hong Kong; Creative Cities Collection, Beijing; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi; Devi Art Foundation, Delhi; Samdani Foundation, Dhaka; Metropolitan Museum, New York; Asia Pacific Museum, California; and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.

Kazim has received a number of awards and artist residencies, most recently as Oxford University's first South Asian Artist-in-Residence, which culminated in a solo exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. He is currently Assistant Professor at the National College of Arts, Lahore.

Ali Kazim lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan.