

Abbas Akhavan: Curtain Call, Variations on a Folly

Art [Chisenhale Gallery](#), Bow  Wednesday September 8 2021 - Sunday October 17 2021 FREE



curtain call, variations on a folly (2021). Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2021. Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Andy Keate

Time Out says

The destruction of culture isn't the most horrifying outcome of war, but it is a powerful symbol. Whether it's the defacing of idols, the burning of paintings, or the demolition of architecture, culture has been one of the victims of war for as long as war has existed.

ISIS, for example, destroyed much of the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria in 2015. It wasn't a one-off moment of wild violence, but the culmination of years of geopolitical instability, of invasion, manipulation, western interference, greed, excess, imperialism and power vacuums.

Now, the colonnade from that ancient city has been recreated in the Chisenhale Gallery by the artist Abbas Akhavan. It stands on a huge chromakey green screen, its columns made of cob, an ancient building material of mud and hay. The gallery is warm, a low throbbing hum pulses out of speakers somewhere in the wall. You stand in front of this mess of mud in the shape of lost cultural legacy, sweat building up; it's hot, oppressive, a little suffocating.

The green screen here is never used for filming, it just acts as a way of saying that this structure can be anywhere, can be moved and manipulated. Akhavan's installation is a recreation of ruins, it's history and culture as movable film set, as digestible commodity.

The work on the roof lets the show down, but fortunately it can only be seen by birds, so you're just left with the bulk of the exhibition, which is powerful, challenging and interesting.

It's also incredibly timely, and almost too damn on the nose, because just as the show opened, the Taliban was streaming into Kabul. Images of fleeing Afghanis, unrepentant politicians and gun-toting soldiers taking hold in a power vacuum left by western forces filled our various screens. It was all media to be consumed, history to be regurgitated later down the line.

Akhavan isn't here to give answers, or to peddle an easy narrative, he's here to show how symbols of war can be twisted and manipulated; to prove that it doesn't matter how many archaeologists try to save these structures and sculptures, the ruins never stop being ruined.

BY: EDDY FRANKEL

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