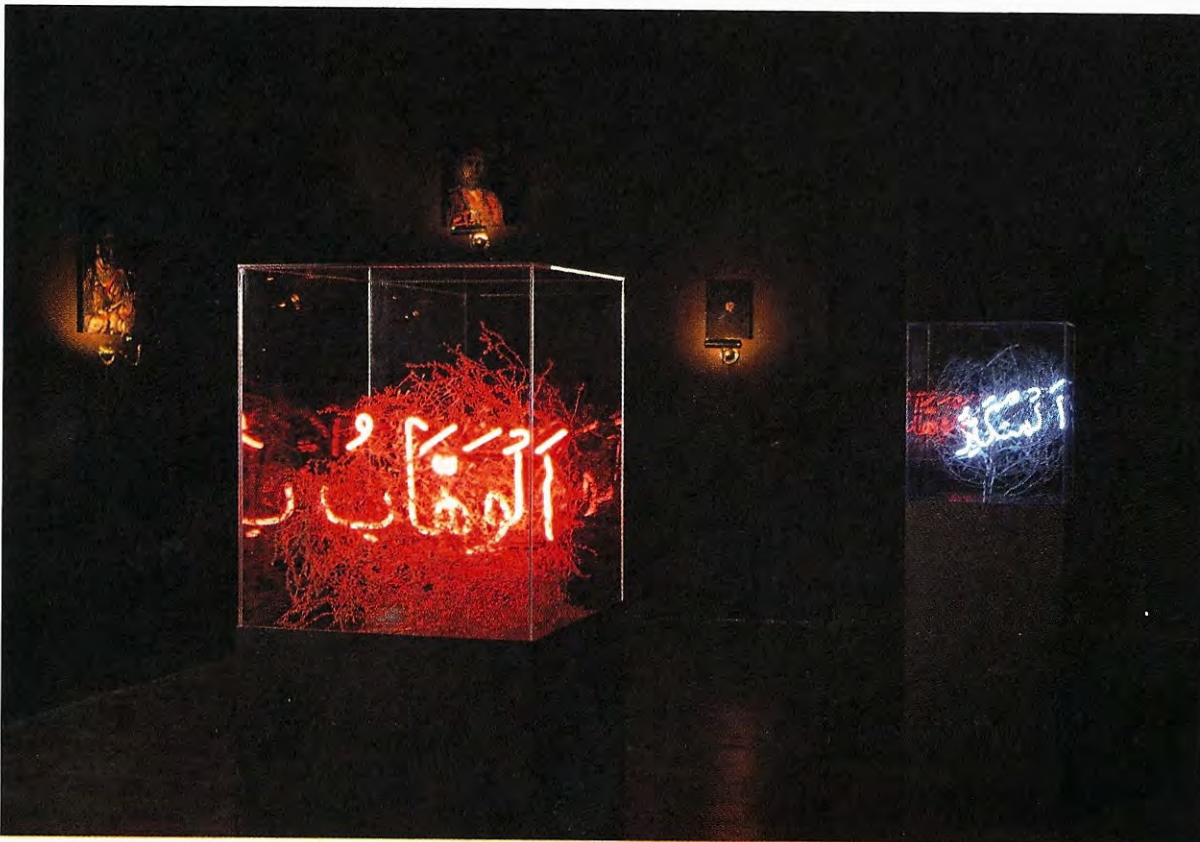


# SHEZAD DAWOOD: IF I SHOULD FALL FROM GRACE WITH GOD

PARADISE ROW, LONDON

23 NOVEMBER - 20 JANUARY



*If I Should Fall from Grace with God, 2007 (installation view). © the artist. Courtesy Paradise Row, London*

Ninety-nine neon names of God trapped in a thistly bristle of tumbleweed bleed a sepulchral light into the dark and cloying night of the gallery. Four stand in here for the full quota; glacier-mint blue, Lucozade orange, fresh-mint green and pomegranate pink, their lurid but somehow Christmassy glare illuminating the space in a close-encounter glow which transforms the blacked-out gallery into a cross between a stage set and a dark Santa's grotto. It is claimed the Koran contains the multiple monikers of the maker; 'The Most Merciful', 'The Most Merciful in Actions', 'The All Glorious', 'The Grateful', 'The Fashioner of Forms'; it has become a sacred chant, a spiritual enhancer for the faithful. But here, in Shezad Dawood's new installation, it is trapped within the timeless trope of the Western: the humble tumbleweed eternally rolling across the dusty main drag at high noon, sweeping the street clean before the final shootout.

Although the apogee of the Western was in the 1950s, when the US was at the peak of its Cold War paranoia and 'red injuns' made a serviceable substitute for faceless Communist hordes 'living right here in our midst!', and although the form has largely been subverted by recent explorations of the genre (*Brokeback Mountain*, 2005, being a case in point), it is still welded into the unconscious of the West as an archetypal embodiment of Western world domination and colonialism. At a time when we are indeed witnessing the 'final shootout' between the West and the modern-day embodiment of the Red Indian – Islamic fundamentalists – there are indeed rich and succulent confluences to be made between the two opposing camps.

On the black walls a more overt statement about this relationship is made by a salon-type hanging of small paintings whose dark skeins of domestic gloss paint form the backdrop to sinister vignettes of a Western variety. Three cowboys riding towards a severed head in the sand, a gun-toting black Civil War soldier and a rabid deer's head, eyes streaming dripped paint, are all rendered in the tenebrous tones of a Goya or Böcklin. The small paintings are lit by pound-shop versions of the sort of eighteenth-century brass table-lamp that one might have found in the sheriff's office in the O.K. Corral, casting the gallery in an uncanny and sinister light, reinforcing a dark evocation of the fractured and enduringly violent relationship of the West to the Other.

On a lighter note, in the smaller, brightly lit side-gallery, Dawood has hung carefully framed 1920s Lyonnais Bianchini-Férier textile designs into which he has introduced several more of God's names. The resonances here are less powerful than in the main room, and the reference to capital and production perhaps a little too obtuse, but what does work is the contrast and dislocation with the other space; capitalism can indeed be all bright and shiny on the outside, like these minimal and covetable designs, but the hidden mechanisms which drive it and its history of exploitation and domination do indeed form a very dark chamber of horrors. *Richard Dyer*