



The Jewels of Apor

## Shezad Dawood

British artist Shezad Dawood's Indian and Pakistani roots have long provided the perspective for his very particular remixing of Western and Eastern cultural and artistic traditions. Dawood plays fast and loose with religion, modernism and mythology, one moment reworking legends of the Wild West, and another casting the name of Allah into a jewelled knuckleduster for newly minted Middle Eastern collectors. Refusing to be typecast, Dawood's work is an ironic cultural fusion, a self-aware art navigating the global-local stress-lines of the art world.

In his new show, Dawood replays modernist abstraction, connecting its hidden roots in mysticism with those non-Western traditions of 'sacred geometry'. In a series of canvases, vaguely symbolic geometric forms – circles, pyramids, ellipses, eggs – are painted on to sewn-together textiles that reek of 'ethnic' authenticity.



Paradise Row Galleries West

Above these hang exotic, taxidermied birds, posed mid-flight in double hoops of coloured neon.

Dawood's paintings cheerfully miscegenate two different traditions of abstraction, while quietly poking fun at those Western pretensions that seek some mystical truth in non-Western cultural forms: eternal circles, cycles of rebirth – all the new age clichés are here. In an age where faith is reduced to a lifestyle choice, old modernism and new age pop culture may actually share a desire for transcendentalism and so Dawood's paintings are emblems of how the spiritual has become a mere exercise in throwing shapes that symbolise an aspiration – everybody knows what the spiritual is supposed to look like, but nobody believes in God any more.

Up above this, however, Dawood's stuffed birds are transfixed at the moment of their passage through their neon-bright, dimensional gateways to some invisible other world. And the paradox of their high-camp, retail-display aesthetics is that they almost trick you into believing that, maybe, some sort of mystical elsewhere might indeed exist, accessible by a wing-beat, or the painted curve of an ellipse.

JJ Charlesworth

Art

## Critics' choice

The five best exhibitions this week



### 1 Gauguin: Maker of Myth

Tate Modern  
The big autumn blockbuster doesn't disappoint, shedding new light on this angry young man's journey to the heart of darkness. Machiavellian? Yes, but a monster? No.

► Jan 16 2011



### 2 James Turrell Gagosian

The illuminator is back in town for his first Gagosian show, with holographs, light-filled installations and a new single-person immersion chamber. From the sublime to the miraculous. ► Dec 10



### 3 Salvator Rosa Dulwich Picture Gallery

'Savage Rosa' has been painted as a quarrelsome bad-boy, even as a bandit, but he's one of few old masters who deserve a rediscovery. Once again, the venerable DPG punches above its weight. ► Nov 28

### 4 Exhibition #3 with Sir Peter Blake Museum of Everything

The museum re-opens in Primrose Hill with Sir Peter Blake's collections of circus curios, junkshop trophies and Victorian taxidermy. ► Dec 24

### 5 Shezad Dawood Paradise Row

Sufi legend mixes with neon signage for 'The Jewels of Apor'. ► Nov 13