TOP EMERGING ARTISTS TO WATCH IN 2018

THE REVITALIZED PALAIS DE TOKYO, A HOTBED OF INNOVATION
NOOR ALI CHAGANI

Noor Ali Chagani creates deeply personal artworks that revolve around ideas of home and personal space — and their ultimate absence. Growing up in Karachi, Pakistan, Chagani received a bachelor's degree in computer science before shifting to art, taking another bachelor's — this time in fine arts — at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan, where he still lives and works.

Known for his sculpture, especially with bricks, Chagani sculptures like a painter: similar to the thousands of tiny brush strokes that comprise a painting, for him, thousands of tiny blocks or bricks create a sculpture. One of the goals of his artworks, he says, is to convey feelings of separation and isolation. The use of bricks takes on several meanings, he said: "as a symbolic take on the contemporary world and the physical and emotional labor and toil that is expended in building, the need for security and protection, but also as a reminder of partition and the walls we build between us." The Victoria & Albert Museum in London has called him "the first contemporary miniature artist using the rules of miniature paintings in 3D."
Chagani may not be well known yet, but his star is quickly rising. Having recently completed an art residency at the Stiftung Staatlische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf, he was named the first-ever Jeanie Prize recipient at the V&A in London, an "international award for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition." He has since exhibited his work across Pakistan, India, the United Arab Emirates, Britain, the Netherlands, Bahrain and the United States.

By tapping into his personal life as well as the complex politics of India and Pakistan, Chagani has become an artist to watch for his nuanced ability to portray not only the isolation that stems from a feeling of existential and political homelessness, but, by addressing it, for the redeeming power of art as well.

— FRANCA TOSCANO