

RICHARD MAGUIRE: WHEREIN DIFFERENCE LIES

SEPTEMBER 3 – OCTOBER 19, 2025
Opening Reception: September 3, 6–8pm

The intertwining of the homoerotic and the orientalist finds compelling new tension in *Wherein Difference Lies*, a new show of Scottish artist Richard Maguire, his debut exhibition in New York.

Comprising 16 small graphite drawings by Maguire that trace and explore the diverse, secretive ways that “sensitive” images have been disseminated over the centuries, the show revolves around largely forgotten figure Ram Gopal, a charismatic pioneer of classical Indian dance largely credited with bringing the art form to the West in the mid-20th century.

Working from a wealth of historic images, Maguire uses the myriad aspects of Gopal’s exotic-coded artistry as a stalking-horse to explore larger themes of sexual and political friction between East and West.

For example, one multi-layered source of imagery is derived from an intimate photoshoot from early 1938 in New York City with American writer-photographer Carl Van Vechten, who was a prominent white patron of the Harlem Renaissance movement. Within the frame of one image, a scantily clad Gopal appears — in a manner that positions him as fervent with exotic promise — alongside the ubiquitous drapery with its “Eastern print”, comprised of various scenes: a seated man is carried upon a palanquin; another climbs a palm tree for fruit; and in a repeated motif, a man is shown seated smoking a pipe.

Maguire zeroes in on the details. In *Turkish Coffeehouse / Cruising Ground*, Maguire elects to crop a sourced image to little more than an ear, focusing our attention to the fabric pattern beyond — a printed motif of a man seated at a table under a tree smoking a pipe. As cited in Joseph Allan Boone’s *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (2014), travelogues from Europeans visiting countries under Ottoman rule in the 13th – 16th centuries described coffeehouses as sites of homosexual procurement where Europeans wanting to participate in same-sex sex acts could fulfill their desires. Described as sites of socialisation whereby men would gather drinking and smoking pipes, the print references such places in its repeat motif of quotidian affairs. *Turkish Coffeehouse / Cruising Ground* captures fleeting and entwined histories of an Indian dancer, his sexuality, and the historical assemblage used as a wink and nod to elite educated homosexuals, and the less told histories of their sexual forays in foreign territories.

The historic (dis)reputation of male Indian temple dancing, and its intimated histories of homosexual prostitution, are negotiated in *Statues Never Die* — a drawing of an erotic scene carved in bas-relief on the facade of a 10th century Hindu temple, Lakshmana Temple, depicting one man receiving fellatio from another. This relief, which survived British iconoclasm, later saw increased use during the fight against Indian sodomy laws as evidentiary proof of a “primitive” Hindu history of homosexuality. This image stands in contrast to the self-directed photo of Gopal in Maguire’s *Spectacles of Flesh*, a reclining male nude save for a decorative headpiece and loincloth, gazing directly at the viewer — the observed becomes to the observed.

Maguire makes other sly and subtle revisions as well. For example, taking off from Sri Lankan photographer Lionel Wendt’s *Bachelor Cruising South* (c. 1934–37), Maguire transforms Wendt’s enigmatic image by inverting the direction of the gesture, so the hand reaches down towards the light source as though fondling a glowing body part. The work, entitled *In Glory (hand reaching in darkness)*, reinforces a subtle, often overlooked intimation made by Wendt: who or what gets groped down south?

Richard Maguire (b. 1991, Aberdeen, Scotland) lives and works in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. He received an MLitt Fine Art Practice with a specialism in Print Media from the Glasgow School of Art, and previously studied at the Royal Drawing School, London, and Gray’s School of Art, Aberdeen. Maguire has presented solo exhibitions at Patron Gallery, Chicago; Village Gallery, Leeds, UK; Maximillian William, London, UK. Maguire was the recipient of Creative Scotland’s Visual Arts and Craft Makers Award for Aberdeenshire, the Edinburgh Art Festival’s Early Career Artist Award, the Founder’s Choice Award at the Ingram Prize, and was previously shortlisted for the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize. His work is held in several public collections, including the Aberdeen Art Gallery, UK; The Arts Council Collection, UK; The Ingram Collection, UK; and The Royal Collection, UK.

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