

ARTFORUM

Shezad Dawood
PIONEER WORKS
159 Pioneer Street
September 11–November 1



View of “It was a time that was a time,”
2015.

London-based Shezad Dawood’s first solo exhibition in the US pivots on his latest film, the titular *It was a time that was a time*. Commissioned by Pioneer Works, the collaborative experiment was filmed in New York on devices that might have survived a postapocalyptic disaster, in this case, a flood. The effect is one of woozy images reflecting a looser, freer new society. It is accompanied by a fragrance—a persistent scent that includes notes of ambergris and algae. This dual effect is one that has come to characterize Dawood’s work.

The exhibition simultaneously acts as a mini-retrospective of Dawood’s practice over the past five years. Neon light pieces such as *The Black Sun* and *Villa Urbaine* (both 2010) illustrate his ability to articulate complex ideas in sparing yet deft strokes: Where the former captures the drama of an eclipse in a single circle of white light, the latter’s geometric rainbow lines render Le Corbusier’s famous master plan for the Indian city of Chandigarh. These in turn contrast neatly with Dawood’s textile works, including the expansive *Ship of Dreams*, 2012, a series of panels arranged to resemble a galleon in full sail.

Eleven works are arranged with the Spartan precision required for an artist whose practice is this conceptually dense: His multifaceted oeuvre also explores a complex matrix of spirituality, circularity, and Sufism. *A Mystery Play*, 2010, one of two other films on display, is a standout, glowing with the luminosity of the Golden Age of silent movies. Dawood plays the lead, weaving together vaudeville, Harry Houdini, and Buster Keaton. He is a dream in white cowboy gear, a Kohl-lined explorer, haplessly caught in an *Eyes Wide Shut*-style romp. Never was eyeliner so delicious.

— *Anna Wallace-Thompson*