

Brandon Bauer

This Is What You Were Born For – mapping Afghan history

Inova/Arts Center April 9th – 24th

Artist Statement

While postmodernism was preoccupied with relativizing historical transformations and contesting the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives, postcoloniality does the obverse, seeking instead to sublate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation.

-Okwui Enwezor, from *The Postcolonial Aftermath of Globalization and the Terrible Nearness of Distant Places*

The work that comprises the project *This Is What You Were Born For* grew out of a desire to understand the history of Afghanistan beyond the terse or glib commentary found in the discourse of many major media outlets. As the Enwezor quote above suggests, there is an ethical responsibility demanded of historical interpretation when reflecting on the cultural legacy of colonialism and its aftermath. In this regard, Afghanistan raises some particularly difficult issues: which colonization, from what empire, in which era? Where do we begin unpacking and understanding the complex history of this land locked central Asian country? The history of Afghanistan is one of continued conquest and occupation, but more than that, the history of Afghanistan is the history of resistance to empire. This history also demonstrates the changing nature of empire and the increasingly diffuse nature of territorial conquest from antiquity to the present. One can see territory as an abstraction, and the act of mapping itself as an abstraction, yet in both instances this abstraction references a concrete reality that has influenced the contours of what we call present day Afghanistan.

Installation Description

The exhibition *This Is What You Were Born For* brings together twelve graphic maps rendered and layered on hand drawn light boxes, and in ink and graphite works on paper that chart the successive invasions of the land now understood as the contemporary territorial boundaries of the country of Afghanistan. Each map is paired with text taken from Francisco Goya's Disasters of War series of etchings creating a narrative that weaves through this fractious history. Within the overall installation Afghan history is charted through eras of territorial conquest by the various empires that have invaded and occupied the country from antiquity to the present exploring experimental cartographic forms that blur the boundaries of narrative and abstraction.

MAPS

with or without a reason (Darius the Great)

this always happens (Alexander the Great)

this is what you were born for (Umayyad Caliphate)

bitter presence (Mongol Empire)

the way is hard (Mughal Empire)

it will be the same (Hotaki Dynasty)

ravages of war (Durrani Empire)

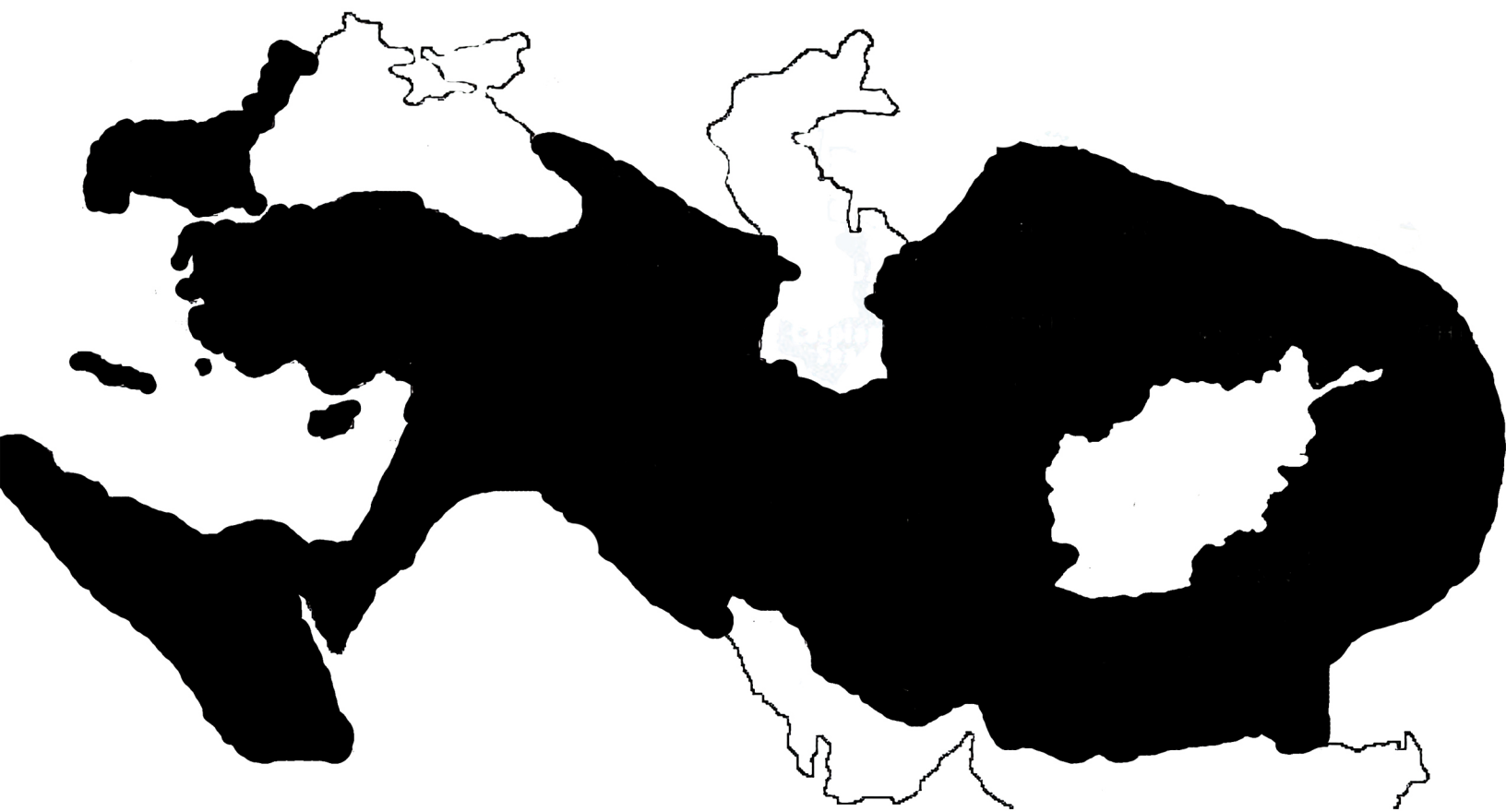
nobody knows why (British and Russian Empires)

a cruel shame (the Durand Line)

there is no one to help them (Soviet Invasion)

the consequences (Civil War)

truth has died (NATO-ISAF)



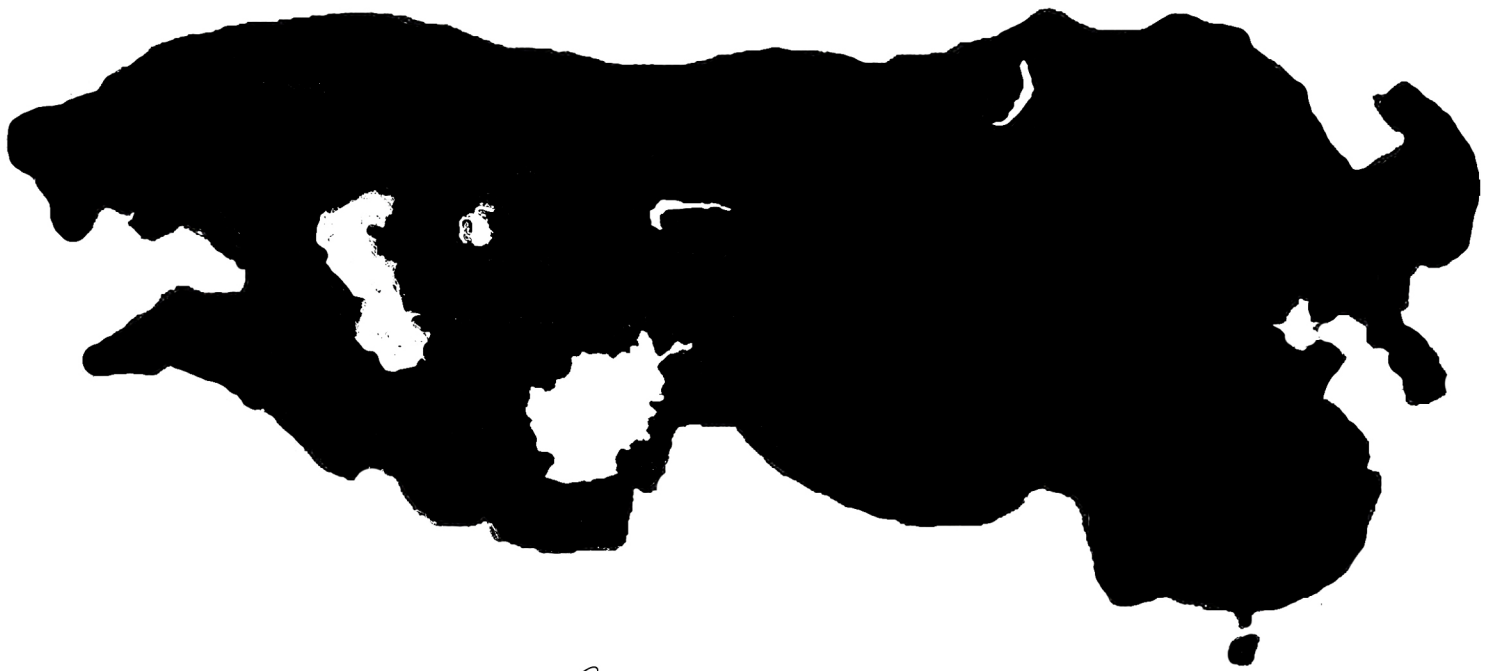
with or without a reason



this always happens



this is what you were born for



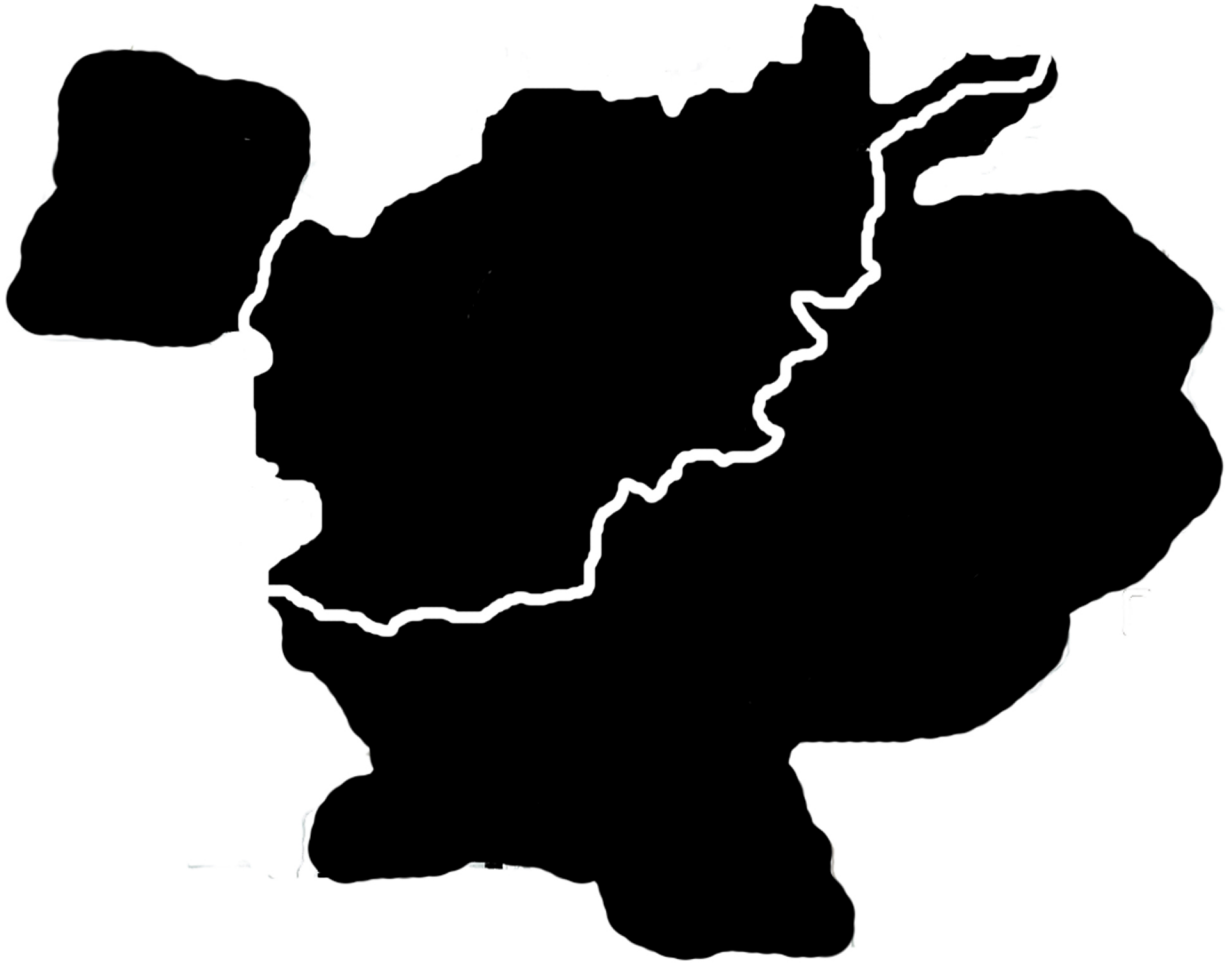
bitter presence



the way is hard



it will be the same



ravages of war



nobody knows why



a cruel shame



there is no one to help them



the consequences



truth has died