

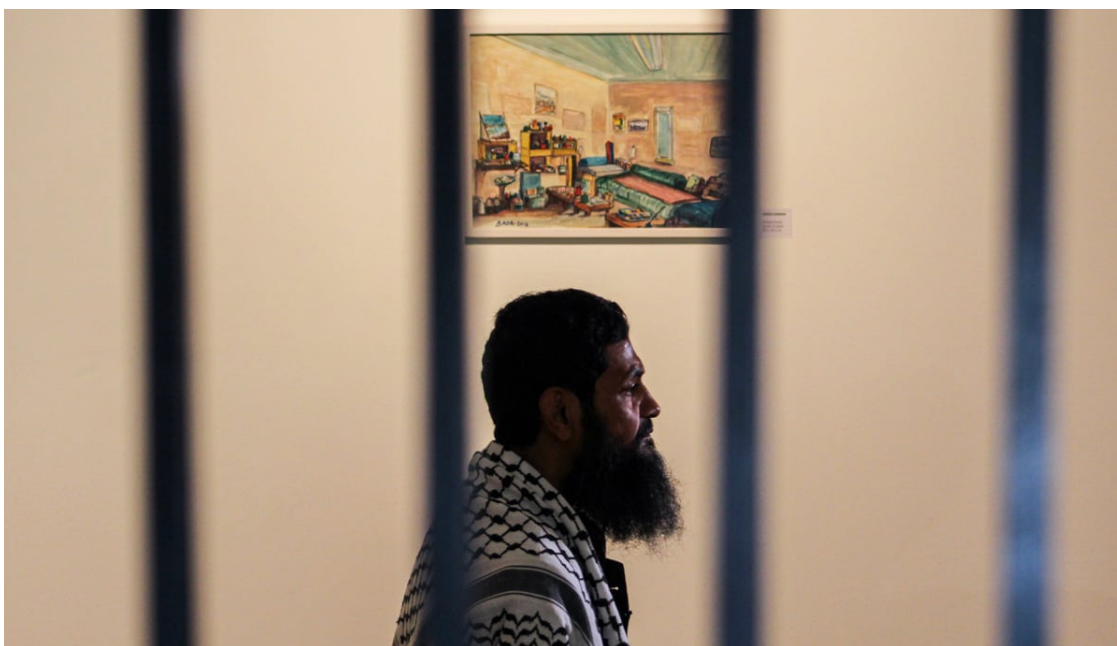
By Rabia Mushtaq

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After years of waiting in internment and being cleared for release by six US government agencies in October 2021, Rabbani brothers finally returned home in February 2023

Muhammad Ahmed Rabbani, a frail Pakistani man in his fifties, is being dubbed as a creator of fascinating but harrowing art using masterful strokes. Lovingly referred to as Badr by his family and friends, he was categorised as prisoner no. 1461 to authorities at the United States of America's Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba.

Since September 2002, Ahmed, along with his elder brother Abdul Rahim Rabbani, was detained in different clandestine facilities operated by the US government including Guantanamo also known as Gitmo — one of the world's most notorious prisons — in a case of mistaken identity with all his human rights stripped away. For 545 days, the two brothers also endured imprisonment and torture in the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) black sites in Afghanistan — dark prison and Bagram jail.



Ahmed stands before a painting he made portraying his room in Guantanamo Bay with rails of

IVS art gallery in the foreground. — Photo by Hassaan Ahmed

Opened in 2001, soon after the US troops arrived in Afghanistan to banish the Taliban government, the detention facility at Bagram airbase, in the north of Kabul, was shut down on December 10, 2014 — a day after a report on CIA's use of torture was released. The dark prison, too, is no longer operational since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

After years of waiting in internment and being cleared for release by six US government agencies in October 2021, the Rabbani brothers finally returned to their homeland on February 24, 2023. Their homecoming made headlines both across national and international media. But what made Ahmed's return extraordinary was his journey from being wrongfully accused as a terrorist to being an artist who painted his pain and anguish on a canvas, as his artworks — made during the period of incarceration at Guantanamo — are on display at the Indus Valley School's art gallery in Karachi.

Ahmed is unlike anything he was labelled to be. His soft-spoken but calm demeanour leaves one wondering about the extent of resilience and patience he has exhibited throughout captivity. On the third day of the exhibition titled 'The Unforgettable Moon', Ahmed arrived at the gallery to share his story with the media.

Dressed in a white crumpled cotton shalwar kameez and a Palestinian keffiyeh draped over his shoulders, Ahmed knew he was placing himself at the centre of the room. Absorbing his surroundings and adapting to this new chapter of life, he stood with confidence wearing a sturdy pair of Peshawari chappals. Appearing a little overwhelmed at times, Ahmed gradually prepared himself to bask in the well-deserved attention. He emitted poise and spoke at length with all those interested in learning his life's tale and his craft, in particular



Photo: Nick
Kenny/Reuters



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Kenny/Reuters





