

# THE ARTNOW PAPER

[www.artnowpakistan.com](http://www.artnowpakistan.com)

VOL IV  
2019

Saleha Arif, National College of Arts Rawalpindi Thesis Display, 2018. Image courtesy the artist

## CONNECTING FLIGHTS

Profile | October 2018

### Regional modernist at heart: Nayyer Ali Dada

*Dada has always been a modernist at heart, though his style has evolved from that to a regional modernist...*

Pages 12-13



Photo Essay | November 2018

### Disrupting nature's course

*The relationship Karachi shares with its edge: both the good and the bad... the escape it offers and their indifference to it all...*

Page 26



In Focus | January 2019

### Navigation of an emotional minefield

*Through this navigation of an emotional minefield, one also must focus on the business of the day... the Degree Show...*

Pages 30-31



Profile | January 2019

### UBERMENSCH

*On the Pakistani artscape, Rana Rashid rocketed like nothing less than a superman. I listen to Rana's impassioned ideas about art-making and art education...*

Pages 6-8



Editorial Note

## Fawzia Naqvi

*Editor in Chief*

Welcome to another edition of the ArtNow Art Newspaper, bringing to our readers selected articles from the online magazine in print form. Our theme for this edition is "Thesis Displays", as some very exciting Degree Shows have taken place over the past two months at various art institutions, including Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVSAA), National College of Arts (NCA), Beaconhouse National University (BNU) – School of Visual Arts and Design (M.A Program), Karachi School of Arts (KSA) and Karachi University Visual Arts Department. This is always an important time of the year, when fresh graduates enter the competitive arena of the art world, bringing new ideas and perspectives that have the potential to carve out and define the concepts and ideals of the future art milieu.

Each of the schools brought forth their own distinct identity with certain works that were unique. ArtNow fully supports these initiatives. Our essays examine a closer look at some of these works and discusses in depth the works emerging from current thesis shows. Beyond the thesis show, we also engage in conversations with artists namely, Nusra Latif, Rashid Rana, Faiza Butt, Adeel Uz Zafar and Arshad Farooqui. You will also be pleased to read the exciting retrospectives of Anwar Jalal Shemza and *Ustaad* Allah Baksh. Our Guest Editor for this edition is the dynamic Amna Naqvi of the AAN Foundation, an avid art collector, philanthropist and publisher running the AAN Gandhara Art-Space in Karachi and Hong Kong. Welcome to the pages of the Art Paper.



Editorial Note

## Quddus Mirza

*Editor*

At the degree show of an art institute, it is realised that we are heir to human legacy, in art, literature, science, technology and other fields of knowledge and culture. Everything created, conceived and constructed by humankind is our past and part of our heritage. We draw references, seek inspirations, and follow examples beyond the boundaries of land or confines of period.

This diversity, and richness is visible in works at several degree shows in the country. Often dealing with personal problems, physical issues, social concerns, matters of cultural identity, the creations of graduating students usually offer different and diverse points of views. These also reflect our surroundings, and changes occurred due to new modes of communication. Here tradition is explored, and examined, may that be of Mughal miniature painting, European art history, or popular urban culture.

The craft of making, exploration of materials, experiments with technique are normally evident in works presented at degree shows. If one frequents these displays, one finds pieces that remind of violence in our environment, pattern of political power, consumer culture's hold on private dreams and desires, memory of things lost, body as a vehicle of emotive ideas, landscape being a view of outside and a map of fear. A number of these artworks, executed in multiple media, revert to personal histories: of families, people, places; observations weaved into visuals, which can be connected and associated with everyone. A realisation both, for the makers of art and its audience; that visual art is not like a language – but is a language, with its distinct grammar, code and meaning.



# PAKISTAN'S LARGEST CHAIN OF BOOKSTORES!





Editorial | December 2018

# Amna Naqvi

*Guest Editor*

A

museum shows and he will now be focusing on art based films and has three in production currently.

There are two questions to be asked thus. What of the 'object' and the 'museum'? If the question all boils down to experience, do we need both or any to employ for 'art making' or 'exhibition making'?

Closer to home, one can research and observe artists such as Shahzia Sikander, Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid who have been working with film and installation since the late '90s which I have been fortunate enough to witness.

Shahzia Sikander created a number of films and installations including her video installation titled 'SpiNN' in 2003 and 'Unseen' at Doris Duke Foundation's Shangri-La in Hawaii in 2012. Her magnum opus though is 'Parallax' which is a seventy-two feet, three channel-single image animation composed of hundreds of hand painting drawings, which is a classically immersive film experience and was created for the Sharjah Biennial in 2013 and has been shown at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, MAXXI Museum Rome amongst others.

Aisha Khalid's video installation titled 'Conversation' was created while at Residency at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam in 2001, while Imran Qureshi's installations at the Singapore Biennial, 2006 and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2013 are a testament to an immersive experience.

These artists though, continue to create object based art but practice their engagement and experimentation with film and in-situ installations with zeal. It is interesting to note, that the artists who were trained at the miniature painting department of the National College of Arts were willing to experiment with other mediums very early in their art practice. The reason could be that to break the 'jadwal' or the border in the training for miniature painting is such an act of rebellion, that to break further boundaries with any medium as well as subject was that much easier.

Rashid Rana, on the other hand, used 'real time' to create his multimedia installations. At his collateral exhibition at the Venice Biennial in 2015, 'My East Is Your West' he manipulated the viewer in real time in Venice with his work titled 'I do not always feel immaterial' and it was a very disorienting artwork to experience for the viewers. I recall constantly moving in and out of the first room to figure it out. Moving on, the viewers in Lahore and Venice were confronted with each other in real time and unknowingly morphed into each other's audience in the second installation titled 'The Viewing, The Viewer and The Viewed'. Or the question to be pondered is that were the respective audiences in different times as weren't those in Lahore

in the future, while those in Venice in the past? As is increasingly obvious with Rana's artwork, notions of ways of seeing, time and space all collide in his practice.

Then there are artists such as Bani Abidi and Basir Mehmood who have chosen film as their primary modes of storytelling, while Adeel Uz Zafar and Abdullah Syed have experimented with sound installations. Khadim Ali chose to realise monumental murals for the 'National Exhibition' at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. While Fazal Rizvi is experimenting with both sound as well as the notions of using the landscape or in this case seascape as a mode for story telling for his work 'Rooms Afloat' rather than the confines of a 'walls/museum'. As for artists such as Yaminay Chaudhri, Shahana Rajani and Zahra Malkani film and technology and are the central focus of their practice.

Publishing projects is another area where art is overlapping with artistic practice. This is not only in the form of artist books such as 'The Straight Path' by Imran Qureshi in 2009 but independent publishing projects such as Scroll, which was a collaboration between the AAN Foundation and the curator Aziz Sohail in 2015 and is now being exhibited in various museums with Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art in Capetown South Africa as its first stop in 2017.

The lines between education, publishing, research, film, architecture, technology, design and art will be so porous that these will inhabit each other's spaces even further and artists who have developed interdisciplinary skills will be more adept at inhabiting any or all of these worlds in the future, be it with creating 'objects' or immersive experiences. As for 'the museum' and if it is to remain relevant then in computer-game speak, it will also have to be an amorphous being which will have to manifest in many avatars, forms and spaces.

*Amna Naqvi is the Founder and Director of the AAN Foundation and AAN Gandhara Art Space as well as the owner of the twice champion Pakistan Super League cricket team, Islamabad United. Together with her husband, they are both leaders in the fields of finance, art and sport. They also own the AAN Collection, which is believed to be the largest and the most acclaimed collection of Pakistani modern and contemporary art. The Collection has been exhibited and published extensively in over fifty global institutions. Her Art Space has set standards in exhibition making by introducing museum quality, longer duration exhibitions among private institutions and museums in the country, as well as, internationally. AAN Gandhara has been a leader in exhibiting new media and seminal exhibitions, which include film, technology and in-situ installations, public programming and art publication since its inception.*

*As our guest editor she speaks about immersive art experiences in the global, as well as the local context.*

While in Milan and on a visit to the Prada Foundation in the summer of 2017, I came across a work of art which was so far ahead in both technique and narrative quality that it left me utterly speechless (and let me tell you, that is a difficult feat). When I had been exchanging emails with the curators, they said that they would arrange a special visit to view 'Carne Y Arena' (Flesh & Sand) a film

## EYE FOR ART



**GULGEE**  
SOLO EXHIBITION

Saturday 6th April, 2019 | Eye for Art Houston

In collaboration with  
ZARMEEN GULGEE

3516 Hwy 6 South Sugar land, TX 77478 USA  
T: +1 347 475 6139  
Email: [eyeforartpk@hotmail.com](mailto:eyeforartpk@hotmail.com)  
[www.eyeforartusa.com](http://www.eyeforartusa.com)



In Focus | February 2019

# From LB01 to LB02: on the continuum of an engaged artistic ethos

by Zarmina Rafi



*Hoor Al Qasimi,  
curator of LB02*

In November 2018, the Lahore Biennale Foundation named Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE, as the curator for the second edition of the Lahore Biennale, scheduled to be held in early 2020. This move signals the Foundation's interest in extending its regional scope towards West Asia and the Middle East.

Held in March 2018, the inaugural of Lahore Biennale (LB01) was invested in situating itself in the region's critical discourse on contemporary art and saw the participation of artists and academics

from Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, among other locations. Lahore Biennale 01 was a fourteen-day event that showcased over 100 artworks across seven major venues in Lahore, making it an unprecedented event that engaged diverse audiences aesthetically and intellectually while garnering popular support.

Local artists and audiences are familiar with the programming of the Lahore Biennale Foundation, that throughout its four-year history under the leadership of Executive Director, Qudsia Rahim has conducted public programming at various public avenues in Lahore, including at local parks, book-stores, cafes, and other conventional and non-conventional exhibition venues. The events Lahore Biennale Foundation has produced, have taken the shape of exhibitions, conversations, discussion groups and artist performances. These have included participation by artists, architects and other creative practitioners such as Atif Khan, Imrana Tiwana, Waqar Aziz, Farida Batool, Malcolm Hutcheson,

Ayesha Jatoi, Risham Syed and Attiq Ahmed to name a few. Distinguished invited international speakers and workshop leaders, such as Natasha Ginwala (Berlin), Paul Keller (Amsterdam), Asma Mahmood (Toronto) and Omar Nagatti (Egypt) have contributed to training and skills development in Lahore by engaging with participants and audiences in various capacities.

The Foundation has developed longstanding initiatives such as artSPEAK, a series designed to spark dialogues on issues of interest relevant to the visual arts, and which support the highly public mandate of the organisation. Since 2015, the work of the Foundation has evolved. Board members of the organisation first came together to work upon a shared vision, which saw the organisation launch one-off projects, such as with Atif Khan's public art installation, 'City Within a City' at Istanbul Chowk in 2015.



*Lahore Museum*



*Visitors with Ayesha Jatoi's work for LB01, Lahore Museum.*

The 56th Venice Biennale Collateral Project, 'The Viewing, The Viewer and The Viewed' at Liberty Market and its affiliated program of workshops, symposia and the site-specific Gandhi Engine Commission by the Tentative Collective in 2016 Matt Kushan and Unum Babar's Project with the Scottish organisation Pidgin Perfect at Bagh-e-Jinnah took the shape of multiple permanent installations, both aesthetically pleasing and purpose-built for the functional enjoyment of park-goers. In late 2016, the Foundation, in collaboration with major international partners including the Goethe Institut and The Danish Centre for Culture and Development conducted a symposium, City in Context on the topic of urban life where sessions and panels gave voice to discussions around issues related to the urban, and artistic solutions or impediments as experienced in major cities in the world. City in Context also provided a platform to showcase compilations of contemporary oral stories, musical performances, lecture performances and exhibitions. These multi-partner and multi-component events continued to feed into the ethos of Lahore Biennale 01 (LB01) in 2018.



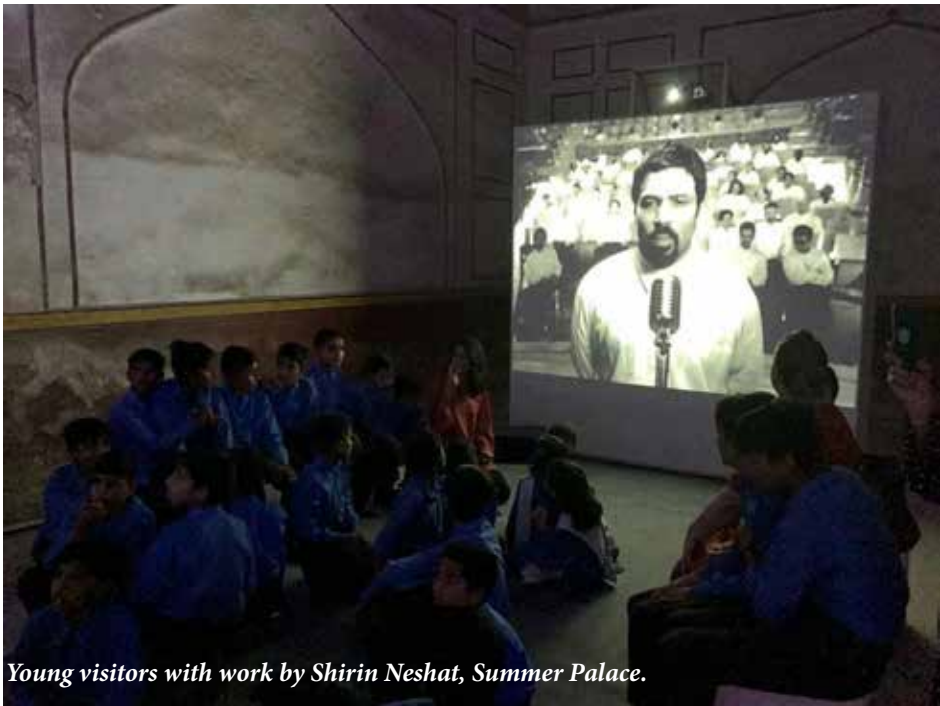


Aisha Khalid and Imran Qureshis works at Shahi Hammam during LB01

In LB01, various elements that made sense for the city of Lahore came together, paying homage to the various layers of urban history, as well as to the diversity of people and experiences of the city. LB01 grew organically, always keeping in view its relevance to our context in Pakistan. The Lahore Biennale 01 organisational team was cognisant of Lahore’s context in their programming, choice of artists represented as well as the use of bilingual materials for publication and press.

With its numerous educational and cultural institutions, Lahore has produced some of the most internationally acclaimed artists of the region. However, what was often lacking in Lahore, and to a larger extent in Pakistan, is that the local artists rarely had the opportunity to view and engage with the works of their counterparts from the city, nation, and region in public settings. Having the Biennale in Lahore meant our Biennale was able to accomplish that at a larger scale, and extend this engagement to more diverse public within the city, and regionally.

As had been the strategy of the Foundation since 2014, by creating programming around topics, or artworks, audiences found ways to enter into sensory or intellectual experiences on their own terms, not always needing a specialised rhetoric of art.



Young visitors with work by Shirin Neshat, Summer Palace.



Naima Dadabhoy’s work at LB01, Alhamra Arts Council

This is a truly unique aspect of the programming of the Foundation, for it has allowed us to cultivate new audiences, as well as to begin articulating in new ways on concepts around “art,” “activism,” “public spaces,” “gendered spaces,” “accessibility” and many other relevant issues, thus opening up these dialogues in the very same milieu that existed prior to the Foundation’s founding but where such conversations on these issues did not take place at such scale. One could also go so far as to say that some of the vacuum created by dwindling establishments of Lahore’s cultural and literary communities such as with Pak Tea House, LBF has facilitated avenues and spaces where local audiences engaged in the creative realm may find new

ways to gather and debate. These are the results of commitment and engagement that has, of course, very much been bolstered through the participation of the artist communities of the city.


In the same vein of opportunity, creation and in the spirit of giving back, the Research Unit at LBF was launched in Summer 2018. The Research Unit also complements that programming of the Academic Forum at LB01, a fourteen-day program of academic talks and workshops, curated by Dr. Iftikhar Dadi of Cornell University, that saw the participation of major international scholars working on visual cultures of the Global South. In Fall 2018, LBF awarded four research grants to Pakistani junior scholars who began conducting primary research on modern and contemporary arts and visual culture of Pakistan.


Initiating research will further develop an ecosystem geared to thinking critically and academically on areas relevant to the region. In this regard too, LBF has been a trailblazer, initially setting up the first research grant in 2015 that enabled scholarship on late modernist artist Zubeida Agha, which has been successfully archived with the Hong Kong based organisation, Asia Art Archive, and can be searched online.

LB02 aims to further create and sustain dialogues promoted during the past four years since the organisation’s inception, as well, to expand upon these discussions keeping in mind the larger MENASA (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia) region. The Sharjah Art Foundation has already maintained collaborative ties with the Lahore Biennale Foundation at the time of LB01, and has previously supported the work of artists of Pakistani background, including Basir Mahmood, Shahzia Sikander, Imran Qureshi, and Rasheed Araeen. Under the curatorship of Hoor Al Qasimi, LB02 hopes to bring a new vitality into the artistic landscape of Lahore, and to Pakistan.

**All images courtesy Lahore Biennale Foundation**

*Zarmina Rafi is a Pakistani-Canadian writer, curator and art manager. In 2018, she was Assistant Curator for LB01. Her writing on art has been published in South Asia, North America and the Middle East.*





### An Introduction to Full Circle Gallery

Full Circle Gallery, a hub of cultural and artistic expression aims to provide an innovative forum for all expressions of Art. The range of artists working with the gallery vary from revered masters to highly sought after artists of today. The gallery hosts versatile exhibitions from curated shows, back to back displays of paintings, sculptures, installations, artist talks, textiles, book readings, musical evenings and video launchings.

Workshops are arranged with the aim of gathering artists, art students and art lovers alike to create an environment of learning and interaction.

The Full Circle Gallery prides itself on providing a platform to the young, talented but unseen artists and supports them in launching their careers to a discerning audience with a dedicated interest in promoting new talent to the world of modern art.

D-53/1 Block-4 Clifton, Contact: 03032239038 galleryfullcircle@gmail.com, Instagram: galleryfullcircle Facebook: galleryfullcircle , Twitter: Gfullcircle



# UBERMENSCH

*A conversation between Rashid Rana and Rohma Khan*

*by Rohma Khan*

Superman as we know today follows the conceptual premise conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche in his philosophical centerpiece, 'Thus Spake Zarathustra', where he presents the concept of *Uberschensch*. As introduced in the popular culture by DC Comics, Superman is an idea of a physically superior being, possessing super natural powers such as speed, strength and heightened functionality.

On the Pakistani artscape, Rana Rashid rocketed like nothing less than a superman. I listen to Rana's impassioned ideas about art-making and art education, and Nietzsche's *Uberschensch*, who inverted the traditional on its head, cropped up in my mind. Nietzsche's metaphysical character of *Uberschensch*, (beyond-man/over-man), focuses on the psychological qualities of the man of the future as he draws distinction between the types of men – the average and the exceptional. In his attempt to define an ideal human being, the 19th century philosopher explains that *Uberschensch* makes their own value systems, are independently-minded, not impressionable, carve their own path, are gentle towards the weak and a little wicked by conventional standards. They are interested in raising the mentality of the society and they accept that they may hurt people in the name of great things; greatness for them lies in the reform of humanity.

People who know Rashid Rana – this Superman of common parlance – his art, curatorial and teaching practice would agree to equate the above-mentioned attributes of *Uberschensch*'s with Rana's insatiable quests for breaking the boundaries. The acknowledgement of Rana's dramatic subversion of the established, by the international art elite has created an exclusive, yet popular, aura around his art practice. The thumping international and

regional recognition has made Rana's approach to art-making an object of curiosity and fascination for both the select and the mainstream art circles, globally. Including art students in Pakistan, who perceive Rana as a source of pride and hope, who, working in Pakistan, has made his name in the most competitive domain of international art. Having produced over a 100 distinguished works, being one of the highest auctioned artists in South Asia, with numerous group shows and solo exhibits globally, and the recipient of many national and international prestigious awards, Rana's zeal and energy towards making a mark keeps growing exponentially. As someone who has witnessed this progression and closely observed him shuffle roles between an artist, educator, curator and now the Dean of the Mariam Dawood School Of Visual Arts and Design, at the Beaconhouse National University, Lahore – a dean who is often the only man sitting on campus working after hours– I have always been intrigued to find out about Rana. What this man is made of and how he surpasses the average to be exceptional? This interview seeks to zoom into the professional life of Rashid Rana, to find out what makes him so special. Here are the highlights:



*Rashid Rana, image courtesy Aroosa Rana*

**RK: You play multiple roles in your professional sphere: visual artist, curator, educator, Dean. How do these roles inform each other? And at the core, what values do you hold as Rashid Rana, the person?**

RR: In my head I don't separate these roles, they are all linked. You could say I am an existentialist with perpetually realigning and changing objectives, with an emphasis on materialistic inquiry. As far as values are concerned, one way to look at it could be that we have come into this world to work – we should do our part (of the work) and leave, but another interesting vantage point, closer to my belief system is that we are a part of a larger creative process. Digging deeper into creative process and expression, the highest form of expression is the universe itself and you are inherently made to fit into it as a viable part of the whole. I find it very natural and exciting to innovate and create in such a way that it falls under the larger discussion of expression.

**RK: What is the relationship between art, expression and life in your practice?**

RR: Art in its present state is a social construct spanning only the last two centuries or so. The wide scope of objects and activity that we lump together as art now was not necessarily seen as such in the past. In fact, the breadth of chronologically scattered activity such as cave painting, pyramids, courtroom miniature painting, Christian imagery and others were not identified as art (as understood today) at the time in which it was created. It is a fairly recent idea to imagine visual expression as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. In the past, other overarching purposes such as religion, mythology, court duties etc. governed the status of visual objects and determined their social role.



*Rashid Rana with his work 'Desperately Seeking Paradise', 2008. Image courtesy Vipul Sangoi*

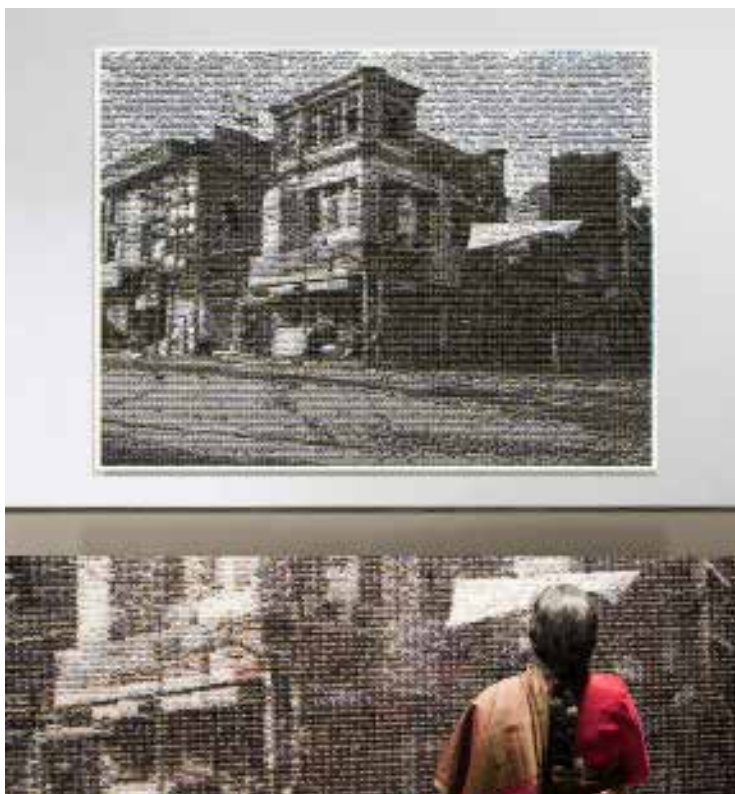


From here on, it is possible to hypothesise that art in its present state is similarly a historic condition, which may eventually come to pass. Whether it's art (in the last 200 years or so) or 'the arts' (all acts of creative expression that came before art and now see through this new lens) have two things in common; mimicking of life (be it a story, drawing, drama and singing) and the poetics of it – all falling into the larger discussion of expression.

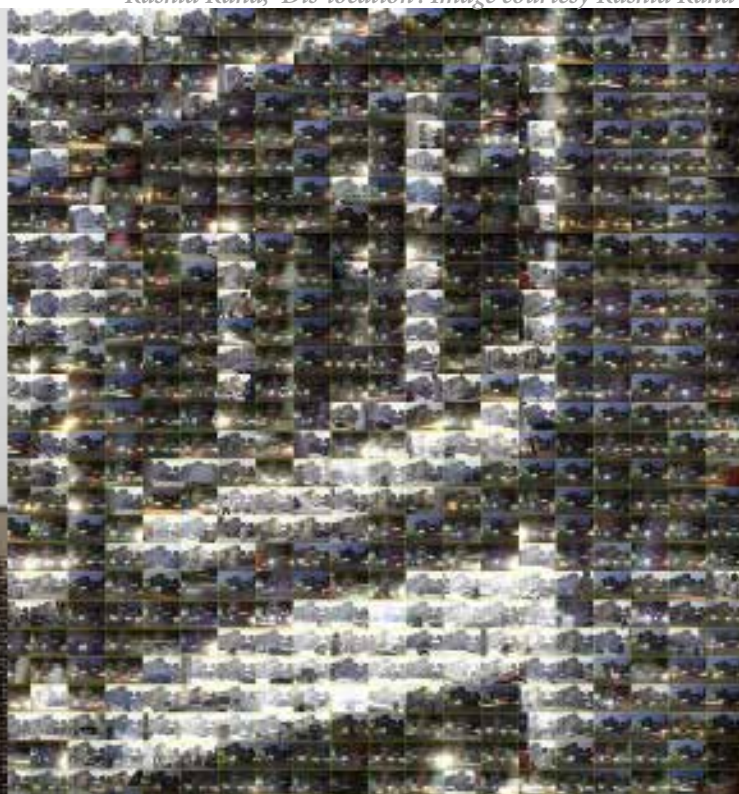
However, I am currently trying to make sense of the 'expression' and 'poetics', taking place in life itself, when one is not trying to mimic life by indulging in art/arts. So, I have worked on a manifesto along with a few other thinkers. Although a manifesto sounds very pompous, my idea is of a manifesto in a subversive way and not in its conventional sense, as it would be ever-changing as a result of a possible discourse – it's called "Eart – a manifesto of possibilities 01" which I conceived and wrote in collaboration with Madyha Leghari. This happened over a series of discussions with Ijlal Muzaffar, Natasha Jozi, Adnan Madani, Risham Syed, Aroosa Rana, Quddus Mirza and Pablo Baler.

**RK: What brought about the conception of 'Eart'?**

RR: Working on the curatorial premise for the Lahore Biennale 01 (before withdrawing from the position of artistic director) enabled me to imagine art/arts in relationship to its 'function'; how art can overlap with 'function' in previously undermined ways, and seek new potentials within



Rashid Rana, 'Dis-location'. Image courtesy Rashid Rana



***"'Eart' is a label that I am proposing for the phenomenon of identification of real life actions or some major earthen functions, performed through employing poetics that transcend the original function and fall under the domain of creative expression."***

-Rashid Rana

A manifesto is typically very convinced of itself. By speaking of manifestos as only possibilities, I seek to undercut conviction in service of exploration.

**RK: Tell a bit about your journey; how did you get here?**

RR: My initial interest in the duality of space (Untitled Series /Grid Paintings, from early 1990s) later on expounded into a wider interest in duality, paradoxes, contradictions, polarities and parallel realities (works from 2002-2009), a way of dealing with the burden of representing reality. I believe that these dualities are very effective as a tool for lessening the drama of presumed absolutes and negating them because they often draw attention to their own absurdity and hence the use of doubles, mirrors etc. In 2004, I wrote: "Now every image, idea, and truth (may it be ancient or modern) encompasses its opposite within itself. Thus, we can say we live in a state of duality. This internal conflict translates into my work at a formal level, as well as having geographical, historical, and political connotations."



Rashid Rana, *The viewing the viewer and the viewed, Venice*. Image courtesy Rashid

the broader realm of visual expressions (art) at present. After I was not able to realise my vision for the LB01, I continued to discuss the curatorial premise with other thinkers and hence the curatorial premise evolved into this conclusion that "there is Art and there is Eart".

'Eart' is a label that I am proposing for the phenomenon of identification of real life actions or some major earthen functions, performed through employing poetics that transcend the original function and fall under the domain of creative expression. I gave this concept a working title 'Eart.'

Eart is the expression or application of human skill, intellect and other faculties through real-life actions.

In other words, activities, events, interactions, interventions, mediations, transactions that either simultaneously or over time transcend their (primary/immediate) function, evolve, but retain relevance through a meaningful position within, or through an extension of the discourse on expression.

**RK: What challenges are you pre-empting for Eart to face and what direction do you see it taking?**

RR: Some may draw similarities between Eart and socially engaged practices such as Relational Aesthetics, but I think that is a misdiagnosis, attributing a false origin; with socially engaged practices (Relational Aesthetics) one is working from within the premise of being an artist even as they challenge the notion of white cube space, find alternate spaces and other ways of engaging with the idea of creative expression.

However, validation is somehow still linked to the institution of art. There is no exit. Eart, on the other hand, refers to a notion outside the institution of art.

Every transgression is eventually bound to become assimilated as an institution or a discipline, and yet, one still has to risk transgression. I want to look beyond art. I am not yet leaving my practice as an artist, but this thought and the subversive idea of writing a manifesto with the help of other minds is an initial spark. In fact, there are a set of open-ended questions at the end of the manifesto, so like-minded people can join together and challenge the existing proposal and maybe we can come up with a 02 version of the manifesto. The current working (Eart – A manifesto of possibilities 01) is admittedly self-contradictory.

**ART  
FOR  
EVERY  
WALL.**

**STUDIO SEVEN ART GALLERY**

Karachi | Dubai

www.studioseven.pk

Karachi: F-42/1, E-Street, Block 4, Clifton, Karachi, Pakistan.  
PABX: +92 345 8287226, +92 21 35373427-29 Fax: +92 21 35373430

Dubai: 803-804, Oxford Tower, Business Bay, Dubai, UAE.  
Tel: +971 4 5587119, +971 4 5587108 Fax: +971 4 5587103

Email: info@studio7-seven.com Facebook: www.facebook.com/std7official  
Instagram: studiosevengallery

**STUDIO SEVEN**  
Art Gallery





Today, I believe that the binaries of East and West are often overplayed. The binaries of ‘actual’ and ‘remote’ are more plausible in this regard; one’s expression is a result of a negotiation between the ‘actual’ and the ‘remote’. The actual is close at hand – something one can experience directly with the body as the site of knowing. The remote is knowledge amassed indirectly, from diverse sources scattered across time and space. The result is a meditation on location, both in a physical, as well as, temporal sense. This has led to works such as ‘Transliterations Series’ 2010-present; ‘The Viewing, the Viewer, and the Viewed’, 2015. ‘Present Elsewhere’, 2016-17. They are an attempt to subvert linear ideas of time and space progressions to offer fractured views of chronology and geography.

In short, unburdening from self-imposed pressure of prescriptive and dogmatic ideas of affiliating one’s identity to political and cultural boundaries has been one of the core ideas in my practice throughout my career, be it my art-making, teaching or curatorial works.”

Prescriptive ideas of identity, is a burden we carry having been born in a region that was colonised in the past. It is very common for you to mistakenly find refuge in the stylistic conventions of the past. I think it’s a trap, especially for the third world. I proposed the same idea in the Prime Minister’s heritage commission; the way to move forward is something I would like to share with the people dreaming of *Naya* Pakistan – it does not reside in the past neither does it reside in following the footsteps of some other country/people in the developed world lest. It especially does not lie in making substandard, modern/contemporary versions of the rich cultural heritage in the garb of “revival.” In my opinion, to move forward one must be aware of the past, present, and future: Look carefully at the present and allow speculative futures to intersect this thought from other trajectories. This is based on a non-linear conception of time that doesn’t subscribe to derivative ideas of progress but rather thinks about how we can construe commons and exchange thought without overarching hierarchies. This is the path I have taken in my practice and also envisioned for SVAD.

**RK: You played a pivotal role in the conception of SVAD in 2002 and now 16 years down with roughly a 1000 graduates from the school, you can easily be “blamed” (held responsible) for steering art pedagogy in a new direction. From conception to realisation, what objectives did you have in mind when you laid the conceptual foundations of SVAD? Was there a moment, an epiphany which got you thinking on your current trajectory?**

RR: I grew up (as an artist) at a time where the overarching question was whether your work looks Pakistani or not. This was especially on my mind during my studies at the National College of Arts (NCA). I made a work titled ‘What is so Pakistani about this Painting?’ with an intention of burying the question once and for all.

However, it continues to rear its head. The more one fights, the more these lines harden. Resistance, after all, is a form of acknowledgement. This laid the foundations of my vision for SVAD, when the opportunity came. I wanted to win those freedoms for the next generation that somebody from a developed country has. My desire was to formulate a curriculum where students are unburdened from traditions and conventions of the past – where they could think afresh for themselves.

I don’t believe in the monolithic idea of identity. Since 2000, I have been very clear in my head. After coming back from MassArt, Boston, the first solo show I created, ‘Nonsense’ was the first time I dealt with the idea of multiple identities and realised that’s what I need to embrace. I believe two people having identical set of qualifiers (in terms of religion, citizenship, gender, race and ethnicity etc.) will still be extremely different, because of the way things have unfolded in their lives. While of course, these qualifiers do determine a lot of aspects of an individual’s life and potential, I think that an over-association with these abstractions risks a kind of determinism that only furthers stereotype.



Rashid Rana with his work ‘War Within V’, 2017. Image courtesy Rashid Rana

A common practice of art education of this region has been to make students master a particular craft through slotted medium based demarcations, and then to express their thought within that singular language in their thesis. This structure pre-values craft or medium above thought. When I got the opportunity of building the curricular foundations for SVAD, I thought that the structure should be such that students don’t have to face this question In a student led program, where students explore their ideas themselves early on; their own individual identity takes lead.

**RK: My oldest memory of you in a class was coercing students to push their imagination, you were telling them to imagine a staircase made of ice reaching all the way up to the sun? What influences propelled you towards formulating such ideas?**

RR: I was always inclined towards the arts; making portraits of friends and relatives and making installations on *jashan-e-eid-milad-u-nabi*.

Rashid Rana, ‘War Within’. Image courtesy Rashid Rana

I also became interested very early in galvanising people to form teams for sports and other activities. The seed of thinking differently was probably planted at NCA and nurtured at MassArt. I learnt the most as a teacher and really enjoyed my teaching when I came back from Boston. Teaching for me is as creative an enterprise as making (art) objects. I feel that often students and teachers are hesitant to exercise freedom.

We talk about thinking out of the box, but the box is materialised as a boundary the moment it is evoked. I also began to distinguish that sometimes it’s not about how much freedom a teacher gives to a student but how much freedom the student is willing to insist on. One cannot inculcate freedom in a straitjacketed banking model of education but rather encourage an independent sense of inquiry which leads students to pave their own way.

From my own practice, I have learnt to remain flexible, reflective and adaptable. I studied painting at NCA, and while the discipline and its accompanying thought continued to influence my work in other media for a while, I was surprised by the turns it took later. My initial with my interest in binaries and dualism, transformed into one about ‘location and time’ Attempts to locating oneself outside of art through Eart is another possibility on my mind that shapes the schools of the future.

**RK: How do you envision the future of art, its pedagogy and site of production (studio) to evolve?**

RR: The notion of ‘studio’ is constantly redefining itself based on how we understand art (and applied arts), its purpose and function/s. This constant state of flux poses challenges especially in terms of the pedagogical context of studio. Art academia is by default an extension of white cube space. In its conceptual framework and its architectural translation, it is not geared towards encouraging/supporting/inviting practices with non-conventional and non-

tangible outcomes. Therefore, art academia in ‘the near future’ (what I like to refer to as a post discipline era) must support an all-inclusive ‘notion of studio’ in both its conceptual, temporal and physical dimensions.

In terms of institution, we know schools did not exist as we know them today, and they will radically change in the future. Hence, I am extremely conscious of this fact while positioning myself in the present time. Maybe the post discipline era is my fantasy, or maybe, it will pan out as I see it.

Who knows?

*Rohma Khan works as an educator and a business director for an advertising agency, Farigh Four. She is based in Lahore and currently affiliated with the School of Visual Arts and Design at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore.*



# Nusra Latif Qureshi Brings history to life

by Amber Hammad



“...and I wanted to explore the history, and art history and its relationship to the artist...”  
-Nusra Latif Qureshi

**AH: Can you tell our readers about your background?**

NQ: I come from Lahore, I studied at National College of Arts and moved to Melbourne to finish a Master's degree.

**AH: A clichéd yet integral question: Why do you do what you do?**

NQ: Raison d'être: I would be a very unhappy person if I was unable to articulate the ideas I am partial to. It is said that the personal is political. I find it relevant in many ways. Using personal interpretation of life and histories around us is one way; another could be refining existing traditional practices to depict new meanings, reinterpret concepts and discover complexities. The end justifies the means.

**AH: What are some of the themes/ideas you pursue through your art practice? And why?**

NQ: There are certain themes like forgotten strands of history and devices of painting that continue to fascinate me. In my paintings and digital prints, I engage with the visual histories of several cultural strands, questioning conventional interpretations, pulling apart and reconfiguring the found patterns to construct new narratives. My particular focus has been investigating little known histories of colonial eras, questioning established narratives and engaging with the politics of representation. I also use photographs, botanical drawings, technical illustrations and historical paintings as visual and conceptual references to construct unanticipated accounts of known events. While heavily referencing Mughal painting with its exquisite detail, I try to create a dialogue that offers new insights into both the past and the present while maintaining a visually appealing aesthetic.

**AH: How do you organise your ideas/thoughts before, during and after the process of art making?**

NQ: The process involves a great deal of collection of images and ideas. I collect these from various sources; the subjects ranging from traditional textiles to cityscapes. I am also very interested in organising the images into suitable categories depending on the ideas; at this point some culling also happens. During this stage many new directions are found that lead to possible practical solutions. Many projects come about as a result of a curated show, and some are commissioned. It can be helpful or conversely limiting if there is a pre-determined focus that directs the work.

**AH: Can you share with us your physical process of art making? From conception to exhibition?**

I take the initially selected images and usually trace them on a painting surface to construct a structure. This process occurs through complex layering, fragmentation, erasure and juxtaposition of accumulated visual material. After a painting is finished, I seem to distance myself from it. The curator usually plays a major role in how and where to place a work in an exhibition.

**AH: Who were/are your favourite artists/artworks and why?**

NQ: Rothko and Howard Hodgkin for their romance with colour and texture; Louise Bourgeois for her focused personal investigations into things too difficult to articulate and her absolute dedication to her work; Georgia O'Keeffe, for her focused and disciplined exploration; Yinka Shonibare, who takes one into patterned political follies; Matisse for his use of colour and pattern and a recent love, John Russell who inspired Matisse with his breathtaking mastery of colour in landscape. I also admire these souls: Louise Paramor, Kara Walker, William Kentridge, Vernon Ah Kee, Ah Xian, Fiona Hall and Guan Wei.

**AH: What is the role of an artist in a society?**

NQ: The artist reflects on what is intentionally or unintentionally overlooked by the society. Art itself offers a sane version of events, often very considered and refined. Given that historically the economic relationship between the patron and the artist keeps changing, this exchange is often subversive but sometimes explicitly critical. Despite the changes in this diametric association, artists have found means to speak their mind through their practice over the centuries.

**AH: How has living in Australia compared to living in Pakistan affected you/your art practice?**

NQ: I mostly find it liberating being considered just an artist. My cultural sensibility is still based in Pakistan, though it is augmented by living next to various cultures thriving in Australia; I bring many rich traditions to it and in turn, accept what other cultures bring with them. I do not carry the weight of explaining my Pakistani tradition and culture to a 'Western' audience. One reason for this stance is that there is no isolated or 'pure' tradition in any culture; all living cultures lend and borrow, cull and adopt from the ones in their vicinity. Right now, a social stagnation is visible in many societies as they strive for a puritan state. At the same time, there is an inundation of communication technology with its potential sophistication to overcome boundaries and borders of all kinds. Thus the global space, when and where it tries to assert itself is interesting and continually evolving. The other reason for not becoming a mouthpiece of a certain ideology is that I as a student of art embrace the art histories of all regions and eras. As a practicing artist I do not see any limits to my access to histories that are not part of South Asia.

Intercultural encounters gave South Asia its potent flavour and sustained the vigorous growth of thought and image for thousands of years. I would contest a view that insists on categorising cultural production as definite and static. Furthering that thought I find the artists obsessing over a 'traditional' grandeur are only copying themselves to exhaustion with watered-down versions of their earlier works.

**AH: What is the best part about being an artist for you?**

NQ: Having an artistic licence seems to be an advantage. I also find it rewarding that I am able to explore one set of ideas and have the choice to move on to another exciting area. It is remarkable that the creativity in this field can keep one thinking and engaging without the fear of stagnation.

**AH: Do you make a living off your art practice?**

NQ: Yes, I am able to. I will tell you an anecdote. When I first came to Australia, I told people that I am an artist. The response mostly was: 'But what do you do for a living?' I would say: 'Nothing, I paint'. This amused and offended me in equal measure, though now I have come to understand that this is an Australian socio-economic scenario for an artist.

**AH: What is a suggestion you can give to aspiring artist?**

NQ: It is something that has worked for me: perhaps consistency is the key. Certainly consistent practice and preferably continuous exhibiting remains helpful.

Originally from Pakistan, Nusra Latif Qureshi was born in 1973 and has been living and working in Australia since 2001. Her art practice uses various elements of South Asian traditional Miniature, but also stretches out to the use of photographic and holographic imagery. From her training in Miniature paintings she draws on factors, like attention to detail and colour, as well as figures and then juxtaposes on elements from art history, photography as well as touches upon notions of the gaze, ambiguity and appropriation through a female perspective. Her audience is spread across the East and the West as some of Qureshi's achievements include, being exhibited extensively all over the globe, including Kunst Historisches Museum in Austria, 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial, 52nd Venice Biennale, Smith College Museum of Art and many other. Some of her works are also housed in the collections of British Museum, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and the National Gallery of Victoria to name a few.

'Quiet Leaves', Nusra Latif Qureshi, image courtesy the writer

Amber Hammad is a regular contributor to Artnow Pakistan.

@thpSocial

thp

The Happiee Place  
(A project by Saeed Research Studio)

ARTLAB RESIDENCY

THP ArtLab is a gallery space in Lahore that aims to put art and design in conversation with other disciplines. The first experimental residency program will run for a year starting May 2019, bringing people from Two Professions for Four weeks to create dialogue, works and/or publications.

We welcome  
artists  
designers  
technologists  
mathematicians  
lawyers  
doctors  
architects  
journalists.

Submissions Open - March 10th, 2019  
Deadline - April 10th, 2019

www.TheHappieePlace.com

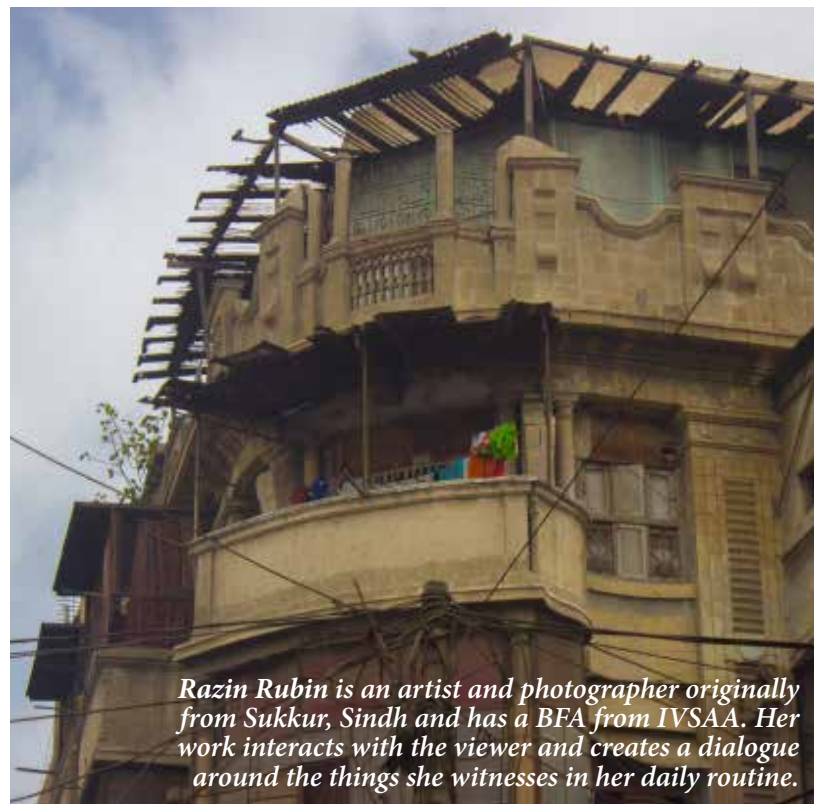
67-A Block C-3 Gulberg III, Lahore, 54660, Punjab, Pakistan



Photo Essay | October 2018

# A walk through Saddar

by Razin Rubin



*Razin Rubin is an artist and photographer originally from Sukkur, Sindh and has a BFA from IVSAA. Her work interacts with the viewer and creates a dialogue around the things she witnesses in her daily routine.*



Buy your favourite art  
from the comfort of  
your home

**visit: [www.artciti.com](http://www.artciti.com)**

36-C, 2nd Floor, Bukhari Comm. Lane-13,  
Main Khayaban-e-Shujaat, Phase VI,  
DHA, Karachi. 021-35250495-6





# Think Big, Act Honestly

The long-standing values of Mitsubishi Corporation are enshrined in our Three Corporate Principles:

“Corporate Responsibility to Society,”

“Integrity and Fairness,” and

“Global Understanding Through Business.”

Our never-ending mission is to enrich society through business rooted in integrity and fairness, while maintaining a broad perspective as we endeavor to make our “next” phase of a growth a reality.

Offering the promise to fulfill expectations, our “next” phase has already begun.



## Karachi Branch Office

Floor#14-A, The Harbour Front, HC-3,  
Dolmen City, Block 4, Scheme-5,  
Clifton, Karachi-75600, Pakistan  
Telephone +92-21-3529-4361~67

## Lahore Liaison Office

3rd Floor, 201 Building, Upper Mall,  
Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam,  
Lahore-54000, Pakistan  
Telephone +92-42-3577-6451~57

## Islamabad Liaison Office

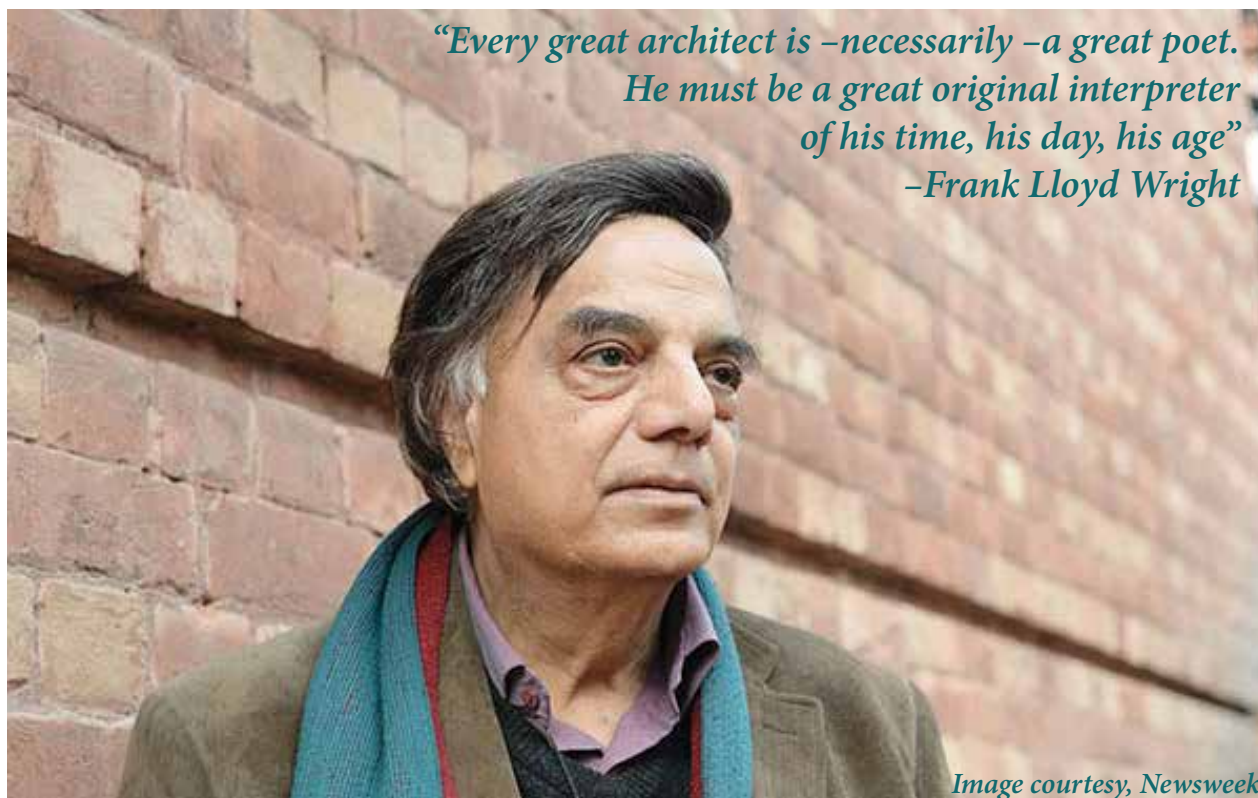
Serena Business Complex North Wing,  
Level-5, Plot No.17, Sector G-5/1,  
Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy,  
Islamabad-44000, Pakistan  
Telephone +92-51-2277-421

[www.mitsubishicorp.com](http://www.mitsubishicorp.com)



# A modernist at heart: Nayyar Ali Dada

by Sarah K. Cheema



Looking back at his long prolific career spanning more than five decades, it’s quite evident that Nayyar Ali Dada knows his poetry; the poetry of space, the poetry of expression and the poetry of interpreting the spirit of the times into built form. Through this extraordinary gift, Dada has gained cultural primacy and has cemented his place as one of Pakistan’s greatest architects.

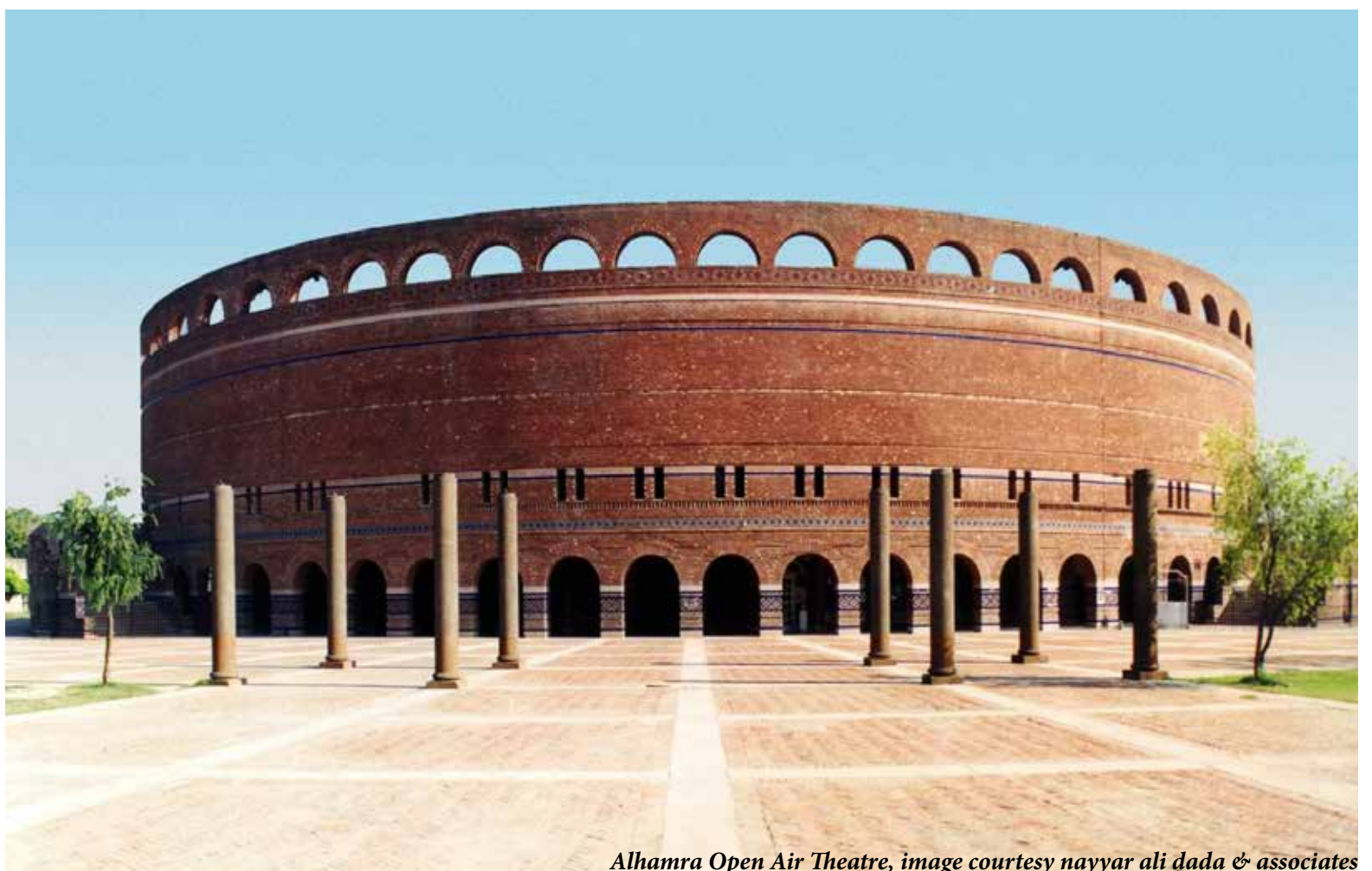
Belonging to the second generation of Pakistani architects, Dada enrolled into the National College of Arts which, in the 60s, was a portal of modernist and progressive ideas under the direction of the, then Principal, a great artist Professor Shakir Ali. It was in this intellectual and artistic environment where the young Dada’s aesthetics were strengthened and refined, giving way to his modernist design sensibilities.

Dada has always been a modernist at heart, though, his style has evolved from that to a regional modernist with a strong sense of the context and an endeavour to discover the identity of Pakistani architecture through his designs. Starting his career with mainly residential projects, it was not until the Rivaz Garden Flats, a project of low-cost apartment blocks that Dada started experimenting with brick, which would later become a trademark in his buildings.

***“Dada has always been a modernist at heart, though his style has evolved from that to a regional modernist with a strong sense of the context and an endeavour to discover the identity of Pakistani architecture through his designs.”***

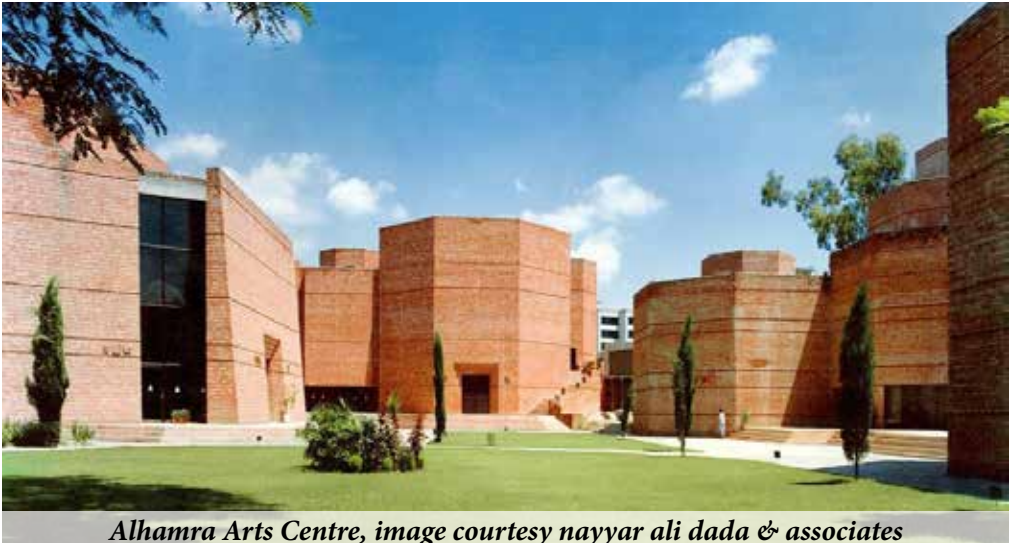
Two of his most memorable works, early on in his career, were a gift to his alma mater –the new Studio Block (which now houses the Fine Arts Department) and the Shakir Ali Auditorium at the National College of Arts. The brutalist auditorium with its grand concrete staircase embodies a distinct plastic quality which makes it blend-in amongst its neighbouring colonial buildings yet, stand on its own making it one of the most defining spaces on the campus. By the late 70s, Dada had made a prominent name for himself but it was a project that he secured from the Lahore Arts Council, which would eventually put him on the world map.

The Alhamra Arts Council building on the Mall Road was built in three phases—starting from a multi-purpose auditorium which, later extended to administrative offices, galleries and concluded with a lecture hall, taking 15 long years to be finally completed in 1992. For this project, Dada delved into the identity of Pakistani architecture by using handmade red brick with traditional mortar to be cast on the concrete walls of the building. Speaking about this project, Dada said, “When I walked through the Mall Road after taking up the challenge of making a very important building on that road, I tried to learn from what had been done well in the past and I found remarkable buildings of Aitchison College, the Lahore High Court and others. I thought that if the British were able to do that, let’s try to do something good as well. I have tried in examples like Alhamra, which are not a Western take-off and nor are they a copy of Mughals [to show that] it is possible to find an expression which belongs here.”



*Alhamra Open Air Theatre, image courtesy nayyar ali dada & associates*

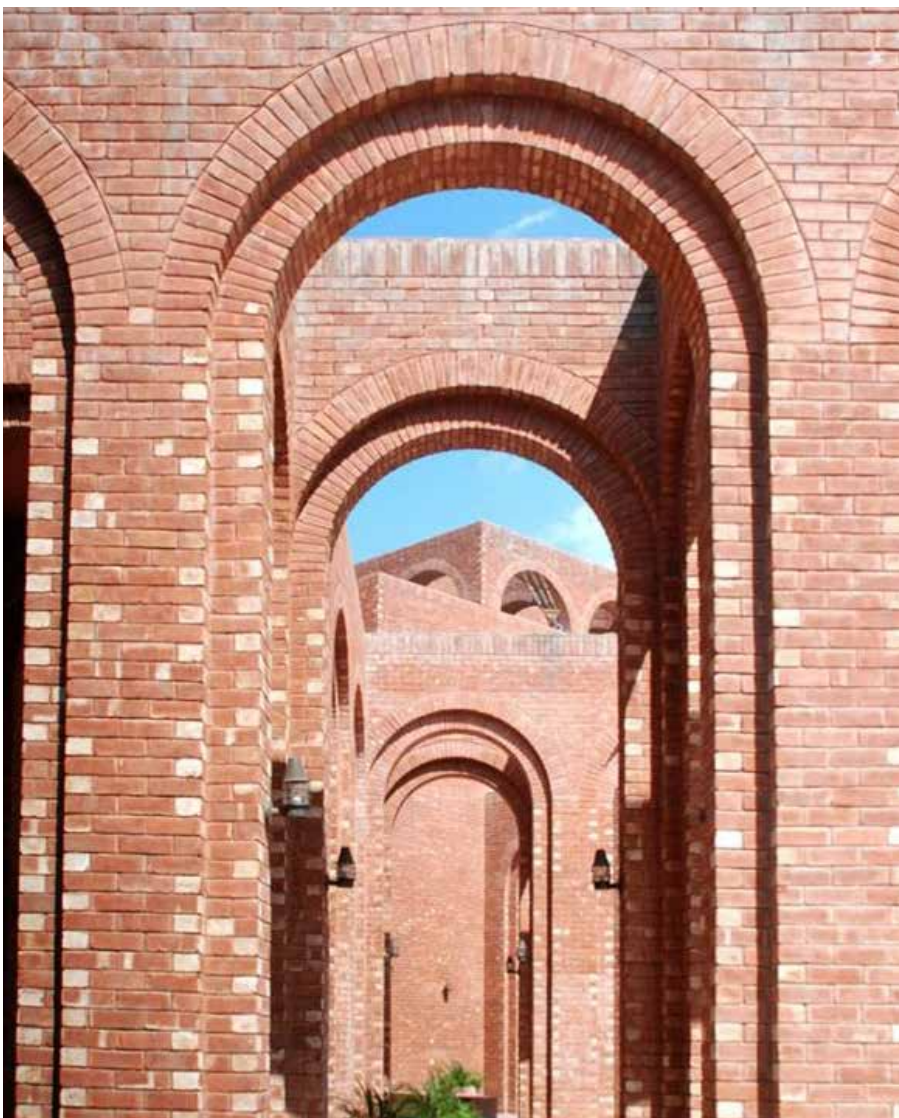




Alhamra Arts Centre, image courtesy nayyar ali dada & associates



HBL- RHQ, image courtesy nayyar ali dada & associates



Punjab Institute image courtesy nayyar ali dada & associates

Another elegant design aspect that stood out was the combination of polygonal forms enclosing outdoor green spaces and courtyards which, gave way to new patterns of social experiences and relations.

Dada became the first ever (and only, thus far) Pakistani recipient of the prestigious Agha Khan Award for Architecture for the Alhamra Arts Council building in 1998. The jury found the complex to be “a rare example of flexible spaces that has enabled several additions to be made over time, each of which has in turn enhanced, rather than detracted from, its overall architectural value. This is a very popular and successful public building, projecting its complexities in a simple and powerful manner.”



Beaconhouse National University image courtesy nayyar ali dada & associates

The worldwide recognition and the success of the Alhamra Arts Council brought in more public works on a mega scale for Dada, especially in his hometown, Lahore, where he redefined the language of architecture in the city with his emblem of native red brick buildings. In 1993, he was appointed to design the Alhamra open-air theatre for large cultural activities. Reminiscent of a Greek amphitheatre, the reinforced concrete arena featured handmade bricks clad with decorative ceramic tile-courses running throughout the façade. The project was later extended to the renovation and extension of the Gaddafi Stadium nearby for the 1996 World Cup which, again, introduced traditional motifs of exposed red brick to a modern form. The style had by now, become quintessentially Dada who had been delving into the identity of Pakistani architecture without being bogged down by the styles of the past, but at the same time being sensitive to the local context and the built heritage.


This was followed by recurrent large scale projects, including office complexes and regional head offices in the late 1990s and 2000s namely, the HBL Regional Office on Mall Road and the MCB House on Jail Road –both buildings successfully reflecting the ethos and visions of the client and becoming an esteemed symbol of the city.

Throughout his works, Dada has always paid tribute to his one true love, Lahore. Though the homage does not restrict to new works only, he has also been involved in the conservation of historic buildings like the Quaid-e-Azam Library, the Freemasons Building and many more giving equal importance to its heritage as he does to the built language of the present day.


Dada is the pride of this country; a star architect and maestro who’s architecture is synonymous with iconic designs. Some recent projects include, Lahore’s Expo Centre, completed in 2010, which was another chance to delve into the character of the city and define it through his designs. Another one, the Grand Jamia Masjid of Bahria Town which, has risen to become the 7th largest mosque in the world. The elegant design of the mosque is the perfect blend of Islamic traditions with a quintessentially Pakistani identity. Frank Lloyd Wright once said, “The mother art is architecture. Without an architecture of our own we have no soul of our own civilisation.”

And indeed, throughout his prosperous career, Dada has strived to unearth Pakistan’s true architectural vocabulary that echoes the present cultural zeitgeist — just like the Mughals and the British had, before us—in turn, defining the very soul of our civilisation. At 75, Dada is still unstoppable and a force to be reckoned with.

**Sarah K. Cheema** holds a Masters in Architectural History & Theory from the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. She is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, NCA.



EYE FOR ART



M.F. Husain Oil n. Conte on Board (Provenance: Christie's London)

THE PREMIER ART GALLERY  
THAT DEALS IN THE WORK OF  
OLD MASTERS

22 C/1 6th Comm Lane, Zamzama Karachi, Pakistan.  
Tel: +(92-21) 35378368  
email: eye4artkhi@hotmail.com, www.efa.com.pk



# The green emergency

*Can the culture of art influence citizen participation to create an inclusive society?*

by Nabah Ali Saad



Mehreen Murtaza, 'How will you conduct yourself in the company of trees' at Bagh e Jinnah, LB01, Image by Usman Saqib Zuberi

In 1962, anthropologist Charles O. Frake defined cultural ecology as “the study of the role of culture as a dynamic component of any ecosystem”. Through this definition, the relation of culture and the ecosystem, a society may be seen as one with numerous applicable ecological metaphors, such as emergence, growth, evolution, complex interdependencies, systemic fragility, life cycles and webs, as these metaphors all illuminate the way that culture functions. More recently, Ann Markusen, the lead author of a 2011 paper, California’s Arts and Cultural Ecology, puts the case in favour, and provides a helpful definition of cultural ecology:

*“An art and cultural ecology encompasses the many networks of arts and cultural creators, producers, presenters, sponsors, participants, and supporting casts embedded in diverse communities. Forty years ago, scientists and policymakers realized that treating plants, animals, minerals, climate, and the universe as endlessly classifiable, separate phenomena did not help people understand or respond to environmental problems. So they created the integrated field of environmental ecology. In similar fashion, art producers, advocates, and policymakers are now beginning to strengthen the arts and cultural sphere by cultivating a view of its wholeness and interconnectedness. We define the arts and cultural ecology as the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings.”*

John Holden, in his report, The Ecology of Culture, speaks of culture as being a “work-in-progress, and always a social process. In addition to that, an ecology is non-hierarchical: all the parts are required to make the whole, and in that sense, all the parts are equal.” When questioned for his report by Holden, Samuel Jones, Head of the Director’s Office at Tate in 2014 spoke of the question of cultural ecology as one in which politics, society and culture are interlinked.

He goes on to say, “A healthy cultural ecology is an environment where people feel confident and able to contribute to that record, where they can feel part of it, and find an audience. This means that people create culture, (where) subcultures can thrive...”

This seems like a highly applicable concept to Pakistani society where cultural roots are strong and have a very big part to play in our precepts for societal norms. The intrinsic link between culture and society, as well as, the symbiotic evolutionary relationship of the two will, therefore, allow us to see how existing stages may be set up to allow for a discourse which addresses the need for a more inclusive

cultural ecology, specifically via using art as a means of community engagement.

The year, 2017, saw a large nation-wide survey being carried out by the U.S. Census Bureau’s Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). The focus of the survey was to formulate the most representative and recurring data collection about how adults from all backgrounds engage with the arts. As part of the survey, the SPPA asks about art attendance, art-making, art consumption through electronic media, literary reading, art education, and other cultural activities. Alongside the SPPA, more recently the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) began an annual survey, also in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, to track adults’ participation in attending art, making art, reading literature, and taking art classes or lessons, with the goal being to understand how these factors relate to frequency of art engagement by the general public. In a working paper resulting from a NEA research grant, Donald Polzella and Jeremy Forbis, researchers from the University of Dayton, found that adults who attend live art events “are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviors (e.g. making charitable donations or volunteering, attending community meetings or voting),” a relationship “irrespective of the artistic domain.” They also posit that “the link between exposure to the arts and pro-social behavior is based on the social characteristics of the encounters, e.g., shared group identity, familiarity with performers or artists, multimodal sensory experience, etiquette, venue, and customs or rituals.”



Mehreen Murtaza, 'How will you conduct yourself in the company of trees' at Bagh e Jinnah, LB01, Image courtesy Mehreen Murtaza



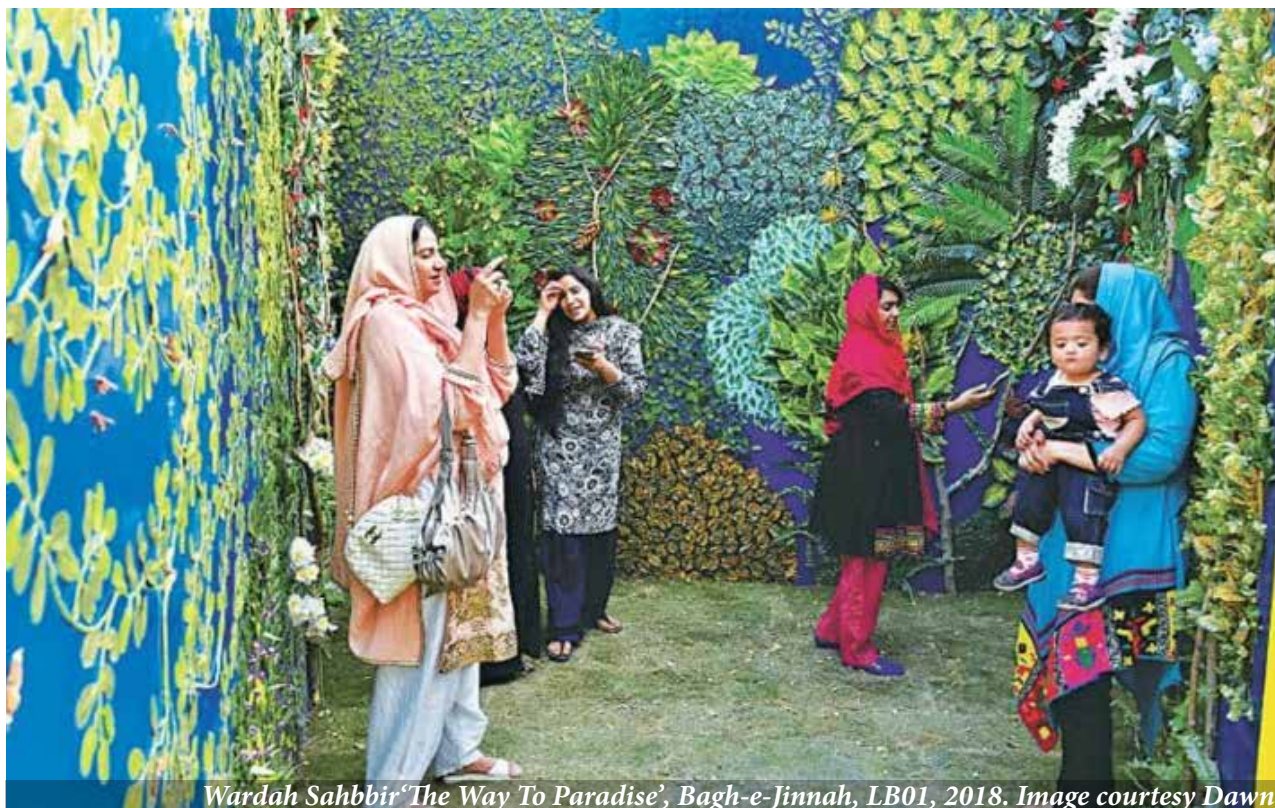
And they show that “individuals who are exposed to the arts through the internet are also more likely to engage in pro-social behavior,” which finding suggests that “live and media presentations are mutually reinforcing.”

In a paper titled ‘Horti+Culture: Participation and Sustainable Development of Cities’, Claudia Madeira quotes from the manifesto article entitled ‘Art Alienated – An Essay on the Decline of Participatory-Art’ (1989) by Greg Evans, where he emphasised the fact that in capitalist societies, in contrast to others (from primitive to pre-capitalist, e.g. medieval or Renaissance, societies), there has been a regression in artistic participation caused by the monopoly of art seen as a commodity/item of consumption and not as participation. In his view, this cycle should be reversed. “As with all forms of human expression, the making of art is an essential part of our being and of our need to express our feelings and thoughts, joys and sorrows.” He also goes ahead to say “...ultimately, then, we must start making our own art in order to begin the process of liberating ourselves from the alienation of commodity culture, and thereby regain our ability to fulfil our expressive needs.” The philosopher Jacques Rancière (2007) calls this the “*emancipation of the spectator*”, who should become a participant in artistic processes instead of standing by as a mere receiver, removed from the act of creation. Since the 1990s, a register of this form of engaged art has been formed which has seen the addition of the lexicons for “participative art” which has been expanding the artistic field into post-studio practices and has been given different names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, contextual art and (most recently) social practice. One of the characteristics of this “participative art” is that this art generally includes an ethical posture, where social transformation or change is sought. The expansion of participation in art may also be explained both as a basic process, to be set against trends that tend to reduce art to mere consumption and, from a more structural viewpoint, as a form of guaranteeing a more organic and inclusive social performance in the public sphere.

This process has been strengthened with the expansion of the principle of sustainability, which, in being inherent in the planning process, is also being included now in artistic discourse and practices. For some writers, it reflects a “*new frontier for art*.”

March of 2018 saw in Lahore the inauguration of its first Biennale, LB01, which served the purpose of establishing a rapport between the citizens of Lahore and the world of art which previously had been kept firmly behind the unchanging socio-economic divide that is prevalent within a country such as Pakistan. Here, where the connoisseurs of aesthetic and theoretical understanding and appreciation stayed firmly ensconced within the periphery of Duchamp and his Fountain, LB01 presented an opportunity to reach out to the masses and invite them into a world - previously inaccessible to them due to the lack of opportunities presented to them by the simple circumstance of their birth. Critical thinking, art appreciation and the creative evolution of a society are aspects of life which do not come on the radar of the average man as part of his daily musings, so how may one avail such platforms in order to engage the city in dialogues which speak towards pressing issues such as the need for a more culturally ecological sustainable society?

According to Madeira, adopting the basis of “participatory art” from the principles of planning and sustainability will have the following underlying elements: the importance attributed to a critical attitude; the notion of participation as a democratic value; and the problematisation of social issues (e.g. social justice, cultural diversity, conservation). This problematisation includes a more comprehensive perspective of the various aspects of sustainability (social, economic, political, ecological and cultural) as well as of the various spatial scales.



Wardah Sahbbir ‘The Way To Paradise’, Bagh-e-Jinnah, LB01, 2018. Image courtesy Dawn

When associated with the artistic sphere, these methodologies are applied within platforms of collaboration, forums, composed of people from the art world, specialists in various social fields and the general public. These forums aim to develop diagnoses, beginning with urgent social issues in a specific (local or global) territory that allow alternative and more inclusive scenarios to be generated.

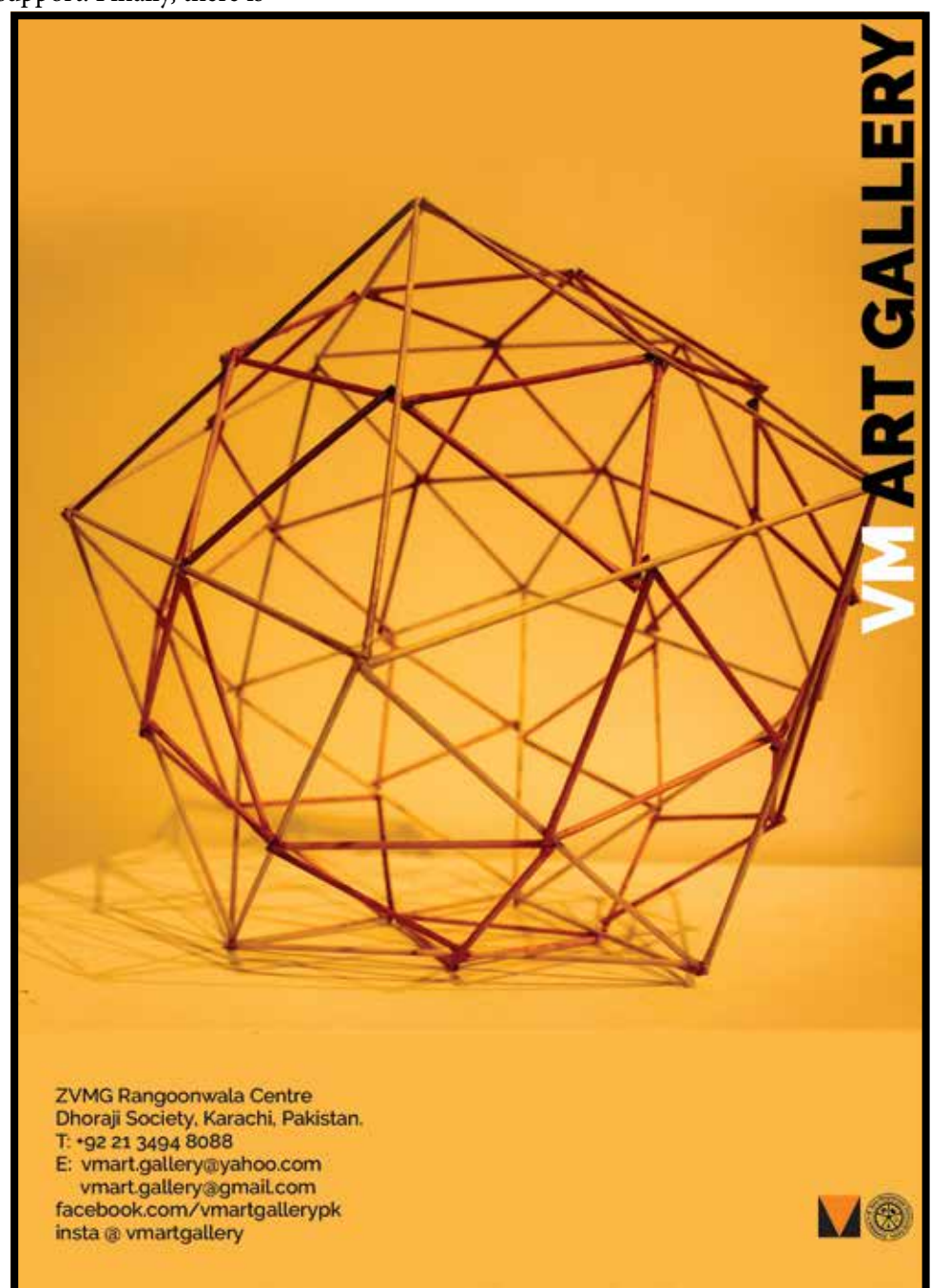
Holden has theorised that the idea of the ecology of culture could be conceived as three highly interactive spheres: publicly funded culture, commercial culture and homemade culture. He further goes on to explain the categories as follows:

The ‘publicly funded sector’, where the production or maximisation of public goods is assisted by support directly from the state or from philanthropists. Next, there is the ‘commercial sector’ that operates through the marketplace. Here, while individual ‘products’, such as films or songs, may fail the test of market viability, overall the sector manages without direct state support. Finally, there is the ‘homemade sector’, where people make culture for themselves fund it themselves. The convergence and inter-relatedness of the three spheres is increasingly being recognised on a global level. Models, such as these, must be developed within Pakistan on a national scale so as to further allow for the growth of a more holistic and sustainable society.

An aspect of this has been developed by the Lahore Biennale Foundation, where the platform served to bring commercial companies, think tanks, education bodies and government organisations together on an urban scale so as to engage the city of Lahore at large. And we must ensure that this is the start of something much bigger than only Lahore. Pakistan as a society is on the cusp of change. Our election results this year have clearly proven that.

The public has now gained more awareness oversocial and political issues and are ready to be engaged in a dialogue, which will further allow them to be emancipated from the ideologies of our political past, which have deeply influenced our cultural and artistic sphere as well. The time is now, more than ever, to further develop the dialogue between the public and the artistic community to allow for a further evolution of our cultural ecology, so that change does not continue to be espoused as merely a concept for a successful election campaign, but manifests itself into the reality that we need it to be.

**Nabah Ali Saad** is an Assistant Professor at COMSATS, Lahore. She received a Master’s Degree in Architecture from the Dessau Institute of Architecture, Germany in 2014, before which she received her Bachelor’s Degree from the National College of Arts, Lahore.



ZVMG Rangoonwala Centre  
Dhoraji Society, Karachi, Pakistan.  
T: +92 21 3494 8088  
E: vmart.gallery@yahoo.com  
vmart.gallery@gmail.com  
facebook.com/vmartgallerypk  
insta @ vmartgallery



# Architect-artist-curator-academic: Arshad Faruqui

by Ammad Tahir



Arshad Faruqui, Image courtesy Tribune

As an architect he has to find ways to satisfy the clients' desires with what is realistic of the space and environment present. This is a part of the separation between architecture and the concept of art and design. That is also the difference between artistic practice and artistic theory. Art and design focus on Fine Art, while the architecture which, Faruqui is responsible for, must balance with professional demands and restrictions.

Faruqui has experience with this collaborative, creative process outside of his own professional practice as well as, through 'Pursukoon Karachi', an organisation he is a

The benches and other structures created by a community of artists through 'Pursukoon Karachi' added both functionality and an aesthetic quality, much needed by the station.

The Karachi Cantt Station project is a good example of the balance Faruqui has found in his work. Such is the balance of creativity and functionality, desire and practicality, through the collaboration of many artists with a shared vision. The restoration not only preserved the historic building but also helped the public practically, by providing them with proper facilities and a more peaceful design. The goal was not simply one of renovation but of revitalisation.



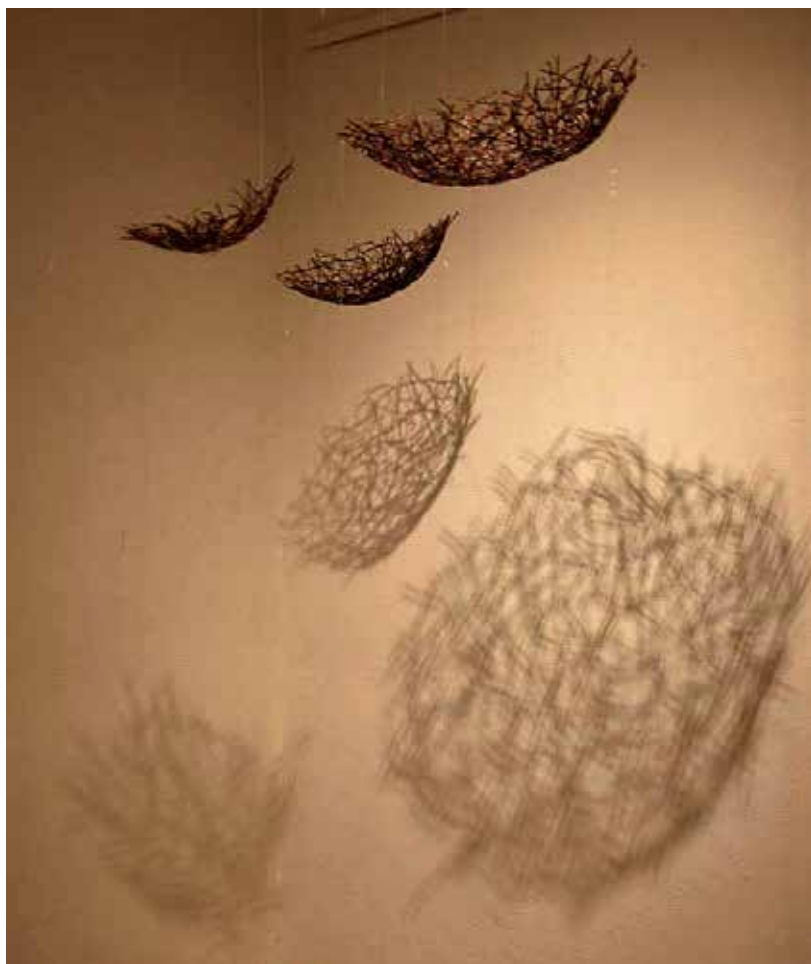
We live in times of visual crisis. We are surrounded by images of all sorts and the choice to view things is becoming more and more limited with each passing day. As the visual culture around us gets denser, saturated with information through billboards, hoardings, advertisements, new flyovers or underpasses, flashy new fuel-efficient cars, shiny new malls and of course, new constructions. One can not even hide behind the screens of one's laptop or smartphones because that space, too, is constantly bombarded with advertisements of online stores and shopping prospects with apps. Which brings me to the question of home / house / architecture. In fast-changing cities like Lahore and Karachi, it becomes almost inevitable to ignore these new visual landscapes. But where are we headed? I try to find the answers to some of these questions through profiling the architect, artist and academic, Arshad Faruqui.

Arshad Faruqui was born in Karachi, Pakistan. He went to the College of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he successfully completed his Masters in Architecture. Ever since, he has been associated with various boards and architectural organisations, including his own design business.

The life of a professional artist is by no means easy and running your own business more so. As an architect and CEO of Copper and Steel, Arshad Faruqui is all too familiar with the unique challenges these have. His architectural practice came into being sixteen years ago because of his artistic vision. Faruqui is an artist who both enjoys and thrives working with others in the creative process. There is obviously the work he must do himself as an artist in design and creation, but there are also collaborations with other artists, architects, craftsman and designers. On the business side, Faruqui must also deal with clients and contractors, which have practical demands of an architectural firm.

As an architect he has to find ways to satisfy

member of. 'Pursukoon Karachi' was created as a response to the violence and deteriorating conditions of Karachi. It is a way for the creative community to work together with the vision to focus on the city's deteriorating conditions and find solutions to mitigate them. The renovation of the Karachi Cantt Station was a project taken on by 'Pursukoon Karachi' to both, return the more than century old structure to its original form and improve what was needed practically and creatively. Numerous people come to Karachi for work and opportunities not available to them otherwise. The Cantt Station is a disembarkation point for many of these people.



Faruqui's one true love, it seems, is copper. In the bustling streets of Zainab and Corporate Market, there are a few shops that sell copper objects. That first interaction with copper objects led Faruqui to *Sarafa Bazaar* and *Taanba Gali*. He discovered two families who have been working with the craft of copperware for many generations. This is when his interventions began, that attempted not only to revive the dying craft, but also find a way to support the families by providing them with larger commissions.

He had first kept these new copper objects at the Koel shop, but due to their immense success he needed to have a dedicated space. However, he also felt that it was important not to expand the business, so as to ensure continuity of quality and good design. And so what began as a hobby turned into a carefully crafted creative practice. This, for Faruqui, was also the point of a friendly departure from mega-project consultancies and the architectural firm, Ali Arshad Associates, as both their visions for their respective architectural practices were different.

Faruqui has also been associated with the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture since the time of its inception in 1996. Initially, he was a full time faculty member, working in the department of architecture. Alongside teaching studio courses, he was also responsible for developing the curriculum. He still has a strong affinity to the art college but he now enjoys focusing on his creative practice more.





As a man who wears many hats, Faruqui has also ventured into other areas of art, including publishing, curating and collaborating with photographers, writers, painters and potters. In his curatorial projects, he places a lot of emphasis on collaborations and bringing the various disciplines of art together. He finds these conversations to be extremely significant towards opening up new thresholds and finding newer directions in art.

It is rare to see architects collaborate with artisans, print-makers or painters, and they are not always readily accepted into the infrastructures of galleries and museums. However, Faruqui broke this status quo a long time ago, not only challenging the norms of complacency but also establishing links within the creative community. He fondly remembers his peers, David Alesworth and Naiza Khan who encouraged him to continue with his artistic practice. This allowed him to form the first committee of the Koel Gallery with the late Usman Ghouri, Noorjehan Bilgrami,

the late Habib Fida Ali, and Amean Jan. One of his first art projects was 'Architecture Beyond the Board' in December 2009. Some of the architects, such as Najeeb Omer and Tariq Qaiser, who participated in the exhibition, still show their work as artists. He then went on to curate 'Just Copper' at the Koel gallery in 2010 and used that experience as an opportunity to learn more about mounting exhibitions and coming up with exciting ideas as thematic.

Application of this newfound knowledge could be gauged from the hugely successful exhibitions that Faruqui curated, soon after, including the show, 'Presence of Absence' in 2014 and the infamous 'Seven Deadly Sins' exhibition. The latter was much talked about during the entire time the show continued in the gallery. The premise of the exhibiton, other than the self-explanatory idea of the 'Seven Deadly Sins', was forming unusual pairs who

were each given a deadly sin to portray through collaborative work. Bringing together author, Mohsin Hamid, fashion photographer, Tapu Javeri, sculptor Seema Nusrat and architect Naheed Mashooqullah, among others, the show provided a new meaning to ideation and collaboration.

It is no surprise that Faruqui likes being busy. He founded the publication project by the name of 'Black Olive' with Amean J. to bolster documentation of architectural practice in the country. He is the convenor of the Institute of Architects, Chairman of the Board of Architectural Education, and the Chairman of the Institute of Architects, Karachi Chapter. He is currently working on another exciting curatorial project, which is due to happen in 2019.

Arshad Faruqui, lives and works in Karachi.

*Syed Ammad Tahir is an artist and academic scholar at his alma mater, the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.*



Images courtesy Arshad Faruqui



# Home away from home

by Zohreen Murtaza



'City Walls', Anwar Jalal Shemza, 1961, courtesy Tate

The word diaspora derives from the Greek words for “disperse” and “scatter” and it may refer to the people who are settled or living away for their homelands. Migration, immigration and assimilation are words that crop up in relation to diaspora and are making headlines today in an ever-changing world where experiences and narratives of displacement are gaining worldwide attention. Whatever the context, this dispersion and living away ultimately means reconciling oneself with taking on hyphenated identities whilst learning to adjust to the realities of a new environment.

This has been equally true for artists who have settled in other countries and continued to work under a new set of challenging circumstances. Language, text and cultural symbols became markers of difference, employed by some artists that highlighted a consciousness of identity and multicultural roots that had hitherto been missing in their works. First and foremost though for many early Pakistani artists moving to another country was not just about experiencing a profound shift in their art making but also enduring a rather demoralising sense of cultural and social dislocation.

Anwar Jalal Shemza was first exposed to these dilemmas when he was enrolled as a student in Slade School of Art between 1956-1960. In 1961, he had moved to the UK permanently. In a statement written in 1963, he mourns how he was an “*established*” painter in Pakistan with solo exhibitions to his credit and whose work was housed in both private and government collections, yet within a few months he had failed his drawing test and had his work rejected by the Annual Young Contemporaries Exhibition.

Conversely, this time period also proved to be the most productive for him. Ultimately, Shemza channeled his conflicts, musings and reflections into his work which resulted in his signature style; one that Iftikhar Dadi describes as “*acknowledging its specific historical legacy but speaking to transnational modernism as an equal.*”

Shemza’s geometric style was certainly a homage to modernism. He was influenced by Paul Klee yet at the same time, it was his visits to museums in Britain that featured Islamic exhibits containing ornamented textiles, carpets and calligraphies that sparked his imagination. From Roman alphabet to Arabic script, which was reduced to a formalist vocabulary of sinuous circles and lines, Shemza drew from these forms aesthetically. In the “Roots” series one could identify geometric plant forms that were sometimes combined with non-legible Arabic script. The hybrid nature of his images transcended culture, history and language giving voice to the realisation and complexity of identity and his roots.

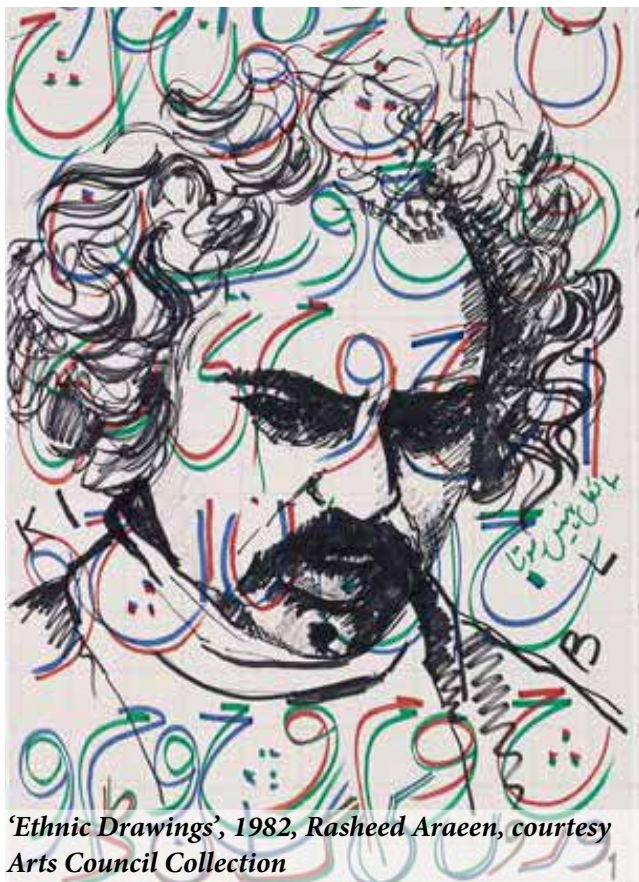
Being slotted into the category of a diaspora artist also sometimes meant confronting Eurocentric structures and institutionalised racism in the Western art world that either denied the complexity of identity or subsumed it under fossilised categories and stereotypes raising concerns pertaining to representation. Very few though, from Pakistan have been as passionate and vocal about this politics of identity as Rashid Araeen. His fame as an artist rests on minimalist sculpture but some of his work in the 60s’ and 70s’ asked important questions about ‘the Self’, identity and art in Europe that chose to ‘other’ him.

Araeen was a multifaceted figure who became a trailblaser in the 60s when he challenged these notions with art that highlighted the social and political conditions of its time faced by immigrants in the UK, also emphasising that Modernism was not just a Western, but global phenomenon. In addition, he wrote manifestos and essays about the current predicament of the Eurocentric art market in a postcolonial world where people of colour and their contribution were reduced to the margins. This culminated in the founding and publication of the journal “Third Text” in 1987, which highlighted the role and importance of artists from non- Western countries who had often been the subject of reductive definitions by the western art world.

Araeen’s response to the dilemma of being a diasporic artist during the economic and racial turmoil that shook Britain in the 70s became the basis for his 4-panel monochromatic “Ethnic Drawings” series, made in 1982, that was executed on cardboard. A portrait of Araeen based on a photograph was reproduced in 4 panels in ink but featured four different variations executed in line.

Each panel has Urdu and English lettering and text arranged or scrawled on it albeit with different arrangements and compositions. The viewer struggles with its partial legibility and nonsensical nature, but in some parts it articulated significant themes that critiqued postcolonial identity as well as the conflicts plaguing diaspora in a hostile and politically charged time in Britain. For example in one portrait features of Araeen’s face have been supplanted by text from the poem “Baa Baa Black Sheep” scrawled in and phrases like “*Yes sir*” and “*one bag*” in Roman script written across it.





*'Ethnic Drawings', 1982, Rasheed Araeen, courtesy Arts Council Collection*

The entire image is interspersed with a mix of Urdu and English, testifying to the everyday spoken use of both languages, while the reference to black sheep could be inferred as a reference to Araeen's own place as an outcast or an outsider in the social and cultural milieu of his current home.

Other artists of Pakistani origin who continued to produce work in Britain, but unlike Araeen, steered clear of such content included: Masood Kohari, Tassaduq Sohail and Iqbal Geoffrey. Amongst the more recent crop of artists that can be classified as diasporic and stand out are: Shazia Sikander, Tazeen Qayyum, Abdullah M. I. Syed, Iftikhar Dadi, Faiza Butt, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Ruby Chishtee, Saira Waseem, Salman Toor and Khadim Ali.

Since the 70s, many diasporic artists have been attempting to alter perceptions and stereotypes within what is still an Eurocentric art establishment, but this has been a road fraught with many obstacles. Tazeen Qayyum graduated from National College of Arts, Lahore in 1996 with a Major in Miniature Painting. Her multimedia art practice has questioned cultural misconceptions, stereotyping and identity. Recently, she has turned to experimentation with text and performance. As a diasporic artist based in Canada, she elaborated upon the advantages and challenges of entering the mainstream art scene, while she was still in the early stage of her career; introducing the aesthetics of miniature painting whose tradition is grounded in the Subcontinent was no mean feat.

*"Back then I felt that if I was living and working in my country, appreciation of my work would have been greater. The basic vocabulary of seeing a miniature and interpreting it is already there. Whereas, the Canadian art scene is fairly conservative as compared to the American or the British art scene. There is very little awareness of miniature painting. That vocabulary is missing. In that way, there were a lot of hindrances for entering the mainstream art scene for us with our background. Their first reaction was that this is not contemporary or mainstream. It comes from a craft tradition."*

This scenario has, of course, changed as more South Asian artists began making inroads, but Qayyum conceded that artists from South Asia are also now appreciated for the same reason. *"Whether it is our oil painters or miniature painters, the element of art making or skill is still very strong, which is vanishing in the West. There is a new trend in the West now, to go back to the making of art, which is appreciated there."*

Qayyum also elaborated upon how the content of her work altered with the change in location. *"Before I moved, I focused more on personal stories that involved women and social issues... after 9/11 and what happened after, our names would come up in random checks at airports etc. and also my environment changed. I began to think of other approaches."*

Navigating through shifts in identity vis. a vis. events that have had global impacts as described by Qayyum has also meant that there are limits imposed on Pakistani artists such as, the fact that they may be coerced into pursuing subject matter that is in the news headlines relating to terrorism, war or being a refugee. A case in point is Khadim Ali who is also a graduate of National College of Arts, Lahore with a major in miniature painting. He hails from Quetta and belongs to the Hazara community and is currently settled in Australia. His dramatic murals, carpets and meticulously painted narratives showcase consummate skill and a poetic sensibility that is a powerful sensory experience to behold, yet the work can not escape associations with the newsworthy labels of "refugee", "exile" etc. Is this sensationalism? Do they limit appreciation or interpretations of work that may owe its understanding to a more of work that may owe its understanding to a more complex, nuanced and wider discourse? This is a Catch-22 situation as simultaneously, just as the platforms have pandered to the market, they have also afforded Ali with recognition and respect for his talent.

***"No, they have to carry the Pakistani flag in order to interest the art market, otherwise the market won't accept them..."*** -Rasheed Araeen

The global art market is, after all, like all capitalist pursuits, driven by money and as Rashid Araeen puts it, when asked if the younger generation of Pakistani artists, *"has been able to escape multicultural cages, trapping artists within their cultures of origin..."*

He says, *"No, they have to carry the Pakistani flag in order to interest the art market, otherwise the market won't accept them..."*

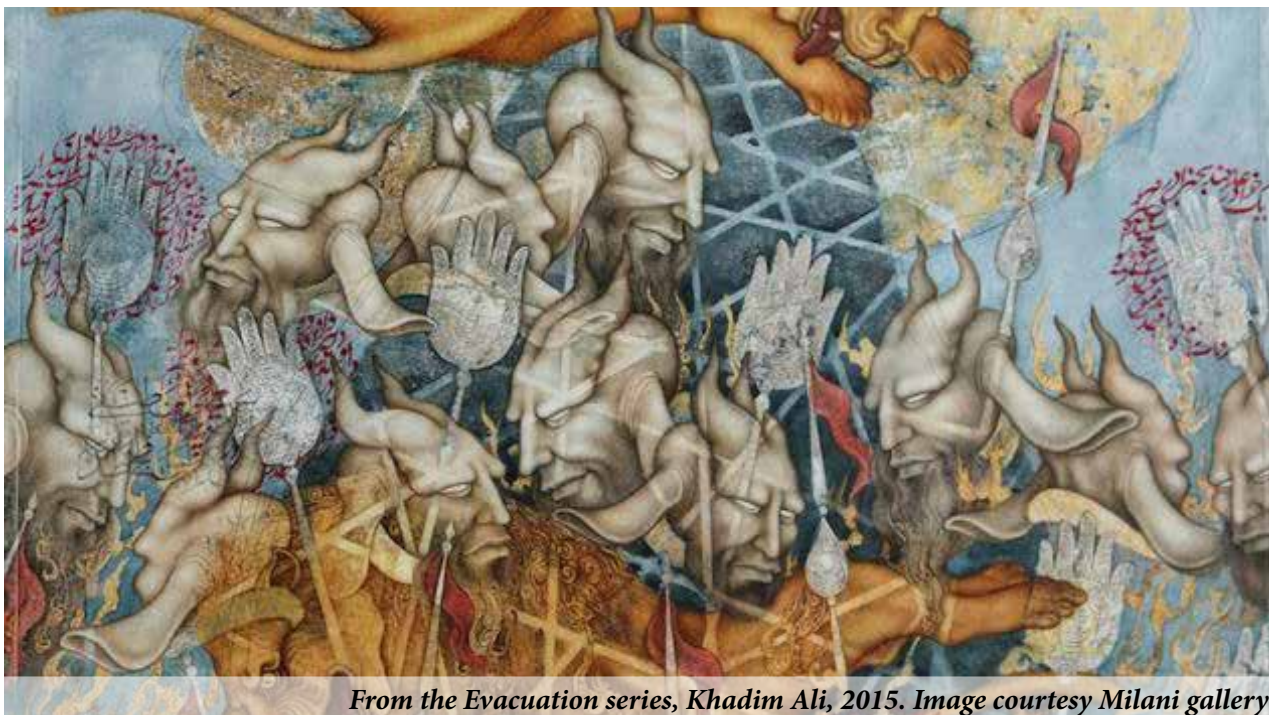
*"...This is a global problem. The Chinese have to be Chinese, the Japanese have to be Japanese...this is part of globalisation. No one these days can just be artists".*

Other diasporic artists have tackled colonialism and postcolonial identity as subject matter which, has allowed them to connect to and inform a broader swath of audience. Shazia Sikander has made a conscious effort to adhere to a research driven approach with mediums and practices that underscore a transnational lens to her art making. Her video animation "Parallax" for example, explores histories of colonialism with respect to the East India Company, trade and structures of power in the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. The animations were created from hundreds of hand-drawn paintings.

Some have deliberately sidestepped such subject matter altogether and with success, it seems. Rather than focusing on the consciousness of cultural identity on the basis of difference, Salman Toor in "Are You Here?", paints scenes in a visually anecdotal style, of everyday life in Lahore and New York where he currently resides. Seemingly banal, everyday and even prosaic, they emphasise a kind of relatable interconnectedness and fluidity of identity that characterises life in a globalised world.

For young Pakistani artists reflecting on our realities today, tackling origin and identity whilst residing in another country is a double-edged sword. While the oeuvres and content of many artists indicate that there is more flexibility in experimentation now but it still requires tenacity and ingenuity from artists if they are to navigate their way through a money-spinning global art market that is prone to rigid stereotyping in many respects.

***Zohreen Murtaza is an artist, academic and writer from Lahore. She received her BFA and MA from National College of Arts, Lahore.***



*From the Evacuation series, Khadim Ali, 2015. Image courtesy Milani gallery*



*'Our Bodies, Our Gardens', Tazeen Qayyum. Image courtesy, YoungeStreet*



# The distance from here

by Hurmat ul Ain

Communities and individuals, whose identities are post-national, not limited by geographical boundaries and often prone to change or transition maybe referred to as diaspora. In all its complexity the post-globalised world presents enough possibilities for the diasporic phenomenon to exist in a cyclical fashion; in its occurrence to its affects. Diaspora basically originates from dispersion or displacement of individuals or communities from a point of origin to another, yet diaspora cannot be just merely categorised in the terms of physical displacement, occurring either upon choice or not, but also in terms of psychological displacement of state of mind.

To address the complexity of behavior and identity of the diaspora communities, literature, art and music have continued to serve as a playground for identity building and retaining and addressing politics of belonging and conflict of migration and transition. Self-expression and art serve as a tool for representation of diaspora in their new habitat through validation of personal history, memory and identity.

‘The Distance From Here’ is a video work by Bani Abidi, sketching out the starting point for diaspora i.e. physical displacement. The work is a re-enactment of various real and surreal spaces and situations that are linked to the experience of visa application, border control and ideas of permission and approval. The video work portrays the high security, controlled environment of entering the Diplomatic Enclave (such as the one in Islamabad) for one’s visa interview. Queues, body searches and a lot of waiting are all part of the visa interview routine. The diplomatic enclave is a satellite space of international governance on national soil. So this physical displacement can occur in two situations; either the individual is displaced from an origin to a new point of origin or the community surrounding that individual has been changed.

In both cases, the displacement eventually leads to reconfiguration of one’s sense of belonging to his/her immediate environment as in the case of *Bishen Singh*, the character from Manto’s ‘*Toba Tek Singh*’. Hence, there is another state, which is neither of complete displacement nor of complete belonging. A state of a psychological diaspora induced due to physical displacement, where a person is unable to achieve either one of the states of acceptance or rejection fully; it’s both or neither.

*“Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out”.*  
(Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Elsewhere, Within Here)

***“Self-expression and Art serve as tools for representation of diaspora in their new habitat through validation of personal history, memory and identity.”***

Trinh T. Minh-Ha, the post-colonial theorist and feminist defines this state as a threshold, a boundary line between the two states, where a person is neither here nor there, and loses a sense of belonging which binds him or her. But here the question arises as to inquire that whether one in the situation of his dislocation is really displaced, or have the ties only now really been established?

Does displacement really detach one from his/her home or does it establish newer, perhaps stronger ties with the home? ‘Forgetting Vietnam’, an award-winning documentary by Minh-Ha, commemorates the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war in Vietnam. It speaks about the origin of the nation and the myth of the two dragons. The film indicates the pressure points in the recovery period since the war and narrates the scars that are carried in the narrative behind the name of the land, its origin and its history of matriarchal sacrifice. A very interesting factor in the choice of the title of work ‘Forgetting Vietnam’ is the irony in the film’s attempts as an actual commemorative piece; it would be an automatic assumption that the film aims at remembering Vietnam’s origin.

A work addressing home through memory and personal associations is ‘Mangoes’, again by Bani Abidi. *“Mangoes, my first video mixed Urdu and English as an everyday language”* again emphasising her relationship with home yet at the same time her acknowledgment of the newer location, hence diminishing this thin line of here or there.

What makes ‘Mangoes’ a seminal work of Abidi, is the presence of the artist herself in the work. The duality and conflict of self is further enhanced by the conversation she seems to be having with herself. The video work is a split screen single shot capturing the artist eating mangoes and discussing the merits of the fruit. The delusion of competition, longing and desire deepens as she starts to hold on to the flavor from her country, and she enforces her identity through a single piece of seasonal fruit.

Anila Qayyum Agha takes a similar stance in her work, ‘My Forked Tongue’ (a tongue which has two ends), where the artist presents a case of her personal history of identity and expression, through hybridity of languages.



Bani Abidi, *The Distance From Here* (still), 2010. Video, Image courtesy E-flux



Agha creates an installation in a walk-in space, with suspended letters of the alphabet from all languages of her origin. This work raises concerns of belonging as a set of cultural and visual codes instigated through language. The language serves as a key to unlock a code that is social, cultural and geographical in time and space. Agha’s work addresses the complexity of linguistic demarcation, overlapping and her own position in respect to that code. *“First, I am a hybrid of Pakistan and India. Then ten years ago I settled in the United States of America. There’s a third history that has become entwined with the first two, that of the United States.”* This case is very specific to the history of the sub-continent; we emerge as hybrids of Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Hindus, and British among many others. The multiple consciousness’ can sometimes be an instigator of displacement.

In terms of diaspora, the medium or the technique of expression becomes really important as this forms a full circle back to the roots of origin of an individual, and it reflects the influences in the formation of an individual. Through his/her expression of this hybridity, as in the case of Hanif Kureishi’s work, ‘Buddha of Suburbia’, it is interesting to note three prominent features in the style of novel writing. The first is the classification of the genre, Bildungsroman that is related to “Bildung”= ‘education’, and “Roman” which means ‘portrait’, ‘shaping’ or ‘formation’. The Bildungsroman genre hence is a classic novel writing about the coming of age where the protagonist goes through a series of processes in order to mature, learn and adapt to his new state of being. ‘Buddha of Suburbia’ is also a narrative style novel, which roots itself back to the storytelling tradition of sub-continent, and lastly it may be classified as an autobiography of Kureshi himself. The story has been narrated by a male figure in first person as if Kureshi would have narrated his own story of formation and desire of acceptance to the British society. Nahem states: *“The Buddha was kind of autobiographical but it was revved up autobiography [...] The relation between autobiography and your writing is a complicated one (...) It came out of my experiences in that sense”* – Hanif Kureshi (Yousaf Nahem on Hanif Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia)

The playful redundancy of the use of the word Englishman really offers an insight into the attempt made by the author towards subversion of the power dynamism associated with the word. Yet there lies an irony in the repetition of the word to illustrate the character sketch of the protagonist Karim. Being called an Englishman is both a normalisation of the status of the character’s nationality and yet a mockery of his true position in British society. If we also look into Hanif’s personal history, (he was born and raised in the London suburbs and faced racism in the early years of childhood. After his father’s migration from subcontinent post-partition, he too just like Karim’s father married a British woman and thus settled in Britain) we would start to wonder if it



Anila Quayyum Agha, ‘My Forked Tongue I and II’ (Detail) Paper, Metallic Thread, 2010, courtesy the artist

was really Karim or Hanif himself reflected through Karim in the novel or is the similarity purely a coincidental poetic license?

A similar style can be observed in the works of Kamila Shamsie. Kamila was born in Pakistan and currently lives in London. Similar to Kureshi, her works are narrated through the lens of a single lead character, mostly female though.



Minh-Ha, ‘Forgetting Vietnam’ (2015), image courtesy West Kowloon Cultural District

Her characters too evolve against the backdrop of diaspora tension of loss, belonging and unresolved nostalgia. Through her works, she continuously reminisces her homeland and her country. She titled her novel Kartography with a K after Karachi, her birthplace. The female protagonist deals with various levels of dislocation in the novel and that conjures up memories of the homeland, identifying her own dislocation and attempts to cure it through memory. The story unfolds primarily in Karachi but carries scars of violence and unresolved drama in its character’s history of the 1971 war that led to the partition of East Pakistan as a separate state of Bangladesh. The second-generation characters born out of the unrequited character’s union are unable to cope with the weight of their past and escape to yet another part of the world where they attempt to reconcile with the conflicts surrounding their identity. Similarly, ‘Salt and Saffron’ deals with escape and departure from the place of origin to find happiness and acceptance. In both these novels, an interesting quality is the use of Urdu language intermixed with English. The unique multi-lingual narration provides the characters a customised dimensionality and accessibility for their readers. Shamsie’s works may be read as an attempt to reminisce or announce one’s presence in another land.

These issues of identity and control or lack thereof, are also visible in ‘East is East’ (1999), a comedy, and drama award nominee film. In the work of Ayub Khan Din, the writer of the screen play for ‘East is East’, a personal experience is visible: *“The disintegration of Pakistan mirrored in some way what was going on with us – for my father the most, I think. Raising dual-heritage children in Salford in the 70s wasn’t easy.*

*My father may have married an English woman, but he expected us to be good Pakistanis,”* (Din in an interview with the Guardian UK). The entire film circulates around the Khan family with a strict Muslim Pakistani father, a British

mother and their seven children. The entire family struggles with notions of identity, cultural and religious expectations and familial ties in the 70s. The father’s continuous disappointment in his own choices and his increasingly anglicised children set a series of comic yet sad events into motion. The irony of his own very-British-choices, such as marry-

ing an English woman, running a fish and chips shop often escapes Mr. Khan as he desires to live in a highly fictional and outdated version of a small Pakistani town. This character’s dilemma may be best explained by Leela Gandhi, *“... aggressive assertions of cultural identity frequently come in the way of wider international solidarities.”*

**Hurmat Ul Ain is an interdisciplinary artist and art educationist. She has a Bachelor’s degree from National College of Arts and an MFA from School of Art Institute, Chicago.**

ARTNOW

Contemporary Art of Pakistan

/Read more

**Retrospective | Amrita Sher Gil**  
  
by Amina Cheema  
*“Celebration of any female who has a progressive spirit is always due among the art circles. But things were different a century...”*

**Review | Picasso Metamorfosi**  
  
by Shireen Ikramullah Khan  
*“The project showcases two hundred works including works by Picasso and ancient works...”*

**Book Review | One Interview, Many Afternoons**  
  
by Fatima Ghulam  
*“Tomkins recounts his meetings with Duchamp, his impression of the man and his opinion on...”*

For more, visit:  
www.artnowpakistan.com

OR

Download any QR code-app on your Android or iOS and scan this code for immediate access to our website from YOUR PHONE.



# Shemza's own arabesque

by Iram Zia Raja

## Prologue:

*"The creative being exists in multi-layered realities; the temporal-spatial, the physical, the emotional, the imagined, the existential, the experiential. And yet all these layers coalesce to create one final reality and that is their art."*

Monica Juneja, in the preface to Simone Wille's book, 'Modern Art in Pakistan' asks if a history of modernist art that goes beyond being a set of 'responses' to European master narratives be conceived? I admit this question intrigues me. There is, of course, a growing scholarship regarding a 'revisionist historiography' that shifts the focus from the West to elsewhere. Could this 'elsewhere' be our locale? Could this retrospective article on Anwar Jalal Shemza's art and life lead us to unapologetic acceptance of pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial patterns in thought and behavior?

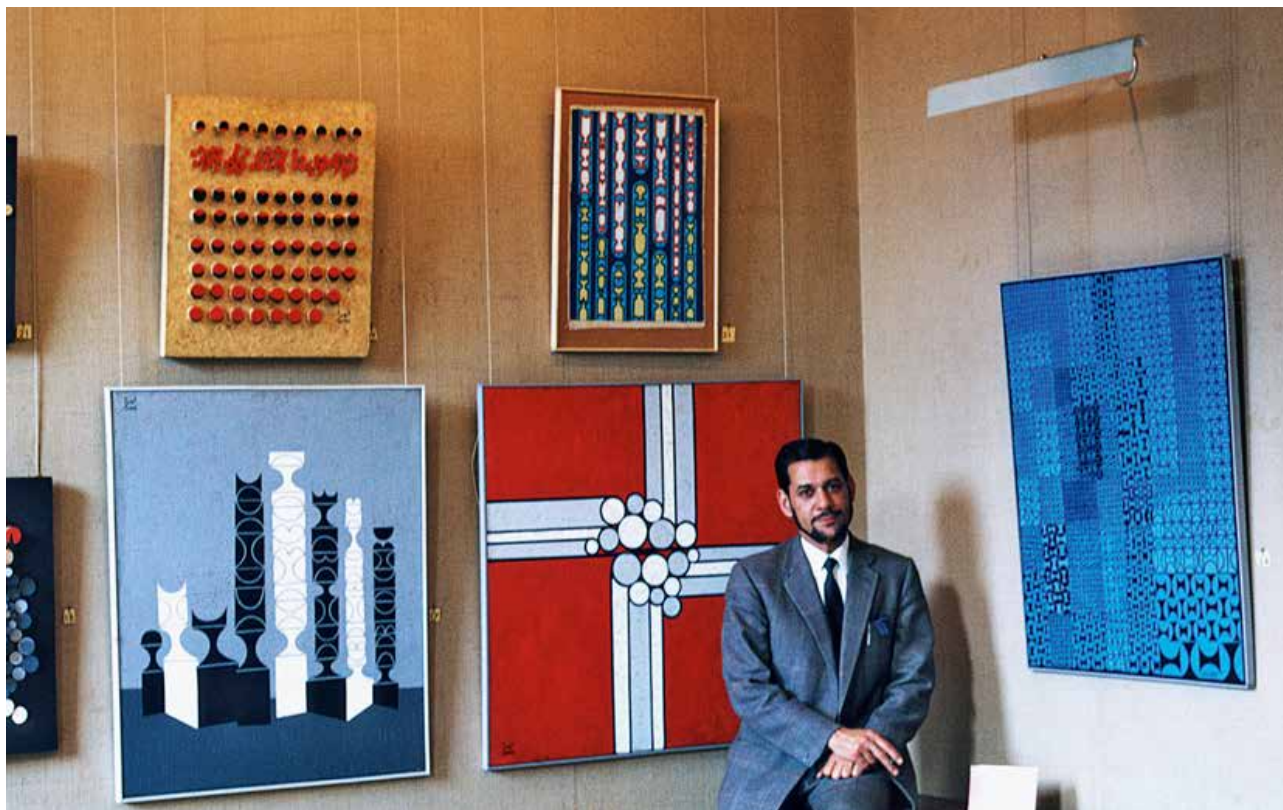
Can his importance be reasserted for a new audience, a newer generation?

A close look at Shemza's images points to the "conscious rediscovery and reformation of 'tradition'", resulting in a 'new aesthetic'. So while there was criticism on Abdur Rehman Chughtai, that he was always in a past world, many others were following suit in the new world order where 'identity crises' reigned supreme. Shemza was prominent amongst them. Dr. Akbar Naqvi credits him by saying, "...Shemza created his own arabesque, something quite unique in art, and certainly singular in the history of Pakistani art". In this retrospective, I would be presenting various critiques on Shemza's work, thereby, trying to look at his life and work through a multi-angled lens of revisionist historiography.

In a bid to break free from the past and propagate their fresh perspectives, a few young painters including, Moyene Najmi, Ali Imam, A. J. Shemza, Ahmed Pervez, S. Safdar, Razia Feroze and Miriam Shah organized themselves into a group in the 1950s. This group later became known as the 'Lahore Art Circle'.

Akbar Naqvi remembers Shakir Ali as the 'catalyst' that the Lahore artists, who had no dearth of ideas, were waiting for. Ali's "settled idea of modernism" as a restrained and disciplined exercise, encompassing formal problems as its focus, rather than themes of narration or expressionism, which, might possibly have been a great influence on Shemza.

Shakir Ali delved into writing alongside his art and so did Shemza. Shemza was a published writer and a regular visitor to the Halqa meetings at the Pak Tea House. These meetings have been recorded fondly by the likes of Intizar Hussain, A. Hameed and many others.



Anwar Jalal Shemza, image courtesy Tate

Simone Wille observes that modernist artists in Pakistan largely draw on "memories available through textual and visual records of the Mughal and Persianate Worlds" and seek to articulate a cultural imagery in order to create links with a 'transcultural past' in a bid to construct a sense of self and locality.

Before bringing Shemza's art into the forefront, let's look at another idea. Homi. K. Bhabha talks of a 'double perspective' regarding the colonial and post-colonial narratives regarding creativity. The said double perspective accepts the situation of unfreedom, lack of rights, demoralisation, and dehumanisation of people in a colonial set up and yet it suggests the creation of certain opportunities for creativity as an agent of change in times of repression, cultural and political pressures. In my view, this model could be of help in studying Shemza's art, especially in Britain. Revisiting Shemza's oeuvre in search of fresh historical, intellectual and artistic enquiry is a just cause.

The idea of this retrospective is not to break down or look at the 'deconstruction', 'configuration', 're-configuration', or the 'rhythmic linear arrangements', 'style', 'symmetry' or 'asymmetry' in his art. This article is a quest and an attempt to look and contextualise the 'new kind of art, artists and aesthetic values' in order to rethink, redefine, resituate and broaden the areas of enquiry. The question to ask today is if Shemza can be accepted as the harbinger of new thoughts in Pakistani art.

Shemza is also important because he belonged to that precious generation of artists which created the armature of 'Pakistani art'.

In Lahore, during the late 1930s and 1940s, a Modernist movement was gaining momentum; the seasoned group of artists, such as, A. R. Chughtai, Ustad Allah Bakhsh, S. N. Gupta, Soba Singh and Mian Mohammed Hussain were making way for a younger generation of artists. The new artists fast gaining recognition included, Sheikh Ahmed, M. Lateef Chughtai, B. C. Sanyal, Satish Gujral, Oz-zir Zuby and A. R. Riaz. The partition of the Subcontinent in 1947, slowed down art activities. Chughtai and Bakhsh retained their position as figures of authority in the new country. Professor Ijaz Ul Hasan, in his book 'Painting in Pakistan' states, "the more spirited and ambitious young artists, however, found the prevailing atmosphere at Lahore, sterile and stifling. Intellectually, they could not relate to the hackneyed work and views of their older contemporaries and patrons".

Hasan writes, that Shemza, was part of the post-independence generation of painters who were "radical in their outlook and infused with an aggressive enthusiasm" and believed that "traditions could not be kept alive by kinetic simulation of the past, but by the artists' awareness of change and perception of contemporary realities."

## Beginnings - bitter and sweet:

The independence from British colonial rule and partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947 was a transformative moment for artists too. Overnight, two new identities were created; Indian and Pakistani and so it was Shemza's first migration. In the artist community as the inheritors of this new post-colonial state, the immediate urge for Modernism or modern art came out of an aspiration. The aspiration was to create a progressive homeland and possibly a mindset too. The past was suddenly another country. Shemza migrated from Pakistan just after eight years of its creation.

From the late 1940s until the mid-50s he remained a prolific writer, poet and editor. The first decade of Pakistan was replete with instances of domestic repression and persecution of leftist intellectuals and activists. As early as 1954, the 'All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association' and the 'Communist Party of Pakistan' was banned. "These events had a highly repressive effect on expression" and, according to historian Ayesha Jalal, were crucial in Pakistan's eventual transformation into "a veritable intellectual wasteland."

"In sum, throughout the late 1940s and well into the late 1950s, members of the leftist intelligentsia were persecuted, driven underground, or co-opted by the state through ideological interpellation and patronage."

The 1950s were a time of new beginnings but also a time that later generated huge disappointments. Many notable artists left for greener pastures, in terms of guidance, clarity and inspiration, to the West especially, England.

## Influences on Shemza's art practice:

Shemza was born in an atmosphere where art and stories of Amrita Sher Gil (1913-1941) were still fresh in the Lahore art scene. Chughtai and Bakhsh's art were accessible to the initiated and the galli coochas of Lahore's walled city retained many artists and craftsmen.

Born in a Kashmiri family who was involved in the carpet business, Shemza was naturally inclined towards motifs and patterns. This early influence urged him to leave his college studies of Persian, Arabic and Philosophy to join the Mayo School of Art in 1944. Curriculum and the course structure at the MSA in 1940s consisted of an Arts and a Crafts section. The Arts section included instruction in commercial painting, design, architectural draftsmanship, miniature painting, fine art, commercial art and industrial designing.



He was taught by such prominent names as, *Ustaad* Lateef Chughtai, *Ustaad* Haji Sharif, Sheikh Shuja Ullah etc.

Marcella Nesom Sirhandi's dissertation on Chughtai states that, the most obvious western stylistic influences prevalent at the Mayo School of Art from the time of John Lockwood Kipling through the 1920s was the European New Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau.

*"The forms of these movements blended easily with Islamic geometric and floral designs that had long been part of the repertoire of Muslim artists in the Punjab."*

Marcella Nesom Sirhandi terms his style 'uncertain' and observes that his pre-London work/art was an apt illustration of *"the relatively narrow curricula for the student in Pakistan at that time."* She also notes, *"A high regard for the 'advanced' nature of twentieth century contemporary western art and, at the same time, the lack of a serious historical and intellectual analysis of Islamic art forms meant that the examples for the artist to emulate were mainly illustrations of the work of artists of the school of Paris."* All these observations go on to show the problems inherent in a colonial past not just in Pakistan but in all post-colonial states. *"While the colonial encounter involved a sharp disjuncture with original forms and practices, it also created new paths for a conscious rediscovery and reformation of 'tradition' among a new group of artists and critics."*

His early influences gave way to more rigorous and deep processes of *mashq*, a routine that his daughter, Tasveer Shemza, points out as she talks about him being intense and working round the clock. In the remoteness of the country he chose to reside in, calligraphy was perhaps his only connection to his identity and he held it very close and dear. His constant referencing of architectural elements, the walls and gates of Lahore, merger of calligraphic form and Islamic architecture with a western sensibility of abstraction, make him a man who belonged and yet longed.

#### London:

The post World War II movement of dissociating with colonial mindset was still in its infancy when Shemza decided to move to England. A major support in Shemza's struggling years in London were the four 'trail-blazing' art galleries committed to showing international avant-garde to the British audience. These galleries are accredited in defining *"London as a centre for radical artistic expression."*

*"On arrival in London, Shemza, a buoyant 'post-colonial intellectual'" and celebrated artist with several successful solos to his credit, was soon hit by the shock of the new. Other than cultural alienation, it was Slade professor and prominent art historian, Ernst Gombrich's opinions regarding the art of the non-West, especially his lecture classifying Islamic art — an art which was labelled as "functional" — that totally devastated the young artist,"* Salwat Ali writes, while reviewing the book on Shemza's life.

His chosen displacement, in a way, acted as a facilitator towards looking at his previous practice that was largely 'figurative' bordering on 'illustrative', critically. As a result of this critical enquiry, in London his work developed towards an abstraction that fused Islamic motifs and calligraphic forms with western abstraction.

In the later months of 1958, as the Mayo School of Art was preparing to be reorganised into the National College of Arts, Shemza, Ahmed Parvez, Murtaza Bashir, Saifuddin Ahmed and Ali Imam formed the 'London Group' and were finally offered an exhibition at the Woodstock Gallery, London.

*"Their aims were idealistic: to project art from Pakistan and introduce contemporary Pakistani artists to a wider audience",* observed by Marjorie Husain in her monograph on Ali Imam. However, the aims were more complex than these as G. M. Butcher, art critic noted *"...they are interested to take part in the self-conscious revival of traditional forms, nor to copy, as such, methods and problems of European painting, old or new."*

*But, equally, as they are not on the edge of the de-facto frontiers of their particular cultural situation, there are no rules for them to follow."* Nonetheless, he was hopeful towards finding tendencies toward the future of painting not just in Pakistan, but also the newly emerging Muslim countries such as Morocco, Indonesia etc. However, British art educator and critic, John Thompson felt that this formulation of a personal art base from foreign models by the Pakistani art community was problematic.

According to some artists-writers, Shemza, in his London years, was re-introduced to *"geometry and spatial order"* that was already a part of his inheritance.

Finally in England, Shemza experienced the modern movements in art firsthand. Armed with his earlier influences and inspirations namely Islamic calligraphy, carpet designs and Paul Klee as his guiding light, he set out to establish a *"vigorous and disciplined practice"*. *"His Roots series, executed in the mid-1980s at the end of his life, relays the anguish of diaspora in a formally restrained language based on calligraphy and ornamental designs of oriental carpets and textiles."*



Anwar Jalal Shemza, 'The Apple Tree', 1962, image courtesy Art Dubai

*"Later he would combine the simplified formal language of these artists with Islamic architecture and calligraphy to create his own style or as he put it: 'One circle, one square, one problem, one life is not enough to solve it.'",* writes Asphra Shemza, his granddaughter.

His London years were interspersed with occasional exhibitions with other fellow 'commonwealth' artists such as, F. N. Souza, Avinash Chandra at progressive galleries like, Gallery One and the New Vision Centre in late 1950s. Having married Mary Taylor, a fellow artist in 1958 and starting a family in 1958, Shemza sought regular modes of income and relocated to West Midlands to begin his teaching career at Stafford College. It was an existence in isolation from the London art scene. Nevertheless, he continued working rigorously and exhibited internationally in many biennales till his sudden death in 1985.

#### Shemza re-discovered:

Called a 'dynamic painter' and 'calligraphic modernist' by many writers/critics, a big development in the scholarship on Shemza's work occurred only after Shemza's wife and daughter decided to make his sketch books and other preparatory work public, a few years ago. Shemza is known for writing detailed notes in both English and Urdu on his sketches.

Most of the following citations from the sketchbooks have been included in John Holt's essay and give great insights.

In his essay, 'Anwar Jalal Shemza, A Search for the 'Significant', Holt terms Shemza's experiences of being an immigrant, the shattering of his dreams and aspirations, his identity crisis as a human and an artist, his confidence building, and the memory of their own cultures as *"not unique"*, since so many other Afro-Asians were going through the same thing. Shemza has been called a resistive character. He felt the need to justify the authenticity of his experiences and being. Facing a dominant and ethnocentric value system, he continued to work.

*"Of course I knew my Pakistani heritage... but I had never utilised it. It never occurred to me that I could relate my Pakistani calligraphy and architecture to the painting problems I had... I am much more aware of my own heritage now than I ever was in Pakistan. You only became aware of the things you lose. This is the greatest contribution that England has made for me."*

Peter Burnhill, who was on the staff at Stafford College of Art and Design where Shemza also taught from 1962 onwards, wrote of Shemza's practice:

*"Shemza's sketchbooks show very clearly his primary interest — obsession, almost — with linear, rhythmically orchestrated and serially developed two-dimensional space, stored in the head and brought out in the very act of drawing rather than developed from observation. Page after page of his sketchbooks are covered with serial developments of black and white drawing from which he could select and later develop paintings in colour."*

A wonderfully edited catalogue by Iftikhar Dadi, on the occasion of Shemza's Tate exhibition carried essays by scholars. Amongst them, Garfield has examined Shemza's practice through the lens of landscape painting, while Dawood has opted for a holistic study concentrating on the critical issues of 'belonging' and 'not-belonging'.

A letter by Shemza included in Dadi's piece might help understand Shemza's initial goals in life. This is addressed to his Lahore-based friend and author Karam Nawaz in September 1960, when Shemza embarked on his journey home. *"Whatever I have obtained in this country [England], it was solely for the sake of students in my country. I have tirelessly struggled to master the intricacies of artistic technique — this research was for the people of my nation who are anxious to benefit from Western experiments. But will I be able to convey this trust to them, I wonder? This is an aching question for which I see no clear answer."* Sadly, Shemza could not be accommodated into any art educational institution.

This is a period of reflection as colonial attitudes dominating London's art world for many many years are being challenged and art history throughout the world is being rethought. An apt example of this re-thinking, was the showing of Shemza's works at Tate Britain from 2015-2016. *"My grandfather didn't get to see his work hanging in the Hayward or Tate, but I doubt he would have been surprised. He was a visionary and paved the way for artists of the future, including myself",* Aphra Shemza, states.

Tasveer Shemza, his daughter laments, *"In his lifetime, my father worked in relative obscurity and that was not the way he wanted to end up. There was little recognition and he must have had such a strong sense of belief in his practice."*

Shemza's work was shown extensively in shows around the world in different biennales during and after his life too. His work is housed in some major galleries around the world today. In his re-discovery, I wonder, has Shemza, unknowingly, become a part of the same art history that he was initially reacting against?

**Iram Zia Raja** is an Associate Professor of Design at the NCA. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Punjab University.



# Purdahkt to pixels: Faiza Butt

by Saima Munawar



Faiza Butt, Image courtesy Saima Munawar

**B**old, vibrant, dynamic, intelligent, beautiful, eloquent are some of the words that can be conjured up to describe Faiza Butt. She graduated with honours at the prestigious National College of Arts and then went on to receive her Masters in painting at Slade Institute of Art where she received an Outstanding Students Award.

Butt is known for her beautifully illustrated dream-like works, which have been obsessively rendered using minute dots. Once she commands her viewers complete attention, she then confronts them with bigger issues such as politics, sexuality or religion. One example of her fantastical narratives is the work titled “Epoch”, a painting of two suited men, kissing while surrounded by pastel coloured cakes, flowers and fruit; the work is at once sensual and delicate but confrontational in its sexual iconography.

## Beginnings at Lahore: Early influences and inspirations

“The foetal years are important” Butt says, referring to her youth. It was at this point in her life she realised that her worldview was very different to that of her siblings. Her early inspiration was her own household and especially her parents. Both her parents were liberals. Education was a fetish in her household irrespective of sex. Her late father, a professor of literature had a modest library in the living area and out of boredom, Butt recalls reaching out to touch, feel and browse through the collection of old, lovingly used books. She recalls these books were mainly from the 1920s and were hand drawn with the most “beautifully illustrated jacket covers” and remembers that “the covers of those books were extremely inspiring at that time”. She recalls how “powerful the images were as words did not hold much meaning back then”. Her father had piles and piles of magazines such as Urdu Digest or *Bachon ka Bagh* and the Pakistan Times scattered all over the house. Hours and hours, Butt nostalgically reminisces were spent “gazing, reading and absorbing this literary material”. As a result, “illustration and the appreciation of the graphic aspect of an image” was embedded at a very early age of her life.

Butt’s mother was also quite an influential figure during her early years. She was a well-respected and an educated woman of society and embraced the traditional role of being a house-wife, and providing a safe haven for her brood to develop their talents. Butt’s earliest memories are of her mother constantly using her hands to make things, be it embroidery, crochet, sewing or preparing food. Upon reflection of Butt’s work “Impermanence” – one can trace back or draw parallels to her childhood. This work in ink on polyester film has an image of a mother protectively holding her child as if understanding the transitory nature of life.

She is dominated by images of decadent pastries, recyclable water bottles, broken slippers. The use of the pointillist technique creates a sense of domesticity: the feminine in her work emulating the look of embroidery.

Butt is extremely passionate about her work and is conscious that people have a simplistic way of looking at her work as portraits. Butt is adamant that she is not a portrait painter. She feels her work is more akin to “illustrations that are derived by combining the traditional Purdkhat technique with the formation of pixels in a photograph”. The graphic aspect of an image holds an immense appeal for Butt as “an image always speaks”; to communicate to anyone – a child, an illiterate, or anyone from any culture.



‘Triumph’,  
Faiza Butt,  
Underglazes on

porcelain,  
Image courtesy  
the writer

## National College of Arts (Lahore): Eyes wide opened

“National College of Arts was a complete game-changer”. Finally, here the “lost and wandering” young girl, as she describes herself at the time, found her tribe. “The college and its culture stands as an immense construct to the rest of the society. It is a little island, a little oasis in what generally surrounds it.”

As a child, Butt attended colonial, Catholic schools with traditional ways of teaching where muscle memory was practiced and questioning was not really accepted. Going to an institution which allowed for mental and personal growth was a revelation. Butt had the privilege of being taught by Quddus Mirza, young, full of energy and enthusiasm and who had just returned back from studying at the Royal College of Art.

Mrs. Salima Hashmi, had just come back from the Royal Institute of Art and Design filled with new ideas and a fresh approach towards education. “Being taught by Mrs. Hashmi was a privilege and she was not only phenomenal in the class room but, had the far-sightedness to invite lecturers from abroad to conduct workshops, which were unheard of in the 80s, helping her students connect to the wider world”. One such workshop had a huge impact on Butt’s life. The lecturer was speaking about ancient painting techniques.

“... I was also looking at photographs and the pixels... are constructed with tiny dots. At the end of the day a photograph is almost like a drawing which is done with these colours, so I started to copy those pixels... the method of working in that great detail developed”. -Faiza Butt

“This was an eye-opening experience for me because other than acrylics, oils, gouache and water-colour I was unaware that other methods of painting even existed.” The lecturer spoke about egg tempera and inspired Butt to actually work in egg tempera for her thesis and which continued till she came to the United Kingdom. After a short teaching stint at NCA, Butt was awarded a residency in Durban, South Africa and so began her next chapter.

## A world beyond

In 1995, Butt was awarded the UNESCO-Aschberg Bursary at the Bartle Arts Trust (BAT) where she was an artist in residence for three months. There she held workshops for women from neighbouring towns presented talks at museums and galleries and produced a solo show at the BAT centre. This was the first time she had a really interesting encounter with history with untold stories of repression around her. After her residency, Butt came back with a real lust for the wider world. “Lahore felt like a small place, like a well” and she wanted to explore beyond Lahore so when the opportunity for Slade came up, Butt jumped at the chance.

These two years at Slade were very intense and left an immense impression on Butt. “Slade was concept heavy and whatever one does is acceptable as long as in a seminar one can justify it really well – the language of art was very important”. Her time at Slade was about “writing, reading and then to justify in equal measures, what I am doing. UCL is a powerhouse for intellectual enquiry. Lecturers from various disciplines including practicing artists, art historians, anthropologists and economists are invited to show students the bridges that connect the world.”

One such lecture by Sir Micheal Craig-Martin an icon of the 90s (YBA movement), had an everlasting impact on Butt’s sensibility. Inspired by photography, Craig-Martin lectured about the power of the image and took the students on a historic journey of the image. This took Butt back to her childhood and the power of the image to make an impact. “The power of the image is very wide, immense and extremely manipulative. From that point I started resisting the western values of art.” Her classmates were inspired by the trend of abstract expressionism and were working with paint on large canvases. Butt, on the other hand, chose to focus on her heritage and used ink and paper in a figurative manner. “My works are derived from photographs. I use the human face a lot but I am not a portrait painter. I use the human face to play my politics through that face; the face has the ability to identify your gender, your age, your class. It’s a very interesting token that could be manipulated to say things through”. Many of her works were mug shots of Muslim men found in newspapers and magazines affirming the clichéd notion of the Muslim man as terrorist. Yet, Butt’s instinct was to beautify them, making them a source of gratification and enjoyment. In doing so Butt also seems to be reacting to the idea of the portrayal of women as objects of desire in art.

Butt’s works are laboriously crafted using the obsessive dot like technique reminiscent of *Purdkhat* style in miniature painting.



## “Find your cause, fight for it and make it work”.

Faiza Butt-



Faiza Butt, 'Epoch', ink on polyester film. Image courtesy the writer

“At the same time I was also looking at photographs and the pixels of photographs and how they are constructed with tiny dots. At the end of the day a photograph is almost like a drawing which is done with these colours so I started to copy those pixels – so then the method of working in that great detail developed”. Butt was becoming known for her work at Slade, graduated with a distinction and started her next phase of life living in London as a wife and a working mother.

### Life in London

“The reality of life is that the mortgage has to be paid”. As a married woman and a young mother, Butt had the responsibility of looking after her children but also the pressure to bring in an income, which art did not do initially. Therefore, she obtained her teaching qualifications in the early 2000s and started teaching in East London. Butt feels this was an important chapter in her life. “I gained exposure to well-kept secrets of British society, the fact that London is a very poor place and that the pavements are not lined with gold.”

She started teaching predominantly first or second generation impoverished British Asian children. With her cosy upbringing in Lahore, this was quite a revelation.

“It was an eye opening experience for me that London has these insular ghettos that don't cross communicate.”

This experience resulted in a series of works called “Stars and Superstars” which mixed the western icons of pop-culture exhibiting western values while hanging out with the invisible immigrant Asians. Butt decided to go back to full-time studio practice with her own hours to manage the kids and the household. “Compromises had to be made but I have managed to make a miracle work.”

### Recent developments in Butt's art

Butt has now recently ventured into focusing on ceramics. “Living in a virtual world increasingly where one is always pressing buttons”, Butt once again wants to create art that involves the use of the senses and the hands. “The sign of the human hand as a signature holds a tremendous appeal to me”. She finds working with her bare fingers in clay, a spiritual experience because of the warmth it exudes. It may also be comforting for her as she always recalls her mother working with her hands. Butt shyly admits that she is “nerdy” about physics and is intrigued by the science of ceramics as “it involves earth, water and fire.”

Even the paint I use is derived from natural materials and then the drawings that I paint on the ceramic pieces go in a kiln around 1200 degrees. It burns, shrinks and comes out fossilised, stoneware that will last the test of time.”

The ceramic pieces are autobiographical with the theme of parenthood emerging. “Triumph” and the series from “the Dinner Dialogue” painted in underglazes is layered with imagery depicting the mundane, the everyday. Here one tends to find her children engaged in banal activities like eating spaghetti or just sleeping interspersed with images of toys, plastic bottles, food, a pair of trainers, cleaning products or logos – the domestic, the day to day. Butt feels that motherhood should be celebrated and that modern age makes one almost embarrassed about being a parent. Like the artist herself, the illustrations are vibrant and dynamic alluring the viewer with its map-like imagery. The flatness, spatial arrangement and the layering of the glazes are typical elements of the miniature tradition. Some of her works were selected for the coveted Sovereign Asian Art Prize.

Butt's work has been exhibited in various art fairs, such as Art Dubai and the Hong Kong Art Fair, and extensively in Europe, South Asia, the Middle East and the United States. Butt has also had several solo shows in London. Her work is displayed between two major galleries (Rossi & Rossi and Grosvenor Gallery). In 2015, she had a mid-career retrospect at the New Art Exchange in Nottingham, UK. The show “Paracosm” travelled to Edinburgh, Leicester and was also on display on the South Bank (a series of museums and theatres in London). The show discussed issues such as gender polemics, identity, politics and popular culture. On display were the huge light boxes for which Butt is also known. Inspired by Abu Nawaz's classical poem, she draws the viewer in with snowy mountains and flora, and confronts them with the Kufic script which is gilded with intricate gold imagery. Upon closer inspection, the script has been constructed like an embroidery with gold, middle eastern jewellery.

Butt is an artist with a mission. She has managed to balance her work life with her family life. She is extremely hard-working and with a grit of iron and resolve is determined to continue to fight her cause. She challenges and asks questions of society about the human condition where most would shy away. She is making the art world notice her with her unusual choice of imagery and subject matter. She cannot be ignored. Asked about advice she would give to young artists, she says “Find your cause, fight for it and make it work”. There is no doubt that Butt has followed this very path herself successfully.

**Saima Munawar** is an artist and a regular contributor for *Artnow Pakistan*. She studied at the National College of Arts, Lahore and Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London.



Faiza Butt, Attenborough arts centre, Leciester, image courtesy the writer





Photo Essay | November 2018

# Disrupting nature’s course

*by Sakina Hassan*



In one of the crevices of the Indian Ocean, lies a vibrant city: Karachi. Its dynamic edge attracts a large audience from all over the city and contributes to its identity. Unfortunately, disrupted by human greed, the very edge is losing its character.

The relationship Karachi shares with its edge: both the good and the bad; the pollution and the entertainment; the hope and the hopelessness; the escape it offers and their indifference to it all.



*Sakina Hassan is an architect and freelance phototographer. A graduate of Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, she currently works at Studio Tariq Hasan.*



# The past that faces forward

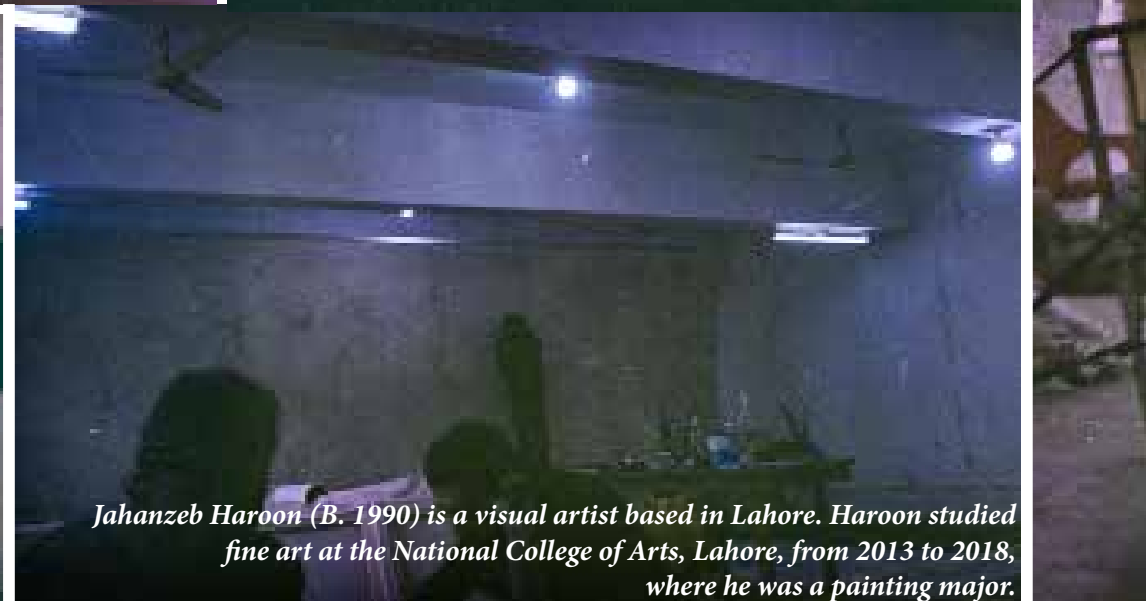
by Jahanzeb Haroon

Photo Essay | January 2019



There are two struggles that one never forgets when it comes to higher education: the paper work, the running around it takes to get admitted to a university and the frenzy which goes into putting up a degree show.

A degree show can be likened to a birth, the panic and anticipation of the unknown, the sleepless nights amidst scattered spaces, the feverish drive to make something coherent from all the chaos. The triumphant moment is the first step towards facing the world without the cocooning safety of the institute. The degree show forms the first mark of a professional identity, by which people recognise you. With the passing of years, its memory may get fogged and cast in different lights. Moments of frustration become pleasant reminiscences, critical remarks become life lessons, the distance between that point and the now continuously increases, but it is never forgotten.



Jahanzeb Haroon (B. 1990) is a visual artist based in Lahore. Haroon studied fine art at the National College of Arts, Lahore, from 2013 to 2018, where he was a painting major.



# Preview

by Syed Faisal Sajjad



**Act 1: A discussion at the Presidio, San Francisco Bay**

Hey, let's walk to the bridge.

*Why? What for?*  
*We're not going to cross it anyway.*

No, of course we're not, but it's a beautiful bridge, isn't it?

*O' come on.*  
*A bridge is a bridge!*  
*And you're supposed to cross it once you reach it.*

No, not necessarily, we can stand on it and see the San Francisco Bay, and the Pacific...

*That... might not be possible, since it's not a footbridge.*

Fine, then we'll stand under it and appreciate the beauty of its structure, its red colour.....

*My dear, a bridge is a bridge, it's not a work of art, and it can't be because there's a purpose to it.*

Well, yes, a bridge is a bridge, however...  
Not all bridges are the same; some are aesthetically more pleasing than the others. It's the beauty that one appreciates, if, if you find it beautiful I mean.

*If you insist, however, a bridge is a bridge, regardless. How beautiful could an object of utility be after all?*

Anyways, when do you have your final thesis at the college?

*Start of January, second week perhaps. But the preview and public viewing is always after the juries.*

Juries!

*Final critique I mean.*

How is it generally? What do the students theorise in the end? I mean what do they present before the jury panel? Is it something like a new art theory or a new approach?

*Well, yes and no, in a way. At times it's something very personal. It's basically how well they've understood themselves and explored their creative side during their student years. A thesis project is the culmination of the understanding of the discipline they have developed over a period of four or five years. It's also about their power of imagination and how far they have been able to develop it. And more importantly, do they trust their power of imagination, have they learned to trust their imagination? But to be honest, it's all kinds of complicated because in recent practices art is increasingly based on ideas and concepts. So theory does become a part of the thesis but it stays in the background, rather it should. After all, thesis can't be mere illustration of theory, that's not what it's supposed to do. Art, I think, has wider concerns. It's like a leap of faith, exploration of the great unknown. It helps you connect with the human in you.*

*We do encourage the students to explore their individual concerns, experiences, and their life in short.*

*A thesis project is a life lived!*  
*And a thesis show is a chronicle of time!*  
*If the institution has kept an organised repository of thesis shows over the years, one can discover and explore how the discourse on art has evolved in the past and how those debates have transformed over the years leading to new sensibilities and artistic concerns. It's history in the making, truly a chronicle of time.*

Is it a big event?

*It remains mostly exclusive, not so much of a public event in the true sense but it is a spectacle nevertheless!*



*There's an exclusive preview a day before it opens for the public viewing and that's strictly by invitation only. The main thing is that all the departments of the college get to display their thesis projects at the same time. So the thesis preview in a way is a true reflection of the ethos of art education that the college has always believed in. It's the coming together of all the mediums of expression; art, design, architecture, film and music in one space and time, sharing the sensibilities that are common to all. One doesn't have to try very hard to discover the connecting thread. It serves as an opportunity for a visitor to reconnect with oneself through art and be able to do some reflective thinking. It's indeed contemplative for some and for others, it's a social event that's not to be missed under any circumstance.*

Then all the who's who of society must also be there for the preview?

*Well, it's generally the artist community; people from the visual arts, performing arts, architecture, design and literature. There are art connoisseurs and art buyers and people who are generally interested in art that also come to the preview. Socialites are also there, both accomplished and budding; you know they have to be seen as one must have interest in art, or at least pretend to have to qualify as a person of culture. The event is also widely covered by the media, both print and electronic. And we can't ignore the role and importance of the social media these days, the thesis show is posted and discussed on Facebook for days.*

**Act2: On the day of the preview**

*In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo<sup>i</sup>*

Fine Art thesis is better this year, what do you think?

*I liked the painting thesis. Miniature is also interesting; at least they've tried to do something new with tradition, otherwise it was getting really boring each year. I mean, how long can one cling to tradition? It becomes repetitive and meaningless. It's like any faithful craftsman who knows his craft but he's not sure why he's making it.*

Why do you always have to look for meaning in art? It doesn't always have to mean something. Sometimes one should be able to simply enjoy an aesthetic object.  
You know it's a problem with you, you read too many books and I know that, again, this year, you're going to buy a painting that you think is meaningful and eventually end up hating it. You'll be stuck with it forever; nobody's interested in a painting that's meaningful but displeasing to the eye. Art should be delightful in the first place.

*O' stop being a connoisseur, that's so nineteenth century. One should rather approach and appreciate a work of art from a critic's eye. How can you separate ideas from art? Do you know how important critical thinking is these days?*

Well that's fine, but I know you're going to waste your money again. For once, you should buy something of worth rather than value. Art is a good investment provided you invest wisely and you are able to judge the worth of an art piece intelligently. It is the worth of an artwork that matters; who's bothered about value and significance. Value is for art historians and critics; they are the ones who can't afford art. They can only talk and write about artworks hanging in galleries and museums, without owning one. Try to learn and pick up some tips on buying art from the reputed auction houses. Anyway, have you seen the architecture show?

*Yes I have, but I don't understand what they have designed. All of them look like they belong to the space age, cyberspace rather, that would be a more appropriate word for those works. I think all the sophisticated pirated software is to be blamed. I wonder what they're trying to make their buildings look like. It should be architecture and not digital art, after all.*

*Seems like all the architecture students have become allergic to architecture; some are making films, some are designing sculptures and some are producing graphic art.*

I guess somebody needs to explain their work with more clarity, or more simply perhaps, but who's bothered anyways.  
People come to see the Fine Art thesis mainly; the architecture display is not for everyone. I guess, only architects can understand those drawings.

*That's right, but have you noticed that some of the architectural works are quite aesthetically pleasing? In their presentation, at least, if not for what they have presented in those drawings. If you forget, for a moment that they are drawings of buildings that are yet to be built. Imagine them hanging on the wall along with other paintings, they could possibly qualify as works of art, can't they?*

Maybe, but the question is: are they really conscious of that? Do they understand exactly what they are doing or is it yet another cliché, inspired from somewhere and half understood, before it's implemented in the form of a thesis project. Are you sure those are real ideas and not merely a style?

*I guess they are, or at least they are trying hard to get there, though, it must be very difficult for them to break away from the conventional perception and understanding of architecture and architectural drawings, and look at it anew, as an art object, a final thing in itself and not a mere representation of some building somewhere.*

*They don't claim to design buildings in architectural thesis projects nowadays; they say that they design the built environment, both in the physical and the psychological sense. It's a brave new world of ideas out there; I guess we have to be brave enough to accept it.*

*There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

A drawing is a drawing!  
And an architectural drawing is an architectural drawing, with all the technical details and measurements of things to be constructed. It's a preamble to something, means to an end, not an end in itself.

*Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?*

No, no not really. Rather they believe in something totally contrary to that. They like to confuse everything, drawing with drafting, painting with print and architecture with fine art. In a good way I guess.  
Even architecture is not strictly tied to utility. Vitruvian ideals of "commodity, firmness and delight" are completely out dated. It's the age of ideas and experimentation, of stretching boundaries.  
Architecture is now interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and multidisciplinary; it's all a hair-splitting debate.



*Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question...  
Oh, do not ask, what is it?*

Curtains down, it's five o'clock, we're closing.  
End of the preview, we're open for the regular public viewing from tomorrow morning.

*"That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant, at all."*

However,  
*A bridge is a bridge!*

**Syed Faisal Sajjad** is a professor of architecture at the National College of Arts, Lahore.

Madiha Furqan, NCA Pindi Thesis Display, 2018, image courtesy Madiha Furqan



# Navigation of an emotional minefield

by Nabah Ali Saad

The first day of college as a young creative scholar is one I remember well. There was a hint of trepidation in my steps, a sense of wariness that was underlying the excited ball of nerves inside my chest. It is, most definitely a stark contrast to the last day one spends as a student when there is no hesitation upon entering the hallowed halls of the college. There is now a nervous energy in every fast paced step you take; wariness has now been replaced by a sense of being lost and without purpose. The ball of nerves is still there, but whereby in the early days it spoke of caution towards a world unknown, now it resonated with being sense of being set adrift from a world which helped define you and your purpose as a creative being. Through this navigation of an emotional minefield, one also must focus on the business of the day; the Degree Show.

In Pakistan, a degree in creative arts takes four years to complete (Fine Art, Design, Film & Television etc), whereas, a degree in Architecture takes five years. During these years, the students are put through their paces at a very rigorous and demanding schedule where they are taught skills and techniques to develop their abilities in their chosen field. There are two streams of courses which run parallel to each other during the period of study.

The first is the Theory course, which covers varying topics and becomes more complex as years progress. Here, the students are made to understand the philosophical discourses which led to the birth of various models and principles upon which the art world evolved throughout history, and how these theorems were developed and applied to works and projects by the great masters across the spectrum. Indeed, all fields of art are, without a doubt, interconnected and have grown together, each undoubtedly influencing the other in its way of thinking and approach to creativity.

The second stream is the Studio course, perhaps the most important of two, and the most enjoyable for the students by far. Here, the students are taught how to develop their expertise and, quite literally, the tools of their trade and are introduced to various mediums by which they may give birth to the ideas which they visualise in their minds. The studio allows the students to explore, experiment and push the boundaries of creativity, thereby, giving life to their imagination and ingenuity. Yet, while the studio course may be deemed important and enjoyable, without a close relationship to the theory subjects, it is hollow and without meaning. For you see, the two enjoy a symbiotic relationship; feeding off each other so as to sustain themselves, as it is the theoretical frameworks, when studied and understood, which gives deeper meaning to the works created thereby, evolving the theorems themselves and perhaps allowing room for the development of new ones.

This process of growth and evolution ideally allows for innovative ideas which push the boundaries of what is acceptable and allowed, thus creating the level of maturity in the student to create meaningful interpretation of the social, political and cultural ideals which tend to influence a person's perceptions of being and their connections and role in the world as we know it.

Over the duration of study and practical application, one also ends up experiencing numerous degree shows on the road to their own. Those belonging to their own school, as well as of others within the academic sphere.

It is a day every artist, architect and designer must face at the end of their scholarly endeavours. A culmination of all the years of knowledge and skill gained, which takes the form of a showcase that highlights one's talents and creative genius. It is the first of many (if you are so fortunate) platforms that you will be afforded to stand upon and declare your presence to the world.

While the degree show encompasses a large range of programs, perhaps the most direct impact on the success of the show is for the young artists, whereby the degree show – whether at BA (degree) or MA (postgraduate) level – is a valuable opportunity to highlight one's work to a wide range of people working

in the art world. Curators, writers, other artists, gallery directors and many others visit degree shows as part of their research into artists they might want to work with in the future. It's important that the showcasing artist's work looks its best at all times, and that you are available and contactable in the months following the show.

Let us look at a short analysis of the degree show written by Tom Morton in 2013 as an op-ed for Frieze online titled: 'Best in Show – The changing face of graduate exhibitions.'

He says,

*"So familiar is the degree show, then, that it's easy to forget what a peculiar kind of exhibition it is. When else do artists find themselves obliged to take part in a group show in which the curatorial logic begins – and, in most cases, ends – with the decisions of a college admissions panel, taken months*

*or years before? Where else are the works they display ascribed (the impossibility of measuring the numinous be damned) a precise numerical score? Then there is the matter of the degree show's public. A humanities student's thesis is read by his or her supervisor, examiners and, perhaps, a particularly indulgent parent, before being immediately deposited in the dim basement of a university library, where it remains untroubled by talent scouts from academic publishers, or the attentions of weekend history buffs or philosophy dweebs looking for the Next Big Thing. Degree shows, however, actively court an audience, often employing professional-grade marketing paraphernalia (the art press advertisement, the celebrity catalogue forward, the commemorative tote) to ensure that the 'right' people attend."*

On the idiosyncrasies of degree shows in the UK, he also had an interesting commentary to add where he speaks about how artists in the past have used the platform as an occasion to counteract the limitations set upon them in a world which, paradoxically pushes one to break boundaries.

*"Given that the degree show traditionally operates as a kind of threshold between the art school and the art world, between studenthood and maturation, it's unsurprising that some celebrated British artists have used it as an opportunity to present works that test institutional boundaries."*



Nell Nicholas working in her studio, 2018, image courtesy Nabah Ali Saad



Examples include, David Hockney's print *The Diploma* (1962), made in protest against the Royal College of Art's refusal to let him graduate without first submitting a written essay (the examiners eventually capitulated in the face of Hockney's growing fame), and Gavin Turk's blue heritage plaque *Cave* (1991), commemorating his time studying at the College as though he were already a sculptor of national standing (Turk was not awarded a degree, although the ensuing press hoopla thrust him to prominence)."

Now that we understand how the degree show affords artists opportunities to declare their presence to the world, there is also another aspect that one must consider when one talks about such opportunities to project oneself; the cost. No doubt, a degree in the arts is an expensive undertaking, even at the subsidised tuition rates that government institutions offer, for without the material to make the art itself, the process of creativity becomes null and void. And the material is not cheap. When we think of the money invested over the years in art materials, the degree show is also seen as a place where one may be able to redeem the expenses through work's sold, if not the cost of putting up the display for the show itself.

When I was in art school at the National College of Arts, well over a decade ago, there was a running joke between myself and friends who were not of the department of Fine Art. Whenever we would view the thesis displays and see the prices that the artists and faculty had determined as the worth of their pieces at that time, we would always say that we were in the wrong program, as no one would be interested in buying the computer-aided drawings that were our tools of presentation in the Department of Architecture. Who would be interested in buying printouts of plans? Unless those plans had been etched into metal plates and then rolled out on a printmaker's press, or painted on canvases, as part of an expression of the built environment and its contextual understanding. Even sketched in ink, pastels or pencils, or woven in cloth and stretched on wood slats. For you see, with each different medium, the worth and meaning of the piece changes, as does the prospective buyer and purveyor. Where students of Architecture may use their works to impress prospective employers, the fine art student may also use the work as a basis to determine their monetary worth in a competitive world.

Herein, the degree show also becomes a site for industry and institutional judgment and this is where we come to the real possibility that each and every single prospective graduate must face.

It is a fear, an insidious feeling that dwells deep in the mind and creeps into the soul. That you could make what you may consider being the most original art or building or even poster. You could weave the most innovative textile or engineer a cutting edge product. Film, in your estimation, an award-winning documentary or compose an original piece of music to put you at par with the greatest of the masters. You could sweat blood, paint and tears for well over a period of four or five years when the day which serves as the culmination of all one's efforts finally arrives, the fear will be present with you like a silent companion, one that you cannot shake off. Your work, your passion...the very representation of your existence to date will be judged and could be found wanting.

And yet again, it is perhaps, here that the fine art student is most impacted by the degree show itself. For it is these same curators, writers, fellow artists, gallery directors and many others who visit degree shows that may deem the presented work unworthy of mention, thus, in turn, ensuring the demise of a young artist's career even before it has begun. This seems to hold true of most cases. But the beauty of the show is where the artist stands tall and decides that no one critic on one single platform has the authority to determine his or her work to be of worth or not, for that is what they have been taught during their years of study, is it not? That numerous famous and great artists in history had no patrons or sponsors and no recognition to their work for many years, if at all during their lifetime, but gained notoriety and fame at some point in their careers, if not posthumously.

And so, we may surmise that where, as mentioned earlier, the degree show symbolises not only one's past and current educational achievements but also one's speculative future and where the preparation for the show can be solitary and competitive, collaborative and public it is also undoubtedly a costly affair, both financially and emotionally.



Saleha Arif, NCA Pindi Thesis Display 2018, image courtesy Saleha Arif

Yet it is also a place which offers up the potential to be a space of disruption, occupation, agitation and protest, where you may be the next big thing to hit the art world while, simultaneously, leave without making a mark and take it up as a challenge to defy the odds, which have been set against you. In all aspects, it is most definitively a challenge to be well met and surpassed.

**Nabah Ali Saad** is an Assistant Professor at COMSATS, Lahore. She completed her Bachelor's Degree from NCA, Lahore in 2008 and received a Master's Degree in Architecture from the Dessau Institute of Architecture, Germany in 2014.





# Ustad Allah Baksh:

## Traces of evolution and Abstraction

by Iram Zia Raja



Ustad Allah Baksh was no ordinary man and his story is an extraordinary one. The wondrous tapestry of his life and art is so intricately woven that patterns emerge, disappear and re-appear thus, bringing newer perspectives to light. The year 2018, marked his 40th death anniversary and is an appropriate time to look at this life again, in the hope to find his multiple perspectives and to re-present him to a generation that might have never even understood his work through its context and underpinnings.

Baksh's art is certainly and unarguably an important part of the overarching narrative of the art of the Subcontinent, during the late 19th and early 20th century. Equally important, is the fact that the work of this noted artist is not a part of the curriculum of many major institutions teaching art in Pakistan, today.

Art, in more ways than one, is a marker of zeitgeist of its times. Now that the visuals of artworks from Pakistan are accessible worldwide, it is, unarguably, the best time to re-visit, re-vision and re-visualise the times Baksh lived and worked in. He was aptly termed as one of 'the predecessors' in the colossal book 'Image and Identity' by Dr. Akbar Naqvi. Almost every author writing on the art of the early 1900s has included Baksh's name in the list of prominent artists and thus, his place in the art of the undivided Subcontinent remains undisputed.

Why is this artist and his work significant? Is it merely by virtue of the temporal significance of that era or is the work connected to a larger narrative of that time? The historical lense of art suggests that both the facets are significant and must be re-looked.

Baksh lived and worked at a time of social and political change, as well as, of new and emerging value systems. Newer standards in art and literature were being created. "Palladianism in architecture, Roman-revivalism in full figure statues and busts of politicians and administrators, and in landscape the picturesque and sublime of Walpole and Burke, were transplanted to Indian soil and grew. A world of new taste and perception was created, and it held as the dominant culture of the eye and the mind. In this world, art became the mirror of life and nature in terms of ideas acceptable to the colonial art establishment of the time in England."

The history of art is essentially, being informed by a trade of ideas—exchange, evolution, assimilation—and creation. Indian art like Indian people endured many colonisations—in hindsight there was a benefit—for what is art if not an enriched set of ideas duly traded/exchanged, evolved and assimilated. One such earlier evolution of Indian painting into a 'breathtaking genre' happened as a result of the Mughal's arrival in the sixteenth century.

Dr. Akbar Naqvi, in his book, speaks of the positive impact of colonialism on art, in terms of the prestige of European tradition of art being invested in India, notwithstanding its evil intentions, through which, "a new way of observation and perception created an epistemology which, had a far-reaching influence upon the Indian mind".

Baksh lived and worked in the years that can safely be termed as the most important, potent and turbulent years in the historical perspective of modern India/Subcontinent. His art must be viewed and studied with the knowledge of this backdrop. In Ravi Verma's person, the first embodiment, appropriation as well as, confluence of Britain and Europe by India can be witnessed.

According to Naqvi, the Euro-Indian art deserves our respect because it gave the Subcontinent yet another opportunity to see itself through the eyes of the 'Other'. In course of time, the Other was assimilated into its culture. It is against this art, and it's long history, that the modern art of the Subcontinent makes sense. Unlike Chughtai, the artist who was repudiated for his loyalty to an old tradition, Baksh acquired significance as a benchmark in the long years of the westernisation of art of the Subcontinent. And in fact, his skill and technique is an embodiment, reflection and a responsive act of the impact of British aesthetic. The other forms that developed during his artistic journey made his art practice rich and profound. Although Baksh caught this radical tide of "Indian-ness" at its ebb, what really makes his art interesting from a historical perspective is "how he transformed his situation into a genuine experience of his own".

Most of his art is not chronologically available to us as he very seldom dated his works. So the supposition is that in the absence of dates for his paintings, speculation can be through various life events. Baksh's art underwent many consequential changes as a result of his relocations to Bombay, the biggest port city of Asia and the economic capital of the Subcontinent.

Before entering this new world, he was a small town, lower middleclass boy who, out of economic necessities, went to train with Master Abdullah and later Ustad Meeran Baksh Naqqash, a relative of Abdur Rehman Chughtai, who guided him in his creative journey. What is also important to know is that Baksh was not a product of the British-established art schools, but his teachers were, as both of them rose to prominence at the Mayo School of Art.

While in Lahore, Naqvi states that "the Ustad's reputation was built on his Hindu mythological subjects in the grand manner of history painting." Chughtai, (a contemporary of Ustad) in his essay on Baksh confirms that in a Hindu household in the 1920s, not holding a religious painting by an Ustad would be a rarity.

### Painting theatrical backdrops in Bombay:

While in Bombay, whether Baksh was an active or a passive recipient of the new ideas in art is open to further discussion and debate, but Chughtai, in his article, confirms that Baksh's new found strength in attempting his ideas with the fearlessness of a soldier was the direct consequence of his work and exposure in Bombay's theatre companies. Bombay, in the early years of the twentieth century, was the biggest port town in Asia and third largest city of the Empire and was hence, marked by a circulation of people, ideas and goods. Port cities generally are way ahead of others, in terms of commercial activity, so it was no surprise that Baksh relocated to Bombay, not once but twice.

Many writers have commented on his job at Agha Hashar's theatre company in Bombay. Chughtai specifically talks about a newer vigor that he witnessed in a post-theatre era after his return from Bombay. Agha Hashar Kashmiri, at the age of 18, was also in search of an occupation and chose to go to Bombay, which was the commercial and intellectual capital of India in the early 1900s.

As Balraj Khanna and Aziz Kurtha stated that, direct contact with the west "opened doors to new ideas—scientific, technical, democratic—that were shaping Europe." New ideas were being brought by the Gujrati and Parsi students too, who were returning to India after completing their education. Some of them having been inspired by European and British theatre decided to open theatre companies in India. While in Europe the various art movements along with WW1 were impacting every conceivable idea. Theatre was definitely one of them.





Expressionism, Absurdism, Theatricalism and Realism helped evolve stage backdrops and the way actors perceived their roles. The conjecture is that all these new thought processes found their way into India by way of new theatre companies. Bakhsh's new vigor might be traceable to his stay and work in Bombay with Agha Hashar.

According to Naqvi, the paintings of Punjab's folk romance depicted the influence of Agha Hashar Kashmiri the most. Theatre and Nautanki made a huge presence in his work. It's interesting to note that Chughtai and Naqvi approached the same topic so differently.

'Hir Ranjha', 'Sohni Mahwal' are some of his paintings in the theatrical vein. It's interesting that most of influences are attributed to his theatre company employment days. Critics and others tend to overlook the fact that he did not go through a regular/formal education system. Whatever influences are there, these have come through his life experiences. Painting theatre backdrops on a regular basis provided him with ample and varied opportunities to understand, design and create compositions that were to give way to his innovative viewpoints into his rural landscapes.

Landscape painting is what Baksh is best known for today. Naqvi enlists Claude Lorraine, Jacob Ruidael, Aldorfer who painted the 'picturesque' and suggests that Baksh might have been exposed to Dutch and Classical European nature paintings but how this may have taken place bewilders him. In the absence of any other data, my own conjecture points to the backdrop scenery in theatre companies of Bombay where he sought employment.

Tired of the monotony of repetitiveness of the work expected of him in Bombay, he returned to the intellectually rich Lahore, where the outside stimuli helped develop and mature his art and explore is further.

For him, the new art of Europe that he experienced in Bombay symbolised commercial undercurrents. Talking to Chughtai, he expressed his discomfort regarding the influence of commercial art in Bombay, which he felt lacked any innovation as it was copied from the west. He was concerned that not one artist could be found who had made a significant impact on Western art.

His diversity and treatment of subject matter did not cease to amaze Chughtai. He spoke fondly about a particular painting on the subject of famine, about twelve years before the famine hit Bengal.

The painting was gravely praised and received awards in almost all major exhibitions of the time. Chughtai was fascinated by the humanism of the painting and the painter. During his association with the Maharaja Patiala's court, he was in awe of the European paintings in the Maharaja's collection. From this, he perfected his style that was to culminate in his 'bazaar studio'.



For Baksh, Lahore brought an intellectual departure, however, it did not provide any material success and so he re-located back to Bombay. This time he actively participated in Bombay's art circle and entered his paintings in many major exhibitions, earning accolades and prizes.

In the rapidly developing consciousness of Indian society, the culture of exhibitions introduced by the government was fast taking root in the cultural centres in and outside of India. Major cities like London, Wimbly, Calcutta, Simla, Darjeeling, Mussoorie, Madras, Lahore and Bombay had displaced the importance of already fast vanishing court culture.

His art had traces of evolution and abstraction. He was called a 'versatile' artist by Tribune in Bombay when the Independent Art Club was founded and he was selected for demonstration. The strength of his brush and uniqueness of his technique spell bounded everyone present included the press as well as the art critics and it was said that his art has milestones of evolution and abstraction.

He also painted landscapes, rockscapes, and genre scenes of village markets, festivals and the romantic folklore of Punjab. *He used the Punjab village with its totemic buffaloes....to humour the land.* Naqvi further wrote *"He and Anna Molka, not Chughtai, were the founders of a Punjabi school of painting."*

*"Ustad Allah Bakhsh belonged to the warp of colonial times in India, and he ought to be judged against his cultural background."*

And then partition happened. Baksh's understanding and reaction to 1947 should be understood in regard to his physical and mental maturity. *"His art became tough, honest and necrophobic"*, Naqvi wrote.

At the height of his career, in a newly created Pakistan, his art touched the heart of one the most influential Pakistanis of the time, General Ayub Khan, who reminisced that he grew up in such landscapes. He declared him the painter-laureate of One-Unit. Should one then, term him as a politically astute artist?

Towards the 1950s, after the very strange case of castration, *"his paintings/art had been invaded by a new power and occupied by thoughts and feelings intriguingly strange"*. Critics wrote that his art entered *"forbidden territory"*.

He continued to paint and take in students till his health permitted. His last show became a synthesis: a coming together of the

major influences namely 'Euro-Indian academicism', Punjab folklore and Sufi poetry.

Through this study of Ustad Allah Bakhsh, the aim is not to re-interpret the meaning and meaningfulness of his paintings or a re-appraisal of his techniques—it is to introduce him as a context to what the art world and art community of Pakistan has achieved.

He painted quite a few thousand paintings in his lifetime but he remains just a name to the younger members of the art world today. So what are the bigger questions that one leaves with after studying Baksh's art? Was his art a cushion between 'high' and 'low', 'kitsch' and 'modern', 'popular' and 'elite'. These are questions that must be embraced first. Art and its perception in different eras has been fluid and continues to be so. There can be no final verdict. And we still ask the valid question if Baksh had any role in the art history of this area. What may be said with some finality is that him and his art sensing the zeitgeist, moved with it. His art changed, transformed and matured with his life's experiences and knowledge. His life and work were not two entities but one, informing each other. His art should be studied as a prism or as a lens guided towards an understanding of the times that he lived and worked in. Art and artist eventually must become documentation.

We tend to internalise that modern art coming sometimes directly from the continent could possibly not have a common thread with the colonial past. Pakistan and many other post-colonial states/countries try to make sense and distinctions among things that were thrust upon them and things that could not be internalised successfully. Conflicts abound these states whether in bureaucracy, politics or in art. No short-cuts unfortunately, are available.

Is his life/art one of painstakingly created opportunities or a just a chance? Will critics ever know for sure? I have yet to find any answers for these existential queries.

Notwithstanding his detractors' claims about his art not surviving the vagaries of time and waning of his artistic influence, is it only fair that his position as one of the 'predecessors' of 'Pakistani' art not be made questionable. We should be looking at his work more intensely, debating more profusely, and writing and critiquing more competently.

Through his life, one is able to understand how the life and practice of an artist passes through different phases and eventually blossoms.



*Iram Zia Raja is an Associate Professor of Design at the NCA. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Punjab University.*



# Adeel uz Zafar: Learning from the younger generation...

by Jovita Alvares

**A**deel uz Zafar graduated from the National College of Arts in Lahore. An internationally acclaimed artist, Zafar has made himself known through his iconic imagery and meticulous craftsmanship. He has participated in numerous exhibitions in Pakistan and across the globe, including a solo exhibition titled 'Monomania' at Aicon Gallery, USA, and most recently 'Shared Coordinates' at Fost Gallery, Singapore. In 2018, the artist attended a month long residency in Spain, organised by AAN Foundation and the C3A Museum at Cordoba, Spain. Alongside his artistic career, Zafar has also been a teacher for over a decade and taught in numerous art institutes. One of his most recent ventures is that of curation, where the artist has been working with several emerging artists by curating a number of shows in the last few years. This interview focuses on Zafar's decade long career as an academic, mentor, his recent work with younger artists and the importance it holds for him.

**JA: Before we speak about your latest residency, I would like to quickly ask about an interesting collaboration you had recently done with Seoul fashion label 'Juun.J' which resulted in your bandaged protagonists moving from wall-size paintings to being mass produced on clothing. How do you think that affected your work and its audience?**

**AZ:** The imagery and figures that I have been producing through my signature style are quite widely understood and accepted, some even are iconic and therefore, global phenomena.

This label usually works with one artist a year and in 2018 chose my work as they believed it fit for their brand, which has been highly influenced by youth and street culture. This process became a kind of multiplication of the works. Someone who may not have seen the original can now own a version of it at a more affordable price. The imagery does change with the scale and medium completely differing, but in my opinion, these fields of fine art, fashion, textile etc. are all linked, so when they come together they create something new and it's nice to see people interacting with it on a different platform. The imagery also becomes a commodity, sold in huge numbers but this not a new phenomenon. You can see it happening all throughout pop culture with collaborations between multiple fields and artists.

**JA: You were recently in Spain for an artist residency which lasted from October to November in 2018. Please tell us how it came to be?**

**AZ:** Yes, this was the first international residency initiated by the AAN Foundation which I was selected for. It was a collaboration between AAN and C3A Museum at Cordoba, Spain. The artistic director there is Alvaro Rodriguez Fominaya and there were a total of 4 resident artists from which, I was the only one not from Spain. The idea for this residency was to go into a new and distinct culture and allow it to inspire my practice, whilst I explore ideas for a new body of work. While I was there, I travelled to different cities within Spain. I was situated in Cordoba and while travelling around I was most interested in researching the overlapping of histories and multiple reigns that the land has experienced. For example, there was the Ottoman Empire where the Muslims were ruling and before that the Romans had come to power; later on came the Christians.



*Adeel uz Zafar, image courtesy Jovita Alvares*

Interestingly, you can find traces of these amalgamated cultures particularly through the architecture left behind. So my query was to look at all these aspects and then work further. The outcome of this residency will eventually culminate into an exhibition of a new body of work at the AAN Art Space in the near future.

**JA: There was also a mask-making workshop that looked quite successful...**

**AZ:** Yes, well normally whenever I participated in an international residency, I have engaged with the communities through different projects. Previously, during a residency in Ohio, I showed the locals my work and did a workshop that engaged the younger community. It's a wonderful experience as they are interested in our culture and always like to know more. So for this residency, the museum asked me to conduct a workshop with the youth for a program they have for their younger audience. Since I have had experience as a puppeteer by doing three international puppet festivals when I was in college, I wanted to revive that for them. That's how this workshop for mask making came into fruition.

We used different found materials that were easily accessible and the kids were very excited with the outcome. I too, was happy with it.



*Adeel uz Zafar, Engraved Drawing on Vinyl. Image courtesy Khaas Gallery*





*Adeel uz Zafar, Untitled, Engraved Drawing on Vinyl, 2017, image courtesy AAN*

**JA: Speaking of holding workshops, you have also been an art teacher for several years...**

AZ: I have been teaching for about 15 years. I have taught at several institutes including the Karachi School of Art. Right now, I teach at the Karachi Grammar School and in the coming year, I will also be a part of the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture as full-time faculty.

**JA: How do you think teaching these students, of varying ages, affect your practice?**

AZ: I think it's not only how they've affected me but also how my guidance over the years has affected them. Considering how long it's been as well as looking at the age bracket I teach, I have always found it fascinating to look at their works and approaches develop. Looking back at someone I taught years ago, looking at how they've evolved is so intriguing. But also, the approach of previous students also seem to differ from present day students which can of course be credited to the change in current affairs as well as the evolutions of artistic medium over the years. Another wonderful thing to witness is these students who ultimately go to an art college and then join the art fraternity where they eventually exhibit alongside you. The process and their commitment is something I am interested in seeing. Also, because of interacting with the younger generation, I usually feel like I'm learning more about the current situation through their perspective which also help with ideas for my own work.

**JA: What is something you keep in mind when teaching your students?**

AZ: Sadly, as I've noticed, there has been a formula set for art students during their formative years before college that is said to ensure them a good grade. However, this grade is short term and sometimes does not benefit the student's future, as the formula only caters to polishing certain skills. So if a student excels in a skill that may not fit in with the formula, they are often forced to abandon it. However, for me, the most important thing is to look at their ability. Everyone has their own unique skill which is what a teacher should look at first. Be it figurative, abstract, or even a particular medium, it is important to allow the student to flourish in their own comfort zone so that there is a clearer understanding for possibilities of their professional future.

**JA: As of late, several curated shows have been credited to your name, particularly those showcasing emerging talent. How did this concern come about and how did you begin?**

AZ: Firstly, I would like to point out that I do not yet consider myself a curator because this is still something very new to me. Having said that, I believe that this is my own way of trying to encourage these newer artists. This idea initiated some three years back. I was thinking about the limited art spaces in Pakistan, even though there has been a steady increase in the number of students graduating from art colleges, making it next to impossible for many to exhibit their work professionally. It is true, that the acceptance of fresh talent has increased exponentially. Especially since my own graduation, several galleries hold shows for fresh graduates.

However, I still felt that something more could be done.

I drew up a proposal for an exhibition of maybe 13 artists, all fitting within a certain age group and most important, all unique in their own way. Be it through medium, imagery or display, I filtered the list of artists meticulously until I reached a decision. Titled 'Microcosm', I curated my first show at the AAN Art Space.

It is important to mention that this was not just a show for first-timers. Yes, there were a few that hadn't exhibited before but there were also other that had. There were even some artists who weren't regular exhibitors but held potential and a uniqueness which was important for the premise of this exhibition.

**JA: You mentioned that after graduation it took you a few years to begin exhibiting; what would you say to those artists today, who are still struggling today?**

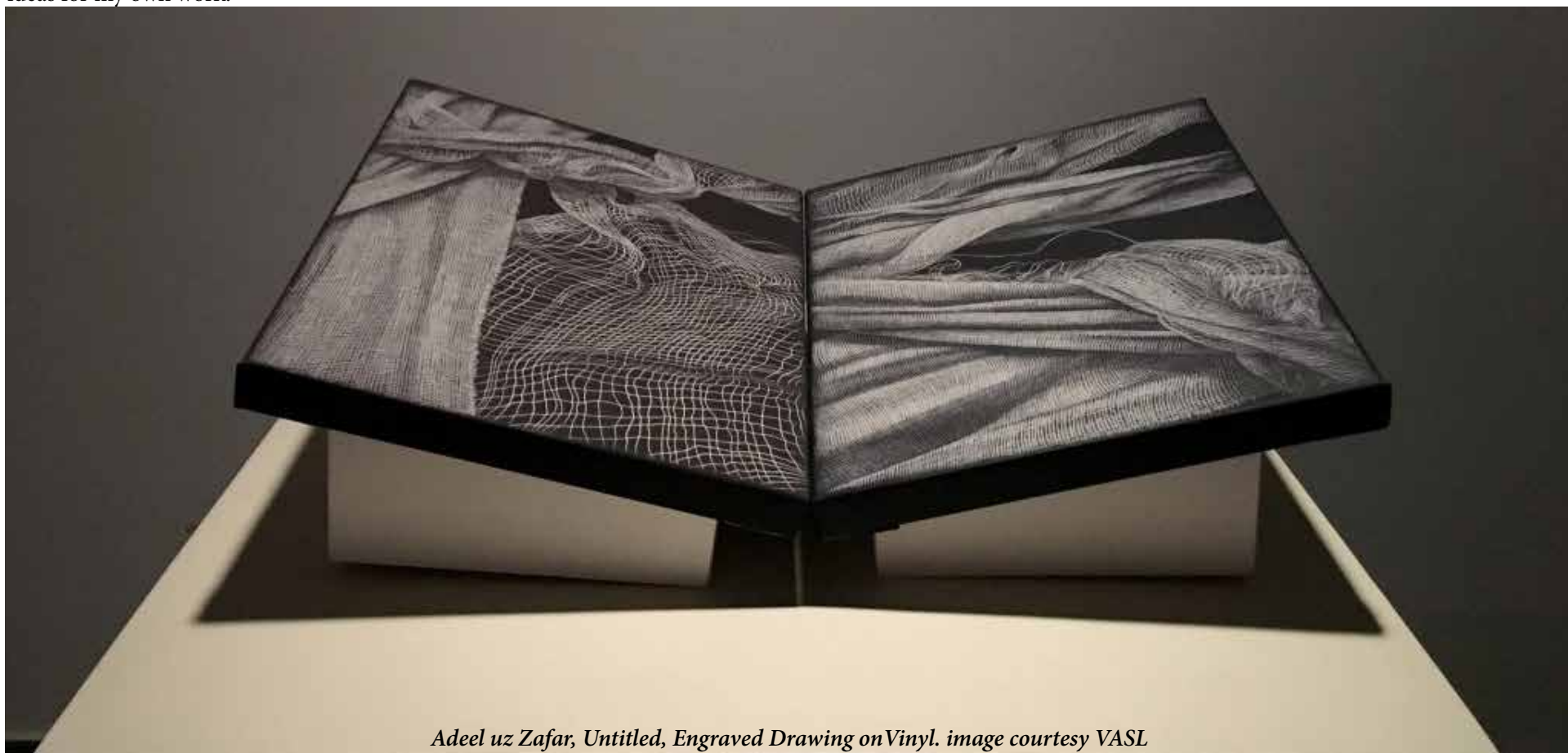
AZ: The most important thing is how passionate you are. You don't always have to be working, sometimes you could just write things down, take notes but always make sure you're doing something. However, if you don't have that passion, then it's just a loss. There should be a drive and there shouldn't be that creeping feeling that once you stop you won't be able to work again. If you try, it will eventually happen; persistence is key.

---

*Jovita Alvares is a visual artist from Karachi. She is a designer for ArtNow Pakistan. Alvares received a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art from IVSAA in 2016.*



*Adeel uz Zafar, Installation from 'Stranger than Fiction'. Image courtesy AAN*



*Adeel uz Zafar, Untitled, Engraved Drawing on Vinyl. image courtesy VASL*



# Traditional motifs strung together: Sana Khan Niazi

by Maheen Aziz



Images courtesy  
Sana Khan Niazi

Sana Khan Niazi is an entrepreneur, theatre artist and a stand-up comic. Having majored in Accounting and Finance from a University in Malaysia, she pursued her career in the performing arts in Pakistan. Niazi conceived the idea of her furniture company called Paimona to bring back the age-old crafts of Pakistan and its craftsmen to a global platform. She has been working on it full-time as the Founder and CEO. What her company has to offer, how she creates state-of-the-art furniture that speaks about and perseveres the heritage and culture of Pakistan, Niazi tells us in this exclusive interview.

**MA: Okay, so you are a standup comedian and a furniture designer, which profession did you start with? And how did you venture on to the next profession (either furniture designing or being a comedian)?**

SKN: I actually started with Accounting as a degree and went into theatre acting and production as a profession. From there, I turned to furniture design as a basis of creating a solution. For the craftsmen as sustainable living and for the customers for high-quality customised furniture. I love what I do with Paimona, but I missed the stage a lot and I could not continue doing theatre with the business running because of how much time both required. So stand-up comedy came as a consequence of that limitation so I could write and perform as, and when I have the time for it. I also wanted to experiment with something new and it drew me in. If furniture design has my heart, comedy is my sanity.

**MA: Can you recall how or why you became a maker?**

SKN: When I started the theatre, I was very deeply involved in it. It was one of those times when you feel like this is it. This is what I will be doing for the rest of my life. But things change and it was on one of the theatre performance trips to Dubai that I found my calling. I was shopping at a big fancy home store and I noticed that every piece was made in India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, China (of course), Malaysia, Thailand but not a single piece was 'Made in Pakistan'. This curiosity took me on a journey to search for our crafts, craftsmen and heritage that is not given its due credit or value in our lives. When I realised that it was mere operational difficulties paired with a lack of education and exposure that was creating the divide between our local craft industry and the global design industry, I decided to step in to fill that gap with a creative solution. I was extremely blessed to have the right people at the right time guiding me along the way. Zain Mustafa, an architect and founder of CSDT (Cube School of Design Technology), is one such person who played a very important part in helping me develop the brand in the right direction and making Paimona what it is today.

**MA: What would you say are your main influences when conceiving a piece of work? And what comes first – the materials or the design idea?**

SKN: A lot of what I create comes from my own experiences of life, people and our culture. The idea that in order to go beyond you must first look within rings very close to my heart. It means going back to our roots, looking through the originality of life in this region, our identity and finding meaning enough to re-create it but with an upgrade as per our lifestyle today. For me, material and design go hand in hand. Sometimes design originates from the material while other times material follows the design. The key thing is craft – what crafts are we employing in the design process as well as how we identify with them.

**MA: How do you choose your materials?**

SKN: In furniture, it is important to look at function and comfort. So materials are generally used based on that. The material is a catalyst for delivering your design into what you want the piece to become. It can make or break it. So, selecting material is often a tricky but an interesting process. Personally, I love working with organic materials like solid wood, jute, hand-woven cloth etc. depending on what function they can play in the design.

**MA: What would you say are your values and ethics when it comes to designing?**

SKN: With design, each designer sets their own boundaries. For me, there are a few things that matter more than anything else and they are: a) My design contributes towards preserving our heritage and identity; b) It contributes towards sustaining not only the craft but also the craftsmen; and c) Quality comes first because it is the product as of its value that people buy and not just the cause. Given the global influences, there is a fusion of culture that we live in today, however, it's important to talk about our identity and how it has evolved but within the framework of who we are. I use my furniture as my art that talks about cultural relevance and connection to us as individuals through time.

**MA: Can you explain how the furniture is designed, Just a brief explanation of the process. And which part excites you the most?**

SKN: It starts with inspiration. I like travelling, especially within Pakistan. Finding nooks and corners around rural Pakistan that are bursting with tradition and people with hearts of gold. Meeting people from different parts of Pakistan, dining with them, working with them is like a window into the past and an opportunity into the future. The second part comes with me pouring ideas and sketching onto my notebook. Once I have gotten the ergonomics of the design, I sit down with the craftsmen and further explore the possibilities. Its hard to point out which part I love working on the most because each process has its own interesting elements. Travelling would probably take the cake though.



**MA: Do you think that the more contemporary a design is the more expensive it becomes? If you agree, then what reasons have you observed?**

SKN: Not necessarily. Contemporising is not something that adds cost to a piece. There are 2 things that decide the cost of furniture piece: manufacturing costs like labour, material and design. The more a design is adding value to the user's experience, the more valuable the design. The amount of work on a design can be gauged by its detail and ability to solve a problem or fulfill a function as well as the innovation that the design is bringing.

**MA: If I am buying a pure oak wood chair from Madina Market that costs me, let's say, PKR 20,000 and the same chair with a slight contemporary touch costs me PKR 100,000 from Paimona. Why should I buy from Paimona? Do you have any marketing strategy for that?**

SKN: I hope I can someday sell a chair for Rs. 100,000! But that is not the case right now. Apart from the value, I spoke about earlier that a carefully designed piece of furniture has (the more carefully designed, the more expensive), different markets are for different people based on the experience they expect or want including the quality and finishes of the pieces. And as the experience differs greatly, so does the cost. Also, with Paimona we try and make sure that the makers are remunerated well for their work which is not a common practice. At Paimona, we believe that our craft is carried forward by the craftsmen and unless part of the value is directed towards them and their quality of life, it will not be sustainable.

In today's market, with so many options to choose from, it is nice to have people who have worked with you share their experience with people they know. For me, thanks to my generous customers, it has worked quite well.

**MA: As there are already local furniture makers, big brands, designers etc. what makes you unique from other furniture makers?**

SKN: The thing about designing your own furniture is that you can have your own language of design and your pieces are unique from anyone else's. There are a lot of people who are doing some really good work in furniture and interiors, but you stand apart with your design language or trademark style. Again, I would say experience is also something that sets us apart.

**MA: When did you start furniture designing and how have things changed over the years, since you begun in this industry?**

SKN: I started, officially, 3 years ago and it has been a roller coaster ride – just the way I like it. Apart from learning a lot myself, I have seen people evolve around me as well. The process started much before I came into the industry, but I certainly did see a big change in people's awareness of the kind of spaces they want to live in since I have been in it. Just the realisation that your living/office space has a lot of impact on the quality of life says a lot about how they will go about improving their spaces. As a designer, it is amazing to have more and more people wanting to focus on the design before diving into changing/creating their interiors. As much as I love working with clients who give you creative freedom, it is also a lot of fun working with clients who are involved in the process – sharing their research and ideas when we are designing.

**MA: Have your practices changed to keep up with new technologies?**

SKN: Technology plays a big role when it comes to hardware and there are so many new gadgets out there that make furniture and interiors interactive and fun. I love using them in my furniture.

**MA: How much labour work and time is required to make the furniture?**

SKN: It depends on what we are creating. Time varies from 4-5 days to a month. The level of detail, process and intricacy of a piece decides where it falls on that timeline.

**MA: Please share an experience in which, you presented to a group. What was the situation and how did it go?**

SKN: In 2017, I conducted workshops in universities in interior Sindh in collaboration with The Nest I/O Tech Incubator for Students to 'Improve Communication Skills through Improv'. During this workshop, I explained the importance of effective communication and how improvisation can help as well as engaged them in activities to show them how it works first-hand.

In one such university in Khairpur, I was trying to encourage the young women in the audience to participate as much as the men were since they were extremely shy but to no avail. One brave young man came up to me and told me that the reason they will not participate is that they will be harassed about it by their fellow male classmates for months. I was stunned. I was angry at the men in the audience, yet they did not seem bothered by this remark against them. To them, it was 'normal'. As much as we talk about speaking up about such issues, it is difficult to realise that you are in the middle of one but better yet have a mic in your hand! It took me a full minute to find my voice and when I did, I took my own lesson and improvised the rest of my workshop into improv, communication and respect.

We did end up getting some women to participate (quite a few lefts and I could not do anything to hold them back) but I had to work with those who were still in the room. On our way back from Khairpur, we were reading out the reviews that those students had written for us and one of those reviews made it all worth it for me. It said: "Apart from it being a fun activity, I learnt one thing today that I could never have imagined that men and women can work together." I was over the moon. That one person is all that mattered to me because that one person is all that made the difference. And so, I continue to teach, to share my experience and knowledge with those who lack the opportunity and the privilege that we have. It may not be enough but one person at a time is all that matters.

Maheen Aziz is the Assitant-Editor at ArtNow Pakistan and freelance writer. She holds a Master's Degree in Political Science from Karachi University .



Review | January 2019

# Through the looking glass at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture

*The annual Degree Show, 2018.*

by Sara Yawar

The works of 23 graduates were displayed at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture early this December. As always, the outgoing batch displays a body of work which comprises of visuals created after a year long process. The graduating batch had an immense variety of artworks, taking into consideration the play with scale, colour, medium and most interestingly, the use of multimedia as a great number of visuals comprised of sound, video and, light.

An eye-catching body of work by Sadia Safder comprised of visuals created through wire mesh. Various landscapes were made which documented the life in certain areas of Karachi, particularly the routes of Saddar and Korangi. Her work discussed the process of shifting and change, since the artist had to move from Defence to Korangi after sixteen years; the visuals having a blurred and murky texture were possibly symbolic of the artist's process of adapting to newer surroundings. The grainy and faded texture of the mesh also seemed to invoke a sense of nostalgia, as if the artist's recollection of her past was dissolving into these layers of mesh making her present setting coming into prominence.



*Images courtesy Sara Yawar*



Sahl Shoiab Motiwala's body of work, which was titled 'Here They Lie', consisted of charcoal drawings discussing her tendency of creating imaginative patterns in objects where none seem to be existing, a tendency known as Pareidolia. Putting emphasis on the folds and textures of clothes, the artist created human faces and figures, reflecting upon the thinking pattern of humans in which they form certain beliefs attached to specific objects. The faces depicted in the artist's work seem to be those belonging to certain creatures, a possible reflection upon the artist's mental construct; the expressions of the figures depict agony and horror, which could not have been portrayed any better without the use of the extreme darks and hues of grey that helped contain the focus.

Abeer Arshad's installation titled 'Fool's Paradise' discussed the concept of environmental pollution; if observed from afar, they seem like vines or fungus but as one observes closely, they are nothing but metal bottle caps.

The deceptive look of the shrubs displayed against the wall shed light on the fact that how environmental destruction is insidious, inconspicuous and highly rigid, taking the use of metal and wires into consideration which are hard and strong materials.

Samra Mekhri's paintings which were titled 'Through the Looking Glass' comprised of miniature sized visuals that explored her hobby of observing and capturing her surroundings through the camera lens. Her visuals, which had a muted colour palette, consisted of scenes from Karachi city that were depicted through the use of distortion, making them look like actual photographic images. The visuals would not have been more engaging if it were not for the small scale paintings; not only did they keep the focus contained but also left the viewer to think about their daily life and surroundings which, one does not give importance to, considering the occupied and busy life of Karachi city, which, the artist captured beautifully in her language.

Lastly, Kiran Saleem's sculptural pieces titled 'Was Her' discussed an incident in which the artist was being watched without her consent. The artist had used metal washers to create tough and solid draperies but at the same time, those pieces were fragile due to their construction, a possible reflection upon the nature of women comprising of both these characteristics despite being complete opposites. The see-through drapery could also be reflective of the voyeuristic male gaze and this particular form of art work was possibly made to be presented as a shield for the female body as it is still something that lacks security in today's world.

Despite shedding light on the works of a few artists, there was an overall interesting variety of art works displayed at this year's degree show which were not only visually appealing but they have also paved way for other emerging artists to experiment and create their own individual language to engage and communicate with the viewers.



*Sara Yawar is a visual artist and writer from Karachi, Pakistan. She received her BFA from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2017.*



# An enchanting encounter

*The National College of Arts, Rawalpindi, Degree Show 2018*

by Mariam Qureshi

Although National College of Arts, Rawalpindi, is young and in its inception, it is fast maturing and catching up to the mainstream art scene of Pakistan. In fact, it is now playing a major role in being a purveyor of Pakistani art. The degree show of the Fine Art department, 2018, clearly narrated how well rounded the graduating class was in reference to conception, comprehension and execution of new and novel ideas. The work was refreshing as it was mature. The artists used elements of kitsch, fauvism, surrealism, humor, caricatures and animations in creative and bold ways. In this article, distinctive works, that really stood out, have been shared.

Areej Ahmed received a distinction in Painting and the title of her work was 'The End of Innocence'. She had explored childlike drawings to express social issues. Ahmed explains "I have painted stories and memories from my childhood to help children to learn to speak up when something abusive happens to them; be it sexual or mental abuse. With each painting comes a story of my childhood that have effected me deeply." A painting depicts a dark room with children inside and talks about how a trusted steward fondled the artist while they were playing in a dark room. Another painting depicts the artist being stark naked in a public place. This is the artist's recurrent childhood nightmare. Ahmed's work was not only conceptually strong but the visual translation and depiction of her story through naive drawings were brilliantly executed.

Nadia Batool, another distinction holder from the Department of Miniature, stood out because of her immaculate sense of composition and an interesting usage of architectural and public space. Her work was painstakingly intricate and the fact that she had used a three-dimensional effect to depict the architecture gave her miniatures a sculptural affect. She had drawn a comparison between the lush green scenery of Islamabad and the dry barren and brown landscape of her hometown Quetta. She says, "I have merged both the landscapes and put elements of architecture and landscapes into each other." One such example is a diptych in which she placed a typical house in Quetta on a green mountain top of hills in Islamabad while in the other part, placed a green covering on a barren hill in Quetta. Her most appealing work is where she merged the architecture of residential areas of both cities together, using the miniature technique and giving it a sculptural form.

Laraib Ahmed is another distinction holder from the Department of Painting. Ahmed's work was about dreams being representatives of reality. Her work talks about the REM phase of sleep in which human limbs and people are represented as organic form. Her work is inspired by themes of Surrealism and Fauvism. She explains "We are living in two realities; one is the state in which we are living and the other is the dream state. My paintings are channeling that energy. Individual figures are disconnected and emerging from the background and blending in it as well but the images are in harmony. My images are about ripples in reality just like when you throw a stone in water, it creates ripples in water similarly if one reality is disturbed it creates disturbance in the alternate reality."

Mah Misha Fatima received a distinction from the Department of Printmaking. Her use of line etching with watercolour sat well with her strips of caricatures. Her body of work was simple caricatures on the life of trees and it was her creative humor that won the hearts of the jurors. She had narrated simple humorous stories with a comic strip effect. One such story was based on the mulberry tree that Van Gogh painted in his last days in the asylum. Fatima added humor to it by narrating how the grandson of the painted Mulberry was boasting to another tree that Van Gogh painted his ancestor. Another humorous concept was termites experimenting with the painted tree bark whether it was real or not; either by tasting it or sending it to their research cell. The termites also send a police force to investigate a murder of trees and the culprits turn out to be college carpenters. Fatima's work was not only creative in her comic style humour but her presentation was unique and aesthetic in its representation.

Following Batool, Maiha Furqan also received a distinction in Miniature. She chose Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as a subject for her thesis. Her work stood out because she created a space that compelled an average audience to empathise with the artist's predicament due to OCD. One part of her thesis was based on a video installation in which she showed a girl pulling her hair while, narrating her urge to pull out the different textures of hair. She stated, "It is an invisible act but the obsession slowly seeps into our life and interferes with daily activities." Another piece was a panel of triangles with circular braids made out of synthetic hair which was of the same color and texture as the artist's hair. But the artist had an obsessive need to use 60 strands of hair in all her pieces. She explains "I had to do this for my personal sanity although the viewer would never know how many strands of hair are used in each piece. My work is very space oriented as the viewer enters an immaculate white space with his feet and shoes covered so as not to jar the white space with the soiled feet. Hence, the viewer is prepared, beforehand, that the artist's works will generate empathy."

Afreen Fatima is another distinction holder in Miniature. Her work was well-planned and spoke eloquently of a simple concept. While talking about her work she said, "My work is on how the only physical thing that you share no matter where one is - is the sky. I am talking about space and I used sky as my major image." She had set up a shelf with 580 photographs taken of the sky. Some sent to her by somebody and some she had taken herself. She had painted miniatures of skies with the bigger paintings showing two skies overlapping and merging into each other. She also set up an installation of a chair and desk with letters she had written for various persons in her life. A video installation was set up with images of two different skies and dialogue between two people living at a distance from each other. Fatima's work had a strong element of nostalgia and the skies she painted had a very therapeutic, serene and calming effect.

Other works that I enjoyed were Maha Zafar who received an Honours degree from the Department of Printmaking had set up a very distinctive installation. Her thesis titled "Light of all lights", was an interplay with lights, pvc sheets and chrome sheets. There were two installation and her concept was self-awareness. A video installation showed the space of two rooms with pvc sheet and lights. When the light in one room was dim, one could see the people on the other side and when the light was high in the viewer's room, they could see themselves. Even when the audience could see the other people, they could also see themselves. The bench in the area makes people pause and sit down to experience the whole concept.

The second installation was a chrome silver pvc sheet. "We use silver in divine and glorified images and the colour represents the glory inside you and the spotlights are being projected on the sheet and because the folds of the sheet cause waves in your reflection. There are motors that spin behind the sheet and they cause ripples and vibrations on the sheets and the sound of the motor depicts worldly distractions" she explained.

Ayat Tanveer received an Honours degree in Painting. Tanveer's work was titled "My security blanket". She added, "Through my personal experience I have noticed that children find security and comfort from their mothers but if, for some reason, the mother is removed from their presence they seek comfort from fuzzy toy animals and blankets etc. Even as we grow up, we seek comfort in objects. I wanted to use an object in my work that everybody could relate to. A toy from their childhood and the most common one is a Teddy bear. The texture is welcoming and comforting. I have added cloth patterns and juxtaposed a teddy bear in front to indicate that although, comfort items have negative connotations, they have a positive effect on one's mental health."

Qurur ul Ain Mushtaq was the only printmaker who was brave enough to stick to the typical technique of printmaking- wood cut to come up with aesthetically appealing images. Her images were linear patterns synchronising to make obscure portraits.

The images emerged and dissipate at the same time.

Lines working together to make characteristic portraits. Her work was titled "Patterns of an infinite journey". She explains, "My work is the journey of Man; be it, up and down, or good and bad, it all leaves a pattern. The fact is that, the human being's journey is an infinite process and I have expressed this infinity through continuous line work."

Numaira Javed is from the Department of Painting. Her

work was nostalgic and had a slight humor to it. It had a happily down the memory lane stance to it. She depicted images on canvas that were cut out to appear as the window of the back seat of a car. She has shown various persons looking out through the car back seat window. She narrated, "I love traveling and observing things and I take photographs of every place that I have visited. I associate the backseat window to my childhood. Hence, I am very sentimentally attached to the backseat. The dusty window with a wiper cleaning symbolises how to cleanse ones mind and see the beautiful scenery one is surrounded with."

Zainab Ali is another printmaker who had worked out of the box. Her pieces were frames with collage images juxtaposed with nylon wires. Her work had interesting negative stance about how lies severely dominate our lives. She explains, "Everything is a fib; since childhood we are taught lies the encourage false memories, fantasies and dreams". She use multiple techniques: drypoint, collage, casting and nylon weaves. Flowers in the frames narrated how teenagers imagine life to be a bed of flowers which are another self-created lie. In another image she used lips to represent wagging tongues and faces covered with goldleaf, representing makeup women use to hide their imperfections.

Saleha Arif from the Printmaking Department made laser cut images on wood to depict the story of coral reefs. Coral reefs are living things that grow widely in the sea and when they die they become hard and transform into bright neon colors. She explains, "I have used an enclosed space because coral reefs grow in covered spaces and are surrounded by fish and plants. The hue of pink neon light I used, depicts not only the neon colors of coral reefs, but also is the symbolic colour of a martyred soldier in many cultures. Similarly, in my eyes, the coral reefs are like martyred soldiers, dying because of global warming caused by humans."

The thesis was refreshing and encouraging. Pindi NCA has come far and it is clear that the focus of the teaching faculty is not only on brushing up the skills of students but serious efforts are being made to make sure the future artists of Pakistan think outside the box and address issues boldly.

**Mariam Qureshi** is a regular contributor for Artnow Pakistan.



Printmaking, Qurur ul Ain Mushtaq, 2018, image courtesy the artist



Photo Essay | January 2019

# A visual exploration

*Department of Visual Studies, Karachi University Degree Show, 2018.*



Karachi University, Department of Visual Studies displayed the works of their seven Fine Art graduates during the annual degree show held in December 2018 of which, two fine artists graduated with distinctions in their thesis. The graduates were: Ainee, Ayaz Hussain, Ehsan Usman, Ramsha Nesar, Saliha Naz, Sana Mirza and Syeda Fizza Fatima.



All images courtesy Karachi University



Review | February 2019

# Gateway to the fantastical

*The National College of Arts, Lahore Degree Show, 2018*

by Hira Shah

The Fine Art thesis display this year, at NCA has been alike a landscape that serves to be both mythical, as well as palpable in nature. Interestingly, each painting crosses the threshold of its canvas and so takes more than a few yards on the wall. Each artwork serves to be a gateway to another imaginary world, a world that spreads everywhere, in every possible direction; at the back of the painting & even on each side. What we see of the students' work, hanging there on the wall, is just a chunk of its meaning. The rest is what we as viewers have to find, by walking down the imagery lane. It won't be wrong to say that NCA's Thesis Display indeed supports the proposition that painting is a form of language that can be read like a prose or poetry. As Curtis Carter concludes, "*Shapes act as syntactic elements in the languages of painting styles*" and so, with an aim to dive into the sea that each painting offered, I had to visit 15 spacious display spaces, not once, but several times, as each time it gave me a new perspective and added more sense to my already perceived knowledge. Each hall offers a world of its own making the spaces altogether a magnificent galaxy of Fine Art.



Anas Abbas chose the frame of ordinary objects that we overlook in our daily lives and magnified them through his paintings; objects such as, windows, door hooks & towel racks. Hassan Furqan painted plain walls on his canvas which had childlike doodles, wall cracks and impressions of tape. Khubaib Irfan painted dream-like paintings, leaving white silhouettes of humans in between, suggesting the presence of the ones invisible to the naked eye. Syed Ali Rizvi adorns the four walls with huge charcoal paintings including, figures of both men and women, suggesting the traditions of a particular Islamic sect. Yaseen Khan uses small circular reflective sheets on canvas and plays with them in a larger space.



Starting off with a minimalist style of painting, the thesis works gradually transformed into grand narratives and provided a thought provoking imagery that revolved around both subjective and objective perspectives. After the four year graduation program, the thesis of 2018 portrayed, well learned techniques, coherent concepts and studious efforts by the graduates. In addition, it reflected the hardwork and supervision of the mentors who, every year succeed in setting a new touchstone, in terms of, execution and concept by ensuring nothing is being recreated or plagiarized.

To begin with, Miniature thesis students explored *Wasli* paper (hand-made paper for miniature) in their own way with techniques like gouache, *neemrang* and *siyah qalam*. Zulfiqar Rind used the metaphor of black & white dogs in his paintings and portrayed the aggression and terror dwelling deep inside him, reflecting his childhood experiences. Rehmat Ullah uses a somewhat crumbled tracing sheet to cover the obscene images drawn with gouache hence, gives a new visual perspective to the idea of freedom of expression. Muhammad Jawad transferred the pages of newspapers with headlines on *wasli* and uses the technique of *neemrang*, making the pages slightly legible and yet vague. Howra Batool portrays the abyss of blasts and destruction with dark wall paintings and a projection in between that hung from the ceiling with fish-wires. The projection displayed the human remnants in descending rows that are usually found after deadly explosions. Muzna Mahmood's collection of painting were like sheets of x-ray which, captured every intrinsic and minute detail thus, leaving the viewer awestruck.

In printmaking, Shehbaz Ahmed portrays a lonely woman sitting in a bedroom and in another artwork, on a sofa. Despite the solitude, the paintings are titled, 'I'm happy I & II'. Another student, Khadija Khalid drew black mountains and composed them in a gothic style, leaving the viewers struggling to dissect each stroke.

In sculpture, Hidayat Marwat makes brown human sculptures and presents them in two compositions. One work is of three thin men shirtless standing with their backs against each other, while their gestures and expressions suggest a state of helplessness and fear. Another composition is of a heap of mud, where different human figures are half buried and half visible.

**"Painting is mute poetry, and poetry is blind painting"**

-Leonardo da Vinci

Walking through the passages, corridors and halls, one surely can hear the paintings speaking their heart out; telling each visitor of its tales and purpose. No matter how much one can rely on their sight, they still can not ignore or forsake what is being said to them in a subtle and covert way.

*Hira Shah is a regular contributor for Artnow Pakistan.  
All images courtesy National College of Arts, Lahore.*





Review | February 2019

# Hues of Diversity

by Maheen Aziz

In collaboration with International Watercolor Society, Art Citi Gallery held the second part of the watercolor show titled 'Hues of Diversity II' on December 21st, 2018 at Beach Luxury Hotel, Karachi.

The show consisted of 24 eminent and senior watercolorists from around the world who displayed an array of watercolor paintings. The distinctive and contemporary approach to the medium, while maintaining the transparency and beauty of watercolor, artists won the hearts of the art lovers. The artists spoke about their culture, people, traditions and lifestyle of their countries in a unique way.

Abdul Hayee, a self-taught, famous and senior most watercolorist, highly influences many young artists towards watercolor medium. His masterly and controlled brush strokes produced vivid images of nature, and the colors used provoked an instinct of reality in the paintings.

Ali Abbas Syed, internationally acclaimed watercolorists, Country Representative of Pakistan to International Watercolor Society, continued to paint the people of Thar including men, women, and children in their natural habitat; creating a sandy and dusty atmosphere in which they live happily.

A H Rizvi is another watercolorist who has gathered fame from the world for presenting a mesmerising and unique set of Mughal era paintings. The figures and features of the men and women were overly exaggerated and painted in intimate poses to add an element of beauty and romance.

Having a profound knowledge of his surroundings and always highlighting the issues of Baluchistan in his artworks, Akram Dost Baloch continued to express his strong sentiments towards the injustice in society through his monochromatic watercolor paintings. The watery flow of the paintings would compel an observer to think in different dimensions and perceive his work through multiple angles; hence one could perceive his paintings as landscapes or caves, waterfalls or distorted faces or destinations.

The founder of the International Watercolor Society and serving this platform for more than 6 years, AnaturDogan has been spreading the message of peace and love among fellow countries and that could also be observed in his artworks. He enjoyed painting people belonging to different ethnicity and culture. He used loud hues to paint these faces and figures that spoke about happiness, peace, and love.

*"I have never seen such a huge collection of artworks, not only that but such amazing paintings that I can't take my eyes off of them. I am in love with these paintings"* Adnan Rashid, Manager Events, Beach Luxury Hotel.

Cuneyt Senyavas, a Busra based artist, chose to paint the city life in watercolors. The choice of colors, different weathers showed in his paintings and deep understanding of the medium kept his paintings simple yet mesmerising. Javed Tababaei also highlighted the beauty of city life by painting cityscapes in lighter colors to depict the peaceful life of the city and added darker tones to the building to make them visually interesting.

Author of many art books, David Poxon believed in painting those corners or objects which human easily abandon. He enjoys watching the transformation of these objects and how nature treats them that is unheeded and forgotten. He painted old locked and jammed doors, rusted taps, and abounded basement that expressed his visual interpretations.

Portugal based artist, Eudes Correia's work centered upon ordinary people, perhaps who are not important to the world but his work revolved around them. He used pastel colors to paint these humans in their natural habitat to portray the simple life an ordinary person lives. Another artist, Fu Man, from Hong Kong, made the daily life and scenes his subject to paint.

Pakistani artist, Ghulam Hussain's works revolved around the desert life of Hakra Civilisation. He filled his canvas with a lot of bright colors that could depict the joy and happenings in the life of the people who live in deserts. He tried to highlight the beauty of the ordinary life in the desert and gave a chance to the viewers to see beyond the paintings through his work.

Ghulam Nabi Qazi has been experimenting with watercolor medium and introducing new techniques. His main subject were old heritage, architecture, and buildings of Pakistan, mainly Hyderabad, Thatta, and Sukkur. He introduced these watercolor paintings in bright as well as monochromatic tones that tend to bring life to the dying architecture and also spoke about the significance mainly of these buildings.

*"You can have a look at all the cultures from around the world in this huge exhibition. I am happy to see people from all age groups, senior artists, art students, collectors, mid-career artists, who have come to support national, as well as, foreign artists who don't even belong to Pakistan."* Fatima Ali, Committee member, International Watercolor Society.

Inspired by the school of Mughal miniature art, Hajra Mansoor portrayed women as a symbol of beauty in her paintings. She explained the standards of beauty Asians have in their minds by exaggerating the features and figures of women that revolved around the fantasy image of a woman and beauty symbols. One could observe big coloured eyes, delicate hands, and long hair. She decorated women in her paintings with bangles, jewels, and flowers and showed them beautifying themselves with kohl or being busy around pigeons.



Artwork by Ali Abbas, image courtesy Art Citi

Iilya Ibryaev, a Russian artist depicted the beauty of nature without human intervention. He painted what solely belongs to nature. His adept strokes brought the paintings to an extent of realism that one would doubt as if it is a photograph or a watercolor painting. He praised the beauty of nature that is untouched and eternal.

A USA based senior watercolorist and known as a watercolor magician, John Salmenin displayed colorful eye-catching watercolor paintings of urban landscapes. His artworks were an extraordinary approach and exploration of the watercolor medium by fusing the transparency of watercolors with abstraction, thus exploring a contemporary side of the medium.

Where other artists glamorised individuals and explored the medium in other ways, Linda A Doll and Sasa Marjanovic did not stress over the beauty of individuals but painted the still life and people. Doll called her paintings 'Peoplescape' in which she painted these individuals who do not dwell upon glamour of personality but stress over their identity. Whereas Marjanovic's focused on portraits and figures whose eyes held all the expressions and seemed if they were speaking to the viewer.

Nader Mohazabina, a Tehran based artist, portrayed the cultures and life of Tehran through his paintings. He attended the exhibition and loved how people responded to his artworks. He said, *"I am glad to be in Pakistan and experiencing this overwhelming response of everyone"*.

Mohazabina also gave a live demonstration of watercolor painting. The process from mixing colors with water and then the light that slightly shined through the colors and reflected back to the eyes of the audience was mesmerising.

*"The watercolor medium is believed to be a difficult medium, but as I just looked at the process in this demonstration, it was so peaceful and relaxing to my eyes that I would never want this artist to stop painting."* A visitor, Madiha Naz shared her thoughts.

Nicolas Lopez from Peru is known for his black and white watercolor paintings. He adopted a different pattern and colors to show the diversity of the medium. He painted cityscapes and objects that usually ignored and abandoned by the human. The black watery images on white canvases were worth looking.

An Italian artist, Pasqualino Fracasso beautified the nature, still objects and captured the beauty of nature on his canvases. He portrayed through his work the intervention of nature in human life like rain or snow and how it makes life worth living and beautiful.

Qudsia Nisar is one of those Pakistani artists who has brought the watercolor medium to a contemporary extent. Nisar believed that physical reality is restricted and caged whereas the abstract reality is free and has no boundary; therefore she enhanced the true beauty that is abstract, in her artworks.

Two artists from India, Rajat Subhra and Sanjay Desai beautifully portrayed the cityscapes. The balance of tones and shapes were noticeable that could also separate the portrayal of a busy moment and a quiet moment of the city life. The wise choice of colours, shadowing and detailing of the artworks made the paintings more attractive.

Ze Ze Lai put all her imaginations on the canvases to create mystical scenes. She painted flowers and birds in bright and soft hues. With her masterly and manipulative strokes, she created an illusion as if one is seeing these images in a dream. She painted birds as a symbol of peace and flowers as of love.

One's eyes could never get tired of gazing at these alluring master's pieces that, one after another, tells a new story of different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles, through watercolor paintings. Many artists introduced new techniques to stretch the boundaries of watercolor medium towards modern.

*'Hues of Diversity II' opened at Beach Luxury Hotel and continued at Art Citi Gallery from Dec 21st to Dec 24th, 2018.*

**Maheen Aziz is an Assistant Editor at ArtNow Pakistan and a writer based in Karachi. She holds a Masters degree in Political Science from Karachi University .**



# War and peace

by Nimra Khan

It is not often that art audiences in Pakistan get to experience works that offer a glimpse into history, into a different era and the motivations that drive artists of the time.

Goethe-Institut recently presented an exhibition that allowed for just such an opportunity, with an extensive collection of 86 prints and etchings by German artist Otto Dix, dating back to the early 1920s. The exhibition title, “War & Social Criticism”, is an apt summarization of the works on display, which range from Dix’s explorations of the marginalia of German society with provocative flair, to a gripping look at the devastation of war — two themes that he is known and celebrated for.

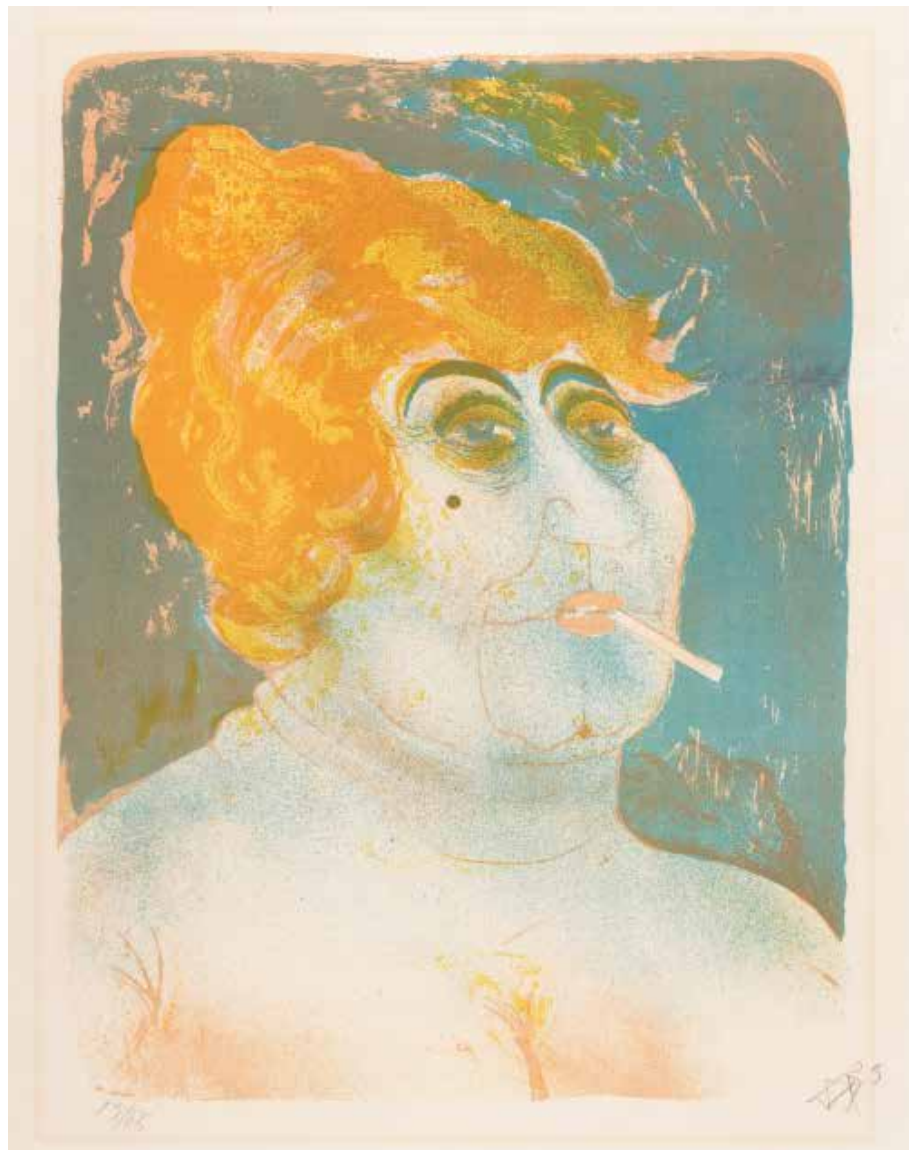
The German painter and printmaker is known for his realistic and brutally honest depictions of German society during the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. His style ranges from Expressionism to Dadaism, but he is most widely recognized as one of the most important artists of the New Objectivity movement. The works on display paint a picture of 1920s Germany, and the post-war climate that shaped its society. The imagery is provocative, gruesome, and at times heartbreaking, using the language of caricature to satirize the ills of society, critiquing its centre through a look at its peripheries, and portraying those aspects that most did not want to see or talk about. “Procuress” is a portrait of a heavyset, perhaps middle-aged woman with a cigarette between her lips, which, as art historian Andrea Welz explains during her guided tour, was a shocking image for that time, when cigarettes were a new thing, and smoking in public, especially for women, was not common. As Welz puts it, Dix’s art “*knows no taboos*”.

“Sex Murder” shows the corpse of a scantily clad prostitute, a gruesome display of sexual violence, while “Sex Murderer” reveals the face of the monster in the middle of the act, amongst sliced up limbs. Multiple works depict unconventional sexual relations between prostitutes and their clients, while a number of works champion outcasts of society, such as circus performers, as “Scorners of Death”. However, a large number of his works focus on war cripples, which paints a true depiction of the post war era and the ways in which it affected the veterans.

“Matchseller”, which he also turned into a painting, shows a crippled beggar on the streets, ignored by the passersby. It is interesting that the artist ignores rules of perspective and skews the standing figures to display as much of their legs as possible to pronounce their privilege and the contrast between them and the protagonist of the piece. There is a lot of such subtle symbolism in his works, where composition choices that appear random actually serve a purpose, such as the dogs in the foreground of “Sex Murder” which signify a kind of animal instinct that lies at the heart of both sex and violence.

One of Dix’s most iconic paintings “Grosstadt (Triptych)” in a way combines his depictions of upper-class intellectuals and outcasts of society to critique what lies at the heart of both, creating a true encapsulation of post-war German society of the 20s. While the panels on the right show us a scene from a nightclub with jazz musicians, dancing women with short hair and knee-length skirts, and ample wine, the left panel depicts the scene outside where crippled beggars and prostitutes roam. These dichotomous scenes are both symptoms of the same ailment: war; while one is a direct consequence, the other is a deeper, more psychological manifestation of it, born from the need to escape its realities.

The rest of the show focuses on some 50 prints from his series of 500 which are more direct depictions of the brutality of war and the devastation that the First World War caused.



As a volunteer soldier on the front lines, Dix saw his share of the harsh realities of war, its horrors and the consequences on not just human lives but on the landscape and wildlife as well. From dead horses to pockmarked smoking fields, to mangled faces stricken with pain and horror, to destroyed homes and cities under attack, every gruesome aspect is covered in these works with strikingly blatant and raw visuals.

In all these works, Dix’s relationship with the body is intriguing, as there is a somewhat deliberate rejection of idealistic depictions. From caricatures faces and stylised bodies, to mangled faces, crippled soldiers and violently sliced up bodies, none of his depictions adhere to the rules of the perfect human form. Perhaps it was a reaction to the art that came before, or the fact that he himself survived the war physically whole while so many fellow veterans were living crippled lives, but there seems to be something about the imperfect, unconventional and desecrated form of the body that seems to attract Dix and inspire his imagery.

Unfortunately, as Welz explains, Dix’s promising career of the 20s was soon thwarted by the Nazi regime in 1933, when his anti-war rhetoric and provocative imagery was dubbed “degenerate” and he not only lost his teaching job but was also not allowed to exhibit or sell his work. Perhaps this is a testament to his influence on public moods and sentiments, and the power art holds to drive certain narratives and shape societies and their mindsets, but it also sadly reflects the tendency of certain parties to exercise control and manipulate these mindsets through censorship and suppression of free speech. The world soon forgot the ugly truths about war and its pervasive negative influence on society, and history soon repeated itself.



All images courtesy of VM Art Gallery

**Nimra Khan** is an artist and art writer based in Karachi. She graduated with a BFA from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.



Review | February 2019

# Transcriptase

by Sara Yawar

A group show titled 'Transcriptase: The genetics of international and regional art and design' took place at Full Circle gallery on the 7th of December, 2018. This particular show, being the third segment of Artists of the Manifesto of Nomadism, was a joint venture of three artists: Manizhe Ali, Ali Khan and Paul-Mehdi Rizvi. The show comprised of a detailed study between objects and their subjects, reflecting upon the contemporary art and its content here in Pakistan. The manifesto's foundation, initially laid by Mehdi Rizvi, sheds light upon the ideology of Nomadism which, according to the artist, is the creation of contemporary art, taking into consideration the exploration of materials with the context. The artists together, constructed a body of work which went through individual experiences of the artists in order to shed light upon the idea of Nomadism; the process of transformation and adaptation.

Manizhe Ali's work consisted of precious jewellery pieces which were made through interactions with the local *Karigar* system in Karachi. A trained artist, her work sheds light upon the concept of value and beauty and during the process of building on her particular practice, Ali learned that even jewellery has roots attached to 'Structuralism', which is the study of the relationship between an object and its subject, that may be completely contrasting, and which, this group of artist thoroughly explored in their work. An interesting piece by Ali titled 'Natural History' consisted of a glass box in which a lizard-like creature, sculpted out of plaster was placed alongside a butterfly ornament and a piece of necklace with precious stones.

Not only was this particular piece making a statement, but by placing two contrasting artworks cum elements together, it left the viewer questioning the concept of worth, both artistically and commercially. In the end, both pieces have commercial value and yet, they are also works of art, leaving the respective viewers to decide and define these pieces with an individual perception.

The second artist Ali Khan, who was trained as an interior designer abroad, diversified his practice to research on and create contemporary furniture. Having extensively explored Pakistan, Khan took inspiration from Punjab and Sindh's metallic and ceramic industry to work and create furniture

The third artist was Paul-Mehdi Rizvi, who made work which seemed to symbolise the artist's own interpretations and also took into consideration how the viewers would perceive his visuals. Building his body of work on the basis of psychoanalysis and structuralism, the artist took to discuss his home city by not only constructing abstract visuals, but also by using materials which might be considered out of the ordinary, taking into consideration the nature of the work and concept. Taking the example of his work titled 'Horizontal Line', the artist had used two canvases on which, he had seemingly applied various pigments and materials. It seemed more like an abstract piece of work but it could perhaps, be sym-

bolic of the artist's own interpretation of a horizontal line, taking into consideration the rawness of his color palette and the visual itself. The indistinct imagery is possibly a reflection upon the state of contemporary art in Pakistan which is not thought upon or practiced widely in this country.

Despite addressing completely different

concerns, it is interesting and heartwarming to see a collective trying to address the critical framework of art in Pakistan, with their own theories and perceptions; be it Freudian or simply their own way of analysing through various other means, leaving creatives and viewers to decide and ponder upon the future of contemporary art in Pakistan.

*Sara Yawar is a visual artist and writer from Karachi, Pakistan. She received her BFA from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2017.*



locally with artisans. Khan's work, which was the product of a nomadic research, seemed to be having a fusion of natural and man-made materials. One of his works titled 'Aura', comprised of a canvas painted in golden pigment, under which was a polished piece of rosewood, possibly the artist's interpretation of a scene he experienced while travelling or perhaps, even an imaginary construct just to relive that experience of being in the natural surroundings. It is interesting how the artist had created and reflected upon a whole experience within his visuals; not only on his own but for the viewers to have a taste of it as well.



*Images courtesy Full Circle Gallery, Karachi*



# Cornered by Spaces

by Jovita Alvares

Existing in a space essentially creates a non-verbal conversation between the participant and their surroundings. The conversations work by means of interaction, where either the atmosphere is physically manipulated by the living inhabitant or the unmoving space influences in the inhabitant in some way. As an artist, one is succumbed to such influences and in turn integrates it into their practice, which is what could be seen from a recent exhibition at Studio Seven, Karachi. Curated by Arif Hussain Khokar, 'Spaces' was a group exhibition that displayed the works of four artists namely, Asad Nizamani, Bahreera Basit, Namrah Fatima and Sabeen Ahsan.



The works are buildings and balconies varying in size and placed one on top of each other, much like an uneven Jenga tower. They are reminiscent of the general concrete maze that has enveloped Karachi over the recent years. Constant construction of new housing, offices etc. can always be seen happening somewhere in the city with high rises standing just feet away from each other. It also brings to mind the kachi abadi's hidings in the corners of Karachi that cater to those who can't afford the rising estate prices.

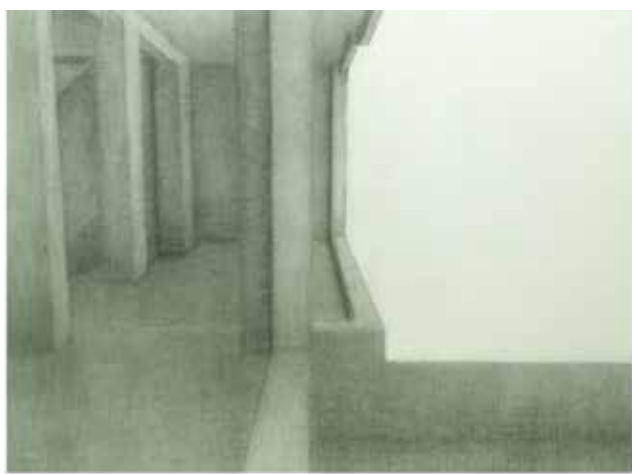
Namrah Fatima also paints scenes of over-filled and cramped up spaces. However, this artist zooms into the cabinets and storage areas of living spaces, particularly looking at the items one tends to hide from public viewing. Her realistic paintings all provide a frontal view of cupboards hiding material meant to be disposed of, those used for cleaning purposes or those kept in storage. Her works give the audience a unique viewpoint into a person's life, particularly one that they may not want you to see. The paintings appear as dirty little secrets, which also give the audience a glimpse to the type of people living in that space.



Eventually, the final product may be completely different, creating a new form, abstract in nature and different from its initial aesthetic. Ahsan describes her work as depictions of her sensory experiences, which means that the viewer is given a unique view of not only the space the artist may have been experimenting with but also the artist herself, her thoughts, feelings and reactions to the surrounding atmosphere. Her pieces add a holistic essence to the exhibition, where they invigorate more than just the visual senses.

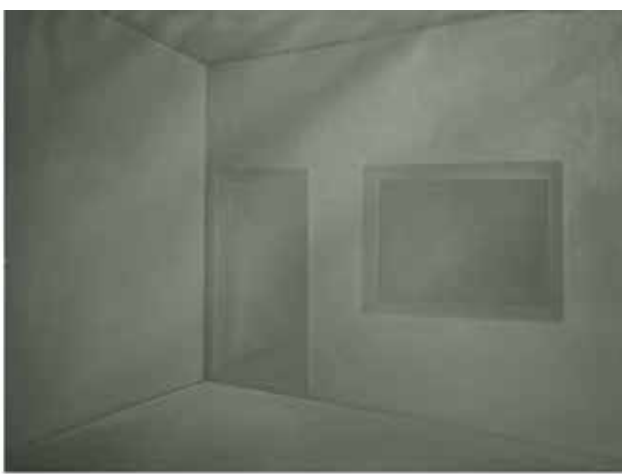


Asad Nizamani's monochromatic paintings depict silhouette-like halls, almost entirely blackened out by darkness. As the artist explains, he is intrigued and also intimidated by dimly lit spaces, which create tensions of what could possibly be lurking further in the darkness.



His works are subtle as they command attention with meekness through skillful drawing and rendering. The attention to detail present almost exact replicas of the possible space and his perspective introduces an alluring illusion of three-dimensionality onto the two-dimensional surface.

In almost direct contrast to Nizamani's dimly lit open spaces are the paintings of Bahreera Basit. The canvases are brightly coloured and claustrophobic in nature. Basit comments on the impermanence of a space and how it continues to shift.



Sabeen Ahsan looks at the impressions various forms may leave. In essence, her works become visuals of the absence of an object or the memory of a space. By using a mixture of paint and multiple imprinting techniques, the artist allows the process to dictate the outcome.



The exhibition continued from 6th November – 13th November, 2018 at Studio Seven, Karachi.

**Jovita Alvares** is a visual artist and designer for ArtNow Pakistan. She graduated from IVSAA in 2016 with a Bachelors in Fine Art.





# The Happiee Place

by Ayesha Saeed

I believe every artist, designer, book-binder, surgeon, dancer, mathematician, craftsman, chemist, a culinary master, physicist, musician or a writer has a very similar process of creating, making and solving.

All these people go to a place, where they can focus, analyse, question and resolve. For some, It is a place under a tree and for some its a well-lit corner of an academic building, some gets their inspiration from going into the woods or spending late hours in a spotless kitchen with their thoughts working under theatrical warm lights. A few create flamboyantly - a sterilised room full of surgical instruments - whole team wearing costumes moving their hands like professional dancers in perfect harmony while making sure the person on a table does not lose its rhythm. I call that space whether tangible or intangible in your mind "The Happiee Place." We all have ours - some of us are aware of it and knows when and where to access it, and some are still finding it.



ArtLab is an experimental residency program, bringing people from two professions to create dialogue,

works, and publications throughout the year, and also serves as a gallery space. Bindery offers the education programs for the community related to paper, binding, and bookarts and hopefully one day will be restoring books and working on paper conservation. Palate plays with the culinary

We had Dastan Goi session with Yousaf Bashir Qureshi, collaborated with ITP and RWB to bring 'Wellbeing Retreat for Emerging Artists'. A group of ten talented artists from seven countries came and became a part of this rich experience. Moreover, we did a wonderful experimental workshop 'Kids as Authors' along with Pakistan's first food performance as THP Jam and Pie Night.

For our second phase, there's so much more to try, explore, share, create and experience. Therefore, we will be moving into THP's new space and into the second phase on the same date we closed a year ago. Hope to see you guys on 10th March 2019 in Lahore.

*Ayesha Saeed is the Founder of SRS.*

*Images courtesy The Happiee Place*



It all started when I was a design student studying at National College of Art (NCA), there were so many questions and so many of our acts that I did not even know how to put in words that bothered me in an institutional setting. I could not articulate what they were until I went to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and eventually to the Royal College of Art. We have a fundamental issue with our society at large that we have kept the arts, sciences, humanities, and law in separate entities, therefore, the professionals of all these fields are hesitant to come together. There is a gap in language and lack of platforms for the people of all these diverse fields to meet each other and accept that they are not aware of knowledge apart from there own. In my opinion, we lack respect for each other's domains, and that is what separates us from any progressive country. I am not stating here that the west is not encountering the same problems and it is only us that are not comprehending the necessity of such exchange, but we need it more than ever now.

SRS -Saeed Research Studio's first project in Lahore is THP -The Happiee Place. It is an artist-run space which understands the need and the urgency of bringing people together to create and build a community around learning new ways of seeing and making. THP is an apolitical - social learning space for adults and kids.

To facilitate The Happiee Place's vision, we have four spaces, ArtLab, Bindery, Palate and BookYard.

curiosities and stimulates the little joys/awakenings in our mind through food performances or daily bites. Lastly, we have our Book-Yard, It is our collection of books from the old bookshops around Lahore and hopefully across Pakistan which one can purchase or read in the yard.

THP aims to put art and design in conversation with medicine, history, engineering, robotics, IT, law, social sciences, anthropology, culinary arts and more to develop a cross-cutting and honest sensibility towards our methods of thinking, creating and exhibiting.

We first launched THP on Nov 5th, 2017 and had a run for 126 days precisely until we had to vacate the premises because of a land dispute. However frustrating that experience was, I count it as a blessing; it gave me time to take a moment to reflect, learn, rethink and restructure. During our first phase, we tried many things and to name a few; we exposed our audience to Russian, Italian, American, British, French, Japanese and Iranian cinema (including a couple of documentaries).





# Craft of material: Jafferjees

Over 135 years ago, the Quettawala family established a business in the city of Quetta, then British India. Shortly afterwards, the product line expanded to include shoes, leather goods and leather upholstered furniture. Our commitment to using the finest materials and uncompromising workmanship never diminished, thus, the Jafferjees name gained a reputation for developing high quality leather goods in British India. In the late 1920's, the booming port city of Karachi presented new opportunities and challenges, and a lone Quettawala

moved to Karachi. In 1935, the city of Quetta was destroyed by a massive earthquake. Hence, the Jafferjees business center shifted to Karachi. Fortunately, the commitment to detail, the use of finest materials and adherence to quality of workmanship was passed down through generations.

Since 1988, Jafferjees has become synonymous with leather products of unmatched quality in Pakistan. The Jafferjees clientele has witnessed the infusion of a branding strategy that not only restated Jafferjees unparalleled quality, but also established it as the brand of

choice for high fashion genuine leather products.

Over the past 135 years, Jafferjees has designed a wide range of genuine leather products. From an array of ladies handbags to a brief case that makes a statement on its own, there is a leather accessory for connoisseurs of fine leather. We take pride in our design and the quality materials used in our products. We are part of the 5th generation to uphold such high quality standards and look forward to continually developing new designs for our demanding customers.

Book Review | January 2019

## The Bride again

by Fatima Ghulam

Edmund White, writing on Marcel Duchamp, informs: “He abandoned art altogether to play chess for fifteen years”; he further writes, “*Duchamp’s most imposing work, The Bride Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (also called The Large Glass) was shattered in storage and later painfully reassembled by the artist, who professed to find the cracks, as elements introduced by chance, to be highly attractive additions*”.

It seems that The Bride is still beautiful, so we see ‘Dancing Around the Bride’, a volume of writings around and about the work, published by Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London. The book is printed “*on the occasion of the exhibition ‘Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*.” The exhibition was held at the Museum of Philadelphia in 2013 and later same year at the Barbican Art Gallery, London.

If one removes the publication from the exhibition – as is the fate of every exhibition catalogue – the book offers valuable texts about the particular work as well as the history of art after / due to Duchamp. Writings of artists, critics and cultural theorists have provided multiple ways to approach ‘The Bride...’, practice of Duchamp, and his impact (influence is a milder word!) on the generation after him; such as the American Pop artists. As mentioned in the Forward (by Timothy Rub) “Duchamp has come to dominate the landscape of contemporary art to an extent that would have been unimaginable in the early 1950s, when the next generation of artists, who are also a subject of this exhibition that this volume accompanies, began to produce work that would deflect the course of modernism”.

The book makes a reader realise how a single work of art is pivotal and responsible in generating innumerable texts, relevant to that piece and to a general theory of modern and contemporary art. Acknowledging it, Reinaldo Laddago comments in the introduction “The story... begins in the 1950s, when John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and a small group of like-minded individuals ..... initiated one of the

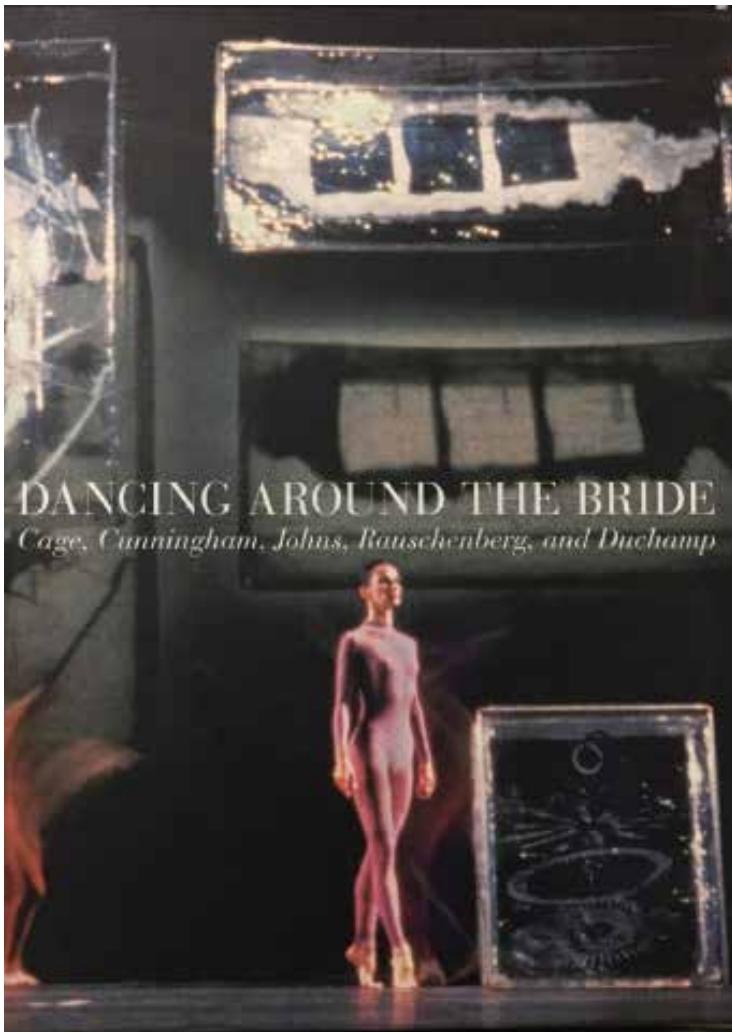
most extraordinary collaborative circles in modern art history”.

Actually, the history of modern art would have not been the same without Marcel Duchamp’s ‘The Fountain’ and other ready-mades. And more than that Duchamp’s stance on being detached from the act of art making, for the sake of chess – or breathing, as he mentions in his conversation recorded in the ‘Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp’ by Pierre Cabanne. On ‘The Aesthetic of Silence’ linked to John Cage’s compositions and performances too, Susan Sontag elaborates: “*Silence exists as a decision – in the exemplary suicide of the artist... who thereby testifies that he has gone ‘too far’*”.

In the case of Marcel Duchamp, silence was a pretext, since his words, late works and presence continued to have an impact in the art world and on generations after. As he discloses “The individual always interests me, more than movements which simply serve to group together young people”, thus the volume brings pieces of reflections and contemplation by artists such as Jasper Johns, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg. Writing on a book titled, ‘The Large Glass’ by Duchamp, Jasper Johns names it a “*greenhouse for his intuition. Erotic machinery, the Bride, held in a see-through cage – ‘a Hilarious picture’*”.

Talking about Marcel Duchamp’s connection with other artists, mainly those of American Pop, Calvin Tomkins, the author of many books on the artist, shares: “Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Jean Tinguely, and Robert Rauschenberg do not constitute a movement of a school, nor they even share a common point of view”. Yet after a few years one starts to recognise some similarities in concerns of these artists who came after Duchamp.

Understandably because an artist, in his time, is only grouped with his predecessors, and not perceived in connection of his followers. He does not have any idea of these individuals.



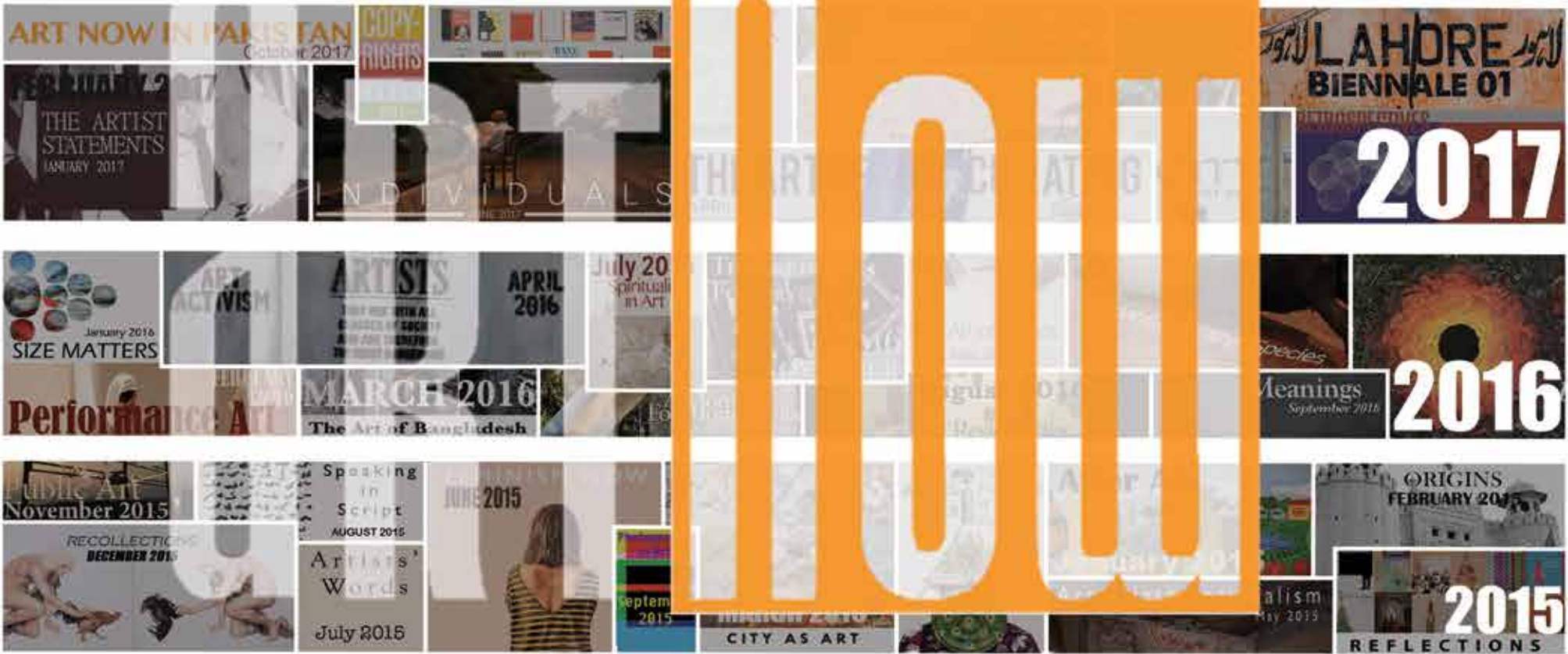
But due to strange structure of art history, an artist is usually ‘understood’ on the basis of who came after him. How his contribution led to open up new ways of seeing and saying (as in the case of Paul Cezanne). Some artists do not have direct disciples in their times and surroundings. Yet works and ideas from the depths of their studio sometime merge and emerge into a mainstream movement – without their consent or information.

However, one must be prepared to acknowledge the contribution of an artist who had changed the course of art, without his intention, design, or desire, still he remains the most important artist of twentieth century, like Duchamp. Although there is another course of art history, which moves beyond the signpost of individual artists, since they are heir to a tradition and contribute to the course of art in future. In that case, Duchamp’s emergence was incredible, but “Had Marcel Duchamp not lived, it would have been necessary for someone exactly like him to live, to bring about, that is, the world as we begin to know and experience it”. (John Cage).

**Fatima Ghulam** is a regular contributor for ArtNow Pakistan



7 years  
Over 1200 Reviews, Interviews, and Essays  
88 Issues  
2019  
Degree Shows





# Jafferjees

1880



[www.jafferjees.com](http://www.jafferjees.com)