

# NUKTA

Biannual Contemporary Art Magazine of Pakistan

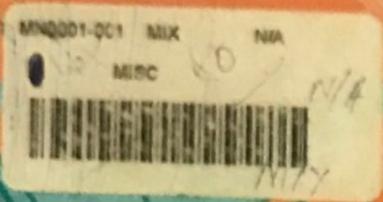


# ART

Volume  
8-ONE-2013

Pk Rs. 700

ISSN No  
1991-0304



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Sharjah Biennial 2013  
The Abraaj Group Prize 2013  
Riwhyti One Night Stand,  
An evening of performance art**

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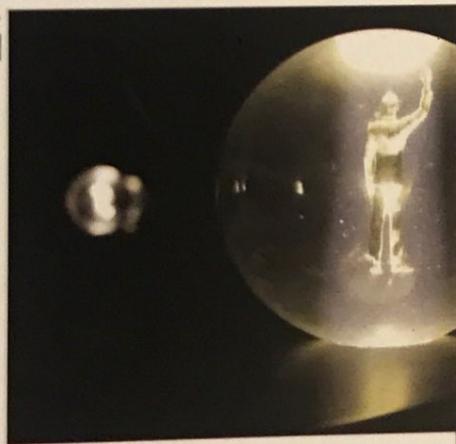
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# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Dr Asma Ibrahim** is an archaeologist with a post doctorate fellowship from Wisconsin University, Madison, and a doctorate in Numismatics. She has worked in the Department of Archaeology & Museums, Pakistan from 1990 till 2006 as Curator, Director and Assistant Director. She is Director, State Bank of Pakistan Museum & Art Gallery Department since 2006, under which the first monetary museum of Pakistan was established. Currently she is involved in several projects including the Sukkur Archaeological Museum, N.A. Baluch Personality Museum, Sindh Printing Museum, etc. As an Archaeologist she has carried out excavations in Balochistan and Sindh, and in the Indus delta area. She discovered an underwater city in the Indus delta and has documented more than 200 sites of stone-carved graveyards, etc.

**Gemma Sharpe** is a writer based in Karachi, Pakistan, where she lectures in Art History at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, and is a Coordinator of Vasl Artists' Collective.

**Ilona Yusuf** is a poet and printmaker. Her professional life involves lighting design, and bespoke furniture featuring decoupage using her own photographs as well as lino printing, under the label 'atelier ilona'. Her poems have been published in book form (*Picture This*, 2001) and thereafter in literary journals in Pakistan and abroad. She freelances for several magazines, writing on art and literature. In her artwork she integrates word and image, combining her poems with collagraph or photopolymer gravure prints to make artists' books. She recently exhibited at ArtChowk The Gallery, Karachi. ([ilonayusuf.blogspot.com](http://ilonayusuf.blogspot.com))

**Kurchi Dasgupta** is an Indian artist and writer based in Kathmandu, Nepal. She has a Master's in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and has been the CEO of the Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Films (2004-2006). She is a frequent contributor to Frieze and Asian Art News.

**Nafisa Rizvi** is an art critic and curator and writes for several publications within Pakistan and abroad. She was the founder editor of ArtNow, the first online magazine of contemporary art in Pakistan. Nafisa has curated numerous shows in the past few years, including a show of Pakistani artists in Dubai. Nafisa is also a writer of fiction having published a novel titled *The Blue Room* in 2008. She presently teaches Art Related Study at The Lyceum School.

**Rabyya Naseer** returned to Lahore after completing her MA in Art History as a Fulbright scholar in Theory & Criticism from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Currently she is visiting faculty at the NCA, BNU and LGS and writing about contemporary Pakistani Art. She is an interdisciplinary artist, whose work combines areas of sculpture, painting, photography and performance. Her work has been shown in Pakistan and at Today Art Museum (Beijing), Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (Japan), Jamjar (Dubai), Ikon Gallery (UK) and in USA. Exploring her interest in Performance Art, she is currently working on her writing, titled *Promises to Keep*; contextualizing performative art practice in contemporary Pakistani Art.

**Dr Royce W Smith** is Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at Wichita State University in Kansas, United States, and a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). He has lectured extensively about contemporary festivals and biennales at several international venues and now serves as Visiting Professor of Contemporary Art History and Criticism at the Insituto Superior de Arte in Havana, Cuba. He is particularly interested in the ways that biennales' European underpinnings have been challenged and reconfigured by non-Western mega-exhibitions (like the Sharjah Biennial). His monograph, *Biennale!: Representation, Crisis, and the Contemporary Mega-Exhibition*, will be published with I.B. Tauris Press in 2014.

**Salman Asif** is an Art Historian interested in examining art through multiple filters of colonial discourses, race, gender, exclusion, rights and conflict. He's a published author and an award-winning documentary film-maker on constructs of 'honor' and violence against women. He is alternatively based in Islamabad and London.

**Saqlain Zaidi** teaches History of Film, History of Art, and Civilization Studies at the Department of Media Science at SZABIST, Karachi Campus. Currently he is developing a course "*Life through the eyes of Pakistani Urdu Literature*" for the students of Media Science, Social Science and Fine Art. He enjoys reading Rumi, Hafiz and Shabistri with his students.

**Shermeen Beg** graduated from the National College of Arts with a Bachelor's in Architecture and then proceeded to the United States to complete a Master's in Architecture with a focus on digital media. She has worked in Pakistan and the US, practicing architecture and pursuing her fascination for graphic design, ranging from eclectic card design to professional booklets. Over the years she has shared her passion for travel, history and architecture through several articles published in local periodicals and through teaching.

Pakistani artists recently bagged two premier art prizes on two different continents; The Deutsche Bank Prize, won by Imran Qureshi and the Abraaj Group Art Prize, awarded to Huma Mulji. This institutional success is a matter of pride for the entire art community. In the last year the demand for art from Pakistan was visible in its expanded presence at many new galleries at Art Dubai 2013. This was echoed in booths at Beirut Art Fair, Frieze, Hong Kong Art Fair and Art Basel last year.

To complete the picture, it's also important for **NUKTAART** to focus on journeys like that of Kohari, who for half a century have introspected on material and process in an art practice that problematizes the homogenization and corporatization of global art.

In January 2013, the three week engagement with art during The Fourth ASNA Clay Triennial with its diverse events created opportunity for not only 60 artists (from 16 countries) working in clay to exhibit their work in Karachi but also carried multiple

conversations between different tiers of society. **NUKTAART** has tapped into some of these conversations; Aasim Akhtar's paper on persisting contradictions and attitudes associated with medium-centric art practices within Post Modernism and the search of a new critical language that can effectively articulate the linkages. The possibilities offered by *Riwhyti One Night Stand*, a seminal event of Performance Art, which was a collateral event of the Triennial curated by Amin Gulgee and focused in *Nukta-e-Nazar*, which covers the perspective of four of the many participating artists. Displayed at NED University's City Campus, the exhibition *Earth, Light and Architecture*, for which designers, architects and crafts persons developed projects together, was yet another show commissioned by the Triennial that broke new ground.

*Earth, Body, Mind* was the conceptual canvas offered to artists at the Kathmandu International Art Festival to re-imagine a world without ecological crisis. Kurchi Dasgupta's critical gaze focuses on the convergent and divergent strategies used by the 100 participating artists, from which four were from Pakistan.

Located in the streets and souks of a working class neighborhood, the Sharjah Biennale made the traditional courtyard its central theme under the over arching concept of '*Towards a New Cultural Cartography*'. Royce Smith examines the art and the underlying tensions offered by the location that challenge both the audience and the artist at the Sharjah Biennale 2013.

Gemma Sharpe's comprehensive piece on the Abraaj Group Art Prize looks at its implications for artists from the emerging art centers of the MENASA region as 'Awarded artists utilize the financial, practical and curatorial support of the prize, its curators, and its organizers, to produce ambitious works that may otherwise be impossible to achieve', elaborates the writer.

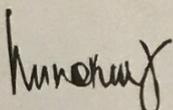
As the urban dispossessed wake up to face another day on the fringe in Karachi, it is recorded by the empathetic lens of photographer and social commentator Vaqar Ahmed, our contributor to the Photo Essay.

The sumptuously printed book, *The Tale of the Tile*, which is authored by Nasreen Askari and Hameed Akhund on the craft of the *kashigar*, has been reviewed by Dr Asma Ibrahim, a well known archaeologist with vast knowledge of this region's history and its crafts.

'The Hosains' at Marble Arch in London was a familiar haunt for those seeking South Asian books and cultural history. The couple that ran it befriended artists, writers and poets who were either in political exile or merely passing through. This connection enriched both their lives and their art collection that Ilona Yusuf covers for The Collector.

The Review section for exhibitions from different cities of Pakistan and the world, has a new addition, initiated from this issue. It is a critical response to a particular work from anywhere that a critic has found extraordinary. Salman Asif and Nafisa Rizvi are the first to contribute to this, in the current issue.

This issue of **NUKTAART**, with its smaller size and crisp design, aspires to retain its identity while giving a fresh face to the publication, which this May will complete its eight years.



Nilofur Farrukh  
Editor

Rumana Husain  
Amra Ali  
Senior Editors

May 2013

## Shermeen Baig



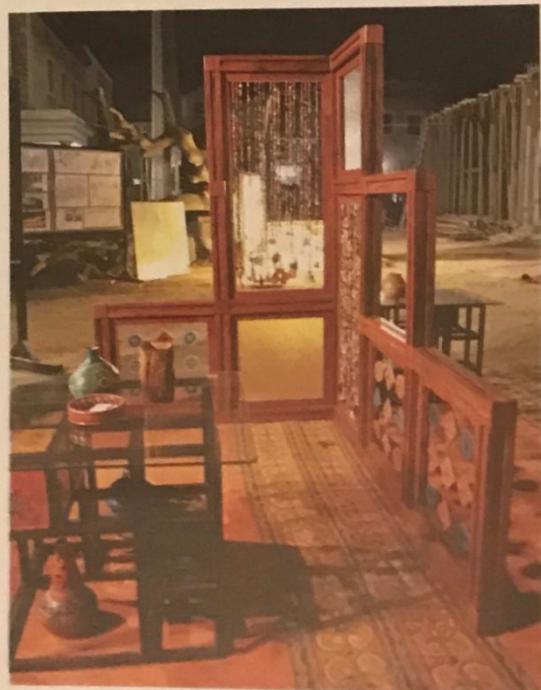
Architect, Usman Mughri and craftsman Mohammad Ali, ceramic, mirror, lights, 304.8 (height) x 365.76 x 365.76 (base) x 426.72 x 426.72 cm (mirror base), 2013

January 2013 saw a series of events as part of the Fourth ASNA Clay Triennial at various venues in Karachi; the ultimate being the exhibition entitled "Earth, Light and Architecture" at NED University's City Campus (Architecture Department) comprising of four collaborative works by young architects and ceramists. Sheba Akhtar, the curator of the show, who invited young designers to participate in this exhibition hoped from each design team (consisting of at least one architect and one ceramist / product designer / craftsperson) to produce a work that would best

showcase "their vibrant energy, creative talent and an ethical pursuit to challenge the boundaries of design (that) would inspire the future designers of our city and our country".

Architecture and ceramics have much in common; both delve into concepts of scale, the relationship between inside and outside and the containment of space. Add the theme of the triennial, 'light and lightness', into the mix and the challenge for the designers was set.

The husband and wife team, of architect Ali Mustafa and ceramist Bina Ali designed a composition of wall panels, to enhance the play of light and shadow. Using a no-nails principle, they prepared a modular wooden structural frame, to showcase interwoven ceramic tiles and colored frosted glass, that were suspended within. Since the composition consisted entirely of planar



Architect, Ali Mustafa and ceramist, Bina Ali, wood, glass, ceramic beads, 182.8 x 182.88 x 121.92 cm approx, 2013

elements, the modular nature of the concept was not fully explored; even if not actually constructed, volumetric ideas could have been explored in sketches. The exhibit would have been more in focus without the clutter of accompanying pieces of furniture. Some frames held strings, with brightly colored ceramic "beads", delicately ornamented in the ceramist's characteristic style; the strings were visually appealing, especially when they moved in the breeze and added yet another dimension if they worked lyrically, as chimes.

Architect brothers, Raza and Hassan Shah, worked with craftsman Yousuf Ismail, to design a sculptural seating fixture using onyx, a characteristically Pakistani material.

The most wonderful aspect of the exhibit was the relationship it created with the dead tree trunk, a significant landscape feature of the NED city campus. The dual nature of onyx, heavy in weight but luminous in quality, successfully expressed the concept of light and lightness. By allowing the material to 'glow', by the use of both artificial and natural light, it appeared to be far lighter than its actual weight. Being poorly



Architects, Raza & Hassan Shah and craftsman Yousuf Ismail, onyx slabs, light, 304.8 x 304.8 cm approx, 2013

crafted, it left one wondering about the comfort and durability offered by onyx slabs in a seating fixture.

The Coalesce Design Studio, consisting of architects Salman Jawed, Rai Yasir, Mustafa Mehdi, Hassan Feroze Lakdawaala and Bilal Kapadia, worked with ceramist Zaid Hameed to produce a series of sinuous forms that were held together by a metal frame as a datum.

Theoretically, the idea was sound; each of the elements (local pottery from Hala) was to have a hidden source of light, which would cast shadows on the floor, not only giving depth to the installation but also adding a feeling of flight to it. However, at the time of the

exhibition, which took place after sunset, this effect was not felt. Even at daytime, this could not be experienced leaving this aspect of the design unsuccessfully executed.

The fourth and last exhibit, by architect Usman Mughni and craftsman Mohammad Ali, the only work located indoors, left one completely unprepared for its impact. Mughni's multi-layered concept, focusing on form (a suspended, inverted pyramid), material (clay and wood), and principle (where segmentation provided the lightness of the material) was dominated by the sheer scale of the three solid faces of the pyramid, highlighting the use of modules in raw form, while the fourth missing face revealed the construction within. The composition was reflected in a mirror below, which symbolized water.

'Earth, Light and Architecture' was a formidable undertaking; each of the four exhibits addressed the theme in a completely different way, giving a great deal of diversity to a small exhibition. On the flip side, however, the varied exhibits were not "woven" together into a unified whole; they remained disconnected and unrelated. Moreover, the exhibition would have been more successful, had the exhibits been more interactive

Architects, Salman Jawed, Rai Yasir, Mustafa Mehdi, Hassan Feroze Lakdawaala, Bilal Kapadia and ceramist Zaid Hameed, (The Coalesce Design Studio), wood, glazed ceramics, 121.92 x 121.92 x 45.72 cm, 2013



with the viewer. Ideally, the installation by the Coalesce team should have been seen only in the day, while that by the Shah Brothers, only at night. However, such exhibitions in Karachi, especially in which the conceptual and developmental work accompanies each piece, enable us to get an insight into the creativity of the next generation and is in itself a significant step. ○

How does the art community conclude, that the work of a certain artist is "art" or not? Why is an artist or a particular art form not permitted entry into the 'mainstream' gallery circuit, while another is? What are the distinctions and why/how have these distinctions between "art" and "illustration" become ingrained in our definition of art? These are some pertinent questions that were put forth by Amra Ali in her review of *'Urdu Digests Illustrated'*\*. Over the years art critics have wrestled with this division, which is a fundamental question. Related to it is the deep-seated language divide in the country between the widely spoken Urdu language, and English, the language of the handful of elite. Urdu is the language of the homegrown *'Urdu Digests'*, a particular genre of writing in Urdu with sensibilities of content and aesthetics which are quite distinct from those in English language publications.

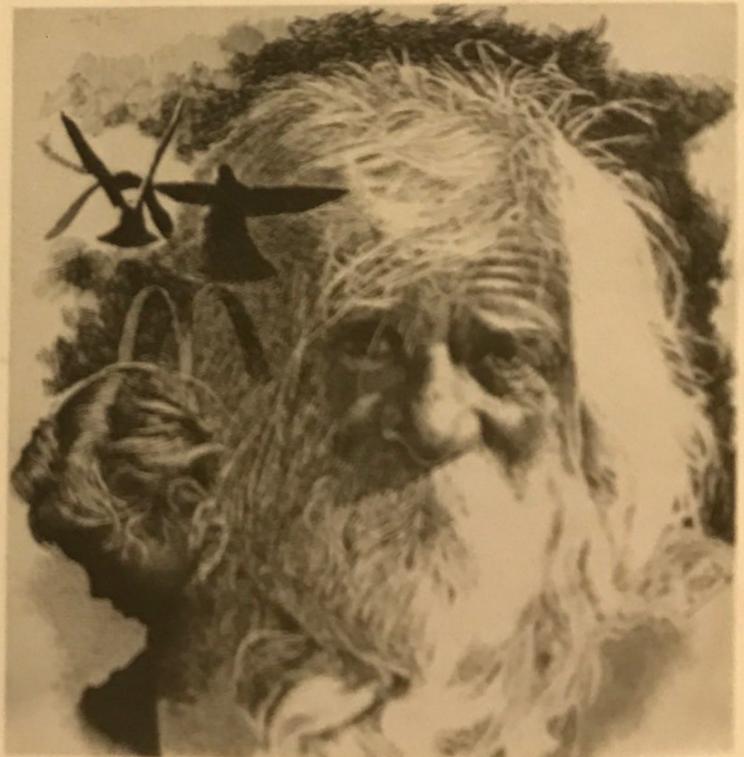
It would be wrong to assume, as most do, that Digests in Urdu appeal only to women. There is a huge market for these monthlies for both women as well as men. Some of the Digests include *'Urdu Digest, Sirguzisht, Dosheeza, Sayyara, Khawateen, Jasoosi, Pakeeza, Sabrang, Suspense and Ruhani*. However, it may be worth mentioning that it is mainly the male artists who dominate illustrative work for all these publications. This pulp fiction is hardly to be seen in any of the prestigious bookshops; small kiosks or book-sellers on pavements are the ones who have the full range, where pedestrians can be seen flipping pages or buying them enthusiastically.

The exhibition under review, *'Urdu Digests Illustrated'* featured artists Imran Zaib, Inam Raja, Shahid Hussain, Shaista Momin, Zakir Hasan Chishti and Zulfikar Azeen. It was curated by Shahana Rajani who has to her credit "Beyond Billboard", (February 2012) at the KSA Gallery on the work of three struggling cinema billboard artists. The days of the hand-painted cinema hoardings have now been over for some years, as they have

Imran Zaib, pen and ink on paper, 68.6 x 53.3, 1996



Inam Raja, pen and ink on paper, 54.61 x 54.61 cm, 1989



Rumana Husain  
**URDU DIGESTS ILLUSTRATED**

been replaced by digital images from the actual movie; blown, printed and stretched on Panaflex.

In 'Urdu Digests Illustrated', Rajani has once again compelled the gallery audience to take into consideration the fringe artists who are an essential part of Pakistan's popular culture. While billboards are seen from a distance, the incredibly popular Digests have an intimate relationship with the readers, who may be regular subscribers or tempted by the cover to buy a particular issue. More often than not the title covers depict a bashful and bejeweled female torso tantalizingly wrapped in a colorful *dupatta* or *sari pallav*.

It is rather intriguing to see that even though the Urdu Digests are small in size and their quality suffers due to low grade paper, cheap printing, badly designed pages and an extremely small font size in order to accommodate more text, but the illustrations are always in large format, and the sizes are reduced at the printing stage. The works on display are therefore in large formats.

The textures in pen and ink works by Imran Zaib, Inam Raja, Shahid Hussain, Shaista Momin and Zulfikar Azeen

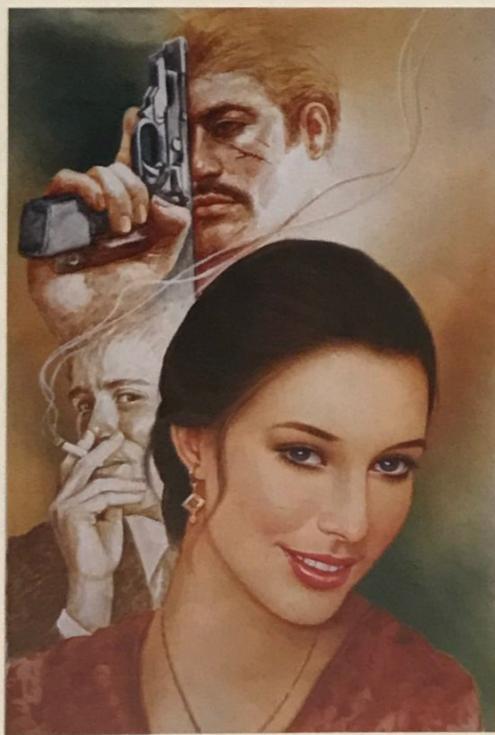
airbrushed female faces for Digest covers are among the smaller works in the exhibition. The idea of the male gaze which manifests itself in different forms in film, music video, photography, art, as well as in writing has its roots across cultures and throughout the world, and these Digest faces are also representative of that gaze. On the other hand, the world of the middle class Pakistani female, be it a college-going student or an unmarried girl waiting to be married, is filled with struggles, unrequited love, repressed romantic feelings or suppressed sexuality. The illustrations of the Urdu Digests appeal to them and fulfill their need to fantasize about themselves as if it is their story and their pictures reflected in those sensuous illustrations.

Rajani has taken a significant step in bringing the 'popular' in a curatorial narrative in a gallery space located in Clifton. This Clifton Bridge on a railway line is often used as metaphor for dividing the city of Karachi between the less privileged and the elite residing on the other side. 'Urdu Digests Illustrated' brought together not only the skill of the Digest artists but also opened it up for discussion. Perhaps this debate will

Shahid Hussain, pen and ink on paper, 25.4 x 40.6 cm

Zakir Hasan Chishti, air brush, water color and colored pencils on paper, 20.955 x 34.29 cm.

Zulfikar Azeen, pen and ink on paper, 71.1 x 47 cm, 1999



are created with hatching, cross-hatching and dots. Imran Zaib's large illustrations of Indian actresses of yore are nostalgic of the black and white movie era. A similar sense of déjà vu is present in Shaista Momin's women reminiscent of Iqbal Mehdi's popular pen and ink drawings. Lahore-based Zakir Hasan Chishti's

never be resolved and the question as to 'why an artist or a particular art form does not get permitted entry into the 'mainstream' gallery circuit, while another has this access much more easily' will remain unresolved.

The exhibition was held ArtChowk gallery, Karachi, January 2013 ○

Nafisa Rizvi

## NISHANA KHATA /

Sabina Zeba Haque, *City of Lights: 24° 52' 0" N / 67° 3' 0" E* (triptych), oil & pigment on canvas mounted on wood panel, 101.6 x 101.6 cm,



Sabina Zeba Haque, *Day Watchman*, oil and pigment on canvas, 71.1 x 86.36 cm



Sabina Haque's present body of work is titled *Nishana* or target, which explains the circular format of some of the paintings, based on ambient vector graphics in video games which are the epitome of violence and carnage packaged as entertainment for young adults. The idea of the surrealistic terrain suspended somewhere between the sky and the ocean, refers specifically to the city of Karachi in its geographical location but more generally to the once-bustling but now desolate city that is represented without the inclusion of any human forms. This idea issues from her use of the hugely popular video game called *Modern Warfare* in which players can visit the city of Karachi and blow up monuments and key strategic locations. This new reality that Haque creates could have become a thematically significant notion had it been painted with more cerebral input. In one of the saddest cases of coincidence, architect Parveen Rehman, a social activist and Director of Orangi Pilot Project

## MISSED TARGET

who dedicated her life to the uplift of the disenfranchised in Karachi, was targeted and gunned down the very same day the show *Nishana* opened in the city.

One of Haque's paintings, *Drone Shadows* is perhaps the most interesting work in the show, depicting an aerial perspective of drones, combining graphic design principles and painting techniques to create a view explored from the safety of the sky and detached from ground realities. The other paintings however, dissolve into masses of inarticulate abstraction, interspersed by tropes that are already owned by Pakistani contemporary artists, like Naiza Khan's hennaed hands and Imran Qureshi's lotus /

tree top from the Kangra and Basholi miniature traditions. It is Haque's need to activate her identity as a Pakistani that impels her to seek familiar metaphors but she does it without panache and they stand out as forced and deliberate elements of inclusion.

USA-born Sabina Haque was raised in Karachi, and returned to settle in the US, which makes her point of departure as a contemporary artist expediently multilayered and pluralistic, giving her the opportunity to create a narrative of significance. But it is unfortunate that she is unable to engage with her background in more of a visually sensuous manner.

Haque's professional credentials include an M.F.A in Painting from Boston University and presently she teaches Fine Art at Portland State University, Oregon. Haque has exhibited frequently across the United States and a show of Haque's works has been curated by well-known art critic Eleanor Hartley.

In recent years, there has developed an argument that

is circulating in the art circles over the semantic and theoretical delineation of Pakistani art vs art in Pakistan, in which diasporic artists are be-labored for exploiting the issues that plague the country without engaging with its effects. It is claimed that these artists garner the attention of their peers abroad for the simple reason that the country is in the news and violence and death are 'sexy' topics in art. But this censure implies a judgment call on the part of critics in determining the relationship between the artist and his/her country when the degree of veracity of the association must only be determined as reflected in the sensibility of the artist, manifested in the works produced. Shahzia Sikander or Hamra Abbas are artists of merit even if they do not live or work in Pakistan and even if they do use the issues manifest in Pakistan's present-day socio-political culture as the pivotal axis of their thematic

skewed perception of Muslim women across the globe. Thus it is not Haque's lack of engagement with her surrogate home that diminishes her work as an artist but her inability to understand it in terms that are grounded in the local culture. Her colorful and apparently 'joyful' painting *Warheads* is a representation of phallic nuclear missiles spouting fire and may be a statement on the dangers of war and the lack of realization of its horrific results, but this abstract representation misses its mark. This is one of Haque's issues as an artist. She paints in a fashion that is confiningly modernist rather than contemporary and although postmodern art is governed by the all-embracing idea of 'anything goes', convened from an era of globalization and pluralism, the abstract expressionism of Frank Stella is far too dominant to ignore and makes her work dated and irrelevant. Her



Sabina Zeba Haque, *Aerial Attack*, oil and pigment on canvas, 71.1 x 111.76 cm,

framework. Sikander employed the idea of the Islamic courtyard at the recent 11th Sharjah Biennale in March 2013 to highlight the unique relationship between what is personal and public or political and internally reflective. Hamra Abbas's *Woman in Black* was inspired by hostile female students of the Lal Masjid seminary involved in violence in Islamabad but speaks volumes for the

goal may be the fusion of ideas and cultures, but she falls through the cracks of both east and west and only commands the purgatorial terrain that is more sensuous and obvious than cerebral.

Exhibited from March 14-24, 2013 at Koel Gallery, Karachi. ○

Saqlain Zaidi

# THE PERFUME AND SUPPLIANCE OF A MINUTE

Munawar Ali Syed, 98  
*Forgotten Books*, carving on  
wood, brass wire, plastic,  
paint, size variable, 2012  
(detail)



One cannot stop weaving the fabric of multi-faceted interesting connotations during and after visiting *B(H)OOK*, the latest exhibition by Munawar Ali Syed, a multi-disciplinary artist.

Munawar has been exploring diverse materials, and this time, in his own words, he has discovered new and unexpected connections between paper, wood and metal.

The word 'BHOOK' (hunger) and Book seems to go hand in hand but the unusual presence and absence of words and letters in different books make them enigmatic. Ibn Al-Arabi, in *al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah* envisaged the universe as symbolized by a book. The manifested Book of Universe or any

Munawar Ali Syed, *Urdu ki Last Kitaab*, (*Kitaabon Ke Aagey Jehan Aur Bhi Hain*, series), copper effect plastic beads, paint, wood, 45 x 29 x 9 cm, 2012



book acquires the real form of letters and words but in *B(h)ook*, besides letters, the books attain varied forms due to the deep metaphysical experiences the artist seems to have gone through.

This work consists of 3 divided installations. In the first section, *98 Forgotten Books*, the installation of books invite exploration, but the irony is that we cannot access anything beyond the covers as the books are carved in wood that cannot be opened. No one can tell what lies within and only the outward rendition is available.

The *98 Forgotten Books* lead us to the second section *Between the Lines*, with works in metal. These works have connections with Syed's earlier line drawings on paper and the artist seems to explore line in the attire of metal. The metaphor of barbed wire refers to agony, painful struggle, injury, agent of leaving inerasable marks of losses; and in Syed's own words, it refers to the nature of knowledge, its hidden and visible potential of harm.

This loud change from closed and inaccessible 98 books to the wide open ones come as a shock as we don't come across any words in them. The barbed wire injects countless contemporary experiences. From blocked streets at the *mohulla* level to the two-way traffic on a one-way road; from load shedding of electricity to the manipulated information sharing of international media, Syed is busy confronting all this without using the basic ingredient of the book - words.

The wandering *Between the Lines* gives access to the third section where books can be opened and closed. This section *Cult of Knowledge* invites the viewer to move into a space of speculation where diverse final outcomes in the form of books can be seen. Unlike the first section where the real content or light was inaccessible, here that accessibility is available at multiple levels. The pieces trigger different meanings in components of motherboard of computers, pages like hologram and interactive 3D books carved in wood.

Munawar Ali Syed, *A Tale of Two Places*, motherboard, metal, china grass, wood, 40 x 29 x 7 cm, 2012



*In Search of Lost Time*, *Overloaded* and *A Tale of Two Places* do not offer themselves as mere books and works like a router that develops a wifi-connection with a huge database of information of past, present and future. This way, the connotation of wandering and travel at different levels is embedded in the theme of the Book. This subliminal aspect of wandering and traveling connects the Book with Sufism. Much importance is given to traveling in Sufism as the moon becomes a full moon by dint of traveling. Rumi says in *Book III* of his *Masnavi*:

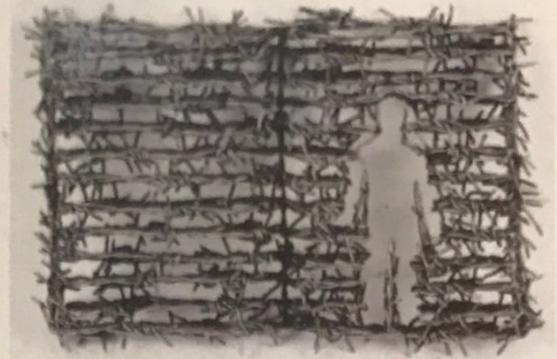
***It is by traveling that the moon becomes great like Kay Khusrau (the King),  
how should it become an emperor without traveling?  
Joseph gained a hundred objects of desire by traveling.***

The third installation compels us to wander more into different pieces, a new mindset has given a new sculpted form to the technological times we live in and has given a new diction and overall meaning to *B(h)ook* and its subliminal connotations of traveling and wandering. In *Aalif Laila*, the way the Prince and the *Saudagur* (the merchant) kept on leaving their homes in order to gain actual experiences is replaced by meeting people as sensation of electronically generated signals in the form of a Skype meeting and facebook interfacing, and twitter interaction. The contact, the pleasures and pain of give and take in the physical sense is slipping into oblivion as Rumi warned in his *Masnavi* ...

***If you keep on taking stones from a mountain and do not put anything back,  
the mountain will come to an end, too. So put something back in place of each wasted breath of yours***

The aid of books to convey *Bhook* (hunger) also conveys the desire to have more of everything. This can be both a good and a bad attitude. Novelist and writer of short stories in Urdu, Intizar Hussain has rendered powerful

Munawar Ali Syed, *Between the Lines I*, metal barbed wire, 30 x 41 x 6 cm, 2012



imagery of the times of our forefathers that teleports us to the past to see the way our ancestors comprehended and conceived the world. Every experience was based on knowledge that was internalized in the real sense and had time-tested results.

These days one is dealing with so much that is new. And most of the time, this dealing is not experiential but only based on information and to tune in, one needs to have real inward attention. This can easily lead to excessive hunger, a *bhook*, craving, for as much as one can have. Bano Qudsia, in *Raja Gidh* talks about vultures and their eating habits. They gorge themselves when prey is abundant, until they bulge but for an easier take-off they have to vomit it all out.

Interestingly, Allama Iqbal writes:

پرواز ہے دونوں کی اسی ایک فضا میں  
کرگس کا جہاں اور ہے شاہیں کا جہاں اور

(Both fly in this very sky, yet crows have their own world and shaheen (falcon) has its own world).

(<http://abrarkureshy.wordpress.com/2012/11/10/iqbal-the-forgotten-vision/>)

Munawar Ali Syed renders, in his own way, three sections or stages, and in my opinion it seems as if the third and last section is all about having more of everything without contemplating what one needs to have. It is developing a mindset where nobody is satisfied, and works like a machine to have more and more. Just like a violet flower short-circuits our sense of smell and yet continues to exude its fragrance, even after the ability to smell it has been lost. We can only smell it after a minute or two, when the smell is resumed. The thing about violets is that no response to them lasts long; as Shakespeare in *Hamlet* put it, they are

***Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute***

In the words of Maryam Azhar, curator of Sketchbook, a show of drawings at the Karachi School of Art Gallery: "that is what counts... taking the first step. It is the beginning, the start of the process of any incredible complete piece of art". And who can deny that a sketchbook is all about making a start, and it is a diary for the visually inclined - the artist.

It is particularly significant that the gallery where Sketchbook was held, in January 2013, is located inside Karachi's oldest art school where students could benefit from viewing works of the 47 artists that the curator had chosen to display.

The exhibits are divided into three sections: old masters, established artists, and emerging contemporary artists.

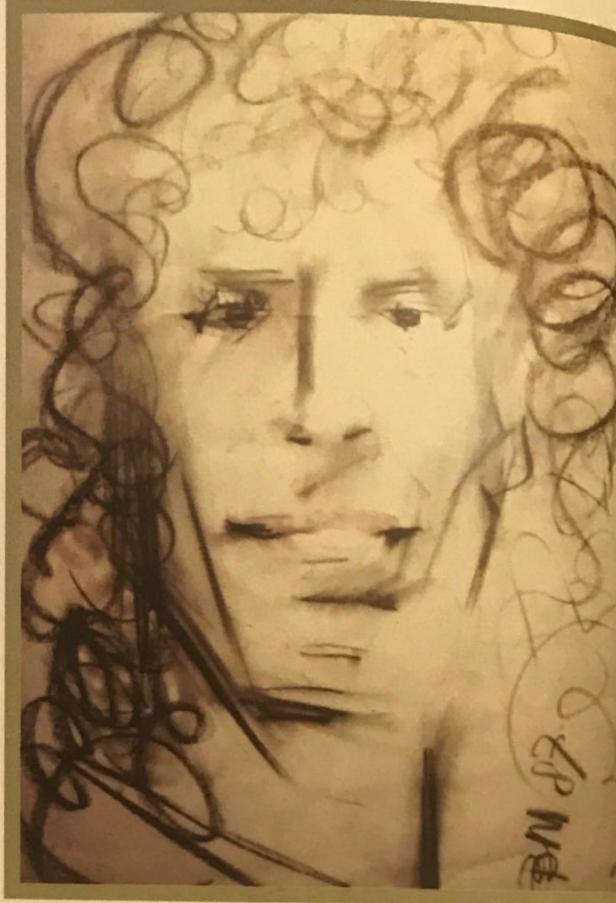
In the first section there are two striking *Untitled* portraits by Bashir Mirza and Saeed Akhter from art critic Marjorie Hussain's collection. Mirza's pen and ink portraits of the common people of Pakistan had propelled him to prominence in the earlier part of his career, but this sketch, a self portrait from 1987, shows the late artist's inimitable spontaneous style in which a few broad lines flow unhampered. Both Mirza and Akhter have used charcoal on paper. Saeed Akhter's skilful and detailed portrait is of a young Marjorie Hussain.

From the collection of Rabia Zuberi, the founder of KSA, are sketches by Zainul Abedin, Sadequain and Lubna Agha.

The strength of fluid lines of the *Untitled* ink on paper sketch of a crow by Zainul Abedin is a visual treat at close quarters. The drawing is reminiscent of the haunting series of his famous *Famine Sketches* in Chinese ink and brush from 1943, which was executed on cheap packing paper. Zainul Abedin later used the crow as a symbol in his drawings of the early fifties, whereby the rebel crow, the raging crow and the scavenger crow depicted man-made crisis and exploitation of the masses by capitalist / colonial forces. This particular sketch was however done much later, in 1964.

Sadequain's sketch of a woman, from 1986, in ball-point pen on paper, reminds one of his innumerable casual sketches in this medium, which he used to give away freely.

Bashir Mirza, *Untitled*, charcoal on paper, 1987

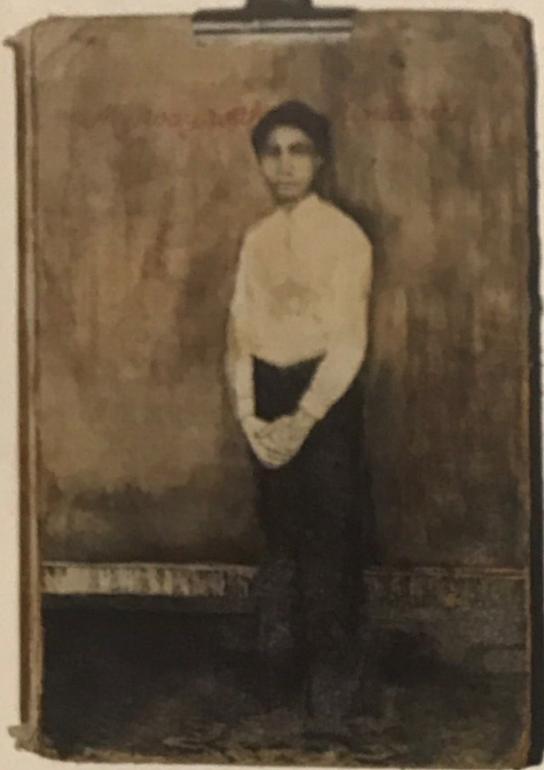


Rumana Husain

## SKETCHBOOK

Lubna Agha's sketch, pen doodles in fine lines on paper, which juxtapose torsos, feet and branches, clearly depicts the artist's intention of using it for another work. The sketch included in the show could have been from the period when she had migrated from Karachi to live in Sacramento, USA. Agha exhibited a few pen drawings there, which was her return to figurative work. She later went on to do the pen and ink drawing 'Tree of Life' with nudes and branches, or the water color, 'Three Days', and several other works in oils, etchings and lithographs done in the early and mid eighties. Her poignant water color 'Final Journey (Doli)' equating a bride's palanquin (*doli*) carried by men like a dead body (*janaza*), done in the context of growing dowry deaths also resonates with the sketch on exhibit. The way human bodies are heaped and juxtaposed in her paintings of that period, as also in her later works of the nineties, such as the 'Day's End' seem to be emanating from this pen and ink sketch, whereby making it a significant drawing.

Madiha Sikander, *Untitled*,  
pointer on book cover, 11.43  
x 17.8 cm, 2009



From among the younger artists, miniaturist Madiha Sikander's entry in the traditional archival style, *gadrang*, is that of a grim-looking young man on the cover of an old book. It is hung with a string and a large clip; much like books displayed where old books are sold. Behind this monochromatic work, Sikander has scrawled "My way with Miniature" in red color pencil. This creates an illusion that it is a real book. This manipulation has been a hallmark of her work. Sikander graduated in Miniature painting from the National College of Art, Lahore in 2010. She has been using old tomes to contextualize past and present and the social and political. Her technique and the surface she uses combine to create notions of memory and identity.

A sketchbook is the root of all creative processes, repository of thought and observations, and it does not matter whether an artist uses a humble drawing

Agha was one of the first students to graduate from the KSA, which was established in 1964. By the early seventies Agha had taken the art world in Pakistan by storm for her energetic but minimalist compositions. The talented Lubna Agha passed away last year in the USA.

Rabia Zuberi, the founder of the KSA has two sketches in the show titled *Human Existence*. One is made in pencil and charcoal on canvas and the other uses mixed media, in which several figures are shown in standing and sitting positions. Her sketches under review are testimony to the figurative sculptural works with which she has always been involved. Zuberi, who studied sculpture at the Government Art College in Lucknow, India, has not only been a pioneering art educationist in Karachi, but is also one of the first women sculptors in Pakistan who has been working since the sixties.

Noorjehan Bilgrami's installation is based on a nest, which a humming bird created with leaves that eventually dried up. The artist has suspended the nest and displayed it in a glass box fixed to the wall, and she has complemented it by five color photographs of the same nest viewed from different angles when the leaves were still fresh and green. All the other material that the little bird used for its abode such as cotton fluff, grass, thistle and thin stalks can also be seen in these images, which are installed on either side of the box in a linear fashion. It is an engaging piece that takes off from the digital documentation of a 'live' subject and transplants itself into the realm of the sketchbook.

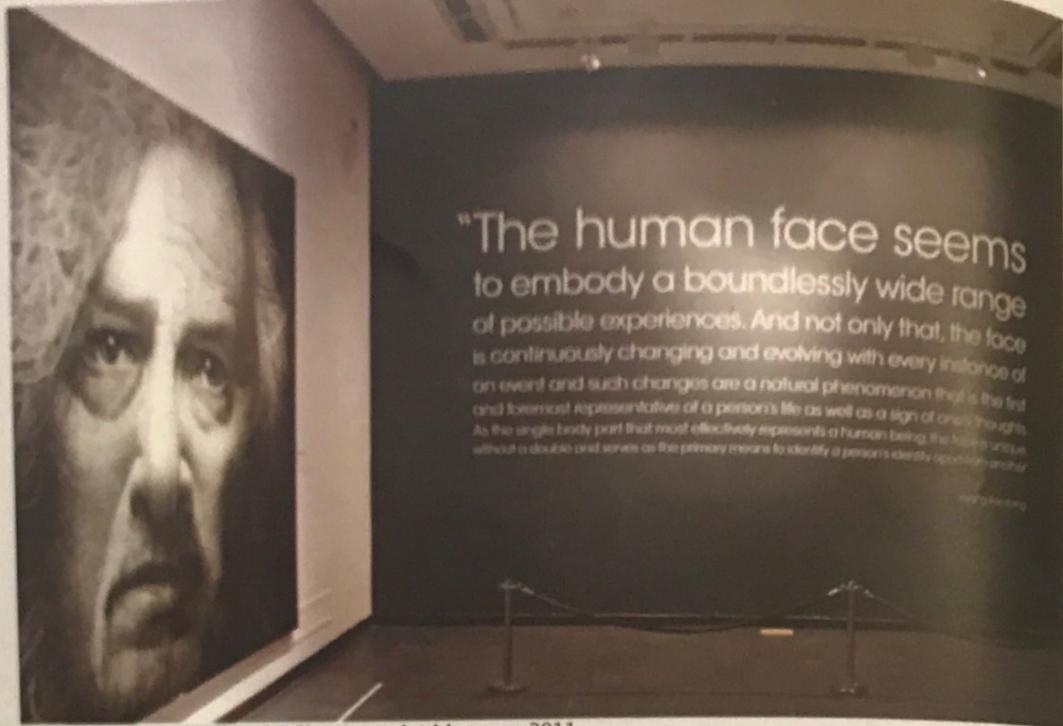
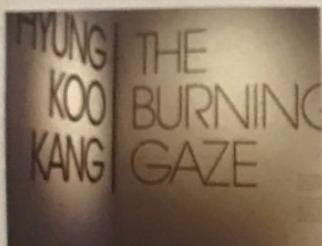


S.M. Raza, *Waiting Room*, digital print on canvas, 50.8 x 76.2 cm, 2011

pad made out of newsprint or a Cason or Strathmore sketchbook. What's important is that it becomes a constant companion of the artist - just like a camera is for a serious photographer - in order to doodle and document before setting up the easel or whatever medium s/he prefers to work with.

There is an interesting combination of imagery in the show as the 'sketches' are not always made in pen & ink, pencil, marker, collage or charcoal but some of the artists have worked in smoke (Riffat Alvi), oils (Babar Moghal), watercolors (Sadia Jamal), *siyah qalam* (Sheema Khan), installations (Noorjehan Bilgrami, Naheed Afridi, Adnan Mairaj), photograph (Jamal Ashiqain) and prints (S.M.Raza). However, the show gives an opportunity to think whether a few of the displays are honest examples of how a work is begun or is it about the artists getting hung up (pun unintended) on putting in a perfect picture for the show. ○

Hyung Koo Kang at  
Singapore Art  
Museum, 2011



Hyung Koo Kang, Wall at the Singapore Art Museum, 2011

Nafisa Rizvi

## PORTRAITS AS SOCIAL PRONOUNS

**Hyung Koo Kang**, the South Korean artist is better known in his home country, in China and some other parts of East Asia than in the West, perhaps because his hyperrealist style of painting does not accede to the expectations of postmodern rigor, and both devices, hyperrealism and painting, are considered secondary, even tertiary, to the principles that govern contemporary production. Since Richard Estes who captured the commercialism of the urban landscape or the satirical art of Malcolm Morley who was said to have pioneered photorealism in the 1960s, there have been few significant super-realists. But Kang's hyperrealism is not that of modern-day realists who sometimes create works solely with the predetermined purpose of disarming the viewer with the awe of their skill. Kang's endeavor is ontological and he expands the discourse on the human condition and talks about lives lived and experiences gained; even fantastical ones that he has himself concocted.

The Singapore Art Museum held a retrospective by Hyung Koo Kang titled *The Burning Gaze*, showcasing almost 20 portraits in oil on canvas and included his collection of miniature sculptural busts worked in clay. Portraits were of celebrities and some represented the ubiquitous people. The images are startling not so

much for their photorealistic qualities as for their scale and impact.

Kang, born in Chungcheongdo, South Korea in 1955, graduated with a BFA in painting from Chungang University, Seoul, but left the profession in order to earn a living to support his family and only returned to art many decades later. In fact little has been written about Kang though that does not undermine his stature as an artist - it only reveals the fact that recognition can be an ambiguous term in the market-centric art world.

Kang's portraits are not the superficial artful mimicry of hyperrealist painters that floor viewers with their meticulous and exhaustive replication of reality, as he does not work with photographs. In fact he takes hundred of photos of his subject, deconstructs and fragments them and then restructures them to form a different and evocative portal into the subject's persona rather than a simple portrait. The portraits of Van Gogh, for example, are of Kang's own construction, as no such photographs of the artist exist. The scale of Kang's paintings is overwhelming, usually at least 8 feet by 6 feet, giving him the space and leverage to study details of the person's face that even a camera

Gemma Sharpe

Exhibition of the award winning works, Abraaj Group Art Prize 2013, Art Dubai, Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai UAE



## THE ABRAAJ GROUP PRIZE:

# LOOKING BACK

**A**t this year's Abraaj Group Art Prize (until recently known as the Abraaj Capital Art Prize), Lahore-based Pakistani artist Huma Mulji executed an eloquent sculpture that unravelled slowly and without the spectacular fireworks common to artworks in such ostentatious contexts. *The Miraculous Lives of This and That*, (2013), renovates the cabinet of curiosities as a fundamentally whimsical exhibitionary form. Cabinets of curiosities was furniture or sometimes even entire rooms that were particularly popular in 17th century Europe as display spaces in which wealthy patrons would exhibit their diverse collections of 'wonders'. Popular before the Enlightenment era of the 18th century (and its associated rise of museum cultures) it promoted the rational organization of knowledge. Mulji's contemporary reworking of the cabinet allows her to question the fundamental reliability of truth in society and her work

thus makes an appeal to a pre-enlightenment epistemology that is comfortable with the kind of productive non-sense as evidenced by the cabinet of curiosities as a form. While Mulji herself suggests that

Huma Mulji, *The Miraculous Lives of This and That*, wooden cabinet, various objects including taxidermy animals, plastic toys and dust, cabinet- 165.1 x 138.4 x 231 cm, 2013



foraging for materials to employ. Often ugly, muddled and astray, the objects that she has included within her cabinet are united under a kind of abject erotics - from specially-commissioned porcelain remakes of Chinese-manufactured dolls, to taxidermy hedgehogs, rows of teeth, and framed displays of animal bones. While the collection is naturally compelling, its death-drive is fascinating. One's eye never manages to keep still as it ranges over objects within her cabinet that seem to be perpetually turning away and disappearing into a



Huma Mulji, *The Miraculous Lives of This and That* (detail)

Pakistani artist Huma Mulji executed an eloquent sculpture that unravelled slowly and without the spectacular fireworks common to artworks in such ostentatious contexts. *The Miraculous Lives of This and That*, (2013), renovates the cabinet of curiosities...

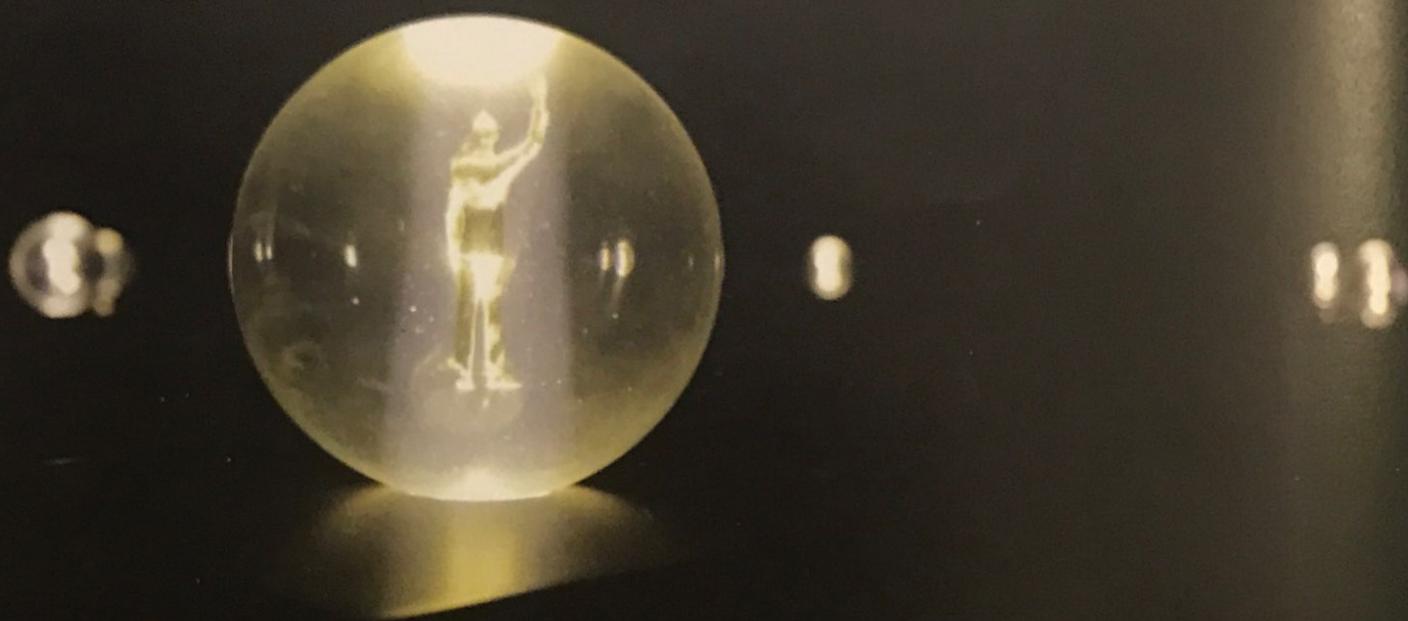
silent discourse with their inanimate companions, both tempting and threatening to pull their viewers into a world of the lost, the dead and the infinite. Including taxidermy animals and a complete cow's head, the work

manages to dwell subtly on the death drive of Mulji's own nation, in which the cadaver features all too regularly within vision. The strength of Mulji's work is its slow revelation and the apparent secrecy of many of its internal relations. Despite its ambition, *The Miraculous Lives of This and That* resists spectacle.

Since 2009, the Abraaj Group - a private equity company that invests in Middle Eastern, North African and South Asian markets - has expanded its sponsorship of the Art Dubai art fair (inaugurated by Sheikh Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE in 2008) by establishing the Abraaj Capital Art Prize alongside the fair. The prize entails that each year artists from the MENASA region (Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia), are invited to participate in a competitive process that sees them submitting proposals for works

the work questions the fundamental reliability of truth in society and our tendency to fashion conspiracy from irrationality, the work also appears to be nostalgic for a time before the imperialism of the European Enlightenment's Universalist, rationalist and humanist systems of thought began to interpolate the intellectual histories of non-European regions.

Within the catalogue dedicated to Mulji's work a visual chapter entitled 'An Inventory of Things', pays testament to her ranging accumulation of unconventional objects. Describing her 'abiding interest in *flâneurie*'<sup>1</sup> in an interview with this year's Abraaj curator Murtaza Vali, Mulji relates her attraction to wandering Pakistani cities



they hope to make should they win the prize. Awarded artists utilize the financial, practical and curatorial support of the prize, its curators, and its organizers, to produce ambitious works that may otherwise be impossible to achieve. The resulting pieces are displayed within the grounds of Art Dubai, later entering the Abraaj collection.

This year Vartan Avakian (Lebanon), Iman Issa (Egypt), Hrair Sarkissian (Syria), Rayyane Tabet (Lebanon), and Huma Mulji (Pakistan), participated. Mulji is the third Pakistani artist to have won, fourth if we are to count Shazad Dawood, who won with his *New Dream Machine Project* in 2011. Of mixed Pakistani and Indian descent, Dawood is based in Britain and is recognized as a British artist dealing with a detached Subcontinental identity within the diaspora.

In 2011 Hamra Abbas recalled a pre-Enlightenment European cultural form with her piece *Woman in Black*, a stained glass window reminiscent of the medieval didactic windows of European churches. Her window depicts a somewhat macabre but powerful heroine

(who has appeared in her work before), standing over a battle-ready crowd, whose facial features resemble Mughal miniature paintings. While this trembling army is lightly decorated with Islamic geometric pattern, it is anachronistically capped with hard hats typically worn by construction workers. In 2012 Risham Syed presented *The Seven Seas*, a series of hand-made quilts that present a narrativised cartography of Victorian trade routes throughout the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Syed's maps incorporate materials and textile practices from the regions depicted (and visited) by the artist in undertaking the work.

The budget, scale, profile, and audience for the Abraaj Group Art Prize could lead one to accuse the works produced for it as conforming to an ever-growing canon of 'biennale artworks' - artworks that, as Jan Verwoert describes, '[reflect] a desire and a need: the desire to share specific experiences in a situation of international exchange, and the need to find a mode of artistic expression that could accommodate the conflicting demands of experiential specificity and

cross-cultural comprehensibility'.<sup>2</sup> Yet as Verwoert himself discusses, this accusation of tokenism is least productive when it is ungrounded. Such works characteristic of a burgeoning global artistic industry that has expanded massively since 1989, largely exhibit a genuine desire to furnish exhibitionary arenas in which artists and viewers can 'articulate what may be at stake when we have a sensual encounter with someone or something at the limits of our understanding and on the threshold of a different form of communication'.<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind it is important to question how one might pursue a productive critique of a project such as the Abraaj Group Art Prize while reserving the artworks and their makers from assault. For there is no doubt that Abraaj offers an opportunity that many artists would be delighted to avail: curatorial support, and the financial and pragmatic reinforcements required to undertake 'dream works' that would otherwise languish in sketch-books. Within the region, the Prize offers a fairly unique opportunity *within the region*. Rather than South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African artists working on commissions for large institutions in Europe, America or the burgeoning network of East Asian museums and institutions, they work with a proximal audience in mind. Despite the curatorial input that the artists receive, the works produced to some extent avoid being subsumed at the point of production and display into overarching curatorial thematic that are characteristic of biennales, (though the resulting works often find their way into biennales afterwards).

So instead of direct curatorial imposition, how are the



Rayyane Tabet, five thousand hand-cast unique lead pieces and two wall texts, ink on cotton paper, lead pieces, size variable, 2013

This year Vartan Avakian (Lebanon), Iman Issa (Egypt), Hrair Sarkissian (Syria), Rayyane Tabet (Lebanon), and Huma Mulji (Pakistan), participated.

artworks collected under the Abraaj heading each year otherwise put to work conceptually and aesthetically? Abraaj has now completed five editions and it is useful to tally the national mix of artists it has represented. With Lebanon the most 'awarded' country with five artists over five years, Pakistan is in second place with Egypt in terms of artistic representation. The rest of the prize-winners are overwhelmingly from the Arabic-speaking world and the Middle East, to shakily include Iran and Turkey within a Middle Eastern continental block, (though the 'blocking' collections of countries into regions is of course an awkward and problematic practice). The Gulf is surprisingly under-represented at Abraaj and so is South Asia. While Sharmini Pereira, who works between the UK and Sri Lanka has been

involved in the prize as a curator in 2011, and Sharjah-born Indian curator Murtaza Vali was awarded the opportunity to work on this year's installment, neither Bangladesh, Sri Lanka nor India, have been represented artistically, (though Shazad Dawood makes a diasporic connection to both Pakistan and India). Artistically Pakistan entirely accounts for the South Asian contingent of prizewinners.

The debate is not whether artists from one particular country or region are sub-par or less geared towards prizes such as Abraaj. Instead it is worth questioning how Pakistan, which sits strategically and politically between the Middle East and South Asia, finds a historical, political and aesthetic place - via its artists - within the cultural remit of the prize. Art Dubai is inevitably an Arabic-language space, both literally and metaphorically. Issues at the Forum turn politically Westwards towards Palestine, Egypt, Syria, as one would

expect, and the stands are dominated by art from Arabic-speaking countries, further afield from Dubai geographically than Pakistan or even the Western provinces of India, though clearly closer to home culturally.

When questioned on Dubai's impact on Pakistani artists, Huma Mulji in a pre-Abraaj interview replied that India still maintains a regional dominance when it comes to

historical trade networks between Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Turkey, the UAE and the UK respectively, and Hamra Abbas' window dwelling on connections running from East to West through Mughal painting, European Medieval stained glass, and construction workers' hats (apparently representing the UAE and its largely South Asian workforce), are effective cases in point. Huma Mulji eschewed the



Iman Issa, *Common Elements*, fifty-five text panels, fourteen framed C-prints, and five wooden sculptures on white plinths. size variable, 2013

Pakistani art and artists. Typically, and despite increasingly Indo-Pak border restrictions, it has done so for decades - the early career of Rashid Rana being a case in point. The shared visual, aesthetic and colonial history of India orients Pakistan visually Eastwards into South Asia, and observing the grounds of Dubai, it becomes clear that Dubai is not in fact a cultural stepping stone between Europe and South Asia (via the cosmopolitan UAE), but a coalescence-point for the Middle East. Moreover, Pakistan does not inhabit an evenly-split middle-ground between Asia and the Middle East here. Art Dubai is a meeting point for Arabic-speaking cultural territories and Pakistan within this sphere represents a neighbor that packs an artistic punch and shares a Muslim heritage that accommodates its peripheral access.

The success of the three Pakistani artists' work awarded has been to take this in their stride and avoid instrumentalizing their home country, instead placing Pakistan intelligently within complex and visibly uneven regional matrices. Risham Syed's quilts reflecting on

camel and references to the Arab world in her earlier works in favor of a European-styled cabinet filled with artifacts mostly collected from Pakistan that included objects that filtered European and Chinese manufacture through her porcelain dolls - European-made porcelain pieces based on Chinese copies of European originals, purchased from markets in Pakistan. All three artists have cast wide cultural nets that refigure the unequal relationships between economically and historically dominant global countries and their own.

Dubai is a strange and unique place economically, culturally and socially. Dubai's ruling Al Maktoum family, have over recent decades established a wide portfolio of major corporations, leading Dubai to place 'an increasing emphasis on foreign private investment, the real estate sector, and the development of free trade zones'.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologist Ahmed Khanna charts the effect of Dubai's embrace of neoliberalism on its cultural subjectivity. The 'flexible citizens' of Dubai, he argues, divert from the regional norm by espousing national identity and nationalistic politics in favour of the politics

of neoliberalism, 'with its valorization of the individual entrepreneur, its provocation to question "tradition", and its commodification of culture.'<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, it appears that Dubai's ruling family had been reading critics such as Julian Stallabrass - who declaims contemporary art's 'core function as a propagandist of neoliberal values'<sup>6</sup> - when they established the fair. Art Dubai is not only an economic boon for Dubai, but also a symbolic one.

The resonance of Stallabrass' critique, while being reductive, is clear in this context, where the neoliberal city corporation marries with contemporary art's (apparent) epistemological and physical accessibility, with artists' affirmation of individuality, and the art world's questioning of 'tradition' as a *habitus*.<sup>7</sup> The winning artworks of The Abraaj Group Art Prize are thus put to work. The artworks displayed are non-distributable, entering the Abraaj Group's collection once Art Dubai is over. The project excites the fair's audience, presenting spectacular (if not always large and flashy) productions that illuminated the artworks on sale next door with their ready availability. The speakers' forums and other associated installations and projects - many of which are valuable and interesting if examined in isolation - further remind the fair's attendees of the academic and intellectual value of the industry they are 'buying into', along with its entrepreneurial spirit. Meanwhile these discursive forums perform a critique in reverse, allowing the fair's profit-gatherers and corporate supporters to acknowledge and contain critique by orchestrating it in advance.



Murtaza Vali, curator of Abraaj Group Art Prize 2013

In an interview with this year's Abraaj curator Murtaza Vali, Mulji relates her attraction to wandering Pakistani cities foraging for materials to employ. Often ugly, muddled and astray, the objects that she has included within her cabinet are united under a kind of abject erotics



Huma Mulji, co-winner of Abraaj Group Art Prize 2013

this year's winner of the Deutsche Bank "Artist of the Year" award, and as more and more Pakistani artists enter the global corporatized art-world the conversation will only pick up more speed and discursiveness. On a wider scale, with the global economic recession still in swing, charitable and non-profit foundations and funders for the arts are scaling back, and particularly in Europe where there has been a general turn towards the Right, financially pinched Governments are appealing to American-style philanthropic and corporate models for supporting arts and culture, entailing the extension and development of an arts-corporate relationship globally. What is particularly interesting about Abraaj and about Art Dubai in general is its relationship with Pakistan territorially. Time will tell whether Pakistan's relationship with Dubai (within the Arab world at large) is a semi-delusional one founded on political fiction-making - as Bani Abidi's portraits of Muhammad Bin Qasim against a contemporary Karachi backdrop remind us in her photo and video series *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing* (2006) - or one that will solidify into something more productive and based on genuine mutual and cultural interest in the future. In order for it to do so, more than the efforts of Pakistani artists alone should be implicated. The congregations at Art Dubai in general should continue to follow the Abraaj Prize's lead in taking a genuine (and historically anchored) interest in Pakistan and Pakistani art, and importantly, Pakistan's vitally important neighbors across South Asia. ○

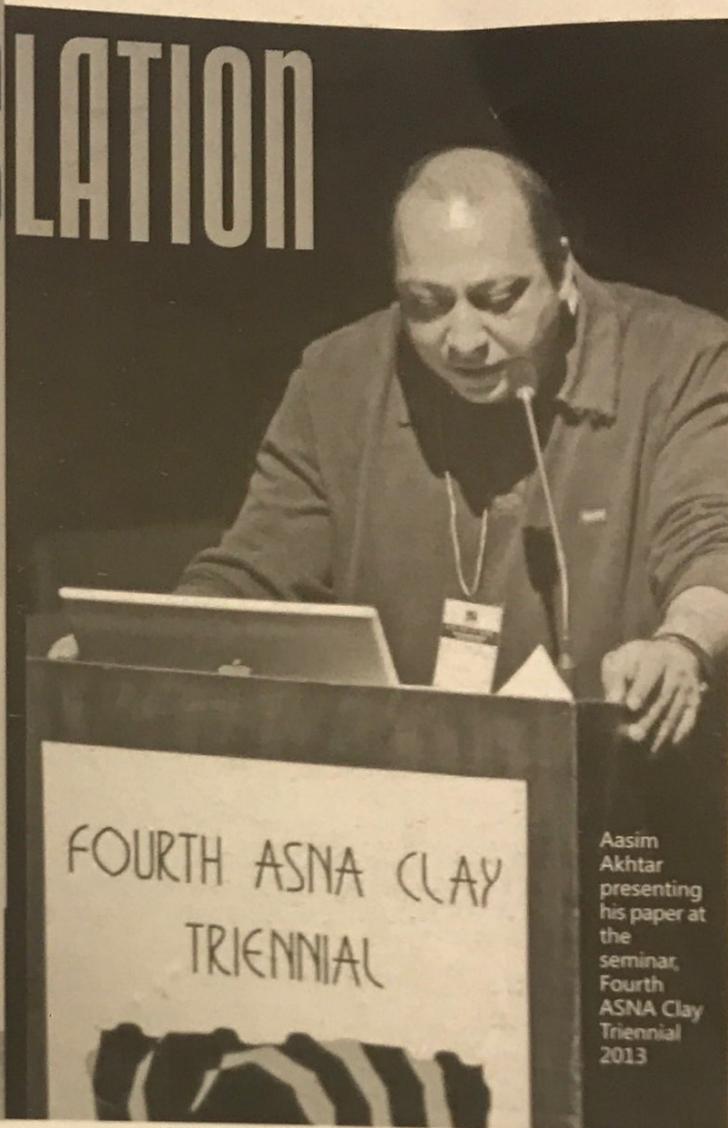
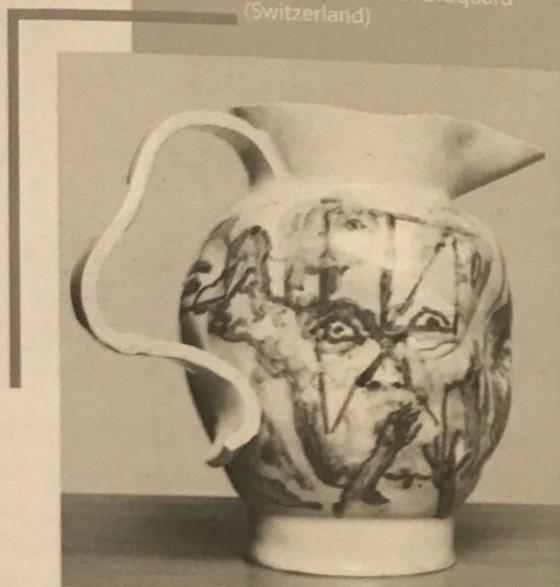
Yet this is not unique to Art Dubai and what is rather refreshing about Art Dubai is the readiness of its various stakeholders to mark their respective presences, unlike, for example, the Frieze in London that has taken place every year since 2003 in Regent's Park. At Frieze, seemingly each and every space, gallery, lecture, prize, and event, appears to be branded under a unified and inescapable Frieze logo. Art Dubai however, has a more openly distributed institutional authorship.

The above paragraphs trace ground that has been well covered before. Pakistani miniaturist Imran Qureshi is

- 1 Huma Mulji, 'Huma Mulji in conversation with Murtaza Vali', Huma Mulji, *Abraaj Group Art Prize Catalogue*, ed. Murtaza Vali. (Dubai: The Abraaj Group), 2013. p99.
- 2 Jan Verwoert, 'The Curious Case of Biennial Art', *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Ovstebo. (Bergen Kunsthall and HatjeCantzVerlag: Bergen and Ostfildern), 2010. p184.
- 3 Jan Verwoert. p196.
- 4 Ahmed Khanna, 'Flexible Citizenship in Dubai: Neoliberal Subjectivity in the Emerging "City Corporation"', *Cultural Anthropology*, 25:1. 2010. p108.
- 5 Ahmed Khanna. p123.
- 6 Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*. (Oxford: OUP), 2005. p72.
- 7 'The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time.' Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 1980. [trans. Richard Nice]. Stanford University Press: California, 1992. p54.

## TRANSLATION

Ceramic work by Bastien Aubry and Dimitri Broquard (Switzerland)



Aasim Akhtar presenting his paper at the seminar, Fourth ASNA Clay Triennial 2013

Officially sanctioned discussions and the continued buoyancy of critical issues in clay reflect the growing concerns, gains, explorations, departures, and redefinitions of clay art that are currently underway. For all that is new, however, ceramics remains plagued by tiresome issues - perhaps none more tiresome than the art versus craft debate. Asserting that "in this postmodern world...an object's medium does not preclude it from a seat at the art table..." the search for a language of critical thought in our field has gone casually onward, addressing other problems and defining criticism.

On the occasion of this seminar, it is therefore, important to analyze the statement and to reexamine the art versus craft debate which it so effortlessly hurdles on its way towards universal inclusion. Yet, the resulting discussion cannot be more of the same intra-disciplinary justification nor a lobbyists' search for interdisciplinary equity. Taking either of these directions will only serve to conflate self-interest, presumption and criticism in a way that erodes the integrity of the latter. I shall

therefore argue the offensive and try to expose some of the fault lines and fissures, which are visible enough from the outside. And ultimately, it is that outsiders' perspective with which we must contend.

To begin understanding the art and craft debate requires a division between pottery and ceramic sculpture - a division not expressed in the term 'ceramist' and, therefore, often confusing to non-ceramists. Then examining pottery separately, one must address function as an additive to the varying ratio of form, subject and content which, no matter how literally or abstractly these terms are understood, characterize art.

While pottery is rich in both form and content, the subject of a utilitarian vessel can only be understood as its function - the purposeful action of the object and the contents for which the object is a medium. And the subject of ornamentation cannot be considered the subject of the vessel unless said ornamentation relates to the form or the function of the vessel itself. Even if this occurs, it is important to distinguish between what is the 'theme' imbued by the vessel's ornamentation

Exhibition at the Fourth ASNA Clay Triennial 2013, VM Art Gallery, Karachi



and whether or not the vessel truly has a subject beyond its function.

Consequently, for pottery to acquire a subject there must be, to a degree which is physically manifested in the work, a sacrifice of function that carries the vessel towards the decorative or the conceptual. It is by means of this exchange and the assumption of the vessel itself as the subject, or even as a motif, that the sculptural vessel, that troublesome inhabitant of a more troublesome no man's land between pottery and sculpture, is born.

While pottery may seek to test the boundaries of pottery, it is far more seldom that it aims to test the boundaries of art or to be anti-art. More often pottery seeks validation as a particular kind of art. Yet pottery is handicapped in its effort toward art status by the requirements of its function. For as long as the pot is predetermined in any respect, as long as it must fulfill obligations, then its commitment to expression is compromised. The pot, to be a pot, suffers an inevitable requisitioning and must, therefore, remain a pot no matter how creative, well designed, or well crafted it may be. This, I would venture, is the essence of arguments pitting 'art' versus 'artistic' or 'an art' and 'sculpture' versus 'sculptural.'

In this vein, one is puzzled by the ill contentment, which pervades the ceramics community. For it seems that

the intrinsic values, historical layers and cultural contexts from which so many great pieces of pottery derive significance do rule so tyrannically that many are unable to accept less than the designation of artist. This they do and, as they search for equity and recognition, also become tributary forces in the erosion of a noble tradition of craft. After all, is it a blurring of the division between art and craft that achieves equity, or is it simply a high and just regard for craft and its discipline? Furthermore, in this respect, is craft a term that too many are culturally ill equipped to accept despite the incumbent honors and privileges of the title?

Title, however, is a very different issue when it comes to 'ceramic sculpture'. These two words segregate and isolate the ceramist by creating a subcategory of sculpture. No further proof of this is needed than to cite those who make forays into the world of ceramics by working with clay but retain the title of sculptor, painter, or, more simply, artist. All of this while ceramists remain ceramists, who by definition, adhere to a singular choice in material.

The issue, however, is not the title of 'ceramist' or 'ceramic sculpture'. Rather, the issue is the contradiction between an unwavering choice in material and how sculpture is understood. Of course, sculpture can be understood in many ways but there are visible trends. First, there is the European tradition, which has defined

the western perception of sculpture as three-dimensional or relief work which relies primarily upon subtractive processes, casting and materials chosen for their economic connotation, aesthetic qualities and physical strength. More relevant to this discussion, however, are contemporary redefinitions of sculpture as the making of objects and installations by artists who choose freely from a wide range of materials according to the purpose and conceptual intent of their work. The ceramic artist, however, is fundamentally different. The ceramist, instead of choosing a variety of materials for one reason, has traditionally worked with a single material that is chosen for any variety of reasons.

As with vessels and as with all of those sculptural vessels whose creators have approached the pot in the same way as an artist might approach the human figure, clay is also sometimes used for physical properties or material specific, content-laden associations and references that are essential to the expression of the work. The significance of this last choice is evident in the fact that so many of the field's most important artists are ceramists who had or have one foot dangling over the ledge of the applied arts. With the other foot dangling precariously over the cutting edge, these artists seem to fully understand the lexicon of ceramic art as a marriage of the material's content and its physical attributes. Consequently, these artists are fully able to bring together innovation and substance, and this is the difference between being revolutionary and being off on a tangent.

Another attribute of contemporary sculpture is that it emphasizes the transformation of materials - taking everyday materials, objects and technological innovations into the gallery, there extracting their visual

and contemplative power and, potentially, shaping the way those materials and technical applications will be viewed in the outside world. In ceramic art, contradiction to this idea is underscored by a conspicuous habit of trompe l'oeil works. These works, while novel and capable of demonstrating incontestable technical prowess, frequently lack a content value that is specific to the medium. These works are more often imitations than transformations, and raise the question of what value does the clay bring to the object, which the imitated object and imitated materials do not possess.

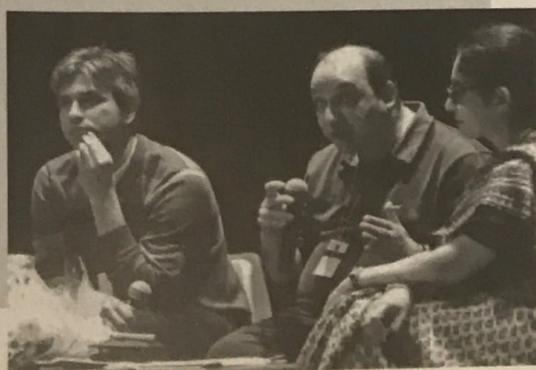
Of course, one would not disagree that in this postmodern world, an object's medium does not preclude it from a seat at the art table. The question, which has been illustrated here, does not concern the material that is chosen but why a material is chosen and how it is used. As long as these questions are not attended to, the artists who chose clay, as a default material will continue to mistakenly equate contemporary sculpture and ceramic sculpture when the two genres, though sharing some overlap, remain different in principle. And as long as the equation is misunderstood, ceramic art will continue in its isolation with the craft traditions from which it evolved.

The divide can be bridged, however, in part by changes in practice. Of course, there are already many changes underway with one of the most popular being the mixed media movement. Yet I would be so bold as to maintain that it is a mistake to imagine, that simply including clay in mixed media sculptures is going to balance the equation presented here. Mixed media sculptures or installations that include clay may find broader validation than ceramic sculpture. Yet the same questions concerning material are at issue. Changes can only begin to resolve the principles that place ceramic sculpture and contemporary sculpture at relative odds.

Another aid in the evolution of ceramic art is the development of a proper critical language. This must be a language that is capable of articulating the diverse approaches and intersecting, overlapping traditions that define ceramic art. The language must also address and not merely avoid or take for granted, the choice of material, how ceramists view themselves, how they are viewed from the outside and why. Indeed, all of these perspectives must be considered if ceramic art, its long history, its variety, richness and the great potential of the material are to be translated into an effective critical language that is comprehensible beyond the borders of the field. ○

The pot, to be a pot, suffers an inevitable requisitioning and must, therefore, remain a pot no matter how creative, well designed, or well crafted it may be.

Panel discussion at the seminar, L to R, Reyaz Badruddin, Aasim Akhtar & Ela Mukherjee



Nilofur Farrukh

# RESISTING WITH

# CLAY AND GLASS



Kohari, Glass sculpture, circa 2012.

As art enters the commercial gallery space and acquires a monetary value, the process of commoditization propped with myths of branding and marketing strategies distancing it from the essence of its being, the intangible life source of imagination and physical energy

of the creative process. At this new location, the highly complex and individual experiences of the embedded narrative becomes irrelevant. At any art fair on any continent the anxiety of the trading floor is the same, as art is discussed on the seemingly endless walls, explained and sold in a lexicon that stands not within the artist's experience of creating art but outside it, in

The advice of the eminent painter Shakir Ali to Kohari, then a young painter whose work was in demand, was 'to look beyond his immediate success'. These words were to become a catalyst in his discovery of a new medium and its lifelong exploration. Clay, the medium Kohari selected, made him leave Karachi for the potteries of Gujrat and later Gujranwala, to work with rudimentary facilities. On a trip to France he met his wife and decided to make a life there but continued to return back to Pakistan.

the world of globalized cultural retail.

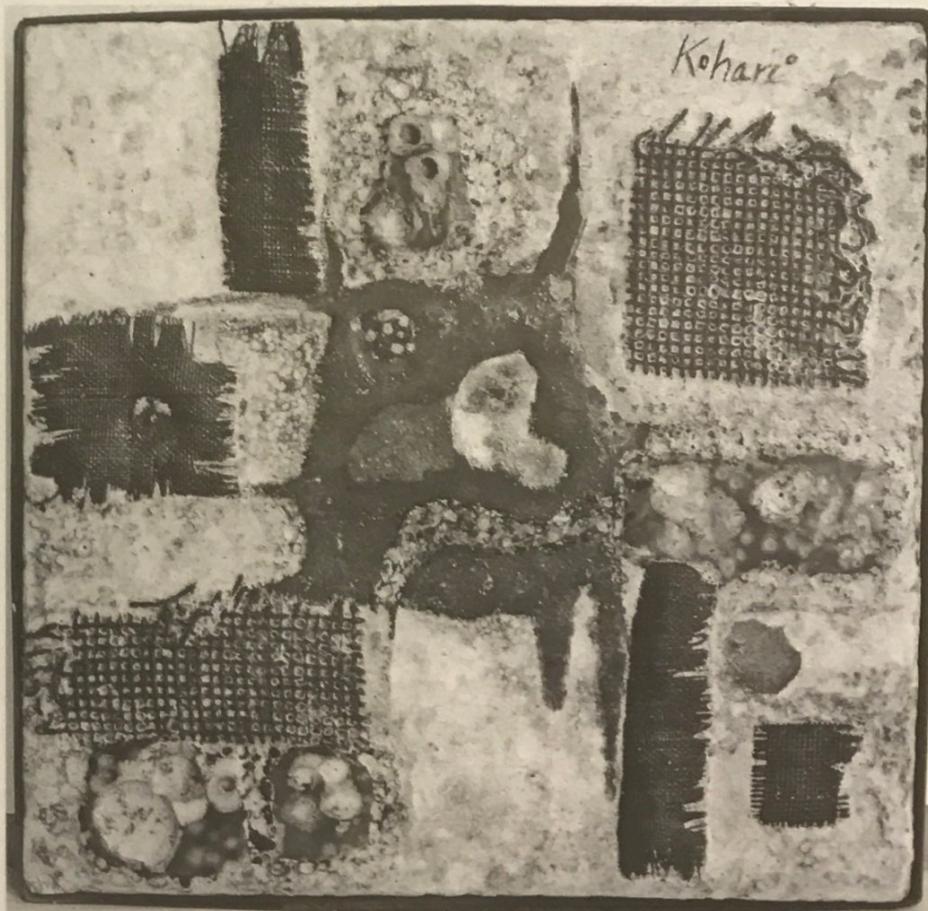
Masood Kohari's art that disturbs the linearity of preconceived notions of 'ism' can be problematic for those looking for an easy reading. This could be one of the reasons why this artist, who has been working in the field for over half a century, finds his seminal breakthroughs unacknowledged and himself an outsider whose life and work seems to have no relevance to the current art scene in Pakistan.

The medium and iconography of Kohari's work creates barriers only if accessed through narrow theoretical

frames. To avoid any misreading, the centrality of the process has to be privileged and a wider view of history, location and the artist's connection to the medium taken into consideration. In the unexpected linkages and specificities of the experience from which the work has emerged also lies a significant chapter of Pakistan's yet-to-be-fully explored art history.

In the decade after Pakistan's Independence, when Masood Kohari decided to become an artist, his city Karachi had no art school. However a group of talented men shared similar ambitions and from time to time shared studio space. Pioneers like Rasheed Araeen, Nagi, Ajmal Hussain, Nasir Shamsi were among them. Their art was supported by a cosmopolitan community, many of them foreign diplomats, as Karachi was at that time the nation's capital.

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Kohari, Fire Painting Series, circa 1970

'to look beyond his immediate success'. These words were to become a catalyst in his discovery of a new medium and its lifelong exploration. Clay, the medium Kohari selected, made him leave Karachi for the potteries of Gujrat and later Gujranwala, to work with rudimentary

facilities. On a trip to France he met his wife and decided to make a life there but continued to return back to Pakistan. In the 1970s he did a long teaching stint as the Principal of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts, Karachi. He has exhibited worldwide, including at the 13th Sao Paulo Biennale in 1976. All these locations and experiences shaped his professional and personal trajectory.

'It was just me and my obsession for the work',<sup>2</sup> the artist remembers the days when he slept on *charpoys* (string cots) laid out in the open on wooden planks to save them from snakes during the nights in Gujrat. Living, eating and learning the craft from the potters

up scraps of rusted wire mesh from piles of waste glass to bury it in the surface of thickly glazed tiles, which at that time seemed like a natural decision to use a familiar element to push his experiments further. The introduction of metal, never attempted before, yielded Fire Paintings that won him critical acclaim and the Shakir Ali Award in 1976. His shift to glass in subsequent years, a difficult decision because sophisticated kilns were not easily available, came as logical progression when he decided to un-clutter his compositions by taking away clay from glaze, with glass left behind to challenge him. Despite the fact that clay was a warm pliable medium, the artist was drawn to glass because



Kohari with master potter from Gujranwala



Visiting Shakir Ali in Lahore



At his exhibition in Marseilles

led to a long association that impacted his perceptions of the medium and its practice. 'Here the work was very much an ancestral practice and a young boy could look through the hole in the kiln and accurately tell the stage of firing'.<sup>3</sup> Kohari's transition from pigments to glazes and canvas to clay and glass drew him deep into the process of handling the medium under conditions that were always in flux. According to the artist, this unpredictability of the outcome gave his search an inward direction.

The craftsman hones his skills to control the outcome to perfect the form, while the artist does it to collapse boundaries and allow space for exploration'.<sup>4</sup> Experiments with glaze formulas to develop the color palette for 'Fire Painting' and later the glass oeuvre marked an accumulation of innovative encounters between material and processes. In Gujrat he picked

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of its changing response to temperature. 'Particles in glass are never still, and are constantly responding to the ambient heat'.<sup>4</sup> Kohari's translucent two dimensional works hold a universe of textures, colors and undulating surfaces within, which can only be given life by light. Working with a painterly sensibility has always come naturally to him, as chromatic and textural possibilities are seen as constant central concerns in his oeuvre. Even the life sketches of nude models are all exercises to understand form and shape, patterns of light, texture and movement, fragmented memories of which

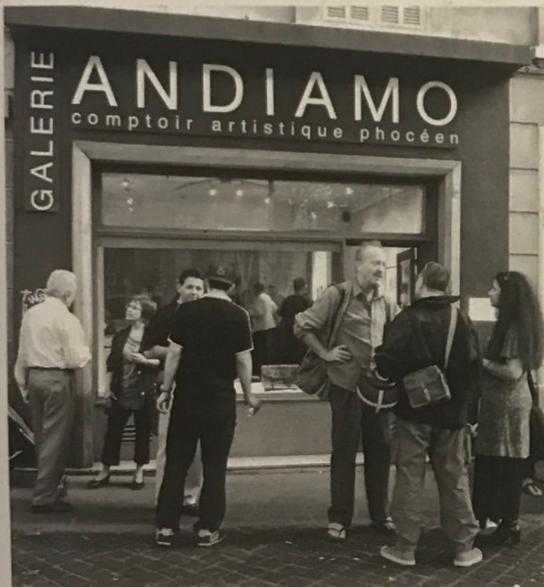
instinctively finds a way into his abstract renditions.

Kohari's recent exhibition at VM Gallery showcased a large body of works in glass and ceramics from different stages of his career, which he has retained in his personal collection. He would like to pass them on to a Museum in Pakistan, someday. This presented a rare opportunity to see the work of the only Pakistani artist who has worked seriously in glass and seminal experiments in ceramics. The minor retrospective however failed to engage most of the art community and there was very little academic interest and even less critical reading of his work. Was this due to a lack of creative curiosity or a disinterest in venturing beyond established territories and hierarchies? Does the fact that history is increasingly identified with moribund practices by contemporary artists because they feel it has no wisdom to offer to current success formulas? This systemic failure to understand art in its complex contextual totality calls for an urgent need to return to fundamental questions and fundamental connections.

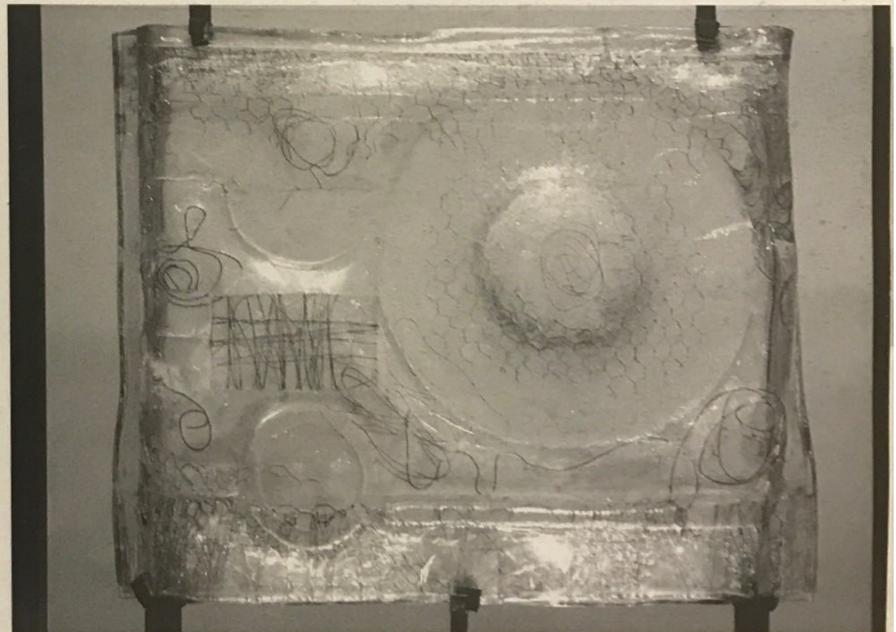
In countries where cultural maps of the past history have been lost or erased by design or re-written to

thrust to promote 'the local' as a non-dynamic space that can only be vitalized and validated by the global network has privileged cultural amnesia. To create new cartographies in Pakistan, art has to be connected to lost knowledge. The stolen songs of Sufis like Shahbaz Qalandar and Bulleh Shah that for centuries that have knit communities together with a message of religious pluralism and multiculturalism have to re-enter the consciousness of a nation. Local solutions can be found in forgotten debates on religious reformation like Dr Mohammad Iqbal's thesis of 'The Reformation of Islamic Thought' and his epic poems, *Shikwa* and *Jawab-e-Shikwa*; the latter based on Man's conversation with God that addresses concerns of a people in religious crisis. Written over a century ago when Muslims were divided between different interpretations of their religion, continues to have relevance today. Secular literature and art that connects people through rituals of cultural tolerance has the power to offer 'local solutions' because it comes from the introspective space within a civilization.

Independent art practices like that of Kohari complicate



Kohari exhibition at Galerie Andiamo, Marseille, France, 2012



Kohari, *Transfuge* (crystal collage), kiln -formed glass with iron net, copper wire, silver and glass crystals, 45.72 x 35.6 cm, 2009

create half truths, institutions have become effete and incapable of creating new knowledge that can interpret art in the context of its chronological development and socio-political environment. Maybe a return to the discursive drawing board can initiate a critique of the seemingly benign cultural globalization, a new form of colonialism, that has contributed to the devaluation of the 'local' and weakened it by robbing the legitimacy from all practices outside its economic priorities. The

hegemonic cultural protocols for they remind us that the 'self' and the 'local' are both culturally autonomous territories that have to be reclaimed and protected from the homogenizing strategies of Globalization. ○

1-4, Quotes from an interview of Kohari by the author on March 27, 2013 at VM Art Gallery, Karachi

Rumana Husain and Amra Ali

# RIWHYTI ONE NIGHT STAND: AN EVENING OF PERFORMANCE ART

J A N U A R Y 1 4 , 2 0 1 3



Artists' meeting with Senior Editors of NuktaArt. L to R Amra Ali, Babar Sheikh, Rumana Husain, Nimra Bucha, Danish Raza and Munawar Ali Syed

In Nukta-e-Nazar or Point of View, mixed media artists Danish Raza and Munawar Ali Syed; filmmaker Babar Sheikh and actor Nimra Bucha discussed their performances in Riwhyti One Night Stand (R.O.N.S). Curated by Amin Gulgee for the Fourth ASNA Clay Triennial in January, the event brought together a jam-packed space of sound and movement. Interconnected through a physical time and space, the performance night delved into questions of aesthetics, as well as on the parameters of artistic discourse.

The artists spoke about their performances in their relationship to Gulgee's curatorial frame. Identifying him as a conductor and stimulator, they felt that the overlapping noise and constriction of space changed their individual works into a collective dynamic in which the two hour duration of the performances and the audience presence played a significant role in completing the work.

**NUKTAART** wanted to locate the relevance of performances that either disturbed or confused the viewer as he or she walked through a barrage of performances in close proximity, none of which could be viewed in isolation from the other. Like a chain of human energy, the Performance Night was a profusion of experiences, and gestures that tested the limits of where art began and ended, or if there was an end. In many ways, it questioned the conventional frame of representation and its viewership, intervening in the dynamics of art to society.

In Pakistan, where Performance Art is an emerging field, a handful of artists are incorporating it in their practice. Among them, Amin Gulgee has been in the forefront. The performances were perceived as a catalyst by ASNA to create an opportunity for artists interested in this genre and create possibilities for an interdisciplinary dialogue.

The observation by each artist reflects a glimpse of their intent, just as the performances were experienced through a continuous movement of a packed audience. That is why the context of each work is not 'explained' in the following observations by the participants. The conversation brings a glimpse of a thought or idea, and like the curator's text, there seems no intent in 'framing' the experience.

# THE CONVERSATIONS:

## BABAR SHEIKH:

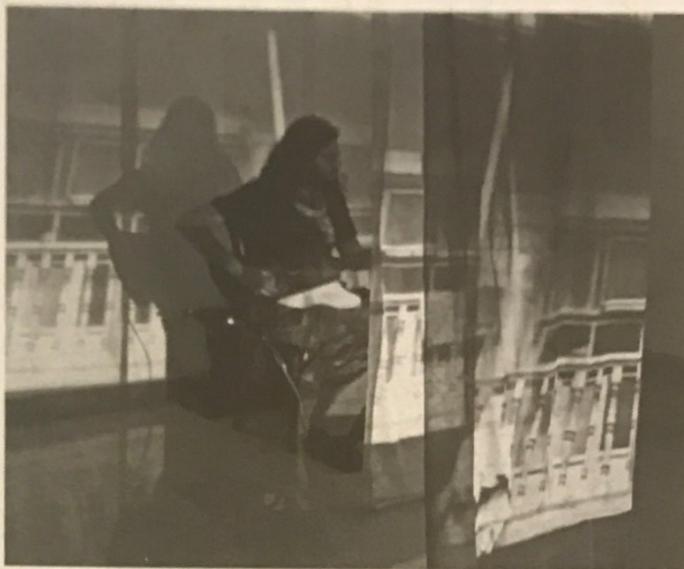
Performance title: The New Wave

This was a great platform to step out into the unknown. We have our own domains, but this was a good extension of our work...

My performance was something of a natural evolution of ideas. I have been working with projections and using motion picture as part of installations for over two years. Being a film maker (my day job) gives me an opportunity to explore

and use moving pictures and their excerpts in many new ways. Most of my images are homage to Karachi...the ever changing metropolis. I shot many hours of footage way back in 2004 just before flyover bridges and new express- ways had started coming up in the city. My piece 'the elevator that never died' (2011) was really the first time that I was breaking the format of a screen (TV or cinema) and projecting on other surfaces. This was something that I had explored over the years.

For R.O.N.S I thought of using outtakes from short films that I had directed and project them onto sheets of cloth. Outtakes have always had an air of mystique about them; there are feet after feet of footage that never sees the light of the day. What happens to it usually is that it's locked and stored away in the producer's warehouses. I also wanted to use the transitions between two shots. We shoot on 35 MM color negative and



there are always some dropped frames when the camera cuts.

These flashes of the shutter gate of the camera have a very interesting visual effect. My piece for R.O.N.S allowed me to use both these outtakes and transitions.

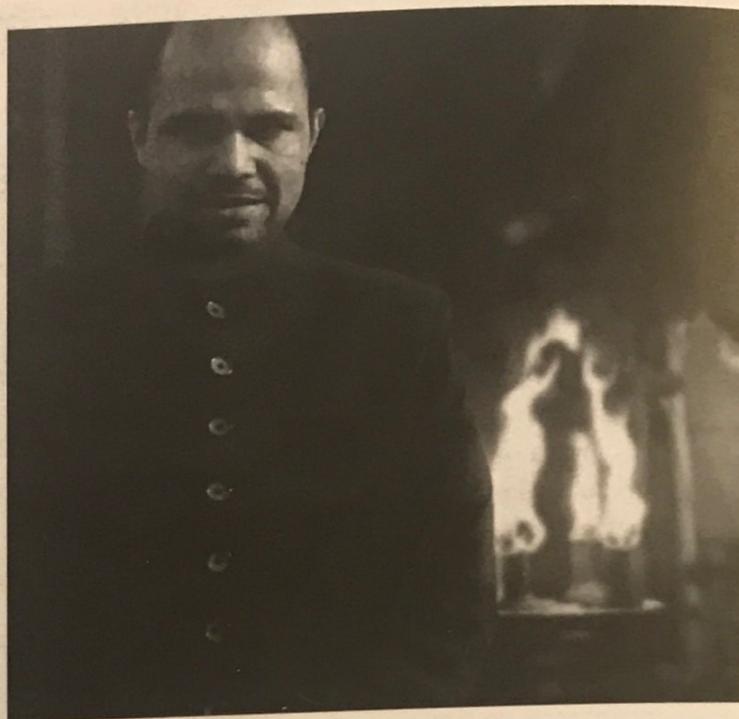
My installation also had me playing live bass guitar. I was performing this from behind the screens, so for the audience I was only a faint silhouette or an outline behind the screen.

# DANISH RAZA

## Performance title: Sacrifice and Surrogates

The Idea was to get people to vote. They needed to vote for something so profound that it took them out of their comfort zone, where they could question their agendas of living; live and let die or live and let live.

Most importantly, the votes were in favor of "NO" to the goat sacrifice and people went all the way to get their votes registered and counted by making the marks on "NO" by using not only pen and pencils but tearing holes on that side, burning, rubbing rose petals and mud into their answer (to emphasize), so that the goat could be saved.



So I discussed with Amin about having a goat and the voting on the sacrifice of the goat, since it is a surrogate for a Pakistani or Pakistan and the voting refers to the national elections. It was a strong and bold comparison. We had decided earlier that we would rig the voting results if voters end up wanting to kill the goat, since we never intended to hurt the animal in any way, but the whole action seemed to suggest that we were actually going to sacrifice the goat

inside the gallery.

The events of the Shia Hazara killings in Quetta happened the week of the performance, with the families doing dharna (sit in) out in the open with unburied coffins. That seemed to have pulled me out of the act and I felt nothing we did could or would make this a better world, since we were so insensitive and indifferent to others. I had asked a friend to read a short write-up we had prepared for the event but when we got there, we were overwhelmed by the sound and the noise and the crowd. I knew there would be people and it would be loud, but the human energy flowing in there was astounding and beyond my expectations.

We wanted to move the goat around in the gallery but it got upset because of all the noise. So we decided to keep it as far away as we could from it all. We started getting people to vote by giving the audience a paper that asked if they wanted this goat to be sacrificed or not.

The response to the act was spontaneous. It was not as if you were looking at a painting and then moved to the next. You were in it.

The sad thing was that people got upset with me because of the act. They thought that we were going to kill the goat for real. Then there were some individuals who were actually waiting for a barbeque and kept asking me when we were sacrificing the goat!

Most importantly, the votes were in favor of "NO" to the goat sacrifice and people went all the way to get their votes registered and counted by making the marks on "NO" by using not only pen and pencils but tearing holes on that side, burning, rubbing rose petals and mud into their answer (to emphasize), so that the goat could be saved.

It was a great and unique experience. It may have seemed that Amin did not perform that day and he was just a host and a curator, but we were all part of a giant two-hour performance by Amin Gulgee. Bravo! Encore!

## NIMRA BUCHA

Performance title:  
Swimming Pool  
(collaborative work  
with Madiha Aijaz)

It sounded like a fine idea when Amin suggested I do something for the performance night. I was dying to do something a bit different, out of my comfort zone.

But I didn't come up with anything with about ten days to the performance, so Amin decided that Madiha Aijaz and I do something together. Madiha had this story that she'd written about a swimming instructor who gives up swimming when she decides to settle down and marry in her early forties. She had won the Commonwealth Prize for this story and it was a really nuanced piece, very visual. But when we thought of the ways in which we could use it, it became quite clear that we needed it to be a very intimate experience for the viewer / listener, so instead of me narrating it we decided to play a recording on headphones. In this way we split the piece up

into an audio and a visual component which actually managed to work independently of each other.

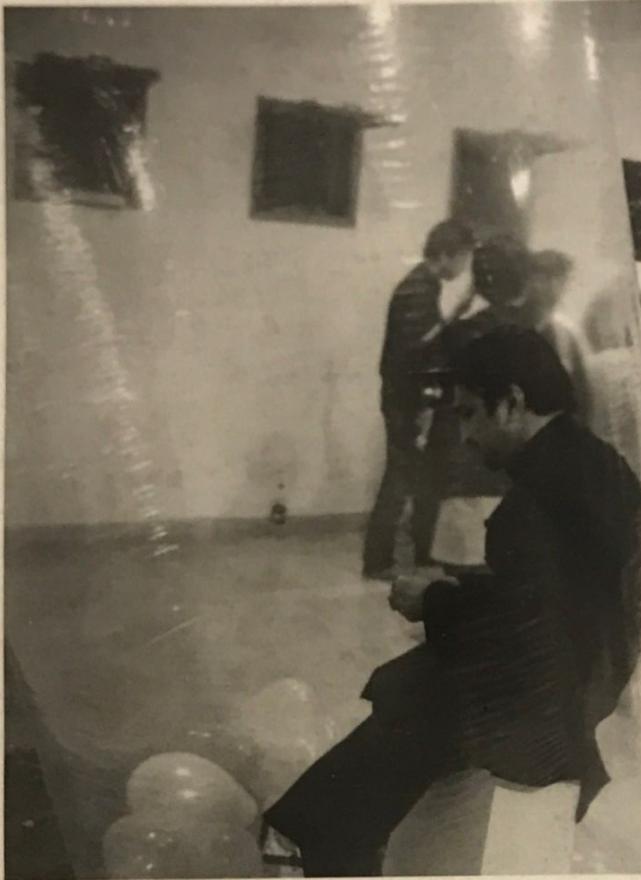
I would say that ours was a very traditional piece of storytelling compared to some of the other pieces. I think what made it interesting was people's interpretation of the visual component. There was an element of one of those street performances where you threw money at the performer. I had to start afresh whenever someone would put on the headphones and the close proximity and body language of the viewer / listener most definitely affected my performance. I didn't find the music around me disturbing though. In fact, I think it added something to how I felt about the character I was playing.

I think our piece was rather minimal compared to the piece we were located next to, which made it appear more realistic than we had intended it to be. It was a three-minute piece, showing that it was 'my' last day at the pool as 'I' bid goodbye to a life as a swimming instructor. The use of the *burqa* made a lot of people think about the piece as being just that, which was problematic, as it really wasn't. It was used as a symbol of putting on the garb, or playing the part. Perhaps photography shouldn't have been allowed as it was really intrusive...but then it was a bit of a carnival!



# MUNAWAR ALI SYED:

Performance title: Gasping



surrounded me, had a fixed supply of oxygen; filling air into smaller colored balloons also symbolized the hope and multiple levels of transforming the society's diversity into strength by owning, respecting, embracing and celebrating the differences rather than rejecting the other.

During the performance many balloons blew up, like a trigger to a blast. An onlooker woman commented, "iss ko saans kahan say aaraha hay? Yay kaheen mar na jaye!" ("Is he able to breathe? He might die!"), which sounded similar to discussions on the survival of the state. I had my carved image of the Quaid-e-Azam on a wall close to the performance site. I went into the work thinking of it as a statement which had many elements of political and social narratives, but that changed as the performance took place. The concern on whether or not I would faint, or find it difficult to breathe was similar to incidents at an accident site, or where there is public concern for a victim who may be a complete stranger. It was a strong element of the audience's energy, and how the audience or viewers become part of the experience.

This performance was a further extension of my previous performances like "Three minutes of fame" at the Burraborang Artist Workshop, Australia in 2003, where I performed for three minutes in dirty water ponds surrounded with my drawings of eyes; "R u listening?" at the V M Art Gallery in Karachi in 2004 where I also used a plastic balloon; and "Time Bomb", a collaborative performance with Jessica Roost at Milton Keynes, UK, in 2005. We performed on plastic bubble wrapping sheet.○



I appreciate the non-commercial-commodity aspect of the work. I was there in the same room as the others but was removed from them due to the airtight plastic balloon-curtain. Breathing recycled air, and blowing colorful balloons inside my own balloon for two hours created a lot of mist inside. After a while my presence was further distanced due to the vapor and fog. But the sound coming from the adjoining rooms became part of my work; it completed the experience for the viewer as nothing remained in isolation.

The performance was an act of self-destruction, as the transparent airtight plastic balloon, which

'For this happening, I have included plastic artists as well as musicians, filmmakers, actors, architects and people associated with fashion. Performance is very much part of our lives in South Asia as births, marriages and deaths are all public events.'

**Amin Gulgee,**  
curatorial note