

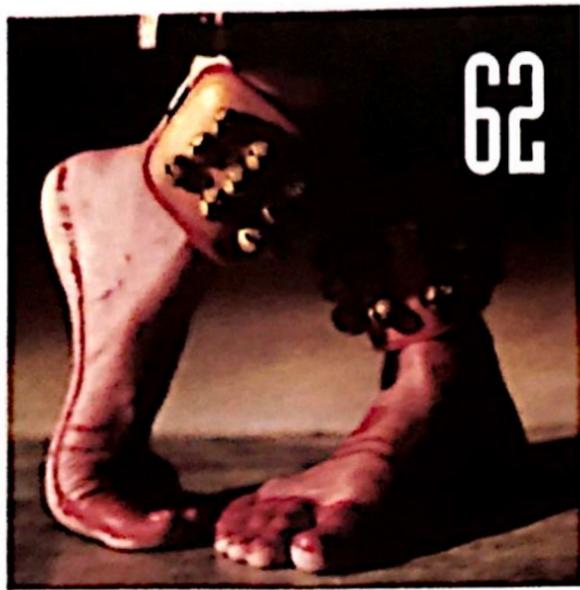
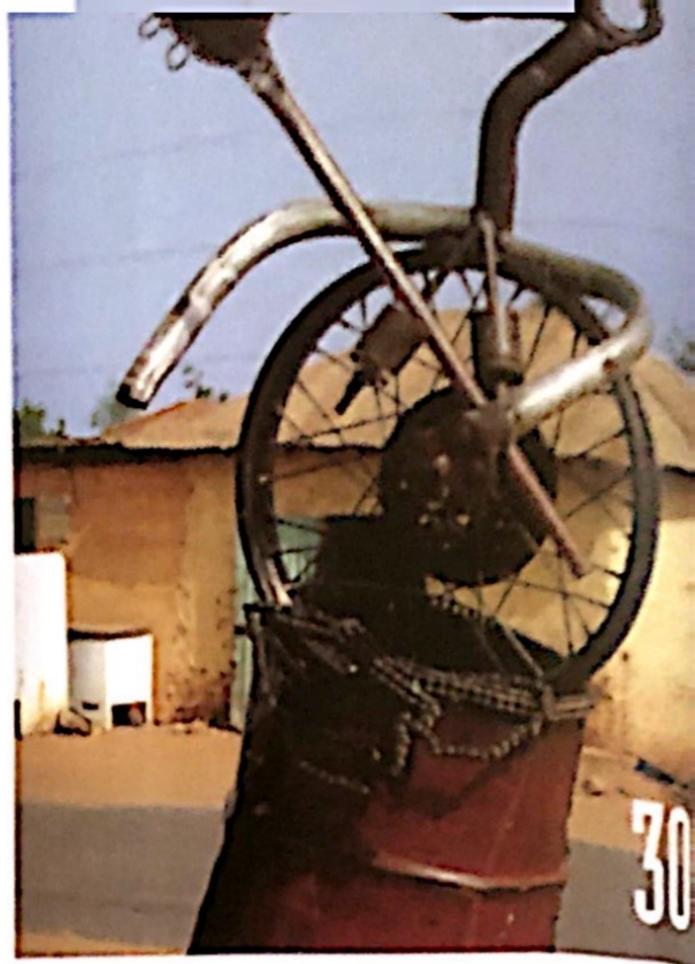
NUKTA ART

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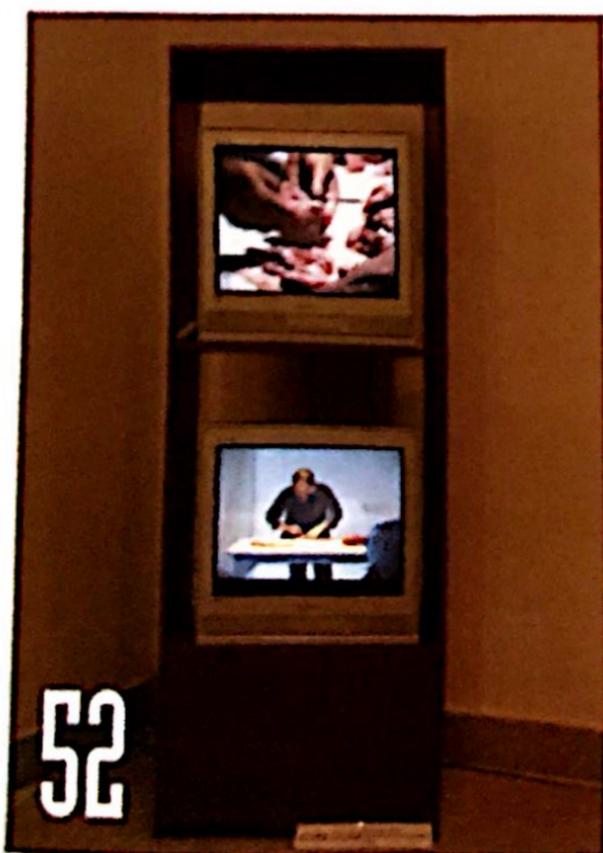
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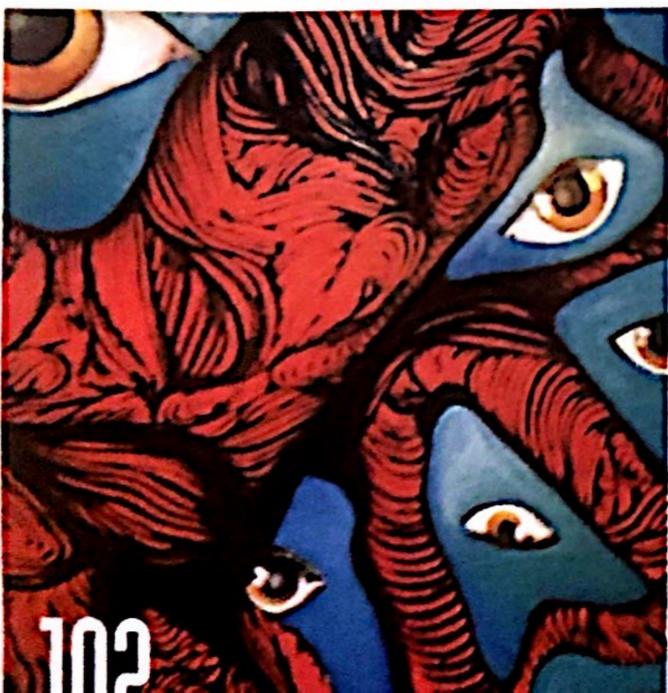
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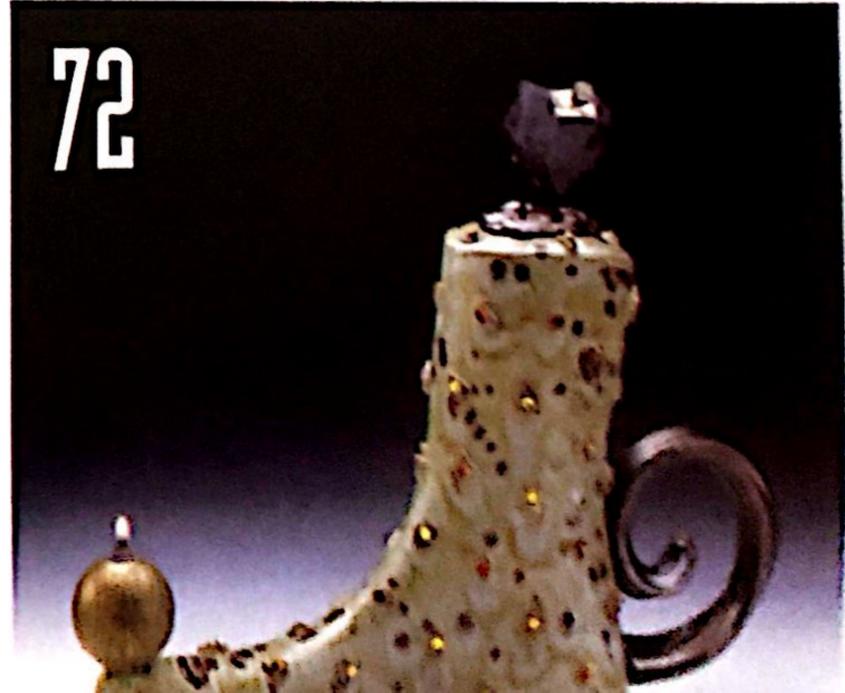
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Contributors

Aasim Akhtar, an alumnus of the National College of Arts, Lahore, is an Islamabad-based freelance art critic, photojournalist and curator. He has written extensively on the arts and culture, both for local and international publications. He contributes regularly to publications such as *Libas* (Pakistan) and *International Ceramic Review* (Australia), among others. He has authored a book on Indus Kohistan, and is currently writing his third book *A Feast of Threads*.

Dr Alka Raghuvanshi is an artist, art writer, and series editor of the much talked about *Dances of India* series of seven books on all the classical Indian dance forms. She shares a ringside view of the sometimes tough and lonely and sometimes rewarding journey of performers and gurus through their chosen profession—dance. In her writing career on the arts spanning nearly 26 years, she has documented an entire generation of artists who have shaped the artistic heritage of the country in the last quarter of the century—captured in two books—*A Moment in Time* and *Pathfinders: Artistes of One World*. She is India's first trained art curator, having trained at the Goldsmiths College, London, and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.

Atteqa Ali is a doctoral candidate in the Art History Department of the University of Texas at Austin. She is completing her dissertation that examines the genesis of socio-political art made in Pakistan today. It looks at the colonial history of South Asia and traces the last two decades of art making in the nation.

Chuck Wissinger is a prominent American ceramist. He has exhibited extensively in his country and abroad. Presently he is associated with the Texas A&M University at Kingsville as Associate Professor and Co-Chairperson of the Department of Fine Arts.

Chuka Nnabuife is an artist and art critic who lives and works in Africa. He is the Art Editor of *Compass* newspaper, Lagos, Nigeria.

Deepanjana Pal completed her Masters from the University of Warwick and is currently based in Mumbai as the art critic for *Time Out Mumbai*. She has written about contemporary Indian art for international editions of *Time Out*, including *Time Out London* and *Time Out Beijing*. She also regularly contributes articles for *Art India*.

Laila Mehreen Rahman is a painter and printmaker. She is an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at the National College of Arts, Lahore. She holds a Master's in Printmaking from the Slade School of Fine Art, London and Advanced Diploma in Painting from St. Martin's College of Art and Design, London. Her work is in permanent collections of the House of Commons Collection, London and in the V&A Museum, as well as the Bradford Art Galleries, UK. She has contributed papers to various seminars and is also a freelance writer for local publications.

Maheen A. Rashdi is a writer/columnist who has been with the *Dawn* newspaper for 15 years, covering social issues, politics, human rights issues, art and entertainment. She has edited four weekly magazines at *Dawn*, including the art fortnightly,

Gallery. She has also worked with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) training on conflict reporting and gender sensitive reporting. She currently lives in Toronto where she works as a columnist with the *Sun Media*.

Murad Khan Mumtaz graduated from the NCA, Lahore in 2003 with a BFA degree in miniature painting. He has contributed for the weekly *Friday Times* since 1999, and taught miniature painting to BA students at the College of Traditional Islamic Arts in Jordan, and later at Beaconhouse National University, as a visiting lecturer. He is currently pursuing a career as an artist and resides in Lahore.

Nafisa Rizvi, a writer and art collector, is a post graduate from UCLA in advertising, and is based in Karachi. She has worked as a copywriter for The Circuit (Pvt.) Ltd, an advertising agency, for eighteen years; as Coordinator, Communication Design Department at Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture for three years; as an art writer, she has been contributing articles and reviews in various local magazines, including the art pages of monthly *Herald*.

Nancy Adajania is a cultural theorist, art critic and film-maker, based in Mumbai. She was educated in political science, social communications media and film. She has been Chief Editor of the visual-arts journal, *Art India*. She has written and lectured extensively on the arts, especially new media, in relation to post-colonial politics and the cultural effects of globalization, over the last decade.

Pamela Rogers, an archaeologist by training, has studied in Canada and in the UK. She has worked as a Consultant for UNESCO, and in 2003 her first assignment in Pakistan was to develop master plans for the Shahi Qila—the Mughal Fort and the Shalimar Gardens, in Lahore, which included conservation management and tourism potential. She is Program Director of the Center of Cultural Heritage, Conservation and Management at the National College of Arts.

Rustam Khan is Assistant Director, Department of Archaeology, based at the Lahore Fort. He is a PhD student at the Center of Cultural Heritage, Conservation and Management at the National College of Arts.

Sangeeta Thapa is a curator and art promoter from Nepal. As the director of the Siddhartha Gallery in Kathmandu, she has also curated shows abroad. She is a member of the Nepal Heritage Society and contributes art writings to *VOW* magazine, Nepal.

Sumbul Khan studied for her Master's at Tufts University in the History of Islamic Art. Since then she has taught Undergraduate Art History at Framingham State College, the Textile Institute of Pakistan and the Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture. Her research interests include gender and identity politics in 16th century Mughal manuscripts and contemporary art from post-colonial countries. She has also worked as Assistant Curator at the State Bank of Pakistan Museum and Art Gallery in Karachi.

- Two recent events have emphasized the criticality of connection between local and global art concerns, between the past and present and its bearing on the production and acquisition of art.

Art Dubai 2008, an international trade fair with a focus on galleries and seminars tailored to highlight the role of the art investors, this year introduced curated shows and Pakistan was invited to be the first. This exclusive showcasing of Art from Pakistan offered crucial support to artists who after a lone effort are emerging among the favorites in the South Asian Contemporary Art Market.

Another important subtext of the event was the cultural intervention by Guggenheim and Louvre in the Arab Emirates which will mark a departure from the indigenous museum based on local pride and culture to the Western museum franchise model for the first time in Asia.

A far cry from 'futuristic' Dubai was the small university town where the First International Art Conference was hosted by the Institute of Art and Design, Sindh University. Here the discussion centered round a dynamic vision for art education and the significance of context. The three-day interface with national and international art scholars offered an opportunity to debate on possibilities offered by national and global developments in the field. In this region steeped in the spiritual poetry and folklore of the Sufi saint Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, and where the past seamlessly slips into the present to create timeless conventions, it shared the same anxiety as the Emirates about loss of identity when confronted by cultural change.

NuktaArt continues to address issues related to context and history and dedicates this issue to the country's most important sculptor, Shahid Sajjad. A detailed article on his life that runs parallel to Pakistan's history, discusses his journey from a destitute child of the Partition to a national role model in the arts. His interview in *Nukta-e-Nazar* provides the reader to read the artist's worldview in his own words. Compelling images from Shahid Sajjad's retrospective at National College of the Arts are included in the Photo Essay. To provide the context in which sculpture developed along divergent trajectories in post 1947 decades in Pakistan and India, two essays have been included.

The African response to Documenta, is a critique of the misreading of the African creative ethos and the exclusive claim of the West to Modernity which relegates local modernities to a subaltern position.

An essay from the foot of Mount Everest looks at the persistent motif of the feline form in Nepalese aesthetics and discusses its relationship to religious and cultural symbolism.

Details of the inauguration of South Asian Galleries at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and a significant event for the Diaspora are covered in an exclusive piece for *NuktaArt*. It gives an insight into this new collection that embraces ancient artifacts to the contemporary. In Pakistan, the living Mughal Museum, the Lahore Fort, gains a new focus when its legendary 'Shish Mahal' receives the attention of conservators. The account is illustrated with some striking visuals of this spectacular monument.

Prominent American ceramist gives his personal account on the emergence of ceramic art since World War II in which the GI Bill that helped educate war veterans played a pivotal role.

In another personal and exclusive account, we are informed of Contemporary Art developments by a member of the *NuktaArt* team who toured Beijing and Shanghai to find out why it has caught the attention of international art pundits.

In this issue the reader will get a rare glimpse of one of the country's most important art collections. An internationally renowned architect, Habib Fida Ali, who not only collects with passion, but displays it with an eye for detail to compliment the interior of his restored colonial style, tiled-roof, stone house in Karachi.

The Pakistani art community in the last few months has mourned the loss of its two stalwarts, Gulgee and Colin David. *NuktaArt* organized a memorial meeting in collaboration with The Second Floor (T2F) to acknowledge Gulgee's place in Pakistan's art and continues to call for urgent steps to preserve his Museum for the children of the country, to whom he had dedicated it during his lifetime.

As *NuktaArt* receives greetings on completing its three years of existence, it feels that this modest endeavor has given a voice to art issues from Pakistan and created a space for international artists and writers to participate in a multi-faceted print discourse sans boundaries.

Nilofur Farrukh

May 2008

Editor

Rumana Husain and Amra Ali

Senior Editors

Art at Jamshoro

'New Vistas in the 21st Century' was the theme of the First International Conference on Art hosted by the Institute of Art and Design at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

The three day conference focused on a vast spectrum of topics related to archaeology, visual arts, crafts, architecture, graphic design, ceramics and music. Speakers from all over Pakistan were joined by visitors from Turkey, Nepal, N Ireland and Germany. The papers will be compiled for wider circulation later in the year.

An International Art Exhibition was also held on the occasion to mark the inauguration of the new building of the Institute of Art and Design.

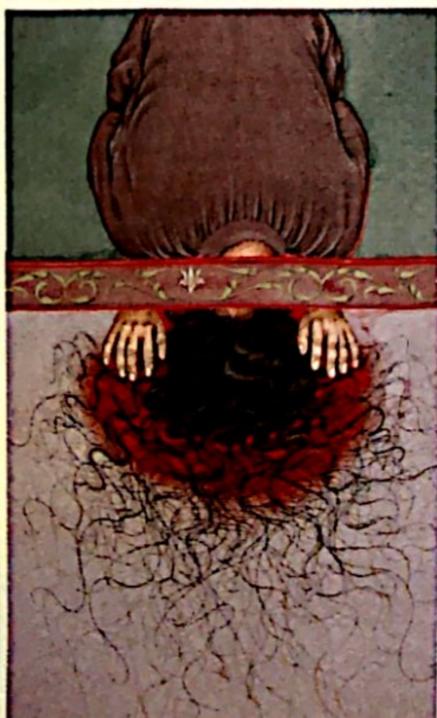
Two More Galleries for Karachi

Two new galleries opened its doors in Karachi to become a part of the burgeoning art market. Art Scene is located in a refurbished commercial building near the DHA Stadium, popularly called the *khadda* market in local parlance. Optimizing on its affiliation to Ejaz Galleries Lahore, Art Scene has had several shows of artists from Lahore and Islamabad.

Ghandara Art aspires for a global outreach as it started with curated shows in Hong Kong where its founder is based. Its location in a small two-storied villa near the Abdullah Shah Ghazi Mazar, offers a large space equipped to hold several shows simultaneously. Also involved in art publishing, it has launched four luxuriantly illustrated catalogues. According to the website of its online gallery, 'Gandhara Art aims to provide artists with opportunities to exhibit their art beyond Pakistan to a global audience'.

artscene

Muddasar Manzoor
02 (detail)
gouache with nail
impression on wasli,
52 x 66 cm



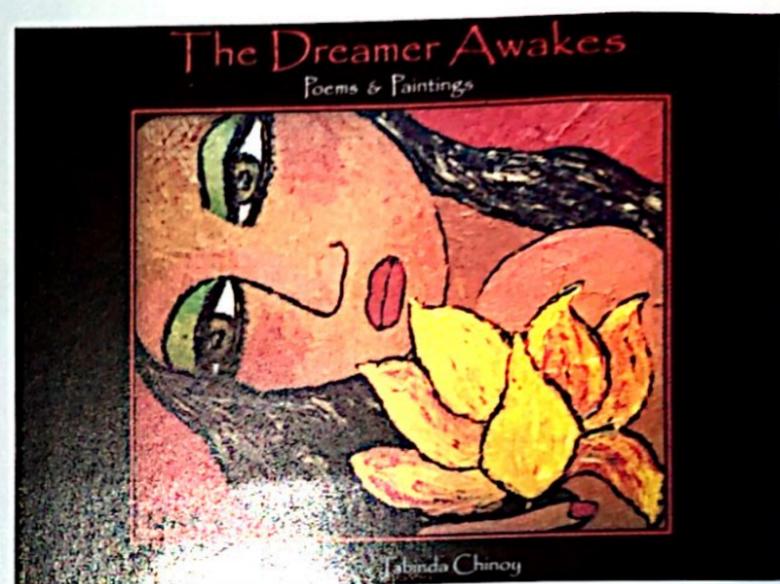
The Art and Poems of Two Dreamers

Two young women met decades ago and then parted. Each followed her destiny and put paint and ink to their experiences. From this grew a body of paintings and poems which were recently brought together in a book called *A Dreamer Awakes*.

This publication took final shape when at a chance meeting they discovered how their work was informed by similar encounters with disappointment, rejection and serenity. These women are artist Tabinda Chinoy and poet Beo Zafar.

In the words of Bapsi Sidhwa, "both show a refreshing clarity and candor in their work"

Recently launched in Karachi, the anthology is printed by Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi, it will be distributed in Pakistan by OUP Pakistan.



Finest Islamic Miniatures in Lisbon

In anticipation of the Aga Khan Museum due to open in 2011 in Toronto, Canada, some select pieces of the renowned Aga Khan Collection are presently on show at Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, Portugal.

The show comes at an opportune moment to the Iberian Peninsula which has seen Al Qaida violence in recent years and it is hoped that this projection of the finest of the Islamic civilizations will promote an understanding, between different religions and respect and appreciation for their traditions.

Dating back to the 8th Century, the works originate from as far West as Portugal and Spain to China in the East and encompasses diverse mediums and skills. This includes some of the world's most important masterpieces of Islamic art, some from the collection of miniatures and manuscripts of the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan.

Interventions of the Art Space

Rhalil Gibran writes about friendship in *The Prophet*. He tells, "Your friend is your needs answered. / He is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving. / And he is your board and your fireside. / For you come to him with your hunger, and you seek him for peace." (*The Prophet*, 1923) This is what a friend is for, as the 1980s American pop song told us as well. Friendship and camaraderie is critical for our private and professional lives.

Rohtas Gallery in Islamabad was aware of this when it opened its doors in 1981. It reached out to artists during a politically unstable age, gave young artists the opportunity to exhibit, and presented artworks not seen at more mainstream institutions. Now, more than twenty-six years later, artists paid back the Gallery for its support so long ago when they were beginning their careers. "Friends of Rohtas" was on display at Rohtas 2 Gallery in Lahore in November 2007. The sales from the exhibition will allow the Gallery to put up shows that are not commercially viable. The Lahore branch of Rohtas has been more active than its sister gallery Rohtas One, in Islamabad; yet it continues to serve the same interests.

Rohtas was a true professional comrade when artists could not get a break from any venues in Pakistan's art world.

Suhail Abbasi, Naeem Pasha, and Salima Hashmi founded Rohtas to showcase art that had no support during the military dictatorship of Zia ul Haq. The first artists to exhibit at the Gallery include Zubeida Agha, Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq, Jamil Naqsh, Mussarat Mirza, Salima Hashmi, and Shahid Sajjad, among others.

The 1970s and 1980s were a tumultuous time for the arts and society in Pakistan. Although the military government did not force artists to change their approach to art, several censored themselves and began to produce images in "safer" genres.¹ In looking at the art made in the 1980s in Pakistan, one will find the predominance of Islamic calligraphy. The Punjab Landscape

School was very active in this decade. A few intrepid artists did look at current events in their work. However, they felt pressure from militant Islamic factions in the society. Galleries shied away from controversial work due to threats; groups of militants attacked exhibitions they found morally reprehensible.

At times, metaphors can be too simplistic; where one thing stands for another, there is no room for nuance. However, symbols could be metonyms as well—a part standing in for the whole. In this case, more meanings are possible.

Rohtas Gallery experienced this firsthand when it displayed Anwar Saeed's art. The police raided his first solo exhibition in 1984 because of what had been written in the newspaper. A provocative article on his work caught the attention of the authorities for the art's potential immorality. The gallery, knowing the sensitivity of the times towards figurative art, had removed some of the work they thought might be offensive when they heard about the article.²

After this initial, potentially dangerous experience, Anwar Saeed has not turned his back to figurative art. His psychological work continues to be provocative, populated by bodies that are in various states of dress. His work was part of the "Friends" exhibition in Lahore. *A Martyr's Imagination* includes a man in a t-shirt and jeans with a gun pointed to his own head. An (imagined) angel floats by; he wears nothing except for a cloth covering his genitals.

In this mysterious scene, there are not many clues that tell viewers what to think. Perhaps we can understand the martyr as a suicide bomber; this would be the automatic assumption in the current climate when newspapers and the nightly news fill our minds with terrorist activity. The young man is acting on the assumption that he will become an angel and go to heaven in the afterlife for his actions. In Anwar Saeed's highly symbolic world, viewers have to create their own scenarios from the images supplied by the artist.

Talha Rathore
Untitled I
 gouache on wasli, 35 x 27 cm
 2007



Symbolism is used by a number of the artists whose work was displayed at Rohtas. These artists use metaphors to convey their messages, indirectly telling stories. At times, metaphors can be too simplistic; where one thing stands for another, there is no room for nuance. However, symbols could be metonyms as well—a part standing in for the whole. In this case, more meanings are possible.

Naazish Ata-Ullah's prints are metonymical. *Transparency of Time* deals with the process of aging. Yet, instead of showing an aged body as a complete entity, the artist has taken an attribute and has repeated it in a number of ways. The semi-circle that makes up the top of the head with a person's hair and forehead is the element she uses to talk about getting old. Hair and the forehead are susceptible to age—thinning locks and wrinkles are the conventional signs of a long life.

Two artists whose work is more difficult to understand are Talha Rathore and Imran Qureshi. However, they both use highly charged imagery. The former makes her paintings on *waslis* made with New York City Subway maps, the latter uses scissors to speak about nature and destruction. Talha's quiet paintings talk about her life in the United States as an immigrant. The subway map shows

movement—how to get from one place to the other. This is what the immigrant's life is about; the process of shifting from one location to another continues long after he or she has settled in a new home.

In Imran's case, he has remained in Pakistan. Yet his paintings speak about movement as well. They are continuously shifting because they are in process. The story and its meaning are not outlined for viewers. Instead of being the final word, Imran's works allow for a more open-ended narrative. *Through and Through* is an example of this. In a richly decorated space, the artist introduces images that he has used previously. Scissors cut through leaves, and stitches are left behind to cover the wounds. These potent symbols of annihilation and the pain it causes tell viewers about the horrors of the world without pointing to any specific event.

Although no theme exists for the exhibition, the ten artists have a similar sensibility. As such, connections are formed among the like-minded works of art.

The symbol that Aisha Khalid uses is a veil. For the past ten years, she has been exploring the position of women in Pakistan. In one of her latest works, *Red and Red*, there is little to indicate a woman directly; however, Aisha makes the woman "visible." She can choose to hide herself, but she cannot be overlooked. The viewer enters the vortex that is her surroundings and is seduced by the sumptuous details rendered in bold shades of red. In this spellbinding universe, the woman is in total control. The viewer will have to submit to the hypnotic realm.

These artists and five others make up the display at Rohtas. Although no theme exists for the exhibition, the ten artists have a similar sensibility. As such, connections are formed among the like-minded works of art. The ten practitioners deal with socio-political concerns, yet they do so indirectly. Viewers need to spend some time in front of their works and dig for meanings. They are not provided easily.

By Atteqa Ali



Nazish Ata-Ullah
The Transparency of Time I
 etching, 40 x 34 cm
 2005

Single page of double frontispiece
Quran, Egypt
14th century

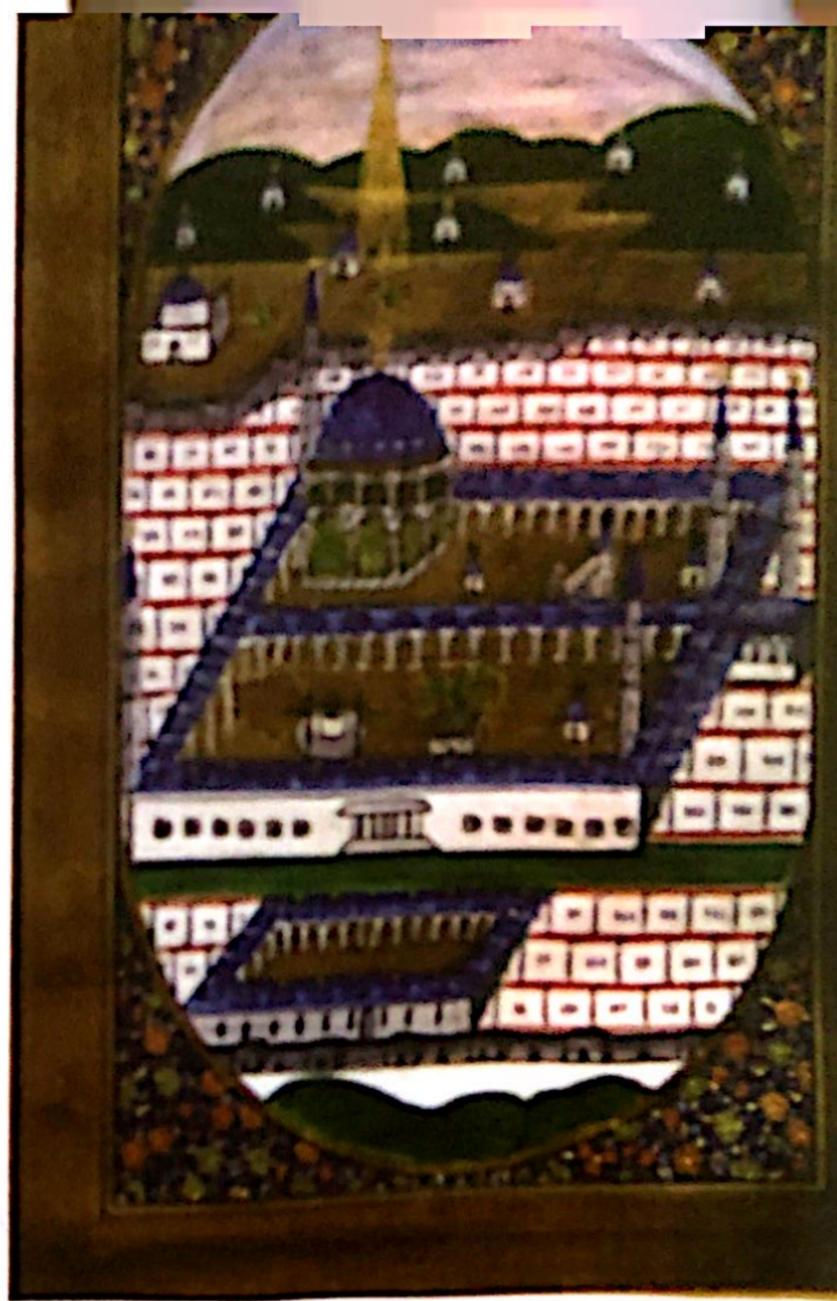
Beauty and Truth

The word "art" originates from the Greek "arête" meaning virtue or excellence, which according to Socrates is the measure of man's ability to perform well his specific function in life. For Plato art meant making perfect. Now what is the ideal of perfection that Plato talks about? For the Greeks the ideal for everything in this physical world existed in the spiritual plane, the plane of archetypes. All traditional cultures express the same view of art, though using different terminologies. The Islamic perspective is no different.

This link between traditional art and esoterism (the inner or spiritual dimension of a religion) was elaborated upon in the third and final seminar titled *Art of Islam*, in the series 'The Islam Seminars' organised by the Baytunur Trust and Iqbal Academy Pakistan in Lahore, August–September 2007. The previous two seminars were on *Diversity Thought in Islam* and *Global Environment and Islamic Thought*.

The seminar on art, held in September 2007, had an introductory talk by architect Kamil Khan Mumtaz. He described how art in our context today is rebounding between two extremes: the liberal/modernist extreme and the radical/fanatic extreme. The modern art historian, for example, following a so called 'scientific' method defines art by classifying it into styles. Thereby restricting art to its form rather than looking at its content and underlying intention. And so, modern art history confines art into eras, explaining everything from a certain 'evolutionist' perspective. While the other extreme of the religious radicals see no need for art in an Islamic context!

Kamil Khan added that given the modern definition of "Art", the traditional "craftsman" seeks acceptance and recognition as an "artist" by "modernizing Islamic art", distorting the traditional forms and incorporating new forms to demonstrate his originality, novelty, creative expression, whereas the modern "artist" seeks legitimacy in the eyes of his



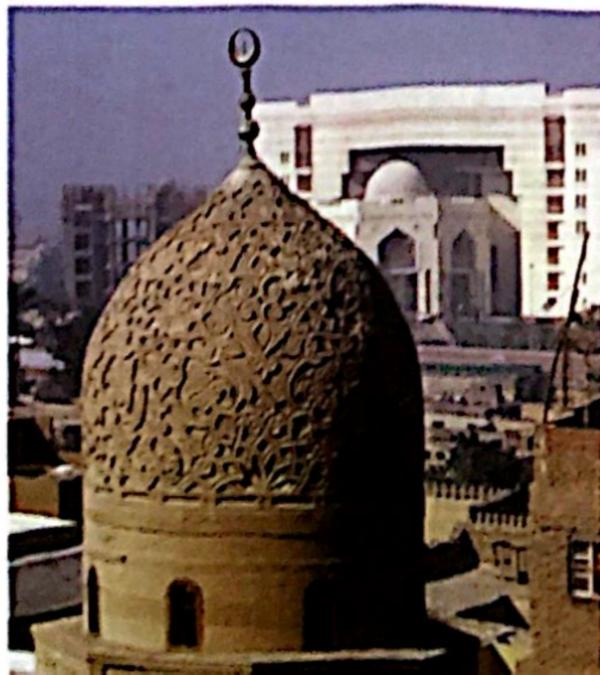
co-religionists by "Islamicising modern art", by incorporating some traditional motifs, such as geometric patterns and calligraphy. He moved on to describe how art has always been a representation of the 'real', and that the artist's perception of reality reflects the world-view of his specific society. He went on to examine the major shifts in man's perception of reality through the help of a timeline, which he divided into four major epochs. Through this the audience saw how man's perception of reality has shifted from seeing God as the ultimate reality to seeing the human subject as the ultimate reality.

Truth and beauty are two aspects of the single source of all creation. That which is beautiful has to be true and that which is true must be beautiful.

The next lecturer was Professor Dr Ejaz Akram, who spoke on 'Truth & Beauty: Perennial Relationship between Art & Spirituality'. He spoke on the necessary link between beauty and truth. For him truth and beauty are two aspects of the single source of all creation. That which is beautiful has to be true and that which

is true must be beautiful. Today's world, he said, is facing a crisis of beauty, and therefore also a crisis of truth. The impoverishment of beauty has given rise to the ugliness of modernity, and the resulting absence of truth has led to the rise of the absurd.

This crisis begins either from the top, as in the case of Christianity, which started with the loss of principles, or from the bottom, as has happened with Islam, by the destruction of its crafts and industry.



Dome
Cairo

Christian art's destruction and reduction to Baroque and Rococo drove many people out of churches. Therefore art has a connection with the spirituality of a people. Destruction of traditional Greek art coincided with the destruction of the esoteric and spiritual side of the Greek tradition that Plato bemoaned. In the Muslim world today, decline of intellectuality is concomitant with the decline of art. Ugly mosques, discordant *adhan* and anti-intellectual mullahs are proof enough! Cosmic laws and spiritual presence always go hand in hand.

It was widely felt that Muslims have become ignorant of their own art history—which is the true manifestation of the spirit of Islam.

The modernist tries to fill the void left by this impoverishment by his theory of aesthetics. But, Dr Ejaz pointed out, this theory is not a philosophy of beauty because the modernist sees everything as relative whereas true beauty is the manifestation of the Absolute. This is why beauty does not lie in the eye of the beholder, but instead varies according to the power of the symbol. Traditional man sees the world as a reflection of heaven through beauty. Any ugliness is therefore man made. For the traditional artist the most perfect example of beauty is in nature, which he tries to imitate by focusing on the essential nature of things and not on the accident. Dr Ejaz ended his talk by revealing that truth and beauty have an invisible partner in knowledge. And it is through this knowledge of truth through beauty that man can truly transcend himself. Therefore an appropriate art form is possible only through contemplation and purification.

The last speaker on the panel was Syed Tajammul Hussain, an artist and a scholar. He spoke on the Quranic art of illumination, emphasizing on its symbolism. According to him each element of this floral and geometric ornamentation has a meaning. Nothing in this traditional art form is superfluous. He goes as far as to say that some of the opening frontispieces of Quranic manuscripts are amongst the greatest works of abstract art ever produced. His talk was supported by images from various museums and private collections around the world. He took each motif and traced its history and elucidated its symbolic meaning. One of these is the six pointed star known as the Seal of Solomon. A universal symbol of harmony, in the Islamic esoteric tradition, it stands for the *Insaan-ul Kamil*, or complete man i.e. the Prophet. Interestingly today it is seen as a sign of the Jews, adoring their flag and called the Star of



David. Syed Tajammul clarified that it was never a symbol of the Jews but was only adopted by the Zionist movement in the early 20th century as an emblem of its identity. This lack of awareness has had absurd consequences. For example the Saudis banning its use—leading their followers all over the world to have a similar prejudice for this age old symbol of Islamic art.

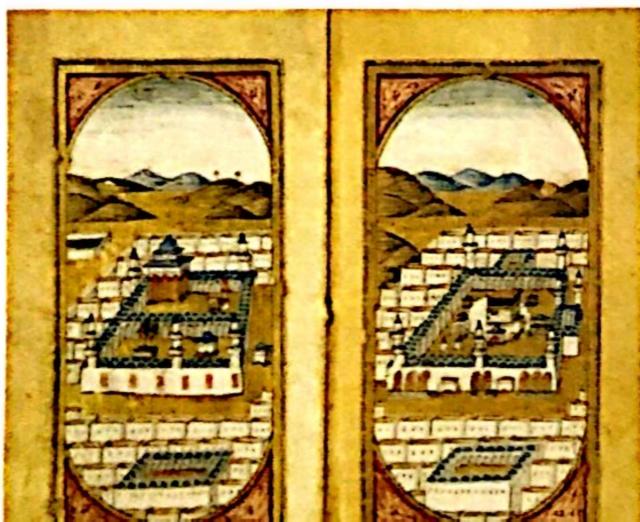
Another eye-opener of the talk was the color blue in Islamic art as is evidenced by its fourteen hundred-year long, rich artistic history. Blue is the universal symbol of God's mercy. Every verse of the Quran except one starts with His name the Merciful. In keeping with this usage the dome of the Prophet's mosque was always blue. Tajammul Hussain ably supported this fact by showing us slide after slide of manuscript illustrations of the mosque, through the centuries. It was only in a nineteenth century renovation that the Ottomans changed it to green.

The audience found the seminar an uplifting experience and they went away with a strong realization of the importance to arm oneself with knowledge to counter ignorance. It was widely felt that Muslims have become ignorant of their own art history—which is the true manifestation of the spirit of Islam—arguably the richest artistic legacy known to man.

Baytunur plans to offer a course 'Art of Islam' based on this seminar in the future. For more details log on to www.baytunur.blogspot.com.

By Murad Khan Mumtaz

Double
frontispiece
Quran, Egypt
14th century



New Media

Berlin Based Artist Visits Karachi

New Media artists from Pakistan have come together to share and discuss their 'shorts' at regular screenings, held by AICA Pakistan, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Karachi. This process was enriched by the recent visit of German artist Florian Thalhofer. The artist engaged in dialogue with local artists, students and art critics in three days of presentations and discussion on the growth and implications of this work that is accessible through the internet. Such an art form provides accessibility to produce short films that are digitally manipulated and may involve new technological innovations.

According to the German artist, he has been called an author, director, and by many other descriptions, simply because his work does not fit a certain or prescribed box or label. He is the creator of projects distributed through the Internet, such as the istory box which contains works such as *1000 Stories*, *Forgotten Flags*, *Love Story project* and the *Karsakow syndrome*, among others. His films have a strong narrative in which he likes to tell stories through multiple links. Therefore, the viewer is offered choices through these links (boxes that can be clicked on), in each story within a film that takes you on a different journey related to the main theme. These links help create a combination of links or stories. His fragmented or interconnected narrative, according to Florian, follows memories which do not necessarily follow a linear progression.

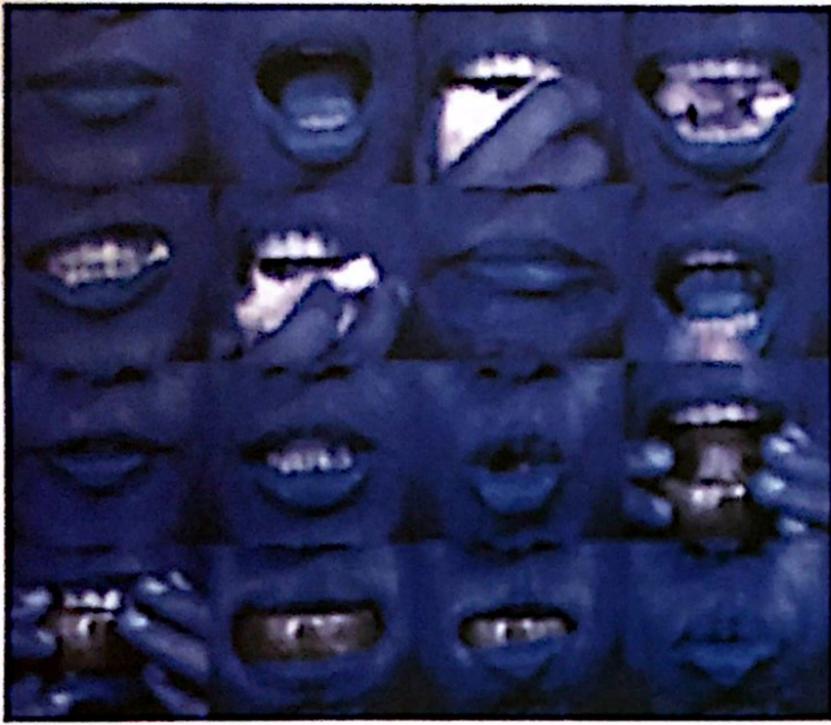
Through what may seem random interviews based on coincidence of geography, the artist's voice seems strongly rooted in his own cultural location. For example, the film *Karsakow syndrome* came about due to the habit of perpetual beer-drinking in his small German hometown. He explores the attitudes of locals through stories on this habit, with the result that the artist's voice emerges through the choice of these conversations. On a different take, he reveals the trauma of the German nation when confronted with the German Flag. *Forgotten Flags* is a story of the flags that were flown throughout the country as part of the mass celebration of the '06 World Cup. However what prompted Thalhofer and fellow artist Julian Henrich on a journey through Germany was to understand why the flag, bearing black, red and gold was still flying high even six months after the games were over. 'These are not just Fahnatiks ("fanatic"), a play on the German word for flag, "fahn", and the word "fan" respectively, as Magdalena Taube called the people who seemed to reveal a quasi-religious connection to the object, but also skeptics, critics and cynics. As well as a disappointed people, who

The artist engaged in dialogue with local artists, students and art critics in three days of presentations and discussion on the growth and implications of this work that is accessible through the internet.

Florian Thalhofer and Julian Henrich

Forgotten Flags
video still





Abdullah Syed
Subliminal Void
multimedia

would have preferred to hoist the flag of Germany, because they feel that this “we” club called Germany has simply cheated them of their lives. . .’, and as the supporting text points that ‘confessions pro and contra nationalism sneak up quietly.’

Local artists Naima Dadabhoy, Abdullah Syed and Adeela Suleman, despite being viewed as painters and sculptors bring a multi faceted approach in terms of material and conceptual framework. For each, the moving image became an extension of their work in the three dimensional. Adeela reacted to the culture of women riders on motorbikes, who must sit at the back sideways, and at times be holding on to two, three or more children. While technically her format remained confined to a linear narrative, she was able to bring another layer of meaning to her sculptural creations that were seen in situ, amidst a package of humor and wit. Local pots and pans were turned to safety baskets and many tiered helmets. Stainless steel milkman’s containers became additional seats to accommodate kids as the family grew in number.

In relation, Naima’s film was based on a folksong of the Thar Desert. A live shot of the famous Sindhi singer performing her song was filmed on the dunes at dawn. Two frames ran simultaneously, one with the singer in her deep voice repeating words that narrated the beloved’s long wait under the Neem tree, the other with images of waves and land brought about an ambiance of romanticism, which has inspired so many folk songs of passion for the beloved soil or *dharti* (homeland). Taking a ninety degree turn to Naima’s, was Abdullah Syed’s multimedia work *Subliminal Void* that involves the use of objects, space, sound, color and movement that explores the technical manipulation of his medium as part of its aesthetics. This vocabulary seems to bring a relatively more ‘modernist’ idiom of expression. The diversity in the three films focused on how Pakistani art can discover new metaphors of creativity that swing between the local and the global.

What the small group discussions amongst the artists also brought into the fore was the absence of structural frameworks to support such initiatives at home, which is why many of the artists working in New Media or experimental films have been showing in biennials and symposia internationally with its larger and more receptive audience. Due to its experimental nature, at least in Pakistan, it is a peripheral medium. Other artists whose New Media shorts were shown through the net were Toronto-based Pakistani artists Tazeen Qayyum and Faisal Anwar, whose works such as *Double Date*, *Suno Kahani*, *Guriya* and others can be accessed directly through the site www.dgdip.com

The diversity in the three films focused on how Pakistani art can discover new metaphors of creativity that swing between the local and the global.

Such an interaction between local artists and a German artist proves to open up further opportunities of exchange on the technical aspects of New Media work, its authorship and continuous evolution, besides coming together in a discourse that helps narrow the gap between artists living and working in different continents and with diverse cultural viewpoints that may otherwise be understood only through prejudice or lack of exposure and a deeper, more truthful understanding of the other. It also is a far cry from Motherwell’s statement that if a work is not aesthetic, it is not art by definition! New Media art may have already fragmented the defined notions of aesthetics.

by Amra Ali

by NILOFUR FARRUKH

The Dissident Dialogue

In Pakistan, the centrality of the human form in sculpture has been seen as problematic and this has contributed to turning it into a site of controversy and debate. It is only in the late 20th century and early 21st century, when it reincarnated with a new identity that sculpture gained greater acceptability in the mainstream.

Attitudes towards sculpture were shaped in nascent Pakistan as the nation searched for a cultural direction that would be compatible with the separatist agenda of the Two Nation Theory. Crafted by political leaders, the Islamic Ideology on which Pakistan was founded, offered theoretical logic as a rallying cry for a new country but could not address practical issues of cultural identity. Despite repeated attempts at engineering a purist Islamic identity, it was near impossible for the state's cultural institutions to separate the fused layers of history, religion and social customs that constitute the synergetic culture of South Asia.

As orthodox interpreters insisted on seeing figurative sculpture only through the prism of Islamic injunctions on idolatry, ignoring broader interpretations which recognize a form to be an idol only if it is worshiped—a fact that excludes secular three dimensional figures.

For the last six decades, artists of Pakistan have worked in this contested space to reconcile the multiple identities informed by lived reality and received ideas. Their highly individualized expression, as opposed to art movements in other countries, reveal the artists preference to follow a personal trajectory between two distinctly polarized viewpoints around which cultural politics have evolved. The liberal perspective finds its genesis in the vision of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Allama Iqbal that proactively recognized pluralistic influences as an agency of progress. The opposing stance narrows the cultural space with its conservative reading of religious edicts in a search for medieval ideals.

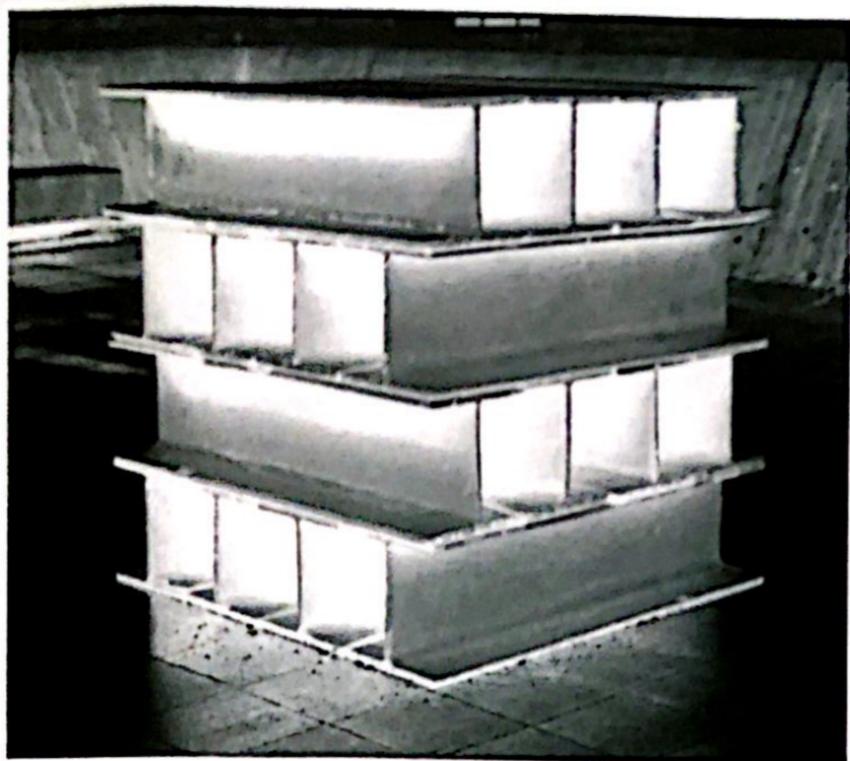


Durrani
aluminium, 66 x 76 x 46

In this contentious environment the three-dimensional representation of the human figure repeatedly became a focus of cultural polarity. As orthodox interpreters insisted on seeing figurative sculpture only through the prism of Islamic injunctions on idolatry, ignoring broader interpretations which recognize a form to be an idol only if it is worshiped—a fact that excludes secular three dimensional figures.



Rabia Zuberi
New Concept of Dynamic Sculpture



Rasheed Araeen
Sculpture No. 2
 painted steel, 122 x 122 cm
 1965

It is interesting to note that unlike creative expression, the three dimensional portraits based on the bust and head somehow escaped the extremist's wrath and were extensively commissioned by newly established institutions to immortalize political and social figures.

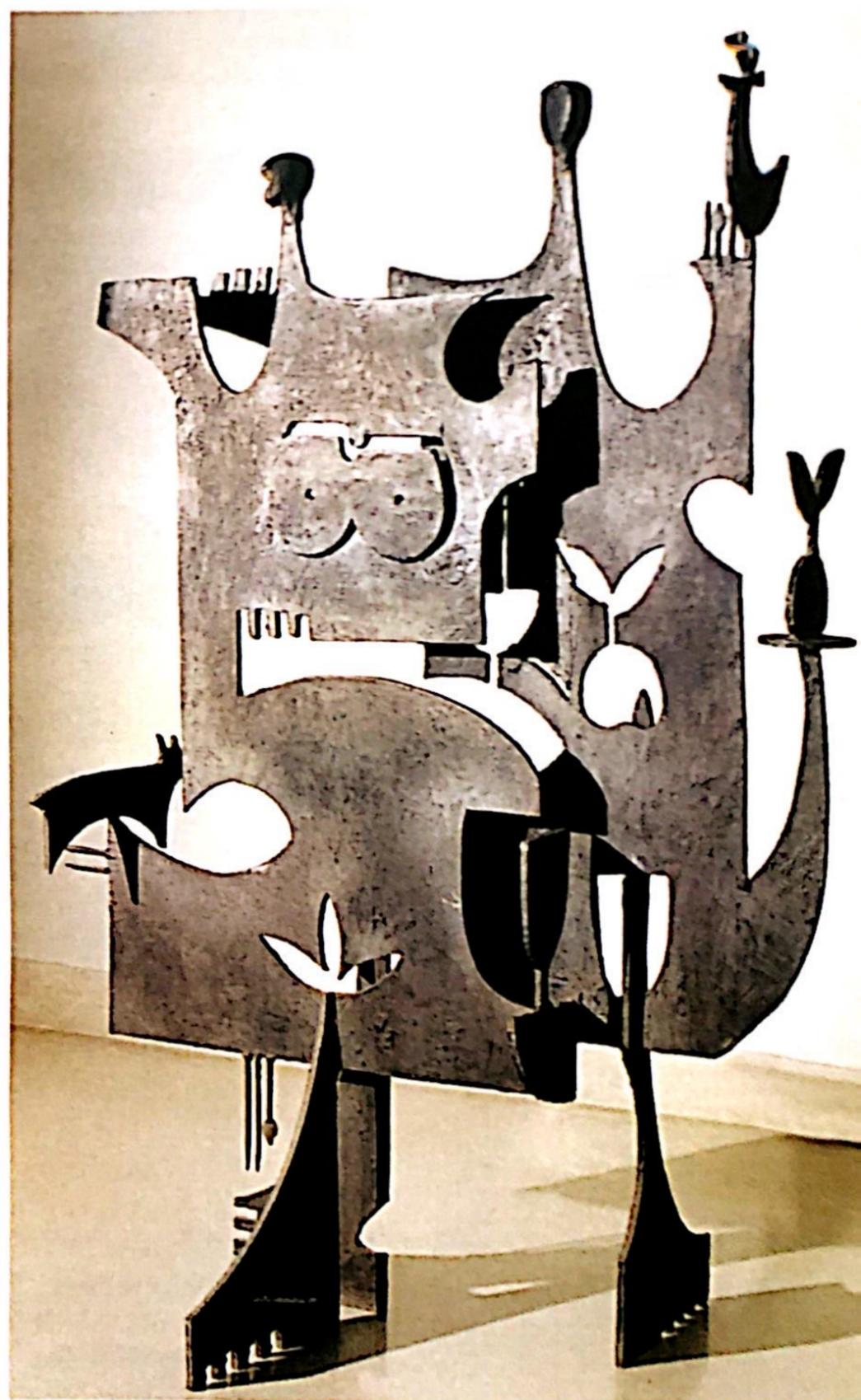
The impact of this conservative view could be seen in the way colonial figurative sculpture was removed from public institutions and only non-figurative sculpture was commissioned by the State.

Jamal Shah, a prolific sculptor who has executed many public commissions in the national capital offers another perspective: "Sculpture or three dimensionality of any kind, I feel, has the power to invoke energetic responses in individuals which can eventually turn in praxis so maybe sculpture is feared for its inherent qualities."

This theory has validity, as both civil and military dictators have used culture as a divisive tool by invoking the most extreme religious interpretations to ban dance and figurative visual art. Conventions of continuity were faithfully followed in the first two decades. Early sculptors, despite their marginalized position, continued to engage with the 'body' for its emblematic and formalist value. It is interesting to note that unlike creative expression, the three dimensional portraits based on the bust and head somehow escaped the extremist's wrath and were extensively commissioned by newly established institutions to immortalize political and social figures. Two pioneer sculptors, Ozzir Zuby and Afsar Madad Naqvi responded to this demand. Ozzir Zuby, who graduated in sculpture from the Mayo School of Art (present-day National College of the Art—NCA) in Lahore and went on to study

sculpture in Florence, had both the classical training and the eye of a portraitist to make a place for himself in this genre of sculpture. Afsar Madad Naqvi, educated at the Lucknow Art College learnt his craft under prominent sculptor Hanif. His work, motivated with the ideal that skills precede content led to the singular pursuit of strong technical skills in clay modeling and casting processes. Both these artists, for different reasons, leave behind no articulation of a personal grammar, and stayed well within the established framework. For Zuby, sculpture took a backseat as he established

Anjum Ayaz
Family
 steel
 2002



Ruby Chishti
I Dreamt a Space Without Me
 installation
 2001

and ran the School of Décor in Karachi. Naqvi, with his full time responsibility as the head of the modest Sculpture Department of the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts (CIAC), and later as head of the school, had few opportunities to exhibit his work and was happy to hone his skills on private commissions.

Rabia Zuberi, who is recognized as the country's first woman sculptor in reality shares this position with Novera Ahmed, a sculptor from the eastern wing of the country who made a short but memorable intervention in the 60s.

Rabia Zuberi, who is recognized as the country's first woman sculptor in reality shares this position with Novera Ahmed, a sculptor from the eastern wing of the country who made a short but memorable intervention in the 60s. As the founder and teacher of sculpture of Karachi School of Art (KSA), the city's first art institution, Zuberi's pedagogic influence on an entire generation cannot be denied but very few of her students followed in her



Qaiser Khan Shinwani
Untitled
 carved wood, 113 × 18 cm
 2007

footsteps. Among those who did, Anjum Ayaz and Roohi Ahmed have successful careers. Meher Afroz, a fellow artist remembers, "Through the 1970s Rabia's sculpture was a steady presence with paintings and prints at group shows and helped to generate interest in the field." Like many sculptors of her generation, Zuberi followed a path to modernism through the influence of Henry Moore, before finding her own vocabulary.

Novera Ahmed was an elusive figure with a tentative link to the local scene because of her frequent travels between Pakistan and Europe. Her longest stint in Lahore during the 60s can be traced to a group of figures that anticipated future trends with innovative handling of metal scrap and pipes that re-interpret the female form.

The 60s was a period when artists like Rashid Araeen moved to London in search of an intellectual space where he created his conceptual sculpture, which now has been given its due recognition as seminal work in the UK and was exhibited at the Tate Modern in 2007. Working far away from Pakistan, Ahmed and Araeen had no direct influence on the local sculpture practice, which, mired in the politics of the figure, was slow to respond to global academic advancement in the field.

Jamal Shah, the first sculpture graduate under the new academic program that marked the transition from the colonial Mayo College of Art to National College of Arts, recalls how as late as 1979, the sculpture curriculum was very basic and offered no theoretical support. Shah, determined to make a difference in the field, went on to teach sculpture at the newly founded Department of Fine Arts of the Balochistan University (Quetta) and later at Hunerkada (Islamabad)—both institutions he founded. A prolific artist, he

expanded his media to clay, wood, bronze, and fiberglass for public works in Islamabad.

Strategies of subversion assimilated non-figurative sculpture and radical abstraction of the human figure to gain a wider audience. Finding new possibilities in non-conventional materials Saghir Ahmed looked to discarded metal pipes, mesh and girders to construct plant forms. Zahoorul Akhlaq, one of the country's most significant modernists for his site-specific monument at Tarbela interpreted the human forms with its arms stretched skywards with angular, hard-edged steel columns. Talat Dabir's monumental cement sculpture, with barely recognizable entwining figures, exhibited at the National Gallery's inaugural show, resonates with a similar sensibility. The more the human anatomy was made ambiguous with abstraction it was found to have greater acceptability. This suited the modernist sensibility of the new generation of sculptors looking for a fresh formal syntax.

A complete break from the figure came in Amin Gulgee's innovative calligraphic sculptures that reference both the conventions of the manuscript and the monument in Islamic Art. A self-taught artist who studied art history and economics at Yale, his work



“drawn from personal early familial exposure to antiques and historical imagery, Islamic design and calligraphy, and study of architecture, Amin focuses on the organic and abstract as consistent reverberating entities, simultaneously familiar and imagined”.¹ His prolific career with extensive exhibitions at home and abroad, including prestigious public commissions in Karachi and Islamabad along with his curatorship of the annual Artfest for emerging talents and projects in the fashion world that has given Amin a media prominence, has brought sculpture into the limelight and inspired the younger generation.

Looking for a connection with the popular identity of the street and bazaar spawned projects like the *Sweet Sweet Madina* and *Heart Mahal* by sculptors Durriya Kazi and David Alesworth. The exploration of local urban crafts vocabulary in their work led to

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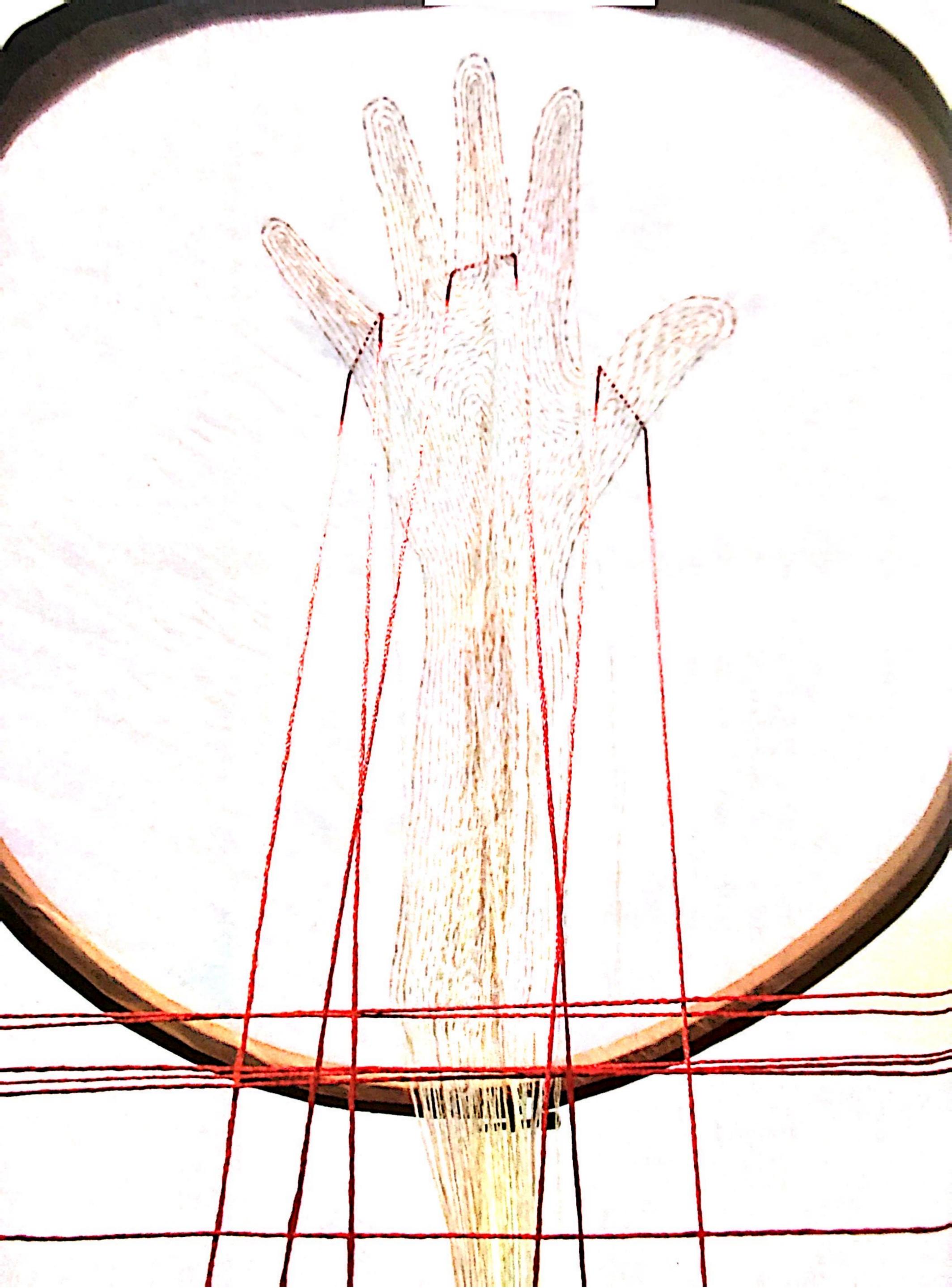
collaborations with highly skilled truck decorators and cinema hoarding painters. Combining an intensity of pattern with the figurative kitsch of Lollywood hoardings, this three dimensional expression widened the debate on sculpture previously restricted to the conventional frame of reference. By locating authenticity in the artistic energy of the bazaar it was culturally inclusive and highlighted the disconnect between a booming urban popular culture and a bankrupt system that lacked a mechanism to respond to it. Since much of this work was exhibited abroad, it opened a debate on the danger of over-exoticism of popular culture with the selective ethnic gaze.

Autonomy of material brought down boundaries of medium and content to strengthen personal and

Jamil Baloch
Baloch
carved wood, height 213,5 cm
2005

political narratives of the new century. Ruby Chishti's crows made from non-biodegradable garbage bags displayed along the coast, was a provocative ecological statement. Human body extensions like hair and nails were seen in the work of Masooma Syed, which Salima Hashmi sees as “. . . a rebellion and acquiescence implied side by side”.² The domestic needlecrafts intrinsic to the expression

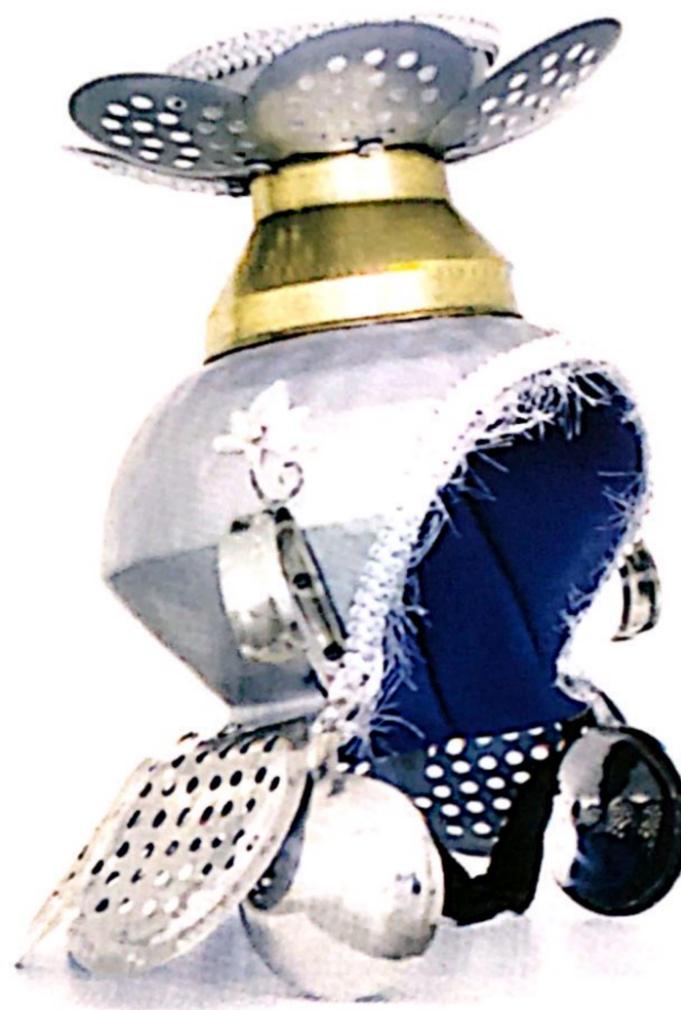
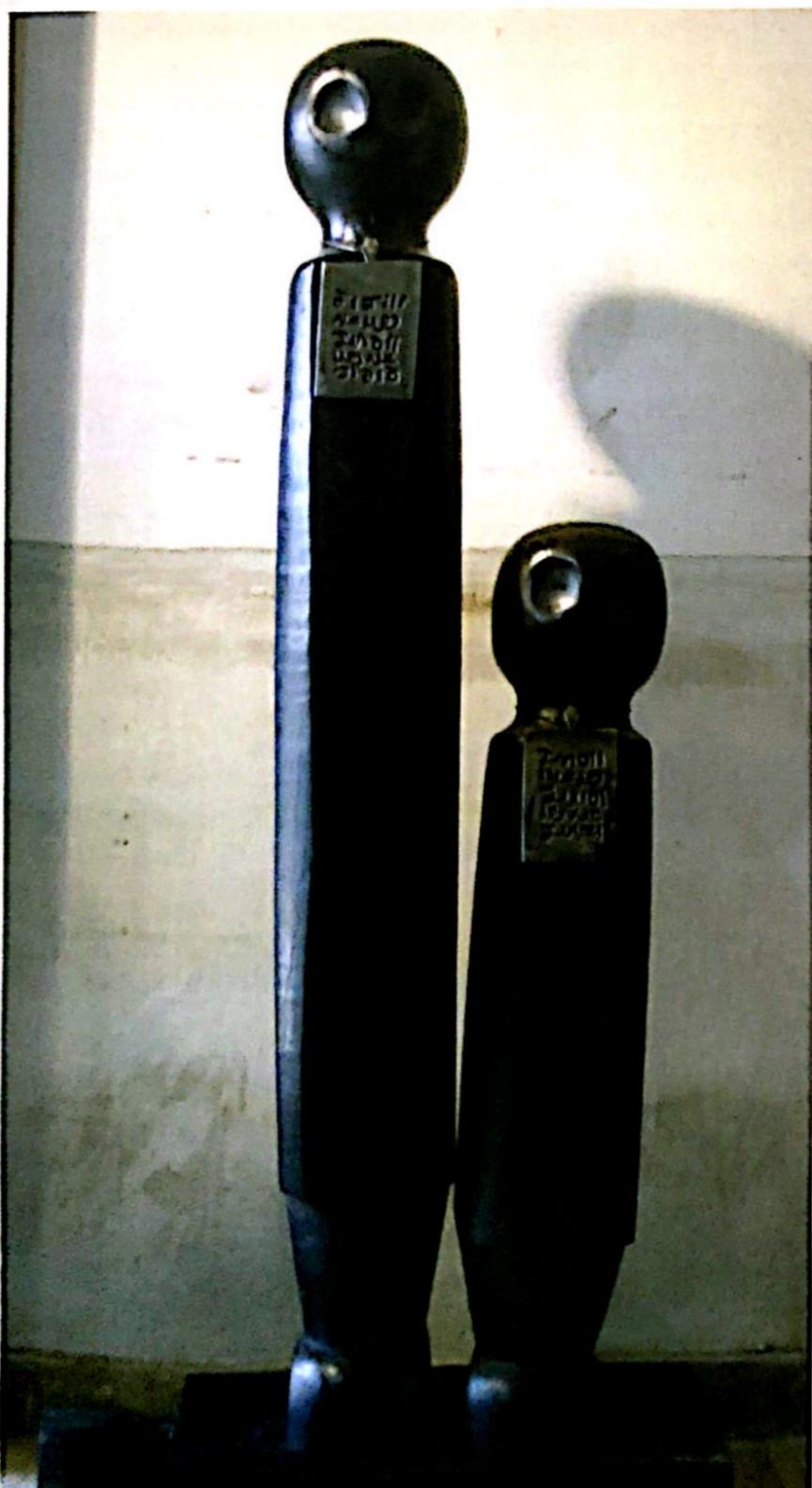




of women resurfaced in the soft sculpture of Ruby Chishti in which she uses old and used cloth to invoke memory and loss of a deeply loved invalid mother in the form of a swaddled life-size figure. Ayesha Khalid mounts vertical needles on red roses embroidered on combat camouflage fabric to draw attention to the forgotten women victims of war. *Lifeline Two* by Roohi Ahmed with a stitched silhouette of a horizontal body on a frame fixed close to the ceiling with its loose silk strands of threads hanging down to reflect in a pool of water attempts to give a tangible vision to the soul's celestial journey. The coherence of material echoes through the work of Adeela Suleman and Huma Mulji who scavenge metal spare parts of motorbikes, plumbing equipment and metal utensils to invest them with new meaning and relevance.

The sculptor whose oeuvre forms the bulwark, and has been the strongest inspirational force, is Shahid Sajjad. His corpus of figurative life-size work has always been a symbol of defiance.

Abdul Jabbar Gull
Father and Son
 carved wood, height 150 cm
 2007



Adeela Suleman
Salma Sitara Sisters Workshop (detail)
 mixed media
 2002

Through the 1980s in General Ziaul Haq's era when Islamization edicts negating figurative art were particularly stringent, he subverted the regime's campaign by creating a mammoth figurative mural in bronze *Cavalry through the Ages* for an army cantonment. His work, based on lost wax bronze casting and wood carving, has reclaimed the space for indigenous skills from colonial art education that has relegated them to a subaltern position. Shahid Sajjad's revitalization of craft skills and using them to create works of exceptional sensitivity has inspired a group of young sculptors in wood like Abdul Jabbar Gull, Munawwar Ali, Jamil Baloch, Tariq Luni and Qaisar Khan Shinwani.

Gull confesses that Shahid Sajjad the artist and person, has taught him not only a deep engagement with material but a commitment to sculpture.

From anxiety and uncertainty to a confident place of permanence, sculpture in Pakistan, with the engagement of the artists and the response of its audience, has challenged barriers to become a potent expression to articulate the country's new social and political mythologies.

1. Elizabeth Rogers, catalogue essay 'The Welding of Form and Space' for the show 'Kinetic Essence', 2006, published by Nitanjali Art Gallery, New Delhi.

2. Salima Hashmi, catalogue essay 'Threads Dreams Desires' for the show 'Art South Asia', 2002, published by SHISHA, UK

by NILOFUR FARRUKH

A Sculptor of Substance

Icon in the media parlance refers to a charismatic and popular figure often transformed into a larger than life figure on the 'drawing board' of marketing gurus. Today sports, cinema and music talent is elevated into megastars with a media aggression that makes reality irrelevant. This however promises no permanent place under the strobe lights in the fast moving world where each sound bite has a price tag and 'change' is the engine that generates big money. Very soon the old icon becomes media fodder in a seamless high energy charge of publicity.

How do we recognize a hero in such a milieu? The very word 'hero' has different connotations for different generations. The cynical

young are too impatient to invest trust and optimism in a mortal from the past. The concept of a hero connects the older generation to the comfort of a pre-spin age. To them heroism embodies a greatness defined by proven courage and moral strength which translates into an inspirational force, gives faith and energizes potential.

One such hero is Shahid Sajjad, a sculptor of substance who has lived quietly amongst us for many decades. Shahid is a modern thinker with the soul of a humanist, and a true heir to this land's legacy. He is someone who does not feel the urgency to prove his global credentials, for self-knowledge to him connects all people at a very elemental level without the strident trends of globalization. He has spent a lifetime discovering himself through his work and learning a vocabulary to carry out a visual conversation with others.

Born in 1936, Shahid's life runs parallel to Pakistan, a country he came to with his parents. The young country offered hospitality and the promise of liberty. He was grateful and learnt to be content with few creature comforts. He was forced to give up school in grade eight because there was no money to spare after the death of his father. This did not however curtail his self-education as he quotes from Francis Fukuyama and Faiz Ahmed Faiz with equal ease. At a young age Shahid Sajjad learnt to be self-reliant, have confidence in his natural talent and optimize meager resources. These lessons, learnt early in life, give him the fearlessness to carve a distinct path.

In 1963 he created an opportunity for himself by writing to a Japanese manufacturer of motorbikes with a request for a machine to tour the world. This tour became a turning point in his life as it exposed him to the art of Gauguin, the great adventurer and painter, at Louvre in Paris, which found resonance with his own free spirit.

A few years later he was to discover the unspoilt paradise of Chittagong Hill Tracts where he spent several years with the Chakma tribe who taught him to live with nature and trust intuition. When the life-size carvings executed in East Pakistan were finished and exhibited in Karachi in 1974, it made the art pundits sit up and take notice of the artist. This was a seminal endeavor as no Pakistani sculptor had attempted life-size figures in wood before. It was particularly bold in a country where three dimensional figurative art is considered taboo in the light of orthodox interpretations of Islamic injunctions against idolatry. Figurative sculpture closely associated with temple art in South Asia has had little patronage in the cultural mainstream but Shahid



Shahid Sajjad retrospective at NCA



Shahid Sajjad retrospective at NCA

Sajjad, in the last thirty years, with a large corpus of sculpture, has been instrumental in helping art audiences to de-link sculpture from idols and idolatry and accept it as a purely creative expression. Throughout the 1980s he defied Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization edicts negating figurative art and even managed to subvert the regime's campaign by creating a mammoth figurative mural in bronze *Cavalry through the Ages* for the very institution whose head denounced representation of the human form.

Lack of formal art education forced the sculptor to acquire knowledge and skills from unconventional sources. He learnt wood carving from the Chakma artisans and has continued to improvise with modern tools. Whatever skills he applies to shape his forms, it is ultimately subservient to the fine textures he painstakingly etches on the surface like a personalized script. His fine chisel cajoles the wood to produce complex and sensitive surfaces with equal ease on tropical species from Chittagong and hardy Himalayan timber from Northern Pakistan.

When Shahid Sajjad turned to bronze casting both cost factors and curiosity made him turn to the ancient lost wax technique that created the elegant Chola bronzes of South India. Through endless experiments this technique was expanded in his studio to cast larger pieces. For technical advice he sought the help of Akio Sato in Japan.

Shahid Sajjad's exploration of these skills is particularly valuable for its impact on sculpture in the country. It reclaimed the space from colonial art education that relegated local craft skills to a subaltern position. His revitalization of craft skills and their integration in his time-less vocabulary has inspired young sculptors in wood.

When Shahid Sajjad, a man who shuns limelight, was asked to speak at the launch of the book authored by Dr Akbar Naqvi on his life and work at the National College of the Arts Auditorium, it was a moment of special significance. Life had come full circle for a young man who once could not afford to attend this premier

art college. Now, at the age of 71, he was being honored by the very institution. He stood there as a Fellow of NCA (conferred in 1996) and was acclaimed by his peers with a retrospective and publication, a multiple honor never given before in the history of the institution.

The visual art community joined the nation in acknowledging the talent and conviction with which Shahid Sajjad changed the direction of his life, from one of a destitute youth to an influential leader.

His guiding vision has been a simple one: he lives modestly and with social responsibility.

Our hero has demanded very little from his country and yet has given back much as a role model of innovation, excellence, courage and intellectual honesty.

***NuktaArt* would like to thank *Dawn* newspaper for permission to reproduce this article.**

photographs by Malcolm Hutchison and Nadeem Wahid



Shahid Sajjad speaking at the retrospective

reviewed by RUMANA HUSAIN

A New City with an Old Soul

TITLE: *Glimpses into Islamabad's Soul*

AUTHOR: Fauzia Aziz Minallah

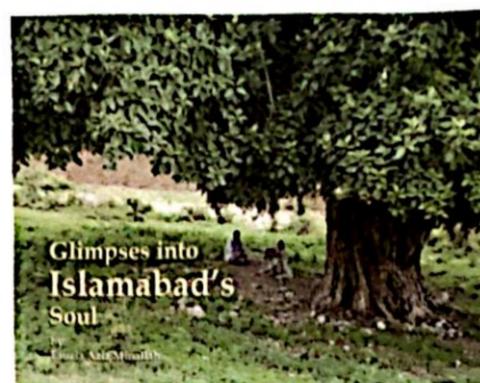
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Fauzia Minallah's passion for art and design converges with her activism through writing and campaigning for heritage, conservation, environmental and social matters. So does her enthusiasm for raising issues of peace, tolerance, and justice; as well as her involvement with children, on a platform that she has provided to them in the shape of an NGO called Funkor Child Art Centre, carrying out workshops for children living in shanty towns, for children with disabilities; refugee children, and so on.

An unconventional artist whose time has been well spent so far pursuing social issues, Fauzia is a graduate of the famous Pratt Institute New York. She emerged on the Karachi art scene, several years ago as an art and heritage activist, curating a show of traditional carved tombstones, the dwindling craft of *chitarkari*—slate engravings—that the craftsmen from her parents' village in Hazara, in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, were slowly giving up as people started preferring other materials, such as marble. Her own inspiration to work in slate, clay, and other materials emanated from working with these craftsmen.

The recent publication, *Glimpses into Islamabad's Soul*, researched and developed by Fauzia, who has so far also written three

children's books, is a hardbound, pictorial, coffee-table publication. It is a complete departure from other books on Islamabad that focus by and large on the urban glitz and glamour of Pakistan's capital city. Fauzia, on the other hand, who has spent over three

As the reader turns page after page, old Banyan and Peepal trees of splendid characters spread out their arms and aerial roots to engulf her/him, into a warm embrace, reminding one of all the historical accounts that these living things must have witnessed.

decades in Islamabad, and is in love with its heritage, presents the history of the Potohar region, where Islamabad, built in the early 1960s, is located. On the western side of the Margallah Hills, lies the oldest capital of this region, Taxila—site for the famous Gandhara civilization.

As the reader turns page after page, old Banyan and Peepal trees of splendid characters spread out their arms and aerial roots to engulf her/him, into a warm embrace, reminding one of all the historical accounts that these living things must have witnessed, and whose lives are now threatened as the land mafia takes on or official 'development', expansion and 'modernization' of the city takes place. Already, the bulldozers have wiped out not only some of the

gigantic trees, but also many unsung man-made monuments. The author traces ancestral homes in remote villages nestled in the green Margallah Hills that stand as bastions, overlooking Islamabad; she not only bemoans the lost clay traditions of the village of Saidpur, but takes up the cause of promoting its pottery so that the "spiritual side of Islamabad is not lost forever." For instance, her photographs showing each stage of Gharoli-making lend much interest in this diminishing craft, which she is poised to save with her infectious perseverance. This particular pitcher is traditionally used for bathing the bridegroom and it is embellished on all sides with ornaments of clay flowers, pendants and mirrors.

The book, replete with photographs taken by the author, also makes use of artist Ghulam Rasul's paintings that depict the rustic charm of the environs and the colorful magnificence of its blossoming trees such as the Amaltas, the Kachnaar, Jacarandas, Poinsettia, Flame of the Forest, and more. In fact, Fauzia acknowledges that his paintings were an inspiration for the book.

The book, replete with photographs taken by the author, also makes use of artist Ghulam Rasul's paintings that depict the rustic charm of the environs and the colorful magnificence of its blossoming trees such as the Amaltas, the Kachnaar, Jacarandas, Poinsettia, Flame of the Forest, and more..

The author points out how the lack of vision, imagination and 'feel' for heritage within the callous government functionaries is either killing old sites by removing them forever or 'uplifting' and 'face-lifting' them, such as the shrines of Sufi saints and other spiritual places that are revered by the Hindu and Buddhist communities of the region. Flooding places with electrical lights, where hundreds



of oil lamps have been lit traditionally or using modern materials to replace the age-old rustic ones—making them 'attractive' for tourists but throttling their very souls, is a very high price to pay for these heritage sites. The author has traversed to caves that were used for meditation by holy men, visited *baithaks* of *pirs* and *faqeers* and also spoken to hundreds of common people who are either still inhabiting the villages or they have been evacuated and hence are displaced. She has been documenting these elements on her digital camera. Moreover, she has spoken to professionals, such as the eminent archaeologist Dr A.H. Dani, who has also penned the foreword for this important book.

One hopes that *Glimpses into Islamabad's Soul* will provide fodder for thought to all those who are at the helm of decision-making in the relevant departments, and to urban planners and sociologists, and "Islamabad's Soul" and their own souls could find solace in unification.

photographs courtesy Fauzia Minallah





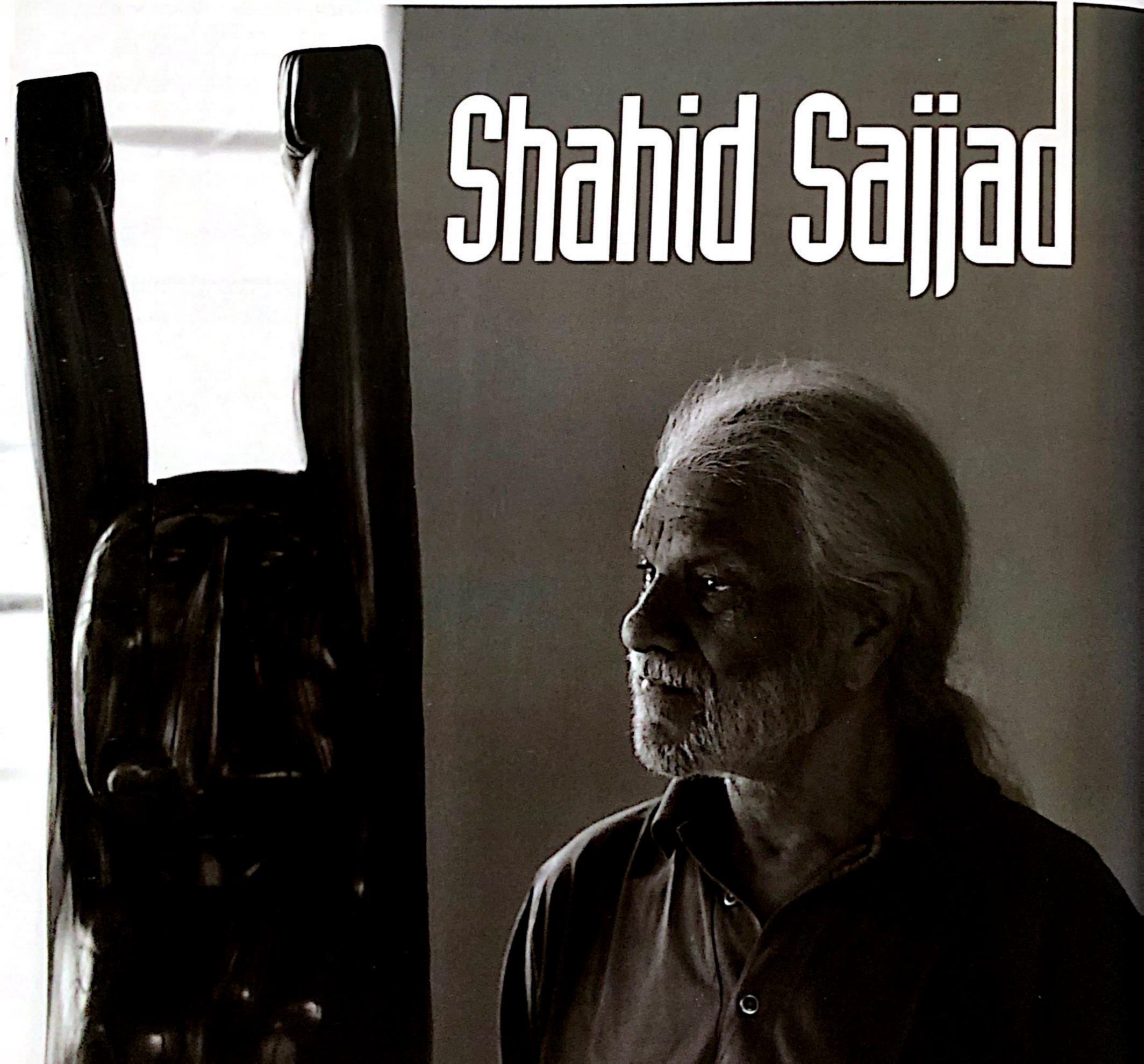
NUKTA-E-AZAR

by THE NUKTA TEAM

NUKTAART
in conversation
with

photography by Dr Altamash Kamal

Shahid Sajjad



On our arrival at Shahid Sajjad's place we met him outside his studio on the ground floor of the single-story house where he has lived for several decades. He showed us around the studio, a long cavernous space where one encounters his work in different stages of completion. Crated works back from a show in Lahore are stacked against a wall. Pass the clutter of work tools and tables deep inside the studio is located the artist's pride and joy, a modest furnace where he casts most of his bronze pieces.

On entering his living space on the first floor, we were greeted by several life-size wooden figures that stand guard like silent sentinels. This includes the funerary works from Kalash obtained by the artist during a visit to Chitral and his own carved figures since the 1960s.

During the long interview with Shahid Shahid we covered many aspects of his art and life including his feelings on recently becoming a grandfather.

An artist who draws his strength from his experience and spiritual wisdom finds resonance in the writings of Bulleh Shah and Krishnamurti emphasizing that the true spirit of his work can be easily conveyed by the Hindu philosopher's words: "Knowledge is essential for technique, not life".

His mantra 'doubt everything, investigate and question to find your own answers' has been a driving force which has helped this self-taught artist to understand his work, his materials, shaped his world view, and brought clarity about life.

What connection do you find between yourself and the Chakma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts where you had spent a considerable time and dedicated the 1994 show titled 'My Primitives' to them.

I am that primitive! The sense of purity and clarity of the tribal craftsmen took me in instantly. I strongly feel that our claim to be civilized is a farce as we remain insensitive to our natural surroundings and towards each other as human beings. Predatory, selfish and wasteful, the irony is that we are known as the 'developed' ones while on the other hand 'they' who live in complete harmony with their own environment and needs are the so-called 'primitives'.

Some of your largest and most memorable work is in wood. What is it that inspires you to work in classical materials like wood and bronze while many of your peers in the sixties and seventies were experimenting with other materials?

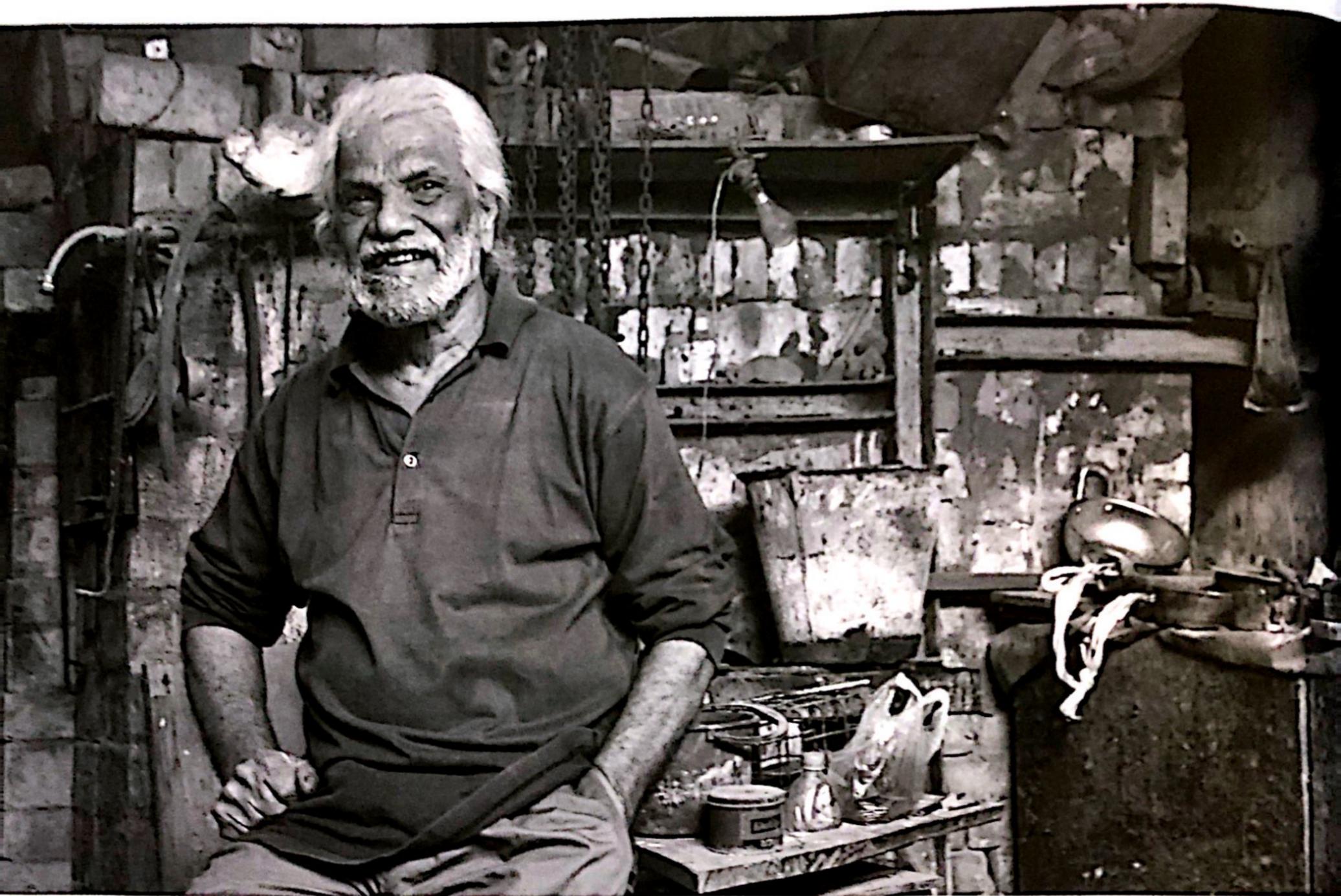
It has everything to do with resources and my own relationship with the material. Wood requires fewer tools to work with. I always admired the works of Rodin, Gauguin and Henry Moore and somehow the materials, the tools, the scale. . . everything came together when I started working in wood.

You have made use of the lost wax method casting technique, which has a long history in our region. Tell us something about it, and also about your Japanese mentor?

It started when I saw a small picture, in an Italian magazine, of a sculptor chiseling away at his piece, using this technique and I wanted to explore it. The lost wax method casting or investment casting comes about with plaster, latex, wax and ultimately metal. It is one of the most difficult technologies to be undertaken for sculpting.

During my visit to Japan in 1973 I discovered that there was a sculptor, Akio Kato, in a village some 450 miles from Tokyo who was working in this technique. He was persuaded to see me for a short time so I remember taking the train right away from Tokyo to make it in time. My short meeting was very informative and later and through trial and error I taught myself the technique. We have kept in touch over the years and he tells me, "Now you are my teacher."

In this technique you can create the original piece with soft materials such as wax or clay. Then make a mold with plaster or fiberglass. However, to preserve the details, an inner mold of rubber or latex is made as well. Molten wax is then poured into this mold and a coating covers its inner surface. Then the original wax is removed, hence the 'lost wax' process. The melted wax can be recovered and re-used, often it is simply burned up. Now all that remains of the original artwork is the negative space, formerly occupied by the wax, inside the hardened shell. Bronze is melted and poured into the shell. Let me just say that it is a lengthy and difficult process. One can labor over each cast, melt the bronze, pour the boiling liquid, and then also see the whole thing shatter!



Sculpture has not been a very popular field with artists so what made you take up sculpting as a career and what were the early years like?

I gave up a career in advertising to ride a motorcycle and travel around the world. On my return, I held my first exhibition. I gave up a comfortable, well paying job and exchanged it for freedom. I could not live with a farce as I was suffering. As I began to paint and later to sculpt, marriage followed.

Salmana, my wife agreed to marry me and came to live here where there was nothing. Not even a chair. The years have just gone by. . . our two boys were born and raised in this house. She never complained and has had few needs. She used to do some sculpture too and you can see some of her pieces in this room, but then she gave up, saying one of us doing this stuff is more than enough!

I have been lucky to have this place in the centre of the city; it is convenient too to be working from the same place. My sculpture . . . the pieces I make. . . are not acts of will. They just happen. Intellectual issues do not figure predominantly in my scheme of things. I just look intently at what I do.

Your bronze mural at Nowshera is an iconic piece, how did this ambitious piece come about?

It was a very ambitious experiment which took me several years just to understand the technical process of casting a 13½ by 6 ft mural which weighs over a ton. After several costly experiments it was finally made in interlocking sections and today stands in the Armed Corps Division Head Quarters in Nowshera.

Your scale over the years has got bigger and bigger and Horizontal Interference is well over 12 feet tall. Can you share with us how that came about?

Horizontal Interference came to me when I brought these very long logs from Mansehra. I wanted to convey with it how with knowledge comes a disadvantage for it does not let us explore on our own. In my work the problem—knowledge—is the dead body placed horizontally, interfering with living moments.

Can you tell us about how you approach your work?

Once you start responding to the physical state of things then all kinds of things start to open up. My materials may not be living

things but they have a memory and they respond. They will respond differently in a different set of hands. I don't deny that much of it is mechanical but perhaps something else happens too. When I say that it is not an act of will, that is only where the mechanical part of my work is concerned, but there is total chaos as far as the psychological is concerned.

Let me tell you something about the large piece called *Recycled Man*. . . I was living in this lumber factory in Manshra. This was the only piece that I had planned as such because the machine had to take over. When the logs were being sliced horizontally by a mechanical saw, the 'eye' part of the piece caught my imagination and I thought that the direction of the oval of the eye can be changed and all the slabs could follow the same direction. The piece refers to the chaos in human relationships within the family, the neighborhood, the nation and different cultures without providing any answers as such.

Our minds are conditioned. We are also quite mechanical in our thinking. Creative notions do not come close to it when the mind functions like that.

After this very important (retrospective) show in Lahore, what kind of pieces are you planning now?

I do not 'plan', it happens. I believe in life just taking its own course. . . the work just takes shape. One must not plan, but live in the present moment.