

# NUKTA ART



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The  
Anxious  
Century

# Contents

## Editor's Note

4 Art News

8 Art@Nukta

## Essays

34 The Wahab Jaffer Collection Goes Public  
by Rumana Husain

39 ArtMart, Inc.  
by Saquib Hanif

42 Songs in Clay: Native American Pottery  
by Ilona Yusuf

## Art Global

48 The Anxious Century: Discourses Waiting to be Born

64 Personal Perceptions of Contemporary Art in Iran  
by Christine Bruckbauer

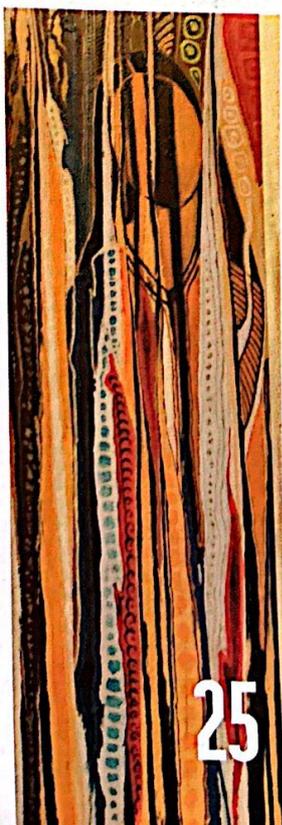
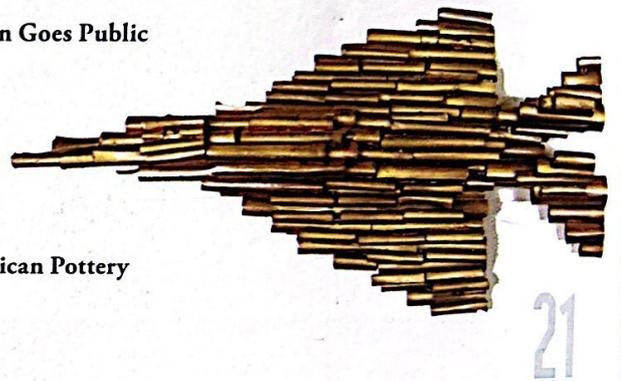
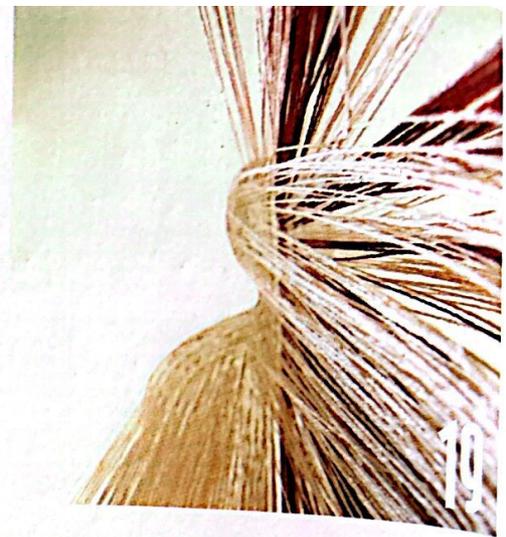
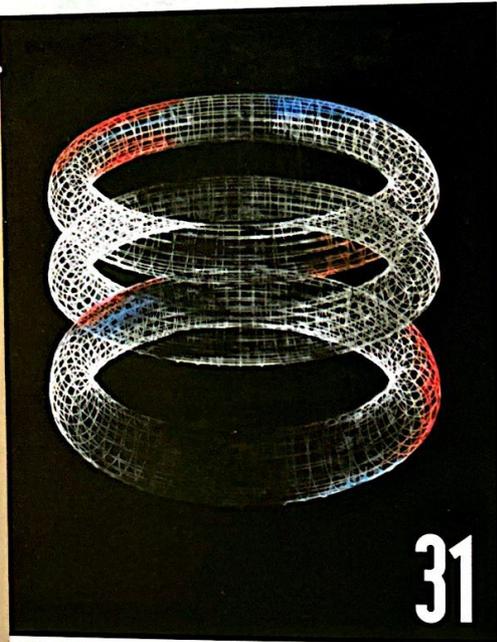
71 Constantin Brancusi at Targu-Jiu: The Local Context of his WWI Memorial  
by Maureen Korp

## Photo Essay

62 The Anxious Century  
photographs by Ayesha Vellani, Kohi Marri and Tapu Javeri

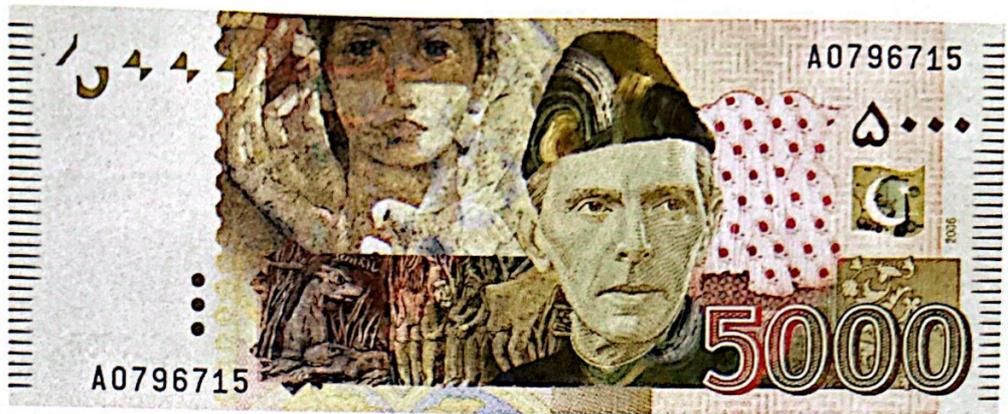
## Art Activism

76 Art with Heart  
by Adnan Lotia





42



39

## Architecture

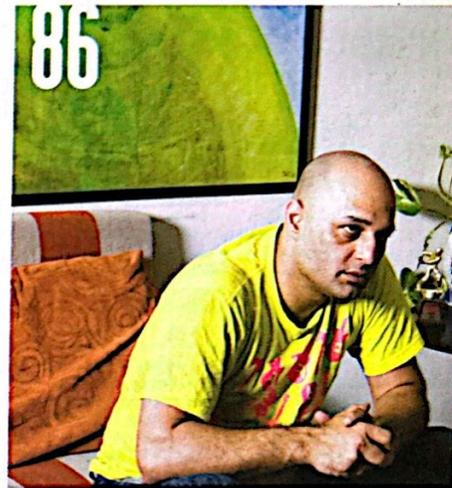
- 80 **Global Capital and the Cities of the South**  
by Arif Hasan



71

## Art Collector

- 86 NuktaArt visits Ali Azmat



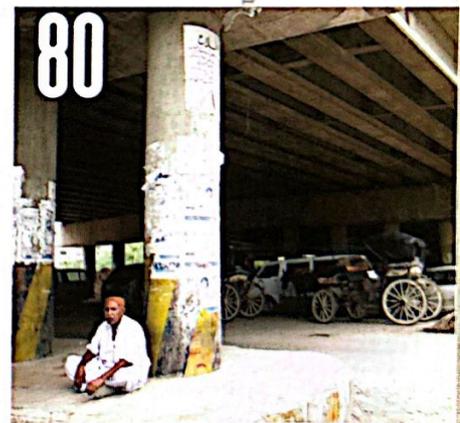
86

## Books

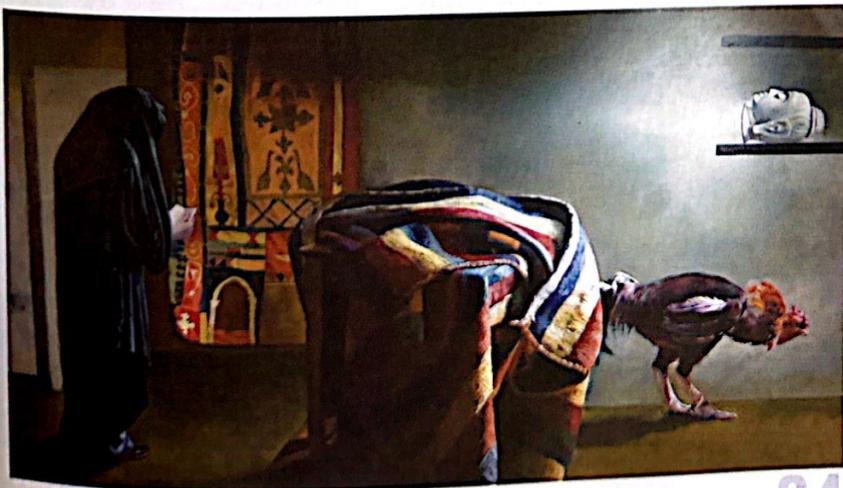
- 94 **Lubna Agha—Points of Reference**  
reviewed by Zohra Yusuf

## Nukta-e-Nazar

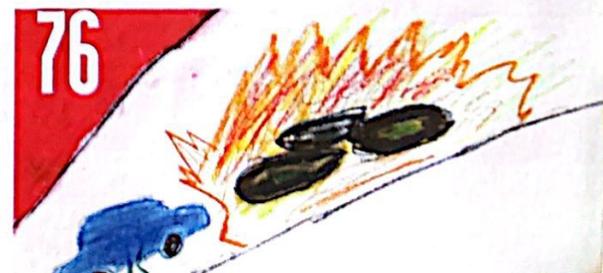
- 96 NuktaArt in conversation with Rashid Rana



80



64



76

The theoretical art discussions in South Asia revolve largely around the concerns of authenticity and authority. The questions asked are, why has the local context of culture and socio-political dynamics not become an acknowledged voice within the grand narrative that is zealously guarded by the politics of power? Will the balance of art sales tilting in favor of Pakistani and Indian artists open a space for the authentic discourses that emerge from the place of origin of the new market favorites or will the control of canon making remain in the hands of Western institutions?

To initiate debate and investigate the ferment of ideas emerging from South Asia, *NuktaArt* in collaboration with Goethe Institut will host a two day seminar on art criticism in October 2008, in Karachi, under the rubric 'The Anxious Century: Discourses Waiting To Be Born.'

The readers get a preview of the four sub-themes under discussion, *Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space, Canons of Control and Subordination, Art Market: An Uncertain Progress and Transformed by Technology* in the abstracts of the papers by art critics from Pakistan, Germany, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran and Maldives in an exclusive section of this issue.

*NuktaArt* acknowledges the impressive achievements of two contemporary spirits: Rashid Rana and Ali Azmat, who continue to challenge the canon in art and music. In *Nukta-e-Nazar*, Rana gives his perspective on issues in his art and how he has constructed a new language centered around technology, to communicate them. The eclectic art collection of Ali Azmat shows his fascination for faces which can be read as an emotive link to the way he intuitively connects to youth and street culture to create music that transcends time and genre.

The themes of Anxious Century are extended with multiple viewpoints. The impact of market forces on urban space is taken up by Arif Hasan, a guru to architects and town planners with a conscience, as he looks at some hard facts in how cities like Karachi are stalked by builders who are mutating its architectural face.

Negatives of a bullish art market are expounded in *ArtMart Inc*, with a discussion on how the relentless pressure of dealers is known to stunt the creative potential of artists. The writer goes on to lament how quadrupled prices have pushed art out of the reach of people who value and understand it and into the hands of speculators.

One high profile art sale inspires optimism as the Wahab Jaffer Collection, sold to the Rangoonwala Trust at an undisclosed price, will soon be displayed in a dedicated public gallery

in Karachi. The exclusive details of this transaction inform *NuktaArt* readers how history was made when art changed hands between two major collectors of Pakistan.

Looking at Iran, a country facing the challenge of change on the art scene, a European art critic sends in her report *Personal Perceptions of Contemporary Art in Iran* that candidly discusses her art encounters.

An in-depth article on Constantin Brancusi draws the great sculptor out of the history books to focus on his monumental work *the Endless Column*. The writer, whose roots can also be traced to Targu-Jiu, Brancusi's birth place, offers an insight into the folkloric significance of his iconography on this unusual homage to local war heroes.

The continuum of Pueblo Pottery is taken up in *Songs in Clay: Native American Pottery* which takes into account the dilemma facing its 21st century creators. Torn between purism and innovation, the choice becomes difficult when a break from rules is seen as a betrayal of tribal conventions.

*Art with Heart* on the art project at Machar Colony, one of the coastal slums of Karachi, comes under a new section: *Art Activism*. This project introduced art as a vehicle of awareness and discovery to vitalize the lives of children debilitated by poverty.

On the invitation of *NuktaArt*, three acclaimed photographers, Tapu Javeri, Ayesha Vellani and Kohi Marri, respond to a photo essay on the theme "The Anxious Century" with pictures in their portfolio. It's interesting to note that all three artists have independently selected to underline their concern for the most marginalized and the most vulnerable in our midst.

Over 30 years ago Lubna Agha with her white paintings commanded the attention of her peers and art critics. In a recent biography of Lubna Agha, *Points of Reference*, Marcella Nesom Sirhandi takes readers back to the vibrant 1970s in Pakistan.

Making connections between past success and future conundrums, this issue of *NuktaArt* attempts to extend the art debate on the Anxious Century.

**Nilofur Farrukh**

Editor

October 2008

**Rumana Husain and Amra Ali**

Senior Editors

# Art News

■ The Rangoonwala and Charles Wallace Residency at Gasworks, London was awarded to **Ayaz Jokhio**. During the three month stay he will work with London curators and visit galleries to gain exposure to the London Art Scene.

■ **Sharmila Samant** started her SAVAC Residency in August 2008. In the next six weeks she will explore migrant experiences of the Mississauga and Vancouver South Asian community, in particular, the Goan and Maharashtran communities, and develop an installation and artist book project titled *Kathajal: A Web of Stories*.

■ Dubai based **Abraaj Capital** initiated a prize for established international curators working with artists from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. The selected proposals will bring the curator and artist together for a creative collaboration which will be showcased at Art Dubai 2009. The award is accompanied with a purse of \$200,000 for successful candidates.

■ **The Second Singapore Biennale** will be held from September to November 2008. Curator Fumio Naro and co-curators Joselina Cruz and Matthew Ngui have invited 60 artists to work on the theme: Wonder. A majority of them are from Asia, but many who live between the West and East will explore new frontiers of fantasy beyond all that is known in this realm.

■ Pakistani Art successes at **Hong Kong Art Fair** came with the first time participation of organizations like Green Cardamom and Gandhara Art. According to Hammad Nasser, co-founder of Green Cardamom, the audience was exposed to a wide range of art from Pakistan in their booths, and both visitors and collectors responded enthusiastically. A good number of art works were bought for local collections.

## Another Artists' Residency for Lahore

This summer, for the First Studio RM Residency invited five artists from Karachi, Lahore and Dhaka for a four week exchange. The works of the participating artists Tayaba Begum Lippi, Usman Ghouri, Sadaf Naeem, Saba Khan and Irfan Hasan created during the residency were later exhibited at Ejaz Galleries, Lahore.



RM Studio, named after its founder, artist and educator RM Naeem, was established in 1995 to provide rigorous skill training to art students. In response to the need for studio space, it also made the space available to professional artists. One of the objectives of RM Studio is to act as a facilitator to new

entrants in the field to facilitate the bridge between artists and the community and to help young artists with career advise. In its brief existence the Studio has played a pivotal role in the careers of young artists like Ali Kazim and Mudasar Mansoor who have gained international success.

## Sculpture Disappears from Karachi's Roundabout

Amin Gulgee's 40 ft high *Forgotten Text* which was jointly sponsored by Glaxo Smith Kline, Merck Marker, Pakistan State Oil, Pakistan Tobacco Company and Siemens in 2004 and stood at a Clifton roundabout in Karachi, has disappeared!

The artist says he was shocked to see the empty space while driving past the roundabout, close to his house. It is anyone's guess what happened to it as Gulgee refuses to probe into the matter. Last year, a large piece of sculpture went missing from the entrance wall of his studio cum gallery when the artist was abroad.

## In Memoriam

### Eqbal Mehdi (1946–2008)

A self taught artist started his career as an illustrator with *Lail-o-Nihar* and worked with widely circulated magazines like *Akhbar-e-Jehan* and *Sabrang Digest*. He built a long and prolific career as a painter. Eqbal Mehdi acquired fame for his portraits and figurative representation in his signature pen and ink style. He painted over 500 official portraits of Mohammad Ali Jinnah—the Quaid-e-Azam (Father of the Nation). His work was widely collected in Pakistan. Eqbal Mehdi passed away in Karachi after a prolonged illness.

### Dr Adam Nayyar (1948–2008)

Prominent intellectual and anthropologist Dr Adam Nayyar, Executive Director of Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) passed away in Islamabad. Dr Nayyar was valued as an authority on Pakistani music, especially Sufi and folk music, and culture. His areas of interests and experience were ethnographic investigations, teaching and training, music and Silk Route music. Dr Nayyar was instrumental in putting Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan on the world map of the music world. In 1991, his film production on the musical heritage of Pakistan, *Pardesi* won an Honorable Mention Award at the Cannes Film Festival. Recently the French government bestowed its prestigious 'Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres' (Knighthood of Arts and Letters) award for his contributions to cultural life of the world.

# Questioning Neo-Miniature

Is there such a thing as the 'New Miniature?' asks Gerard Mermoz. I can imagine the paintings at The Genesis 2008 responding with all the petulance of six-year-olds, "Well of course, what do you think we are!"

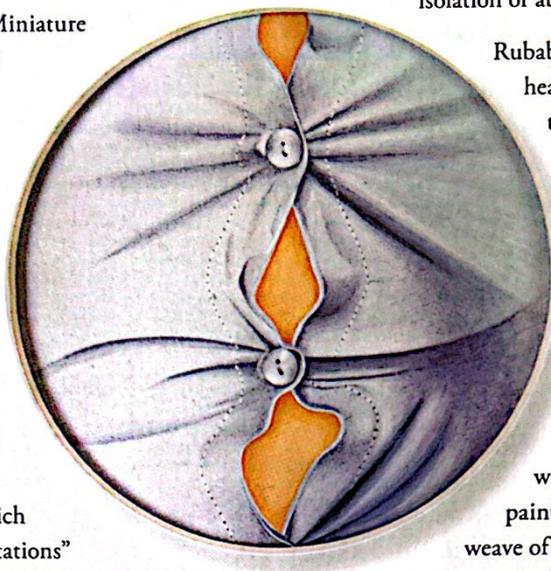
At some point in the last ten years Neo Miniature became an instantly recognizable label in Pakistan, with some artists claiming it as their own individualized style of expression and some writers calling it the first art movement to be born and bred in Pakistan. Whereas its development may have followed the expected organic cycle for Pakistanis, from the vantage of those of us who were geographically distanced from the site of its production, Neo Miniature appeared as a self-proclaimed category which took the international market by storm. Hailed as "a genre, which is completely Pakistani in all its manifestations" on the one hand, and yet so totally steeped in post-modernist appropriation on the other, the Neo Miniature posed many ontological questions, including the one raised by Mermoz.

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It has already been acknowledged that at the semantic level, Neo Miniature asks us to locate what miniature is and if the Neo Miniature is a new kind of miniature, how can its novelty be qualified?

In its size, the choice of media, that is, *vasli*, and method of execution, miniature traces its lineage as far back as the Mughal and Rajput ateliers of 16th century Hindustan but the prefix Neo-, Mermoz rightly observes, explains the way the subject matter has altered from its antecedents: from literature to autobiography, from fixed imperial symbolism to more flexible signs, from illustration to Art. The bigger question for me is that if we all agree that the Neo Miniature has nothing to do with the historical miniature except its size, *vasli* and method of brushwork then why does it continue to retain its label and why do Pakistani artists continue to subscribe to it? Part of the answer may lie in an analysis of The Genesis 2008 held at Gandhara Art Space Gallery, Karachi.

Works of ten women artists, all recent graduates of the National College of Art Miniature Department, are displayed at the exhibit which addresses several overlapping themes such as femininity and its social construction, personal narratives revolving around isolation or abandonment, nostalgia and memory.



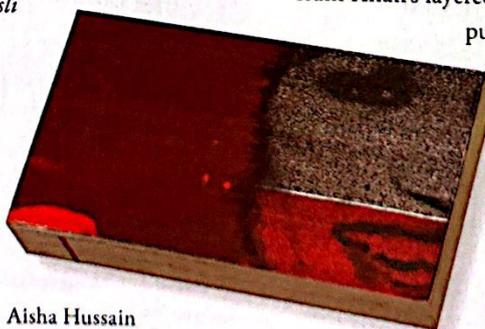
Rubaba Haider

Rubaba Haider and Isbah Afzal's work relies heavily on the use of fabric and needlework to describe a particularly feminized experience of the world. Much like Judy Chicago's generation of Feminist artists, their work appears to valorize domestic chores such as embroidery and sewing, simultaneously evoking women's cultural responsibility of stitching together families regardless of the number of times they get pricked by the very needles with which they work. While both artists use the *vasli* as a painting surface, Rehana Mangi activates the weave of the *vasli* itself by interlacing human hair in it instead of thread. Long female tresses are a much romanticized part of Pakistani femininity and have been long associated with patient domesticity. Criss-crossed butterflies and roses of human hair elicit ambiguous responses of the pleasing and repulsive together.

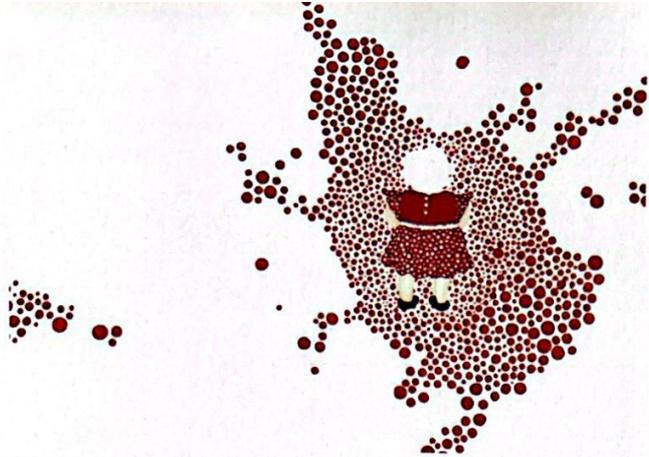
Amna Omair and Ammara Khalid turn to physical spaces like office cabinets, mailboxes, houses and open cardboard boxes to allude to entrapment and solitude respectively. Whereas Omair looks to the mundane routine of compartmentalizing people, places and events, Khalid dissects closed boxes, peeling them open along creases to expose how susceptible closed havens are to being invaded. Sobia Zahid also pries open the past and forgotten with unfolded images of origami. The pristine white surfaces of once-folded paper do not guile the viewer into considering a spotless history.

With grim industrial infrastructure, Sana Mehmood paints a gritty world-view of the marginal and side-stepped. Her pipes can be taken literally as evidence of slummy, derelict neighborhoods and as metaphors for those living outside the norm. Similarly obtuse are Narissa Fernandez's thorny stems which allude to pain and pleasure, love and loss in their never-ending horizontality.

Iram Khan's layered ECG *vasli* and Aisha Hussain's raised *vasli* paintings depend as much on the treatment of their surfaces as they do on the images they employ for the communication of their ideas. Hussain's blocks of *Nothing is Black or White* with images of Benazir Bhutto rendered in type, beg consideration as



Aisha Hussain  
*Nothing is Black or White*



building blocks for unrealized political ideals due to an untimely assassination. The translucency of ECG strips, polka dots of blood samples superimposed with graphite images of homes tell a tale of a familial loss and the fragility of life.

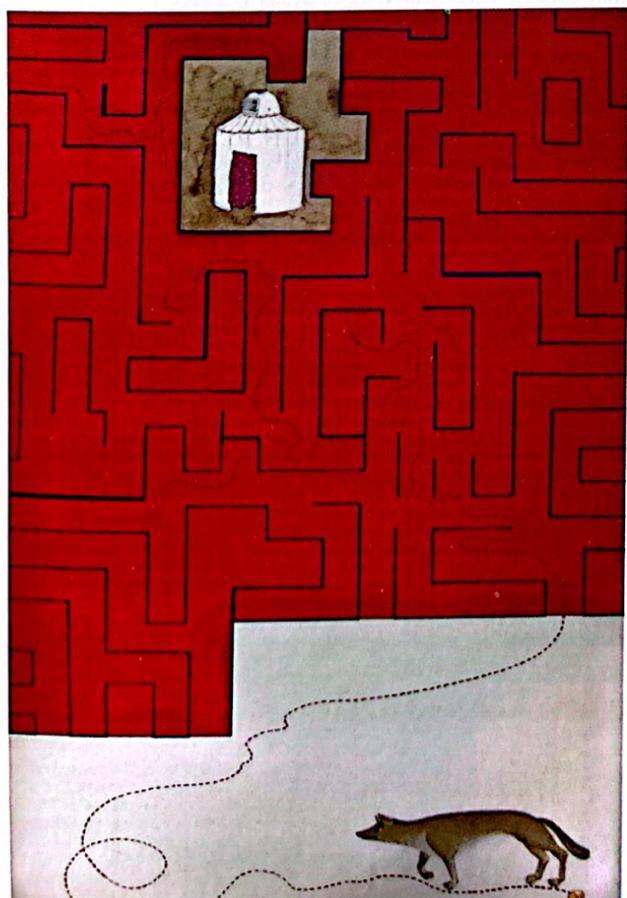
A turn around the corridors lined with very lovely renditions that speak to the viewer on an emotional plane does not leave any doubts about the merit of the work in terms of skill and fertility of ideas. What we see here though is not earth-shattering creativity. I recall one of my undergraduate painting professors saying to me, "It's all been done before—Rauschenburg, Hesse, Nauman—it has all been done. Does that mean you stop painting because there's nothing 'new' to make?" The verity of her words struck me very strongly as I walked through the exhibit. The level of experimentation with imagery and medium (even if not *vasli* itself) has all been done before but that in no way demerits this work for what it is in this time and place. If we've seen all this before on a larger scale, we are now seeing it smaller, with a slightly different range of tonal modalities even if the substance is what it was before. The realization brings me back to the question with which I began and I wonder why I am being so adamant about a label.

In an art market as diverse and competitive as it is, with Soho and Chelsea lined with gallery offices stacked with aspiring artists' CDs (most of which do not even get browsed), how much of a chance does a Pakistani artist have if he/she subscribes to the same labels as do all of her/his equally competent competitors? A pragmatic world-view argues that working under the banner of the Neo Miniature gives a Pakistani artist a niche for specialized entry under what we are locally familiar with as the minority quota. The label "Neo Miniature" ethnicizes the work, even though its only ethnicity is the origin of its author, but in doing so it also aligns the work with the a moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent which was contemporaneous with the Italian Renaissance—an era considered most important in the history of western art.

The Neo Miniature needs the semiotic reference to "miniature," to be recognized abroad as an ethnic and hence marketable category.

by *Sumbul Khan*

**Sumbul Khan** studied for her Masters 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 and Architecture. Her research interests include gender and identity politics in 16th century Mughal manuscripts and contemporary art from post-colonial countries.



## Challenges in the Sacred Journey of Life: "Labyrinth"—Recent Works by Waseem Ahmed

**A** labyrinth, unlike a maze, has only one path. The way in is the way out. The narrative in Waseem Ahmed's show, "Labyrinth," at Ejaz Galleries in Lahore takes the viewer on a purposeful path.

The show, comprising of 21 works by the modern miniaturist who was born in Hyderabad, Sindh and then reborn at the National College of Arts (NCA), Lahore also displays, among other things, his proficient painterly skills. His seductive brushstrokes highlight magnificent details demonstrating the use of traditional elements. Waseem's tiny 'stitches' throughout many of his works either in the form of cross-stitches or running stitches glide playfully on paper but are in reality dexterously 'painted' strokes. It is only

Waseem Ahmed  
*Perforation*  
gouache and silver leaf on vasli, 30 x 50.8 cm  
2008

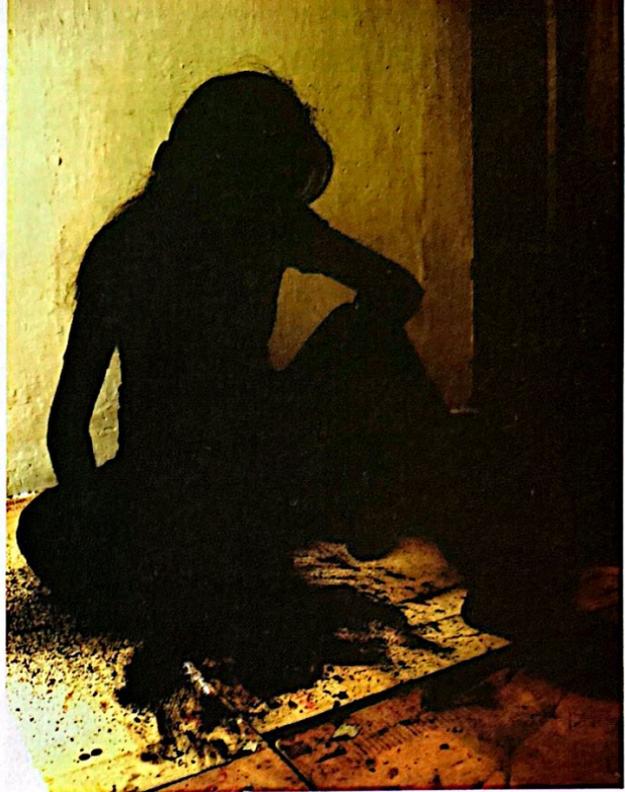
# Emerging Talent 2008

**F**our years at art school shapes a young person's approach to making art and the legacy of those years of instruction and learning stays with the artist forever. The Emerging Talent show at the VM Art Gallery held each year showcases thesis work by students from schools across Pakistan. The show is an idea made possible by the inventiveness of the curator Riffat Alvi and by the fact that there are only a handful of art institutions in the country, though befittingly, there is annual representation from all four provinces.

Emerging Talent acts as an insightful reflecting pool for those interested in ascertaining the future of art in Pakistan. Though the 2008 show was an affirmation that things are going well in the art world, there were pockets of shadows that speak of arcane methods of teaching. There is no doubt that our young artists hold the power of limitless possibilities within their grasp as they have immeasurable talent. But talent isn't always enough. An art school helps to develop the essential ability to communicate the meaning of any work produced, and it assists the aspirant to find a comfortable niche in the complex system of discourse, belief and society.

The role of the art school is essentially to shape the understanding and approach to the making of art by the student. The learning helps the aspirant to develop the ability to communicate the meaning of their work, which in turn is necessary for the artists to get by and service in the art 'market.' But it's not just about contending with the market. It's about participating with a measure of confidence in the art culture of the day and finding a path through the complexities of thought and discourse.

Sara Khan



Sahar Javaid

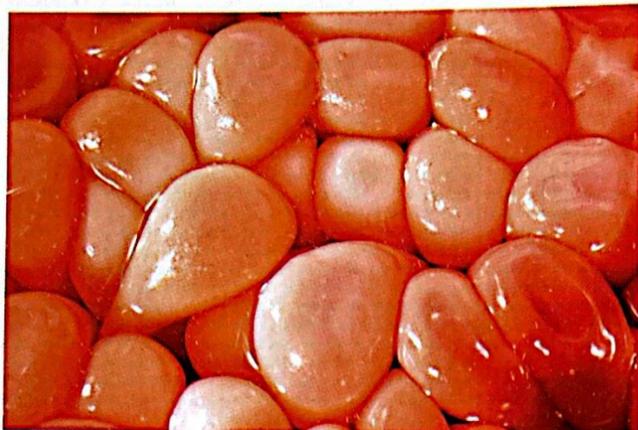
If this sounds like too much to expect from an art student, it's not. Anything less, in fact, is what relegates art students to the shallow end of a vast pool of art making. In fact one of the first gaps to be seen in graduating students is the missing document—the thesis—that brings the conceptual nature of the work in line with the physical construction of the art. A thesis involving research, dialogue and debate is imperative to precede the body of work. Coherence, logical conclusion, resolution of ideas, and interpretation of cultural frequencies that make the students' art worthy of the materials they are made of.

It is in these aspects that the differences between art schools really show up. The extent and level of a teachers' involvement, articulation and engagement with the students and the reciprocal enthusiasm of the future artists, makes up in some measure for the lack of the thesis document. Students' works indicate that at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, at Beaconhouse National University, at the Karachi University Visual Studies department or at the Karachi School of Art we find that the faculty is closely concerned with the students through their time at the school offering a degree of understanding and universality.

From the Karachi University, the large photographic print by Sahar Javaid silhouetting a female form is dramatic, while Amber Imam's work discreetly addresses issues of nuptial fears through realist painterly images of a cummerbund and *shalwar*.

Sara Khan's walnut installations refer to the racist slang by which we speak of the indefatigable Pathans. The walnuts are rendered in actual size and set within transparent frames. The luscious pomegranate lies at the heart of Sophia Mairaj's work in which the fruit is invested with mythological properties and stories.

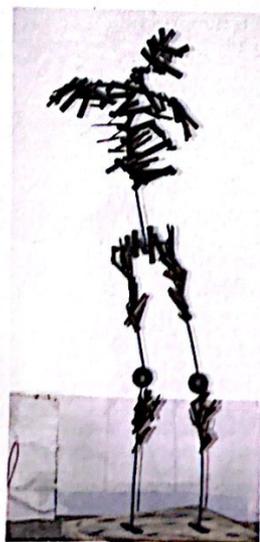




Moira Plair

The students of Beaconhouse represented the school's 'coming out' though they constitute the second batch of students graduating from the university. Moira Plair's photographs of what may be deciphered as food, conjures a morbid loathing but titillating absorption with the human body and its deeper recesses. Rabia Tariq fills the ubiquitousness of a living room with the drama of surreal longing by placing furniture and decorative objects in a floating dream-like sequence. Eymah Nuzhat makes a bold but slightly obscure and incomprehensible connection with feminism through the painting of a cluster of objects that seem a cross between the female breasts and bowling pins, with a leaking milk drop.

The students of Indus Valley School presented diverse work. Marium Ahmed's comic book illustrations are poignant and cutting edge, depicting the story of an ordinary man caught in the middle of gang warfare. Shehar Naved's large paintings show a child's curiosity for things that are beyond her understanding and field of information.



Sadia Jamal

The Karachi School of Art students seem to be inclined towards sculpture and three-dimensional form, perhaps encouraged by their principal instructor Rabia Zuberi. Sadia Jamal has engaged playfully with the human figure, working in semi-abstract three dimension, assimilating small scraps of metal, wood and rope to construct the human form. Rabia Dawood's life-sized figure seated too comfortably on a chair of nails is an interesting piece of molding and sculpting, though without an articulate expression of the idea.



Farooq Chandio

It is unfortunate that the students' work from the universities that are located away from the two major hubs of art show promise but lack a dimension of understanding that comes more easily to students living within the 'hot spots' of art and this is probably due to the level of acuity and insight of the teachers rather than the students. To rectify this, an effort can be made to set up a student exchange program whereby universities exchange a group of art students each year in order to give them an opportunity to experience another side of life and art and a different set of faculty. It will offer students a more multifaceted perspective. However unlikely the scenario may seem now, there is much to gain from such a goal.

This distance is evident in works by students of the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, and the Balochistan University. A lot of the talent seen was still raw and unfinished, still uncommunicatively caught in the throes of infancy even at the culmination of a four year learning process. Farooq Chandio, from the University of Sindh, Jamshoro exhibited a canvas depicting two young men in a setting manipulated for a figurative drawing class. The backdrop, unfathomably, is a Mondrian-like backdrop of flat spatial plains set in a grid of bold colors. Here is an example of unprocessed talent. Works by Afshan and Ambreen Aslam from Balochistan University were also unresolved and undeveloped.

Emerging Talent lays open the problems of art education in Pakistan without criticism or finger pointing. Those involved must realize the potentials and possibilities and wake up to the truth that art shapes societies and cultures and neglecting it will only lead to regression rather than growth and progress.

by Nafisa Rizvi

by RUMANA HUSAIN

**O**ut of the total range of things available in a society, some are marked as commodities, others cherished for their spiritual and cultural value. Perceptions about art in the last decade have radically shifted as this cultural asset has begun to be looked upon more as a mere commodity. In both cases the provenance of an art work is of great importance and once art exits, the artist's studios, its fate, lies in the hands of the buyer. Some great masters are hidden away only for private gratification, while others reach millions due to the generosity of their collectors. Some art collections become controversial like the ones stolen during World War II, and others are synonymous with certain countries like the Louvre and El Prado collections. In the life of an art work, its owners have a critical role to play.

Barbara Isenberg, associate director of the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities, who writes and lectures about art issues and personalities, defines an art collector as a decorator, possessor, scholar, trader, exhibitor, patron and influencer.

In my opinion an art collector is an amalgam of all these and much more. A serious collector is often also a visionary. If and when the collection is passed to another custodian then the dreams of yet another person become tied to it.

**A serious collector is often also a visionary. If and when the collection is passed to another custodian then the dreams of yet another person become tied to it.**

Recently one of Pakistan's important art collections, that of Wahab Jaffer, the scion of the Jaffer family was sold to the Rangoonwala Trust.

A businessman by profession, art collector and painter by passion, Wahab Jaffer can be called as one of the country's most avid art-collectors with the work of 127 different artists. According to him "They are not all Pakistani, as although 75% of the collection does comprise of works by artists of this country, I also have various contemporary works from India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Indonesia, UK and Canada."

Karachi based Jaffer started out by buying Constable and Picasso prints done on canvas from a gentleman who used to come down from Lahore to Karachi to sell them. One day, he was persuaded by a friend to visit Ali Imam's Indus Gallery from whom Jaffer bought a painting by Mobin-ul-Azeem. His friendship with the artist-turned-gallerist grew as Jaffer began to frequent Indus Gallery. This was the genesis of his collection.

Jaffer befriended many artists, took classes from Ali Imam and Ahmed Parvez, and with time also made a name for himself as an artist.

# The Wahab Jaffer Collection Goes Public

Modern masters and contemporary art dominates Jaffer's collection, as they number several hundred. The collection extends to antiquities like rare manuscripts, sculptures, Miniature paintings from Jain, Bengal, Deccan and Persian schools of painting. He built up his collection through acquisition from private galleries, as well as from auctions at Sotheby's and Christie's. At one time Jaffer had some 112 paintings by Ahmed Parvez, the artist who was Jaffer's mentor and a dear friend. Later the number went down to 'only' 65, when he gave them



Wahab Jaffer  
Untitled

Ahmed Parvez  
*Untitled*  
 acrylic on board, 32 × 44.5 cm  
 1976



away as gifts to family and friends. The great master, Sadequain is represented by 47 paintings followed by smaller numbers of Bashir Mirza and Tasadduq Sohail.

Back in 2001 when I asked Jaffer if he had catalogued his entire collection, he surprised me by saying that he always notes in his diary the date of purchase, price tag, place of origin, etc. but they are not formally catalogued. At that time he had not insured the collection either and he did not feel the necessity: "It is rare that paintings get stolen in Pakistan as they are of no use to thieves and dacoits. A fire outbreak was perhaps the single factor that one could worry about..." he had said.

In recent times things have changed radically with the Pakistani art market turning bullish and attracting international auction houses and buyers with art funds and large purses. All this has steered most art discussions from its critical evaluation to its present and future value in hard currency.

When the Wahab Jaffer Collection (WJ Collection) was sold to the Rangoonwala Trust, it made national history as the first time in 61 years such a major private collection had changed hands from the private to the public domain.

To research the story, I posed a few questions to Wahab Jaffer via email in Toronto as to complete the story it was important to find out what motivated him to sell something he had collected with much passion. Did the collector who turned 67 this year take this decision because for the last several years he has begun to divide his time between Pakistan and Canada? How did he

make the selection of the artworks that he wanted to part with, and if so, what was the criteria? With the upsurge in prices for contemporary Pakistani art, would he have liked to revise his decision, given a chance?

Unfortunately, those questions have remained unanswered as he decides to maintain silence on these matters.

The speculation and discussion on the boom in art prices continue to be taken up by the national and international media. In July this year, Ilyas Khan from Karachi wrote in an article entitled *Prices Soar for Modern Pakistani Art*: "In Pakistan's increasingly speculative art market, posthumous sales of better known painters can bring windfall profits..."

"So why such an indiscriminate rush now for modern Pakistani art?" he asks in the same article, and then goes on to answer his own question: "One reason is that the traditional art collector has been replaced by speculators from the corporate sector," concludes Khan before he quotes Zohra Hussain, the owner of Karachi's Chawkandi Art gallery:

"Many investors in the stock market and real estate sectors have realized that investment in art is comparatively more reliable and secure. What's more, liberal bank credits and low interest rates during the last few years have enabled people to shovel larger amounts of money into art."

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Sadequain  
*Untitled*  
 oil on canvas, 135 × 89 cm



Maqbool Fida Hussain  
*Equus I*  
 oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm  
 1979

Pakistani contemporary art has caught the attention of auction houses and cultural institutions alike abroad. In June the President of Asia Society, New York, Vishaka Desai announced that a major exhibition of contemporary art from Pakistan will take place in 2009. It will be New York's first Museum exhibition exclusively dedicated to Pakistan and shortly after this the Director and Curator of Japan's Fukuoka Art Museum visited Pakistan to source artists for their next Triennale. In 2008, Art Dubai invited Pakistan to showcase art at a specially curated show...and the list goes on.

While in Pakistan art is still not standard front page news, the astronomical rise in prices and the passing away of artists do make the headlines and now and then it is no longer mutually exclusive. It needs to be pointed out that the media has had a role to play in demystifying art for a wider audience and keeping them informed of various art activities through constant reviews.



Gulgee  
*Untitled*  
 acrylic and oil on canvas, 32.5 x 61 cm  
 1975

The oft-asked question is, how the art bubble of high prices continues to grow, and how long will it last?

Three years ago, Gwyn Jones wrote:

"The Chinese and Indian economies may be developing at a rapid pace, but their art markets are moving up in value even more quickly. There have been auctions dedicated to Indian, Pakistani and Chinese art for several years but since 2002, auction houses such as Bonhams have reported a big increase in interest in 20th century art from the Far East."

In the same article she quotes Claire Penhallurick, Bonhams' Indian and Islamic Art specialist, who says: "Indians and Pakistanis are patriotic about their heritage and in other areas of art, they have traditionally been the buyers of their own countries work. As a result of these factors, prices have begun to rise to the fever pitch they are at now. And since the Indian economy is strong, there is no reason to think this growth will not continue. The interest in this field is phenomenal, with each sale attracting more and more new bidders."

In this context what kind of significance does the sale of such an important art collection have on the art market and the art scene in general? To get more answers I meet with the facilitator of this deal, Riffat Alvi, Director/Curator of the VM Art Gallery run by the Rangoonwala Trust.

Alvi has managed the VM and shaped its mandate since its inception in 1987 which has led it to its expansion both in size and reputation. She has also been instrumental in creating the Rangoonwala Visual Arts Award and the annual 'Emerging Talent' that focuses on the nurturing and support of new entrants.

Alvi got an opportunity to play a critical role in the acquisition of the WJ Collection when she helped to catalogue it some years ago. Once when Jaffer mentioned to her that he was continuously hounded by buyers but it was his wish to make a sale only to someone who would keep it together and in the country. Alvi shared this with the Rangoonwala Trust that responded positively with a promise to adhere to the terms. After negotiations their offer was accepted by Jaffer...and the rest is history.

According to different sources, the WJ Collection comprises mostly of two dimensional works and those which were his and his family's favorites have been retained by Jaffer. The antiques are also not a part of the sale, however, numerous books, old manuscripts, prints, including those of Henry Moore (and some Japanese prints as well), have now become the property of the Rangoonwala Trust.

After meeting Tariq Rangoonwala, the Chairman Rangoonwala Group of Companies in Pakistan, who is also the Chairman of the Zuleikhabai VM Gany Rangoonwala Trust, a lot of ambiguities were cleared up by his version of this important sale.

Bashir Mirza  
*Untitled*  
 oil on paper, 55 × 48 cm  
 1990



As the son of late Mr Muhammad Ali Rangoonwala, the great philanthropist and patron of the arts, he is responsible for the Trust's many philanthropic activities, including the Rangoonwala Centre within which the VM is located.

"Pakistani art has finally arrived," says Tariq Rangoonwala and elaborates that since 1987 when the VM was started, they have made two kinds of acquisitions, one for the collection of the VM and the other for the individuals within the Rangoonwala family.

"However," he says, "in essence our objective was that art becomes a sustainable vocation. If we patronize the arts then it will help the artist community to remain in this field and not move away. Creating a culture of acquisition of art is important."

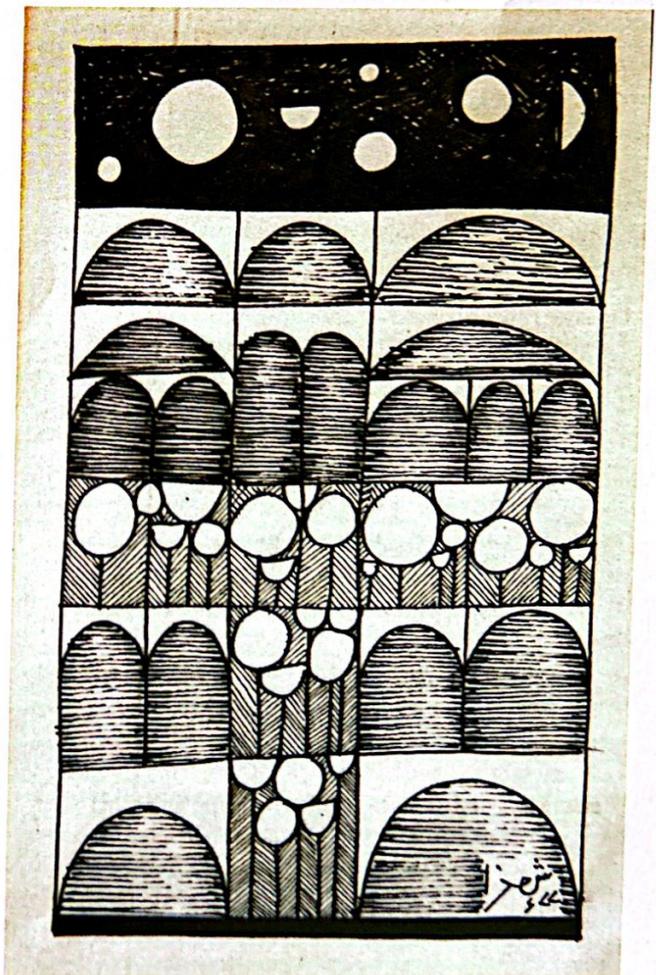
**"If we patronize the arts then it will help the artist community to remain in this field and not move away. Creating a culture of acquisition of art is important."**

To a question why he selected to invest in the WJ Collection, he says that "it includes a much wider kaleidoscope of works as it is also from the era before 1987, when we started collecting for the VM."

To my question if the WJ Collection will remain in the country, Rangoonwala reiterates that it was a central condition from Jaffer, who was very keen for his collection to stay in Pakistan, so the Trust's plans to accommodate it are being made. A large property adjacent to the Rangoonwala Centre in the near future will be the new site of the library and reading room, which will be moved out of its current premises from the Centre and the space used to accommodate the installation of the WJ Collection.

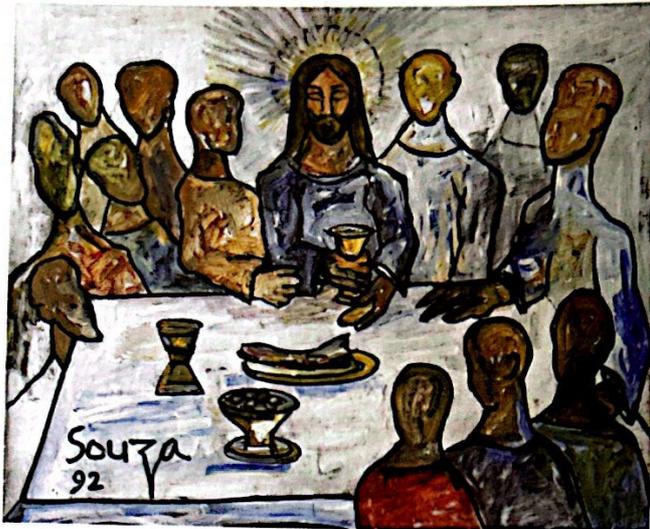
The future plans for the WJ Collection include several different shows with lectures and slide-shows to contextualize the work.

When the WJ Collection sale was in process, professional advice on storage and documentation was sought from Savita Apte, consultant expert, South Asian Art at Sotheby's, who is also a Curator, Writer and Head of Education, DIFC Gulf Art Fair. In future she will also help with the printing of the WJ Collection catalogues. In order to store the collection, arrangements involving special vaults and cool rooms will be created on international specifications. The entire collection has been digitally catalogued and special security arrangements will be made for its safety.



Anwer Jalal Shamza  
*Architectural drawing*  
 9 × 15.5 cm  
 1977

Francis Newton Souza  
*The Last Supper*  
 oil on canvas, 90.5 × 74 cm  
 1992



There are several interesting parallels in history of the sale of important collections. Reported in the beginning of this year was the news of a major art collection sold to UK galleries by London art dealer Anthony d'Offay, 68, who sold 725 works including works of Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons at the price for which he bought them—\$53 million. That's just over a fifth of its current estimated value of \$250 million. The money has come from the British and Scottish governments and from art funds. The magnanimous gesture was to “plug significant gaps in Britain's national collections. The scale of the donation is remarkable: enough art to easily fill a floor and a half of London's Tate Modern. Artist Rooms will take the form of 50 rooms of contemporary art by 25 artists, with the intention that they will be seen across the UK and not just in London and Edinburgh.”<sup>4</sup>

His reason? He has done it for the kids.

Similar gestures can be found in the case of one of the world's major private collections amassed by the late eccentric philanthropist Gustav Rau. In May this year, ABC News reported that ten works of art from his collection are scheduled to go on sale at Sotheby's in July. Most of the paintings have already been moved to Germany, where they will be sold gradually to provide funds for vaccines, medical care and clean drinking water for children in the developing world, the German branch of UNICEF announced in this connection. “While working as a medical doctor in Africa, Dr. Rau regularly slipped away to Europe and the United States to indulge his passion for works by the old masters. Using the wealth he inherited from his family, who made money in auto accessories in Stuttgart, Dr. Rau bought hundreds of paintings and sculptures from five centuries, including works by Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne.”<sup>5</sup>

Then there is the case of Robert H. Benson, head of a potent, English banking house which bears his name. After indulging in his passion of art collecting over a period of approximately 40

years, Benson now 77, recently decided to sell it. “The question is why Benson now allowed his matchless treasures to pass from his possession? It has been hinted that high income taxes and inheritance taxes in Great Britain have influenced many a wealthy man to relinquish his art holdings. Besides, these works are of such international interest that most of the time they are being exhibited through the owner's generosity, in museums—the Royal Academy, the Burlington Fine Arts Club, the New Gallery Exhibition (in London and in Manchester).”<sup>6</sup>

There has been much discussion in print by Pakistani art critics and writers on the paucity of state art museums in the country, particularly as the country turned 50, a decade ago.

The WJ Collection once on public view will lead to the realization of the vision of Wahab Jaffer and the Rangoonwala Trust to give Karachi, a city of 17 million, its first large modern and contemporary art museum where the works of great masters and contemporary artists can be viewed and acknowledged as an integral part of the collective national heritage.

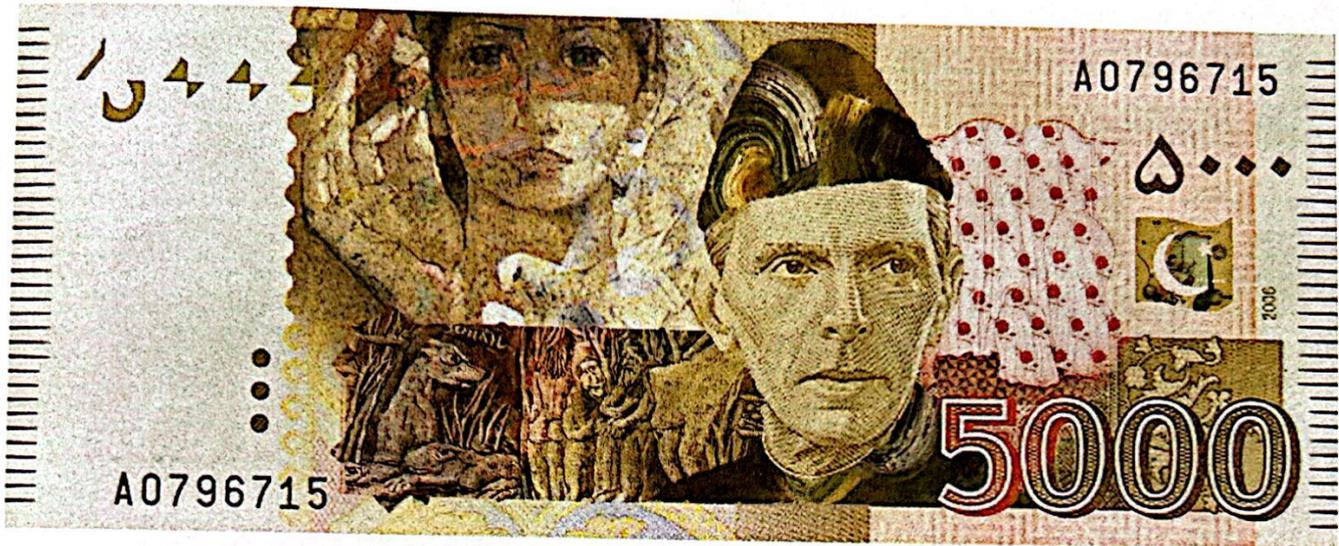
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Images courtesy VM Art Gallery/Rangoonwala Trust

by SAQUIB HANIF

# Artmart Inc.



“I am flabbergasted. He’s barely two-and-a-half shows old and expects people to fall for this. Who does he think he is?” Such were the sentiments expressed by a collector in a text message that beeped on scores of mobiles following the opening of a much-hyped solo some years ago at an eminent Karachi gallery. News of the show had attracted near-infectious interest due to the young artist’s ‘Sold Out’ exhibition in London that garnered rave reviews, unanimously feting the arrival of a “watch-list talent” on Pakistan’s art map.

If the work left one lingering impression it was of a grinding, thrusting, lapel-grabbing razzle-dazzle masquerading as substance. The London exhibition was no more than a flash in the pan, concluded all, presciently enough. The artist went missing from the local and international circuit soon after his homecoming and has not been spotted since.

The case serves up a smorgasbord of issues besetting the local art scene as it continues to reel from the ongoing boom in the Pakistani art market. It’s all there for the most part: international outreach, premature canonization, tepid high-mindedness,

**In Pakistan, this has meant a heightened awareness and interest in art, resulting in the emergence of young artists as well as a new collector class comprising young and upwardly mobile professionals and businessmen who are ready to pay top-drawer prices, administering a badly needed shot in the arm for a field that was sluggish, some even say moribund, for a long period.**

To say the Karachi show failed to live up to the ‘promise’ of the London do would be an understatement. In fact, the *foreign ka muse* was all but smothered by the desi imp of fakery as the young artist hung work shoddy enough to affront the intelligence of his unsuspecting home audience. Those visiting the gallery were greeted by a bizarre hand-scrawled artist’s statement, declaring that the work was the distillation of “impeccable moments,” whatever that meant. Next was a series of perfunctory, though pricey, drawings possibly cranked out in minutes. Ditto for the paintings that had little else besides high price tags and the odd flicker of deft drawing.

inflated prices, uneven output, uninflected connoisseurship, runaway sales, quick turnover—in sum the gradual attrition of traditional and still-relevant values of art practice, meaning skill, deliberation, formal vitality, emotional range and density of thought, which in turn constrict the space for genuine skill and objective critique.

Despite the yawning chasm between the material conditions and aesthetic attainments of Artmart Inc.—its reality and rhetoric, that is—it would be downright foolhardy to ignore or sidestep the myriad benefits accruing to the art community at large, including shady itinerant agents, galleries and of course the artists

themselves. In Pakistan, this has meant a heightened awareness and interest in art, resulting in the emergence of young artists as well as a new collector class comprising young and upwardly mobile professionals and businessmen who are ready to pay top-drawer prices, administering a badly needed shot in the arm for a field that was sluggish, some even say moribund, for a long period.

**“Speaking for ourselves, the work sells almost as soon as it arrives from Sohail’s studio, sometimes before the paint is fully dry. I can’t get enough work for buyers who are literally coming in droves, most likely for its investment potential.”**

**—Zohra Hussain**

A natural corollary to this trend is the mushrooming of galleries and promotional outfits on the one hand and a spike in art prices and their investment value on the other. Even well-established framing shops owners in Karachi and Lahore have extended or bought spaces to include in-house galleries. The establishment of the swanky Art Scene and Ejaz Galleries in Karachi and Lahore, respectively, by the proprietors of the popular Lahore-based ‘Framer’ is only one example of this entrepreneurship. Clifton Art Gallery, also in Karachi, and Hamail Gallery in Lahore fall into the same category. “The increase in the sheer gallery acreage, particularly in Karachi and Lahore, is phenomenal,” says Zohra Hussain of Chawkandi Art, one of Karachi’s oldest and most reputable galleries. “But that is a healthy development as it increases competition and keeps us on our toes to offer better and better work to retain clients.”

“Over the last one year alone, prices have jumped at least 20 to 30 percent and are likely to rise further in the near future,” contends a seasoned collector on conditions of anonymity to ward off the likelihood of a bull-run on the art market. Part of the reason for this price hike is the burgeoning international market for Pakistani art. Acclaimed contemporary miniaturists Muhammad Imran Qureshi and Ayesha Khalid, who are now represented by Corvi-Mora gallery in London and regularly exhibit abroad, are now selling at international prices in Pakistan. At Qureshi’s solo held in December 2007 at Canvas Gallery in Karachi, his paintings were priced between 4,500 and 6,500 pounds. Of the seven on display, one was not for sale. The remaining six sold before the opening of the show at the asking price. As a counterpoint, an A-grade Qureshi miniature from his *Love Letters* series sold in the region of 12,000 to 15,000 rupees at the artist’s first Karachi solo at Chawkandi Art about seven years back.

Sameera Raja, curator at Canvas Gallery, laments relative newcomers insisting on pricing their work on their international rates. “I have the time of my life convincing them to scale down prices. But invariably, they cite international prices of their work and stick to it.” Raja’s concerns are echoed by many gallery owners in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad.



Thanks to globalization, Pakistani art is finally on the radar of the international art world, featuring as it does in important exhibitions at prestigious addresses, art fairs, auctions, collections and museum acquisitions. The upshot of this visibility is not only the exposure Pakistani artists are getting to foreign audiences, tastes, trends and a host of resultant opportunities but also the continuing escalation in prices of Pakistani art, locally and internationally.

Take, for instance, the work of senior Pakistani artist Tassaduq Sohail. The artist, who lived in London for many years before coming back to Pakistan, flogged his miniature-sized phantasmagoric paintings from city sidewalks for as less as 20 to 30 pounds a piece and an equivalent rupee amount or thereabouts in Pakistan. But that was until 2007 when one of Sohail’s paintings, relatively larger than his signature work, was bought, reportedly by a major Pakistani collector, for 32,000 dollars in an international auction, immediately triggering a flare-up in Sohail prices back home.

“Until the end of 2006, a standard issue work by Sohail fetched between 12,000 and 15,000 rupees from a small clutch of loyal collectors,” says Hussain. “Today, the asking price for a 16 × 18 inch canvas, inclusive of commission, ranges between 250,000 and 325,000 rupees, depending on the gallery. Speaking for ourselves, the work sells almost as soon as it arrives from Sohail’s studio, sometimes before the paint is fully dry. I can’t get enough work for buyers who are literally coming in droves, most likely for its investment potential.” Banking on the artist’s growing cachet, a somewhat dubious Karachi gallery has started hoarding Sohail’s paintings, perhaps anticipating the death of the artist of advancing age and failing health.

**“I have the time of my life convincing [exhibiting artists] to scale down prices. But invariably, they cite international prices of their work and stick to it.”**

**—Sameera Raja**

Sohail is less renowned than someone like Abdul Mohammad Ismail, popularly known as Gulgee. Shortly after Gulgee’s tragic death in December 2007, a lapis-lazuli mosaic from his studio sold for a whopping 336,000 dollars at the Dubai auction of Bonhams, a venerable auction house. Similarly, prices of works by deceased and living Pakistani masters such as Allah Bux, Abdur

Rahman Chughtai, Sadequain and Jamil Naqsh have continually headed north since the past few years.

The reclusive Naqsh, who has practically abandoned his Baloch Colony residence in Karachi to live and work in London, has been churning out paintings of his favorite fauna, often accompanied by his moon-faced women, catering to an ever-increasing demand, especially from the prosperous Pakistani expat community. During his sojourn in London, banter wags, Naqsh has painted more pigeons than those flocking Trafalgar Square, despite sound critical advice to finally let the birds fly. And when the going gets tough, his wife, Najmi Sura simply places one painting from her huge museum-quality Naqsh collection under the auctioneer's hammer.

**The art landscape is littered with decayed creative cells once belonging to many self-styled wunderkinds who were blindsided by the lure of quick fame and fortune and plunged headlong into the eddy of the market, becoming better at the sell but losing their grip on the service in the process.**

Those decrying the rampant commercialization of Pakistani art have a point—though only to a point. The art landscape is littered with decayed creative cells once belonging to many self-styled wunderkinds who were blindsided by the lure of quick fame and fortune and plunged headlong into the eddy of the market, becoming better at the sell but losing their grip on the service in the process. That said, money has historically done less harm than good for art, thank you. Picasso was a millionaire at 40 and it didn't affect the quality of his output. Many great artists could not have produced their masterworks in the absence of money and patronage. The stereotypical image of the struggling, unsung artist is passé at best. And the idea that privation opens the floodgates of 'true' creativity is nothing more than pious fiction.

Anita Dawood and Hammad Nasar, the brains behind Green Cardamom, a London-based not-for-profit organization promoting mid-career Pakistani artists through international exhibitions and publishing to initiate critical discourse, scoff at the idea of commercialism quashing creativity. "Why can't artists doing good work make money in the process?" asks Nasar. "No one criticizes the ambitions, success or earnings of other professionals. So why begrudge artists a good reputation and income. Artists are also professionals, after all."

Responding to the flak they have been getting for raising prices of relatively "junior" artists under the Green Cardamom umbrella and insisting that the same be maintained for sales in Pakistan, Nasar points out: "I don't recognize the difference between the so-called junior and senior artists. Prices should be based on the quality of the work rather than chronology. As for our insistence

on uniform prices, we don't want our clients discovering that a painting bought by them in London for  $\times$  pounds is selling for half the price in Karachi. This defeats the purpose of our efforts to secure larger, viable markets for talented artists."

Makes sense. "When works of art are rare, rarity itself is a value; it is only when they are common...that one can learn their intrinsic worth," wrote Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, on first visiting Naples. But here's the rub. Working solely on the laws of demand and supply and the ring of the till, the market is most likely pivoted on an unargued, ungoverned energy. The 'creativity' birthed under its spell is like fireworks—a lot of bright, random sparks of light and color that fade from memory before you can say 'Wow.' All impact, no resonance. Similarly, the chorus of infinite possibilities spawned by the art boom has simply been torqued to deafening decibels, fudging the barriers between disinterested evaluation and salespeak. The result: hyperbole drifting to places where it clearly does not belong.

Understandably enough. Under the swell of the boom, the contemporary art market becomes no more than an immense bourse where work of all shades is traded for prices that would seem like science fiction a decade earlier. Granted art has long been a commodity with a price tag. But to constrict art in the shackles of the market circus and price and turnover graphs is akin to trundling visual experience under the might and muscle of price.

Rewind fifteen years when it was easier to appreciate an artwork for its inherent worth. Contemporary art has lost this availability to the higher faculties of eye, heart and mind. Instead, art is imposed on us from without as an authoritative rather than communicative object, money making mutes of most of us. This is to say that art has become more than a sum of its parts, not in terms of its visual appeal and purchase on the imagination but its monetary value.

Given it is in the interest of the market to erase all value snagging growth, the cult of inflated celebrity and still easier money is the tail that wags the art dog, provided one is plugged into marketing smarts. Moreover, since a perch in the art pantheon is easy enough to secure, we have a virtual cavalcade of Johnny-come-latelys curating themselves into cultural existence as amber-encased myths by striking tarty poses and demanding indecent prices for their dreamy mediations and narcissistic bleatings.

This shameless pursuit is not difficult to inflict on the new breed of buyers who move in great schools of fish in a feeding frenzy, picking up dubious art simply because, well, "they bought it." The dull homogeneity in the tastes of such buyers compels artists to produce suspect work based on trite formulas and 'clever' turns, simply to sell some soon. Small wonder that the aesthetic enterprise has been reduced to a rat race, not to the better but the voluminous. But hey, if you win the rat race, you are still a rat.

# The Anxious Century

A seminar on Art Criticism is jointly hosted by the Goethe-Institut Pakistan and *NuktaArt* magazine, in Karachi, on October 25–26, 2008 at the Arts Council Auditorium. This is with an objective to further a critical discourse in South Asia by bringing art critics from Pakistan, Germany, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Iran and Maldives together to present papers on relevant art issues and discuss the collective vision emerging in this field.

The seminar will focus on renewed energy at the beginning of the twenty-first century in which the art discourse of South Asia is being reclaimed from the historical distortions of colonialism. While it shares with the rest of the world the successes and failures of Modernist philosophies, the inclusive pluralism of contemporary art movements combined with technological tools and networks has begun to free it from the canons of control and subordination.

In this part of the planet which knows some of the largest concentration of human population, domestic politics of power and poverty complicate lives with uncertainty and anxiety. This is internalized into an expression that weaves strands of optimism and pessimism into creative mythologies of a new age that today finds currency at art biennials and art fairs around the world.

To understand the ferment of new ideas and the edginess of their narratives the theme will be divided in four relevant sub-themes:

**Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space**

**Canons of Control and Subordination**

**Art Market: An Uncertain Progress**

**Transformed by Technology**

Concept by Niilofur Farrukh



#### Seminar Committee

<b>Petra Raymond</b>	Former Director Goethe-Institut, Pakistan
<b>Niilofur Farrukh</b>	Editor <i>NuktaArt</i>
<b>Marcus Litz</b>	Director Goethe-Institut, Pakistan
<b>Rumana Husain</b>	Senior Editor <i>NuktaArt</i>
<b>Amra Ali</b>	Senior Editor <i>NuktaArt</i>
<b>Maliha Noorani</b>	AAA Researcher in Pakistan
<b>Mona Mala</b>	Program Officer, Goethe-Institut, Karachi

Discussion on art archive building in the region and documentation of the event supported by Asian Art Archive (AAA) Hong Kong.

#### Hosts

*NuktaArt* and Goethe-Institut Pakistan

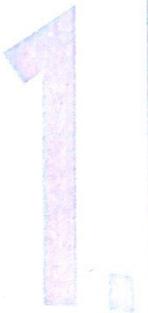
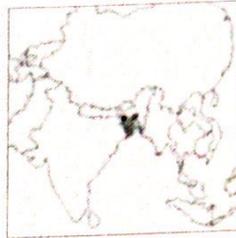
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**REGIONAL SEMINAR ON ART CRITICISM**



## Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space

### The New Art in Bangladesh: Towards a Polycentric Aesthetics Abul Mansur

The turn of the century has transformed the face of the visual arts and has thrown it into a hitherto unknown realm of aesthetic manifestations. The artist in a third world country like Bangladesh has found him/herself in a condition of dilemma where s/he wanted to express ideas in a language which could at the same time display a contemporary artistic vocabulary and his/her own kind of identity. The concepts of modernism and postmodernism remain dominantly Eurocentric in character despite examples of heterogeneity even in the early modernistic works. Postmodernism, in particular, allows space for accommodation of cultures outside the arena of mainstream western art. But the manifested examples of most postmodernist works, such as conceptual arts, installations, performances, happenings etc., remain heavily dependent on references from the western culture.

The contemporary practitioner of art in Bangladesh who is eager to exploit these new vocabularies of visual arts finds him/herself in a condition where situational conditions and inspirations are not the same. Thus, s/he invents a language which produces artistic works of a different visual character. Here we shall try to present the works of such three artists from Bangladesh in whose works the connoisseurs might find some characteristic distinctions different from the western examples. The three artists presented here are Dhali Al Mamoon, Mahbubur Rahman and Tayeba Begum Lipi.

Dhali Al Mamoon was trained in painting and printmaking. His transition from paintings inspired by traditional folk elements to a more radical picture-language was evident in some of the works where he

Painted pictures that resembled photo-negatives or distorted photographs. He has lately shifted to arranging installations and happenings where local and indigenous materials were given new dimensions and meanings. His concern for identity and the dilemma of a Muslim inheritance remains one of his main concerns.

Mahbubur Rahman, on the other hand, was trained as a sculptor and drew attention with his figures of tormented humans. He tried his hand in painting and proved to be a very powerful painter as well. He is at present doing installations, performances and site-specific art and has become one of the most talented exponents of those artistic expressions. His prime concern seems to be the contemporary affairs of local and international importance. His references from contemporary local life and his bold presentations impress the viewers. Tayeba Begum Lipi's works very obviously display her feminine concerns. Starting with paintings, she at present expresses through installations and other contemporary vocabularies. Lipi's world is a complex one which encompasses femininity, childhood memories and visions of a world strewn with elements of indigenous origin. Her works also display a conscious effort to accommodate traditional feminine arts.

It is hoped that some examples of the works of these three new-generation artists from Bangladesh would present a comprehensive picture of an artistic activity which displays a new art inspired by the contemporary trends in the west, but at the same time trying to break the Eurocentric hegemony and incorporate elements from the local cultures to put forward more polycentric and alternative aesthetics.

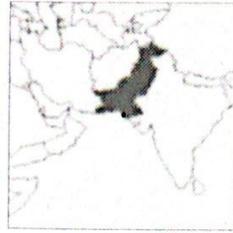
*Dialogue* by Dhali Mamoon



**Abul Mansur** is professor of Fine Arts in the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. He studied painting and art history in Bangladesh and India. He has authored and co-authored six books on art and has written several monographs on renowned artists and related topics. He regularly contributes articles to national and international journals and has represented Bangladesh in seminars and symposiums at home and abroad.

Abul Mansur is also an independent curator and has served as a member on the jury for national exhibitions.

## The Anxious Century: Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space



## Multiple Identities: Spaces of Negotiation or Subordination? Amra Ali

The topic choice of multiple modernities and other sub topics of this seminar signify a crucial step in steering a dialogue that would invite enquiry into some of the key issues that have shaped and continue to steer the post colonial construct in Pakistan and in this region. It is only through sustained research and documentation that we can study the shared and collective burden of our historical pasts, keeping in mind the specificities of our distinct cultural and national issues, and through this introspection, hope to understand and define our link to Western Modernism and its inherent characteristics as it manifests today.

“Modernity” can broadly be related to urbanization, industrialization, advanced technological communications, capitalist market economy, consumerism etc. All of these components have fused and been adapted to suit each nation’s particular aspirations and directions of transformation to modernity. If capitalist agendas have moved to offer just frameworks for governance, they could not help but diminish the sanctity and sovereignty of multiple national agendas. We need to engage in a process of enquiry that seeks to deconstruct the myths and fetishes of the dominant Western discourse, and its critical framework of hegemony and colonization.

This paper will focus on the artists in the Pakistani Diaspora, their relationship to dispersed contexts of location and the distancing from the country of birth, the distance traveled; distance in terms of the geographic as well as the transformation, fragmentation and the alienation in new contexts; the making of new identities, specially for the Pakistani Muslim in George Bush’s post 9/11 America.

How do the mechanisms of this community influence and interact with the new entrants from Pakistan into the fold of international Biennials? Vigilant critiques of capitalist agendas and their colonial thrust have been addressed by Walter Benjamin, in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, among others. Amartya Sen gives the example of James Mill’s *History of British India* as having provided a view of the Indian as the ‘primitive,’ or Mills’ mistrust of ‘native’ scholars, even though according to Sen, Mills never visited India, nor was he familiar with the regional languages of the Subcontinent. In *The Argumentative Indian*, Sen addresses this dilemma due to the poor understanding of social and cultural dimensions, and the ‘incompatibility of frameworks to be addressed’ by the colonizer.

Today, the narratives of capital globalization have somewhat blurred the parameters of the nation, the state and the ‘indigenous.’ Migration and mass mobilization are key factors that have accelerated the phenomenon of transnationalism. With new locations of the local, multiple/dispersed identities and dual passports, there is no more a homogenous centre. The disintegration of the concept of nationalistic boundaries favor an approach that is interdisciplinary, as artists extract images and references from diverse sources. Foreign universities have opened departments of cultural studies.

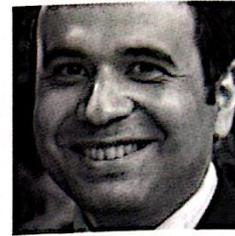
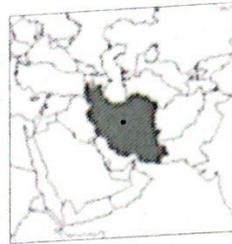
The underlying intent of the paper is to investigate if the Diasporic artist functions on the periphery, and if so, what are the mechanisms of subordination that address the multiple modernities that are part of the Pakistani framework within the new contexts of colonization, manipulation and marketability of the art and the artist, and the changing connection between the inside and the outside, sans a homogenous centre.

**Amra Ali** is an art critic based in Karachi. She is a founding member as well as a Senior Editor of *NuktaArt* magazine.

She studied studio arts and art history at the University of Ottawa, Canada, in 1985, and was a Nieman Affiliate at Harvard University (2001–02). She began writing art reviews for the *Frontier Post*, Peshawar in the early 90s, and has contributed to *The News* (Encore), *Star and Gallery*, *Dawn*, *Friday Times*, and *Newsline*, besides contributing to *Art India* and *Circa*. She is the Secretary of the Pakistan section of the International Art Critics Association (AICA, Paris). As Secretary AICA Pakistan, she was on the coordination team for the international seminar “Mapping The Change.”

In 2006, Amra Ali was invited by the Mohile Parekh Center for the Visual Arts, in Mumbai, India, to present a paper on the theme of ‘Multiple Cultures in a Globalizing World.’

## The Anxious Century: Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space



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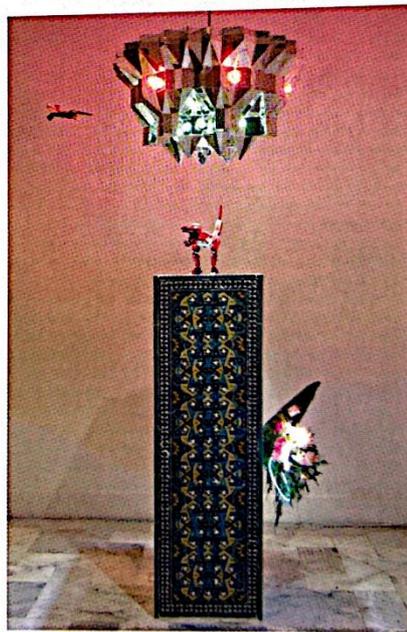
### Hybridism: Contextualization of Contemporary Iranian Art in the early 21st Century Hamid Keshmirshakan (Dr)

Examining visual culture in post-revolutionary Iran, with particular focus on the developments during the past decade, this paper will address how the regeneration myth become almost a mania for the new generation and how they struggled for an intellectual and aesthetic change to initiate a contribution to global culture. It will then attempt to deal with the works of artists which are likely to involve some account of the historical specificity of their context, as well as an exploration of the ways in which the artists' focal beliefs about national identity, social relations and cultural essentialism, and self-depictions linked to the psychologies of national ideology, find expression in the work at hand.

This paper also seeks to explain how artworks are created as representations of critical junctures of Iranian society in the so-called Reform period (1997–2005) and the subsequent period (after 2005 election) of cultural and political change. Of particular relevance are the ever-present obsessions with cultural and social issues; the impact of “after modernist” imagery which refers to fragmentation and hybridization—the scattering of traditions and the re-

combination of diverse elements; and the effects of globalization and transnational cultural and social links. This will provide platform from which to further ponder the question of identity and the influence of both traditional and Western elements on the artists' hybrid works.

Artist: Shahab Fotuhi



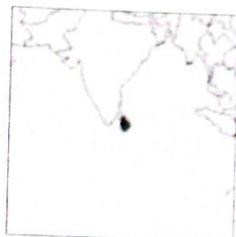
Topics explored in this paper include the issues of the effect of cultural and economic globalization (global market) on the expectation and artistic practice in Iran, and the relating tendencies located differently by generations. It will address the questions such as how locality of artists has been built, and how an effect of the globalization process can directly influence the representation of such a locality in their art (with a reference to tradition or, as having the nature of a localized culture) can be explained. Artists whom I am going to address—their works and attitudes both—will be chosen from the most active and prolific figures mainly among the so-called “Third Generation.” Among other artists Barbad Golshiri, Shahab Fotouhi, Simin Keramati, Behnam Samadzadegan and Farshid Azarang can be named.

**Hamid Keshmirshakan** is an art historian and critic and Visiting Associate at the Khalili Research Centre for the Art and Material Culture, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford. He obtained his PhD in History of Art from SOAS, University of London in 2004 with a thesis entitled “Contemporary Iranian Art: Neo-traditionalism during the 1960s and 1990s.” He was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship by the British Academy, AHRC and ESRC at Oxford University in 2008 and a post-doctoral fellowship by the Barakat Trust at the Oxford University in 2004–5 with the research entitled: “Reproducing Modernity: The Art of Post-revolutionary Iran since the late 1990s.”

He was the organizer of the International Conference on “Contemporary Iranian Art: Modernity and the Iranian Artist” at the University of Oxford in July 2005 and the International Conference on “Persian Painting and Modern/ Contemporary Iranian Painting: Continuity or Discontinuity?” in Imam Ali Museum, Tehran in June 2007. He is the author of several publications.

Dr Keshmirshakan is also an artist. He has had six solo exhibitions of which the latest one was the exhibition of his works at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS in London in 2004.

## The Anxious Century: Multiple Modernities—Reclaiming Cultural Space



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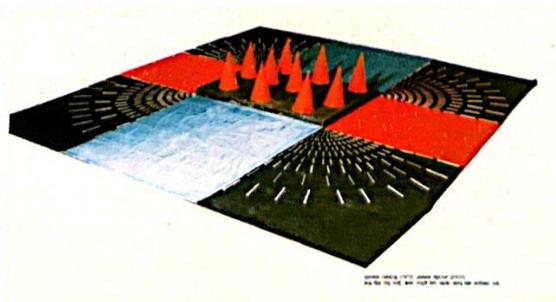
## Post 1990s Sri Lankan Visual Arts: A 'Para-modern' Discourse on Recent Social and Political History Sasanka Perera

Sri Lanka has a very long tradition in the visual arts particularly with reference to painting and sculpture as particularly indicated in the archaeological record relating to Buddhist temples and monastic structures. This is specifically a religious tradition which only changed to accommodate more secular artistic ventures in the 19th century under colonial rule. The authoritative voices that commented on this artistic tradition came from a background of history and archaeology on the one hand and popular writers on the other. In effect, Sri Lanka has not had and to large extent still does not have a dynamic art-historical tradition that is de-linked from the limitations imposed by mainstream historical and archaeological discourses. In this context, the present paper will look at a particular genre of influential visual arts emanating from the 1990s that emerged essentially as a commentary on recent social and political change with a focus on political violence and its aftermath and the consequences of urbanization and its impact on youth. In a situation marked by a general absence of recent socio-historical writing and a relatively complete absence of art history, these works have essentially

become a repository of historical and social commentary often based on the personal experiences and explorations of the artists themselves.

The paper will look at paintings, sculptures and installations of selected artists from the post 1990s period, and comment on the kind of histories these artworks attempt to narrate and what their politics might be. These works in general have broken away from the more traditional practices of art-making of the modernist period in terms of both the methods used and the subject matter covered. These works appear in some senses to indicate a preoccupation with post modern politics even though many of the artists engaged in producing these works have not

*Beautiful Explosion* by Prassanna Ranabahu

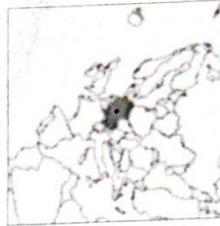


carefully thought about or engaged with post modern politics or theory. In this sense, one might loosely call this entire discourse a 'para-modern' discourse simply to illustrate the interest of these artists to dismantle certain modernist preconditions and move to another domain of art-making that is not exactly post modern either.

**Sasanka Perera** trained as a cultural anthropologist at the University of California at Santa Barbara. At present he teaches at the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo. He is also the Chairman of the Colombo Institute for the Advanced Study of Society and Culture. Broadly speaking, he is interested in contemporary social theory with an emphasis on the idea of culture and its politics. His research interests include politics of education in multi-ethnic societies, rhetoric of 'development,' politicization of religion, and politics of space with an emphasis on urban space.

He is the Chief Editor of the Sinhala language journal *Patitha* and serves in the editorial board of its Tamil version, *Panuwal*. A columnist for the Colombo-based daily, the *Island* and the Kathmandu-based magazine *Himal South Asia*, he has extensively published both locally and internationally in English and Sinhala and some of his writings have also been published in Tamil, Japanese and Spanish. At present, he is working on a book on the politics of violence and memory in Sri Lanka.

## The Anxious Century: Canons of Control and Subordination



1

## Canons of Control and Subordination

### The Vision which Strikes Everything with Similarity Heinz-Norbert Jocks

Has the world of contemporary art really become more porous, more polyphonic, freer and culturally more open, as is argued? Or does it perhaps not perform in such a way that the global market, which is a Western one, has secretly taken over the control and regulation, and in doing so forces a westernization of everything which, in being channelled into the market, has become a commodity. Thereby it not only operates a subtle effacement of difference, but also seeks to defend its cultural supremacy.

At the latest since the exhibition "Africa Remix," curated by Simon Njama and shown in Düsseldorf as well as in Paris, London and Tokyo, and since the boom in Chinese art—which achieves horrendous prices—accidentally kicked off by Harald Szeemann, a change in the perception of not just foreign cultures seems to have gotten under way. No, contemporary art seems to be the place where the pluralism is exemplified, which may possibly be reproduced by society. Whereas at the time of the legendary "Magiciens de la terre" exhibition staged by Jean-Hubert Martin one still turned up one's nose not only at the

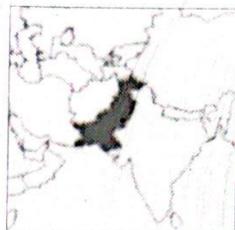
concept but also at the artists from China, in the meantime the Chinese from then belong to incontrovertible Top Ten.

So the times change. But has comprehension also changed since then? Have we Europeans since really made the effort to try to understand an art which originates in a different culture? Or isn't it the case that we always only discover and uncover the parallels to our own culture, our own history and our own art movements, and furthermore forget what alienation the alien elicits, and with it the confusion and revitalization of one's own seeing and hearing and thinking. As comprehension is inevitably far from certain to follow the exhibition of the alien, and because the seeing which the culture industry has taught us is often only a comparing and making comparable, the openness towards other cultures is more illusion than reality. The thesis of Horkheimer and Adorno that the exchange value makes comparable what cannot be compared can also be applied to our way of seeing. Our vision is one which strikes everything with similarity.

**Heinz-Norbert Jocks** studied German language and literature studies, philosophy and history at the Heinrich-Heine-University in Düsseldorf. He is correspondent for the arts magazine *Kunstforum International*, an independent journalist, and has published books in German.

He is especially occupied with the transitions between photography, arts, literature, theatre and philosophy.

## The Anxious Century: Canons of Control and Subordination



## Untitled Naazish Ata-Ullah

The teaching of the traditional art of miniature painting at the National College of Arts has undergone dynamic transformation over the past thirty years. It has emerged as the most significant indigenous art movement of our times that has not only subverted the canon but has also been subsumed within post modern visual vocabularies by creating new canons of control.

A significant policy during the colonial enterprise was to establish art schools in India that were based on the model of the South Kensington schools of art and design. Thus the teaching methodology and curriculum at the Mayo School of Art (established in 1875), followed the pedagogical canons laid down by the state. Indian painting, though included in the curriculum, was taught as a token to the traditional painting tradition.

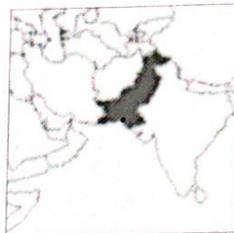
This form of tokenism persisted even in post colonial times at the National College of Arts until the early eighties. Professor Zahoorul Akhlaq's analysis of the aesthetic and formal structure of miniature painting, through his own contemporary practice, gave impetus to further investigation of the genre. As Head of the

Department of Fine Art he initiated a specialization in the field of miniature painting at the NCA that caught the imagination of a new generation of artists who progressively elevated traditional practice to its current position.

In this paper, I propose to raise questions relating to the pedagogies of the past and present. The research will focus on a critical analysis of two methods: the traditional/historical teaching methodology of our region and its convergence with current modes of teaching and practice. By using the archives of the National College of Arts, I propose to draw examples both from curricula as well as from students' work produced in the Miniature painting department at the NCA. To advance the discussion I will also draw on several other artistic concerns in order to arrive at the plurality of approaches evident in contemporary art production. I will discuss how the genre has been received both within Pakistan and internationally and how this has impacted on teaching and learning within the art school environment.

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Professor **Naazish Ata-Ullah**, Principal of the National College of Arts, Lahore is an artist, writer and curator and has been teaching at NCA since 1985 in the Department of Fine Art. She studied painting at NCA, printmaking at the Slade School of Fine Art and art education at the Institute of Education at London University. She has exhibited in Pakistan and internationally and is best known as a printmaker. She has also published and lectured internationally and in Pakistan on the history of art and design education, as well as on modern and contemporary art issues. She has co-authored: *Travels Mundane and Surreal: The Life and Works of Esther Rahim*, 2006, with Salima Hashmi and Sikandar Rahim. Most recently, she was the curator of an exhibition entitled "Re-forming Landscape" for the inaugural show of the National Art Gallery in 2007.



3.

### Querying South Asia(n) Sumbul Khan

This paper unpacks the contemporary art historical category South Asia (n) through an analysis of the history of its usage in art historical practice in the us. While academic interest in Multiculturalism and the Diaspora has sought to defend the Western art-historical position against Saidian critique, this paper asserts that loose generalizations extended by way of these terms, especially in the case of South Asia, perpetuate the very essentialism and Euro centrism that post-colonial theory had hoped to dismantle. It uses a combination of theoretical approaches to foreground how tenuously the cultural identity of South Asia (n) is hinged on to the geographical terrain described as South Asian. It opts for and proposes the use of South Asia (n) in favor of South Asian, as a more accurate descriptor of works by artists from South Asia.

Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (2004) positions the postcolonial experience in the immediate vicinity of the postcolonial diaspora without:

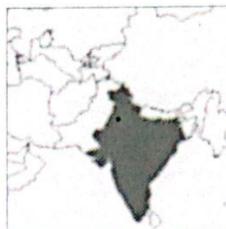
- a. acknowledging the pre-1947 diaspora that had existed in various parts of the world because of the British Indenture Program much before national identities evolved in South Asia.
- b. incorporating the native experience of the postcolonial resident in his/own independent nations and thus situating hybridity solely in the postcolonial diaspora.

These omissions render only the experience of those who occupy the American turf as "authentic." It appears that to validate one's experience as a postcolonial hybrid, it is necessary to have migrated to that sector which promises such recognition. Post colonial studies as espoused by Bhabha then exist only in the dimension of a new hegemonic state that identifies its ethnic minorities only in the light of their history as once-subjects of colonial rule.

The implications of such a polemic are far reaching for South Asia especially when a contemporary Pakistani artist with no transnational affiliations to the us chooses to exhibit there. Whereas in the us, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Sri Lankan minorities band under the label of South Asian for want of a recognizable ethnic identity, at home, South Asian is perceived only as a regional qualifier and not a cultural identity. The modern label 'South Asia' is ascribed to what was the Mughal Behr-e-Hind and the British India but whereas Behr-e-Hind and British India were unified entities, present day South Asia is not and that in no way suggests that it has remained static and without cultural cross-pollination on its terms. There is a greater multiplicity and plurality of linguistic and ethnic strains to which the blanket term South Asian does not do adequate justice. Hence to find South Asian as a cultural signifier in the postcolonial diaspora is to perpetuate the Imperial mindset which fragments and makes whole an entire region at its own will.

**Sumbul Khan** received her Masters in Islamic Art History at Tufts University in 2005 where she wrote her thesis on gender issues in a 16th century *Tutinama* manuscript from Mughal Hindustan. Since then she has taught undergraduate Art History at Framingham State College, Textile Institute of Pakistan and Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. She was Assistant Curator at the State Bank of Pakistan Museum and Art Gallery in 2007. Currently she is Visiting Faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and contributes articles to *Newsline* and *NuktaArt*. She is also co-editing an anthology *Between Intention and Reception: Art Criticism in Pakistan*.

## The Anxious Century: Canons of Control and Subordination



4.

## Museums and the Making of a National Art—The NGMA Case Study Vidya Shivadas

This paper is part of Vidya Shivadas' ongoing research on modern art museums in Indian and in particular the National Gallery of Modern Art, an institution that was established in New Delhi soon after Independence, in 1954. The National Gallery was distinguished from the National Museum, the preserver of India's ancient past, by its mandate to collect works made after 1857, ie from the Raj period onwards.

Shivadas begins her consideration of the National Gallery of Modern Art by examining official discourses around 'modernity' in the early years after Indian independence. Taking her cue from Benedict Anderson's reading of nations "distinguished not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined," she examines the role the newly independent nation state has envisaged for its cultural institutions, particularly the modern art museum.

In this first instance, when the history of nation and the State were indistinguishable, the State played a paternalistic role in ushering in the modern via the museum—vesting the institution with the task of educating its millions in nation building and democracy. In the arena of culture, 'modernity' discourse, significantly, was often grafted upon 'museum' discourse. The museum was modernity in culture.

Shivadas picks out key moments in the history of the Gallery—from the formative discussions around the role of

the museum, the role of art in a modern nation and its relation to the public played out at the national art conferences that were instrumental in the setting up of the museum, to early acquisition policies and exhibitions, and the role of key curators and advisors like Hermann Goetz, L P Sihare, W G Archer—to look at how the institution has shaped over the years.

One instance is the reception of Bengal school in the 1950s and how this was renegotiated in the 1970—from being discarded to being reinstated in the national cannon. In another case she looks at the 1960s engagement with international abstraction via the coining of Neo-Tantric, to suggest that western-inspired forms of abstraction or near abstraction seen in India in the 1960s and 1970s were rooted in pre-modern Indian traditions of Tantric art, where geometric forms and mandalas were used to signify esoteric content.

Piecing together different historical moments as the Gallery negotiates with different art languages and mediums (the role of sculpture versus painting, or allowing the entry of abstraction in 1960s and a medium like photography in the 1980s), the inclusion of "other" voices (women artists and folk artists in the 1980s), and the rewriting of art history (reevaluating artists like George Keyt for instance in the 1970s), Shivadas arrives at a case study of a cultural institution that is deeply symptomatic of the formalizations, confusions, aspirations and failings of our modernity process.

National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA)

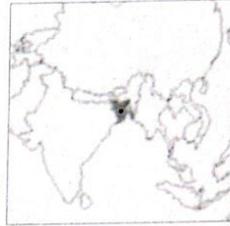


**Vidya Shivadas** is a curator and art critic based in New Delhi, India.

After her Bachelors in Sociology from Delhi University and a Masters in Art Criticism from Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University, Vadodara, she worked briefly with the daily *Indian Express* and then joined Delhi based gallery, Vadehra Art Gallery in 2002. In her five years at the Gallery, she has curated several exhibitions and is the author of catalogue essays.

Vidya is also actively involved in the setting of the not-for-profit Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art that supports artists and art professionals devoted to the study of contemporary Indian art.

Apart from her Gallery experience, Vidya is also deeply interested in the relationship between institutions and art practice. Her essay on National Gallery of Modern Art was published in a seminal academic publication *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art* in 2003. In 2006, she worked as a researcher on the Getty funded study *Museology and the Colony*, a nation-wide study of museums in India.



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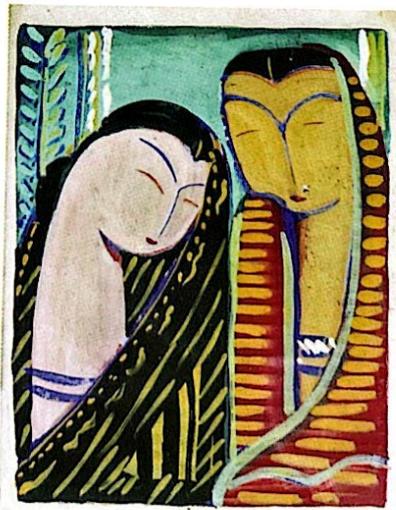
## Replacing Language: Strategies in Post-colonial Art Production Ziaul Karim

Simply put, colonialism is the conquest and control of other people's land and goods. The seizing of foreign land for government and settlement was in part motivated by the desire to create and control markets abroad for western goods, as well as securing the natural resources and labor-power and peoples at the lowest possible cost. Colonialism was a lucrative commercial operation, bringing riches to West through the economic exploitation of others. The process of colonialism was not identical in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into most complex and traumatic relationships in human history. Modern European colonialism was the most distinctive and by far the most extensive of the different kinds of colonial contact occurred in history. By the 1930s colonialism had exercised its sway over 84.6 per cent of the land surface of the globe. Most importantly, colonialism created a way of seeing the world, an order of things that was to be learned as true and proper with the specific aim to prove the truth of the 'inferiority' of colonial subjects. Edward W. Said in his monumental work, *Orientalism*, showed how the knowledge that the Western imperial powers formed about their colonies helped continually to justify their subjugation. Said mostly paid his attention to the colonizers than the colonized.

The development of metropolis and the colony is much more problematic and intrinsically bound up with each other. Both of them were deeply altered by the colonial process and both are also restructured by decolonization.

The contemporary literature and art produced by post-colonial societies are not simple adaptation or continuation of European models. The diverse and powerful body of new writing and art in cultures as varied as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Australia and the West Indies is the result of both a profound interaction and appropriation of western codes and discourses and a radical critique of Eurocentric notions and post-colonial subversion.

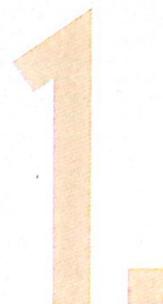
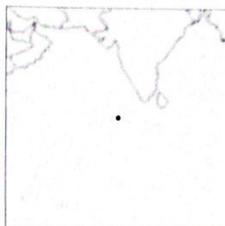
Artist: Zainul Abedin



The present paper argues that the most significant contributions in the new art from the countries with a history of colonialism come from the artists who at one hand appropriated Western canons and discourses but on the other looked for inspiration in indigenous popular culture. The present author agrees with the theory of culture's role presented by Amilcar Cabral that the power of colonialism has never been total and colonialism's cultural hegemony does not extend to the subaltern class beyond the metropole.

Ziaul Karim is editor of *Jamini*, an international arts quarterly, published from Bangladesh. He is also the editor of the lifestyle monthly *ICE Today*. He has published and lectured internationally on issues related to art and culture. His international publications include *Commonwealth Journal of Literature* (Cambridge, UK), *Asian Art News* (Hong Kong), *Art Asia Pacific* (Australia) and *South Asian Journal* (Pakistan). His book *Contemporary Architecture in Bangladesh* is due this December.

## The Ambitious Century: Art Market—An Uncertain Progress



## Art Market—An Uncertain Progress

### Maldivian Art at the Beginning of the 21st century Mamduh Waheed

Unlike her South Asian neighbors India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the Maldives was never a colony of the British. Attempts to perceive the arts through the context of dominating (modernist) philosophies of the 20th century were never made in the country which consists of over 1000 islands (of which only close to 200 are inhabited). Traditionally western institutions such as museums, galleries and art schools and colleges were never established in the country. And the main players of a typical art market which today is almost a global phenomenon were never identified as influencing the role of art in society. These include the Art Critic, the Art Dealer and perhaps most importantly, the Collector (private, public, institutional and individual).

In the Maldivian context, the word 'art' in the western sense does not have any consequence in that it does not signify anything. In other words, there is no word in the Maldivian language Dhivehi connoting art. Instead there is craft. As for art forms, there are plenty, including different genres of poetry, music and dance. There are also many craft forms and practices that on occasion overlap with art.

Western art practices such as drawing to represent or reproduce a reality or express an idea or emotion, and the use of paint to do the same would have come to the Maldives early in the 20th century if not before. With the onset of the tourism industry in the early 1970s, some of these practices—which utilized the various skills employed in the production of contemporary art forms, including painting and sculpture – made the transition into the production of souvenirs or mementos for visiting tourists. The introduction of

tourism in the early 1970s also marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of art and craft in the country in that a new avenue was opened up for Maldivian artisans working in the visual media, giving them many commercial incentives to be engaged in the production of various crafts, including painting, stencil-printing and carving. And although this new development intensified technological innovation and productivity, a negative side-effect of this was that artisans increasingly grew dependant on this emerging market which became a flourishing trade by the mid-80s. This reliance on the tourist dollar to sustain the practices of artisans also hampered academic and institutional development with a contextual focus on recognizing the cultural value of these practices and nurturing the same with individual and institutional patronage (both public and private).

The forces created by the lucrative souvenir trade generated a market dynamics that was estranged from academic and critical discourse. And when at the beginning of the 21st century attempts were made to institutionalize the arts through state funding and sponsorship, the lack of a vibrant cultural discourse surrounding the arts was severely felt. Moreover, reaching out to the international community and art markets—through

the regular channels of art fairs and in enlisting the interest of international curators have also been troublesome for the same reason. This leaves the Maldivian arts community—including individuals and institutions in a vacuum-like situation where parallel attempts have to be made in multiple streams to create links with market forces rooted in global art trends.

Wardrobe by Zuhura

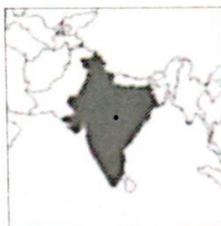


**Mamduh Waheed** is an artist and writer presently based in the Maldives. His reviews have been published in Pakistan and his catalogue essays, fiction and translations are published in Male, Maldives. Presently Waheed is Arts Coordinator at the National Art Gallery, Maldives.

Waheed holds a BA (Hons.) in Installation Art and Events (UK) where his dissertation looked at the discrepancy between visual images and written or spoken language and how this informs cultural discourse.

Waheed is also the author and publisher of the online journal [www.maldivesvisualjournal.com](http://www.maldivesvisualjournal.com) on contemporary visual arts in the Maldives.

The Twenty-First Century Art Market—An Uncertain Progress



2.

## The Twenty-First Century Art Fair: a Site of Critical Discourse? Savita Apte

Although, by the very definition, art fairs are forays that promote and facilitate art commerce, contemporary art fairs have been at great pains to leaven commercial transactions with debates and panel discussions which illuminate the zeitgeist propelling them from being merely mercantile events to cultural phenomena. The most successful art fairs of the twenty-first century have been modeled on Sam Keller's blueprint for Art Basel with its heady mixture of art, entertainment and celebrity. On the face of it then, although these appear unlikely environments for serious critical discourse, twenty-first century art fairs have in many instances usurped the position formerly occupied by the venerable institutions of art.

This paper will map the evolution of the contemporary art fair and its position in the perceived hierarchy of the art world. It will examine the rise to pre-eminence of Art Basel, Art Basel Miami, Frieze and Armory; two of which are located in Europe and other two in North America. A concomitant and unprecedented boom in the art market elevated not only these fairs, situated in Basel, Miami, London and New York respectively, but also their host cities to a new cultural eminence.

This paper will critique the gate-keeping policy of these fairs which denied access to galleries that showcased art from regions outside Western Europe and North America. It will examine the effect that this policy has had both on the galleries as well as the institutional perception of art from these regions. In particular

the paper will focus on galleries and artists from South Asia who have consistently been kept out of these fairs. It will contend that this exemption has been a unique form of twenty-first century artistic control resulting in cultural subordination and the ongoing proliferation of the centre/periphery model long after it has been art historically dismantled.

The penumbra of satellite fairs which emerge around Art Basel, Art Miami Basel, Frieze and Armory are seen as a physical manifestation of the centre/periphery model.

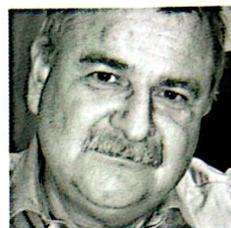
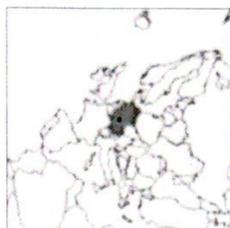
This paper will contrast the Euro American art fairs with the newly established art fair in Dubai: Art Dubai. The evolution of Art Dubai and its concentrated efforts to showcase art from South Asia signaled a significant shift in the art world. Galleries and artists from South Asia assumed centre stage at Art Dubai commanding market respect. Showcasing the art in this environment allowed international curators and critics, in addition to international collectors and institutions rare access. This in turn has allowed a certain critical discourse on the subject to emanate from such platforms as the Global Art Forum.

This paper offers a critical insight into the commercial world of art fairs and highlights the reasons that they have become the sites of South Asian discourse. Given the paucity of national institutions which act as preservers of a local canon, the art fair has usurped the authority once vested in such institutions and now mediates local and global contexts.

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The German Century transformed by Technology



## Transformed by Technology

### Regarding the Role of Regional Art Michael Hübl

In the European world of art the so-called globalization is considered as a main challenge dramatically changing the concept of both European culture and the idea of modernism. Discussions about this development show flagrant similarities to reflections on the economic effects and the social impact that have been generated by the world-wide opening of markets and production fields. Many European societies see a need to protect themselves from being levelled or absorbed by anonymous global structures. As for the arts, arguments apparently follow the same patterns as those on the economic level. There is a—presumably realistic—anxiety that local production and prosperity might suffer or even be destroyed by superior supranational economic powers, and this fear finds its parallel in the concern that art and artists could lose their identity - however this identity may be defined.

Two separate strategies to face this problem can be observed. On the one hand there is a conceptual approach by trying to define the limitations and implications of what is described as cultural identity. On the other hand there is a vivid tendency to stress and strengthen cultural qualities that are regarded as typical of specific ethnic groups or nations. The first position (as a conceptual one) has been realized, e.g. by a project established in the Netherlands, where artists, art critics, art historians and theorists asked the question *How to become Dutch?* and took it as starting point for further investigation. Another example for this artistic implication towards contemporary society is the project *Becoming German* by Joanne Moar. The artist, born in New Zealand in 1971 and living in Germany since 1995, tries to define identity on the basis of empirical studies and in terms of oral history.

Compared to these activities the second position is a more traditional one. It is closely linked to the idea of national or ethnical characteristics which are visualized by means of art. This attitude is e.g. reflected by Finnish photographers who in their images create an atmosphere of roughness, wildness and gentle craziness, as if these were the driving forces for people in Finland. And it is not least German painting that sometimes flirts with stereotypes supposed to be typical for this country in central Europe; it seems that even the economic success of those paintings partly results from its putative “Germanness.”

Apparently, the inclination towards traditional forms of art is very much connected to historical periods of change and upheaval. When in the third decade of the 20th century Western societies were shaken by a deep crisis, modernist tendencies were blamed as inhuman, and a strong interest in figurative art was fostered. When in the late Seventies radical economic liberalism was let off, a “New Spirit in Painting” was proclaimed. And when nowadays uncertainties arise which are caused by accelerated changes in many sectors of life, again traditional forms of art might serve as a haven of relief. This raises questions concerning the international interchange of artistic production. Recently—especially in exhibitions like Documenta 12 or Luanda Pop at the Venice Biennale 2007—the topic modernism has been re-discussed: Is it a common language overcoming every boundary of nation and notion, race or religion? Or is it an instrument of global repression downsizing every local peculiarity? Modernism is certainly aligned with the general development of economics and the society as a whole. And yet, regional aspects of art can play a role prominent enough to be regarded as a passable way to future development or even as a means to remodel the current state of arts as an alternative to that of the world in general.

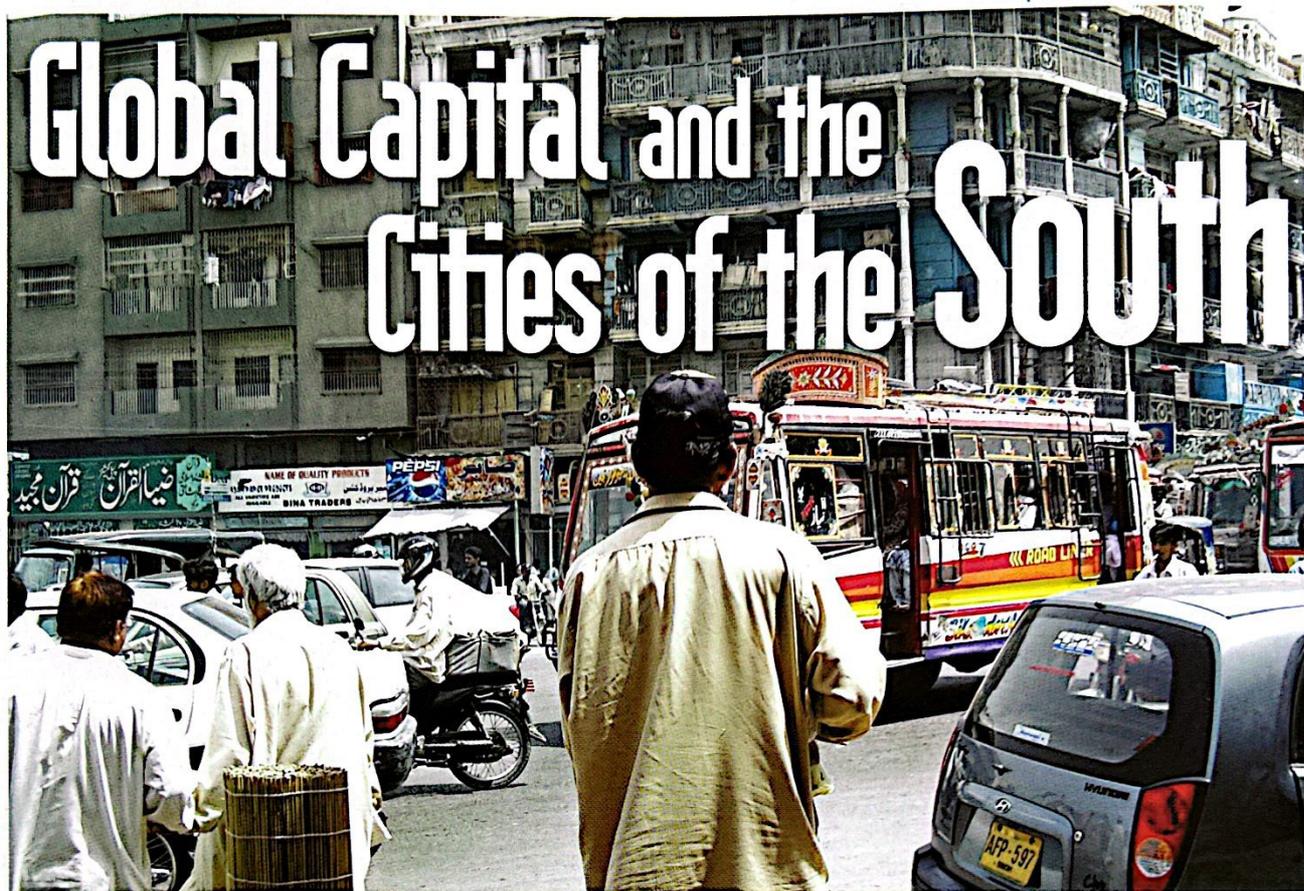
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He has published numerous texts and essays about contemporary arts and is the chief executive of the section Culture, Film and TV in the *Badische Neueste Nachrichten* in Karlsruhe.

He has contributed texts to the illustrated books *Maulbronn* and *Karlsruhe Bilder einer Fächerstadt*, which were published by the G. Braun publishing company. His writings include a commentary on the Cistercian Maulbronn Monastery, a World Heritage Site.

by ARIF HASAN

A view of old apartments and traffic at Eidgah Maidan, M.A. Jinnah Road, Karachi



# Global Capital and the Cities of the South

## The Reality

International capital is desperately looking for a home. Cities of South and South-East Asia are attractive destinations since they have a weak regulatory framework and have undergone structural adjustment. Here, this investment, is increasingly determining not only the shape of the city but also social and economic relations.<sup>1</sup>

**Local governments are obsessed by making cities "beautiful" to visitors and investors.**

New terms, such as "world class cities," "investment friendly infrastructure," "foreign direct investment" or "FDI" as it is called, have entered the development vocabulary. All politicians and official planners in the Asian cities I know are using these terms and it is largely because of them that the whole approach to planning has undergone a change. Local governments are obsessed by making cities "beautiful" to visitors and investors. This means building flyovers and elevated expressways as opposed to traffic management and planning; high-rise apartments as opposed to upgraded settlements; malls as opposed to traditional markets (which are being removed); removing poverty from the

centre of the city to the periphery to improve the image of the city so as to promote FDI; catering to tourism rather than supporting local commerce; seeking the support of the international corporate sector (developers, banks, suppliers of technologies and the IFIs) for the above.

The above agenda is an expensive one. For this, sizeable loans have been negotiated with the IFIs on a scale unthinkable before.<sup>2</sup> Projects designed and funded through previous loans have not met their objectives and there is evidence to show that they will again not meet their objectives. Many of the projects are being



A distant view of M. A. Jinnah Road, Karachi, with Qamar House (left) in the foreground



Selling fruit in Qasba Colony, Manghopir Road, Karachi

floated on a BOT process. Projects have replaced planning. This is especially true of transport related projects.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there has never been more liquidity in banks and leasing companies. However, due to the freedom that these loan giving institutions have today, this liquidity is used to provide short-term high interest loans which do not bring any benefit to the city or to the majority of its residents.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of investments being made in many of the Asian cities and the mindset behind them, are increasing land hoarding; evictions<sup>5</sup> of settlements, hawkers and informal businesses;

informal settlements far away from the city and from social sector facilities; exclusion (due to gentrification) of poorer communities from public spaces of recreation and entertainment; and the ad-hoc urbanization of ecologically sensitive and agriculturally productive land. The current master and/or strategic plans are not giving priority (unlike in the decade of the 80s) to the socio-economic issues arising out of these trends.

**the most serious repercussion of this new development paradigm is that the overwhelming power of international capital and consultants and their local partners has weakened government institutions and the democratic political process.**

The rich-poor divide has increased as a result of these policies. Subsidies for the social sectors and increase in inflation and price of utilities, especially in countries which have undergone structural adjustment, has multiplied this divide.<sup>6</sup> However, the most serious repercussion of this new development paradigm is that the overwhelming power of international capital and consultants and their local partners has weakened government institutions and the democratic political process. Governments



A junction in old Karachi: Campbell Road and Roopchand Belaram Road, with Burnes Road in the background



Waiting under the Lily Bridge, Cantt. Karachi

have become deaf to the concerns of the environmental and dissenting academic lobbies. And all this in an age where the media is freer than ever before and “consultations” are the order of the day.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, successful NGO projects, the result of the populism of the 1980’s, have now in many cases become “respectable” and are in partnership with governments. The NGO movement has undergone a change. It is increasingly an industry manned by “development professionals” and no longer by populist altruism.

**If this Trend Continues**

If the present trend continues then the rich-poor divide, evictions, informal settlements and exclusion will increase with not only the poor but also the rich living in ghettos surrounded by armed guards and security systems (this is already happening). Governance issues will increasingly become law and order related and not justice and equity related. This will increase fragmentation, for the only thing that will hold the city together will be an aggressively upwardly mobile middle class. In addition, development will take place where the investor is happy and so the other regions will become the backwaters (again this is also happening).<sup>8</sup> The continuation of the current process is a recipe for conflict.

**How can this be changed?**

Foreign capital (and local liquidity) has its benefits and must be encouraged. However, it has to fit into a larger development plan based on development principles so that an inclusive and an environmentally-friendly urban environment can be created. These principles could be:

**If the present trend continues then the rich-poor divide, evictions, informal settlements and exclusion will increase with not only the poor but also the rich living in ghettos surrounded by armed guards and security systems.**



A road cut through the Manghopir Hills, Karachi

- i) planning should respect the ecology of the areas in which the urban centres are located;
- ii) land use should be determined on the basis of social and environmental considerations and not on the basis of land value or potential land value alone;
- iii) planning should give priority to the needs of the majority population which in the case of Asia are low and lower-middle income communities, hawkers, informal businesses, pedestrians and commuters; and
- iv) planning must respect and promote the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the communities that live in the city. Zoning byelaws should be developed on the basis of these principles so that they are pedestrian and street friendly, pro-dissolved space and pro-mixed land use.

If South-Asian cities are to be taken as examples, then what is required is:

- i) a heavy non-utilisation fee on land so as to bring hoarded land into the market;
- ii) a cut-off date for the regularisation of informal settlements and an end to evictions (where relocation is required, market rate compensation should be paid);
- iii) planned squatting for five years during which programmes for closing the demand-supply gap for low income housing takes place;
- iv) initiation of programmes for built units and plots which successfully solve the issues related to targeting and speculation;<sup>9</sup>
- v) development of rules, regulations and procedures to guarantee that the natural, entertainment and recreational assets of the city will not be in the exclusive use of the elite or the middle classes;
- vi) a regime for privatisation backed by institutional arrangements that guarantees provision of sustainable employment and development; and
- vii) an understanding that all programmes and projects will be advertised at their conceptual stage, subject to public hearings before finalisation, supervised by a steering committee of interest groups, have their accounts published regularly, and overseen by one government official from the beginning to the end.

The major question is how can the above agenda be achieved in an age where social and political evolution is in a flux and the economy is controlled globally by undemocratic international organisations?<sup>10</sup> Can local "civil society" organisations (funded by bilateral agencies and international NGOs) do this by coming

together as a large network? Or can this be achieved more successfully through the national political process or by an international movement seeking to modify the current paradigm in the interests of the poorer sections of the population?

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#### Five Books

1. *Globalization: Capitalism and its Alternatives*: Leshie Sklair, 2000
2. *The Age of Consent*: George Monbiot, 2003
3. *The Challenge of Sustainable Cities*: Rod Burgess et al, 1997
4. *Empowering Squatter Citizen*: David Satterthwaite and Diana Mitlin, 2004
5. *Understanding Asian Cities*: David Satterthwaite, 2003

#### Five Films/Poems/Architecture

1. *In This World* (feature film): Director Micheal Winterbottom
2. *Khosla Ka Ghosla* (Hindi feature film): Director Dibakar Banerjee
3. Rehabilitation of Hebron Old Town (Project) by the Engineering office of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee
4. *Lyari: Highway of Tears* (Documentary film) produced by COHRE
5. *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (Book): Ursula K Le Guin, 1997



Passing time outside Empress Market, Preedy Street, Karachi

Endnotes

- 1 David Satterthwaite; *Understanding Asian Cities*, ACHR, October 2005
- 2 Between 1976 and 1993, the Sindh province in which Karachi is located borrowed US\$ 799.64 million for urban development. Almost all of this was for Karachi. Recently, the government has arranged to borrow US\$ 800 million for the Karachi Mega City Project. Of this, US\$ 5.33 million is being spent on technical assistance being provided by foreign consultants.
- 3 Cities such as Bangkok, Manila, Calcutta have made major investments in light rail and metro systems. Other Asian cities are following their example. However, these systems are far too expensive to be developed on a large enough scale to make a difference. Manila's light rail caters to only eight percent of trips and Bangkok's sky train and metro to only three percent of trips and Calcutta's metro to even less. The light rail and metro fares are three to four times more expensive than bus fares. As a result, the vast majority of commuters travel by run down bus system (for details, see Geetam Tiwari; *Urban Transport for Growing Cities*; Macmillan India Ltd., 2002 and Arif Hasan; *Understanding Karachi's Traffic Problems*; *Daily Dawn*, January 29, 2004.)
- 4 For example, 502 vehicles have been added to Karachi per day during the last financial year. It is estimated that about 50 percent of these have been financed through loans from banks and leasing companies. This means that loans worth US\$ 1.8 billion were issued for this investment which could easily have been utilised for improving public transport systems or for social housing.
- 5 ACHR Monitoring of Evictions in seven Asian countries (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines) shows that evictions are increasing dramatically. Between January to June 2004, 334,593 people were evicted in the urban areas of these countries. In January to June 2005, 2,084,388 people were evicted. The major reason for these evictions was the beautification of the city. In the majority of cases, people did not receive any compensation for the losses they incurred and where resettlement did take place it was 25 to 60 kilometres from the city centre. (Ken Fernandes; *Some Trends in Evictions in Asia*; ACHR, March 2006)
- 6 David Satterthwaite; *Understanding Asian Cities*, ACHR, October 2005. Also, the economic survey of Pakistan 2006-07 concedes that the gap between the rich and poor is widening and quoting gini coefficient and consumption share of quintile the survey states that the share of consumption of the richest 20 percent stands at 39.4 while it is 9.5 for the bottom 20 percent population. It further states that the gap is growing inspite of a seven percent GDP growth.
- 7 NGOs and community activists and academics in Delhi, Karachi, Phnom Pehn, Calcutta, Lahore all have the same complaint. They claim that consultations are an eye wash and environmental assessments are rubber stamps.
- 8 Urban settlements that have been bypassed by the communications revolution are dying economically while small towns are loosing their elite and skilled persons to large towns and becoming politically irrelevant. For details see Arif Hasan; *The Scale and Causes of Urban Change in Pakistan*; Ushba Publishing International, Karachi 2007.
- 9 There are various ways of doing this that have been successful as pilot projects, but the land hunger of a powerful nexus of developers, bureaucrats and politicians is the biggest hurdle in implementation.
- 10 The UN is controlled by five members who won the Second World War. The IMF and World Bank function on the principle of one dollar one vote. The WTO was created out of the green room negotiations that produced GATT.

Arif Hasan is an architect and planning consultant in private practice in Karachi. He is the author of a large number of books and publications on planning and development, including the much acclaimed *Understanding Karachi—Planning and Reform for the Future* (City Press, 1999). He is Chairman of the Orangi Pilot Project—Research and Training Institute and the Urban Resource Centre in Karachi. He is also a visiting professor at the NED University.

photographs by Rumana Husain

**Nomad Centre and Art Gallery**, founded in 1984, is a private voluntary organization committed to promoting art and culture, indigenous crafts, training and to Human Rights and Woman Rights issues through advocacy and consciousness-raising efforts.

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