

N U K T A ART

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THE DIASPORIC ART PRACTICE

from
Iran,
the Middle East
and Pakistan

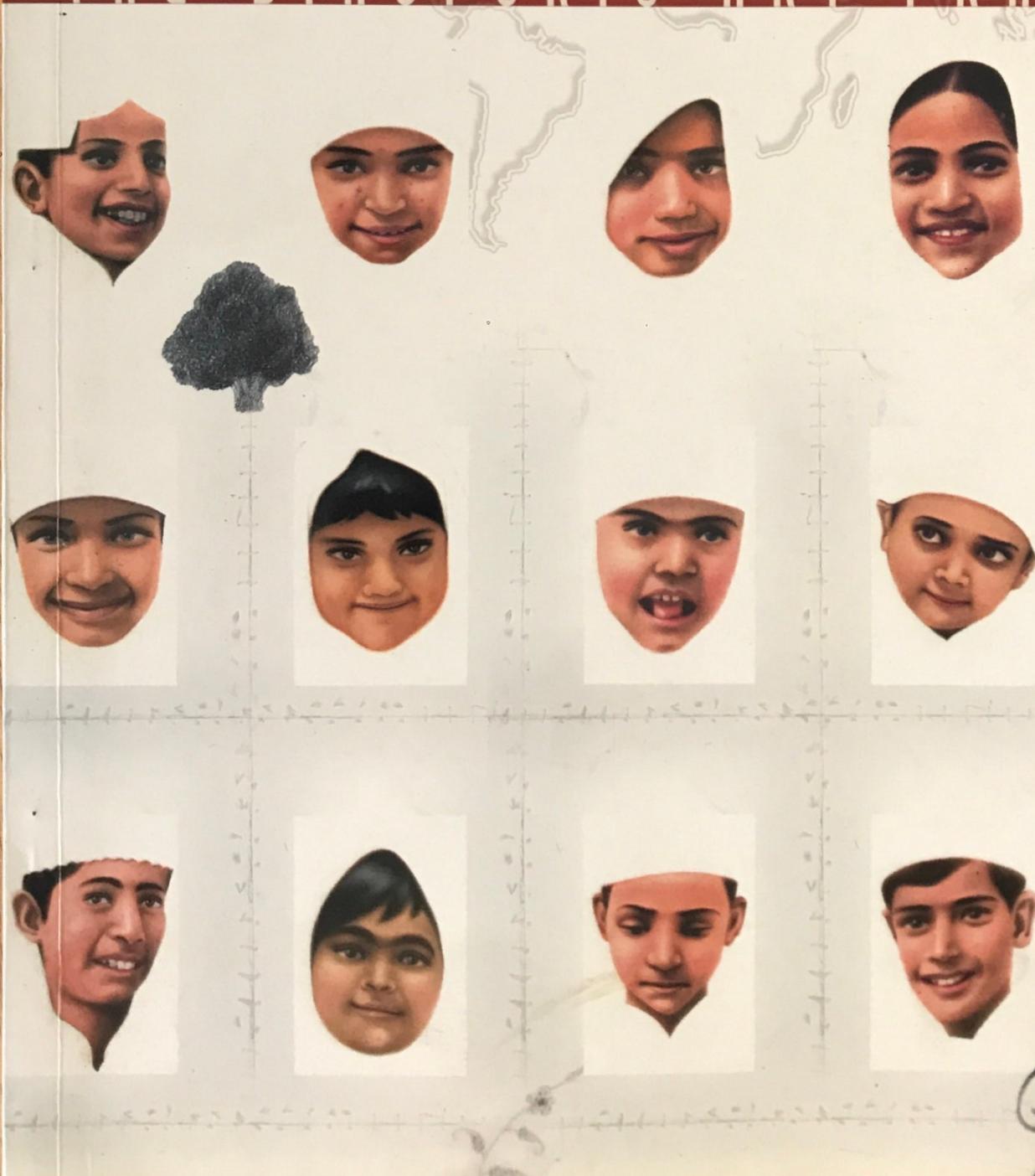
Exhibition Reviews -
from Pakistan, Tunisia,
Germany, UK, USA
and Canada

Exclusive interview
of Julian Schnabel by
Edward Rubin

Urdu film hero
Waheed Murad's film
'Ishara' revisited by
Khurram Ali Shafique

Berlin Biennale

Whitney Biennale



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The fact that every eighth Pakistani has been displaced by the floods tells us how vast and ferocious has been the scale of this catastrophe. The art community has responded with fundraising with the sale of art to assist in relief work. Its second phase will be the mammoth task of resettling them, which will need an equally sustained effort over the coming months.

This issue of **NUKTAART** focuses on what has been called 'the discontinuous state of being' of immigrant artists. For diasporic art, the distance from the fringe to the mainstream has taken half a century in UK. It began with Rasheed Araeen and his peers who, forced by alienation, initiated a visual and written discourse to address racism and marginalization. Today his art has been acknowledged by the prestigious Tate Modern and commercial galleries and auction houses have opened their doors to émigré artists.

Examining this transnational art, writers from Bahrain, Teheran and Karachi present a perspective of the diasporic art as seen from the country of origin. This has become particularly relevant as these artists have begun to confront social and political issues in their country of origin and act as its representative at international art events.

In Nukta-e-Nazar, Gemma Sharpe and one artist each of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin examine the role of the local museums in creating cultural stereotypes by failing to recognize the shifts regarding identity and race relations.

Two interpretations of a monumental work by Kiefer, *Palm Sunday*, has been included in this issue to provoke a debate on the validity of multiple viewpoints in a culturally inclusive environment when the de-territorialization of discourse has begun to gain currency.

Readers will read in detail about two important art events. The Berlin Biennale where art linked to personal and cultural memory has found resonance with the audience. On the occasion of the mega Julian Schnabel Retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Edward Rubin records an exclusive interview with the artist who talks about creative convergence of painting and film.

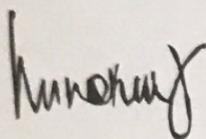
An innovative portfolio that combines photography with digital design comes from artist/designer/photographer Marie Noelle Chatelian who finds links between Toronto's architectural landmarks and elements from historical monuments. Seen for the first time in print, **NUKTAART** would like to thank the artist for her generosity.

Among the two books reviewed here, one is the well illustrated biography of prominent architect and artist M A Ahed, which helps to re-introduce his sensitive watercolor renderings to a new generation. The second book is *Bolti Lakeeren*, a young designer's project that employs art to articulate social change.

As **NUKTAART** visits Saquib and Nadia Hanif, it finds an art collection that acknowledges both personal relationships and professional brilliance. Their strong affinity with some of the artists has led to the acquisition of true gems of their works, particularly of Mussarat Mirza - the Sukkur-based artist.

Researcher Khurram Ali Shafique brings to light a relatively unknown contribution of the chocolate hero of Pakistani cinema, Waheed Murad. His challenging experiments in film that went largely unnoticed because they were ahead of their time are central to the essay. Particularly in his film *Ishara* that with his direction, explored the literary technique 'stream of consciousness' to connect with audiences at a level that transcended the conventional narrative.

Diasporic artists as the new favorites of Western curators have gained visibility at art biennales and shows in international galleries and museums and since their oeuvre represents the contested space between an authentic discourse and a mediated one that sometimes marginalize artists whose art practice is linked to grassroots issues within their country, it merits a special debate. It is hoped that the arguments presented from both sides in **NUKTAART** will extend the discussion for a better understanding of its layered complexities.



Nilofur Farrukh
Editor

Rumana Husain
Senior Editor

Amra Ali
Senior Editor

A Democratization of the Gaze -



Amber Sami,
Phoolon Ki Chador,
diamond
pattern
wood frame,
(studded on
oasis) with
approx.
12,000 local
red roses,
427 x 305
cm, 2010

"Mazaar, Bazaar" can be likened to a richly woven tapestry. Its subtle hues and myriad designs and motifs, constantly surprises and enriches our visual journey. Indeed this book parallels a journey into the history of our country, our past and most interestingly the references which we see but yet do not see, never having understood their significance or their weighty place in our visual vocabulary.

Saima Zaidi's labor of love has enriched us and posed many a question. Edited and extensively researched and collated, Zaidi has brought together diverse writers to give us their insights in this remarkable visual journey. The Zahoor ul Akhlaque Gallery at the National College of Arts organized a seminar and an exhibition around this book in April 2010, where Dr. Ayesha Jalal, Durriya Kazi and Quddus Mirza read papers, which not only explored the ideas in this book further but also demanded a significant dialogue to be held, wherein questions of identity, nationhood, our colonial heritage and what the actual nature of popular art is in Pakistan, can be extensively discussed.

What emerges from these pages is an undeniable visual narrative that is completely tied into the political saga of Pakistan. An example is the Pakola drink, from the 1950's; emerging on the beverage scene, it is no accident that it is bottled in clear glass, and is bright green in color. It underlined the new country's need to separately identify itself from India, it is green like the color of the new flag, and it is therefore claiming in none too subtle a language that it is the drink to drink in the new state of Pakistan.

In the article contributed by Rubina Saigol and Adil Salahuddin, "Signs of the Times - A Pictorial History of Pakistan through Postage Stamps"; underlines our innate need to believe Pakistan has existed forever; we have stamp series of "Pioneers of

Freedom" which show portraits of Tipu Sultan, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Sher Shah Suri and Amir Temur. Their inclusion on an item like a postage stamp meant the automatic and easy proliferation of the idea and rightness of Pakistan's place in the nature of things. In other words in God's/ Allah's grand scheme, Pakistan was always meant to be, sanctioned by the portraits of the above mentioned luminaries.

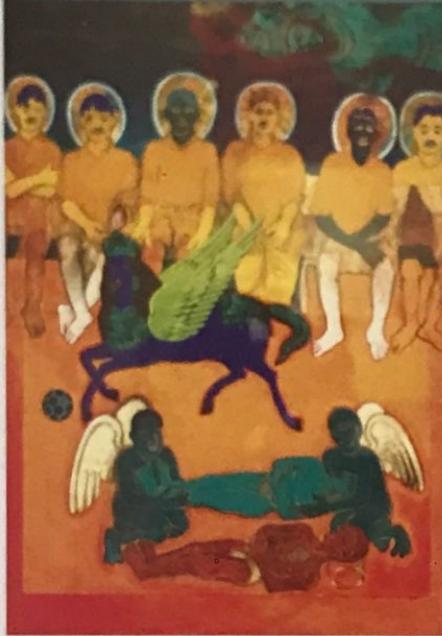
From gaudy billboards which grab your attention to friezes in black stone, detailing the life of the Buddha, visual storytelling has always played a center-stage role in our history. We see the lotus flower symbolizing fertility and affluence in Gandhara art, its later transition into rich patterns of foliage in Miniature painting dating to the Mughal Period, continuing in this traditional art form, but emerging now in the works of Khadim Ali and Aisha Khalid as threatening, ambiguous but certainly not simply decorative. The aqua green packaging of Tibet Talcum Powder, not only shows a beautiful woman garlanded in flowers, but perhaps even unconsciously is drawing on an earlier visual tradition; that developed under the Mughal Emperor Jehangir; when artists specializing in portraiture invented this precise shade of aqua green to paint their backgrounds in. Incidentally it is the same color Mazaar, Bazaar has on its dust jacket!

Decorativeness in our iconography has spilled over from, centering medallions on endpapers of embellished Qurans, to symmetrically divided posters of *pehlawans* (wrestlers) recalling complicated pages of calligraphy, to political posters advertising the candidates and their symbols; posters advertizing a *majmaa* to be held; to stalls of fresh vegetables, greens interspersed with bunches of red radishes at regular intervals. In short everywhere we look, there is a reference to the designed space, be it matchbox covers, *dastarkhan* napkins, covers of Urdu Digest to stamps. The

elements they all have in common are either grandiose images of "Muslim" heritage and power, and a love of the symmetrical and visually pleasing. A mighty falcon on a book of matches,

Mazaar, Bazaar

denotes the sport of kings, thereby signaling power and glory, the Khyber Gateway, refers to successful Muslim invasions of the subcontinent, dating to 712 A.D, the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim, in Sindh; which Pakistani history books assure us, is the date of the advent of Islam in Pakistan.



Anwar Saeed, *Angels putting the soul of man back into his body*, acrylic and oil on wood, 1996

The questions raised by the papers read at the Seminar at NCA, range from speaking, writing and creating in ways and languages the West will recognize and therefore eventually applaud. This, as mentioned by Durriya Kazi, stems from our colonized history, which still shadows all creative processes. To succeed we have to have arrived in terms, images, prizes, etc that the West has developed and recognizes. Referring to the erudite and humane philosophy of the Sindhi poet Sheikh Ayaz, Kazi underlines the point that in diversity and the ability to be different, lies strength. We have to embrace and understand our fractured past, in order to create meaningful words and pictures of relevance. Dr. Jalal brought to the fore, ideas of nationhood which to stand firm have to recognize what we owe to the influx of other cultures. The fragmentation inherent in the play of power in Pakistan is more honestly represented in this collection of images that lead us from era to era than in a history textbook. The theme of difference being something to celebrate rather than be ashamed of, was touched upon. Constructive dialogues between the practitioners of art and writers of history and literature are sorely in need of taking place, in order to push the parameters of this essential dialogue further.

The links with popular imagery, which were explored by Quddus



Ali Baba, *Light upon light*, minarets cast in white cement & marble powder, fire place, 215 x 185 x 51 cm, 2010, image courtesy Nashmia Haroon

Mirza ranged from what the cognoscenti have decided is "Popular Art" and the reality of the same, simply being perceived by the greater viewing public, as information. That is to say, the image of a truck painted with the *Buraq* and General Ayub Khan, denotes religious righteousness and political power when it is viewed by an art historian, but is also simply seen as a design dating from the 1960's, the era associated with Ayub. However herein lies an area of danger. Many creative minds are clever enough to pick up these popular images, be they flower chadars, which we visually and historically connect to shrines and death, plaster minarets sitting atop madrasah gates or mosques, or more creatively, pink, metal casts of *Minar-e-Pakistan* studded with gems, or simply the seats from a minivan, decorated in plastic paisleys, recalling Kashmiri shawls and silver work. Because their relevance has not actively been studied, these images will remain quick fix art pieces, memorable for a day, then no more. The purpose in creating an exhibition devoted to the culture of the popular as seen in bazaars and mazaars, was not to transplant stuff from the streets into a gallery space, thereby bestowing upon the "stuff" a relevance and weight which would ordinarily not be given them. This recalls Duchamp's poke in the eye to the museum culture with his "urinal". Surely what the exhibition sought to showcase, were works stemming naturally from this culture, as seen in Anwar Saeed's painting. Situated next to a poster from a Shia shrine, it completed the circle of information and inspiration. Atif Khan's "Carpet" made from thousands of stamps, also was a nod in the right direction, whereby craft was elevated into the creative process. The exhibition could have been more erudite and rewarding in visual connections, to perpetuate and understand the wealth of information and thoughts in "Mazaar, Bazaar".

Laila Rahman

Laila Rahman is a painter and printmaker. She is an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at the National College of Arts, Lahore. She holds a Master's in Printmaking from the Slade School of Fine Art, London and Advanced Diploma in Painting from St. Martin's College of Art and Design, London. Her work is in permanent collections of the House of Commons Collection, London and in the V&A Museum, as well as the Bradford Art Galleries, UK. She has contributed papers to various seminars and is also a freelance writer for local publications. In 2010 she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to pursue research and studio practice at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA.

by Amro Ali

The Pakistani Diasporas A HOME PERSPECTIVE

...it may be argued that the past is a country, from which we have all immigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity

- Salman Rushdie

In trying to understand the multiple (and fragmented) locations of artists from Pakistan, it is necessary to look at the nature and role of the multiple identities shaped by their location; the distance between these locations; the relationship of the diasporic artist to home, and the location of home/s, whether within its physical geography or perceived as a state of mind. It is not my intention to present a survey of individuals and groups that comprise the diaspora (That list is too large with issues that can only be partially identified in this space); but to reflect on some of the issues, interrelationships and emerging characteristics within the dynamics mentioned above.

In today's globalized dynamics of change, there is growing focus on networking towards inclusion in international forums such as Biennials, auction houses, residencies, museums, virtual sites etc., creating a closer sharing of values and turf between the Pakistani artist who has migrated to North America, for example, and one who lives in Pakistan and shows internationally. At the same time, there is a considerable physical distance, not to mention the cultural and historical disconnect between the diasporic artist's new home and one that has been left behind.

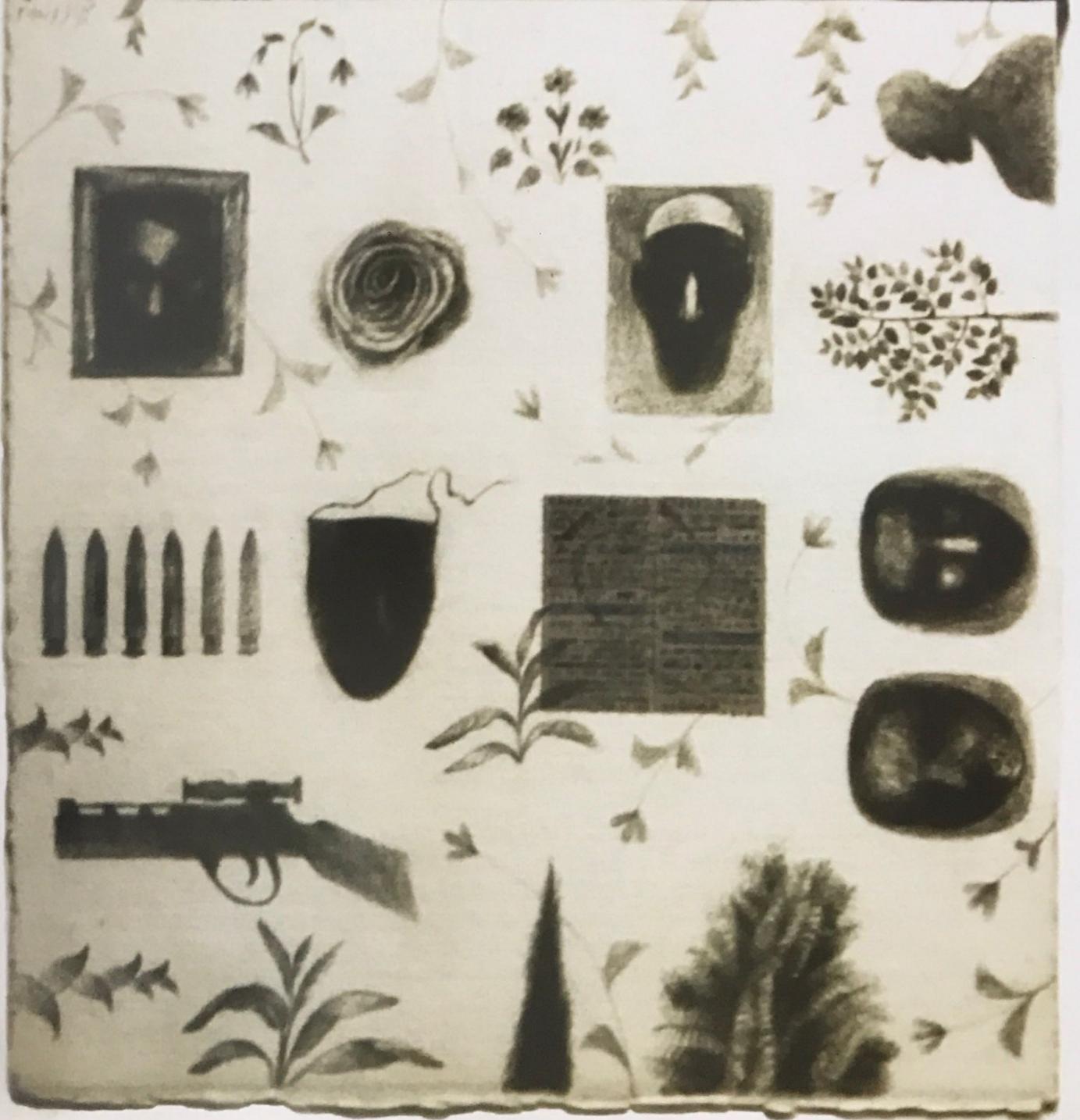
As the distance back becomes part memory, part nostalgia, there is a growing gap between the concerns of the two. Although the social dynamics within the country or home left behind continues to evolve, it is not static as is often perceived or revisited in recall.

This evolution is also marked by ruptures within, accelerated by the growth of consumer markets in Pakistan, whose primary

criteria is to engage the artist internationally. Sales at home are often a reflection of prices fetched abroad. One symptom of this is the disparity in prices (and hence the value) between younger artists and established artists. Artists from the older generation, like Meher Afroz, Mussarat Mirza or Nahid Raza, for example, are still selling at a much lower price compared to the new stars, barely ten years out of art school.

Amid the many strands of art practices in Pakistan, one is of the artist who practices and shows primarily in Pakistan, speaks a language that is elusive. For example, Karachi based Summaya Durrani's body of work on canvas, *Irfan-e-Sarmust*, *Shahab-e-Saqib*, and *Rukh-e-Mustafa*, does not translate into an accessible language, because of the lack of its conceptual and philosophical proximity to the current discourses, even within Pakistan. At the recent exhibition of her work at Chawkandi Art, Karachi (2010), the continuous audio recording of the *talbiyah*, *Allah Humma Laka Labaik*, recited by Muslim pilgrims during Hajj, created considerable unease in the gallery audience. It offended some to the degree that it was at times turned off, so that the audiences' entry to the work could be eased through the familiarity of the visual, possibly for commercial purposes. Clearly, separating a work from its context and intervening in the intent and medium, the artist's voice is distorted. The sacred space that Summaya wants to claim is an innovative intervention, the art gallery being another kind of sacred space that reflects the contradictions in Pakistani society and disparity between the artist, gallery, and art audience.

There is resonance in the resistance that Sumaya's work is able to elicit, to a different kind of resistance that is seen in Toronto



based Samina Mansuri's mixed media work. Poles, even worlds apart, these two artists worked in Karachi during the early 90s, teaching at the same art school. Samina's own sense of alienation in Pakistan might have driven her to North America, but there too, there has been a strong sense of unease in the work, coming from both the inner self and a reaction to the outside. She was able to translate her inner conflict to that of the dislocated, in its perpetual state of impermanence. The animated

Mansuri's evolution, cities/sites of destruction, put together piece by piece by the artist, despite the urgency to discard its own creation, into something else, is only able to retain fragments. The wholeness is in the consistency of discontinuity. Her new work, imagined her studio, on one level embraces the reality of loss (identity, dignity, nationhood), it critiques the politics of Western power (read US), through the media manipulation on war and terror. Creating a distance by allowing

only an aerial view of these sites, the artist plays the oppressed, the oppressor and the intermediary, hovering as a drone would, over the sites of destruction of her own creation. 'Through mimicry, the colonized undermines the colonizer's power, because although the colonized is similar, he is still different', argues Bhabha about the character of Ralph Singh in Naipaul's *Mimic Men*.

Sumaya Durrani,
Rukh-e-Mustafa(PBUH)
(detail), mixed media,
213x152 cm, 2008



Sumaya Durrani, *Rukh-e-Mustafa*(PBUH), mixed media, 213x152 cm, 2008

figures in her initial 2D drawings, part human part other, morphed into awkward 3D creatures; then dissolved, reappearing as mappings, in work created with tape, which too altered or stripped with time. Translation being a key issue here, the work exists only as memory, through documentation.

In the context of V S Naipaul's *The House of Mr Biswas*, Homi Bhabha critiques: 'The homes that Biswas builds are destroyed, which suggest the diasporic predicament of temporariness, of not permanently arriving. When he has achieved his goals, (against heavy odds), he dies'. In discussing Naipaul, Kavita Nandan writes about the 'longing for certain whole states of being' which is aware that 'such authenticity has been ruptured by the history of colonialism' and 'that it is impossible to return to any pure cultural and historical origin and / or wholeness'. She notes that 'Naipaul's anti hybrid stance is part of his anticolonial critique...pointing to the resistance of the diasporic colonized subject of his fragmented reality'; identifying the term "wound" used as a metaphor in Naipaul's writing. (V.S. Naipaul: a diasporic vision, Kavita Nandan. *Journal of Caribbean literatures*, spring 2008. *Bnet: The CBS interactive business network*, p.2)

Nanda refers to Naipaul: '... the empty Marabar caves will continue to terrify and confound us, for they address the divides in us, against ourselves and others'. (p. 119-120).

The obscurity of both Durrani and Mansuri's narratives makes it difficult for the curator, gallery or the critic to 'slot' the artist, against the backdrop of a regurgitated discourse, on terror / Islam that is imposed from outside their lived realities.

Access for artists of Pakistani origin can come from a familiar conceptual aesthetics, in which cultural translation is not a barrier. Bani Abidi lives between New Delhi and Lahore; hers is a different tier of art practice, part of a larger community of artists in cross cultural dialogue. Abidi's early video work was specific to the Indo-Pak socio-politics, but her recent digital prints of road barriers which showed in Pakistan and toured internationally, were also bought by the MOMA (*Lines of Control*, 2009, VM Gallery, Karachi, courtesy Green Cardamom). These digital prints, of different barriers used in front of embassies or high security zones in Pakistan, are easily recognizable because of their global approach to terror politics. However, the work also opens up questions of self-representation, an issue similar to a lot of miniature work being

shown internationally and in the diaspora. The lines between whose culture, whose terror, colonialism and post colonialism are blurred here. This is one meeting point of the many locales of Pakistani artists.

The reinforcement of stereotypes through regurgitated imagery, such as that of the veil, is another meeting point for the

elsewhere, and the primary audience is international, a certain degree of distancing is integral to the work; the use of the words, "local" and "their" imply separation. The need to identify colonialism as British seems like simplistic first lessons in history to an uninitiated audience, whereas the discourse at home has moved far beyond. This is only one reading though, and the work may carry other narratives that are not understood



Samina Mansuri, *Enigma*, paperclay, 20" (h) x 42" (l) x 15" (w), 2004, Installation. Photo: Offthemapgallery, Toronto Canada

Bani Abidi, *Securities Barriers A-L*, 12 digital prints, 30cm X42cm each, 2008 copyright the artist, courtesy VM Gallery & Green Cardamom



diasporic artist and artists in Pakistan showing internationally. It is a problematic area, with subtleties and degrees of variation in approaches, multiple viewing points and audiences. In another vein, Toronto based Sylvat Aziz's body of digital prints *Mother of all Postcards*, has been the first recent purchase of work of an artist of Pakistani origin by the ROM (Royal Ontario Museum), Canada. Magnifying the 'local' through arches, minarets, and other architectural elements juxtaposed with colorful shots of laborers (from visits to Pakistan), it provides ample margin for debate on the nature and relationship of voyeurism and gaze of the artist to her country of origin, and to the nature of institutional markets where it sells.

The seduction of similar imagery also hits one in the recent work of Australia based miniaturist Nusra Latif Qureshi. For the concept of *The Invisible Gun*, (Chawkandi Art, Karachi, 2009), the artist writes: 'The images of European colonial and older furniture, referring to the modifications in everyday living, as well as to the change in the thought of locals about their own age old beliefs and mannerisms during British colonization'. When work is transported to a Pakistani audience from

from where it is read now. The understanding of the nature or diversity of international audiences is also necessary to read such work in its entirety.

Similarly, Hamra Abbas' engagement (earlier based in Berlin, and now living between Boston and Islamabad) has been with the politics of power and colonialism, but she confronts it by linking contradictions of time, place and culture. In *God Grows on Trees* (2008), for example, she uses the provocative reference to the "training" of children in Pakistani *madrassabs*. Portraits of 99 children photographed on visits to Pakistan, this is a critique on the ambiguity and duality on the nature of her subjects; between innocence, spirituality, militancy, and her own sense of identity. Another reading of the work suggests the fascination with the subjects in the *madrassabs* to those of 18th century orientalist painters' fascination with the harem.

Bhabha notes that this erosion of cultural distinctiveness (of place) and the loss of territorial distinctiveness also leads to a culture of doubt and confusion, and for new, often contradictory and unexpected meanings to emerge in the work. (Related work on her website <http://www.hamraabbas.com/category/work>)

US based Shahzia Sikander, also trained in miniature art from the NCA (National College of Arts) Lahore has used the miniature to confront, rather than seduce her new audiences abroad (or perhaps her imagery seduces, and then confronts). In the context of an early work *Who's Veiled Anyway?* (1979), Shahzia speaks of

Shahzia Sikander, *Who's Veiled Anyway?*, vegetable color, dry pigment, watercolor, tea, 345.4 x 264.2 cm, 1997



it as an outcome of the frustration she felt in the US on being seen in relationship to being Muslim, woman, Pakistani, artist. She remarks: 'I was interested in challenging these simplistic ways

of describing somebody by people who have less information about another culture and with it, can be judgmental or biased. That is the duality of the title of this work'.

(redstudio.moma.org/interviews/shahzia.html)

Jason Cruz, in his critique of Salman Rushdie's writings *Death, Mutation and Rebirth* cites the theme of duality and fragmentation as woven in Rushdie's works. He writes: the duality and eventual fusion is mirrored in his migrant protagonists. The identity of the migrant is such that he is torn in two opposing directions. In all of his novels the protagonists have alter egos, or what Jung

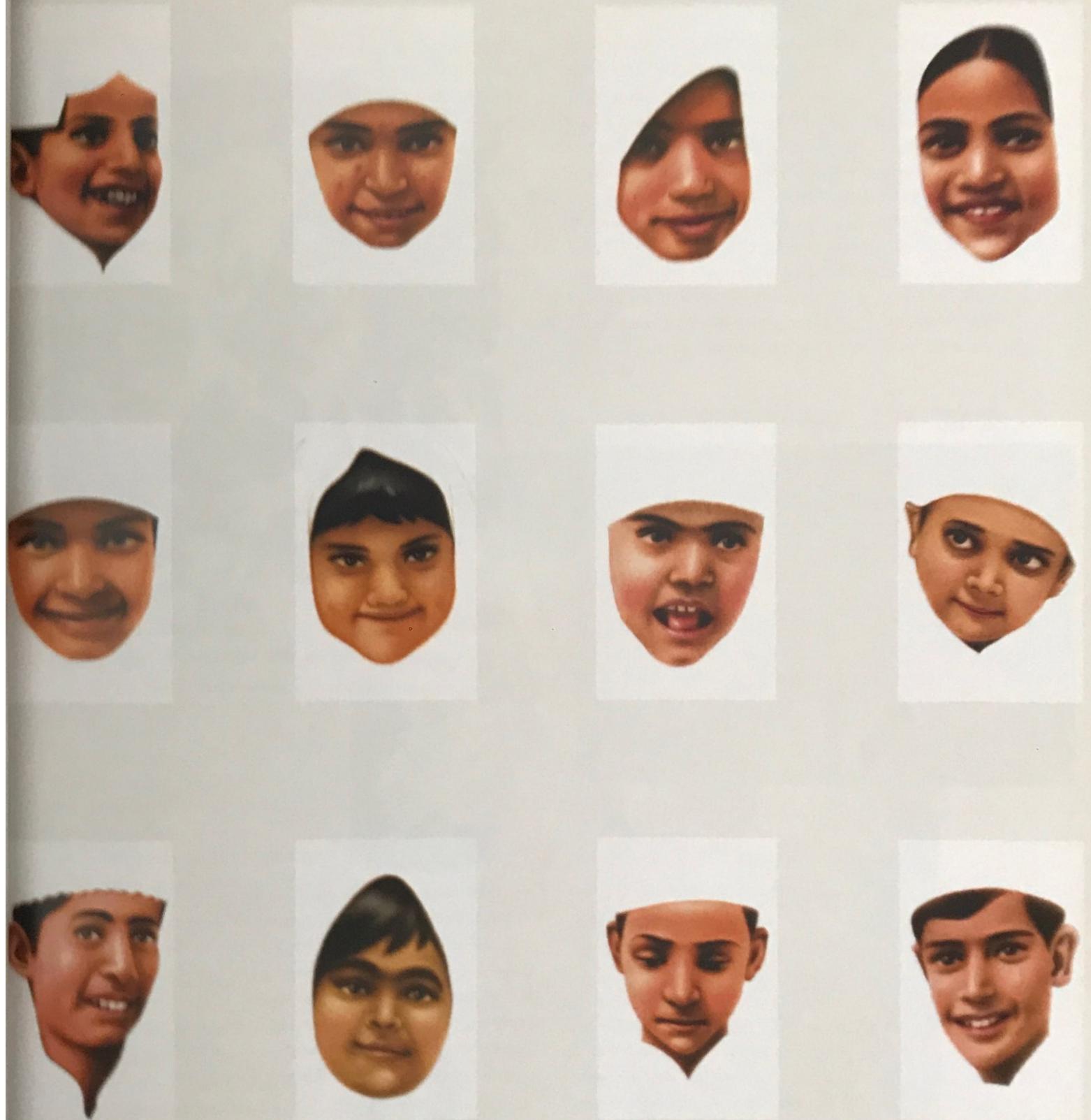
would refer to as shadow figures. In *Midnight's Children* the introspective prophet is paired with the Machiavellian Shiva. (*Essays on Imaginary Homelands*, Granta, 1991).

US based Khalil Chishtee bestows the ordinary toxic garbage bag with qualities of a higher reality (spiritual, psychological?), hence dealing with the contradictions / dualities of home and ownership. The cynicism of his vocabulary submits to the permanency of not belonging, of detaching to the limit of not being. One asks if the bodies of Chishtee's subjects are really devoid of a physicality or gender, and are mere thoughts, perhaps apparitions. Figures, often in groups, are in some sort of a transition, reminding one of Jean Francois Lyotard's notions of thought existing without a body or a permanent home. The artist claims that he has no home, this negation reflected in the disposable nature of his medium; the fragility of the self is translated into his form. Negation is double edged: it is as much to boundaries of nation, as it is to the place of migration.

Writes Chishtee in a recent email correspondence with me: "Moving out of Pakistan made me realize many things about this idea behind patriotic belief system; instead of connecting to mankind, we are trained / conditioned to connect to the nation, religion or culture, and to me that is the very basis of being violent. After I moved to the US in 2002, instead of becoming American, I became human. Later, I realized how tiny we become when we cling onto one definition or label.

Home for me is a trap - a selfish place where I see nothing other than my pride, ego and desire. By saying so I am not denying my long past associated with Pakistan, but I am acknowledging the importance of love that I have for the same place, and that love is not based on any kind of nostalgic, patriotic belief systems."

Interesting is Chishtee's reference to Mirza Ghalib's *aakhir iss dard ki dawa...* opening a window to the past, that lives within. This verse, from the Sufi poet's, *Dil e Naadan*, reads *dil e naadan tujhe huwa kya hai* (oh naïve heart, what has befallen you),



Hameer Abbas, *God Grows on Trees*, gouache on wasli, installation size variable, 2008
Courtesy: Green Caralamon

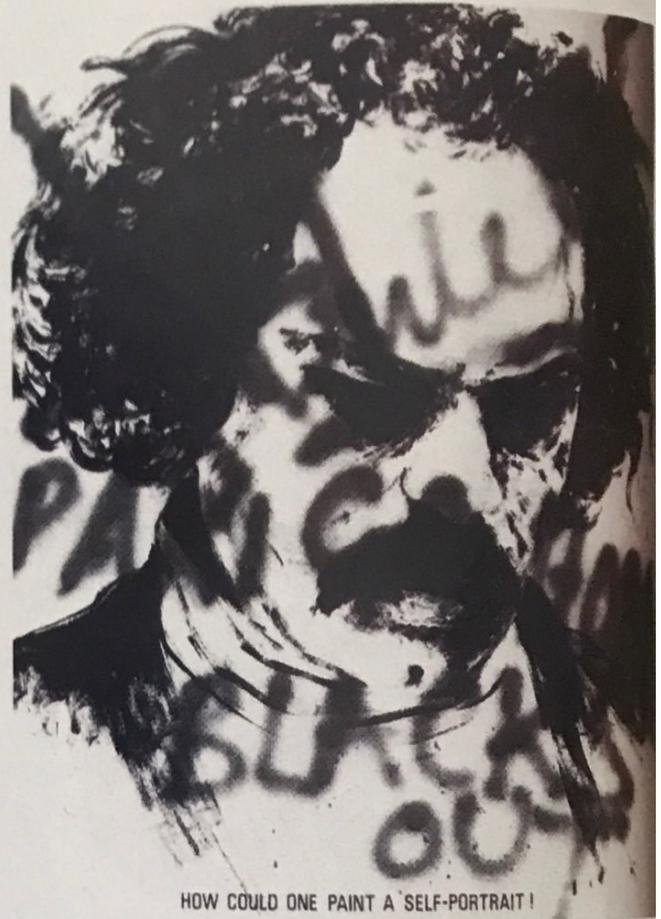
Nusra Latif, *Some Old Things*, mixed media on illustration board, each panel 28cm X21cm, 2009



aakhir iss dard ki dawa kya hai? (What is the remedy for this pain?).

Even though Sufism is about the submission to God, the liberal artist, like the liberal poet, refers to the pain of worldly love. The poet's subversion addresses the creator: *jab teray bin koe nabee hai maujood* (when there is no one besides you in this world), *phir yeh bangama, ai khuda kiya hai?* (then oh God, what is all this commotion). Transporting the meaning of *dard* (pain) from the 19th century poet, Chishtee's reference could also be read into the exodus from India to Pakistan; the personal transforming to the universal, just as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* refers to the hour of India's division.

The level of visibility gained by the Pakistani diasporic artists, however, barely exists, even on the periphery of the dominant discourse. At the Documenta 12, in Kassel, Germany, the 'core issue was ...to dissociate from its (Modernism's) failures, to confront its connection to colonialism'. Curators Ruth Noack



HOW COULD ONE PAINT A 'SELF-PORTRAIT'!

Rasheed Areeen, From his Biography, 'Making Myself Visible', 1979, (Kalapress - London 1984)

and Roger Brugel, in their curatorial concept, referred to 'the migration of form, as a traceable movement through geography, time and media'. The evolution of Modernity in Pakistan is an important aspect of understanding the link between the past and present in art practices in Pakistan, as well as its link to colonialism and modernism. Curatorial preferences for such mega events do not extend themselves to understand or also to acknowledge the integrity of different modernisms.

At the Venice Biennial, 2009, Aisha Khalid, Imran Qureshi, Khadim Ali and Nusra Latif Qureshi were grouped in a space peripheral to the rest of the exhibits, together with Irani and Afghani artists. The show with its emphasis on the interpretation of traditional art and craft practices presented Pakistani Contemporary Art in a narrow framework, apart from having more in common with South Asia than West Asia', writes Nilofar Farrukh. (NuktaArt, vol 4, issue 2, 2009, p 73)

One answer as to why Pakistan remains invisible at one of the most important world forums could be because it is being seen from a narrow lens of distrust or through constructs of its political identity, only in relation to terrorism, as it effects the US. Reading from a wider lens, Editor of the Third Text, Rasheed Araeen, argues: 'What we face today is not colonialism, but its legacies... keeps the world dependent on the political, economic and cultural models of modernity developed in the West for its own interest'. But he has also talked about the need to engage with the dominant discourse, through a system of communication that can recognize 'some kind of a trans-national identity of Asia.' (Editor's note, Rasheed Araeen, Third Text Asia, issue 1, spring 2008).

The resistance that Araeen offers in the face of 'the growing global power of the West, reinforcing the legacy of colonialism' may be idealistic at a point when the mechanisms that can allow access to this dissent, are being negated. The indigenous voices that are embedded, sometimes, cross disciplines, are therefore not accommodated within contemporary artistic practices, because there is no room for them to be translated due to their non-capitalist or anti-capitalist natures. The critical engagement of art writers / curators could be deceived especially when there is an unclear line between the colonizer and the colonized, and they too become players in the networks that support neo colonial ideas.

One of the more problematic areas is the gaps created in curatorial practices that do not convey the wider

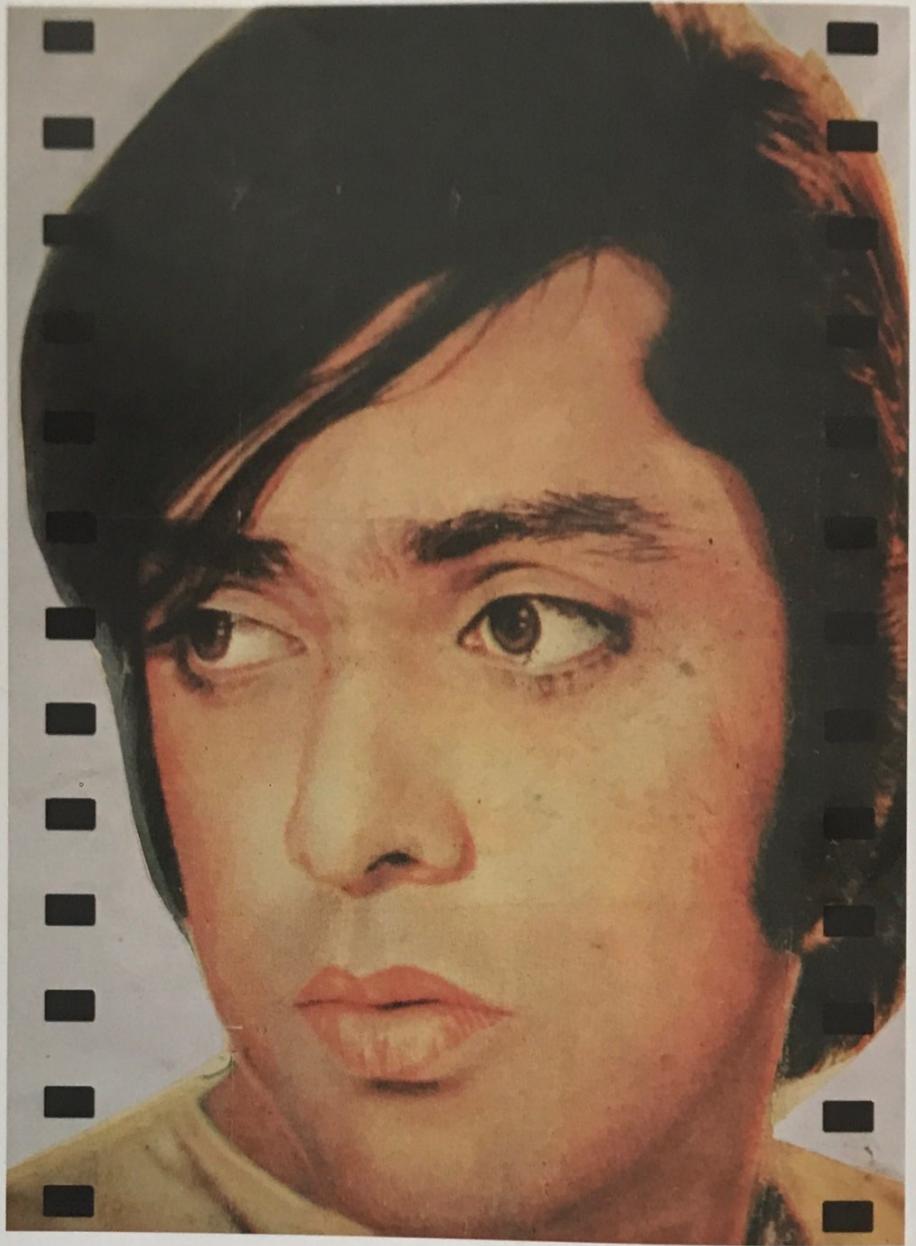
historical dimensions of Pakistani art. The recent showing of Anwar Jalal Shemza's art in the UK (2010, by the Green Cardamom) could have incorporated practitioners with a closer understanding of Shemza's milieu and his relationship to modernity such as Rasheed Araeen; Dr. Akbar Naqvi's critique of Shemza or the late Marium Habib's commentary of the artist as she was part of the Lahore Circle and followed Shemza's career closely. For new meanings to be extracted from Shemza's art, or other artists who pioneered the engagement with modernity, it is essential to have a more cohesive historical perspective of the art, in the context that it was created. In the same way, contemporary readings of Neo Miniature have to go beyond the packaging of it for a Western viewer. ■

Khalil Chishtee, *Dreaming of Dreaming*, Installation detail, 2010 - Esplanade Singapore
photo credit- The Esplanade Co. Ltd. photo by Ken Cheong



by Khurram Ali Shafique

A Portrait of the Artist as



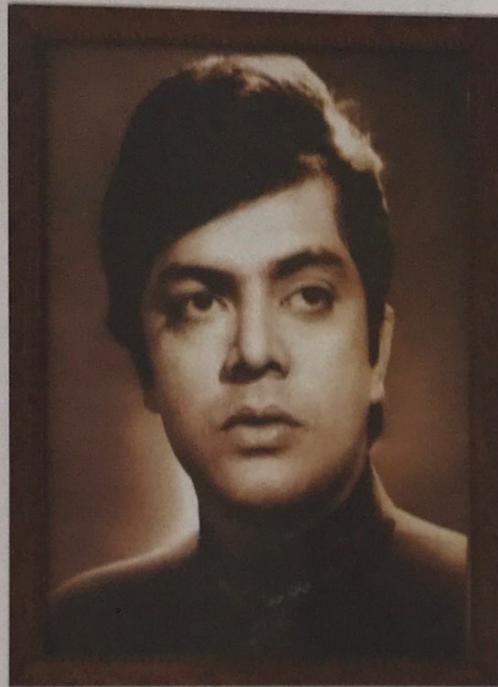
Waheed Murad

"And he sets his mind to unknown arts". Ovid wrote it in Latin, James Joyce cited it as epigram of his famous novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-16), and I am using the English translation for describing Waheed Murad (1938-1983).

Given the nature of its content, a good way of beginning the present article would be to remind the reader about Joyce's novel and the stream of consciousness technique used, and then to show how Waheed translated the literary technique in cinema, with a different purpose. This is seen in *Ishara* (1969), an Urdu movie written, produced and directed by him.

*

Hence I am now on the Wikipedia page about the novel. The link to Spark Notes gives me that handy definition which I need to share, "stream of consciousness, a stylistic form in which written prose seeks to represent the characters' stream of inner thoughts and perceptions rather than render these characters from an objective, external perspective." Waheed replaced "written prose" with movie and sought to represent a combined "stream of inner thoughts and perceptions" of two characters: he and the viewer.



Waheed Murad as the artist Amir in *Ishara* (1969)

The film begins with the subjective camera moving into a street and a voice-over welcomes the viewer. Thus it gets established that what you see is what passes through the stream of your "inner thoughts and perceptions" while you watch the movie. This also makes you the main character in the story, which now becomes a story about your exploration of a new world, and the world is the movie you have entered.

A second character is introduced almost simultaneously. It is the welcoming voice, "Mera naam Amir hai..." ("My name is Amir..."). The voice tells you that he lives on that street, and soon you are taken to the room where Amir is painting pictures. The voice belongs to him, which is Waheed himself in the role of an aspiring painter who has good taste but is also passionate about feedback from the un-initiated. Three little children from the neighborhood are shown watching him making the painting, out of which the first child likes it, while others do not. Now, it may become clear that the street in the opening shot represented the world of cinema, the room is the mind of Waheed Murad and the pictures are a metaphor for movies (in Urdu, both are called *tasseer*). Three little children are the entire range of feedback you may offer about the "picture" (read "movie") that is being made in front of you: like it, don't like it or dislike it, but your feedback is essentially premature right

now because you are new to this world and are yet to understand its ways, just like those children (be any of them or all of them, they are depicted as your alter egos).

*

I would have liked to write here what happens in the story but Wikipedia has distracted me with the term bildungsroman. "The bildungsroman (German: "formation novel") is a genre of the novel which focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood," says Wikipedia. "The birth of the bildungsroman is normally dated to the publication of Goethe's *The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm*

Meister in 1795-96." However, a famous earlier example is the Arabic romance *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*, named by its 11th century writer Ibn Tufail after a Persian story by Bu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna) of a century earlier. Ibn Sina's story was about an old sage instructing the young reader about the mysteries of the universe - active intellect informing the rational human soul. Ibn Tufail's story is about an abandoned child growing up to maturity through inquiry and reasoning.

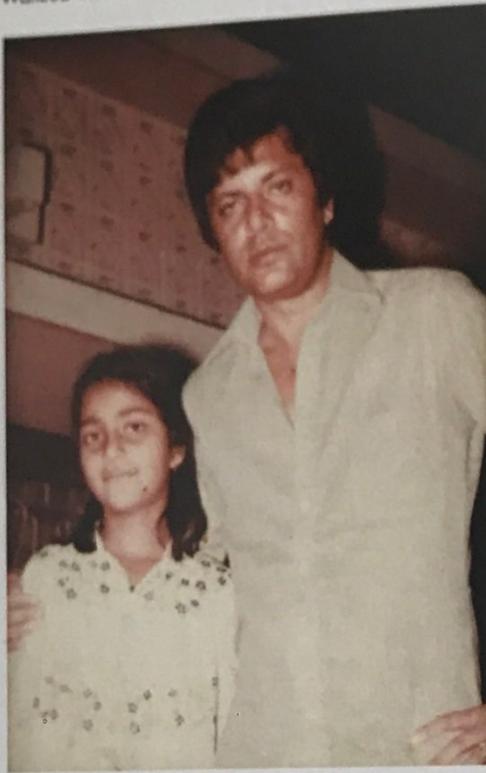
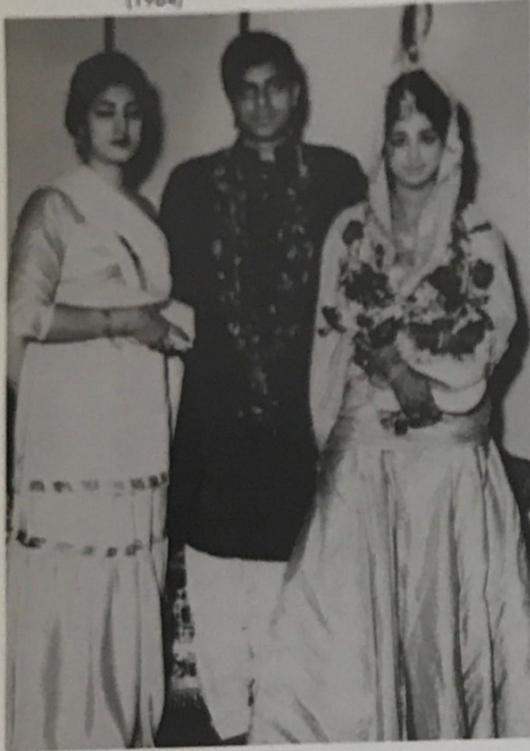
Ishara is a coming of age story, but it is the viewer who grows up as he/she enters the world of the artist as a new born. Sees oneself as one (or all) of three little children this is followed by the artist falling in love with Aliya, a college student. It is not impossible for the viewers to identify themselves with Aliya at this point: in real life, it was the name of the filmmaker's infant daughter, born around this time. The poet Allama Iqbal used the name of his son, Javid, to represent posterity. Waheed used the name of his daughter as a metaphor for the next generation, as he instructed them about mysteries just like the old sage of Avicenna's story, transforming them from the children of the first scene to the college student of the main story.

The instruction is offered, and the story told, through "stream of inner thoughts and perceptions" that typically passes through

the imagination of a viewer while watching a movie from the made destiny smile on all who share the artist's world. While singing and dancing (with abundant allusions to well-known moves of Waheed from his other movies), he pulls together the entire range of society from *burqa*-clad women to girls in high fashion (teddy *shalwari*), and from the roadside worker to men in formal suits. Bringing them together in pairs from three successive generations of children, youth and seniors, he makes them dance in a circle around him while he revolves, not very unlike a whirling dervish, in the centre. Gradually, he moves out, but the circle keeps revolving ("Nations are born in the

Waheed with his bride Salma (right) on their wedding (1964)

Waheed with his daughter Aliya



mainstream cinema, especially from Indo-Pakistan. Destiny intervenes and the aspiring artist gets noticed by a woman who is young, rich and single. Reshma falls in love but Amir's heart and soul belong to Aliya. Hence Reshma probably represents the artist's contemporaries who help him gain recognition but the artist remains committed to generations that shall come later ("I am the Voice of the Poet of Tomorrow," said Iqbal. "Turning away from my contemporaries, I have a word to share with the new generation"). Posterity shall return the artist's love, but may have its own issues to sort out first: Aliya is under obligation to marry Ishrat, the son of her aunt and guardian. Of course, destiny intervenes again in the end and things get sorted out as they should be - but what is that about?

*

In presenting *Ishara*, Waheed relied exclusively on stock items of mainstream cinema but he managed to make some pertinent statements. Foremost among these was his theory of art. In *A Portrait*, Joyce's protagonist had famously viewed family, nation and religion as constraints. Around the very same time, in 1915, Iqbal offered a different view of art in 'Secrets of the Self' (*Asrar-i-Khudi*), where family, nation and religion worked as catalysts for the artist. In *Ishara*, the artist belongs distinctively to this school of thought.

His first song is a hymn in praise of the Almighty, who has

hearts of the poets," says Iqbal. "They prosper and die in the hands of politicians").

This is a portrait of the artist as a force that binds together diverse schools and classes in ecstasy and joy. The poetics of this artist is summarized in his advice to friend and neighbor Bezaar, the penniless but proud maestro of classical music. "Times have moved on," says Amir. "People shall keep running away from you unless you sing to the tune of Time. There is nothing wrong with your music but very few people can understand this type of music. In my humble opinion, keep pace with Time, and truly there is none like you in the whole world."

Bezaar happens to be an epitome of the Joyce-like artist who seeks isolation. Amir's advice leads him into a fantasy where he sees himself on the stage of a night club, singing a pop song and performing like Fred Astair (and parodying Shammi Kapoor), while all the musicians of the orchestra are his own clones (played by the same actor). He feels irritated when they go on praising him senselessly ("Wah bhai wah wah, wah bhai wah wah...") but gets upset again when they stop.

How different is the inner world of this artist from what we saw of the Waheed/Amir school of thought! In this comparison, differences between high and popular, classical or pop, or traditional and modern forms of art become secondary. The

real criterion is how an artist connects with the people, and whether or not they have a place in the artist's inner world (the elitist journal where Joyce's novel was first published was called, quite appropriately, *The Egocist*).

Needless to say, names are symbolic. The name Amir comes from the same root as the Arabic words for culture and civilization, architecture and society. Moreover, it was the surname of Qais (the legendary lover better known as Majnun). Aliya literally means the Exalted, and as the real-life name of the filmmaker's infant daughter it symbolizes posterity. Bezaar means "Fed Up", Reshma has connotations of silk, while Ishrat means luxury. In choosing Amir instead of Ishrat, destiny has preferred culture and civilization over luxury for Aliya but her guardian, despite being a well-wisher, is in conflict with the youth's destiny.

A cliché in most other mainstream films, destiny becomes a powerful motif in *Ishara* and is personified in full bloom in the final fantasy of the artist. In the beginning we had entered a black and white movie but in the very last reel, when the artist realizes that he cannot be united with Aliya and goes into fantasy, the film turns into color: while the mind of the artist was presented in black and white, his imagination is shown in color - imagination is so much more colorful and possibly also more important. A troupe of mysterious dancers leads Amir into a park. Standing on a lower plane, he finds himself in the presence of Aliya who stands on a higher plane. A chorus of eight dancers accompanies each of them, bringing the total number of people on each sphere to nine, which is identical with the number of stairs between the two planes. "My love, do not be sad," says Amir as he begins the song. "You stand on one side, I on the other and the insensitive Time between us." Ascending the nine steps, he moves over to the other plane but the mysterious dancers drag Aliya away and out of the park. The gate closes on Amir, leaving him trapped inside.

After this grand vision of destiny, Amir returns from fantasy and back into his real world where things get sorted out miraculously: Ishrat after learning the truth dramatically unites the lovers, who fly off to Islamabad, never to be parted again. Although the artist has come out of his fantasy, the film never returns to black and white, and ends in color. So, is the happy ending occurring in real or is it part of the fantasy too? Can it be a current which, although unknown to us, is always flowing beneath our "stream of inner thoughts and perceptions"?

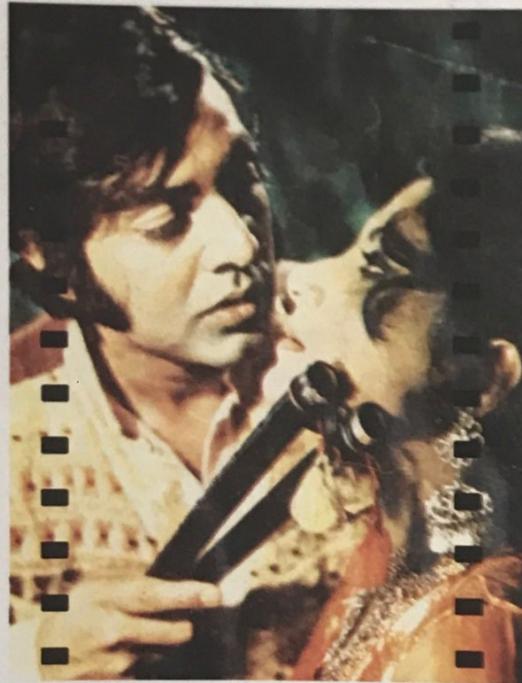
These questions draw diverse answers whenever I raise them in my workshops and presentations. Recently, I posted five clips from the movie on my blog, Kburramdesk.blogspot.com, and

the following comments may give the reader an idea about how viewers approach the unusual wind-up of this movie:

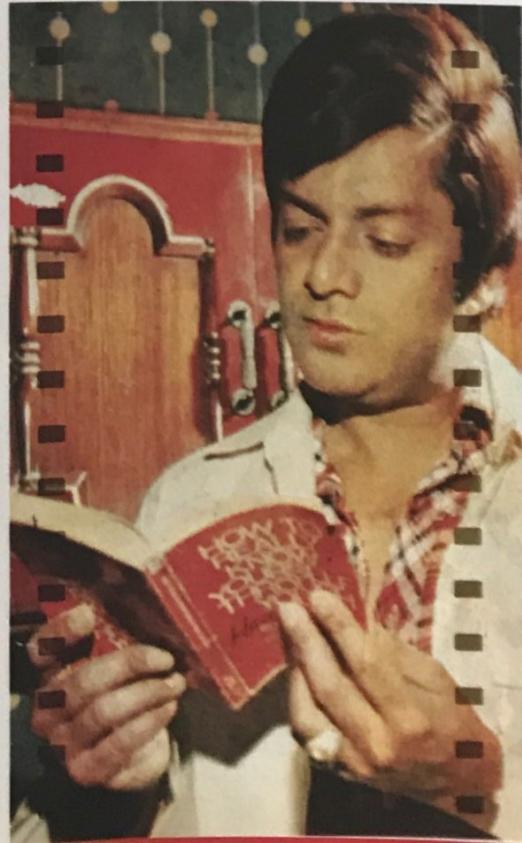
■ "The opening sequence was an artist's vision for consensus which realizes in this closing sequence, as here everyone seems to be helping the artist in realizing his dreams. Those who once were seen singing and dancing to their own tunes are now seen helping others. Consensus has taken place and the artist's vision for a better tomorrow has dawned."

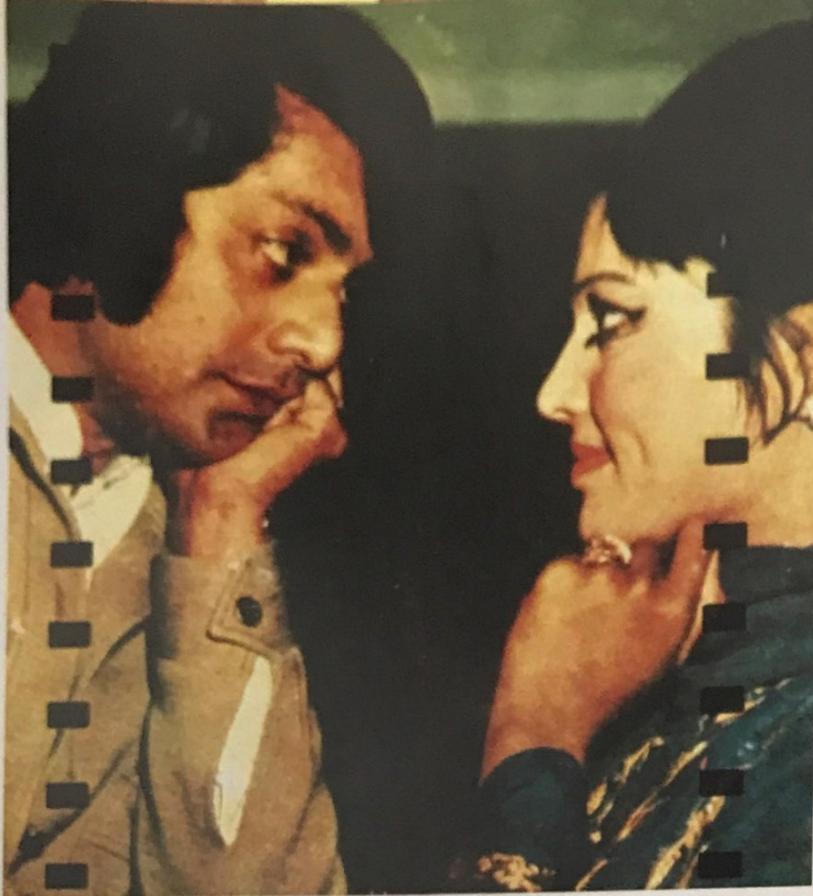
■ "The film which started with black and white has ended with color, With the color of his soul, Amir - the artist -

Waheed Murad and Deeba were paired together in a number of films, including *Ishara*



The Chocolate Hero





Waheed with co-star Nisho

succeeded in painting his outer world in colors. No one is sad and everyone, including Ishrat and Reshma, support Amir in achieving his desire. A society which makes its decision with consensus achieves its desire and its goal."

■ "The symmetry - complete with rich colors and light, morning and night, and then the dramatic blacks - the moonlight whites and shadows - all provide a grand design.

This backdrop provides a mirror sometimes and at other times a frame for Amir's reflective and pre-occupied moments. Against this design he moves alone and then back in touch with others and the crowd. This design shows others' movements away and toward him and him towards them."

*

It may be a good idea to provide some relevant biographical information about Waheed Murad before ending this article. His grandfather was Zahoor Ilahi Murad, a lawyer from Sialkot and also an acquaintance of Iqbal, according to the oral tradition in the Murad family. Zahoor's son, Nisar Murad, was born in Sialkot in 1915, the same year when Joyce finished serializing *A Portrait* and Iqbal published 'Secrets of the Self'. Nisar shifted to Karachi and was twenty-three when his only child was born on October 2, 1938. This was Waheed Murad.

Waheed started his schooling in the prestigious Lawrence College, Ghora Gali (Murree), where he lived in a hostel. His parents missed him so much that they called him back after Grade 2 and got him admitted to Marie Colaco School in Karachi. He was only nine when Pakistan came into being, and Karachi became the capital. Waheed saw his father celebrating the newfound independence by changing the name

of his film distribution company to Pakistan Films. At school he met Javed Ali Khan, a nephew once-removed of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and Pervez Malik, the son of an army officer. Waheed and Pervez wanted to acquire a Masters in filmmaking, but Waheed's parents didn't want to part with their only child for such a long period. They gave him the money but asked him to acquire the learning by producing his own films in Karachi rather than going abroad. Film Arts was the name the young man chose for his new production house. To back his hands-on experience with a Masters in English Literature, he went to Karachi University, where Waheed also won a prize in some elocution

competition that would have remained insignificant if the prize was not *Ulysses*, the sequel of *A Portrait* by James Joyce. The "stylistic form in which written prose seeks to represent the characters' stream of inner thoughts and perceptions" fired his imagination and he tried to familiarize himself with as many masters of the stream of consciousness as he could - especially Henry James, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. Soon, he started dreaming about making a mainstream Pakistani film utilizing the stream of consciousness technique.

*

Isbara was released on February 14, 1969. It was written, produced and directed by Waheed Murad. Dialogue and lyrics were by Masroor Anwar (who later wrote the famous national song 'Sohni Dharti') and the film's music was composed by Sohail Rana. Playback singers were Mala, Mehdi Hassan, Naseem Begum, Ahmad Rushdi, Waheed Murad and Deeba (the last two were not credited). Actors included Waheed Murad (as Amir), Deeba (as Aliya), Rozina (as Reshma), Lehari (as Bezaar) and Talat Hussain (in his debut role as Ishrat). The movie ran for a little over 25 cumulative weeks (Silver Jubilee), which was considered to be not very well-received in those days.

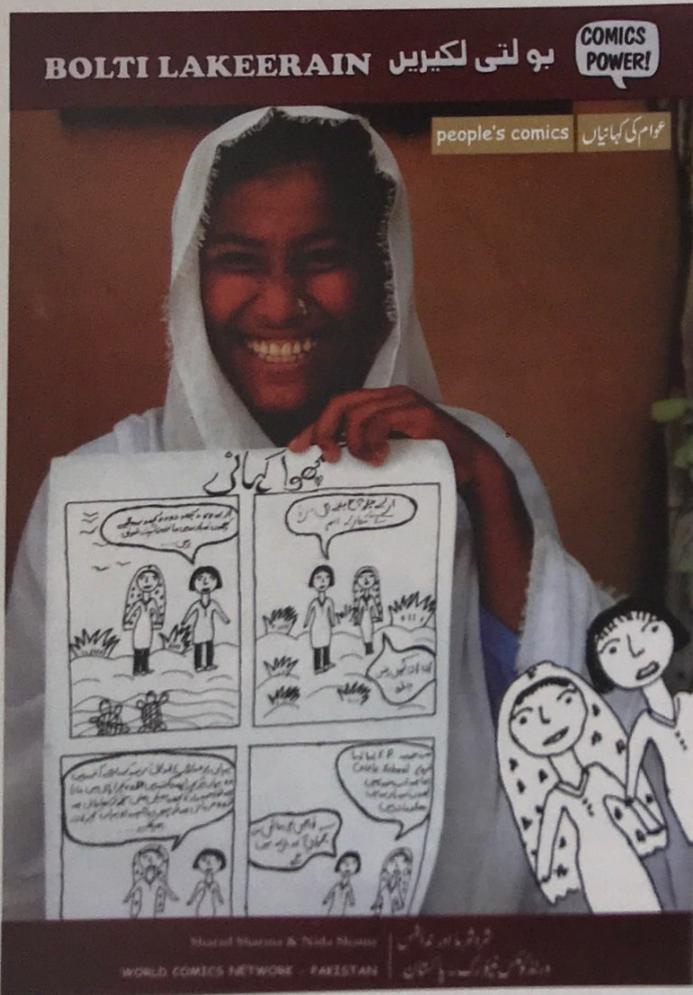
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Khurram Ali Shafique

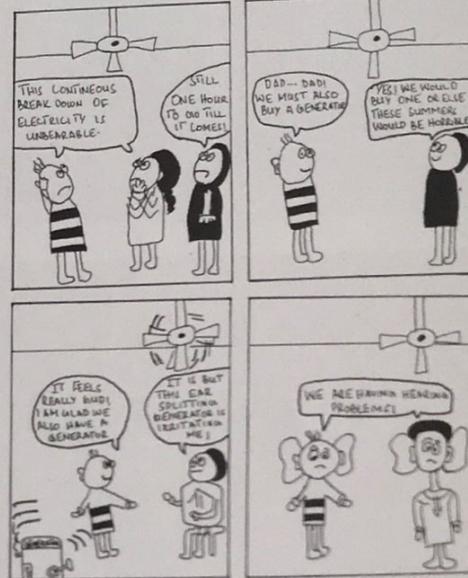
Khurram Ali Shafique is a Karachi-based author of *Iqbal: an Illustrated Biography* (2006), which won the Presidential Iqbal Award (named after Pakistan's national poet and philosopher Dr Mohammad Iqbal). His writings contain biographies, screenplays, and magazine articles. His publications include *The Republic of Rumi: A Novel of Reality* (2007) and *Damadam Ravan Hai Yam-i-Zindagi* (in Urdu, 2003). His official website is *The Republic of Rumi* (<http://therepublicofrumi.com>).

Reviewed by Rumana Husain

Title: Bolti Lakeerain - People's Comics
Publisher: World Comics Network - Pakistan
Compilation: Sharad Sharma and Nida Shams
Date of Publication: April 2010



SOLUTIONS CREATE PROBLEMS



ZEESHAN AHMED

ہماری پمپنگ سٹی کے لوگ بھی اس مسئلے سے دوچار ہیں۔ ان کے پاس بجلی کے کٹاؤں کے دوران ان کے کاموں کو چلانے کے لیے جنریشن سے بڑے پمپنگ سٹیشنوں کی ضرورت ہے۔

Bolti Lakeerain is a 100-page, soft-cover collection of some of the numerous comics done in black ink, and gathered together during the last five years. Each comic eloquently narrates a story...a concern.

The simple and unfussy comics reproduced in *Bolti Lakeerain* - a book published by the collaborative efforts of Sharad Sharma (India) and Nida Shams (Pakistan), under the banner of World Comics Network - Pakistan, are a testimony to the strength of conviction that awareness and expression of problems can bring about a social change through art at the grassroots level.

It is not an easy task to bend strict social constraints imposed

by years of tradition and to cast a critical eye on the social and political structures that are taken for granted. However, the idea of low-cost, no fuss comics' workshops is to minimise expenses and to enable the participants to carry the work further on their own. These grassroots comics are low-cost and quick to produce as only pens, paper and photocopying are needed.

Nida Shams has a BFA in Graphic Design from the Visual

Studies Department, University of Karachi. She got her motivation to work at the grassroots level after she did an internship for an NGO and then on started participating in various movements, becoming a part of several campaigns. Later she worked for several national and international NGOs, including WWF, Indus Institute of Research and Education, Environment Protection Development Agency, Rozan, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Hawwa Women Craft Cooperatives, etc. Though Shams has also worked in advertising for sometime, she reverted back to the development sector as a freelance designer. As a peace and human rights activist, the contact with reality - various social problems faced by common people - became a driving force for her to take up working as a designer teaching the making of comics to the less privileged. The workshops have been held not only in cities like Karachi and Lahore but also in distant rural areas of the country.

Bolti Lakeerain is a 100-page, soft-cover collection of some of the numerous comics done in black ink, and gathered together during the last five years. Each comic eloquently narrates a story...a concern.

The book is divided into nine parts, which begin with 'Essential Education' and end with 'Water Matters' and 'other stories', and in-between are topics such as 'Load Shedding' and 'Talking Terrorism'. It has been used as a campaigning tool by people who understand their local context better than professional cartoonists.

The Foreword of the book has been penned by Dr Muhammad Ali Siddiqui, Dean Biztek University, Karachi and a prominent scholar of Pakistan.

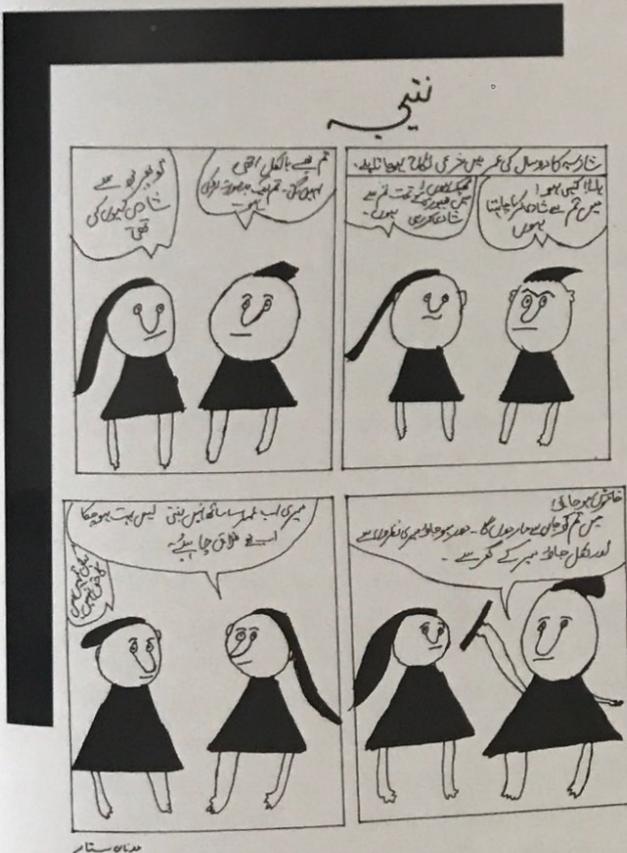
The language of most comics of *Bolti Lakeerain* is Urdu and a crisp translation in English has been provided at the bottom of each page. Likewise, for comics in English, an Urdu translation is given.

Speech balloons figure in all the comics and provide some welcome relief to pure visual intensity.

The World Comics Finland (WCF) website puts forth this idea quite succinctly, laying emphasis on two factors: the importance of the facilitators' passion for the comics' workshops and the content of the comics produced. It says, "Community activists can use grassroots comics as an inexpensive communication tool to put forward their views. Activists, who have very little or no experience in drawing, can in a few days learn how to produce grassroots comics. It is the story, its drama and how it is presented, which is central, not the drawing skill. The activists' passion and engagement in the issue at hand are evident in the stories they produce..."

WCF is an NGO founded by comics' artists and aid activists in 1997 in Helsinki, run on a fully voluntary basis. WCF is a registered NGO and currently it has about 30 members in Finland and works together with a number of different organizations, both in Finland and abroad, including South Asia.

Comics seem like a perfect symbiosis of the image and the symbol. The main format of this particular activity is a wall-poster comic, which is stuck on a tree or a wall in public places as it is important that the comic is seen by a large number of people gathering at village *panchayats*, bus stops, clinics, schools, road-side food stalls, barber shops, etc. ■



"The Result": Shazia was married at the tender age of 2 years. As she grew up, her spouse sneers at her and brands her ugly. Exasperated at such insult, Shazia wanted to get rid of her spouse by divorcing him. But the spouse does not do so rather his sadism comes to the fore when he told her she can't divorce as does not have the right to divorce. Story and art: Adnan Sattar

Gemma Sharpe

It might be useful to open with an acknowledgement of our respective approaches to this show. I think I can safely say that all three of us have come through a visual arts background. When our work finds its way into institutions, or we write about art within institutions, usually these institutions are galleries dedicated to visual arts and contemporary art. This

was really interesting. The museum always manages to engage the local demographic and that's what it's there to do as a Local Authority museum. This exhibition is a testament to that. If you look at the demographics in the south of Ilford (part of the London Borough of Redbridge), it's fairly diverse in comparison to the north, which is quite white.² The museum is in Ilford in the south, where there's a large Asian population, about 50% of which is Pakistani. The museum

does look at the demographics to see what's important to the local community and it's really encouraging to see local people going to this exhibition who don't usually access art galleries or museums. The museum is based in the same building as the local library; so you get young people working towards their exams, and studying for their GCSEs or A Levels who pop up to use the toilets on the first floor, which is directly opposite the exhibition space. They get pulled in as they see these images. I love that. I've been to the exhibition when this has happened and as a local resident I'm really encouraged by it.

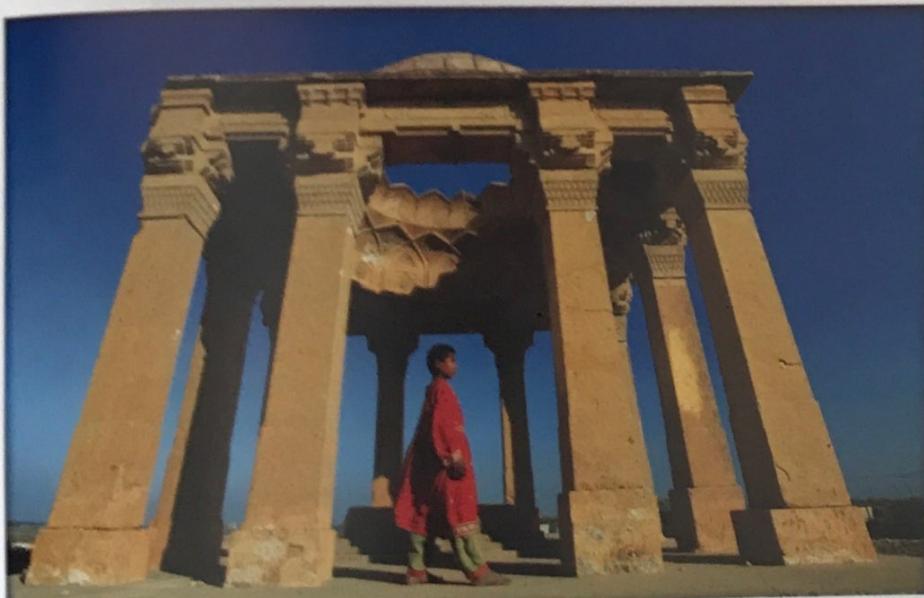
GS:

When I visited, there was a mixed audience. A few elderly British couples were spending a lot of time with the detailed text panels and I had a conversation with two students who were laughing at many of the images. They were from Pakistan, studying in London

and living locally. I guess they were laughing at the points of identification and recognition; the image of the train with hundreds of travellers on its top and sides was familiarly amusing to them.

Hamja Ahsan:

The identifications I experienced weren't related to regional identification alone. There's a photograph of a Baloch woman smoking a big pipe and just thought, she looks so punk rock! But thinking of demographics, after Naseem Khan's seminal report in 1976 - *The Arts Britain Ignores* - there was a policy



Nadeem Khawar, Makli, Thatta, Lower Sindh, digital print, 2010

exhibition is within a municipal museum however, and that might demand an alternative way of looking. Perhaps a particular set of questions needs to be asked in order to locate the work within the space of the Redbridge Museum, and in relation to its audience in Ilford.

Sadia ur Rehman:

For me, I'm coming at this discussion via two prongs: as a local resident in Redbridge - I have lived in Ilford my whole life - and also as an artist who makes work about my cultural identity and explores being a Pakistani. I thought the exhibition

report in 1976 - *The Arts Britain Ignores*³ - there was a policy introduced in the UK that meant every national institution had to have a minimum 5% representation of black and Asian activities within their gallery or museum infrastructure, in line with the national population being around that figure when the policy was written. But in areas of Britain like Tower Hamlets where 45% of the population is Bangladeshi, this figure looks very arbitrary. I think that's really problematic in many ways, but I do also think in relation to this show that white people in Britain should be interested in Pakistan. Their country is occupying Afghanistan, and Pakistan is important to that.

GS:

And the British once colonized the terrain that is now Pakistan.

HR:

Exactly, there's the colonial history too.

GS:

Sadia, may I come back to the second prong of your engagement with this exhibition? You said that you also look at the show as a visual artist. How does that impact on your experience?

SR:

To be honest, I find it difficult to separate those prongs. They're both essential to me being a citizen in England and more specifically, east London. A lot of what I do in my work or talk about in my practice is about living in this place. So it is difficult to separate my being an artist and my being a resident of Ilford when thinking about this show.

Having said that, I found the interpretation panels quite interesting. For a local visitor, particularly one who doesn't know about Pakistan, the panels were really important, but I don't need that sort of interpretation because as an artist I mainly engage with the images, however I do feel the interpretation was important in providing a context and information for the audience that it engaged.

GS:

The exhibition had an explanatory remit to fulfil and people were spending a lot of time with the display, probably because there was a lot of reading material; a panel for each image, and the exhibition was broken up into loose themes with a panel for each theme. It was very 'readable' material - informative and a clear syntax - but I had to keep reminding myself to look at the photographs. Having said that though, many of the photographers in that show work as journalists or they publish books and will be used to seeing their photographs in a text-rich environment. Both of you are

visual artists and I guess you relate to that negotiation between text, image and display. I'm thinking in particular of your *Other Asias projects* like 'REDO Pakistan' Hamja. You draw performance, publications, image works, texts and seminars into the same space. These elements work together and maybe even against each other too. But in terms of this exhibition and speaking visually, there is that question of whether the images become subordinate to the texts and the pedagogical function of the project. I guess that's related to the fact that it's a museum exhibition and here I go back to my first point, which is about how we might set it apart from a photography exhibition in a gallery.

SR:

Of course they do function so differently, a local authority museum and a gallery.

HR:

But if you look at the new Museum of London⁴ for example, strictly speaking there's no contemporary art in the exhibition space but artists invented every single display in that exhibition. They have video installations, performative sculptures, sound installations and forms of interaction that you could compare to 'relational'⁵ practice. It can be difficult to separate the gallery, the museum, or 'community arts'⁶ and there are projects like 'Do you remember Olive Morris' that are situated in the spaces of 'community arts' and the contemporary art gallery at the same time. Maybe even Thomas Hirschhorn's⁷ projects sit between those spaces too. Yet to compare this exhibition to something like the 'Where Three Dreams Cross'⁸ exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery last year, to me 'Pakistan Through a Lens' really undermines that inflated show. Considering that the curator of this exhibition doesn't come from a curatorial or even a visual arts background, it shows there was something really inflated about the whole arts infrastructure that produced the Whitechapel show. Do you know how many years it took to make that show?!

GS:

Within many of these projects that take on a national, historical or community-based set of questions, there arises a question of 'education'. Yet within contemporary art, education might often be rephrased as 'interpretation' within the institution, or as 'relational', 'dialogic' or 'participatory' practice when it functions within artworks. Hamja, do you ever use the term 'education' in relation to *Other Asias projects*? Or do you prefer an alternative terminology?

HS:

If we do a project about Jinnah in London for example, not everyone knows who he is, even South Asian people, sadly.



Fayyaz Ahmed,
Silhouette
(The Poncho
Shot), Khaadi
factory, Karachi,
Diva Magazine,
digital print,
2009

that is ethnically diverse. Going to that exhibition a few times, I've seen how Asian visitors have responded and they've treated it as a celebration. They are being celebrated. There is pride about the fact that the local museum has put on an exhibition about the place that they originate from.

HA:

I'm from Bangladesh¹ and if there were an exhibition about Bangladesh here then I'd go to see it regardless of whether it was any good. I don't think that Monica Ali is a great novelist, but she's famous and I'm glad that she's writing. It's almost like supporting a football team; there's something that impels you to pay attention, regardless of its quality.

GS:

It automatically becomes educational or pedagogical. It's the same with the Black Audio Film Collective⁹ or the practice of Isaac Julien⁹ who says that he sees his work as being pedagogical. In that moment of transit to the audience, work like this inevitably becomes educational.

GS:

One of the intentions of 'Pakistan through a Lens' was to readdress a restricted perspective on Pakistan that a British audience might find within the mainstream press. Does that entail that the exhibition, at heart, is oriented more towards that audience it seeks to enlighten or educate than the local Asian and Pakistani residents of Ilford who have a relation to the work already?

HA:

For every single exhibition about Pakistan, this is the first line: "this exhibition is situated against mainstream Western media." I don't know what my feelings are towards that, but that's usually what's at the top of the blurb.

SA:

I know the museum because it is in the south of Ilford where I live, and the exhibitions do engage with an audience

But what do you do with any points of misidentification in that case? You have proximity to what's being represented in a show about Bangladesh for example, but you might really disagree with how something is being said and that can be difficult to deal with. You want to support the team, but it lets you down this time.

HA:

There was a big show at Rivington Place about 1971 in Bangladesh. It was a first-ever show about 1971 here but it showed a very one-sided story of those events. Within Bangladesh that story is really contested. However it's still important that the show happened. In Britain, when you think about how South Asia is represented by cultural organizations, it does tend to follow a pattern. First India, and then Pakistan, and then Bangladesh. For example there was 'The Empire Strikes Back', an exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery this year, which claimed to be an 'Indian' exhibition, even though there were several Pakistani artists in it. It's not the first time that this has happened. Apart from anything, there's a touristic 'gap year' selling point that India has and Pakistan, for example, doesn't. The word Pakistan is quite loaded here.

GS:

Sadia, how do these questions play out in relation to your practice?

Sur:

I've spent the last five years on a journey relearning my mother tongue, Pushto - documenting that process and producing learning objects. My practice seems to be part of my being on an ongoing search for a real authenticity. The community I live in tells me that I have a very English accent and I'm quite Western and that I'm not 'Pakistani' enough. What equates 'Pakistani' when you were born and brought up in a place other than Pakistan? My practice is an exploration of that. I recently made an installation charting the journey that I've had with Pushto. The installation is made up of four videos: the first video presents me as a fluent speaker of the language. When I was young it was my sole form of communication. The second video follows the journey that I made to school...you can hear English beginning to slip into my speech patterns. The third video is set at the primary school I attended from the age of 5 to 7. When I was at school, English became so predominant in my life that I was eventually taking it back home and speaking English with my siblings and then even with my parents. The last video shows me relearning Pushto with my grandfather and in a sense reclaiming the language. So my practice is a constant exploration of that quest for authenticity. It's about who I am and where I sit in the world.

GS:

Whenever either of you make a piece of work an immanent audience must be prodding at the back of your mind?

HR:

My work is always conscious of that and quite antagonistic towards its audience, even towards a South Asian audience. I

made the Morrissey film piece on two British Asian Morrissey¹² fans and a Bangladeshi man who walks the length of Brick Lane bawling about racist comments that Morrissey had made. There was also a performative piece that I made for my degree show at St Martins that was quite antagonistic towards its audience. I stationed a street tout from a Brick Lane restaurant in the show. He intercepted the viewers with his "come inside, come inside"



Ameer Hamza, Gadani ship-breaking yard, digital print, 2009

routine and it really highlighted the particular race and class of the audience in relation to this man. I'm trying to break Eurocentric and America-centric conceptions of art history and how visual culture is mapped out. I'm also trying to create new audiences and that's why I started curating as part of my practice. I noticed that the Bangladeshi community in East London weren't going to the art exhibitions that were all over the place. So I tried to create these intersections with *Other Asias*. Ours were the only events in which we had ironist skinny jeans-wearing arty people and first generation Bengalis in the same room. That's very rare, but there's an antagonism even in that scenario.

Soft

I always get an interesting reaction to my work, particularly the work about my journey with Pushto. Often it's from a white middle class audience who say things like, "Oh that's really sad", and "how did you lose it?" But they don't know much about being Pakistani, or about the culture of Pakistan and what it feels like to be brought up and co-exist within two cultures, so my work is an eye-opener for them. I have a studio at Valentine's Mansion, in Redbridge, and we have three public openings a year. The audience is predominantly white middle class. The other people that come into the Mansion are young diverse families and I enjoy the conversations we have. It's funny; often people say to me, "you're Asian? you're Pakistani? you're an artist and you're a woman?! How is that possible?!" I don't actually think it's that revolutionary. But maybe it is revolutionary in Ilford. ■



Gemma Sharpe

Gemma Sharpe is a writer and critic with a background in Art History and English. She has worked for Afterall Publishing, the ICA, Gasworks and the Triangle Arts Trust. Currently completing an MFA in 'Art Writing' from Goldsmiths, she has written for Shifter, MAP, Afterall Online and Untitled. She has contributed various essays to exhibition catalogues and publications and has given talks at the ICA and The A Foundation in London, at Weld in Stockholm, the Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture in Karachi, and at 1 Shanthi Road, Bangalore. She is a founder member of art writing platform 'antepress' and is a member of the 'Other Asias' research circle. This year she co-curated the events program for the Whitstable Biennale.



Hamja Ahsan

Hamja Ahsan is based in London and Dhaka. He is an artist and independent curator, of Bangladeshi origin. A graduate of Central St Martins, Hamja holds a Masters in Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice from Chelsea School of Art. With Islamabad-based artist Fatima Hussain, Hamja runs Other Asias, an artist-led initiative that challenges contemporary navigations and representations of Asia as a region. A collaborative platform that includes exchanges between artists, designers and writers at a creative level, Other Asias has contributed work to exhibitions internationally; it has produced projects for radio and compiled a significant body of self-published documents and critical texts. This year, the second installment of the 'Redo Pakistan' project, 'Declaration of War Against the Present Times', will take place in London and Lahore.



Sadia Ur-Rehman

Sadia Ur-Rehman is an artist born of Pakistani parentage. Her multidisciplinary practice includes film and multi-media, together with participatory projects. She often works in collaboration with her sister Shazia. Her work is an ongoing investigation into questions of home, cultural identity, authenticity and belonging. Challenging stereotypes by confronting representations of ethnicity and prevailing attitudes towards place and nationality, she proactively engages individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds in her practice; developing works that interrogate language, dress and situation, reflexively and critically.

- 1 Destination Pakistan Facebook page.
- 2 The 2001 National Census recorded a 76% white population in Ilford North, as opposed to 45% in the Ilford South. There is a 39% Asian population in Ilford South. 19% of the Ilford South population is Muslim. (Source: 2001 National Census, UK).
- 3 Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*. Community Relations Commission, 1976.
- 4 The 'Museum of London', which focuses on the history of London, was opened in 1976 close to St Paul's Cathedral and the Barbican centre. In 2003 the 'Museum of London Docklands' was opened in a converted warehouse by Canary Wharf. In 2010, the original 'Museum of London' was reopened after a £20 million redesign by London-based architects Wilson Eyre.
- 5 See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (1992), for an expanded reading of this term.
- 6 A long-term project commissioned by Gasworks and led by artist Anna Laura Lopez de la Torre. Working with communities in South London, the project looked at the life and work of black activist Olive Morris (1952-1979). See <http://rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com>
- 7 Thomas Hirschhorn, (b. 1957, Switzerland) is an artist working largely with installation or the 'kiosk' architectural form. See for example, the *Bataille Monument* (2002).
- 8 'Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 years of photography from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh', The Whitechapel Gallery, London. Spring 2010. Curated by Sunil Gupta Hammad Nasar, Shahidul Alam and Radhika Singh.
- 9 The Black Audio Film Collective (1982-98) was formed in Hackney, London by John Akomfrah, Reece Auguiste, Edward George, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison.
- 10 Isaac Julien, (b. 1960, London) is an installation artist and filmmaker.
- 11 'Images of the 1971 Bangladesh War', at Rivington Place, London. Curated by Shahidul Alam and Autograph ABP, 2008.
- 12 British singer, songwriter and former frontman of The Smiths, Morrissey throughout the 1980's and 90's was been accused of racism on account of nationalistic and anti-immigration sentiments within his lyrics, and through his toying with imagery from far-right visual culture. He denies that he is racist and is publicly aligned with a number of anti-Fascist and anti-racism organizations.