

# NUKTA ART

Biannual ■ Contemporary Art Magazine of Pakistan  
Vol. 7- TWO- 2012 ■ Pk Rs. 700 ■ ISSN No. 1991-0304

Collector  
Photo essay  
Book Review

Exhibition reviews from  
Pakistan and around the  
world

**Documenta 13**, 2012, Kassel,  
Germany: A Pakistani  
Perspective

A discussion on multi-  
lingualism and its impact on  
the making and interpretation  
of contemporary art

Debating on the critical  
issues that surround the  
reading of art through  
the recent works of two  
celebrated painters

**Mehar Afroz** and  
**Nahid Raza**

**Dr Valeria Fiorani Piacentini**  
shares her research on the  
cultural exchange via the  
coast of Balochistan  
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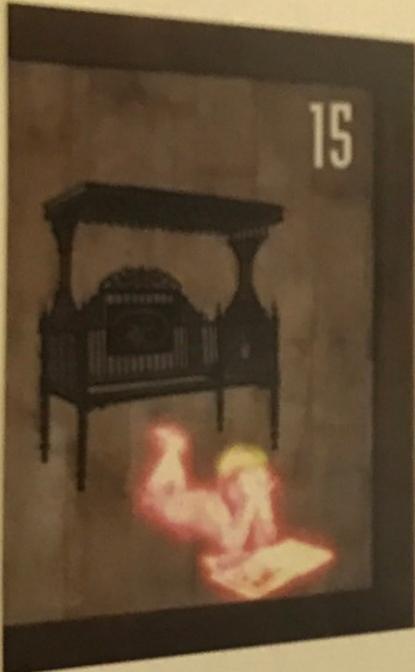
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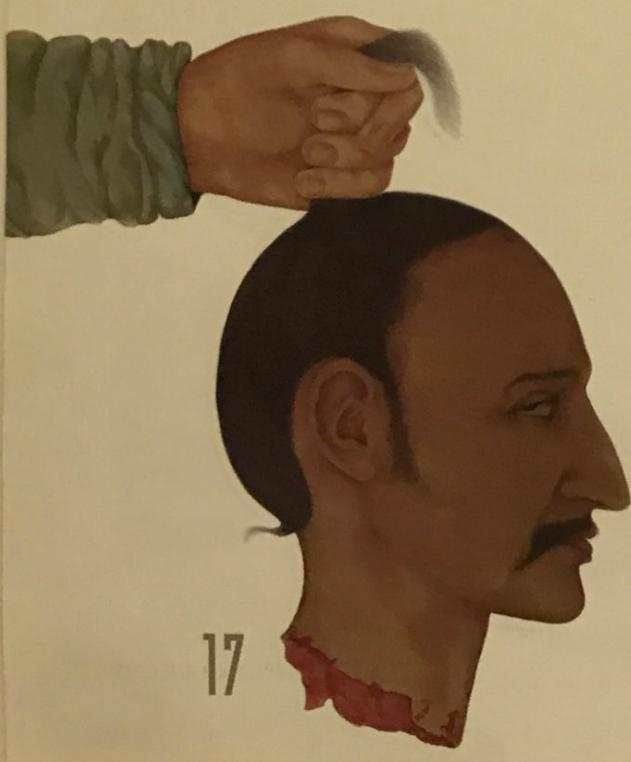
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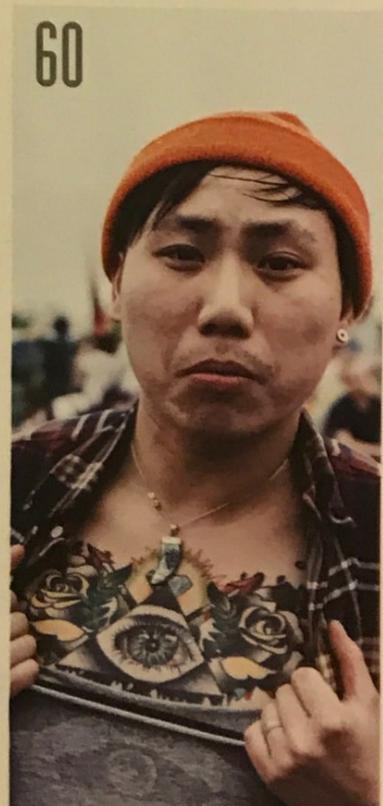
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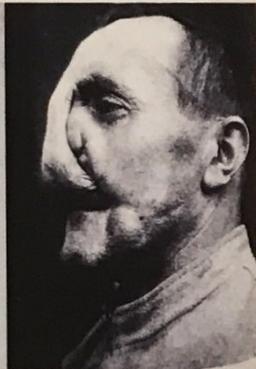
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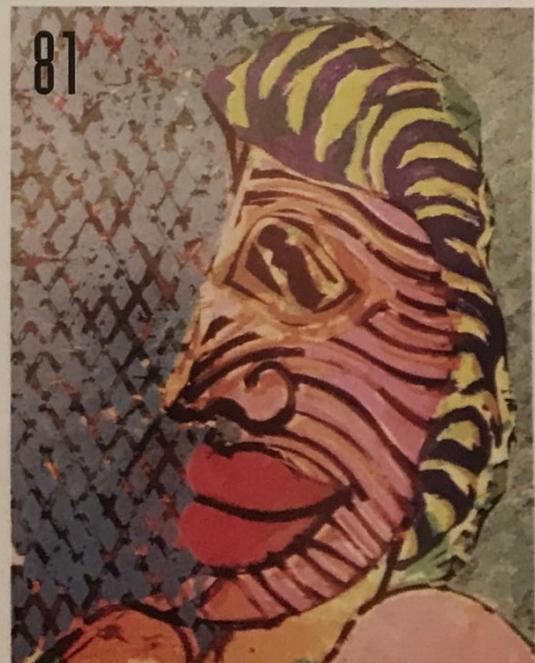
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**AASIM AKHTAR**

Aasim Akhtar is an artist, art critic and curator. His writing is published in magazines, catalogues, and books both nationally and internationally, and his artworks have been widely exhibited, more recently at Whitechapel Gallery, London, as part of a commemorative show entitled, 'Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh'. He is the author of two published books, and has just finished writing his third, 'Dialogues with Threads: Traditions of Embroidery in Hazara'. He teaches Art Appreciation at Fatima Jinnah Women University in Rawalpindi.

**ASMA HUSSAIN**

Asma Hussain is an architect and artist working in Shanghai. She studied Sculpture at Colby College in Maine, USA, and later graduated with a Masters in Architecture from Rice University, Texas, USA. She was a Watson Fellow in Brazil and India, where her research involved low-cost and squatter housing typologies in planned and organic cities. Her architectural as well as research work focuses on the political and social potential of the built environment, often in unconventional ways. Currently, she is the lead designer at an architecture and interior design studio in Shanghai and involved in various projects all over China.

**BENOIT FLORENCON**

Benoit Florencon is a French-born photographer who has been Shanghai-based since 2006. He's been a close follower of the local music scene and has been shooting numerous press pictures for various artists, and recently a photo documentary on Shanghai's underground music scene called *Inner Spaces*. His commercial work includes architecture, fashion and advertisement. His work can be viewed on [www.bureau36.com](http://www.bureau36.com)

**LAILA MEHREEN RAHMAN**

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

**DR. MEHJABEEN ABIDI-HABIB**

Dr. Mehjabeen Abidi-Habib is interested in the links between nature and people. She researches rural communities in Pakistan who continually interpret nature for economic, social, cultural and spiritual significance. As a development practitioner, she is also committed to rekindling our traditionally held reverence, sense of beauty and respect for creation in the natural world. She lives in Lahore with her family and when not working, tends to her garden, trees and domestic animals. This article is her first foray into the art discourse of Pakistan.

**MUNEEZA SHAMSIE**

Muneeza Shamsie is a literary critic, currently serving as a judge of the 2013 DSC prize for South Asian Literature. In 2009-2011 she served two terms as regional Chair (Eurasia) of the Commonwealth Writers Prize. She is editor of three pioneering anthologies of Pakistani English Literature including the award-winning 'And The World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women'. She is bibliographer (Pakistan) for the Journal of Commonwealth Literature, guest editor *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing: Special Issue (Pakistan) May 2011*. She writes freelance for *Dawn*, *Herald* and *Newsline*.

**QUDDUS MIRZA**

Quddus Mirza is an artist, art critic and independent curator. He is the Associate Professor in Fine Arts at the National College of Arts, (NCA) Lahore. Trained as a painter from NCA and Royal College of Art, London, he has shown extensively in numerous important group exhibitions, along with several one-person exhibitions, held in Pakistan and the UK. He has also curated a number of exhibitions; including 'Trade Union' and 'Take Away' at Zahoor ul Akhlaq Gallery, NCA, and 'One to One' at Alhambra Art Gallery, Lahore. His other exhibitions include 'Love' at National Art Gallery, Islamabad, 'Beyond Borders', 'Art from Pakistan', at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Mumbai, India, and 'Exotic Bodies', based on the miniature paintings from the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, that was displayed at Preston Museum in UK. Mirza is an art critic with a regular weekly column appearing in Pakistan's major newspaper, *The News*, as well as contributing to other publications like *Dawn*, *Herald*, *Depart*, *Himal*, *Libas*, *Contemporary*, *Flash Art* and *Art India*. He is the co-author of a book "50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan" and has written essays on Pakistani art in different international catalogues.

**RABBYA NASEER**

Rabbya Naseer returned to Lahore after completing her MAAH as a Fulbright scholar from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Naseer is currently visiting faculty at NCA and BNU and contributing in the art review circle by writing for various publications. Naseer is an interdisciplinary artist, whose work combines areas of sculpture, painting, photography and performance. Her work has been shown in Pakistan and at Today Art Museum in Beijing, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Japan, JamJar in Dubai, Ikon Gallery, UK and in USA. Exploring her interest in Performance Art, she is currently working on her writing, titled 'Promises to Keep; contextualizing performative art practice in contemporary Pakistani Art', while also working on introducing Performance Art as a studio-course taught to undergraduates.

**SAQLAIN ZAIDI**

Saqlain Zaidi teaches Interdisciplinary courses at SZABIST's Media and Social Sciences Department. Currently he is teaching History and Aesthetics of Film and Art History with special emphasis on Ancient India, China, Persia and Early Middle Ages. He is also associated with the Department of Visual Studies, Karachi University where he has been teaching History courses related to Fine Arts, Architecture and Film. Currently he is developing courses on Pakistani Cinema and Fiction for Film.

**SHAHANA RAJANI**

Shahana Rajani has graduated from Cambridge University with a BA in History of Art. She has worked in Karachi as an art curator and educator. She is currently pursuing an MA in Critical and Curatorial Studies at University of British Columbia.

**DR. ZOLTÁN SOMHEGYI**

Dr. Zoltán Somhegyi, Ph.D. (1981) is a Hungarian art historian based between Budapest and Bologna. His main fields of interest are contemporary fine arts and art market trends. Author of two books, twelve catalogues, and more than two hundred articles, critiques and art fair reviews, he curates exhibitions and participates in international art projects. He is the International Relations Manager of Art Market Budapest - International Contemporary Art Fair. Apart from being active in the contemporary arts, he is also a researcher of classical arts, specialized in 18-19 centuries, having written his PhD dissertation on Romantic landscape painting. Currently he is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Szeged, Hungary.  
<http://www.zoltansomhegyi.com/>

International art events like the Documenta serve as a reminder that all contexts are subordinated by the dominant discourse, which leads to misrepresentation of non-Western art. This is a concern addressed by two essays in this issue. 'The Incomplete as a Strategy of Misrepresentation' reflects on Documenta 13 and the unchanging theoretical prism that did not allow the original voice behind the art from Kabul to be heard.

Amra Ali's essay through the art of two celebrated Pakistani women artists Meher Afroze and Nahid Raza engages in a discussion on the art market that can marginalize artists who privilege local concerns that does not find traction with global audiences. To allow the subaltern narrative to be heard and extend the discursive space, the production of knowledge that produces critical / historical texts from each location has become even more vital and urgent.

**NUKTAART's** mandate has been to integrate the multi-disciplinary threads that constitute the contextual matrix of Pakistan. In Nukta-e-Nazar, Dr Prof Valeria Fiorani Piacentini shares her exclusive research on the coast of Balochistan, which as an alternate trade route to the Silk Road had a pivotal role to play in the transfer of knowledge with material goods from East to West in the Pre-Renaissance era.

Dr Mehjabeen Abidi Habib's anthropological study of the Hunza children's perception of their physical environment and sense of self through their drawings, underlines an essential connection to one's location.

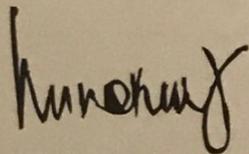
The impact of multi-lingualism on the purity of language and the hybrid form that has emerged from this experience is examined by Quddus Mirza in the context of societal change and text as form and content in contemporary art of Pakistan.

Art Dubai, seen through the eyes of Hungarian critic Zoltan Somhegyi, brings a fresh perspective to an art event which has become the watering hole of the MENASA (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia) art community and some of world's premier art galleries. Its Global Art Forum in 2012, with the participation of artists, curators and artists examined the relationship of reportage and artworks under the rubric "The Medium of the Media."

The book reviewed here is the autobiography of Attiya Dawood, a firebrand feminist poet and activist, whose life in rural Sindh echoes the conditions of artists who have struggled against gender apartheid to find success.

China is often typecast through the idealized culture of the Middle Kingdom but the Photo Essay in this issue challenges this with portraits by Shanghai-based photographer Benoit Florencon, of a generation that wants to taste the edginess of music and explore other youth subcultures.

Laila Rahman visits Ghazala Rehman's art collection in Lahore to discover the eclectic taste of this pioneer designer that marries contemporary visual art sensibility with traditional applied arts and their exquisite skills that transcend time.



Nilofur Farrukh  
Editor

Rumana Husain  
Senior Editor

Amra Ali  
Senior Editor

November 2012

where words are appropriated and have come to be understood within an insiders' frame, whose parameters are well insulated from peripheral ideas in creative fields in the larger society.

Amra Ali

# The gallery as a meeting of ideas



Moeen Faruqi, *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm, 2012

This is a time that curatorial initiatives can play a crucial role in shaping the art discourse relevant to the context of a dynamic artistic milieu in Pakistan. A globalized world, where the anchors of identity and ideology are fractured, diverse and blurred, the nature of curatorial work brings with it complex challenges of addressing multiple layers which confront art-making and its interpretations. A greater challenge lies in curatorial initiatives to be able to investigate, if not command, a path with a vision to dissect cross cultural influences and interdisciplinary practices, and in turn challenge notions embedded in colonial and/or capitalist and appropriated discourses, not just of art-making and art criticism, but also of curating.

Since it has become somewhat of a fashion to be referred to as a curator by anyone in the art world managing a show, this need for personal visibility for the 'curator' becomes a strong contender in the process of disseminating new knowledge. Aspirations that have to do with becoming 'relevant' are mere marketing tools for entering the 'club'; unhealthy symptoms of the practice. However, curatorial initiatives do also have an immense capacity to emerge as channels of introspection and debate, if they are anchored in a creative and critical thrust with the vision to allow and reconnect with history/ies; so that their discourses are not tailored for prestigious 'Prizes', 'wanna-be' consumption, or just 'getting there'.

The baggage of language is the burden of contemporary art writing, its related fields such as curatorial and artists' statements, catalogue essays, etc. Art jargon is also a discourse of exclusivity,

Similarly, certain words have become significant to the survival and support of art networks/agendas. Furthermore, 'curatorial practice (which frames the way art can be read) is (also) a methodology of control and propaganda\*'. (\*Void as Exhibition, <http://axisweb.org/usforum.aspx>)

The plethora of jargon, often a chaotic assimilation of conflicting histories, allows for words to be twisted, minced and/or exploited due to the lack of enquiry into the ideological implications of words and ideas; without allowing for interpretations of different cultural/political/historical contexts and layers. On a negative side, these are the frameworks that curatorial work can emulate and support, and perhaps to aspire. However, the question is: can they see beyond this frame?

At a recent show held at Karachi's VM Gallery, many issues emerge, which address the nature of curatorial practice in relationship to art-making in Pakistan: '*Rapture/Rupture*,' curated by Sumbul Khan, encompasses the relationship of a larger frame of words, to their application and meaning in both the personal and the political. It initiates discussion of cross disciplinary directions between film, literature, music and painting; between the visual to the literary and musical, which enjoy far integration to the larger society. There are points of possible rupture (and rapture), and of entry, into the processes and linkages of each medium. The framework provides more room for understanding, if it is not 'viewed' as a 'regular' exhibition, but as a possible model for investigation into 'reading' art with a non-linear, non-hierarchical approach, where the creativity of curatorial choices



Though Rashid is not considered a traditionalist, Faiz has noted that Rashid, 'aimed towards the middle class intelligentsia, which is why his popularity remained limited to certain sections of society, familiar with Western literature and poetry' (MH). In this space, Nameera's work is the most unapproachable due to its ambiguity and tiers of symbolism, and would not enjoy popular appeal. The notion of art as idea and not as a conventional 'commodity' is to be considered here. The curator's creativity

To Kerai, the closer visual idiom to his work would be a miniature from the *Ragni Series*. He speaks about his music going into the trajectories of traditional mythologies, the subtlety of his '*lelja*' (accent/tenor) and 'in between frequencies' closer to Chughtai's intricate line. Kerai's rupture is also within the exploration of varying tempos of sound, starting with '*ik chaald*' (gait), with a change to a different '*chaald*' (*chaal badalna*). He speaks about his compositions being related to ideas, as opposed to accompanying



draws on these two distinct trajectories to form equations, putting the art viewer in a place outside his comfort zone; and to rethink the relationship of art to the art gallery space.

There are moments of rapture within Rashid's reference to freedom in '*kebaak ho gai aakbir*' ('The gown of the night has been torn/ demolished at last' MH). Sumbul talks about the layered references: to Rashid's own will to escape from the shadow of Faiz (*aadmi hum bhi hain, aadmi tum bhi ho*). The text is left open, to be interpreted through the discourses of other arts in a gallery, without the curator's commentary in a conventional frame. The frame is the dynamics of the physical and social space itself.

A different, quite discordant dynamics is established in a space partitioned for a framed semi-abstract canvas by Moeen Faruqi, with the tabla composition recording by Yousuf Kerai in the same space. It is interesting that the fragmented form in Moeen's painted imagery is a point of rupture in his figurative; rapture, due to new possibilities ahead. Yousuf Kerai, who views the relationship between the two mediums and their content, and texture to be very far from one another, notes that the visual most likely relates better to jazz in relationship to the tempo of his painted form.

Perhaps, the presence of Kerai's composition in its classical 16 beat cycle, '*teen taal*,' placed in close proximity to a work that is derived or inspired within a Western modernist sensibility best elicits the dichotomy and rupture within contemporary narratives.

a song; just as 'the themes of Rashid's poetry run from the relationships between words and meanings, between language and awareness'. (MH)

On another note, the placement of Faruqi's painting in an otherwise bare space with white walls, although it allows space for the music to breathe, and for the audience to contemplate, as the curator might have intended, also addresses the ideology of the 'white cube'. Whether or not this kind of an appropriated model of how modern art is to be viewed is an aspiration, it can initiate discussion into the existence and assimilation of Western modernist values (separation of art from mass culture, hierarchies of art/craft) and its dynamics in Pakistan. Especially significant is the context of this initiative is to locate the curatorial thrust on the relationships of democracy to ideologies of capitalism and their relationship to structures that nurture creativity. The ruptures and effacement of social transformation and context are avenues that demand extensive discussion in terms of curatorial work.

In Noon Meem Rashid's words, '*aadmi zaban bhi hai, aadmi bijaan bhi hai*' ('Human is also language, Human is (verbal) expression too' (MH). That is perhaps the most important anchor for this initiative from an art critic's point of view, and if discussion and research can be sustained on the complex linkages presented before us, there can be authentic critical engagement with the frameworks that dictate the making and reading of art. ■

# Freedom

Muneeza Shamsie

In a country so often burdened by totalitarian regimes, the tentacles of censorship, oppression and state violence have become an enmeshed part of the state structure.

This has imposed restrictions which have a profound influence on literature and art and therefore our perceptions of us and our society. To tackle these issues, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) organized a rare and stimulating Sindh Writers/Artists Convention in Karachi. The many participants included

## of Expression in Troubled Times



(R to L) Ghazi Salahuddin, Dr Javed Iqbal, Dean Karachi University, Prof Dr Pirzada Qasim, Dr Muhammad Ali Siddiqui, Prof Sahar Ansari and Attiya Dawood, IA Rehman (speaker)

## HRCP Sindh Writers/ Artists Convention

a large number of writers, artists, intellectuals, scholars and activists based in Karachi and other parts of Sindh.

In his opening address, I.A. Rehman, the Secretary General of the HRCP, spoke of the importance of free speech and the freedom of expression in our troubled times amid acts of daily violence in Pakistan. In the opening session "The role of writers in the 21st century",

Meher Afroz and Muneeza Shamsie, artist Mohammad Ali Bhatti sitting behind her



the influence of writers and books and indeed, the Internet, was discussed extensively. This was illustrated by comments on various periods of Pakistan's history, South Asian and international literary history, including the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, the trauma of Partition and the significance and example of Nelson Mandela, as a symbol. Poet Attiya Dawood remarked that it remains a great strength in our society that writers such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Fahmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed have spoken out courageously and are honored by a younger generation too. Ghazi Salahuddin pointed out that in Pakistan, when we talk of free speech, we tend to think in terms of the press, but it is an

In the third session 'Culture and the Challenges of Our Age', Nilofur Farrukh referred to culture "as a transformative force". She spoke of the plurality of influences and the rich multi-ethnic, multi-religious fabric of our own society and referred to links between literature and arts and the influences of modernism, post-modernism and globalism on culture.



Nilofur Farrukh giving her speech at the HRCP Convention

issue which concerns everyone and is a battle which cannot be fought alone by the media but is also the responsibility of civil society.

He referred to Zubeida Mustafa's recent book *The Tyranny of Language in Education* and concurred with her findings that there is a serious problem in the continuing importance given to English. Since it is an alien language in which so few in Pakistan can adequately express themselves creatively, he asserted that we stand in danger of being rendered without language/speech "bey zabaan". Many conversations came back to the issue of language. Several spoke passionately on the marginalization of Sindhi as a language. Some participants highlighted the enormous

urban-rural literary divide in Pakistan and pointed out that those living in the urban areas are not aware of the extensive protest poetry being written in different provincial languages of Pakistan, whereas those in the rural areas are well acquainted



Akram Dost Baloch, *Shanakht Series*, mixed media, 35 x 48 cms, 2012

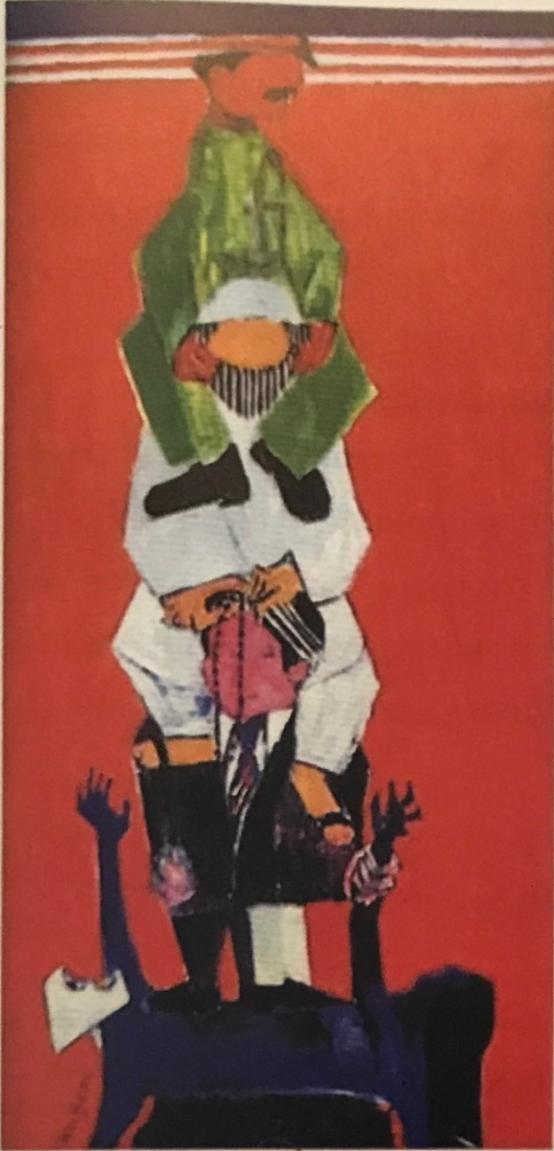
with urban/Urdu writers. Dr. Pirzada Qasim, the former Vice Chancellor of Karachi University referred to the need to create a "knowledge-based society" so a wide number of readers can contribute to revolution and change. Dr Mohammed Ali Siddiqui emphasized the importance of developing further the tradition of critical studies in Pakistan, to interpret literature and place



Eminent journalist Zubeida Mustafa in conversation with a visitor

within a wider context.

In the second session "The Role of Artists and Writers in Human Rights" Zahida Hina drew on Greek mythology and incidents across the world of writers defying draconian regimes such as that of Hitler, the Shah of Iran and Communist China, among others and suffering for it horribly, to illustrate the mankind's struggle against injustice. She linked this to persecution of writers during Zia's regime. However she was also critical of the literary community for its failure to sufficiently address the many abuses of human rights in Pakistan, including sectarian violence and the marginalization of women in the name of religion. Zahida Hina's speech and many others referred to the conflict in Balochistan



244. A. R. NAGORI, *Tower of Power*

and all urged for greater transparency and more information about that suffering region. Several speakers and discussants also mentioned The Progressive Writers Movement which challenged authority and orthodoxy and also Manto's unflinching portrayal of the Partition riots. Karan Singh reminded his audience that the poetry of Shah Enayat and Shah Abdul Latif also spoke out against injustice and he referred to Zamir Niazi's books on press censorship in Pakistan which provide an excellent record of the number of people who raised their voice against authority but were censored and suppressed. The artist and activist Abro Khuda Bux spoke of his involvement with 'Poster for Tomorrow,' an international human rights project for whom he conducted a series of Jamhooriat (Democracy) workshops for young Pakistani artists. He was excited by the stunning work they produced on topical issues of culture and society. Zubeida Mustafa spoke of the crisis in education and problems of disseminating ideas when literary rates are so low; she also mentioned that poor but bright students have a limited access to cultural venues and events and urged a holistic view to culture, literacy and society.

In the third session 'Culture and the Challenges of Our Age', Nilofur Farrukh referred to culture "as a transformative force". She spoke of the plurality of influences and the rich multi-ethnic, multi-religious fabric of our own society and referred to links between literature and arts and the influences of modernism, post-modernism and globalism on culture. She underlined the confusion and flux evident in today's electronic age, in which "truth" is presented by the media which is often selective rather than inclusive. Nilofur said that imagination and creativity provides "the means to deal with conflict from reasoned analysis to synthesis" and can bring about a meaningful social change in the 21st century. Her talk was illustrated by spectacular paintings by Pakistani artists including A.R. Nagori, Rashid Rana, Akram Dost Baloch, Imran Kureishi, Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed: their work made an incisive, powerful and harrowing comment on oppressive regimes, urban violence, state violence, religious extremism and gender bias.



Naima Dadabhoy, *Untitled*, wrought iron and tin foil, 160.02 x 38.1 x 27.94 cm, 2000

**A.R. Nagori, Rashid Rana, Akram Dost Baloch, Imran Kureishi, Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed: their work made an incisive, powerful and harrowing comment on oppressive regimes, urban violence, state violence, religious extremism and gender bias.**

Mehr Afroze's speech also raised pertinent points on issues of identity and nationhood [*shamaash*] and dynamics of the international art market.

During discussion, the many other issues raised included the importance of developing creative activities in schools and to build up an atmosphere in our universities and colleges, where literature and art, which criticizes society, can be freely discussed. It was also pointed out that Pakistani English fiction which is so highly regarded internationally is published abroad, not in Pakistan, due to constraints on both publishing and free speech. ■

# 1 vote

The time you have all been waiting for.



Hashaam Hasan

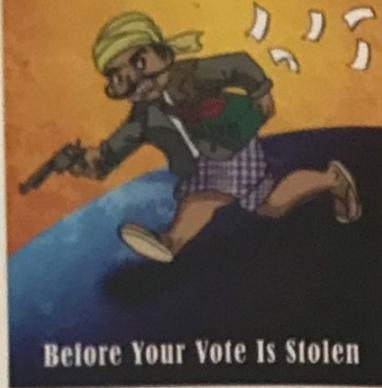
*Poster 4 Tomorrow* is a three year old independent, non-profit organization, based in Paris, promoting human rights issues through graphic design. "Draw Me Democracy" was one of its projects. It consisted of a series of workshops in 12 countries across the world - in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia. Poster 4 Tomorrow rallies young designers and communication professionals invoking their sense of social responsibility for a democratic process and empowering them for an active participation in their country's future.

"Without faith in the future, without the conviction that democratic values and fundamental human rights are not only necessary but possible for our society, our movement could not have been sustained..." Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi had said while receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. She is a symbol for the struggle for democracy. Unfortunately democracy has been evading countries that are either ruled by dictators or monarchies, or countries such as Pakistan that have had military rule for much part of its existence.

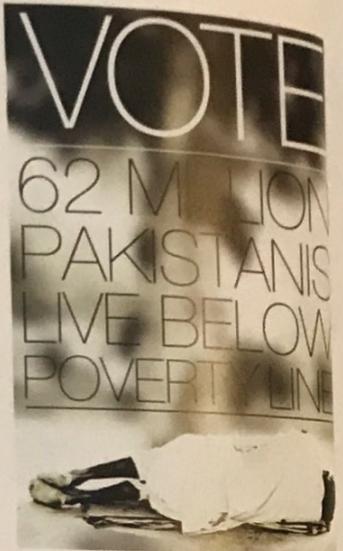
# Draw for Democracy

## VOTE!

Yasir Mehmood Shah



Syeda Maria Ayaz



## Rumana Husain

Artist and activist Khuda Bux Abro who is a part of the Pakistani online jury for *Poster 4 Tomorrow* coordinated with the Department of Visual Studies, University of Karachi, to bring over two *Poster 4 Tomorrow* designers for a workshop on "Draw Me Democracy." It was conducted by Will Georgi (Holland) and Tommaso Minnetti (Italy) in April 2012 with 29 students of the Communication Design Department. Two persons from civil society organizations were also invited to join in.

Initially, discussion sessions were held in order to fill any possible gaps in the knowledge of the participating students regarding democracy. In addition, Georgi and Minnetti also assigned homework about a week before their arrival, which, according to Saima Zaidi, the coordinator of the project, "proved beneficial in planning the way forward on the first day." She says that "the instructors laid a lot of stress on conceptual development, and students were encouraged to explore their ideas. Students also appreciated the constructive criticism by the workshop facilitators."

According to Abro, given "our city / country's political situation, the discussions held with the participating students on the subject of "why we should vote" were an important pre-requisite." He says that the students, initially not so convinced about their voting rights, needed convincing. From the workshop emerged a variety of ideas and many of the posters reflected the local context. Abro believes that this ambiguity regarding the process of democracy not fully experienced in Pakistan made the posters "very different from the other participating countries, especially from India, and Mexico and also from African and Latin American countries."

The posters created during the workshop were exhibited at the Department of Visual Studies at Karachi University and later at Farar Gallery of The Second Floor (T2F), Karachi.

Among the effective designs was Rabeea Arif's use of a close-up of a partially shown face, with the eye representing the letter 'o' in the word 'vote'. It was clever and eye-catching. The words "Democracy is not Blind. Neither Should You Be. Vote Wisely" has been written as a small, single-line message at the bottom.

A few others also used photographic images, such as Tehseen, who has rendered a monochromic poster of hand postures with the slogan "Change is in your hands". However, in comparison, a similar message on a hand-rendered poster by Hira Mushtaq, "Your Future is in Your Hands" failed to catch attention with its small lettering, choice of font and inadequate drawing.

A potent though simply drawn poster by Muhammad Zeeshan: "Vote or die powerless" focused on a noose that has a disconnected cable at one end, depicting the country's power crisis, and a tap with no water on the other end of the rope, portraying shortage of water. These two basic necessities in short supply represent the dire needs of the people.

Hashaam Hasan's use of typography highlights the number 18, the age at which one becomes eligible for voting. Its slogan "The time you have all been waiting for" and symbols such as a Pakistan flag, young people drawn in silhouette hailing the word 'vote,' and the number '18' had the potential to become a hodgepodge design, but Hasan pulled it off with the right balance of forms and colors.

Maria's black and white poster proclaimed that "62 Million Pakistanis Live Below Poverty Line," with the word 'Vote' written across the top of the poster. With bold typography and an image of a homeless person lying with his back towards the viewer, at the bottom of the poster, comments on the bad choices made by the electorate.

Most of the posters had a clear

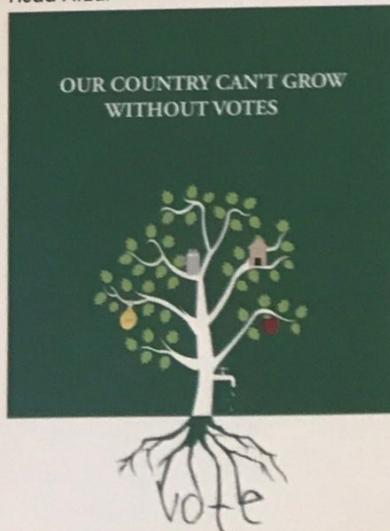
message and there was a remarkable diversity of ideas and designs.

However a pertinent comment from Abro needs reflection. According to him the lack of fluency in English language proves to be a barrier for many students who have not studied in elitist schools, and can succumb to conservative ideologies; but if opportunities are provided to them, "they discover themselves and express themselves." If they are also introduced to other visual and performing arts, as well as to the world of literature, their talent can be harnessed.

Rabeea Arif



Huda Afzal



Zaidi rightly points out that "It is also a great opportunity for the students to be a part of an international design network dedicated to human rights."

"As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy," Abraham Lincoln had famously said. He had of course coined the popular diktat 'Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people'. The young designers of Pakistan were reminded of this, at the *Poster 4 Tomorrow* workshop. ■

Quddus Mirza

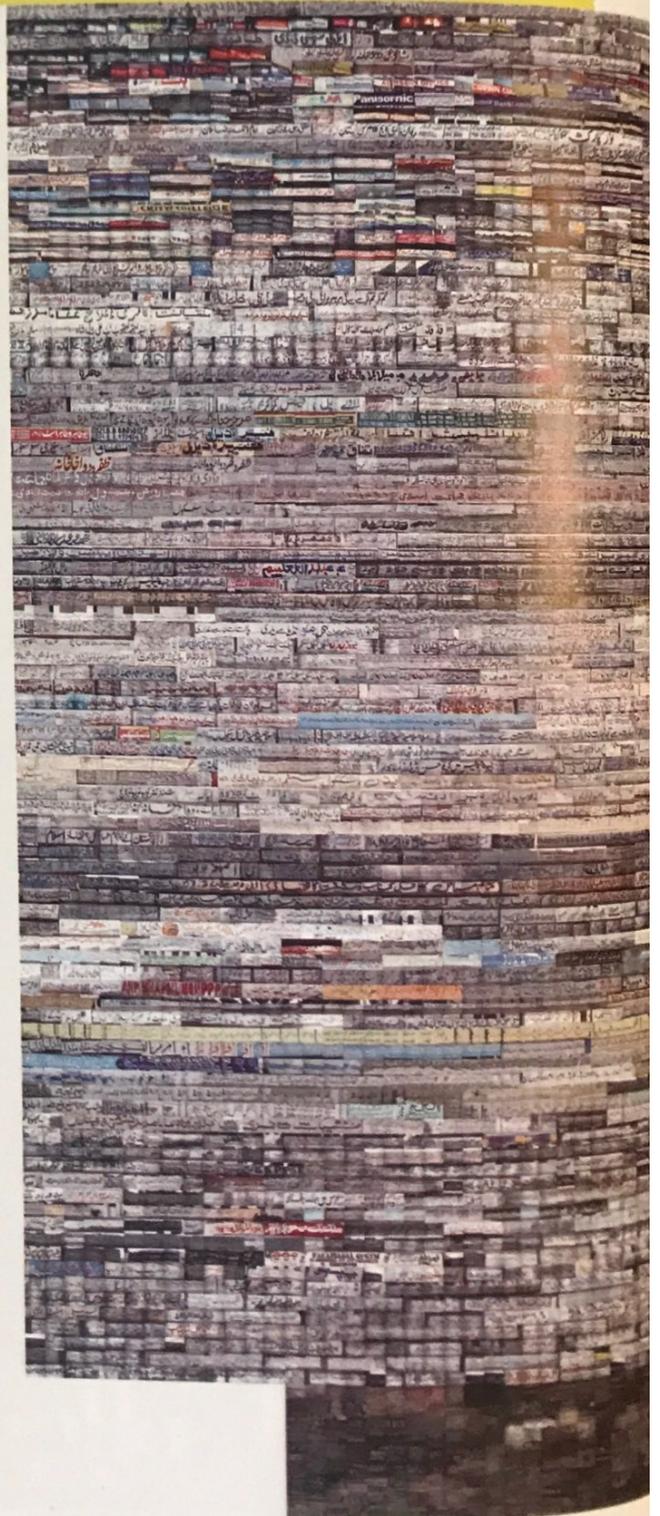
# THE SKYSCRAPER OF BABYLON

"Tahar Ben Jelloun was quoted as saying that he approves of polygamy with languages, not women. He said 'My wife is Arabic and my mistress is French and I maintain a relationship of betrayal with both of them.' When it comes to writing novels and poetry, the Times reporter observed, Ben Jelloun has been more faithful to his mistress than his wife."<sup>1</sup>

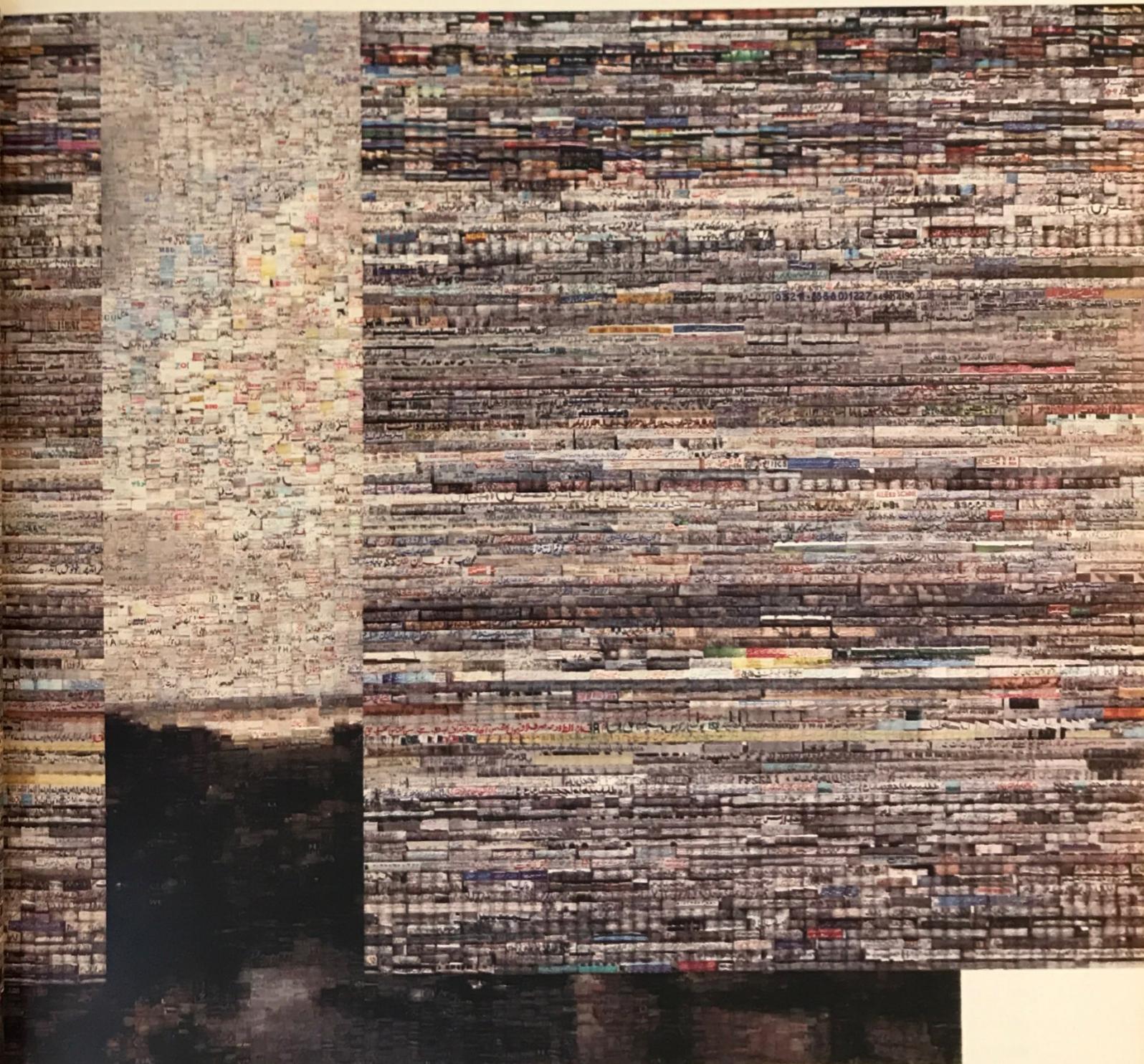
Every human being is endowed with one tongue, but some of us possess more than one language. Humans often learn languages other than their mother tongue. Usually these are acquired for work, education, marriage and migration or just for the sake of knowledge. No matter as many languages a person can command (some speak more than seven) he is limited to having only one experience at a given hour and place. However each time this experience is recalled, the shift in language may now be narrated separately in different languages. So for instance, a young man who had invited a beautiful girl on a bright day at a road side café, can enjoy the variations of that one meeting depending upon in which language he recalls the encounter.

Octavio Paz mentions about the modification of an event through the act of translation in his essay *Reading and Contemplation* from the collection '*Convergences: Essays on Art and Literature*', in which he suggests that if the man's travel to moon was directly broadcasted and simultaneously converted into the language of some African tribe, it would appear like a mythical story.<sup>2</sup>

Paz extends this example in another essay '*Literature and Literalness*,' from the same book "To learn to speak is to learn to translate; when the child asks his mother the meaning of this word or that, he is really asking her to translate the unknown term into his language."<sup>3</sup> Also when we perform as translators in our daily life, we transform objects into sounds, then sounds into legible words, which are further transcribed as text/script. Thus our lives are spent in transmuting or translating ideas, concepts, phrases, which



Every human being is endowed with one tongue, but some of us possess more than one language. Humans often learn languages other than their mother tongue. Usually these are acquired for work, education, marriage and migration or just for the sake of knowledge. No matter as many languages a person can command (some speak more than seven) he is limited to having only one experience at a given hour and place. However each time this experience is recalled, the shift in language may now be narrated separately in different languages.



Rashid Rana, Language Series # 7, C Print + DIASEC, 360 cm x 213cm, 2011-12

depict and describe the outer world as well as the inner self. Sometimes, translation or this shift from one entity to the other is so swift and seamless that we are not aware of the process of change from the physical object to its representation in sound and word. But "Incidentally, 'translation' in medieval ecclesiastical usage", as Talal Asad reminds us, "meant the 'removal of a saint's remains, or his relics, from one original site to another', and the narratives relating such events were called 'translations'"<sup>4</sup>.

This phenomenon is normal with every human being who can speak, whether his language is shared by billions or merely a few thousands - or even hundreds. A citizen of postcolonial societies and from many other developed nations also knows more than one language and uses it at varying occasions and for specific purposes. For instance a group of people or country once occupied by an external power had to learn the colonizer's language, so they can comprehend their masters and make themselves understood. Likewise, a person from Europe or USA studies a foreign language, which can facilitate matters of business, tourism and academic careers. Often the command on another or other's language (if the balance is in favor of the colonizer rather than the subject) gives him supremacy.

But unlike people from the First World, persons belonging to postcolonial nations do not have any choice, because they are

academic and literary discourse, whereas majority of the public spoke Arabic (and Berber, by some population), a linguistic arena that was left for groups with fundamentalists and conservative doctrine. Since there was no dialogue between two languages/world views, so the only interaction possible was a bloody one. Hence for many years, Algeria suffered from violence, unrest and acts of atrocities, both by the Islamic militants and government forces.

In our surroundings, situation is not as grim as it was in the North African nation, but one can glimpse the distance of ideas and positions by comparing the Urdu and English press in Pakistan. If the English newspapers and magazines have moderate and liberal views, the Urdu press projects fundamentalist and conventional approach, not only in the realm of local and international politics, but also in matters of art, culture, fashion, family norms, dress code, music, dance, film, and science and philosophy. Thus it is not surprising that English dailies, weeklies and monthly magazines devote more space to art and cultural activities than the Urdu papers, which report it in a few lines, and in those too, the tone is terribly naïve, nasty or nonsensical.

Apart from the written text, the spoken language is a different experience/entity. Like other postcolonial nations, Pakistani society is also caught in the duality of tongues. People in their conversation swiftly move from one language to other, often

"To learn to speak is to learn to translate; when the child asks his mother the meaning of this word or that, he is really asking her to translate the unknown term into his language." Also when we perform as translators in our daily life, we transform objects into sounds, then sounds into legible words, which are further transcribed as text/script. Thus our lives are spent in transmuting or translating ideas, concepts, phrases, which depict and describe the outer world as well as the inner self.

required to grasp the language of their (former) masters, in order to compete in their own society; since a better command in the diction of past rulers guarantees success in matters of state, jobs and academic excellence. But the divide of language is not about bygone histories or locations, since it mounts to a hierarchy in the social classes. In Pakistan, and a number of other countries, where English or French is used as official mode of operation and the medium of cultural expression, split between speakers of local tongue and the official language is marked by the early education of an individual. If a person converses confidently in English or writes creatively in French, it means that he belongs to an affluent and rich class, and was sent to elite schools as compared to state run institutions, which fail to equip their pupils with a sufficient knowledge of other/second/official language.

This division does not remain in the economic sphere, since it has its impact in other social and cultural areas. Difference in the users of languages is/was manifested in a cruel scheme in Algeria, where the elite and intelligentsia chose French for political,

blending words, combining phrases and joining expressions both from English and Urdu. This phenomenon is taking place in our midst, in a rapid speed and on such a wide scale, that we, the users of this 'mix' are not conscious of it, unless we write or read, two activities, which force us to remain within the limits of one vocabulary.

In addition to that and due to the spread of the Internet; popularity of social media networks, and usage of mobiles (with SMS), people in Pakistan are blending two languages in the most frequent manner. Now even a person who went to a government-run school or is an illiterate, combines a few words and expressions of English in his speech. Also, a majority of students, professionals and those belonging to the middle class converse in *minglish*, in which words from the two languages are employed for the sake of convenience. One can witness this in soap operas, stage plays and talk shows on television, in which people switch from English to Urdu or use a sentence, grammatically constructed in Urdu but with a couple of English words/terms in it; hence nobody

is able to speak even a single sentence in a single language, unless one tries hard and consciously. Yet, when it comes to the printed world, the two tongues do not meet. They stand apart, not only in their scripts and semantic structures, but in their content too. Since certain subjects are dealt with easily and eagerly in English, because it is normally understood that the general public won't be able to access whatever appears in the English press, therefore it is safe to take up controversial subjects and express provocative points and opinions. Whereas the Urdu press caters for a wider taste, and is thus reluctant to pick themes that might be offensive to the general public.

It is intriguing how this split, between spoken and written language, has been altering our society and its different modes of communication. This (linguistic) issue becomes a pertinent concern in the realm of art; as here the linguistic boundaries are defined, decisive and sometimes they also prove destructive. Normally an artist is taught in one language (Urdu), and uses it in his daily life, explains the work in that language, but when it comes to the question of institutionalizing and formalizing a discourse on art, he has to rely on another (English)...the official medium of art. Most artists, particularly from previous generations, like Chughtai, Allah Bux, Sadequain, Shemza and even ZahoorulAkhlaf, Bashir Mirza and Jamil Naqsh were educated in Urdu and talked about their work in this language; but if one examines the earlier writings on art, apart from occasional contribution by some artists such as Chughtai, Shakir Ali, and by a few writers such as Syed Sibte-Hassan and Hasan Askari, there was no regular art critic in Urdu. (Shafi Aqeel, as a writer on art, was more active in the 70s and 80s with his weekly column appearing in daily *Jang*). Even till our times, most of the writings on art have been in English,

because several of them did not belong to a class who was well versed in English, so they were unable to command and control on whatever was said about them and their creations. Something like what Edward W. Said quoted of Karl Marx writing in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented."<sup>5</sup> Hence our artists were also represented by the elite that took the responsibility and role upon themselves to describe their art to the public and to the artists also! The influence of English was so prominent that invitations, information, catalogues and reviews of an exhibition were / are printed primarily in English. This may have posed a problem for the artist, because he shares his ideas about his - and his contemporaries' work with his peers, in Urdu (or may be Punjabi or another regional language) but when he has to translate and transcribe his thoughts in English, he may not find himself comfortable or honest in that 'forced' endeavor/exercise. Yet the supremacy of English being a fact is so evident that it was not unusual for the majority of artists from the early generation (except in some painting of Chughtai and calligraphies of Sadequain) signing their names in English on their canvases.

This dichotomy of English and Urdu is not only limited to the realm of language, since it is connected to the issue of identity as well. Intriguingly, this concern is raised only when a large public fails to understand or associate with a work of art. For instance, many never question the custom of painting landscapes and figures in the manner of nineteenth century French and English art, being an alien practice, but if an artist opts for abstract imagery or contemporary concerns, he is accused of being Westernized - without realizing that rendering models, trees, fields and canals in nineteenth century European style is also a Western

Rashid Rana, *Language Series # 2* (detail), C Print + DIASEC, 360 cm x 213cm, 2011-12, edition of 5



despite a few exceptions to connect Urdu with our art - like Dr Akbar Naqvi's attempts in contextualizing by inserting Urdu verses in his book on Pakistani art, *Image and Identity*; in which the author appears to interpret modern and contemporary art through local literary sensibility. But probably an overt emphasis on English, from the inception of this nation, was a result of our colonial legacy as well as to do with the fact that in the early years of Pakistan, only the bureaucracy and the rich were interested in art activities, therefore the medium fit for criticism and commenting on art was English, the language they felt at home with.

This early emphasis on English, somehow subjugated artists,

custom/tradition. Only because if a person stands in front of a landscape or a figurative composition<sup>6</sup> - even if it is an oil on canvas (two materials which were introduced by colonial rulers/educators in India), he accepts it as his local art, since he does not need an explanation to read / access it. But if confronted with an abstract surface or an installation, he is baffled, confused and disoriented, and accuses of it being foreign and Western. May be because the explanation of that kind of work is provided in English, hence it is not the visual material that has a link with the East or West (Urdu or English) but the discourse on art determines its relation with either of the two.

However, along with this the supremacy of the West, and its language, acquired by the affluent class; the language also signifies the position of gender in Pakistani art. From an early period to the mid '70s, the world of art was populated by men, even though women artists (an important segment) were also a major part of it - like Zubeida Agha and Anna Molka Ahmed. To this day a large number of male artists come from lower middle class background with no or minimal knowledge of English. But the galleries, art writing and art buying (and art institutions to some extent) are mostly dominated by women, especially since the 90s; who were well versed in English and thus controlled the discourse and distribution of art. Today most art criticism in newspaper and magazines is written by women. However it would be interesting to collect data of art writers in our English magazines and dailies and to note the shift of gender equation in this regard (and to compare with the writings of Nasir Shamsie, Dr Naqvi, Amjad Ali, Sultan Ahmed, Jalaluddin Ahmed and Shahid Suharwardy, from earlier periods).

But more than the question of gender and consequently the



## Amin Rehman: Final Hours

Alhamra Art Gallery Lahore, Pakistan  
Monday-Saturday, 9a.m. to 6p.m.  
December 15-31, 2012 [www.aminrehman.com](http://www.aminrehman.com)

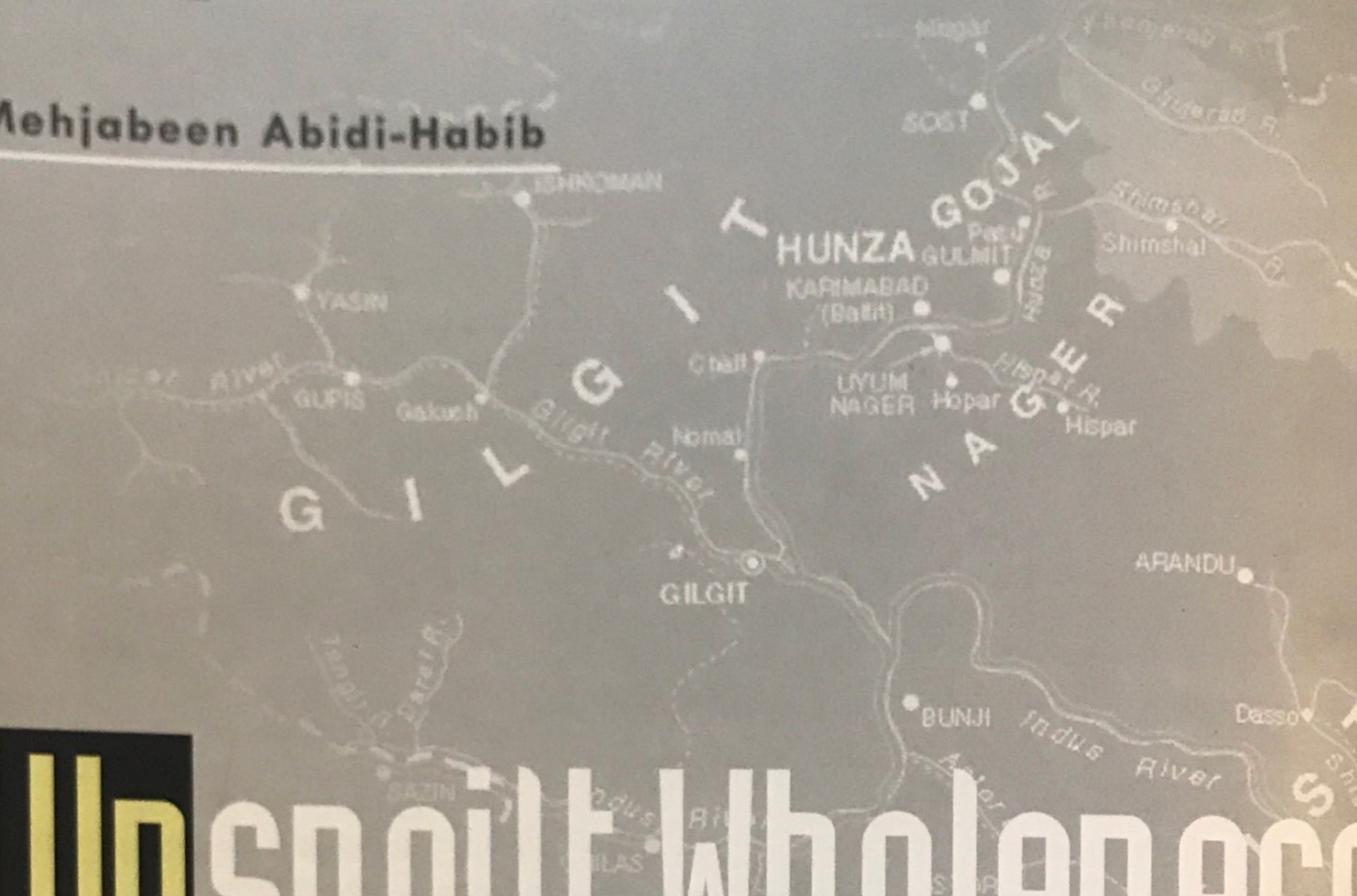
preference for English, I think it is the language of art criticism, which demands a scrutiny: that there is a visible lack of art criticism in Urdu. There have not been regular or devoted writers of art in Urdu - for multiple reasons. Perhaps one of the valid factors is that we have still not developed serious (lexicon) diction of art criticism in Urdu. Thus whenever it is attempted, it comprises of descriptive, flowery or even funny-sounding phrases. One of its examples is a recent book by Dr. Agha Salman Baqar on Shafique Farooqui. Dr. Baqar is the great-grandson of the famous Urdu writer Maulana Mohammad Hussain Azad, but his book on the painter is full of exuberant language that has nothing to do with art - and nor with language, since its main function / essence is to communicate! In his book, Dr. Baqar describes one painting in these words: "The metaphoric existence of an ample female is stated in symbolic expressive narrative. Woman with beautiful form and shape of body is prominent. The most dominant part is her beautiful moon-like breasts. There is a passionate whirlpool at the position of her heart. Deep down, the point of her naval is embedded in the yearning of beauty's abyss. Her hips are elevated from the ground. Buds of new love are visible in her hair. One eye is peeping through her left shoulder. Thus there cannot be more than this symbolic, imaginative portrayal of the state of painting."<sup>6</sup>

This is merely one sample of how our Urdu writing on art enjoys fabricating lyricism, almost trying to cope or compete with the imaginative skills of artists. Although in Urdu there has been a strong tradition of literary criticism, which is devoid of any superfluous expressions, but it did not filter through art. May be our Urdu authors have recognized that words, despite their best choice in either language, are incapable to substitute visual art, thus instead of being an essential component language is a hindrance in the course of art, its meaning, comprehension and consumption. So they move their verbal domain away from the visual realm and instead of transposing image into word, seek to keep their texts independent, free and uncontaminated by art.

Yet the supremacy of English being a fact is so evident that it was not unusual for the majority of artists from the early generation (except in some painting of Chughtai and calligraphies of Sadequain) signing their names in English on their canvases.

1. Shamas, Anton. *Critical Fictions*. Bay Press, Seattle: 1991 (pages 76-77)
2. Paz, Octavio. *Convergences: Essays on Art and Literature*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, NYC: 1987 (page 28)
3. *Ibid.* (page 184)
4. Shamas, Anton. *The Drowned Library (Lives in Translation)*. Pelgrave Macmillan, NYC: 2003 (page 124)
5. Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books Ltd, London: 1985 (page 13)
6. Baqar, Dr. Agha Salman. Shafique Farooqui. *Multimedia Affairs*, Lahore: 2012 (page 70) translation QM.

Mehjabeen Abidi-Habib



# Unspoilt Wholeness:

## self, community and nature in indigenous children's drawings from Shimshal, Upper Hunza, Pakistan

*Synopsis: Using approaches from ecological anthropology and environmental psychology, this article will create an appreciation of wholeness of meaning that is natural to the children of Upper Hunza, as well as share drawings of children that are relatively 'unspoilt' by standardized school-taught drawing methods in art class. Other scholarship suggests that when it is the lived experience of children, wholeness of meaning is the foundation of a future ability to act on behalf of their cultural and natural wealth.*

This research aims to heighten awareness around two themes: first using children's drawings of their home in Shimshal Valley, to analyze the place-based concepts of children about themselves in relation to the built and natural environment, and second to explore the use of children's drawings as a tool for unmediated self-expression. Ashis Nandy, India's eminent sociologist emphasizes that when place-based identity is disrupted by dramatically changed lifestyles, normative systems of communities can collapse so that social flux and anomy prevail. For example, when people are displaced into urban shanty towns by poverty or calamity, he points to a 'vague sense of loss, anxiety and anger...that invalidates vocation, religious and ethical life'. In these circumstances, people become vulnerable to influence from 'violence-based, organized and ideologically led political praxis' (Dawn, 2008). What has been lost or broken in the worldview of such persons?



I was interested in why modern society is creating attitudes of alienation and annexation of the human mind, the malaise alluded to by several scholars (Nandy, 2004, Habermas, 1984). The field of place, identity and environmental behavior held up some light about place-based identity and its connection to meaning-making and normative community life. It is grounded in the environmental movement at large and the phenomenal growth of rural-urban migration in particular (Editorial, 2010).

In contrast to problems of modern alienation, other work on environmental pioneers in Pakistan suggests a framework that explains altruistic behavior and why certain individuals have contributed to community service and conservation in extraordinary ways (Abidi-Habib, 2009). This framework of meanings is about how humans seek an 'expanded sense of self' (Tenzin Gyatso, 2002) or 'engaging with our whole being' in life (Schuon, 1965); the inner meaning of the Islamic concept of 'taubid or integrating oneness' (Kazmi, 2005) is relevant here. In this frame, three typologies of meaning-making

that lead to action are proposed: type 1 is about creating distinctions and classifications in our world; type 2 is about synthesis and finding continuity; and finally type 3 is about experiencing transcendence of self into a larger whole unity.

However, current scholarship in environmental psychology grapples with conceptual frames to interconnect the human experience of place, identity and behavior (Editorial, 2010). Identity is a complex and ambiguous term that is socially constructed within cultural, political and economic forces with impacts on cognition, affect and behavior. These together form a distinct way of seeing the world. There is broad agreement that a stronger environmental identity creates greater empathy with non-human forms and does lead to better resolution of environmental dilemmas (*ibid*). I found the concept of 'insiderness' or self-identification with place useful when looking at Shimshali children's drawings, which scholars suggest leads to actions on behalf of place at both individual and collective levels (Lim and Barton, 2012). For example, insiderness influences decisions in the context of technical development impacts upon a natural place. Notably, much of this work is based on understanding urban contexts such as selected neighborhoods of New York City.

Here drawings of middle-school children in rural Shimshal Valley, Upper Hunza are explored as visual descriptions of their home. This is among the nation's most literate yet remote communities located in the high Karakoram Mountains. The Ismaili community, who constitute a majority of residents in the region, places high value on acquiring education all over its diaspora, and Shimshal is no exception. Two middle

schools in the Valley, the Diamond Jubilee Middle School of the Aga Khan Education Service and the Government Middle School, allow almost complete child school enrolment.

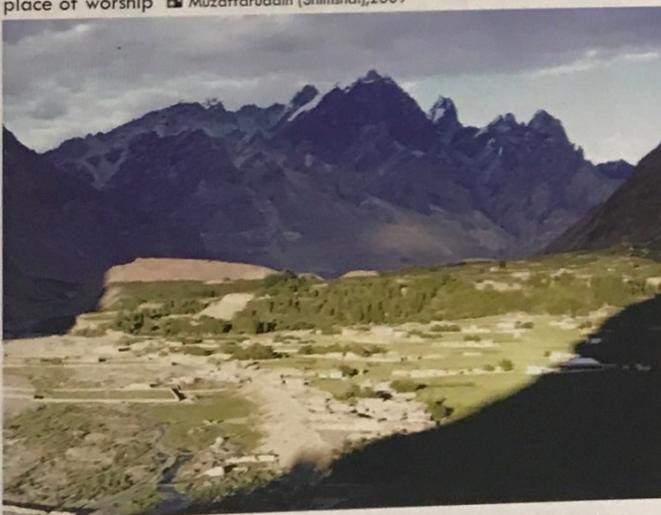
In 2006, the first road connected Shimshal to the Karakoram Highway (KKH) and the outside world. Prior to this jeepable track, the hardy residents of this valley had to walk three days through an extremely challenging landscape to reach the nearest village on the KKH.

In the 1990's, when today's Shimshali adults were youths, they participated in an unusual research collaboration with Japanese scholars. As part of an environmental education program, they recorded and evaluated their natural and cultural environment assiduously as school children, and became, in

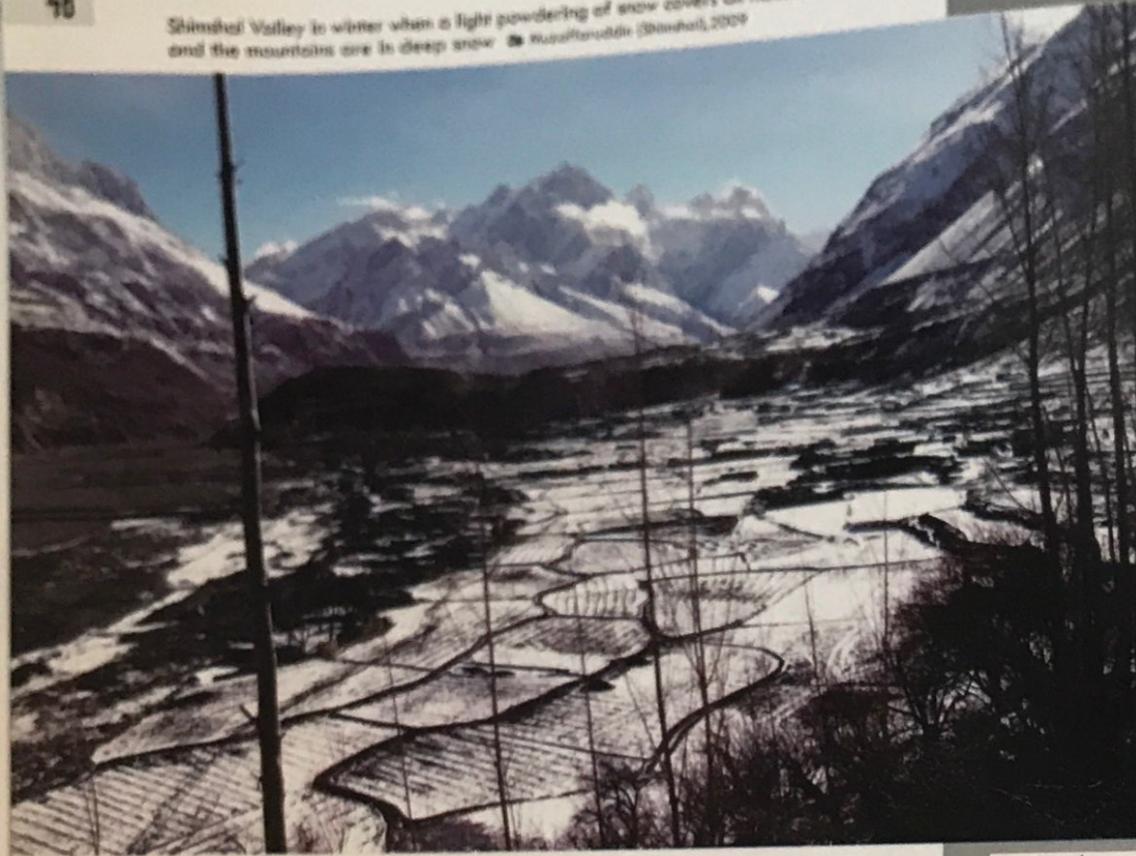
Map of Shimshal Valley and its communal territories in Northern Hunza Pakistan. © Inayat Ali of Shimshal, 2006



Photograph of Shimshal Valley in summer with the orchards and homes in the foreground and the High Karakoram Mountains in the background. The large metal roofed structure in the village is the Jamat Khana, the Ismaili place of worship © Muzaffaruddin (Shimshal), 2009



Shimshal Valley in winter when a light powdering of snow covers all habitations and the mountains are in deep snow. ■ *Muhammad (Shimshal), 2009*



the words of one eminent native, 'like an environmental taliban' acquiring an intolerance for actions that threatened their culture and environment. But as one Shimshali mother comments now "if children go away from Shimshal for school at an early age, then resuming rural life is very difficult. But others will return to the large lands, the safety and natural beauty' (interviews in Abidi-Habib, 2010).

This enquiry arose from a research project forming part of doctoral work where I used an intergenerational approach to gain insight into community perspectives to social and ecological change in response to a newly built road connection to the Karakoram Highway (KKH). The data from children in Shimshal was gathered through drawings made by about 50 children of 12 to 14 years of age from both local schools. The data set is segregated according to gender and allows a comparison of drawings made by girls with those of boys. Children were asked to imagine standing on a particular vantage point on the valley shoulder, and draw what they see of Shimshal, highlighting key features they think are important including built and natural features such as their homes, fields, *jamaat khana*, and mountains, river and wildlife.

Do Shimshal's children share connectedness with the landscape both built and natural, and how do they describe the place where they live? This question is especially pertinent given that they are the first generation to have relative ease of access to the outside world through a new road connection, and they are the community of the future whose notions in childhood will help shape the changes that are allowed to enter the valley.

### Look inside the picture: anecdotes and meanings

**Ibex and Snow Leopard:** Both rare and endangered species of Pakistan, Shimshalis are proud to have these magnificent wild animals in their territories. Children depict them as icons of their wilderness.

**Jamat Khana:** Often depicted within a neat enclosure, this is the Ismaili place of worship prominent in the landscape. All Shimshalis meet here for sunrise and sunset worship and community congregations.

**Tractor:** Until recently, the lone tractor of Shimshal was a prized object as it was airlifted into the valley by helicopter prior to the road. Packed for transport by disassembling the parts, it was given as a gift from a benefactor.

**Jeep:** A few years ago, only one jeep was owned by a prominent Shimshali family, which functioned as everyone's taxi, ambulance, goods lorry and collective pride.

**Cricket field:** This is the first space dedicated to children's sport and was created only recently. Children prize this as a village asset especially for them and take annual tournaments seriously.



Drawings by children of Shimshali local Middle Schools depicting important built and natural features of their home, community and valley. 2007.

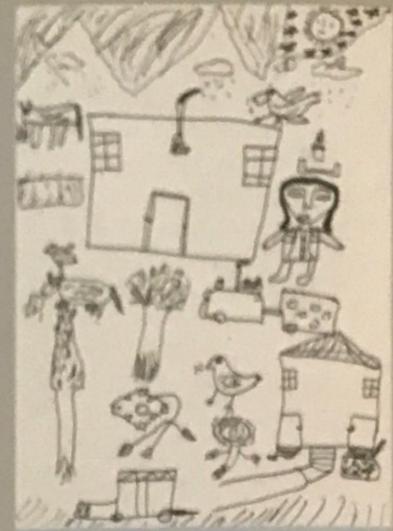
Altaf Hussain, Govt Middle School

Notice four recurring themes in the drawings: nature, community, infrastructure and elements/connectors. Nature is represented by mountains, wildlife, river, trees; community by built structures such as school, *jamat khana*, home, cricket field; infrastructure by road, jeep, tractor, walls. The four elements of fire, water, earth and air with connecting dots to various themes can be seen in several drawings showing fire by the sun, water by rain, earth with soil and air with clouds: they integrate the landscape and village in the minds of the children who drew them (Abidi-Habib, 2010).

Analysis of these images shows remarkably integrated drawings of the key themes in the landscape. Psychologists point out that this is like the Sioux Indian conceptions of the earth, the Great Spirit and man as ordered around a complete cosmos of the four elements and resembles the historical drawings of the



Drawing by Amin Shah, between 12-14 years of age. Note the scalar difference of perspective when compared with the previous image made by a girl. The picture shows activities such as mountaineering, plowing, playing



Zubida Wahid, Diamond Jubilee Middle School

Themes of community and infrastructure figure as a second order of prominence and are the elements that animate the landscape with centrality and activity such as the working of the land, playing cricket, swimming, gardening, and animal tending. The elements and connectors are also prominently present in many drawings and deepen the integration of the features in the image.

Let us also focus on these drawings by a girl Noorina Sultana, and a boy Amin Shah. Although the data set is too limited to be generalized, these drawings show a different scalar description of each child's world.

Amin Shah's drawing is a larger view of the valley with several activities that describe plowing the land, mountaineering, walking on the road, playing cricket, two jeeps, and a prominent woman near a home. Noorina's picture divides the picture into three horizontal zones: on a large centrally located school building; on a domestic realm where a woman with traditional Hunza cap, tends to her garden beside her home, and a clothes line with laundry is strung between fruit trees. Wrapping round the school, chicken approach their coops, and a fruit tree awaits to be picked. In the uppermost, horizontal band are located all the features of nature and the elements: a snow leopard, a Himalayan ibex, mountains, birds and the sun peak from behind the backdrop of mountains. Although both pictures contain similar components, the emphasis in both gives a different scale of connectedness to the various realms available in the Shimshal panorama.

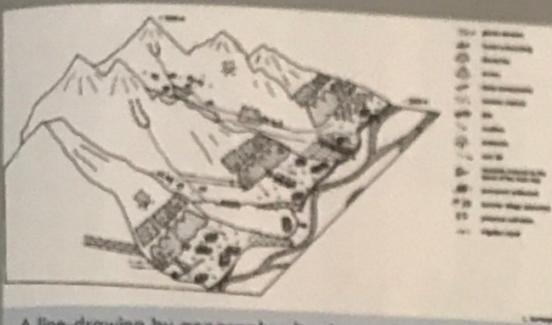
Finally, let's turn to a comparison of a line drawing by a geographer who researched Shimshal for its natural hazard potentials (Iturrizaga, 1997) and Mehmood Tahir, child from the drawing group: both are made about a decade apart in time.

If we examine the accuracy of the landscape features drawn in both these images, we find considerable agreement in both.

Shimshal Centre is the middle of the three settlements shown in the Irrutizaga image, which is the focus of Mehmood Tahir's drawing. Although both are made from a differing vantage point, they show a settlement framed by a river below and an irrigation channel above. The Lake on the upper left side is the same as the one that has two stick-figures having a swim. The walking trail on the upper right side leads to alpine pastures which peter-out in a place where a snow leopard stands in the child's picture and is leading to an elevated alluvial fan where the summer pasture is located in the geographer's image.

Yet, for the common accuracy in both, the meanings inherent in them differ one from the other. The geographer's drawing intends to show distinctions and classify them for meanings that lead to scientific analysis of the landscape. Thus the glacial advances, fluvial undercuttings, steep escarpments, mudflows and rockfalls are depicted in detail. They are places to beware of hazards and surprise events and are the key features to inform the viewer. There is some measure of empathy that enlivens the drawing as a person herds yaks up to the alpine pasture and juniper trees are cultivated in an area around a building.

In Mehmood Tahir's drawing we see a valley where much is happening and its intent is to express the myriad forms of human and natural activity. The landscape is peopled with activities of leisure (swimming, cricket playing) production, cultivation, ploughing with tractor, animal tending (cow and person). The natural world intermingles with the built one in which a bird perches in a fruit tree and one in the mountain wilderness, the snow leopard is poised tantalizingly next to the walking trail up the mountain, and the yaks are found outside a safely walled fruit orchard as well to the side of a field. A male ibex with magnificent horns stands framed by a mountain. This is a landscape where sun, sky and community are all interactive and integrated. This is an expose of an inner world of synthesis and unity, not



A line-drawing by geographer Iturrizaga showing a land-transect of Shimshal Valley. The focus of the image is a description of landscape hazards present near the habitations (Iturrizaga, 1997).



Mehmood Tahir's portrait of Shimshal is used to compare a local child's sense of place with that of a geographer. While key features in both pictures are accurate, such as the central habitation framed by a river below and an irrigation channel above, the meaning and emotions presented in both are quite different. This drawing emanates a joyful rightness in the world of man and nature.

difference and fragmentation. Above all the drawing emanates a joyful rightness in the world of man and nature and an environment imbued with meaning arising from the physical, social and cultural.

Other social science research in Shimshal shows that this community has highly integrated symbolic meanings of self with nature (Butz, 1996). Shimshali ideas of identity, mythology and future conceptions are deeply embedded within its ecology including the natural landscape and wildlife - thus forming a wholeness of social fabric that leads to integration with place. These children's drawings echo continuity with this cultural interpretation across the history of the community.

As tools for unmediated self-expression, the drawings do convey

the wholeness experienced by children: they are in a place knowledgeable, fully, with empathy and a sense of wonder. An insideness that scholars also call emplaced understanding (Lim and Barton, 2010).

In a context where social flux is rife in Pakistan, understanding children's sense of place opens up a way for artistic and educational understanding of how they experience urban or rural places, whether they are new arrivals who navigate a new home or historically rooted residents with a long, culturally constructed meaning of place. The drawings show these children as skillful and active constructors of place-based meanings that make them important sources of understanding the experience of wholeness within self, community and nature. ■

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Amra Ali

# Critical

# SPD



Nahid Raza, *Kaa'ba Series*, acrylic and lace on paper 55.88 x 73.66 cm, 2011  Wahid Khairi

Nahid as a woman 'seeking empowerment' while at the same time asserting that 'motherhood was an affirmation of feminine rights...and echoing the struggle of the urban middle class woman of Pakistan'

It so happened that two prominent women painters of Pakistan, Meher Afroz and Nahid Raza exhibited their new work in consecutive order, in solo shows at Chawkandi Art, held in Karachi's peak exhibition season earlier in 2012. Not only did this coincidence of being back to back bring two 'heavy weights' of Pakistan's art world into a close proximity of one another, but in an unavoidable comparison that might not have otherwise happened.

The two women artists' careers spanning four decades run parallel

to one another. Recognized as significant painters they have articulated the social history of their times through nuances of texture, color and imagery in the two dimensional canvas and paper. The social context of the imagery in both Nahid Raza (b. 1947) and Meher Afroz (b. 1948) has been explored in the writings of Dr. Akbar Naqvi (A.N., *Image & Identity*, Oxford, 1998) and Nilofur Farrukh (N.F., *Pioneering Perspectives*, Ferozsons, 1998). Both Naqvi and Farrukh have located Nahid in the context of a 'feminist' space that emerged from the shadows

# Spaces of Discontent



Meher Afroz, *Naqsh-bur-aab*, Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 45cm, 2012 Jamal Ashiqain

Meher, viewed as a 'pioneer' printmaker/painter, and as a 'critic of negative decadent values in the urban culture of Pakistan' (NF).

of an earlier generation of female artists such as Anna Molka Ahmad and Zubeida Agha. Both painters have been referred to as 'pioneers' by Farrukh, seeing Nahid as a woman 'seeking empowerment' while at the same time asserting that 'motherhood was an affirmation of feminine rights...and echoing the struggle of the urban middle class woman of Pakistan'; Meher, viewed as a 'pioneer' printmaker/painter, and as a 'critic of negative decadent values in the urban culture of Pakistan' (NF). These artists were seen to be 'looking beyond the formalism of modernists like Shakir Ali, Ahmad Parvez, etc. into a critique of

their own society', through their lived experiences (NF). There were other strands of critique, in which Meher and Nahid's relevance was established by Naqvi in the collective ethos of fourteen women painters (among them, Laila Shahzada, Lubna Agha, Rabia Zuberi, Hajra Mansur, Qudsia Nisar and others) in a first all women-artists' exhibition, at Ali Imam's Indus Gallery in Karachi, in 1982 (AN). 'What was happening was that the submerged Yin part of art history had surfaced. It was not numbers alone, but the emergence of a new territory of art with its own vistas, independent of male control, that was impressed

upon our consciousness,' wrote Naqvi in '89. (AN., pg. 648)

The purpose of the discussion here is not to go into the historical context of the readings of the work of the two artists entirely, but to attempt to locate the critical space/s outside the frames of their paintings/prints, as it supports /negates /engages with their work and its relationship to mechanisms of the current art 'market'/discourse(s). This critical space includes current readings (critical readings overlap with reportage), because the written word is documented and distributed to a wide network of potential

buyers, thus giving it one kind of market 'value'. It includes gallery strategies that promote and also give 'value' to the work through catalogues (images and text), which are documentation of another kind. Thus, if we assume the work to be the positive space, and the critical /curatorial /market space to be the negative space, how does one affect the other? And what are the conversations that do take place in the interrelationship of these spaces? Finally, what is the nature of the dynamics of this space, and other spaces around it?



Nahid Raza, Ka'ba Series, acrylic on paper, 55.88 x 73.66 cm, 2011 © Wahid Khairi

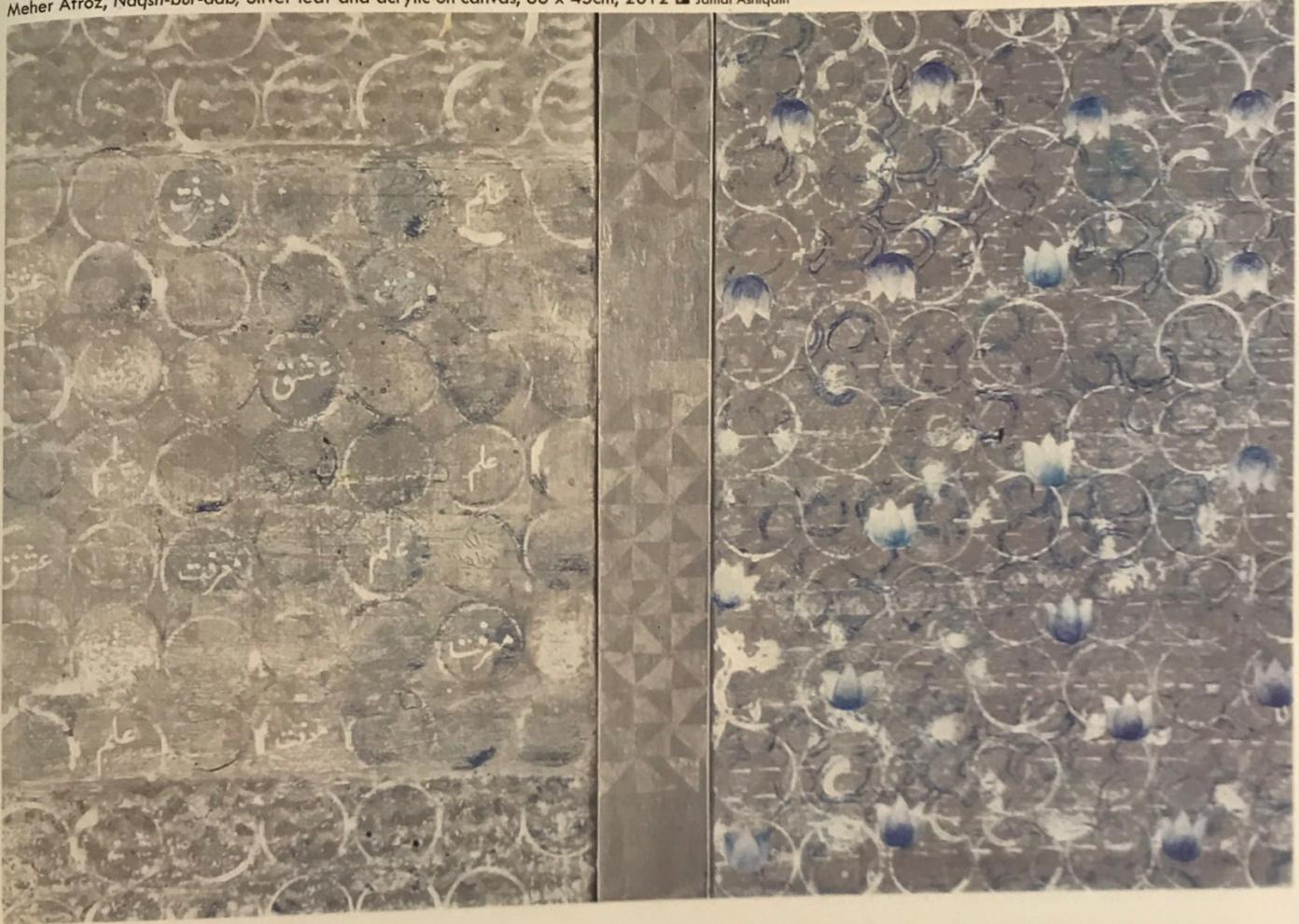
Nilofur Farrukh included Nahid in a book on 'pioneers', then what was the relationship to her later work by her or of subsequent writings? If Nahid was seen as epitomizing the 'struggle of the middleclass Pakistani woman', then did that reading alter with time, as Nahid's work became to be considered *passé* (or did it)?

It is important to divert from this and note here, that in Pakistan, there has been an overlap of writing that can be called critical or is relatively more serious, with reportage, which simply informs, (sans any creative or critical input), and is usually the repetition of what an artist's statement/ catalogue essay/gallery press release provides. Although there is a growing space given to art 'reviews', in monthly /weekend current affairs and fashion magazines and dailies (*Herald, Newline, Sbe, Gallery Dawn, Libas, The News on Sunday, Friday Times*, etc., and more recently *ArtNow*, an e-magazine on current art, and *Nigaab*, an art /social pages quarterly), or the role that *Nakla-ye* (biannual print publication) has played to develop art writing in the last eight years; the quality of content of each of these spaces is a matter of concern, if critical thought has to develop in Pakistan. The separation between PR, networking, reportage and critical discourse are interwoven, the former overshadowing the latter in most cases.

Interrelated to this issue are two aspects: the lack of critical voices /narratives emerging from within academia, or in academic research (to understand and study the different dimensions, e.g. of artists such as Nahid Raza, Meher Jinnat, Mussarrat Mirza, and earlier artists' oeuvres in a wider historical reading), as well as from the current thrust of art writers. Artists who are teaching in the art colleges, at least in Karachi and Lahore, or those shaping curricula at the

On another note, the opulence of surface decoration, of possible reflections on water speaking of words such as *ishq* (love), *ilm* (knowledge), *maurfat* (eminence), seem to reflect a defiant narcissism: what does the artist not allow us to see in that reflection?

Meher Afroz, *Naqsh-bur-aab*, Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 45cm, 2012  Jamal Ashiqain



undergraduate level are oblivious to the reservoir of knowledge that lives in critical readings throughout history, their relationship and impact on contemporary writing and debate, and the understanding of contemporary issues in the context of the colonial discourses embedded in the larger culture. Institutions such as the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, for example, have failed to produce any significant writers /researchers on art and architecture, perhaps because the critical space in their structural and ideological framework is much narrower than the space given to individual narratives of artists, whose scope of discourse may be limited and overshadowed by their personal market /consumption strategies. A very small case in point is a discussion held in connection with the show *Band Baaja and Baraat* (2012), held at the IVS gallery. Although Amin Gulgee and Saba Iqbal, two participating artists were present at the conversation/discussion, there was little critical engagement from the faculty or students into the nature of issues emerging from the show, which had many dimensions of the personal /social

/political narrative to it. An opportunity lost, the many conversations of two dimensional imagery, object, video and performance (and its documentation) that the exhibition knitted, provided many layers, none of which were seen in their contemporary or historical context of artmaking in Pakistan. Perhaps the discussion could have started with the curatorial premise of artists working in pairs; pairing itself was a subject that emerged from it, the most fascinating being the pairing of Gulgee with Iqbal that could have opened discussion into questions of sexual and social taboo, role playing, censorship, and ideological and social disconnect (between the artist and society, and within the art community itself), among other aspects.

An aspect in the lack of development of critical thought could also be because there are only five or six serious writers who appear almost everywhere, from catalogue essays, to review and other essay-based writing, and they are the ones playing the curatorial role as well. In such a closed scenario, there is bound to be a monopoly of critical thought, a lack of challenge as well

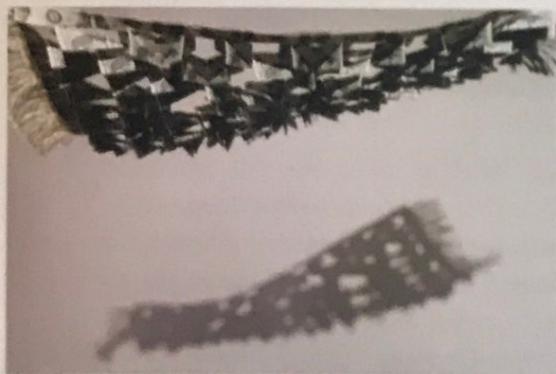
of discussion into the reading/s of art /market (not to mention, critics' 'role' in that market). For this very reason, if we are to locate the context of Nahid Raza and Meher Afroz, it has to be done in some conversation and context of how it has been read by writers who are and have followed their work, and debated on the issues that have emerged in their writings. For example, if Nülofur Farrukh included Nahid in a book on 'pioneers', then what was the relationship to her later work by her or of subsequent writings? If Nahid was seen as epitomizing the 'struggle of the middleclass Pakistani woman', then did that reading alter with time, as Nahid's work became to be considered *passee* (or did it)? Neither Nahid nor Meher became the 'material' for inclusion into the current (read relevant) discourses of new and emerging global markets, nor part of the international biennial circuit. The question of 'relevance' is the subtext of much of this reading, and of the local /global disconnect and connect, and requires a longer, more engaged study in the context of artists like Nahid and Meher, among others of their generation; especially if we allow ourselves the space to reflect on the relevance of the connection of their early careers to the later rupture in terms of medium and content. These are critical points of departure as well as rupture in the historical context of art in Pakistan.

If the culture of writing /curating itself played a significant role in addressing the newer idioms of expression that suited the marketing of the art in Pakistan, and its mushroom in the last fifteen years, then was that role also being played to market certain artists /agendas, and exclude others? *The Rising Tide*, Mohatta Palace, Karachi, 2011 as an example of the local, and *Hanging Fire*, Asia Society, 2011, as an example of an international show of Pakistani artists. '...The Asia Society's surveys of new art like *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art From Pakistan*, tends so often to be topical in content, market ready in format and didactic in delivery' and 'this exhibition of new art from Pakistan, with its references to war, religion and consumerism, largely conforms to the Asia Society model', wrote Holland Cotter, reviewer for the NY Times. Cotter gave a parallel example of an Indian survey show at the

society in 2005, *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India* focused heavily on art that addressed current social issues like sectarian violence and the effects of a global market economy. Not represented was a range of new abstract or near-abstract art and sculpture from South Asia that doesn't necessarily look "Indian" and that is personal, and only incidentally political, in content'. (Hanging Fire: Activist Energy with a Light Touch, Cotter, Holland, Art review, October 1, 2009, New York Times). Cotter briefly addresses similar issues of market /consumption /exclusion on the Chinese art that was surveyed by the Society, as having excluded many narratives in favor of 'brash, democracy-loving artists who wanted to break away from the past... To enthrall Western audiences... Which they did'. While the Chinese and Indian shows had 40 and 60 artists represented respectively throughout spaces in New York, the Pakistani show had 15 artists selected and shown in two galleries. 'So it doesn't pretend to be a survey. It's a closely edited group show drawn from a small pool of artists, most of whom attended the National College of Arts in Lahore,' he writes. If the links to history, and a wider base of narratives are included in the 'mainstream' discourse, then there can still be a rejection, but with knowledge of social and historical contexts. Similarly, the "Rising Tide" could have explored and strengthened its curatorial narrative had it connected with what we can assume to be in "Low" or "Receding" tide. Local municipalities in Pakistan, too, use erasure in social memory, by changing the names of roads, to show their own dominance, as well as prejudice.

'Selective knowledge used as a devise in epistemic violence during the colonial period continues in the way facts are distorted to support stereotypes that fail to convey the entire story,' writes Farrukh in her reading of the portrayal of violence in Afghanistan, the destruction of Buddha statues in Bamyán/selective media portrayal by the West of it, and its relationship to the inclusion of miniaturist Khadim Ali at Documenta 13 (*The incomplete as a Strategy of Misrepresentation*, NuktaArt, vol. 7, # 2, 2012). This connection of the global to the local is necessary, because

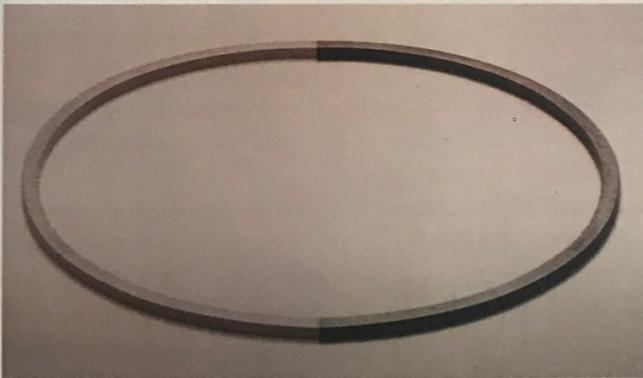
Abdullah M I Syed, *The Flying Rug I* (detail), installation at IVS Gallery, Karachi, folded U.S. one dollar bills and staple pins, installation dimensions variable, 2008. © Mahmood Ahmed



it is in the exclusion strategies due to lack of research and critical historical knowledge within the local that also facilitates the selective 'profiling' of 'other' histories on the global arena.

There is a generational shift and rupture in terms of ideology and aspirations of art, and for that reason alone, Nahid's work, as well as of Meher's, stands in need to be revisited, their readings revised; as new media, and the interdisciplinary media take over the language of art, one must ask if it is the medium that has become the vehicle that conveys a vision, or if it has become a tool of appropriation. The connections to works that have traveled outside the 'frame', such as miniaturist Imran Qureshi's recent onsite work at the Sharjah Biennial (2011) and the Sydney Biennial (2012), to narratives that reside within the frame are necessary to understand the many narratives that have been compromised, and to read what there is in that gap.

In the more recent readings of Nahid's *Kaa'ba series*, Aasim Akhtar places her work in the context of Malevich's square. 'If to the art world painting itself was marginal, Ka'aba pictures are the epitome of irrelevance. The exhibition reveals Raza focusing skillfully on strategies: color combinations, shape and buoyant responses to art history... but in most, she risks a compendium

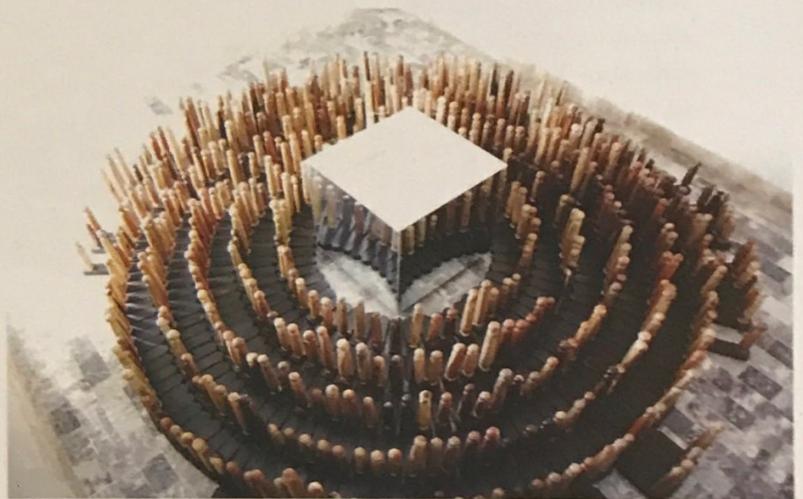


Sumaya Durrani, 'Allah, Mohammad', digital print, 46.736 x 62.484 cm, 2012 © Jamal Ashiqain

To widen the critical link to Nahid's *Kaa'ba* work it needs to be interpreted in the context of its appearance initially in the prints of Sumaya Durrani (90's), and a decade later in miniaturist Aisha Khalid's work of the late 90s or early 2000s, in sculptor Abdul Jabbar Gul's work (installation, 2009, Gandhara Art, Karachi), and in the thesis work of artist Marium Agha at the IVS in the early 2000s; artists who are part of her milieu. The context in which Aasim Akhtar reads the work under discussion needs to be explored in order to understand the frameworks in which Modernism was absorbed in Pakistan, and the different strands of Modernity that evolved in this context.

of clichés', argues Akhtar. (*Pictures and Objects*, Encore, The News on Sunday, May, 2012). Akhtar's is one of the few critical voices in our midst today, due to his knowledge, creative and critical expertise in art writing, the many issues that he raises are important for their relevance to the reading and making of art (and Modernist thought) in Pakistan. It appears that he chooses to question the mystical association of Nahid's 'square', when he asks, 'why Raza insists on keeping the square in the prisonhood of mystical faith'. And yet he also relies on a clichéd reading of the square, refusing to see it in any context other than in term of its relevance through

Abdul Jabbar Gull, "Without White Cloth" 304.8 cm (diameter) figure sizes vary from 20.32 x 38.1 cm high, Installation, wood and mirror, 2009



Rothko, Rauschenberg or Gerhard Merz. If an artist such as Nahid, who is oblivious to the theoretical implications of her 'square' in relationship to Western Modernism, and uses the square as a symbol of her intuitive response to the Kaa'ba, and 'decorates' it with unrestrained love (creative energy), then that is the social context in which the work demands to be read. In this case, Akhtar imposing his theoretical awareness becomes a cliché of appropriation of Western paradigms of reference. Unfortunately, the distance between Western Modernity and the evolution of modernist thought and its layered influence to the generation of Nahid Raza and Meher Afroz has not so far been explored in art writing or curatorial practice in Pakistan so far, except to some length by Dr Naqvi. But Naqvi's premise stands in need of debate and understanding, not exclusion.

In the catalogue essay on Meher Afroz's new series titled *Naqsh bar Aab* (Reflections on Water), exquisitely designed to complement the imagery of the work, the critical thrust in Saqib Hanif's observation about the work, 'cast(ing) the magic of muted notes' in his short introduction essay, 'The Alchemy of Restraint', gave the exhibition an important anchor. Despite the introspective nature of Hanif's observations in terms of the social implications of Afroz's imagery, it was an opportunity lost in terms of mapping the wider dimensions of Afroz's art, in longer essays, especially because her narrative requires translation in its conceptual as well as philosophic content. The references that Meher makes to Sheikh Saadi, for example, are in constant need of translation to art (and other) audiences who are not familiar with the history, let alone begin to recognize

the punctuations or contradictions in the art, or to distinguish if they exist. These have had to do with translating a thought process, which speaks a language that is not articulated in current terminology. Hence, because the relationship to Saadi and other *ulema* is not understood by those critiquing the work, the bridges that could have linked dichotomies of place and time, have not been possible. One reason for this could be due to the consumer thrust of the show in a commercial gallery where the red tag ends the dialogue with the art and the art community (critics and artists) are in awe of the material dexterity of the work.

On another note, the opulence of surface decoration, of possible reflections on water speaking of words such as *ishq* (love), *ilm* (knowledge), *manfat* (eminence), seem to reflect a defiant narcissism: what does the artist not allow us to see in that reflection? The explanations around her inspiration, on the stages of Sufism, provided by the artist in her Q & A with Niilofur Farrukh may provide the inspirational context to the work, but in the end, the work stands on its own; apart from the intention of the artist. Does the presence of the word *ilm* provide new knowledge and how does it convince the viewer of the presence of 'that' knowledge?

An issue which needs to be studied in this body of work by Meher is the aspect of spirituality: Whether or not the relationship of the viewer to the art becomes a moment of recognition of spirituality in the art, or a recognition of what the artist acknowledges as an essence of spiritual planes, and the nature of that connection and recognition. The premise of Meher's interview titled, 'Images on Water: a visualization of the threefold path of devotion', by Niilofur Farrukh suggested the undisputed connection to a spiritual space, but froze possible connections to the art by placing the artist on a pedestal, perhaps because it did not explore the critical space, and spaces of possible disconnect around the concept, imagery or process. A catalogue such as was published for the exhibition, therefore, became more of an extension of the gallery/commercial market value.

The layered connection to the surface and the relationship of gold/silver, and of geometric patterning in Meher's work that may be anchored in a traditionally Islamic aesthetics need to be

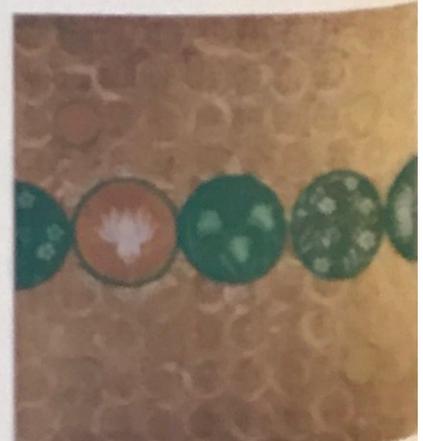
understood in connection also to the wider relationship of references by other artists such as Aisha Khalid (2011), Abdullah Syed (2011-12), so that the paradigms of religious and secular can be reviewed. How far is Aisha's connection to Iqbal and why at this time? What is the dynamics of economic/social mobility and regurgitation in Abdullah Syed's magic carpet and who is his target audience, keeping in mind the poetic nature of his form? These works, punctuated with connections to commodity/religion/politics, in which the separation of reading between religion, politics and the politics of consumption is so narrow. How to access that which is not spoken in the language understood today in the mainstream of art, is one of the many difficulties that widens the disconnect to Meher's work. If at all, its surface opulence resists and deflects the viewer's engagement. The work of both Meher and Nahid, should also be read in relationship to the social concerns that was part of their earlier concerns, the conceptual terrain of form and formlessness, and its relationship to the nature of rupture/s in this very society today.

To widen the critical link to Nahid's *Kaa'ba* work it needs to be interpreted in the context of its appearance initially in the prints of Sumaya Durrani (90's), and a decade later in miniaturist Aisha Khalid's work of the late 90s or early 2000s, in sculptor Abdul Jabbar Gul's work (installation, 2009, Gandhara Art, Karachi), and in the thesis work of artist Marium Agha at the IVS in the early 2000s; artists who are part of her milieu. The context in which Aasim Akhtar reads the work under discussion needs to be explored in order to understand the frameworks in which Modernism was absorbed in Pakistan, and the different strands of Modernity that evolved in this context. How did Nahid Raza and Meher Afroz internalize the aspirations of its formalistic and conceptual concerns into their language especially when neither artist chose to look at the theoretical context of the frameworks they so adopted? If they can be compared because their careers run parallel to each other, then what are the concerns and aspirations that separate the vision of these two artists? And finally, what are the mechanisms of market (capitalist agendas) that dictate the market value of each? ■



Nahid Raza, *Kaa'ba Series*, acrylic on paper, 55.88 x 73.66 cm, 2011 ■ Jamal Ashiqain

How did Nahid Raza and Meher Afroz internalize the aspirations of its formalistic and conceptual concerns into their language especially when neither artist chose to look at the theoretical context of the frameworks they so adopted?



Meher Afroz, *Naqih-bur-ans*, Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 45cm, 2012 ■ Jamal Ashiqain



Adrian Villar Rojas (Argentina), *Return of the World*, 2012

## Nilofur Farrukh

Alighiero-Boetti (Turin), *Mappa*, 147X228cm, 1971

'.....the second form of colonization, the one which at least six generations of the Third World have learnt to view as a prerequisite for their liberation. This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds. ....we are concerned with a colonialism which survives the demise of empires.'

Ashis Nandy (1)



The Fridericianum, since 1955, the main exhibition venue of Documenta

Thomas Bayrie (Germany), *Airplane*, Photomontage, 800 x 1,340 cm, 1982-83



The Incomplete, as a Strategy of Misrepresentation:  
A Reading of **Documenta 13**



Kader Attia, *The Repair from Occident to Extra Occidental Cultures*, slide show projection and genuine artifacts from Africa, dimensions variable, 2012



Goshka Macuga (Warsaw), *Of What is Not, That it is Not*, 2012

Selective memory, which has always been a strategy of the privileged discourse, is central to Kader Attia's *'The Repair from Occident to Extra Occidental Cultures'* (2012). Set up like an anthropological archive with tall shelves and an overwhelming clutter of books and objects, it confronts conflicting dualities from the past that have shaped perceptions of the present. The books nailed and padlocked to the shelves speak of a painful yet persisting relationship with colonial epistemic erasure that defies easy reclamation.

The 13th edition of Documenta (2012), was dedicated to 'artistic research and forms of imagination that explored commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to theory.' It's Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and her team focused on stage, siege, hope and retreat as points of provocation to connect four locations: Kabul, Alexandria, Kassel and Banff.

My attempt in this article is to look at the curatorial layers of Documenta 13 and offer a critical reading from Pakistan, a place which has a historical, cultural and geographical affinity with Kabul, one of the four chosen locations.

With destruction and Kabul woven into a motif of war (and siege), the Rotunda at Fridericianum, one of the primary venues, offers two significant introductions to Afghanistan. Several figurines of Bactrian Princesses from late third/ early second millennia BC, these serene objects, exquisitely crafted with inlay designs, speak of a gentler history of the region. Current times are represented with a western style landscape with a story of resistance. This work by Mohd Yusuf Asefi, was painted over figurative works of masters in the museum and government offices, with temporary landscapes in watercolor, to save them from destruction by the Taliban regime.

Just a few feet away hang a series of pictures, *'Lee Miller in the bathtub of Hitler's apartment in Munich 1945'*. These were taken shortly after Miller visited the Dachau camps and her presence in the dictator's personal space is unsettling in much the same way as seeing the painted-over artwork by the Afghan artist. Set apart by half a century or so, they evoke deeply embedded memories of resistance to ideological dogma and its destructive power that holds a nation hostage.

Between the ancient past and recent history representing Afghanistan at the Rotunda, there lie many centuries of cultural renaissance that shaped the sensibility of a people that are located at the intersection of Persian, Mongol, Chinese and Indian civilizations. The miniature paintings from Herat, which are emblematic of an intellectually rigorous tradition that heralded idiomatic experiments in visual arts and literature, if exhibited it could have provided a strong reference of its nuanced continuities and rectified the erroneous impression of a cultural void between the archaic represented by the Bactrian statues and Asefi work, an outcome of the recent conflict

Selective memory which has always been a strategy of the privileged discourse, is central to Kader Attia's *'The Repair from Occident to Extra Occidental Cultures'* (2012). Set up like an anthropological archive with tall shelves and an overwhelming clutter of books and objects, it confronts conflicting dualities from the past that have shaped perceptions of the present. The books nailed and padlocked to the shelves speak of a painful yet persisting relationship with colonial epistemic erasure that defies easy reclamation. In a corner slides slowly click like gun sounds in Russian roulette as image after image of Caucasian soldiers deformed by war injuries in the space finds resonance with the heavily stylized features of African masks/ statues, and documents replete with racial 'othering' that provoke questions on the use of genetic purity and

physical perfection as an agenda of power. Selective knowledge used as a device in epistemic violence during the colonial period continues in the way facts are distorted to support stereotypes that fail to convey the entire story.

In her introductory essay, Christov-Bakargiev elaborates: "The emancipatory potential of thinking in new ways without producing constituted knowledge that is instrumental and easily transformed into negotiable investments could lie in an accord between human and the many forms of non-human intelligences, effects and beliefs, emotions and beliefs, emotions and forms of trust, that can be established among all the life-forms on the planet. This does not indicate less interest in humanity and people, their lives and cultures, their art and imaginations; it is based, instead, on the principle that more potential lies in "becoming with" than in mistrust, fear and competition over resources and possibilities." (2) 100 notebooks were commissioned along with the dozens of art works which were displayed in institutions and improvised spaces all over Kassel, offering ideas in progress as a challenge to constituted knowledge.

Institutionalized knowledge and its relationship to the book as the receptacle of communal memory cannot be left out of any conversation on siege, hope and retreat as issues of distrust and skepticism are central to societies, particularly those that have experienced long conflicts, extended occupation or oppressive democracies.

When artist Khadim Ali's family fled Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion to take refuge in Pakistan, even during the most

difficult of times his grandfather recited *Shahnama-e-Firdousi*, perhaps the most widely read and recited Persian epic in the region. Afraid to lose the cultural connection after they had lost their land, they held onto it like a lifeline. For the artist it has become the lens through which he views his people's reality. On his return to his homeland, Khadim Ali discovered that the Taliban had appropriated the characters of the *Shahnama* in propaganda songs. The artist's response to this manipulation was the *Rustom* series based on the protagonist, who he transformed into a horned devil haunting the empty Bamiyan caves, which

Documenta site, Kassel, Germany



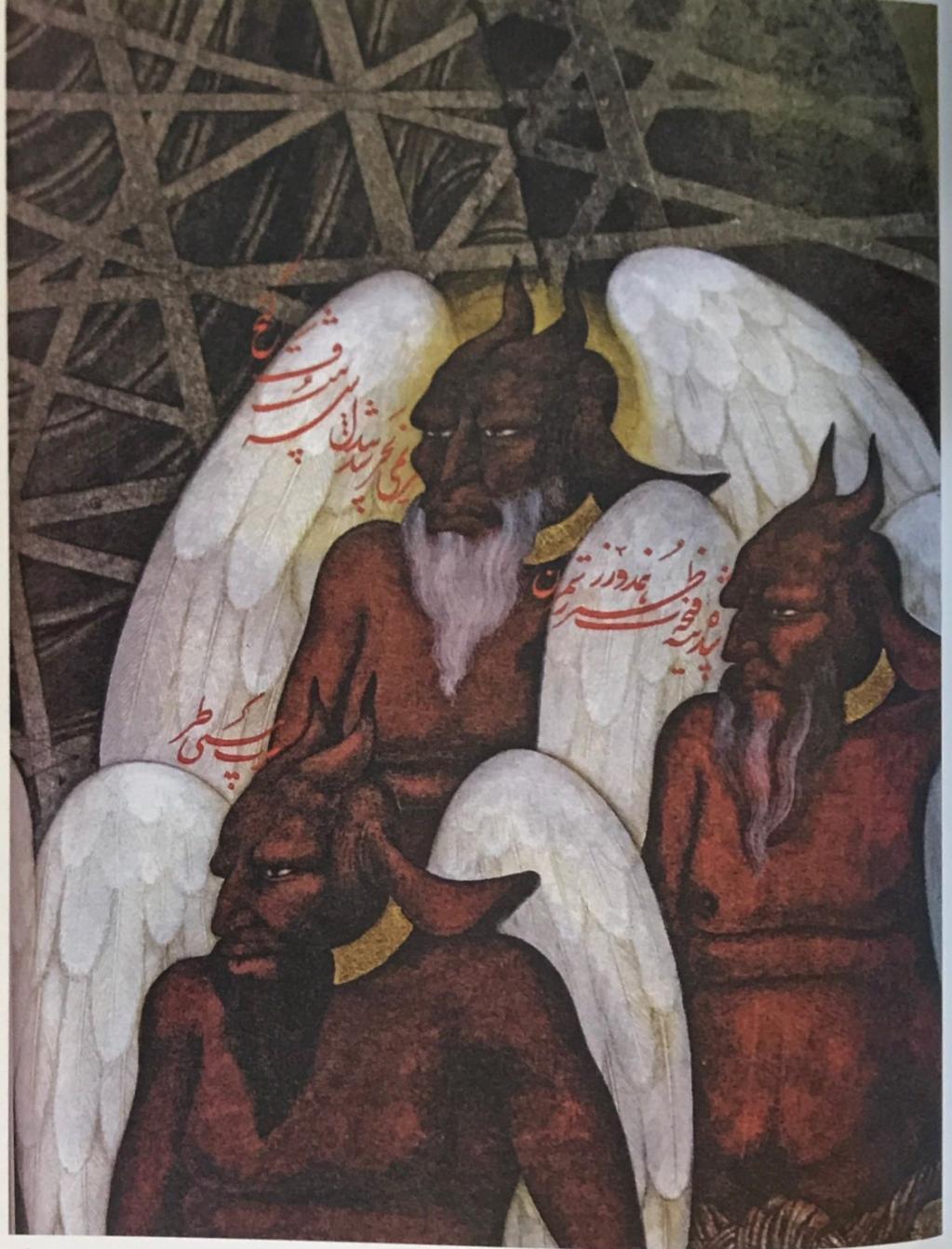
Geoffrey Farmer (Canada), *Leaves of Grass*, cuttings from old issues of *Life* magazine, 2012

once housed the Buddhas. Another attempt by Khadim Ali to revive and rehabilitate the original spirit of *Shahnama-e-Firdousi* in the memories of the younger generation was to conduct a workshop on story-telling during the Documenta intervention in Bamian. Khadim Ali's *The Haunted Lotus* which hangs at Neue Galerie in Kassel, an image of a horizontal Buddha with horned Rustom's gathered around it. Painted on handmade *nasi* paper in the miniature painting idiom, it is linked to the art of the book, a collaborative practice between the disciplines of literature, calligraphy and painting. Current media representation of Afghanistan with its focus on violence, extremism and oppression of women will compel most visitors to link it's imagery to war. Yet, another reading of the work is possible: Buddha which even in its fallen state dominates the canvas by dwarfing the 'Rustom devils', and embodies the duality of Afghanistan's reality. The centuries of religious tolerance which led to the conception, building and the long life of the Bamiyan Buddhas and other of more recent violent bigotry that destroyed it, are legacies that co-exist. The Afghan culture which has supported religious plurality for centuries points to an optimistic future.

Constructing stereotypes and misrepresenting history is made possible through erasure and manipulation of

collective memory, Emily Jacir's *'ex libris 2010/2012'* points to knowledge robbed, neglected and lost. This display of printed images taken from a cell phone of book covers and pages of school books, novels, scientific manuals are from the thirty thousand books looted from Palestinian homes by Israelis. The notations on the pages, unlike a library book bear the personalized

Khadim Ali, *The Haunted Lotus* (detail), gouache, ink, and gold leaf on wasli paper, 70 x 54 cm, 2011-2012



Khadim Ali, *The Haunted Lotus*, gouache, ink, and gold leaf on wasli paper, 70 x 54 cm, 2011-2012



Central Asia, 'Bactrian Princesses', circa second millennium BC

link to the owners who too may have faced similar displacement. The artist photographed them from the six thousand books kept in the Jewish National Library in W Jerusalem that bear the misleading label 'abandoned property'. Jacir's artwork as stated in the catalogue 'raises questions regarding repatriation and restitution' of cultural property. Her earlier projects on the objects of the looted and destroyed National Library and Museum in Iraq addressed similar issues. The two museums that became cultural casualties, one in Iraq, which happened on the American watch and the other after the Taliban took over Kabul, remain untold narratives of grand destruction and grand larceny of our time.

Collaboration between un-named stone carvers from Afghanistan and artist Michael Rakowitz creates a room of memories dedicated simultaneously to two bombed sites, Bamyian and Fridercanium in Kassel. On display are partial fragments saved from these locations in the form of charred books, documents, pieces of the statues displayed in tall cabinets like curiosities. To some visitors this may appear an unconvincing connection as the scale of bombing and destruction of the cultural heritage at Kassel was far greater and persistent than the Taliban bomb casualties

at Bamyian which were two cultural artifacts but in which no loss of life took place. On tables in front of the cabinets are displayed masterfully carved stone replicas of classics from Afghanistan and Germany/Europe including some of the earliest Medieval manuscripts that activate a lesser known chapter of history when the exchange of

knowledge, that began several centuries ago flowed from the East along the trade routes. This is manifested in the content and design of Islamic and Chinese manuscripts which strongly influenced Europe's medieval illuminated manuscripts. Paper-making expertise from China too crossed Central Asia into Islamic Spain before reaching Europe to bring about major social revolutions, like the Reformation.

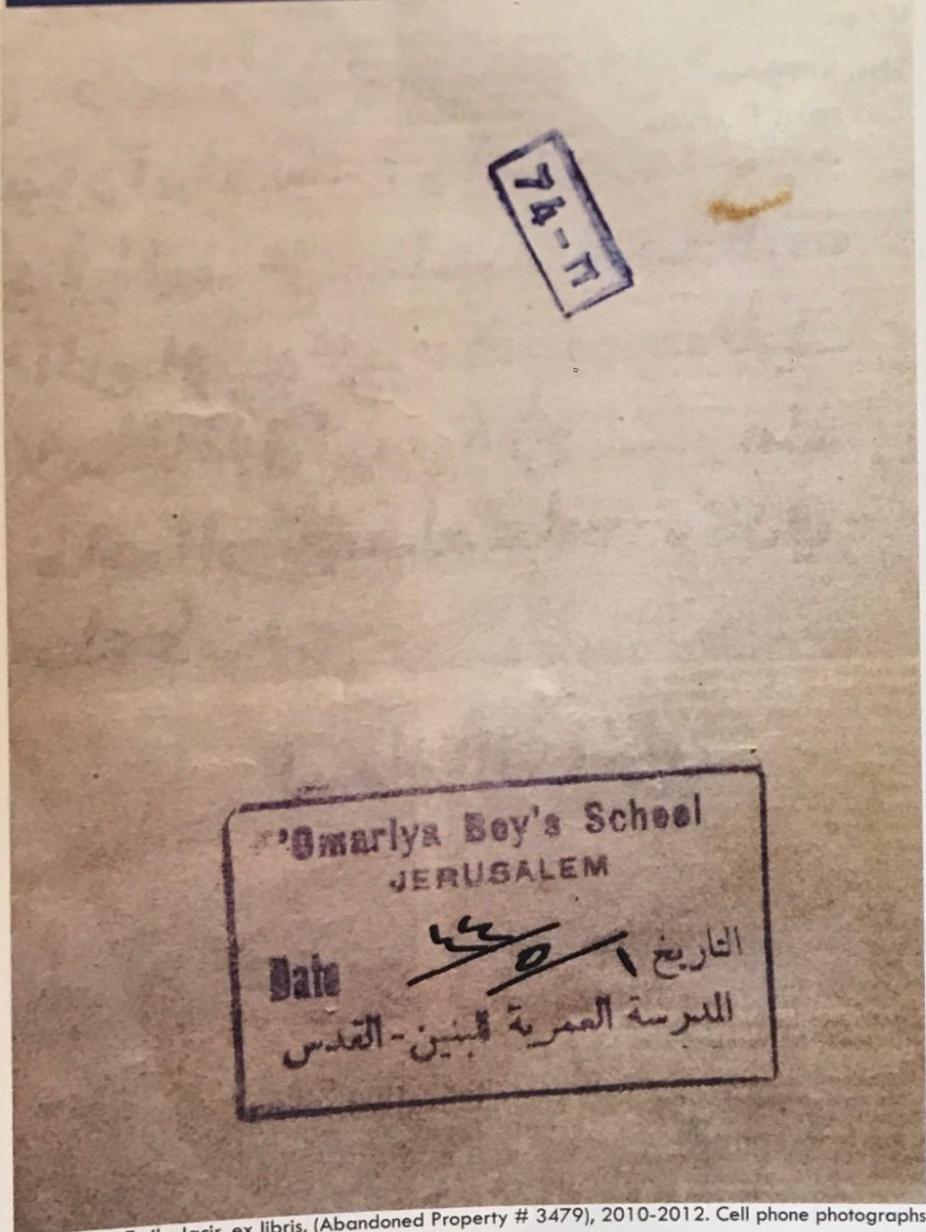
'To disown knowledge is completely different from refusing it as all kinds of totalitarianisms do. To disown knowledge is not an absence, it is not ignorance that is praised here. It is the presence of the undone, of the still possible.' (3)

Withholding knowledge, destroying it and replacing it are various forms of refusing knowledge. The concept of disowning knowledge is a complex one as it requires a deep commitment to openness sans hierarchy, to accept new forms of knowledge without bias, even if the very fundamentals like its production and relationship to people may be completely alien to the dominant discourse.

The Western discourse based on theoretical / institutionalized knowledge is often suspicious of experiential and intuitive ways of knowing that excludes many different kinds of intelligences

Yet, another reading of the work is possible: Buddha which even in its fallen state dominates the canvas by dwarfing the 'Rustom devils', and embodies the duality of Afghanistan's reality. The centuries of religious tolerance which led to the conception, building and the long life of the Bamyian Buddhas and other of more recent violent bigotry that destroyed it, are legacies that co-exist.

Emily Jacir's 'ex libris 2010/2012' points to knowledge robbed, neglected and lost. This display of printed images taken from a cell phone of book covers and pages of school books, novels, scientific manuals are from the thirty thousand books looted from Palestinian homes by Israelis. The notations on the pages, unlike a library book bear the personalized link to the owners who too may have faced similar displacement.



Emily Jacir, ex libris, (Abandoned Property # 3479), 2010-2012. Cell phone photographs by artist.

in the discourse. Experience and received wisdom in many non-Western societies is integral to creativity and its meaning. Cultural knowledge is organic and not bound by theories, but by faith and

continuity therefore it's ever evolving dynamism defies existing methodologies of documentation. This knowledge is embedded in the memory of its exponents which create the inter-generational, inter-disciplinary linkages to enrich the sophisticated yet nebulous creative expressions.

The project of 20th Century Modernity has many critics that have begun to recognize the limits of logic and compartmentalization. To vitalize the discourse, the West has begun to seek out non Western cultural diversity. The problem however lies in the haste with which the appropriation takes place with disregard to the deeper philosophical content. The borrowing is done with the assumption that form can be divorced from its meaning and interpreted through any cultural framework, a position which is both arrogant and disrespectful. The writers of critical text from the West, when knowing and knowingly use Modern theories to interpret art that belongs to a different context, its cultural voice is suppressed, also because Western social theories are not compatible with its sensibility, and the art often comes across as weak and insipid. In her notebook essay Nawal Al Saadwawi titled 'The Day Mubarak Was Tried', weaves personal history with that of her nation into a response with a multiplicity of layers informed by the writer's experience of living in Egypt under the oppressive dictatorship of Mubarak. It resonates with the complex reality of Post Tahreer Square Egypt, in a way no critical text based on mediated information can communicate.

Artists from Non Western communities that exhibit globally also, have developed a tendency to customize their art for a Western audience and can fall into the trap and acquire an outsider's gaze. The veil as a symbol of women rights in visual discourse is such a case in point because it emerged with the media hype that turned it into a tool of gender apartheid while failing to take into account its cultural and social connotations in different communities. This 'outsider gaze' has been exacerbated by the proliferation of certain images and slogans that are given a new meaning by the media that make it difficult to separate the imagined from the real.

The Documenta 13 does acknowledge a need to open up the theoretical space through notebooks that symbolizes the possibilities within

formative ideas, but falls short of addressing the issues of intellectual siege created by mis-reading and misrepresentation of Non Western Art. This is perhaps most visible in privileging

the references to Bamiyan Buddhas, which as a cultural symbol of Afghanistan is purely a construct of the Western media which has given it a central place in the imagination of the Western people pushing aside more pressing issues like the human cost of the conflict and the greatest ever displacement of the Afghan people. Many of the Diasporic Afghan artists are a part of this displacement and yet have chosen not to challenge the frames that exclude this exodus and the repressive strategies that have brutalized and radicalized an entire generation.

Looking at Kabul (and the Afghan War) through the art and

critical texts in the exhibition catalog leaves many questions unanswered and raises new ones as discussed in this essay. Many of them are linked to power relationships developed and perpetuated by politics and capitalism. Documenta 13 attempts to foreground Kabul and Alexandria and the emerging realities there that have created a space for 'new players', but the discursive parameters remain unchanged as 'the incomplete' as a strategy of mis-representation has yet to be re-negotiated so that their art can be interpreted through its own context to allow the unmediated voice to come through. ■

Bani Abidi (Pakistan), *Death at 30 Degree Angle*, video Installation, 2012



- 1- Ashis Nandy *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1983. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988
- 2- Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The Dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted and lasted for a long time," *Book of Books*, Documenta 13, Catalog 1/3, 2012
- 3- Chus Martinez, "How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog," *The Book of Books*, Documenta 13, Catalog 1/3, 2012

## NuktaArt Team

Prof Valeria making a presentation at the State Bank of Pakistan Auditorium, (Courtesy: Dr Asma Ibrahim)



## Dr Prof Valeria Fiorani Piacentini



Prof Valeria (© Rumana Husain)

**Dr Prof Valeria Fiorani Piacentini** is an Italian researcher who has worked in Balochistan and Sindh for over twenty years. The centrality of Kij-u-Makran region, which is the classical name of Turbat, and Sindh, as pointed out in historical records, was the theme of her talk "*Silks and precious merchandise in the 13th century: Genoa's thrust to the Orient. Sindh: Sources in Arabic & Persian, records from Italian archives.*" She read her paper in a seminar in the summer of 2012, which was organized in Karachi by the State Bank of Pakistan.

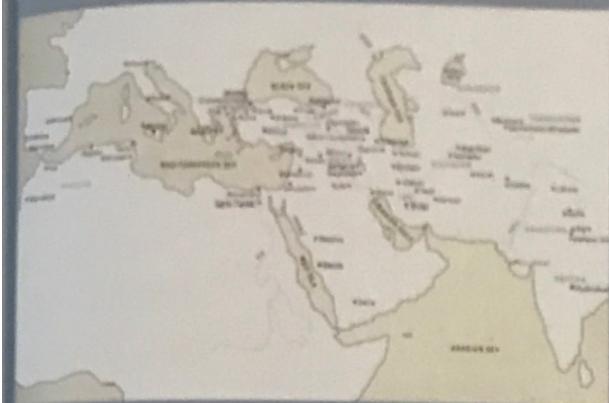
**Rumana Husain** and **Niilofur Farrukh** of **NUKTAART** met Dr Piacentini to find out more about her research in Balochistan and Sindh and the pre- Renaissance cultural exchange between Asia and Italy in which the land trading route based in present day Pakistan played a pivotal role.

Prof Valeria Fiorani Piacentini elaborated "I came back to work with the French archaeologist, Monique, and the Pakistani archaeologist Dr Asma Ibrahim (she is the Director of the State Bank Museum, and was the force behind the seminar). I started from Hormuz, then Makran, and my quest is to find that harbor...therefore I am now working in the Indus Delta. The site of Bhambore could also easily be that harbor town."

Regarding the contention that Bhambore, located around 64 kms from Karachi could well be the ancient port city of Debul, where in 712 AD, Arab conqueror Mohammad Bin Qasim of Baghdad landed and captured the area by defeating the local ruler Raja Dahir, Prof Piacentini says, "If the site of Bhambore is Debul - I would say "yes," 99% it may be, but I want to investigate the 1% to determine this beyond any doubts."

It would not be wrong to say that it was Prof Valeria Piacentini's knowledge of Arabic and Persian that brought her to this part of Asia and engaged her in its history.

"My great uncle, who was the brother of my maternal grandfather, was a well known Orientalist, and he lived on the upper floor of my grandmother's house where I had moved in order to study these languages. My father was disappointed with my choice



## Silks and Precious Goods in the 13th Century: Genoa's Thrust to the Orient.

of subjects, as he had wanted me to study medicine, so I deemed it best to get away from my own house for sometime. I felt privileged to have studied under my great uncle's guidance and held discussions with him every day. He had a dark sense of humor and told me that I would die poor, as studying these languages would not bring me any money," she said with a smile.

While working at Triesta University she got an opportunity to move to Mashad University in Iran from where she started her work from Hormuz four decades ago. She added that there has always been a keen interest in the civilizations of Arabia, Persia, India, Central Asia and China and for its academic study the first Oriental University had been set up in Naples at the end of the 17th century.

The importance of Hormuz was its link to the northern silk land route. The buyids, to counter the Kermizians and the Fatimids in Cairo controlled Hormuz. They also reunified Sindh, Makran, Kirman and Faras to Shiraz, which was pivotal to the trade from Asia to Europe.

"It was a very active North - South route, coming from Central Asia, Samarkand, Bukhara, Neshapur...all along the caravan routes down to Hormuz. From there was the land route to Makran."

In her research she found that Kij-u-Makran region had great importance for Genoa, for, as Prof Piacentini explains, this route meant by-passing the Byzantine Empire which levied heavy tax on traders. Records show that the Genoese were the first to find this alternate route when they first came to Tabriz, Shiraz, during the Mongol period and aligned themselves with a very powerful merchant family who had commercial links right up to China. Genoa in the Middle Ages was one of the maritime Italian republics. Together with Pisa, Venice, and a few others these city-states competed with each other militarily as well as commercially.

The Makran coast or Kij-u- Makran in Balochistan which constituted the main trade route was a very green region and well fortified with "castles that date back to the 6th millennium BC, some of

which are still inhabited by people. The powerful *sardars* were supported by the Zikri sect and the Gichkis who were not Baloch, but Rajputs."

Dr Valeria further explains that "In the 15th century Rome became the first center in Europe to have a big market for medicines, potions and filters. While working in the Vatican City I came across two letters from the 15th century written from the secretary of the Pope to the captain of his fleet, which was sailing to the East. This east," she elaborates, "was *your* east. It was a long list of items - more than 200 items - requesting to import those from the East. In a little postscript, there was a shorter list of items like quartz, lapis lazuli, etc. explaining that they needed to make a special powder of these precious and semi precious stones to be used for filters."

Also on the list of imports into Italy was saffron from Kashmir, silk from Khurasan and Neshapur, dry fruits, fresh dates, muslin, dyes, indigo, and fine textiles embroidered in gold and luxury goods, which were all transported via Sindh. Much sought after was a mussel shell, found only in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, from which crimson dye was extracted for the imperial color used in Italian city states.

Ruby, onyx, lapis lazuli and turquoise were the precious and semi precious stones in demand in Europe in the late 15th century. As was Chinese porcelain from the Tang and Ming periods, incense and frankincense (*luban*), the art of falconry, string instruments, medicines, arts and crafts, carpentry, weaving, binding of books, brass and ivory inlays...

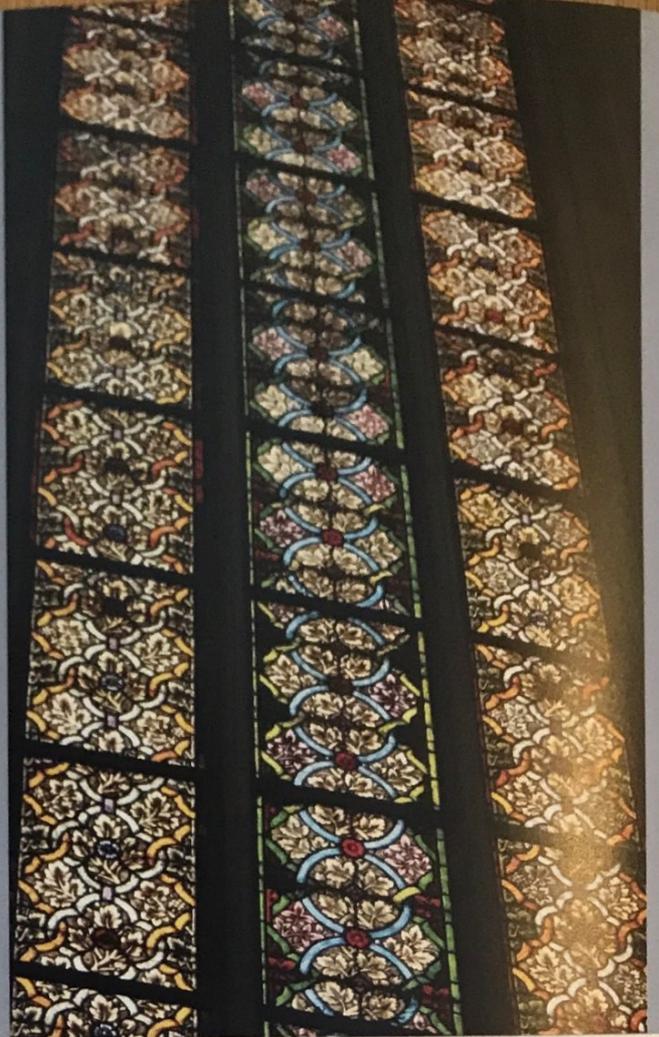
She says that Italy, more specifically, moved over from trading to production, in the 14th century. "And this is how the balance began to change. The form of payment was rough pieces of silver, felt, wool, and sometimes gold coins."

Speaking about the people of those times, she says that "craftsmen were very mobile. They shifted their tools and families wherever there was business. Merchants lived where there was stability, and it was the military empires that could impose stability and security, and they prospered."



I have seen our religious paintings with Kufic Arabic scripts on textiles and dresses of ladies, including dresses of the Virgin Mary, use decorative motifs painted on them that are definitely from

the East. The design using Arabic script, is called Arabesque decoration, as they did not understand the script and used it as design or motif, which we also call pseudo writing," Prof Piacentini added that "There is also stained glass on the dome of Vienna and used in our churches, adapted from what you have in your mosques."



Stained glass in Minoritenkirche, Vienna

**NUWTAART** inquired if Prof. Piacentini had come across any record of miniature paintings of the Moghul courts or any religious statues from India going to Genoa or to Rome or Venice.

**Prof. Piacentini** "In 15th century Tabriz, I found a religious encyclopedia with miniature paintings. But I have seen *our* religious paintings with Kufic Arabic scripts on textiles and dresses of ladies, including dresses of the Virgin Mary, use decorative motifs painted on them that are definitely from the East. The design using Arabic script, is called Arabesque decoration, as they did not understand the script and used it as design or motif, which we also call pseudo writing," Prof Piacentini added that "There is also stained glass on the dome of Vienna and used in our churches, adapted from what you have in your mosques."

"In Jivani, Makran, I have come across a tomb, which is a rectangular wall, with two kinds of minarets, where on the front entrance inside the main wall there are several tombs of saints, and over there on the brick walls are beautiful porcelain bowls in turquoise and white, of the Safavid period - 17th century - sticking out. It will be interesting to find out why they used these bowls or platters instead of using flat tiles, which are used more extensively," she wonders. The researcher had also seen the use of such bowls and platters as surface decoration in Iran as well as in churches in Italy.

**NA** The Italian city of Florence also has its ceramic tradition

with yellow and green floral decorations therefore did she conclude that there is any ceramic influence from Asia? Moreover, what other intellectual exchanges has she come across?

**Prof. P** "Whether they copied us, or we copied them, both have had the use of bowls in our countries. Together with bricks, the use of the ceramic bowls appeared quite beautiful," she says. "Also I found in Jivani a Chinese influence of colors on the ceramics, in blue and white porcelain."

The connections in the decorations across these countries are indeed fascinating.

Expanding on the intellectual exchange, other than medicine and the sciences, she says that "Dante, in exile from Italy, traveled to the east. Some of his passages were certainly inspired by the eastern culture; they were not ours. He had access to stories and met some of the diplomatic groups coming and going, and he could exchange ideas. It became an epic, classical literature ...and the stories of Laila Majnoo, Shirin Farhad, and the Romance of Alexander the Great were all incorporated..."

**NA** asked Prof Piacentini to elaborate on her findings from maps, records, documents and field research on the Makran Coast from 1987 onwards.

**Prof. P** "There were small settlements, fishermen villages, no interlinks, no connection with the hinterland. The people of the coastal areas were afraid of the people in the hinterland, and



vice versa. There were no big harbors but there were shelters for piracy, yes,...as many as you like, small settlements in Pasni, Gwadar, Jivani...but no great harbor. Even today it is very difficult to dig and build a big harbor there because of the silt.

"My excavations were all along the Turbat area, which is a continuous strip of oasis from the Iranian border and beyond. It is a natural road that can be followed. There were many shelters there; several castles and shelters built for caravans to rest. One could survive there very well. Outside were cultivated fields. The castles were of course in a dominant position. The mounds reveal that the castles were built one on top of the other. They were made of mud bricks. There was protection from the flooding of river. There was continuous work of repair and maintenance.

"I found beautiful halls that were plastered and painted. To me they reminded very much of the Iranian style and culture. They were vaulted; while everything there was roofed. There were magnificent paintings, but everything was collapsing."

**NA** asked about the kind of decorative imagery found in the castles and the people who built them.

**Prof. P** During the excavations she found the Gichki castle. "There are beautiful flowers, peacocks, fish, etc., such as one of those lustrous Shirazi or Isfahani carpets. These were probably made between 200 to 300 years ago. The British did not destroy

them once they conquered the castle.

"The Gichkis, who were a Rajput family, came to Makran in the 16th century, at the end of the Mongol period. They came as a family...they are not a tribe, and they became sardars of the region. They were not familiar with the local population, so they rebuild the old castles and mostly stayed inside those. In order to rule they needed an army, so they took up people from the local population. Having come from India, they had a lavish taste for all kinds of commodities: carpets, furniture, objects, using slaves...They used some ladies of the local tribe as wet nurses for their own children. The Gichki men didn't marry local women, though their women married local men, in order to keep the lineage 'pure.'"

Prof Valeria Fiorani Piacentini's search for the harbor town in the Indus Delta, which she believes was the central harbor in Makran, may have yet to conclude but her findings to-date have opened important chapters in Pakistan's history. The active role of the Makran Coast as the land trade route to Europe during the Middle Ages, which led to a large scale exchange of material goods and ideas and its subsequent impact on the Renaissance needs further investigation. The Gichki forts that have survived 500 years in some places also calls for immediate documentation for its unique indigenous architecture, so these can enter mainstream discussion and study.