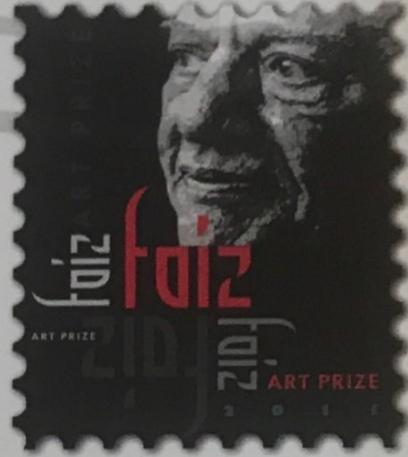


# N U K T A ART

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آجاء افریقہ!

Interpreting  
Faiz Ahmad Faiz  
through Art

Exhibition reviews from  
Pakistan, Tunisia,  
France, UK and USA

Pakistan and Africa: A  
South-South Dialogue

Art Dubai and  
Sharjah Biennial 2011



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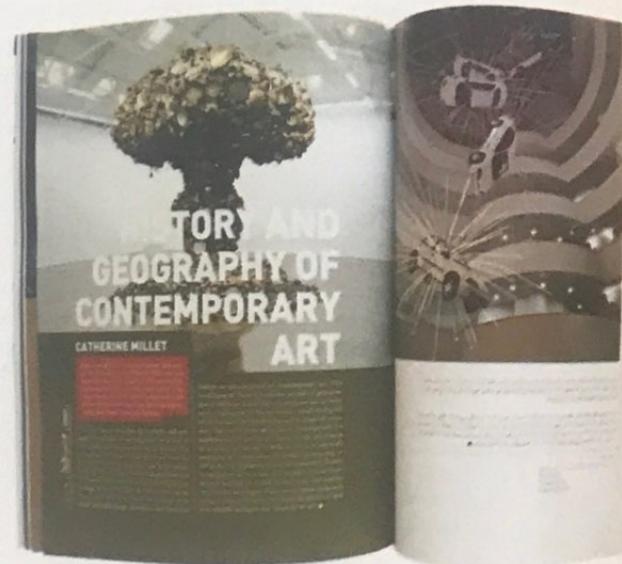
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## Arooj Zahid

Arooj Zahid holds a Masters in Fine Arts from the College of Art & Design, Punjab University. She did field work in Art History at major museums in UK in 2008. She is an artist, art writer and presently engaged in teaching at the Punjab University. She has a very keen interest in art as well as its history and undertakes assignments related to these fields.

## Asif Farrukhi

Fiction-writer, critic and translator, Asif Farrukhi lives and writes in Karachi. A public health physician by training, he was educated at the Dow Medical College, Karachi and the Harvard University, USA. Known for short stories and essays, seven collections of his short fiction and two collections of critical essays have been published. He has published translations of prose and poetry from modern and classical writers. He contributes regularly to the English-language press. Two of his adaptations have been staged in Karachi. He is the editor of *Duniyazad*, a literary journal of new writing and contemporary issues in Urdu.

Asif Farrukhi has presented papers and participated in literary events at home as well as abroad. He is a founder member of the Karachi Literary Festival. For his distinguished work, he was awarded the Prime Minister's Literary Award by the Pakistan Academy of Letters in 1997 and the Tamgha-i-Intiaz by the Government of Pakistan.

## Christine Bruckbauer

Christine Bruckbauer studied Art History and Art Teaching at University Graz in Austria, and later, for two years she studied Cultural Management at University Linz, Austria. She has lived in Pakistan from 2002 - 2006. She is an art historian who specializes in contemporary art from South Asia, Middle East and North Africa. Currently she lives in La Marsa, Tunisia.

## Edward Rubin

Edward Rubin, writer-photographer-collagist, and curator, lives in New York City. His writings appear regularly in various magazines such as *Sculpture*, *ArtUS*, *Canadian Art*, *d'art International*, *Hispanic Outlook*, and *NY Arts*. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AIACA), Outer Critics Circle, the Drama Desk, and the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC). When he is not art-viewing he is reviewing theatre online for *NY Theatre Wire*, and on *Hil Drama* - a Time Warner cable TV show, based in New York City.

## Fatima Quraishi

Fatima Quraishi is an art historian, currently working as a faculty member in the Liberal Arts Programme at Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture. She has a Masters in History of Art from University of Victoria (Canada) and Bachelors in History of Art & Architecture from Brown University (USA). Her research is focused on the historiography of Islamic art in the Subcontinent.

## Hawra Harianawala

Hawra Harianawala trained at the National College of Arts, Lahore. She enjoys the process of verbalising and discerning art trends in Pakistan. Having worked with SAVAC, Toronto and currently teaching an early morning art studio at Faraar / T2f in Karachi, her aim is to find cross-sections between art and existence.

## Maddie Phinney

Maddie Phinney is an independent curator and arts writer with a BA in Art History from Smith College. Her scholarship focuses on representations of gender and sexuality in visual culture. She has been an assistant curator of exhibitions at the Smith College Museum of Art and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Her past work includes *Cézanne's Paragon: Greenberg's confusion of the arts in Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, *Constructionist Identity in Glenn Ligon's Feast of Scraps* and, most recently, a dissertation on the role of queer time and space in the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, a study that is now held in the archives of the Pompidou's Bibliothèque National d'Information. Her first curatorial effort *ON TIME: NY to LA* was exhibited in winter 2009 at the Palos Verdes Art Center in Los Angeles. As a freelance critic she has reviewed exhibitions for *Art Observed*.

## Nada Raza

Nada Raza is a curator from Pakistan, currently based in London. She has worked with *Paradise Row*, *Quintessentially Art* and *Green Cardamom*, and is now completing an MA in Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice at the Chelsea College of Art and Design.

## Rabyya Naseer

Rabyya Naseer has recently returned to Lahore after completing her MA in Art Theory from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) as a Fulbright scholar. Currently she is visiting faculty, at NCA and BNU, senior art teacher at LGS and writing about contemporary art for the monthly *Herald* magazine. Naseer is an interdisciplinary artist whose work combines areas of sculpture, painting, photography and performance. Her work has been exhibited in Pakistan and at venues in China, Japan, USA and UK. 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*.

## Sehba Mohammad

Sehba Mohammad is a multi talented art enthusiast. Raised in Karachi, her urban aesthete was given roots in Lahore where she studied Communication Design at the National College of Arts. She has contributed articles and reviews to the weekly *Friday Times* and monthly *Newsline*, and is currently exploring the world of nonprofit as Asst Manager Individual Membership at WWF Pakistan.

## Shahana Rajani

Shahana Rajani graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in History of Art and is currently working as an art critic in Karachi, writing for monthly *Newsline*, *NuktaArt*, and other publications. Until recently, she held the post of Gallery Curator for Karachi School of Art.

## Shireen Ikramullah

Shireen Ikramullah is a painter and museologist with a BFA from the National College of Arts, Lahore, and a Masters in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Manchester, UK. She worked as a Visitor and Gallery Consultant at the Manchester Museum, and has participated in group shows in Lahore and Islamabad. In 2007 she was commissioned to work for the Dag Hammarskjöld Building in New York. She works at the National Art Gallery (NAG) in Islamabad as Research Officer for a major data-base project concerning the artworks in Pakistan.

## Simone Wille

Simone Wille is an art historian. She has written a doctorate thesis on Contemporary Art in Pakistan at the University of Vienna, Austria. She writes for various newspapers, art magazines, and exhibition catalogues. She is currently based in Vienna.

## Syed Waseem Hussain Zaidi

Photographer Syed Waseem Hussain Zaidi works with the Department of Museum and Art Gallery, State Bank of Pakistan. He is responsible for the entire photographic documentation of the reserved and displayed collections of the State Bank Museum. Previously, he worked with the Department of Antiquities and the Department of Archaeology and Museums.

## Xhinyu Chen

Xhinyu Chen is a contributing writer for *Art Asia Pacific*, *Yishu Journal*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *ArtInfo* and *NuktaArt*. She was raised in New York City and attended Middlebury College in Vermont, USA, where she studied Fine Arts and Chinese. She is a well-established consultant for contemporary art and cultural projects in Shanghai and greater China. Her book *Chinese Artists: New Media, 1990-2010* is a comprehensive introduction to a select group of Chinese contemporary artists working in new media. It was published by Schiffer Publishing at the end of 2010. Xhinyu currently lives and works in Shanghai.

## Zahra Shahid Hussain

Zahra Shahid Hussain is an education and media consultant. She studied and trained for international civil service and has post graduate degrees in international political relations and strategy and crisis management from The London School of Economics. She has taught at the University of Karachi and other educational institutions. For the last ten years she has been working with IDSP in Balochistan on projects committed to human resource development and training of young people. For the last thirty years she has also been researching and working on the enhancement of skills and crafts of Pakistan and has been involved with the reproduction of antique fabrics such as silks, embroideries and the Kashmiri Shawl, and promoted and marketed them in America, Europe, Middle East and South Africa. She has lectured and written extensively on the subject.

It was a historic art moment for Pakistan as artists won awards both at Dubai and Sharjah in March 2011. Imran Qureshi's spectacular site-specific work, *Blessings upon the land of my love*, made him the winner of the highest award at the Sharjah Biennial 2011. Aisha Khalid's *Kashmiri Shawl* enjoyed a place of prominence in the foyer of the Sharjah Art Museum. Among the five winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize 2011 at Art Dubai, two winning entries were from artists of Pakistani origin. Hamra Abbas's stained glass window *Woman in Black* and Shezad Dawood's *The New Dream Machine* proudly took their place in the 'winners' courtyard'. At Art Dubai Rashid Rana, Faiza Butt and Shazia Sikander had booths dedicated to their latest work. Several other galleries also showcased Pakistani talent.

To see a Zahoorul Akhlaq work at the Green Cardamom booth, an artist who was a mentor to the young Pakistani artists who received laurels, sharing this moment of glory, was both important and appropriate.

**NUKTAART** brings the achievements of these artists to readers in this issue.

On his Birth Centenary, **NUKTAART** pays tribute to the poetic genius of Faiz Ahmed Faiz by exploring the common ground between Faizian philosophy and visual arts. The emotive iconography of the poet, with blood and roses as motifs of love and pain is brought into discussion by Asif Farrukhi. Another article focuses on the work of three prominent artists, who like Faiz, focused their oeuvre on the struggle for human rights.

With an aim to involve 2000 artists and art students mainly from South Asia, where Faiz is read and admired, **NUKTAART** with its partners Aman ki Asha (Geo Network) and Progressive Writers Association, has organized the Faiz Art Prize which invites participants to address a *Postcard to Faiz*.

Expanding on the theme of subversion, Rumana Husain in her research discovers the making and re-making of socialist icons in different national and ideological contexts.

'Dream City' by Christine Bruckbauer, reports on the pre-revolution people's initiative to convert the historical quarter of Tunis into an art space. As the people of Egypt and Tunisia are redefining the politics of the Middle East, it dominated the art and debates at Art Dubai and the Sharjah Biennial. Jack Persekian, the then Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation, dedicated the 2011 Biennial to 'the spirit of change and young souls who are leading the revolution in the Middle East'. Ironically the day after the Biennial was inaugurated UAE sent its troops to crush down the unarmed people's protest in neighbouring Bahrain.

Simone Weil also writes about the changing mood that made political art a hot favourite with buyers at Art Dubai as an increasing number of galleries displayed the Arab artists' spontaneous response to the optimism emanating from Cairo and Tunisia.

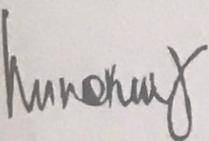
**NUKTAART** has initiated Youth-Lens, a project for young photographers which will enable them to print images from their portfolio in the publication. The works of Eefa Khalid and Marium Ismail have been selected for this issue.

Also featured is Agha Abbas's collection of industrial photographs in our regular Photo-Essay with images that have the power to surprise with its hard edged elegance.

The relationship between art and societal issues underpins the discussion in Nukta-e-Nazar and the urgent need for a local framework for artists and curators that can make interventions like *No Honor in Killing* more relevant to the community.

Imagining Cities at Amin Gulgee Gallery with New Media Art from the African continent, juxtaposed with art from Pakistan conveyed the urgency of the city as it negotiates the past and present, as it hurtles towards an uncertain future, this rare South South art experience both informed and challenged the audience. Amra Ali in her essay examines the many layers of this curated show and calls for "proactive discussions on the subtext/s that emerge now and will continue to do so".

**NUKTAART** has reinforced the importance of an interface and in the last 5 years given a voice to concerns of the South like Censorship, Environment and the Art Diaspora among others. This has helped contributions from developing communities to set the agenda for the debate.



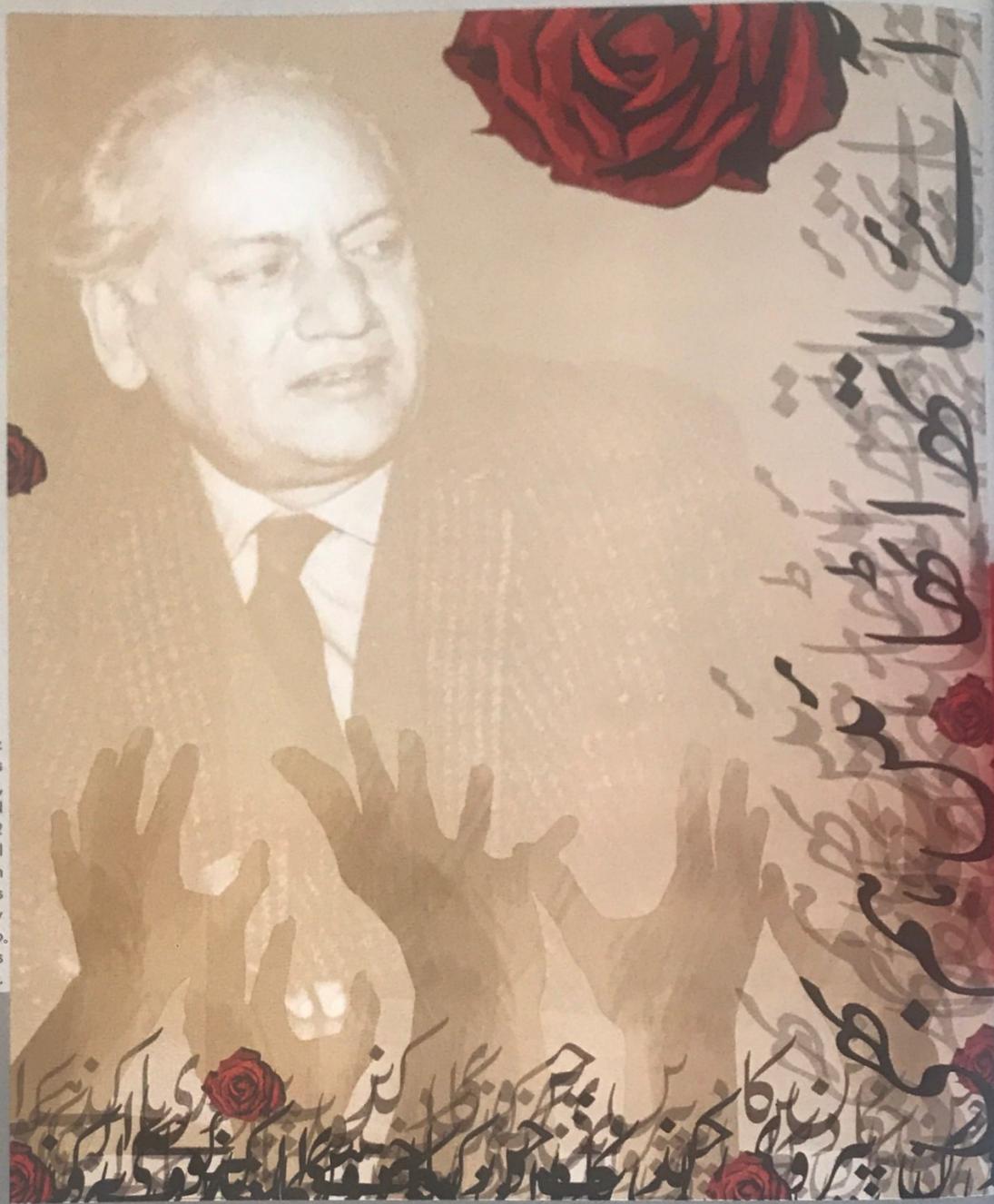
Nilofur Farrukh  
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Amra Ali  
Senior Editor

May 2011

To celebrate Faiz Ahmed Faiz's 100th birthday, the daily DAWN published 32 pages of a special supplement in February. This illustration by Khuda Bux Abro, appeared on its back cover.



The poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, arguably one of the finest Urdu poets of all times and certainly the best-known from the later half of the twentieth century, creates a rich, silken and sonorous impression on its audience / readers, an effect which seems to defy description or analysis. You are moved and drawn in even before you fully understand what it is saying. This is probably true for all great poetry, but in the case of Faiz, even an initial exploration will reveal that this poetry gives voice to a contemporary sensibility, in tune with the spirit of the age, through traditional conventions and stylistic norms drawn from classical poetry going back from Ghalib and Sauda to the Persian masters. It manages to be classical without being pedantic and is fully modern without cutting of its classical moorings. Multiple-layered with a heavy texture, Faiz's poetry is not simply a happy accident or a mere fusion between the classical and modern. Yet, this is not all. Its artistic appeal goes beyond this simultaneous access to the classical and the modern. There are other aspects of Faiz's style, perhaps not so marked, but significant in their own way and the

visual aspect of imagery is one such stylistic feature and holds a key (though obviously, one of many) to a better understanding of his stylistics.

The color-drenched panorama inherent in Faiz's poetry and the manifold possibilities it may unravel before an artist was brought home to me by this beautiful ghazal, the first of several I was fortunate to hear him recite and which continues to fascinate me decades later:

رنگ پیرہن کا خوشبو زلف لہرانے کا نام  
موسم گل ہے تمہارے بام پر آنے کا نام

Going beyond the anthropomorphic placing of the Beloved from the classical Urdu poetry, it is the sensuous celebration of what Dylan Thomas would call "the green force" which fuses growth with color and proclaims a beautiful vision opening the world to

unabated light which must have moved painter Bashir Mirza to inscribe the first line as a title for one of his *Lonely Girl* series, a calendar reproduction of which I hung over my writing desk for many years, drinking in the rich visual music in daily doses for as many years as I could.

This beautiful opening couplet is perhaps too obvious an example, but it was through a recent reading of another poem which sent me on a trial of the visual in Faiz's poetry. I began by looking for the historical circumstances in which the poem was written and the strong testimony it bears to the unknown victims of tyrannical government but right at the end came across a startling visual image. This is "*Yaban Say Sbeber Ko Dekho*", signed Karachi by the poet and dated March 1965. This is how it goes in Naomi Lazard's translation:

Asif Farrukhi

# THE COLOR OF BLOOD OR ROSES:

# VISUAL IMAGERY IN THE POETRY OF FAIZ

If you look at the city from here  
You see it is laid out in concentric circles,  
Each circle surrounded by a wall  
Exactly like a prison.  
Each street is a dog-run for prisoners,  
No milestones, no destinations, no way out.

If anyone moves too quickly you wonder  
Why he hasn't been stopped by a shout.  
If someone raises his arm  
You expect to hear the jangling of chains.

If you look at the city from here  
There is no one with dignity,  
No one fully in control of his senses.  
Every young man bears the brand of a criminal,  
Every young woman the emblem of a slave.

You cannot tell whether you see  
A group of revellers or mourners  
In the shadows dancing around the distant lamps,  
And from here you cannot tell  
Whether the color streaming down the walls  
Is that of blood or roses.

As translations go, it can do only some justice to the original poem. The opening lines here offer a prosaic description while the original poem is more suggestive and the evocation of a city bound in circles then opens another frame with a description of its people. We cannot know if this group of people are revellers or mourners and their behavior is not unlike the absurd behavior on the streets in a Naguib Mehfoz story, *At The Bus Stop*. It seems to me to be a companion piece to another poem *Laboo Kay Suragh*, similarly signed and dated by the poet in a manner which illuminates the poem from its position sitting on the margin of the text.

Poems are not completely explained by descriptions of the circumstances in which they came to be written. The same is true for this poem and descriptions, no matter how detailed, can only be tentative. In a recent account of Faiz's poetic response to

There is a sliver of blue under the edge of  
the rooftops,  
Blue of frozen shadows.  
In that blue lake the bubble of a leaf floats  
in silence,  
Floats for a moment, sails and breaks, softly.  
Very softly, very pale, the faint color of  
wine  
Fills my glass, softly.

Here the description dissolves in a suggestion and the evocation of color completes the visual / poetic effect. Colors take a different purpose in the exquisite poem *Rang Hai Dil Ka Meray*, which is as follows in Naomi Lazard's translation:

Before you came things were just what they  
were:

The road precisely a road, the horizon fixed,  
The limit of what could be seen,  
A glass of wine no more than a glass of  
wine.

With you the world took on the spectrum  
Radiating from my heart: your eyes gold  
As they open to me, slate the color  
That falls each time I lose all hope.

With your advent roses burst into flame:  
You were the artist of dried-up leaves,  
sorceress

Who flicked her wrist to change dust into  
soot.

You lacquered the night black.

As for the sky, the road, the cup of wine:

One was my tear-drenched shirt,

The other an aching nerve,

The third a mirror that never reflected the  
same thing.

Now you are here again - stay with me.

This time things will fall into place;

The road can be the road,

The sky nothing but sky;

The glass of wine, as it should be, the glass  
of wine.

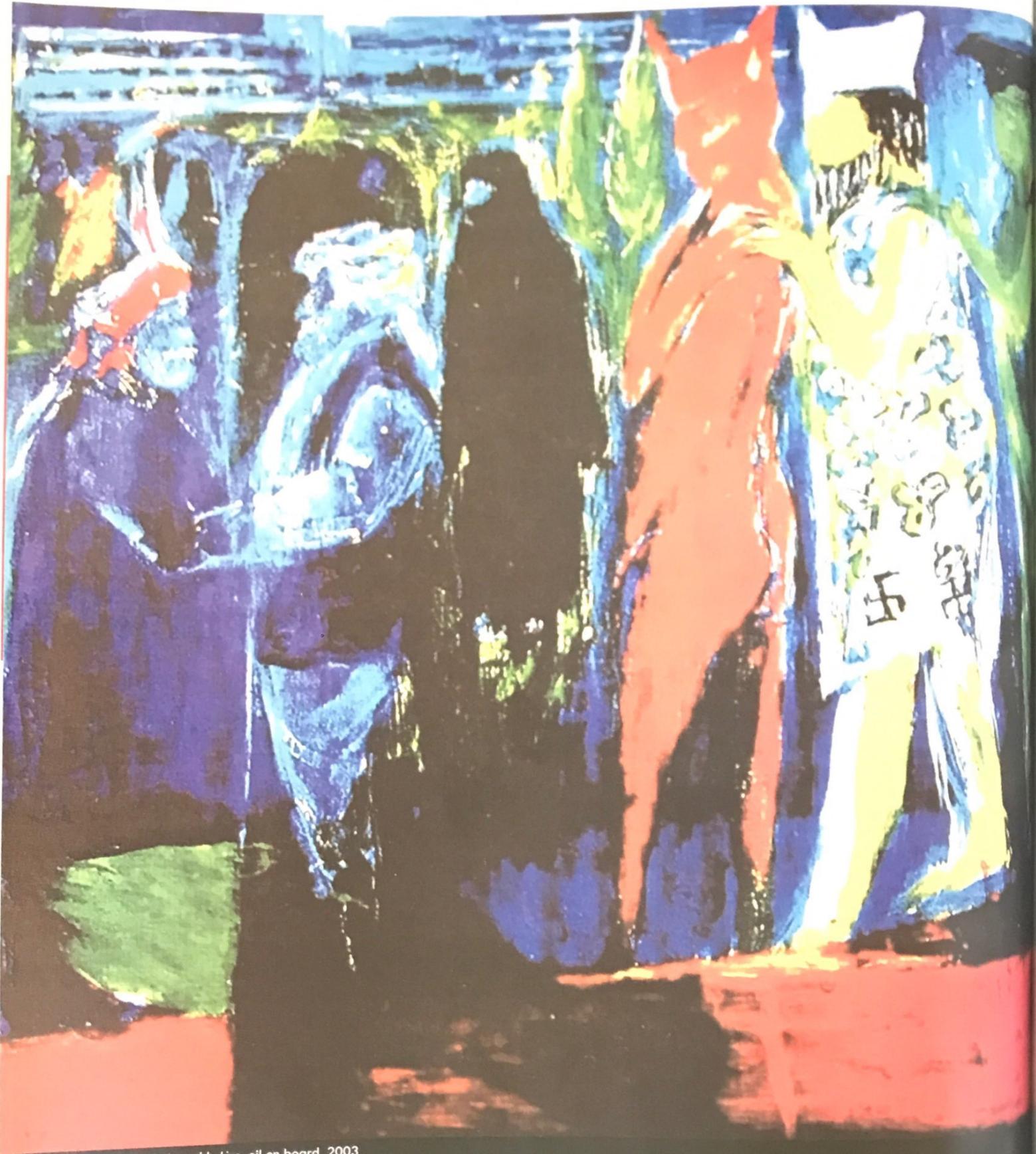
Visual and colorful in its effects, the poem opens with an indication of the limits of vision, what the eye cannot see and what the heart will not behold. As the heart takes on colors, so does the world. Each color moves on from the merely visible to the color of imagination and emotion. So it is *champaai rung* (the yellow of frangipani) and then *rabat e deedar ka rung* (the color of delight in a vision of the beloved) and then *surmai rung, saadat e baazaar ka rung* (the color gray...the time of boredom and apathy), in a way which does not achieve its full effect in the otherwise competent translation. The color of poison, the color of blood and the color of the dark night and colors reflected in an ever-changing mirror stretch the visible to its limits, acquiring new shades and evocative of moods and feelings. Such is the power of Faiz's poetry that he makes colors speak a different language.

Faiz is a poet of unexpected colors and colors emerging from



Aisha Khalid,  
*Birth of Venus*  
(page from  
artist's  
miniature  
album),  
gouache  
on vasli,  
2001

unexpected places. He speaks of "*neelay shaal, dosbalay lay ker*" in *Utho Ab Matti Say Utho*, and "*dard ki kaasni pazaib*" in *Paas Raho*. Why *kaasni* (purple)? I leave that to your imagination. But the choice of color adds a completely different hue to the image. The anklets of pain would have jangled differently if it did not have a *kaasni* color given to it. Faiz weaved the magic of his poetry primarily through language. Some critics and analysts have written about the auditory power of his poetic imagination, evident as in the moving lines from the poem addressed to the students involved in the Iranian revolution, "*jin key laboo ki asbrafiyan chan chan, chan chan.*" In the bejewelled imagery of this poem as well as in many others, it is the visual imagery of Faiz which contributes significantly to the overall success of the poem. Can anybody who has read the beautiful lines with "*aag ki kachchi aliyan*" or "*batbon ki bai-kul chandi*" ever forget that particular shade of fire or the hue of silver? ■



Nagori, *Assembly Line*, oil on board, 2003

# Sharing a Metaphor with

Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the distinguished Urdu poet whose work is read worldwide in many languages, in his extensive texts on culture articulated a distinct vision for art and literature in the country. He looked at collective cultural experience as a cohesive force that could play a positive role in uniting diverse communities into a nation. In the editorials of *The Times of Pakistan* from as early as 1948 is narrated the untold political history of Pakistan with the promise of a free society fading as the state dragged its feet in dismantling the colonial authoritarian apparatus. With the ideals of Jinnah that attracted people to Pakistan under attack by political expediency, the citizens' confidence in the young democracy was seriously challenged.

When Faiz used both his pen and activism to defend the rights of the people, he was repeatedly sent to prison and exiled for his resistance. From behind bars and in solitary confinement he wrote some of his most poignant verses in which emerges the metaphor of the beloved through which he addresses his people and his country. His poetry was banned by dictators for decades, but it continued to be recited in public gatherings and six decades later, its relevance has made it a timeless anthem of resistance.

Faiz's poetry and his texts address issues of an emerging nation and its internal conflicts. Human dispossession runs like a common thread throughout his work, while poetry is an emotive response to tyranny. His essays offer a direction to the struggle with practical strategies.

Faiz explains, "*Whatever his (writer's) social status his intellect and his education will automatically place him in the ranks of the elite minority. His emotional sympathies and ideological convictions however may demand his identification with the majority, the underprivileged masses. He will therefore, be called upon to make a choice of his audience, to write for his own class or transcend the class barriers. Conversely his literary tradition may be attuned to the idiom norms and conventions again of another class and another period not his own, the ruling class of the colonial or feudal period. He will thus be called upon to satisfy the demands of both the continuities of his past and of the realities of his present. And in all cases he will be expected to combine the integrity of his experience and his people's consciousness. He has to rely solely on the passion of his commitment, the depth of his vision and the reach of his creative talent.*"<sup>1</sup>

While the Progressive Writers Association and Lahore Artists Group (which was inspired by the Progressive Artists of Mumbai), were devoted to liberal values and an egalitarian social order, the writers, of which Faiz was one, found it easier to develop an

expression in Urdu to fulfilling their mandate. The Lahore Artists Group that adopted Modernism because it was compatible with their search for a new canon, however, got drawn into the formal concerns of the new idiom. This distanced their work from the aspirations of the people and made its iconography inaccessible to the people, even though some of the artists were ideologically committed to social and human rights.

Faiz regarded art highly: '*Art, unlike culture is not the raw material, or social life, which exists independently of individuals, but a deliberate and superior manufacture created by a body of specialists.*'<sup>2</sup>

In this essay I would like to investigate the points of convergence between Faizism (the philosophy found in the poetry and writings of Faiz) and the Visual Arts of

Pakistan through the opus of three artists, Sadequain (1930 - 1987), A. R. Nagori (1939 - 2011) and Imran Qureshi (born 1972), artists of three generations that have shared the aspirations for a nation free of violence and exploitation but settled for being a part of the struggle, heeding Faiz's clarion call *chalay chalo abi wo manzil nahin ayee...* (keep going for you have not reached the destination).

Sadequain painted distorted and mutilated figures to communicate his disillusionment with repressive social and political environment in much the same way

Sadequain (1930 - 1987), A. R. Nagori (1939 - 2011) and Imran Qureshi (born 1972), artists of three generations that have shared the aspirations for a nation free of violence and exploitation but settled for being a part of the struggle, heeding Faiz's clarion call *chalay chalo abi wo manzil nahin ayee...* (keep going for you have not reached the destination)

as Faiz used his verse. He too re-interpreted classical icons and crafted new ones in his paintings, the emaciated man usually a portrait of himself with bleeding fingers holding pen and brushes, sometimes enmeshed in cobwebs in what Faiz once called Sadequain's 'loveless and macabre world'. The works reinforced Sadequain's claim: 'I am a painter of the dustbin, the gutter', for he preferred to stand with the *mazloom* (disenfranchised). Sarmad, the dissident beheaded by the orthodox Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb reincarnated in Sadequain's work as the headless figure twisting in agony as he held up his bleeding head; this was his eulogy to Sarmad's courage to speak the truth. The synthesis of the cactus and figure that was uniquely Sadequain's creation, morphed into an emblem of survival and hardship. Throughout his oeuvre, the human torment is revisited with intensity and empathy and is often portrayed as personal anguish in a society that was becoming increasingly intolerant. This was to become a metaphor for widespread political and social repression that Faiz cites in his poem 'Yeh Dagh Dagh Ujald', an ode to the dawn of hope.

While Sadequain, unlike Faiz, never faced incarceration, he suffered from destitution and social alienation after his migration to Pakistan. This created a bond with the disinherited majority that became both his protagonist and the audience of his many public murals. In his public art he celebrated the masses as the builders of the modern industrialized society and inheritors of our civilization. Throughout his non-linear career with stylistic dexterity the painter foregrounded the concern for the proletariat. Sadequain's mural, *The Saga Of Labor* in the Turbine Hall at the Mangla Dam (1967), one of the largest in the world, is dedicated to his permanent audience which are men who toiled to generate power and their counterparts at work throughout Pakistan, to

Sadequain, *Sar Ba Kaf*, pen and ink, 1966

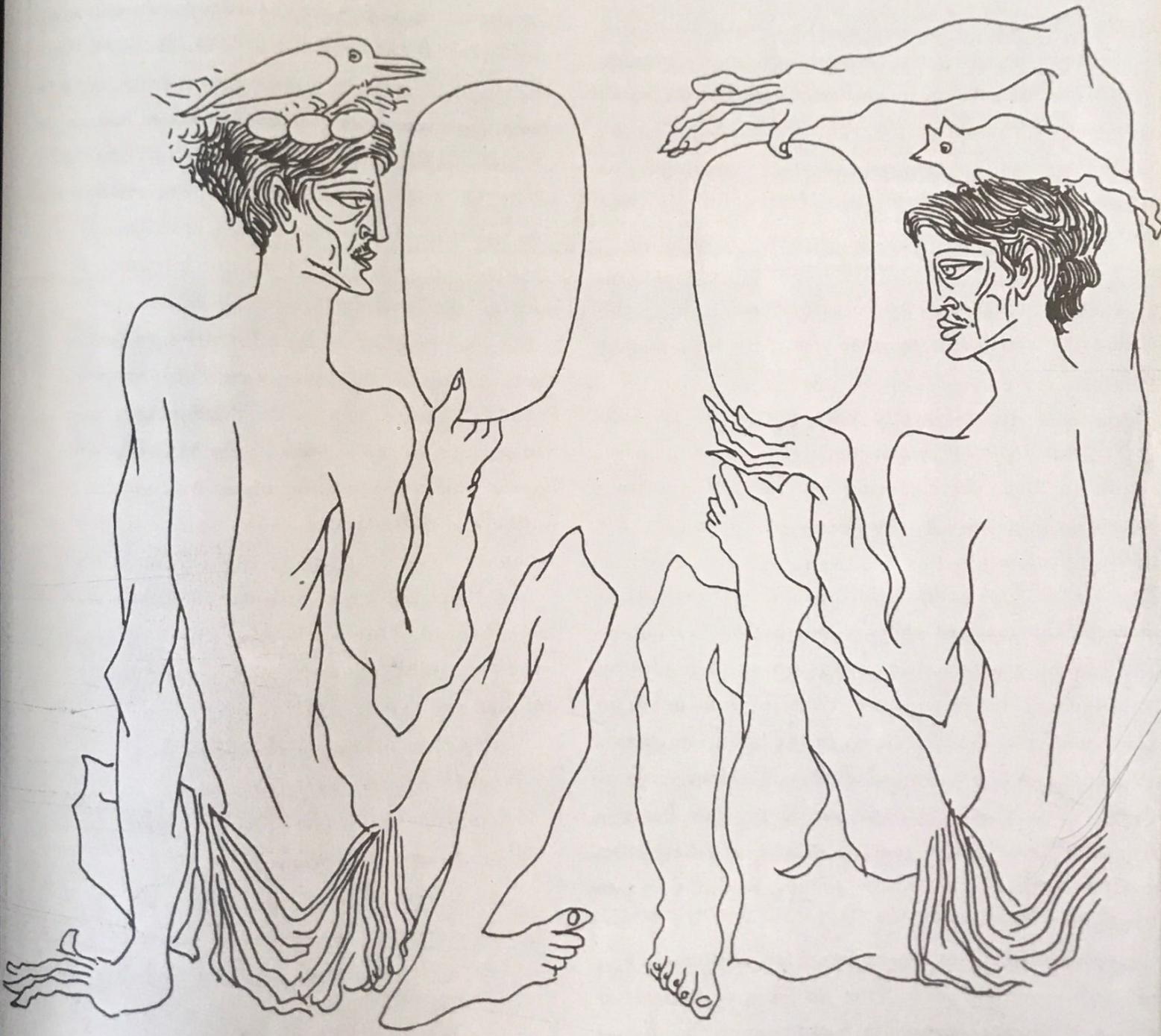


whom Faiz dedicated his poem *Ihtesaab*. It starts by sharing their plight in the verse '*Zard patton ka ban jo mera des hai, dard ki anjuman jo mera des hai*' (a land of pain and sadness).

Nagori's visual political commentary shares the defiant spirit that resonates in the poetry and editorials of Faiz, as the artist and the poet both contest human right abuses during authoritarian rule. His poems like *Aaj Bazar Mein Pa Ba Jolan Chalo* a narrative of the public humiliation of the dissidents by the law enforcers is a theme Nagori responded to in his paintings when Ziaul Haq used brute force in Sindh after the arrest of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the late 1970s. The work communicates repression both through scenes of pitched battles between the army and the resistance in the jungle

and with iconic symbols. To illustrate the new political hierarchy Nagori, in his brash style, painted a human tower with the arm dictator on top and a crushed citizen in tattered clothes at the bottom with politicians and others in between. Nagori's series on the primer for school children incorporates new words of repression that become the legacy of dictatorship and people's resistance to it. This body of work also refers to the new textbooks introduced during the Zia era to push an agenda of fanaticism. After the restoration of democracy, Nagori, in the 1990s, turned his lens to deprivations of the people and the wretched of Sindh that live unchanged lives of abject poverty. These forgotten outcasts that live on the periphery of development like the Bheel Tribe of the Thar Desert take on the form of a woman with the head of a bird with its beak looking up expectantly for rain. The corrupt and self-serving politicians were targeted in his last exhibition as predatory wolves and owls (owl in South Asia symbolizes stupidity), and crowding trees were depicted against the lush landscape and grand monuments of the nation's capital. To speak out for values like egalitarianism and human rights in an environment of fear created by dictatorship despite personal hardship was the courage of conviction shared by Faiz and Nagori, for the artist too faced threats, a ban on his work

Sadequain's mural, *The Saga Of Labor* in the Turbine Hall at the Mangla Dam (1967), one of the largest in the world, is dedicated to his permanent audience which are men who toiled to generate power and their counterparts at work throughout Pakistan, to whom Faiz dedicated his poem *Ihtesaab*



Sadequain, *Untitled*, pen and ink, 1970

and setbacks in his job at the university, but at no point did it silence his protest, almost as if he was inspired by Faiz's verse:

Speak, this brief hour is long enough  
 Before the death of body and tongue:  
 Speak, 'cause the truth is not dead yet,  
 Speak, speak, whatever you must speak.

(Translated by Azfar Hussain)

The dominant thread in Faiz's poetry is a yearning for social justice articulated in the metaphor of a lover's yearning for his beloved. The country takes on the role of the beloved in the format of the classical ghazal and the poet weaves in the pain of separation with the pain of injustice. The loneliness and separation become emblematic of lost dreams. Imran Qureshi, one of the pioneers of Neo-Miniature, a movement linked to Mughal and Regional Schools of Miniature Painting in South Asia, by investing new meaning in classical elements has contributed to the

transformation of the idiom. His visual commentary on 21st Century concerns like conflict, the crisis of identity and politics of extremism is constructed from familiar aesthetics with a subversive edge that contests its received meaning. This device mimics the way the romantic ghazal has been used by Faiz as a tool of protest. A similar marriage of the miniature format and techniques with social engagement connects Imran's oeuvre to issues of the people around him.

The witty twist the painter gives to a dictator's favorite dictum 'Enlightened Moderation' by turning it into Moderate Enlightenment in his series by the same title, alludes to the limited efficacy of such slogans. The artist illustrates this through the portraits of young men and women who try to balance the correctness of their Islamic dress code with their desire for the latest in fashion accessories. Outfitted with a beard, skullcaps and a pristine white *shalwar kameez*, meticulously worn above the

Imran Qureshi, *Blessings Upon the Land of My Love*, site-specific installation, emulsion and acrylic on brick, dimensions variable, 2011  
 Commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation, Photo by Alfredo Rubio



ankle, sport the latest branded footwear and bags fashionably slung across the chest. The same is true of girls in concealing *hijab* (veil) that draw attention to the elaborate embellishment on the garment. These humorous contradictions in the works poke fun at trappings that replace substance in political slogans, that demagogues have a penchant for imposing on a hapless nation. His comment on the arms race at a time when the nation was experiencing euphoria on the introduction of new missiles in its arsenal in the early 2000s, works like *Kagaz Kay Sanam*, *Law of Motion*, *Beginning of an End* with their somber palette, overpowering the fresh foliage, are a grim reminder of the politics of confrontation. Imran's site specific work at the Sharjah Biennale 2011 is reminiscent of a courtyard full of red stains and splashes bizarrely similar to an actual site of carnage. The only indication that this is an artistic intervention is his signature floral motifs resembling a chrysanthemum that the artist knits together like a magnified fungus. The work combines Pakistan's recent history of assassinations, bomb blasts and drone attacks and the wars in the region that have taken a heavy toll on life as well as the recent

audience, only accessible to a small minority. Faiz was fully aware of this, the 'epistemological violence' of colonialism and recommended strategies for "Vertical integration which means providing a common ideological and national basis for a multiplicity of national cultural patterns and horizontal integration, which means educating and elevating the entire body of their people to the same cultural and intellectual level. This means that the qualitative political change from colonialism to independence must be followed by a similar qualitative change in the social structure left behind by colonialism."<sup>3</sup> According to him this was possible by "salvaging from the debris of their shattered national cultures these elements which are basic to national identity which can be adjusted and adapted to the needs of a more advanced social structure, which help to strengthen and promote progressive social values and attitudes."<sup>4</sup> Faiz contributed to the cultural infrastructure by setting up the Arts Council as early as 1959 in Lahore and two decades later, he got a chance to set up The Pakistan National Council of the Arts and the Lok Virsa (museum and archive of rural craft and culture). In his paper on Problems of Cultural Planning in Asia, Faiz was prophetic when he warned against the politicization of art and culture by allowing an organic synthesis of regional

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uprising in the Middle East that have added a fresh chapter of bloodbath. Blood or *lahoo* is a recurring theme in Faiz's poetry that has been used as a symbol of pain, defiance, patriotism and exploitation. His poem *Lahoo Ka Suragh* written as a lament of the cover-up of political murders is particularly relevant today when the killers remain faceless and unpunished leaving behind a trail of pain and helplessness adding to a nation's angst.

Faiz reminds us that art modifies reality by articulating the sentiments of the people that they cannot do themselves. While artists still have the desire to speak for the people, they seem to have lost the discursive connection for the theoretical framework and the language in which they communicate about art to the

cultures into national patterns facilitated by an environment of tolerance and excellence to empower the artist to contribute towards a strong cultural identity for Pakistan. ■



Rumana Husain

# Popular Socialist Imagery

**T**he idea behind poster art is mass communication; and throughout the history of modern poster, which dates back to 1870, symbolism has been in use, whether to convey religious diktats, advertising for commerce, or for travel, entertainment and events, propaganda and politics. Some symbols became nationally or internationally popular, and they have permanently affixed themselves in people's memory.

The world over, socialist imagery, e.g. the Swastika, the Hammer and Sickle, or the spade; laborers, peasants, factory workers, the raised hand or fist, the Red Book or the color red itself, all came to symbolize a revolution for basic rights and equality. Some of those ideas and imagery filtered through and also came to Pakistan.

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**Es lebe Deutschland!**

National-Socialist German workers party poster showing Hitler

"Dignity of Labor", "We Can Do it!", "New Rights, New Duties" and "Hope" were the slogans of the posters that we were assigned to create as students of graphic design in the late sixties and early seventies. Much later, in March 2006 at The World Social Forum (WSF), held in Karachi, which I attended together with my colleagues at the Children's Museum for Peace and Human Rights (CMPHR) the slogan had changed, it now was "Another World is

Possible". The slogans and imagery painted by the young students at WSF against imperialism, slavery, poverty and other oppressions and also about dignity of labor, were a personal reminder of heady days when Che Guevara's portrait was transformed into an international symbol for romantic rebellion, and a smiling Chairman Mao's image remained a constant reminder of Socialism in China.

folk artists for the same purpose: to create artistic propaganda for the improvement of the nation. During this period Art was seen as a service, hence there was no 'art for art's sake'.

It is relevant to mention here that similar rules had been laid down in the early 1920s by the Bolshevik Institute of Artistic Culture to glorify the Bolshevik Revolution. Later, a direct propaganda approach was the need of the day for Stalin's rapid industrial growth; the Socialist Realism style became the only approved style for paintings, sculpture and posters. The power of the Red Army was central to these artworks, and so were the successes of collective farms and steel mills. Until the later



Many Chinese artists who participated in the Long March in 1934, a year-long 8,000-mile military venture of the Red Army against the Nationalists, established the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts at Yan'an

Brezhnev era of the late 1980s, this art was practiced in the entire Soviet bloc, including Poland, East Germany, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic States.

Chinese posters, which differed slightly from the Soviet style, had brighter colors. Compared to this, Cuban revolution posters were understated. The Cuban poster developed after Fidel Castro seized power at the end of 1958, and tried to take an independent line from Russia. The Socialist Realist posters of Cuba from the early years attest to this influence, but more interesting are those that came about after 1965 when relations between the two became strained. But by the 1970s the liveliness of the Cuban posters diminished and this unique chapter in the history of the political poster there came to an end.

However, the common factor between the Chinese, the Soviet and the Cuban poster is the negation of the individual graphic artist and his/her personal style, to prioritize communication with the mass audience. The style that runs like a thread throughout is the dominant palette of flatly laid out red and black colors. The stylized lettering evokes the times when it was either free-hand calligraphy or done by the graphic artist, or letterset was used manually by the printer.

My earlier mention of the nostalgia surrounding Che Guevara's



Left: Poster depicting The Long March of the Cultural Revolution in China, collection: Rumano Husain

Right: A weather-beaten poster of the Red China period selling in present-day Shanghai. Image courtesy: Benoit Florencon

portrait is from the period when cultural organizations within Cuba, such as OSPAAAL - the organization for solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, distributed its posters worldwide. Those were the pre-television (and of course pre-Internet) times in Pakistan, but the universal Che Guevara posters found their way into the country after crossing the proverbial seven seas.

"The fact that many of Cuba's graphic artists have been, and still are, painters and sculptors, is evidence that the new society has bridged the gap between fine arts and graphic arts (an artificial gap at best), created with the advent of high speed printing presses and the mythology surrounding the nature of art as being somehow unintelligible to the masses,"<sup>3</sup> writes Dugald Stermer. Stermer further explains that all Cuban propaganda posters were unsigned. The ego and imagination of the artist, assumed to be individualistic, became subservient to the larger cause of the revolutionary culture.

Fidel Castro, in his Words to the Intellectuals, laid down the ground rules for artists and writers in his statements "Without the Revolution, everything. Without it, nothing," and "the Revolution does not ask sacrifices from its artists; rather, it says, put your creative spirit to work for the new Cuba without fear that the quality of

your art will be curtailed. And if someday you feel that it has been, say to yourself that it was worthwhile to make this new life."<sup>4</sup>

In the introductory essay in Dugald Stermer's book, Susan Sontag compares the Pop Art style of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Tom Wesselman, calling it 'parasitic on commercial poster aesthetics'. She reaffirms that the Cuban poster artists "remain very conscious that the poster art is a public art, which addresses an undifferentiated mass of people on behalf of something public (whether a political idea or a cultural spectacle)."<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note Sontag's other comparison between a graphic artist and a poet. She says that the graphic artist in a revolutionary society does not have the problem the poet has, "when the poet uses the singular voice, the lyrical "I": the problem of who is speaking and being spoken for."<sup>6</sup>

More recently, Maoist posters in Nepal, calling people for action protests on May Day, the imagery used by the All Nepal Federation Trade Union can be linked to Soviet expression of the past. Missing Maoist members shown on the top right of these posters reinforce the message of sacrifice and martyrdom, and flags showing different manual labor tools (the Hammer and Sickle) are displayed prominently in the middle, with smaller flags framing the lower half of the layout.

## Conclusion

It is interesting to study the deconstruction of socialist imagery in China by contemporary Chinese artists; for example, the jaw-breaking grins painted by one of the most important artists of the Chinese avant-garde, Yue Minjun, who has achieved international stardom by making parodies of symbolic smiles in his self portraits. He uses a similar technique to that in advertising and propaganda posters: sharp outlines with even color which

gives a 'Pop art' effect. During the Cultural Revolution period, there were Soviet-style posters showing happy people laughing, which Yue Minjun now uses in his paintings as a comment: 'normally what you see in those posters is the opposite of reality!'

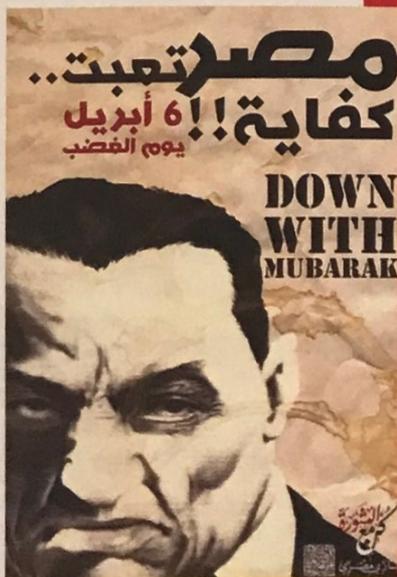
In the works called the 'Great Criticism series' of another Chinese artist, Wang Guangyi, who grew up in China during the Mao era, images of the Cultural Revolution are juxtaposed with mass-produced images from Western advertisements. This style of art combines political propaganda with Western pop art. Wang Guangyi's 'Great Criticism: Coca-Cola' is a prime example of the Political Pop art of the 1980s and 1990s. In it the artist uses three figures (in the past it was common to depict one soldier, one laborer and one farmer, the latter often a female figure shown between two men), as it is a familiar concept for the Chinese people: strong revolutionaries standing with their left arms outstretched, in this case holding an oversized ink pen. Below the pen is the familiar Coca-Cola logo in bright white on a red background. The Coca-Cola logo in white stands out boldly against a red color, which has its own significance (the red of the western Coca-Cola Company and Mao's 'Red China').

As recent as February 2011, posters appeared in the Tahrir Square in the mass protest in Cairo, Egypt, when the Egyptian people demanded the end of President Hosni Mubarak's 30 years of dictatorship. The imagery on these posters varied from swastikas and the Star of David as well as equating Mubarak with Hitler or the Egyptian pharaohs.

Attitude and interest may have shifted and changed, but the reality of poverty, oppression and marginalization that inspired the socialist ideals of yesteryear have not disappeared. In fact, they are the cause of a totally new set of crises and problems that face the world's thinkers today, and may continue to do for some time. ■



Walk Like an Egyptian by Dwayne Booth (pen name: Mr. Fish), gives Che Guevara an Egyptian face of Pharaoh Tutankhamun



## End Notes:

1. Ref. Appreciation Woodcuts, 'China Institute' - an online journal founded in 1926 by a group of American and Chinese educators.
2. Ref. History of the Modern Chinese Woodblock Print by Yan Shancun
3. The Art of Revolution by Dugald Stermer published by Pall Mall Press Limited, London, 1970
4. Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel by Lee Lockwood, published by Macmillan, 1968
5. Introductory essay by Susan Sontag, The Art of Revolution, Pall Mall Press Limited, London, 1970. An author of seventeen books, a human rights activist and a social critic, the late Susan Sontag who died in December 2004, was one of the most powerful thinkers of her generation.
6. Arts editor David Walsh's talk October last year on Socialism and Cinema, at the University of Salford in the UK, in which he referred to yet another talk given by him sometime back in Toronto.

Amra Ali

Do South-South dialogues hold the future answers for

# re-imag[in]ing cities?

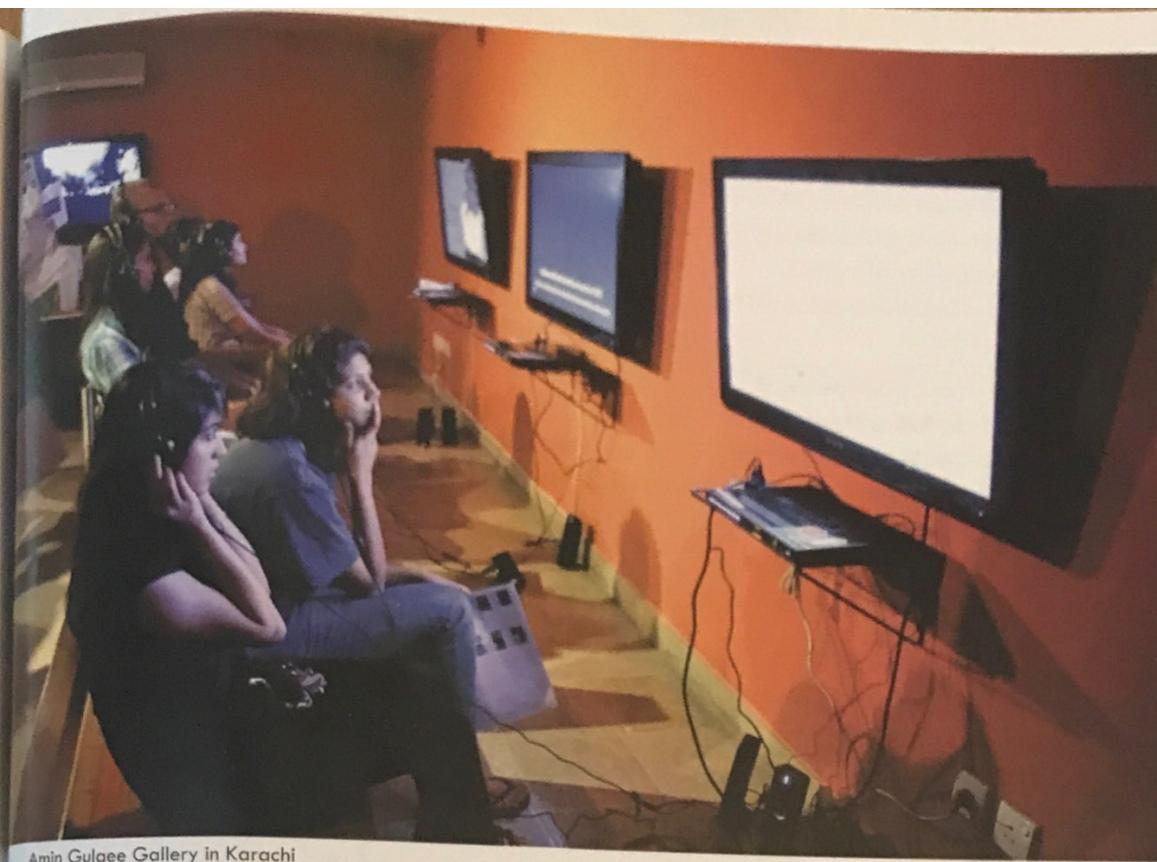


Dicoco Boketshu (born 1976) - Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo  
*Blueboy & SAPE Dogs* (2009)



© D. Boketshu

Memory has been part of the post modernists' dilemma; a space addressed to accommodate a plethora of narratives that have to do with negotiations of histories within a (global) dynamics. The need to break away from a specific cultural / creative mold in lieu of one whose nature is "beyond borders" of geography, race, religion, myth, folklore, language and class, is part of the new identity politics. A large part of this separation determines the equations between the 'subaltern' in the hegemony of Western discourse.



Amin Gulgee Gallery in Karachi

*center of my talk*.  
(Hooks, Bell. Marginality as a site of resistance, in R. Ferguson et al. (eds), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990: pp. 241-43, Wikipedia). To my mind, one of the fundamental issues to address in art in Pakistan today would be the relationship between memory and post colonialism.

To what extent do

the narratives woven in the complexity of overlapping contexts of art-making, curating and writing provide directions that can truly be called post-colonial in form and spirit? What are the agencies that can support and sustain such activism and nurture it? And are these agencies (of change?) stemming from our lived experiences, past and present and what is their vision of the future? To what extent are artistic voices in South Asia or the developing world subjugated by the structures (of success, ownership) residing in the Developed West. The question can be rephrased to ask, as to what extent the subaltern voice is self-imposed.

If it is possible, as it must be, to mark a tangible shift towards a South-South dialogue/s, these must become hands-on reality, that have to do with activism, re-engagement with the community, and ethics, not just rhetoric. Recently, Sparck (Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge) and the Amin Gulgee Gallery in Karachi collaborated to bring the digital works of 52 artists from the vast African Diasporas: Douala, Kinshasa, Cairo, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Algiers, Paris, Berlin, Lubumbashi, Luanda, New Delhi, Melbourne and Pakistani artists from Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi. Its first stop in South Asia was at the Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi, in February, 2011.

Karachi, a highly unlikely venue for an international mega art event, carrying a notorious image as a hub of terror, is also a thriving metropolis, with its unique visual and sound culture, past and present (unlike what becomes headline news on CNN & BBC). A meeting place as likely or unlikely as any of the above African cities, the curators see these centers as the future of the South-South discourse. The curatorial team of Sparck, artist Kadiatou Diallo and academic Dominique Malaquais, and artist Amin Gulgee address the notion of ImagINing cities, in a two

Recently, Sparck (Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge) and the Amin Gulgee Gallery in Karachi collaborated to bring the digital works of 52 artists from the vast African Diasporas: Douala, Kinshasa, Cairo, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Algiers, Paris, Berlin, Lubumbashi, Luanda, New Delhi, Melbourne and Pakistani artists from Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi

For the Pakistani Diasporas, there are as many points of negotiation within, as there are anywhere else in the world. Multiple points of reference, a magnitude of directions, an acceleration in the opportunities of inclusion in the Mega events and international residencies, we are too close to be able to make sense of the complexities of new ideologies taking root. But memory remains, whether it is in the way art (and art writing) can attempt to erase it or build on it. It is also manifested in the way we recall our recent past, which may be sometime earlier the same day, as in today, or yesterday. Recall is synonymous with representation and misrepresentation, self-censorship too. Memory can also fail.

Writes Hooks: 'No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the

day happening. Terming the present and future of these cities as ephemeral, the interplay of digital sound, noise, voice, through juxtaposed projected sound installation, digital photograph, photomontage, video, create pockets of recognition, doubt, fear and humor.

The nature of the engagement is never a stayed experience, so that the viewer is able to absorb each of the artists' narratives only in fleeting transition from one work to another, a curatorial intent. Making sense of the overload of sound and image, the viewer is a voyeur within a space framed to be such; each conversation is an outcome of signs and symbols that have been part of a larger vision. The commentator too, documents, challenged by the

Or is it simply a form of ghettoization, the "South" existing only because the "North" has insisted on defining it in relation to the self-centered self?

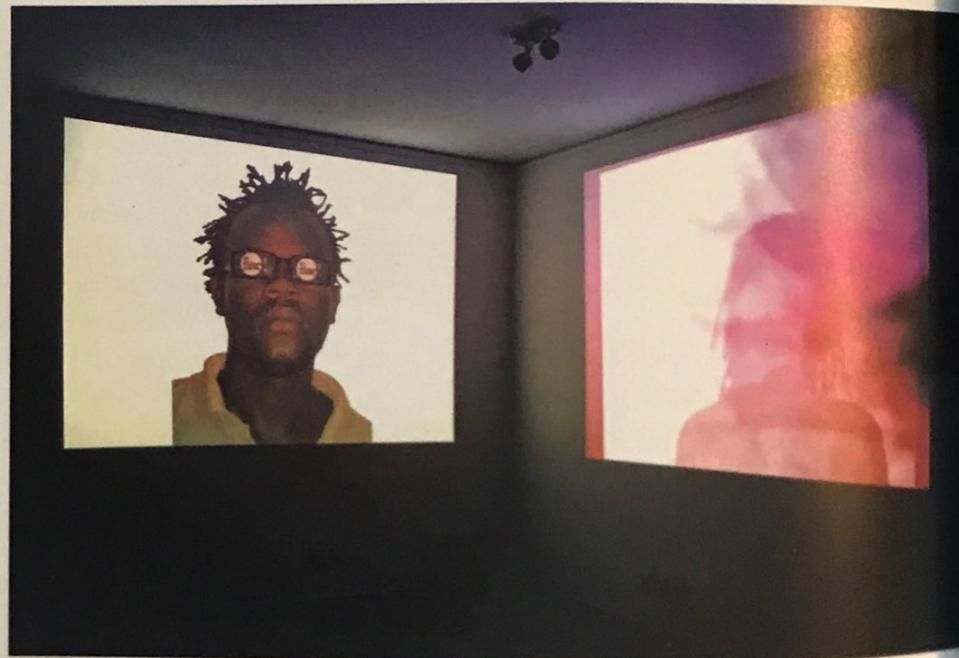
The futility of this question is strongly mirrored in *Totems*, (projected digital photographs in a loop) by Hervé Youmbi, and on an adjacent wall, *Bucking*, (video) by Abdullah Syed. Youmbi's 10 images show artists from the developing world wearing sunglasses whose lens bear stenciled dollar signs, logos of Western centers such as the Louvre, Tate Modern, MOMA, Guggenheim, of Art Basel, the Venice Biennale etc. Its proximity to Abdullah's

The futility of this question is strongly mirrored in *Totems*, (projected digital photographs in a loop) by Hervé Youmbi, and on an adjacent wall, *Bucking*, (video) by Abdullah Syed. Youmbi's 10 images show artists from the developing world wearing sunglasses whose lens bear stenciled dollar signs,



Hervé Yamguen (born 1971) - Douala, Cameroon  
*The Dripping Man* (2001)  
Projected argentic photographs

Hervé Youmbi (born 1973) - Douala, Cameroon  
*Totems* (2010)  
Projected digital photography



amorphous nature of pace, pause and conceptual content. It is the coming together, or bringing the unlikely into new equations, for possibilities of newer conversations, some of which germinate in the audience, at that very moment of interaction - between individuals.

The more convincing voice, despite these different worlds coming together, is the curatorial intervention, because at the base of the experience, there are pivotal questions put to the viewer, the commentator and the artist. The curators, as commentators initiate questions that address the contradictions inherent in both the making and reading of art: re-reading, re-imagining and re-aligning. They ask a necessary question: 'Does it make any sense at all to speak of Southern voices, as opposed to Northern or Western ones? Is the term "South" itself of any use whatsoever?

video playing simultaneously makes it impossible to stay put in front of Youmbi's work. Through the curatorial 'stories about stories', we know that the artist also 'renders stylized renditions of cult artworks such as of Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, and Takashi Murakami'. Like Youmbi's subject, Syed faces the viewer. Although autobiographical, Youmbi's subject conceals his gaze behind the dark lens, a barrier created between the viewer and the artist. This anonymity allows the artist to continue to dream about success and inclusion in the West. In the latter, the artist as subject gradually chews a stack of dollar notes, increasing the level of the viewers' anxiety, until he throws up the bills onto a plate.

Turning anxiety into disgust, Syed explores the politics of consumption, using cliché and regurgitation, without being

didactic. The artists as muse, position themselves as willing consumers, not only of commodities, but of the commodity they become in the white cube that they so set out to critique, thus reinforcing the paradox of their (neo-colonial) times. If we are to find fault in Syed's slick rhetoric, he is clever enough to throw it back at us (and them), he already having predicted the response.

Androa Mindrekolo (born 1983) - Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo  
*Transit* (2008) & *Scuba City* (2009)  
 Projected digital photomontage



at the narratives in the African Diasporas, and it is from here that possibilities emerge, of a discourse through which we could begin to read the subtext within them. The chances of stereotyping, within the South-South dialogue, or generalizing on its diversity remains, unless the individual histories are understood from their particular contexts of place, race, class, etc.

The curators ask the audience and the artist to make sense of the vast African experience, while they too make sense of the Pakistani experience. How are Pakistani stereotypes seen in Durriya Kazi's video *Rocket* (1999) addressed by the curators? Works related to the Pakistani Truck iconography have already been criticized as being palatable commodities for Western museums, such as those identified by Youmbi, carrying with them immense issues related to self-representation and gaze. Since there is a curatorial interjector in bringing it as the 'centerpiece', we need to re-address these issues, as they continue to reinforce ideals of Western fetish with other cultures. 'But what of translation? How shall we manage that? Should we?'... ask the curators. We could conclude that the curators do not dictate, they hint, providing room by widening the relationships they present. Inclusion and negation seems to be another



Abdullah M. I. Syed, 'Bucking' 2011, 9min 3 sec, one channel video, edition of 5  
 Video stills: Courtesy of the artist

The artist legitimizes his own voyeurism. It is possible that Emika Ogboh's sound installation *Go Slow* (2008), provides another kind of voyeurism, through the sound of Afro-beat drums, and the call to prayers amidst the traffic noise of Lagos. One question to ask is how the curatorial narrative positions itself in addressing that voyeurism, or if some of the new equations are incidental. If almost every image of our daily life can be interpreted for its exoticness, then is it possible to escape it?

*Blueboy* and *SAPE Dogs* by Dicoco Botetshu and SAPE Project by Jean-Christophe Lanquetin, also digital images, playing in a loop, provide a window for Karachi's audiences to recognize the familiarity depicted through the lure of Western brand names, such as Armani or Givenchy, as the "REAL THING". "Gentlemen of Bacongo" a book by Photographer Daniele Tamagni features a subculture in the Congo where men express their creativity through their clothing. They are part of a cultural movement called *Le Sape*: "a clique of extraordinarily dressed dandies from the Congo. In the midst of war and abject poverty, these men dress in tailored suits, silk ties, and immaculate footwear." (ADA, African digital art.com). These intersections provide a first glance

paradox that challenges here. But we are not sure, because the conversations are so transient.

In including Director Saquib Malik's music video *Na Re Na* (2005), Gulgee provides a wider lens to rethink the role of unnatural divisions between art and popular culture, and the growing participation of mass media / culture in shaping contemporary iconography. It is interesting that *Na Re Na*, which was made for a popular audience, aired on television, and sold in the market, can be interpreted in this equation. In the "art" video, *Once upon a Transition* (2010-11), Babar Sheikh negotiates his pace directly from the symbols built through the transitory moments which could be of any thriving metropolis in South Asia. Without pretense, both narratives indirectly blur the line between what is art, out there and what is not art, in the gallery. Malik incorporates the world of high fashion, using a popular fashion model. Sheikh's monochromatic palette and slow movement vacillates between recall, nostalgia, present and the future. It is the curatorial intervention that provides conversations to begin between two unlikely genres, that otherwise operate in different worlds, and address different audiences.

Adeela Suleman's video *Saffir* (2005) provides yet another layer to the discourse. Adeela's 'readymades' are welded to form new equations that diffuse the line between art /craft /kitsch, infusing new life onto the common (objects such as cooking utensils, the beaten metal patterns adorned on trucks, drain pipes etc.) and the popular. One of the main reasons why such work has been shown more consistently in Western museums is due to the lack of infra-structure in Pakistan, that can fund and support experimentation. The circuit of commercial galleries is not able to make that commitment either, because their clientele still prefers the framed painting that can be color coordinated in a living room. A majority of artists, who do enter the international circuit of galleries, residencies or biennials, hence easily get absorbed within the Western contextual and theoretical Western frameworks, which is why appropriation becomes an issue. Another factor is the lack of critical engagement by local (politicized) reviewers, who



Babar Sheikh, 'Once Upon a Transition', Karachi, 2004

predominantly regurgitate the terminology used by the artist/gallery-ist, and fail to penetrate the discourse beyond its visual description.

In digital photographs, *Race 1 & 2* (2010), Izdiyar Setna injects an element of humor and innocence into what could have turned into an object of exotic fetish within the white cube. The henna adorned donkey and his cart adopt the role of the marginalized and the exploited. There is a parallel commentary here on the polarities in urban pace, social and economic disparity. The image of the donkey challenges the discourse of the critic into a laughing stock, because no matter how one may read into it, one faces the donkey, which is moving away from you. The subtlety of the artist's narrative provokes the white cube narrative, and with him we can laugh at ourselves.

If doubt is part of the dynamics of translation, there is sufficient amount of curatorial idealism. They speak of the imagined cities, as 'strong, beautiful, and perhaps even more equitable, than we dream of bringing into being'. Equity is a strong ideal. Lalarukh's

sound installation *Subh-e-Umeed* (2008) ('Dawn of Hope' and a reference to Faiz's *Subhe Azadi*) is based on live recordings of slogans from the historic lawyers' movement in Pakistan. One of the slogans from the rallies is a 're-mix' on a patriotic song: *iss parcham kay saye talay ham aik hain* (we are one under this flag). The altered song reads: *America (aur NRO) kay talay ham chor hain, sub chor hain* (under the American (flag), we are all thieves).

There are other anchors of subversion in the show that open widows to social activism by artists, such as in the video excerpts by filmmaker Laurent Malaquais in *No Art on a 2 \$ a Day* (2007), which documents a protest by an artists' collective called *Auto Da Fe*. Writes Dominique Malaquais, 'appalled by the violence of the regime that has ruled Cameroon for the past 30 years and by its refusal to see engaged contemporary art as anything more than a potential danger to its hegemony, each of the collective artists set alight his highest priced painting. A massive bonfire

In digital photographs, *Race 1 & 2* (2010), Izdiyar Setna injects an element of humor and innocence into what could have turned into an object of exotic fetish within the white cube. The henna adorned donkey and his cart adopt the role of the marginalized and the exploited.



Izdiyar Setna (born 1976) - Karachi, Pakistan *Race 1 & Race 2* (2010) Digital photography

ensued. With the ashes, a new work - part sculpture, part collage - is currently in the making'. In a fleeting discussion with the essayist in residence at *Imag[in]ing Cites*, Cameroon, essayist Lionel Manga and I share thoughts on the element of subversion in the art of Pakistan and the African diasporas. Perhaps, those voices are not actively being sought, because they do pose the danger of swaying the current power politics in art markets of the West, and markets that cater to them.

There are other voices in the African continent that negotiate through art. One project, *'That a History Forgotten is a History Lost'* relays interviews that are transmitted on tv, radio and viral adverts, launched on the days leading to the Freedom Day that marks South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. An artistic

intervention to open sourcing transforms the art as sacred object to a vehicle which has to do with social intervention and transformation. Creative solutions by bloggers such as Awab Alvi and the Mauj Media collective in Pakistan, of Usman Haq in the UK, are already addressing open sourcing through the digital, as an answer to an elitist hegemony of art and technology. The links that they are creating with architecture students of the NED University, Karachi has started conversations into socially oriented concerns such as the conservation of electric power, into green architecture, etc. Their participant can be anybody (e.g. cell phone or internet users), who is out there to be empowered as an agent of social change. This is not a part of this event, but continuity in the South-South dialogue can provide more opportunities for such conversations to emerge in our cities, in real or cyber space, across continents.

The challenges offered within the equations available here, even if fleetingly presented, are a call towards proactive discussions on the subtext/s that emerge now and will continue to do so.

The curators clarify that 'the works shown here are, neither individually nor as a group, meant to be prescriptive. They actively refuse to tell a linear story, or to create straight forward one-to-one dialogues'. Dominique Malaquais and Kadiatou Dallo recognize that 'transitions are notoriously difficult: 'How shall we negotiate barriers, fences, walls (and words) edged with barbed wire? Do cities of the global South offer particular suggestions, tactics to countermand violent strategies deployed elsewhere?' Finally, what role does the artist and commentator play in this curatorial idealism, in which the future discourse of cities of the

South are directly linked to the future of post colonialism within the South-South and its relationship to the West?

The levels of pain witnessed through the works varies, for example in a video and sound installation, *Ground / Overground / Underground* (2010) by Mowoso, a group founded in 2006, in which a man named Bokungu takes a trip from his home in Congo to Paris, to escape the violence of his land brought about by colonialism and 'post-colonial hells'. In the process, the curators comment, 'neither his body nor his soul will emerge intact'. In projected digital photography of an installation, *Fire* (2004, 2009), Malam Essoua creates larger than life installation of bodies trapped in city spaces that 'have violently broken them, physically and mentally.' Once he makes them, he sets them on fire.

Perhaps the strongest visual narrative comes from the self-portraits, in which the artist 'alters his appearance with foam, fire and peculiar plays of light to tell the story of a man moving through the spaces of a postcolonial city in never ending flux.' (The dripping Man, 2001, projected argentic photographs by Herve Yamguyen). Dominique Malaquais quotes these lines from Yamguyen's poem of 2008 that speak of the ultimate dilemma of the post-colonial:

**My mother - moon  
films and projects herself  
on a wide, white sheet thick with flies and ants.  
She casts light on portraits  
whose features have lost their shape in the hallways  
and the labyrinths of this city** ■

## Imag[IN]ing Cities is dedicated to Goddy Leye who passed away a day prior to the preview opening, on February 19.

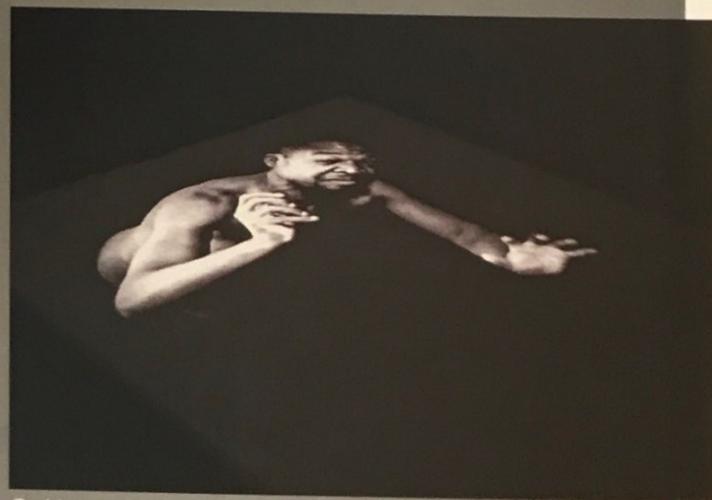
The works gathered in this room are not easy. They speak of bodies and words adrift in broken cities. Still, all hold at their core a kernel of possibility: of hope that we may transcend the violence and pain that has come to mark so many of our cities planet-wide.

### Goddy Leye (1965-2011) - Douala, Cameroon *The Beautiful Beast* (2009)

Sound installation and video projection on a bed of sesame seeds (91X30cm)

A man writhes on the ground against a pixelated field. We know nothing about him, save that he seems in pain. Or might he be grinning? The image is profoundly disturbing. Overhead, coming in waves, is a soundscape: Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece, "Metropolis". A Hitlerian voice battles with another, a voice of reason and demand: demand that the man on the ground be treated with care or perhaps, simply, with basic human sympathy. We will never know which voice wins out. The post-colony such as it is analyzed by historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe is not far. In it, the crushing violence of the social, political and economic order is internalized by those - the masses - whom it most damages. In response, many rebel, but just as many loose the means to fight back. They become the beast, take perverse pleasure in its ravages. More often than not, either/or situations are not of the essence. One rages against and revels in the cogs of the machine simultaneously, in a zero sum game on whose outcome the survival of one's very spirit depends. Goddy Leye dedicated his life not to felling the beast, but to gently taking away its pain, seeking to bring it into the fold of possibility. His spirit was - his spirit is - indomitable.'

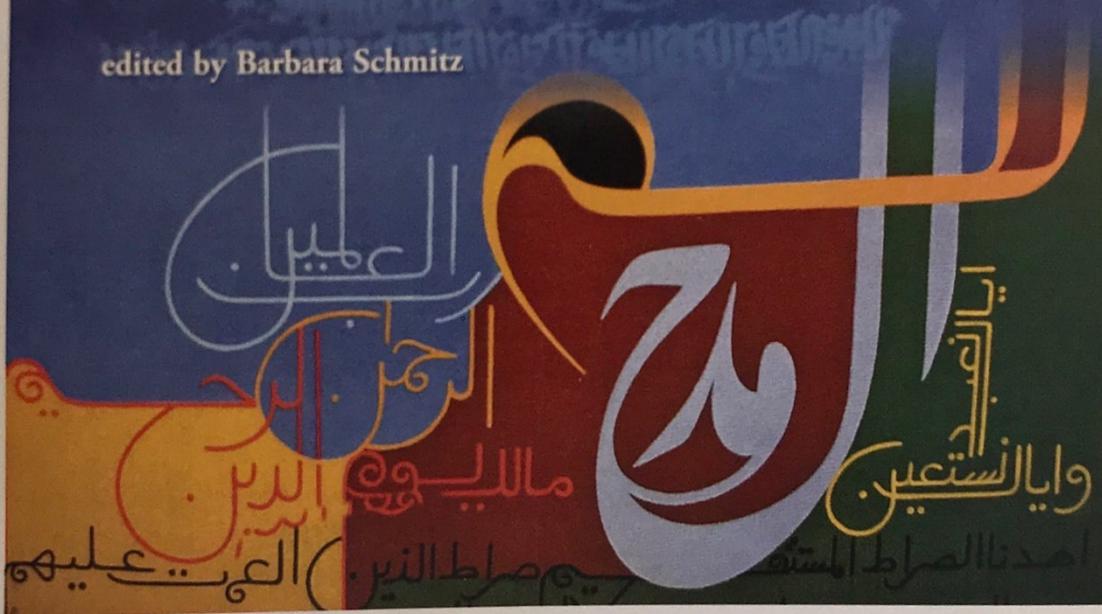
- Dominique Malaquais, curatorial note, *Imag[IN]ing Cities*, 2011



Goddy Leye (1965-2011) - Douala, Cameroon, *The Beautiful Beast* (2009)  
Sound installation and video projection on a bed of sesame seeds (91X30cm)

# LAHORE Paintings, Murals, and Calligraphy

edited by Barbara Schmitz



Reviewed by Zahra Hussain

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and Calligraphy

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## LAHORE PAINTINGS, MURALS AND CALLIGRAPHY

Edited by Barbara Schmitz

Lahore is an undeniably beautiful city. Those who know it or visit it are taken in by the grandeur of its tree-lined avenues and boulevards. The splendor of its architecture, be it Mughal, colonial or contemporary, reflects Persian, European and central Asian influences.

The book, Lahore, Paintings, Murals, Calligraphy - edited by Barbara Schmitz provides us with some hitherto overlooked

aspects of Lahore's architectural beauty and artistic attributes. It is a collection of ten essays on the paintings, murals and calligraphy of Lahore from the early 17th century to the present day, which introduces readers to current research in the arts and crafts of Lahore.

The book has been published by Marg Publications of India, supported generously by shawl manufacturers Ahuja Sons. While

one can admire and acknowledge the contributions and understand that art has no boundary, the question that comes to mind is why, when the contributors and the subjects are Pakistani, is there no effort to support and promote research and preservation of irreplaceable treasures within Pakistan by Pakistani authorities and Pakistani patronage.

In the introductory article Barbara Schmitz has ably traced the history of Lahore with interesting allusions to the arts and paintings of the time to illustrate and highlight historical facts.

The Mughal presence in Lahore is very evident in much of its monuments and buildings even now, but not so well known are the various artistic endeavors and crafts which went into their embellishment.

Kanwal Khalid's study of the frescoes in the Seh Dara of Jehangir's Quadrangle at Lahore Fort, truly intrigue and pique one's curiosity. The subjects of these frescoes are European and Christian and the style is reminiscent of the arts of the European masters of that time.

This departure from the normally known frescoes adorning most of Mughal architecture makes one wonder why they were commissioned. The question, when did Emperor Jehangir visit and stayed in Lahore is raised, and scholars have been trying to find reasons for these frescoes being there. The Mughals had become familiar with European art since the times of Akbar, and its influence is evident in some of the art of that period. The article is well illustrated by digitally enhanced photographs of the frescoes in the Seh Dara.

The next article is on the frescoes in Ranjit Singh's Samadhi. These are remarkable for at least three reasons; 1) they are dateable, 2) they provide excellent examples of the modifications which were undergone by Pahari painting style in the mid 19th century in Lahore, and 3) their sequence reveals an underlying program. The photographs illustrating the article show definite themes and although the Krishna theme dominates, episodes

**In the introductory article Barbara Schmitz has ably traced the history of Lahore with interesting allusions to the arts and paintings of the time to illustrate and highlight historical facts**

from other important texts and the Epics, The Ramayana and Mahabharata are also represented. The frescoes are unique specimens of Sikh paintings and need urgent measures for their conservation.

The article by Barbara Schmitz on Mohammad Bukhsh Saahaf and the illustrated book in Ranjit Singh's Lahore gives a fascinating account of the production of the handwritten books and the

Mughal imperial workshop - or *kitabkhana*.

Photographs of a number of paintings from the period include ones showing Emperor Akbar playing polo and another of Akbar and his party hunting a tiger. The article is evidence of fine scholarship and gives details and impressive information of the craft and techniques used in the production of manuscripts and paintings of that time.

Humaira Alam and Uzma Usmani's essay is on the ivory painting collection in the Lahore Museum. The art of the miniature and how it is executed on ivory is explained and its history given. Some truly remarkable paintings are shown depicting the various Mughal rulers and Mughal Buildings on ivory.

Anjum Rehmani's article, Islamic Calligraphy in Lahore assesses the development of Islamic calligraphy in Lahore from the Ghaznavid times to the present. Dr Rehmani's inclusion of calligraphy on coins, monuments and manuscripts makes the study comprehensive and inclusive.

M. Athar Tahir has written several books on Pakistan's literature, culture, arts and crafts. His article, Word as Image: Calligraph-Art in Pakistan, is supported by well researched and interesting accounts of the process and the work of artists best known for it.

Sajida and Pervaiz Vandal's deep knowledge of Bhai Ram Singh is clearly indicated in their article - Coronation Darbar 1911, Drawings by Bhai Ram Singh. The exquisite drawings represent the era perfectly and the accompanying text adds to the interest of the reader with anecdotes and facts from history. Sadly, the originals of these drawings have disappeared from public eye, as the owner and the Lahore museum could not agree on a price.

The three articles on more recent developments in the world of art in Lahore are on contemporary miniature paintings in Lahore, on Shemza, the Lahori artist who juggled symbols and the art of political cartoons in Pakistan. They are written by Rukhsana David, Ayesha Siddiqui and Shaukat Mehmood and are delightfully illustrated.



They are evidence that extra-ordinary talent coming out of Lahore shows promise of change.

The

contributors are well known experts in their chosen fields and have an impressive array of highly acclaimed and accomplished research to their credit. No one volume could ever encompass the whole, but this book is an extremely able attempt to do so. The illustrations alone could have been used to form a beautiful coffee table book. The addition of the historical references makes it an invaluable guide and repository of some of the major arts and crafts of Lahore. ■

Abdullah Syed & Roohi Ahmed,  
Kulliah- Re, metal, wood and fabric,  
variable, 2009



Nukta-e-Nazar continues to engage with the multiple viewpoints that shape art practice in Pakistan. Here, we explore issues in and around **No Honor in Killing: Making Visible Buried Truth**, a traveling exhibition and dialogue from 2008 to 2010. Conceived in Karachi, it traveled from Jamshoro to Khairpur in Sindh, to the Punjab in Lahore and Islamabad, with a final showing at the VM Gallery in Karachi. The outrage of the curator, Nilofur Farrukh, to the Nasirabad honor killings, whose 8 victims were buried alive as recently as 2009, translated into a dialogue that brought artists and activists on a single platform; urban artists came face to face with both art and non-art audiences on the periphery. The art image/object became a vehicle to facilitate discussion, and disregarding art hierarchies, the curator addressed ways that are more socially relevant in bridging the disconnect between the artist and his/her community. This process marks a shift towards altering the perceptions of the artist, to taking ownership of her surroundings.

As Nilofur Farrukh puts it, the discussions that centered on Karo Kari, the participating students, activists, community-based workers and a general audience identified explicit and hidden forms of violence that they are victims of; some of which is from the male to female, and male to lesser male.

From literal references to Karo-Kari, honor killing, to more subtle associations with violence, the broad artistic diversity embraces the larger framework of pain, embodied in Naima Dadabhoi's fragile 3D sculptural form of a hollow corpse, its silver foil wrapping yet protecting its dignity, to looser connections through the celebrated verses of Faiz, in Salman Hassan's black and white text-based work; in Riffat Alvi's smoke paintings on cardboard, that were the artist's helpless cry to the Karachi carnage of the 90s, to Seemin Farhat's (and Quin Mathew's) use of the Urdu script that gives the female body its form, contextualized in the debates that center within the post 9/11 constructs of identity politics. Conceptually and materially. These and other artistic voices merge, overlap, and disperse, revealing very personal concerns and responses.

Amra Ali

# NO HONOUR IN KILLING

Making Visible Buried Truth

Parts of some narratives emerge here in my conversation with Niilofur Farrukh, the curator, and with Marium Agha, one of the participating artists.

**Amra Ali:** What is the nature of activism in your curatorial context?

Let's consider the meeting points for social and artistic activism. In what form can art be a vehicle for social activism? How feasible is an intervention in which the process of engagement or activism becomes the art process - out of the gallery space. Can we relate that sort of activism to far off social projects of Joseph Beuys or recommendations by Rasheed Araeen on Balochistan?

Niilofur Farrukh: For No Honor in Killing, the foremost

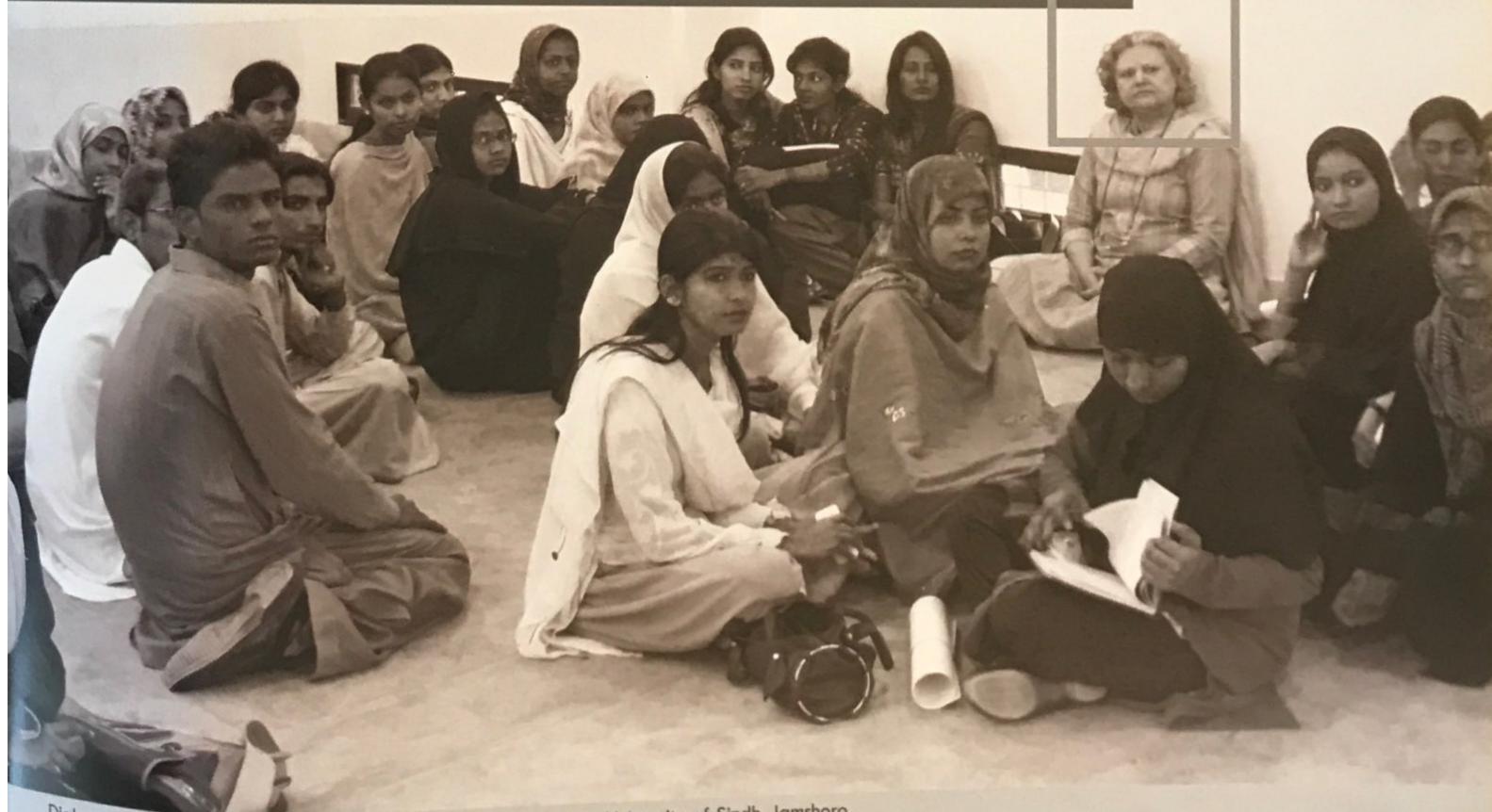
seen in the work of Joseph Beuys.

How does No Honor in Killing fit into this? My priority was to reach a wider audience, so I looked at a curatorial strategy that would take the show to smaller towns, engage the community with interactive sessions and invite local artists at each location to include their voice.

The art also traveled outside the art gallery to local spaces where dialogue and viewing the art by diverse audiences was possible.

In Jamshoro, we had several hundred students and faculty as a part of the interactive session on breaking the silence against gender violence; in Khairpur, it focused on Karo Kari, as this region has a high rate of honor crimes. Here school children wrote and staged small skits on gender violence. The dialogue

In Jamshoro, we had several hundred students and faculty as a part of the interactive session on breaking the silence against gender violence; in Khairpur, it focused on Karo Kari, as this region has a high rate of honor crimes. Here school children wrote and staged small skits on gender violence. The dialogue with audience and community activists at all five venues vitalized the art and its concerns for the non-art audiences. The involvement of local artists from diverse communities across Pakistan lent value to their perspective



Dialogue in the gallery with students of Institute of Art and Design, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

objective was to create opportunities for dialogue for intervention in the social architecture. It was not meant to be a theoretical construct like Rasheed Araeen's concept of Nominalism.

If the art object cannot communicate because it is constrained by the conventional form of the art object, the artist must challenge its form, so the intervention can be socially relevant as

with audience and community activists at all five venues vitalized the art and its concerns for the non-art audiences. The involvement of local artists from diverse communities across Pakistan lent value to their perspective.

For a curator, who usually comes from a position of arrogance, it was a humbling experience, because No Honor in Killing was

about sharing, listening and understanding.

**AA:** What was the nature of the dialogue in smaller cities like Khairpur and what is the nature of violence that was addressed in larger urban cities like Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi? Who were the audiences?

**NF:** For smaller cities like Jamshoro and Khairpur, the discussion was centered on the silence that perpetuates Honor Killing in their communities. We learnt about local issues like the politics of gender violence. For example, in Hyderabad lawyers and activists informed us that the corrupt Jirga offers its verdict for sale and the male accused in the honor crime can buy his way out unlike the woman who usually faces death. Activists like Arfana Mallah and Amar Sindhu, at considerable risk to their lives, have carried out a signature drive against the Jirga to pressurize the Provincial Assembly to implement its ban on the Jirga.

In Lahore, the audience, mostly of artists, faculty and students focused the discussion on domestic violence and abuse in power relationships in the context of gender violence.

The young girls in the audience in Islamabad showed keen interest in the helpline offered by an NGO, *Rozan*, for victims of gender violence. This brought to the surface the social reality of Islamabad, which is a peculiar meeting point of rural and urban social norms, where the first generation of daughters of the low and middle level government officials are getting college education. The subtext of the dialogue was the conflict between the conservative values and the girls' demand for economic and social independence.

**AA:** Your intervention is also to bring the non-art form, that is, the dialogue, back to the gallery. The exhibition ended in Karachi in an established art space and dialogue with the art community.

**NF:** It is not so much about bringing the dialogue to the gallery, as approaching art in a holistic way. Interventions that open themselves up to new ways of connecting have a greater chance to be effective.

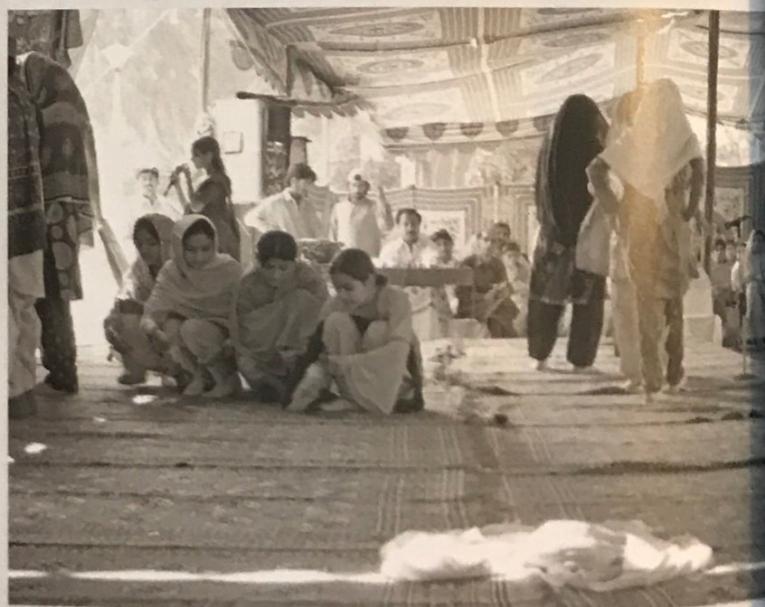
The terms of issues addressed, related to violence, and they

took different forms as the show traveled. In Karachi I wanted to bring the discussion back to art as a tool of social engagement, but found the artists fairly disengaged. Maybe their reticence was because they lack a framework for socially committed art. With Social Realism outdated and irrelevant for obvious reasons, artists today need to find a new a structure that can give them the tools to make serious interventionist art. They probably also realize that a passing interest in social issues is also not adequate to do so.

**AA:** No Honor in Killing comes across as an intervention on many levels: social, political, artistic, aesthetic - the interrelationship of one to the other. How do you see the present relationship of artistic narratives in relation to social factors, such as a subject like Karo-Kari. What were the levels of engagement that you saw, as the show traveled?

**NF:** There are different levels of engagement. Some artists are engaged superficially in a rhetorical way. Their aim is to be politically correct without feeling the need for a deeper understanding of social factors. This works in different ways. Sometimes social issues are projected in art to be a part of a trend, to follow what is being shown on the scene. Then there are artists who are deeply committed to injustice and social ills,

Students in Khairpur performing skits on the theme of violence against women.



Interaction with audience at The National College of the Arts, Auditorium, Lahore.



From literal references to Karo-Kari, honor killing, to more subtle associations with violence, the broad artistic diversity embraces the larger framework of pain, embodied in Naima Dadabhoj's fragile 3D sculptural form of a hollow corpse, its silver foil wrapping yet protecting its dignity, to looser connections through the celebrated verses of Faiz



Nalini Dadashegy, *Jhalkhat*, wrought iron and foil, 160X38X28cm, 2009  
National Art Gallery, Mumbai

so their work in the show was a deeper response to violence against women. With women artists, the personal often becomes political. For artists from Khairpur where the Taslim Solangi honor killing took place, the artist quoted directly from this experience of violence.

I wanted to involve a diverse group in terms of experience and art practice so different voices that represent our society could be present in the show.

It also made me realize that one of the reasons younger artists cannot engage with the larger social issues has to do with their education. Since most of their references come from another place, which is why there is this disconnect with one's immediate context. For example, in Pakistan, art that talks about gender is often seen through the framework of Western gender discourse. The Feminist initiatives at home which prioritize local anti-women practices seldom come under discussion.

**AA: How is this intervention particular to Pakistan?**

NF: In our society, while the female body is also looked upon as an object of desire, the reference is made indirectly through the narrative of honor and shame. If a woman is seen without the veil in public or seen interacting with a male who is not from her family/clan, it has strong sexual/honor connotations that can sometimes lead to punishment by death. So the body is seen through the lens of honor/shame. The patriarchal system uses honor codes to exercise control over the body and lives of women in Pakistan's quasi feudal/tribal society. The idea of the chadar is not always about concealing the body, it has become an instrument of control/violence/ humiliation.

**AA: How do you think that the collaborative work of Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed addresses cultural stereotype?**

NF: Abdullah Syed and Roohi Ahmed's work objectifies the instrument of honor crime; its conceptual approach communicates to audiences at various levels. It deconstructs the word Kulhari (axe), first as a physical tool associated with Karo-Kari violence and to this is added yet another layer - with Qula (a fan-shaped ornamental projection of a turban that symbolizes honor and feudal hierarchy) in two different kinds of fabrics with each kulhari alluding to male/female relationship. One in *chundri* fabric associated with the dupatta (scarf) worn by Sindhi women, and the other is white cotton used by men for their headdress (turban). In the installation the wooden handles of the kulhari cross each other indicating conflict and also the image echoes the wall display of guns, etc as instruments of power. The Qula with its complex social interpretation works with its multiple meanings, some more obvious than others. The work was well received because it communicated with un-initiated audiences in Jamshoro and Khairpur, as well as others and managed to address material and conceptual concerns.

**AA: Meher Afroze is addressing the social via a link to the**

past in the show, and referencing Mirza Ghalib. In this fast-paced and shrinking world, such links to the past are seen as removed from the present concerns of dismantling a traditional aesthetic. There is a disconnect to such works because it may be seen as very prescriptive, even didactic. How do you see this disconnect, if you agree that it exists?

NF: I think this is a different approach because it uses the great poet/philosopher Ghalib's verse, which is such an integral part of our culture to evoke the dichotomy between how we value poetry that respects women, yet fail to live up to its high ideals. Text is an important part of our visual tradition; Meher prefers to register her protest through it.

We have a very different relationship with our past as compared to the West. For an artist like Meher, cultural memory is an

Another compelling anchor in the show is the installation, 'We Shall Rise', by Maria Aftab, a young artist based in Peshawar. There is an element of beauty in the pattern and yet the subtext is loaded with references to different levels of violence/confinement

Maria Aftab, *Will I Rise?*, mixed media, 4m,67X55cm, 2009





Mehr Afroze, 'Wajud-e-Zan Say Hai Tasveer + Kainat Mein Rang',  
mixed media and muslin, variable, 2009  
Zahoarul Akhlaq Gallery, NCA, Lahore

instrument to investigate the social practices of the present. Her work is often a commentary on civilization, as articulated by scholars/writers. Unlike Abdullah and Roohi, who apply a western framework to local symbols, Meher speaks through a timeless idiom. Both are equally valid and represent contemporary art practices in Pakistan.

**AA:** What are other aesthetic anchors for you in the show?

**NF:** Another compelling anchor in the show is the installation, 'We Shall Rise', by Maria Aftab, a young artist based in Peshawar. There is an element of beauty in the pattern and yet the subtext is loaded with references to different levels of violence/



## Conversation with Marium Agha :

**Amra Ali:** Your work, *72 Virgins for my suicide lover*, was initially shown in a different context. It is interesting that it can be interpreted differently in different contexts.

**Marium Agha:** A venue cannot possibly affect the nature of the work in its most physical element. The context it was shown in was called 'Home Page', a story or discussion about one's home.

However, I view the shift in its most natural order. Honor Killing, suicide bombing, woman as property, honor, and reward are part of the cultural practices in Pakistan, shielded by the 'Mullah Religion'. The language of visual interpretation changes when it has an audience whose social, cultural standings are different and the art then has another language.

**AA:** You approach a taboo subject, sexuality, at the core of which is the issue of violence in relation to honor. At the same time, there is something very lyrical and unassuming in your imagery, and medium. I am interested in locating the subversion.

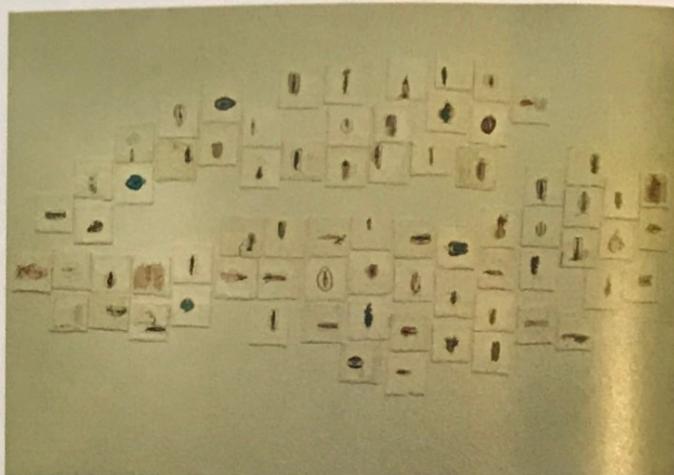
**MA:** Every now and then, an ill-informed fanatic decides to become a suicide bomber. Whether it is done because of a romance with God, or for hidden desires, the world sees them as sexually deprived souls.

Artists have always been the part of society where revolution in an idea should be at the core of their work, or at least that's how I see it. The romance in the lines, material and choice of imagery is just an extension of who I am. It is never intentional.

**AA:** How do you assume that 'the world sees them as sexually deprived souls'? Who are they and who is the world, and where is the artist, you, in this mediation, if it is a mediation?

confinement.

It refers to domestic bliss that can turn into domestic servitude. How the idea of marriage dominates a girl's life. Marriage, in our middle class context, can also be seen as a way to personal freedom, but experience shows this is far from the truth as the restrictive ways of the family are replaced with another kind of confinement. The death of dreams is a kind of violence also, where wishes are systematically finished. Self-esteem is robbed. Society does not easily recognize the violence within marriage as in many parts it is the acceptable norm. Through this work and others, we are able to talk not only about the explicit violence in Karo Kari, but about other forms of violence in our society. ■



Marium Agha '72 Virgins for My Suicide Lover', thread and fabric, 20 X 20cm each, 2010

Is there a danger that the artist is regurgitating the jargon dictated by the West? I am also interested to know how you view gender power politics that has to do with feudal power politics, in relation to what you term, of the 'ill informed fanatic'.

**MA:** I don't 'assume' as per say, the information is gathered over series of casual dialogue on social network sites about Pakistan's political scenario, Suicide bombing, Islam and the image it renders to entities over the globe.

It however worked in my very interest to support this free flowing conversation with people who have anti Pakistan and anti Islam sentiments during my MA course in London; while the '72 virgins for my suicide lover' was in fabrication.

The title itself has more meaning to it than when just read at a glance. If I were to reinstate the jargon of the West, the title would be different. The concept of 72 virgins that awaits a martyr in heaven is a myth as per my readings and research; I am yet to find anything that will even remotely validate the concept, therefore

I choose to call the martyr a lover.

To answer your last query, one's ability to practice freedom of will and thought, is absent because of the very popular blind following of religious cultural practices imposed by the 'Mullah'. It is by and large through their preaching that the practice of gender inequality has become an attribute of Islam and ingrained in our socio-political mindset. Hence the 'ill informed fanatics' are responsible for mayhem in the name of religion.

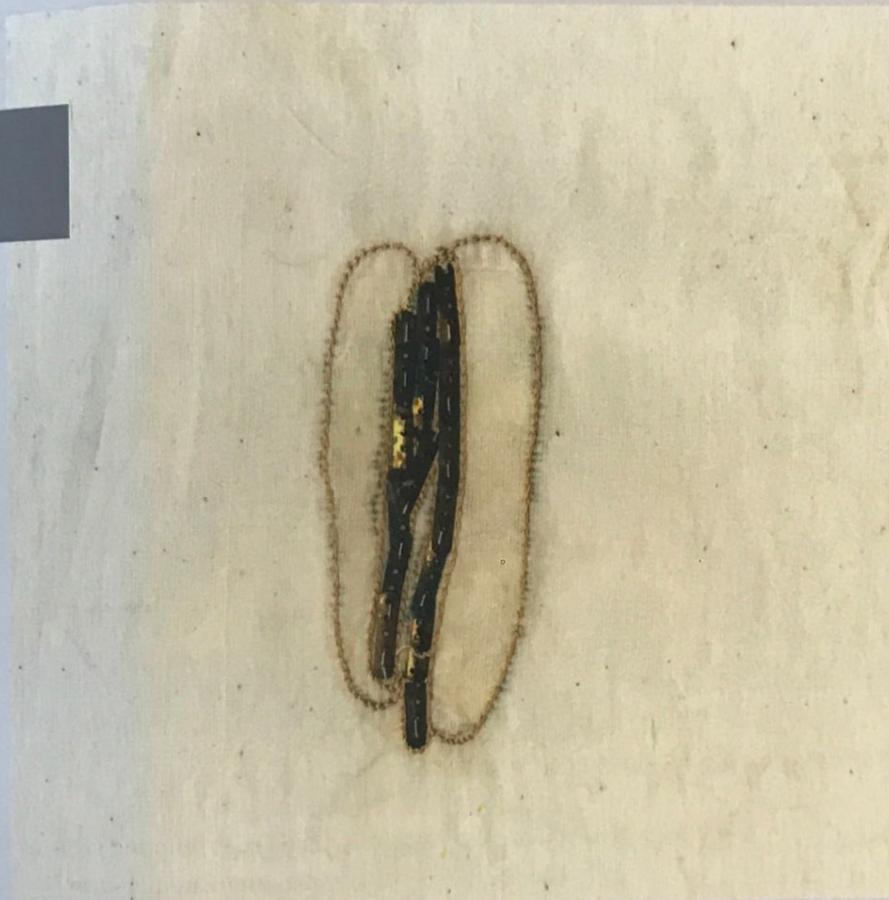
**AA:** Your experiences as a middle class woman are probably quite separate from the issue that you are addressing, and

outsider to the issue, not just of honor killing, but to the wider dimensions of the dialogue on aggression. There is cultural, ethical and moral aggression which is not considered.

**MA:** The imagery on its own could have never been subversive; it is just a vagina, and nothing more than that. The meaning of the image changes the minute I address a topic and put the viewers out of their comfort zone and force them to think out of the box.

If, lets say I was to show this imagery as just beautifully designed vaginas, it would have never stirred a debate, not in Pakistan, not even in the west. There would have been attempts to psychoanalyze it, but it wouldn't be more than a vagina. But it's the concept of the work and the title that makes the work subversive. The language of the work and the viewing it attracts changes.

**AA:** Tell us about the medium. You use cloth to embroider the lines of the vaginas, with sequins, as one would a bride's trousseau. There is something very personal, as if these were the leftover pieces found at home. Each square bears testimony to a woman in the past, and is therefore linked to the history of another woman, to traditions that continue. The same cloth could have been used to cover her head, or her body, dignity and honor. For me that is an important subtext of this work. But you invade and go beyond cultural norms of privacy. If society covers, you seem to uncover, and expose what should remain the sacred domain of the virgin.



Marium Agha '72 Virgins for My Suicide Lover', thread and fabric, 20 X 20cm each, 2010

in this case honor killing. Can class become a barrier in this negotiation? What are the other points of negotiations with the feudal mindset?

**MA:** Issues are always the same; class has no role to play in it. The intensity of exposure to it may vary, the name may change, but the issues for a woman are always the same.

**AA:** I enjoy the subversion, because even though as an emerging artist you may be unclear on the larger implications of your stand, you respond passionately as a woman. You do break the confines of the preciousness of the art object. You seem unafraid. You invert the physical frame and hence provide an engaging misbalance in the gallery space. Yet I know that the subversion in your line, medium and symbolic content is located in a framework through which you are an

**MA:** You are right about the medium being leftover pieces found at home; piece from an old dupatta, shirt etc. These lyrical lines that outline the vagina were the result of me running a small design house which catered to women's clothes for a year or so. I have gathered information, learned the art and I absolutely love how thread unfolds on fabric. Just one thread line that runs across on fabric has this very delicate, feminine beauty. I relate so strongly to the medium because of the way it narrates its individuality, which is similar to that of a woman.

What 'should' remain a sacred domain of the virgin is how the society dictates it. The myths and popular beliefs that surround virginity put a woman in a very questionable position. What is hers should remain hers and not someone else's honor, property or reward, and those are the very first steps that one can take to honor their women as individual entities. ■