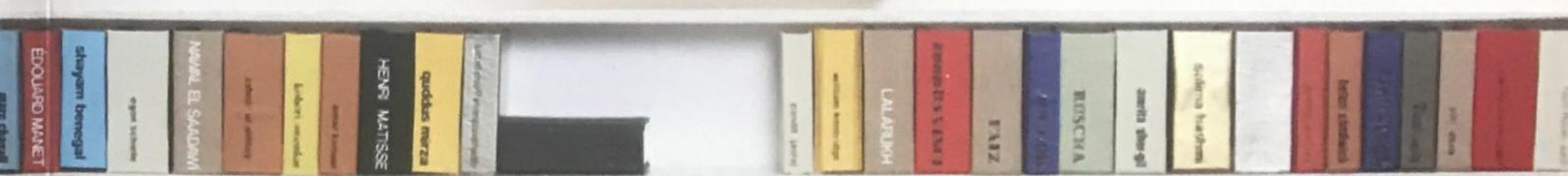


# N U K T A



# ART

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



Extending the discourse on  
**Location, Dislocation, and  
Relocation**

**Exhibition reviews from  
Pakistan, South Africa, Italy and Australia**

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- Vento Sul and Mercosul Biennales, Brazil
- India Art Summit, India
- New Islamic Galleries, MET, USA

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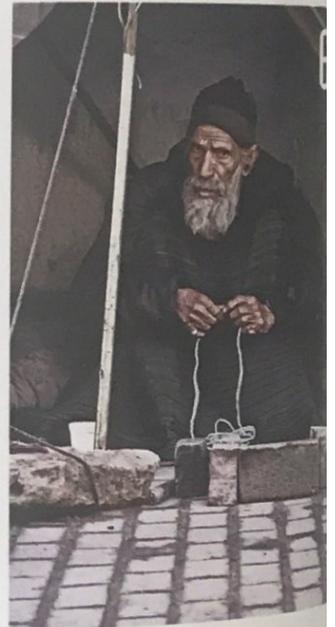
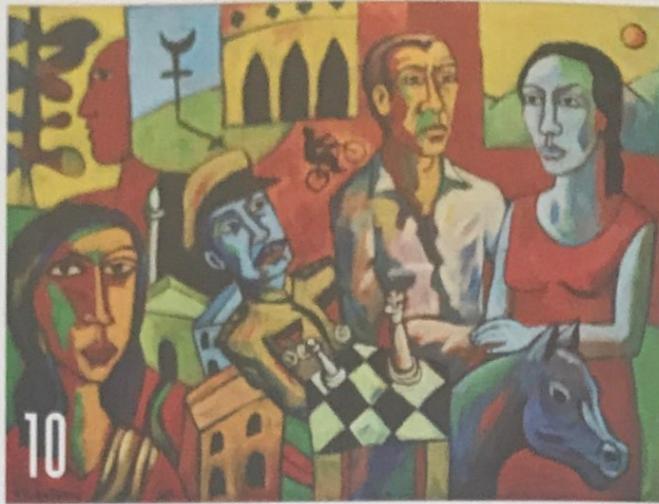
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(Translated from the French by Ishrat Abid)

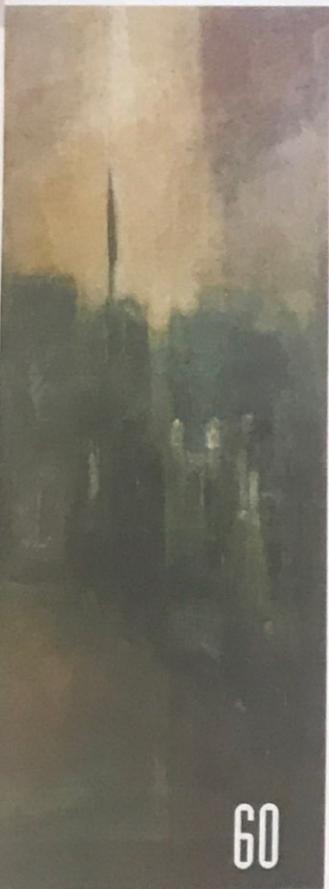
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**Rasim Akhtar**

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

**Andrew Lamprecht**

Andrew Lamprecht is a senior lecturer at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. He is active as a writer and critic with a special interest in contemporary art. As a curator he has produced numerous exhibitions, most recently *Tretchikoff: The People's Painter at the Iziko South African National Gallery*.

**Edward Rubin**

Edward Rubin is a New York-based writer, curator, artist and world traveler covering art news internationally. An active member of AICA, the prestigious International Association of Art Critics, his writings have appeared in such magazines as *Art & Antiques*, *ArtUS*, *dART International*, *Canadian Art*, *ArtNexus*, *Flash Art*, *Hispanic Outlook*, *NYArts*, and *Sculpture* magazines, as well as numerous online venues. His photographs and collages have been exhibited at museums and galleries in the United States, as well as in Europe. His exhibition, *Anne Ferrer: Billowing Beauty* (May 13 - June 2, 2011) curated at the The Lab Gallery in New York City was nominated for the Best Show in a Commercial Gallery by AICA, USA. His most recent exhibition, *In The End A Good Story Is All That Remains: Eight New York Artists Figuratively Speaking* (January 12-February 19, 2012), opened to critical acclaim at the Fran Hill Gallery in Toronto, Canada.

**Franck Hermann Ekra**

Franck Hermann Ekra is a curator and an independent art critic of French-Ivorian origin. He works between Paris and Abidjan. He is interested particularly in the arts of Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East scenes and their Western Diasporas. Franck H. Ekra has contributed to international conferences in Africa, America and Europe and participated in individual or collective publications. He is the recipient of the first edition of the AICA Award of Encouragement for Young Critics (2010). Since the Congress of the International AICA in Asunción (Paraguay), he is member of the Fellowship Fund and on the AICA Jury of Awards for encouraging young critics.

**Ilona Yusuf**

Ilona Yusuf is a designer, poet and printmaker. Her poems have been published in book form (*Picture This*, 2001) and thereafter in literary journals in Pakistan and abroad. She freelances for several magazines, writing on art and literature. Over the past two years she has begun to integrate word and image, making artists' books. [ilonayusuf.blogspot.com](http://ilonayusuf.blogspot.com)

**Laila Mehreen Rahman**

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

**Maliha Noorani**

Maliha Noorani holds a BFA with honors in Indian and Islamic Miniature Painting from the National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan. She received her MA in the History of Art and Archaeology from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and was the Norma Jean Calderwood Curatorial Fellow in the Department of Islamic and Later Indian Art, Harvard Art Museum/Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Noorani is currently pursuing her PhD at Yale University. She has curated exhibitions and lecture programs including *Company to Crown: Perceptions and Reactions in British India*, Sackler Museum, 2011

**Qudus Mirza**

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

**Sehba Mohammad**

Sehba Mohammad has a deep rooted passion for visual arts. Her interest in South Asian Art was honed at the National College of Art, Lahore. She is currently based in New York and works at Louis Blouin Media, a multi faceted global art and culture organization. She has written reviews for NuktaArt, Newsline and Friday Times.

**Sheba Akhtar**

Sheba Akhtar has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics from Bryn Mawr College in the United States and a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1991 she received her registration from the Architects Registration Board of the United Kingdom. Akhtar has practiced as an architect in the United States, England, Scotland and Jordan, where her work has included the design of institutional, commercial and residential buildings and projects, as well as the restoration of ancient monuments. She was Professor of Architecture at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi since 1994. She has taught Architecture Design at the University of Karachi and at NED University. Akhtar is a founding member of The Atelier Pakistan, an NGO that aims to promote the educational and professional development of young designers in Pakistan. She lectures and writes on art and architecture, and on architectural education and practice; she published her first book, *Of Colour and Form*, in 2010. Akhtar is currently working on her second book, pertaining to the history of art and architecture.

**Shireen Ikramullah Khan**

Shireen Ikramullah Khan is a painter and art critic and contributes regularly for NuktaArt, Blue Chip Magazine and the daily Dawn. She has a BFA from the NCA in Lahore (2006) in painting, photography and printmaking. In 2009 she acquired an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Manchester. Currently she is working as an art consultant.

**Sushma H Bahl**

Sushma K Bahl, MBE, former Head Arts & Culture, India, for the British Council (until 2003); is an independent arts adviser, writer, and curator, based in Delhi. Author of *5000 Years of Indian Art*, Bahl has also written for and edited several books on artists including Thota Vaikuntam, and Shuvaprasanna. Her curatorial projects include art exhibitions: *Contemporary Chronicles in Miniature Art of works from India and Pakistan*, *Vistaar and Convergence* involving collaboration between artists and designers, *Annanya* an overview of contemporary Indian Art and *Ways of Seeing* that won the IHC Art India best curated group show award. Co-Director for Indian Arts at the Gwachon Hanmadang Festival South Korea 2004, Guest Director for XI Triennale-India 2005, Co-curator for V9/U9 Indo-UK digital art project and Art Link Indo-German artists' residency 2006 & 2007, Project Consultant Bharat Rang Mahotsav XI1 and Jury member 14th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh 2010, Sushma Bahl is on advisory panels of select cultural institutions in India and abroad.

**Yaminay Nasir Chaudhri**

Yaminay Nasir Chaudhri is a Pakistani artist based in the United States. Her work explores themes of home, longing, displacement and the aesthetics of migration. Chaudhri received a Bachelors of Architecture from Cornell University followed by a Master of Fine Arts from the State University at Albany in New York. She has worked as an architect, curator, media producer and social organizer all of which have become a part of her practice as an artist. She is currently participating in artist residency programs at the Vermont Studio Center and The Jennel Arsené Residency program. [www.yaminay.com](http://www.yaminay.com)

The art practice of a group of young artists focuses on helping children to deal with inner aggression in strife torn Karachi, to avoid criminalization. This grassroots intervention is diametrically opposite to practices that regurgitate formulaic frameworks in white cube sterility. A handful of lone exponents strive to fuse the physical and spiritual, imbibed from their location to access the universal (not to be confused with the man-made construct of globalization). These diverse sites of art in Pakistan have evolved at the intersection of location and dislocation, local and global, market pressures and social engagement. **NuktaArt**, in this issue, extends the debate on the insider/outsider 'gaze' through essays and a photo-essay.

Twelve years into the new century, history, memory and its archives are being re-visited to understand their impact. **NuktaArt** looks at it from different vantage points. A commentary on the new Islamic wing at Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC) informs readers how historical objects can be re-grouped and re-contextualized to be in step with new understandings of a legacy. Two more modest, but very relevant exhibitions in Karachi attempt to look at the fracture of a nation in 'A State of Being So Divided'. Interpreted by a new generation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi artists with memories tempered with time, that make a 'narrative of closure' possible.

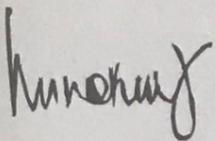
Connecting with more recent history of the Arab Spring, artists at Tahreer Square in Cairo give visualization to the spirit of revolution at Porto Allegre in Brazil. At the International Art Critics Congress and Biennales of Mercosul and Vento Sul in Brazil, the tensions and conflicts and the role of the artist and critic as its interpreter took center stage.

The sensibility of a photographer and an educator, Qamar and Almas Bana, seen through their collection of paintings, furniture and textiles introduced in the *Collector*, highlights how choices made with passion and engagement gives a distinct personality to a living space.

Virginia Whiles' book *Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition and Contemporary Miniature Painting* is reviewed with special insight by Maliha Noorani, who as a student at the NCA's Miniature Department participated in the early years of the Contemporary Miniature Movement.

Niilofur Farrukh

Editor



Rumana Husain

Senior Editor

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Senior Editor

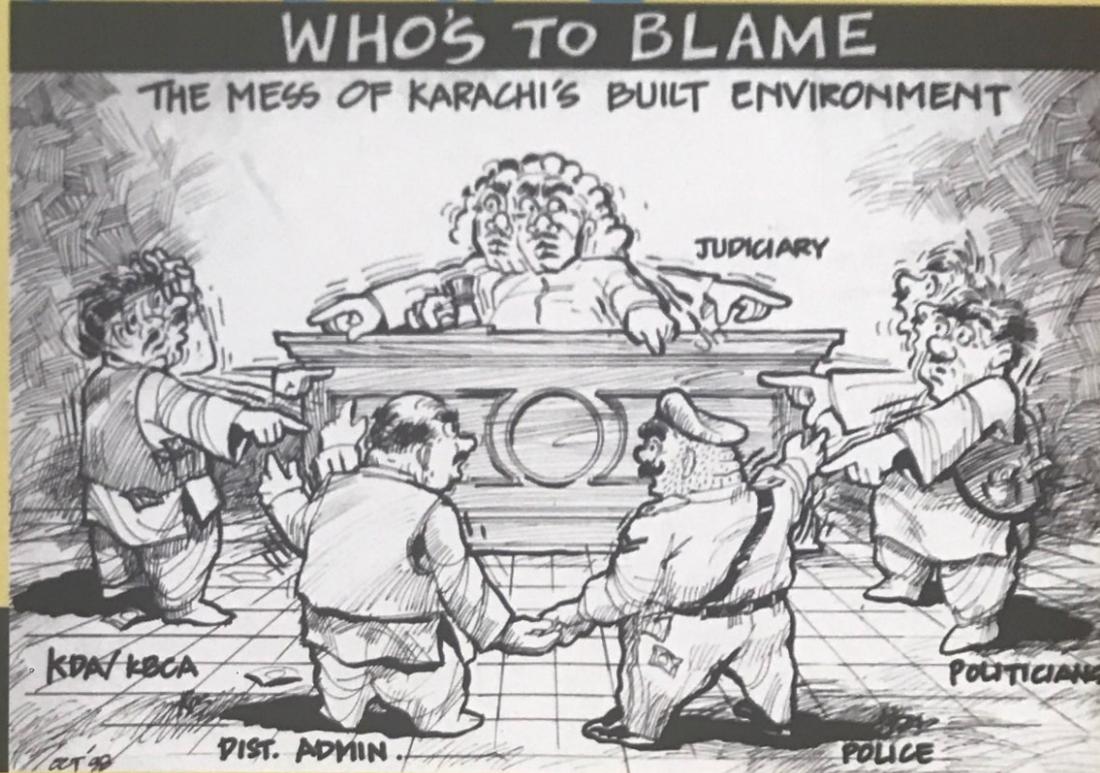
May 2012

Rumana Husain

# The DAZ

## Pizzazz

Cartoons by  
Danish Azar Zuby



Danish Azar Zuby, 1998

VM Art Gallery in Karachi welcomed 2012 with a retrospective exhibition of works by Danish Azar Zuby (DAZ), a man of many talents who is better known as an interior designer, but has also worked as an architect. Son of the late sculptor and painter Ozzir Zuby, DAZ has acquired the artistic genes from his late father and the range of his creativity spans from graphic designs to furniture designs, portraiture to photography.

What remains a mystery is why DAZ did not exhibit his drawings, paintings, calligraphies and photographs up until now, although he has been working in these various genres for almost four decades. It was an extensive show of his work in all these fields, and since it is not possible to review all of it here; the focus is on his cartoons and some important works in the retrospective.

DAZ's caustic collection of political and social cartoons is finely illustrated, in which his drawing skills shine through. Speaking about his cartoons of the eighties, the artist says that he has commented on the brutalization of our society, environmental degradation and economic crises, among other issues, going on to add that "in this exhibition my main thrust was on our recent history and how we have fared as a nation."

Here he refers to his installations. The first installation is titled "Charpae - Tehzeeb ki Aakhri Nisbaan", which attempts to show

a mindless rejection of our cultural and traditional values and heritage. DAZ has put up a traditional charpoy that is garlanded by hand-painted calligraphy of prose about the charpoy by the legendary Urdu humorist Mushtaq Husain Yusufi. The charpoy floats atop a grave.

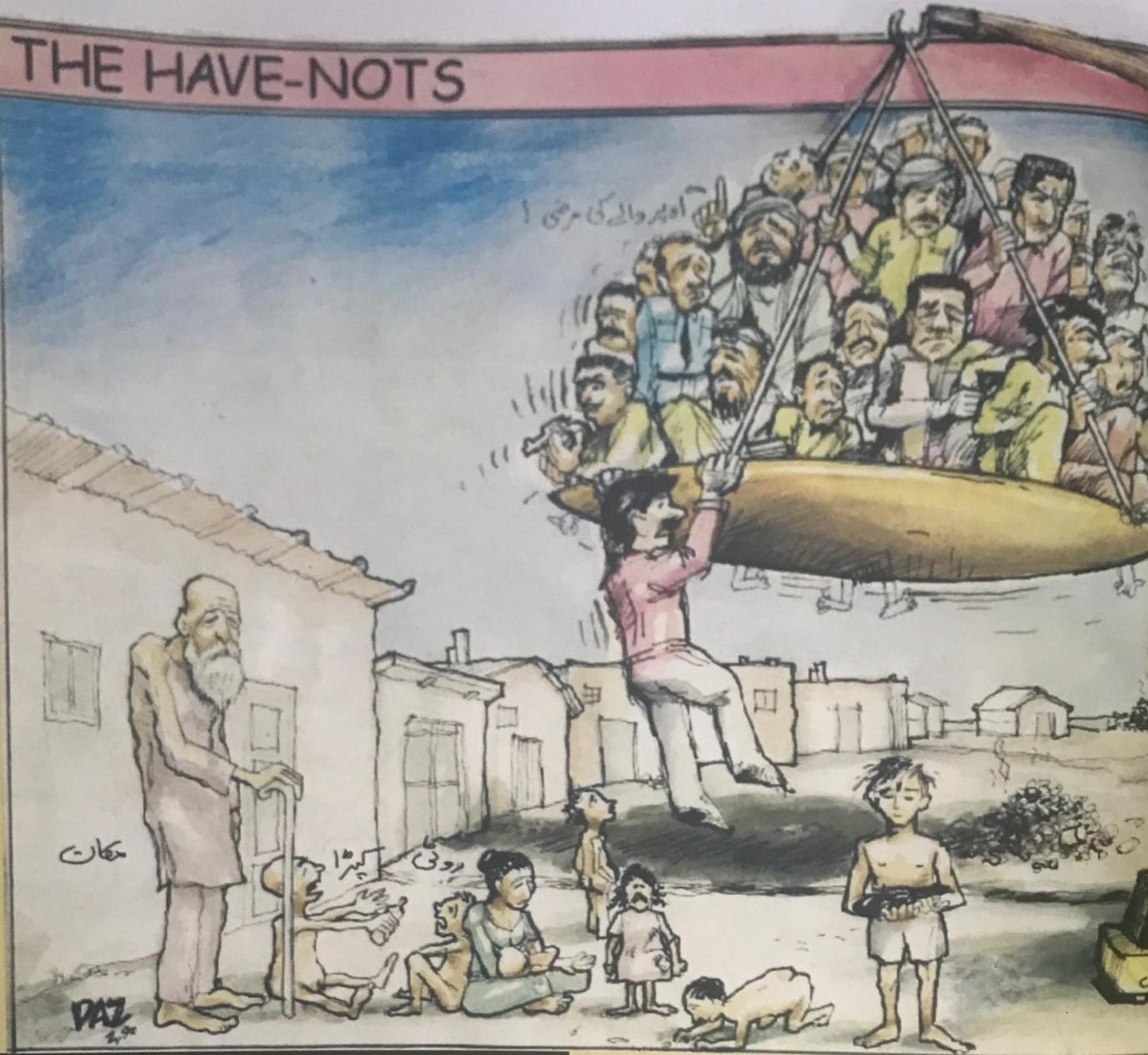
The second installation is titled "Roti, Kapra aur Makaan." In the artist's own words, this piece shows how "the people of Pakistan have been befooled by the 1% ruling elite through the politics of exploitation. The three iconic slogans are framed in gold, with a barbed barrier between the promise and the masses."

"Cartoons may convey information and elicit reactions, but they rarely influence the subject of their satire."

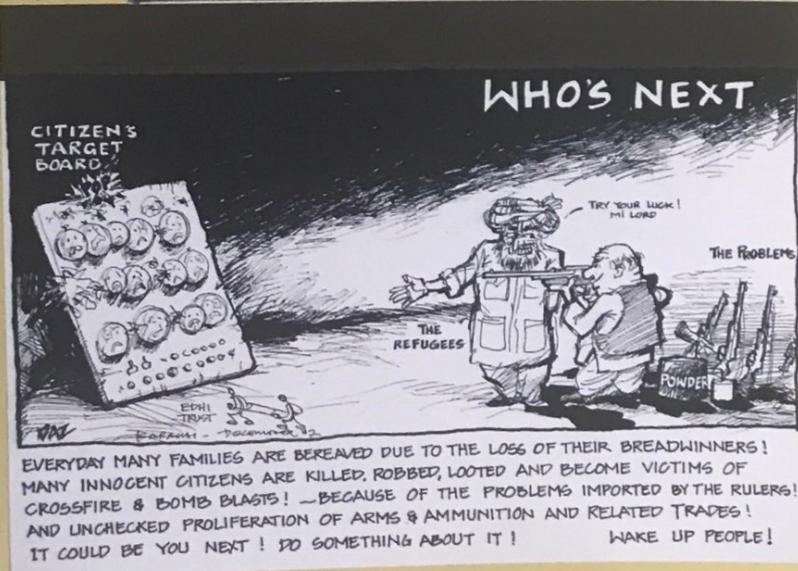
After viewing DAZ's cartoons, all from the eighties and the nineties, one cannot help relating to the above quote from Michael Mayne as the 'subjects' of his cartoons remain uninfluenced and undeterred, in spite of the fact that sooner or later politicians or other high-ups find themselves the subject of a political cartoon.

The display included published as well as un-published cartoons. In one work, a casualty ward with symbolic characters are shown as patients. An intravenous transfusion of (new) blood is being given to a female patient lying on the floor. The words 'World Bank' are written on the drip, and a child sitting close by is

Danish Azar Zubey, The Haves and Have Nots, 1991



Danish Azar Zubey, 1987



arm. The three patients are obviously representatives of the common people of Pakistan and the aid crutches, which have benefited the ruling elite.

As one who is practising architecture and designing interiors, DAZ's concern for the built environment is also presented through some of his cartoons whereby in one cartoon he blames the urban mess of Karachi onto the KDA/KBCA, the District Administration, the Police, the Politicians as well as the Judiciary.

In 'Noora Kushti', a term used for a fixed match, 'The Unsuspecting General Public' is shown as an undernourished and fearful man on one side who is faced with three hoodlums: the 'Developers' and Builders' Mafia', 'Government Agencies' and the KBCA (Karachi Building Control Authority).

injecting himself with an 'IMF' (International Monetary Fund) syringe, while a skeletal male counterpart is shown half-lying, half-sitting on the hospital bed. A hefty person (Successive Governments) is propping him up, and a doctor (Civil Servants) is dispensing a 'Foreign Aid' syringe in the almost dead patient's

Yet another illustrative work portrays two versions of the Karachi National Stadium: in 1989 and in the year 2000. The older drawing has vast open grounds all around the stadium, but in the year marked as 2000, there are buildings not only surrounding the stadium from all sides, but also one built right in the middle of

## THE HAVES



increase in vehicular traffic and the absence of trees.

The text added at the bottom of these cartoons often seems unnecessary. Either the artist has underestimated his own skills in depicting what is obviously stated, or he misjudges the readers' ability to 'read' the cartoon unaided. In fact, the explanatory texts in some of his cartoons take away from the powerful drawings.

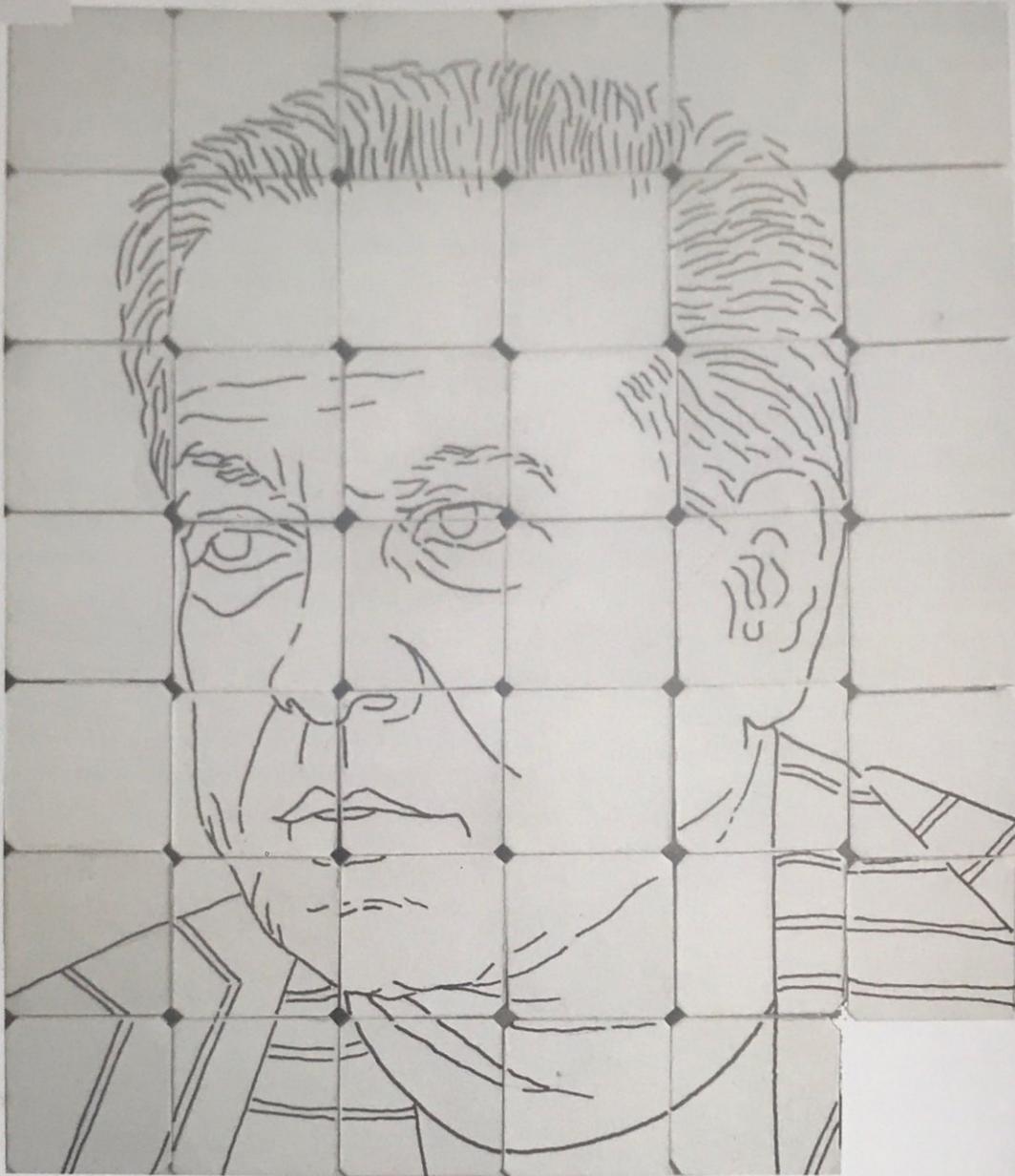
DAZ certainly has panache as a cartoonist. Cartoonists in Pakistan are few and far between, and among them some important names are Rafiq Ahmad, popularly known as Feica, Yusuf Lodhi, Sabir Nazar, Nigar Nazar, Abro, Khaliq Khan and Rathore. DAZ shares with them an outstanding cartooning skill, sensitivity to socio-political issues and irreverence for corrupt leaders. ■

Danish Azar Zuby, *Economic*, 1995



### Reference:

1. Michael Mayne, in a write-up on Chris Lamb's book *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.



Amjad Talpur, *Portrait*, 17.8 x 20.3 cm, pen on wasli, 2011

**Salmaan Taseer's** assassination on January 4, 2011 remains a bloody and shameful marker in the calendar of Pakistan. It was fitting indeed that he should be remembered in the month of his death a year later in his home city, Lahore. It was also fitting to put up a show of work ranging from photographs, paintings, works on *wasli*, performance art and video installations; all variously reflective of the life and times of Pakistan, in remembrance of a man who frequented art exhibitions and who was a most generous patron of the arts.

Two back to back exhibitions were held at The Drawing Room Gallery, curated by Salima Hashmi and Umer Butt respectively. While the twenty eight participating artists are to be lauded for their enthusiastic participation, there were some offerings which remained somewhat inexplicable. These images when viewed within the mandate of the exhibition defied reasoned explanation while others were simplistic in their overtly political message. When paying homage to a person who occupied center stage, who was vibrant and larger than life, it becomes all the more imperative to put up work that either remembers the man, his life, his interests and his personality and not to succumb to the temptation to simply fill wall space.

Imran Mudassar's image of a whole human heart rendered against delicate arabesque patterning was particularly moving when we recall that in the bullet-ridden body of Salmaan

Laila Rahman

Fitting  
Tributes:  
Letters  
to Taseer  
I and II

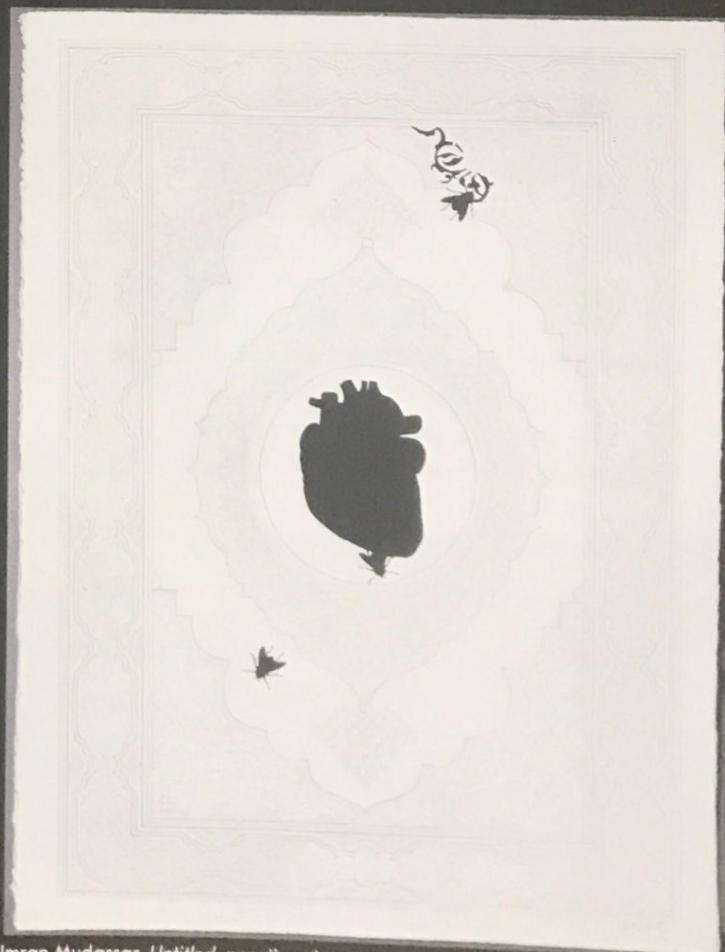
Adeel Uz Zafar, *Unleashed III*, 57.2 x 49.5 cm, engraving on sensitive photographic paper, 2011



Imran Mudassar's image of a whole human heart rendered against delicate arabesque patterning was particularly moving when we recall that in the bullet-ridden body of Salmaan Taseer, every organ was hurt, all except his heart.

Taseer, every organ was hurt, all except his heart. Set against this evocative image is Rashid Rana's *Red Carpet*. This composition of pixilated images of slaughter houses is relevant in so far as such images are background noise as it were for all political activity in Pakistan. *Record Room* by David Alesworth also refers to a wider malaise afflicting all modus operandi in Pakistani government offices, wherein no file ever "moves" to its rightful conclusion. In fact, should a correct decision ever be taken, one is truly taken aback. This image perhaps also refers to cases, despite their high profile or because of it, which are relegated to a dusty back shelf, offering no resolution or succor to the despair contained within.

Nothing in life can, and does remain static, i. e., change is always occurring. So is it with reading symbols. What people understood from the pattern of the flag of Pakistan sixty years ago, cannot be inferred in viewing the same in 2012. The passage of time will always play its role in such situations. The crescent therefore was formerly a symbol only of Islam and purity; however we see it in both R. M. Naeem's *To Whom it May Concern* and in Sadaf Naeem's simply titled *Tribute to Salmaan Taseer*, taking on a different guise altogether. R. M. Naeem's vision has the crescent peopled with sinister forms of



Imran Mudassar, *Untitled*, pencil and poster paint on paper, 50.8 x 76.2 cm, 2012



Sadaf Naeem, *Tribute to Salmaan Taseer*, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 91.4 cm, 2012 (right)

children's bodies, while Sadaf Naeem's oil on canvas shows us a smudged form made up of red flowers. This shift away from the pure silver sickle is indicative of how directionless we now are, as a nation and as a people.

Red roses make another appearance in Waseem Ahmed's filigree-like painting. The strip of arterial red moves the viewer towards the event that took place in 2011 at Kohsar Market in Islamabad. While Street 3 in Islamabad has become almost a shrine in the work of Hurmat and Rabbiya, in a video played only at the five times of the call to prayer; red flowers formed the circle of the wreath placed on Salmaan Taseer's grave by his son. However, to balance the books, the same ubiquitous red flowers were perversely showered in celebration on his assassin and he in his turn was garlanded with the same arterial flowers. This serves to remind us of the deep divisiveness present in our society's framework.

Two starker images dealing more directly in death and the loss of all control and power are those by Adeel uz Zafar and Rehan Bashir. Zafar's *Unleashed III* portrays a grim and oft seen reality, that of anonymous dead bodies wrapped in their final garments, of shrouds. They recall universally recognized images of mass graves, filled with hastily tipped in bodies, victims of political murders, who have been offered no last rites as is the due of every human being. Bashir's *Newsprint* featuring the single word "*Anal Haq*" speaks of both sacrifice and salvation. That single cry which has reverberated down through the centuries can still raise goose bumps.

Zeeshan Muhammad's quirky yet sinister *Eenie Meenie....* which highlights the very arbitrariness of life and death in such conflict-ridden areas of the globe as Pakistan.



Zeeshan Muhammad, *Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe, Lover*, reflective stickers on mount card, 20.3 x 96.5 cm, edition of 100 pieces, each piece 17.8 x 12.7 cm, 2012

The power of words as seen above has great endurance, but in oversimplifying messages in words we may fall into a trap. While both Ayesha Jatoi's and Hasnat Mehmood's sentiments are not at fault, it should be adopted subtlety as it is a glorious weapon. While both these images have immediate impact, due in part to their scale, and not least the sentiments expressed therein, a whisper can scream as loud as a shout. Ali Azmat's *Through Sacred Grills* and Mudassar Manzoor's *Hero* are visual throwbacks to the past, to an age long gone. But their relevance centers in their quiet violence and in our collective recognition of this.

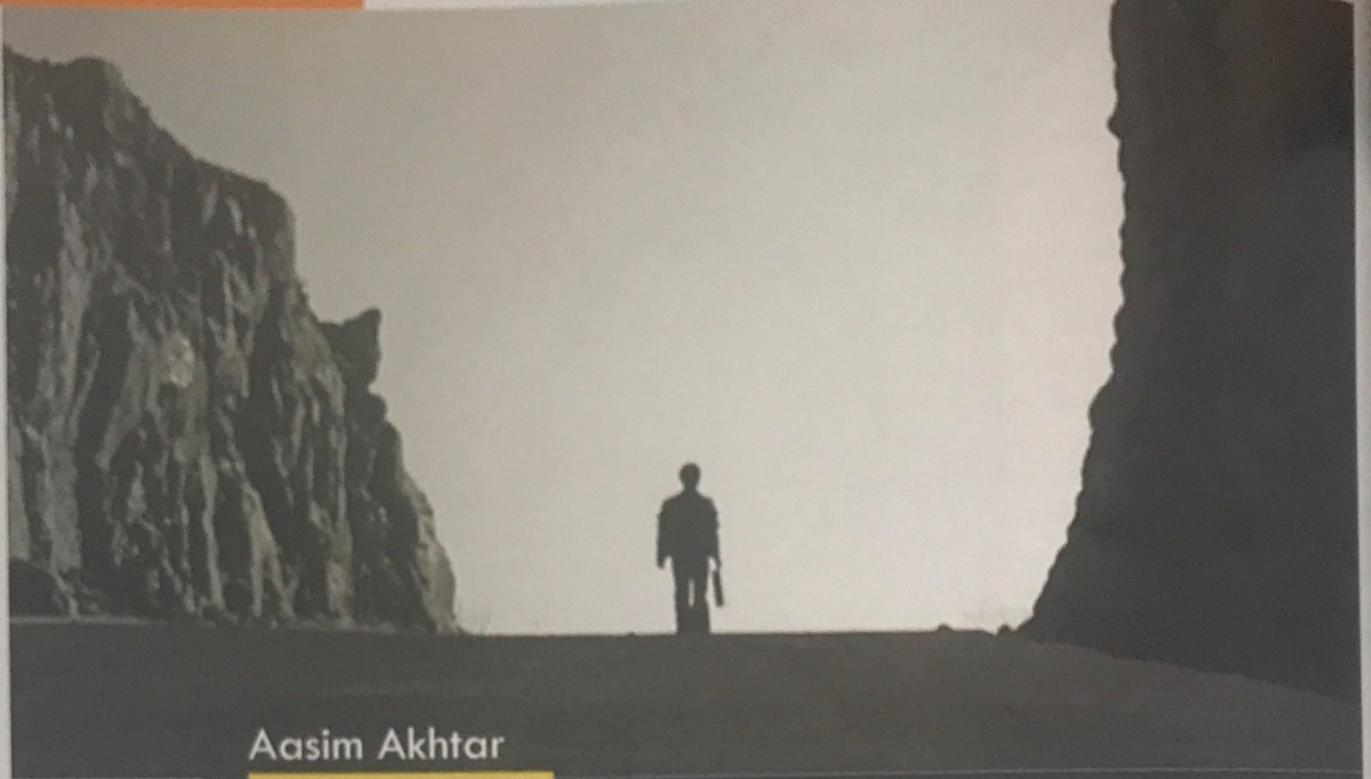
The videos of Mohsin Shafi and Nadia Khwaja deal with hopelessness and shock. The repetitive action in Shafi's *A Chorus*



Rashid Rana, *Red Carpet-1*, C-print and Diasec, 241.3 x 324.9 cm, 2007

of *Hollow Souls* underlines the futility of protest, even though it will always remain a human need. The silence of this is offset by Khwaja's ride in a rickshaw in *Flesh it Out*. This video speaks eloquently of a blow sustained but not comprehended as yet. They are both eloquent pieces occupying a much needed space.

To use the word "fitting" once again, it is fitting to conclude with Zeeshan Muhammad's quirky yet sinister *Eenie Meenie....* which highlights the very arbitrariness of life and death in such conflict-ridden areas of the globe as Pakistan. However this image can apply to any trouble spot in the world, not least the U. S. of A. If not on the 4th of January 2011, then another date, another time would have burned into our memory....the end result was pre-ordained. ■



Aasim Akhtar

## INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE HISTORIES

At the Annual Degree Show of the NCA, Rawalpindi, several key issues emerged this year, which pressed for a new analytic look at the complex takes on spectacle, identity, authorship, and materiality, and suggested ways in which these issues fold into the contemporary moment with remarkable fluidity.

Narjis Mirza's works are invitations to meditation. She dug into history in order to legitimize the complete abandonment of a painterly lexicon, while bearing witness to the breakdown of medium-specific ambitions. Her four video installations entitled, *'The Line'* are neither sculptures nor paintings but rather both at once, for they reflect and suggest the tension of form and move beyond their confines into space and time. The individual titles given to each installation hint at an impulse towards something beyond...something as unfathomable as that suspended stage between wakefulness and sleep. *The Line* brings to mind a determined situation of certainty, an affirmation that things are "this way and not another." The singularity, however, seems to separate the circumscribed space of certainty from a broader space of evasion and metamorphosis; the site of a color that extends in waves toward a dimension where possibilities dissolve into atmosphere, light, sky, and dream. Meanwhile, the title of the exhibition itself projects the mind to a distant horizon.

Mirza's works thrive on a suspended temporality. The centerpiece of the exhibition, *'Elevator'* is a closed door. The door enshrouds the viewer's vision in a visual rhythm, guided by the tonal modulations and the harmonic division of the space, as it

mechanically opens and closes on different scenes, the perfect proportions of which are an interpretation of Renaissance equilibrium. Inside the hall, one cannot help but listen to the silence. The other works in this exhibition, likewise establish a rapport with the clean architectural space of the gallery, where they find echoes and references. Their carefully calibrated formal minimalism unleashes a subtle and enveloping emotion of transition, migration, mutability, exodus, baggage, journey, distance and exile.

In *'The Y Line'* the camera follows people in a slow tracking shot as they move through an undefined space. Transferred to a wooded wasteland in Islamabad, the scene takes on a dreamlike, or rather, a nightmarish presence. The searching, directionless movement of the protagonists is doubled by the film-loop and intensified by the camera's uneasy changes of focus between foreground and background - as if searching for clues to understand a complex situation whose rules one does not know. But the young people seem unable to reach their goal, because the destination as vanishing point no longer exists. Mirza stages moments released from the continuum of time, interstices and transitional spaces, thereby revealing a concentrated though nevertheless laconic image of the mental and social present.

Goethe establishes a direct connection between a person's name and skin by characterizing both as indispensable components of identity. The name is something external, something bestowed by others, while the skin is given to a person at birth. Skin is the



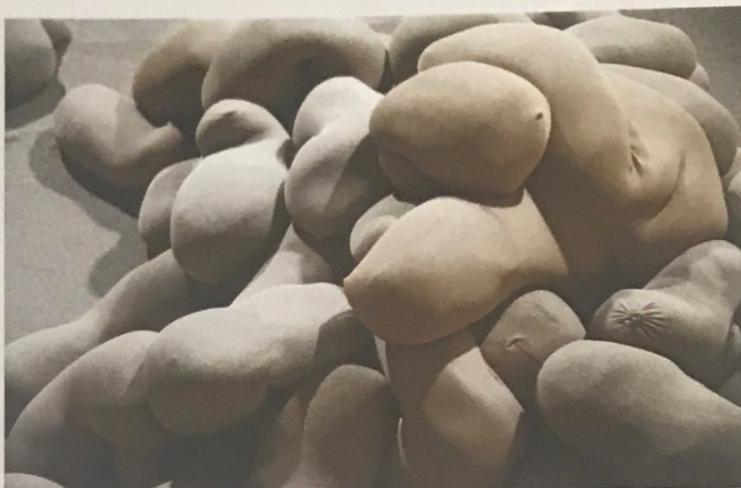
Nazir Hunzai, *Cushion*, silicone, polyester and synthetic hair, 43.2 x 43.2 cm, 2011

place where boundary negotiations take place. From the Renaissance

onwards it has been considered the mirror of the soul and the projecting surface of the invisible inside. As a reflection of the inside, a canvas of psychological, emotional, or cognitive processes, the skin has for some time now been in a crisis.

Out of this crisis come Nazir Hunzai's skin installations. For the newborn, the skin is the most important organ of communication and contact. It is through the skin that the newborn learns where to begin or end.

This dark meeting point evokes both arts' correlation with the life force and the inevitable decay that awaits even the most pristine surfaces. Hunzai's 'Untitled' is an incision in a gleaming white wall: echoing the crenellated edges of a wound, it harbors a fleshy centre. The idea that the skin is the outermost sheath, the corporal dress of human beings, their visible and performative surface...Hunzai's sculptural installations examine the conceptions and rhetorical patterns that see skin as boundary and contact surface, probes into the practice and phantasms of penetrating and removing the skin, and investigates the question of the body surface as the place where identity is formed and assigned. The work analyses images and fantasies: armored or stigmatized skin, skin color that rubs off, people shedding their own skin, the image of a tattered or transparent epidermis, flaying, and extraction. In Nazir Hunzai's remarkable constructions, skin - fashioned out of silicone - is used as a stand-in for "person," "spirit," "body," or



Nazir Hunzai, *Of Life and Other Things*, stockings and sand, variable, 2011

"life." On the other hand, it functions simultaneously as the other of the self, as its enclosure, prison, or mask. The complex question concerning the skin, as boundary is resolved through showing the extent to which skin is still understood as a porous, nonclosed surface.

Maimoona Riaz's installations (3-D) fitted together to create the laboratory-playhouse-home-archive - poised architectures of clutter. To nurture obsession is one definition of the artist's task, and if the expression of that obsession is interesting, it is worth looking at in various iterations. Riaz's subject, after all, is the sprawl of a culture whose concrete parts threaten to bury us as we extrude them; how can she make her point without replication?

A city is constantly in flux. Its boundaries mutate as it expands and contracts; buildings are demolished or decay and then are rebuilt or replaced. History lingers, with modern development abutting older neighborhoods. In so doing, it creates a unique, personal negotiation of past, present, and future.

In her 'miniatures', Maimoona Riaz cuts out and collages narratives of urban development and the built environment and their impact on an individual's experience. Her renderings of cartographic and urban plans form the foundation for the layered compositions. The areas of color and dynamic markings that overlay and animate the works may resemble diagrams of weather patterns, but to the artist they signify human activity.

The viewer pulls apart the various facets of the work to piece together a narrative, just as one's experience of a city comprises distinct moments, scenes, and acts. The physical engagement with the artwork by the viewer, who is compelled to change his position with regard to Riaz's often wall-hung boxes and frames in order to take in their shifts in scale and layered imagery, mimics the active, perambulatory way an individual navigates city streets. Sometimes she produces atmospheric compositions, other times intimate analyses. A cacophony of lines, marks and painted shapes may dominate. In other cases, a comparatively spare accumulation of overlapping drawn plans may be primary. This latter approach, suggesting the ghostly confluence of multiple realities, is apparent in *Invasion of Personal Space*.<sup>14</sup>

Maimoona Riaz, *Untitled* from the series *Invasion of Personal Space*, preserved insects, 25.4 x 33 cm, 2011





Rumana Husain

## PRESENT PAST — PAST PRESENT

We all have our individual time machines through which we sometimes traverse into our past; clinging on to memories that are cherished. The time machine can also take us forward, into the future, whereby we dream - with open-eyes - of living a life that we crave. It is understood that each passing moment becomes the past, and therefore it is natural to want to keep a record of it.

The 2011 thesis show at the Visual Studies Department of the Karachi University had five graduating fine artists. Among them, Sujjal Kayani's thesis *Haal Mazji - Mazji Haal* (Present Past - Past Present) stood out in the group.

Her thesis presented the theme on multiple perspectives, incorporating interesting images and mementos in a well thought out body of work. Mundane items gave interesting insights as each of these objects had its own story. Sujjal's pragmatic approach to her theme gives no professed overarching impression. On the other hand, she allows her art to mediate with the individuals, personal events and histories that she projects.

"Time and space change continuously and enter into the realm of the past. Past, present and future are inseparable. They are connected to one another and share a strong bond," she says.

The artist displays a certain discontent, a poignant sadness, even wistfulness, evident in the small-scale works for her *Haal Mazji - Mazji Haal*.

She uses watercolors, oil paints, acrylic on canvas, old cassettes, old paper, books, stamps, aerogrammes, envelopes, metal boxes and wooden scales to create an imagery of familiar faces and spaces that creates a dialog between individual memories and collective spaces. Her miniature paintings present her family and her previous dwellings in her ancestral town (Sahiwal, Punjab), and patterns which serve as a surrogate for the real. Sujjal blurs the boundaries between documentation and creation. She creates everyday experiences that she has witnessed as a child and transforms those ordinary moments into extraordinary narratives. Using actual objects on which to depict the faces of her loved ones, or painting objects such as crumpled paper, pencil shavings, cotton swabs, used matchsticks, etc. which her family had once used (and discarded), she builds a nostalgic relationship with them.

When movement in a certain period of time and space ceases to be, the journey for those who are no more walking with the artist continues through the artist's medium. Objects of daily use



Sujjal Kayani, *Wrinkles*, watercolor and acrylic on canvas, embroidery frame, 2011

become a part of her, sharing a space within her. "In the end they all end up in my memories. The whole experience is like traveling between two spaces and time," says Sujjal.

Albums containing hundreds of family photographs are one traditional and popular form of documentation of the past. Moreover, the digital age now provides people with 'new' technology that helps to store endless virtual images on the computer, on the web or on social networking sites, making those images available to the world at large through a click of the 'mouse'. However, Sujjal's use of portraiture in the miniature style onto objects used in the not too distant past; such as letters,

several key sentences in Urdu in a booklet, such as, "we are fine," "have received the money," "grieved to know this," "summer is almost over," etc. Vertical as well as horizontal lines divide these as in an exercise copy. The person wishing to 'write' a letter can fill in or mark the pre-prepared sentences given at the top, then put his/her signature and date at the bottom and send it off!

Unsurprisingly, when one looks at all the other works in this thesis show, the work ranges widely in concept, approach, skill, medium, materials, confidence and ambition. Most of these student-artists are still at exploratory stages, and one or two struggle to unpin themselves from imitating established artists with varying degrees of success and failure. Sujjal Kayani's paintings, on the other hand, retain a spontaneity that recalls their



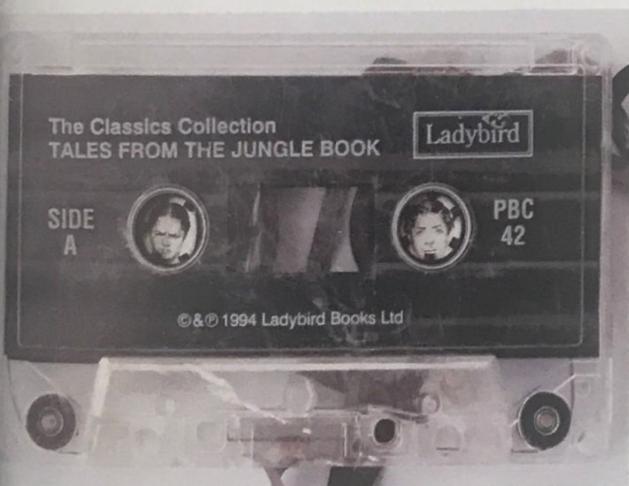
Sujjal Kayani, *Lifafa II*, postal envelope and mixed media, 2011

origins. She presents her small-scale work in sections containing

the different objects mentioned earlier, and each section contains specific memories. Although the paintings are not immaculately finished, the entire portfolio is modest and unpretentious. She has succeeded to tell the stories of her parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles with earnestness. ■



Sujjal Kayani, *Futta*, oil paint on wooden rulers, 2011



Sujjal Kayani, *History II*, watercolor on cassette, 2011

stamps and envelopes for communication purposes, or metal pencil-boxes, rulers/scales, and a 'treasure' box that belonged to her mother, containing jewelry, lipstick and other knick-knacks, circular wooden embroidery-rings that are no longer in use (now replaced with machine-embroidery), or (now redundant) old cassettes with spools of tape form the body of her work.

"I express my yearning to interact with my past through objects that are sometimes ephemeral and sometimes antique," says the artist.

An interesting display is an innovative 'Qaida'-like form of letter writing for the fast paced life of today. The artist has provided



Ayaz Jokhio



Atteqa Ali

Quddus Mirza

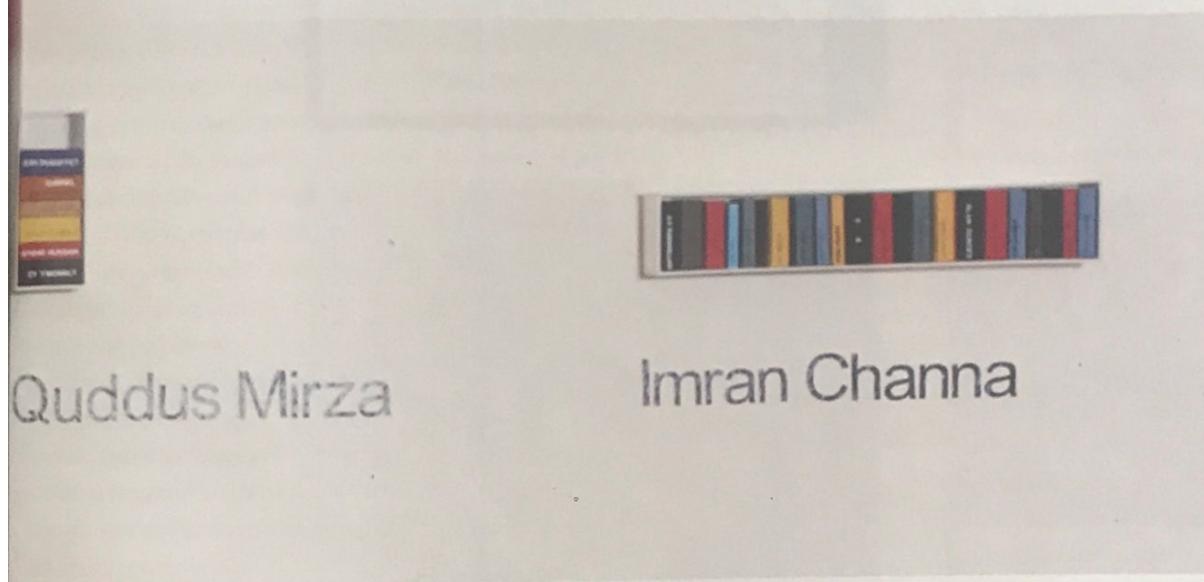
LEFT  
OUT

In Arabian Nights, there is a story about a prince, who, on the threshold of sleep and wakefulness, feels that a genie is transporting him to an unknown destiny. Upon arriving at another place, he starts his life, begins some business, gets married, has children, grows old and when lying one night in his room, senses that he has been lifted by the same genie, and opening his eyes, finds him on his old bed, abandoned years ago, but it seemed that he has not left it for an instant.

The fable is a perfect example of two phenomena: migration on a massive scale in the twentieth century, and the act and effects of art making. In both cases, a man leaves his place - either physically or virtually, but in a sense (or in its essence) is never away from it. So, the journey, which may take minutes to months, or seconds to centuries, is just (like) a dream, which has to finish before one wakes up into - and embraces the reality. A man is made up of strange substances, thus in our minds time often

"Today people are more interested in flight from themselves than discovering their authentic self. The self has become boring, and belongs to a different culture. The possibilities of transformation, teleportation, and metamorphosis hold far more promise than digging in the dirt of the self."

- Dubravka Ugresic<sup>1</sup>



Hasnat Mehmood, view of *The Inquiry of Art* (installation), letreset dry transfer on handmade books, vinyl lettering and acrylic shelves, size variable, each book size approx. 6.3 x 7.6 x 2.5 cm, 2010-2011

plays incredible tricks. The division of time or its residue in memory is quite different from what is experienced in normal life. The spans of years, months and days is reduced to a tiny second in our recollections, and sometimes just a few minutes are recalled over and over and we spend hours in dealing with those few minutes in our minds.

This nature of time was illustrated by Jorge Luis Borges, in his series of lectures, *Seven Nights*.<sup>2</sup> Referring to dreams, he explains how the measure and concept of divine time is distinct from human time. Because according to holy books, God created the universe in six days, but for Borges, those six days were not identical to our idea of 24 hours. Borges illustrates this demarcation through the difference between dream and reality. According to him, in our dreams we experience a life span or a number of years, months or days, but in reality it is just a few minutes or may be an hour or so that we spend having that dream in our sleep. Yet in mid-dream we believe it to be real, till we emerge out of it.

The displacement of time is equal to the dislocation of space. Usually when a man moves away from his homeland, he is living in two worlds. In actuality, he spends his days in his physical surroundings, but the inner self is immersed in the place that

was left years ago. So it is not surprising that one comes across the migrant population in most European countries, which are backward, reactionary and fundamentalist - and psychologically are residing in their 'ideal' homeland. Not that they are too eager to follow religion, but for them the country of their ancestor assumes a combination of cultural practices, customs and conventions, which they adhere to - like a holy faith; and feel that they must preserve and protect their tradition, that has turned into signs of their identity. Compared to these immigrants, the people still living in the abandoned countries do not have any need or desire to safeguard their cultural traditions. For them culture is a continuous flow of events and incidents, letting new ideas, objects and practices enter and blend in with the old ones.

In the realm of art, the same phenomenon happens, but in a separate scheme. The idea of art connected to a country is a peculiar concept; or a late construct, because the nation-state is a relatively new entity in the history of mankind. Countries existed but the concept of a country with defined boundaries, and/or based upon a race or a political ideology is a modernistic notion. Earlier on, countries such as China, India, Japan and Russia were part of the world map, but the borders were not strictly defined, since these countries were recognized due to the seat of power

or emperor/ruler. Those countries were perceived more as society, rather than as single political states (often with multiple races, religions and languages). Therefore, we still study Indian art, Chinese art, Greek art or Persian art, but if probed deeply, there is no one idea, style, technique or imagery attached to the art of one nation. Because after the advent of nation-states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all these diverse art practices are now associated with one particular nation, state and country.

The first line of E. H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art*, is "There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists"<sup>3</sup>; so one must examine if the relationship of art with a country is similar to the relationship of artists with a country; and how a country can be different from a region. Countries continue to modify their political boundaries; Pakistan, India, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Sudan and Palestine/Israel are a few states that have altered in the past 70 years. A person who was once a citizen of India became a Pakistani only to transform into Bangladesh after a few decades. Likewise, an individual who was born as Yugoslavian became a Serb or Croatian citizen after the country was disintegrated into several small republics.

In fact, the idea of connecting art to a country is a residue of art history. In academic situations, Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Italian art are distinguished, a custom that demands to perceive art within the framework of a (present day) nation state. Thus, French, German, Spanish and British art are accepted terms, without realizing that

A person who was once a citizen of India became a Pakistani only to transform into Bangladesh after a few decades. Likewise, an individual who was born as Yugoslavian became a Serb or Croatian citizen after the country was disintegrated into several small republics.

pursuits. Therefore, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali and several artists who were migrants from other parts of Europe are considered French, but in their life time, the question of their national identity was not a main or crucial concern for them, or for others.

This custom or habit of identifying art with a nation has resulted in the desire to expect that each nation state has its own independent, different and unique 'national art'. The notion of national art is so embedded in our midst - and mind sets, that it is often demanded that artists must recognize the national traits, acknowledge elements which are connected to national identity, hence employ these in their work. Thus in our surroundings painters have tried to inculcate local landscape, Islamic calligraphy and Indian miniature painting, so their work can be identified with this location.

In fact, the reason to imbibe the indigenous



Hasnat Mehmood, Courtesy of V & A Museum, graphite on paper, 66 x 96.5 cm, 2011

the rise in art of these regions - at certain points in history was not linked/dependant upon the national identity of a country, but upon specific aesthetic, formal and intellectual

ingredients in an artwork - on a conscious level and as a strategy, betrays two motives/factors. If, on the one hand, it is the internal urge to formulate an indigenous art, it is the expectation from the outside (art) world that leads artists to work within the frame of 'Pakistani Art' (because the mainstream art world prefers to circumscribe the peripheries into such divisions/descriptions). So, whether it is from an outside expectation or inside pressure, the term 'Pakistani Art' is understood among many individuals from our art circle as a sacred concept. (Something like the strange term 'The ideology of Pakistan!'). It frequently appears in all the discourse on art: in seminar papers, classroom discussions and

Hasnat Mehmood, Notebook Series, currency notes on handmade books, size variable each book approx. 6.3 x 7.6 x 2.5 cm, 2010- 2011



in print, both in newspaper articles and in academic books.

Due to its repeated usage, this term is taken to be an undisputed truth. The phrase, 'Pakistani Art', however, is a deceptive description. Although we are obsessed with this, it probably does not exist at all, especially in this age of rapid globalization. Today, a nation or society can hardly boast of a distinct identity/practice, since the cultural differences between various nation states are diffusing, with the unprecedented progress in information technology. The patterns of knowledge, trends of fashion and the movements of art travel from one place to the other in a swift manner and with a quicker pace is a given norm.

This changing scenario, caused by globalization, is not limited to certain fields of creative expression. It has been affecting the entire society. Now, a number of sections/functions in this society represent an amalgamation of the 'local' and 'foreign'. Two important examples of this phenomenon are the realm of language and the world of fashion. Whatever we use now, can hardly be defined or labelled as the national/Pakistani dress or national/Pakistani language. Our usage of language is also transforming to the same degree. The flavor of our national language, Urdu, is constantly changing with the induction of words and phrases from English. The everyday language has turned into a mixture of English and Urdu, in our ordinary conversations, as well as in our media. But interestingly, Urdu is not a specifically or solely Pakistani language, because the same vocabulary is employed in the songs and dialogues of Bollywood movies, besides being an important language in several Indian states.

In this context, where the national dress and (practically) the concept of the national language is a thing of the past (much like the old fashioned adaptation of national flower, national bird, national sport, etc.) people still expect from artists to create a national art. But, just as there cannot be a national or Pakistani mathematics, physics or chemistry, Pakistani art is also a difficult possibility. Actually, there is a distinction between Pakistani artists and Pakistani Art. We can mention individual artists, who happen to be from Pakistan, but their works cannot necessarily be classified as Pakistani Art. Since the act of making art is a personal endeavor and every work bears the individual mark of its maker, rather than some kind of a national trait.

Arguably, this desire to have a national Pakistani Art echoes an old phobia about the sacredness of cultural boundaries and the safeguarding of a nation's identity. The paranoia of preserving culture in a particular format is not a new one, or the urge to remind and reassert this issue, a recent phenomenon. It reveals an attempt to control culture according to the whims of cultural puritans/pundits, which is also shared by that other section of society, which is called fundamentalist, reactionary and fanatical. Both of these, whether intellectuals or religious extremists, aim to create a monolithic, uniform and pure art and culture. In a society that has been a melting pot of races, religions, languages and customs throughout centuries, it seems irrelevant, if not absurd, to talk about the purity of art or culture based on nation.

Since, in our art, a multiplicity of trends, styles, techniques and traditions have contributed to construct an indigenous vocabulary, what we have now as art from Pakistan is not a precise, monolithic or clearly defined visual practice, but a structure, in which it is difficult to distinguish or disintegrate vernacular elements from outside influences.

However, no one questions the existence or origin of majority of our cultural practices, unless these are connected to the West. For us, the West, instead of a geographical boundary, is an idea that encompasses diverse, often contradictory components. Due to our colonial past, the West has been equated with England, which expanded to other regions, like Europe and North America.

(Interestingly certain countries, such as Latin American nations or Russia, though totally immersed in the European civilization, do not

For example, a painting by Mohammad Ali Talpur or an installation by Hasnat Mehmood, can be from any part of the world. Even though their concerns may relate to this region, their language is transnational/contemporary.

Mohammad Ali Talpur, *Leeka*, technical pen on paper, 76.2 x 106.7 cm, 2009



Mohammad Ali Talpur, *Leeka*, technical pen on paper, 76.2 x 106.7 cm, 2009



Mohammad Ali Talpur, *Leeka*, technical pen on paper, 76.2 x 106.7 cm, 2009



fall into our description of the West).

Thus, we have a peculiar notion of the West, especially in the context of art and culture. Our postcolonial society (like many others) seeks a relationship of love and hate with nations/civilizations that represent its former masters. Several of our artists and cultural theorists stress the need to evolve an art form that is distinct from the West, but simultaneously hope for its recognition in the mainstream art - located in the West. So, if we insist that our art must have its indigenous flavor, it should retain its traditional sensitivity, it must have its roots in history, and it needs to reflect its people and surroundings. In the same breath we are anxious that it be received in the world art centers; and our artists can exhibit in major galleries and museums in

art, which is keen to concentrate on new arenas, after having exhausted its usual sources.

Along with miniature painting, which is moving in the direction of contemporary art (connected to a Western aesthetics), a number of artists in our surroundings have freed themselves from the question of ethnic divide between East and West. For them, debates like these are a residue of the past, which portray the lingering habit of imagining a perfect East in comparison - and competition to a pure West. One realizes that the world is not separated in such clear boundaries. Presently, several practices from the West have been absorbed in the East, and vice versa.

Perhaps the greatest example of this cross-cultural exchange is McDonald's McArabia, an item on the menu that represents not

Rashid Rana, *What is So Pakistani About This Painting?*, oil, acrylic, printed fabric on canvas, approx. 167.6 x 335.3 cm, 2000



USA and European capitals.

This state of affairs may appear a dichotomy, but in reality unfolds a logical construct. Actually, we wish to conquer the West through our past, since we cannot compete in the realm of the present. So, because of this urge, the craze for launching an art form that represents our heritage, thus offering something unique to the art world, was an understandable motive, that - if not generated, but popularized - the movement of miniature painting in Pakistan, which eventually became the greatest and the most successful art export from here.

However, art does not always flow in a direction determined by its makers, users or analysts, because it often surprises all. The movement of miniature painting in Pakistan, after surviving a few years as a symbol of identity and of ethnicity, is slowly transforming into something unexpected. A number of artists who have been trained in traditional miniature, are exploring other forms, such as sculpture, installation and conceptual art. This is probably in response to the demand from contemporary

only the Western system of food but of Eastern taste too. Akin to that, the current art in Pakistan, or for that matter, in other countries, is fast losing its connection with a particular place. For example, a painting by Mohammad Ali Talpur or an installation by Hasnat Mehmood, can be from any part of the world. Even though their concerns may relate to this region, their language is transnational/contemporary. So is the case of many other artists in our midst, which are producing work, without the dilemma of East or West - since it is too difficult to divide the two. ■

1. Ugresic, Dubravka. *Karaoke Culture*. Open Letter, Rochester: 2011
2. Borges, Jorge Luis. *Seven Nights*. Faber and Faber, London: 1986
3. Gombrich, E. H. *The Story of Art*. Phaidon, Oxford: 1991

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Yaminay Nasir Chaudhri

# PRIVILEGE: A conversation about artists, and subalternity

"In its most general formula, critical art intends to raise consciousness of the mechanisms of domination in order to turn the *spectator into a conscious agent* in the transformation of the world. We know the dilemma that weighs upon this project. On the one hand, understanding alone can do little to transform consciousness and situations. The exploited have rarely had the need to have the laws of exploitation explained to them. Because it's not a misunderstanding of the existing state of affairs that nurtures the submission of the oppressed, but a lack of confidence in their own capacity to transform it." (My emphasis)

- Jacques Ranciere (Ranciere, 2004)



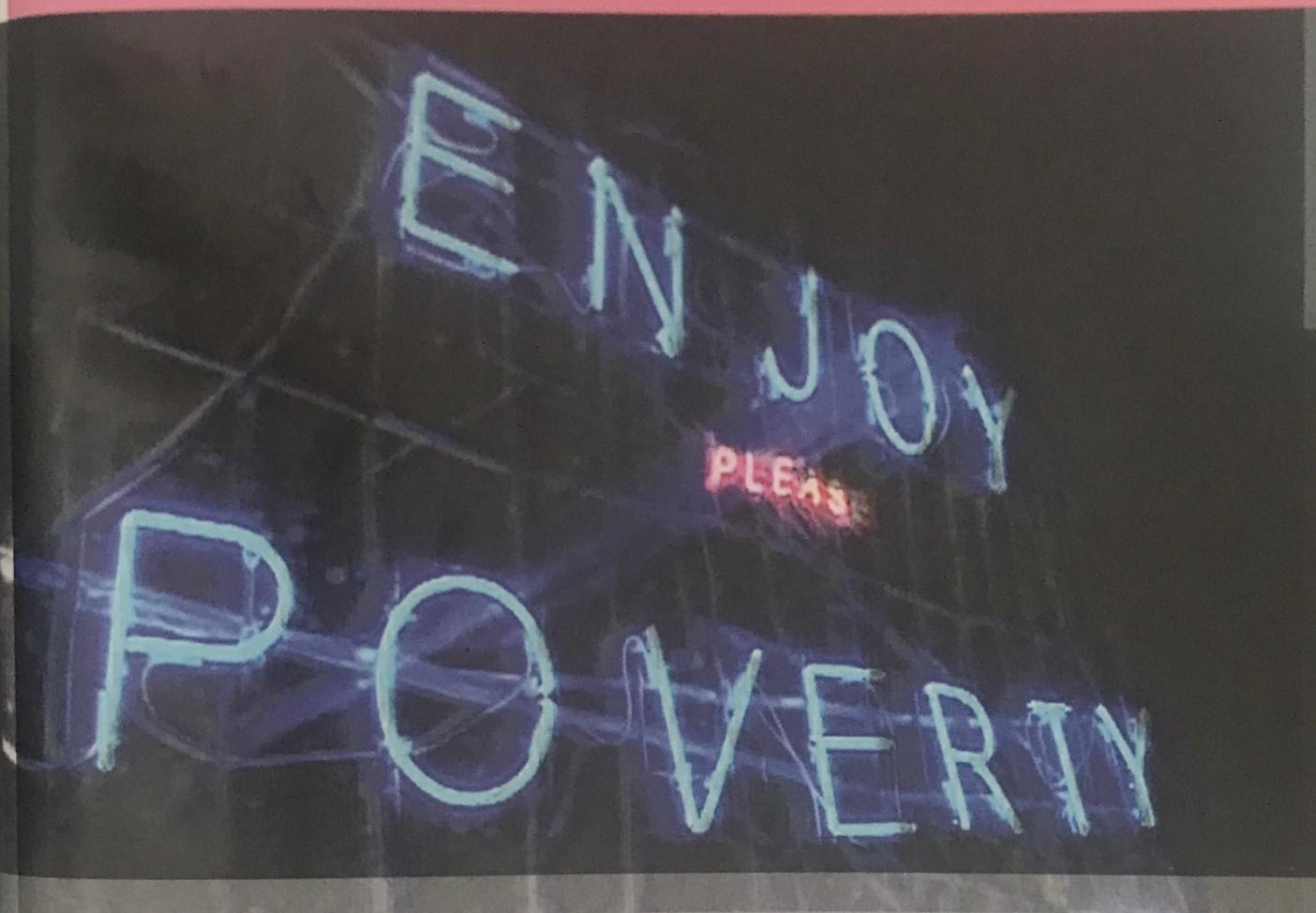
Renzo Martens, *Episode 3 & #039, Enjoy Poverty and #039*, video still, 2008

Taking this statement as a starting point and an ethical context for my writing, I'd like to analyze four works and artists and their subsequent intersections on issues of privilege, subjectivity, and representation. As a consequence I'd like to touch on issues surrounding socially conscious visual art in Pakistan.

The first work, *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008), is a film by Dutch artist and director Renzo Martens. It was shot in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the artist claims to investigate the country's greatest export—*poverty*. The film is a poignant criticism of investigative journalism by countless western subjects framing nameless Congolese objects as images readied for consumption. Martens asserts that despite the endless documentation of the misery of the Congolese and the responding aid that pours into the country as a result of this documentation, the suffering doesn't seem to diminish. This is not simply an accusation that money is perhaps spent ineffectively, but also a

criticism of the structural systems of power and the consumption of 'objects' by 'subjects' (or the colonized by their colonizers) that implicate him as much as the other photojournalists. So he does something different in response, and decides to step into the frame of his camera in a reflexive act of commenting on the documentary medium itself, thereby admitting complicity in the construction of this social order and completing the picture of 'documentation'. As a further punch in the guts, Martens, with an expression of visible discomfort, teaches a group of Congolese wedding photographers that they would make much more money if they photographed their own misery (rape, murder, famine,

Episode III: *Enjoy Poverty* (2008), is a film by Dutch artist and director Renzo Martens. It was shot in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the artist claims to investigate the country's greatest export - poverty.



Renzo Martens, Episode 3 and #039, *Enjoy Poverty* and #039, video still, 2008

etc.) like the other photojournalists. Martens shows us images of the Congolese trainees photographing their community in response to his instruction and their unfortunate inability to make the money Martens had so mathematically calculated (for them). In response the Congolese simply accept this outcome without much ado, and Martens steps out of the scene after feeding a poor family as an unfortunate acknowledgement of all he can really accomplish.

The second work, *Turkish Jokes* (1994), is an audio intervention in public space by Danish artist Jens Haaning. In this work Haaning projects jokes, recorded in Turkish by native speakers, via a loudspeaker mounted on a pole in a public square in Oslo. The square is close to an area where Turkish immigrants live, but is visited by a mixed audience. The jokes, when they were projected, intentionally privileged the marginalized, immigrant Turkish

community in Oslo at a time when the political situation regarding immigration was tense. The work went beyond a pessimistic critique of the status quo because it actively intervened and created a situation where a subaltern population was given an unlikely break. We, as a secondary audience, can easily imagine a scenario in which a group of Turks stand laughing under the light pole while non-Turkish Norwegians pass by looking perplexed. Haaning's action created a temporary sense of ownership for one group and displacement for another, inverting the power relations of immigrant versus native. What makes this work powerful in a different way from *Enjoy Poverty* is the creation of a humorous and absurd situation that draws people to engage and participate, temporarily losing themselves for a few moments. It offers optimistic relief despite the heavy subject matter lurking as subtext.

Alternatively, we could also critique Hanning's impulse for facilitating this action from the lens of a theorist like Gayatri Spivak, who might accuse him of having the 'missionary impulse' - a possible internalization of the colonizer expressing savior narratives despite good intentions. I look back at Haaning's work for answers but the subject (himself) is absent. Haaning has not included traces of his own involvement in the piece (on site) and so has chosen not to draw attention to his own relationship with the narrators. Perhaps that's not important to this work because it would distract from the situation that has been created here-

and intentions will always be subject to critical inspection - perhaps as one measure of success. In an interview with Nicolas Bourriaud, Hanning says:

"In a certain way, the artist is a kind of marginal figure, and he has things in common with other marginal figures, such as immigrants. The great difference is that the artist, unlike the immigrant, works as a medium for society. One thus pays a lot of attention to what he wants to say with his work or his discourse, while a Muslim, for example, is rarely asked for his opinion about society."

*Turkish Jokes* (1994), is an audio intervention in public space by Danish artist Jens Haaning. In this work Haaning projects jokes, recorded in Turkish by native speakers, via a loudspeaker mounted on a pole in a public square in Oslo.



Jens Haaning, *Turkish Jokes*, photograph, 1994



Jens Haaning, *Turkish Jokes*, photograph, 1994

but it still raises questions about authorship, agency and the desire to speak for oppressed 'others'. Is that because they are assumed to not be able to speak for themselves?

I don't want to linger too long on the missionary critique of Haaning's work because this might distract from the more fantastic and transformative aspects of *Turkish Jokes*. These are questions, however, that artists (including myself) face in the act of making works that deal with issues of privilege, power, and social intervention. Like Martens, turning the lens inward and acknowledging complicity (a terribly uncomfortable activity), provides a transparency that protects the artist, if indeed their ethical impulse is to address the injustice that he or she observes. Of course I am not suggesting that it is the artist's job to always defend their ethical impulses. But when artists engage in social practice and create interventions in subalternity their privilege

With that, I'd like to turn to subjectivity itself. Both Haaning and Martens deal with subjectivity in indirect or direct ways. In his defense, Haaning, when exhibiting the work to his secondary audience, shows a photograph of himself in a room with two Turkish men holding microphones. Further, in speaking about his work, he reveals the connection that he feels he has in common with "marginal figures, such as immigrants." This connection - I'm going to call it subjectivity - provides space for him to intervene as an artist. From another point of view, Haaning successfully addresses Ranciere's charge of *turning the spectator into a conscious agent*. Haaning literally creates chuckling subaltern subjects! Meanwhile, Martens reveals subjectivity by aptly referring to *Las Meninas*, a work by Diego Velasquez where the subject is referred to consciously as an agent needed to complete the picture. This subject lies outside the picture plane and its importance is reflected in the gaze of the figures peering out of

the painting. The presence of this 'outside' conflated with the 'inside' of the scene is an action that Martens reconstructs with his presence in most of the scenes of his documentary - carefully exposing his subjectivity, his complicity and a 'whole' picture.

Martens' approach is heavily laden with sarcasm. He subverts privilege by addressing our (the viewer's) role in consumption and voyeurism,

feeding a child, legs moving, fragments of people dancing, grain being sifted in the air and a rhythm organizing the flow of images. A kind of ephemeral experience is created as clues are eagerly sought to try to compile the images into some kind of logic. In

one of her statements during the film *Minh-ha* declares, "Scarcely 20 years were enough to make two billion people define



Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, oil on canvas, 318 cm × 276 cm, 1656

inspiring self-reflection; I leave the work feeling depressed to say the least. Comparatively, Haaning subversively inverts privilege using lighthearted jokes. His work inspires an upward movement towards the imagination of new situations, which makes his work intrinsically action-oriented besides also being thought provoking.

The third work in this essay, *Reassemblage* (1982), a film made by Vietnamese artist and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha was shot in Senegal as a result of several years of field research in West Africa. This film is a collage of visual fragments with a persistent rhythm of music running in the background. Every now and then Minh-ha's voice interrupts the scenes, making statements that carefully avoid describing what we are seeing. These statements sound like anecdotal observations of specific moments of her experience, sometimes she recollects a line pulled from native folklore that she has overheard. No facts are presented to the viewer. Instead we see glimpses of faces, a close-up of a breast

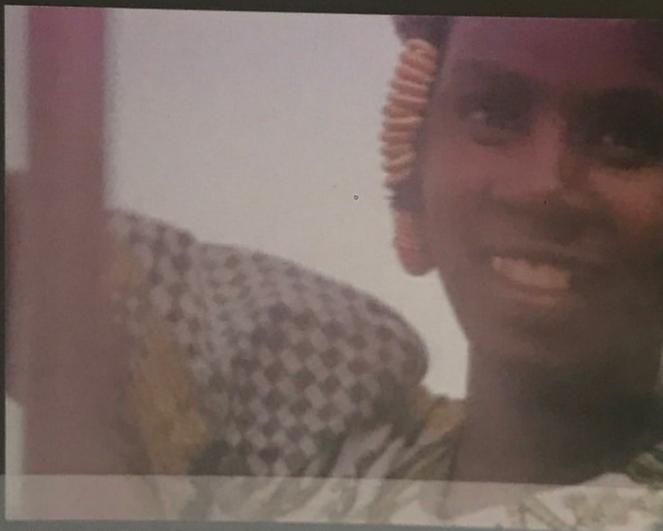
themselves as underdeveloped", alluding perhaps to subjectivity and the internalization of 'otherness'. What perhaps is most poignant is when she says, "I do not intend to speak about, just speak nearby". Minh-ha is asserting one's inability to represent a culture. She is acknowledging the slippery nature of 'cinema verite', and the inability to summarize complex cultural relationships. Using her technique, she denies the tradition of authoritative representation, a method that is typically accompanied by the self assured voice, describing factual observations of the peculiar/exotic/ oppressed/ backward 'other'. We see and hear this in countless documentaries of 'underdeveloped Africa' and become subtly accustomed to this methodology of production to the extent that the absence of a narrator in *Reassemblage* is disorientating. The denial of a specific 'consumable' to her audience refuses the traditional subject-object relationship that privileges the voyeur. Additionally it's important to note that

when she does speak, she abruptly cuts off the background music which has so far been taking us along on an emotional journey through her collage, making us aware of the construct of documentary she so carefully deconstructs.

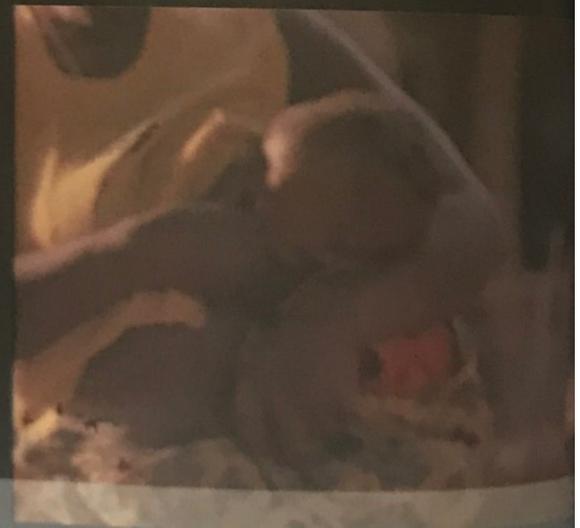
While Minh-ha is subversive and reflexive about the medium of documentary similar to Martens, her approach is different from both of the other artists. In her case, the making of this video is an act of resistance. Her work responds most strongly to Baudrillard's assertion that the subaltern cannot be represented and that an attempt to recover a voice or agency for them would result in failure (Jeane, 1983). Minh-ha circumvents the

subaltern communities such as migrants, minorities, women, or underprivileged citizens. When we write our own histories and document our own people, what positions of relationality do we assume to make our judgments? What positions of subjectivity do we expose when we try to engage the subaltern? Turning the lens inwards on my own practice, I can say that despite the fact that I am a Pakistani woman, I am extremely privileged like many of my contemporary peers. I have received a Western education in my own country as well as abroad and come from a middle-class family who lives in Karachi's affluent suburbs. This privilege while it enables me to act, equally disables me to fairly engage with or represent the Pakistani subaltern. Being an expatriate

*Reassemblage* (1982), a film made by Vietnamese artist and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha was shot in Senegal as a result of several years of field research in West Africa



Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*, video still, 1982



Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*, video still, 1982

representation issue entirely, by not even falling prey to classifying/generalizing the people in the video as the subaltern. Besides the fact that the video is shot in Senegal, we don't know who these people are, what region they belong to, what they believe in, or if they are even filmed in the same place! We get a sense of a series of individuals and small groups of people who stand independently as fragments of a whole - a whole that is constantly shifting and bleeding outside the limits of the picture frame.

Thinking back to Velasquez and tracing the simple idea of subject and object (the viewer and the viewed), through the works described above, one can dissect the evolution of an important part of visual epistemology and the structures of privilege, agency and omission buried within them. These lead me to Pakistan and the situations that artists are presented with when they work with

further removes my agency, and contrary to Spivak's assertion I sadly acknowledge that perhaps *I cannot speak* for the subaltern even in my own country.

Before I end this essay on the rather abbreviated note of personal despair at my own paralysis when faced with the desire to represent the subaltern voices in my country (fully aware of my own missionary or colonizing impulses), I want to turn to one last example of work made in Pakistan.

*Homage* (2010), a video by Naiza Khan was shot on Manton Island, a 20-minute ferry ride from Karachi's shore (Khan, 2010). Khan dressed in a t-shirt and track pants is painting a pile of wooden debris a specific shade of blue. The scene cuts to show the larger context of the landscape, where fading yellow buildings stand on the horizon bearing witness to this quiet activity. The dilapidated appears to be school furniture. It is bounded by concrete walls

-memory of a school whose boundary wall has collapsed taking with it the lives of a few children playing underneath. It turns out that the blue is the exact shade of the tombstones in a nearby cemetery, and that the island itself is in a transient state of flux as the local (working class) residents are being relocated in preparation for an imminent re-development scheme. The camera

Or is this video really aimed at a privileged audience who after all is complicit by consumption; who knows, we might be renting condos or walking through metal detectors down a paved strip mall on Manora one day.

In conclusion, as a privileged artist working with dilemmas of privilege and subalternity in Pakistan, perhaps one can take lessons from Martens, Haaning, Minh-ha, and Khan and simply begin a series of introspections or collaborations across class divisions allowing various voices to talk to each other, possibly providing counterpoints for a noisy but transformative discussion. ■

*Homage* (2010), a video by Naiza Khan was shot on Manora Island, a 20-minute ferry ride from Karachi's shore (Khan, 2010). Khan, dressed in a t-shirt and track pants is painting a pile of wooden debris a specific shade of blue.



Naiza Khan, *Homage*, single channel video, duration 13 minutes, 2010. Courtesy Rossi & Rossi, London

Naiza Khan, *Homage*, single channel video, duration 13 minutes, 2010. Courtesy Rossi & Rossi, London



zooms into a hand scraping away at the old paint, and at a steadily moving brush. A local man watching the activity joins in and starts painting too. He does not ask Naiza to explain when she tells him in Urdu that she is doing it for those children who died in the accident. There is a calm silence in the air. The video ends with the sound of brush strokes and intermittent conversation, leaving the viewer with a sense of perpetuity.

*Homage* is important to this discussion because it points to a displacement of people and erasure of subaltern narratives happening not only on Manora, but also all over Karachi as an unspoken consequence of developmental progress. The work also points back to the artist's subjectivity and privilege visible in how she is dressed. Is Khan revealing her tenuous position as a witness from a different part of Karachi unable to do more than memorialize a lost fragment of Manora's subaltern history?

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Nilofur Farrukh

# ENTERING THE



# MUQAAAM / location:

## The Narrative of Belonging in the Art of Mussarat Mirza

In the Western dialectic of art, dislocation denotes alienation and disjuncture as discussed in the context of a lost sense of belonging due to physical and intellectual rupture. These anxieties gained currency once they were articulated in Diasporic texts and began to be addressed in debates on Multiculturalism in the last century.

The official policies of pluralism that grew out of these new priorities, particularly in the UK, became instrumental in creating a more even playing field for ethnic minorities and institutional space was created for art previously excluded from the national narrative. To get a sense of how much the environment has changed one need not look further than the Third Text that was established as a voice of the racial minority and has diligently chronicled and debated the global politics of exclusion.

Another cultural rupture that's yet to be fully understood and



Musarrat Mirza, *Hain Muntazir*, oil on canvas, 66 x 182.9 cm, 2011

debated is the combined impact of what Spivak has called 'epistemic violence' of the colonial period and globalization. Within half a century of the end of colonization, globalization, an economic/ trade hegemony began to colonize knowledge production and culture with its seemingly benign homogeneity. Economic interests fabricated a culture industry based on a corporate structure that simultaneously controlled the art canon and the art market. With over simplification as its mantra, a low tolerance for distinct and dissident voices, unmediated by Western frameworks has become prevalent. With a generation interpreting progress and opportunities through the validating lens of globalized culture (read West) has created an unquestioning acceptability of strategies of asymmetrical cosmopolitanism, over simplification and standardization. In previous colonies where globalization of art followed close on the heels of Modernism, a

The act of existing within the location can be an immersive experience as expressed by the Urdu word *Muqaam*, for location. Its multiplicity of meanings conveys the time/space dimension, for it can be read both as a site/physical space or a stage in a journey. The word is also used to indicate position/status. In the Sufic discourse *Maqamat* (the plural of *Muqaam*) identifies the various levels of closeness to the supreme power who is perceived as the beloved.



Musarrat Mirza, *Hain Muntazir*, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 64.8 cm, 2011

cultural attitude that finds traditional ways of thinking, seeing and imagining moribund, is created. Without the assimilation of local philosophies in the twenty first century identity, it becomes easier to acquire an 'outsider gaze' that makes artists into cultural expatriates in their own land, with a process called the 'double othering' by Homi Bhaba.

The 'true' distance between the local and global increased, yet cleverly concealed in the mythology of globalized culture, it has pushed aside the debate between 'location' and 'dis-location' even though it remains a central concern in issues of authorship and authenticity.

If location is read as a binary of dis-location, then the art produced at the place of origin should be free of alienation and linked to the cultural continuum. Built on the belief that rootedness in ones 'location' opens the artist up to a profound engagement with philosophical and cultural dimensions can put external influences in perspective instead of marginalizing local frames of reference. A process that can provide intellectual resources to counter the postcolonial mindset that allows the external discourse to become the dominant framework.

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journey. The word is also used to indicate position/status. In the Sufic discourse *Maqamat* (the plural of *Muqaam*) identifies the various levels of closeness to the supreme power who is perceived as the beloved.

Among the few artists whose work penetrates the physical and discursive plane of *Muqaam* is Sukkur-based painter Musarrat Mirza. Judging from her oeuvre, her years in Lahore, while she studied for her MFA at the University of Punjab and a stint as a lecturer at the Fine Arts Department at Jamshoro, a few hours away from her hometown, were an interlude in her journey back to this ancient town.

Anthropologically layered, Musarrat's Sukkur has a complexity which demands all the senses to engage with its historical, religious and cultural traces. Pre-Indus excavations can be found along the route taken by the marching armies of Alexander. In the city center, the *minar* of Masum Shah, of brick and blue tiles commemorates Emperor Akbar's visit. The Talpur fort still holds bullet marks of the colonial armies. It was at this point that the colonizers later built the Sukkur Barrage. The Sadhu Bela island temple in the river has attracted Hindu pilgrims for centuries in much the same way as the revered shrines of Muslim saints on the bank.

The artist has assimilated the tangible and the intangible in her oeuvre in which the landscape acts as a metaphor. The unchanged

course of *Sindhu Darya* (Indus River) that has flowed under her window since childhood and the sand storms that roll over date plantations, captured through the aperture of familiarity, become internalized references in a narrative of belonging.

It is not as if Mussarat is not mindful of the bustle of modern Sukkur - the province's third largest city - or that she is a recluse; the artist travels for her shows all over Pakistan and abroad, but she prefers to live away from the art centers where art consumption has become the dominant instinct. Painting to her is like composing a piece of *sama* (devotional) music, which taps into the transcendental vibrations. Fragments of architecture, dark corners with awkward angles, walls that screen off, and hallways and windows that beckon the light into haunting interiors map the rhythms of a long hot season when the cooling comfort of the thick walls and the respite of the night breeze are imprinted on

the skin of memory. Observing, living and experiencing them on an inward expedition, Mussarat arrives at the spiritual *maqam*, a sanctum within the man-made city. Sometimes the narrow lane, through which she approaches her home, becomes the canyon/ the cliff and the crevice through which she explores the urban terrain. The deep fields of rooftops sprouting with vertical wind-catchers, a familiar nocturnal sight from rooftop where summer nights are spent under the stars, become visualizations of an autobiography written without words.

There is a constant pull and push between the foreboding dark concrete and the shadows it creates, and light. The light is a living thing for the artist, sinuous and sharp like lightening, glowing in soft haloes, or blinding white that can destabilize the picture plane with its starkness. Sometimes, light appears to fight its way through dense particles of suspended desert sand and at



Mussarat Mirza, *Fain Munkhez*, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2011

other times is muted into tones of gray of a misty morning. Pigeons, in dazzling white spread out like sparks in the near monochrome trance that can take over Mussarat's canvas.

Inspired by sufic interpretations of poets like Sachal and Bhitai, the nuanced light in Mussarat's works calls for different readings, as the *noor* or heavenly light of serenity and enlightenment and *roshni*, the more generic term used for absence of darkness vie for primacy. Her work in gold invokes the door of a holy shrine; the metallic tincture in loaded brush strokes 'alchemizes' the surface so *roshni* and *noor* can meet between the layers.

Mussarat, whose art can stir the deep recesses of the imagination creates an art that needs no categorization; she is not a modernist, although she started her journey as one with her mentor Anna Molka Ahmed, nor is she a post-modern artist, landscapist nor expressionist but a painter/ thinker whose independent trajectory defies popular labels. For researchers who find it difficult to work without labels, maverick artists that explore 'what happens at the borderline where reason find its limits' have been grouped under 'Contemporary Sublime'.

The Western Civilization based on rational thought when confronted with what Kant calls the awareness of lack, where reason is challenged and presents no answers is the place where the limits of logic exist. Artist Marina Abramovic explains "Our rational way of thinking demands proof, evidence, but this is only one element in our perceptive capabilities. Things which we cannot explain rationally are eliminated from our lives, as if they were non-existent". Elaborating on her art she adds "Breaks with conventional understanding are important for me; I want to lead people to a point where rational thinking fails, where the brain has to give up. The confusion which then rises in the brain is also an interval. Another world can open up."<sup>1</sup>

There is a seamless flow from the rational to the subliminal in cultures of South Asia where the expanded consciousness accepts both as lived reality. In this region of Sindh where Muslim saints are revered by Hindus and Muslims alike and the ancient practices of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim civilization converge, and music, dance, art and verse have long been the instruments of transcendence. This pluralized metaphysical space in the twentieth century was contested by the linearity of the Modernist dogma, even postmodern multiculturalism seen through the lens of the

rational, has not been able to fully recognize this unconditional embrace of the 'other'.

Negotiating time and timelessness in recent works titled *Muntazir* (2011) the view from the rooftop, a reoccurring visual, transforming the banal architecture into a void, as it gives up the privilege of concrete existence to the unknown. In returning to the emptiness, Mussarat's imagination activates the *Muqaam*.

These works may be quiet and meditative, yet they are not passive. Painting them is Mussarat's act of subversion as she is walking in the footsteps of the people's mystics to reclaim and foreground all that has been lost and pushed to the fringe by privileged discourses. The art then becomes her '*tarikah*', the path to the divine as well as an instrument of resistance echoing the dissident verse of Bulleh Shah and Bhitai, which continue to flow from the *Muqaam*.

The creativity that presents the 'unpresentable' has the transformative power to destabilize the illusion of rational order which Ziauddin Sardar terms as the post-normal time, characterized by confusion, chaos and contradiction in the age of Globalization.

According to Ziauddin "The most important ingredients for coping with postnormal times, as Cilliers suggests and I would argue, are imagination and creativity. Why? Because we have no other way of dealing with complexity, contradictions and chaos. Imagination is the main tool, indeed I would suggest the only tool, which takes us from simple reasoned analysis to higher synthesis. While imagination is intangible, it creates and shapes our reality; while a mental tool, it affects our behavior and expectations. We will have to imagine our way out of the postnormal times."<sup>2</sup>

Mussarat who locates herself in the consciousness of all that Sukkur is, and symbolizes as the metaphysical landscape of the void, creates a transformative narrative that offers a new way of seeing and imagining, and belonging to the *Muqaam*.



Musarrat Mirza, *Hain Muntazir*, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 35.6 cm, 2011

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Art from South Asia (16th–20th centuries). New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Sultan Muhammad,  
 The Feast of Sada,  
 (Shah Tahmasp's  
 Shahnama Firdausi),  
 opaque watercolor,  
 ink, silver, and gold on  
 paper, 24.1 x 23 cm,  
 circa 16th century



Sehba Mohammad

# Art of Reverence - Revisited

Recently  
 Expanded  
 Islamic  
 Galleries at  
 Metropolitan  
 Museum of  
 Art

In a time where Islam and Islamophobia are synonymous, where infinity has been replaced by extremism, it is imperative to be reminded, as we face the troubled age of Islam, of its vibrant past. And what would be a better way than by showcasing its rich and refined artistic history. A well meaning attempt is in process at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the heart of New York City.

The exhibit, with its somber title 'New galleries for the Art of the Arab lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and later South Asia' is a newly expanded form of the Museum's Islamic wing. After almost a decade, and over \$40 million in renovations, the reopened space aims to capture the creativity which flourished under centuries of Islamic rule. 1,200 pieces elaborately span over 15 galleries carefully divided by historic period and geographic stratum.

The endeavor plays out in exhilarating and prolific yet sometimes arduous aesthetic journey. Sheila Canby, the curator in charge of the Department of Islamic art, and Navina Najat Haidar, the project coordinator have ensured easy navigation. Each of the galleries has a

distinct character, yet smoothly transition into one another. A momentum builds as the visitor can easily get lost in a wondrous exploration of abstracted arabesques and innovative glaze techniques.

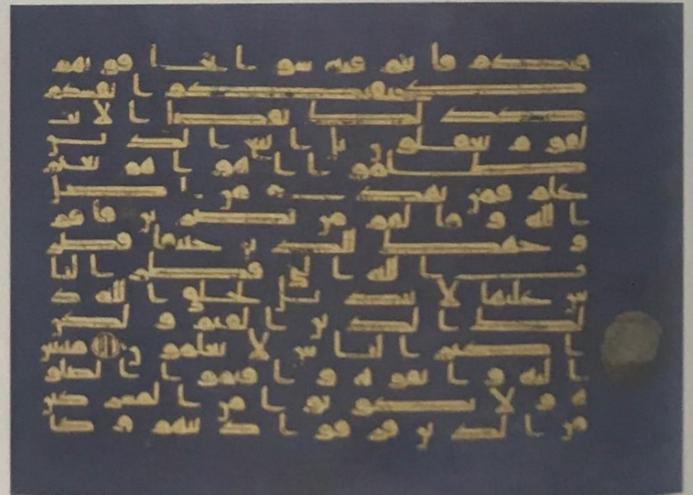
The Introductory Gallery remains, even after viewing the entire exhibit, the most awe inspiring. An excerpt from a seven foot Quran adorns its walls. The folio comes from Surah 28, Al Qisas, of the holy book. It relates, among other details, a narrative of Prophet Moses. The folio is seamlessly crafted using the *Muhaqqaq* calligraphy style by Umar Aqta in the late 14th Century. This colossal Quran was created for the emperor Tamerlane, who was unimpressed by the calligrapher's previous rendition of the Quran, which was so tiny it could fit under a signet ring. An equally impressive four foot high carved wooden Quran stand sits regally on the opposite end of the gallery, its smoothly engraved, curvilinear calligraphy is accentuated with delicate floral designs. In-between the two objects a sharp steel blade made in the Ottoman period appears suspended in a glass box. Just below its ivory hilt, an intricate battle between a dragon and a phoenix is illustrated in gold and rubies. It is juxtaposed with a ceramic bowl from 10th century Iran with black minimalist calligraphed words that read "Planning before work protects you from regret; prosperity and peace." An 800 knot silk carpet from the Safavid period, Mihrab tiles and illuminated manuscripts all invite you to discover the centuries yet to be unfurled.

The catalog states that the exhibit is "one of the world's most comprehensive collections, including ceramics, textiles, glass, metal work, miniature and period rooms from throughout the Islamic world". But that is not the commendable part, the exhibit shows a discerning re-examination of Islamic art, rightfully acknowledging and exemplifying non-Islamic influences.

In the early Abassid and Ummayyad dynasties, Roman, Byzantine and Coptic traditions are displayed side by side with original Muslim innovations in luster glazes, beveled style wood carving and a standardized mosque plan based on the Prophet's house. Among countless others, an infusion of Chinese imagery is also noticeable. The widespread trade network from China to the Mediterranean during the Mongol conquest of Persia in the 13th century resulted in this absorption of Chinese iconography based on phoenixes, dragons and other mythical creatures.

A historical context allows stirring texts about royal battles and noble deceit to punctuate the art work. Elite slave soldiers overthrowing the Abbasid Sultan in Egypt, Changez Khan's grandson ransacking power in Iran and a child emperor with a passion for book arts. This focus on Muslim rulers as patrons of art results in a cosmopolitan oeuvre with the inclusion of many secular themed pieces, such as a mid 13th century metal candlestick base displaying an astrological rather than a monotheistic reference. Found

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Blue Quran (probably Tunisia, Qairawan), gold and silver on indigo-dyed parchment, 30.4 x 40.2 cm, second half of 9th-mid-10th century



Tughra of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (Istanbul), ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 30.4 x 40.2 cm, circa 1555-60

in modern day Iraq, the same region where Islamic greats like Al Biruni and Ibn Sina were shedding light in a time of global darkness, this carved brass piece with silver inlay contains intriguing illustrative and figurative scenes from court life intermingled with representations of the zodiac signs.

The miniature "two lovers" is another instance of temporal work. Crafted by the famed Riza Abbasi, a leading Persian miniaturist from the Isfahan School, shows a pair of slant-eyed lovers on a golden background in an evocative embrace. Simple yet precise lines make up their bodies which contort with a tension made

apparent through the drapery of their clothes. A conspicuous bottle lies at their side. The image, without considering its suggestive innuendo runs counter to the persisting popular belief that Islam opposes the representation of figurative form.

This all-encompassing view, which painstakingly tracks the fluidity of the art form as it interacts with cultures and reaches crescendos (sadly) leaves out the soul of the Islamic Art. The root of the creative endeavor in Islamic art is meant to capture and reiterate the intricate magnificence of the faith, and the oneness of God that is central to it. These ideas are ingrained in its themes and

Art from Egypt and Syria (10th-16th centuries)



seemingly decorative visual representations.

The viewer should be reminded that the exquisite pieces on display aim to transcend the worldly, their imagery representing the spiritual realm, universe, and the unity of creation. The edges of a fourteen point star extends to form diamonds, which branch out into unusual five sided polygons; and it continues and repeats. Each sharp-edged shape is filled with an intricate latticework. This infinite algorithm spreads over a pair of engraved rosewood *mimbar* doors from 13th century Egypt. The impression of

Moroccan Court (recreated). Patti Cadby Birch Court



unending repetition created by geometrical patterns alludes to the infinite nature of God and the intricate balance of creation. These patterns are a central motif in Islamic art, and spread over a large number of pieces on display ranging from a monumental metal zoomorphic incense burner with a removable head to a stucco grave stone from 10th century Nishapur, Iran. Similarly

vegetal and floral patterns are not only an aesthetic cursor but a philosophic symbol. Lush blue petals in full form with yellow centers, leaves intertwining in a never-ending quest, abstracted organic patterns and a dense network of flat fleshy foliage cover, in varying forms, almost everything. From earthenware vessels to celebratory hunting horns, water pipe bases and writing boxes to the walls of the Hagia Sophia - they are said to depict the promise of paradise, a central concept in Islam, like in most monotheistic religions. In the Quran It is often described as a garden, beneath which rivers flow. The eclectic selection of illuminated manuscripts and miniature paintings however dot the exhibit like an oases. A mixture of refined skill and creative display techniques allow a humbling and refreshing interaction. Carefully created glass and wood stations allow the viewer to sit down or lean against bars to reflect on the minute universes created by natural pigments and squirrel tail brushes.

Miniature painting in the Islamic World dates back to around 1000 AD. It was most widespread during the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal eras. Iconic work from each of these is on display at the Museum. Enthusiasts can trace common aesthetic values while noting the variation of subject matter. These include illustrations of palatial court scenes,

romantic epic and amorous poetry, historical texts and mystical tales.

Most of the Mughal miniatures belonging to the South Asian region depict stout brown mustached emperors and buxom maidens. Their faces in sharp profile, dressed in stately attire complete with minute details...e.g. a strand of pearls, a nose ring. The works revolve around the emperors and their imperial existence like the wide bordered piece '(Emperor) Shah Jehan admiring jewels with his favorite son' or '(Emperor) Aurangzeb with his royal hunting party.'



Rosette bearing the name and titles of Emperor Shah Jahan, North India  
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, circa 1645

A portrait of Sultan Ahmet I (1603-17) represents the Ottoman interest in royal portraiture, which resulted in the production of many illustrated albums containing miniatures of successions of Sultans.

A portrait of Sultan Ahmet I (1603-17) represents the Ottoman interest in royal portraiture, which resulted in the production of many illustrated albums containing miniatures of successions of Sultans. In the piece a smiling bearded Sultan, dressed in gray with an enormous white turban crowning his head, sits comfortably in front of a background that poignantly omits perspective.

The miniatures of the Safavid dynasty are equally enlightening. In the early 15th century Shah Tahmasp became the ruler of Iran at the young age of ten. Having studied painting and being an avid patron of the book arts, Persian miniature flourished during his reign. An illustrated copy of the *Shahnama*, or *Book of Kings*, a 60,000 verse poem by the great Persian poet Firdowsi traces an astounding and mythical history of Iran from its inception till the Islamic conquest in the 7th century. There are several different depictions of the *Shahnama* on display. The Ilkhanid gallery contains a folio from the *Shahnama* with Mongolian-looking Buzurghmir masters surrounding a game of chess. The 12 illustrated folios on display from the reign of Shah Tahmasp however, are the most striking. The pages vary in content and are painted and written by different artists. In each of these visual capsules you will find moon-shaped faces with slit eyes, heavy eyebrows and small mouths. Fluid bodies, detailed drapery, compositions full of movement. Bent trees and coiled clouds also fill the pages, and the content is equally compelling. The first folio "Firdausi parable of the ship of Shiism," is a depiction of the introduction of the poem in which God launches 70 ships bearing adherents of the religions of mankind onto a stormy sea. The piece on display shows a figural representation, with veiled faces, of the Prophet Muhammad and his Son in Law and Grandsons.

Some may see the categorization and lack of emphasis on the religious motivation as a westernization or 'orientalization' of Islamic art; where although the artwork is greatly appreciated by the western world it is primarily seen as a good or commodity for trade. In the words of art historian Maymanah Farhat, "In its captions, the department (of Islamic art, Metropolitan Museum of Art) takes great care to describe the "lavish," "sumptuous," and "superb" qualities of these objects, bringing to mind the brand of "documentation" that is a staple of the antiques market.

The sheer scale of the exhibit hints at western excess. After starting off enthusiastically absorbed in the intricacies and importance of the artwork one may begin to feel lost as they progress; overwhelmed by a whirlwind of dexterously crafted hand-knotted carpets, rich hues, figures smaller than your index finger and numerous stone paste ceramics. The same smothered feeling that a foreigner may feel the first time they enter an American supermarket, where the best of every world is attractively packaged for consumption.

On exiting the galleries one thing is for certain; the visitor's visual vocabulary of Islam will be enlarged forever. Images of *burqas*, beards and bombs will give way to rich ornamentation, resplendent resonance, and refined craftsmanship. ■

Rumana Husain

# "State of Being So Divided"

**O**n December 16, 1971, Lt Gen A K Niazi, the Army Commander of all Pakistani forces in the area signed a surrender document as a cheer went up in the Dhaka racecourse, and Dhaka became the free capital of a free country, Bangladesh.

The last forty years have not washed away the burden felt by me and similarly by millions of other Pakistanis of my generation, and the stains of blood of the atrocities committed in East Pakistan have not been washed away. In Faiz Ahmed Faiz's words: "*keboon kay dhabbay dhulaingay kitni barsaaton kay baad*," which translates into "how many rainfalls are needed to wash away the stains of blood?"; written by the poet in 1974 on his return to Pakistan with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after attending a failed peace mission in Dhaka.

Numerous literary works in Bengali, English and (a few) in Urdu have been written on Bangladesh's Liberation War. Besides these, works of art, documentaries and feature films have been made in Bangladesh. However, for decades, all has been 'quiet on the

'western' front', as not only was news censored in West Pakistan from March 25, 1971 onwards, when the West Pakistan armed forces "launched a pre-emptive strike against the Awami League, and other perceived opponents, including members of the intelligentsia and the Hindu community. Independent researchers think that between 300,000 and 500,000 died. The Bangladesh government puts the figure at three million."<sup>1</sup>

We have lumbered with the "complex and contradictory matrix that gave rise to Bengali nationalism and the mixture of racism and hysteria that spurred the Pakistan Army on to a path of atrocities."<sup>2</sup> It is indeed shocking that findings made by the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission on the 1971 war were not made public.

On November 1, 2011, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the 1971 war, Karachi audiences witnessed "*State of Being So Divided*," a project comprising of theatrical readings and exhibitions of video and performance art and installations.

This commentary on the collective history of South Asia - India,

1951



'State of Being So Divided' curated by The Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP), 2011, photo courtesy CAP

Pakistan and Bangladesh - was presented by The Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) and Vasl Artists' Collective.

The CAP exhibition, curated by Alia Chughtai, Sophia Balagamwala and Hasnain Lalani, was held at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVSAA) Gallery. It was a journey through a well constructed Timeline featuring photographs, newspaper clippings, historical documents from CAP's archives, plus videos and audios of oral histories. Since this is a seldom-visited part of our past, it was a learning experience for a new generation unfamiliar with it, who visited this exhibition for over three weeks.

With displays of peripheral and anecdotal happenings, it presented the events building up from the Partition in 1947 to the making of Bangladesh in 1971. Several images, like one showing naval destroyers led by the Pakistan Navy's 'Babur' executing a maneuver during the 1971 war, or an artist's impression of gunboats called PNS Rajshahi, Comilla and Jessore (cities in East Pakistan) participating in a joint assault with the Pakistan Army and Air force, was a source of embarrassment to those who could relate

to those times. An image from an article titled "Bangladesh Guerrillas: We will win in the end", dated August 7, 1971, showed women marching in the streets of Dhaka with rifles. Together with these there were also images of the poor and flood ravaged people of East Bengal, inter-dispersed with reprints of original advertisements of Pakistani goods, including the 'golden fibre' from East Bengal - jute.

Selected visuals and audios for other historical events such as the 1965 war with India were also an important part of the Timeline, with singer Noor Jehan's patriotic song, '*Aye Watan ke Sajedey Jawanoo'* playing in the background.

For CAP, the "*State of Being So Divided*" was a continuation of its previous exhibition at the Mohatta Palace titled the "*Birth of Pakistan*." The imagery, relics and objects in that exhibition had ended at Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's funeral in Karachi in September 1948. With many more artifacts used in that exhibit and the show meandering through the upper floor halls and corridors of the majestic Mohatta building, the compact

۱۹۵۷ء

1957



ایک سماجی گروہ کی تصویر



ایک سماجی گروہ کی تصویر



ستمبر 11، 1956ء، پنجاب ایس ایس ایس (ایس ایس ایس)  
 These photographs from May 11th, 1956 by F.E. Chaudhry document a busy "ice factory" in Lahore



24 جولائی، مولانا آزاد کی پیدائش  
 24 July 1904 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad born in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh

24 جولائی، مولانا آزاد کی پیدائش  
 24 July 1904 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad born in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh

۱۹۵۶ء

1956

21 فروری: آئین ساز اسمبلی نے ملک کا پہلا آئین منظور کیا اور پاکستان کی جمہوریہ کا قیام کیا۔

February 21: Constituent Assembly approves the country will be a Federal Republic, women as women's Republic of Pakistan

23 مارچ: 1956ء میں وزیر اعلیٰ پاکستان مولانا محمد علی جناح نے پاکستان کے پہلے صدر کی حیثیت سے عہدہ سنبھالا۔

March 23: 1956 Constitution entered in Pakistan. 1st Prime Minister Liaquat Khan sworn in as first President of Pakistan

13 مئی: وزیر اعظم مولانا محمد علی جناح نے ملک کا پہلا دستور منظور کیا۔

May 13: Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali presents the first five-year plan

12 ستمبر: آئین ساز اسمبلی نے ملک کا پہلا دستور منظور کیا۔

September 12: House of Representatives approves office of appointed Prime Minister

12 ستمبر: آئین ساز اسمبلی نے ملک کا پہلا دستور منظور کیا۔

October 5: The Election Bill is introduced in the National Assembly providing for Joint Electorates in East Pakistan and West Pakistan

space at the IVSAA gallery by contrast forced the curators to think of a linear display that led to a completely different layout of the show. It was simpler for presenting and following the story of the "State of Being So Divided."

On the opening night of the above exhibition, dramatic readings of two short stories under the title *Shigaaf* were organized by *Zameel Group*, who read from an English translation of Afsan Chowdhury's Bengali play and the Urdu play '*Tishnagi*' by Pakistani writer Masood Mufti. The macabre and chilling themes of these readings by theatre practitioners Asma Mundrawala, Mahvash Faruqi and Saife Hasan took the audience back to the trauma of intense fear, helplessness and horror in Afsan Chowdhury's story set in rural East Bengal and the frenzy of lust and violence; destruction of life and property together with the destruction of fundamental values: justice, reasoning and humanity, in the other.

Another component of the "State of Being So Divided" project was an art exhibition, curated by artist Zahra Malkani, held at the V M Art Gallery.

The three participating artists Yasmin Jahan Nupur (Dhaka), Ahsan Jamal (Karachi) and Ayub Wali (Gilgit-Baltistan) had created works at the Vasl Artists Residency. Nupur, the daughter

of a Bangladeshi freedom fighter of the 1971 struggle displayed her installations based on three white pillows fluffed up against a white wall. The embroidery on their covers carried meaningful images. She explained that the three South Asian countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India are like three strange bedfellows who are living together with a troubled political past. The imagery of a map of undivided India, marked with green embroidery silk for Muslim majority populations, was presented on one pillow, while an embroidered gun decorated with rose stems around it was on the middle pillow and a skull with a garland of roses was displayed on the third. The various symbolisms at play in this work were juxtaposed with references to sleep, coziness, a past, a present, violence and genocide, guilt and pride.

Nupur's performance on the opening day was a potent act that left the spectators bewildered and terror-stricken. Dressed in white, the artist, who wore an oval mirror like a mask without any eye-slits, carried a long-stemmed rose in one hand and a pomegranate and knife in the other. Chained to a pole, she descended the steps leading to the sunken gallery. With one leg restricted by the shackle, she went about offering the rose, one by one, to the audience who had gathered around her. As she neared each person, they could see their own faces in the mirror



Ayub Wali, *Untitled*, metal and threads, variable, 2011



Ahsan Jamal, *Earth to Earth* (triptych), charcoal and powder pigment on paper, 182.9 x 121.9 cm, 2011 (left)

Yasmeen Jahan Nupur, *War & Roses*, cotton cloth with embroidery, 71.1 x 55.9 cm, 2011 (right)

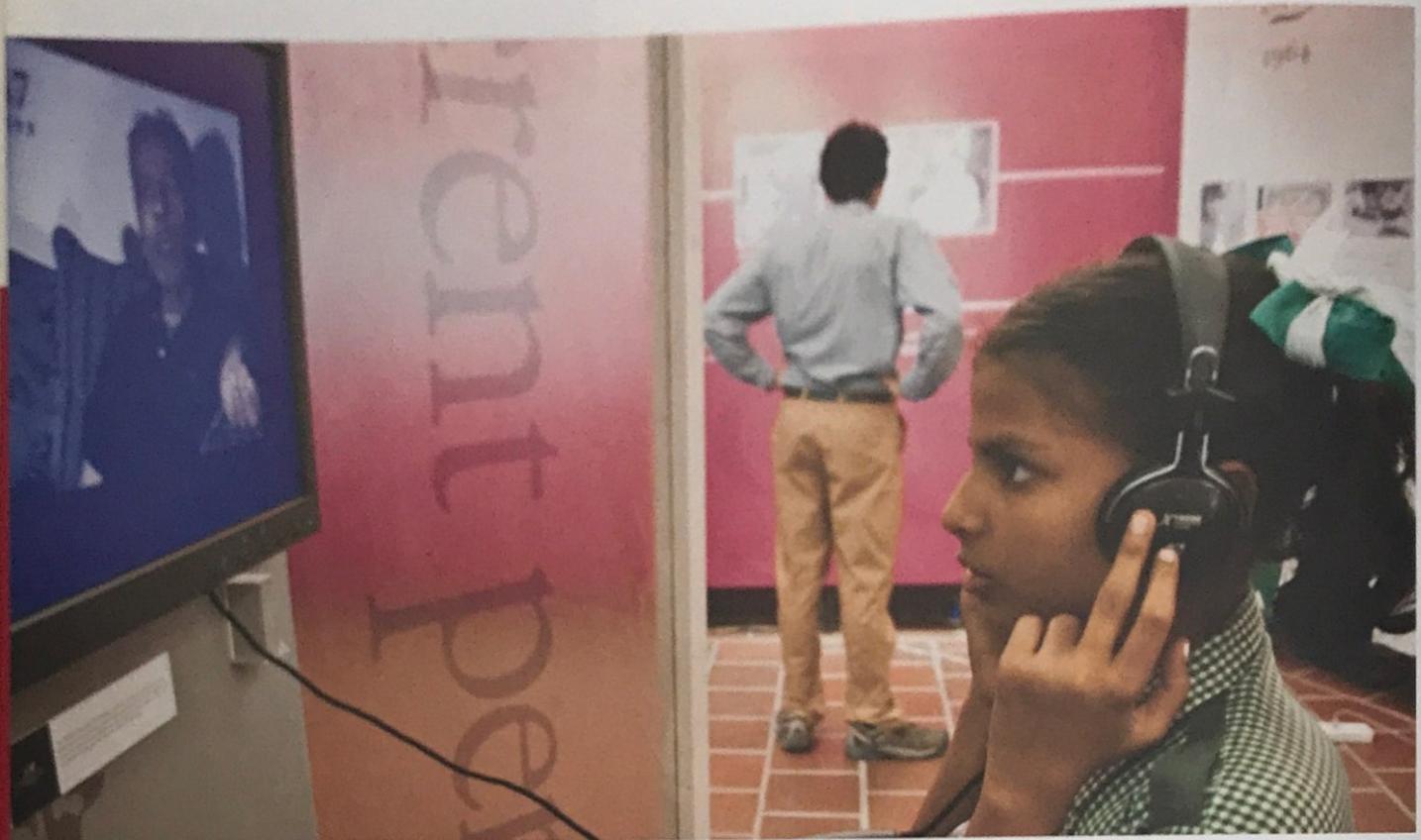
that was covering the artist's face. After none ventured to receive the rose from her, she sat down, still masked and shackled, and began the tortuous process of peeling and ripping open the fruit, then cutting it into pieces with the knife. Unseeingly and undeterred, she continued the process and the striking knife smattered her white clothes and splattered the blood-like red juice on the floor.

The discomfort of the spectators cannot be over-emphasized, as they realized their role as 'perpetrators' and 'tormentors' and

were equally perturbed that the 'victim' was in danger of cutting her own hand.

The preceding performance by Karachi-based printmaker Syed Ammad Tahir, was a speech delivered in English. Dressed as Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman, he rendered the East Bengal leader's speech delivered on March 7, 1971. It was a rhetoric commonly used by politicians to mobilize the masses and to change the destiny of their people.

The third performance was the recital of a Punjabi poem by



'State of Being So Divided', 2011, photo courtesy CAP

Ahsan Jamal, which was written by his father, a poet, who had migrated in 1947 after the division of the Punjab; from East Punjab (India) to West Punjab (Pakistan).

Ahsan Jamal is a miniaturist. He had painted a large and impressive triptych, '*Earth to Earth*', depicting herds of goats moving together in one direction. It was an obvious reference to migration and displacement due to conflict. For the "*State of Being So Divided*", it indicated the emotional upheaval and trauma experienced by the migrants of these two historic events, in 1947 and later in 1971 that continue to haunt many a people even after a passage of four to six decades.

The artist from Gilgit-Baltistan, Ayub Wali's installation was a shower that sprayed red 'water' signifying his region's turbulent past and present. Gilgit-Baltistan was inducted into Pakistan in 1948, a year after Partition. More recently, in 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan gained a de facto province-like status without having so constitutionally. The artist's depiction of his turbulent area in the form of a shower of blood also refers to the rise in sectarian violence in that remote and beautiful northern area.

This project gains greater significance in the absence of a national discussion on the 1971 tragedy, or the ethno-nationalist Bengali



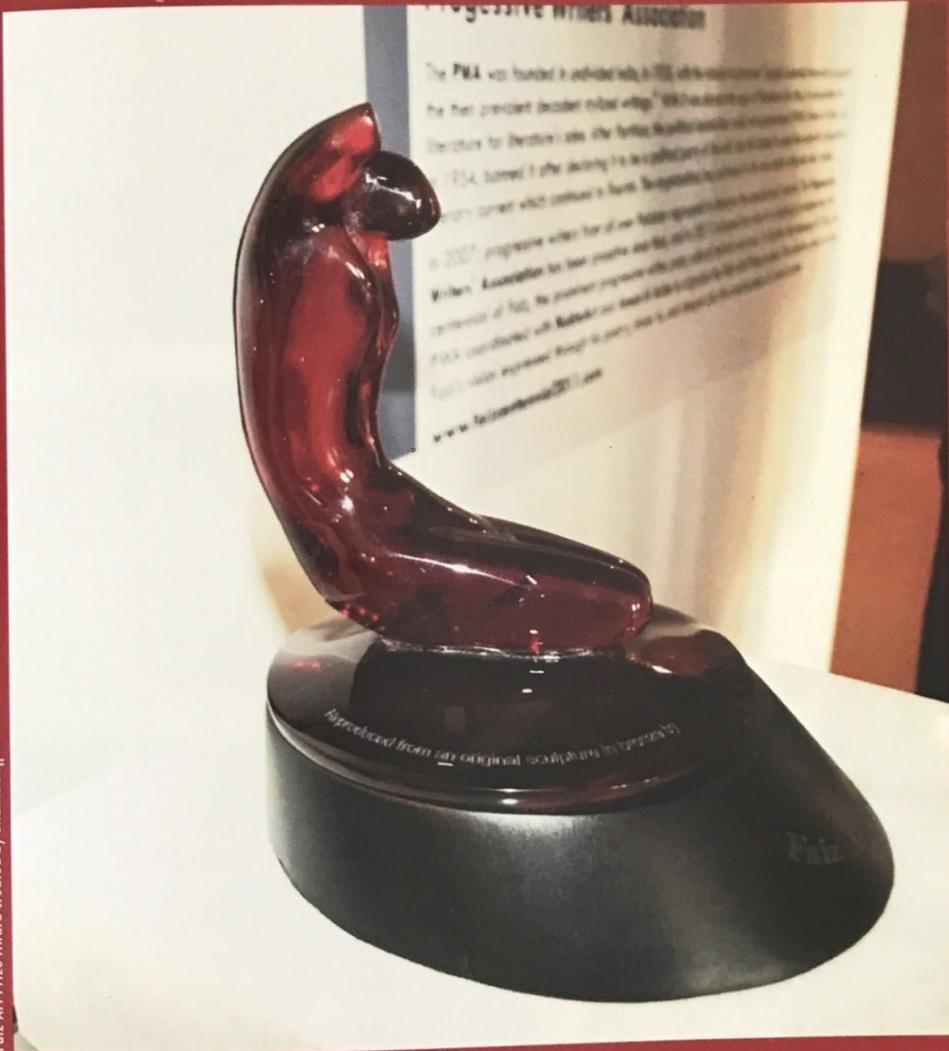
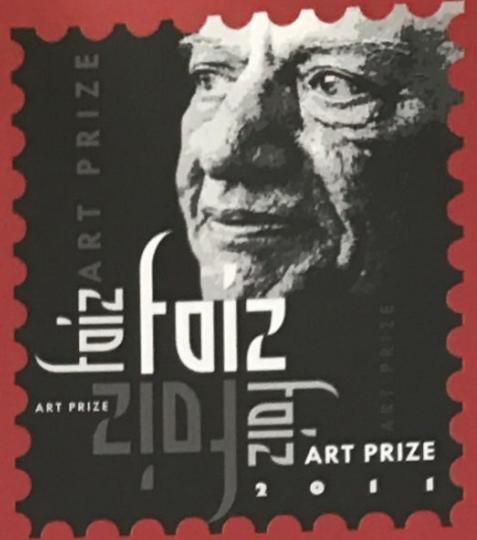
Yasmin Jahan Nupur, performance, 2011

movement. Only a handful of fiction writers have written about it but it hasn't been dealt with in film, or in primary or secondary school curricula, where the textbooks barely carry a paragraph or two on this significant part of Pakistan's political history. ■

#### References:

1. "Bangladesh war: The article that changed history" by Mark Dummett, BBC News, December 16, 2011
2. "Flying Blind: Waiting for a Real Reckoning on 1971" by Naeem Mohaiemen, Economic & Political Weekly, September 3, 2011

# faiz Art Prize



Faiz Art Prize Award created by Shahid Sajjad

Aasim Akhtar

# Activist Aesthetics



'Postcards to Faiz' exhibition design by Habib Fida Ali

The social history of art, as it fitfully developed over the course of the 20th century, had always been bound up with the troubled history of the workers' movement, and more particularly with its state-socialist variant. There seemed few ways to think through the relation between art and the social outside the parameters provided by canonic Marxist ontology. With the collapse of the state socialism project and the profound uncertainty into which the international Left was thrown in its wake, this interpretive model has been in the grip of a widely perceived crisis for at least a generation now. All the more heartening in these dark times, then, that as a new range of activist movements appears on the horizon - the 'alter-globalization' movement with its widely publicized protests against a new round of neo-liberal capitalist expansion being only the most visible among them - we also are witnessing the gradual emergence of new models of politico-aesthetic inquiry. Making use of new tools that lie outside Marxist orthodoxy, and analyzing moments and movements that have often remained marginal to accounts of the social history of modern art, this new line of research offers the possibility of a thorough reassessment of the complex dynamic of art and politics as it has evolved over the past century and a half. The Faiz Art Prize Exhibition provides the viewer an opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these new interpretive paradigms.

If, for an earlier generation of social art historians the Russian Revolution of 1917, which resulted in the consolidation of Bolshevik power in a monolithic state apparatus that coordinated all aspects of social and economic life, had provided the great touchstone for this new generation the standard, and starting point, is rather the Commune of 1871, when the Parisian popular classes briefly assumed control of the capital and declared a

revolutionary government. The change is telling: politically the Commune model is one of direct democracy, with strong anarchist tendencies, rather than the dictatorship of the vanguard party; while artistically we find the rejection of bourgeois culture embodied equally in Gustave Courbet's deliberately coarse paintings and in the destruction of Napoleonic monuments, instead of in the wholesale adaptation of bourgeois taste within a bureaucratically imposed Socialist Realism.

The most exciting aspect of the grand opening of Faiz Art Prize was its unexpectedness. After nearly two years of little else besides bad news, from slashed public funding for the arts to periodic announcements of yet another failed exhibition, most everyone can agree that all the doom and gloom is getting old. Curated by the editorial team of NuktaArt, Pakistan, Faiz Art Prize is a surprisingly smart exhibition executed with energy and optimism. The exhibition's unifying strength is the process that enabled the curators to "discover" the work of the selected art makers. The conventional nature of the exhibition installation belies the decidedly unconventional mix of folk artists, amateurs, teachers, hobbyists, professional artists, and people who create for ends other than pursuing an art career.

This exhibition is not about the art-world market and all of its influences, but instead about creating a situation where work by local producers becomes available to an audience that wants to experience it. Yet it's difficult to simply dismiss conversations about insider status, power, and high and low art. The exhibition's premise hinges upon the curatorial taste of the curators and organizers. In addition, their status ensures art world interest and awareness. While it certainly succeeds in opening up the minds a bit wider, it does so in a kind of melting-pot approach to exhibition making.



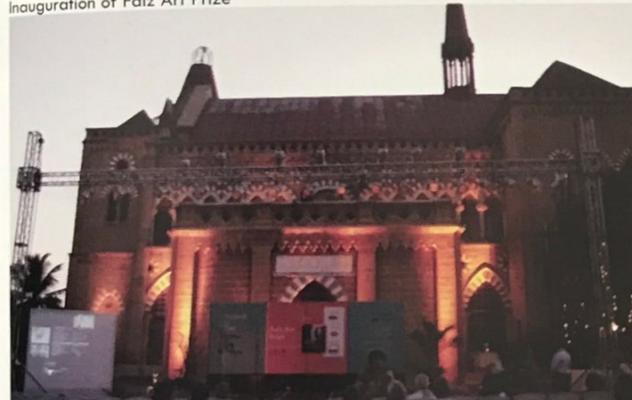
Selection of entries for display



Jury members with NuktaArt Editorial Team



Inauguration of Faiz Art Prize



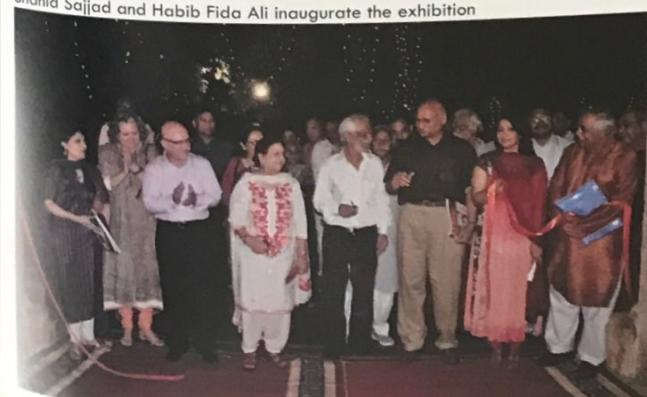
Faiz Art Prize Award by Shahid Sajjad unveiled by the artist



Inaugural ceremony, Rahat Saeed, Acting Secretary Progressive Writers Association presents his remarks



Shahid Sajjad and Habib Fida Ali inaugurate the exhibition



Visitors to the exhibition



Perhaps the best test of an exhibition's success, given the sheer volume of art with 135 participants (87 practicing artists and 48 art students), that such events necessitate, is the ability of its artworks to remain in the memory, to mature on reflection. This year's Faiz Art Prize is a great achievement in this sense. Shown in the atmospheric, otherwise vacant, Frere Hall (Karachi), the show featured 135 artists, but through steady pacing, a tight thematic structure, and plenty of interdisciplinary activities, it never felt overwhelming.

As this exhibition so eloquently evinces, it showcased some of the most original and imaginative artists working today. Their enigmatic storybook scenarios immediately recall the penchant for employing art as a primary vehicle for storytelling. The abundance of conceptual complexity and formal inventiveness in the work of Pakistan's less-known artists was trumped here by personal expression. While there are works that evoke Noam Chomsky's study of syntax and social language and other systems of social classification, they might be mistaken for documentary were it not for the exaggerated moments of stasis, which work to erode the barrier between subject and viewer. In this, it echoes a split traced by the exhibition as a whole, between art as diversionary entertainment and art that is unafraid of confronting topical anxieties.

At first glance, Faiz Art Prize evoked artistic or political upheaval, and seemed like a comfortable fit with various other exhibitions of its ilk. Everything seemed perfectly in place for a socially conscious extravaganza. So it was lovely to find a richly idiosyncratic, brilliantly curated exhibition, chock-full of layers and surprises having much to do with the multiple connotations of the word 'revolution.' The political consciousness aroused by Faiz Ahmed Faiz's verse signaled, of course, crisis and catharsis, and there were a number of excellent works about revolutionary energies or particularly fraught sociopolitical issues. Each part of the exhibition had its charms, and included works at once scholarly, adventurous and charged with multiple meanings. Still Frere Hall, undeniably beautiful despite its architectural decay, best embodied the exhibition's concerns. The Hall that belongs to the past could be seen leaning towards the future.

In his critique of what he described as "the Culture Industry," Theodor Adorno viewed artistic self-expression as the last potential holdout of freedom and nonconformity against authoritarian regimes' ubiquitous dissemination of mass culture. He argued that such regimes used mass culture as a tool to reinforce conformity and consensus and to weaken citizens' ability to resist their authority. "The total effect of the Culture Industry is one of anti-enlightenment... It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves," he wrote in 1975. What happens, then, when you subject creative production to a very standardized format? Not only do you breed conformity, but you also threaten to abrogate voices of opposition and resistance.

The treatment of artistic practice as a competitive sport with very strict rules instrumentalizes creative energy and robs it of its more gratifying, liberating potential. Adorno's concept of autonomy fades into nothingness, and work is packaged and



## TIME LINE

### Faiz Art Prize 2011 excellence in art, NuktaArt, Aman ki Asha and Progressive Writers' Association

June 2010

Project initiated by NuktaArt in collaboration with Progressive Writers Association (PWA) of Pakistan and Aman ki Asha.

#### December 2010

Eminent sculptor Shahid Sajjad agrees to conceptualize and create the Faiz Art Prize Awards for winners in the artists' category. Distinguished architect Habib Fida Ali agrees to undertake the designing of the exhibition display.

#### February 2011

Call for submission of artwork and postcards sent to artists and art students in Pakistan and the Pakistani Diasporas in the UK, United States, Canada and Australia. Artists in India contacted via Times of India.

#### July 2011

Workshops for artists / art students to discuss the possible links between the philosophy of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Visual Arts held at Alliance Francaise in Karachi by Shakil H. Jafri and by Harris Khaliq at Kuch Khas in Islamabad

#### July 2011

'Postcards to Faiz' entries received by NuktaArt in Karachi

#### October 03, 2011

Inauguration of 'Postcards to Faiz' exhibition of the Faiz Art Prize. Unveiling of the Award by Shahid Sajjad. Launch of NuktaArt issue with The Faiz Art Prize Catalogue. The silent auction of the artworks begin, to fundraise for reconstruction of Yarak, a traditional potters' village near Dera Ismail Khan. Voting commences for Popular Awards selected by visitors to the exhibition.

#### October 4 to 7, 2011

Exhibition Open to Public  
Faiz's recorded voice borrowed from the archives of Luthfulah Khan played in the Gallery

Gallery talks by Rumana Husain, Senior Editor NuktaArt for students from 18 schools that were specially invited to visit the exhibition.

#### October 5, 2011

Panel discussion on the sensibilities shared by art and literature, with art and literary critics, novelists, historians, academics, vocalists and artists.

A presentation, 'Hum kay theray ajnabi' by Asma Arshad Mahmood, visiting artist/curator from Canada

#### October 08, 2011

Day-long jury to select the winners of the Faiz Art Prize. The jury members were Prof. Naazish Atallah (Lahore), Mussarrat Nahid Imam (Islamabad), Saquib Hanif (Karachi), Tariq Rangoonwala (Karachi) and Dr Asif Aslam Farrukhi (Karachi)

#### October 9, 2011

Award Ceremony and Live Auction of artworks

#### October - November 2011

Selected works displayed simultaneously at V. M. Art Gallery and Chawkandi Art to raise funds for rebuilding Yarak Potters' Village.

#### November 2011

Department of Architecture at N.E.D University agrees to collaborate on the rebuilding of Yarak Potters' Village.

#### December 2011

The Faiz Art Prize Exhibition put up at the National Art Gallery, Islamabad.

School students listen to 'gallery talk' by Rumana Husain, Senior Editor NuktaArt

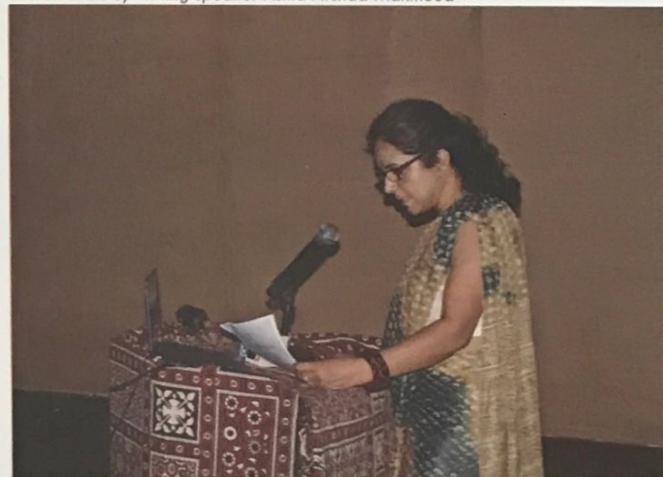


Meher Afroze, winner of Faiz Art Prize (artists category) views the exhibition

School students cast votes for the Popular Prize



Presentation by visiting speaker Asma Arshad Mahmood



Amra Ali Senior Editor NuktaArt presenting her paper at the Panel Discussion



School students view the exhibition



Panelists at discussion on 'Art and Literature'



marketed for direct and immediate consumption. The elation produced by the crystallization of an original idea that may counter social norms and take a more progressive stance is foreclosed. The fulfillment that comes from communicating that idea through a work of art is pre-empted when strict directives dictate the kinds of ideas that are to be generated and communicated. Adding insult to conformity, the specificity of such projects' challenges reminds one of first-year-art school assignments that aim to hone an artist's dexterity with materials and channel it toward a cohesive concept: to design the cover of a novel; to work collaboratively in producing public art work; to make a portrait of one of the other contestants, and so on. They seem restrictive - if not juvenile - for artists who have already mastered their craft and matured their concepts. On the contrary to the above, rather than oiling the wheels of commerce, Faiz Art Prize claims more altruistic goals, mainly to make high art accessible to real people.

Art competition themes are not meant to be too rigorous, lest they appear inaccessible to a broad audience. This is, after all, entertainment-meets-cultural-concept tinged with the diffused hope for educational experience. At worst, this begins to sound like art therapy. At best, it reminds us that some of today's strongest works hit you first in the gut. Like most art events developed by a team of curators, Faiz Art Prize, on occasions, may run the risk of suffering from inconsistencies - mingling the simplistic and sophomoric with the highly developed and overproduced.

The vitality and professionalism of public and private institutions operating in the sector, combined with the specific political will to make the most of our cultural activities, has allowed us during this time to build in our region a contemporary art system that

now includes important venues, an art magazine that recently was able to reinvent and revitalize itself in significant fashion on the global stage, a dynamic network of art competitions which over time have built the city's credibility on an international level. One of the most important reasons for their success in this sector, to the point where Karachi is now considered a reference point in the contemporary art world, is not only the qualities of the activities that are taking place, but also their capacity to create a system that relates to the abilities of the various entities to make their voices heard, to interact and to converge on shared goals and to work together, each in its autonomous and specific way, to achieve them.

Faiz Art Prize is configured as an observatory of new art languages on an international level; it is a project that can provide the global panorama with an essential destination for those who want to know what is happening in the domain of contemporary art in Pakistan.

Like all systems, the Faiz Art Prize is also constantly evolving, strengthened by the results that have been achieved, thanks to the various people who have made contributions, over time, to an array of spaces that seem to open up extraordinary new possibilities, and a public made up of city inhabitants and visitors, who are increasingly perceptive and sensitive. Our region will undoubtedly know how to confront the challenges that lie ahead; Faiz Art Prize is clearly a challenge that has been met.

Faiz Art Prize is a forceful reminder of the necessity to engage with political discourse. As the twentieth century dissolves into the past, its ghosts survive in emerging hybrid structures. One must evolve with the times. Today, to produce possibilities in the face of adversity or austerity may be the only solution.

## WINNERS'

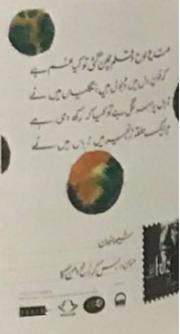
Meher Afroz



Ruby Chishti



Sheema Khan



Nillofur Farrukh, Editor NuktaArt at the Award Ceremony, presents welcome remarks



Audience at the Award Ceremony

Photos Courtesy:  
Qamar Bana  
Wahid Khairi  
Rumana Husain

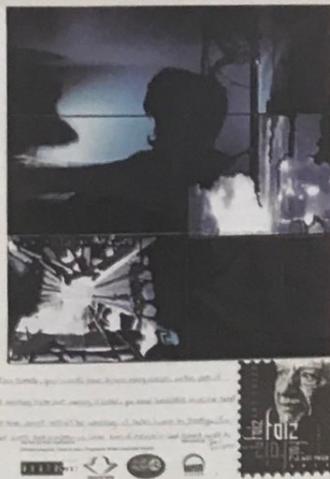
Award winners with jury, organizers and special guests



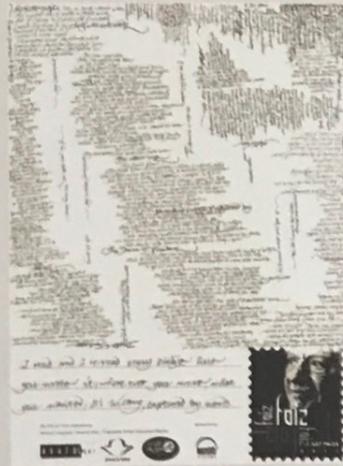
Salima Hashmi, daughter of Faiz Ahmed Faiz presents her address



Noureen Rashid  
(NCA, Lahore)



Uzair Amjad  
(NCA, Lahore)



Adnan Mairaj Malik  
(Karachi Uni.)



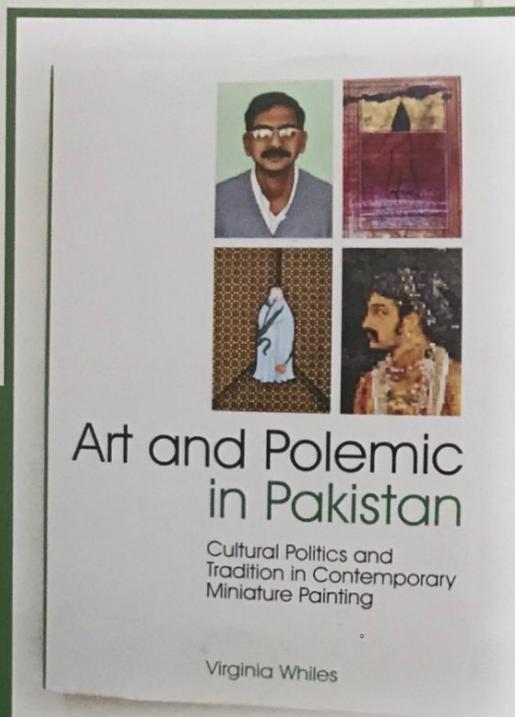
Zohra Tanveer  
(Punjab Uni.)



Humaira Baloch  
(Uni. of Sindh, Jamshoro)

Reviewed by Maliha Noorani

# Art and Polemic in Pakistan



**Title:** Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition and Contemporary Miniature Painting

**Author:** Virginia Whiles

**Publisher:** Taurus Academic Studies, 2010

**Year of publication:** 2011

**ISBN:** 978-1-84885-365-2

**No. of pages:** 294

**Price:** Rs. 995

*"The basic conflict between tradition and modernity will be introduced across the dynamics of two groups of miniature practitioners. These groups have been tagged in my research as 'Group O' (for 'orthodox') and 'Group X' (for 'experimental')...the two groups, O and X, are represented by actors in a dramatic scenario, emulating the tensions of a gang fever such as that between Shakespeare's Capulets and Montagues"*

It is on this charged note that Virginia Whiles' book *Art and the Polemic* begins. Whiles is a familiar figure in Lahore art circles, and has curated shows and authored several essays on the subject of contemporary miniature painting in Pakistan. This is an ambitious undertaking and the result of extensive field work in and outside the National College of Art (NCA). *Art and the Polemic* is a comprehensive investigation of the contemporary miniature movement and attempts to deconstruct the complicated tenor of the neo-miniaturist genre through the bifocaled lens of ethnography and anthropological methods.

Establishing the tense polarity of these groups, the first chapter elaborates the multiple intersecting histories that led to the development of the neo-miniature movements. It charts the Mughal legacy, socio-political reactions, submissions made under the British Raj and the post 1947 years, linking the broader forces pervasive in Pakistani culture and politics today. The book discusses the NCA's role, examining pedagogical development and, Whiles argues, the polarization of two ideologically opposed groups within the genre, the X and the O. Her detailed documentation of studio practice within NCA's miniature department illuminates the opacity of the painting process. The book points out the lack of student interrogation of the Lahore Museum miniature

collections. No dates are provided here, and the reader gleans only from the interviews with Group O that this was during the early 2000s. Should one conclude that the studio environment has remained unchanged for a decade?

Nine 'cameos' punctuate the book: bite-sized biographies of the artistic careers and preoccupations of artists from 'Group X'. All nine have been trailblazers in the field and continue to be prolific practicing artists, included amongst them are Imran Qureshi, Nusra Latif, Khadim Ali and Hamra Abbas.

Whiles's scholarship is heavily informed by the works of several anthropological and visual art theorists, as is evident in her extensive citations; Clifford Geertz, Clement Greenberg and Alfred Gell's methods are employed to distill and extend her argument to locate contemporary miniature as idiomatic of modernity. Her scope broadens to include small, mostly commercial ateliers in Lahore and India (Jaipur and the Kangra valley). Group X's images (which later on takes on the term Lahore group) are shown to elicit a response from the master-artists that run them. Through their distaste of the avant-garde tropes, she drives home the point that the neo-miniaturist movement coming out of the NCA is really the only source of such 'dissident' artists within the miniature genre. Whiles' employment of the Geertzian

It charts the Mughal legacy, socio-political reactions, submissions made under the British Raj and the post 1947 years, linking the broader forces pervasive in Pakistani culture and politics today.



Plate 62. *Karkhana I*, 2002 (28x20), courtesy Geom Catlanom by Karkhana Project



Plate 63. *Karkhana III*, 2002 (28x20), courtesy Geom Catlanom by Karkhana Project



Plate 36. *Surremudal Bi*, 2003, each portrait 6x6 by Ahsan Jamal



Plate 37. *Baardi*, 2003, each portrait 6x6 by Ahsan Jamal



Plate 34. *Mughal Bath, Snow Reminiscend*, 2006, installation: lenticular prints (152x92x2) by Hanna Abbas

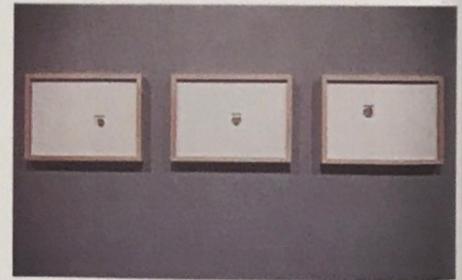


Plate 35. *God Given or True (Beta II)*, 2008, installation: 99 miniatures (3.5x3) Caprin (Diasac) (90x102) by Hanna Abbas

method runs beyond the use of the 'thick description', describing both the behavior and the context in which that behaviour is meaningful. As Geertz did in his seminal 'Notes on a Balinese Cockfight', Whiles, too, shifts from curious and empathetic spectator to participant as her observations are colored with anecdotal references to personal encounters.

"*Art and the Polemic*" provides useful insight into the social structure of the field. I would however like to consider aspects of its argument. I had reservations on the examination of a particular group of painters, Group X, through the context of their supposed 'Other', which, rather than extending the scope, limited it, creating reductive and polarizing binaries. The language of the classifications; Experimental and Orthodox are loaded and essentializing terms. While *Art and the Polemic* follows the careers and works of X, group O is employed as a virile source of 'opposition' (to use a reductive word myself). The reader can glean nothing more about Group O than that it is a shadow of eight female students. Represented through conversational quotes, the lopsided representation of O and basis of comparison works against Whiles' argument. The reader does not have access to

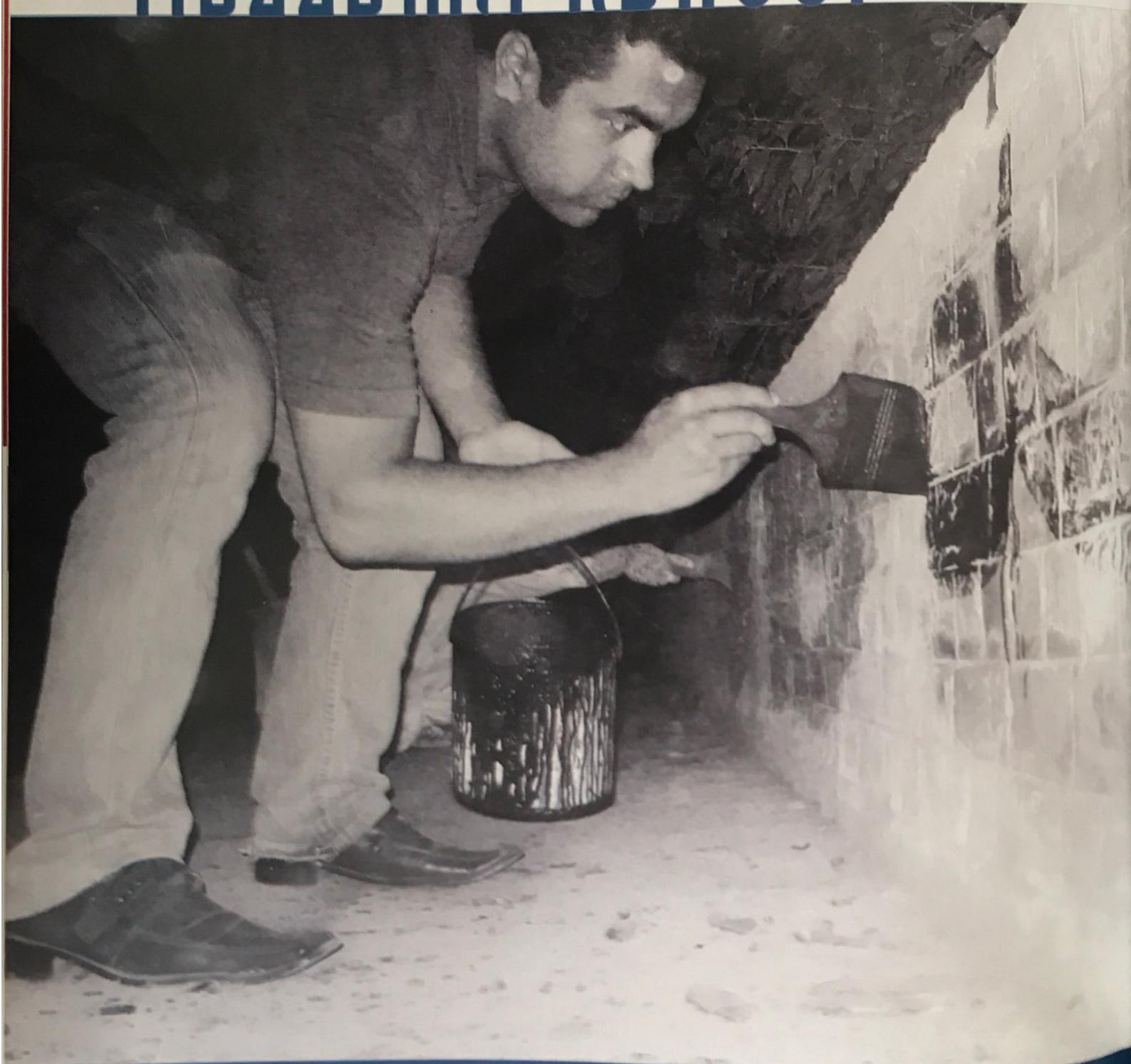
their works as practicing artists, their cameos, or even their names; Whiles gives only their initials. This caution raises the question - who is group O, and do they even exist outside the NCA miniature studio as practicing artists to support such an argument of polarity? More importantly, are not group X artists very much mainstream, both as artists and instructors? Who then is at the periphery and at the center? Indeed, the severe binaries she constructs leave little room for discussion of dynamics within these groups themselves. It creates a neat and ultimately opaque division of art practices within the miniature painting tradition.

*Art and the Polemic* is an often intimate, holistic inquiry and exploration of the genre of contemporary miniature painting. The anthropological lens(es) she employs are useful tropes to uncover this genre, that has been a defining movement within Pakistani visual culture. But ultimately, it serves only to obscure the rich conversations surrounding the social dynamics and their effect in this genre. That said, *Art and the Polemic* is a useful and comprehensive addition to the growing scholarship in the field as a source that extends outside the realm of art history. ■

Nilofur Farrukh

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# Muzzumil Ruheel



Muzzumil Ruheel, Cholo Chalo, the artist doing wall chalking for 13 Sahelife Public Art Project , 2007

Muzzamil Ruheel, *This is made by....*, (inspired by work of Jackson Pollock), (Installation), oil painted banner with artist and friends posing in front. First displayed at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore.



**Muzzamil Ruheel** was introduced to calligraphy in his early teens and since then has rigorously practiced his skills, and learnt to interpret it within the contemporary framework. His first solo show at VM Gallery confirms that he has not allowed the dense tradition and history of calligraphy to restrict experimental zeal, as the geometric purity of the script is transformed with new imaginings and conceptual possibilities.

Ruheel, who grew up in Lahore, became a *shagird* of renowned calligrapher Ustad Khurshid Alam Gohar Qalam before studying for a BFA Degree from the Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. Currently, he lives in Karachi and is a part of the faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.

**Nilofur Farrukh** met the young artist who has attracted attention with his 'conceptual calligraphies', to talk about his art practice, and for the new direction he has given to text-based art in Pakistan.

**NF** You are the only contemporary artist of your generation in Pakistan who has received both a formal education in calligraphy from an *ustad* for three years and completed a BFA from an art school. How different did you find these education systems?

**MR** While studying calligraphy, I felt the need to know more about the art I saw around me. This was the time I also discovered that all famous calligraphers in history were well known fine artists of their time. So, after completing the three year course, my search led me to an art school.

I finally joined Beaconhouse National University (BNU) where my portfolio made me eligible for a scholarship. Here I learnt how to incorporate new ideas and became aware of different kinds of calligraphy, like wall chalking, etc. Unlike the concentration on one subject with the *ustad*, at the art school we were taught other mediums and techniques, and this exposure has helped me to contextualize my calligraphy.

The fundamental difference between the two education systems is, that one is based on an *ustad-shagird* relationship where you had to pledge unquestioning devotion and the teacher in return passes on his knowledge with generosity as no

fees is charged by the *Ustad*. Each student who is accepted is given a place to sit in the studio and guided. This system is built on the *Sufi* wisdom that by giving their knowledge freely the teacher not only gains the devotion of his students but expands personal growth. It was my *Ustad Ji* who inspired me to become a teacher. The other is based on the Western system of structured learning.

At BNU I also found supportive teachers who were ready to help me at school where I made it to the Dean's Honor List for three years. The faculty also found part time jobs for me in their studios, so I could sustain myself financially. I worked the longest with Rashid Rana, (for three and a half years) during which I took photographs and managed the photo albums for him.

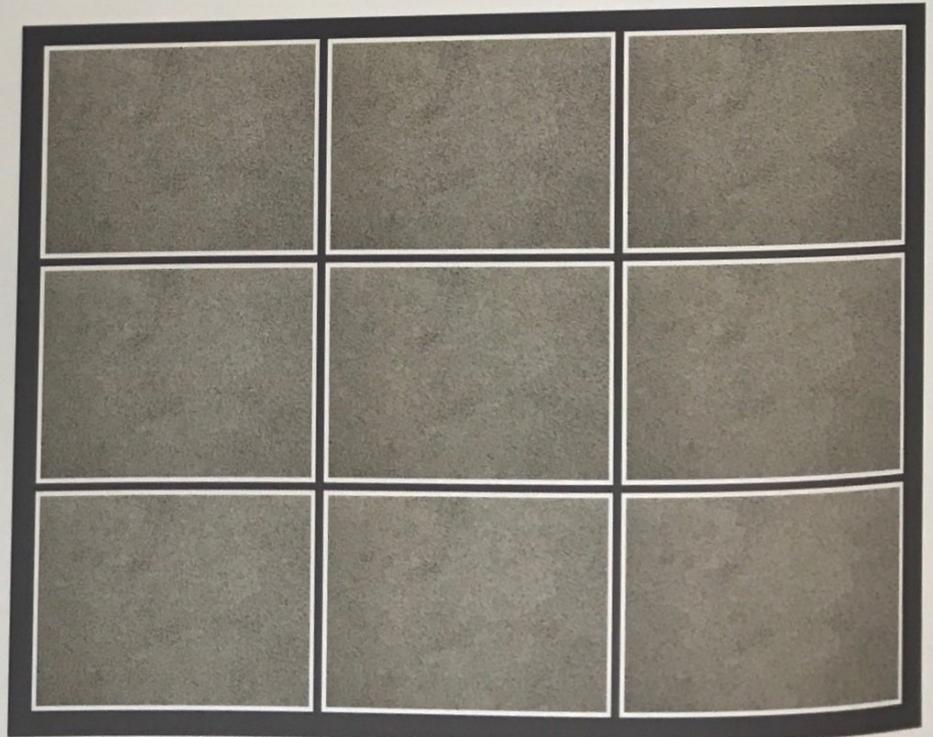
**NF** You are a text-based artist who primarily works in Urdu, but much of the gallery audience has a disconnect with Urdu and its traditions, how has this influenced the reception?



Muzzumil Ruheel, *Diwani Script* (detail), ink on aged paper, 2005

unreadable, like the one based on my conversations with my mother for a period of 90 days while she was sick. I did not want to share it with others so I turned it into an illegible text by fragmenting the words. In my recent solo show at the VM Gallery, I created a monster with words in the *Suls* Script, in which, by using a decorative script to make something ugly, I am addressing certain contradictions within our society. The work *Word Map*, that depicts Muslim countries of the world in green, contains a text-based pattern of words that were picked up from local and international broadcasts to reference the role of the media in international conflicts and polarization of communities.

It was much earlier in my career that I realized that people seldom read text, so just to shock them I wrote words/ messages they least expected in a formal *tughra* format, sometimes I even got away with it. The *Maula Jat* series was inspired by the impact the *Maula Jat* genre of popular movies had on its audience. I knew people who took on the persona of the characters of the movies they saw over the weekend. As a joke, I created a *tughra* (calligram) with dialogue from the films and gave it to them to hang in their room. This was meant to underscore the blind reverence of religious texts that



Muzzumil Ruheel, *Stories of My Last 90 Days*, ink on wasli, 248.9 x 198.1 cm, 2010-11

**MR** As you know my practice is varied. Some of the works require a knowledge of Urdu while others do not. I also deliberately make the text

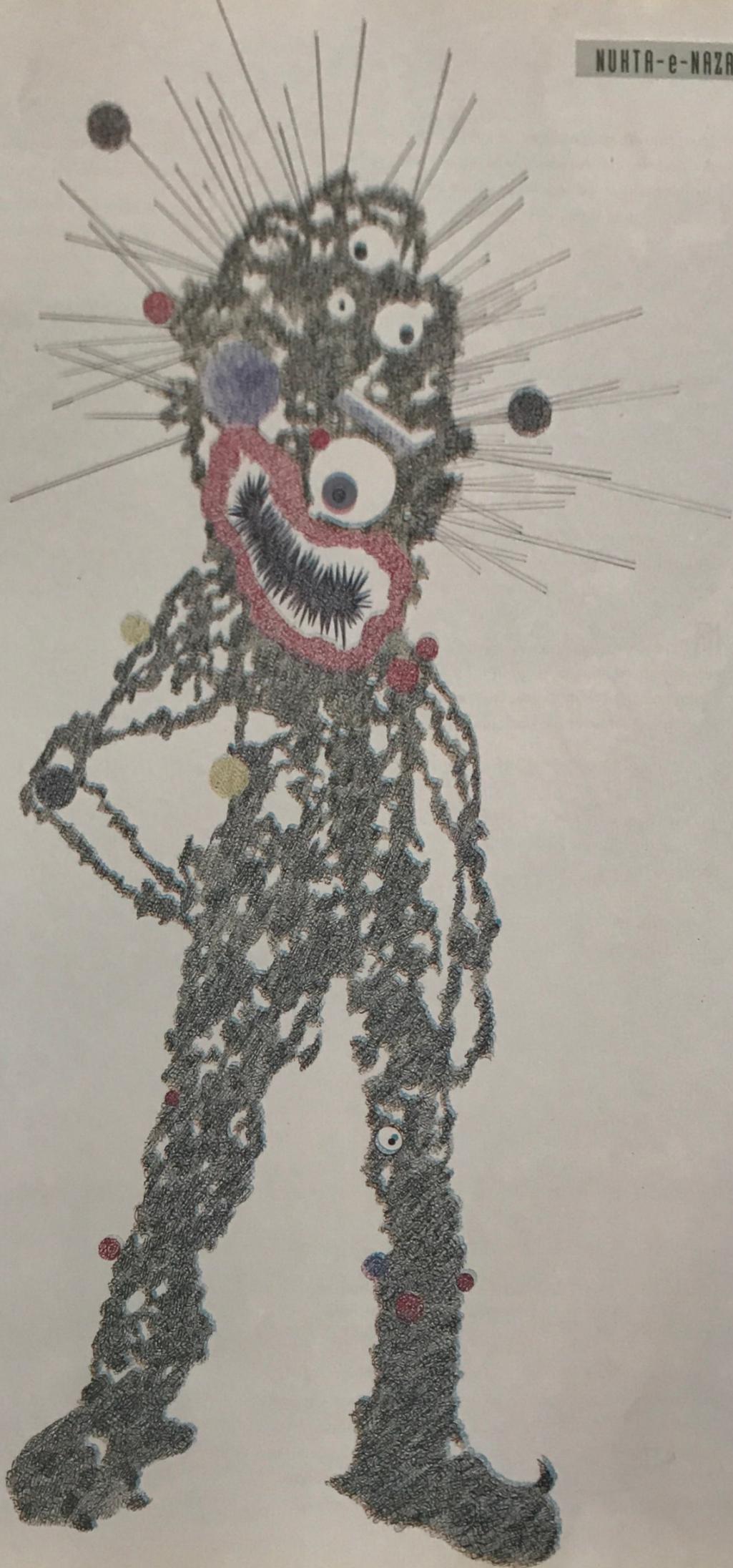
is seldom read or understood and just blindly venerated. This attitude has bothered me, so I wrote irreverent texts in the reversed format just to compel people to stop and take notice.

**NF** The politicization of calligraphy during Ziaul Haq's



Muzzumil Ruheel, *Mula Jutt*, ink on wasli, 11.4 x 14.1 cm, 2005

Muzzumil Ruheel, *Uncle Tom's Monster*, ink on wasli, 147.3 x 99 cm, 2011



Islamization process gave it a different connotation. It also divided the art community between the conformists and dissidents that led to a rejection of calligraphy, for a period, on ideological lines. Do you see any bias today?

**MR** Whenever there is a relaxation of something forcibly imposed on people, a moving away from it or rejection follows. The '80s state patronage was not good for calligraphy as only one form, sacred calligraphy, dominated the scene and there was a lot of repetition of the same. During that decade and later, this became a symbol of resistance to Zia's politics, but after the dust settled, artists began to return to it and gradually new frames of reference were developed.

**NF** Your work makes us aware of new possibilities within calligraphy, but unlike the Miniature Painting tradition, calligraphy has not been fully explored. Can we expect a revival of the calligraphic genre in future?

**MR** Replicas and variations of Mughal Miniature Painting have been produced in some form or other and they have been a part of the fine arts tradition, and later when the Dept of Miniature Painting was set up at the National College of Arts (NCA), fresh

tradition within Fine Arts. Unfortunately, there are very few *Ustads* left who know the tradition and can teach and discuss it the way it is required.

During the Zia Era because only sacred calligraphy was practiced and there was more repetition than innovation, this kept calligraphy from evolving in the contemporary direction. Recently, at the

The work 'Word Map', that depicts Muslim countries of the world in green, contains a text-based pattern of words that were picked up from local and international broadcasts to reference the role of the media in international conflicts and polarization of communities.



Muzzumil Ruheel, *Word Map*, ink on wasli, 97.7 x 176.5 cm, 2011



Muzzumil Ruheel, *Word Map (detail)*, ink on wasli, 97.7 x 176.5 cm, 2011

ideas were introduced into this genre. This institutional support and patronage facilitated the revival of Miniature Painting. Presently calligraphy does not have this institutional support, as only NCA offers a course in this subject. In other institutions, the short courses offered, teach it as typography and not as a

show, *Letters to Taseer*, Mohammad Ali Talpur's work was inspired by calligraphy. I was very pleased to see him use the head of the alphabet 'ain' that appeared very much like a crescent, in a grid. This kind of exploration by contemporary artists is a positive sign. ■