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She Wandered...

A Monograph on
Farida Batool's Art Practices
1993 - 2019

Fig. 1

And She Wondered...
Lenticular print
46.9 cm x 91.4 cm
2006
Edition of 7 + 1 AP



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She Wandered...

Publisher's Note

White Turban Art Consultancy has been working to promote artists and to provide them the long-awaited recognition that they deserve. The consultancy strongly believes in the arts of Pakistan and works towards creating opportunities that may reach a wider audience. This monograph is merely an extension of this very objective that the consultancy is based on.

It began when I was asked to shuffle my seat on our flight from Dhaka back to Lahore. Coincidentally, my new seat not only placed me in the VIP section but also right next to Farida Batool. The smiles exchanged at that time, reflecting the collective embarrassment of high profiles, became the beginning of us. I had curated a show with Farida's works but had never had the opportunity to communicate with her in-depth. This fortunate moment gave us the opportunity to get to know our practices better—what I did as a consultant and what she did as an artist.

Farida talked about her childhood, her days in college, political influences, her personal experiences with the city, and how the amalgamation of her experiences shaped her into the artist she is today—one who is sensitive towards the often-ignored socio-political elements around her. Raised in Lahore, her affair with this city that gave her recognition and attachment evolves still. At times she leeches onto it, resiliently fights for its long and lost culture, or studies its unpredictable contemporary pop culture. Often, she just walks down the canal and catches sight of a crumpled old paper afloat the murky water—a sight that transports her back to the untold tales of her historic city. Sometimes, just like a faltering affair, the same city pushes her to the peripheries of social injustices—injustices that consume her only to spit her out. It is almost like returning to a lover who instils creativity, makes her bloom into an artist, and then rejects her. A bittersweet affair, she calls it.

There seems to be no stopping for Farida; the activism in her continues to make the impossible, possible. It is this ever-flickering ember in her that has made me understand the link between her person, her work, and her experiences. As a consultant, I aspire to never limit my experiences and so the anecdotes narrated in the almost four-hour flight had to be formally documented. The inspiration for this monograph came to me like an epiphany that day in the aircraft, in the comfort of a seat in the VIP aisle.

This is the first of the five-monograph series for the consultancy focusing on artists whose stories need to be told. For this project, I realise that each artist has a multi-faceted practice that should be observed through different lenses. My aim here was to invite artists, writers, curators, critics, art theorists, anthropologists, and her mentors to write about Farida's work and to look at her art practice through their own respective, specialised vision. These conversations and essays are intended as the starting point of a critical conversation for the reader, to help develop a better understanding of her practice.

The discussion with her mentors, Salima Hashmi and Naazish Ata-Ullah, gives the reader an insight into the beginning and making of Farida Batool as the artist she is today. The conversation with artist Masooma Syed offers an understanding of how their art practices were moulded by their shared

experiences as teenage friends—visiting each other’s homes, walking to college together, going on excursions to the walled city, delighting in their mutual love of fabrics and the little artefacts they picked up. New York based writer, curator, and art theorist Tom Huhn writes of how he experiences her work through a foreign lens, creating linkages with philosophy. Hajra Haider’s research essay discusses Farida’s work along with that of two of her batchmates from the National College of Arts, Risham Syed and Bani Abidi. Haider compares the three female artists, associating her comparison with the unique urban infrastructure of their respective cities. Lastly, Shaila Bhatti and Christopher Pinney, two known anthropologists, discuss Batool’s art in great length, identifying the culture behind each work. This essay is the result of an ongoing conversation with Farida, her thoughts and her engagement through her art with the Pakistani society.

This project was almost two years in the making—the idea was initially discussed with Farida Batool and her excitement and enthusiasm is what translated into the key element of motivation for us to move forward. With barely any funds, this publication only became possible with the help of everyone involved. A cluster of devoted individuals who understood the value of this project and worked with a commitment worthy of being rewarded. The art patrons who supported us through their generous contributions. The incomparable advice given by Salima Hashmi and Naazish Ata-Ullah, and Asad Hayee’s constant assistance and unconditional support.

This is an ongoing project: the sales of this book will support a monograph of another artist, and so on. We will continue to stand true to the notion that an artist’s story must be told.

I personally express my gratitude to all those who believed in this project. The captions and the essays in this publication have been supplied by the contributors. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, we do not under any circumstances accept responsibility for errors and/or omissions.

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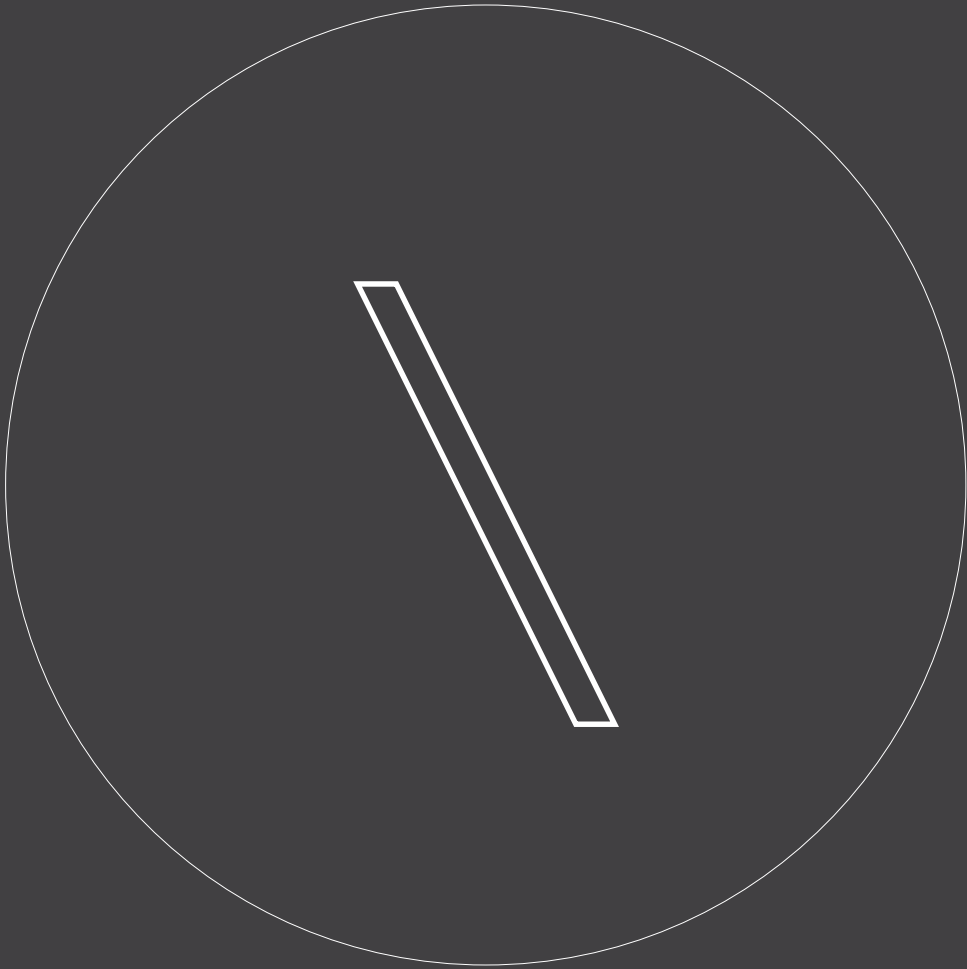
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Look at the City from Here,

~~by~~ *through* the High Walls and the Closed Gates

Haajra Haider Karrar



Tom Huhn is the chair of the Art History and BFA Visual & Critical Studies Departments at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He received a PhD in Philosophy from Boston University, and has been a visiting professor at Yale University and the University of Graz, Austria. His books include: *Imitation and Society: The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant*; *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*; *The Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste*; and *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*.

His publications include: *New German Critique*, *Art & Text*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, *Art Criticism*, *Telos*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*, *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Art Book*, *Art in America*. Huhn has been a Getty Scholar and Fulbright Scholar. Huhn's curatorial works include: *Ornament and Landscape*, at the Visual Arts Museum and Westport Arts Centre; *Between Picture and Viewer: The Image in Contemporary Painting* at the Visual Arts Gallery, NYC.



The Persisting Past in the Art of Farida Batool

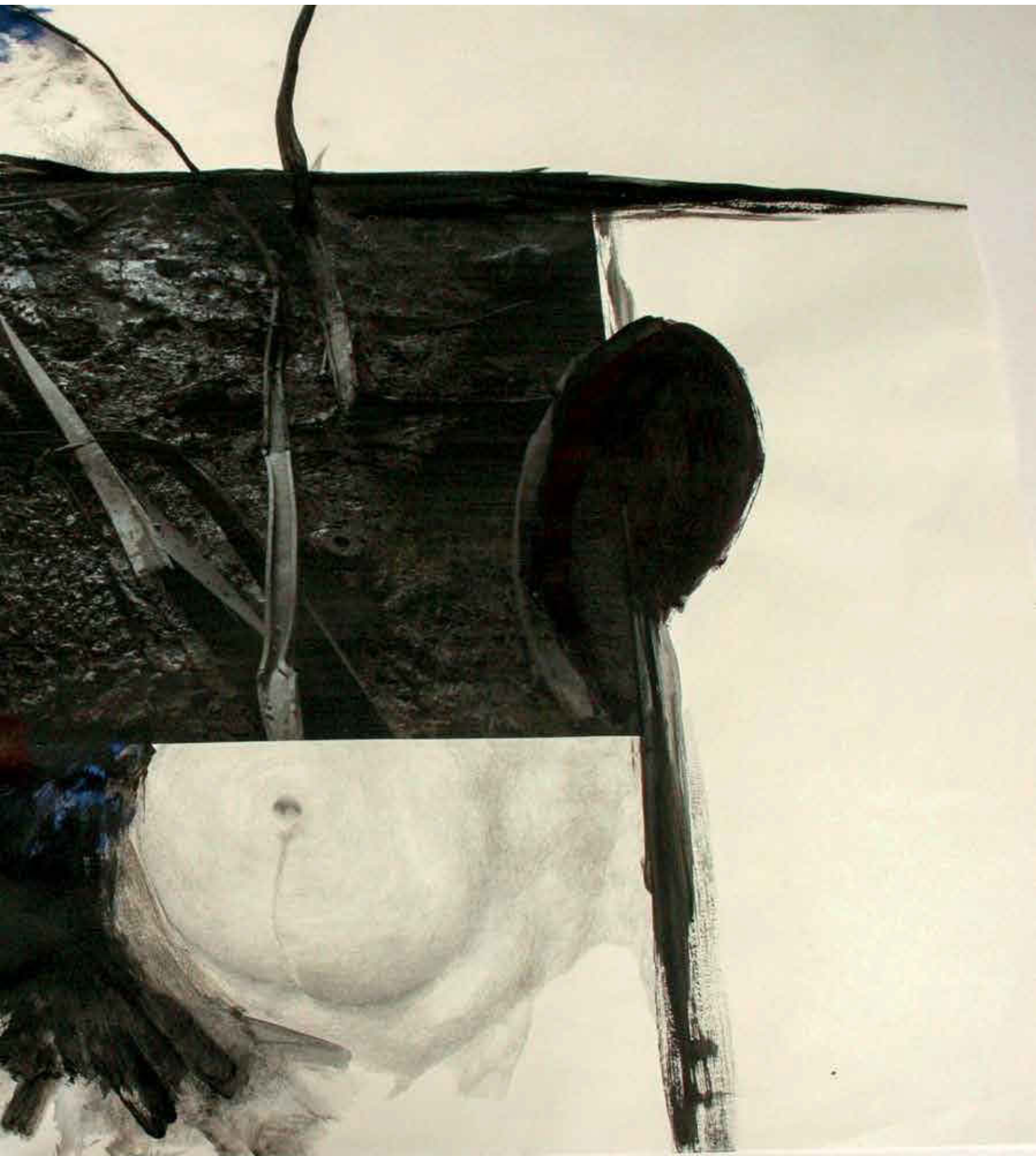
Tom Huhn



Fig. 1.1

Untitled
Mixed media on digital print
50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
2008

Image courtesy | Rohtas 2, Lahore



Farida Batool's work returns us repeatedly to ourselves. Along the paths of these returns we encounter an always-vigilant struggle against the many abstractions in which we normally find ourselves. Batool instead relocates the very sense of place, and of self, somewhere uncanny: a place both familiar and strange. We find ourselves in a world that requires an ongoing struggle not to remain in the comforting habits of the familiar, the channels of the everyday, normal and recognizable. As active worldly creatures we cannot help but continue to make up habits and mediations by means of which we engage the things of the world; we often hope thereby as well to encounter and to recover ourselves. No doubt we more often than not also learn to avoid ourselves in the habits and mediations we build to surround ourselves.

But Batool's works are anything but another series of image-things to mediate our experiences: more importantly her art is a way of making an encounter that short-circuits the roundabout mediations whose sway and influence we are in thrall to. This is why place, and especially Lahore and the body, are so central to Batool's practice, for the body is but another way of making place draw in still closer, and to make it present.

What is it about the body, and the enlarged body of the city, or even about ourselves, that puts just these things at such a distant remove from us?

Batool's works often return us to the site of the body, not as an encounter with something alien or unknown, but rather, we find in her work a kinship with ourselves, and thereby a rekindled intimacy toward others. Consider here her 2004 work *Line of Control*, especially as it is situated in the exhibition *Skins*, in which bodies nuzzle together as though they were puzzle pieces finally reuniting with one another. One cannot help but think of the tale told by the figure of Aristophanes in *The Symposium*, Plato's justly famous dialogue on the nature of *Eros*. Aristophanes relates the myth explaining how human beings were previously created as whole creatures, each composed of two pairs of arms, legs, genitalia, etc.

The gods somehow were threatened by this state of human *wholeness*, prompting Zeus to sever people in half, top to bottom, so that each of us has but one set of limbs, etc. The myth explains how it is that we all subsequently spend our lives wandering about with outstretched arms in search of the lost half that once made us whole.

Fig. 1.2

Untitled
Mixed media on digital print
50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
2008

Image courtesy | Rohtas 2, Lahore

Fig. 1.1 & 1.2 are two images of drawings from the series 'Lahore-My Love'. The background images are of ransacked buildings after the mob attack on Mall Road, initiated by setting the Shezan restaurant on fire, which the mob wrongly alleged belonged to the Ahmadiyya community.

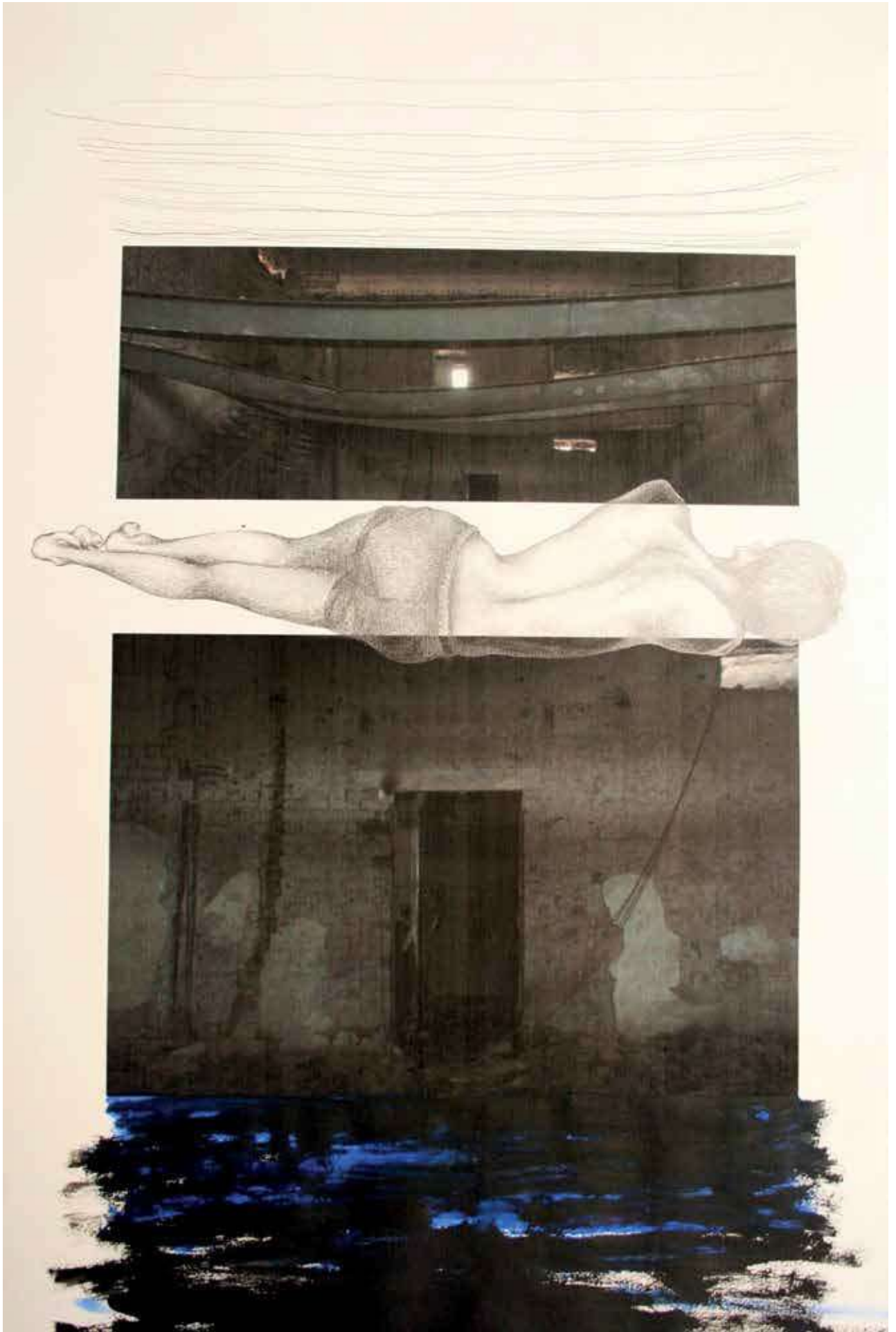




Fig. 1.4

Nai Reesan Shehr Lahore Diyan
(view two)





Fig. 1.5

Love Letter to Lahore
Lenticular print
50.8 cm x 74.9 cm
2006
Edition of 7 + 1 AP



Batool's lenticular works arrive at a similar juncture, where the stability of a particular representation or picture is undermined by the multiplicity of images in one and the same place as well as by the vacillation from one to the other. The dynamism generated within these pieces, and so too by means of these works, opens up what Rancière characterizes as a genuinely aesthetic possibility.

That is, what counts as aesthetic no longer concerns what is beautiful, nor what might be sensuously pleasing, and not even what might in the end move and transform us. The aesthetic designates instead the realm of possible experience, of something happening in and to us that is not yet regulated by the regimes of knowledge or power or the disclosure of truth. This is less a novel definition of the aesthetic and more a bringing to the fore of a feature that has always been present in much of the theorizing about the nature and goals of the aesthetic.

I see a kinship between the lenticular works and *Line of Control*, one that lies in their mutual activation of a possibility that refrains from declaring its precise shape or location. To name it might be to say it is the possibility of human experience, and more specifically an experience that has not yet committed itself in service of one agenda or another, of knowledge or of truth.

We might well take this activation of undeclared potentiality to Batool's works that locate themselves within the very specific precincts of Lahore. Consider in this regard the marvelous *Love Letter to Lahore*. Broken glass everywhere, as though the composition itself would spread its shards to cover the whole of the city. And of course the broken glass is not only a metonymy for a shattered Lahore, but so too for a broken heart. The lipstick traces mark the site of a previous love, and of a mouth open to speak and to interact, and even perhaps open to the touch of another. The love it displays is thus vulnerable. But nonetheless it declares itself, and in doing so it asks for reciprocity, it requests a love be declared and enacted in return. In short, it is a call, an invitation, and a provocation. And it should well remind us of what is especially illicit in Lahore is the making of images at all, let alone images of love. This work is thus a double provocation. Public displays of love are often violently responded to in Pakistan. An image of love, of desire or longing, is a provocation against the dignity of the human being as him or herself complete in their relation to god. Public love also provokes in its demonstration of the unfinished and incomplete aspects of being human. It is, we might say, a mark of the brokenness of being human or, as we put it earlier, of our having arrived in the world as severed beings, cleaved off now not just from our other half but from the wholeness of god and creation.

Batool's works, especially in their loving insistence, begin with the premise of a world cracked apart, and cracked open. Batool's practice is then inseparable from the very fact of Pakistan's coming into existence by means of its partition from India. The double provocation of Batool's practice mirrors the double fragmenting of Pakistan in its

origin in partition as well as the echo of that split in the 1971 creation of Bangladesh out of a portion of what had been Pakistan. The kinship of Batool with Pakistan is overdetermined, as she is at once both herself a Pakistani and so too a modernist.

One of the key features of Modernism is a commitment to the fragment, of a thing or a phenomenon that while wholly itself is somehow no longer whole and complete, and might nonetheless signal, in its very brokenness, the contours of what might be whole once again. The modernist philosophy of the fragment appears under many different guises, for example it is apparent in the value ascribed to unfinished works (as if they became fragments because the very process of making them was broken off), or the value given to gesture (or even just its residue), and finally we might even consider the materials that make up so-called found art, as if the objects selected from the world come to have value insofar as they come to be seen as significant fragments to the extent that they appear broken off from the world at large. Pakistan comes to be a whole in its origin as a fragment of what was once something else. Batool's practice mimetically stages the fragmentation that first gave rise to her country and to her own citizenship and identity. And this means that she must also find a place in her work for violence, for violence was present at the fragmenting origin of the country and violence remains present now. Of course this does not mean that the work must itself be violent, but rather that the work cannot help but situate and relate itself to violence.

The 2009 work, *A Forbidden City*, is a prime example, for in it we see the violence of sets of eyes plucked from the faces to which they belong (another example of the fragmentation that runs throughout her practice), but so too do we feel the violence of the seemingly countless, and anonymous, surveilling eyes upon us. We are at once both pinned by these eyes as well as lost in their gazing at us because we cannot tell who is actually looking at us. It is a most disjointed experience of being seen but not knowing by whom or what. It is thereby a reminder and powerful enactment of our fragmented, broken, and ongoing incompleteness. Still, Batool's works also always open us, however furtively, to the project of recovering ourselves in the unfinished and as yet unclaimed spaces within and between us.

Fig. 1.6

Eik Shehr Jo Udaas Hai
Lenticular print
91.4 cm x 266.7 cm
2009
Edition of 7 + 1 AP









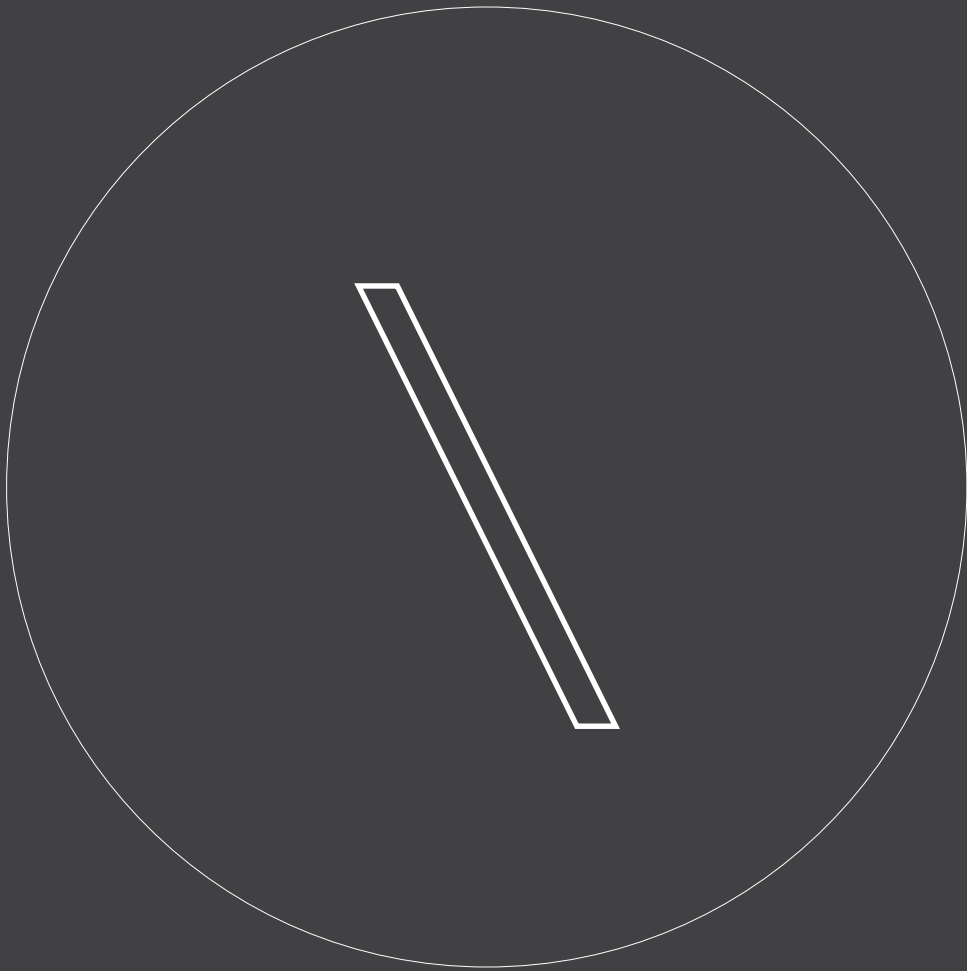






Dekhna Mana Hai
Lenticular tiles
5.08 cm x 15.2 cm each, total
500 tiles
2009
Edition of 2 + 1 AP

The installation with eyes started in the first exhibition as B&W print cut-outs at the Zahoor ul Akhlaq Gallery NCA in 1996. It later transformed into a lenticular medium in 2006 and this work was developed in 2009.



Masooma Syed's trajectory has been unusual as an artist and art academic. She has practised and taught art in several universities and art schools across South Asia including the National College of Arts; Beaconhouse National University; the Indus Valley School in Karachi; School of Culture and Creative Expressions, Ambedkar University, Delhi; Kathmandu University, Nepal; Theertha School of Art, Colombo, and Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Batticaloa in Sri Lanka. She is the recipient of the Commonwealth Fellowship of Art and Craft, Australia; HAT (Here & There) Art and Craft Fellowship, Manchester University and, most recently, a Research Fellowship at the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, Kelaniya University, Sri Lanka.

Born in Pakistan in 1971, Masooma has lived and worked across South Asia. Her works have been exhibited widely at home and internationally: in the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi; Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi; Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial, Japan; Harris Museum and Blackburn Museum, England; Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo; Apex Art, New York, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, and National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai. She has also featured in galleries such as Rohtas Art Gallery, Lahore, Gallerieske, Delhi/Bangalore, Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi, and Red Dot in Colombo.

Syed's art practice involves intricate processes, layered ideas of duality, and diverse mediums in both 2D and 3D works. These are accounts of her own life as a woman, both as a national and a traveller in countries of conflicted borders and contested bodies in today's complex world.

Of
Beginnings
and
Boundaries

Farida Batool
in conversation with
Masooma Syed

Masooma

Well, that was reflected in your entire persona and lifestyle. You resisted that class barrier in every way, whether it was working for a cause like Hawwa Associates for women empowerment in the Walled City in 1994, or your choice of friends and the people you spent time with.

Farida

You mentioned my drawing prowess. I still recall that you took English literature and I had Urdu Advanced as a subject in Intermediate in Lahore College. You took Art History in the English class whereas I took it in Urdu because I didn't have the confidence to take it in English. I was in awe of you and your ability with the language. I was so unable to accept that I could comprehend a course in English.

Masooma

I never realised that.

Farida

You know, my father had guests coming to the house, bureaucrats and influential people, people of knowledge, and he would ask my opinion on important matters when those friends were there. I was always worried about being put on the spot and not delivering to expectations. And growing up in a classless environment we were never really taught about grooming or being fashionable.

Masooma

No, but your mother has always been a very modern and stylish lady.

Farida

Yes, but I guess it was not their concern to make us stylish.

Masooma

But there was more to it. I remember you sharing pictures of your grandparents travelling to Europe. I remember beautiful old fabrics that had come from abroad...

Farida

Yes, and I made *shalwars* (traditional pants) out of them.

Masooma

And gorgeous lace dupattas. I couldn't have explained it all at the time but now I can say that we're talking about highly educated, open and cultured people who stand against all pretence. Your family is rooted in its own culture and traditions and this, I believe, kept you all very grounded.

Farida

Yes, I think that's true. It did have some positive effect ... eventually!

Fig. 2.3

Ammi
Mixed media on semi-baked ceramic
tile
30.4 cm x 30.4 cm
1998

Fig. 2.4

Appreciating jewellery and its making and designing have always inspired me as an artist. Watching Masooma Syed make jewellery pieces was a pleasure that initiated many discussions between us. This photograph is about the making of a necklace piece in collaboration with Sheraz Faisal, the artist and jewellery designer. The necklace with a photograph of my mother surrounded by gold leaf formed a perfect gift for my mother, Silvi Khurshid Fareedi, on her 75th birthday.

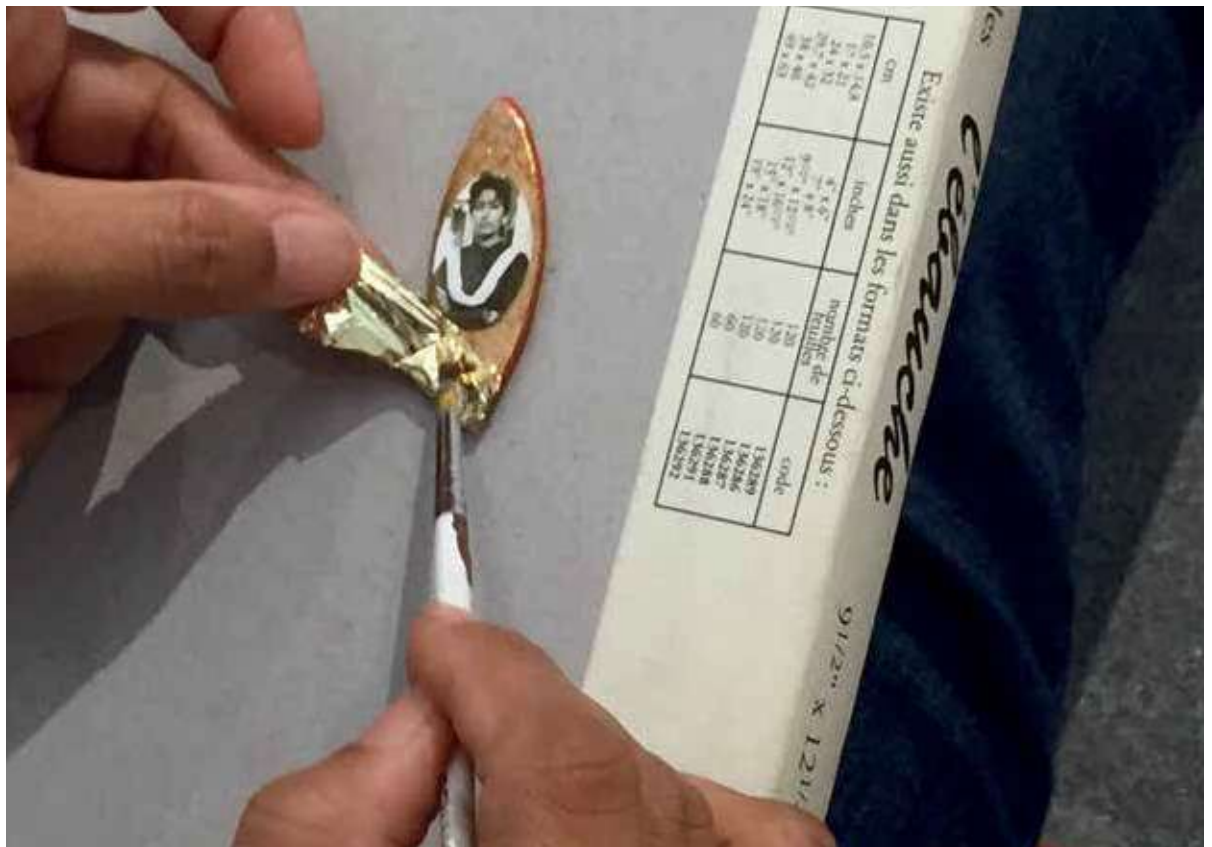
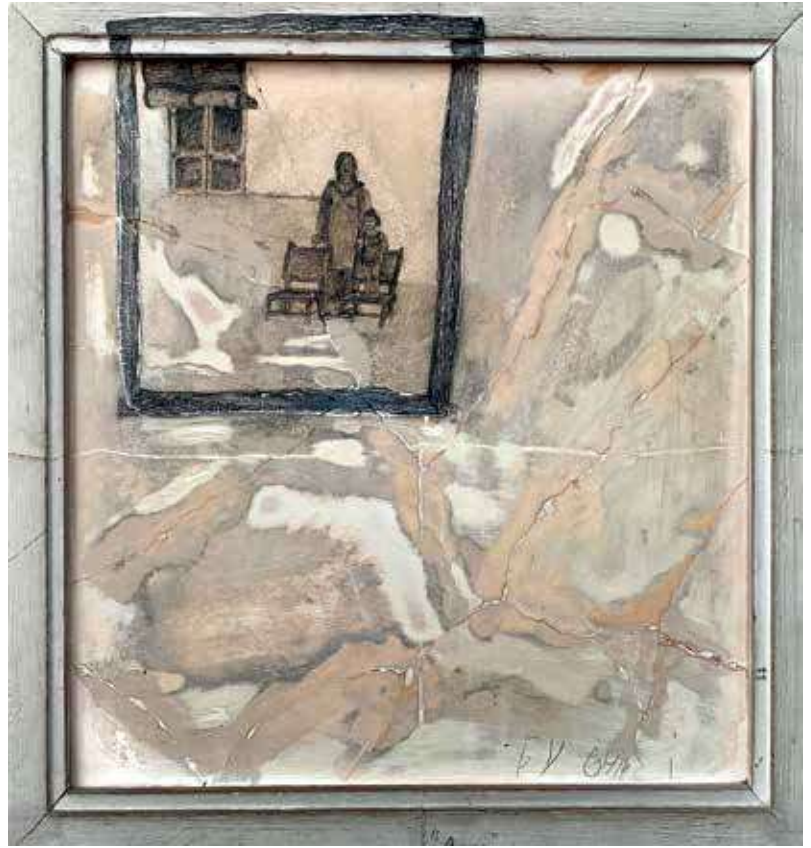




Fig. 2.6

Masooma Syed
Untitled
Human hair and hairspray
2014

Image courtesy | Masooma Syed



Masooma

The lenticular works were a milestone, a huge evolution—poetic, personal, daring. The kind of work I wished I had done! The images were direct yet so intelligently layered, the titles were brilliant. Especially that image where you are seated surrounded by pigeons ...

Farida

Yes, that's a diptych. There's one piece with Zain (son) in the foreground and the other with me surrounded by pigeons in Russell Square in London. They are titled *Phool Mera Watan* (flower is my country) and *Chand Meri Zameen* (moon is my homeland). Both images have the Punjab Assembly in the background. You just mentioned layers. If you take the personal to deal with political, layers are inevitable. This piece evolved from a telephone conversation with my father during my PhD period in London. He was the sitting judge at that time in the *shariat* court, an influential man with powerful connections and he was still concerned about the custody of my child. He was a man of power vulnerable enough to suggest that I should refrain from returning, as he knew that I was about to for my PhD research. This one incident changed everything. I wanted to ask my country, "I love you but do you love me back?" And I thought, "No, you don't, you make laws where a mother herself is not the guardian of her own child." I was devastated and I began seeing things through a different, more personal lens.

Masooma

What kind of law is this? Religious, national?

Farida

I don't know what to think! Family law, I guess? I was always questioning earlier but now it was a different dilemma. The law does not consider the mother a natural guardian. For so long we had believed the words of the patriotic song "Chand meri zameen phool mera watan" (moon is my homeland, flower is my country). The lyrics are glorious but the reality is very different. I was listening to it and the irony brought tears to my eyes.

Masooma

For me, your work *Line of Control* is an aesthetic and conceptual zenith. It withholds all, has multiple connotations, it's a drawing, it's poetic. Even if you omit the title *LOC*, it can be viewed as a landscape—plains, colours, line.

Farida

You've seen the reflection of the Saiful Muluk lake. The original idea was for bodies visible in the landscape and it gradually evolved into a more personal narrative. Beauty that seeps from a certain trauma, a melancholy in the mountains. A woman's body is also seen as a place of conquest and poetry and literature all resonate with the plains, peaks and curves of womanhood as metaphors for land.

Fig. 2.13 & Fig. 2.14

Series of Saiful Muluk photographs I took in 2004 to use as working drawings while I was developing the lenticular piece *Line of Control* (LOC).

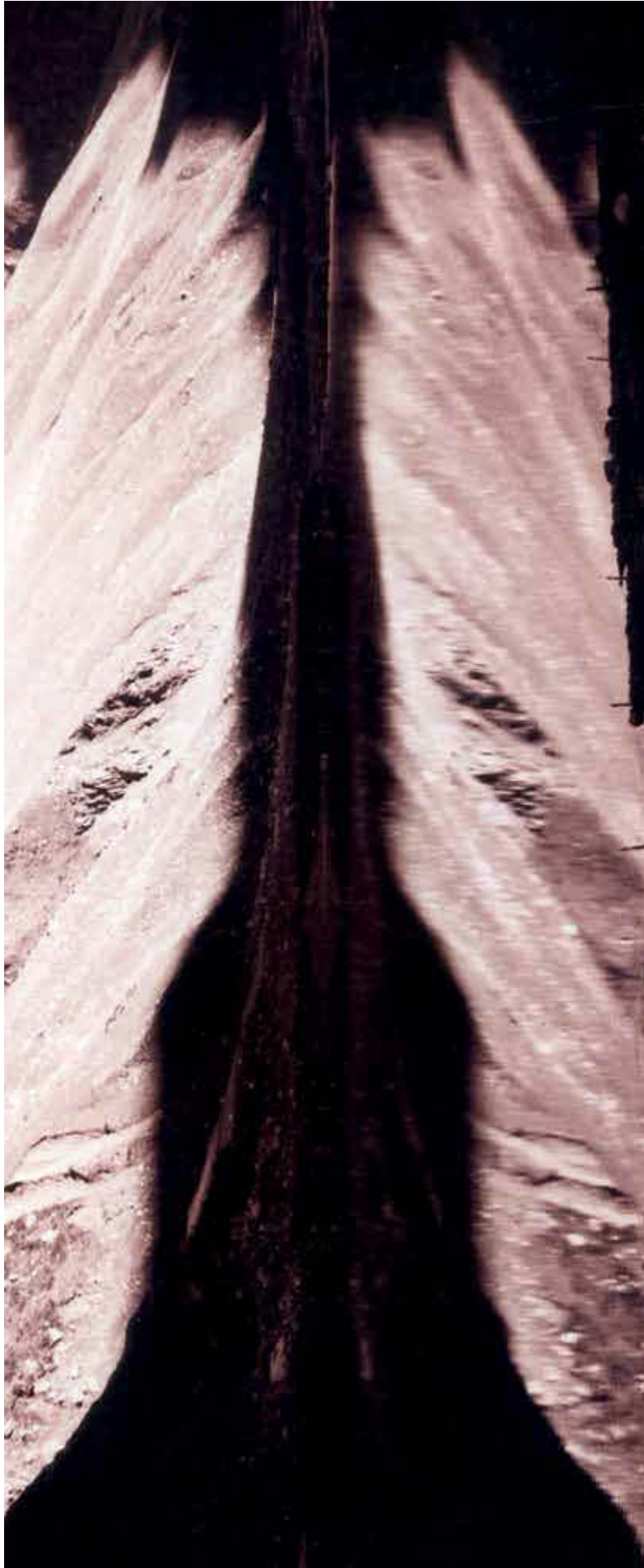




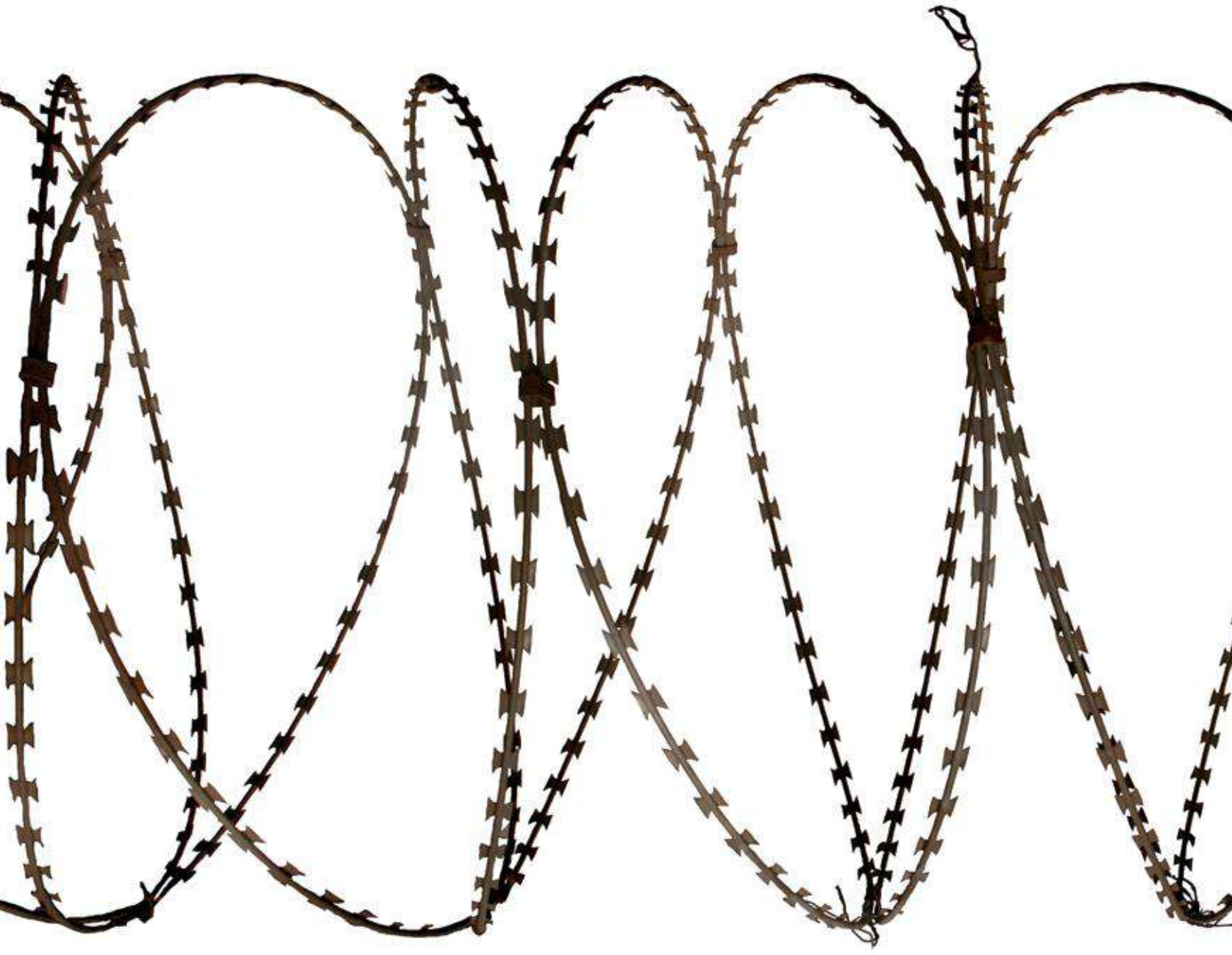
Fig. 2.15

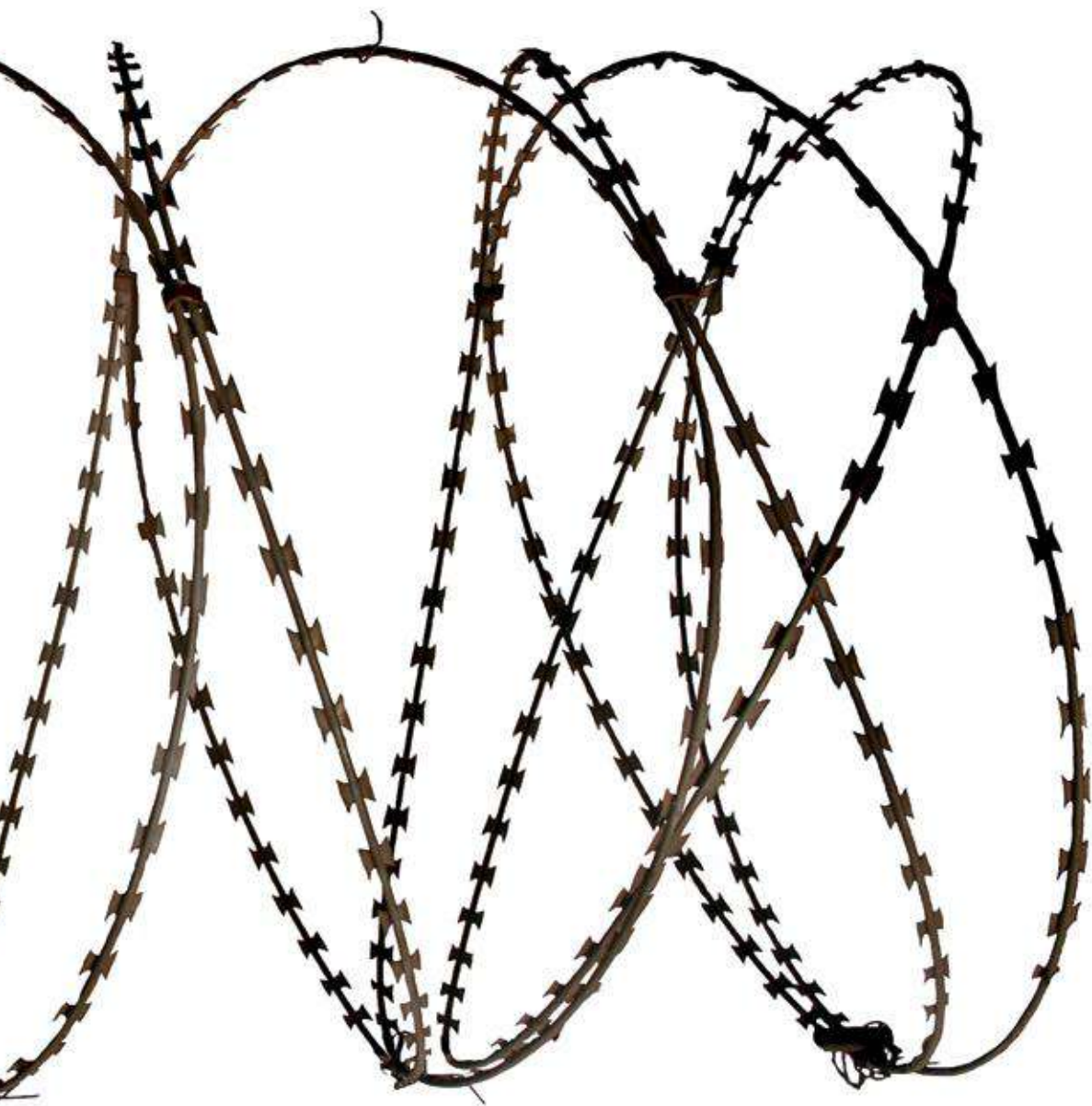
Phool Mera Watan
Lenticular print
27.9 cm x 22.8 cm
2009
Edition of 7 + 1 AP



Fig. 2.16

Chand Meri Zameen
Lenticular print
27.9 cm x 22.8 cm
2009
Edition of 7 + 1 AP









Shaila Bhatti is Associate Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies at the National College of Arts, Lahore. Bhatti gained her PhD in Anthropology from University College London where she was also an Economic and Social Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow. Her academic interests span material and visual culture of South Asia, colonial/postcolonial social and object histories and identities, as well as the politics of cultural representation. In particular she is interested in comparative museologies and museum histories with an emphasis on re-establishing non-western museums, their collections, and public consumption as part of the dominant museum narratives in order to rethink possible museology of the future. Bhatti currently teaches courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels based on her own research over 15 years on museums and visual culture of South Asia. She has written on her academic interests and is the author of *Translating Museums: A Counterhistory of South Asian Museology* published by Routledge.

Christopher Pinney is Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London. He has held visiting positions at the Australian National University, University of Chicago, University of Cape Town, Northwestern University, Boğaziçi University (Istanbul), and Jagiellonian University (Krakow). His research interests cover the art and visual culture of South Asia, with a particular focus on the history of photography and chromolithography in India. He has also worked on industrial labour and Dalit goddess possession. Amongst his publications are *Camera Indica* (1997), *Photos of the Gods* (2004), *The Coming of Photography in India* (2008) and *Photography and Anthropology* (2011), *The Waterless Sea* (2018), and *Lessons from Hell* (2018).

An Artist, her
City and the
'Motherland'

—

Farida Batool
the Personal,
Performative &
Popular

Shaila Bhatti with Christopher Pinney

Farida Batool's work embodies fruitful paradoxes that are entangled in the many layers around the nation, city and body. These are often portrayed in her work as she deals with issues of identity and how it is tackled/negotiated, accepted/denied, ignored/revealed through the self and the nation at any given moment. Her work denies a simple reading as she has become increasingly concerned with performance and yet, it remains semantically rich. It engages with the 'popular' in both its repressive and liberating aspects, avoiding taking the easy option of basking in the latter as an alternative practice/space to counter the 'elite'. Batool navigates the complex interaction of the personal with the 'national', to produce a nuanced understanding of 'motherland' that mounts a critique of the global phantasm of 'Pakistan'. She holds up a mirror of the local and its moments of dis-location and re-location to a body that projects and refracts personal and national selves.

Among the other complexities which need to be negotiated is a recognition that Batool is a practitioner versed in the international art world and in the global flows of art theory who uses these to illuminate issues that are firmly grounded in Pakistani experience. This is very clear in her Master's thesis published as *Figure*. Undertaken in the Art Theory programme at UNSW, her research was in a broad sense anthropological, exploring the nature of visual culture in Pakistan. This interest in what one might think of as total social practice places her in a loose sense in a tradition of global 'pop'¹ ranging from Roy Lichtenstein to Bhupen Khakhar. Like this broader movement, Batool builds a practice from the ground up, working in a language that is partly already present in the everyday. But unlike most figures associated with that embrace of the popular, Batool's work has been notably more critical, casting a politically sceptical eye over practices that, far from promising liberation from the imprisonment of 'high' art, appear complicit in oppression and coercion. Batool can be viewed as a quasi-ethnographer engaging 'actually-existing' practices, rather than offering a utopian manifesto of what-ought-to-be. But she is not in search of a 'community' (as some anthropologists still are). Instead, the popular offers material for critique.

To this consideration of the conflicted role of the popular in Batool's work we will add two other general themes. The first of these relates to what Fredric Jameson in a famously contentious argument referred to as "third world literature" and "national allegory". In short, this proposed that in this homogenous and problematically conceived form of literature, "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (1986, 69; italics in original)². It is unnecessary to detail the various critiques of Jameson here since the value of his argument for our present purpose lies in the counterpoint it provides to elements of Farida Batool's work. Her work, as will become clearer below, is often concerned to wrest the personal from the national, whilst always recognising the geopolitical and Orientalist entanglements and framing of life in a country such as Pakistan. Much of her practice poses the question of the artist as 'motherland', or 'herself'.

Footnotes

1: Geeta Kapur, 2007. "The Uncommon Universe of Bhupen Khakhar" in Kobena Mercer ed. *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* INIVA/MIT.

2: Frederic Jameson, 1986. "Third-World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn): 65–88

3: Diane Losche, 1995. "The Sepik Gaze: Iconographic Interpretation of Abelam Form" in *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* No. 38, (September 1995), pp. 47–60

4: Personal communication with Farida Batool (25.10.18)

5: Interviews carried out with Farida Batool on 06.05.17 and 15.05.17

The second general theme concerns ‘performativity’. This can be treated as a general heading for increasingly fashionable routes to understanding art as an ‘act’, and the art object as involving agency, rather than meaning. Interestingly, Batool was supervised in her UNSW Master’s by Diane Losche, an ethnographer of the Abelam of Papua New Guinea, a group whose art practices have played a seminal role in the anthropology of art’s move towards ‘agency’. Losche argued that anthropologists were misguided in seeking to establish the meanings of Abelam art for they did not signify in this conventional sense. Abelam art’s power lay in its ability to transform the world, and she concluded that asking the Abelam about the meaning of their art was akin to asking Americans what their refrigerators signified; it was the wrong kind of question³.

Batool’s position, as evidenced by her practice and clarified in her own theorisation, is quite different and engages performance as a method that is compatible with, rather than opposed to, semantic richness. As Batool states, “Performance is something we are doing all the time even in the gallery space when we are acting as audiences and also when one is flâneuring [sic] the streets of Lahore.”⁴ Performance for Batool, then, is more of a teasing engagement, a playful strategy that blurs the boundaries between art/viewer, gallery/public space and brings the beholder into more intimate contact with the artwork through bodily interactions that destabilises their sense of being. Performance does not supplant meaning as a radical alternative. Rather, it entices the viewer, asking them to participate in a theatrical space in which affective resonance co-exists with language.

In what follows we propose a chronological engagement with select works of Batool based on personal interviews ⁵ with the artist and our own interpretation of the works that highlight the consistencies and continuities, and also the transformations, in her oeuvre.

Fig. 3.1 → & 3.2 ↓

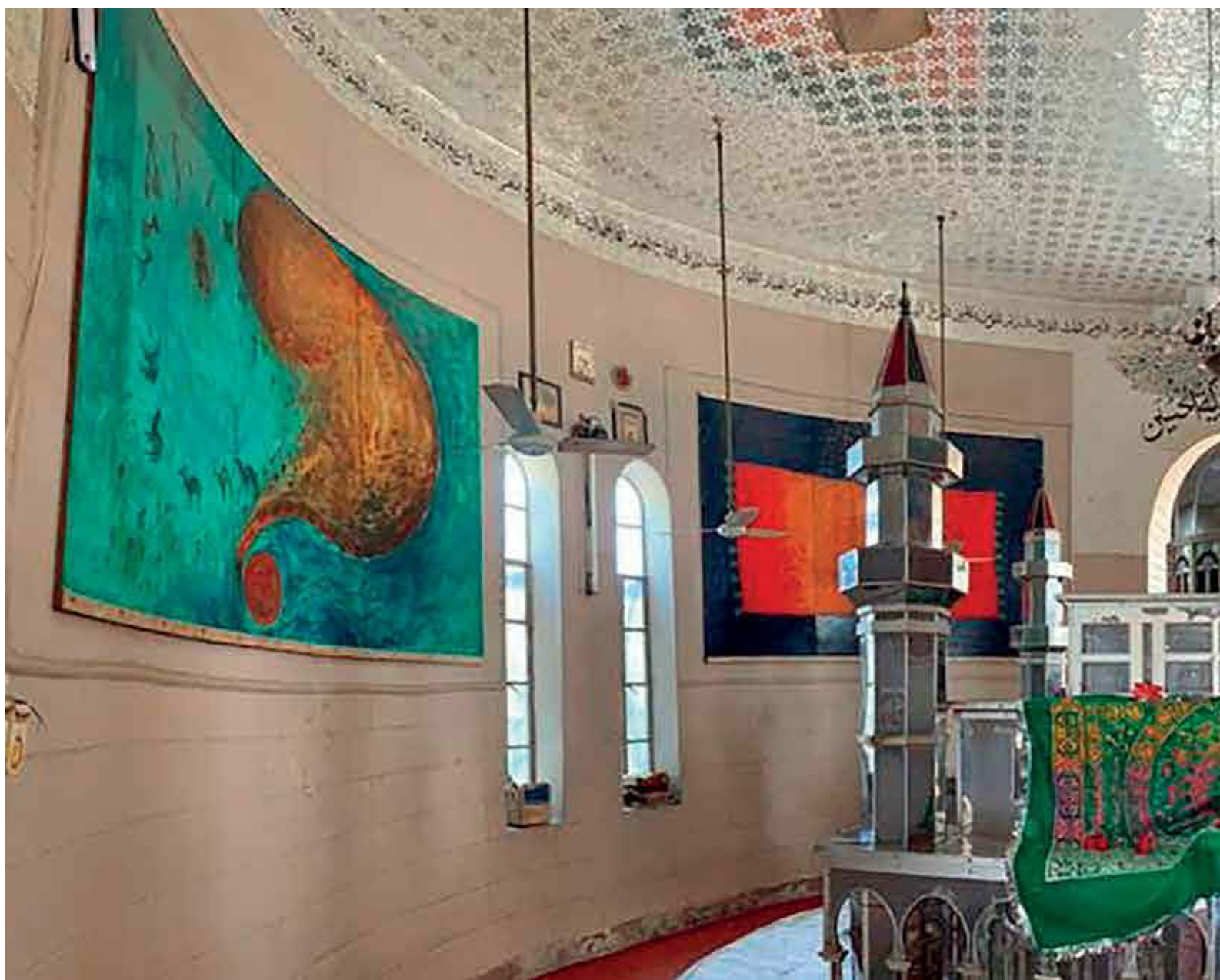
Exterior and interior of Imambargah at Zainabia Trust next to Mansoorah on Multan Road Lahore. The four murals were painted in 1996 at the request of Syed Irshad Ali Shah, a very close family friend and the Founder Trustee. The Trust and Imambargah is dedicated to Bibi Zainab (AS), sister of Imam Hussain(AS), who led the mission after all the family were martyred at Karbala. During my visit to the Imambargah I found a metallic plaque with detailed etched map of the route of the whole of Karbala from Madina to Damascus. The route, strangely enough, looks like the shape of a question mark, etched forever, leaving geography as a witness to the heinous killing of the Prophet's family. That question mark was the triggering factor in starting the four murals.

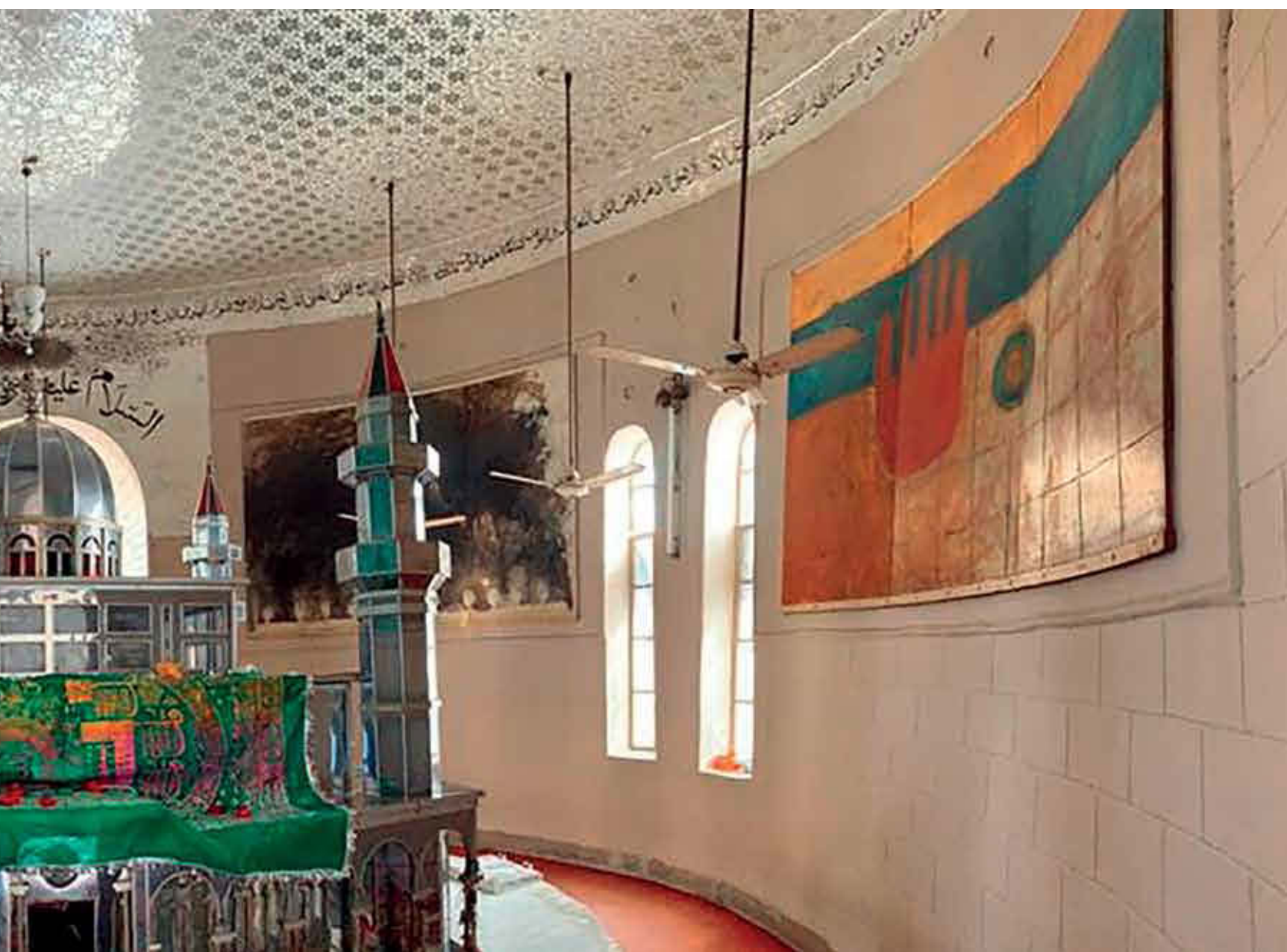
The Trust has a library, hospital and residential halls on its premises which provide free services to the surrounding community.





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ





—**Razor-Sharp Desires** Another item on display and available for purchase was razors. These common objects were chosen deliberately by Batool as in themselves they would not attract overt attention as they were everyday objects with little agency. However, the conversion they had undergone made these razors into potent symbols that counteracted the 'face' and strict religious ideology of the mullahs who advocated the separation of male/female spaces and interaction in public, with female covering being deemed the rightful mode of attire.

This perception of the pious self and the female othering was explicitly depicted on the razors by transforming the handles into a pole around which a female and a male figure are intertwined in a tight grasp. The male on one side is gripped tightly by the female who is totally covered with only her eyes and vagina exposed and glaring outwards. In a sleight-of-hand the two opposed versions of the female, virtuous and sexualised, are depicted as both attracting/controlling the desires of even the most pious of males. Once again, the location of (dis)honour comes into play where the normative projection/treatment of females as salacious perpetrators requires them to cover up and be modest, when in fact it is the males who are in need of restraint to maintain honour—be it of the individual or at a societal level.

In this performance Batool deftly employed banal objects to act as agents of critique without overt disruption to the social dynamics that were pervading Pakistan then and now. The art objects she created through mutilation/mutation opened up a space where interaction and enjoyment were performed by the visitors themselves, predominantly young men, without any seeming disruption to their identity or selfhood. The fact that visitors could easily manoeuvre from Batool's stall to others' like that of *Jaish-i-Mohammed* reveals the complex desires and ideologies that permeate the Pakistani socio-scape and apparently contradict one another but also co-exist in a heady mix. A mix which, once unleashed in the streets of Lahore, intensifies into many realms of expression, action, representation, and include the gaze to which we turn next.

Fig. 3.11

Untitled (detail)
 (interactive art performance)
 Plastic shaving razors, plaster
 of paris, paint.
 2003





Fig. 3.12

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back
(view one)
Lenticular print
52.07 cm x 77.47 cm
2006
Edition of 7 + 1 AP



Gazing at Lenticulars

The year 2004 signalled a major shift in the medium of Batool's work; she began to experiment with the use of the lenticular. This was a conscious change motivated by two factors: one a professional need and the other her own mediations on artistic medium as vernacular. In relation to the first, Batool desired acknowledgement from her 'community'—the art circle in Pakistan. She was recognised as an artist but a misplaced one, with Batool being considered an artist who dealt with 'public art', which was a problematic term at the time as its conceptualisations amongst the art community in Pakistan effused derogatory undertones. However, once Batool adopted the lenticular as a mode of artistic practice that commented on the socio-political realities of Pakistani society, this status changed. And so, her move paid off professionally but also artistically, as now not only Batool but the art community itself would indirectly legitimate the Pakistani everyday as a socio-politically fecund site for artistic expression and intervention.

Batool's interest in working towards the production of lenticulars emerged out of her exposure to popular forms of expression that were being consumed and circulated in society. Whilst collecting objects for her performances (see above), she came across everyday items such as cigarette lighters with mini-lenticulars printed across them depicting various actresses who came alive in response to the touch and movement of the user. This got her thinking about vernacular mediums of expression that were readily available in local settings and how they could act as compelling political and social signs of the everyday. Perhaps one reason Batool appropriated the lenticular was because it enabled her to continue performing her artistic expressions on the city, its practices and her place within it (see below), but now with a frame that was appropriate enough to be displayed in an art space. The lenticular as a medium was ideal for Batool's work as it did not cause the loss of dynamism and performativity that were central to the everyday and her work, and so it came to epitomise her work.

Fig. 3.13

Thandi Sarrak
Lenticular print
55.8 cm x 91.4 cm
2008
Edition of 7 + 1 AP



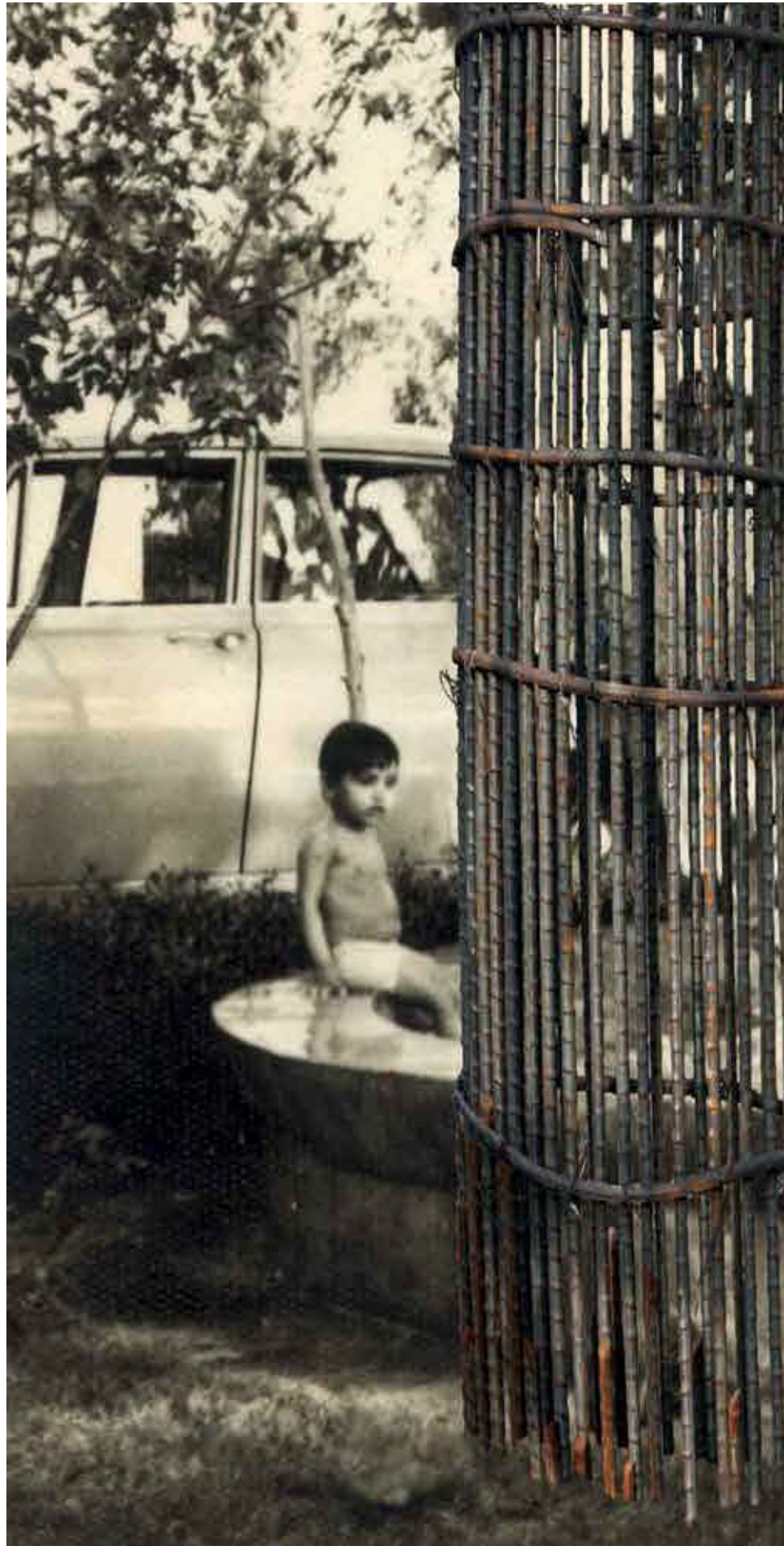


Fig. 3.14

Qadam Qadam Azad
Lenticular print
63.5 cm x 91.4 cm
2008
Edition of 7 + 1 AP

Fig. 3.15 ↓

Sunken Feet
Lenticular print (dyptich)
91.4 cm x 91.4 cm (each)
2017
Edition of 7 + 1 AP







Chand Meri Zameen, Phool Mera Watan

Located in central London and pursuing her PhD in Media and Film Studies at SOAS, Batool was an unsettled figure personally. She was now a mother, a single mother, away from her surroundings and family, but also a child/citizen of another 'mother' who was constantly being wounded—Pakistan, from whom too she was distanced. Although split between Lahore and London, Batool recognised that the two were inextricably linked through her body, state of her mind, and experiences. One way of exploring her own internal turmoil and anguish was through the interchangeable appellations of mother for the external nation. These conflicts were not unrelated, as the young single mother in London was trying to cope with her own afflictions but was also ever alert to the events unfolding back home in Lahore—in particular the violent riots¹⁷ that took place on 14th February 2006 in reaction to the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) as a terrorist in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 30th September 2005. Reflecting upon these agitated states of being, Batool was impelled to produce works that dealt with acts of self-destruction within the mothers that prevailed as wounds—past and present, amongst overarching questions regarding laws, rights, pain and suffering of the self and nation.

Following her successful experiment with the lenticular in *The Blink* (2009), Batool remained with this medium in the two works produced here—(i) *Chand Meri Zameen* and (ii) *Phool Mera Watan*. The names of these two images are a dissection of *Chand Meri Zameen, Phool Mera Watan* (1965), a popular patriotic anthem sung by Ustad Amanat Ali Khan¹⁸ reciting the virtues, beauty and strength of the Pakistani nation, its soil and people. Recourse to this title provides a semiotic layer to these lenticulars that Batool composed here, where the utopian/imagined nation/mother exist against a countering stratum of images that emerge in a performative dialogue—desired versus real experiences on the ground. Both these works, although produced in London, are deeply entrenched in the many layers of the city, of Lahore and the nation of Pakistan, figured as the dislocated mother symbol.

Fig. 3.16

Sohni Dharti 1
Lenticular print
50.8 cm x 152.4 cm
2008
Edition of 7 + 1 AP

The base image featured in the lenticular works *Thandi Sarrak*, *Qadam Qadam Azad* and *Sohni Dharti 1* were taken by my father, Syed Afzal Haider.

Footnotes:

17: A protest that was organised by a small Bareilvi group - *Tahafuz-e-Namoos-e-Risalat Mahaz* (The Front for the Protection of the Honour of Mohammad's Prophecy' (TNRM)), rather than the usual right wing Deobandi 'Islamists'. However, what came as a surprise for Lahore was not the protest itself but its violent and riotous nature that was not common in the city.

18: It was lyricised by Saqi Javed and the music composed by Akhtar Hussain Akhian.





Fig. 3.17

Sohni Dharti 2
Lenticular print
50.8 cm x 152.4 cm
2009
Edition of 7 + 1 AP

Photography by
Humayun Memon

Image courtesy
Dr. Furqaan Ahmed





Fig. 3.18

Phool Mera Watan 2
Lenticular print
50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
2009
Edition of 2



Salima Hashmi is an artist, curator and contemporary art historian. Professor Hashmi was the founding Dean of the Mariam Dawood School of Visual Art and Design at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. She was also Professor of Fine Arts at the National College of Arts [NCA] Lahore as well as Principal of the College.

She has written extensively on the arts. Her book *Unveiling the Visible—Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* was published in 2002, and she co-authored *Memories, Myths, Mutations—Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan* with Yashodhara Dalmia for Oxford University Press, India in 2006. She also edited *The Eye Still Seeks—Contemporary Art of Pakistan* for Penguin Books, India in 2014.

Salima Hashmi curated *Hanging Fire*, an exhibition of Pakistani Contemporary Art for Asia Society Museum, New York in 2009. She curated the critically acclaimed exhibition titled *This Night-Bitten Dawn* hosted by Gujral Foundation and the Devi Art Foundation in Delhi, which opened on the occasion of the Delhi Art Fair, 2016. She has most recently curated a group show of Indian and Pakistani artists *Pale Sentinels* at Aicon Gallery, New York.

The Government of Pakistan awarded her the President's Medal for Pride of Performance for Art Education in 1999. The Australian Council of Art and Design Schools (ACUADS) nominated her as Inaugural International Fellow, for distinguished service to art and design education, in 2011. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Bath Spa University in 2016, and the following year she was awarded the title of *Professor Emeritus* from Beaconhouse National University.

She is a council member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Naazish Ata-Ullah, artist, educator, curator, writer, social and human rights activist, lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan. Professor Ata-Ullah retired from Government service in 2010 as Principal and head of academic and administrative affairs at the National College of Arts, Lahore and NCA Rawalpindi Campus. The Republic of France awarded her the title of Knight of the Order of Arts and Literature in 2010, for services to art and culture. In 1985 she established the printmaking studio and programme at the National College of Arts and remained the Head of Printmaking in the Department of Fine Arts till her appointment as Principal in 2007.

She has published widely on art, museum studies, visual culture and the history of art education from feminist and post-colonial perspectives in South Asia in books and journals of international repute. She has presented her work at international venues, and contributed her writings to existing and forthcoming curatorial and academic publications in cultural and academic institutions, including Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris; Teachers College Columbia University, New York; the Asia Society, New York; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan; the Institute of Education, University of London; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The Indian Arts Society, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Asia House, London; Whitechapel Gallery, London; the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India; Cartwright Hall Museum, Bradford, UK; The Slade School of Fine Art, London; the Art Academy of Oslo, Norway and the Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad.

She has co-authored the book *Travels Mundane and Surreal: The Art of Esther Rahim*, (Sang e Meel, Lahore, 2006) and co-edited and co-authored *Labyrinth of Reflections: the art of Rashid Rana 1992-2012* (Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, 2013).

In Conversation

Salima Hashmi &
Naazish Ata-Ullah
with Farida Batool

Naazish

When did you join National College of Arts as a student, Farida?

Farida

It was in 1990.

Naazish

That was post Zia-ul-Haq. It was a politicised decade influenced by the women's movement and activism. For instance, Anwar Saeed's practice, or even Afshar Malik's and Quddus Mirza's—just before he went to England—reflected that. Even someone as apolitical as Zahoor ul Akhlaq made works centred on the Nawabpur incident.

Salima

After Zia it was important to look at the pedagogy, how and what we were teaching, and we had the freedom to examine the syllabus—which was never actually written down. I went to India, to review the curriculum there. When I came back I focused on South Asian culture and indigenous forms. The challenge was to make connections in medium and exchanges with people and cultures.

Naazish

Salima introduced us to 'ways of seeing' and wrote a formal syllabus. I joined the college as a mature student and graduated when Zia was in full sway. Then I went for a postgrad in Art Education and both of us became the only faculty in the department with formal art qualifications. Anwar Saeed and I were the only ones who did printmaking at the same time—we were asked to set up the printmaking studio. The specialisation of miniature and print occurred around the same time, because prior to that sculpture and painting had been the only departments since 1958. These new departments opened up ways of printmaking in terms of thinking and process and it was a very exciting time.

Farida

Yes, I remember it was difficult for us to decide between departments and Bani Abidi said it was avant garde to go into printmaking.

Naazish

Anwar had been working with design students and even they were using printmaking techniques for design.

Salima

This brought about a major change in the understanding of painting. Before, there had been a thesis requirement to do one piece which had to be oil on canvas and it was difficult to deal with the resistance. The first time I gave a collage assignment in the seventies it was much criticised. After Zia's regime, though, there was a sense of revolutionary belief that things can change.

Naazish

There were no computers or internet then and all we had was books and

Fig. 4.1

Untitled
Thesis scroll painting (detail)
Mixed media on paper
488 cm x 101 cm
1993



Haajra Haider Karrar is an independent curator and writer interested in addressing the current constructions of contemporary art practice in Pakistan and initiating critical discourse around it. Her focus lies in investigating artistic practices, navigating socio-political and urban infrastructures in the transitory landscape of South Asian cities. She expands this research by further exploring the potentiality and materiality of spaces and mediums employing interdisciplinary modes of knowledge production. She has been a core member of The Tentative Collective. She was also the Chief Curator of IVS Gallery, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.

Karrar has curated numerous shows in galleries and museums nationally and internationally. Some of her collaborative and individual works have been shown at Centre Pompidou (Paris), MMOMA (Moscow), Akademie der Kunst (Berlin), Manchester Art Museum, IV Moscow Biennale for Young Art, 5th Baku Biennale, UQBAR (Berlin), NAPA (Karachi). Her most recent show *Who Gets to Talk About Whom? Collective Thinking and Its Politics in the Decolonial Turn* was held at AAN Gandhara Art Space (Karachi). She was recently the coordinator and presenter at the Tate Seminar (Karachi). She has written for various publications, journals, and monographs. Karrar is currently based between Pakistan and Germany.

Look at the
City from Here,
~~by~~ *through* the
High Walls and
the Closed Gates

Haajra Haider Karrar

I

Who gets to talk about whom? is a recurring question which sits at the base of knowledge production at large as well as in the day-to-day navigation of life in general. It is a pivotal and crucial question which addresses the notion of representation. Representation establishes the foundations of our perceptions and belief systems that command personal and collective life in a human society, thus shaping the structure and understanding of social constructs. The dictionary meaning of the word 'representation' defines it as the act of speaking or acting on behalf of someone else, though a further philosophical definition is to share (beyond your person) an experience related to the self or the other or, in many cases, juxtaposed to established social understandings. It is an act of claiming authority and exuding agency, which carries the risk of exploitation if not rendered responsibly. This act is usually performed by those who command a certain authority (groups or individuals who claim this power through expertise and/or stature) or are in an authoritative or privileged position in a specific situation.

Each one of us, through the multiple facets of our socially established identities—whether through gender, class, race, discipline, or social roles—have either fallen victim to or been perpetrators of representation. To be able to resolve conflicts and violence involved in this act, it is important to consistently revisit the definition and need for representation. Representation is an ongoing negotiation. Its ethics and terms of engagement can be addressed, and a semblance of a balance acquired and maintained through which the violence of the act is minimised. But a lack of representation can create invisibility, which leads to injustice and deprivation of rights and resources and, eventually, extinction.

Social media is one such platform, a virtual medium which has enabled and empowered individuals to represent their self, ideas, and opinions while maintaining a sense of anonymity and select privacy.²⁶ It has also created a platform for marginalised bodies and communities to voice and represent their realities—though at the same time it also serves the extremist and popular factions. In either case, we cannot undermine the power of this platform which has on multiple occasions mobilised masses in revolutionary movements, as well as Islamic State recruitment.²⁷

Anything that may lie outside of our reality and privilege can often be invisible to us. This invisibility is increasing as the walls ensconcing us in our own realities are rising ever higher. The architectures of neoliberal societies thrive on creating homogenous bubbles of exclusion that refuse to accommodate multiple realities, contrary to the organic expansion of cities—unless we challenge and stretch our realities to look beyond ourselves and create empathetic and inclusive spaces.

I experienced the city in its organic form witnessing the gradual changes

Footnotes

26: This is debatable. These representations are not necessarily authentic. Personas are often created to garner a certain kind of response. The idea of privacy is also questionable especially in light of the recent allegations against Facebook on selling consumer data. Despite its value and association for its consumer, the entire model is based on a capitalist ideal which is focused on profits instead of egalitarian values.

27: The biggest example of this is the Arab Spring. More recently in Pakistan, it is the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement which mobilised entirely through social media in face of complete media blackout. Or the three-week long sit-in by Tehreek-e-Labbaik in Islamabad. These examples give a clear idea of the advantages and repercussions of social media. The Islamic State has used social media platforms quite strategically in spreading their mission and building their armies.

with bridge constructions and demolition of informal settlements while growing up. But I only became conscious of it during my time at university in Lahore while getting to know the city on foot and through using public transport. More recently in Karachi, along with a few other practitioners I ventured out to explore and understand the multiple nuances, histories, bodies, and voices that mark the city, which can easily go unnoticed if one does not attune oneself to them. Perhaps it is a mental exercise at first, where the mind acknowledges the existence of the happenings at the peripheries of your existence. The body follows suit by embodying this knowledge, so that the next time you step out, it picks up on the multiple signals that charge the space you traverse within. The observations made become sharper. Sometimes this attunement also comes through rude awakenings of unpleasant experiences which alter and limit your experience and mobility. Though that varies according to the kind of body and space traversed.

II

The distance between personal and collective resonates with the distance between inside and outside. Depending on how a body has been categorised by gender, race, class, ethnicity, and religion, this distance can be negotiable, even subversive, but is most often non-negotiable and extreme in a patriarchal society.²⁸ The dichotomy between inside and outside is stretched to the farthest limits possible on this spectrum of body categorisation, with invisible borders maintaining a precarious balance where the slightest step crossing the border can have serious repercussions. These consequences are meant for anybody, even one categorised as male, that is deemed to have defied the norms of a patriarchal society.

Categorisation is exclusionary in nature. It limits and reduces the potential of a person or entity, dividing them into rigid readings and gender formations with socially defined codes of conduct pertaining to each one of them. Anyone who dares to challenge these codes is considered a deviant and falls short on the spectrum of ‘respectability’—the acceptable and approved code of conduct—becoming an outcast often with dire punishment.²⁹

My intrigue surpasses my own observations made during the process of navigating the distance between inside and outside, and shifts to the functions of the creative mind which assimilates, translates and transmits select parts of these personal and collective experiences into visual and tangible forms. This curiosity led me to artistic practices responding to collective experiences pertaining to familiar and foreign milieus. It was intriguing to discover during my research that it is mostly female artists who have been engaged in this, showcasing astute observations, while their male counterparts were engaged in more formal concerns. Perhaps understandably so, especially as most of these observations often entail the outside³⁰—a contested space for a woman in South Asia.³¹

The recognition or acknowledgment of women and other marginalised bodies as equal, with equal rights, is a constant battle—fought by few, succumbed and suffered by most.

Instances in the political history of the world have shown time and again, that national movements would have failed if they were not inclusive of these exact bodies. Each one of these instances bought loyalties by raising hopes and making promises of reforms for equal rights and opportunities, disregarded as soon as the nationalistic vendettas were accomplished. One such example is the role of women in the nationalist movements during the partition of the Indian subcontinent and its aftermath. By 1978, a mere thirty years post-Partition, the political strategies adopted by General Zia-ul-Haq introduced oppressive regimes and legal structures which deprived and discriminated against women and other minorities. The Hudood Ordinance and *chaddar aur chaar dewari* were proposed as the ‘official state doctrine’ for women,

Footnotes

28. A patriarchal society is one where the primary power in all social, cultural and political aspects of life is governed by the male members of the society. It is based on a set of ideas which justify male dominance and establishes gender roles according to power hierarchies based upon biological differences between men and women.

29. Refer to Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. London: Tavistock, 1977.

30. Outside here has also been used to depict the heteronormative patriarchal structures where the slightest deviation from the rigid boundaries is defined as outside.

31. This situation is not limited to South Asia but is a condition of patriarchal societies and can be found/experienced in varying scales around the globe.

32. Islamisation of Pakistan took place during the reign of military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, who wanted to establish an Islamic state and enforce sharia law. The Hudood Ordinance and *chaddar aur chaar dewari* among others were introduced in this process. Women and minority rights were largely compromised and discriminated against with dire consequences.

33. Farida Batool. Figure: *The Popular and the Political in Pakistan*. pg 68. Published in Lahore, Pakistan.

34. Depoliticisation of institutions during the Zia reign is another phenomenon at large, which explains certain behaviors, something that needs to be discussed in detail at some other point.

35. This poem belongs to the genre of *shehr-e-ashoab* in the tradition of Urdu poetry. This specific genre encapsulates the socio-cultural turbulence of cities.

reducing their status to an entity meant to be veiled and kept 'inside'. This enforcement created a new perception of the inside as an enclosed controlled space. The implications made through these and other policies deemed the female gender to be an inferior one which needed to be controlled. This was justified and carried out under the guise of religion—Islamisation of the state.³² Among other restrictions, it set the limits and boundaries of creative expression.

But all this was met with outrage from different factions of the society. A pertinent and relevant example of this outrage is the Women's Manifesto which was written and signed by fifteen female artists.³³

—We recognise, respect and uphold the right of every woman artist to her own faith, her individual approach to context, form, medium, method and style in the realisation of artistic ideals. And we denounce any attempt, overt or covert, to suppress, inhibit, control or regiment her artistic functioning, or to interfere otherwise with her basic right to freedom of expression.³⁴

This manifesto was not made public as it was drawn up as a commitment meant to be implemented by the parties concerned in their artistic and pedagogical practices. This manifesto resisted the oppressive regime and struggled to create alternate spaces of their own reckoning. Charged by this commitment, these artists became focused on their mission and its ideals and soon their work started reflecting this strength and resistance.³⁵ These women played instrumental roles in academia and in the development of the future generation of artists in Pakistan.

III

In the process of my research, I have focused on the sixteen-year rich oeuvres of three female artists who have been engaged with the urban infrastructures of their respective cities: Risham Hosain Syed, Bani Abidi, and Farida Batool.

Even though in this essay I will focus on Batool's practice, the context would be incomplete without briefly discussing Syed and Abidi's works. All three of them belong to the same batch and discipline of the National College of Arts. The choice of subject matter is perhaps also an influence, directly and indirectly, of the resistance practised by the senior generation of female artists who drew up the Women's Manifesto, some of whom were also their professors. This is probably one among the many other factors which made space for and shaped the understanding of each one of these three practices.

I contextualised these three practices under the premise of *Look at the City from Here*. This title phrase holds multiple connotations; a literal reading invites the viewer to look at a city or their city from varied perspectives. But a slightly deeper interrogation might draw attention to experiences that we have ignored or missed out on, either due to our privilege or their erasure. The connoisseurs of Urdu literature and poetry would recognise that it has been borrowed from the title of a famous poem by the renowned Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, written while he was in state-enforced confinement.³⁶ This poem encapsulates and subverts the perception of inside and outside in oppressive regimes, where the outside becomes a confined space due to the policing of dissent. It thus becomes an important association to these practices as they highlight the expectations, understanding, and conservatism embedded in the national psyche, either through tropes of humour, fiction, history, or social experiments.

Fig. 5.1 ↗

Risham Hosain Syed
History as Re-present-ation 3
(Installation)
Acrylic on canvas on board,
wooden stand with a bird, old stool
with a baby Victorian chair
Painting 12.7 cm x 17.8 cm
2016

Image courtesy
Risham Hosain Syed

Fig. 5.2 →

Bani Abidi
Karachi Series I
Duratrans Lightbox
50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
2009

Image courtesy
Bani Abidi

Footnotes

36. This poem belongs to the genre of *shehr-e-ashoab* in the tradition of Urdu poetry. This specific genre encapsulates the socio-cultural turbulence of cities.





Fig. 5.3 ↑

Risham Hosain Syed
Doongi Ground
 Series: We are very sorry for this
 transient inconvenience
 Digitally woven jacquard panel
 60.96 cm x 104.14 cm
 2012

Image courtesy
 Risham Hosain Syed



Fig. 5.4 ↴

Risham Hosain Syed
Reduce Speed
 Series: We are very sorry for this
 transient inconvenience
 Digitally woven jacquard panel
 60.96 cm x 101.6 cm
 2012

Image courtesy
 Risham Hosain Syed

Fig. 5.5 →

Risham Hosain Syed
Vaila K'vaila
 Digital print, embroidery, acrylic,
 applique on cotton, synthetic wool
 filling
 198.1 cm x 137.1 cm (quilt)
 2016

Image courtesy
 Risham Hosain Syed



IV

Risham Hosain Syed traces the trajectories of the past and the present, often bringing them together in one composition through visual or material elements creating a juxtaposition or a reconciliation which defines the relationships in question. She tackles the collective past which informs the collective present through familial histories, her training at a convent school, and through other vested remnants of our colonial past in the form of objects, behaviours, or psyches. This exercise is perhaps an attempt to understand the current structures of consciousness which dictate gender roles and our social and cultural existence. Staying true to these depictions, her portrayal of power hierarchies through gender, race, and material, while drawing on political histories acknowledging urban developments, is a recurring element in her practice.

Meanwhile, Bani Abidi adopts the regional tradition of storytelling as a means of engagement with social narratives, portraying subjectivities depicting the national psyche. Her allegorical narratives are constructed with fiction and satire as subversive tools used for expressing idiosyncrasies found in the intricate and complex web of social constructs in the region. Her curiosity to discover realms that lie outside her reality are often explored through the other. Fiction enables accessibility to these realms creating an imaginary which overlaps with multiple realities and ways of being. It is the attention to banal details in each frame and character that make them relatable, often creating nostalgia for unknown spaces which appear as extensions of our lived realities.³⁷

Farida Batool follows a head-on approach where the personal is political. Her practice is a direct engagement with her reality, encompassing the multiple roles of a woman—that of an artist, mother, daughter, wife, teacher, and citizen. It draws upon her navigation of the social constructs of a South Asian city. These experiences are often conducted through social experiments portraying the understanding of gender through a collective psyche. The formal construction of the work is one of resistance which shows chaos inside order. True to her stance, her works challenge the gaze of the viewer, sometimes making it impossible to enter the work.

Syed, Abidi, and Batool majored in painting and developed their mediums according to the needs of their content. But it is interesting to notice that each one of them has picked time-specific mediums. Moving images are common for Abidi and Batool in the form of video and lenticular prints respectively, though for Risham the movement is metaphorical and is maintained in the act of creation and materiality of the medium. It would be important to consider the reasons behind these careful choices.

Abidi's narratives require an unfolding of multiple frames where video as a medium became inevitable. These vignettes are as carefully

Footnotes

37. Refer to Yaminay Chaudhri's essay "Portraits of an Imperfect Beloved" for a reading of Bani Abidi's work through the lens of nostalgia in the publication of *Look at the City from Here*.

constructed as her paintings. Batool's decision to opt for lenticular prints stems from the need to capture contrasting realities, the temporality of moments and shifting ideologies. It has also been inspired from vernacular objects (though manufactured internationally, mainly in China) but with vernacular imagery used in postcards, stationery items, children's toys, and accessories depicting landscapes, cityscapes, and characters often connecting image and text.

While Syed builds upon collages and paints photographs instead of moving images, she stretches the time between past and present while bringing it together. The photographs capture a split second, a time past, usually a time from before she was born. But for Syed, the slow process of painting a photograph is an act of participation—in a moment and event which exists outside her reality. The combination and culmination of materials that she uses in the construction of her collages and installations also embody time within their histories, each sharing a unique story brought together to construct a new history and narrative. Her choice of material is informed by the content—whether it is a quilt or a digital tapestry made in China—visually depicting a developmental narrative at hand in Lahore while simultaneously drawing upon the history of the industrial revolution and its contemporary counterpart.

Syed portrays power hierarchies through found objects and their history. These hierarchies are further enhanced by the placement and spatial dynamics of her installations. Meanwhile, Abidi and Batool are invested in covert power relations portrayed in their male characters displaying absurd masculinities, whether it is the soldiers in *Marching Masculinities* (Batool), the retired old man in *The Speech Writer* (Abidi), or the nutcracker champion in *An Unforeseen Situation* (Abidi). The practice of these two artists is drastically opposite in nature. Batool is almost ridiculing the regimented and accepted structures and their futility while Abidi is drawing upon the bodies which lie at the peripheries of social structures and consciousness.



Fig. 5.6 ↑

Bani Abidi
An Unforeseen Situation
 Video still
 6 min 52 sec
 2015

Image courtesy | Bani Abidi



Fig. 5.7 ⊣

Bani Abidi
The Speech Writer
 Artist's book consisting of ten flip
 books Raking Leaves (publisher)
 2011

Image courtesy
 Bani Abidi and Raking Leaves

Fig. 5.8 →

Bani Abidi
The Ghost of Muhammad Bin Qasim
 Set of 9 photographs
 27.9 cm x 42.1 cm
 2006

Image courtesy | Bani Abidi





Fig. 5.9

Oos Shehr ki Oonchi Dewar
Digital print on archival paper
73.6 cm x 101.6 cm
2009
Edition of 7 + 1 AP





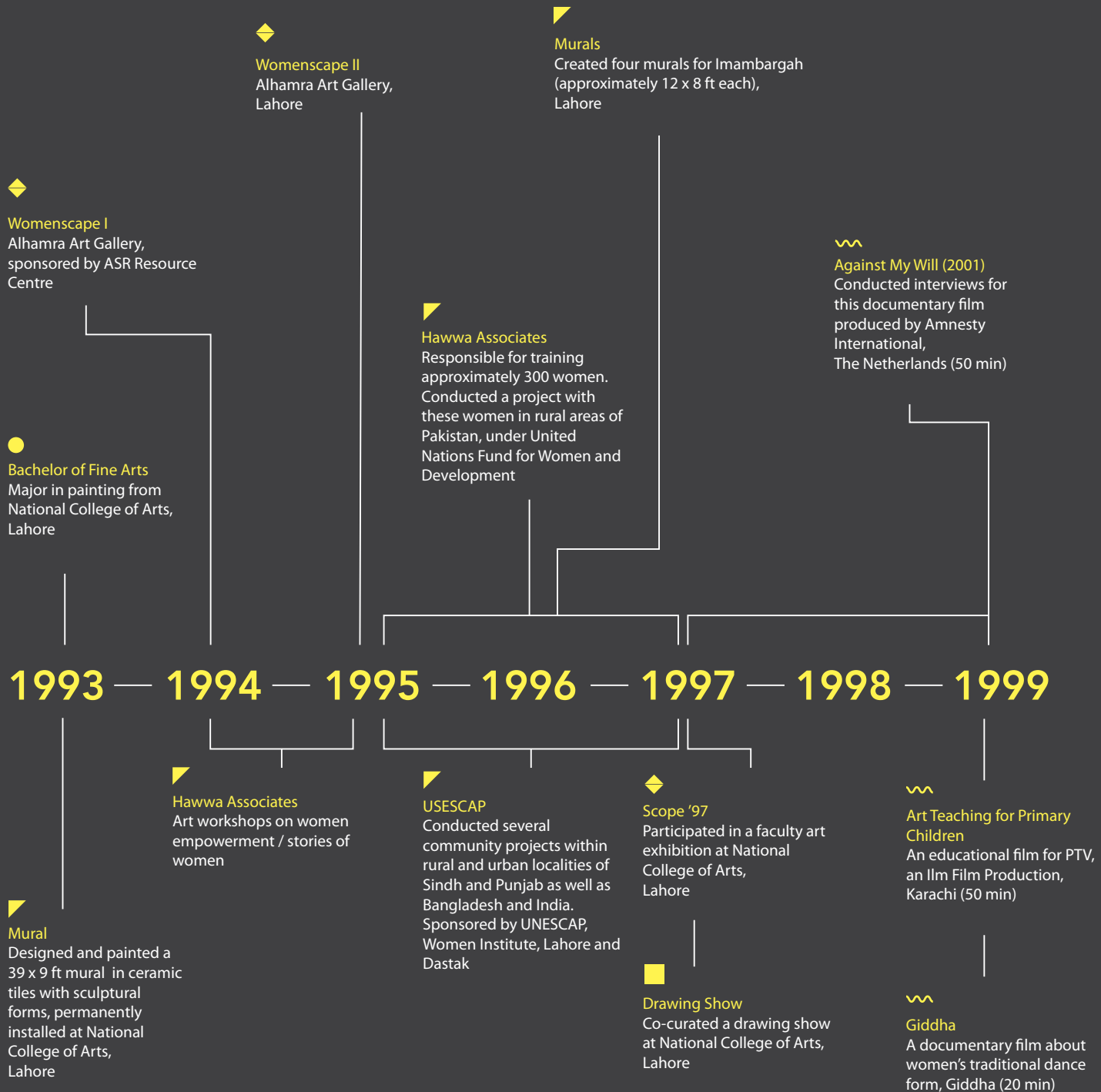
Fig. 5.10

Awami Art Collective
Hum Jo Tareek Rahon Mein Marey Gaye
Installation at Lawrence Gardens,
Lahore
2015

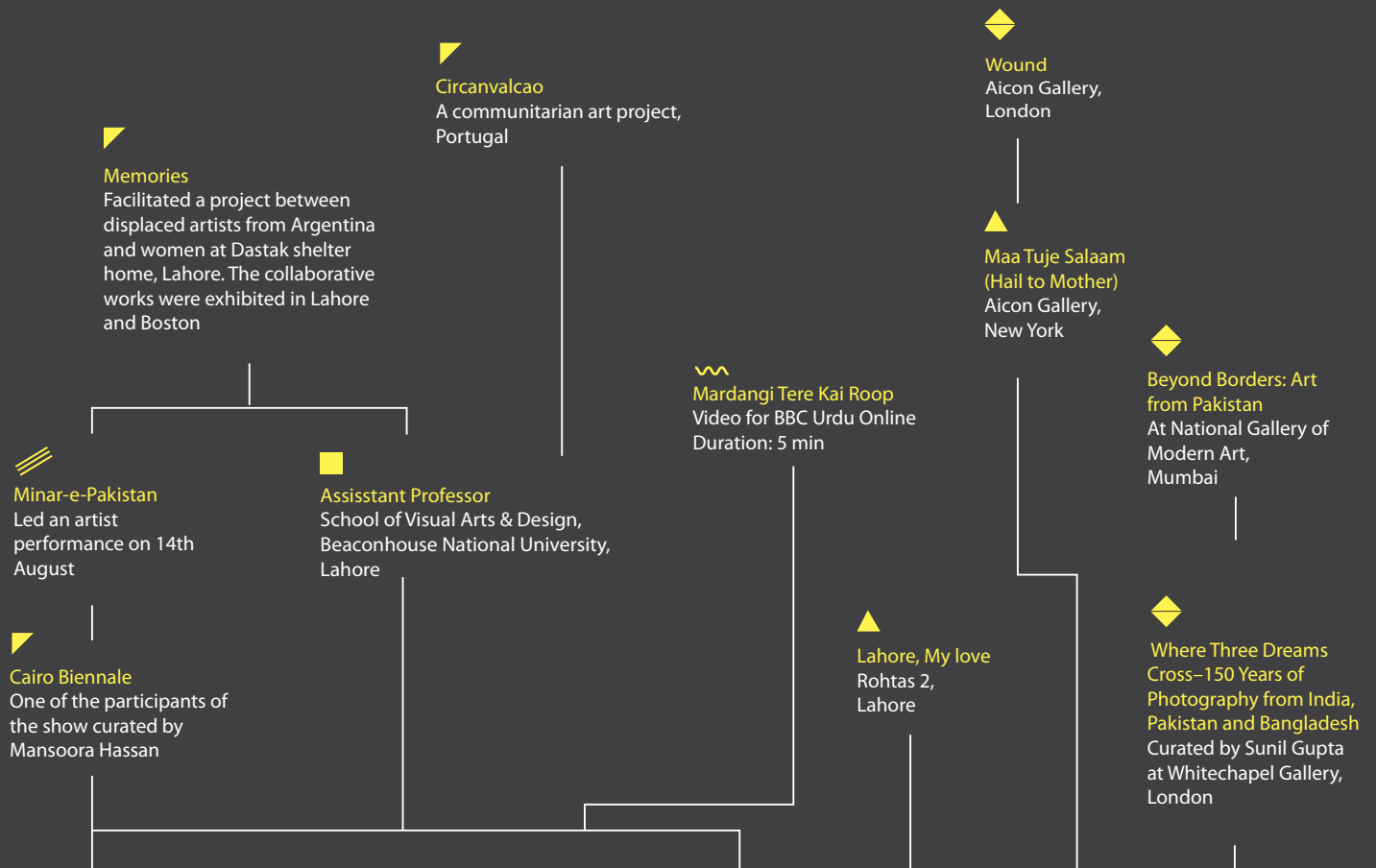




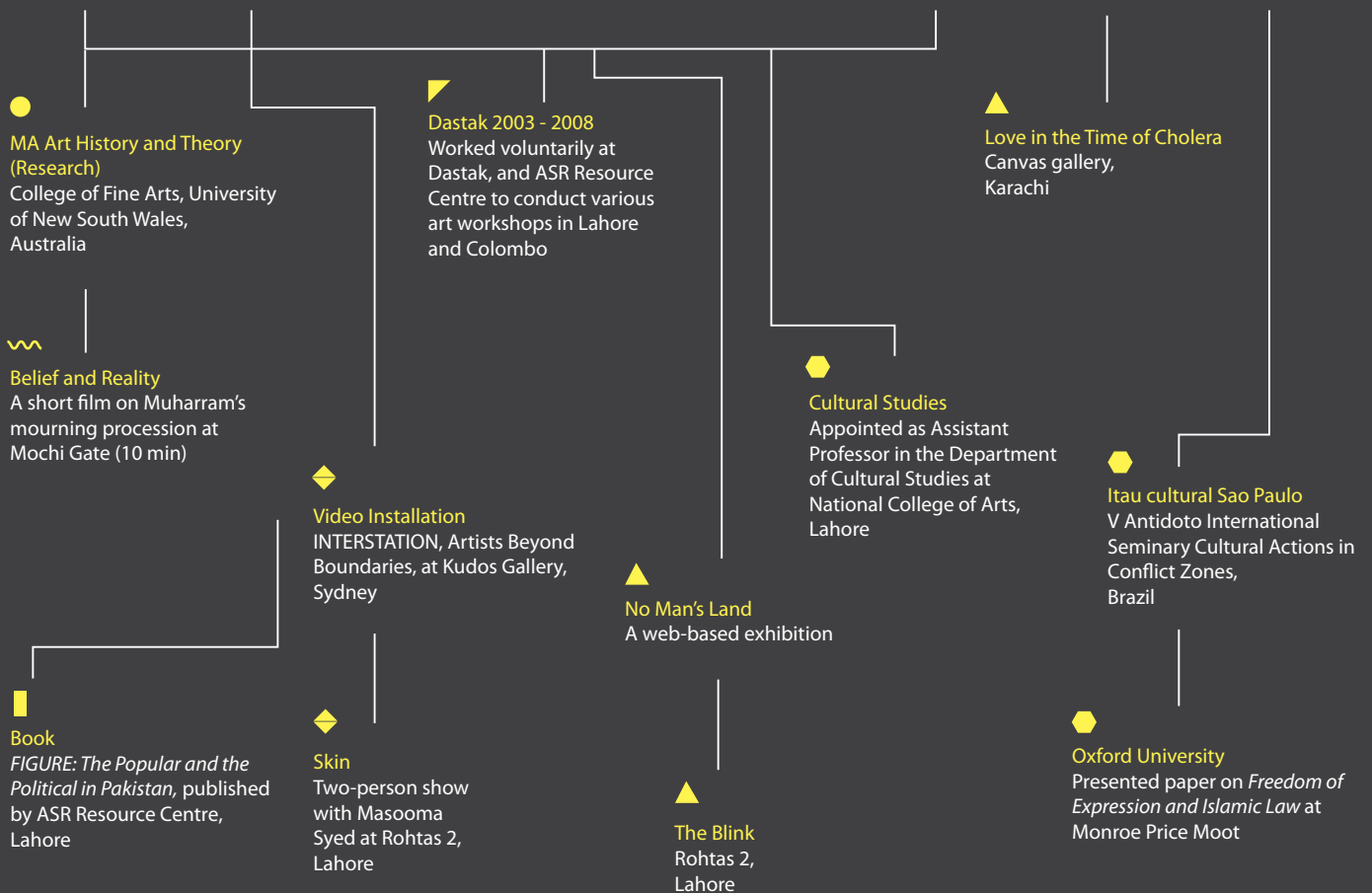


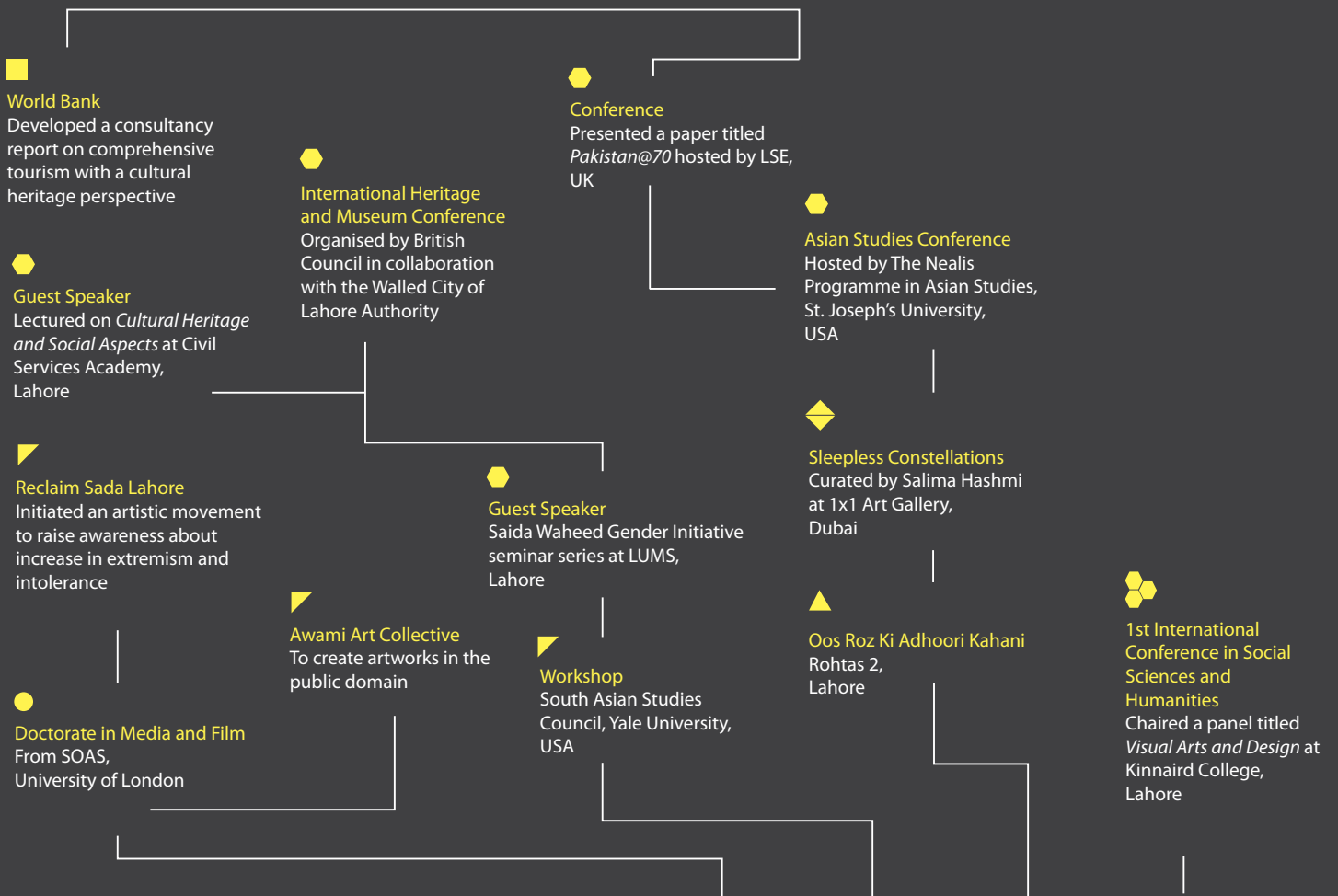


-  Education
-  Work Experience
-  Projects/Workshops
-  Solo Exhibitions
-  Group Exhibitions
-  Lectures/Papers
-  Panel Talks
-  Performance
-  Films
-  Book

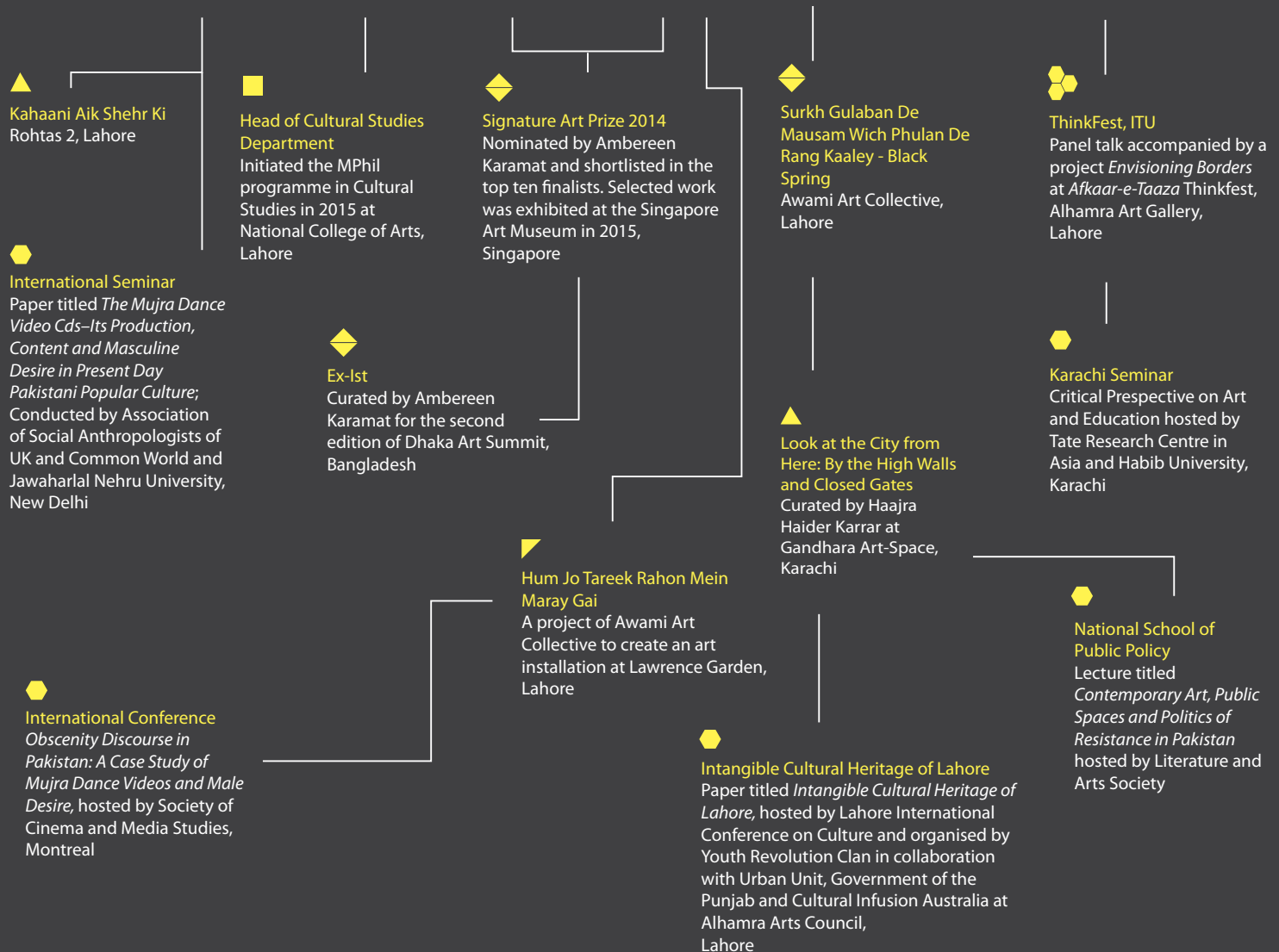


2003 — 2004 — 2005 — 2006 — 2007 — 2008 — 2009 — 2010





2011 — 2012 — 2013 — 2014 — 2015 — 2016 — 2017 — 2018





& She Wondered...

Mid-career retrospective
curated by Asad Hayee
and Sheraz Faisal,
Alhamra Arts Council,
Lahore



Lahore Literary Festival

A panel discussion
titled *Kahani Eik Shehr
Ki*, soft-launching the
monograph *& She
Wandered...* at Alhamra
Arts Council,
Lahore

2019



& She Wandered...

Monograph of Farida
Batool's art practices,
published by White
Turban Art Consultancy

